

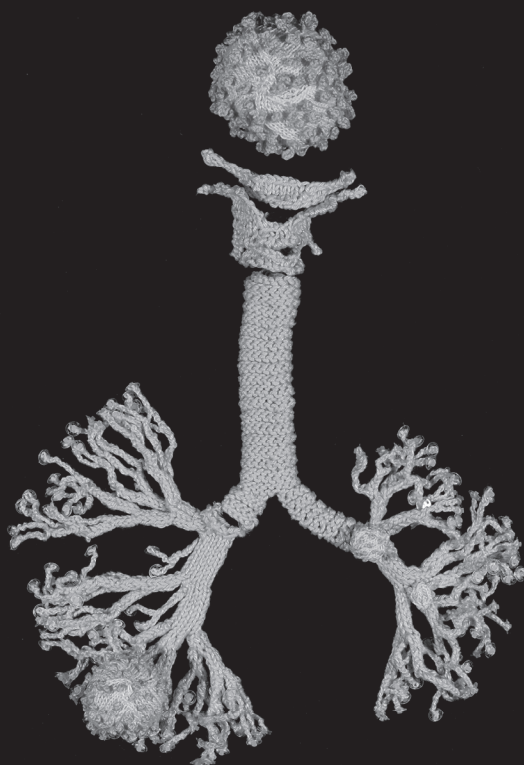
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„Corona und Lunge“ von Katharina Sabernig. Auch wenn heute Covid-19 als systemische Erkrankung eingestuft wird, wurde sie ursprünglich als Lungenkrankheit bekannt. Als Medizinerin und Medizinanthropologin kreiert, strickt und photographiert Katharina Sabernig anatomische Modelle um medizinische Inhalte den Sinnen zugänglich zu machen (<https://www.knitted-anatomy.at/>).

"Corona and Lung" by Katharina Sabernig. Although today Covid-19 is classified as a systemic disease, it was originally known as lung disease. As a physician and medical anthropologist, Katharina Sabernig creates, knits and photographs anatomical models to make medical content accessible to the senses (<https://www.knitted-anatomy.at/>).



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Editorial

When the World Health Organization classified the spread of the coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 as a pandemic in March 2020, the Curare editorial team sent out a call for (auto-)ethnographic diaries via various mailing lists (see full call in the Introduction to this Special Issue). We hoped for a handful of “correspondents” who would write diaries in the strict Malinowskian sense of the word to record the unfolding pandemic times on a daily basis. The number of participants exceeded by far our expectations. Having been overwhelmed by the large response, we were unable to edit the dozens of diary entries we received daily. The large quantity and variable length of the entries led us to decide to publish all the diaries of those authors who agreed to it on boasblogs.org, where all the diaries are freely available in full length. The 2020 and the 2021 issues of Curare are both devoted to our collective diary project. We asked selected authors to revisit parts of their diaries and to comment on individual aspects from an analytical, anthropological perspective. In this issue, we are grateful to be able to present a collaboratively written text by JULIANA BEECHER, LEE BRANDO, VAIDA NORVILAITĖ, and SONIA YUHUI ZHANG from New York.

In a fictional dialogue in the forum of this issue, ERHARD SCHÜTTPELZ and EHLER VOSS reflect on the horror scenario of the imminent triage in German hospitals that has been repeatedly envisioned during this pandemic. EHLER VOSS then reports in detail on street protests against the German Corona policy and the counter-demonstrations against the protesters. The reports focus on examples from Leipzig and are supplemented by two in-depth interviews with critics of the Corona policy, who explore the situation against the background of their socialization in the former socialist East Germany. The protests are interpreted as part of a conspiracy culture that already existed before Corona and are analyzed in terms of the accompanying stigmatization processes. We conclude the issue with a continuation of our “Teach-

ing Forum” section, which we started last year and for which we were able to attract 22 authors for 14 contributions so far. We would like to continue this section and look forward to receiving submissions.

Since there was a great need to comment on the subject of Corona with shorter reports and reflections independently of the laborious work of diary writing, we launched the blog “Witnessing Corona” in collaboration with the Working Group Medical Anthropology of the German Anthropological Association and the Global South Studies Center in Cologne. There we called for submissions of short, unique contributions that reflect on the current situation from a social science and medical anthropological perspective. The contributions are published simultaneously on boasblogs.org and medizinethnologie.net.

There is good news regarding the plan to digitize all previously published issues of Curare. The application to the German Research Foundation (DFG), which we submitted together with the Specialised Information Service Social and Cultural Anthropology (FID), was successful and all issues will now be scanned and made freely available to the public at digi.evifa.de by the Humboldt University of Berlin in the near future. We are very grateful to all involved people and institutions.

Currently we are still in the midst of the pandemic, but in the meantime formerly new habits like mask wearing, regular testing, and social distancing have already become familiar elements of many people’s everyday lives in Germany and beyond. The editorial team hopes that presenting a diverse set of Covid-19-related contributions, and particularly the commented diaries from New York, will hold for our readership surprising moments between memory and forgetting that will help make sense of what we have experienced so far.

KATRIN AMELANG, JANINA KEHR, and EHLER VOSS for the editorial team

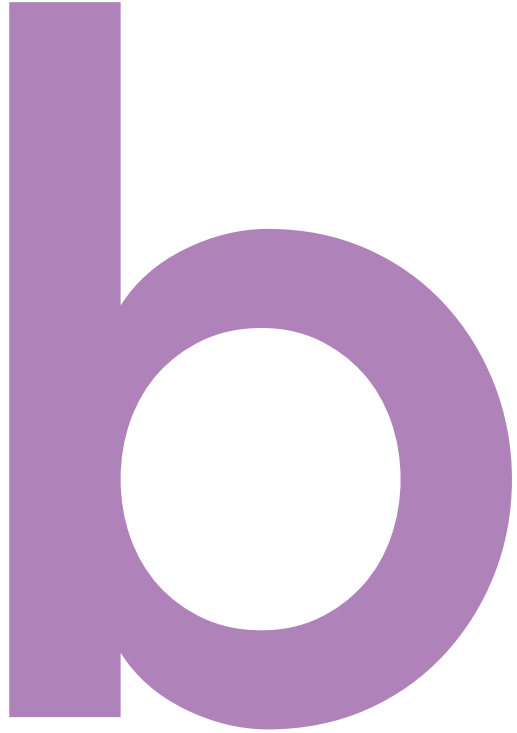
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**CURARE
CORONA
DIARIES**



A Collection of Diaries
in the Strict Sense of
the Term

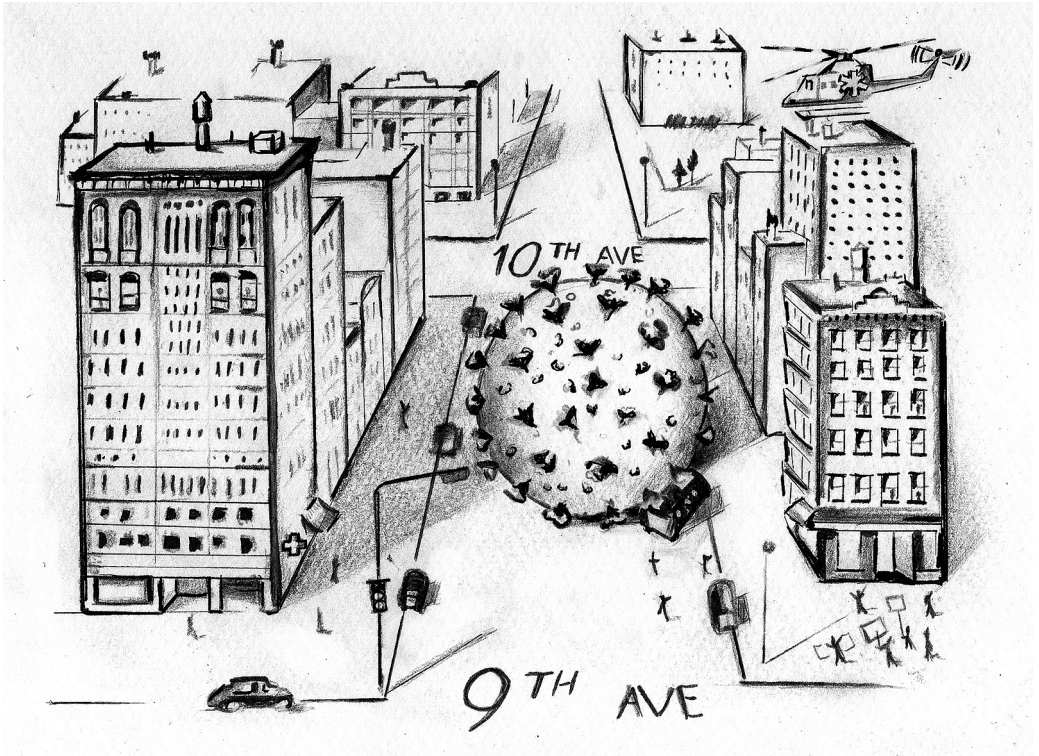


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SCHWERPUNKT
THEMATIC FOCUS

Curare Corona Diaries I



Chronicles of a Pandemic

Introduction to Part 1 of the Curare Corona Diaries

On March 18, 2020, shortly after the WHO declared a novel coronavirus disease to be a global pandemic, we, the Curare editorial team, launched a call for (auto-)ethnographic Corona Diaries in the strict sense of the term, which would record what was happening in peoples' environments. More than 100 authors from over 25 different countries participated in the project. This overwhelming interest exceeded our expectations. We were unable to include all the diaries in our planned special issue of Curare. So, we decided to publish the diaries in full length on *boasblogs.org* and a selection of the diaries in the present (2020) and the forthcoming (2021) issue of Curare. For readers to be able to trace the editorial process and understand its outcomes in print and on *boasblogs.org*, we present our call, which circulated on several listservs and was subsequently adapted as an email to interested authors, here:

The editorial board of "Curare. Journal of Medical Anthropology" is planning a special issue on the current corona pandemic. For this purpose, we are collecting ethnographic material written down as (auto-)ethnographic diaries, which record what is happening in one's own environment. This is perhaps a unique opportunity to generate ethnographic material that makes it possible to reconstruct collectively, in retrospect, what is happening right now and what we cannot comprehend at this moment of crisis. The situation in individual countries is developing differently, and countries are increasingly closing their national borders, which makes it interesting and important to look from a comparative perspective at what is happening in similar and different ways in individual countries.

The retrospective interpretation of what has happened will probably be quite controversial in the public sphere when it later comes to assessing how this situation was handled and the consequences of crisis management, as well as drawing lessons for the fu-

ture. This kind of daily ethnographic recording will be all the more important for this discussion.

Therefore, we are looking for correspondents from different countries who observe their own everyday life and that of others, who follow media coverage, save media documents, and record everything in a diary. Most important: We are looking for records of your own reactions and those of your environment on a daily basis and not retrospectively, to ensure that parts of the "indexicality" of the process can be reconstructed later. We are looking for diaries "in the strict sense of the term" (cf. Bronislaw Malinowski). You don't have to be a trained anthropologist. Important for us is the daily or almost daily protocol based on the current state of knowledge, practices, and experience. This protocol does not have to be long – short and very short notes are also okay. They can be descriptions of situations, descriptions of one's own behavior and the behavior of others, notes on conversations, reflections, fragments of thoughts. The diary can be kept like an anthropological field diary and therefore can have the character of a collage and need not but may contain not only texts, but also other media such as pictures, videos, screenshots, drawings, forms, etc.

The diaries should leave space for ambivalences, paradoxes, uncertainties, confusion, messiness. They should focus on everyday life, i.e., on ordinary affects (Kathleen Stewart) under extraordinary circumstances. As a medical anthropological journal, we are mainly interested in medical aspects of this crisis and their social embeddedness. What ideas are there about the cause and effects of the corona virus? How do you and your environment assess the risk? Do you and your environment have any worries associated with the pandemic, and if so, what are they? What is the mood of you and your environment? What are your current ideas about how to counter the virus? What types of prevention in the form of behavior or drugs are recommended? What therapeutic measures are recommended and which are taken? In other words: what are the theories of healing on a daily basis? The diaries should focus not only on expectations and ideas, but

also on practical everyday affairs, i.e., hygiene practices, greeting behavior, changes in routines, etc.

As medical anthropologists, we are of course also intrigued by how the public health and (bio-)security measures taken in individual countries, regions, and homes affect not only everyday life, but also the possibilities of social and political action or collective action more generally. What novel forms of solidarity have emerged in your environments? What political actions are rendered impossible? Are forms of civil disobedience to security and confinement measures emerging? And for what reasons? What is the economic impact of the biosecurity measures, not only on national economies, but also on household and grassroots economies? On what evidence or data or lack thereof are public health measures taken in “your” countries or regions?

And of course, we are interested in the sinister side of events, because they may erupt any day or week in the coming course of events: rumors, scapegoats, the uncanny side of contagion in blaming and shaming. Please write down things you observe, even if you feel they are irrelevant or an embarrassment for you and your community. We have already heard for example of Chinese people being suspected in the US of spreading the virus, and we should not expect this to be the end of such false claims. Of course, we will not spread any of these rumors, but we ask you to consider them in your protocols if they occur.

Regarding the media: It is not necessary to save all the media coverage. It is rather a matter of paying attention to which reports you encounter yourself, which are pointed out to you, which have meaning for you and which for others. And then it would be good if you could store these reports, in a form that allows the source to be traced – for example as a PDF in which you write down the source, for example a URL, and the date of access. But you don’t have to be encyclopedic or strive for completion in any sense – it is neither possible nor a goal for our enterprise. Documentation should be for documenting your experience and observations, that is all.

It is primarily a matter of collecting ethnographic material. The texts sent to us will be circulated among the Curare corona editorial team. How we will interpret and reconstruct the material is still open at the moment, but we want to make it available to a public. Of course, only what you want to be published will be published – anonymously if you wish. And we will

have to think of protecting other people’s rights as well, as in any ethnographic text.

Some of you have asked if they can write in their mother tongue because of the intimacy of a diary. This is of course fine and we encourage this intimacy of expression; but for a publication, we might have to think about a translation. We publish texts both in English and German.

We cannot say anything about the duration of the project at the moment. We will start it first and see how things develop. “Follow the crisis” is the mode we propose. After all, we are all participants in a historical process that challenges our understanding of participant observation.

We aim to bring together various diary entries in an upcoming special issue of Curare. Since we have received an overwhelming response to our first call on March 18, 2020, we will in addition offer to publish many of the diaries later on boasblogs.org – of course only with your permission. We will keep all contributors updated on this opportunity.

But the diaries must be distinguished from a blog. The idea of the Curare corona diaries project is to write a diary in the strict sense of the term, to record what happens in your understanding of the crisis as it develops on your local (and global) basis. This is about ethnographers and anthropologists and some others documenting the “ongoing accomplishment” of the crisis or rather crises. Our understanding is that a blog or a daily published diary entry is NOT a diary, because that would mean writing for the public and with and against and within the public, but that a diary (in the strict sense) or a fieldwork diary is an irreplaceable genre of experience, observation, and reflection that we should cherish in its own right, and that we want to give it a chance. Apart from this assumption, there are no limits and no rules as to what you may write.

Before the diaries are published, all authors can look back on their diaries and decide what to do with the texts. There are several options for this:

- 1) The diaries can be published completely or in extracts.
- 2) The complete or selected entries can be published under your own name or anonymously.
- 3) You can decide that the complete or selected entries should not be published, but may be evaluated and cited anonymously by the Curare corona editorial team.
- 4) You can decide that no entry may be published and no entry may be evaluated by third parties. We

will, of course, delete everything that the authors want to have deleted.

In case of publication, each author will be responsible for making all data in his or her text anonymous in such a way that all the people described are sufficiently protected or have given their permission.

Please send us your diary entries daily or at least at brief intervals in a text document, which you will add entries on a regular basis (e.g. every two days, once a week or so), so that we can see who is on board and how the project develops. Please describe yourself and your situation at the time you started the diary at the beginning of the document. Who are you, what is your profession, how did you get into the current situation, with whom are you staying, etc. If you link in the diaries to articles on the Internet, we recommend that you save the respective pages with URL and date of access. You can also use screenshots and include them in the diary. Please always use the same sender address when you send us the documents and always start with your full name in the subject line in the same way. Please send your entries to the following email address: cura-recoronadiaries@agem.de. If you have any questions, please write an email to: curare@agem.de – if we do not answer, please ask again.

*Independently of your participation in the Curare Corona Diaries Project, you are welcome to write alternative or additional contributions to the “Witnessing Corona” blog that we have just started in cooperation with the Global South Studies Center Cologne and the blog *medizinethnologie.net*. In this case, please send your contributions to: *witnessingcorona@boasblogs.org*.*

The future is unwritten, but at least we can write down the present. And let’s hope for the best. We are looking forward to your participation.

After about 2 months, the activity decreased significantly; many had already finished their diary and from many the gaps between contributions became longer. Therefore, we ended the collection on June 30, 2020.

In our original call stemming from March 2020, we deliberately did not ask for anthropological analysis of the pandemic situation, but for “simple” everyday diaries. Many of the diaries we received were indeed ad hoc affective and very personal descriptions, their *raison d’être* was important in its own right. The 2020 and 2021 Special

Issues of Curare dedicated to the Corona Diaries pay tribute to these ad hoc contributions while also providing a platform to take reflections further. In the first of the two special issues, we present a text written by four graduate students at the New School for Social Research in New York: Juliana Beecher, Lee Brando, Vaida Norvilaitė, and Sonia Yuhui Zhang. They were part of a group of nine who participated in the Curare corona diaries project and while doing so experimented with writing alone/together. For the present issue, they have selected parts of their diaries, which can be read in full on *boasblogs.org*, reflecting on bodily and intellectual techniques that were more or less newly developed during the pandemic or at least unusual before it: the process of writing together while in isolation, the wearing of masks, the practical negotiation of social distancing, and daily hygiene procedures. Each section has a different author, but includes ethnographic material from fellow diarists. Rather than following the much-too-often invoked lone wolf scenario in anthropology, they brought their individually written, shared, and collectively discussed diaries into the form of a collaborative auto-ethnography, as they spell out in their introduction.

The Curare Corona Diaries project has been possible only due to the engaged participation and work of diarists and collaborators alike. We would therefore like to thank all the authors for their participation in this project. Furthermore, we thank Erhard Schüttpelz for inspiration, Daria Ledergerber and Leonie Schäfer for their precious editorial assistance, and Peter Gillissen, Florian Lueke, and Annette Steffny for their technical support and careful work on the website.

For the present issue, Katharina Sabernig provided us with a photo of her knitted coronaviruses for the cover, and Regina Uhlig created a drawing that illustrates the New York Diaries. Many thanks to them as well.

KATRIN AMELANG, CLEMENS EISENMANN, JANINA KEHR, HELMAR KURZ, MIRKO UHLIG & EHLER VOSS

Writing Ourselves Out

Collaborative Autoethnography from the Epicenter of a Pandemic

JULIANA BEECHER, LEE BRANDO, VAIDA NORVILAITĖ & SONIA YUHUI ZHANG

Abstract The following text is the product of a collaborative writing group, who took up Curare's call for coronavirus diaries in the Malinowskian style. As the United States became the epicenter of COVID-19 in March 2020, nine academics (graduate students and a professor from The New School for Social Research) trained their observation skills and recorded their introspections about their experiences from within. Though various social distancing measures stymied their previously mobile lifestyles, writing and meeting digitally took on cathartic resonance and provided a means for connection. In this text, a subset of four diarists present a few salient aspects of life during the pandemic, as the recursivity of writing and reading together not only pushed us beyond our interior spaces but also diffused our singular perspectives into a layered text that interrogates boundary formation, maintenance, and negotiation. Each section has a different author but includes ethnographic "data" from other diarists. The first piece is a metacognitive reflection on the methodology of diary writing and anthropologists navigating their positions as remote observers. The following sections localize globally pertinent topics on the meanings and materialities of mask-wearing; the challenges and dilemmas that emerged from a tepid social distancing policy; and the imaginaries of multispecies interactions opened up by hygiene/cleaning practices around COVID-19. This text represents reflexive and collaborative work. The ethnographers themselves move between subject/object positions. Scope, scale, and temporality are unfixed, lending a sense of dynamic collectivities and new possibilities that are evident in content and method.

Keywords autoethnography – collaboration – COVID-19 – diary – boundary-maintenance/negotiation – masks – hygiene – social contract

Introduction

Ethnographic work typically centers around an "experience-near" perspective, one in which an anthropologist attains entry into some kind of community. But the physical closeness and mobility often required for that work became restricted as the spread of SARS-CoV-2 accelerated in New York in mid-March of 2020. "Stay-at-home" orders were issued, universities shuttered, and the usual din turned to deafening quiet save for an eerie uptick in the frequency of ambulance sirens. Public health measures required avoiding gatherings with individuals from outside one's household and keeping two meters' distance from one another in public places. As we saw our lives closing in, eight graduate students and a professor from The New School for Social Research took up Curare's invitation to keep Malinowskian-esque diaries. We also saw the ethnographic potential of

engagement in a unique type of participant observation that allows for close social and intellectual proximity while being physically distanced.

From natural sciences to philosophy, scholarly pursuits share a long history of celebrating solitude to acquire genuine knowledge (SHAPIN 1991). However, the trope of the "lone anthropologist" became not only inaccessible as social distancing policies limited our range to our own homes but also disingenuous as our physical and intellectual spaces co-mingled.¹ On the one hand, we remained forced to immerse ourselves in solitary spaces, avoiding physical interactions with others; on the other hand, digital data and online conversations proliferated and generated ethnographic materials that are intrinsically collective and shared. The collaborative writing of diaries became a confrontation and an opening. By ex-

posing our interiorities in ways that are impermissible in conventional social settings and academic exchange, we were able to observe and analyze the pandemic beyond our personal lives and living spaces.

Writing together while apart thus became an opportunity to compensate for our limited physical movement: a roving eye/I that sought catharsis through regular writing, sympathy through reading each other's diaries alongside the broader news, and security through reconciling renderings of self and other. Four of us ethnographers/diarists then embarked on a multi-perspectival analysis of our partially imbricated experiences, assembling a window from individual "panes," facing inward and outward. We used all nine diaries as ethnographic materials, with sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of exposing our collective intellectual processes. What emerged was this joint autoethnographic account of an event, which fuses subject and object, process and product, and diarist, author, and editor iteratively (cf. CHANG, NGUNJIRI, & HERNANDEZ 2013). The panes intersect through overlapping materials but approach the same phenomena from different perspectives. In this way, I, you, s/he are in motion. To help the reader, the authors have used their first names and the first-person pronoun "I" when writing. Where first names appear elsewhere, they refer to our fellow diarists, unless otherwise noted. We have maintained our individual writing styles to produce a textured collaborative piece.

The first section, or "pane," of this text explores this writing/being/thinking modality. In "'Seafaring' from COVID-19 and 'Surfing on Time' through Autoethnographic Diary Writing," Vaida Norvilaitė contemplates collective diary keeping as a tool of observation, employing two marine-themed metaphors. While "seafaring" guides through the blurring boundaries between the life-threatening waves of COVID-19 "out there" and secure lives on "dry land," "surfing on time" helps to contemplate autoethnographic writing in the form of a diary as such. This piece is followed by a trilogy of critiques on the policies and practices used to arrest the spread of COVID. Juliana Beecher's section, "'Masks Required for Entry': Material Engagements with a 'New Normal,'" reflects on the many place- and time-specific meanings of wearing face masks. Lee Brando's piece, "The Social Contract

Calls for Social Distancing: Negotiating Rules of Engagement During a Pandemic" indicates a paradox created by social distancing and the dilemmas that arose from disunified and muddled policies in the United States. Taking up the related practice of hygiene, yet casting it within the scope of multispecies coexistence, Sonia Yuhui Zhang's "pane," entitled "Coexisting with COVID: Daily Practices of Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Imagining in a Global Pandemic," gazes between diary entries to explore relationships between people and their positions in the biosphere during the pandemic. Together, these pieces, forged from a type of dynamic collaboration, both illustrate and instrumentalize the fluidity of relationships emerging from a crisis.

Pane 1: "Seafaring" from COVID-19 and "Surfing on Time" through Autoethnographic Diary Writing

Longing for Informants and Collective Diary Keeping

Anthropologists are trained to be immersed, to be at the forefront, and to expose themselves to the onrushing waves of the unknown. Emerging as an invisible tide, COVID-19 surreptitiously transformed from a shallow undercurrent into a full-fledged tsunami. By no means resembling emergency flood workers, a handful of The New School for Social Research (NSSR) anthropologists found themselves positioned as remote spectators, often envisioned as the dream of philosophers – a privilege of observing "the distress of those at sea from the safety of dry land" (BLUMENBERG 1997: 2).

Although most of the coronavirus pandemic microbial "storms" are taking place on the ground, this essay engages with two nautical metaphors: HANS BLUMENBERG's "seafaring" (1997: 2) and PHILLIPE LEJEUNE's diary-keeping as "surfing on time" (2009). Throughout its rich history from Homer's *Odyssey* to Christian iconography and beyond, the sea often represents a place of danger, "where evil appears." In times of anguish, notes BLUMENBERG, the sensation of perilousness on the high seas "serves to underline the comfort and peace, the safety and serenity of the harbor" (1997: 7). This piece accordingly deploys BLUMENBERG's "seafaring" to navigate the space between

the life-threatening waves of COVID-19 “out there,” and secure lives on “dry land.” Lejeune’s “surfing on time” depicts a specific awareness of temporality, unfolding through autoethnographic diary writing.

The metaphor of shipwreck is also detectable in the public discourse around the coronavirus. RICHARD GUNDERMAN (2020) compares sheltering in place during the pandemic to Crusoe’s shipwreck as it suspends established habits and rhythms of life. On rare occasions, the aforementioned anthropologists braved dipping their toes into the allegedly abating waters of the pandemic by stepping outside their apartments, which served as cells of social confinement. Their excursions ranged from stocking up on necessary supplies or visiting laundromats to enrolling in the “Meals on Wheels” program or acts of care such as mediating neighbors’ domestic violence episodes and visiting friends in need. Not to mention more reckless endeavors such as clandestine rafting in the white waters near Portland or crossing the entire East Coast from New York to find repose in Mississippi. The stimuli outside spiced up monotonous days on “dry land” and led to encounters with longed-for “informants.” I (Vaida) recall the rush of anthropological excitement when a cashier at Walmart in Lucedale, Mississippi, bluntly stated that the economic collapse does not frighten her since she owns stock in Amazon.

