



September 2020

A Planetary Actor Awakens

Forum contribution: [After the Pandemic: Which Future?](#)

Mimi Stokes

I pay attention to dramatic memes in the mental landscape, and the theater metaphor of a “dress rehearsal” has emerged during the pandemic emergency. The question is, what is COVID-19 a dress rehearsal for? More pandemics? The climate emergency? *Unjust, Amoral Bailout: The Sequel?*

In the art of theater, the purpose of a dress rehearsal is to bring all the elements of a production together for opening night, discovering what is working well and what is not in order to make whatever changes may be required. In this light, I see the pandemic as a dress rehearsal for all the [scenarios](#), revealing to global humanity what will and will not work to give us a future we can live in.

An Apocalyptic Viral Actor

The coronavirus has “lifted the veil” on the fault lines of Conventional Worlds. “Normal is killing us” has emerged as a meme in opposition to the push by the forces of the status quo to return to normal. “Normal” has been branded as “fatal,” delivering a potentially mortal blow to business as usual. The pandemic propelled a global economic depression and revealed that the market, rather than serving or saving human life, has fatal consequences. If the supply chains of global capitalism break, our food security is imperiled, risking the onset of a global famine.

As the pandemic permeated every “wall,” the response of “lockdown” felt like a dress rehearsal for Fortress World. It also revealed who the barbarians of Barbarization are: the marauding gangs stealing vital, life-saving supplies are not guerrilla citizens, but the US government gone full rogue nation.

The virus was “apocalyptic” to the millennial generation that will live in a planetary civilization—if we ever make the transition to it. The pandemic delivered a collective generational trauma to their plans and pursuits for their future, already being stolen from them by the cataclysm of climate change, and adding a great global depression to the synchronous tragedies our children and grandchildren are experiencing.

What are the possible future trajectories of the triple traumas of pandemic, climate change, and global economic depression? Did the pandemic give Eco-Communalism new purchase as asylum and survivalism from Barbarization? Is this generation’s paradigm of sustainability “immunity by retreating from civilization”? Did the pandemic seal this generation’s sense of life as virtual reality?

From Pandemic to “Pandemos”

Even as it catalyzed tragedy, the pandemic was a beneficial catalytic event for a Great Transition. In this dress rehearsal, we discovered that the coronavirus was the global actor we have been waiting for. Something planetary is happening to each and every human being. The pandemic is initiating us into a human community, not through ideologies or abstract theories, but by our most fundamental commonalities: our bodies, our loved ones, our death, our life. The pandemic is awakening the interdependent planetary consciousness that thousands have been trying to cultivate for decades.

An interdependent human community—a “*pandemos*” (“common to all the people”)—is emerging in the global emergency of the pandemic. We are experiencing ourselves as a global ensemble of citizen actors who have personal, global agency, discovering that how we act in our individual, day-to-day lives is a matter of life and death for planetary humanity.

Paul Raskin has called for a “pragmatics of hope” to catalyze the Great Transition. Hope depends upon a sense of salutary agency. We need a felt sense, in ourselves, that how we act makes a difference in order *to act* to make a difference. The Great Transition is vulnerable to failing unless a sense of planetary human agency is awakened. By awakening this sense of urgency, the pandemic has become a game changer and a key to the pragmatics of hope.

The New Actors for Life

For decades, the global left and the raging right have been holding up before us what tragic actors human beings are. Their respective ideas of who is “the tragic human” differ, of course, but opposing political ideologies hold before us the same dramatic human identity: the tragic human, spawning the woeful green meme that “the planet would be better off without us.”

The pandemic counters the dramatic hegemony of “the tragic human” by putting on display human acting in positive, compassionate, caring, courageous, beneficent ways, and the planet and the world are better for it. It shows us acting for the sake of the lives of the whole “pandemos.” With respect to the environment, ordinary people have played the part of dramatically effective actors, experiencing personal biospheric agency to clear the air, skies, and water. We became *actors for life*, the lives of fellow humans and the life of the planet, initiating a great correction to the hegemony of “the tragic human.” This gives us a specific strategy for a pragmatics of hope: turn the spotlight from “the tragic human” to the effective and empathetic, caring and courageous, human *actor for life* moving to center stage.

Women in positions of leadership appeared on the coronavirus world stage in the role of *Leaders for Life*, teaching by example the qualities of moral courage, care, and empathy. New Zealand’s Jacinda Ardern showed the world how a life-saving economy can protect us from “fatal” global capitalism.

Labor was given a new planetary part to play: essential work by workers essential to life. Ordinary human beings played the part of *heroes for life*, willing to make extraordinary sacrifices, motivated by a common sense that specific acts are vitally necessary. The pandemic showed us that a clear directive to do what is vital and necessary to live has the power to inspire extraordinarily difficult, courageous, heroic acts of care.

Opening Night

I share Paul Raskin's inspired view that all human civilization so far has been a great rehearsal for the [planetary phase of civilization](#). The pandemic showed us what great actors for life the planetary human ensemble is capable of being.

Are we ready for opening night of the Great Transition? The pandemic moved us closer.

About the Author



Mimi Stokes is an award-winning playwright who focuses on the intersection of sustainability and drama. She is a certified practitioner of playback theater, an improvisational community building method in which actors “play back” the real-life experiences of members of a community, dignifying individual emotional truths. She currently is developing *The Dran Model*, a drama-based theory and practice of cultural evolution and sustainable social change.

About the Publication

Published by the [Great Transition Initiative](#).

Under our Creative Commons BY-NC-ND copyright, you may freely republish our content, without alteration, for non-commercial purposes as long as you include an explicit attribution to the Great Transition Initiative and a link to the GTI homepage.



Cite as Mimi Stokes, “A Planetary Actor Awakens,” a contribution to the forum *After the Pandemic: Which Future?*, *Great Transition Initiative* (September 2020), <https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/pandemic-scenario-stokes>.

About the Great Transition Initiative

The [Great Transition Initiative](#) is an international collaboration for charting pathways to a planetary civilization rooted in solidarity, sustainability, and human well-being.

As a forum for collectively understanding and shaping the global future, GTI welcomes diverse ideas. Thus, the opinions expressed in our publications do not necessarily reflect the views of GTI or the Tellus Institute.