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Longing for a Familiar Way of Going Forward

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ABSTRACT
This essay uses autoethnographic exploration to examine the lived experience of the COVID 19 virus. I particularly consider our transnational moment, with new platforms of/for work, and work to confront a sense of longing for a familiar way of going forward.

Today is March 18, 2020. I woke up this morning to an actual fog outside. Fitting, amidst the COVID 19 virus, how it is pressing us to reconsider what we know to be clear. Longing for clarity, I reach for the poet Paul Guest. Guest writes, in a poem for Eliot Khalil Wilson called “My Luck”: “My best friend toils in a land/named Minnesota where sunlight is also optional” (Guest, 2008, p. 78). This line resonates with me in a variety of ways. I know Eliot as a man who was my teacher. I know Paul through his work. I know Minnesota as the land of my youth. I know sunlight there is either warm (in the summer) or cold (in the winter). I am longing, amidst COVID 19, for clarity in conditions, in weather, in any(every)thing.

With the daily development of the virus, I wonder where we will be in one week. I had been looking forward to traveling today. Postponed for now, in the way the best place for anyone to be amidst our transnational moment is inside. And so I put my courses online, posted videos and audios and wrote emails and sent/send them. Author(ed) daily emails. Connected/ting with my students virtually, through digital tools. The impact is still in development, yet to unfold. Philosopher Hubert L. Dreyfus asserts: “learning by apprenticeship can work only in the nearness of the classroom and laboratory; never in cyberspace” (Dreyfus, 2003, p. 583). I wonder, if not worry, if Dreyfus might be right in an emergency. The pace with which we all brought everything online. And yet we taught seminars and gave workshops. We held drop-ins and shared beverages and stories. Were we not as prepared as we could have been? I think we were. I wonder, as always, how I might have done more?
Ever the optimist, I read my students’ work, interact with them, from home. I lean toward “what can be counted as real in virtual space” (Turkle, 1995, p. 323). I remind them all in various ways that it is okay, even expected, to feel stress, loneliness, disconnection from the routine, in these difficult times. The autoethnographer (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) always inter-plays self and other (Reed-Danahay, 1997). The interplay is today more concretely defined, owing to COVID 19: the self is at my home here, the other is at their home there. To me, boundaries are uncomfortably finite in an emergency. I look for ways to permeate boundaries. I continue my daily routines. Treadmill, pushups, texting. I stay mostly indoors. I take reasonable steps to try and follow the guidance. I wait for my work to reopen, to reunite with students so that we might continue our lessons. Is COVID 19 our new normal? I hope not. I am longing for clarity, for what was normal: a familiar way of going forward.

Notes on contributor

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