

# TIME, CINEMA, COVID, CARE

PATO HEBERT, AND ALEXANDRA JUHASZ

**Résumé :** En 2023, les auteurs ont amorcé des échanges au sujet d'un type de cinéma pandémique, une conversation Zoom enregistrée, un mode de communication apprécié, puis sauvegardé par diverses technologies numériques et d'enregistrement pour tenir des conversations, suivre les mouvements, les interactions humaines et l'espace dans le temps et pour le temps. Sur Zoom et au début de la quatrième année de la pandémie, les auteurs demandent : Et si nous écoutions les personnes qui réclament des pratiques plus inclusives? Quelles sortes de pratiques d'image d'inclusion et de solidarité espérons-nous dans les temps de changement que représente la COVID?

**Mots-clés :** cinéma, COVID, COVID de longue durée, médias militants, pandémie

**Abstract:** We engaged in a conversation [in 2023] as and about one kind of pandemic cinema, a recorded Zoom conversation—a communication that was enjoyed and then saved via several digital and recording technologies to hold conversation, movement, human interaction, and space in time and for time. On Zoom and entering year four we asked: What if we listened to people who ask for more inclusive practices? We ask: What sort of image practices of inclusion and solidarity do we hope for in the changing times of COVID?

**Keywords:** COVID, long-haul COVID, pandemic, cinema, activist media

## I. TIME. CINEMA<sup>1</sup>

ALEX: We will engage in this conversation [in 2023], as and about one kind of pandemic cinema—a recorded Zoom conversation—a communication that is enjoyed and then saved via several digital and recording technologies to hold conversation, movement, human interaction, and space in time and for time. Of course, the *not* recorded Zoom screen is another kind of moving image: a lost and losable one. We could posit that a recorded activist or artistic Zoom screen might be a cinema of solidarity. It holds, for us and then others, in time and technology, how we are with COVID and

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Pato Hebert – New York University, New York, New York, United States

Alexandra Juhasz – Brooklyn College, CUNY, New York, New York, United States

in community now—for good and for ill, well and not well, present and not present—and then for a later time, across the years, in a form that might be informative for ourselves and others.

But is Zoom a *cinema*? A corporation? A set of quickly refining pandemic practices and their linked cultural and economic protocols? A way of seeing? Being? Thinking? Knowing? In this conversation—held on and also about Zoom; in and about the changing times of COVID; and as a representational practice of communication and sometimes care—I am using the word cinema because it marks a historical representational apparatus also known for holding time and ideas, often aligned with corporate ownership and economies as well as regimes of reception and protocols of production. When life went to the screen during (and following) COVID lockdown, we might say Zoom could (sometimes) be a pandemic form of cinema, as well as much more (or less): to be discussed!

Pandemic Zoom screens and their cinema are fundamentally alienating and not aesthetically pleasing. This is a simplified and pared down format and also its opposite: “the screen as care.”<sup>2</sup> So the Zoom screen can be a cinema of care that is COVID-inspired and COVID-inclusive:<sup>3</sup> one that can be COVID-aware and also physically safe for any participant. It is also a vernacular mode of cinema, or media, that came into being and was refined, codified, and corporate-platformed over the years of COVID: a rapidly adopted form of moving image communication and capture, one that reflects very powerful kinds of solidarity as well as capital.

So Pato, here we are on Zoom and entering year four. “What if we listen to people who ask for more inclusive practices”? I can ask: what sort of image practices of inclusion and solidarity do we hope for in the changing times of COVID? (See Figure 1.)

PATO: We are continuing to live in the most mediated pandemic (and time) in the history of humankind. Smartphones have enabled this. We’ve previously theorized the paradox of the screen as care—recognizing that helping people be socially connected, even and especially when they can’t be physically connected, is an important practice that has been normalized in this pandemic, if not always as *care*, then as necessity. This manner of screen culture has been vital for allowing some forms of organizing to happen and some forms of conviviality and pleasure to happen as well.

I want to remember that the explosion of Zoom is happening at the same time as the explosion of TikTok. And I’m also struck by the fact that even prior to either of these formats and platforms,



**Figure 1:** Digital tile from *Practicing Inclusion in the Time of Covid*, created by a partnership between Strategies for High Impact and What Would an HIV Doula Do?

corporations on the one hand, and activist networks on the other, have both been using screen culture for a long, long time. And so, I'm intrigued by how people take up technology to thrive and survive. And in my brain fog, I've lost the point that I most wanted to make at the very, very end here. Maybe that's quite fitting.

ALEX: Yes, we are holding and representing our bodies, many modalities of thinking, and linked methods for sharing and recording as central to this writing on Time, Cinema, COVID and Care. Technologies, illness, connection, and loss are live. TikTok and Zoom are understood to be expendable, fleeting, and quick. They're built and understood to be only momentarily feeding. What happens when we use those technologies which are not built for our well-being, which are not built for duration and hence our solidarity, which are not built for our healing, to do those things? Things that activists

do. Things that humans do. When I hit RECORD STOP, and then when we polish the words first spoken live and between us into something more refined and public, that is not what the technologies are asking of us or them. That is us bending the technologies at hand into a form that better holds our relationship to stillness and movement, as well as self- and community care.

PATO: I want to bend words very briefly in closing. I'm struck by language that has also been normalized when you talked about how normalized the screen has become through Zoom: story, real-time, line, feed, content, creative, and how bent by capital those have become, yet how bendable they are again by activism and art and solidarity.

