What the Body Does Next

m: The needle skips and skips and . . .

n: I can't believe what used to pass for safety.

o: And I dream of the song's next note.

p: A second shot at a resolving chord.

I've been wearing the same sweatpants on this couch for eight months and I don't even notice a smell.

I've been wearing the same frown around bodies as well, but mouths are no longer shared.

My mouth hurts and my chest constricts and I can't rotate my arm and I wonder – would I feel the first time it's copied inside a cell?

A moment's anxiety unresolved for two weeks, like a melody incomplete and interrupted by rest rest rest rest . . .

Not fear, yet. More like a raised eyebrow – how bad could it be? A couple of weeks should see it through. Variants on a theme, only a cause for minor pause – if that.

Sure, shelves are stripped, and somebody mentioned washing their mail, and one guy wore

a mask in the classroom last week.

But there's still free Two-Day delivery. Nothing can take that away. It's mostly all for memes now. And mostly for thinking

"not me."

a: The center is holding for now.

b: Luck, competence, whatever – it's a blip.

c: The variance is hard to measure.

d: A slow wave of incomprehensible response.

Do you even want to see anybody anymore? Is this emergence worth it, to let down your guard? Six naked faces on the riverwalk early one morning, and you remember a lightness, once.

Six hours later you'll wonder if you were too weird. Or too close.

When you cut six feet in half, and half again, you'll land somewhere between solitary one and the pair you've pined for.

We all came back but you're only one data point and you better hope it's negative.

One thousand bodies near, close and damp in the humidity of our heat and sweat. Someone's spilled beer soaking through the canvas sides of my Chucks.

Visible in the contrast – bright stage lights against the dark pit – we eagerly inhale a collective

mist of respiratory droplets

And normal.

exhaled in a cathartic belting of C O M E B A C K K I D!

Shoulder to sweaty shoulder, exultant and high and normal.

f: After the dive, we come up for air.

g: Four days later, a fever.

e: Let's do this again tomorrow!

h: We heard someone there had symptoms.

i: You've had your fill for now.j: Thin ice cracking underfoot.

k: Like tea leaves, too many articles.

I: This is your enthusiastic yes.

Author's Note: What the Body Does Next is a digraph poem, in which the circled sections may be read in any order. The reader is encouraged to start by reading any one of the four circled sections, and then to proceed to a next section based on whichever nearby letter suits them - just follow the corresponding arrow. Assuming a reader can start at any section and makes choices which result in reading each section precisely once, What the Body Does Next contains 24 distinct poems. Because the underlying structure is the complete digraph on four vertices (with loops), it is also possible to cycle through the poem infinitely. For more information on digraph poetry, see this Bridges paper.