The SCAS Book Series
No. I

SWEDISH
COLLEGIUM
for ADVANCED STUDY

Pandemic Ponderings:
Fellow Reflections beyond Corona

Edited by
CHRISTINA GARSTEN &
SANDRA MARIA REKANOVIC

SWEDISH COLLEGIUM FOR ADVANCED STUDY (SCAS)

Publisher: Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS),
Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, S-752 38 Uppsala, Sweden
www.swedishcollegium.se

ISBN 978-91-981948-3-8

Edited by: Christina Garsten and Sandra Maria Rekanovic
Cover and graphic design: Sandra Maria Rekanovic
Cover page photo: Poeform
All other photos: Kristjan Aunver

Printed by Exakta Print AB, Malmö, 2022

How Simple Life Can Be: Reflections on Place, Space and Time

JOHANNA ANNALA
Erik Allardt Fellow, 2020-21

Place, space and time are vital elements for a researcher. The Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS), as a site for curiosity-driven research, promises 'timeless time' — time to read, write and think — that is different from 'scheduled time', which is common in academic work today (cf. Ylijoki and Mäntylä 2003). It also promises separate places and spaces dedicated to my work and my personal interests. Following the twists and turns of Covid-19 statistics and regulations, the ability to travel to that place was on shaky ground, and after the Christmas break the possibility to return was updated every two weeks. In the end, I was physically present at SCAS from September to December and from April to June 2021. In this paper, I share my reflections on place, space and time at SCAS during the exceptional 2020–2021 academic year.

Place

'A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write (—)'. These famous words of Virginia Woolf (1929) reflect the starting point of my stay at SCAS. A place is an arena for our actions, including a physically, historically, socially and culturally constructed environment for our bodies (Lindén et

al. 2019). As I write this in my room at Villa Therese Andersson, I look out of the same window shared by former Nobel Prize winners. The rooms and walls in the house repeat the whisper of voices belonging to previous scholars who have worked, slept and cooked here; become inspired or annoyed; experienced joy and sorrow; and enjoyed private and social lives inside the very same walls. When I walk to the Prefektvilla and Linneanum, tourists hang around and take photos. I am proud to walk in. I have a key and a room for work. During the pandemic, this was important, because since March 2020, in my home university, the only available option was to work from home. To have one place for work and another place to enjoy private life has worked for me, and it is a privilege to have not one, but two rooms of my own. A third important place for me was the woods and fields around Uppsala. These three locations created a triangle of places I could call mine, and soon I realised that I did not hanker after any others.

Still, a physical place is not the only condition for writing; the idea of a 'room of [my] own' connotes the freedom to think and observe with a capacity to focus. Laakso (2020) emphasises the societal relevance of Woolf's message: the practical conditions affect your ability to think creatively and openly, and, accordingly, I see them as key requirements for research. This is why the broader space, not just the physical walls, becomes important: how well are you able to free yourself from other obligations and free your mind to foster creativity? How do other people in your environment encourage your work, and how safe do you feel being there? Spatial perspectives have widened our understanding about students' learning and sense of belonging within academia (Temple 2018), but here my focus is on the creative work of academics.

Space

The question of mutual encouragement and safety is not self-evident in today's academia. University life has been characterised as 'toxic' because of the intensification of academic work, expectations of efficacy, constant competition, and steepening hierarchies (Smyth 2017). In this world, one may have a place but not have space. Space could therefore be defined as a pure dimensionality and void, but could also include social and perceived belonging (Casey 2001).

Before joining SCAS, I knew that we were going to be a group of scholars at different stages of our careers and from different disciplinary traditions. I knew that reciprocal interaction was expected and that having an interest in engaging in multidisciplinary activities was required. What was exciting for me was the chance to find out how much space for others there would be in this group; that is, how much genuine willingness would there be to engage with others? Do the prevailing disciplinary or positional hierarchies that are common in academia transfer to the fellow communities, and if so, who occupies the space and how much space is given to others? Even though there were few who shared similar research interests with me, my experience was that fellowship in research—whatever the field—is possible. I found my space among the others. I found that it was possible to have a respectful and reciprocal space which went beyond the formal merits, positions, rankings and prizes won. However, the reality of the academic world with its hierarchies showed its face at times and reminded us of its existence.

We live and work not only in 'given' spaces, but in constructed, reproduced and transformed spaces in our daily lives (Brooks, Fuller, and Waters 2012). Besides the physical

walls and social and perceived belonging, we have a plurality of spaces: international spaces, virtual spaces, even galactic spaces of which we caught a glimpse in our lectures. An international space is self-evident in a collegium, but during this year we needed to get accustomed to meeting each other in the virtual space of Zoom. This affected the group and individuals differently.

Different spaces can be characterised as 'thick' and 'thin' places (Casey 2001). Thick places are spaces where human beings feel engaged and have strong connections which they regard as their own spaces. They connect a person's self and identity with a sense of belonging. They are experienced as meaningful and are embodied by activities. Thin places are not embodied and are not experienced as a person's own; virtual spaces are often experienced as such.

In the beginning of the academic year, I experienced many thick places during lunches and research seminars and unofficial dinner meetings with fellows: there were deep conversations about topical issues regarding policy, society and our separate and shared life histories. When we moved to the virtual space of Zoom, there was a risk of thin space and thin engagement. Some felt more alienated than others, and informal activities almost ended. Joining online seminars from other countries kept the thread of fellowship thinly alive.

