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"I DO WONDER IF THE WORLD WILL EVER BE THE SAME AFTER THIS." STUDENTS JOURNALING THE 2020 LOCKDOWN

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Abstract

The novel coronavirus surfaced in the United States during the spring of 2020 and quickly overwhelmed our world as we knew it, including those of us in the field of higher education. The present effort seeks to convey how the COVID-19 lockdown moment was experienced by Chicago-based college students enrolled in the authors' course, Surveillance and Society, as the spring semester was interrupted by the abrupt imposition of "social distancing" and "shelter-in-place" policies. Analysis of how the COVID-19 was experienced by students is based on our reading of their weekly journals, which they were expected to maintain throughout the semester, but which acquired special poignancy during the pandemic. The journals are examined for expressions of social practices, sentiments, and perspectives that shifted during the second half of the semester, when students were under lockdown and socially isolated. The journal entries capture a moment in history that students illuminate through their unique experience as actors making sense of the pandemic, fraught with altruistic fears of spreading the virus to loved ones, as well as the perspective of being a pupil in a surveillance studies course at a time when surveillance is seemingly evolving and multiplying. We reflect on the importance of integrating the academic voice with the personal voice by way of the student journal, ultimately arguing for its permanent position within social science pedagogy as both a gateway to autoethnography and a mechanism for cultivating in students a sense of ownership over the curricular materials they are asked to absorb in our classes.

Keywords

autoethnography; surveillance; critical pedagogy; narrative; qualitative methods

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Everywhere, there's eyes.
We're constantly being watched.
What is there to hide?
We're all on credit watch.

Oh, heading out?
Did you remember to get your mask?
How about your gloves?

Wait!
Your headphones!

My favorite set of eyes.
With the adjustable pupil,
The red glow at night.
The most unusual,
stare.

Will this last forever?
Is this the start
Or the end?

- Nello, student

In the spring months of 2020, at the height of "the lockdown," while steadfastly observing the shelter- in-place rules that public health authorities had issued, it was difficult to directly observe how those in your community were being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We were so isolated from others that our vantage points became oblique, even though we were living in two of the largest metropolises of the United States (Los Angeles and Chicago). Certainly, we might have caught glimpses of lives led during our fleeting encounters with grocery store clerks and restaurant workers handling take-out orders, or through our hurried interactions with neighbors we had until now been comfortable chatting with at a more leisurely pace. Social media feeds as well as traditional news coverage might have also provided us with portals into how others were managing under the mass quarantine we were now having to abide. Assuming one was living in a household, family-based or otherwise, one could expect to hear stories about the observations one's housemates had made, either directly or indirectly. Non-resident family members, friends, and co-workers with whom one maintained contact through the period also offered their slices of direct and indirect experience, albeit from a safe, mediated distance. These streaming accounts and encounters contributed to the composite picture that was gradually coming into view for us during this hunkered down period.

An additional and fortuitous vantage point into life under COVID-19 restrictions emerged through our work as academics teaching a course on *Surveillance and Society* at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). At the time of the shutdown, we were in the ninth week of a fifteen-week term when faculty and graduate students were suddenly called upon by our university to "migrate" our classes to an online learning format. Henceforth we would only interact with our students via the socially distancing means provided by interactive computer technology. During the ensuing online class sessions, asking our students how their lives were faring during the pandemic was generally a non-starter; few spoke up in response to this kind of prompt.

Fortunately, we had another way of learning about what was happening in our students' lives – via their weekly journals, which constituted the major writing component of the class. The idea behind this assignment was that students would use their journals to respond in different modes to the course readings and lectures: here in a cognitive and analytical register, there in a more ruminative or expressive register. We were especially interested in inspiring our students to comprehend the materials not just in an academic mode, but also in a cultural mode, that is, to see the curriculum as a guide to understanding how surveillance had come to define possibly seen but otherwise unnoticed aspects of their mundane practice and experience. In effect, we directed the students toward doing autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner 2000) without calling it such, encouraging a view of themselves as participants in the "culture of surveillance" (Lyon 2018). Thus, Nello introduced the poem that prefaces this paper by noting that the moment he describes,

