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From: **Encounters S20** <[notifications@instructure.com](mailto:notifications@instructure.com)>

Date: Thu, Apr 2, 2020 at 12:10 PM

Subject: First Day of Online Discussion - Ecology of Strangers: Encounters S20

To: <[mouatjh@whitman.edu](mailto:mouatjh@whitman.edu)>

You created this Announcement:

Dear Class,

Wow! I have been reading and rereading this [discussion board](#) on "Ecology of Strangers" and sometimes it just brings tears to my eyes. Such beautifully thoughtful and articulate posts. Thank you. It's also been really fun to hear something from each and every person. How are you all finding it? I've created a new discussion board for [General Class Questions/Meta-Discussion](#) here, in case you have a comment on the experience of online posts or anything else about the class in general.

I wanted to try to summarize what I'm seeing emerging as our themes in this discussion, and I would say those themes are:

- The ideas of the **borders of selfhood**, which is something that I see particularly in posts from Claire, Ava, Livvy, Jackson, Claire, Kieran, and Conor.
- The ideas of **perspective/focus of attention**, which is something that I see particularly in posts from Ella, Timo, Kiana, Caroline, Andei, and Nadr.
- The ideas and **ideals of community**, which is something that I see particularly in posts from Elea, Emily, Benji, and Owen.

Of course these things are all related and overlapping, and it's not entirely realistic to break them into simple groups like I did above (and indeed for several of you I had to really debate which pile to put you in and I'm still not sure I'm "right"), but I thought it might be interesting to try to pull out some of the threads.

One of the quotes from an earlier part of the book (that I didn't post) that really jumped out to me was when Odell (who is an artist) was talking about the painter David Hockney and how his art transformed over time. As she is talking about [how he shifted from painting to collages using photographs](#), she says, "In other words, the piece is a collage not so much because Hockney had an aesthetic fondness for collage, but because **something like collage is at the heart of the unstable and highly personal process of perception**" (99, emphasis mine). That idea - that each of us is constantly creating our own collage of meaning through our experience and what we choose to pay attention to - resonated with my own understanding of reality. To be human is to be a meaning-maker, a story-teller. But too often, we slip into unconscious ways of making meaning and allowing other systems in place to tell our stories for us. Perhaps what is so special about this period of time - in which we

have been ripped out of our usual context and so forced to pay attention to different things suddenly - is that we get to decide where to direct our gaze in this moment - and to be *aware* that we are making a choice.

This, in turn, reminds me of a quote from much earlier in the book (which I'm attempting to make into a block quote below, but sometimes the formatting gets changed when I publish this to announcement so we'll see):

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...we *absolutely require* distance and time to be able to see the mechanisms we thoughtlessly submit to. More than that, as I've argued thus far, we need distance and time to be functional enough to do or think anything meaningful at all. William Deresiewicz warns of this in "[Solitude and Leadership](#)," a speech to an audience of college students in 2010. By spending too much time on social media and chained to the news cycle, he says, "[y]ou are marinating yourself in the conventional wisdom. In other people's reality: for others, not for yourself. You are creating a cacophony in which it is impossible to hear your own voice, whether it's yourself you're thinking about or anything else." (60)

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In other words, this time of social isolating is an opportunity to stop and reflect and choose how you are going to shape yourself and direct your own education going forward. (I really recommend that Deresiewicz link I inserted above, by the way. Funnily enough I had already inserted a link to another speech he gave into the last week's module, although I haven't decided yet how to use it - but maybe I'll put some more thought into that now.)

Well, that's probably enough warbling from me for one morning! Don't forget to post 2 responses to other classmate's posts (preferably ones without two replies already) by midnight tonight. Many of you have already done this though - thank you! The [discussion posts for Friday's reading](#) will be due Friday night at midnight and then you will have all weekend to post replies to two posts. Discussion leaders for Monday - Kiana and Ava - please be sure to send me something for that board over the weekend (by midnight Sunday at the latest - but preferably earlier if possible).

Thank you all - so much - once again. I am so honored to be your instructor, particularly in this historic moment. I'm humbled to get to process some of this with you. Thank you for engaging.

Warm wishes,  
Jen