However, little as the anthropologists anticipated, their most crucial informants were not the coincidental interlocutors of the external world, but the diaries they shared. Collective journaling in a time of pandemic served as a means to fill the void of real-life anthropological engagement by equipping the group with a birds-eye-view tool of observation. They/we were captivated by the observation of time stopping, breaking and re-starting, moments of despair and grief, and finding stillness in madness in the shimmering glow of communal mundanity.

Crisis Diary as “Surfing on Time”

In one of his first diary entries on the 15th of March, 2020, Nicolas, a professor in Anthropology, drew a parallel between the beginning of the lockdown and World War I: back then, “everybody was excited because, finally, something was

about to happen. Today, everybody is excited because, finally, nothing happens. Time will come to a stop.”² The surge of diaries is also a common denominator between the COVID-19 pandemic and the period of World Wars. Journaling in times of distress, periods of both personal and global crisis, observes KATHERYN SEDERBERG, offers “a possibility for thinking about the present moment in the face of defeat, as the future opened up and one has the feeling of living through history” (2017). Diarists are stuck in the presentist moment of self-reflection, as they “cannot narrate their lives from the point of relative stability, looking back.”

The paradox of diary writing is its “stuttering forward movement: the present of the diary is both continuous and continually interrupted” (SEDERBERG 2017). On the 30th of April, a fellow diarist, Lee, reflected on how writing changes together with new events unfolding: rising mortality rates, the domestic violence episode between her neighbors, and her friend being sick with an undiagnosed disease. “This diary is turning into a personal morbidity and mortality report. I write as my partner is still sleeping. When she awakes we are going over to our friend’s. Yesterday we received a call indicating that my friend Leslie³ was vomiting uncontrollably again.”⁴

Diarists are similarly frustrated by the minuscule number of things that can happen each day and how incapacitating this slow unfolding of events feels. On the 30th of March, Juliana engaged in quite an unusual activity for a New Yorker. Having returned to her house in Vermont, she was in the midst of boiling syrup when a Kafkaesque realization of meaninglessness slipped in: “We boiled sap for 11 hours on Saturday. 10 gallons of syrup. Friends came over, all the same people who we decided, weeks ago now, to isolate with, as a closed group. [...] We made waffles and poured on syrup straight from the evaporation pan. Bloody Marys and Coronas turned into Micheladas. It felt like any other spring day in Vermont. Except for the conversation, the hopelessness.”⁵

Twelve days later, on the 11th of April, Juliana contrasted the continuously changing months and seasons of the year to the destabilizing moments of numbness: “It’s been snowing since Thursday. ‘April is the cruelest month, breeding/lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/memory and desire’...I’ve

been trying not to give in to the drag of memory, the hopelessness of planning for the future.”⁶

PHILLIPE LEJEUNE compares keeping a diary to “surfing on time” (2009: 182). “Time is not an objective, continuous thing that the diarist tries to portray from the outside using tiny discontinuous brushstrokes, as a novelist would. He is himself caught up by the moment, he is sculpting, moving along with it, emphasizing certain lines and directions, transforming this inescapable drift into a dance” (2009: 182). LEJEUNE also refers to the image of “surfing on time” and the “thrill” of the diary as “the feeling of touching time” (2009: 209). Fellow diarist Sonia’s writing similarly plays with time: its idleness, its feeling of stretching out, and then shrinking back again. This playfulness, however, is marked by the sense of despair and the absence of foreseeable closure. “When I am awake, I spend a lot of time staring at my roommate’s cat, crying a little bit when I want to,” Sonia wrote on the 27th of April.⁷ A few days later, she went through a period of intense gaming, meshing multiple days into one blurb of time:

On Tuesday I started the game “Ancestors: The Humankind Odyssey” and have been unable to stop. I probably slept for about 15 hours in total over the last four days. In the game I am an ape - or a clan of apes - in prehistoric times trying to survive the jungle, pass generations, and eventually evolve into other hominid species. [...] After four days of almost non-stop playing I am still at a very elemental level in the game; my school work is lagging behind and I am rushing through my readings and writings; there is no way I could play this game in a normal semester.⁸

Diarists were eager to go home, commence their fieldwork, or resolve financial difficulties. However, as time passed, they were struck with the realization that a return to normality was not apparent on the short-term horizon. The mundanity of diaries, categorized with timestamps, argues JENNIFER SINOR (2002), helps to create a “fiction of stability” and imitate the making of order to counter external chaos. Similarly, Dana was battling messiness, like Sisyphus, while seeking refuge from the pandemic in her mother’s house with her husband and two children: “I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve put away the same toys. Why do I even put them away? I like order. There is no

order in this.”⁹ After all, the most desired outcome of the crisis diary is its end – “searching how to get out of the crisis, and as a consequence, out of the diary itself” (LEJEUNE 2009: 195). In other words, waiting for the surf wave to break and wash one to the shore.

Failed Attempt of “Seafaring”

Besides surfing on time waves, anthropologists are navigating their positions as remote observers. BLUMENBERG centers his renowned piece *Shipwreck with Spectator* on the detachment and security of the viewer’s perspective on the shore, allowing them to contemplate the catastrophe from afar. He historically traces the literary tropes of “seafaring” and “shipwreck” for his broader project investigating metaphors as contributing to the nonconceptual underlay of philosophy. Indicating multiple perspectives of a disastrous event, BLUMENBERG’s piece also interestingly interconnects with the current “privilege” discourse in academia. In the context of the ancient philosophical attitude of theories, BLUMENBERG shares an anecdote of Socratic philosopher Aristippus being shipwrecked on the island of Rhodes, where he re-evaluates the perils of a philosopher’s life over pleasure and money:

Even in the hopeless situation of being shipwrecked on a foreign shore, a philosophically trained person still knows what to do, when he recognizes civilized reason in geometrical diagrams and thereupon decides to proceed immediately to the city’s gymnasium and earn through philosophical disputation what he needs to restore his lost outfit (BLUMENBERG 1997: 12).

In a later moment of epiphany, Aristippus teaches the homebound passengers that “one ought to provide one’s children with only such possessions as could be saved from the shipwreck, for the things important in life were those that neither the trials of fate nor revolution nor war could harm” (BLUMENBERG 1997).

Further in the booklet, BLUMENBERG similarly refers to the French Renaissance philosopher Montaigne and his position towards seafaring:

Montaigne does not justify the spectator of shipwreck by his right to enjoyment; rather, he jus-

tifies his pleasure, positively described as malicious, by his successful self-preservation. By virtue of his capacity for this distance, he stands unimpaired on the solid ground of the shore. He survives through one of his useless qualities: the ability to be a spectator. The shipwreck man comes out of the catastrophe unharmed (1997: 17).

BLUMENBERG suggests that our actions during a crisis partially depend upon our perception of proximity to disaster.

On the 30th of April, during one of the many remote Zoom lectures, this time on the subject of loneliness and solitude, MASHA GESSEN (2020) aptly commented on the prevailing impairment of academics to successfully self-preserve: “Philosophers, people whose job is to imagine the future, are lonely. The idea that we might change the world is not self-evident. This situation should be a philosophical dream, but it isn’t. The overwhelming sense that the world has emptied is debilitating.”

Responding to GESSEN’s remarks, ANN STOLER (2020) piped up in the chatbox: “The fact that academics and intellectuals aren’t able to use the privilege of this time for our work feels as if we have been exposed to ourselves, that the projects we thought so important, that the ‘work’ we so value is often an affect that we perform for ourselves. We got caught in the privilege and the protections that we have built around our lives.”

Whether coping with the unimaginable, feeling trapped in the “privileged” structures of academia, or being caught up in the cage of loneliness instead of the intended action of solitude, most of the diarists shared similar sentiments of uncertainty and stuckness. Multiple entries referred to the inability to concentrate or deal with endless to-do lists, the inclination to postpone tasks to the last minute, or simply feeling like a failure. Cedric on the 17th of April, wrote:

Every day I wake to see techno-optimists celebrating their delivery cocktails, celebrating the #silverlining. We are told the prosthetics are as good, if not better, than the real limbs with which we embraced one another. If we have the “privilege” of staying at home, then we must be “productive.” Save lives, stay at home, produce content. Salute the heroes, grief is unamerican.¹⁰

A wave of relief washed over me when I read everyone’s diaries for the first time. I was swimming through the fine lanes of poetic dream-like states of Sonia’s reality and was at ease with myself realizing that I am not the only one who cries. I could taste the sweetness of Juliana’s freshly boiled syrup drowning the fluffy waffles. I was forcefully spat ashore by the domestic violence episode Lee witnessed and drained my wounds with those unravelling their relationships and sinking in the sea of grief and anxiety. By failing in our attempt of seafaring, as Nicolas writes on the 20th of March, we discovered “the sense of interconnectedness which ‘humanity’ experiences in the face of a common enemy,” and found ourselves bathing in “a warm glow of every day,” watered by the stream of consciousness of our diaries. Nevertheless, Nicolas added that the political situation, the scarcity of financial and medical resources, and other tears in the social fabric might still pull us apart.¹¹

Pane 2: “Masks Required for Entry”: Material Engagements with a “New Normal”

In the weeks leading up to New York City’s lockdown, store shelves for hand sanitizer, gloves, canned foods, and toilet paper were empty, and diarists/ethnographers in the city wrote about precious disinfecting wipes (the fear of wasting even one!). But it was the face mask that emerged saturated with meaning: scarce commodity, uncomfortable necessity, barrier-turned-accessory to intimacy, symbol of mutual obligation, indicator of political affiliation, and an iconic object of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a multispecies world, face masks also became hopeful boundary markers between the human and the microbe.

Masks are a tried-and-true tool in disease outbreak mitigation. The modern medical mask was invented in northeast China during the pneumonic plague that began in 1910 and was adopted globally during the Spanish Flu in 1918 (ABDELFATAH & ARABLOUEI 2020). In cities where air pollution increased in the late 20th century, masks became standard accessories to avoid exposure or exacerbated respiratory illnesses, protective barriers against adverse environmental conditions. In more recent epidemics, they became symbolic of public responsibility and care. As medical an-

thropologist CHRISTOS LYNTERIS notes, wearing a mask in China, Hong Kong, and other areas during the SARS epidemic was a symbol of civic duty, public health awareness, and acknowledgement of a shared fate, messy coexistence, and mutual obligation (2020). Masks were worn out of courtesy and care for others more than fear of contagion. Sonia wrote in her diary that, “people at home [in China] wear them when having a common cold.”¹² Indicating how ordinary masks are, she continued: “some of my female friends put on a mask simply when they are not happy with their looks.”¹³ But the normalization of masks was slow to develop in the U.S., and remained a topic of scientific and political debate.

As “stay-at-home” orders swept unevenly across the country in March, some people embraced recommendations for mask use and social distancing; others flouted them. Governmental leaders and public health officials issued confusing and often contradictory information regarding the efficacy and necessity of masks. When venturing outside, some of the diarists noted how many people wore masks, their sense of safety corresponding to the ratio of masked to unmasked faces on the street and in shops. President Donald Trump refused to wear a mask, perhaps realizing his powerlessness as masks became constant reminders of the severity of the COVID crisis. In contrast, New York governor Andrew Cuomo mandated facial coverings in public. Inconsistent messaging from authorities, and a particular ideological brand of American individualism that refuses governmental interference in personal life, made mask wearing a matter of discretion, especially beyond the epicenter. Essential businesses often required them for entry, and occasionally customers resisted, proclaiming their personal freedoms in videos that became viral flashpoints. Masks became symbols of group affiliation: the tribalism of Trump’s America. Intentionally or not, donning a mask meant acknowledging the severity of the COVID crisis, the scientific expertise of public health authorities, and a responsibility to protect one’s community. *Not* wearing a mask became a symbol of disbelief in that scientific expertise and loyalty to a president who consistently downplayed or denied the threat of the coronavirus. Masks became political statements.

In the early days of COVID-19, masks were challenging to procure. When Isabel tried to purchase disposable masks, she encountered inflated prices: a box of 50 masks usually costing \$12.49 at a pharmacy, was sold for \$40 at a supermarket; and, it had to be requested from behind the counter. (She opted to purchase a cotton mask online.) Hospitals stockpiled personal protective equipment (PPE), and required doctors and nurses to reuse normally disposable N-95 masks. Hesitant to force U.S. manufacturing to produce PPE, the federal government arranged a series of flights on privately-owned planes to transport masks and other supplies from China to New York hospitals (HOLLAND 2020). Procuring the means by which to maintain the human/microbe boundary became a central focus for individuals and governments.

As a result of shortages, mask ingenuity proliferated. Just as distilleries adapted their production lines to make hand sanitizer, apparel companies turned to making masks. Crafty volunteers sewed masks for mutual aid networks and hospitals. As I (Juliana) noted in my diary, designs for homemade masks abounded online:

[P]ossible features: pleats, a curved front, pocket for a filter (e.g., cut-up vacuum bag), wire sewn in to go over your nose (...to keep [glasses] from fogging up), elastic, cotton ties, shoelaces...The CDC suggests just folding a piece of fabric in a certain way and using two rubber bands or hair elastics to hold it over your ears (CDC 2020). Cotton is always the recommended material, the tighter the weave, the better.¹⁴

Museums and archives around the world began collecting homemade masks as part of COVID-19 documentation projects (YONG 2020), and planning for future exhibits when such essential artifacts could be moved from daily use to exhibit halls (HESTER 2020).

Ad-hoc facial coverings—like a T-shirt collar pulled up over the nose—also appeared. Isabel traversed the Williamsburg Bridge, passing other walkers, and “saw a lot of creativity in the face masks: disposable ones, cloth ones, handkerchiefs, scarfs, people wearing whatever thing they have...”¹⁵ Vaida wrote, cycling through Brooklyn: “The sea of mouthless faces, covered with all sorts of masks, merged into the background of the invisible tunnel of motion that I was in. Dispens-

able blue, and minimal black masks, repurposed scarfs, and trendy ones with ornaments or floral prints.”¹⁶ Masks started to become details in the backdrop of COVID, that might, in the future, help to date a photograph—obvious reminders of the ever-present viral threat.

Most significant to the diarists was the way in which masks mediated or obstructed interactions with other humans and their environments. Wearing a mask could come with initial feelings of discomfort or frustration, but a sense of mutual obligation often triumphed. Lee wrote:

I honestly despise wearing a face mask outside, and whenever I am far away enough from people I move it to around my neck. It is difficult to breathe...[t]here is no feeling of fresh air, and my vision is also occluded. So the walks outside on a lovely sunny day are now dampened by protective gear...I understand why, the sirens outside my window remind me.¹⁷

Lee wore a mask despite the discomfort out of a sense of responsibility to her community, which, in the time of COVID, could feel both hyper-local and overwhelmingly global. This sensation—stifled breath, muffled voice—mirrored the restrictiveness of “stay-at-home” orders and renegotiation with the viral, intimate, and collective spheres of daily life.

Mask wearing sometimes led to interpersonal tensions around risk tolerance. Sonia, who was used to masks, wore hers even inside. When her roommates asked if they should mimic her precautions, Sonia felt guilty, like she had “imposed some unfair standards onto them.”¹⁸ Masks were just one piece of a more extensive network of objects and practices that individuals and groups had to learn to navigate in order to share space and maintain social relationships, while avoiding viral intimacy. When Isabel and I met in a park in May, we had the double barriers of social distance and masks. Pre-COVID, we would have embraced enthusiastically, sat close, maybe shared food. The lack of normal intimacy and loss of full facial expressiveness made it difficult to remember how to talk together, be together.

Early in the pandemic, masks often felt like a barrier to intimacy, but with the passage of time, they came to be *enablers* of in-person interaction. I left New York in the middle of March to join my

partner in northern Vermont and began delivering meals to elders in the community. In my flowered mask, I struggled to connect with meal recipients: “I’m realizing how much I rely on people being able to see the lower half of my face as I empathize with their stories of chronic fatigue and bones aching in the rain, or smile at their jokes.”¹⁹ But as the long *durée* of COVID-19 sank in, the initial shock of pandemic life was replaced by the need for sustainable social practices, and masks became a symbol of the current version of “normal.” As businesses began to reopen, masks, outdoor locations, sanitizing, and physical distancing allowed for in-person interactions, a welcome alternative to screen-based socializing. In New York City, masks became almost comfortable and could be seen hanging around necks or dangling from ears, always at the ready. This easy wearing mirrored the narrative arc of past epidemics when masks were sometimes worn less meticulously, almost as “amulets” (SONCUL & PARIKKA 2020), demonstrating varying levels of precaution and fear.

At the end of June, Isabel and I met in a park again, this time sitting far enough away to remove our masks and talk freely. In just two months, this accessory became less strange, its navigation less awkward. We felt empowered to use the full set of tools—masks, spatial distance, hygiene practices—at our disposal to create the conditions of our interaction. And the coronavirus became a more familiar member of our multispecies community, one that required strategic boundary management, not all-out barricades against the world beyond our blurry-edged selves (YANCY 2020).

As the US epicenter shifted away from New York, states that had previously resisted aggressive mitigation took up their masks. On July 11th, Trump appeared for the first time in a mask, caving under pressure from his aides as he toured a military medical facility (WISE 2020). On the national scale, though, wearing a mask remains political, and communities and governments go to court over the right to mandate masks (ROMO 2020).

When protests and riots erupted across the country after four Minneapolis police murdered George Floyd, a Black man whose last words, “I can’t breathe” echoed those of Eric Garner, killed by police six years ago, masks appeared bearing

those words, and others: “Black Lives Matter;” “No Justice No Peace.” In crowds, masks gave protesters protection from COVID-19 and a sense of anonymity, mimicking recent pro-democracy demonstrators in Hong Kong who wore black face masks to disguise their identities from security cameras with facial recognition software. The protests against police brutality broke out amidst a public health crisis that disproportionately affected communities of color, with the death rate for Black COVID-19 patients in New York City double that of white patients (CDC 2020). Attention shifted away from the coronavirus toward a national reckoning on racism and violent policing almost overnight. As Vaida wrote, “Corona, the only way you are still visible is the sea of black masks...We wear them to stop the virus, but the masks cannot mute the voices of the unheard.”²⁰

As calls for racial equity and justice implicate individuals, corporations, communities, and governments in the maintenance of racist policies, systems, and beliefs, the blurriness of our “self” and “other” edges is fiercely emphasized and examined on historical, political, and economic (as well as epidemic) scales. The “sociality that exceeds each one of us” (BUTLER AS CITED IN YANCY 2020) stretches backward and forward in time, and traverses species boundaries that both define and defy our bodies and environments. Our physiological safety relies on the carefully drawn lines around our physical bodies, made thicker by the two-meter-rule, as if drawing over the lines with a fatter marker tip. And yet, even despite our efforts, the coronavirus crosses these lines, revealing them to be, as always, opaque, porous. And so, in putting on masks, we try to shore up those boundaries—stuff in a piece of tissue as an extra filter, add a pair of gloves—as if it is our civic duty to maintain that barrier between self, other, and the air in between. But we employ our masks’ materiality—their patterns or graphics, how we handle them, how much we wear them—to demonstrate that this physical boundary does not erase our social connections and affiliations. The challenge, for the diarists and others, became maintaining that barrier, while searching out the non-edges that implicate us in each other’s lives. To embrace, even in a pandemic, as George Yancy pleads, “an ontology of no edges,” and the ethics of mutual care that follows (2020).

Even through the personal tensions or sweaty discomfort of masks, a sense of care and civic duty, of acceptance of scientific expertise, won out for the diarists. Masks demonstrated ethnographic care in the same way as keeping and sharing diaries: proof of our engagement with this moment; awareness of our positionality as privileged enough to go out in public; to observe; to use our judgment and the tools at our disposal to keep ourselves and each other feeling safe (as Lee discusses in the next section); to inhale the contagious world in all its flavor and chatter through a cotton weave, a baby blue gauze. To draw one boundary line while breaking down another: reaching across the abyss of physical distance to share diaries, to blur our edges together in collaborative auto-ethnography.

Pane 3: The Social Contract Calls for Social Distancing: Negotiating Rules of Engagement During a Pandemic

The Pandemic Presents a Paradox

Recent media coverage has highlighted how the US response to COVID-19 indicates a defunct social contract (VIRUS LAYS BARE 2020; WE THE PEOPLE 2020). Considered a cornerstone of liberal democracy, the social contract yields an exchange of individual freedom for security, whereby the government is the arbiter of relations among a collection of people. Critiques of the social contract abound, pointing to its colonial history, its false dichotomy of nature and politics, and its humanist perspective that is myopic in scale and time, effectively perpetuating social inequalities and aggravating ecological calamity. In this way, MICHEL SERRES posited the idea of a “natural contract,” which does not place humans outside of nature or maintain divisions and hierarchies of human and non-human, subject and object, and owner and owned; rather he conceives of dynamic symbiotic relationships within nature (SERRES & MCMARREN 1992; SERRES 2006).²¹ Similarly, TOBIAS REES implores us to rethink the political, and along with it, our separation of the human and nonhuman in light of COVID, which blurs distinctions that derive from a conception of the modern. Placing a fine point on the temporal boundedness of this differentiation and the catastrophic effects

to both the planet and the people within it, he argues that we should shift away from a “politics of difference,” to one of the “microbiocene,” that is, from the microbial outward (REES 2020).

Likewise, it seems especially preposterous, even violent, to discuss the social contract when not only COVID-19, but an enduring, illiberal state of police brutality and a recent conflagration of related protests have irradiated our view of structural inequalities and institutionalized, extant, and lived racism in the United States (and globally). COVID-19 further foregrounds inadequate infrastructural preparedness evident in the 20% decrease of spending over the past three years to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and an insufficient amount of supplies (e.g., personal protective gear, ventilators, testing equipment) (MILMAN 2020). Moreover, endemic structural inequalities indicated by the CDC reveal enduring and fresh manifestations of the biopolitical with disproportionately higher morbidity and mortality for African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos and an increased willingness to expose certain groups under the moniker of “essential worker” or “hero” (FOUCAULT 2003; GIDLA 2020; NEW YORK CITY HEALTH 2020; SCOLES 2020). These deficits have been met with calls for health and financial support by all levels of government. At the national level, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, passed in late March, provided over two trillion dollars in a patchwork of economic stimulus, loans, deferred and adjusted tax payments for individuals, businesses, and states; medical supplies, services, and research; nutrition services; and support for higher education (US CONGRESS, HOUSE 2020); however, concerted efforts toward rapid testing and tracing and unified policy for social distancing have been lacking. With respect to social distancing and mask-wearing the executive branch under Donald Trump has sent mixed messages; therefore, states have had to implement their own policies.

The social contract’s continued deployment in the media, its rather unique application within the US federalist system of government (whereby powers are at times separated or shared by the national and local authorities), and its particular enactment in New York during the spring of 2020 warrants our attention. Therefore, this sec-

tion will examine a specific application of the social contract: social distancing policy promulgated by the New York state government during the height of the first wave of the epidemic. Using policy guidelines and ethnographic evidence from our diaries I identify a paradox: that the social contract, a mechanism devised for living together, was reimagined to keep people apart through social distancing.²² Our interpretations of policy through everyday decisions presented dilemmas about social responsibilities that are remote, invisible, and intangible yet also proximal in terms of social interactions, relations, and obligations. In other words, disunified policy shifted the onus of interpretation onto the individual, whereby the combined individual risk and specter of mass infection required continually confused decision-making regarding personal proxemics. These predicaments instigated both internal conflict and social friction as social distancing decisions were subject to surveillance of self and nearby others.

Social Distancing Recruits Biopower

Social distancing is not a new term but was recruited into our everyday parlance as a decree and a plea. Unlike Germany, India, Israel, Italy, or Spain, uniform country-wide lockdown orders were absent in the United States – a country that encompasses only 4–5% of the global population and in May accounted for almost a third of the deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic (WELNA 2020).²³ Each state issued its own “stay-at-home” measures, and in New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo issued “PAUSE” (Policies Assure Uniform Safety for Everyone). Taking effect on March 22, 2020, this executive order contained a 10-point plan that closed all “non-essential business,” restricted “non-essential gatherings,” and required “social distancing” measures, limiting public exposure and a six-foot (two-meter) space from others when outside the home (NEW YORK STATE, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH 2020). Issued concurrently, “Matilda’s Law,” named for the governor’s mother, created a subset of “vulnerable” individuals subject to additional precautions (EXECUTIVE ORDER 202.19). These public health standards were instituted with the aim of “flattening the curve,” a phrase that represented keeping the

number of cases from exceeding health care resources.

Indeed, these laws imply a reimagined social contract (KESSLER 2020), where the state mediates social relations through the deployment of biopower *viz a viz* social distancing measures.²⁴ A \$1,000 fine for violating the PAUSE order, while not insignificant, paled compared to the mounting death toll during the peak in late March. But it soon became apparent that the collective result of social distancing had helped to gradually reduce the rate of new infections and COVID-related deaths during the first crest in the spring of 2020 in New York (SILVER 2020). Social distancing as both a policy and a practice was widely discussed in the diaries – a mode well suited to document a self-regulatory measure. The following section explores the anxieties, dilemmas, and negotiations stemming from translations of social distancing laws as they were balanced against a sense of ethical obligation. In this respect, three themes surfaced: parlaying shared space, emergent or emergency situations, and planned or strategic engagements.

