

# CONCURRENTLY SIMULTANEOUSLY

Killian Dunne and Désirée Coral

## INTRODUCTION

*Concurrently Simultaneously* is a book that contains not only the art and academic research and explorations of two artists but also a more intimate narrative of the experience of a family momentarily divided by the implications of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 30 August 2020, Killian Dunne arrived in Scotland from Ecuador to begin his new role as a Lecturer in Printmaking, Publishing, and Editions at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee. His wife Désirée and their three-year-old son were to stay in Quito, Ecuador until Christmas while he organised accommodation for the family and while Désirée concluded her university teaching semester. Unfortunately, COVID-19 restrictions and the complications of Brexit meant that by May 2021 Désirée and their son had still not arrived in Scotland. At that point, the artists decided to create an artist book responding to this experience. Killian created his section of the book in Scotland, and Désirée created her section of the book in Ecuador. They then digitally printed the book's editions in Ecuador and Désirée brought the books to their new life in Scotland when she and their son could travel.

The artists decided to create the book as an emotive reflective abstract response to this unique and challenging experience they found themselves in. At 9 x 13cm in an edition of 50, it would be both physically small and small in editions to reflect the books' themes regarding memory and documentation.

While planning the book, they found a component of their individual ongoing research projects; Foucault's concept of heterotopia became more prominent concerning the book's themes of time, location, and physical experience. Heterotopias act as 'other spaces' within all cultures, as they are 'simultaneously both part of and apart from the hegemonic arena' (McCabe, 2014). These spaces do not wish to replace everyday spaces; their 'aim is

to challenge the dominant culture yet at the same time it is constitutive of that very culture which it opposes and challenges' (McCabe, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed many everyday work and personal life spaces into a connected set of lockdown heterotopias. Everyday work and social norms began to 'deviate' (Foucault, 1986) from the everyday, as the crisis forced actions to take place 'elsewhere' or 'nowhere' within digital spaces. Pre-COVID-19 heterotopias were forced to change function following 'the synchrony' of the new online COVID-19 culture. An online artist talk or a social event broadcasted from the home

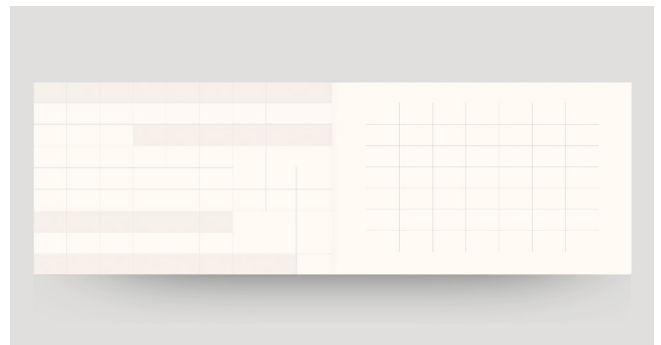


Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure Titles and information

Figure 1: Concurrently Simultaneously Book Grid

Figure 2: Concurrently Simultaneously Book Covers

became 'a single real place' that awkwardly juxtaposed 'several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.' While viewing other spaces on group online meetings, the viewer also sees their own face contained within a box in the corner of their screen, mirrored and shared from their digital device camera. This live image of the self makes the space of the viewer 'absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there' (Foucault, 1986).

The everyday of lockdown living was an 'absolute break' (Foucault, 1986) with the experience of 'traditional time'. It was a space where 'time never stops building up and topping its own summit'. At the same time, and paradoxically within the same space, endless government COVID-19 lockdown protocol updates could change on any day. Time was 'not oriented toward the eternal'; it was 'absolutely temporal'. Days blurred into each other, and simultaneously, with such protocols, people were ironically living day by day, unable to make plans. When people rarely left their homes to enter another space, this location developed heterotopia characteristics, as to gain access an individual had to 'submit to rites and purifications' such as hand washing, social distancing, temperature checks, and 'track and trace'. The access to these spaces was 'only an illusion'; with the many new COVID-19 protocols, people entered spaces where 'by the very fact that we enter' we are 'excluded.' These sudden changes to home and exterior spaces created 'another real space', resulting in a connected set of heterotopias of 'compensation', while simultaneously with their Zoom beers and virtual art exhibitions creating a 'contrary' set of heterotopias of 'illusion' that exposed 'every real space' (Foucault, 1986) that existed before lockdown.