## II. CINEMA. COVID

ALEX: This is the second part of a recorded Zoom conversation from summer 2023 that we're hoping to use as the backbone for our article on solidarity and cinema with attention to ecology and non-human worlds. Given COVID's viral nature, we often talk about how the virus helps us to remember the non-existent boundaries between our bodies and the world. I am thinking back to our first published writing, *It Could be So Much Worse*, from January 2021.<sup>4</sup> You wrote:

A few weeks ago, my students gave each other a lovely prompt for their weekly writing reflection: "Has there ever been a time when you felt like a part of your body was not yours?" I do not feel that this body is mine, in the sense of being anything I possess or control. But I also don't feel that it is COVID's. We now belong to each other and to something more. This is a bit like the way that we are fortunate to steward land (not own or extract or vanquish it), and perhaps even belong to a place with time and care.

I am trying to sit with the longing and belonging, the bodies and disembodiments that come with COVID. A lover once told me that he wanted to own his HIV. He meant that he didn't want it to get the best of him, didn't want being pos to be the primary determinant of his life. This was in the mid-late 1990s, and I think he also meant that he did not want to die.

I often think about his agency and resolve, even as I desire no ownership over COVID. When I walk the park and pay attention to the things that can be found there, the land helps me to feel connected to another kind of enduring, seasonal cycles and geologic time, things much larger than this moment. And then the PPE



**Figure 2:** Image of surgical mask in Los Angeles' Elysian Part. Courtesy of Pato Hebert.

bring me back. Masks, soil, shimmering light, a COVID body.  
(See Figure 2.)

ALEX: Reading this again today, many years later, I see so many balancing acts we still hope to engage in this writing where we are theorizing time and cinema alongside the solidarity work we do as AIDS workers, long-haul activists, people with long-haul COVID, and related care work. Theorizing cinema and COVID while living and writing inside a world and bodies, and through systems, that are flesh, material, viral, and technological.

Activist COVID art or perhaps any cinema of solidarity might put more attention on COVID and care than does a more traditional cinema or even political cinema. This cinema of solidarity might put first our bodies and communities, and our work to better the world we inhabit. Yes, we're theorizing time in cinema, but we're doing that through lived experience, in time, in our COVID-influenced bodies, and as part of our attempts to organize around COVID and long-haul COVID and care.

PATO: How does time function in COVID? What are the images of COVID? I want to put duration at play in relationship to time.



**Figure 3:** Pato Hebert, selfie while waiting for chest x-ray, 5 April 2020.

Duration implies a start and an end, whereas time can be sort of clinical—X amount of time—but it can also zoom way out to an era, century, millennia or period. Time has the potential to be many other things: endless, cyclical, a spiral, abstract.

I want to hold duration and time into relation with COVID and care and image. At this moment, I'm having to reimagine yet again what care looks like as people I love find themselves in very different COVID times. You, my sister, my ex/maybe-still partner. I'm realizing I'm in a really different COVID temporality than each of you as your risk thresholds and activities are increasingly different than mine. And I have no idea what the images of that are. (See Figure 3.)

ALEX: If ours is fundamentally a time project, but also one of COVID and care, it is also a representational and image project ("cinema"?). Since we both became infected in March 2020, and then found ourselves to be long-hauling that summer, and ongoing, we have been marking what COVID looks like from ground zero of any moment every three or four months: in our bodies, in our apartments, in our cities, in our communities, in activist settings, in images. And it has changed so profoundly at each mark.

Real-time theorizing asks, what does COVID look like now? Do we have words for this? Can we share those words? Do we have images? Can we share those images? As COVID churns and remakes itself, the real-timed-ness of our thinking and interaction has been useful for us as people needing solace, information, and systems to understand our bodies and this world, and as a way to keep track of this pandemic in flux. And I believe our writing and images will be differently useful in the future, with hindsight, and as they are taken up to remember and reflect.

We have understood COVID as generating multiple temporalities<sup>5</sup>: when one gets COVID; when or if that infection ends; all the people on their own different ticks on any cycle. But what I'm hearing in your discourse today is that there's yet another change, an affective one: an aggressiveness or even hegemonic control over these multiple temporalities. COVID has been deemed "over" by governments, businesses, families, and people.<sup>6</sup> A temporality of stop; a duration ended. So some human beings (people with COVID, Long COVID, or who care about this or us) will have to either fight or withdraw from the time battle.

PATO: You said very early on, in 2020, "this will end, there will be a time that's hard to see now, when COVID is in the past." I think I agreed with you then by thinking about what was called the Spanish flu. But tuberculosis never went away, and AIDS is not over.<sup>7</sup>

We know from our AIDS work that some of the ways that COVID may never be over. (See Figure 4.) And yet COVID-19 has long since been declared as such. And so, given my Long COVID, I am experiencing new isolation, not yet in the most literal sense, but in a more spiritual and political sense, and in a day-to-day decision-making sense as well: a forever isolation rather than the duration isolation that so many of us sought. And that's because so many of you are moving on from COVID-care by letting go of mitigation behaviors you had used to care for yourselves and others. These are no longer the behaviors you're using. But I can't afford to behave that way.

