



**MLC RESEARCH CENTRE  
TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

# **PANDEMIC DEBRIEFS**

**A COMMUNICATION AND  
CULTURE SYMPOSIUM ON  
COVID-19**

**TUESDAY, 14 JUNE 2022**

**2:00 PM - 5:00 PM**

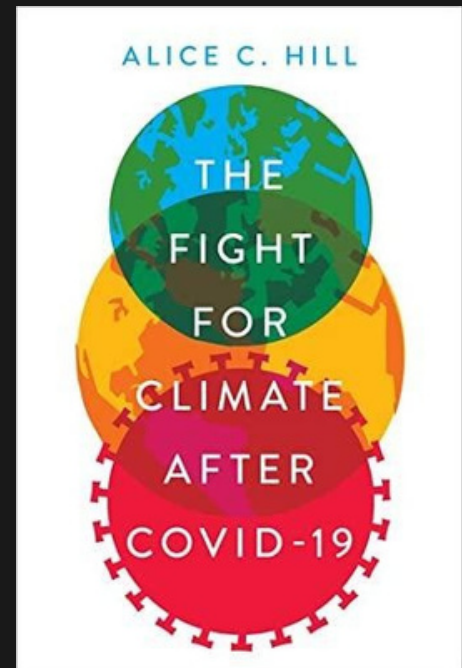
# KEYNOTE

The catastrophic risks of pandemics and climate change carry deep uncertainty as to when they will occur, how they will unfold, and how much damage they will do. The most important question is how these risks can be faced to minimize them most. This book draws on the troubled and uneven COVID-19 experience to illustrate the critical need to ramp up resilience rapidly and effectively on a global scale. It exposes parallels between the underutilized measures that governments should have taken to contain the spread of COVID-19—such as early action, cross-border planning, and bolstering emergency preparation—and the steps leaders can take now to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Through practical analyses of current policy and thoughtful guidance for successful climate adaptation, the book reveals that, just as society has transformed itself to meet the challenge of coronavirus, so too will the thinking and policies need to be adapted to combat the ever-increasing threat of climate change.



**ALICE C. HILL**

Senior Fellow for Climate  
Change Policy at the Council  
on Foreign Relations



# PROGRAM

## WELCOME

2:00-2:05 PM

Land Acknowledgment  
Introductory Remarks

## CREATIVITY & COVID-19

2:05-3:00 PM

*Reframing Creativity*

David Gauntlett & Valeria Duarte

*COVID-19 Anxiety: Location, Refuge and Loss*

Daniel Payne & Pam Patterson

*The Rise of COVID-19 Diary Comics and Autotheory during the Pandemic*

Griffen Horsley

*Processing the Pandemic: COVID-19 and Comics*

Barbara Postema

## PLASTICITY & COVID-19

3:05-4:00 PM

*COVID-19 in the Suburbs: From Leisure Studies to Co-Presence in the City*

Jeanine Webster

*Fashioning the Face Mask During a Pandemic: From the Spanish Flu to COVID-19*

Sephra Lamothe

*E-Pimping on OnlyFans: Sex Labour during the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Cassidy Rempel

*Visual and Procedural Rhetoric: Immersing in Game Worlds during COVID-19*

Alexander Hurezeanu

## KEYNOTE

4:10-5:00 PM

*The Fight for Climate after COVID-19*

Alice C. Hill, Council on Foreign Relations

# ABSTRACTS

## CREATIVITY & COVID-19

### Reframing Creativity

DAVID GAUNTLETT & VALERIA DUARTE

Reframing Creativity investigates how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the work and creative practice of individuals who identify as artists, producers or makers. Through qualitative, open-ended interviews, our research demonstrated that, despite the many obstacles creators had to face, the pandemic translated into an opportunity to advance new knowledge about themselves, their values and motivations, and focus their work in the future. Key findings include: First, the challenges of this time prompted participants to generate new perceptions of their creative identity. Second, they often found a valuable connection to nature during the pandemic. Third, the most pressing challenges were related to their mental health and financial stability.

