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A changing sense of place: geography and COVID-19

Understanding the relationship between people and places and exploring the processes that shape those relationships is a central concern for geographers. In this essay, I suggest that understanding the changing meaning and significance of place during the COVID-19 crisis can help us to make better sense of these changing relationships and what might be going on. This moment presents an opportunity to reflect on who we are together, as a discipline, and the kinds of futures we might want to see. Each of the five parts of this essay addresses a distinct dimension of place and poses questions for our changing sense of place in relation to COVID-19.

1. A global sense of place

One of the most poignant scenes of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia are the vast banks of planes stored, side by side, at the airport in Alice Springs. Hulking great A380s pressed nose to tail seem diminished in this setting, swallowed by the vastness of the central Australian landscape (Figure 1). This image evokes a sense of being grounded, reversing what we have become used to about a world defined by mobility and connection especially over the past few decades. John Urry (2007) draws on figures from North America to point out that in the 1800s, people used to move on average by fifty metres every day, but by the early 21st century, people moved on average a massive fifty kilometres a day—though of course it's a figure that betrays some huge disparities. Here in Australia, we had got used to mobility being central to our way of life: a world of long daily commutes threading through our capital cities; fly-in fly-out workers jetting out to remote mine sites; tourists taking bus tours; mobile health workers and teachers that regularly travel through our regional areas; agricultural workers that travel to live on farms in harvest seasons; IT workers and project managers that regularly zip between capital cities, using flights as many of us in Melbourne use trams.

All this mobility shaped how we understood place prior to the pandemic. So much so, that in the 1980s, as international trade and travel were growing exponentially, David Harvey (1989) developed the concept of time-space compression to describe how this rise of mobility was altering our sense of the world. Time-space compression refers to a sense of a shrinking world at a time when spatial barriers and our perception of distance were both decreasing, dramatically changing

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how we imagine the idea of place. It no longer made sense to see places as self-contained relatively unchanging entities but, because of all this mobility, it became important to understand how places are formed through their relationships with other places. Mobility contributed to our global sense of place. This interconnected sense of place is so true when we think of what makes many of the places we value as vibrant and energising places to be. Walking along a street in the inner north of Melbourne, you might glimpse a billboard advertising a gig for a band based in Los Angeles and an orchestra visiting from Taiwan. A businesswoman just flown from interstate gets out of a taxi, pulling a small suitcase. A little further on, you pass a shop where you can buy freshly baked Lebanese flatbread; a group of young people enjoying hookah pipes sit on chairs on the pavement. A family group passes you by, clearly excited to be here; they're clutching a guidebook and taking photos. To your right, a service has just finished at a Greek Orthodox church, people are spilling down the steps. You wait to cross the road, and you notice a passing minibus maybe taking tourists to the Great Ocean Road. You decide to pop into your usual coffee shop, and the barista you've known for a few years updates you on his mother's health in Ahmedabad in India. For Doreen Massey (1991), place is not a static and unchanging object, but a process that is formed through all kinds of globally interrelated movements coming together. Massey transformed our geographical ideas of place, beyond the idea of just a dot on a map, to appreciate how it is through movements, big and small, that make a place what it is. If we cast our minds back to the start of 2020, all of this mobility enabled certain experiences to take place: to meet up, to see people, to visit places, to undertake work. This mobility also contributed to our sense of place in highly distinctive ways. Think of how spaces of transport give rise to all kinds of chance encounters, we look at strangers and wonder about their worlds; we fashion sociabilities, we learn new things about ourselves and others.

Yet in March 2020, so many of these movements creaked to a grinding halt in Australia and around the world. As lockdowns kicked in and many people were prevented from leaving home except for essential trips, even though we were living in the same location as before, our sense of place radically changed. With this restricted movement, gone were many of the things that made our cities buzz: the cafes, bars, restaurants, nightlife, galleries, sports, and social-meet ups. Gone were those intangible but very real atmospheres that get under our skin and make our favourite parts of the city what they are. Rather than being characterised by connection and mobility, our cities felt disconnected and still. These mobility restrictions brought about by COVID-19 meant that

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places previously within reach now seemed very far away. Since March 2020, people in Australia cannot leave the country without very good reason, and non-citizens cannot enter Australia. So many of the freedoms of movement that many of us had previously enjoyed were taken away. Migrant families are now separated over vast distances with very little chance of being able to see each other in person for the foreseeable future. In early 2021, there are still over 37,000 Australians who have been stranded overseas since the start of the pandemic owing to the small number of flights into Australia. In short, the time-space compression that geographers had written about so extensively is being reversed. In this new COVID-19 world our felt sense of distance is expanding as things are slowing down creating a strange sense of time-space expansion. This time-space expansion is felt in periods of waiting and delay. In an on-demand world, where many people had become used to having what they want when they wanted it and going where they wanted to, suddenly these desires and aspirations have to be put on hold. We have to be patient.