> Takes place in a post COVID-19 world, where we never got rid of the virus. The virus is now prevalent like pollution in China/Japan with constant mutations. It becomes mandatory that everyone wear masks when out in public and remain six feet apart.
>
> Families have to wear similar colors out in public to eliminate them from being targeted for being close to one another. Nearly half of the population of people over 60 with underlying health conditions have passed away.
>
> Security cameras monitor everyone's actions and make sure they are following proper safety guidelines. In-person communication is improved with the use of Bluetooth devices. Anyone found not following gets docked and the punishments get harsher and harsher.

Nello imagined a societal context, replete with tacit understandings and formal rules, within which his poem encapsulated a moment projected from our present condition onto a possible future, depicting themes he had been absorbing from the curriculum in creative form.

The handout describing the journal assignment read, in part, as follows:

> As an emergent, multivalent, and ubiquitous phenomenon, surveillance arguably should be addressed by keeping an open mind about its nature, manifestations, impact, and value. Your weekly journal will provide you with a forum within which to capture and reflect upon your thoughts about surveillance, as prompted by the course readings and materials, the class discussions, and your direct as well and indirect experiences with forms and practices of surveillance encountered beyond our course setting. That is, in addition to the course materials and class exchanges, things that happen to you as well as your relations that seem to relate to the topics addressed by the course can be the spur to reflection, as can any items that appear on your social media feeds.
>
> The writing in these journal entries can vary in style. It can be expository, such as when you expound on a point, to persuade others; or it can be poetic, such as when you encapsulate a feeling through the use of verse. We encourage you to write in different registers as you respond to and reflect upon what you are reading and learning about by way of the course. If a poem comes to mind, write it. If a scene you observed deserves description write that. If an argument that is made or a finding is reported, or a distinction is advanced, and you consider it worthy of further inspection or extension, write that. The point is for you to try different ways of writing in your journal; the entries should not all look the same.
>
> Throughout your entries, there should be some touching base with concepts from the readings and class meetings, there should also be some recognition of the arguments that you are being exposed to, as well as the findings (and interpretations of findings) that are being reported. In effect, then, the journal entries are partially "free write" and partially academic. This can be an illuminating as well as liberating mixture, and we are excited to read what you produce.

Twenty-two students were enrolled in the class, 20 undergraduates and 2 graduates. Although it has in recent years made strides toward becoming more of a residential college environment, historically the majority of UIC students commute to campus from the city and its suburbs. The UIC student body is diverse. In addition to "traditional" college students whose parents attended college, UIC also has a large share of non-traditional, first generation college students. They may be working part-time, first- or second-generation immigrant (UIC is classified as a "Hispanic serving institution"), and receiving financial aid. In short, many of our students are struggling financially, juggling studies and work, and are often also assisting their families of origin. Thus students' journal entries documented that their migration onto a "remote platform" entailed a series of disruptions, at times connected to an underlying precarity, the ramifications of which revealed themselves progressively as the semester unfolded, as they struggled to make sense of the moment in personal terms while also seeking to bind themselves to their course mandate: that they reflect on matters related to surveillance and society.

Reviewing the journal entries written during the semester's tail end, which corresponded with the final six weeks of the course, a series of overlapping themes emerge as especially prominent[1]. The notion of a *drowning world* presents itself, a continually cresting tide that threatens to engulf the self. The image of *an upended world* expresses the sense that routines have been interrupted and plans and expectations have been indefinitely paused if not abruptly felled. The sense of *an infectious world* captures the many ways in which the students alight onto themselves, others, and various spaces and scenarios as vectors for transmission, an especially poignant impression as they contemplate the danger they pose for vulnerable loved ones. The *surveilled world* pertains to how the students see the surveillant assemblage (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000) expanding and ramping up during the COVID-19 moment. Cumulatively, the students come to ponder whether a "*new normal*" has been arrived at and gesture toward the person they will have to become to traverse it.

These themes assert themselves as the students write about the impact of the novel coronavirus and the attendant stay at home policies, but also as they consume media accounts, report on their observations at work or transit through the city, and their conversations with friends and family.