However, an interesting development occurred when we shifted from the physical space to Zoom: our previous contributing functions in the seminars changed as if the norms and roles in the group were reformulated. Some preferred entering into situations with physical presence, but for others, the online environment provided a more natural place and space to manoeuvre, enabling them to speak out and have their voices heard. This means that not all virtual places are thin and con-

straining; instead, they may be an affordance. Towards the end of the academic year, there was a greater variety of new voices and perspectives in the virtual spaces, as well as through the physical presence and engagement found in shared spaces for lunch outside in the garden.

Time

Besides place and space, time may be experienced as an affordance or a constraint (Leonardi 2011). In today's 'toxic' academia, just as with space, time may be taken or given, and some may consider their time more valuable than the time of others. Time can be described as a resource that you can spend, own, budget, use, invest and sacrifice (Mäkinen, Annala, and Lindén 2020). Time researchers have identified the general intensification of time which, as Rosa (2010) noted, not only has a connection to the economy-driven ideas of utility, but also to the trend of living a full life and getting the most out of it, as the future is not secure. Nowotny (2020) speaks about the compression of time, as if it were squeezed into smaller and smaller temporal units that regulate what we do. In contrast to this, the Collegium offered the privilege of timeless time equally to all the fellows.

Timeless time makes way for the deep interest needed to have encounters with knowledge, and it permits a person to focus on reading, writing and thinking, free from squeezing things in and multitasking. I had all the time I needed to immerse myself in the dialogue between literature and data. This opened my mind to a new intellectual path, which helped me to take a huge step towards new worlds and new thinking. For me, encouragement to move forward with a curiosity-

driven approach meant allowing myself to read and write slowly. This was exceptional, and the pandemic did not disturb that; instead, it was the opposite. There was neither the possibility nor the need to use my time for cultural activities, museums, concerts, shopping, going to restaurants, daytrips or other things that people want to do, or are expected to do, when abroad. While there, everything was simple.

Being at SCAS created a specific space for my 'proper time', or *Eigenzeit* (Nowotny 1994), which is different from the 'time of systems', and, for me, also different from 'social time' and 'clock time' (Adam 1995). Nobody was waiting for me after work, and no one created expectations about how I should schedule my days. As a mother of two already grown-up girls and a wife, despite loving them all very much, this experience of being free from all the social, cultural and systemic expectations of using time was a refreshing one. I was free to do my work without social or systemic constraints and could spend as many hours in the office (as well as in the woods) as I wished.

Having timeless time and a separate place and space to immerse oneself in research is an ideal that many wish to experience. How to provide more room for this type of experience in ordinary academic work? It was a privilege to have this opportunity. Whilst I do not have collegium experience without Covid-19 restrictions, my guess is that during a pandemic, maybe there is even more opportunity for timeless time and new spaces. What could be a better way to spend your time during a pandemic than this? Descriptions of the pandemic period often refer to constraints, but besides those, I truly experienced affordances. The place, space and time I was given were an affordance which led me to alter my everyday routines towards a simpler life.

REFERENCES

Adam, B. 1995. *Timewatch. The Social Analysis of Time*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brooks, R., A. Fuller, and J. Waters, eds. 2012. *Changing Spaces of Education. New Perspectives on the Nature of Learning*. New York: Routledge.

Casey, E. S. 2001. "Between geography and philosophy: What does it mean to be in the place-world?" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91 (4): 683–693. doi:10.1111/0004-5608.00266

Laakso, S. 2020. "*Klassikot itävät rikkaassa maaperässä*", October 12, 2020. Accessed May 19, 2021. https://www.maailmankirjat.ma-pe.net/virginia-woolf-oma-huone/

Leonardi, P. M. 2011. "When flexible routines meet flexible technologies: Affordance, constraint, and the imbrication of human and material agencies." *MIS Quarterly* 35 (1): 147–167.doi:10.2307/23043493

Lindén, J., M. Kanninen, R. Kupiainen, and J. Annala. 2019. "Sensing the same space – Spatial understanding and engagement in higher education." *Dansk Universitetspædagogisk Tidsskrift* 15 (27): 83–97. https://tidsskrift.dk/dut/article/view/112640

Mäkinen, M., J. Annala, and J. Lindén. 2020. "Perceptions on collaboration, time management and meaningfulness: Millennials' innovations in the subject teacher education programme." In *Subject Teacher Education in Transition: Educating Teachers for the Future*, edited by E. Ropo, and R. Jaatinen, 25–45. Tampere: Tampere University Press. http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:tuni-2020042437l6

Nowotny, H. 2020. *Life in the Digital Time Machine.* The Wittrock Lecture Book Series No. II. Uppsala: Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study.

Nowotny, H. 1994. *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Rosa, H. 2010. *Alienation and Acceleration. Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*. Malmö: NSU Press.

Smyth, J. 2017. *The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rock Stars and Neoliberal Ideology*. Palgrave Critical University Studies. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Temple, P. 2018. "Space, place and institutional effectiveness in higher education." Policy Reviews in Higher Education 2 (2): 133–150. doi:10.1080/23322969.2018.1442243

Woolf, V. 1929/1990. *Oma huone*. Orig. publ. 1929. *A Room of One's Own*. Translation K. Simonsuuri. Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä.

Ylijoki, O-H., and H. Mäntylä. 2003. "Conflicting time perspectives in academic work." *Time & Society* 12 (1): 55–78. doi:10.1177/0961463X03012001364