Dilemmas Derived from Social Distancing

Parlaying shared space: Everyday negotiations of shared space and resettlement

The diary entries indicated that differences in attitudes or behaviors about social distancing could cause conflict or unity, in other words, factions. Typically, partners in intimate relationships would reach consensus on practice, but clearly, as cited below, that was not always true. Rather, consternation suffused many entries. At times, conflict was internalized, as in the case of Sonia, when she wanted to institute more conservative measures. Having family in China, she was aware early of the virus' nature, its gravity, and the implications for containing transmission through social distancing measures. Her diaries expressed conversations with family and friends abroad (in Shanghai, New Zealand, and the UK) regarding the lax practices in New York as it was becoming the next epicenter. Yet, at the same time, she wished to avoid forcing her views onto her roommates or shaming them into adopting her sensibilities. Alternatively, another diarist, Volkan, moved from his apartment and avoided explicit, interperson-

al conflict when his roommates decided to continue to Airbnb an empty room in early March. His concern about viral transmission led him to resettle in the apartment where both Sonia and Isabel lived. Isabel's diaries reflected both internal conflict about her practices inside an apartment and eventually, external strife with an explicit confrontation with her roommates. Her habit of taking long walks with her husband while her roommates mostly remained inside erupted in mid-May when roommates *caught her* not wearing her mask. Isabel writes rather philosophically on the matter, "Common life is being taken by microscopic identities...isolat[ing] humans from other isolated humans, the invisible murderer is also isolating humans from their own houses." Furthermore, she added, "in this new world of fussiness, those who take less precautionary measures are socially doomed."²⁵ The first quote reflects a violation of the interior by an invisible invader. This inversion of micro and macro or inside and outside compels an inner negotiation of practice and outer surveillance of others. One's behaviors directly impact the safety of the entire house, and the movements of members of the household affect the broader health of the public outside. The second quote indicates her own social banishment for what she perceives as less fastidious, yet excessive efforts to avoid spreading the virus. In situations of cohabitation with roommates, reaching consensus proved difficult and resulted in conflict or relocation. In this way, interpretation of social distancing removes the government as referee in the social contract and relegates that role to the individual in micro-interactions that have macro-implications.

Emergent or emergency situations

Anxious ruminations are also evident in diary entries about the extemporaneous, as impromptu circumstances required a departure from one's *regular* practice and less time for deliberation. As a New York native and mature graduate student with social and familial roots in this city, I (Lee) encountered two situations where my wife and I had to negotiate the ethics of social distancing regulations with concern for a neighbor and a friend. In the first instance, a neighbor was intentionally locked out by her husband for "violating the quarantine." His misinterpretation of policy led to her

seeking refuge in our apartment. However, this raised an immediate dilemma for us to interpret social distancing rules. *Do we allow our neighbor inside when there is an order to avoid this or is this an exceptional case?* We chose to allow her entry since she is chronically ill, and we felt it worse to have her stand in the hallway. Again, we decided to bend the rules when a friend, who lives alone, had acute health issues. Our friend's refusal to call for an ambulance out of fear of going to a hospital and contracting COVID seemed to warrant entry into her apartment. However, doubt and guilt ensued as these ad hoc situations ostensibly stretched into rule violation. For example, our own feelings of isolation resulted in lingering at our friend's apartment unmasked. And our sense of hospitality led to our neighbor touching objects in our apartment like a glass of water and my wife's phone. Such events added stress because they required quick assessments of ethical choices, risks, and decisions. These decisions required continual justification in my partnership, with occasional self-rebuke for going beyond the "essential" act of caring. Clearly, these admonitions intended to reassert the practices of social distancing after they were *un/justifiably* violated. Here again, we see the enactment of self-regulation in lieu of clear and consistent directives through a diffuse social distancing policy.

Planned/strategic engagements

In contrast with the urgent situation, the planned event would appear to be a preferable antidote to the social exigencies brought on by COVID's isolation. However, the novel coronavirus has presented shifting facts, policies, and behaviors. Moreover, as demonstrated, translations of social distancing policy are anything but uniform. Here, I use a scenario that Juliana also highlights in her section on masks. In the context of social distancing, it indicates uncertainty even when meetings are planned. The diaries of Juliana and Isabel describe their encounter at Fort Greene Park in Brooklyn. Juliana left Brooklyn for rural Vermont, where she resides with her partner and dog. In mid-May, she made a trip to Massachusetts to visit her partner's family and then returned to New York to pick up the remainder of her belongings and say goodbye to close friends. Her meeting with Isabel and her husband conveyed how

once taken-for-granted social norms had been altered, constraining their interaction. Both diaries liken physical distancing to emotional distancing as a lamentation of what is lost in this hyper-coordinated encounter. Juliana described a reduced ability to "share facial expressions."²⁶ Similarly, Isabel describes only their eyes being seen, this "friendship from a distance, this placement of rules before physical affection, this disheartening moment of negation, this reality of losing the freedom to love."²⁷ Strong emotions expressed in these diaries are balanced against muted demonstrations during their time together. This meeting's importance was intensified by the fact that Isabel, too, had completed her Master's in the same program and hoped to return to Colombia. When they would see each other again was uncertain. Comparable examples of precarity were expressed in each of the nine diaries about fieldwork, additional labor/job-related work, vacations, and visits with relatives and friends. Plans were contingent upon the shape of the pandemic, which could potentially shift in a moment, rendering the virus, the laws, and our interpretations coterminous and part of an unwritten social contract.²⁸

The Social Contract Reimagined Through COVID

Nation-wide infrastructures that included clear and universal regulatory measures were delayed, muddled, uncertain, and contradictory. Therefore, more localized forms of regulation and surveillance accompanied social distancing measures. Around this argument, I close with two interrelated points. The first is on method. As a form of ethnographic material, diaries are befitting here because they clearly illustrate reflections on the management of self and nearby others within a small collective of individuals. They contain a wealth of introspection threaded within narrative events. While there was likely some self-censoring, that is, aligning self-image with some expectational representation, this does not erase their value. Arguably, similar representational challenges are well documented in the pursuit of the ethnographic. Moreover, our diary analysis was augmented with other forms of contact including: cohabitation, in-person meetings, and/

or digital communication (e.g., Zoom meetings, emails, texts).

The second take-away is also trained toward collaboration but casts a wider dispersion. Within the epicenter of the COVID pandemic, as cases and deaths rose to catastrophically high figures within New York during the months of March to May 2020, the porosity of the social contract was undergirded by a marshalling of biopower. This presented a paradox of the social, whereby the social contract was reimagined and called for interpretations of social distancing and negotiated rules of engagement. The diaries illustrated that these subjective interpretations resulted in self and proximal group surveillance; dilemmas and anxieties about decision-making whether everyday, immediate, or planned; heightened inner conflict and group tensions; as well as increased feelings of insecurity. Social distancing policy fused social and individual responsibility, reminding us that our individual fates are tied to the collective and that you and I are mutually bound by a virus. The next section, written by Sonia, incorporates the social but also travels within and beyond it to explore destabilized relationships, interrogated categories, and the forged imaginaries around interspecies boundary maintenance through COVID-related hygiene practices.

Pane 4: Coexisting with COVID: Daily Practices of Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Imagining in a Global Pandemic

When New York State announced its lockdown in March, the world seemed to have become sparse at first: silence replaced roaring commercial planes, springtime flowers bloomed in empty streets. But it only took a moment for the diarists to become aware of the proliferation of a microbial entity, a contagious pathogen called SARS-CoV-2 that now penetrates every aspect of our daily lives. This cognizance was followed by a heightened need to clean and disinfect, practices that were in themselves nothing uncommon or new: since the early 20th century, anthropologists have explained hygiene and cleaning activities amongst the array of social rituals that help draw boundaries between the clean and the unclean, the sacred and the profane, the self and the other (DOUGLAS 1966). However, without physical visibility or scientific exper-

tise to confirm and make sense of the coronavirus' material existence, interspecies boundary-maintenance has taken on a particular urgency during the COVID-19 pandemic. Living with social distancing policies, putting on masks and writing diaries in our apartments, we became auto-ethnographers scribbling our imaginings of the virus and engaging in the practice of cleaning in the hope of pushing the pathogen aside. While our diaries reflect confusion and conflict with other people, animals, and uncertain species, they also open a reflexive space to rethink the boundaries we draw and the intellectual traditions we rely on.

The diarists' awareness of the new coronavirus' presence in physical space was apparent from their earliest diary entries in March. "We made every effort to contain the children, we cleaned their hands with hand sanitizers several times – yet some virus seems to have slipped through,"²⁹ writes Nicolas when one of his daughters had a high fever after a trip to the German Consulate in Manhattan. Although his daughter recovered quickly, he was particularly troubled since his family had fulfilled disinfecting practices that offered promises of keeping the virus away. During the same week, Brooklyn-based Volkan started to feel increasingly insecure at his apartment since his roommate regularly sublet her room. The apartment to him became a polluted space with viruses impossible to ward off: when he moved out, he "armed" himself with hooded sweatshirts, gloves, and masks, and called the items he transferred from the flat "contaminated cargo."³⁰ Using an analogy from the video game world (the site of his research) where a lone character delivers cargo in a post-apocalyptic landscape, Volkan drew eerie similarities between the virtual land of nuclear waste and his apartment saturated with infectious particles. Unlike his game character who travels alone with anti-contamination equipment, Volkan's life is embedded in a social architecture that is intimately associated with the spread of COVID-19, where person-to-person contacts are now abnormal and implicated with danger.

Amongst the diarists, Isabel, Volkan, and I (Sonia) moved to a three-bedroom apartment shared by five people and a cat. Cohabitation during the pandemic exposed our imaginings of COVID-19, which profoundly changed the affective landscape of everyday life. While Volkan and I felt protected

by wearing masks at home and frequently wiped all surfaces, Isabel disagreed and thought that the series of cleaning behaviors were part of a futile attempt to isolate oneself from an omnipresent entity. She felt consumed by the previously mundane act of using the laundromat:

you search in your pocket for the hand sanitizer to clean your hands that were infected when pulling the door of the laundry / you realize that you are infecting the bottle of the hand sanitizer with the hands that were infected when pulling the door of the laundry / you put hand sanitizer in the bottle of the hand sanitizer hoping to disinfect what your infected hands infected...³¹

Without the ability to identify the virus, every object, and surface become materials for imagining contamination, transmission, and thus mesh into an unclean and unsafe environment. Such imagination translates into the constant pressure of cleaning, the impossibility to distinguish between the personal and the public, and the everlasting preoccupation about and anger towards a viral “other.”

The introduction of self-protection measures did not only affect the way we live in our neighborhoods; it also influenced our relationships with the more expansive urban space, which is harder to predict and control, making the invisibility of coronavirus even more troublesome. While the diarists longed for outdoor walks during sunny days, they had mixed feelings about busy streets: walking to Greenpoint, Brooklyn on a summer afternoon, Vaida described a sense of freedom and joy as “the heat had shoved people from the chambers of solitude into this communal feast,”³² but felt the scene was somehow inappropriate. Isabel took pleasure in observing a crowded supermarket until rotten smells in the corner convinced her to leave the shop.³³ Juliana observed the bustle of New York City that she missed but also became aware of a restaurant that “looked dirty in a way I’m not used to car[ing] about.”³⁴ By having second thoughts when seeing scenes they would typically take for granted, the diarists started to reorganize things in public space from safe to unsafe, from clean to dirty. The boundaries between self and others became ambiguous and ambivalent as diarists tried to situate themselves in the urban

environment that suddenly seemed both familiar and strange.

In addition to living with other humans, COVID-19 also made the diarists rethink their connections with non-humans, including animals, plants and the wider biosphere. The zoonotic nature of COVID-19 (SUN *et al.* 2020) has rendered the pandemic as a vehicle for critiquing humans’ violence towards the rest of the earth. Voices condemning human disruption in animal life intensified as mammals were reported to be diagnosed with COVID-19, ranging from tigers at the Bronx Zoo to pets in New York apartments (GORMAN 2020). By affixing mortal symptoms to humans but not to other animals, COVID-19 is increasingly imagined as a representation of the retaliative “nature”: observing dramatic weather changes from her rural house in Vermont, Juliana was compelled to think “nature tried to get us with the big...but now she’ll get us with the small.”³⁵ The image of nature “cleansing” human influence from the Earth is one of the fantasies of COVID-19 shared by the mass media (CUNNINGHAM 2020), but instead of imagining doomed humanity, Juliana was inspired to rethink her relationship with her community and natural surroundings. As the quarantine made Juliana return to Vermont from the bustling city of New York, her closeness to local communities and observations of striving wildlife and vegetation reminded her of possibilities and losses in her life. Contemplating between her alone time at home and virtual gatherings with friends, Juliana carved a space to develop new visions of how people could get closer physically and how societies could operate locally.

In contrast with Juliana’s optimistic imaginations about a “COVID cultural shift,” Isabel pointed to the potential for the pandemic to induce further environmental degradations. Aware of the sheer volume of disposable masks, bags, and gloves in trash cans and reading quantitative reports on disposable items from the internet, Isabel expressed concerns for the intensified burden of recycling, which in the foreseeable future is bound to impact the biosphere negatively.³⁶ The frequent use of disposable goods and the social ritual of cleaning replaced more than the long mask-free outdoor walks that Isabel longed for. For her, the equation of disposable goods with safety and sanitation also meant she could no longer take

long treks to farmers' markets for produce free of plastic packaging and to glass bottle recycling centers. To those like Isabel, who were on their way to adopting more sustainable consumption habits, the necessity of using disposable items cut off possibilities for connecting more intimately with or maintaining a more protective distance from, the biosphere. In imagining the earth degenerated irreversibly amidst invasive human activities and carbon emission, temporary revivals of wildlife in urban streets during the pandemic offered little consolation.

Isabel's speculation of a post-pandemic biosphere was cut off by a sudden invasion of ants into her Brooklyn apartment room. Although two distinct biological species, insects and pathogens are both minuscule, irritating, killable, yet impossible to eliminate. In the COVID-19 pandemic, the co-occurrence of virus and insects might have intensified the conflicts already percolating. With the hope of inflicting minimum violence, Isabel and her partner Jose decided to smoke the insects out so the animals would leave the apartment quietly.³⁷ Against their wishes, the colony migrated to Volkan's room. While Isabel and Jose listened to the sound of ants being sucked into the vacuum cleaner, Volkan thought eliminating the ants was his responsibility, since he assumed their entrance to be the result of leaving a milkshake in his room, a behavior he despised but allowed under the circumstances of self-quarantine.³⁸ In this case, the double guilt of indulgent life habits and causing animal death worked themselves out through hesitant choices and heightened tensions during the pandemic, an event that would have remained unclear if not recorded by the introspective diaries. A case like this later opened room for reflection: Isabel reconsidered her adamant decision to kill a cockroach, questioning why she is afraid of roaches but not of ants or pathogens causing COVID-19. On what basis do we rank the degree of danger and repulsiveness of other species? Does the term "interspecies connection" mask the specificity of which species we are willing to be associated with? These moments provide rich intellectual materials to reflect on, ranging from conceptualizing interspecies connection to calling for adopting pet insects to foster multispecies empathy (KIRKSEY 2020). However, for the diarists living in the immediacy of contact with an

alien species, they had little choice but to react antagonistically, which inevitably added collateral damage to the diarists' roommate relationships, exacerbating the already too acutely felt disparities between ways of living with other species.

The pandemic introduced SARS-CoV-2 as a microbial entity that people had no choice but to engage with and include in their network of social interactions. Such entry exposes an array of interconnections between people, animals, and the rest of the world. By encountering them, the diarists across the US find themselves saturated with diverse affective states, questions, and imaginations. Amidst these experiences, however, the sense of living in a sparse world persisted. Vaida embraced the solitude of walking in the breeze of the empty streets, yet she felt that the loneliness of New York City had intensified. Juliana's immersion in her Vermont local community was met with a sense of loss when she revisited once familiar places in New York. Sonia, Volkan, Isabel, and Lee's frequent interactions with their roommates and neighbors seemed to create more silence and confusion than solidified friendships. In the sea of multispecies interconnectedness and coexistence, they seemed somehow alone in their practices of boundary maintenance.

Perhaps the question is not so much about drawing boundaries after all. For the shared sense of loneliness is as much a failure to connect as it is an opening for reconceptualization, an acute reminder of the insufficiency of our current assumptions in coping with challenges of the pandemic. REES (2020) and HAYLES (2020) have both explained how bacteria and viruses constitute the very core of human evolution, pointing at a sense of inseparability that calls for rethinking interspecies relationships. Anthropologist of immunology A. DAVID NAPIER pointed out as early as the 1980s that the immune system is as much about "defending us from the 'other'" (2020) as it is about assimilating differences through symbiosis. In this sense, the failures of boundary maintenance in our diaries become ethnographic moments to question these boundaries' legitimacy. By writing and sharing diaries, the direct exposures to each other's interiority at a time when physical contact was suspended opened a rare opportunity for "we" anthropologists to put aside the trope of the solitary ethnographer, and instead to think

about how to engender conversations and produce knowledge by breathing through the same ethnographic materials and writing ourselves out.

Conclusion

With rampant social inequality and knowledge of the coronavirus far from complete, the nine diaries we draw from move in and out from a particular space and time – New York during the first crest of the COVID-19 pandemic—and extend throughout the United States. This small glimpse might be viewed in specific respects as a microcosm of the imbricated lives we lead. Contrary to Malinowski's famous diary in which he encapsulates bold moral statements inside his private journals to ease his personal tension from long-term seclusion in a strange world, our shared logs brought the ethnographers closer to each other. With the desire for collaboration in mind, the intellectual interiority of the diaries became social material for ethnographic scrutiny and collaborative writing. The diaries also forged connections, provided catharsis through a series of losses, and allowed us to document changes in a suddenly uncertain temporality. The overlap of experiences expressed in the diaries provided a sense of the material, affective, aesthetic interconnectedness of things, the transformative nature of interpretation, and the durability of the ethnographic toolkit adapted to an emergent event.

Classical principles of ethnographic practice simultaneously require the ethnographer to immerse themselves in public life and to acquire intellectual privacy: the immersion in one's ethnographic environment, the meticulous documenting of an ethnographic subject, followed by the detachment from them through retrospective writing (GEERTZ 1973; INGOLD 2014; MALINOWSKI 2007). Keeping diaries during the pandemic initiated an occasion to rethink this model, and writing this text extended and transformed our collaborative process further. Writing ourselves out was extended from a cathartic escape toward a decentering of the "I." Here, we attempted to go beyond our interiors and give shape to global phenomena by representing shifting perspectives, suggesting diverse analyses, and offering an alternative to the solitary scholarship of the stereotypical anthropologist.

Each "pane" separately and together provides a window for examining multiple social realities. In effect, we were pressed to consider and question commonsensical assumptions in public conversations. And in doing so, we realized paradoxes such as the simultaneous desire and failure to cultivate philosophical insights in isolation; the separation of pathogens and connection with people through the collective practice of mask-wearing; the clash of social and individual values in the making of social distancing policies; and the necessity and impossibility of maintaining boundaries from an invisible species. Amongst the emergent literature on the COVID-19 pandemic, there are more and more voices calling for recognizing the inseparability between different individuals, social groups, and biological species. Rather than pressing harder on theories and practices of distancing and separation, this literature suggests that the pandemic has allowed for reconsiderations on the existing boundaries. These claims are not new, but the pandemic provides rich empirical materials to act upon. Our writing is one of those attempts to ethnographically recognize, reflect upon, and rethink individual, social, interspecies boundaries and relationships in the context of a global pandemic, to work towards an epistemological and ontological account and practice of collaboration.

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Notes

- 1 There's a rich literature on solitary scholarship versus collaboration. For example, GOTTLIEB (1995: 21-26) argues that anthropology is an inherently collaborative discipline and illustrated much more collaboration among colleagues, partners, etc. than understood.
- 2 Nicolas 03/15/2020.
- 3 Leslie is not one of the diarists. Her name was changed in the diary for her anonymity.
- 4 Lee 04/30/2020.
- 5 Juliana 04/11/2020, quoting T.S. ELIOT's "The Wasteland" (1922).
- 6 Juliana 03/30/2020.
- 7 Sonia 04/27/2020.
- 8 Sonia 05/01/2020.
- 9 Dana 03/31/2020.
- 10 Cedric 04/17/2020.
- 11 Nicolas 03/20/2020.
- 12 Sonia 03/29/2020.
- 13 Sonia 03/29/2020.
- 14 Juliana 04/06/2020.
- 15 Isabel 04/19/2020.
- 16 Vaida 05/17/2020.
- 17 Lee 04/06/2020.
- 18 Sonia 03/29/2020.
- 19 Juliana 04/27/2020.
- 20 Vaida 06/01/2020.
- 21 In an interview with BRUNO LATOUR, SERRES expands upon the idea of collectivities, formed of fluid relationship as a "will toward synthesis," which accounts for the intentional and unintentional ties that join and unjoin (1995). LATOUR (2014) later writes about the unattainability of a contract itself because it is lateral and contingent upon agents not actors, imbuing a teleology and fixed subject/object relationship. He promotes a cohesive view of science, nature, and politics engendered in political ecology, which aims to reimagine the political and to examine it in the same critical lens as science (2004).
- 22 Critique of this term is rooted in the conviction that physical or "spatial" distance is not social distance. My argument does not conflict with the charge that social distancing is a misnomer, but rather reinforces the ill effects of an unclear policy, in effect social alienation. Whether the charge is that it is an ambiguous term, ignored because governments do not engender a rich sense of social responsibility (PRESTERUDSTUEN 2020), or that there are deleterious effects on mental health (DAS GUPTA & WONG 2020; EATON 2020).
- 23 Sweden's "Nordic individualism" has relied upon "lagrom," meaning "just right," embedded within a social compact that embraces the idea that people will act with a sense of public responsibility. The results have been relatively poorer than nearby nations that took a more centralized approach to managing the pandemic (LEBANO 2020).
- 24 FOUCAULT defines biopower as the mechanism of the state (institutions, apparatuses, techniques, discourses) to enact control through a form of self-discipline (1978).
- 25 Isabel 04/13/2020.

- 26 Juliana 05/17/2020.
- 27 Isabel 05/17/2020.
- 28 MICHEL SERRES asserts that the old social contract is both "unspoken and unwritten" (2006).
- 29 Nicolas 03/23/2020.
- 30 Volkan "My Name is No Longer Sam".
- 31 Isabel 03/28/2020.
- 32 Vaida 05/17/2020.
- 33 Isabel 04/19/2020.
- 34 Juliana 05/17/2020.
- 35 Juliana 03/21/2020.
- 36 Isabel 04/28/2020.
- 37 Isabel 05/27/2020.
- 38 Volkan "On Vincent and Indulgence"; Sonia 05/23/2020.

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APPENDIX: Excerpts from Diaries

The following excerpts were chosen for several reasons: because of their reference in the corresponding text, because they spoke to us personally and to the historical moment, and in order to preserve, when possible, narrative arcs that developed within the diaries. These excerpts are unedited to maintain the rawness of the diary form, save for the few places where a date was clarified to help in referencing. Some of the diaries are accompanied by biographical intros, which we've included at the beginnings of excerpts. Full versions of the diaries are available at boasblogs.org.

“So, everything now is a threat: The door handle, the stairs, the walls, the floor, the shoes...”

ISABEL ARCINIEGAS

Yendo de la cama al living / Going from bed to the living room references a Charly García's song that one of my contacts on Facebook declared as her soundtrack for the quarantine; an idea that I shamelessly plagiarized. Maybe the difference is that I am not even going from bed to the living room. I am a Colombian Anthropology student locked down with my husband in a NYC apartment that we share with four human roommates and one non-human roommate. The borders of my country are closed since the second week of March, and the always reassuring thought of going back home if something weird happens in the country where we were living at the moment is not an option anymore.

That thought is not nostalgic, though. We used to spend our leisure time in NYC on trips way longer than going from bed to the living room. Our weekly urban walks used to last at least 8 hours; we have been devouring the streets of this city by walking endless miles before all of this happened. Now, we spend 24/7 in our tiny room going from bed to our tiny desk, and then to bed again, and then to the tiny desk again, except when trips to the toilet or the kitchen are urgently required. But maybe I am exaggerating, occasionally we do one of our bestial walks to get even on the absurd trips that don't even reach the living room.

Please: My chaotic and infrequent diary is not a reliable source of anything!

March 28, 2020

Loading a washing machine in the laundry

How was the procedure?

You enter the laundry by pulling the door / you search in your pocket for the hand sanitizer to clean your hands that were *infected* when pulling the door of the laundry / you realize that you are *infecting* the bottle of the hand sanitizer with the hands that were *infected* when pulling the door of the laundry / you put hand sanitizer in the bottle of the hand sanitizer hoping to disinfect what your *infected* hands *infected* / you give yourself peace with that thought.

You hesitate to open the door of the washing machine, you didn't bring disposable gloves, you don't have any disposable gloves anyways / you don't want to waste a disposable disinfecting wipe only cleaning the door of the washing machine / you open the door of the washing machine with a right bare hand / you twist your body into a strange position to search for the hand sanitizer with the left hand to clean the right hand that was de-sanitized after opening the door of the washing ma-

chine / you give yourself peace thinking that at least you are not *infecting* the pocket in which the hand sanitizer is / your thought immediately goes away when remembering that you searched in the same pocket for the hand sanitizer with the hand that was *infected* after pulling the door of the laundry, but at least you think it would be the same if you had done that with disposable gloves, you would have needed to search in your pocket with *infected* disposable gloves anyways / Or maybe you wouldn't have needed hand sanitizer at all / you cannot give yourself peace to that thought.

[...]

April 4th, 2020

Six-foot away conversations

We went out for a walk, my husband and I. Our initial destination was Prospect Park, so we started walking towards the east, and gradually descending towards the south. Near home, people on the street seem to take the six-foot distance very seriously when a stranger was approaching. If two persons (or couples) were walking on the same sidewalk but opposite directions, it was common that one of them crossed the street to change sidewalks. Before being quarantined, I remember to feel judged if I changed sidewalks when another pedestrian was approaching me. In this case, it seems to me that it was a practice that we all understand and accept.

Home Depot was the first obstacle, the street where we were walking ended there. My husband suggested crossing it through the parking lot. I preferred to surround it, but I followed his suggestion. Immediately I felt sick. It was full of cars and people going in and outside. Almost all with masks and gloves (we have not worn masks and gloves once yet, when will we start using them?) I feel sick, I repeat to my husband, a terrible idea to walk through the parking lot.