A Drowning World

The feeling of becoming engulfed comes through in many students' entries. The onslaught of events, shifting demands, and changing guidelines require a range of behavioral, emotional, and interpretive modifications that can feel like being suddenly caught at high tide. Jennie for example, references the struggle to sustain a viable posture amid the persistent flow of information, which she is personally struggling to process:

> I would be lying to myself if I said that I have been feeling good and maintaining positive spirits. The best way to describe how I have felt over the last couple of days would be to say I am "drowning": I have been drowning in my thoughts, emotions, news reports, and technology.

Now confronting simultaneous challenges – to their living conditions, daily routines, and learning environment – the students feel a bit at sea about how they are supposed to live now. They find themselves transfixed by the sheer volume of updates, death counts, and attendant implications for daily life that they feel displaced with their mental health taxed. Another student, Madison, conveys the sweep and accelerated pace at which the tide seemed to rise, beginning at a distance, but now abruptly at home

> Life has been kind of insane. It went from hearing about the Coronavirus in China back in December where the United States was completely unaffected, but fast-forward to two and a half months later and it is a full-blown pandemic… Every student is displaced, people with jobs are either out of work or working from home, people are scrambling to get food and supplies while trying to socially distance themselves so they do not contract the virus or give it to someone else, protecting elderly people, some millennials not taking "shelter-in-place" seriously, and new information and rules to American citizens being implemented every day.

The problem of an ever-expanding workload, in the context of shifting working conditions and piled on academic tasks, exacerbated the aquatic metaphor's saliency. Thus, Nadine, who was working at a grocery store during the pandemic, expressed worry about finding her footing as she approached the end of the semester:

> I take every precaution that the WHO has said to take, but I will say I have been very anxious, which is making it hard to concentrate and get used

1. Excerpts used in this essay were chosen because they tapped into how students experienced the coronavirus shutdown while enrolled in our course. Following the semester's end, after grades had been submitted, we e-mailed students, seeking their consent to use their journal excerpts. The project's context was described (e.g. the publication venue, the paper's focus, etc.) and – in the interest of transparency – the excerpts being considered for inclusion were revealed. All who responded agreed, and we did not use excerpts from students who did not respond to our query. To maintain confidentiality, all quoted students either chose or were given pseudonyms.

> to the online courses – the restructuring [of university classes] has thrown me for a loop.

Students' journal entries made it evident that they were struggling to keep their head above water as they balanced incoming demands on their time, labor, and attention. They were stressed and uncertain about how to withstand the sudden undertow.

An Upended World

In addition to the sense of being submerged by the sheer volume of information that had to be absorbed, behavioral modifications that had to be undertaken, and feelings and thoughts that had to be processed, students – particularly those who were slated to graduate during the COVID-19 pandemic – also experienced a significant disruption to the looming launch of their careers. The job market into which they would soon be venturing was patently unstable and diminished. For Nello, carefully laid post-baccalaureate plans were now entirely suspended, without clear prospect of revival. In the months leading to the pandemic he had arranged to become a recruiter for the Army, working through the summer within Chicago's schools. The glide path to his career abruptly vanished, and he had no idea what he was now going to do, either to earn income or launch his career. After graduation, he wrote,

> I'll be in a pickle. The (army recruiter) training (that I would get paid for) that was scheduled for this summer has been cancelled. With no schools in session, there's really no need for a Gold Bar Recruiter. My Admin is in the process of looking to find another position, but it's up in the air.

Similarly, Anthony shared concern about the disruptions he imagined he, along with his colleagues, would be facing due to the pandemic. At the time he was writing entries in his journal, Anthony was working as a security guard. He found himself contemplating whether to continue in this employment (which he had seen as transitional in nature), and if not, how to adjust to shifts in the job market for new graduates:

> With the whole coronavirus pandemic, it's going to be harder for me and other graduates to get a job – because of the falling economy and also the limited amount of hiring that will be happening … If application does not permit, I will be moving over to full time (as a security guard). But I might also be moving towards responding to the Illinois National Guard's support of the testing that is being conducted by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

The shift to online learning also was disruptive to the students, upending learning styles they had cultivated over their years in college. The unsettled moment is captured by Lucia's worried and unanswered questions she raised early in the remote migration:

> Will some professors continue to teach through video chats? Or will they hand off the class to the students and grade them based on participation and submitted assignments? It is worrisome for me because my learning strategy is more hands on… How is our administration going to handle instances where students do not have access to laptops, computers, cellphones, or simply even Wi-Fi? How will we have access to the libraries if they are closed?