The bareness of the threads connecting us are showing. And that means I'm feeling a semi-permanent isolation. This is not a fucking duration that leads to "I'm better." I'm trying to hold that and distinguish between *duration*, which has the implication of a start and an end, as compared to a time that may be forever. Crip time.<sup>8</sup>

ALEX: I don't think COVID is over. I wouldn't ever say that. My relationship to COVID is different today. I know people have COVID right now. I know people are long-hauling right now. I'm covered with





**Figure 4:** AIDS IS/AIDS AIN'T: A Collaborative Inquiry. Creative Time presents Remedy at Rashid Johnson's Red Stage, Astor Place, New York, 13 June 2021. Photo by Mike Vitelli/BFA.com. Courtesy of Creative Time.

hives right now. I think COVID is in a different place, and it always has been. I am in a new period with COVID for about a month, maybe six weeks, where I started consciously making a decision to not wear a mask. I'm looking around: there's a lot of ventilation here. I know what the infection rates are right now. I'm following that data. I think my chance of getting COVID in this movie theater is actually quite slim. And what's happened to me is that I make that decision about a restaurant, I make that decision about an airplane, and then there's this sort of gradual slide into . . . the decision has been made. However, if I saw numbers rising, I would wear a mask.

I'm making new calculated decisions about my now. But questions about solidarity with those most at risk, the most vulnerable, the ill and the disabled amongst us, is an ongoing political practice of this and all times of COVID. What is at stake for maintaining deep solidarity with people undergoing a lived relationship to a virus that is different from one's own, that itself has its own rhythms and moods and pulses? And when I converse with you, when I make media with you, when I hold space with you on Zoom and on the page, as an act of care—yes, but also as an act of political commitment and thinking—it reminds me about the



solidarity work with people at risk for COVID that I must do as an ethical person and as a loving human.

I have to build in methods of connection and communication—of representation—to keep me true to a decent “crip kinship.”<sup>9</sup> And that’s true for most people who are not currently suffering in this moment of their life, from COVID, or another illness or disability: that we need to be responsible for producing the methods that will keep us ethically, politically, and humanly true to those with bodily need. That’s our responsibility. Because it doesn’t take that long, when I hear you, to remind myself that what you are saying is ethically and politically righteous because you are speaking from a position of pain and bodily assault that has been rendered by this virus.

It’s human to be frail. It’s human to be sick. It’s human to be disabled. It’s human to suffer from illness and viruses in the air and also from the dirty air we breathe and other forms of violence.

When we feel healthy, it is exactly then—no better time—that we most need to reach out to someone who is not well and listen to and honor what they know about the world. And as for representational practices, whether that’s the making of this form of cinema, Zoom cinema, or your photographs,<sup>10</sup> or our writing or websites,<sup>11</sup> these are places for the disabled or chronically ill, the long-haulers, to have legitimate, respected conversation together and with others. And for others who are, at that moment, not disabled, not ill, not long-hauling to listen and also to join. In this dynamic, my function is to listen as one aspect of solidarity. But I also think our diverse lived perspectives of any virus, our analytical perspectives, can vibrate. So, I might also offer to you what I know now, not-long-hauling. If we can meet for a time where we both feel safe enough, solidarity can occur when we oscillate in and out of privilege as we are aligned with so-called positions of power, health, ability.

It’s so hard to see myself change so much in a relationship to you. I was sick with long-haul COVID with you for several years. Right now, all I have is hives. It’s important for me to be able to say this to you and not feel like our allyship or solidarity is at risk. And maybe it is. But I have to be able to test that with you respectfully and with love as part of our practice here.

PATO: I hear you naming solidarity as a politics of difference but towards one of common political goals. When I chose to disclose on Facebook and Instagram that I had COVID, with words and images of my real-time experience the day after I got my test result in March 2020, that was a kind of call; and you joined me there. Some of what I sought was solidarity, but some of it was simply to say, “It’s

here.” So, maybe this is more like sustenance, which is not counter to or separate from solidarity, but when we make something for one another in what we understand to be our sharedness, it’s a little different than trying to make work for somebody who we know is not in this lived experience or frame of mind. Back in March of 2020, I may have been trying to do both.

Because we each got infected early on and then understood ourselves as long-hauling early on, that was a solidarity with each other that also became sustenance. But we also thought this might be an emergent solidarity and an emergent sharedness where such distinctions might not be necessary between us or many others. What you call disclosure is a shorthand for that politic that got disrupted or had to shift when everybody was getting infected.

What happens when people need to come together to understand what is happening to them but are not worried about whether other people understand that? Compare that to when we’re making something that is trying to move across a bunch of different spaces and experiences. These are two different ways for me to think about COVID media and activist media.

ALEX: Here’s an example of making media across those differences. At the Cinemas of Global Solidarity Conference, we made a set of formal choices that we thought would be useful to express what an activist cinema looks like in the times of COVID-19, and Long COVID (see Figure 5). We forefronted the use of Zoom as a solidarity



**Figure 5:** Screen grab from video for “capillaries of care (15 mins)” for Cinemas of Global Solidarity conference, 2022, <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/62053528>.

media format par excellence, a technology that was ready to keep people safe in physical isolation while seeing and talking to each other in real-time.<sup>12</sup>

And we showed a Zoom video of ourselves doing this at a Zoom conference, as opposed to speaking live, because we thought it was a way to show moving image activities and forms that were activated and changed by the virus.