Finally the gate, and instantly, I feel better! Is paranoia what makes me feel sick? We keep walking, we find the Pratt Institute. There are a lot of people here, I tell José, I feel sick again. The plan to go to Prospect Park seems distant, so let's go to Fort Green Park instead, he suggests. I accept, but I propose (again) that we should walk down through a more desolated street. My suggestion doesn't work as planned—as we get closer to downtown, we encounter more and more people. There are many with cloth bags, we presume that they went out for food. Others walk with their dogs. Many have exercise clothes, we presume they are going to the same park as us.

"KEEP THIS FAR APART" says a red giant sign, with an arrow that was, probably, 6 feet long. That is how the park welcomed us. I cannot say it was crowded, but there were many people exercising. Dogs were hotbeds of attention or excuses for conversations happening at six-foot distance between interlocutors.

We take a seat at the park over the trunk of a cut tree, and we start eating hamburgers. A squirrel

is crazy about us, she tries to approach us many times. A rare view, squirrels are too nervous to get too close to humans. We chatted about the impossibility of being immune. Or that's what I want to believe. Is one safer buying ingredients at home through the internet? Still, there are humans behind packing, they may not have masks. They may sneeze or talk over the ingredients they are preparing. Droplets can fall over the food. Or is it impossible to get contaminated if you eat food that it's contaminated?

More than one hour passed, and the park was crowded. It looked like a normal spring Saturday afternoon. No, indeed, it seemed to be more people in the park than on a normal spring afternoon. Lots of dogs, people playing Frisby, others chatting. However, every "party" tried to have the suggested six-feet apart. I tell José that the next time we go out, we better do it earlier.

On the way back home, we pass by a bakery that looks pretty fancy on Clinton Hill. The baker wasn't wearing gloves or a face mask. Again, we encounter strangers talking six-feet away.

April 13th, 2020

House Taken Over

First, it was the face and its holes. To cover the possible entrances of the invisible murderers to the roads of your lungs (lucky those with glasses). Soon, it was the infallible plastic; its polymers supposed to isolate fearful fingers from the microscopic murderers. But the infallible plastic covering fingers was soon discovered as a trick. Plastic fingers can still carry invisible soldiers after touching anything in which the invisible murder is supposed to live. So, everything now is a threat: The door handle, the stairs, the walls, the floor, the shoes, handrails, packages, chairs, the table, cutlery, plates, the toilet (as if the microscopic murderers were to be transmitted through holes other than those in your face). Maybe the only ally is the magic bottle wherein resides the unique hero who will make your wish of security comes true -not this time a genius of the lamp -not this time a sophisticated cleaning product made of fragrant stuff -not this time liters and liters of sodium hypochlorite -but an ordinary liquid called soap. Common life is being taken by microscopic identities, as if more than isolate humans from other isolated

humans, the invisible murderer is also isolating humans from their own houses.

April 19th, 2020
The resignation

I woke up convinced that we finally need to have face masks. We only have a couple that one of our roommates gave us, but that's it. Since the beginning of all of this we never rushed out to buy some, neither plastic gloves. Without touching the face, avoiding being close to strangers, and washing hands as soon as we get home was enough for me. But not for our roommates though, some of them are wearing masks every day inside the house, and I feel it's because of our different incompatible habits scrambled in one single space. That explicit act of discomfort has made me wonder if I am a monstrous walking vector of viruses without a face, or just a careless person, or a monstrous careless person and thus a potential host of viruses using the same kitchen and toilet for their despair. I also don't want to get sick, but at the same time I don't want to get carried away by the collective whirlpool of paranoia. Anyways, some days I am more concerned about keeping my husband quiet with his piercing non-politically-correct jokes that can exacerbate the already tensioned ambiance in the house. But today I came to finally accept that this thing is going to last long, and even if we resume in-person classes, face masks are not going to disappear and I feel uncomfortable with the thought of additional judging eyes looking at me. In this new world of fussiness, those who take less precautionary measures are socially doomed...

Somehow Jose also resigned to the same idea (he has been even more reluctant than me to all of these measures), and he suggested me to go to Chinese supermarkets, because probably there, where nobody wants to go, there are still some face masks yearning to be bought. We have been visiting pharmacies lately to buy some, but we haven't had luck, they are always sold out (the funny thing is that EVERYONE on the street is wearing disposable masks. How the hell did you get to have one anyways?!). Amazon is not reassuring either, packages can take up to six weeks to arrive. So, José's suggestion made a LOT of sense to me, and

we decided to embark in our long walking trip in search of Chinese supermarkets.

[...]

We have crossed the Williamsburg Bridge thousands of times riding the Subway, but by foot only once. That day was a very cold December afternoon just after finals, and I remember seeing groups of Jewish girls walking through the pedestrian path in animated talks. This time, it's a sunny and warm morning during the lockdown in New York, and the bridge is CROWDED OMG. Runners wearing or not wearing masks, families with masks, individuals with masks walking in a hurry, just like us as we decided to do the same after seeing that keeping six feet apart in that narrow pedestrian path was impossible. At least, I saw a lot of creativity in the face masks: disposable ones, cloth ones, handkerchiefs, scarfs, people wearing whatever thing they have to cover the nose and the mouth. Is walking the new sport? I can't tell because I have never been on this bridge on a warm day, but the strident subway riding besides us looked safer with its cars almost empty of commuters...

We entered a pharmacy to check on the prices before going into Chinese supermarkets. Of course, face masks were sold out, but we took note of the price tag that was still hanging there: one box of 50 masks costs \$12.49. Good idea to have been there before; when we stepped into the first supermarket the girl at the counter reassured me twice that a box of 50 masks cost \$40. What? Face masks were safekeeping behind a counter next to other pharmacy stuff, they were not at the reach of the hands. Just in case that the girl at the counter gave me an inflated price because of my non-Asian face, I started walking around the supermarket trying to spot the price tag with my own eyes. Bad idea. There was no queue to enter the place, there was no restriction of social distancing, the place was a free entry for anyone wanting to buy stuff. And it was CROWDED. I kind of started finding interesting how their irreverence was keeping their

business alive until I smelt something rotten and left the place not before confirming that the box really cost \$40. Reluctant to pay more than the triple because of the hypochondriasis of the world, we went to a different supermarket with a queue outside. Same face masks behind the counter, same \$40 dollars for a box of 50 units, a man buying one of those boxes and I don't know how many little bottles of hand sanitizer. And my naive commentary that nobody would buy face masks at that price got stuck in my throat...

[...]

April 24th, 2020
A stagnant lagoon

Today I really realized that the quarantine is affecting my academic performance. My way of concentrating and engaging with an idea (an idea of an author or a personal idea) consisted of working little by little every day. I used the breaks between days to reflect on what I am doing, but the breaks necessarily implied an experience in a different physical place. Movement makes me think. Changing environments makes me think. I cannot concentrate without that period of reflection that comes while moving. It's like my thoughts don't go anywhere; I feel they are halted. Movement brings me the necessary maturation time for my thoughts to grow up in something. I spend all my days of the quarantine sitting on my minuscule desk at my room, or over the futon beside my husband and with my back pain hanging all over me. Being trapped in this room, my mind goes so easily to any thought; as if my only way of moving is through my mind going from one thought to the other frenetically. I often remember the figure of the artist working with rigorously discipline in her studio every day, without the need for changing spaces. And I genuinely feel envy of that image. I want to find that. I want to find that sanctuary of concentration. Maybe when we will be living in our own apartment, I keep telling myself everyday...

[...]

April 28th, 2020

The end of the world is not disposable

I saw a photo on Facebook this week of tons and tons of face masks and gloves thrown up over what looked like a beach. At home, things are not different, in the garbage I have seen many times pairs of gloves that probably were worn only once (and only at home). Before all of this happened, I was dreaming of the day when Jose and I could make our own decisions about lifestyle at home, and how it included the elimination of single-use products as far as possible. No paper napkins, no disposable disinfection wipes, no nothing (except, perhaps, for toilet paper?). Back home in Colombia, things have always been impeccably clean with just bleach and an old cloth, and I would like to maintain things like that. Of course, I know that everything you buy comes wrapped in single-use plastic, I know that the medical / food / whatever industry requires single-use products to avoid bacteria and protect the quality of the products, I know that it's inescapable and necessary (I know...) But, anyway, the thought animated me, I was thinking of switching our shopping place, and instead always buying from Farmer's markets with our own bags/boxes and our little shopping car to bring products home (as long as our budget allows it, of course). I was even thinking of researching for a shop where you could take your own glass bottle and rebottle, let's say, milk or apple juice (bad luck for recyclers from my side, I'm sorry). I was also thinking of having our own compost garbage, or participating in communal gardens, and so on and so on...

[...]

May 17th, 2020

The time is over

(Written in retrospective)

And of course, it exploded. I knew it, I knew from before, and I was sure that Jose and I would be the closest to the blast, of course. That afternoon when we arrived at the apartment and found the AC turned on, that afternoon I realized that our time in this apartment is over; that afternoon felt like a bad augury, and my feelings were right. The ones taking less apparent radical precautions are

the doomed, hence we are. Today, my best friend in NY texted me when I was doing laundry in the morning if I wanted to see her for a few minutes today, just to say hello and give us some precious blood tree also known as Maple Syrup. Immediately I accepted and went home and proposed the plans to Jose, and also it occurred to me that we can ask her if she can take care of our Happy Plant. Since we were thinking of leaving the country as soon as borders are open, we needed to find someone to take care of our beloved plant. Surely if we left the plant at this apartment it will die of sadness and darkness, as the other plants that have inhabited this place have died, as I feel I have been dying slowly over all these months here.

So, we took the plant and went to the living room to do all the bureaucratic stuff of getting ready to submerge in the infected sea outside, but we had the extremely bad luck that everyone was there at the moment. Of course, to carry a plant with us was not common, so we were interrogated, and I had the extremely naïve idea to tell the truth: to say that we were going to meet my best friend. And then we left, not knowing anything that was going to wait for us in our arrival.

So we left, and of course freedom, the most beautiful freedom of the world to let your feet go endless more meters than from the bed to the living room. We walked very fast for 40 minutes to be punctual with our appointment, although Jose started feeling breathless because of our rapid pace while wearing a facemask. We arrived at Fort Greene park and found a hand weaving at us from a distance. It was her! I went rapidly while she stepped in the grass with hands in front of her, like in a warning sign. I understood what she meant, so I asked how we should do this, and she told me that it was better to be apart. I could see her beautiful blue eyes over her flower face mask looking at me, and my own dark eyes became filled with water with that sight, this friendship from a distance, this placement of rules before physical affection, this disheartening moment of negation, this reality of losing the freedom to love. I thought that maybe I will have a similar feeling the first time I see my mom.

And then, we were like in a trade, and it felt kind of funny. She was sitting with her bike behind, and we were in front of her with some meters of empty space between us. The plant and the

maple syrup were placed in that empty space, like offerings: A jar of bronze tree blood for a plant that was “rescued” after being abandoned at the door of our building. Not a bad deal. The strangeness of the meeting melted a little bit when our own friendship made our mouths talk about things that interested both parts. It felt kind of bizarre and sad, but in the end the conversations slowly erased the absurdity of the situation. Now that I write about it, I regret for not trying to enjoy the uniqueness of the situation that surely, I will not live again in my lifetime. But I suppose the impossibility of not being able to hug her was still hurting. We walked together to the entrance of her house and put the plant on the floor while saying goodbye. I asked Jose how he imagines the plant should be feeling right now, and he suggested that maybe it remembered the time when another person left it abandoned at the entrance of our building. I hope this time the plant will be feeling even more spoiled in my friend’s hands than in ours.

And then, we were back at home and the bomb exploded. One of the roommates sat us in the kitchen and basically accused us of attempted homicide of the entire house. First, that she has seen us, through the window of her room, entering the building without facemasks, thus assuming that we never wear facemasks outside. Second, that going to see my friend was not “essential”, and subsequently prohibiting us from going outside unless for something that *she* considers essential; while putting herself as an example of how she responsibly rejected a similar invitation from a friend. In the meantime of the accusations, Jose was reading some letters instead of paying attention to her (brutally and unwise, I know), and something exploded in her and accused us of not being reciprocal with the sacrifices that they have made for us(?)

The face mask box suspiciously pasted at the back of the door of the apartment became the evident and rude and explicit suggestion that Jose and I thought it was the first time we saw it. Just as in life, in this apartment the things that are not shown explicitly are taken as inexistent, and I remember the Zettel that I wrote for Nick about this. If something is not communicated broadly, if it’s not being marketed, if something is not shown off explicitly, it doesn’t exist. It’s like a shout in the middle of the desert, if “nobody” (nobody that can

count as “essential”) heard it, it never existed. And it seems to me that with the forms of care it’s basically the same thing. If you care, you must show off. In this new reality, the signs of care should be explicit and blunt: if you don’t show up that you care, you are not caring, you are irresponsible, you care a shit about the people dying every day, you are a murderer. What’s the limit between really caring for oneself and others and the performance of showing off that you are taking care? The thought made me feel repulsive.

Of course we have face masks, of course we wear them outside, of course we might take them off before going inside the building to not agitate more our lungs while climbing the stairs, of course we always bring our hand sanitizer, of course we took precautions with our friend, of course we were all wearing facemasks, of course we were sitting apart, of course we didn’t touch... We ended up explaining ourselves. I even justified that we needed to go to the hospital the next day for Jose’s follow up appointment, and she rolled her eyes. In that moment, I felt that my pride was nonexistent, I remember feeling inexistent. And my feelings were corresponded by her: although we assured her that we always take precautions, it was as if one word entered through one of her ears and went outside through the other unprocessed. She didn’t want to listen to us, nothing else seemed to enter into her narrow and fixed idea of what is essential. When we proposed that going to buy groceries might put people more in “risk” at the moment of the interaction with the cashier than in the way the encounter with our friend unfolded, she just responded with a personal example of how prudent she is by always checking beforehand on Google at what times the supermarkets are emptier. When I told her that I need walks because I am becoming crazy (for being trapped in this horrible apartment) the answer was, again, a moral example of how she didn’t prohibit us before from going outside for a walk because she thought that “it *might* also be an essential thing” (and no, she hasn’t been outside during these months to catch some sunlight). Going outside to see a friend (from a distance, she knew it, she didn’t listen) is “not essential”, that our encounter might end up killing her husband who is taking strong immune suppressors—a husband that was sitting at the back of the living room, looking at his

computer as if doing another thing (careless, as always) but of course, vulgarly listening.

While I was listening to her, lecturing us on what things she considered as essential and how we must obey to her criteria from now on, I remember thinking how insignificant is her knowledge of our private life, how she literally knows absolutely nothing of what might be “essential” for us, and how infinite is my desire to keep her as far as possible from knowing anything about us. That was the end of the conversation for me, and I said to her “I learned the lesson” and retired to our room. We opened the computer and bought two tickets for June 7th, with the uncertainty of not knowing if Colombian borders will be open to that date. When we extended our futon and turned off the light, Jose was laughing alone, and if he couldn’t contain himself, and the sight of seeing him in the dimly lit that anxious and emotionally uncontrolled killed me. I understand her fear, but I don’t share it, as I haven’t shared the extreme horror for the virus from the beginning of all of this; and especially as I haven’t been sympathetic to a single idea that comes from her mind since months ago. Our time in this apartment is finally over. And to be honest, it feels like a kind of relief.

[...]

May 22th, 2020
Escape routes

We have to leave the apartment to see our new house for the next three months, and my hands are sweating. My heart beats a little bit faster than normal. I feel I have a fog in my head, a fog of concern. Should I tell everyone where we are going? / *But why should WE do that if they don’t tell us where they are going every time they go outside?* / Should we wait for a moment when no one is in the living room or in the kitchen? / *But surely, we will have the bad luck that someone will go out from their rooms and see us fleeing, like fugitives* / Maybe that’s how I feel now, like a fugitive for going outside. But since we are now the fugitives, the bad moralists, literally the monsters without face masks, we should embrace our new disguise with as much pride as possible. What if we go outside through the fire stairs? We can get off through our window, climb up the fire stairs, arrive at the rooftop, open

the door and enter the building through the last floor. Pray that anyone in the apartment will go outside at the same exact moment when we cross in front of our door on our way downstairs to the street door. Just to pray again that anyone will be looking through the window at the same exact moment when we are stepping outside. We can do the same prayers when we come back, going upstairs to the rooftop, then using the fire stairs, and then entering our room without anyone noticing that we flee this apartment for a few hours ;)

[...]

May 27th, 2020
House Taken Over–Part II

I screamed like crazy last night when I saw a giant cockroach slipping under the toilet's door when I was brushing my teeth. We have been besieged by insects this week. On Thursday, I opened my eyes and my blurred vision saw an army of dark points moving around the window like crazy. Ants! Lots of ants! I have been feeling guilty with two of my roommates for not telling them the truth that we had ants in our room. We felt that if we opened the mouth the mandatory protocol would be to kill them, so we preferred to stay silent and take care of the issue by ourselves. We burned incense, and Jose spent the whole morning harassing them with the smoke so they don't find this place pleasurable anymore to explore. Apparently, the trick worked, but they were stubborn and the next day they tried to reach the dirty kitchen through one of my roommates' window. I tried to ignore the sound of the vacuum cleaner suckling them into the black hole of dust, and Jose reassured me that maybe ants don't get killed by the vacuum. Maybe they just get caught in the tornado with their bodies in one single piece, and once the collected dust is put into the garbage, they might be reborn from the dirtiness, just as the Phoenix (?). I have been remembering those strange stories of wild animals having cool walks in the urban. Maybe is it that insects are feeling that humans are less

active, so they are tempted to explore other territories? Or as one of my roommates jokingly said, maybe they want to take revenge on those causing the Anthropocene. Or maybe it is because it's getting warmer? Or as Jose suggested, maybe they don't agree with what is written in Insectopedia.

My attitude with the cockroach was completely the opposite, and Jose took the dirty job of killing it. Hypocrite my attitude with insects, I know. When I was recovering its corpse to flush it into the disgusting sewage of New York, I couldn't understand why I am so uncontrolled afraid of cockroaches, but not that afraid of the virus. Is it because I can't see the virus? Is it because all my extended family (and I must say, my family is HUGE) are all healthy? What I want to say is that, fortunately, no one that I care about has been profoundly affected by the virus. I might know one or two people that might have been sick of the virus (oh, and maybe myself, I have to write about it!). But I haven't been in "close" contact with the tragedy of the virus, despite living in what is considered now the capital of Covid. Some weeks ago, I read a Facebook post of someone who lives in NY assuring, with an infinite concern, that the city is all day invaded by the sound of ambulances carrying people dying of Covid to the hospitals. But New York has ALWAYS been invaded by the sound of the ambulances, no? It is as if this person is assuming that people are only dying of Covid. As Jose says: After the virus, there are no other sickness anymore.

I remember now lots and lots (and I'm not exaggerating) of messages that I received during April of people writing to me asking if I was ok. My message was always the same: we spend the whole day at home, we don't see the tragedy, I don't know anything. I can have a look at the numbers, but the horror is not personally touching me. Maybe I'm not that afraid of what I haven't personally witnessed... Would I have a different attitude if this thing would personally affect me?

[...]

. . .

“I couldn’t help but think: nature tried to get us with the big—the hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, fires—but now she’ll get us with the small.”

JULIANA BEECHER

I’m a student in the MA program in anthropology at The New School for Social Research in NYC, where I’m focusing most of my work on environmental pollution, seed saving, more-than-human worlds, speculative design, oral history...Before moving to New York for grad school, I lived with my partner, Josh, in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, and I returned there, to be with him and our dog, Topper, when the pandemic ramped up in the US. I work in the theater industry as a freelance production manager, and have a background in food and agriculture. I love rural living and time in the wilderness, but also love the human bustle of the city, and experience existential turmoil when people ask me, “yes, but which one do you like more?”

Friday, 3/13/20
Brooklyn, NY

Coronavirus.

I’m sitting in my attic room, trying to read a novel for class (which will be online today and every Friday, until further notice), and listening to my roommate pace the living room below, talking on the phone. I often listen when he does this, and wonder if he knows I’m listening, if he realizes how audible his phone voice is, especially considering my room has no door, only a narrow sloping staircase. And I wonder if he minds my accidental listening. Sometimes he takes a call in his room, and then I know he doesn’t want to be overheard. Sometimes I put on headphones and play music to drown out his conversation, if it’s distracting, or seems too private for me to eavesdrop.

Today, Jeff’s had mostly work calls. He runs a theater, and an upcoming rental company just cancelled their show, and wants their money back. Broadway went dark last night, other theaters are sure to follow.

Jeff also talked to two friends, who called because we were all meant to have dinner and then go bowling. Talking about plans right now means talking about the coronavirus, and every conversation spans time from the next few hours to next week when the city might be on lock down, to the next 6 months, the amount of time Mayor Di Bla-

sio has warned people to prepare for significant disruptions to economic and daily life.

I’m going back to Vermont this weekend, to visit my partner in the house where I also used to live full-time. I have mixed feelings about going. What I still can’t quite articulate is the sense of being at the center of the world here, especially at this moment of crisis, in a way I never have felt in Vermont, in a small town with slow internet. Metro-centric, I know, and I’m over-romanticizing being self-isolated for 14 days in a small Brooklyn apartment with two roommates who, despite living together for almost two years, are still somewhat strangers to me. The empty store shelves and frantic headlines and jagged stock market graphs do instill a real sense of fear and dread, one I have not yet let myself succumb to, but one I feel, viscerally, with a shortness of breath and a heat behind my eyes, whenever I forget about it for a minute, and then remember again.

Coronavirus. COVID-19.

The shock that some people still misspell it.

It was almost two weeks ago that I first went to the grocery store, the new Wegman’s in the Navy Yard, and took my time considering what to buy for the probable crisis. Cartons of soup, hand

soap, flu medication, muesli, farro, butter, beans, rice, lentils, corn chips, pasta, sauce, popcorn kernels, multivitamins (for when my diet is devoid of nutrients beyond beans and rice). Again, yesterday, Wegman's. Busy even at noon. The shelves holding soap and sanitizers, frozen pizza, frozen chicken nuggets, frozen vegetables, rice, pasta: empty. In the middle of a space usually reserved for displays of weekly specials: four pallets of toilet paper and mountains of bottled water. Why those things? What's going to happen to NYC's remarkably potable water?

Yesterday, I managed to track down some hand sanitizer. Not Purell, but an alternative brand, which, at first glance is "herbal," but upon further inspection contains 75% alcohol (the recommended threshold for effectiveness is at least 60%). I also went to the post office and mailed a bunch of paperwork for a job this summer, one of those future-oriented tasks that seems useless, when so much is more unknown than usual. It's hard to make plans and promises right now. And yet craving normalcy requires persisting in the accomplishment of such tasks as mailing hiring paperwork and searching for post-graduation jobs.

[...]

Wednesday, 3/18/20
Greensboro, VT

This, too, shall pass. Being here, I sometimes have to remind myself what's happening in the wider world. Being in NYC, I couldn't forget. I don't know which I prefer.

Solidarity is being offered. Google Docs with lists of mutual aid networks, GoFundMe pages, PayPal donation opportunities, resources for those in need or able to offer assistance, grocers, deliveries, housing, shelter, cleaning supplies. Slack channels for organizers and advocates.

But also: urgency right now means staying home. This is only the beginning.

Jose and Isabel got on a train yesterday. We hugged goodbye in the tiny Montpelier Junction station. It was snowing. "I hear New York is a ghost town," said the Amtrak employee from inside her trinket-filled office. The platform was empty except for one other stony-faced traveler, and a little boy who had come to see the "choo-choo" with his

grandparents. Isabel and Jose were rushed onto the train, waving over their shoulders, and calling last words, in a scene reminiscent of the movies: an unexpectedly hurried goodbye, rimmed with grief, danger, and the uncertainty that the parting characters would ever see each other again.

According to Netflix, people have been watching old films like "Contagion" at a record rate. Is it helpful to compare this reality to movies? Maybe fiction is the only place we can look for comparisons.

Josh and I stopped at two grocery stores to stock up on food. The federal government has now recommended that everyone stay home, except for essential activities, as much as possible, and limit gatherings to less than 10 people nationwide, no discretionary travel, and, of course, wash your hands, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, don't go anywhere if you feel sick.

My mom (librarian and town welfare director in central New Hampshire) is on the town ICG (Incident Command Group). She seems pleased. My dad continues to work alone in his office. Small, local libraries are offering home deliveries and curbside pickups. Josh's dad goes to and from home and his office/wood shop, alone. Josh's mom is finally, we hope, moving all her therapy appointments online. We worry about her bringing COVID-19 home to his dad, who is in the at-risk category. My mom recently, morbidly, on the phone: "at least most of the family we had who are especially at risk have died in the last year." We count the still-living. Every tally feels like a death sentence.

Saturday, 3/21/20
Greensboro, VT

The news unfolds quickly. NY, NJ, CA, CT, IL all have stay at home orders. Last night, my roommate, Jeff, had a virtual game night with some friends. Everyone is figuring out how to stay inside, how to pass the time, alone but social.

My niece, Emma (6), has been writing and illustrating a book about the Color Majudul. Her sister, Fanny (4), has had a lot of solo playtime (which she loves). They go on car trips to the beach or the Medford Fells to get outside, away from people (at least 6 feet). Emma and their mom, Lisa, a doctor in Cambridge, MA, both have coughs and other vague COVID symptoms. Lisa got tested at a drive-

thru site in Somerville on Wednesday (or was it Tuesday?). She can't work until they know the results. And if she tests positive, she can still work as long as she's asymptomatic for 72 hours. The same is true of healthcare workers all over. She's been told she's not allowed to leave the state.

Josh's grandmother went into the hospital on Thursday night, and tested positive for COVID yesterday. She was put in isolation, and was disoriented enough not to know what to do with a phone when Josh's mom tried to call. This morning, she's doing a bit better, on less oxygen. I watched the idea of his grandma dying alone, no family beside her, dawn on Josh. An effect he hadn't yet considered.

