Introduction

Approximately four years ago, teachers and students in higher education confronted a crisis in teaching and learning brought about by a pandemic referred to by scientists as Co-Vid: a contemporary plague of widespread consequence which periodically continues to raise its hideous head in different parts of the country and the world. Within a short period of time, a matter of months, students returned home to access their education through zoom or other platforms, studying Shakespeare and calculus either synchronously or asynchronously, with younger siblings playing around them, dogs barking, and parents observing. Teachers almost immediately had to acquire skills and a content knowledge they had largely assumed they could ignore, or safely assign to someone else to execute. They had to make decisions concerning which aspects of their curricula were transferrable, which should be rethought, or which should be outright dismissed.

For some, perhaps for many, the pandemic provided an opportunity for teacherly self-reflection, because everything looked newly strange, everything was newly denormalized, and everything was newly subject to reconsideration. Should students write more or less, read more or less; should they be required to participate in discussions, must they turn on their video screens even if that meant giving teacher and peers access into previously private spaces; should they be expected to observe traditional deadlines, even when they were themselves ill, or needed to care for an ill family member, or needed to attend the funeral of a grandparent or friend? Why do we ask students to do what we ask them to do? That became a critical question for many, perhaps for the first time.

In most of the essays here, pedagogical revision is presented in inspirational terms. Heroic narratives are shared, constructed by teachers who seized the pandemic moment as

an opportunity to take risks, to transform the zoom box of the pandemic classroom into a virtual yet vital learning space. We are delighted to publish these optimistic pieces.

This issue also contains other kinds of reflections, analyses, and arguments. It begins with a gracious memorial for Ann E. Berthoff, who died November 26, 2022, written by her long-standing colleague and dear friend (and regular contributor to *Reader*) Neal Bruss. It also offers a useful summary of how the recently and collaboratively produced CCCC statement on reading was generated and how it can be applied in the classroom. The last piece is written by a former co-editor (with Mariolina Salvatori) of *Reader*, Paul Kameen. Since retiring from the University of Pittsburgh, Paul has published prolifically on Amazon, both in prose and poetry. We're honored to be the vehicle for his return to traditional journal publication.

The four pandemic pieces in this issue responded to the following CFP:

> Essays are invited for a special issue of *Reader* on Reading and Teaching Reading in the Pandemic. We'll consider full length academic essays, short or long memoirs or narratives, poems, etc. Possibilities: How have your own reading practices—or the practices you teach–changed during the pandemic? Have you been helped by particular texts in confronting personal, academic, and pedagogical challenges? Have your students? Did your course syllabi change?

They set up a quite stimulating conversation consisting of numerous overlaps, echoes, and shared premises.

The first is "The Abstract of 'Cryo-EM structure of the 2019-nCoV Spike . . .' and Interpretation's 'Curious Triangle'" by Neal Bruss. This is not a classroom essay, per se, but a piece in which he applies what he learned from Ann Berthoff about the "curious triangle" to a significant but not widely known pandemic text, at least in humanistic circles: the abstract of a groundbreaking article published in

the prestigious journal, *Science*, announcing the discovery of a special entity that made the development of a covid vaccine possible (this is truly heroic research). Using Berthoff's triangle (which was influenced by her reading of Ogden and Richards' *Meaning of Meaning*), he offers what, in her terms, could be called a "naïve" reading. It is "naïve" not in terms of conceptual sophistication or complexity but because it focuses exclusive attention on the text itself--the word on the page: it requires the analysis of "text grammar," "stress," and a "communal lexicon." Bruss explains that while a scientific abstract is unfamiliar to most readers, when it is carefully analyzed, it seems to resemble oral narratives, which are so ubiquitous and so accessible as to appear like natural expressions of experience.

