


Artwork: Focus on leisure and health during the pandemic

Finding leisure through improvisation at home: Self-sustainment during COVID-19

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Abstract

During tumultuous, shaky, and uncertain times such as COVID-19, understandings of and life at home have shifted dramatically, especially amidst lockdown or on-and-off stay-at-home orders. While staying at home made me feel a sense of safety and protection, lockdown was a whole other challenge. Staying at home from morning till dawn, doing the exact same things over and over again, and relying on technology more than ever to fuel my social needs, encompassed my lockdown routine; a routine developed out of desires for normalcy and desperation to feel a sense of stability and so-called productivity. In light of my sanity and survival, I had to make do. I had to improvise. I had to find 'leisure' that worked for me while the world moved cautiously amidst COVID. In the details of everyday pandemic life, I found leisure in improvisation. In some cases such as my lockdown experience, leisure *can* be found in improvisation; not just in one thing or activity per se, but also in a series of pursuits that can help us make do, pass time, keep sane, and even experience temporary bliss and enjoyment amidst an unsteady and unpredictable environment.



Photo caption: Photo (previous page) is a homemade Dalgona coffee in a teacup. At the height of lockdown, making homemade coffee, instead of getting from coffee shops, was a temporary retreat from what I considered 'normal'. Making homemade coffee was an act of improvisation which, despite its unusualness or transitory experience, helped to carry me through the day(s) during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many individuals and families to make alternative arrangements (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021) within which what was once known as life at *home*, a valuable resource from which many practices and routines of life originate (Tomas, 2022). For many, stay-at-home orders, transitions to work-from-home (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021), and absence of in-person learning (Azhari & Fajri, 2021) disrupted the *ongoingness* and "everyday atmospheres" within home (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2014, p. 171); consequently destabilizing routine practices occurring at home.

Navigating unpredictable circumstances such as living with my family during lockdown, feeling helplessness and disappointment from the dullness of going through the motions of "stay[ing] the blazes home" (April, 2020, para. 2), and adjusting my leisure preferences, were tricky and unsettling. Much like most individuals who jumped on different lockdown bandwagons like baking sourdough bread, creating temporary work-from-home stations, and filming TikTok videos, I entrenched myself into a daily routine consisting of a series of improvised activities that helped me to survive and accept the daily bouts of lockdown. Inspired by my Philippine heritage, I offer reflections on how I used leisure to sustain myself during the pandemic through the frames of *pansamantala* ("temporary" or "for the meantime") and improvisation.

"Pansamantala lang." ("It's only temporary."), as my Filipino elders would say during difficult times as a reminder that suffering or any challenge is temporary, taught me that leisure can be found in improvisation during uncertain times like the pandemic.

Meeting with friends over coffee was replaced with virtual coffee dates through FaceTime and with home-brewed, instead of shop-bought coffee. Instead of eating out on special occasions, trying new recipes became a favourite family pastime. My regular gym visits were replaced with following free YouTube fitness videos playing in the family room. And getting ready for school/work was "maintained" by getting dressed for Zoom meetings, as if I were attending them in-person. In the interest of my sanity and survival, I had to make do and improvise—to remind myself that this, too, was *pansamantala*. I had to find leisure in ways that worked for me to sustain myself as the world moved cautiously amidst the pandemic.

Figuring out how to stretch my time by finding meaning and purpose in those improvised daily activities—intentionally engaging in them with care, attention, and gratitude, despite the reminder that they are an improvisation of my so-called 'normal' leisure, taught me to have a greater appreciation for routine activities I not would have otherwise spent moments thinking about prior to the pandemic. While these activities did not *fully* replace my leisure pursuits pre-pandemic, they sustained me; they helped me to keep going despite uncertain circumstances. I didn't do leisure. I found it. I *had* to find leisure by improvising in the details of my everyday life during lockdown. In some cases, such as my lockdown experience, leisure can be found in improvisation, or in a collection of improvisory practices (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2014) taking place within the home to make do, pass time, keep sane, find stability, and experience temporary bliss and enjoyment amidst unsteady and ever-changing times.

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