Also yesterday, his cousin called from NYC to ask about our closest hospital. His wife is due to have their second baby on April 11th, and they've been told that there might not be bed space for them, or medical supplies in NYC by then. So they're looking for somewhere else to have the baby, maybe to induce early delivery in order to time the birth around the peak of the pandemic in the Northeast US, which is predicted, currently, for mid-April.

Meanwhile in Vermont, it's that riotous season between winter and spring. Two days ago, Josh and I put skins on our skis to climb up a nearby closed ski area, and skied down. Topper came too. There were about 20 cars in the lot, all folks doing the same thing. But we had the windy, cloud-socked summit to ourselves. When we got down, a classic apres-ski parking lot party was in session. Bags of chips being passed, beers in hand, people perching on tailgates. Not everyone is being serious about this yet.

Yesterday, work in the morning, boiling sap in the afternoon and evening. We made 6.25 gallons of syrup. It was warm, around 60 °F, gusty, rain showers, then the clouds broke around sunset. It was the dramatic kind of weather-changing-evening that I couldn't stop watching.

I couldn't help but think: nature tried to get us with the big - the hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, fires - but now she'll get us with the small.

[...]

Friday, 3/27/20
Greensboro, VT

My second round of bread baking was more successful. My roommate in NYC, Jeff, noted that he couldn't find yeast in any stores. I had a hard time finding flour. I like to imagine people all over, quarantining, trying to bake bread for the first time: the failed proofs, the soggy bottoms, the ecstatic, glutenous successes.

So far, Josh and I have been good at finding ways to occupy our time. He's turning wood in the garage today on his lathe. I finished a book, pruned an apple tree, wrote some emails. I'll finish some other projects later, I hope: a baby hat for Josh's infant niece, a wooden menorah made of scraps.

Josh's brother called while out walking his dog in Cambridge. He talked to Josh for a while about us being his daughter's godparents. They're redoing their wills, and trying to decide between us and her mother's brother. Josh assured him that, if the situation arose, we would raise the baby to their wishes, but said we wouldn't be offended if they chose the other uncle. Life often has to undergo rearrangements: if we ended up taking care of a kid, we would rearrange our lives for her as needed. (This, too, is a time that requires rearrangement.) I wonder how many similar conversations are happening around the world, about the type of future that once felt unthinkable but now feels possible.

Saturday, 3/28/20
Greensboro, VT

[...]

Coronavirus has sent people from the cities to second homes in small towns, vacation towns, like this one. Those towns' permanent residents are fighting back in news and social media outlets, asking city folk not to infect the rural population, to potentially burden their smaller hospitals. I've hoped not to be the person from NYC infecting the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, but we'll see. I've been coughing a bit recently, and feeling fatigued. But it may be a lack of the social time extroverts like me need to recharge.

Luckily, yesterday was full of virtual social time. First, a meeting with fellow anthropology

students; then a class; then a Zoom call with college friends; then another Zoom call with friends from Ohio. (Zoom stock must be doing well right now.) The virtual happy hour with college friends was the most relaxed - everyone was so themselves. Erin, who's a midwife and on the front lines at a hospital every day, bemoaned being single in the time of COVID, and not being able to have sex for, potentially, months. Jokingly, we all asked Vinny, a computational biologist at a pathology lab in Berlin, if he'd made a vaccine yet. Gwen gave her husband a hard time when he left the toilet seat up in the bathroom, visible on all our screens down the hallway behind her. At one point, Gwen's chair completely broke under her. We couldn't stop laughing.

On the later Zoom call, our friend in Montana told us he and his girlfriend just broke up. He's dreading being single right now. I offered to try to set him up with Erin. We talked about how online and phone sex are having cultural moments.

He read us Montana's governor's version of a stay-at-home order, which mentions that outdoor recreating is an allowable reason to leave your house, but that you should recreate safely, including backcountry skiing only if practicing proper avalanche safety. Outdoor spokespeople, organizations and leaders have been warning people to be conservative in their outdoor decision-making, to manage risk carefully, so as not to overwhelm emergency services and hospitals. Parts of the Appalachian Trail have been shut down.

The Craftsbury General Store, nearby, is letting customers order bulk wholesale items at cost, to be delivered on their weekly truck. Our friend Nina got 50# of flour, 20# each of rice and black beans for her family. Nina came to collect sap with me on Thursday. She's been riding around Craftsbury in the school bus delivering meals to kids this week. Now that I've been mostly isolated for 14 days, I'm eager to start helping. Lots of people around here are also eager to help. It's that kind of community (at least parts of it). Sewing face masks is a popular pastime.

My dad told me about his friend in NYC whose girlfriend is staying with him. She's from Korea, and was unable to fly back when she was supposed to. She's teaching all her university classes online, in the middle of the night.

Monday, 3/30/20
Greensboro, VT

We boiled sap for 11 hours on Saturday. 10 gallons of syrup. Friends came over, all the same people who we decided, weeks ago now, to isolate with, as a closed group. Some neighbors stopped by to say hi. It was sunny, nearly 60 °F. We made waffles and poured on syrup straight from the evaporation pan. Bloody Marys and Coronas turned into Micheladas. It felt like any other spring day in Vermont. Except for the conversation, the hopelessness.

A Zoom call that night with some friends. They all seem to be coping by drinking a lot. One said that she feels like everyone who's leaving NYC is a "pussy," that she couldn't imagine being anywhere else right now. Another friend was obviously taking the whole thing hard, but joking it off, as she always does. Another talked about the benefits of exercise, and having a dog.

I've also felt the benefits of having a dog. Someone whose behavior seems unaffected by the state of the wider world. Though he is very much affected by the fact that Josh and I are both at home all the time, and he doesn't get as much alone time as he'd like. Lots of sulking and wandering the house whining.

There are two foxes in the woods and field behind our house, not just the one we've been seeing. Two mornings in a row we watched them running and playing in the field. They'll be harder to see once the snow melts out.

Yesterday was the first day I didn't leave the house. Not even to go outside. I made crackers and talked on the phone. Tried to work on some projects. FaceTime with my brother and his two daughters, Fanny and Emma. They were writing birthday cards to my dad (it's his birthday in a couple days). They were goofy, and my brother was patient with them in a way I've always admired. He's been working from home, editing documentary footage for a project for the Basketball Hall of Fame. He went on a long run this weekend, in preparation for an upcoming marathon. It's now become a "virtual marathon," so everyone is supposed to run on their own, and they'll get their swag in the mail. I told him about the article I saw, featuring a man in France who ran a marathon inside his apartment (no treadmill involved).

Today, Josh and I ventured out to get rid of some trash and recycling, and mail packages to our siblings and nieces. The post office, which shares a building with the Craftsbury General Store, had a sign asking customers to stay outside until the tiny room was clear. The Genny has a huge, hand-painted sign advertising their curbside and delivery options, asking people to call ahead, or order on the porch (which I did). A favorite recent Instagram post: “Remember when going to the grocery store was something we did on the way home from doing other things?”

[...]

Thursday, 4/2/20
Greensboro, VT

Grocery day. Josh and I opted not to bring our own bags, as we normally do. Some places have banned reusable bags altogether, an understandable but depressing turn of events after plastic bag bans have swept this part of the country in recent years. A microcosm of all the regulations the Trump administration is discretely removing in the name of coronavirus management.

We bagged our own groceries, trying to be friendly to the young woman (young enough that she had to call a manager to check my ID for purchasing a bottle of wine), behind the newly-installed plexiglass. People moving about the aisles (and there were surprisingly many) either smiled sympathetically at each other, or fiercely went about their own business. Still no all-purpose flour to be found.

Josh had seen a YouTube video on how to sanitize your groceries before bringing them into your house. Wipe down all plastic and metal containers. Using clean hands, remove the inner bag of cereal and discard the outer box. I scrubbed a colander of citrus with soap and water, thinking about a chef I once worked for. He instructed me to wash the rind of a melon before cutting into it. “But I’m going to cut off the rind anyway,” I said. “But your knife will push all the dirt on the outside to the inside. And where do you think melon farmers pee when they’re working in the fields?” Between food safety and hypochondria, he saw the possibility for contagion everywhere. So, now, do I.

[...]

Monday, 4/6/20
Greensboro, VT

My first trip out of the house wearing a face mask, per the CDC’s guidance. I drove a delivery route for Meals on Wheels, which provides a daily meal for low-income seniors. It was my first time volunteering for MOW. I got an orientation, and was accompanied by one of the organizers on the route (in separate cars). She made sure I followed protocols and introduced me to the people we delivered to. Because of coronavirus, there are extra protocols for not contaminating the food being delivered, and we’re delivering a week’s worth of food at a time. The contamination protocols came easily for me. So did the friendly-yet-detached task of arriving on strangers’ diverse doorsteps. For one woman, we were the only people she’d seen in a week. Her hunger for conversation was palpable, as she wrapped a wool scarf around her face as a mask, and talked to us through the screen door. She kept pushing the door open, wanting to get closer, then stopping herself. Six feet.

A few hours with a bandana poorly positioned and loosely tied around my face convinced me to try to sew a better mask. Online, the pattern possibilities are endless—many hospitals have been sharing patterns or publishing their own. Different possible features: pleats, a curved front, pocket for a filter (e.g. cut-up vacuum bag), wire sewn in to go over your nose (best for people with glasses, to keep them from fogging up), elastic, cotton ties, shoelaces, or T-shirt material for straps. Some of them are quite complicated. Others are rudimentary. The CDC suggests just folding a piece of fabric in a certain way and using two rubber bands or hair elastics to hold it over your ears. Cotton is always the recommended material, the tighter the weave, the better. Not recommended: wearing medical grade masks or N95’s - reserve those for healthcare workers only and avoid public shaming.

I’m grateful to be able to help, especially since it gets me out of the house.

[...]

Saturday, 4/11/20

This has been a tough week. I feel exhausted. And it's been snowing since Thursday. "April is the cruelest month, breeding / lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / memory and desire..."

I've been trying not to give in to the drag of memory, the hopelessness of planning for the future. Yesterday I had to call all my would-be employees and tell them that their summer job has been cancelled. And I had to face the fact that that same job, which would have bought me some time before trying to enter the job market post-graduation, is no longer a safety net for me either. It's getting harder to ignore the future, and harder to use the pandemic as an excuse to not make plans. I keep being reminded: you have to make plans in order to change them.

My laptop, which has felt like a much-needed source of connection, is now a source of anxiety. Sitting down in front of the screen each morning, trying to read, write, answer emails, join a Zoom meeting, plan for final papers or job searches...And it doesn't help that my "office chair" is straight-backed and wooden. Never have I longed for a cushy, swiveling, seat like I do now.

At least the snow allowed for another snowman to be built. This one perches on the back deck, peering in the window, standing in for a friend spontaneously visiting, or the Jehovah's Witnesses who once arrived on that same deck on a sub-zero January day. I was amazed their little car made it up the driveway. This snowman is curious, and looks both puzzled and slightly perturbed. Topper hated him at first. Wouldn't come into the living room because of the imposing figure outside. Now they seem to have made their peace.

I've made more snowmen this year than in recent memory. In a class yesterday, someone paraphrased the book we'd read, *Tristes Tropiques*: anthropologists try to stay children for as long as they can.

Last night, on a video chat with old friends, we discussed the idea that what matters is not that one is good, but that one keeps trying to be better. Two math-minded friends, an electrical engineer and a computational biologist, Vinny, wanted to come up with a word for the rate of change, the movement over time of an individual toward good. (Putting aside, for the moment, the defini-

tion of good.) I watched deer foraging for old corn cobs in the dusk outside my window. Vinny drew three graphs with the y axis labeled "good," the x axis labeled "time": a line sloping up, a line sloping down, and a flat line. Maybe each trend needs its own name? Or can all three be encompassed in one name?

"Faith?" the biologist suggested.

Sunday, 4/12/20
Greensboro, VT

Josh, Topper, and I had a clandestine meet-up with my parents, who live in New Hampshire. We met them in the middle, just across the border, about an hour away. We parked at an empty high school, and walked around the ball fields. Topper found some old fly balls in the woods to chew on, but preferred a stiff, fluffy squirrel's tail, the body to which it belonged having met some other fate.

The primary purpose of the rendezvous was for my parents to give us gardening supplies. Essential agricultural business, we planned to tell the cops, should we get pulled over. The roads were not as empty as I expected. At the border going back into Vermont a large construction sign warned visitors from other states that they were expected to enter quarantine for 14 days upon arrival.

It felt like a treat to be driving on the interstate, after barely leaving the house for weeks. Just the day before, a new record was set for the "Cannonball Run," the drive from New York City to Los Angeles. 27 hours. That will be hard to beat, since the highways now are emptier than they've ever been. I remember the feeling of driving fast across open plains, the freedom that a car brings. Now that public transportation is so restricted, having a car provides a sense of security - not that there's anywhere to go. At the same time, I hate the rural reliance on cars. Last week, the price of gas at a nearby station was \$1.50. Now that Trump and OPEC have arranged for a decrease in oil production, it will likely climb back up.

We talked with my parents about the virus, and how my dad's life hasn't really changed that much. He works by himself in an office, bikes from and to home. He works in environmental waste management, consulting on policies and procedures for treating, composting, and otherwise disposing of solid waste from municipalities. Normally,

“sludge” from wastewater treatment plants that isn’t composted and used as agricultural fertilizer goes into landfills. Those landfills have to maintain a certain balance of dry waste (e.g. municipal and construction) and wet waste (from wastewater treatment). He said that we’re starting to face an unprecedented situation: a decrease in the production of dry waste due to economic shutdowns, which means landfills can’t accept as much wet waste. That waste currently has nowhere else to go, and isn’t part of any state’s emergency plan. This is what my dad has been spending his days thinking about.

My mom gave me a face mask that she made, far better than the one I made myself. She said she chose this one for me because it’s “cheery” and I should wear it when I deliver food in the community. They also sent us home with seedlings, a grow light, and other gardening supplies.

[...]

Saturday, 4/18/20

Besides working in the garden, I’ve been spending less time outside, and less time exercising. I feel it in my body. Today, I’ll spend most of the day outside, moving, not staring at a screen.

I’ve taken part in two rewarding Zoom public events this week, one on the US food system and COVID-19, the other on conducting oral histories of disasters. I appreciated my own anonymity during the 2-hour sessions, the ability to shut off my microphone and camera and watch the conversation unfold, while taking notes or looking up references mentioned by the speakers. I don’t like that I liked that anonymity. But I also felt a sense of community, and was invigorated by the discussions. Talking about the food system, folks were weary of the growing season to come, and the inability of farmers to hire enough workers to plant and harvest, since many of those workers are international migrants, and in precarious positions within the economy and healthcare system. Already, COVID has disrupted food supply chains, not by creating new deficiencies, but by exacerbating pre-existing weaknesses. It’s revealed the food supply chain’s dependency on people. In South Dakota, one meat packing plant is responsible for more than half the state’s cases of COVID, and meat supplies are close

to running low. There’s also optimism that this is a chance to rethink the food system, to make it more sustainable, to undo decades of consolidation, and cut out some of the powerful middle men who make it impossible for the milk being dumped in upstate New York to move, instead, to the refrigerators of food banks in city. Maybe people will become more in touch with where their food comes from, and try growing some themselves. But in Detroit, and other places, community gardens have been shuttered, along with parks.

Another online birthday celebration last night, with everyone taking advantage of Zoom virtual backgrounds to poke fun at the birthday boy. Josh’s computer isn’t new enough to work effectively with the virtual background, so we were simultaneously visible and erased into the photo “behind” us. We weren’t the only ones. Digital ghosts.

Sunday, 4/19/20

On a bike ride today, I found myself counting beer cans along the side of the road. There seemed to be more than usual, and I wondered if it was a reflection of the times, or just the build up over winter, only now visible because the snow has melted. One thing people like about living in this area is its “lawlessness.” Craftsbury, the next town over, voted a few years back not to have a town police force, because the only people they’d arrest would be local people, like the people voting on whether to have a police force. And no one wanted that. It’s rare to see cops on the roads around here, but lately they’ve been more present. State police and traffic control. Some people find it reassuring, others hate it. There’s no political divide that I can tell - some of the most progressive people I know here might drink a beer in their truck on the way home. Maybe the difference is that they wouldn’t then toss it out the window. But I’m not sure. Moments like that blur the political divides that sometimes feel so stark in this country. The other day at the general store, the bulky, shaved-head guy in a dirty sweatshirt was wearing a face mask, while the young woman with a kitten on her shoulder, who I know to be the granddaughter of a prominent progressive activist and puppeteer, wasn’t wearing a mask, and got too close to the pickup window. Those liable to shirk the so-

cial rules of the day come from all sides. That is, I guess, part of the “lawless” appeal of rural living.

I thought of the protests around the country, headed by white nationalists, 2nd amendment die-hards, and fueled by our commander-in-Tweets. Those people are so familiar to me. Condemnable for their language and behavior (especially the ones who blocked the entrance to a trauma center at a hospital with their trucks), but familiar. We brushed shoulders in the pre-COVID grocery store. I’ve sat around their kitchen tables, laughed about local gossip, argued about climate change. Sometimes, in a small community, differences are put aside.

[...]

Wednesday, 4/22/20

Josh’s grandmother and aunt are both out of the hospital. His grandmother hasn’t been able to speak for weeks, though she’s been feeding herself. Hopefully a return to a familiar place will help restore some communication skills. Josh’s mom has been beside herself, trying to coordinate care from afar, with all the empathy of a psychotherapist, and all the struggle of family stress.

Vermont is letting some people go back to work, those who work alone or in pairs, or outside where social distancing is easier.

The flurry of social video chatting has dwindled, and I’m feeling more and more the effects of a prolonged shut-down. On Monday, I was as eager to chat with some of the folks on my food delivery route as they were to chat with me.

[...]

Monday, 4/27/20

Today is cold, snow and rain. I didn’t wear enough layers when I went to deliver Meals on Wheels. I shivered as I packed bags out of my trunk. Once, I forgot to put on the Latex gloves (new pair for each stop). Mid-way through the route, my first scary experience of someone not coming to the door when I knocked. And usually she’s the chattiest, already at the door as I walk up. I called her name, knocked a bunch, then walked around the house. Finally, her dogs spotted me and started

barking, and she turned up at the door. These faces are growing familiar, and I wonder if I remember them better, despite not knowing them well, because I don’t see many others to mix them up with these days. One woman always in a leopard print house dress. Another with purple hair. A guy who always asks if I’ve been fishing (I haven’t) and, today, if I knew where he could get “one of those masks.”

On the radio, as I drove around, the governor was holding a press conference. Masks, he promised, will be with us for a while. Social distancing, too. Masks are emerging as fashion statements. And I’m realizing how much I rely on people being able to see the lower half of my face as I empathize with their stories of chronic fatigue or bones aching in the rain, or smile at their jokes.

[...]

Friday, 5/1/20

It’s May. Hardly believable.

Slowly, plans for the future are forming. Summer stretches ahead as an empty space, fillable, promising to be busy as it always is, but with what? A project with a friend who shares some ethnographic interests; applying to a job or two; tentative plans to visit Josh’s family and to host some friends later in the month. I’ve always liked thinking about logistics, and right now they take on new urgency. If we drive to Massachusetts, can we make it on one tank of gas, and without stopping to pee along the way? Are our current isolating efforts sufficient, or are there additional steps we should take before we go, in approximately two weeks’ time? We talk to Josh’s family about the steps we’ve all been taking, our grocery shopping schedules, my Meals on Wheels protocols. (I realize that the people I’m delivering food to are probably the safest folks for me to interact with - they’re all more confined to their homes than we are.) Travel logistics include not only considering routes and stops, but where the virus might be lingering. We’ll be moving from a less affected area to a more affected area. When we come back to Vermont, we’ll quarantine again. Do we buy groceries for those two weeks *before* going to Massachusetts, or on our way back? Do we ask a friend to shop for us? (No grocery delivery servic-

es in these parts...) Consider: where is the biggest threat? Who do we want to take the chance of seeing? Intimacy has new meaning and scale.

[...]

Monday, 5/4/20

Yesterday, I video chatted with old friends, the social worker, who finally has more permanent housing, and our friend who's living in Mexico. She's still staying with her newish boyfriend and his mother outside of Mexico City. She adopted a street dog as a quarantine companion. Her younger brother got engaged last weekend. She's evasive with her real feelings about his fiancée, but we all agreed it's nice to have something to look forward to.

Saturday afternoon we invited a few friends over to sit on our lawn in the sun. Mostly to let the dogs play. We discussed politics at 10-foot distances. Biden is no one's choice, but voting for him is compulsory. Just think of RBG. She can't make it another four years. Think of our current president, and his suggestions that we all inject disinfectants to kill the virus. (Brad Pitt as Dr. Fauci on SNL last weekend - thank god for parody in times like these. Satire. Comedy. Sunshine.) The argument from his base has always been that they don't take him literally. But it's become apparent that doesn't matter. Think of the violence he's fomented. Maybe he hasn't literally said "Take your guns and go stand outside the state house," but he might as well have, because the result is the same.

I found out that my favorite bike mechanic in Brooklyn lost his 34-year-old son to COVID. I've surprised myself by how sad I am. This is a guy who looks tough—always dressed in black pants, a black button-up shirt, shaved head - and could easily be the kind of jaded, gristly mechanic that gives bike shops bad reputations. But he's not. He remembered my name from the first time I brought my bike in for service, and he's always honest about how he's feeling. He fixes delivery bikes all the time, practically for free, always getting working folks back on the road as fast as possible. Friends of his help out or sit around gossiping and sharing memories of races over the Alps, or last week's ride out Long Island. We chat on the sidewalk as he opens the shop in the mornings, if

I happen to walk by. He was one of the first who made me feel welcome in the neighborhood.

I was reading yesterday about the grief we feel for strangers, how it's often discounted in stories of loss. Like the only losses that matter are our own. But that's been disproven time and again by public outpourings of grief in the wake of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean, or school shootings, or police violence, or natural disasters...and now a pandemic. How to live with that grief, how to fold it into our social fabric *without* discounting it, without trying to leave it behind or inside or below, but let it be a presence in public life, without it being politically instrumentalized - that's the challenge.

[...]

Thursday, 5/7/20

Last night I had a dream that we had gone to visit Josh's parents near Boston. As planned, I drove from there to New York to get some things from my apartment. But I left three days early. After I'd been in New York for most of a day, walking around and grocery shopping with a group of random people (clearly not realizing this might not be the best time to be forging new in-person friendships), I realized what I'd done. My roommate didn't feel safe with me staying in the apartment for more than the one night (for which he would stay at his girlfriend's), and I couldn't go back to Boston to stay with Josh's family because I was possibly infected now, nor did I feel OK about collecting Josh three days early and returning to Vermont, cutting short his time with his family. I was trapped.

[...]

Monday, 5/11/20

I listened to most of the Vermont governor's press conference while driving around today. Every week the same questions: people aren't wearing masks - why don't you make it mandatory? Why aren't you testing *everyone* in nursing homes and jails all the time just in case? How are you counting the positive tests, by town? County? Zip code? Postal route? Why aren't you collecting more data?

Is Vermont going to get in trouble with the feds for pushing through unemployment claims without resolving all the issues? Why the holdup with payments?

All questions I could answer by now. There must be better questions to be asking. There must be better ways for these journalists and public officials to use their time, rather than struggling with un-mute codes and fuzzy phone lines. I got so frustrated yesterday I started yelling at the radio.

We're preparing to visit family in Massachusetts starting on Wednesday. We'll spend a few days there, then I'll go to New York for a night to collect some things from my apartment, and pick up two friends. On Monday, we'll drive back to Massachusetts, stopping briefly in Connecticut to say hello and goodbye to Aaron's parents, who are likely moving across the country before the end of the month. Then we'll pick up Josh at his parents' house, waving from across the driveway, definitely not going inside, not even to pee. Then we'll drive back to Vermont, stopping for two weeks' supply of groceries, before settling in for quarantine.

Five days of car travel to familiar places and it feels like the biggest trip of our lives. More stress and uncertainty than the month-long mountaineering/climbing adventure in Patagonia. Logistics that have never needed discussing: will we stop to use public restrooms? Should we bring an extra tank of gas? Will we fit in the car with all the groceries, luggage, and two dogs? Are we going to be responsible for spreading COVID to the Northeast Kingdom?

Wednesday, 5/13/20
I-93, NH

This morning I sent in my last paper of grad school, planted some onion starts in the half-frozen-but-quickly-thawing ground, and jumped in the car with Josh and Topper. We drove south on a familiar route, and except for various signs explaining COVID-related protocols (at the state line, "Staying in NH? Quarantine for 14 days upon arrival"), everything seemed eerily normal. Most noticeably, we passed through Franconia State Park, a popular destination within the White Mountain National Forest, where the highway cuts through the mountains, flanked on either side by recreation sites: ski area, bike path, hiking trailheads,

waterfalls, a huge cliff face often climbed. All the parking lots were roped off, or blocked by cones. Strange to see wilderness closed.

[...]

Sunday, 5/17/20
Brooklyn, NY

I'm in New York for half a day and a night, to get some things from my apartment, see my roommate and a couple of friends, and ride my bike around the empty streets. I drove down yesterday, stopping once to get gas (gloved and masked), and twice to pee in the woods.

My roommate, Jeff, is being very sensitive about sharing the space. We're wearing masks, except when eating (which we've done, together, since he was unable to resist the urge to share food, to make me feel welcome), and giving each other wide berths in the apartment.

We went for a bike ride around Red Hook, exploring empty parking lots and old piers that have become oases for people looking for outdoor space. One parking lot behind a port warehouse was full of other bikers and skateboarders, and some parked semi trucks and buses. Parks and walking paths were packed with people, cops standing around, chatting with folks, presumably reminding them to maintain distance.

We wore our masks the whole time, and it took some getting used to. I had a couple of moments of claustrophobic panic at the beginning. Like anything, you get used to it.

I met Isabel and her husband, Jose, in Fort Greene park. They gave me their plant to take care of, in anticipation of returning to Colombia when the borders open. We chatted at a distance, one of many small groups scattered around the park. Strange to speak through a mask, not be able to share facial expressions. But so nice to see them. And to be in a place with people, to see how folks are managing to be outside, to talk to each other, to eat take out on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant - it felt oddly like any sunny Sunday in that part of the city (an affluent bubble). The 7 o'clock applause for healthcare workers was a surprise for me, even though I knew it would happen, that it had become a city-wide ritual.