Bruss then approaches the abstract from a slightly different interpretive perspective, focusing on the "communal lexicon": by "communal lexicon" is meant language that only trained practitioners would understand. But even a "communal lexicon" has a potentially broader provenance, if one interprets it in "curious" ways: for example, one can use the OED to notice connections between scientific and nonscientific discourse, thus making familiar what is initially strange to the everyday reader. Another move, one we could call "from this to this," is an act of interpretive stepladdering by which certain dots are connected, bringing scientists into relationship with humanists, scientific discourse with humanistic discourse. "Divergent realities" thus become "convergent." While Bruss doesn't say it, or go this far, the pandemic moment triggered for many teachers the kind of transformation by which what is normally kept apart is placed in alignment (such as home and classroom).

The next essay, "The Noticing Journal" by Kara Wittman, brings us into the classroom, reflecting on reading as a type of noticing. The work of the Russian Formalist Shlovosky, especially his work on estrangement, inspired Wittman to design an assignment that would help students establish a

more intimate and mindful relationship with their zoom box environment. In this assignment, issued in two successive classes she was teaching collaboratively (one taught in the height of the pandemic, the other after the peak) she asked students to create a "Noticing Journal," consisting of several parts. First they were to notice something about their physical reality, their familiar space, something they might have overlooked or considered insignificant. They were then to write about it. Then they were to write something they noticed about the assigned reading. Finally, they were to post these acts of noticing on the course discussion board. Wittman noticed that over time students became more willing to reflect on the significance of what they were noticing and to make a space "for perceiving divergent reality" (one hears an echo of Bruss). They also started to notice each other's acts of noticing.

Wittman had hoped that the process of noticing with intention would have an ameliorative effect on their reading practice: that to notice differently would mean to read differently. Sadly that didn't happen, at least not in any obvious way (actually, it's not always easy to detemine how, when, and if skills transfer). We shouldn't conclude from this result that Wittman's pedagogical experiment was a failure. Far from it. Let us see why by looking at a few of her conclusions, which carry immense emotional weight.

First, the rupture induced by the pandemic might have led to various experiences of significant dehabituation, in many different ways, of many different kinds—even if it may take some time for us to *notice* the shift. As the result of the pandemic, those thoughts that come to us unthinkingly, automatically, and unquestioningly—those thoughts that make us reside in conceptual spaces we might really not want to inhabit—might be exposed for the dangers they contain: in Wittman's words, these dangers include "the unceasing acts of violence we carry on in the name of patriotism or possession." Second while her noticing of noticing might have been

prompted initially by the pedagogical challenges posed by the pandemic, it was also inspired by her experiences with reading and the teaching of reading. There's something to be noticed here, she explains, about the ethics of reading, something about attention, about care. And there is also something about love.

In Walter Wadiak's essay, "Slow Teaching: Lessons from a Pandemic Semester," we encounter a medieval scholar and teacher at a small liberal arts college confident enough and willing enough to investigate the liberatory potential of a "pandemic semester." While he didn't want "to make [his] pandemic experience sound more gratifying than it was," he nonetheless was willing to invest in the time required to notice his classroom, his students, himself; to do a bit of weed-pulling in his pedagogical garden; to edit those practices he had normalized over time. For example, one of the lessons he learned in his Chaucer class was that a course need not stuff everything into a semester, that "coverage" (which he views as a particularly American preoccupation) is an illusion. Instead he came to think of the classroom "less as the default place where everything happens than as a special kind of space for focused interrogation." Among the many fruits of this recognition is that as a teacher he can do less and thus paradoxically can do more by proceeding slowly, turning the dial to simmer rather than boil.

Two additional methods Wadiak came to value are worth mentioning here, each inspired from his revised sense of his course's temporality, his adoption of "Slow Teaching." For example, in his Chaucer class he posted (as numerous other teachers have done) "mini-lectures," whose content students could absorb in their own way, on their own time. They then were to write about their reactions and share them on line, thus alleviating the kind of anxiety that being put on the spot in a face-to-face class can produce. Wadiak also discovered that he and his students could do pleasure reading together. And they could create a sense of intellectual and physical

intimacy in the zoom-box by performing recitations of poetry, taking advantage of the resources at hand, having fun.

