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The Face Mask in COVID Times: A Sociomaterial Analysis is one of the early examples of the studies intended to explore a COVID-19 pandemic-related phenomenon in a more systematic and holistic manner. The book is written by a collective of Australia-based social scholars, Deborah Lupton, Clare Southerton, Marianne Clark, and Ash Watson, who work on topics of public health, technology, materiality, culture, body, and gender. The data was gathered throughout the first year of the pandemic (2020), which resulted in a dynamic analysis of how masks were re-assembled as a socio-material object in the context of the global health crisis. It describes the period when the initially-uncertain status of masks and concerns about their inefficiency or related risks were replaced by the requirement to wear masks whenever it is impossible to maintain a safe distance and which was introduced in over a hundred countries around the world by July, 2020. The book is interesting and peculiar in at least two ways; first, in what it says about face masks as the key symbol and material equipment of the pandemic, and second, in what it reveals about the specific epistemological position of researchers who produce knowledge amid the ongoing events.

The Face Mask in COVID Times consists of five empirical chapters, a theoretical introduction and epilogue, and the auto-ethnographic preface where the authors share their personal experiences of dealing with masks, both on their own faces and on the faces of other people around them. It covers: (1) changing health policies regarding face masks and the development of political discourses around this object; (2) the integration of masks into people's everyday practices; (3) the increasing visibility and tangibility of breathing during the pandemic; (4) various forms of non-mass-produced masks; and (5) care for human and non-human entities that is implemented by means of masks or should be promoted as a response to the ecological threats that masks create. Throughout the book, the researchers refer to a broad variety of cases and examples associated with the main phenomenon under their investigation, from traditional face-covering practices in non-Western countries to the representations of breathing in particular climate conditions, or specific socio-political circumstances such as the Black Lives Matter movement. Overall, it turns out as a patchwork-kind of study that connects different perspectives on

one object, different national contexts, different types of data, and the different research interests of the authors.

The central argument of the book becomes more apparent and pronounced by the end when the authors show how various manifestations of care for humans that are accomplished through face masks come into dissonance with, first, the rising tensions and inequalities between diverse categories of care-givers and care-providers and, second, the lack of care for the environment that eventually affects and harms both human and non-human beings. This care, understood as "a duty and a set of practices" (72), has taken different forms enabled through the different material embodiments of masks, apart from the obvious use of masks as an instrument of protection of one's own and, even more so, of others' health. For instance, especially in the early periods of the pandemic, mask-aid became a form of political diplomacy demonstrating the care (or the lack thereof) of countries for each other, and humanity in general. The DIY production of masks made it possible to care for medical personnel at the time of shortages in the supply of medical masks, for both geographically distant and close family members and the vulnerable members of a local community or society at large. It also made it possible to care for one's identity and self-expression in public, despite the partial invisibility of one's face. Thus, not wearing a mask may be considered as an act of care for individual freedoms and personal boundaries rather than a mere act of ignorance. Here, the researchers do not over-romanticize (maybe a little) the mask as a tool of care; instead, they highlight the difficulties and non-obvious outcomes of care performed through mask (non)wearing, production, and distribution.

On several occasions, the authors discuss the moral and political polarization resulting from the opposition between those who support mask-wearing requirements (either compulsory or not, depending on the country) and those who resist it. They gradually reveal the ambivalence of this socially-constructed binary logic. In particular, on the one hand, "the act of wearing a mask seems to overlook and override any potential shortcomings of the wearer, and issues like racism are erased or eclipsed. On the other hand, shame is deployed to paint and position those who do not wear masks in broad brush strokes as "selfish, unintelligent, and sometimes racist" (78), while, as they mentioned earlier, masks are differently embodied and demand different amounts of efforts due to the differences in individual bodily, mental, and environmental conditions. Hence, in some cases, wearing a mask becomes almost impossible even when a person agrees with the public health and moral imperative. This might be the case for members of the deaf community, people with disfigurements who experience difficulties with putting masks on or taking them off on their own, people with autism-spectrum disorders, victims of violence, etc. (41–42).

Another crucial ambiguity of masks as an instrument of care is hidden in the broader bodily and ecological entanglement of masks as socio-material objects and the consequences of their usage. Wearing a mask might be harmful to one's body (such as skin allergies and damage caused by wearing a mask for a long period of time, or infections caused by improper mask-handling), or to communicative and mental abilities. Moreover, as a new, major source of pollution, masks are certainly harmful to non-human

species and to the environment in general. Thus, relying on masks as a crucial instrument of care requires developing a set of additional individual, collective, and global ecological care practices that could both restrict masks' "negative" affordances and reinforce their positive effects. This suggestion has not only important pragmatic but also significant theoretical implementations. This research is part of the war against the "deep seated approach [that] reflects historical and contemporary philosophies that value and recognize human exceptionalism and agency over nonhuman agencies. In this arrangement, the natural or more-than-human world is seen as passive and there to be shaped by the agentic human subject" (81), which makes people ignorant to "intra-action" (27) through which distinct human and non-human agencies emerge.

