

Our little pandemic has been humbling in a number of ways. I think this revelation is the most significant one: Our world is just fine without us. First, see, I heard that L.A. — Los Angeles! — quite suddenly has air that's not just better, but even the best of any major city, worldwide. That shouldn't be possible, yet... Next, I heard that Yosemite wildlife now roams more freely than has been seen in many decades. You think those owls and wolves and cats and moose are missing us much? Yeah, neither do I. And finally, I saw a video of a jellyfish bobbing down a Venetian canal. None of this normally happens, but here we are: People go away, and the planet starts healing within a month. It kind of reminds me of my last posting, about how it's such a relief — even for Mother Earth, apparently — when those who make one miserable are nowhere to be seen. I'm embarrassed, though, that it's us, ~~humanity,~~ ^{humanity,} my kind, that is the absence the rest of nature now luxuriates in. "Maybe we really should try a bit harder to not suck quite so bad... you know, as a species?"

Ok, next thought: Is this the "New Normal," then? NO! For Chrissake, please stop throwing that term around so blithely. As humbled as we should be by our world's utter lack of use for us, we also know that we're not dead yet, as the Python fans might say, and that very soon pretty much everything will be back to the same as it ever was, as the Byrne fans might say. This is new, but it's not normal, and almost certainly it won't become so, at least not this time. "New Normal" denotes a permanent change... do you think our collective willingness to abandon capitalistic enterprise is permanent? Unlikely. This is the new abnormal, a historical blip, after which, if we're very lucky, we might enjoy an uptick in handwashing as a durable cultural artifact. I wouldn't anticipate much beyond that.

Staying on the topic of terminological pet peeves, I just have to register my lonely opposition to our unflinching use of the word "lockdown" in contexts far removed from explicit command-environments like jails and military bases. For years I've bristled at the growing familiarity of this awful, institutional word, now so often applied to places like schools and sports fields whenever local pigs want to exercise their ~~power~~ ^{muscle} in the vicinity; this foul word with all its hideously fascist undertones. Unfortunately, if there was ever any hope of curbing the authoritarian assault on our ~~collective~~ worldview through the vector of vocabulary, I'm afraid this virus scare marks a point of no return — the word "lockdown" is on everyone's lips now, from local newscasters to PTA moms to pizza-makers. Another illiberal genie is loosed from its bottle, and before you pooh-poo me too much, just consider the influence of how we speak on how we think, and then the cascading effects of our thoughts on our beliefs, our beliefs on our ~~values,~~ ^{values,} and our values on our actions. Words do matter, so maybe when we accept phrasings that normalize the "locking down" of playgrounds or churches or even entire neighborhoods of private homes, we cultivate a certain kind of world, too. A certain kind of people.

Finally, the T.V. news here is full of stories of our fearless highway patrollers angrily ranting about people driving faster than usual on the near-empty 10-lane freeways. "Everyone's speeding!", they oink hysterically,

as if exceeding an arbitrary speed limit on clean, dry roadways that were engineered to safely handle modern cars travelling at 100+ MPH was a deadly pandemic in itself. It's not. There's no cross-traffic on the freeway, no bikes or pedestrians, no little kids or dogs darting out from behind parked cars... everyone is fine. They could just leave people alone, but with fewer folks in cars generating ticket revenue, police need to find something to fill their quotas and justify their existence. Besides, they're probably feeling a bit put out... after all, it's normally just the cops - on duty or off - who rocket down roads at twice the posted limit with impunity. Their elitist sense of exclusive privilege must feel threatened, so actually, with that in mind - yes, do be careful if you're out there driving fast. It really is the most dangerous behavior of all, you know... making cops feel unspecial. That sort of recklessness can get you killed for sure.

Be safe, everyone! 😊 (Or don't - I'm sure I won't know either way.)

* Printed on truly recycled paper, lol... cuz I'm almost totally out.

Ignore the scribble-outs



Write me at:

Harszewski
AC2622 C-Yard
P.O. Box 409060
Ione, CA 95640



~~Flying Over Walls/SF Bay Area chapter of Black and Pink~~

~~In solidarity,~~

~~"queer" (8 pages, 4 double-sided pages).~~

~~This letter contains an excerpt from the Gender Graphic Novel discussing the term~~

~~Study Group Readings: Session 2~~

Date: 2/18/20

To: 

~~San Francisco, CA 94140~~

~~PO Box 401014~~

~~% Flying Over Walls~~

~~Study Group~~