Perhaps most significantly, the meaning of mobility has changed. We had got used to mobility being positive and enabling. Mobility was what made our sense of place dynamic and exciting through its capacity to create relationships with other places. Now, at once, mobility is the problem at all kinds of scales. Geographers of mobility have explained that certain kinds of mobility have often been framed as negative. Think back to the rise of the railways in the nineteenth century, for instance; this mobility was greeted by the owners of the means of production with delight. However, for others, this mobility was threatening to place, potentially eroding its character and worse. Fast forward to the 1970s, and many geographers became concerned that intensified mobility would somehow dilute places, making them feel the same, such that some even feared the rise of what Edward Relph (1976) referred to as ‘placelessness’. But the mobility threat posed by COVID-19 is of a very different sort: lockdown is all about reducing the mobility of this coronavirus, but this is a mobility that is imperceptible. Stephanie Lavau (2014) reminds us that viruses are parasitic, like a hidden stowaway, carried by people. So suddenly, it is predominantly the mobility of other people that is threatening.

During the first Australian lockdown in March 2020, though we became disconnected, there was also a sense of all being in it together. This sense of sharing an experience seemed to do things in terms of our collective mood. Looking overseas, we were all living a similar-shaped virus case graph, and it was as if we were just at different points along it. Now, months later, what is

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particularly discernible is how this sense of collective experience has been replaced by a multi-speed sense of place, where different places are moving to very different beats. During the second lockdown in Melbourne from July 2020, if we were to read the news from Perth or Darwin, the daily rhythms and structures of feeling that each story attests to look so very different from the sense of place in Melbourne. In other parts of the world, localised lockdowns are having a similar place-fragmenting effect. For months, we have experienced state border closures across Australia for the first time since Federation, giving us a new feeling of the people of a fragmented nation hyperaware of a series of colonial lines that, previously, we might have been relatively unaware of. We are certainly not used to our internal borders being secured and policed in the way that they are. And we have seen the complications that arise from this restriction of movement, especially for communities that straddle borders, which is a reminder about how artificial these boundaries really are—another legacy of colonial government. Indigenous Country certainly coincides with neither these imposed borders nor the very idea of such clear territorial lines. The re-emergence of Australia's colonial boundaries and the associated fragmentation of society provides a (much attenuated) glimpse into the impact of the colonial disciplining of space in the colonies' early periods (which included the decimation of First Nations' societies through pandemics in addition to possession, occupation and extermination). Of course, if we think about our own networks of significant people—our family, friends, and colleagues—these certainly do not align with the kinds of borders restrictions that have been introduced. Zooming in from the state scale, the microgeographies of our cities have been reshaped and reimagined by detailed map visualisations—choropleths and graphs—that depict the prevalence of the virus in different suburbs. City regions, suburbs, and postcodes and even individual business names become indelibly linked with outbreaks, overriding other webs of meaning and significance.

In short, the pandemic has rewritten our global sense of place and changed our emotional geographies in the process. In some parts of Australia, many have been mourning ways of life that they feel they have lost. In other parts of Australia, people have been looking to Victoria and other parts of the world with trepidation and fear that what they are seeing could indeed be their future if the virus spreads and gets out of hand once again. So, understanding of how our global sense of place is changing matters. Yet turning to our own daily rhythms and routines, we also need to consider questions related to our 'looped' place.

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2. A looped sense of place

In the mid-twentieth century Torsten Hägerstrand (1970) developed an intriguing technique to draw space-time paths to visualise how our sense of place is formed through movements between places. Think of your own daily space-time path before the pandemic. How long was it, and where did it take you? For many, these space-time paths would likely be quite extensive, especially since commuting distances around the world have largely increased year on year. But over the past year, our own daily space-time paths have shrunk and likely look very different. For those working from home, daily commutes for many have become a walk between the bedroom and kitchen table, and non-work travel has been reduced to an infrequent shopping trip or a walk around the block for exercise.