### COVID-19 Anxiety: Location, Refuge and Loss

DANIEL PAYNE & PAM PATTERSON

Beginning in June 2020, inspired by generative and co-participatory activities with students, we pushed ourselves into new directions during the first lockdown. An irrepressible, manic curiosity consumed us, a kind of “anxiety of dissolution” (Loveless 49). To address this, we asked deeply reflexive questions about how we, as artists/researchers, could learn from this heightened pandemic anxiety. This presentation discusses the results of this research creation project including a COVID-19 (re)contextualization of Clara Peeters’ self-portrait *Vanitas* (1610) painting, seated at a table, prompting one of the authors to depict himself in his own domestic environment during the 2020 lockdown.

### The Rise of COVID-19 Diary Comics and Autotheory During the Pandemic

GRIFFEN HORSLEY

Boston-based graphic designer and illustrator Katy Doughty has produced pandemic-themed diary-comics during the COVID-19 lockdowns by interweaving medical data with sensitive personal ruminations and experience. Drawn in 2020-2022, these comics are part of the dramatic rise in the production and sharing of COVID-19-focused diary comics, blogs, and other personal-narrative-based media. By examining works by Katy Doughty and Jillian Tamaki, I argue that they produced and shared documentary comics as a means of coping with health anxieties. They did so by integrating the autobiographical and the theoretical, what artist/theorist Lauren Fournier has termed the autotheoretical turn (2021). Thus, by investigating diary comics, I ultimately contribute to the study of COVID-19 at the intersection of affect theory and medical humanities.

### Processing the Pandemic: COVID-19 and Comics

BARBARA POSTEMA

In September 2020, while New Zealand was still cut off from the world due to strict quarantine conditions and only months after the country-wide lockdown was lifted, the Christchurch Art Gallery published *Lockdown: Tales from Aotearoa*, featuring nineteen New Zealand cartoonists chronicling their experiences during those five weeks of forced isolation. While the speed with which these comics were produced shows an urgency about sharing experiences in diary and documentary form, these cartoons also integrate fantastical elements to represent the dystopian realities of the pandemic. Ultimately, as I argue, the comics form was among the first creative responses to the crisis used as a way of processing the pandemic through art.



## PLASTICITY & COVID-19

### COVID-19 in the Suburbs: From Leisure Studies to Co-Presence in the City

JEANINE WEBSTER

"The copresence of multitudes of persons unknown to one another in urban public spaces provides fertile terrain for analysts of interaction," writes Mervyn Horgan in his anthropological approach to the city. Focussing on pre-COVID-19 urban spaces, Horgan's interest lies in how strangers develop rituals to avoid each other in the city. I propose to involve Horgan in a dialogue with Troy D. Glover's spatial theory, the latter arguing that the city during COVID-19 created new ways of playing with public city spaces, for example, through reinvigorated sidewalk activities amongst neighbours. My approach nuances Troy Glover's by focussing on the city of Markham (located 30 kilometers northwest of Toronto's downtown with 330,000 residents) during the pandemic; I argue that spatial privilege left social divisions relatively intact, enabling neighbours to avoid each other by practicing Hogan's avoidance rituals of co-presence—even during the crisis.

### Fashioning the Face Mask for the Pandemic: From the Spanish Flu to COVID-19

SEPHRA LAMOTHE

During six waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most controversial and visible material culture objects has been the face mask. Not only providing protection, but also carrying cultural meaning and profound affect, it was embraced by many and rejected by others, mirroring the responses to the face mask during the Spanish flu pandemic, which caused millions of deaths around the world a century earlier in the wake of World War I. By taking a material culture, fashion studies, and comparative approach, I examine the face mask as a complex material culture object to gain an understanding of how cultural narratives a century apart both intersect and diverge. Ultimately, I advance our understanding of the material culture of COVID-19 at the intersection of fashion studies, and history.

### E-Pimping on OnlyFans: Sex Labour during the COVID-19 Pandemic

CASSIDY REMPEL

The internet content subscription service OnlyFans enjoyed a boom during the pandemic and presents a case study for investigating the intersecting dynamic of COVID-19, sex labour, and gender. Launched in 2016, OnlyFans is distinguished by its participatory digital culture, the "creators" shaping their sexual content based on the requests of their "fans" or "members" who pay for the service. Thus, OnlyFans involves the labour of content creation as well as the emotional and aesthetic labor involved with selling sex. Given that OnlyFans provided an income for many women who were disproportionately unemployed during COVID-19, and given also that 87% of members were male, I explore whether the use of OnlyFans during the COVID-19 pandemic made sex a laborious task for women.