The main conceptual framework applied by the researchers is the more-than-human theory supplemented by the domestication theory and feminist new-materialism informed by Indigenous and First Nations philosophies (5–6). Although the application of more-than-human theory seems a bit too illustrative and superficial in some instances, as in the analysis of the virtual event generated through the viral "Bunnings Karen" video (28–29), overall, it helps the authors to hold the complex and multidimensional analytical construction together and lead it to the final theoretical conclusion. They claim that we should aim at "exposing and resisting our tendency to adopt a human-centric position in a post-COVID world in which our connections with and to nonhuman others have become more apparent and important than ever . . . [which] requires responsiveness and carefulness so as not to resort to humanist tendencies that prioritize human experience when we work to imagine collective futures. As we imagine these futures, we will need to negotiate the tension between human-centered understandings of 'health' and the needs of the more-than-human world of which we are inextricably a part" (83).

Along with the mutual constitutions of human and nonhuman agencies, the authors also criticize the persistent and dominating model of the human body as an autonomous and closed-off entity. Such a model leads to the idea of strict body control and individual responsibilization as the key mechanisms assuring public health. Here, the researchers rely on Foucauldian concepts of governmentality and bio-power. While people tend to experience deep cultural anxieties about the loss of bodily control and the blurred boundaries between one's own body and those of others, they fail to recognize how problematic and to the great extent of how harmful this model is in the spread of respiratory disease. The inability to accept that "leaky" bodies (6) are normal rather than marginal and that public health has a trans-corporal rather than individual nature leads to their disbelief in the virus or in the protective effect of masks.

The Face Mask in COVID Times fits a certain genre of research and books widespread in social history, anthropology, and cultural studies. The research focused on one particular material object and its diverse but interconnected socio-cultural entanglement. Although it belongs to sociology in general, this book may be considered as a contemporary history study that is meant to document a crucial part of the pandemic as a global phenomenon that — as it feels from within the moment — is changing the course of human history. It tries to grasp and organize as much diverse evidence of the mask's

socio-political, material, embodied, and media existence as possible, as long as this data remains on the surface of our news feed and everyday experience. It is essential to see this book as written in the very uncertain social situation amid the pandemic when spatial mobility is highly restricted, and ties researchers to their locally specific position and view on the world more than usually. Such context leads to a couple of significant limitations that this study seems to have.

First, the research is mostly based on digital visual and textual data and is only occasionally accompanied by auto-ethnographic observations. Such a set of data helps to draw a larger-scale picture of the face mask as the main symbol and equipment of the pandemic, but it does not allow the conducting of a deeper analysis of those socio-material practices and micro-politics of the interaction between humans, masks, and other material objects or elements of the environment. The lack of systematic offline observations made some of the sub-topics to be presented in a slightly sketchy manner (in particular, Chapter 3 on living with facemasks). The availability of digital data and the difficulties, or impossibility, of acquiring alternative empirical material is quite understandable in this situation, but it is worth a methodological reflection in relation to the theory and findings.

Second, the authors consider the diversity of cultural, political, and geographical contexts on several occasions in which face masks are embedded as a global and seemingly-universal socio-material phenomenon. Nevertheless, they mostly focus on Western anglophone countries, especially Australia and the US. While the former is obviously the closest and the most well-known reality for the Sydney-based researchers, the over-representation of the latter would need additional reflections. Due to the upcoming US presidential elections, an exceptionally high number of corona cases in the US, and events associated with racial injustice and the BLM movement, the US dominated the news in many countries around the world in 2020. It is probably also true that the US public discourse regarding the pandemic and sanitary measures affected other national media and political agendas and became exemplary. However, this should not be taken for granted as it narrows the researchers' perspectives on some of the key subjects, especially when it comes to the politicization of masks, the arguments for/against wearing them, and the moral arguments developing around masks. It would be great to see such kinds of research grounded in more diverse contexts.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, this study represents a brave and successful attempt to systematize and analyze a global socio-material phenomenon as it has been assembled and embedded in the everyday life and the public discourse of people around the world. Taking the conditions of academic work in that period into account, it is a pleasure to see that a collective of scholars can reach such an ambitious research goal.

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