Those who have resumed commuting have been met with new dilemmas about how to travel, especially because being in public transit involves potentially heightened exposure to the coronavirus since they are high-density spaces that require us being in tight proximity to others. In a previous project of mine on commuting, I lost track of the number of times that people referred to the interior of buses and trains as virus and germ capsules. Now it seems that such suspicions have been heightened by COVID-19 and we are being advised to avoid travel by public transport if we can. High density public transport infrastructures that have been at the heart of progressive urban planning are challenged in a COVID-19 era because trains and buses are reaching maximum capacity quickly under physical distancing regimes. Some city governments have toyed with the idea of having booked timeslots to travel to spread the morning and evening peaks, but of course this workaround reduces some of the flexibility that makes high frequency public transport desirable.

All of these challenges mean that the private car has come back into its own of late, offering a protective cocoon that shields people from each other while in transit, leaving trams, buses, and trains rather empty. This state has obvious knock-on implications for carbon emissions and congestion. Heated debates are taking place in businesses about who has the right to car parking spaces, which of course are already at a premium. All this churn raises very tricky questions about whether the hard-won battles of the past few decades to change people's travel habits to switch to public transport have been lost in an instant. What will this shift do to the viability of public transport in the long run, especially if, as public health experts insist, COVID-19 is something that we

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will have to live with for many years? There are important equity issues at stake here too when we consider who, exactly, can afford to run a car or two cars, and pay the high parking fees that are charged in city centres? In my own research on commuting (Bissell, 2018), many people valued their time on public transport as 'me' time to do things that they want to do: playing games, watching a series on Netflix, or even catching up on sleep. What will we miss out on if we cannot benefit from what spaces of public transport provide us with?

We might also question whether COVID-19 disrupts the futuristic visions that have been put in development in some technology companies about the seductions of platoons of shared, on-demand autonomous vehicles. Where previously it felt like there was a path dependency about such proclamations, right at this moment the bright futures of shared autonomous mobility suddenly do not seem so inevitable—or desirable. Think of how in the UK car sharing has been touted as a solution, but only if driver and passenger are looking away from each other, which reveals just how difficult such a solution is. But many working from home are simply not moving very far at all, barely leaving their suburbs since March. For those in lockdown areas, restrictions on movement translate into loops around one's neighbourhood, arcing out in different directions to create a hyperlocal sense of place. There have certainly been some joys in these restricted movements, perhaps because some people are becoming more intimately acquainted with their immediate surrounds. It has been heartwarming to witness demonstrations of empathy that have been springing up through these neighbourhood loops: rainbows on windows, poems in chalk on pavements, 'Spoonville' families on grass verges (Figure 2). But everywhere, there is evidence that things are not quite the same. The absurdity of a plastic crocodile tied up with red and white tape in a children's play area near me makes me smile but is an ever-present reminder that we're living a restricted existence (Figure 3).

Then there are the altered inter-personal dynamics that have evolved between people in public spaces. Geographers such as Michele Lobo (2016)—who studies everyday encounters between people—have shown that there is a lot going on even in apparently the simplest everyday public situations. Think about when someone is coming at you in the street, and you have to do an awkward in-the-moment negotiation. These sorts of negotiation have changed: some people arc out to avoid being close to others, walking into the street, and this might be acknowledged by a nod or smile. Not doing this manoeuvre can result in being reprimanded by a glare or tut. The prevalence of

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face masks changes how people relate to each other in public spaces; mirroring the screened-off interactions that are taking place in shops. Writing well before the pandemic, Lobo suggests that comparable negotiations might seem insignificant, but actually tell us a lot about how we navigate and gauge our changing responsibility to others, especially when we consider new kinds of generosity, suspicion—and even shaming—that are unfolding in and as we move through our neighbourhoods. Beyond the neighbourhood, such judgement and suspicion have taken on a more sinister tone as certain marginalised social groups have been singled out for attack by (often) right-wing commentators; and we can see how this development is an extension of racist associations of disease with 'othered' people. There is a history to this line of thought that geographers such as Tim Cresswell (2006) have called out. Furthermore, while the move of some sorts of public event online might be helpful in creating new places of togetherness and new opportunities for debate, such spaces might also create new sorts of inequalities along the digital divides that geographers such as Jess McLean (2019) have described.

Attention to these micromobilities of neighbourhood life also raise important questions about the kinds of policing that are going on. During emergencies, it is often tempting to think about power being wielded from above, such as by state and federal governments, but many of these situations that I have described show how new kinds of self-disciplining and policing of others is taking place in public. Yet, in some cities, a more top-down style of policing has taken on a different form, with robot dogs being used in some parks in Singapore to disperse crowds of people and remind people to maintain physical distance. But what are we sacrificing if we allow such policing to become institutionalised like this?

