

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Fragments of Mushroom Thoughts from A Fragmenting Portland On A Saturday

Pamela K. Santos · Monday, July 27th, 2020

1. I am relieved there has been enough years to distance the last airing of Portlandia to this current moment.
2. When I wake up, I connect to the outside world through social media. I was and still am slightly ashamed that this was part of my morning routine, still in bed, reaching for my phone. When I was depressed and having a hard time getting out of bed, sometimes what kept me in bed longer was reading timelines. Timelines and stories. I jump around from this and that account, thinking I'm actually in the world that has time, has stories. It's okay to not be part of the story, I tell myself. It's okay to be in here, in bed, reading stories, I tell my self.
3. For two nights, I've been so tired that I'm weighed down by 9 o'clock. I wondered why this keeps happening when I've been taking multivitamins and attempting kale intake like never before. I hope that all the kimchi I'm eating round the clock is protecting me from COVID. I patiently await my order of vitamin C since the local stores were all out. I have been tired earlier in the night and still I check my phone.
4. It used to be that I wake up and whatever is going on out there is troublesome but is general, if that even makes sense. I know that there are larger movements and I'm paying attention to what needs attending, I tell my self. Something changed when the feds started taking people off the streets into unmarked vans.
5. I have very few groupchats. Really. I used to have a Whatsapp one (members: 3 including me) for MFA applications. Not very active since we got into our programs. I have a Facebook Messenger one for Fil-Am writers (members: again 3), started when we met in D.C. for a festival. More often I have standing conversations one on one with friends that can be opened anytime, no reason, saying hey. The groupchat I've had the longest was the one with my Pinay friends (members: 4) from all out potlucks and hangs. One of them doesn't even live here anymore. She's the journalist who sent me the link to the OPB article about the vans.
6. I think about how I consume news and it's very zombie like. Mechanical. Gestures repeated, swipe and tap in the same movements. I wonder when I'll finally know the day and date it is without checking my phone app, without double-pressing the side button to show my lock screen. It's like Groundhog Day but I don't learn anything and I most definitely don't fall in love.
7. The journalist friend sent us the link to the story maybe at midnight. I was up and said I hadn't seen that story yet (at the time). In the morning, I woke up and read it. I was so engrossed, I didn't notice my son knocking and trying to get me to come downstairs. I know there's a difference between reading a headline on a link in my text messages and reading the full details painstakingly laid out so I can follow the logic of what I'm reading. I know that when I receive the headline, along with reactions by others in the text thread, that headline already became a part

- of my body. It spored onto me and I wasn't aware of the degree to which it reproduced itself. It was a fragment. It was a sliver of ten words. I wasn't aware. I didn't pay attention.
8. When she sent me the link, I was secure in our friendship and did not put up a façade. I didn't say I read something when I haven't. That's not how I talk to my friends. Talk is a misnomer since most friends hardly use the phone anymore to talk. We text. We use the tapback functions for shorthand. For that story, I held my finger on her message and selected !! because, obviously, !! was the only and best reaction. I find myself !! as a verb more and more often.
 9. In my memory, I responded. What actually happened is that I didn't text back with any kind of words until I'd read the article twice. I write with friends or on my own every day at noon so I can see now that I responded back two minutes before my writing session. I asked two questions with some kind of hypothesis wrapped up. I don't know what else could be said, not at that moment.
 10. That link exchange 9 days ago. It's mid, actually late afternoon on a Saturday. I talked with a friend about a project and caught up a little over the phone. The real phone, not FaceTime or Zoom or Messenger. Before hanging up, he said he might go over to the protests. I changed my tone and with much restraint over the emotion in my voice, I pleaded (very mild pleading) with him to text me when he got home. We joked that he's older and I'm still treating him very mom-like. Two nights in a row, I worry about which one of my friends are going out to the Justice Center and will show me in some way that they're safe in the morning. I wish I wasn't asking for more, for things I wouldn't ask of friends. Is that even the kind of intimacy we have? Am I sure? I only ask two friends to text me. I'm not asking for a lot. It would be weird to ask everyone on my friend network to text me. I tell myself two is enough. I can track two.
 11. Last night, I inexplicably cried in bed. I was already tired and wanted to sleep. It was about 10 and lights off in my room. When I set my sleep cycle tracker app, the time lights up, the only source in the room. I remembered my friend was going out that night. She's a mom, too. She's in my groupchat of 4 (not 3). She doesn't text all of us when she goes. I had been asking in IG messages since she was posting so many IG stories for weeks. She's a teacher. She is the friend we joke about being 10 minutes away and arrives a half hour. I am the latest-arriving one of our bunch. She's the friend I can pick out of her throwback photos with her sisters who all look alike because she's the one with the thousand-watt smile. She's gone to protests, vigils, union rallies before. She's been in danger once before when we heard about a school shooting. I don't know if the last time I saw her in-person was my birthday 238 days ago. We had a Houseparty group call maybe in early April. We LOL and Ha! tapback react to each other's texts and IG stories. It feels like I'm overreacting. Why am I crying? She's gonna be fine, I told myself so I could sleep. She had said she was going with her mother, she's gonna be fine, I told myself as I rolled over to my side, my comfortable sleeping side.
 12. I remembered, on my side, that I saw other friends and colleagues going in groups, with posters. I know them. I am friends with some. Others I had some kind of communion over rice and drinks in the course of the years of living in Portland with attempts to commune with other people of color. I communed, now that's a word. I don't feel in touch with so many people, before COVID. I don't know what I'm supposed to be feeling.
 13. The posters. This is about Black lives mattering. It was always supposed to be about Black Lives. It still is, I tell/told/tell myself. It still is.
 14. They are out there because something has to change. I paid attention when acquaintances were out there 50 days ago. What changed? Did I change? Did my focus of worry change?
 15. Before shelter-in-place, right before spring break started for my son, his high school principal sent a message to parents:

we were made aware of a threatening and racist message written on the wall of one of our restrooms

included the N word

This act is incredibly disturbing.

I remembered telling a friend here and there how worried I get about my son, a student very visibly Asian and very visibly not white, in a very white, well-funded high school. A high school with underage potential Nazis and whatever the word is for when you can't be held responsible for smirks or passing thoughts or bathroom graffiti because calling a white teenager in Portland a racist is not done. My son walks to his special-ed-supported classes unburdened because the email is addressed to me and other parents.

I have to find ways to distract myself throughout the day until he is home, when I get a message like this. I have to decide whether to send him to school the next day, when something could happen.

(I don't send him.)

16. This isn't the only time. I wonder now about how many principals have to copy and paste *we were made aware of a threatening message*. How many times the Portland Police Bureau had to go through the steps of how to assess *real and credible threats* with schools. What it takes for something not to be a threat even with the presence of threatening messages and the line *it included an image of a knife and gun*.
17. *I take your physical and emotional safety very seriously.*

pero no se dirigió a ningún individuo o grupo, e incluyó una imagen de un cuchillo y una pistola

18. I told friends it feels like I get an email about a threatening message every few weeks or at least 3 times one month. When I search for these emails, I'm chasing a ghost trail that conflicts with my memory. I remembered a dozen messages about racist graffiti in my son's middle school before this. I don't know how to live like this. I don't know how anyone lives like this. Not in this city. I always wanted to be a mom but no one ever told me how to live like this. I wonder if it was a mistake to take my son out of New York.
19. I go back to checking news timelines. It's Groundhog Day, iPhone edition all over again.
20. I wait for some sign that people I've made lumpia with are gonna get home safe to their spouses, to their kids tonight. It feels selfish. It feels like I'm not caring enough when I am caring about these few people whose faces are in my phone with arms hanging over ourselves in goofy poses. I know it's supposed to be this way. It's supposed to happen, change is supposed to happen in these increments. They happen.
21. I tell my self I'm being irrational for worrying in the first place. I should go back to my books, I should go back to some readings bookmarked, get dinner started for my kid. I should be reading *The Mushroom At The End of the World* and *M Archive: After The End of the World*. I started it 2 nights ago.
22. It feels awful sitting in my waiting. It feels like I'm not doing anything.
23. A week ago, I wrote a 692-word essay for a fellowship application. I don't think I made any sense. I was thinking about the futility of envisioning a future when the present was forcing me to

attend to her every single waking minute. I had written, “*Pandemic as portal*” frameworks have come up for me through friends, idea transmission resembling mycelial reproduction. Systems fragmenting before they can bud. Banana leaves tearing in reproduction. I made some observation about mushrooms reproducing and hoped that something made sense. I don’t think anything makes sense today, least of all time reproducing. Five days ago I started an erasure of that essay and most I got so far was:

*The messianic
reduced*

I’m
No one’s
we die
not together
feel vulnerable my/our
impossible
Before
we see other
I am this

taught me/us
admit it’s
made
“We’re in this ”
unmarked

24. I know the change happens, with and without my witnessing.
25. No poet ever mentioned how excruciating waiting was in the witnessing. No one ever talked about fighting with time in the body. No one talked about the processing of other people’s pain. I wonder about the class I took nearly 3 years ago when my teacher brought up witness poetics. The poem I wrote then was bearing witness to something awful far away. I needed a photo to be able to bear witness. The things I’ve born witness to with my eyes have found their ways into other poems. The witnessing of injustice, that’s been harder to hold in my mind and on the page. I think to my self it’s not enough to write about it. I think to my self I’m wrong somewhere.
26. Two photographer friends have been packing lunch and going to protests at the Justice Center. They’ve gotten shots of RiotRibs who has been cooking free food for protestors for weeks. They’ve gotten different perspectives of the Wall of Moms. Those two friends (okay, one is more of a person I see often and am happy to greet when we lock eyes) have gotten hurt in three days (nights). The locking eyes person got hit with a pellet in the back while shooting footage of protests by the fence. Pellet is what I’ve called it. I never went paintballing so I don’t know what those look like. It looks like a brightly colored jawbreaker when he held it in his hand on his IG story. I mesaaged him, Ingat ka! We don’t talk much but I wanted him to be safe even if I’ve never said those words to him before. I meant it. Ingat. I tell my friend who lost her glasses in the tear gas chaos ingat too. Three days ago she had hid behind a tree amidst flash bangs and spicy air. On its own, it does so much work, that one word. They’re both younger than me. They’re not as fluent in Tagalog. They likely heard ingat from older relatives. I mean it when I say it. Ingat. Take care of yourself when the rest of us can’t do it. Take care.
27. The friend who lost her glasses, hid behind trees, and yesterday was collecting helmets to distribute, that friend, I wonder if she’s eating well when she gets home and has to get the tear gas off her skin. I wonder if she can still smell and therefore taste the food she is eating when she is finally safe at home. This is the same friend who texts me when she has extra food and especially fresh vegetables for me to bring to my family. I am hardly outside so I used to take photos of beautiful flowers nearby whenever I’d pick up the food.

28. I'm reading news timelines and nothing on divesting police funds of note has happened in a month. One city commissioner has been the most vocal about divestment in the city budget, been vocal before taking a seat as the first Black female commissioner. There's some news and discussion among personal acquaintances about performative allyship among the politicians here. It's a small city so if you did what I did and had any time spent on campaigns or organizing, you tend to know who's out there doing something in institutions or in the streets. On a writing session with my friends, one of them is very aware of what goes on. We talked about the dual existence of being adjacent to what's happening and still not being a part of it. We talked about how we cried that same morning.
29. That same morning I was reposting the petition about the 15-year-old Black high school student locked up in detention for not completing homework. I signed my name and I questioned whether anything I put my first and last name to mattered. I questioned and I signed.
30. I was curious about Naked Athena 6 days ago. I think about the performance art implications of Naked Athena's body. Today I stopped my friend from talking about Naked Athena anymore in our conversation about conceptual artists. I have a headache and it's not Naked Athena's fault. Tomorrow I don't wanna think about Naked Athena. I'm glad I didn't repost Naked Athena on my IG story. Not even the photographer posted Naked Athena on his own Instagram. He posted ten photos and countless videos about the tear gas.
31. I have been feeling like my phone is enabling my anxiety. I am enabling my anxiety.
32. I wish I knew what day it was.
33. On my phone, I had a countdown app. I used to keep it for my birthday (I'm a Sagittarius who loves my birthday). I had one page for counting down to my book debut. That one is a bit moot now. Two mornings ago, I started a timer to count back to the day Oregon's governor set the shelter in place. I was on an artist residency in the mountains. I was already in a shelter in place for different reasons. According to that date, it's been 124 days (9 hours: 12 minutes, and rising). I count those days now. I can barely recall today is Saturday. I sometimes don't know what month it is.
34. I tell my self I should be reading. I should be starting or ordering dinner for me and the kid in our family of two.
35. My friends are out there. Witnessing.
36. I'm in here. I think I'm witnessing their witnessing.
37. I'm crying again.
38. It's been 124 days: 09 hours; 14 minutes and rising.
39. Tomorrow it is supposed to be 100 degrees.
40. It will be 101 days: 02 hours: 42 minutes and less until the presumptive winner is called on election night.
41. I stopped crying.
42. I don't know if it's right that I'm crying. I don't know if we're gonna get to 200 days since shelter-in-place started and still have federal agents sending projectiles into crowds. I don't know if it will be the Portland Police Bureau shooting into crowds. I don't know what body I'm supposed to maintain by the time we get to 200 days.
43. I am waiting for these texts, waiting for the future to assure me that my cared for ones, my ingat ka comrades, they will be safe. I'm waiting. I'm wishing I could set out a trust thread from my body to their bodies so I know when they are safe. I'm sitting in my home and casting invisible ingat threads. I still don't know if anything matters. I hope anything matters.



(Featured image from Wikimedia, by user Tedder)

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