Later, I rode my bike into Manhattan. Over the Williamsburg Bridge, down the long ramp onto Delancy St. that always feels like a landing strip, lights blinking on in the dusk in the flanking apartment buildings. I rode up Avenue A, waved at the theater where I worked last fall, hoping that production wouldn't prove to be the last for me, nor this pandemic the end of theater.

Over one block to 1st Ave, and up past the hospitals. Cars pulling up at entrances, people in scrubs coming out or going in, or walking home-ward, checking their phones. Not as many sirens as I expected, based on the things I've read about the constant, anxious drone. Everything oddly calm, almost serene in the twilight. And empty. No traffic. I hardly stopped at lights, even the red ones. Over again, on 42nd St., remembering previous rides in Midtown, on my way to or from a theater, unable to keep a steady pace even in the bike lanes because of all the pedestrians overflowing from the sidewalk and the taxis and cars pulling over to let out passengers.

Up 6th Avenue to Central Park, then into the park, also empty, despite the warm evening. Reflecting on the brilliance of Olmstead's design, the rolling hills, the paths criss-crossing, winding, looping, intersecting. The bedrock jutting out, where in the fall I bouldered, unsuccessfully attempting a classic route up Rat Rock. West again, crossing the park on a path without dismounting from my bike, as instructed by signage. I passed two people, deep in conversation.

Then a turn south. Out of the park to Broadway. The park's foliage had muffled the city noise, but when I got to Columbus circle the quiet persisted. One or two cars passed. Another cyclist. I could see a few people on the sidewalks, lone walkers.

Down Broadway to the northern tip of Times Square - a place I usually avoid at all costs. Maybe a dozen people milling about, taking pictures of the emptiness, like me. Cops on horses, surveying. Only the blinding screens and signs above reminding of the busyness. Theaters shuttered, 8.5x11 printed signs on lobby doors, last-minute-made.

Over to 9th Ave, and down past the bus station. Some folks, mostly homeless, I think, gathering on corners. Some restaurants open for take-out only. I considered stopping for a slice at Two Bros, but the line was long, and the place looked dirty

in a way I'm not used to caring about. And what would my roommate say? So I didn't, even though I was starving by then.

When the pavement got bad on 9th, and then on 7th Ave, I crossed over to 5th, and rode down through Madison Square, usually a mess of various kinds of traffic, but now a breeze. Then down past The New School, gazing up at the corner windows of the building on 16th St. where, not so long ago, I met with friends and colleagues and faculty for classes, department events, late-night study sessions. That room that was always too cold, but had a view of the sunset, where you could hear a saxophone player in the afternoons, somewhere below.

Then down around Washington Square Park, where what looked like college students laughed loudly, and some homeless folks with big bags gathered around benches. Through Greenwich Village for a few blocks, not many restaurants open here, but more people on the streets. Then over to Broadway, down through SoHo to Canal Street. Momentary disorientation in the dark. Then cutting through the off-ramps to the bike path, so familiar, to cross the Manhattan Bridge. Then I was on the same route I took every day, to and from school or work or the library or a theater. And I zoned out, as I often did, letting my mind wander, buffered by the pools of lamplight and the guardrails as I traversed the East River. The Empire State Building pulsed red like a heart-beat, *dah-dum, dah-dum*.

The contrast between rural and Manhattan was stark. It's not like the streets of Greensboro, Vermont are normally packed with people. In Manhattan in the evening, the absence of people on the streets was palpable. But so was the feeling of people packed into houses and apartments, a presence of adjustment, waiting, watching, making do.

Friday, 5/22/20
Greensboro, VT

It's my 30th birthday—one I've been looking forward to. Josh arranged a series of Zoom calls with groups of friends and family every evening this week. They were meant to be a surprise, and the first one was, but then a participant quickly gave the whole scheme away. I've had fun with it, and

felt oh so loved, but it's also exhausting. After two months of mostly only seeing Josh and Topper, the social time of travel plus the new roommates (from New York) plus the nightly social hours leave me simultaneously invigorated and drained. My concentration is limited. There's always some task to complete, and it's never reading or writing or applying for jobs. Maybe next week.

But the weather has been beautiful and we've been riding bikes most days. Today, Josh and I went on a long, hilly ride to visit the maple syruping friends from a social distance. Two of the three houses we visited were empty, but at the farthest point of the ride, two friends set out a table with snacks and cold water, and chatted with us from their porch.

I'm feeling the quarantine fatigue, combined with the lust for summer busy-ness. Our little house with a big yard has become a comfortable haven, and I haven't tired of it. Venturing out feels both scary and exciting, and returns are bittersweet. Northern Vermont feels as far-flung as ever, and I dream of driving out - west or northeast (would they let us into Canada?).

[...]

Saturday, 5/30/20
Greensboro, VT

2020 takes another turn. Protests in Minneapolis, Brooklyn, Atlanta, Louisville...Social media threads and posts with graphics of their faces, promises to say their names - George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery—promises to do more and be better and here are the actions you can take. Social media is not enough, protests are not enough. I spent yesterday evening glued to my phone, watching videos of protesters and police, people young, old, Black, white, Latinx, Menonite, LGBT - a blur of identities - peace and violence and people pushed to the ground and threatened by Tweets and journalists getting hit by rubber bullets or arrested on live TV, burning precincts, arms linked in solidarity, faces with and without masks because all of this is happening against the backdrop of a pandemic. Apocalyptic images compounded. But just like at so many other moments before and leading up to this one, since the colonization of this

continent, since the first slave ships arrived from Africa, this is only the end of some worlds, only a threat to some lives. I watch a livestream of a police van burning on the edge of Fort Greene Park, near where I was sitting with two friends just a couple of weeks ago, a few blocks from the apartment I'm still paying rent for. I imagine my roommate listening to the shouts and sirens out the kitchen windows. I wonder if he's there, watching the van burn, or joining the protest by Barclay's Center. Would I be, were I not 350 miles north? I wonder what the COVID case count will be in a few weeks. I wonder if it will matter anymore. The spectacle of violence in the streets outweighs the hidden chaos of deaths in overburdened hospitals. I long to write a phone number on my arm in Sharpie and take to the streets. Instead, I scroll through Twitter and click donation links, one after another, late into the night.

[...]

Sunday, 6/7/20

[...]

I've lost track of what and where is "open." The logic eludes me. What does it mean when the streets at the epicenter of the pandemic are crowded with angry, change-making bodies but I resist hugging an old friend in her backyard? What is "open" when windows are smashed and Black folks can't breathe and history seems to be repeating itself and we all pray that it is because we need change but also that it isn't because in 1968 Conservatives won the White House?

Vermont is lifting its mandatory 14-day quarantine for visitors who are coming from a county in New York or New England that has a similar COVID rate as Vermont. There's a map on the health department's website: who is assumed to be contaminated, and who is not.

[...]

Monday, 6/14/20

This morning, when I went to pick up Meals on Wheels food for delivery, I saw a woman sitting in a lawn chair outside a window at the nurs-

ing home. She's been there most weeks, I realized. Probably visiting a resident, talking on their phones, and looking at each other through the window.

I had an encounter that seems like it will bother me for a long time. My second-to-last delivery was to a woman who I haven't seen in a few weeks. She's normally reticent, says hi, thank you, see you next week, and that's it. Today, she came right out, eager to chat about her new horse. On her cement patio, clearly written in a child's handwriting, inside a chalk heart, were the words "white lives matter." I stepped on the drawing as I approached her door. I didn't know what to say about it. So we talked about her horse until she noticed the chalk. "Oh, look what my granddaughter drew," she said. A million potential responses raced through my mind, and my position as educated, complicit, relatively well-off, having to come to her house every week to deliver this social service that she relied on...all of this ended with, "uh huh." What does she think that means to her granddaughter? How old is her granddaughter? Who gave her granddaughter that idea? Does she know what implications those words have, especially right now? Has she been watching the news? What's her news source? Why didn't she notice the drawing sooner? Or did she, and now she's covering it up, playing it off like she didn't know, because she *does* know. She knows what those words imply, knows that they shouldn't be displayed like that, knows that I probably don't agree with that white supremacist statement.

Thursday, 6/18/20

[...]

I stopped at the grocery store on the way home. Fewer people were wearing masks, and the summer vibes were obvious and accompanied by the laissez-faire dismissal of COVID rules. I wore my mask, and sanitized my grocery cart, tried not to touch any items besides the ones I purchased. Still there were empty grocery shelves, still no flour, not much meat.

Friday, 6/19/20

Juneteenth!

This morning I joined a webinar on land reparations. A group of white folks who identify as "reparations accomplices" told us about the Black Land Project, and the idea of returning land to Black communities and Black land stewardship.

I went with a friend, Sayre, to a vigil in Essex Junction. During rush hour, we stood with maybe 150 other people at a busy intersection known as the 5 Corners. We held signs ("Black Lives Matter," "Defund the Police," "Equity Now," "Racism is a Virus") standing 6 feet apart (roughly). Right before 6 pm, we read aloud names of African Americans killed by police, then stood in silence for 8:46 in memory of George Floyd, in solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives. Then the vigil disbanded.

It was the first event I'd been to, and I was glad to have gone, performative as it might have been, to see what's happening in the streets of Vermont (one of the whitest states in the nation). But other activities, like the land reparations webinar, and reading about anti-racism, have felt more productive, ultimately.

On the way home, we stopped at an outdoor restaurant along the road. Crazy to eat restaurant food and listen to live music. We talked about misogyny in Vermont, in our lives in general, and about the discomfort and necessity of having difficult conversations about race.

[...]

Wednesday, 6/24/20

Tamworth, NH

I'm at my parents' house in NH. Josh and Topper too. We came here yesterday, in two cars, to visit my parents and help care for my nieces, who are staying for the week. They have so much energy, but have learned to play together better since COVID made them each others' only playmates. Disagreements about what and how to play that used to dissolve into screams and tears almost immediately now stand a chance of being worked out quietly between the two of them, no adult intervention required.

Tamworth in the summer is usually bustling with seasonal residents, tourists, and locals shopping or snacking at one of the two stores in town, visiting the library, attending summer stock shows at the theater. But Main Street is largely empty. My mom has been working more at the library, facilitating curbside pickups. The head librarian is in the hospital this week (not with COVID, a detail that always needs to be noted these days), so my mom is working more. She's fairly relaxed about COVID. She was a nurse practitioner in her previous career, and has a degree in public health, and she sees our main COVID-related problem as human behavior. It's really hard to change human behavior, and even her fellow librarians get fed up wearing masks at work. Despite her incredibly persuasive (in my vast experience) way of presenting facts and evidence, of encouraging people to just do it, even though it's uncomfortable, plan to take breaks when you're alone or outside, away from others...even she doesn't have her usual sway.

[...]

Sunday, 6/28/20
Brooklyn, NY

Back in Brooklyn, to move out of my apartment, and say some goodbyes, or goodbye-for-nows.

Yesterday, I hung out with my current roommate, Jeff, and our former roommate, and their partners. Fort Greene Park was the hub of our activities and many others'. Jeff isn't being as strict about wearing masks in the apartment. It's too hot, too stuffy, doesn't provide any relief.

This morning, again, I sat in the park with friends from NSSR. We opted to go maskless, though keep our feet of distance. We chatted leisurely about life, the anthropology department, summer plans, fall plans, travel bans. Hours passed in a summery haze. Later, I rode into Manhattan with Jeff to see if we could join a rally in Washington Square Park. A flat tire on my bike caused us to arrive just as it started to dump rain. We took shelter in NYU Bobst library's entryway with other folks, many of whom wore T-shirts, ribbons, or carried signs supporting Black lives, Black Trans lives, or bedecked with rainbows. Today marks the 50th anniversary of the Pride March

in NYC, a tradition started by Black Trans activists in the wake of Stonewall. The Pride parade (a heavily corporate sponsored event these days) was cancelled this year due to COVID, but people took to the streets, combining the BLM movement with Pride in the Queer Liberation March. After the rain, hail, and thunder passed, a double rainbow stretched over West 4th Street.

I walked my unrideable bike around some more, alone. Visited Stonewall, where the street outside had become a block party. Almost no one in a mask, all ages, races, genders, dancing, drinking, snapping selfies. "Say My Name" by Destiny's Child came on the loudspeaker, and the DJ paused at every line of the chorus and called "Say her name" or "Say his name" and the crowd responded with "Breonna Taylor," "George Floyd," "Tony McDade," and more.

I walked to City Hall, where the Occupy movement has returned (though in a different form) to demand cuts to the NYPD budget, due on June 30th. I wandered through the camp, reminded of the years I lived in Boston and attended Occupy protests and rallies. I made some signs to hang on the police barricades, and listened to words about police brutality, Marxism, anti-racism, social contracts, and new donations that had just arrived. In one corner, recently soaked by the rain, was an ad-hoc memorial for the people whose deaths have sparked this movement. I felt some comfort, some ability to process, minutely, the intensity of this historical moment, as I wandered, anonymous, through a crowd of masked strangers freely sharing space, resources, and ideas. This kind of anonymity in a crowd is something I've always loved, and I missed it during the quarantine.

I visited my favorite bike mechanic at his shop. I told him I'd heard about his son. He cried, as I expected, and I teared up too, tried to stay with him in the moment, remembering that feeling after a profound loss, when tears are always near the surface, consistently uncontainable, day after day.

Tuesday, 6/30/20
Brooklyn, NY

My last corona diary entry.

It's fitting. Tonight will be my last night in my apartment in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Though my lease isn't up until the end of July, I'm hoping they

find someone to move in early, and it's harder just to swing down and move out on a whim with the necessary quarantine on one end or another. Now, NYC is asking people coming into the city from hot spots to quarantine, since things here are under control.

I'm in the midst of packing. Over two years of grad school the most notable accumulation is books. Otherwise, I don't have much more than what I moved down with: clothes, a small table, a chair, some knickknacks, a lamp. And my bike. How I love riding the city on my bike. Especially in the summer, especially on a warm night when the lights are soft-bright spots and shadows, blurry and distant and the air is thick with summer stickiness and salt water scent and your moving body melts into it, gliding over the bumpy streets, catching glimpses through backlit windows, late-night dog-walkers, snips of music on the sidewalk or stoplight...Even now, wearing a mask, it's still freeing.

New York feels different than it did three months ago. Partly it's the summer weather: people are out and about, sitting in the parks, meeting for socially distant walks and gatherings. Outdoor dining tables have extended into parking spaces. Ad-hoc tables and serving windows in storefronts with tarps strung up overhead (like the taco place two blocks over). There's less car traffic, more bike and foot traffic, less movement in general. And of course, the protests. People are taking back the streets. And it feels wonderful.

I just emptied my food cabinet in the small shared kitchen. Cans of beans, pasta, cartons of soup—all purchased in the days and weeks before the shut-down, when fears of being stuck inside my apartment inspired my grocery shopping habits. I sat here, where I'm sitting now, and wrote furiously in a paper journal. Feeling, in waves of curiosity and dread, the intensity of the moment. The need to witness, to document, to write. (I later copied that first diary entry in the time of COVID-19 into the digital diary I've been keeping since.)

Three and a half months. Hard to believe. I'm sad to be leaving this little room at the top of a house with an orange door. I'll miss the sky lights, the feeling of being either in a tower or a cave, depending on the time of day. I might even miss the low, sloping ceiling and crooked stairs. I'll miss

the sunlight streaming in through the kitchen windows in the morning, when I'm the only one awake early enough to enjoy it. I'll miss watching the street out those windows, the neighbors' art projects, the domino games, the Uber drivers who pull up out front, where a fire hydrant provides a space to stop and check a phone, eat a sandwich, change a shirt. I'll miss late-night conversations with my roommate, talking about whatever - theater, literature, politics. I won't miss his unwillingness to get rid of things, even if he can't remember where they came from or what he used them for. Now, more than ever, he's spread his stuff out in the common spaces. As he should—he's been living alone for months now, since our other roommate started house-sitting for a wealthy couple in Cobble Hill. I'm grateful that I was able to go to Vermont, to give him space, myself space, as our physical worlds contracted.

At the same time, I missed witnessing New York in one of its defining moments, as the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will surely become a historical marker, one of those things New Yorkers check each other with: "Did you stay through the quarantine?" And then they might ask about the curfew, too, the week of protests, looting, the drone of helicopters ("This is the sound of the police losing," one friend had to remind herself, growing angry) that replaced the drone of sirens. Now the audio landscape includes fireworks every night, and conspiracy theories abound. Some kids near the park the other night were shooting Roman candles into the air from a street corner. I stopped to watch. Delighted by their delight. Able to enjoy the revelry, at least for a moment, because I can sleep through it, unlike many people. (Last night I had dinner with my cousin, who works for the public advocate's office, and he said, "I just don't understand the fireworks. I mean, you can't do that. It's not allowed. It's just not *allowed!* You can't do that!")

Monday, I did some work in the morning, saw a friend in the afternoon, and biked into the city to visit the Occupy camp at City Hall (more police than the day before), and then meet my cousin for dinner. Outside dining on a street in SoHo — a luxury even in ordinary times—felt otherworldly.

Today, I met Isabel and Jose for breakfast in Prospect Park. We brought our own food (though I did try one of Jose's chocolate pancakes with

homemade blueberry jam), and sat far enough apart that we could take our masks off. It was much more relaxed than our last meeting. Still no hugs, but we could talk more freely. They're happier since moving to a different apartment. Still waiting for Colombia to open its borders or for passage on a humanitarian flight in August. The New School will be completely online in the fall, so they hope to be in Colombia for the whole semester. If all goes according to plan, I probably

won't see them again until 2021. We spent a few hours in the park, talking about their life since they moved, their plans for the fall, Isabel's new job, my job search, New York and how we love it, academia and how we hate it. The thrill of sitting with friends, in person, in public, just talking, is sharp and sweet. Our parting was hasty, because it started to rain.

. . .

“This diary is turning into a personal morbidity and mortality report.”

LEE BRANDO

I am a second year PhD student in anthropology at the New School for Social Research in New York City. My research interest is in pain and telehealth, situated in the Northwestern United States region. Ironically, my fieldwork for this summer was supposed to be in Seattle (the first U.S. epicenter for COVID-19). I have also worked as a public high school history teacher for the past 12 years. And, since mid-March I have been teaching remotely. I live in downtown Brooklyn, within a seven building cooperative complex, which is a community amidst the bustle of urban life comprising the seat of municipal government, the main borough post office, many courthouses, a couple of college campuses, a multitude of small businesses, and greenspace within Cadman Plaza and Brooklyn Bridge Parks. I share a 68 square meter apartment with my wife (Tara), dog (Lucy), and three cats (Biscuits, Cole, and “Baby Cat”). My building complex is poised between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, which is usually percolating with throngs of tourists and transit between the boroughs; however, it has recently become deafeningly quiet except for the intermittent, piercing sound of sirens.

[...]

Friday 3.20.2020

In the six years that I've lived in my apartment, I have had relatively minimal interactions with my direct neighbors across the hall. We attended a rooftop party together once and occasionally commiserated about the miserable state of politics while taking the elevator. However, I often forgot their names and had to reach deep into the recesses of my mind to summon them upon seeing them in passing. But last night, after Tara and I returned from walking the dog -- one of the few times we escaped the confines of our one-bedroom apartment -- our neighbor rang our bell shortly after our return. We had just seen her in the hallway and exchanged greetings. She asked if she could come in because her husband had locked her out. Tara and I hesitantly agreed. My hesitance was because this seemed to violate social distancing measures and Diane appears to be in a vulnerable group, likely being above 60 years old and having underlying conditions (another neighbor told me she has cancer). Diane walks and talks very slowly, she is always wearing layers of clothing even when it is warm, and her incontinence is sometimes evident from the smell in the hallway. Admittedly, part of my reluctance to invite her in was because Tara and I were about to eat dinner and

I also felt socially awkward over this irregular situation before us. In spite of that, Diane came in and sat down and we had a strained conversation for about an hour before Tara suggested that she call her husband. She borrowed Tara's phone and upon her using it I thought that we must swab that with alcohol when she leaves. Harry, her husband did not answer so she left a message and said that Harry was probably sleeping. After another few minutes passed, we asked Diane if she cared to join us for dinner. She declined because she said she had IBS and said she found that skipping one meal a day helps that condition. At that point, Tara went toward the kitchen to cook and when out of Diane's view signaled rather vigorously to me that I should knock on their door. I went into the kitchen to mime a conversation with Tara to check if that was a good idea given that Diane did not want me to knock on the door. Tara confirmed that she wished for me to do so, so I did. Harry answered the door and I told him Diane was with us. We exchanged some awkward conversation about the effectiveness of bleach versus alcohol for killing germs and there was an understanding that Diane would return home. When I came back into my apartment Diane was looking at pictures in our hallway and commenting that she liked seeing other people's apartments. She seemed reluctant to leave and both Tara and I were impatiently waiting for her departure. After she left, we both

exchanged expressions of *wasn't that crazy* to one another. However, it was not two minutes before our doorbell rang again. I answered it and Diane was there returning the half bottle of rubbing alcohol I gave her since she said she didn't have any. Both the bottle and her hands smelled of bleach, which made me wonder if Harry had forced her to put bleach on her hands. I accepted the returned alcohol, wondering why they couldn't just keep it. Tara and I had our dinner, incredulous about last night's occurrence, and debating which one of us will now need to return the sunglasses and paper Diane left behind. It looks like it's going to be me.

Saturday 3.21.2020

We had a repeat of Thursday evening last night. When I returned from walking Lucy at 11:00 pm, Diane was standing in front of her door. I asked her if Harry locked her out again and she confirmed that. I asked her if she wanted me to call the police, knock on her door, or if she wished to come into our apartment. She responded in the negative to all three. She explained that Harry wished for her to get into a cab and go to her brother's house on Long Island. Harry found her brother's number and gave it to her. Diane then came into our apartment and used Tara's phone again to call her brother. It seemed odd to me that from the side of the conversation I heard appeared to lack some question on the part of Diane's brother about the oddity of this scenario. However, I just proceeded to knock on my neighbor's door. Harry looked out of the peephole and then opened his door. I explained that Diane was in our apartment again. He sheepishly told me that she "violated the quarantine." I asked if he was sick and he replied that he wasn't. So I told him that we are not under quarantine and we may go out permitted that we remain six feet away from others. He said that he is imposing a quarantine. At this point, I thought he was paranoid and cruel and I told him that Diane called her brother. We would call a car service to take her to her brother's but she needed her phone, her medications, change of clothes, etc. (and that it was 11 pm at night... and in my tone conveyed *for christ sake you don't fucking lock your seriously ill wife out of the house and have her take a cab without a phone to Long Island*). Harry gathered up some items. He gave me a phone

without a sim card and said he could not find her phone. Tara called car service and we put her in a cab. Our doorman told us after the car service pulled away from the curb that this incident was not an aberration. Harry often has Diane waiting for him in the lobby when he is out seeing his girlfriend. One time she had soiled her incontinence brief and was sitting in the lobby waiting for him to return. Therefore, when Tara and I returned to our apartment I called the 84th precinct and left a message with the domestic violence unit.

[...]

Monday 3.30.2020

It's 8:30 am and my lazy cats have just ambled over to eat the food I put down for them. My dog and Tara are still sleeping. I love the quiet of the morning and the quiet is even quieter now and the mornings are even longer. I have hours to myself to address items on my list before having to negotiate my time. This is a novelty to me—or rather something I haven't had in a while. The schedule for when I eat, urinate, and sleep on weekdays is usually tightly structured and choreographed to maximize my efficiency, energy, and motivation. I feel guilty for enjoying the relative freedom while being isolated inside under rules of social distance and I wonder if this feeling will continue. Admittedly, this weekend's continual rainy weather did wear on my spirits and I did experience boredom last evening for the first time. But the quietude of this morning to think, read, reflect without dealing with a typical day filled with throngs of students and faculty has been pleasant.

Postscript to last week's APS note: I made contact with APS and provided Diane's information for her to hopefully get a home health aide. I have not seen or heard Diane or Harry but that has been my usual experience over the last 6+ years.

At 9:30 am APS called me again to say that Diane was not picking up her phone. I offered to knock on her door, but the caller suggested she would try in an hour.

4:11 pm

There are a couple of significant things I have left out likely due to self censoring from an embodied vestige of my Catholic upbringing. The first is more of a confession (another latent holdover). I have been watching an incredible amount of television in the evenings. I am concerned that my brain may rot as a result of this pandemic. The other is that I have been very concerned about my dad. I have called him at least once daily. He is immunocompromised both because of his age and because he is currently undergoing treatment for non hodgkin's lymphoma. I am trying to just text him today because I think that my surveillance of him is annoying him (and it's a bit onerous for me as well). Like many in his age group, it takes him on average two to three hours to respond to text messages. He has not completely embraced digital communication.

[...]

Monday 4.6.2020

Last night I had a dream that was both comforting and disturbing at the same time. It comprised two key figures from my research and work life. The setting was Seattle and the director of the site where I was given access was allowing me to go ahead to continue. However, his lax attitude about covid transmission made me anxious. He was not wearing a mask. I questioned whether transmission was still a threat. The scene moved to include my boss where I was moving within a space deemed contaminated. I had to be there for some reason. My supervisor entered the area and then there was a whirl of odd scenarios. One that I could tease out and remember is that she sent me on some errand to get items from the drying machine (this may be a holdover from my doing laundry yesterday or something related to the hygienic ritual practices of washing). I imagine that the dream represented my fatigue over the rituals of disinfecting and mask wearing. I went to bed last night worried that I did not wash my hands long enough when returning from walking the dog. And, this morning I woke to the news that a tiger has contracted covid.

I honestly despise wearing a face mask outside and whenever I am far away enough from people I move it to around my neck. It is difficult to breathe with a mask on my face. There is no feeling of fresh air and my vision is also occluded. So the walks outside on a lovely sunny day are now dampened by protective gear...I understand why, the sirens outside my window remind me. They are symbols of the morbidity and mortality statistics that we read daily on a local, national, and global level.