3. A capsular sense of place

For those who have mainly been confined to their homes over the past year all this talk of movement, even around our neighbourhoods, can still feel like a conceit of sorts. For some, all around the world, the months of COVID-19 have been spent largely in the same room. In this regard, we have heard much about the practical challenges that working from home has brought about, especially those with caring responsibilities. Not to mention that perhaps never before have our private spaces been made so public, as we allow other work colleagues and strangers into our intimate spaces. On such grounds, we would do well to remember geographer Doreen Massey's

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(1993) important point that all mobilities are caught up in power geometries. In other words, our actions have knock-on impacts for other people—we are never just acting in a vacuum. In this case, the immobility of some *requires* the mobility of others.

It is curious how, after associating some forms of mobility with freedom for such a long time, now it is a particular sort of immobility that is becoming privileged—namely the ability to work from home and stay at home (Figure 4). But in order for us to be still, we require mobility from others. Think here of all the workers who have come to front doors in Australia over the past few months. Uber, Deliveroo, and Easy deliver your take-away meal, AusPost delivers your parcels, Woolies delivers your groceries. And, of course, beyond those coming to your home, your act of going to the shops or going to the doctors requires other people to be on the move for you, stocking shelves, delivering blood samples. While many are locked down, a whole world of logistics has continued to operate—one involving drivers, hotel workers, or security guards who must continue to travel. Fly-in Fly-out workers continue to fly out to mine sites from Perth; and healthcare workers, agricultural workers, and other distance workers must continue to travel. And because they must continue to travel, they are at a heightened risk. In short, what we are seeing is the rise of a new mobile power geometry that is based on exposure to the virus. We would do well to consider how such power geometries intensify forms of classed difference as the immobility of working from home becomes a privilege only afforded to those in traditionally white-collar jobs.

As well as these practical challenges, what is perhaps even more striking now that we are deeper into the pandemic is how our capsular sense of place is shaped by the strange experiences of time that we might be feeling. Many times, we might catch ourselves asking ourselves 'what day even is it?' Cultural theorist Mathew Arthur (2020) invokes the idea of 'Blursday' which captures the notion that time now just feels strange, where the last two weeks can seem like a strange ten years. Thus, the specificity of any day—for many academics at least—collapses into streaming meetings, angst-filled insomnia, and slow-creeping domesticities. Blursday seems to capture the hazy, vague forms of perception that are part and parcel of the relentlessness of being in our capsular places. Oftentimes over the past while, I have thought about Xavier de Maistre's curious little book *Voyage Around My Room*, a somewhat tongue-in-cheek travelogue that surveys the curiosities that are close to hand in one room—written while de Maistre was under house arrest for 42 days in late 18th century Turin. The book teaches us the mindful appreciation that joy and wisdom can be found even

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under the most constrained circumstances. Yet in spite of his earnest pleas, there is also a sense that de Maistre is actually just very bored and losing it a bit. Isolated and marooned in our capsular spaces for months, any joy at inhabiting a new immobile way of life may, for many, have given way to a pervasive sense of relentlessness, a time 'lived without its flow' as Denise Riley (2019) might say, utterly circular. From lockdown, it is hard to even comprehend the lives that others might be living at present. We're perhaps most reminded of this insight from glimpses into the lives of others through social media images which give an intimate portrait of life taking place in parallel worlds.

A quarter of a century ago, anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) famously wrote about how places associated with the rise of 'supermodernity' such as airports and supermarkets are so devoid of any apparent history or social relations both within them or in relationships with their surrounds—they're so functional, rather than meaningful—that they're best considered 'non-places'. While our domestic capsules are, on one hand, so distant from the kinds of places Augé is writing about, on the other hand, when suspended in capsular space in lockdown, I'll venture that there is more than a whiff of non-place about these worlds: functional, feeling devoid of meaning, bodies worn down by the relentless pressures of life without forward movement: in short, a kind of non-place that is detached from its surrounds, from elsewhere, from aspiration and optimism: a closed bubble, to use one of the pandemic's most prevalent spatial metaphors.