Anthony, who also wrote about how having to absorb course materials remotely was a challenge to him, in addition alluded to how the abrupt end of the semester, and the cancellation of graduation ceremonies, was disappointing and a source of grief that he was still processing:

> The University of Illinois' announcement that we would change to online classes I was not too happy with because … I lose interest and concentration very quickly… Now I am struggling to get used to the online classes that the school is forcing me to do. Moreover, the graduation ceremony for this upcoming May was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that's pretty shitty as well.

In short, for students top of mind was facing not only an increasingly precarious labor market, but also determining how to navigate finishing up the school year in pandemic circumstances. As Lucia wrote: "For

me, my fear is not my health but being able to finish off this semester."

An Infectious World

The COVID-19 public health crisis was experienced as a series of personal problems by our students, who also wrote about their sense of suddenly inhabiting an infected world in which they were both potential vectors as well as targets of transmission. For US residents living in metropolitan environments like Chicago and Los Angeles, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shelter-in-place orders meant that few people other than those residing in one's household had been encountered face-to-face beginning in mid-March 2020. The isolation from family and loved ones was particularly challenging, especially as students were managing disruptions to their studies and employment and feeling a bit unmoored and overwhelmed overall. Reading their journals over subsequent weeks, we found students sharing their fears and worrying about potentially spreading the virus to their loved ones, particularly those who are vulnerable and immunocompromised. Lucia, for example, expressed fear, not for herself, but for her father as the pandemic became increasingly more severe:

> Even if our bodies may be able to contain the virus so that it does not become symptomatic, we can still spread it to others, including those we love. Personally, I have a strong immune system so my fear is not that of contracting it but contracting it and passing it to a loved one whose immune system is not as strong. My father just received a double liver and kidney transplant; God forbid he is hit with the virus, the likelihood of him living is slim, therefore, my fear.

Such "altruistic fear" (Warr, 1992), or fear on behalf of others, was also expressed by Tim, who shared that he missed his family and would like to see them, but dared not risk their exposure. As the oldest sibling in his family, he felt a sense of responsibility to support his family at this difficult time, but he was at a loss about how to carry out that role given the shelter-in-place orders and the threat posed by the pandemic's contagion:

> If anything, I am more worried about my family members, especially as I don't get to see them. I miss them, like a lot. I am the eldest sibling of three in my household. My brother is 17 and turns 18 in June. My sister is 8 and only in second grade. I obviously miss my parents too. I often consider whether I should make that 45-minute drive and visit them, but I don't want to risk it. Like, I'm sure they don't have the virus, but who knows if I have it? None of us know if we have the virus really, you know? I think about them and my extended family often. I mean we still talk and text and stuff. But it's not the same.

Students were forced to adjust to distanced and less than ideal forms of communication with loved ones, but the uncertainty that comes with the virus leaves few options otherwise. Preoccupation with the risk of infecting loved ones was common, especially for those whose employment made them vulnerable to contact with viral droplets. Nadine, employed at a grocery store, was explicit about this nagging fear:

> I feel constantly paranoid that, because I am out so much because of work (grocery store), I'll spread it to my loved ones.

For students, the altruistic fear of spreading the virus was invasive, pervasive, and exhausting. With constant updates and the 24-hour news cycle seemingly on a loop with COVID-related stories, students could not get away from the constant reminders to be fearful of transmission and spread.