Real-time media, real-time theorizing, real-time art production are critical aspects of activist media; that is, media made in conversation, in solidarity with movements for social change and social justice. Media that take a very long time to make, that take money to make, that takes distance, the time and distance of history, the time and distance of thought, the time and distance of perspective, are important forms of solidarity cinema, yes. But what we practice as media makers, theorists, teachers, activists as our COVID work is real-time work.

However, for this intervention here that isn't quite true because this is a written chapter. Can we model what it looks like to think out loud in real-time from our bodies and with another now using words? My body is actually flaring up with hives as we speak, some kind of autoimmune response. Your body gives you brain fog, and makes you hot, and really hurts in various places.

We are talking on Zoom about cinema, time, COVID, and care in real time. Can we press that against what academic writing looks like from a later vantage of time, distance, perspective when we take these words up and shape them for publication? I want to mark our method as part of the themes at hand.

PATO: Yes, Zoom becomes the activist media that you and I theorize and use the most but what about TikTok or FaceTime, which almost never come up in our conversations? These might be the moving images that I would call the cinema of the now (or the last five-plus years or so).

Maybe because of social media, or the explosion of the screen from iPads to cell phones to large-scale televisions, we've been in the era of the moving image for a while. I'm curious where that bumps up against the era of COVID, the time *and* the duration of COVID.

But I want to mark recordability in distinction to real time and what is important for the now. Because some of what I've been doing has been for the future.

I don't make moving images that much. If anything, I probably try to reassert liveness. I'm often thinking of a future audience,

because throughout COVID I've been wishing I could go back and read what artists and progressives were thinking during the Spanish flu. I've also been thinking about the revisitation work that you and Ted theorize about AIDS.<sup>13</sup> So what does it mean to make work for both now and the future?

I'm also thinking more as an organizer than an activist. The way I think of activism and organizing also has much to do with time. Activism being more immediate and short-term with specific goals, and the work of organizing often reaching beyond the now—holding the lessons of our real-time present in order to build something different that is for a time we may not personally see.

ALEX: Interesting! One of the differences between Zoom and TikTok, maybe not FaceTime, is durational. In recent work on fake news and social media,<sup>14</sup> I suggest that the work that I need done in relationship to activist (and human) representational practices, needs time and related depth and context. It cannot be done in short bursts and fragments. That's not without merit, but the political project is durational. It's what you're calling organizing, and I might also call theorizing. For solidarity—whether that's difference-organized or sameness-organized—you need time to speak and listen, to think and build, to transform relationships between people and what they say and hear, want and need. And so, the long form is really important.<sup>15</sup>

It's not an either/or. But there's something to me about Zoom duration that is longer than those other formats; it holds that much (more) time. It's the opposite of a selfie and the opposite of TikTok. And that is one power of video for activism: its durational capacity. Something happens in real time that is for the now and the future, by definition. Video holds time for us and for the future, which is the opposite of performance.<sup>16</sup> So it's interesting to me that at the beginning of our conversation you mark the difference between duration and time.

And what I love about video is that it holds time and words as much as anything. That is, activist video as opposed to cinema. If you think about cinema as a highly crafted, aestheticized, carefully rendered form—whether documentary or fiction—cinema as ideas and images sculpted from the real world into art, Zoom video doesn't start from or end in that place. Zoom video doesn't start from the place of aestheticization or resources, doesn't start from the place of captivating from beauty. Rather, there's an impulse of time-, voice-, and perhaps person-capture: a pared-down rendering of human thinking, experience, and expression about the world itself.

While there's always artifice—what the technology and maker produce aesthetically and in form—this one, Zoom cinema, is not leading with the aesthetic. Of course, one follows, but it's an aesthetic in service to communication and record, the need to mark and hold, the need to say this happened and I'm moving it forward and it's going to be useful for us in a day, in a year, in the millennium, whenever. The need to communicate, now.

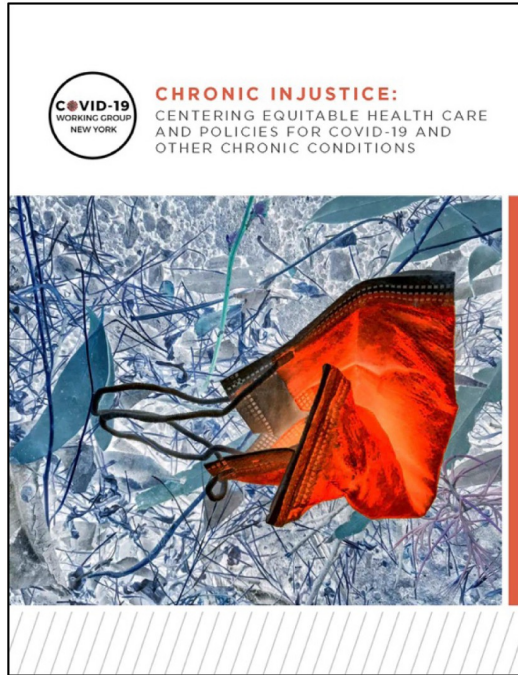
What does real time do? What does real time do if it's out of time or in a different time or technology? We're trying to theorize through COVID and care about this disease in our bodies, in our culture, in this time. This virus again and again in real time . . .

PATO: Maybe only the emergent now is a time when we can *pretend* to get a little escape velocity from COVID because COVID seems less like a crisis to so many now even as it still is. I think that the images I made from the beginning were very much aesthetic first, which would counter your notion of what activist media is. (See Figures 6 and 7.)