A few years ago, against the current zeitgeist in geography for thinking of abundance and connection, Chris Philo (2017, 258) wrote an impassioned plea to geographers to consider the less-than-human geographies associated with that which "diminishes the human, cribs and confines it, curtails or destroys its capacities, silencing its affective grip, banishing its involvements." Philo's words here and now seem to resonate with what the pandemic has thrown at us, and the kinds of diminishments that we might be feeling from life inside our capsular places: about exhaustion and being pushed to thresholds of bearability. Perhaps in some very small way, experiencing such confinement creates other more subtle forms of empathy, a connection—albeit very unequal—to those who experience different, systematic hardships in a much more ongoing way. As the year has continued, our sense of place has been shaped by the economic reality of COVID-19, blighting people's livelihoods, decimating incomes. Words that bring into view such diminishment immediately raise ethical questions about how we might care for such diminished lives, a theme

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developed by geographers such as Emma Power and Kathy Mee (2020), not to 're-move' them back into being productive beings, but about how we might console and repair.

4. An uncertain sense of place

I began this essay by describing something we confidently know—that mobility slowed. However, we've arrived at a much more existentially difficult place—which brings me to a fourth sense of place. One of the things I'm keen to emphasise is our struggle to come to terms with, to reconcile, and to make sense of our situation. Part of this struggle is an indication of its complexity. That there are so many people writing and talking about COVID-19 is an indication that it exceeds our capacity to grasp it. For sure, we know more about the disease itself than we did back in March 2020, and especially about how it moves. We know a bit more about what it is doing to bodies. Far from just a mild flu, this is a multi-systemic disease, as Felicity Callard (2020) has highlighted in her writing on long-COVID and the potentially long-duration debilities that it will inflict on both young and old. But what the virus is doing to our sense of place, to our sense of who we are, and to our understanding of togetherness are much more open questions.

Because so many of us have had to change our day-to-day lives so much, our sense of who we are might have become a bit unstuck. Since our ontological security is often anchored by need for predictability and control of a situation, when we are not sure what is going on, when we cannot plan for the future, things feel a bit up in the air. Sometimes it can be difficult to know how, exactly, to feel about something, which itself can feel disorienting. We have wondered about when life will return to 'normal.' As literary scholar Lauren Berlant (2007) reminds us, the idea of normality itself is a kind of fantasy. It is an idea that works infrastructurally, keeping people afloat by providing the comfort of not having to justify oneself or one's actions. Over the past few months, we have had to get used to 'the new normal,' which indicates a situation that cannot just be snapped back to a previous point. In terms of our sense of place, some of the more desperate attempts to make things feel normal end up seeming utterly bizarre. Think about the kinds of simulated socialities that have been used to make places seem lively: cardboard cut-outs of fans in sports stands, restaurants using mannequins to create a 'lively' atmosphere, but perhaps ending up being more reminiscent of some low-budget chiller movie.

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Around the world, this sense of uncertainty has become manifested in terms of the governance of the crisis—or lack of—which has, at times, becomes centre stage. Where we see chaos, confusion, and U-turns, some say that these are manufactured affects to further some hidden agenda. And although sometimes this idea may be so, I think it perhaps also tells us something more fundamental about the limits of power, its blind spots, as Mitch Rose (2014) would say, in the face of a situation of overwhelming complexity. Power here in some respects seems less like a bright force shining against the various obstacles it finds, which is how we often imagine it, and more like a desperate echo against an unravelling and untameable situation. Geographers have long appreciated that socio-spatial life has always been maddeningly complex and, as Yves Citton (2010) writes, the way we make some sense of this chaos is to turn to stories. We create narrative structures. It is no wonder conspiracy theories become so attractive for some in times of crisis, as a way of joining the dots, forcing them together in warped and unsubstantiated ways. A fear response, for sure, but really, a desperate attempt to feel one's sense of place in the world differently, where absurdist fantasy combines with disavowal and denial to afford ways of cleaving some mastery over an achingly impossible situation.

