

May 6, 2020 — Zoom Meeting

Teaching/Concerns During COVID-19

Teaching and Pedagogy - Care and Concern

Maya: It might be constructive to convene conversations that are akin to a teach-in, during COVID-19 conditions: this possibility seems really rich and delicious. I feel like there's also a need for space wherein instructors may communicate how vulnerable-making it was, when the shut-down unfolded in March 2020, to have pedagogy - let alone everyday life - altered.

I have had some invaluable conversations with colleagues about the doubt and guilt of working in isolation and teaching in isolation. We were asking ourselves complex questions: how do you balance rigour, or a pedagogical arc for a class, while also taking the myriad situations that one can't even imagine into account; how might we balance accessibility and support but also exercise self-care and privacy concerns? Hearing colleagues and pedagogs share how they navigated that deeply complex compromise could help us approach the semesters ahead with a sense of community. We could place the energy that drains with uncertainty into care and creative pivots with our students and our own networks. This could be as specific as a conversation topic set to pre-COVID-19, anticipated course outcomes and their metamorphoses to accommodate realistic, emergency course trajectories; how educators grasped learning borne of the shut-down and applied it to working over the summer, amidst multiple crises, to approach future course content. Or queries could be as general as: what do educators think is appropriate to expect in the classroom as it is at the moment?

As we gear up to Fall 2020, I've been hearing a fair number of anecdotes communicating anxiety about student expectations. Ostensibly we'll have the summer months to prepare 2020-2021 courses into online courses, but in fact none of (well I shouldn't say none of us), but a fair number of faculty haven't had online pedagogy training: this is a specialisation, not a matter of watching a YouTube video on how to set up Zoom Rooms. Will there be an energy of care and tactics emanating from the students and faculty and staff come the Fall 2020, or will there be an overarching sense of absurdity? We will soon find out.

Emergency Remote Delivery

(11:25):

Alice: I was just in a webinar where they explain how e-learning is not the same as online teaching. Theories of e-learning are about delivering content on a device that students can have access to at any time, like on a bus. But when you are talking about online teaching, it's about real-time delivery. We also have to remember to distinguish between rigorous online teaching (or distance teaching/learning of lessons) normally administered as part of a program or even as part of a course, and what we are doing now, during a pandemic, which is the unplanned emergency remote delivery of content, or emergency remote teaching of content which in most cases were not designed or crafted to be online or distance learning experiences.

(12:18):

Analays: It came to my mind that, as we are all grading, we could reflect on the experience of grading at this time, because I am torn apart in the sense that I want to preserve academic excellence but at the same time I also want to show some compassion. How do we achieve balance in our grading? And then how do we deal with this situation?

Edith-Anne: Another thing that I like to bring up is the fact that for the past 15 years, I have considered teaching as a curatorial gesture. As an art historian, you choose certain items that go together and you create a narrative around them. So, it's like a theatre in a way. But with the current situation, what happens to me is that because I like small capsules instead of a three-hour lecture it shifts the thing. And I think that I tend to go towards a less material approach, towards a more conceptual approach because I try to deliver the essentials conceptually but not talking that much about each work of art because I give them links to find the data about the artist and the way it's done and as in comparison to class, even though I am working with reproduction, but it's another level of media... in an online approach. In class I am always attentive, even though it's reproduction, to material approach... to the way it is made... so I think that for me at least, there is a shift between... and a less material approach, more conceptual approach while doing those capsules. Of course, because of the current situation and if we had more time maybe it could be done differently. But for now by creating small capsules, very short sessions, it's more like... I would say... more... like marketing your concepts, you know?! The communication tools are so different, that something happens in the content as well. So, I am reflecting on that. I don't have a... [*French*] on that. But it is something that I would like to reflect on.

(19:32):

Alice: ... the goal is... [laughter]... the goal is generative... transformative, and generous.

(27:48):

May: I think there also seems to be - I don't know if it's a tension, maybe if it is a tension, it is a productive tension - around some of the things that have been proposed. Some seem like longer-standing projects, while other ideas put forward are more tied to thinking through crisis, and ideas about practice and praxis, and care and attention. So I do wonder if thinking about art and research through the time of COVID - just to be crass - can be a kind of anchor in a way, or if that's just part of the conversation. Because, Maya, I empathize with the complaints that you made earlier...just because my interests are so amorphous and pulled in different directions, that I find myself unable to really concretize things that I want to propose. I am not sure if we should list things that we want to work out individually, things we think are broadly pertinent, things we can cluster around. I think the idea of clusters was mentioned earlier, but I don't know if we're starting to congeal themes or just thinking more idiosyncratically.

