

## Coda

Last summer. After an argument, a friend said these days we spend more time stroking our fingers across screens than over each other's skin.

He paused.

Than over our own skin.<sup>179</sup>

When my daughter's daycare opened after the first lockdown, with a heavy set of regulations and requirements – such as the need to wash the linen she uses for her daytime naps at 100 degrees Celsius every day – I started walking the three kilometers between our home and the daycare twice a day, as a welcome break from confinement at home. Each afternoon we would walk through the local forest, passing by a large field overgrown with crooked old hawthorn. One night, lazily scrolling through a local Facebook group, I stumbled on a post that pointed out that this exact field was the site of a mass grave of victims of Copenhagen's 1853 cholera epidemic – an outbreak caused by poor hygiene in the densely populated inner city. On top of the grave had been planted the hawthorn, whose pointy thorns were ideal to keep humans and animals away. Today the hawthorn is the only monument to mark the dead, now long composted beneath the white blossom. The cholera epidemic has been forgotten, except in remote corners of the Internet. Yet the deer and picnickers that otherwise roam the forest still intuitively seem to stay away from the site. (KV)

The time we have taken to write this book has been a time of care and carefulness, as much as it has been a time of moody introspection and uncertainty. Each chapter has revolved around a central narrative about some of the distancing measures – imposed or self-imposed – used to stop or slow the spread of the virus, and has thus tackled different spatial and temporal regimes at work in the pandemic. We have discussed the concrete physical constituents of these measures, the affective responses to them, and their consequences for how we understand touching and being touched. We have also discussed the way skins and screens have become interchangeable, as illustrated in the quotation above from writer and artist Inger Lund Wold. While our reflections have grown out of an unstable and constantly changing situation, we have tried to follow the ripples of effect and affect caught within the largely invisible waves in which the virus has spread through our vicinity, with their latent undercurrents of sickness, death, and bereavement as well as of change, chance, and touch.

In Chapter 1, we considered the kinds of touch and touching that are possible from behind a screen, the validity of a digital hug as it is articulated in statistics from dating and mental well-being apps, and how distance is digitally configured by contact tracing apps. In Chapter 2, we considered how fabrics allow



**Figure 28:** The mass grave area in Dyrehaven, north of Copenhagen, January 2020. Image Credit: Private Photo / Kristin Veel

distance – from face masks, to curtains, to the marquees that enable public activity and testing to take place outdoors but sheltered from the rain – while Chapter 3 considered distancing between individuals in public spaces by means of changing practices, urban choreographies, and movement through the streets. Chapter 4 moved into the space of isolation: pandemic stuckness, as experienced on a cruise ship or in one’s own home during lockdown, where the house and the nuclear family have been touted as a means of cultural salvation but might equally give rise to the claustrophobic feeling that you are stuck – to your nation-state, your home, your family, yourself, or your own body. In Chapter 5, we tackled the different temporalities to which the virus gives rise, as well as the heightened attention to the mundane – that which we take for granted, never asking “why do you do it like this?” – which the virus brings about.

Overall, however, we have not set out to grasp, express, or articulate the changes we have identified throughout this book, or to bring them out of their invisibility. Rather, by trying to deal with our own implication in them – as individuals, and as a small collective consisting just of two people – we have attempted to mark out the slippery and vanishing ontological borderline that these shifts and changes embody. Any narrative of “before” and “after” the pandemic might simply camouflage hidden regimes of restructuring, regimes that cling to exploitative capitalist economic structures or anthropocentric ways of thinking. Such regimes would preserve the problematic construction of the free and autonomous Western individual subject, and would prevent us from seeing and imagining other relationships, collaborations, and forms of cohabitation. But by engaging with our own affective responses to the current situation’s perfect storm of crises, we wish to identify and challenge pregiven conditions of knowledge and of academic work. By centering on different configurations of touch and touching, we hope to tease out some of those relationships and the politics that underpin them, and thereby open up a discussion of the reconfiguration of relationships in the possible aftermath of the pandemic, pointing to our hopes for justice even as we mourn the dead.

We had an ambition to be brief, although we knew from the start we would fail. We have tried to move beyond the entrapment of linear and abrasive temporalities that would impose problematic categories of “before” and “after,” origins and faults, insides and outsides, ownerships and genealogies; but we are stuck with words, sentences, and page numbers. Along the way, we wished we could just write a poem or a song, or let out a slow, indistinct growl to loosen up the knot that had formed in our bellies. What we did instead was to write this book, and in light of the unusual situation, we decided to write it in a slightly



**Figure 29:** The greater Copenhagen area where the mass grave is situated and where the field-work for this book has taken place. Map by Ludvig Both, Copenhagen, 1858. Image Credit: Danish Royal Library

different way than our usual academic practice, as a set of loosely composed essays and reflections. Thinking about writing differently connects us with feminist reflections on epistemologies, methodologies, ethics, and politics. While we are unable to make visible and express all the intersections of power differentials and social categorizations based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality, dis/ability, age, or other factors, these factors are nevertheless at play. They have emerged in unexpected ways as we have turned to notions of affect while moving away from the single-author framework. This also raises uncomfortable questions, since we insist on a politics of location and understand knowledge production as situated, even as our method itself has revealed that our (subject) positions are ragged around the edges. Although this book has bundled together our feeble hopes that we can envision and contribute to practices of caring for a shared and more just future, those hopes never quite coalesce into a cohesive call for practice. Rather than a manifesto for change, we have tried to write our way towards a more differentiated understanding of the latent workings of the present crisis.