[...]

Tuesday 4.21.2020

As I read about conditions improving, slightly fewer COVID-related deaths and hospital admissions in New York City, I am hearing about cases within my wider social network. The cases are from outside of the center of New York City, which is consistent with what is being reported regarding the suburbs cresting after the city. This disparity is corroborated by my anecdotal conversations with health care workers that I know. My mother-in-law's nursing home in Queens (the borough in NYC hardest hit by COVID, where she is the director of nursing) has seen fewer patients going to the hospital and dying this week. However, my cousin, a nurse working in a small Nassau County hospital, is seeing the same steady stream of five COVID admissions a day. And, she indicated there are still PPE shortages; they are not receiving N95 masks (but another type of hospital grade mask).

My close friend told me on Saturday evening, when we spoke, that her uncle had died from COVID. He lived on Long Island, possibly Suffolk County. Last night, after teaching my seminar, I received a text from my mom indicating that my brother-in-law's colleague (whom he is in close contact with) tested positive. He is an essential worker, working for Metro North. My patience was a bit short -- unsure if that was because it was a long day or I am burnt out from constantly fielding problems in my sister's life... but my texts were a bit clipped: practical and less emotional. My advice was that he needs to self-quarantine. He suggested living in his basement, away from his family for two weeks, is the course of action that is recommended. I'm sure that my sister is displeased with that since

she will now have to wrangle her four children alone. I do not envy people with small children; I imagine this isolation is much more stressful having to manage their psychological, emotional, and physical needs on top of one's own.

Thursday 4.23.2020

My very dear friend has been vomiting all morning and has muscle aches and pain in the area of her left kidney. I was called by a mutual friend and asked to check in on her but not indicate that I heard that from her. I was told to wait before calling because my friend was apparently vomiting now. So as I waited, passing the time by grading, I received a phone call from Leslie. She called to thank me for a card I sent and I used the opportunity of her sounding terrible to ask what was wrong. She shared her symptoms and I advised her to call her doctor. I was surprised that it wasn't difficult to persuade her; she's typically quite stubborn. She must be scared—living alone. I would be also. I will hear from her again after her telehealth visit with her doctor...

Our mutual friend, Jen, is a social worker in a Brooklyn hospital. She said that more people are being discharged but the ICU cases do not recover. That corroborates reporting on immunity (as uncertain as that is) playing a significant role in the disease's trajectory. I inquired about her accounts of Remdesivir and she said that it is looking less promising than previously thought.

[...]

Thursday 4.30.2020

This diary is turning into a personal morbidity and mortality report. I write as Tara is still sleeping. When she awakes we are going over to our friend's. Yesterday we received a call indicating that Leslie was vomiting uncontrollably again. Her neighbor and friend, Patricia, is currently riding this out in the South with her family. She contacted Tara because Tara and Natalie (our resident cat rescue cooperators) are using Patricia's empty apartment for a foster cat that was found on the property. Tara took "Quinn" to the vet and she seems to be recovering from a host of health issues nicely and will be adopted.

When we went to Leslie's yesterday, she looked white as a sheet. She was on the couch and despite our pleas, she refused to go to urgent care. I was in touch with her siblings and her brother, a retired nurse, made some suggestions. I went to the pharmacy to gather up some OTC remedies and pushed some pedialyte on her to replenish her electrolytes, which she vomited up before we left. Tara and I are resolved this morning to call 911 if she does not agree to allow us to accompany her to urgent care. I informed her sister via text last night and she agreed with this course of action.

I am trying to temper my anger and frustration with her, but the truth is that I am scared. Leslie is so fucking difficult, especially when it comes to her health care. She typically ignores problems, has a shitty GP, and does not comply with his treatment plans. I had to fight with her to enter her apartment yesterday.

5:21 pm

After spending several hours at Leslie's, we are back home feeling much better that our friend is not currently dying. She drank fluids and even ate a half sandwich while we were there. And, it was actually pleasant to be working in another location other than my apartment (well, if I am going to violate a social distancing measure, I may as well enjoy it).

[...]

Tuesday 5.12.2020

I lost the habit of identifying the day of week for several entries above. It is probably an indication of the monotony of life at the moment. I'm taking a break from grading hell right now, if only to maintain a small hold on my sanity. This may seem like an embellishment, but the boredom of repeating the same comments while seriously engaging in work is an exhausting business. One that I cannot say I am always fully committed to doing. Usually, I can commiserate with colleagues about students (which I have mixed feelings about—it is both an outlet but also a distraction). To some extent, Tara has served as a nice collaborator, in that regard, during these moments of social isolation. She gets her share of subpar work from stu-

dents and annoying questions... However, she is busy right now and I need to scream after reading each essay or two. This entry will need to serve as my scream!

[...]

. . .

“I go into my room, firmly closing the door behind me. I’m with me again.”

VOLKAN EKE

VE, who often animates other people more than he does himself, is a Doctoral Candidate in New York whose existence has had to come to terms with its biggest fear due to COVID-19. Whenever he suffered uncertainty in terms of his doctoral project, which represents more or less 2/3 of his life, Volkan had found respite in possessing the single focus of being able to go back home. As an international student, Volkan has always treated life in New York as a passing thing. He’d always manage to get back home if things got rough. Over the course of the COVID-19 times, he had to grapple with the ensuing fear that New York, and not the virus, had actually proven to be his biggest villain and inescapable fate. Could he find a way to escape once again, as he has done so many times before? Or has his good faith in escapism, cultivated through years of virtuous practice and hard-earned experience, finally turned out to be misplaced? I suppose I do not have to tell you how frightening it can be for an anthropologist to be unable to go back home.

[...]

The sound of a page turning

[Date: The big week of NYC shutdowns]

Pretty soon, I look down on the world from the same hill.

“I moved”, I say to my friend and colleague who had merely tuned in for a check-in. It’s been a while since we’ve last seen each other as my default mode of being is already socially distant in the first place. I’ve been quite worried about the increasingly unsanitary conditions of my Airbnb and showings-riddled old place. My partner been growing quite worried too, I add. We had been monitoring the pandemic since the early days of its onset in Wuhan after all. My friend is freaked out to find out that I moved to a new place, but her message ends on a tone that is not on the same page as mine: “*thankfully all these measures they’re taking will put our minds at ease*”. There have been talks about taking measures at the department too. In a show of uncharacteristic preparedness, it doesn’t take long for the school to announce taking everything online and closing down campus. This effectively takes all classes online, but not just classes, but my PhD exams too. A contested notion as it was met with resistance when it was first brought up in the past in committee communications.

As it takes little for me to turn the page officially to social distancing, some of my colleagues, if not advisors, remain on the previous pages. In a few days, we hear that both my colleague and advisor got the virus.

I hope to catch wind of the sound of a page turning. *I told them so, didn’t I?*

Nevertheless, I also find myself wishing there could be a way for me to be there for them. I’d like to think of this as my better side winning out. Because it’s for their own good too.

For I am good at helping, when I know I was right.

My Name is Sam

[A day after I had stopped checking the calendar]

The vast hangar looks like the inside of a high tech warehouse. The garage lift is empty as my bike is nowhere to be found. I will have to make the trek on foot. But the terminal is very smart so I don’t have to interact with anyone in the shelter. The conveyor belts come to life and soon I’m handed two metal suitcases to take to another shelter in the area. I take my cargo, give it a moment’s thought about whether to attach it to my suit or to put it on my back rack. Decisions like this matter. I check my maps and anticipate lots of hard terrain and difficult footing. I don’t trust my back

pains but I trust people even less so I scurry away regardless.

It is a beautiful world with bright sunlight. From here on to the snowy mountains out in the distance there is nothing but the calm of unused craggy landscape. Wonder what it was like before there were cities full of people. Not as beautiful I wager. If I'm lucky, I won't encounter any crazies along the way. The people might be wiped out but their leftovers are not friendly. Or perhaps too friendly. I like my cargo run when it's just me. With the sound of one foot in front of the other, I hold on to the bag straps on my shoulders tightly. The next shelter shouldn't be far now. I imagine the terminal will be as easy to use as the last one so I don't have to interact with anyone. I press the buttons tightly. It makes sure Sam walks his way just fine.

My Name is No Longer Sam
[Same day]

I hate this. I hate that I have to move my stuff. No, I hate that I've gotten so much better at it that I don't even notice anymore. I wish there was a way to do this without asking for help. It is hard to move cargo around and I don't trust my neck pains but I trust people even less so I scurry away regardless.

I strap on my armor. It consists of a hoodie with my shirt safely tucked in my trousers. The hoodie is a cosplay item. I trust it. I might need my shirt when I get back so it's well protected. Got my trousers in my home country though. Travel limitations now prevent me from going back there. I would hate to see my trousers from home wasted on a trek in these alien lands. The school bag strapped on my back is kept empty for the cargo I can hopefully save when I make it to my destination. The cart I drag along is also empty but reserved for contaminated cargo. I take a deep breath, fend off my new roommates' offers of help. Adjust my mask, pull up my rubber gloves and open the door outside. It is a dimly lit world with lots of dust and grime in the corridors. With any luck, I won't encounter the crazies at my old place. The airbnbs or visitors might be gone but the apartment they left behind is as good as contaminated already.

The trek is treacherous but I stand at the entrance of my old apartment anyway. I lean to the

door and listen carefully. No movements inside. Ok this is my chance. Regrettably there is no way to open this door quietly and just like that, the whole building knows I'm here and up to something. I don't want to be seen wearing a mask and having to explain. I dash in quickly with my bag and cart trailing behind. Checking doors and corners so as not to run into my old roommates or any other unfriendlies. When I play as Sam, there is this thing I do where I press the buttons tightly. It makes sure that Sam walks his way just fine. I must still be pressing the buttons because even in the rush of things, I haven't bumped into any of the corners. I go into my room, firmly closing the door behind me. I'm with me again.

My old room looks abandoned. With things lying around like they suddenly fell from the ceiling one day. This is the end of the road for one of the gloves. With practiced speed, I clean with the gloved hand and cycle the essentials into my bags with the other. I suspect some of my stuff must have been exposed, but I cannot part with all of them, so they go right into the cart. They will have to be sorted out later. With the cart and the bags, it is simply too much to carry for one person. I press the buttons tightly. Lean on the door and listen to the apartment, still contaminated, if not more so. There is only so much speed one can muster when going out of the room with the weight of an arbitrarily selected plethora of one's own things. With the corner of my eye I see shadows sliding under my roommate's door. Is this finally the time he is coming out of his shelter? I coordinate between carrying cargo, dragging the cart around and sneaking out. When you sneak, the key is to act like now is not the time for the worst to happen. I sense movement in the Airbnb end of the corridor. I thought they had left already. The apartment door mirrors my impatience as it shuts close before I can fully drag everything out. I press on and make it out in a close call.

I stand there for a moment. I'm with me again. But I still keep pressing the buttons.

[...]

On Vincent and indulgence

[Date: Towards the end of lockdown, when we could exempt ourselves to an indulgence or two every now and then]

Today, the ants have decided that my name is Vincent.

Vincent is a lot harder to be than Sam. In this one game, Vincent is riddled with so much guilt he wakes up to a nightmare tower that he needs to climb every night lest he risks falling dead in his sleep. That is how the curse goes, for one who has indulged in a bad fantasy. Although, the true difficulty is not the horror, nor the emotional weight that comes from playing a character who suffers from self-deprecation and guilt, for I am all too familiar with those.

But from the fact that Vincent chooses, or as playing Vincent I chose, to help uplift others I meet at the tower.

In any case, when Vincent wakes up, he finds his 3x5 room overrun by ants.

I hadn't played this game in a long while. Why am I Vincent today, of all the days, then? Because today, I woke up to a room full of ants.

My parents have always taught me to keep my room tidy. No food anywhere in the room, let alone the vicinity of the bed. But once, only for once, given the pedestrian extraordinariness of COVID, I thought I could indulge myself. And left an open milkshake on the bedside desk overnight.

This is what you get for not doing the right thing for once. For being someone other than what you imagine yourself to be, someone who doesn't care about his lessons, if only for once.

I now spend the day wondering two things: 1. was I in a nightmare tower in my sleep? Does this mean I'm also cursed - for perhaps indulging in the bad habit of neglecting my code of cleanliness for once? 2. how do I get rid of a whole colony of ants without spreading them, and thereby the curse too, to others?

This is going to be a long day.

. . .

“Time will come to a stop.”

NICOLAS LANGLITZ

I'm professor of anthropology at The New School in New York. As the COVID crisis hits and administrative meetings multiply, I have the bad luck of chairing the department. I started this diary when the university had just closed its campus and all meetings were moved to Zoom. This semester I'm not teaching though. Two years ago, my family moved from Brooklyn to Maplewood, NJ. Maplewood is a village or suburb in the Greater New York Area. A direct train connects us with Penn Station. Most people here work in Manhattan. They tend to be middle- to upper middle-class white collar workers who now get to work from their home offices (although one of our friends plays a role in the Broadway musical Harry Potter, which was an extremely well paying job, but now she is without income). When I don't have to go to my office, I usually work in the Millburn Public Library. But that has just closed as well. So I'm working from our house, which I share with my wife Donya and our two small children, Kiki (5 years old) and Loretta (2 years). All daycares have closed and they can't go on playdates with their friends anymore, which is not exactly conducive to work, but I do get to spend more time with the children—which I enjoy.

Finally Nothing Happens
15 March 2020

The New School has shut down classes and administrative meetings to prevent the spreading of Sars-CoV2. Everything has been moved to Zoom video conferences. On Wednesday, I already had online meetings from 10am to 4pm. Now spring break gives us a moment to breathe.

It's a beautiful spring day. The trees are beginning to blossom. I go running on the soccer field of DeHart Park right behind our house and our 5-year-old daughter Kiki agrees to run with me for the first time (she gets to take short-cuts). My wife Donya rides next to me with our two-year old daughter Loretta on the back seat. Many people are enjoying the spring weather in the park. Everybody keeps their distance, but the atmosphere is relaxed and peaceful. It feels like the time around Thanksgiving or between Christmas and New Year when everything comes to a halt. As I run, I feel energized and free. I'm looking forward to a summer without travel during which I can write a short book on psychedelic mysticism titled *Permanent Holiday*.

The situation reminds me of how World War I began. Everybody was excited because, finally, something was about to happen. Today, everybody is excited because, finally, nothing happens. Time

will come to a stop. But we know how long the enthusiasm about the war lasted.

[...]

Anthropological Pessimism
20 March 2020

The Dutch organizer of a canceled psychedelics conference writes back to me about rescheduling the event. I have never met him in person, but these days otherwise purely logistical exchanges often turn into more personal conversations about how we experience this global pandemic in different parts of the world. This colleague expresses his hope that the crisis will not only kill possibly millions of people and destroy our economies but foster a sense of human interconnectedness. And indeed we're creating and feeling this interconnectedness as we write to each other. I experience it when I leave the house to go jogging on the soccer field before dinner. Every time a short middle-aged black woman in a black parka paces around the field. She is always talking to someone on her cell phone, but every time I pass her we exchange a smile. In the university, one of my colleagues has

come down with a high fever and, although they still don't have the resources to test him, he has to self-quarantine. Immediately, other members of the department offer to go shopping for him and drop off bags of food at his doorstep. Yes, we are all in this together and facing this challenge together nurtures a sense of solidarity.

And yet it's not just because I enjoy playing devil's advocate that I object to the Dutch colleague's expression of hope. From past epidemics we know that they don't alleviate but aggravate social inequalities. Here in the United States, this effect will be especially dramatic as those without secure jobs—and even many with jobs they thought secure—are losing their income and their housing. The rich will take a temporary hit as the plunging stock markets decimate their wealth, but if you have more than enough money even in times like these now is the time to buy—to emerge from the crisis even richer. The *New York Times* reports that two Republican senators sold off stock affected by the pandemic before the financial crash after they learned about the bleak predictions of experts in closed-door meetings. And yet they didn't warn the public or contradict their President who ignored briefings by his own intelligence services and dismissed the pandemic as a Democratic hoax, yet another attempt to impeach him by wrecking confidence in the strong economy that would fuel his re-election. At press conferences, Trump is sparring with journalists over whether it's racist to call the new corona virus “the Chinese virus” or “Kung-flu.” Meanwhile, European governments can't come up with a unified response but confiscate medical supplies to prevent them from being brought to fellow EU member states who need them just as badly. Italy has largely fended for itself—until the Chinese, as they are beginning to get the original outbreak in their own country under control, come to the rescue, filling the geopolitical void which Trump's America First politics have created.

The sense of interconnectedness which “humanity” experiences in the face of a common enemy might still be giving a warm glow to everyday life in these early days of the pandemic, but in the political sphere it hasn't even lasted for three weeks. As the financial and medical resources to save our lives and livelihoods are growing scarcer by the day, new tears in the social fabric will pull

us apart. As the recession hits, the crime rate has been predicted to rise. It won't take long for man to be a wolf to man again. COVID won't cure me of my anthropological pessimism.

[...]

Fever

23 March 2020

Our 2-year old daughter Loretta develops a fever in the evening. We measure 39.1°C. She oscillates between being in good spirits and feeling miserable, wanting to nurse. We give her a Tylenol suppository, which helps. Her sleep is fitful, but she wakes up cheerful again, still running a temperature though.

Probably nothing serious (even though children have been reported to develop only mild symptoms of COVID-19). What I find troubling is that we have been very serious about social distancing in the past 10 days. Donya went into supermarkets twice but took all the precautions and the children stayed with me. The only time that we took Loretta into a social space was when we went to the consulate three days ago. And we made every effort to contain the children, we cleaned their hands with hand sanitizers several times—and yet some virus seems to have slipped through. Sheer luck that it probably wasn't SARS-CoV-2.

Angry Old Lady

25 March 2020

I take our daughters to Maplecrest Park in Maplewood. As I'm pushing Loretta on her tricycle and making sure that Kiki doesn't cross busy streets on her scooter, I'm trying to talk on Skype to a Cologne friend who self-quarantined because of a soar throat. The girls get angry at me for not paying attention, so I end the conversation.

In the park, we run into an elderly lady who starts yelling at me: “Do you know what all these people are doing in the park together? Why are they here?” I say that it looks as if the group nearest to us was a family playing soccer. “Impossible!” she yells back. “I don't understand why your generation doesn't care that my generation will die of this virus!” I tell her that I very much agree with her about the importance of social dis-

tancing measures. It took me two weeks to get my mother in Germany to understand the severity of the situation. Until a week ago, she still squeezed herself into a car with several friends to go for a walk together. She even considered attending a funeral and a church service for a neighbor whom she had disliked while he was still alive. Many of her friends, including a doctor who lives upstairs, think that the recommended social distancing measures are ridiculous. In other words, the divide isn't simply generational. That doesn't pacify the frightened old lady. My daughters are about to get upset that again I'm not paying attention to them and we have to move on.

[...]

Natural Historical Nightmare
Friday, 26 March 2020

At 5 a.m., my 5-year old daughter Kiki dashes into our bedroom. "Daddy, I'm scared of the cough," she says crawling under my blanket. It seems as if she had had a nightmare. I can't fall asleep anymore and think of Koselleck's essay about dreams of terror during the Third Reich. History leaves its traces in our dreams and so does the natural history of SARS-CoV2.

[...]

911
Saturday, 4 April 2020

I go for a walk in the morning before the rest of my family wakes up. I talk to my mom on FaceTime. As I get back to DeHart Park I pass by two African American ladies chatting at the bottom of a short grassy slope leading to the baseball field. One is lying on the floor with her left leg straight and her right leg bend, which looks like a position from one of my daily stretches. I'm just surprised that she would be doing this on the grass, which is still a little wet. She is wearing a face mask. Then a third person starts calling, gesturing toward the lady on the floor. Suddenly, I realize that she is injured. I climb down to her and she explains that she ran past a dog that jumped at her and she fell down the slope. She had a back operation five years ago and has limped every

since. She appears very anxious, which I understand all too well. After experiencing the fragility of your back such even small events can be terrifying. I feel ashamed that I initially misinterpreted the situation. I call 911 and soon after the firemen arrive with face masks. They ask the injured lady—Beatrice is her name—if she had any COVID symptoms, which she denies. They pull her up and she refuses to be brought to a hospital. She seems fine, just anxious. She wants to walk home, but the firemen insist that she calls her husband to get picked up.

I meet the lady who found her two more times in the park that day and we always greet each other. The park has become such a social hub now that everybody is largely confined to their homes.

[...]

New Life
21 April 2020

I dream of having been accepted to an MA program in Israel. In the wake of COVID, American higher education has collapsed and I have to start a new life. I must have applied indiscriminately because when the acceptance letter arrives I don't know anything about the university. I check online and their research in paleontology looks really interesting to me. I don't know anything about paleontology other than that you get to travel to excavation sites and dig out bones of extinct animal species. But I'm ready to do something entirely different.

Together with my family, I get onto a Deutsche Bahn train to Jerusalem. We realize that DB lost our suitcases. They always mess things up, but I don't mind that our old stuff is gone.

We get off at a small stop in a neighborhood full of students. It's spring and the atmosphere is relaxed and easy going. I realize that I should let my mom know that we've moved to Israel. Even in times of COVID, I'm sure she will mostly worry about the risk of a terror attack. Her risk perceptions tend to be irrational. Life seems so carefree over here.

I call the university admissions officer because I haven't received the paperwork they wanted to send by mail. He asks for my address and wants me to spell my name. I realize that I'm not spell-

ing my own name, but a different one: S-C-H-L-A-N-K (which means slim). “Nicolas Schlank”? I don’t know why I’ve given a false name. If I’m serious about this new life, I shouldn’t give some alias. But maybe I did just that because I really wanted to start an entirely new life?

At least in my dreams, this crisis opens up possibilities and restores a sense of youthful expectancy.

[...]

. . . .

“The delineation of loneliness resulting from COVID and exaggerated version of isolation that was already part of our modern life is, however, thin.”

VAIDA NORVILAITĖ

I am an anthropology candidate, and my goal to disembark the shores of the tropical Rio de Janeiro this summer for nine-month-long fieldwork has shattered into pieces. Unsettlement is what I am dealing with.

Just before the COVID crisis, I returned from my home in Lithuania. I spent a couple of weeks with my mother since her health is on and off. I keep reconsidering the decision to come back to the reddest dot in the Corona map on earth. I also asked my roommate to move out, little did I know back then that confinement was about to start. Overall, I enjoy my sunny and cozy solitary cell in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn. Sometimes it just gets too solitary, not to mention expensive. Looking for a new person just seems too much of a risky idea right now.

My boyfriend James just moved to New York and lives in Greenpoint. He is the only person I see and sometimes bike with. On a windy and grey day, only the piece of road populatic by the Hasidic community continues its life. It feels like a surreal scene from David Lynch’s movie when crossing it.

March 23rd, Monday, 5:41 pm

A friend, who shamed me for planning to go to Nashville (a trip originally planned for this upcoming weekend and canceled due to Corona) reached out to me with a suggestion to flee our apartments and go on a clandestine trip to Austin, Texas. Imagine—30 degrees celsius, a barbeque, and a backyard. I just got rid of my roommate, so leaving a space free of foreign problems, attitudes, dirty coffee mugs, and paying yet another rent does sound too alluring. On the other hand, nothing else really does. Neither the opportunity to finish unfinished projects, nor meditations, nor watching Netflix all day long. In fact, everything sucks. But maybe this week will be the one turning the sentiments of unsettlement into something more settled.

[...]

March 25th, Wednesday, 3:32 pm

Today my friend Mike woke me up from the lethargy condition that I have been in and out of for the last 10 days. He introduced me to a mental vaccine of mental toughness consisting of 1gallons of water, 45 minutes of exercising outside, and 45 minutes of exercising inside, 10 pages of reading

(this one is easy!), healthy eating, and no alcohol. And this has to last for 75 consecutive days. Honestly, no alcohol is the only thing that makes me hesitate. Alcohol is so central to survival in these times of depression. Also, can I even go for walks every day in Brooklyn, New York? It seems this city is becoming a hot mess.

[...]

April 2nd, Thursday 7:03 am

Been throwing up all night. Out of blue. I did not eat anything suspicious, everyone around is comparatively healthy and managing the way through. And sometimes I wake up, have to sit in my bed for a couple of minutes until I finally realize that this is not some surreal dream and I am by myself here in New York, Brooklyn. Maybe I shouldn’t have asked my roommate to leave, even though she kept the most enormous pile of clothes and uncleaned mugs and other dirty dishes in her room to the point that one could not enter it? At least I could wake up to some sort of liveliness and extra money. The last time I was throwing up like this when I was going through some uneasiness at

school. Maybe this is how my body screams for attention to be more gentle with myself.

April 6th, Monday 5:30 pm

I had a call with my Portuguese tutor Francisco, he lives in Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. I get live updates about what is happening in Brazil, my future fieldsite where I had to be this summer, from him twice a week. I listen to his complaints about Bolsonaro, see him migrating from his house to his parents and back, observe how his mood changes with the numbers of cases growing and new policies of seclusion being installed. His studies in marketing have been moved online, but he is happy that the language tutoring business is thriving—he says he has 10-15 classes every day. Today we were just talking since he was too exhausted. I told him about my doctoral project, about my unfulfilled expectations to start it this June, about uncertainties around it, about my research objects. I noticed his eyes lighting up when I mentioned that one of the collectives I attempt to research are spiritist mediums in Brazil. Apparently, he is one! He realized that last year, when he saw the spirit of a man who previously used to live in his parents' house hanging out in their kitchen. He agreed to help me with my research and be my informant! I think I will stop throwing up now.

[...]

April 14th 2020, 10 am

My friend called. The one that a few weeks ago suggested to plan a trip to Texas. Now she says she has rented a house in Mississippi by the lake. She and her husband made an executive decision and they are definitely going. I explained to her that I cannot afford any luxurious trips at the moment. She said that they will give me a generous discount. As much as this idea sounded crazy a few weeks ago, now I am starting to see myself in the deep south, sitting on the porch and sipping some sweet tea. The stickiness and humidity of the air soaking to my skin. New York is alright, and the cheerful claps every night at 7pm (today I went all in and banged some pots and pans) give hope. The daily cheer for the essential workers also provides an opportunity to greet my neighbors. The couple

across the street looks very friendly. Despite this daily splash of positivity, I still feel caged. Both in my apartment and my thoughts.