The Surveilled World

Atop personal burdens were reflections centered around the course, which exposed students to surveillance studies. They were thereby predisposed to apply lessons absorbed as they noted trends in our increasingly surveilled world, now under COVID-19. This

could mean that students felt that those around them did not appreciate what was occurring as much as they did. Madison, for example, noted that most people did not sufficiently recognize the ramping up and deepening institutionalization of surveillance. The sense of urgency and necessity surrounding the development of strategic responses to COVID-19 meant that the introduction of surveillance into more and more aspects of life permits its invasiveness to go undetected:

> Without most people even realizing it, we are living in a heightened surveilled society where authorities are monitoring the places we can go. They are restricting hours, some giving store access before the store opens to elderly people, restricting the places we can eat (only takeout is available), and so on. This is surveillance, whether people want to recognize it or not.

Other students, however, engaged members of their household in relation to surveillance, inquiring about what they were encountering. Recounting a conversation that he had with his father about his father's workplace, Miguel wrote that,

> The most shocking thing I found out was that they are required to take their temperature before entering the building and before leaving the building. My dad said that this was too much. It feels like he is constantly being watched whenever he is doing something. He mentions how he feels like a robot just having to be in this constant cycle, being watched by others for whether he is following the new protocols established by the company.

Such accounts confirmed for the students that the pandemic could not be separated from surveillance – the pandemic was reshaping how surveillance operates, reorganizing social spaces and relations, allowing it to "re-root" and flourish anew, as witnessed by what others in their household reported.

Whereas before the pandemic students' journal writing centered around personal experiences with social media, police surveillance, and university-related surveillant mechanisms, during the lockdown, and without explicit prompting from us, their writing adopted an increasingly expansive approach to surveillance. Students were now seeing it in areas that the course had not explicitly addressed, including in connection with public health emergencies, as well as in its spread to areas otherwise foreign to state officials. Noticing surveillance processes in settings they had not previously imagined. Surveillance became recognized as a more ubiquitous phenomenon than previously considered. Nadine, a grocery store clerk, reflected on the unusual scene of watching police officers patrol the aisles of her workplace, for example:

> There have been a few things about surveillance that I have noticed, like the heavy amounts of police presence, whether it's police patrolling on the lakefront or driving through the streets. Even in my own store, there have been a few police officers wandering around inside especially after certain hours. They have been monitoring people, making sure no one is picking at items or licking or acting inappropriately toward items that people need, especially since there have been stories in the news of people licking or sneezing on items at that grocery store. So, the increased police presence has been to stop this from happening.

For Nadine, COVID-19's still mysterious nature entailed "surveillance creep" (Marx, 1989) as a way of managing the public health threat that it represented. Surveillance could justifiably be brought to bear upon novel spaces and situations given the inchoate understanding authorities had about it, justifying the presence of police officers where it had hitherto been unusual to find them. Another student, Kam, pointed out that surveillance, particularly medical surveillance, enabled the constant updates about how COVID-19 is spreading through the population:

> The surveillance concept we have been talking about throughout the semester is highlighted daily in how we know the virus is ongoing/spreading dramatically. There are constant updates on the number of identified cases, along with the number of deaths caused by this virus… Without surveillance, none of these updates would be possible.

For Kam, such medical surveillance kept society abreast of the geography of viral spread and its penetration into vulnerable populations. Notwithstanding the positive impact of such information; however, Kam also adopted a critical stance toward surveillance praxis during the Coronavirus moment, with particular concern for how marginalized groups could be impacted by its diffusion into communities of color and the undermining of civil liberties. Consequently, Kam's entries showed him vacillating between being skeptical of surveillance, on the one hand, and feeling it was essential to safeguarding the wellbeing of at-risk groups, on the other:

