We are very happy to share this collection of “Short Attention Span Criticism,” which aims to give space and voice to those who do not have the time or attention to write full length articles, and provide vital criticism for those who do not have the bandwidth to read longer pieces. The authors and creators featured here offer insightful, challenging perspectives on the relationship between media and the pandemic, and we were delighted to discover the myriad ways their pieces speak to each other. Their variously historical, social, technological, and aesthetic approaches help us see this global crisis in a new light.

We wrote and distributed this CFP before the murder of George Floyd, and before the national uprisings protesting police brutality, racialized violence, and systemic racism. The submissions we received, therefore, primarily address an earlier moment of the pandemic and do not focus on the relationship between the media, the pandemic, and the Black Lives Matter movement—a relationship that has come into sharp relief in the last weeks. The media dynamics addressed in these pieces of Short Attention Span Criticism do, however, continue to shape our view, experience, and understanding of the rebellion as well as the pandemic.

Among many other important topics, the authors here address the inequities of access (Mondelli), labor (Monaghan), and education (Nassiri) that have long existed but are now being exacerbated and illuminated. They consider how the pandemic exposes socioeconomic inequality (Enzerink) and global hierarchies (Mihailoya), and analyze the role of translation and technology in building or dismantling trust between the state and its marginalized populations (Camargo, Synenko). They theorize the mediation of death and mourning (Brown, Purcell). They frame the eruption of worldwide protests as a collective outcry puncturing the silent waiting
(Goodwin), and a public movement disrupting the “homebody TV” (Spigel), that have characterized much of the pandemic.

While we were eager to create a space to share short-form pieces and ideas in development that may not fit traditional academic publications (some of what we missed with the cancellation of this year’s conference), SCMS+ is by no means the only place to find incisive, short-form scholarly work on media and the pandemic. We recommend checking out OVER*FLOW: Covid-19 Conversations from FLOW in collaboration with Film Criticism and Film International, and Coronavirus and Cinematic Experience from In Media Res. As we also think critically about the intersection of the pandemic, racist systems, and the media, it is useful to turn to past and present Black media scholarship, including (sticking to the short-form mode) the SCMS Black Caucus edition of In Focus from 2014 as well as this winter’s In Focus on Modes of Black Liquidity: Music Video as Black Art.

As the pandemic continues to shape our media content and consumption, and as the media continues to shape our understanding and experience of the pandemic, we are happy to present this collection of Short Attention Span Criticism as a contribution to these larger conversations.