ALEX: I think your work is aesthetic first as well. These images can be used by activists who have an agenda. How are you representing COVID now? What is the art form that is speaking to you?



**Figure 6:** Pato Hebert, "Untitled," from the *Linger* series, archival pigment print on silk charmeuse, 2020–21.



**Figure 7:** Front cover of *Chronic Injustice: Centering Equitable Health Care and Policies for COVID-19 and Other Chronic Conditions*, advocacy publication by the COVID-19 Working Group New York, featuring an image by Pato Hebert in a design by Kristen McCabe, March 2021.

PATO: What roles do images play? Even though I just said aesthetic first, it's complicated. I think the images I made in the first years of the pandemic were mindful of aesthetics, but with politics right there. It's a synergistic embodying, like A.1 and A.1.1.

What is the role of the word in the era of the image? Whether it's Twitter, now X, and Threads all the way up to academic books, or love letters, or emails, or whatever. What is the role of text, and of text and image together? I think that words have come forward as my pandemic form way more than images in my COVID work, as well as the liveness of performance, but mediated by Zoom because of the care of being physically separate but digitally connected. So much of the COVID work I've done is lens-mediated performances on Zoom that involve performing texts while foregrounding images.<sup>17</sup>

ALEX: But what is a useful cinematic form of solidarity for today?

PATO: I think we actually need COVID cinema, which we don't have very much of yet. And you've posited in previous conversations that it

can take time for people to make work of that duration, scale, and resources. I'm hungry for that. Currently, the most interesting COVID media I see [are] through my Instagram feed. And in terms of image, I think there's tons of stuff that's happened over Twitter that's incredibly important for COVID. But TikTok, I would say, continues to be the medium of now, that is of this pandemic.

ALEX: Okay, so what are its features or affordances?

PATO: So much of how people are experiencing and making sense of the world, and maybe shaping how things happen, are now through these forms.

ALEX: That isn't cinema, it's moving image and moving image cultures.

I'm interested in your point about making cinema about COVID. I have been very moved to see artists attempting to represent the previous time(s) of the greatest COVID impact.

Right now, in 2023, humans are currently repressing our trauma from that first year or so when we were in lockdown and people were sick and dying and we knew so little. Most people are not thinking about it or not returning to it (yet). Art will help us do that, take us to that place that we might not otherwise go. And that's what I imagine COVID cinema will be: an aestheticized careful return. And there's certainly solidarity in that in the sense of reckoning, accounting for, remembering, holding the truth that many people died, that some people suffered more than others due to systemic imbalances of health. This will be needed for maintaining COVID solidarities across time. We will always have COVID because the people who lived through it will continue to reckon with it, either through repression or through later making or watching.

Cinema is the format for both an aestheticized and distanced, intellectualized and emotive rendering of what we've been through and what we will continue to carry. We lived through this mass death experience; people were locked up in their homes for years.

PATO: I'll just throw a curve ball. I never before watched as much TV as I did during the pandemic and that wasn't cinema.

ALEX: That is cinema.

PATO: I'll just mark that as a kind of COVID cinema experience that shifted radically.

ALEX: You're right, that was also the cinema of this pandemic.

PATO: What about streaming as a mode for us to think about activism? And what does it mean that my binge streaming played all too nicely into the aims of big tech and streaming platforms?

ALEX: Let's end with that as a question. If we talk about TikTok and Zoom and FaceTime as modes, streaming is the other. Not breaks and



fragments; corporate controlled, immersive, aestheticized moving image media, one that is also open to be theorized in real-time.<sup>18</sup>

### III. COVID. CARE

ALEX: Hi, Pato. We're recording. It is July 24th, 2023. I am in Santa Fe, New Mexico. You're in Los Angeles. We do this every three, four months, checking in about COVID and Long COVID and the state of the world and what that is helping us to think about in relationship to our art and activism and theorizing of practices that people can engage in together to improve our shared experience. So, to begin, can I ask you how your COVID is?

PATO: I would say that my COVID has not been great. One of the ways Long COVID impacts me is that I get more overwhelmed at lots of levels—I melt down more quickly, more easily, and it takes longer to calm that process or come out of it. So, intense emotions, whether it's excitement or sorrow, and the ways that my nervous system gets overloaded and fried, can affect my thighs seizing up and feeling sore or my brain fog acting up really intensely.

If I think of crisis as a kind of inflammation that can be bodily or political or emotional with people you love, that feels a lot like where my Long COVID is. I was trying to write about that in my journal last week. And I realized, because I've been in so much turmoil across my life, I no longer can tell what's Long COVID and what's anything else. And so maybe that means my reinfection in late October 2022 wasn't as intense as it could have been, thankfully. Or it could just be that the reinfection on top of long-hauling is so compounded that I can't distinguish. Or that all the emotional stuff I was dealing with superseded whatever I might otherwise have been able to listen to in the body and its reinfection.

Today—right now—that's showing up in a lot of brain fog and a lot of fatigue.

And because it's summer and hot, this body's inability to regulate its temperatures feels quite intense. So the laptop is heating and sitting on my thighs. My thighs are heating up, my brain is heating up. And the hack I use when I'm giving public talks online is to have an ice brick under my feet so that I'm hacking the body's temperature outside the frame of the Zoom. And if I think about all this compared to two years ago, I'd say that I have a little more trust and a little more capacity. And if I think about it compared to five years ago, I'm a hot mess and I'm really chronically ill. So,

depending on the temporal analytical frame, I can feel very differently about how I'm doing.