An especially rich moment of self-reflection comes at the end of the essay when Wadiak describes an epiphany he had while teaching an intermediate writing class. While peer-responding is a common practice in writing courses, and has been for decades, it was never one that Wadiak engaged in with any enthusiasm. He considered it a waste of time because students lack the requisite skills to make it worthwhile, and they also find it awkward to provide critical feedback to peers. His approach was to invite peer response groups to establish community before embarking on textual review. They could share their experience as writers, for example, or delineate their "writing sins." Once students established trust, Wadiak discovered, they became much better readers of each other's work. They noticed more, and they "noticed" better. We can imagine that by encouraging this kind of community-building, Wadiak's students noticed something important about him: that he really cared. Once again, there is something akin to love being expressed here.

This brings us to the fourth and final pandemic essay, interestingly, one whose subject is also older literatures and languages: this time, Old English. In her essay, Nancy Atkinson describes how she shed certain self-imposed teaching restrictions in response to comments made by her students. For example, the Old English textbook she had used for many years, a standard in the field, outlined an extremely prescriptive method of learning which students found difficult to follow. Students suggested different pathways through the text, and Atkinson eagerly made the necessary adjustments: the pandemic having provided her an opportunity to teach differently. She made other adjustments as well in order to accommodate the new pedagogical environment. She did more with less, as did Wadiak, Also like Wadiak, she moved through the material more slowly, using technological tools, new to her, to engage her students in more visual terms: for

example, using screen tools to trace, literally, the physical configuration of runes.

Her students' difficulties in adjusting to new classroom modalities were one source of inspiration for these changes, but so was the state of her own health (this is the only essay which discusses the teacher's debilitation). Having contracted covid in December, she continued to deal with the repercussions of the disease the following semester. Some of the "slowness" in her teaching resulted from her having to save her breath to talk. Her teacher's body became a major pedagogical determinant: she really was "teaching the body." But she also started to think about issues of embodiment in other ways, in the fact, for example, that elements of classroom discussion can be captured on discussion boards. Those boards can be shared by new students from year to year. Students can learn from these records of teaching and learning that their difficulties are not unique, that others dealt with the same problems, and they survived. As Wadiak also noticed, the sharing of difficulty can have a powerful ameliorative effect: it can place difficulty in perspective, manage it, diminish its threat, exploit its learning power.

In a first for *Reader*, we are excited to publish two original works of poetry. Like the essays in this issue, "Fairy Tales Redux" and "Sightings" by Natalie Mera Ford explore the question of what it means to read and write "pandemically." Extending Witman's idea, we read Ford's poems as examples of pandemic "noticing."

Ford's poems bring us to the end of the pandemic section. The last two essays have broad applicability to that topic, but offer less specificity. The first essay, "The Genesis of the New 'CCCC Position Statement on The Role of Reading in College Writing Classrooms and its Application to the Classroom," by Sherita V. Roundtree, Howard Tinberg, and Alice S. Horning shares insider knowledge about the genesis of this long awaited and extremely important document: the position statement on reading (primarily "rhetorical reading")

which was finally presented to the membership in 2021. The first part of the essay shares the backstory: for example, the difficulty that those who initiated the developmental process had in convincing CCCC leadership that such a statement was needed (as the authors point out, the subject of reading in writing studies has aways had a "Here today, Suppressed tomorrow" dimension). It's interesting to know who was involved, what they were responsible for, how everything finally came together. *Reader* is delighted to have this piece of professional history formalized within its pages.