Such reflections regarding their personal lockdown experiences and heterotopias drew the artists towards their shared interest in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The play is set in a sealed space, which like lockdown has a highly peculiar relationship to time and of course concerning the artist's specific situation, a shared relationship with waiting. One character of particular interest to the artists in the play was 'Lucky', a character who references a vast time and set of locations that existed long before the sealed space of the play's set. With these days seemingly long in the past and his current situation hopeless, Lucky feels 'entangled in a net' (Lawley, 2013, p. 104). For their book, the artists wanted to respond to their own net as a grid system. This grid could reference the camera views on group Zoom calls, world maps, or like Lucky, the physical sense of entrapment within a location.

To reference their shared experience in two countries, the book was titled *Concurrently Simultaneously*. These two words are from Lucky's 733-word one-sentence monologue in the play, a monologue which jumbles time, location, and events through dense language play. Over 32 pages in the book, both artists responded to their lockdown experiences from either side of the book (16 pages each), eventually meeting in the centre of the book. For the book cover, as a reference to reflection concerning the breaking down of traditional time, the word



Figure 3

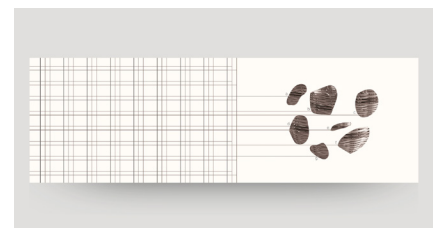


Figure 4



Figure 5

Figure 3: *Concurrently Simultaneously* Killian Dunne Page  
 Figure 4: *Concurrently Simultaneously* Desiree Coral Page  
 Figure 5: *Concurrently simultaneously* Wall Installation

'Concurrently' sat atop the upside-down word 'Simultaneously'. When opening the book from Désirée's side, the book read 'Concurrently Simultaneously', while when opened from Killian's side, it read 'Simultaneously Concurrently'.

Pages, moments trapped in time, and potential narratives in the book have no linear progression. Time was documented as it was experienced so often during lockdown, as a blur of moments within the physical and digital net. The pages of both artists inevitably drifted towards the centre of the book, which acted as an undefined date in the future. While the personal experience of time and location within lockdown informed the physical structure of the book, the reader could still dip into or open the book on any page spread.

### **KILLIAN DUNNE: SIMULTANEOUSLY CONCURRENTLY**

I had never been to Dundee before starting my new job in September 2020, and after two weeks of isolation in a Dundee hotel, I found myself wandering the empty streets of a ghost city that I had never known when it was not in lockdown. At work for tutorials, I met with students online or in socially distanced studios. Because my family had not yet arrived, I found myself living alone in the three-bedroom flat I had rented for us. Our son's bedroom sat empty apart from the pirate boat bed and toys I had bought for his arrival. When a stricter lockdown was enforced in January 2021, the heterotopia living room became my home office, and for over three months, the heterotopia express supermarket was the only space where I could meet people in person.

Time within the empty city seemed frozen, but this open space in stillness was also reminiscent of Foucault's museum heterotopia, where within one space all time had built up on top of itself. This situation drew me to the university archives, a fascinating gridded shelved space filled with art objects, stuffed animals, and vintage scientific equipment. A dried pressed plant in the archive reminded me of this unique feeling of time stopping but also inevitably continuing within lockdown. The pressed plant was an object that had stopped growing within time but was also a component that contributed to the growth of the archive and the building up of time within that space. At this point, I found myself photographing pressed plants and documentation texts in the archive. As part of our artist book, these elements were combined within the grid net with images from my pre-existing artistic research, material that made up so much of my everyday experience as a researcher in lockdown.

While we had named the book *Concurrently Simultaneously*, I also wanted to use a select number of words from Lucky's 733-word one-sentence monologue. These open-ended words without punctuation became a medium for me to respond to and document the experience of living isolated within highly unusual lockdown heterotopias. I wanted to slow Lucky's words down, isolate them and recontextualise them. These words, like the rest of the book, could be read in progression from page to page or as single isolated pages.

