

**Mourning the loss of subjective temporal continuity
A personal reflection**

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Abstract: Covid led to a disruption of subjective time experience – an abyss which separates Covid and pre-Covid time. Temporal memory has become unreliable, putting into question which other memories can no longer be trusted.

Keywords: Grief, Covid_19, loss.

Submitted: August 12, 2020 Revised: November 15, 2020 Accepted: November 15, 2020

Psychoanalyst Deutsch argues that at present we face four interconnected emergencies: nuclear, climate, pandemic, and racism. She argues “An adult reaction to emergency would include realistic fear, concern for oneself and others, a rational sense of time, and single-minded focus” (Deutsch, 2020, para 2).

For those of us influenced by a Western tradition, time constitutes a one-directional stream. I think of it as a road on which you can only go forwards. You may look back, of course, and there are landmarks that allow you to think of phases of your life as “before” and “after” – with different landmarks for different people. For me, it would include moving from Germany to the United States as a student, and from the US to Canada to take up my first university appointment, the birth of my child, marriage, divorce, buying my cottage, and more. These milestones have segmented my time into before and after phases – but nevertheless, the experience of the flow of time is continuous.

Covid 19 was a different experience. I realized that when I updated my cottage book. I have owned my cottage for 36 years, and during all this time I have asked people who stay with me to write briefly about what they experienced. Occasionally, some are a bit dismayed when they get this request, but when they come back the year after they eagerly go to their previous entry – “yes, do you remember that?” and enjoy reading their own and other people’s comments. I add my own remarks, and at the end of the year I glue in photos of my friends who were there. It is interesting to see how people change if there is only one photo of them per year. Some go from baby to adult.

This year I was late with bringing my cottage book up to date. It was the end of

March until I had the photos printed, and Covid had hit us like a truck. That was the moment when I realized that my sense of time had been seriously distorted. I was utterly surprised to find out that my German friends who I thought had visited years ago, had actually been there in 2019! Last year! And even after this experience, I was shocked again just a few days ago when my cousin reminded me that we had seen each other last year. Again, I had mentally placed my Germany trip years before when it actually happened. Time was no longer continuous. Instead, there was an abyss which separated the Covid-time from the pre-Covid time. Covid_19 did not constitute a landmark for a before and after phase, but represented a radical disruption of temporal flow.

I also realized that I had stopped reading the Guardian Magazine when Covid_19 started – later, I found all these old unread issues and never quite managed to go through all of them. In other words, I isolated myself from one of the ways in which I know about the world. Covid 19 disrupted the temporal continuity that so far had always been an unquestioned part of my life.

Logic and reason tell me that time flows like always – but emotionally, Covid_19 is the Grand Canyon crossing my time road. It has created an irrational, rather than rational, sense of time for me. I cannot trust my memory as I did before Covid_19 came along. I wonder what else I cannot trust any longer. I mourn the loss of experiencing time as continuous rather than discontinuous.

Reference

Deutsch, J. (July 24, 2020). Nuclear Weapons and Extreme Threats: A Tale of Two Men Handling Emergency

<https://socialistproject.ca/2020/07/nuclear-weapons-and-extreme-threats/#more>

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