





7 May 2020,
THURSDAY

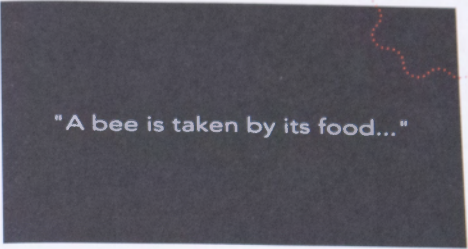
DEAR LAURIE,

I feel like over the past six-seven weeks (we've been at home since mid-March) my relationship to time and distance changed quite drastically. The distances I've passed through over the past few years —flying over several countries in the span of a calendar year— feel like remote realities now. Even going to the grocery store around the corner requires different kinds of effort and accompanies a specific type of alertness. Although I've always been attentive to the materialities around me, I don't remember ever being this aware of the surfaces I'm touching, whether it is wood, plastic, fabric, human, animal or plant... This awareness also comes with a particular slowness, one that I can't relate to any past experience.

I spend most of my time cleaning, cooking, eating and attending Zoom meetings like you. As I mentioned in previous correspondences, I'm also resorting to fiction over this period. Reading about universes that don't have this peculiar transforming force has been consoling me. In terms of the other unjust material realities you mentioned, I believe the virus is working consistently all around the world, underlining all the pre-existing structures and conditions of inequality, making them more visible than ever and in the meanwhile radicalizing them. As Michael Marder phrased it much more eloquently: "Transgressing old borders, the virus becomes a figure of sovereignty in the age of the dispersion of power. To understand its workings is to get a glimpse of the way power operates today."¹

¹
Michael Marder, "The Corona Virus Is Us," *New York Times*,
3 March 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/03/opinion/the-coronavirus-is-us.html>

As for my relationship to the future, that is also changing in accordance with my relationship to time. I'm teaching myself to think in shorter temporalities, to plan for only the next seven days ahead, with the learned habit of using weeks as a measure of time. Since everything else that is further away seems to exist on shaky ground, I try only to respond to the immediate future that awaits. In doing so, my relationship to the past is changing as well, my life as an artist seems like a distant past most of the time, even though I was in the studio only 47 days ago. Concerns I had in February about particular projects feel so irrelevant, everything feels minor compared to the reality at hand.



"A bee is taken by its food..."

Still from *How long I ask you to watch*, 2015.

10 June 2020,
WEDNESDAY

DEAR GÜLŞAH,

Now too much time has passed since you wrote and your questions might be different, but I will try to address them anyway. In the U.S., George Floyd was murdered by police on May 25, and that racist murder following so many others has inspired an insurgence of protests in solidarity with Black³ lives all over the country (and internationally) and calling for abolishing the police. It was impossible for people not to leave the COVID isolation and put on masks and join people in the streets. I have been thinking, through the lichen writing, about structures and histories of domination and subjection via the perilous taxonomic totem pole of valued forms of life, crowned with a non-inclusive "human" at the top, a category of sovereign individual to which many humans were / are still not

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In July 2020, the Associated Press announced that it would capitalize the word "Black" when used in the context of race and culture, and that it would not do the same for "white" because "white people in general have much less shared history and culture, and do not have the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color." Many writers and publishers in the U.S. had already been implementing this practice for years for many reasons, including the desire to pay respect in a context of ongoing injustice and inequity.

deemed to belong, and below which other forms of life have been assumed to be lesser and lesser, with lichens at the bottom as "the excrement of trees."

The writing also led me to thinking about lichenologists and their unusual passion for studying this marginal organism in the field, and their embarrassments about being seen in public places, nose to the ground, butt in the air. Then I read about Christian Cooper. He is the Black birdwatcher who encountered a white dog-walker in Central Park in NYC the same day that Floyd was murdered. When Cooper asked the woman to put her dog on a leash, which is the law in that part of Central Park, she called the police and started screaming into the phone that an "African-American man" was threatening her in Central Park. In subsequent articles, other Black birdwatchers testified, matter-of-factly, that they are always vigilant when out in the field with their binoculars, knowing that they will be seen as suspicious if a white person sees them, and some of them routinely ask a white friend to go birdwatching with them so as to not make other white strangers uncomfortable; they acquire a white chaperone in order to not have to worry about being threatened, arrested, or killed.



Some lichens in California, 2014.

6
A. Laurie Palmer, *Whitedirt.com*, *nomorepotlucks.com*, 2012.

Dr Campbell's Safe Arsenic
Complexion Wafers
advertisement, circa 1890.



cah / sevgili



Dear Laurie, Dear Gülşah / sevgili Laurie, sevgili Gülşah



MR LAURIE DEAR GÜLŞAH