### Visual and Procedural Rhetoric: Immersing in Game Worlds during COVID-19

ALEXANDER HUREZEANU

Consider an image of a mountain and a climbing anchor from the November 2019 action game *Death Stranding* by Kojima Productions, which became a hit during the COVID-19 pandemic, selling 5 million games by July 2021. The climbing tools in the foreground suggest to viewers that the massive mountain in the distance is scalable using climbing tools. However, the process of how one chooses to interact with the tools or mechanics of the game to scale the mountain is unique to the player's specific approach, hence the procedural process of overcoming adversity in a manner that provides the player with a sense of control and agency. I argue that the game's rhetorical invitation to overcome adversity helps explain the game's remarkable popularity during COVID-19 as games present a powerful medium through which visual rhetoric evolves into a conceptual form called procedural rhetoric: a framework that players consciously and unconsciously use to navigate and immerse themselves in game worlds.

# BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS

**Valeria Duarte** is a Research and Project Manager for the Creativity Everything lab at Toronto Metropolitan University. She holds an MA in Communication and Culture.

**David Gauntlett** holds the Canada Research Chair in Creative Innovation and Leadership in The Creative School at Toronto Metropolitan University. He directs the Creativity Everything Lab and is the author of *Making is Connecting* (Polity, 2018) and *Creativity* (Wiley, 2022).

**Alice C. Hill** is the David M. Rubenstein senior fellow for energy and the environment at the Council on Foreign Relations who previously served as special assistant to President Barack Obama. She is the author of *The Fight for Climate After COVID-19* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

**Griffen Horsley**, an MA student in Communication and Culture at Toronto Metropolitan University, uses research creation methods to explore memory and affect in relation to personal experiences of loss.

**Alexander Hurezeanu** is a PhD student in Communication and Culture at Toronto Metropolitan University; he researches cultural reproduction and narrative structures in video games and other forms of interactive media.

**Sephra Lamothe**, an MA student in the School of Fashion at Toronto Metropolitan University, researches the pandemic's effect on material culture objects, comparing the Spanish Flu with COVID-19.

**Pam Patterson** is a performance artist and Assistant Professor, OCAD University, where she directs WIAprojects, a multi-faceted feminist arts-informed research and practice program.

**Daniel Payne** researches visual and material culture and is co-investigator in the "Covid-19 Anxiety: Location, Refuge and Loss" project housed at OCAD University.

**Cassidy Rempel**, an MA student in Communication and Culture at Toronto Metropolitan University, researches the rhetoric of medicine.

**Barbara Postema** teaches in the Department of English and Culture at Groningen University, Netherlands. She is the author of *Narrative Structure in Comics: Making Sense of Fragments* (Rochester Institute for Technology Press, 2013).

**Jeanine Webster** is an Academic Coordinator in The Creative School at Toronto Metropolitan University and a Communication and Culture MA student.

# ORGANIZERS

Irene Gammel and Jason Wang

The graduate students in *CC8836/CMCT 6135: Pandemic, Modernity and the Everyday*

With the support of the Modern Literature and Culture (MLC) Research Centre

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**A special thank you goes to our symposium keynote speaker**

Alice C. Hill, Council on Foreign Relations  
for her time and intellectual generosity

**Thank you to the guest speakers in the course,  
whose ideas laid the foundation for this symposium**

Will Straw, McGill University  
Priscilla Wald, Duke University  
Troy D. Glover, University of Waterloo  
J. Michael Ryan, Nazarbayev University  
Valerie Visanich, University of Malta  
Tsitsi Ella Jaji, Duke University  
Anna Triandafyllidou, Toronto Metropolitan University  
Emmy Waldman, Bournemouth University  
Barbara Postema, Groningen University

**We thank the MLC Research Centre for support**

Diamond Carvalho Rocha, Allison Kinahan,  
Renée LeBlanc Proctor, and Madeleine Sweenie