And I am not subscribed to a progress model. By late spring of 2020 I had to conceptually and corporeally stop looking for the cure or biomedical solution as my primary orientation and instead start learning to manage a chronic illness and disability. That was a really important spiritual and political shift that I made very early on with you. And embracing long-hauling rather than recovery as the goal because when recovery was the frame and ever-unrealized goal, it kept breaking my heart and making my symptoms worse. Whereas harm reduction<sup>19</sup> and managing symptoms allow me to ask, where am I now in this moment, without the ableist burden to be recovered?

People keep asking me about progress, and if I have to, I'll tell you the truth of where I am. But progress in recovery is not my political or wellness orientation. Rather I am about learning to manage chronic illness. And I feel like that is an intervention into ableism that I keep doing, my own and someone else's. How about you? How is your COVID?

ALEX: I have not had any symptoms of Long COVID for a pretty long time and feel very far away from that as a framework for how I'm doing every day, but also an analysis of a world with COVID and the ongoingness of the pandemic. I have a harder time accessing the ongoingness of the pandemic as a person who's not currently long-hauling. That also seems far away because very few people are talking or representing COVID right now. So distance is being manufactured by the culture and I'm being more sucked into that. But, oddly enough, or perhaps definitively enough, I have hives again and I just saw two more on my wrist during this conversation!

And I have three on this elbow and my thighs are riddled with them. I have no idea why this is happening. I wish it wasn't. It's not that big a deal. I hope it's not a harbinger of more symptoms returning.

OK, I have Long COVID, and I continue to tell people that, symptoms or no.

That's how my COVID's going. I don't like having hives. They itch and they're scary because maybe I'm returning to ill health.

And I am not confused about why we live in a moment socially, politically, culturally, and in relationship to media and communications that says that COVID is over. I understand why that's being expressed and why it's being received as true. And I know it isn't true. I know COVID isn't over; I know that lots of

people have Long COVID; I know that the discussion around Long COVID has been taken back off our screens.

I feel like it's a scary thing to talk about with you. Not that I'm afraid that something will happen interpersonally between the two of us. A lot of the reporting around COVID from doctors, epidemiologists, the medical community says COVID has become the thing that we had hoped it would: a treatable illness. We have therapeutics, people are vaccinated, people aren't dying from it in numbers that are disproportionate to other viruses and flus. But what it doesn't ever mention is Long COVID, right?

So, if you don't pay attention to that, if you don't acknowledge that as real, if you don't empathize with that, if you disregard it, this is where solidarity breaks and a disability politics enters.<sup>20</sup> It's very easy to not theorize from the position of disability.

But I'm not engaged in communities talking about Long COVID like I was even five months ago. So, I think you have to be connected actively to Long COVID to stay true to what the actual and complex experiences of human beings are right now. And if you don't opt in, that stays invisible. And I maybe have started to opt out a bit.

PATO: And is that a relief? Does that feel like a relief?

ALEX: Sure, yeah.

PATO: Can I ask, you're navigating all these different family spaces in a short amount of time. Are you masking?

ALEX: No.

PATO: No one's masking anywhere.

ALEX: I stopped masking.

PATO: You're the second person I love in 24 hours who I've asked that and then I had the same shocked response. And that is the level at which it's now become bodily—what I would reflect back to those of you who don't mask anymore. And I'm really glad that you're not living in fear. But it raises the question that disability politics has been raising for forever, which is "what is solidarity?" What does it mean to wear a mask to protect others from what we may unknowingly be carrying asymptotically? What does it mean to hold this in relationship to also honoring our deep human need for connection? And why it's important to mask as disability justice even as it's important not to shame people when they're not masking, right?

ALEX: I wouldn't shame anyone who wears a mask. I would be eager to include masking and ventilation and enough space and all the COVID protocols in public gatherings that I am organizing.

PATO: So, are we now in the first COVID silence, to use your and Ted's language.<sup>21</sup> Or was the first silence what we were experiencing from day one of the pandemic? Who knows temporally where we are, but it's not just a silence. It is an active ableist assault. And it has become extraordinarily painful for me to always have to be the one to ask, "Are you masking regularly? Is the meal outdoors?" And everybody says what you just said, "No, of course I'm not masking." And I'm like, but you just invited me to dinner and you know I'm sick and need mitigation efforts to be shared with others and not just on me.

Silence, silence, silence, fucking silence. And I don't want to make somebody else's birthday party something they perceive as a pain. I don't even want to have to introduce the thought to them as they've just kindly invited me. But it's not even on their radar. And, I have a lot of very strong and painful feelings about how my life and the lives of so many disabled folks are continuing to get harder now because of all that. The acts of solidarity are evaporating, masking being the most obvious one, but people don't organize their lives thinking about disability. We all too easily organize our lives through ableism.

As often the only person masked now, I see a lack of immediate solidarity that is happening all over right now. And it's profoundly isolating, maybe at a certain level in a way that's worse than any time in the pandemic. So, I have to be politically and logistically isolated because I constantly have to do the intervention to ask, if you want me there or if I want us to be together, how are we approaching this question of mitigation and care? And that fills me with great sorrow.

And it gives me a profound gratitude for the crips in my life because we talk about it as a given whenever we plan to get together. And I'm very grateful for the people I have who are crip and/or long-hauling because I don't have to be the only one to hold that space in the conversation and the care. That's how I feel. What about you?