> The increase of the coronavirus has led to an increase in mass surveillance. I feel as if this should worry us, just as much as surveillance makes us feel better that [authorities] might have control over this virus. Globally, governments and their private partners in crime have already turned to physical and bio-surveillance to contain the pandemic. The Russian government is reportedly using facial surveillance technology to "catch" those who may have violated quarantine orders. Many European countries have implemented the use of hi-tech tools, including lie-detector tests and drones for "migration management" and "population control;" alarmed human rights specialists worry about a discriminatory impact on already vulnerable refugees (The Guardian). I certainly agree that this can become a huge dilemma, more than what it already is, if specific people are targeted for the possibility of having the virus… This coronavirus has impacted much of our world, but jail institutions are one of the main hotspots when it comes to this pandemic. I wanted to discuss this because the surveillance aspect throughout these establishments is very minimal during these times. Many detainees and staff are testing positive for the virus, which only leads to the spread of it overall. I say the surveillance aspect is minimal during these times, because not only are these institutions failing to test all these individuals, but even staff who have the virus are brought back to work when their symptoms are gone. This creates a problem in my mind because even if they are free of symptoms, without being surveilled and tested thoroughly, they are likely to spread the virus regardless of how they may feel. This virus is much more serious than simply saying 'I feel good, so I do not have it.'" Although this may be the case for many individuals, ignoring the slightest symptom will spread the virus within the poor conditions of these institutions. *Surveillance is one of our only hopes in attempts at controlling this complex, ongoing issue.*

This kind of internal debate within Kam's journal entry is consistent with what we had encouraged students to carry out: identifying and ruminating upon the pros and cons of surveillance practices – its "sword that cuts both ways" quality, and now Kam and his peers were extending the reach of their reflections to a kind of multi-layered analysis that we had not seen prior to the pandemic. Like Kam, Juan was of two minds about surveillance, alternating between speculating that governments were pursuing laws and policies that were diminishing individual privacy, but then also wondering whether our privacy was in fact being strengthened, precisely because we were sheltering in place – we were thereby no longer being "exposed to cameras or other types of [public] surveillance." In short, it may be that the shelter-in-place environment encouraged freer, more open-ended reflection than we had previously seen. As Juan put it, "With in-person classes cancelled, my mind has started to ramp up into overdrive thinking about surveillance."

Keeping journals evidently forced students to dwell on the aspects of the coronavirus moment that could be thematized as surveillance relevant. Although students enrolled in classes without this topic of inquiry might have noticed similar things, it is also likely that our students had these themes at the forefront of their consciousness, and hence processed the COVID-19 pandemic by filtering experience through a surveillance lens. Discussions rooted in academic surveillance studies provided students with a way of making sense of COVID-19, but their observations also led them to ponder directions in which surveillance might be headed that our readings might have only hinted at, or not fully anticipated.

The New Normal

As the pandemic progressed from mid-March through early April, our students continued processing lockdown-related experiences through their journal writing. Entries started to showcase the notion of our having entered a historically "*new normal*," one entailing a certain adaptiveness, even as there was also a sense of being haunted by the sudden disappearance of what had previously been. For example, Jennie, in her March 30th journal entry, reflected on the largeness of the moment we were encountering:

> A lot has occurred over the last two weeks, specifically in relation to COVID-19. I would have never thought that I would be experiencing a pandemic in my lifetime: it is so strange to think that I am living through a historic moment that will ultimately shape future generations; this is bound to be in history books in upcoming years.

Her grasp of the new reality continued to morph; by the time of her April 16th journal entry, Jennie. – who had earlier shared her struggles with mental health when the pandemic first began – started to feel a new sense of normalcy. Although this new sense of normalcy was less than pleasant, she had found a way to accommodate herself to it:

> In terms of my mental health, I have become accustomed to waking up in the morning knowing I cannot leave my house: I have a new adjusted routine.

Not only did students recognize that their personal realities could have been permanently changed, but, as with Jennie's March 30th entry, Juan wrote about how comprehensive the transformation to a new reality was likely to be. For Juan, this shift to a *new normal* exposed the frailty of the world as we knew it:

> We're nearing a month in quarantine and it's settling in that life will never be how it was before. This global pandemic puts the entire world in perspective, and we are not ready for the future.

Tim's journal entries suggested a shift in his worldview, from experiencing fear at the prospect of any kind of foray into public space, to a sense that we had shifted to a new way of being in the world, perhaps permanently so:

> At first, I was simply too scared to leave the house to buy groceries or go to work, but now I am not as scared and accept that this is reality. I mean, I still take the proper precautions obviously.... (but) I do wonder if the world will ever be the same after this.