Edith-Anne: In terms of forms of writing, I am dreaming of a book where we could each have our own text or something. But I would dream of having at least one collective text ["Ahum"]... because that is also a statement about our individualistic society where we are all in competition between universities. But it could also be seen as erasing our individuality ... to have only one collective text, common voice, eh? So instead, we could have...and I don't know...not necessarily as a common introduction...but something a bit more political... ["Ahum"]...even a poem!...I mean...

Alice: (*excitedly*) OR A MANIFESTO!

Edith-Anne: YES!

Alice: I have always wanted to write one.

April 22, 2020 — Zoom Meeting

Research During COVID-19: Ethnographies of the Self

Alice: About our research during COVID-19... This is the research. Our group's research was literally born during COVID-19. The novel human coronavirus disease COVID-19 was first reported in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) was officially notified 31 December 2019. The Worlding Public Cultures (WPC) Project started January 1, 2020. There is no way to avoid addressing the impact and implications that this has for our research questions and the project in general. We do want to be able to conduct research during the time of COVID, not surprisingly, precisely on not only (1) how research can be done at all but also (2) what kind of research needs to be done, or can only be done, during a pandemic. For example, I know the things we say now, that we are talking about now, that are being recorded --like our reactions to snow (some for the first time)... and how we would be experiencing it if we were not in lockdown - these kinds of reactions, responses, "affects" if you want to call them that, these can only be recorded, tracked, traced and documented, and expressed now. Right? So, we want to transcribe our conversations and mine them for nuggets of content pretty much right after that fact, so that we can capture the sense... of urgency, our sensibilities... like how my voice is higher than usual... because I am in a state of alertness, a prolonged state of stress. And then there are those expressions that may not be able to be conveyed through transcripts, words, writing. They could be in visual art form or some kind of script, recipe, comfort food -- those shared affects that engage other senses, that can't really be put into words, but that are felt anyways. And mark this moment we are living through. This is the invaluable research that we can only do now.

Maya: One of the things that I found echoing in my mind while Alice spoke was the potential to experiment with autoethnography: your process of doing research under particular constraints; the imminent, archiving moment that you are in. That sounds like it could be an interesting experiment and one that's lending care to other researchers and writers and emerging scholars too. I feel that is one of the potential outcomes that could be really supportive for the academic community at this particular time. Our conversations would be a process of autoethnography and archiving of - as you said Alice - the affect and felt experience of navigating constraints.

And that would be super refreshing... anyway!

Varda: My background is not in art history so I don't know if I am articulating or doing the right thing. But I am slightly not sure how to speak about how things are back home when I am sitting here - that's my personal concern. Speaking about them, while I'm sitting here [in Montreal]. That is the kind of top down position that I am not into. In fact, I think I could just be writing about that.

On another point, I think if we are talking about worlding art history, would it not be much more grounded if we, as you have been saying, come out of this emergency with a more diachronic picture. For example, how did people respond in 1918 when the Spanish flu hit? How were artists responding to it before any of the calamity? This isn't the first time something like this is happening, as much as we - we tend to think of it as such. This is not the first time and it won't be the last time. So it might be interesting to do historical research on how artists were responding to pandemics historically, so that we look at worlding beyond this moment.

(16:08)

Ashley: As an MA student, the program's period of research is quite concentrated compared to that of a PhD program. I mean, obviously the length and breadth of a MA thesis is different, but I do think it's interesting for me personally to examine completing a literature review in four months with restricted library access. I am interested in how restricted access to research material will impact my thesis. I am considering the following question: how do I make my research just as meaningful an experience in spite of these obstacles? Because if the restrictions make in-depth research impossible, why am I enrolled in the summer term?

As someone thinking of applying to PhD programs in the next year or two, how can that still be a meaningful experience?

(21:10):

Analays: Sometimes I write about Cuban Art, about the Cuban situation. But I am speaking from here, and I live here... and I want to put this in relation as well... When I am in Cuba, or when I was in Cuba, I didn't see myself as Latin American, whatsoever. It was when I came here, stayed here that you know I started assuming that identity. And a lot of people think I can... that I know the true about... the truth about what happens in Cuba and the situation, and I do not, at all, not really. I have been trying to reconnect with that... with the Cuban art scene in the last few months and even when I try to, when I go there Cubans look at me as a stranger, as a tourist, as someone who does not belong anymore to that context, and it's really hard for me to get access to the information that I want. And... when I come back here things are perceived differently... I mean I am talking about ... the position... from here I am a Cuban art specialist... but when I go there I am not (anymore)... I mean I don't... they think that... I... know nothing about the context anymore. So, it's kind of... a very strange position, writing from here ...about a different reality...that I used to be part of, or immersed in it.