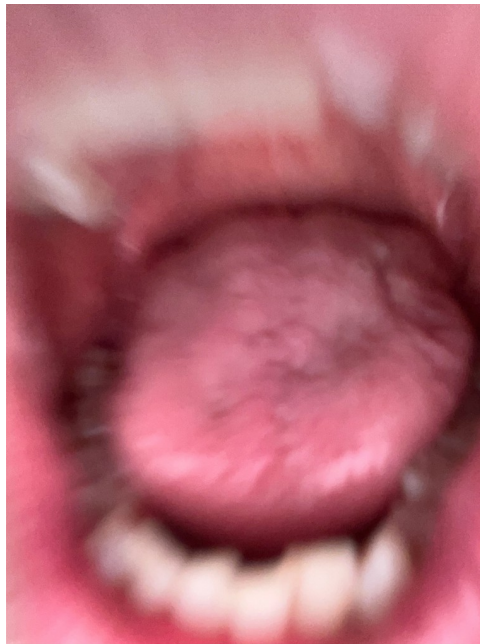
ALEX: What's the emotion I want to share? It's neither guilt nor shame in where I am, but like, just in the way that you're very sad, it does make me sad to acknowledge my own human frailty. Part of the engine of staying connected or staying in solidarity, staying present or staying awake is to be here with you and also first, to produce the possibility for this conversation to occur. Oddly, this technology, this "cinema," helps with that . . . Representational solidarity today looks like digital platforms of conversation across COVID

difference. This reminds me to be vigilant and awake and not complacent and to honor people whose experiences are being evaporated.

PATO: I'm really always grateful for your candor. Meaningfully theorizing solidarity across Long COVID status has been part of our project. And I think it's why the silence has happened. We are people who are pretty close to each other's political orientation. Yet imagine trying to have a conversation like this with most people in the United States right now.

But in the Long COVID community we are actively talking with each other about our firsts or won'ts, and the spaces between first, won't, and never. Our first time on a plane. Our first concert or movie while being one of the only ones masked. Our first kiss on our first date post-breakup while still long-hauling. This is not simply fear but rather vigilance, the word you just used. The vigilance necessary to survive, thrive and stay connected.

ALEX: Is there an image of that? (See Figure 8.)



**Figure 8:** Pato Hebert, Selfie of interior of mouth, made with a smart phone on 23 February 2023 in anticipation of 3rd Illiversary.

## POSTSCRIPT, SEPTEMBER 9, 2024

The coronavirus and climate change teach us that networks of relations—understood through Indigenous frameworks of reciprocity—must be rebalanced to extend care multi-directionally. Science is still unclear if long-hauling is the body's ongoing response to infection or if the virus remains present as trace fragments. Even that language is still too reliant on the notion of the intact and distinguishable as opposed to the interconnected that I'm living each day, and for which our organizing strives.

—Hebert and Juhasz, "Capillaries of Care"<sup>22</sup>

In the United States, from where we are writing, COVID-19 continues its most torrid summer surge of the last three years, with wastewater analysis showing sky-high levels of infection in every part of the country. In one of the classes in Pato's university department, three out of sixteen students called out sick with COVID on the first day of school. The solidarity of staying home to prevent additional infections seems to be a somewhat persistent practice, as does a professor permitting this choice from our students. The simple and effective practice of masking to help prevent transmission to begin with is a similar act. The virus likes to join us at orientation and in the classroom, at the hospital and in our halls of worship, on the subway and at the family gathering, the factory floor, retail floor, dance floor and grocery store. It loves when our actions conscript us to play host. COVID thrives on the breakdown—and willful neglect—of our ecologies and practices of care.

Since we first recorded our conversations for this writing in the summer of 2023, Israel has killed at least 40,000 Palestinians in Gaza and destroyed healthcare, education, and sanitation systems. The genocide continues to be livestreamed, if not as cinema, then certainly as moving image horror, and resistance, and desperate plea for global solidarity to contribute to an end to carnage. The Mediterranean courses with raw sewage. Polio proliferates. Olive groves and strawberry fields are bombed and bulldozed. Clean water is difficult to come by. A million people march in London to protest the genocide, one of the city's largest protests ever. Arms shipments from the United States to Israel continue apace.

Scorching temperatures made for the hottest summer on record. The climate crisis makes some places virtually uninhabitable for humans and the more than human. But none of these conditions of plague, genocide, and ecological catastrophe need persist. Solidarity and reciprocity remind us that other ways are possible.

One of our favorite moving images of the last week was aerial footage of the Klamath River running free in the Yurok lands of northern California for the first time in a century. Coalitions of Indigenous activists and communities, along with environmental organizations, have worked for decades to make possible the largest dam removal project in the history of the world. The free flow of rivers is vital to the nutrients needed for a healthy, shared ecology. These river ecologies of solidarity with salmon, lamprey, bear, waterfowl, insects, and plants remind us that healing is possible when visionary efforts and practices of care are coordinated and sustained over time. Cinemas and other image streams of solidarity must be just as strategic, coordinated, caring, and reciprocal as a river.