Tim, in fact, eventually decided to resign from his new job at a grocery store: "I only worked there because I thought I needed the money, but money is not worth my life." The self-assertion evident in quitting was echoed among other students. Katherine, for example, felt it necessary to address some of the onerous demands placed on her by another university professor, ultimately discovering that the coronavirus moment had cultivated a new self, one who was not afraid to make her needs clear:

> I wrote an email to one of my other professors (who was not being super understanding of how stressful this time is) and asked him to reduce the requirements for a huge project we have do and explained why it was so important. He was really nice and understanding and made all of the changes I suggested. I think one positive thing that's come out of this whole experience is that I'm getting better at calling bullshit on my own internal surveillance and I've stopped being quite so afraid to interact with the people who are actually "surveilling" me.

Katherine, like other students in our class, emerged from the pandemic experience a more resilient person, willing to practice a radical self-care through the communication of tangible needs – a necessity at a time of social distancing and shelter in place policies, as other means of self-care and support proved to be unavailable. The coronavirus moment proved to be a time of growth for our students, and not a mere suspension of "real life."

Conclusion

As noted above, our analysis of how our students experienced the COVID-19 moment was made possible because we had asked our students to maintain a journal throughout the semester, one in which they were asked to write expansively about the materials as well as their personal lives and social involvements as they might be directly or indirectly connected to the central ideas of the course. Because everyone in contemporary society interacts with surveillance systems and practices, we envisioned the journal as an autoethnographic site for them to document and comprehend how their encounters with forms of surveillance made them participants in surveillance fields in shifting ways: at times as agents of monitoring, at other times as targets of monitoring. At our final "face to face" meeting, before "migrating" to remote online instruction, we asked the students to be sure to write about how the pandemic seemed to be affecting them, and to feel free to integrate surveillance themes in whatever way seemed natural to them. We felt no need to cancel the journal writing assignment, in fact it seemed more vital than ever, but we were not sure how the assignment would function for them.

During an end of the semester debriefing, students shared their thoughts on the *Surveillance and Society* course and its objectives. Several students mentioned that they had never taken a class in which the major writing assignment entailed keeping a journal, and most indicated that they were grateful for – or better off for having had – the opportunity. The students felt that journal writing helped them to interact with the course materials, kept them engaged with the core themes and ideas, while also forcing them to monitor and mine their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences, resulting in encounters at the intersection of biography and history, personal observations and collective realities, that are the hallmark of an active sociological imagination (Mills 1959).

Journal writing breaks down a discipline that students are asked to absorb over the course of their four (or more) years in college, whereby they cultivate and brandish an academic-sounding voice, one that puts forth arguments and analyses of matters large and small. While we do not believe such training in disciplinary writing is to be objected to per se, we also believe that journal writing – by undermining the distinction between personal voice and academic voice – empowers students to write more authentically about what we teach. Such a pedagogy is not at all foreign to the humanities, where diaries and journals are esteemed as being important genres of writing with crucial roles in creative processes; but the social sciences do not seem as keen to direct students to such outlets for expression. We consider that a loss, for students often inhabit and circulate within the kinds of social worlds that we teach them about, and anything that we can do to suggest that they observe locally what we in class are discussing as occurring globally, will likely give them leverage to, in various senses, "own" what they will hopefully have learned in our classes.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 moment – at the onset of being placed under lockdown and attendant shelter-in-place policies – was experienced by those of us who had never been through a pandemic or subjected to the massive disruptions brought on by a global public health emergency, as a shock, entailing adaptations that felt panicky and a horizon that was uncertain. Journal writing at such a time – whether imbued by an engagement with surveillance themes or any other themes – constitutes an important historical archive of this sense of panic and uncertainty (Ibarra 2008). Eventually, the sense of indeterminacy fades away, and a sense of normalcy returns. The historical archive offered by the journals will remain, however, offering captured impressions that would otherwise disappear, documenting those fleeting experiential traces that show how the present was experienced by cultural actors who were, at the time, separated from the maps they had hitherto been guided by, while also pointing to the makeshift anchors they found reassuring as they ventured forth.

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