Others with money have resorted to isolationist fantasies of the sort that geographer Brad Garrett (2020) explores, which take us into the lavish bunkers the super-rich have constructed deep underground to escape any ensuing crisis, and which is evidence of a highly exclusionary, isolationist understanding of place. But just wishing away a problem does not make it go away. Disavowal and denial are not long-term solutions. The problem of such narrative structures are simplification and reduction. Whereas in actual fact what we need is an appreciation of the complexity of the problem. What I am suggesting here is that in among this uncertainty, we need to listen closely to see what is happening, and we need to better appreciate—not downplay—the complexity of the situation, the new relations and associations that have formed in this crisis. As Anja Kanngieser (2015) suggests, this listening work is hard work, but it might enable us to see how COVID-19 is fully enmeshed with other crises: climate change, environmental degradation, fascistic horrors. This crisis is as much about nature-culture as it is about public health. Just think about how metaphors and vocabularies for dealing with other crises have been transposed and repurposed for the pandemic, as talk of hotspots, outbreaks, and spot-fires move from last summer's regional bushfires into this winter's city-based catastrophe, taking on new meaning as they do, but also folding Australia's two most

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palpable crises of 2020 together. Acknowledging such complexity by feeling and working with connections across multiple crises is about restoring a belief in *this* world; and it is the only way that we are going to find concepts that can help us make sense of what is going on and solutions that work. Which brings us back to geography.

5. A geographical sense of place

Fundamentally, in this time of extreme uncertainty, we need geographical scholarship more than ever before, both in terms of research and teaching. This is a discipline that has always been driven by the quest to think about how the complex relationships between people and place changes, and my wager is that geography matters now more than ever as we try to move forward and refashion our lives in the long comet-tail of COVID-19. Arguably more than any other discipline, geography brings together the human and natural sciences to address the challenges of our time—to understand human-physical intersections and complex systems, and to establish how everyday practices relate to structural forces.

And yet in this moment here in Australia, we find ourselves under extreme pressure, with massive threats to universities. These threats are partly an effect of the abrupt slump in international student enrolments that COVID-19 has induced. This was a cohort that used to make up almost half of the student population at some Australian universities and provided crucial cross-subsidised funding for research activities (Marshman and Larkins, 2020). With most international travel probably off the cards for at least another year, it is unlikely that the previous numbers of international students will be able to return any time soon. Universities have slashed projected incomes and current predictions are for over twenty thousand job losses for staff on contract and continuing positions across the nation's universities through a combination of voluntary and forced redundancies. These losses will have devastating effects on families and communities, as well as local and national economies (Blackmore, 2020). Furthermore, such losses will likely hit regional communities harder, as alternative employment is more difficult to find, and people will be forced to uproot and move in search of other opportunities.

Those who remain in academic work are being forced to reconfigure their research activities, move their teaching online, and address complex and diverse student needs, all of which are potentially intensifying the feelings of overwork, stress and exhaustion that many were already

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experiencing before the pandemic. Where the talk is of downsizing operations, threatening yet more rounds of university restructuring, where geography becomes aggregated with or disaggregated from other disciplines, we find ourselves in an unenviable situation where those in disciplines such as ours must fight to justify their continued existence. Now, more than ever, is the time to affirm our sense of who we are as geographers. We must continue to advocate for our discipline within our own institutions, taking the time to articulate our valuable contribution with clarity and verve. But we must also be confident and proud to represent who we are outside the academy, to politicians, the media, and industry, as professional *geographers* (Turton and Maude, 2020).

We have outstanding geographical research and teaching going on in Australia; where geographers are working passionately and with conviction, to deepen our sense of the multiplicity of the crises we find ourselves in—social, economic, health, environmental—and carving out new possibilities, learning about the kinds of worlds that we want to live in. But rather than retreat into our individual bunkers, we need to remember to appreciate how our disciplinary sense of place as geographers is utterly reliant on each other, on our community. In an institutional environment that so often pits people against each other, at this moment more than ever, we need to value how our own worth as educators, thinkers and learners is fully tied to the worth of each other. We enact this valuing of each other in so many ways already: through collaboration, co-teaching, peer review, attending each other's seminars, participating in reading groups (Ey et al., 2020), and through the many other ways that we play an active part in the intellectual, pastoral and administrative lives of the communities that we are part of. But we can help each other to feel valued in other significant ways too: by affirming each other's contributions, by taking the time to give newcomers a warm welcome, and by helping others to feel that they belong. Such gestures of concern matter because, as Chris Ingraham (2020) reminds us, such gestures are affectively generative, producing dispositions that orient us towards rather than away from one another.

Where over a quarter century ago Derek Gregory (1994) insisted how a geographical *imagination* is about affirming the ecological relation of land, life and thought; I want to finish by affirming that our geographical imagination as a discipline requires us to acknowledge and cultivate the ecological relations that connect us all together as geographers. So, in this time of COVID-19, my parting suggestion is that we need to do all we can to affirm our unique sense of place as a geographical community by cultivating our collegiality, standing up for each other, and reaching out.

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Figure 2. Credit: David Bissell

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