## NOTES

1. Part I was first recorded in 2023. Other sections and writing took place at different moments within the pandemic. Noting the changing nature of COVID, and thus our embodied, conversational, and representational practices about it are central to our project.
2. We used these words writing together only a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic, and our own ongoing illness, as we commenced a public practice about the changing and current state of COVID, of which this current piece is but one entry. "It Could Be So Much Worse," Pato Hebert and Alexandra Juhasz, In the Moment Blog, *Critical Inquiry*, January 6, 2021: <https://critinq.wordpress.com/2021/01/26/it-could-be-so-much-worse> (accessed 25 March 2025).
3. "Practicing Inclusion in the Time of COVID" is a brief guide for gatherings and a call for disability solidarity, created in partnership with What Would an HIV Doula Do? It is an educational and activist project that began several years into the pandemic, in 2023, and in which we both participated with other activists and with the support of Strategies for High Impact: [www.strategiesforhighimpact.org/covid-inclusion](http://www.strategiesforhighimpact.org/covid-inclusion) (accessed 25 March 2025).
4. Hebert and Juhasz, It Could Be So Much Worse: <https://critinq.wordpress.com/2021/01/26/it-could-be-so-much-worse> (accessed 25 March 2025).
5. In "Long Hauling," for *ArtsEverywhere.com*, 2021–2022, we commissioned and edited five writings about "the stories of 'long COVID' survivors and community efforts to use the lessons learned from other viruses to provide care for patients during the early months of the outbreak and into the uncertainties of late-pandemic years." We presented from this work at the conference Cinemas of Global Solidarity: [www.artseverywhere.ca/series/long-hauling](http://www.artseverywhere.ca/series/long-hauling) (accessed 25 March 2025).
6. "End of the Federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) Declaration," updated 5 May 2023: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/end-of-phe.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/end-of-phe.html) (accessed 25 March 2025).
7. *AIDS Is/AIDS Ain't 40* is a zine and set of related activities organized by our collective What Would an HIV Doula Do? in 2021. "When we say AIDS IS/AIDS AIN'T 40, we're



acknowledging the longer and multiple histories surrounding 40 years of caring for each other and ourselves. If AIDS had a birthday party or anniversary celebration, we would bring our dancing shoes and a card that read, '40 is just a number.' AIDS is an ongoing, global catastrophe whose realities have never fit into easy narratives or conventional timelines. Together, we tell the stories of the pandemic." <https://hivdoula.work/aidsaisaint> (accessed 25 March 2025).

8. Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2013). "What would it mean to explore disability in time or to articulate 'crip time'? Temporal categories are already commonly used in formulations of disability; one aspect of crippling time might simply be to map the extent to which we conceptualize disability in temporal terms. The medical field in particular has a long tradition of describing disability in reference to time. 'Chronic' fatigue, 'intermittent' symptoms, and 'constant' pain are each ways of defining illness and disability in and through time; they describe disability in terms of duration."
9. This term is used by my former student Shayda Kafai in her *Crip Kinship: The Disability Justice and Art Activism of Sins Invalid* (Montreal: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2022).
10. Pato Hebert: *Pato Hebert: Lingering*, Pitzer Art Galleries, January 22–April 16, 2022: <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/458548/pato-hebertlingering/> (accessed 25 March 2025).
11. "You're Still Sick" by Pato Hebert and Alexandra Juhasz, *BOMB*, July 28, 2020: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/youre-still-sick> (accessed 25 March 2025).
12. Video for Cinemas of Global Solidarity, "capillaries of care (15 mins)," 2022: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/662053528> (accessed 25 March 2025).
13. *We Are Having This Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production*, Alexandra Juhasz and Ted Kerr (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).
14. *Really Fake*, with Nishant Shah and Ganaelle Langlois (Minneapolis: meson press, 2021): <https://meson.press/books/reallyfake> (accessed 25 March 2025). *My Phone Lies to Me* (n.p.: punctum press, 2022): <https://punctumbooks.com/titles/my-phone-lies-to-me-fake-news-poetry-workshops-as-radical-digital-media-literacy-given-the-fact-of-fake-news> (accessed 25 March 2025).
15. "Irony is Ubiquitous" (scholarly talk and paper), in *Learning from YouTube* (MIT Press, 2011), <http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/texteo.php?composite=23> (accessed 25 March 2025).
16. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
17. *Yesterday, I Received a Call* [online illustrated performative reading], 8 May 2020, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCI2wzj45nA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCI2wzj45nA) (accessed 25 March 2025).
18. Laliv Melamed and Philipp Dominik Keidl (Eds.), *Pandemic Media* (Minneapolis: mesonpress, 2020), <https://meson.press/books/pandemic-media/> (accessed 25 March 2025).
19. What Would an HIV Doula Do? "HARM REDUCTION IS NOT A METAPHOR: Living in the 21st Century with Drugs, Intimacy, and Activism" (2023), <https://hivdoula.work/downloads> (accessed 25 March 2025).
20. Fiona Lowenstein (Ed.), *The Long COVID Survival Guide* (New York: The Experiment, 2022).

21. *We Are Having This Conversation Now* lists six times of AIDS, all of which orbit around, in, or through silence.
22. Hebert and Juhasz, "Capillaries of Care," in *Lingering* exhibition catalogue (2022).

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Pato Hebert** is a visual artist, educator and organizer. He joined Tisch School of the Art's Department of Art & Public Policy in 2012, where he has served as Chair since 2020.

**Alexandra Juhasz** is a distinguished professor of film at Brooklyn College, CUNY. Her current work attends to pandemic media, fake news poetry, online feminist pedagogy, and other more radical uses of digital media and their archives.