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The use of Lucky's words in the book also acted as an unexpected continuation of past work. I had previously used the entirety of the 733 words in an artist book for my 2019 MFA graduate show at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The words were presented with family photos as a medium to reflect on economic migration in Irish history. In the 1950s, my grandfather emigrated to England from Dublin to find work; his wife and three children followed him months later. While my migration to Scotland as a Contemporary Art Practice Lecturer was of course vastly more privileged, in this book our family experience was contrasted and reflected on. The book contained a photograph of my grandfather holding my father as a baby. A pandemic and a dismal political climate had formed an unusual and unique connection with this man who died in England many years before I was born. In this 1943 photograph, he is close to my age and my father is close to our son's age.

### **DÉSIRÉE CORAL: CONCURRENTLY SIMULTANEOUSLY**

Six months before we started working on *Concurrently Simultaneously*, I had begun my practice-based PhD remotely at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design. The PhD, which explores colour as material, continued in person when I finally travelled from Ecuador to Scotland. As part of my PhD during this lockdown period, I looked specifically at the weaving grid systems of textiles and basket-making traditions in Andean cultures concerning the organisation of nature and natural materials. I was weaving within these lines and grids, and in doing so documenting reflections that could become conversations between objects and agricultural practice.

For my half of *Concurrently Simultaneously*, I wanted to record the everyday of lockdown within the page's net grid system, using my weaving-based lockdown research as a diary-like visual language. In this scenario, PhD research themes, related academic projects, connected topics, source material, art materials, tools, explorations, experimentation, and investigations flowed through the book in a completely different reflective context.

Within the spaces of the book, they were represented as atmospheric visual reflections on my everyday mental, digital, and physical space. The lines of the grid system also moved in composition and form throughout the book to represent daily themes of classification, organisation, repetition, location, and memory mapping.

During this period, the book as a daily experience also took influence from the other grid spaces into which my lockdown heterotopia digitally projected. These spaces included the drawing classes I was teaching remotely to Universidad San Francisco de Quito students on the Galapagos Islands, the *Symposio De Cerámica Contemporánea Ecuador 2021*, which I was organising and hosting, the mixed media classes I was teaching at the Universidad de las Américas, an artist talk at Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar, and

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“Encounters: through Art, Ethnography and Pedagogy”, an artist residency hosted by Arts Cabinet.

While the page spreads from Killian’s side of the book contained one blank page on the left and one digital collage image on the right, the spreads on my side of the book contained images on both pages. These page layouts represented Killian being by himself in one space in Scotland and our three-year-old son and I being in another space in Ecuador. Such family themes were also visually present in my side of the book. Placed amongst the spreads that record research life in lockdown are images of our everyday temporal family life, including a cropped photo of our son’s hair, a wall visible from our living room window, Andean cosmology signs, and Ecuadorian flowers from the windowsill that contrast with the pressed archive flowers from Killian’s pages. These images hold equal atmospheric value to the research images; a blend of silent heterotopia reflections, portraits in Lucky’s net, material ponderings in process, and accidental still lifes, documented as a farewell to a life in Ecuador while simultaneously not knowing the date of travel.

## CONCLUSION

In July 2021, after 11 months apart, the family were finally reunited, meeting in Madrid before flying to Scotland together in August 2021. During this period, the artist book was reimagined as a digital print wall installation where all time and visual responses could be viewed at once.

In keeping with the two locations the book was created in, the wall installation was exhibited in both Quito, Ecuador and Dundee, Scotland. It was first exhibited in October 2021 at the Bienal Universitaria de Arte Multimedial 21, held at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Quito, Ecuador. It was then exhibited in February 2022 at the DJCAD Research Expo, held at the Matthew Gallery, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Dundee, Scotland. In April 2022, the wall installation and an interview exploring the creation of the work were featured as part of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago Alumni online Showcase for EXPO Chicago. This was a fitting third location of reference for the work as Chicago is the birthplace of the artists’ son.