The next two parts of the essay describe how two members of the task force incorporated "deep and rhetorical reading strategies into the first-year writing courses that they teach." In the first application, Howard Tinberg applies the principles of the position statement to the community college classroom. For example, he acknowledges that while community college writing teachers understand that their students "struggle to engage readings"—that they find reading extremely difficult and that they very much need to develop their reading skills—instructors nonetheless often resort, perhaps due to frustration or the simple desire to move on, to providing summaries of the reading materials. This results in teachers doing their students' reading for them, ultimately disempowering them as readers. Tinberg also discusses ways to engage students in identifying the deep structures of the texts they're reading. What is of special interest here is that in deciding to engage students in this kind of work, the author/teacher began with self-reflection. Why should students read in a writing class? What does it mean to write well in this environment? What kind of reading depth do students at this level need to achieve? How much explicit instruction is helpful? How much is harmful? Tinberg not only poses such questions, but responds to them, at least implicitly.

In the second application, Sherita Roundtree begins by acknowledging the "complementary nature of critical reading and rhetorical strategies": for example, the importance for

students "to think about content in context when reading texts." The author adds that she hadn't really considered how students were being helped "to think about the entangled relationship between reading and writing." The approach she uses to remedy this lack is that of "backwards outlining," by which she helped students to read strategically, often by using graphic organizers that made visible various kinds of relationships. We encourage our readers to study these methods and experiment with them.

This brings us to the final contribution: Paul Kameen's essay on "Quantum Reading." This essay is a challenge (a highly satisfying one) to address, since Kameen is an associational thinker, who moves confidently through a rich repertoire of source materials. But parsing isn't really the point. The essay offers three discernible "runways" (to use his word), which come together and dance apart in a variety of mysterious and magical ways.

Kameen begins by reflecting on "conspiracy" and its increase in invisibility over the past decades: he asks how conspiracies emerge and why people believe them. Offering different explanations, he settles most assiduously on both Gadamer's theory of "preunderstandings" and the phenomenon of the postmodernist turn, which severed the traditional relationships between word and meaning, making it possible for people to say anything they please and to have confidence that someone will believe it. Moving on in his essay, he shares his reading of five works recommended to him by friends and referenced in other texts he had read: two by Chellis Glendinnig, one by Elaine Pagels, a selection of writings by Mikhail Bakunin, and a biography of the poet Li Bai (aka Li Po). Finding each of considerable interest and unsure where to begin, Kameen chose to read them simultaneously, moving from a chapter of one to a chapter of another, ten pages here, ten pages there. As a result of his simultaneous reading, the five works began to blend, turning into one book with five different facets. It helps in this regard

that each manifests the same central premise: "a profound and hard-earned distrust for externally imposed state sponsored orthodoxies." Despite this commonality, however, the biography of Li Bai seems resistant to other kinds of alignment. Kameen explains that when he experiences textual uncertainty, he starts writing and goes where the writing takes him. The reader of Kameen's essay could choose a similar course: begin reading, and see where the reading takes you.

The final runway of this piece is the recent interrogation by a congressional committee of three women presidents (one of color) at the head of three distinguished universities The ostensible purpose of this meeting was to provide information about first amendment protections and the punishment of hostile speech, in the context of recent outbreaks of antisemitism on college campuses. The real purpose of the meeting was obviously political, one of many efforts in recent years to slander institutions of higher education as bastions of left wing ideology. Kameen's comments about this incident—that the unwillingness of the presidents to respond clearly, simply, without equivocation—demonstrate the pernicious yet ubiquitous effects of the postmodernist linguistic turn.

And finally—an update on *Reader's* transition to online publication. Since the announcement in our last issue that we would be moving *Reader* online, the rapid rise and proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is raising new questions about writing, reading, and intellectual property. Like all of you, we are working hard to understand the implications of these changes. For now, *Reader* will continue as a print journal, and will will make selected essays available to readers for free on our website. Please visit sites.lafayette.edu/reader/ to read selected essays from this current issue.

This seems a good place to conclude this introduction. We urge you to follow wherever these essays may lead. Find your own runways. This strikes us as an especially strong issue of *Reader*. We hope you agree.