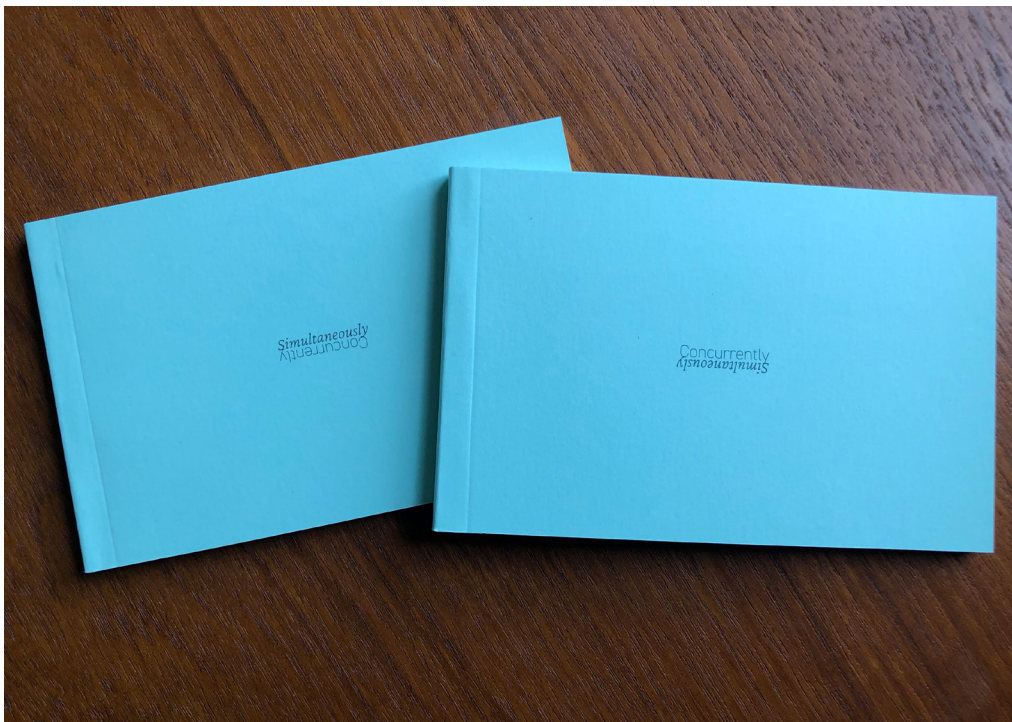
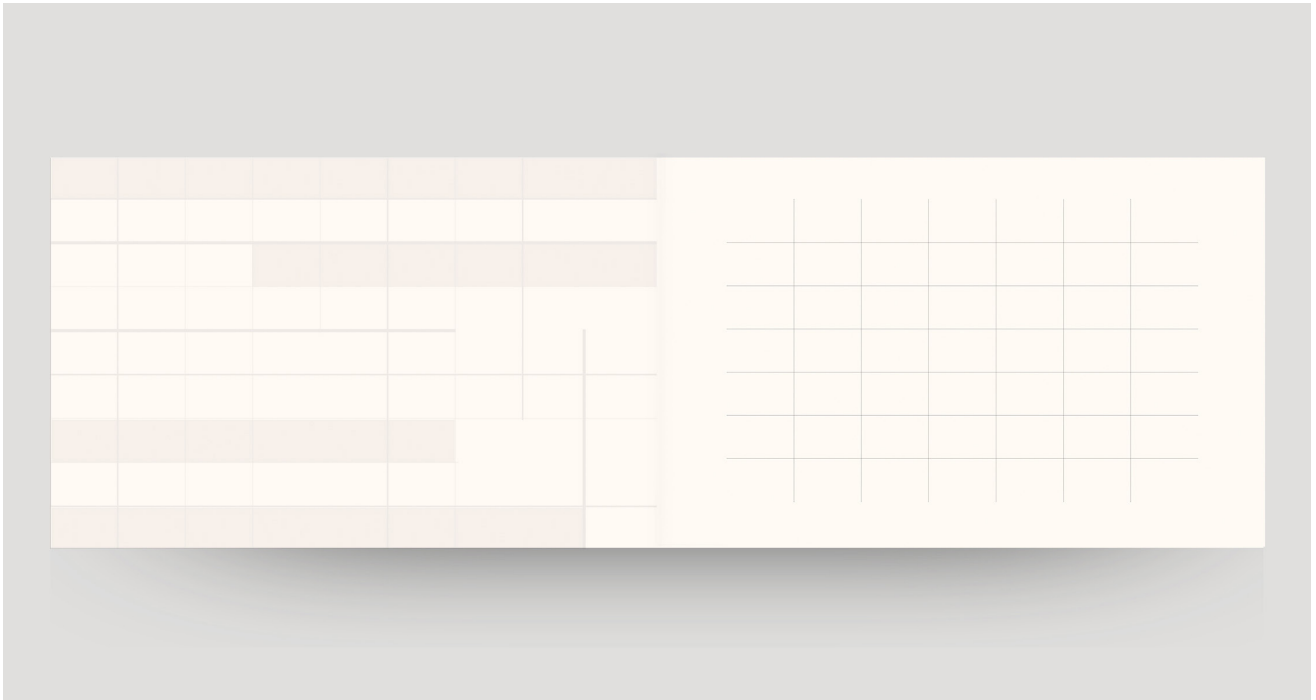
Copies of *Concurrently Simultaneously* are now part of various international artist book and special collections, including The National Irish Visual Arts Library, ARTEXTE, The Artists Book Collection Dundee, Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library at Yale University Library, and Columbia University Libraries Rare Books Collection.

## REFERENCES

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## IMAGE GALLERY



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Figure 1: Concurrently Simultaneously Book Grid  
Figure 2: Concurrently Simultaneously Book Covers

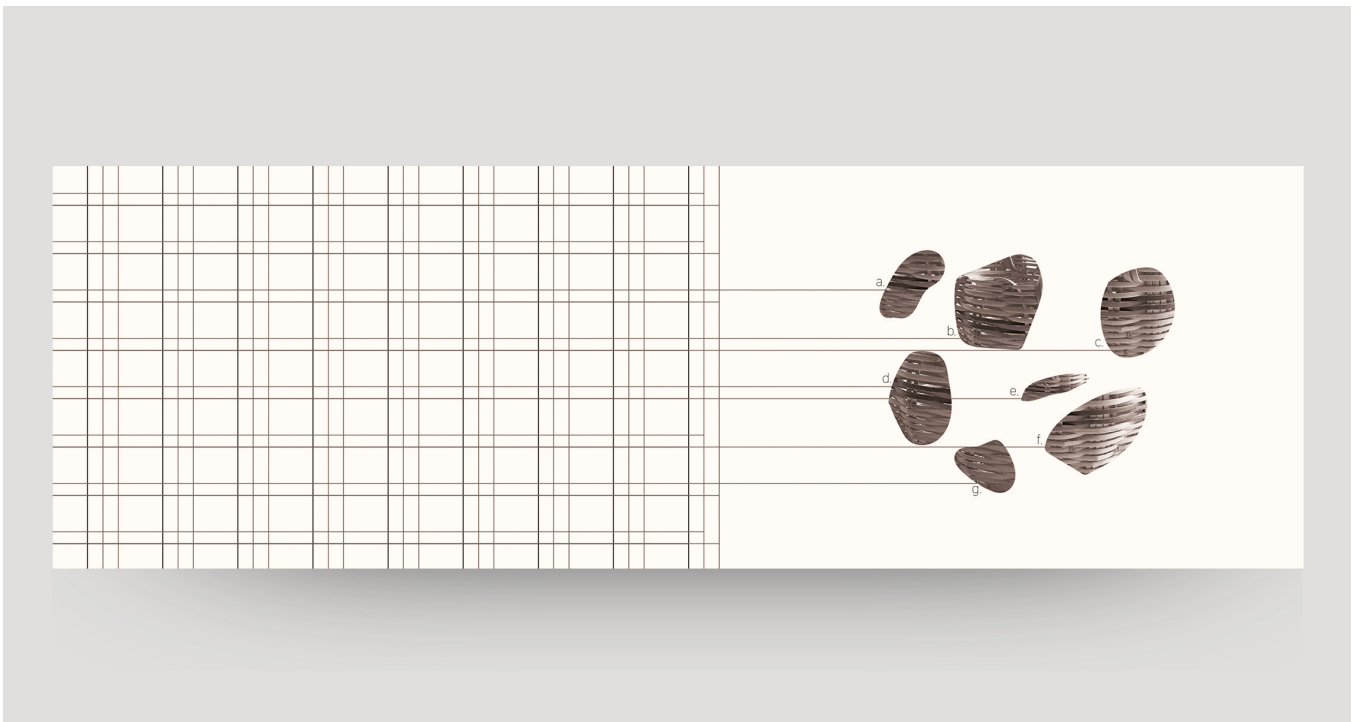


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Figure 5: Concurrently simultaneously Wall Installation