April 15th, 6pm

We are in all seriousness contemplating going to Mississippi. But can we? Shouldn't the national guard at the border stop us and send us back? Can we even cross states? Where will we sleep midway? Maybe the best idea is just to do it in one go and not to stop anywhere. Where will we stop for the bathroom? Are we endangering local communities by coming there from New York? The anthropologist inside me is actually excited to go. I can sense a lot of ethnographic material throughout this eighteen-hour journey.

[...]

April 17th–18th, the longest days so far

We did it—we managed to reach the state of Mississippi. New York has never been easier to drive through, almost disturbingly easy. We were not stopped, we were not asked what we were doing, where we were going. The whole trip was almost too easy. "We are all in this together. Keep social distancing," said one of the signs in Pennsylvania. Virginia struck me as refreshingly green, full of picturesque valleys and peaking mountains. The bible belt states perturbed us with countless gigantic crosses, confederate flags, license plates with religious references, churches around every corner, fast food restaurants, and lots of signs. "Trump, 2020." "Don't worry about the future, it has not come yet." "Trump hates fags." "If you have time to worry, you have time to pray more." Gas stations were empty, and we were the only ones wearing masks and gloves. We decided to treat ourselves with the southern *délicatesse* of chick-a-filet. The drive-through pickup line was long but worth the wait. The front of the car served us as a table.

The very last stop was Walmart at Lucedale, the nearest town from the place my friends rented. I have never been to a shop that was huge and empty. In comparison to New York, where lines to enter Trader Joe's were around 3 blocks, Walmart was operating business as usual. Barely any of the

shoppers were wearing masks and definitely not 100% of the staff. The middle-aged woman at the counter showered us with the southern hospitality, smile, and laughter. Although my inner barometer could not indicate the level of her genuinity. When her co-worker came to chat with her, she complained about how tired she is and said she is thinking of leaving this job. “I just don’t care if you fire me,” she said, “I have shares on Amazon.”

Hans Blumenberg (1997) in his “Shipwreck with Spectator” observes that “In the field of representation, shipwreck is something like the “legitimate” result of seafaring, and a happily reached harbor or serene calm on the sea is only the deceptive face of something that is deeply problematic” (p. 9). We reached our harbor—a majestic four bedroom house near the private lake, which at night explodes from the sounds of frogs croaking. We found our own serenity in Mississippi, but the serenity of Mississippi Covid19-wise is almost disturbing. Social distancing is not something that is visible and tangible here. So much more is happening underneath the soil of this wetland and it is almost a pity that it is not the Covid-19 hysteria.

April 20th, 6:08 pm

Although Mississippi has been our home for only a few full days, I keep replaying images of the distressed New York. It almost feels that I can relive my emotions more sharply. The visual of an empty Brooklyn bridge is stuck in my head. As if leaving the shipwreck of NYC, the privileged position of the insider, placed me in a better view of a remote spectator. I am enjoying a cup of my late afternoon earl grey in the porch, hiding from the intense spring sun. Yesterday I forgot to put sunscreen on, and my arms and legs burnt. How does the fact that I am in this safe harbor (where the only thing I have to worry about is my red limbs) affecting my memories about New York?

April 23rd, 9pm

We decided to stay for another week. An 18 hour trip after only a few days in this southern paradise does not seem like a fair deal. Today I cooked some pasta with shrimp, and we played cards sipping red wine. Few last days meshed into each other. It is not clear where they end where they be-

gin—they are all pleasantly calm, soothing, and serene. I read books, write to my friends, swim in the lake and relax on a chaise longue in the backyard. We were supposed to have a call with our friends in New York, but I completely forgot. Completely forgot that there my friend Alex still sees semi-trucks with dead bodies in them. It seems that the situation in New York is getting relatively better, and some states are considering opening.

April 26th, 8:30 pm

[...]

Life in Mississippi flows without any significant disturbance. The next day on our walk, we will see the women with messy grey curly hair passing by again. She goes fishing at the Dream Strike lake, the lake visible through my bedroom window. In the emptiness, vastness, and spaciousness of nature and self-imposed effortless social distancing, the virus cannot find its ways in Lucedale, Mississippi.

April 28th, 11 am

Time is slow, and my morning coffee never tasted better. The only disturbing thought is that we are going back to New York soon. An image of being trapped in a tiny apartment makes my stomach ache. And it is not only the spatial containment but the absence of movement freedom that bothers me. Even when you go outside, you feel somehow guilty for walking and even breathing. To sustain the positivity and to redirect my thoughts, I stopped reading news. Maybe the news stopped reaching me. The mal-informed president and his inane performance, fatalistic graphs, catastrophic consequences of the market’s downfall to people’s lives penetrate our brains like mental bugs. As Steven Pinker (2018), a Harvard professor observes, “consumers of negative news, not surprisingly, become glum. [...] misperception of risk, anxiety, lower mood levels, learned helplessness, contempt and hostility towards others, desensitization, and in some cases, [...] complete avoidance of news.”

At the beginning of the crisis, I did consume a lot of news. I would stay with my eyes wide open until 3 or 4 in the morning, and I barely ever strug-

gle to fall asleep. Pinker (2018) aims to prove that we lack conceptual tools to ascertain whether progress on the global scale has taken place or not and that the very idea of things getting better, in general, does not compute. And at the moment, my brain cannot “compute” the near-future outcome of the situation. On the one hand, the scale of the matter is so vast that it is hard to speculate its movement patterns, the accuracy of the numbers, and prediction models. On the other hand, the reaction to it can be very sudden and almost unexpected. The flights from Europe were shut in one day. It took only a few days to close local businesses and pass social-distancing orders. Should we stop in Georgia on our way to New York for a nice meal? It just doesn't sound right yet.

[...]

April 30th, 2:03 pm

Some states are opening up—pictures of people drinking lattes in Georgia and going to nail salons in Alabama are fleeing the internet. New York will remain closed. How two weeks of Mississippian wilderness will affect the remainder of time under the quarantine conditions in the Big Apple? The destabilizing moments of numbness are what I fear the most.

I just finished listening to Masha Gessen's talk about solitude and loneliness during the pandemic. She was interviewed by Simon Critchley. I enjoyed the content of the conversation almost as much as observing these two philosophers in their ordinary home environments. It is interesting to contemplate how Zoom (which became a generic word to describe the means of remote communication), amplifies social and spatial distancing. Freezing screens, cut off sounds, ability to leave or turn off the camera at any point is part of our daily communication these days. At the same time, Zoom conferencing exposes us to intimate environments, our homes. Makeup free faces and sweatpants became the new normality. While Masha was wearing a black turtleneck and a grey blazer, Simon had a Liverpool FC training top on.

Masha explained the difference between solitude and loneliness, saying that the former is an action, while the latter is a feeling. “While solitude is a philosopher's dream and a deliberately

chosen condition, loneliness can be felt amid a large crowd. Thinking happens in solitude and it requires being alone. The forced isolation, however, is the enemy of solitude—it converts to loneliness and creates conditions of losing the comfort of one's thoughts,” she said. “Loneliness,” stressed Masha, “is compounded with anxiety and fear. And now, philosophers, people whose job is to imagine the future are lonely. The idea that we might change the world is not self-evident. Indeed, philosophers were trying to cultivate self-isolation for years, and this should be a philosophical dream, but it isn't. The overwhelming sense that the world has emptied out is debilitating.” In response to the observations concerning the intellectual life, Ann Stoler's comment popped up in the QA box: “the fact that we as academics and intellectuals in the making can't ‘concentrate’ as we ‘should’- aren't able to use the privilege of this time for our own work something we can exploit feels as if we have been exposed to ourselves, that the projects we thought so important (are perhaps not), that the ‘work’ we so value is often an affect, that we perform for ourselves. We all did think that we would find space to advance our dissertations and manuscripts, but we got caught in the privilege and the protections that we have built around our lives.”

The delineation of loneliness resulting from COVID and exaggerated version of isolation that was already part of our modern life is, however, thin. “When I pass a shopping mall biking, I cannot tell the difference between a closed or opened shopping mall. We see our pre-conditions exaggerated. In a crisis, we become more ourselves. Loneliness is endemic to contemporary American life,” acutely notices Masha. Indeed, sometimes I catch myself comparing how my street looked before the crisis and during it. I contemplate how I utilized these public spaces and what role they played in my life, what was home to me, and how its perception is changing through this experience.

Masha also noticed that “things just happen too quickly and become new common sense/new reality at the speed of light. We are witnessing the disappearance of society, the loss of time and space—the Arendtian totalitarian loneliness. Distance has become an abstraction. We live close to our families, but we cannot see them. So many

connections are not occurring anymore. Even Trump, who thrives on masses and rallies, is destabilized." The crowd he is continually facing (and recently has refused not to) is not his personal favorite—they are informed and seeking-for-answers journalists. "While Trump was in denial," noticed Masha, "the country was functioning with no disruptions. The bureaucratic machine was not malfunctioning, it worked as it was supposed to work. It is not designed to consider the possibility of failure. Nationalism has become the answer. Nationalism offers the promise of the divine and a way to break with loneliness. It is the last resort of locating yourself, a safety hub. Countries of Europe closed the borders as an automatic gesture. And that's terrifying." "We find ourselves in the Hobbesian state," responded Simon to Masha's reaction to self-isolation of the European nations.

At the very end of the talk, Simon asked whether "the pandemic can be envisioned as a portal for new possibilities. And if so, what is it a portal to?" To finish the conversation, Masha raised a few questions: "Can we think about the interconnectedness of the world without thinking about national borders? What is school for? The crisis has shown that school in modern society is for warehousing children. Do we want to warehouse our children when we return to society?"

May 2nd, 11:pm pm

It is our last day in Lucedale, Mississippi. We are leaving for New York tomorrow. Everything was perfect today. Midday corn with butter and chili flakes, an improvised football match, even the walk during the golden hour passing the abhorrently smelling farm, a sunset yoga practice with an audience of around a dozen fisherman in the lake and an evening discussions by the hypnotizing fire reminiscing good old pre-corona days. We miss bars, saunas in the gyms, freedom just to go whatever one's eyes see and feet take. The highlight of the day, we all agree, was the face-to-face encounter of the lady we saw the other day. When we talk about her, we call her Darlene.

Darlene: "You guys are leaving tomorrow, right? You guys sure enjoy walking, the fishing isn't good today, but you guys don't like to fish anyways."

James: "I'd like to learn to fish."

Darlene puts her fishing rod down and comes closer (closer than the recommended 6 feet): "Sorry I'm hard of hearing, you guys leaving tomorrow? Yeah, I've been fishing a lot, I used to work at the drugstore, but I quit, now I collect unemployment. I like to be surrounded by people. My husband passed away 17 years ago. In this lake, most people just put the fish back, but if I catch something, I'll take it home and cook for my kids. I know the family that used to live in that house. The kids are all grown up now and have left. There was Michaela, Ethan, Elliot, Mia, the youngest is a doctor now in California. You heard about this corona stuff? It's bad, it's horrible. We've had 14 cases in George County—that's this county. People not wearing masks and whatnot. I used to get my hair done once a week. I don't go anymore, too dangerous now."

James: "Are those your horses next door?"

Darlene: "No, those horses belong to Marty Davis. He has two kids—they ride. You better enjoy your walk now, walk on. This is the real country of America. The country. Are you guys leaving tomorrow? Have a safe trip. You must be leaving in the morning cos the cleaner will come in, next people coming in around 4."

May 3rd, 9:30 pm

Today we left Mississippi. Instead of dividing our trip into two days, we split it into three. Our goal for today was Nashville, Tennessee, and we reached it. Tennessee is one of the states that was supposed to open up, but once we were there, it did not feel like open. Maybe because we arrived in the middle of the storm. The drive for the last hour was horrifying. We could see the tops of the trees reaching the ground, and our humongous Chevrolet Equinox (appropriate for the American road trip) was sliding to the sides of the road. I sheltered inside our car, while James ran into the hotel we have booked for the night. He came back all drenched in rain and breathless. Our hotel lost electricity, and we had to drag our stuff upstairs via the side door. None of the staff in the hotel were wearing masks. They gave us a presidential suite (although it did not feel very presidential in a hotel of a lower budget), which indicated that there are only that many people staying. After the storm calmed down and the rain seized,

we braved for a walk to downtown Nashville. We crossed the river, and the educational signs telling about the lynching history and slavery were guiding us to the center of it all. The shiny signs of the bars and music venues were intensely pulsing as if inviting people to come in, but there wasn't a soul around. The main streets, the focal veins of the city, which in normal circumstances were floating with drunken bodies and country music sounds, were apocalyptically quiet. Except Hooters was open, but nobody was inside, just a lonely host.

Out of nowhere, a bachelorette party of three with all appropriate attributes popped up. They were drinking champagne from the bottle and taking pictures. I secretly wish I had taken a photo of them. My stomach was upset with the fast-food meal from Sonic. The 1000 calorie burger just sat there, refusing to be digested. We found an ice cream shop on our way back, and a vanilla scoop on a cone and a cup of black tea helped me to feel alive again. My sugar must have dropped. The electricity in the hotel was still gone, so we dwelled in complete darkness saving batteries of our phones and computers. Instead of navigating social media, we were traversing the empty corridors of the ghost hotel and the tunnels of our minds. We were witnessing a historical moment, and Nashville revealed it in its eminence. James, being a black brit, was wrapping his head around the signs about the lynching being right to all these bars and restaurants. He found that contrast to signify the entire microcosm of America – deep traditions of country music side by side with slavery and racism. And the pandemic circumstances made that disparity to stand out even sharper.

May 5th, 8 pm

We are back in the city. The sun rays wrapped the skyline of Manhattan upon our entrance through the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, connecting Staten Island and Brooklyn. The rest of the trip through Ohio and then Pennsylvania was uneventful, but scenic. The 76 highway from Pittsburgh, where we spent a night, to New York unveiled the northeastern greenery, rocky landscapes, valleys, and flats. In contrast, to the southern humidity and heat, the air was crispy and fresh. But huge signs screaming, "Trump 2020" were the same. For a few hours, we sang along the famous road trip songs—Hotel

California and likes. Under the cheerfulness of our voices, one could sense an aftertaste of sweet bitterness of going back home. When I opened the door to my apartment, it looked like a dollhouse. The cheap Wayfair furniture seemed so small and comic in juxtaposition to the real and adultlike furnishings of the Mississippian lake house. The windows looked dusty, and the plants half alive. I did not plan on leaving them for that long. Smith street was busier than two and a half weeks ago. In general, on the road and the city, the atmosphere relaxed. People might be getting tired.

[...]

May 12th, 3:31 pm

It is hard to be with myself sometimes and my mood, which tends to fluctuate like a rollercoaster, does not bring easiness. There is a possibility our lives will be like this for months and months and any intellectualization of the current state just does not feel like making it better.

May 17th, 9:54 pm

Mayor De Blasio warned New Yorkers that he would not allow for the big apple to turn into New Orleans. On Friday at 7 pm, it was still around 25 degrees when I finished my last obligation for the semester—the Portuguese exam. On my way to Greenpoint to see James and celebrate my alleged freedom, I was thinking to myself that it does not feel like quarantine any more. Cars were blasting music, and the heat, which had accumulated throughout the first hot day in the city was evaporating from the asphalt. I instantly felt elevated, and the shivers of excitement tiptoed my skin—this is exactly how New York summer feels. I was biking as fast as I could to soak in the breeze of the river. The sea of mouthless faces, covered with all sorts of masks, merged into the background of the invisible tunnel of motion that I was in. Dispensable blue, and minimal black masks, repurposed scarfs, and trendy ones with ornaments or floral prints. On rare occasions, when I had to stop at the red light, I kept looking around. The beehives were forming around bars with their fronts widely opened for the thirsty populace of the city. Indeed, resembling New Orleans, the Jewel of the South. It

looked as if the heat had shoved people from the chambers of solitude into this communal feast. As if Dante's Alighieri's 2nd circle of hell, where souls are blown about in a violent storm, were yawning wide open, but in a positive, almost liberating and slightly inappropriate way for the given situation.

[...]

May 29th, 2:59pm, one of the first days of protests

We are pulled over by the police. James once mentioned that there is nothing else he wants to avoid in the US as a black person more than being stopped by the police. And here we are in this surreal, almost Kafkaesque, moment. We glimpse at each other, looking for confirmation in each other's faces that this is actually happening. James steers a bright white sporty Mercedes towards the right lane and stops. We open the window on the passenger side, who happens to be me.

Policeman #1: Hello, my name is This and That. We pulled you over because your speed was 90 miles per hour (James swears it could not be more than 80!), 25 miles per hour more than the allowed 65 limit. You just passed us without even slowing down a notch. Where are you heading in such a hurry?

Me: we are going to Virginia for a week of quarantine.

Policeman #1: is there a reason you were speeding up so much?

Me: hmmm... this is a rental car, and we must not be feeling it quite well yet.

Policeman #1: can you please give us your registration and insurance documents?

James hands him a long receipt (almost Duane Reade long) from the rental company. I start viciously browsing through the documents in the compartment in front of the passenger seat. I sigh with relief in my head after I spot a rectangular piece of paper wrapped into the plastic with the word "insurance" on it. Policeman #1 also asks for both of our IDs. He heads to the car with James' driver's license and my passport.

Policeman #2 (pops up out of nowhere and abruptly starts interrogating): We were just wondering what the relationship between you two is? After looking at your documents, we noticed that

you two are from two completely different countries. How did you meet?

Me (surprised): he is my boyfriend...

Whether it is the background noise of a freeway or my accent unusual for the Delaware locals, he leans in (not wearing a mask) looking confused. He asks to repeat what I just said. James has to shout that we are dating and that we met through a company that we used to work together. While we are trying to lay out the history of our friendship, he keeps suspiciously glancing at the back seat.

Policeman #2: What is in that jar with the green substance at the back seat?

We both look at each other and smile.

James and Vaida in unison: a smoothie!

I explain to the policeman #2 that I prepared smoothies for the trip and that we just drank them.

Policeman #2: are there any other substances in the vehicle that we should know about?

James and Vaida in consonance: nope, nothing.

Policeman #2 also asks about what we are doing in this country. James explains that we live here, and both have visas. I jump in, telling him that I am on a student visa. Policemen #2 seems to be intrigued by my studies. He asks to name the university as well as the program I am in. Finally, he walks away. We patiently wait, I also snap at James and ask not to answer questions instead of me next time.

We see policeman #2 through our side mirrors approaching again.

Policeman #2: do you, by any chance, have any documents indicating your addresses?

Vaida: I actually happen to have a few bills in my backpack since I intended to pay them during this trip. Here you go – my electricity bill.

James (no wonder!) does not happen to have a bill with him, so the policeman #2 has to write down his address on the envelope issued by Con Edison. The officer leaves again and comes back with a ticket. Policemen #2 underscores that this time they reduced our speed to 80 miles per hour and wishes us safe travels. The ticket states:

"State of Delaware

Uniform Complaint and Summons

The undersigned, being duly sworn, upon his oath, deposes and says

On 5/29/2020 at 1459

Name: James X

Address: X, Brooklyn

Sex: Male, Race: Black, Ethnic Origin: Non-hispanic

Violations: Speeding in Excess of Posted Limits”

We keep silent for a while. Both re-running this conversation in our heads. Why were they interested in our relationship? I half-joking half-serious ask James whether they thought that he kidnapped me or something.

May 30th, 8 pm

This quote from New York Times, sums it all: “The symbolism of a billionaire-owned, for-profit space company launching astronauts high above the heads of thousands of people protesting state brutality and oppression amid a global pandemic and economic collapse should not be lost on anyone.”

June 1st, 11:28 pm

Today, on the sixth day of protests, I cried and cried and cried. At one point, I felt vulnerable and so microscopic in the turn of events. I snapped at James again. As the day unfolded, I kept providing him “feedback” on how his behavior can improve. I was lost in my feelings, bursts of emotions. I could no longer draw a boundary between the inner and outer triggers of the deep sadness tearing my body, incapacitating it to concentrate on daily chores. My chest area was aching with grief and sorrow. The president has finally got out

of the bunker. He did not acknowledge systemic racism. He did not talk about necessary structural changes, about dissected America, about misery and ingrained hierarchies that blasted the long-overdue abscess of societal pus. I cried for lost lives, for people marching, for women, for inequality, for essential workers, for humanity. We joined the protest here in Virginia yesterday, but today I felt like crying is my only option. Corona, the only way you are still visible is the sea of black masks. Who would have thought that wearing or refusing to put on a mask would have become a political act? We wear them to stop the virus, but the masks cannot mute the voices of the unheard.

[...]

June 22nd, 9:10 am

The city is going crazy. Yesterday my friend Asta, who resides in Harlem, sent me a minute-long recording of fireworks blasting in the neighborhood. “During the day neighbors are partying and when it gets quieter, the fireworks start. During the work week, constructions are going on. No silence at all. Thus, I am so tense,” she wrote. Twitter is blasting with tweets that the semi-professional firework shows all over New York skies have coincided with the protests and are being used to unsettle communities of color.

. . .

“When I am awake, I spend a lot of time staring at my roommate’s cat.”

SONIA YUHUI ZHANG

I am a graduate student at the New School studying anthropology. My parents and I decided to stay at home in Shanghai until the second week of Spring semester so that we could celebrate Chinese New Year together. When I boarded the plane to New York at the end of January, there had been about 60 cases in Shanghai and my parents and I haven’t left our apartment for weeks. A week later, I was told that a member of my late grandfather’s family died of COVID-19 in Wuhan. I spent the first half of the semester commuting from Bedstuy, Brooklyn to school in Union Square, Manhattan for classes (it’s about 50 minutes one-way), but I tried to avoid unnecessary outings, being weary of the potential of a global outbreak and the ongoing anti-Asian sentiments. I have also been in touch with my family scattered in various cities in China.

When COVID-19 in New York elevated as a public health crisis in Mid-March, airplane ticket prices skyrocketed and I soon received the news that China no longer allows non-Chinese citizens to enter. Although all of my family members live in China and I spent most of my childhood and adolescence there, my nationality is New Zealand. I am now staying at my Brooklyn apartment which I share with five other people and one cat. After my lease ends in June, my options are either to wait for the removal of travel restrictions to China or go to Auckland, New Zealand, where my closest contact would be a family friend.

2020.3.28 Sat

I have been missing my sleep window in the past week. I get extremely sleepy at about 9, but it feels too early for bed, and it’s about time my parents in Shanghai wake up and start texting me. Are you and your roommates staying in? Remember to drink water and exercise. What’s your temperature? Tell us if you are scared. After a mixture of replying and playing Animal Crossing, I go to bed at 12, struggle until 1, then open my eyes and realise I’m no longer tired.

In the 1-hour-struggle for today, I kept thinking about the messages I received. My late grandfather’s partner sent me a long message about how her family coped with the nearly three-month-long quarantine in Wuhan: only ordering grocery delivery, going downstairs wearing hats, masks and gloves, sanitising everything before entering the apartment, letting bags stay on the balcony for at least two hours before opening them. It’s so difficult, but protecting ourselves was the only thing we could do for the nation, she said.

My aunt sent me short videos of her demonstrations of covering door handles and toilet flush with tissue paper. Sanitisers don’t kill the virus instantly, of course tissues are better. Now in our el-

evators the buttons are sanitised several times a day, but I still only touch them with a tissue. They can survive on metal surfaces for days!

At a time when the stabilisation of knowledge is not nearly in sight, those with experience claim the truth.

[...]

2020.3.29 Sun

[...]

My roommates asked me today if I am wearing masks in the kitchen because of them going out for groceries, and whether I will feel safer if they wear masks too. It made me feel sad. It is true that I get nervous every time I hear them using the apartment door, and I try to not go out of my room until unpacking is finished. But I also gladly take the delivery boxes they bring up. Wearing masks for me have always been perfectly normal: people at home wear them when having a common cold; some of my female friends put on a mask simply when they are not happy with their looks. I

thought people here were stubborn to find it hurtful and offensive. But hearing my roommates asking me whether they should wear it still makes me feel I have imposed some unfair standards onto them, that I am using my judgemental acts to put pressure onto the house.

2020.3.30 Mon

I'm not sure if I am influenced by the zoom meetings or simply hit a long enough time, today I started to feel like I rather get some air than scrolling through endless emails and messages. Even though I have work to do, I feel all my time has been meshed into a lethargic blob. Even playing Animal Crossing has become a bit of a repetitive business. I was slowly reading a passage in *The Book of Disquiet*: "I'm sleeping while awake, standing by the window, leaning against it as against everything...And I don't know what I feel or what I want to feel. I don't know what to think or what I am." But Pessoa had the choice to let himself adrift walking in the street. His whining turns into relentless expression and a committed masterpiece. I read only to ease my guilt from idleness.

2020.4.1 Wed

Half way in a Zoom meeting, I realised it is precisely a year since my grandfather passed away. If he is still alive, he would be living in the neighbourhood only a few blocks away from the seafood market where the COVID-19 outbreak started. Perhaps it's lucky that he didn't have to go through that hospital system breakdown in his last days, my parents said. I agree with them, but I still wish to have messages with my grandfather. He would have a lot to say about quarantine life, he would write long articles and save them in his secret mobile autobiography.

In my room, there is a miniature hourglass sealed in a plastic block, beside it is a Chinese idiom written in old-fashioned font: "Be content with oneself". I found the block on the floor of my grandfather's flat in the morning of his memorial service, and my family said I can take it with me. Perhaps he would suggest the same if he is still alive. The thought made me feel better.

2020.4.2 Thur

[...]

Laundry and grocery shopping are my least favourite housework, but today I was excited because it would be my first time leaving the apartment in three weeks! The sun was still shining when Volkan and I stepped out of the gate at around 3:30, there were only a few people in the street and some were wearing masks. Wonderful masks!

The excitement lasted for less than five minutes. When we crossed the street, wind started to blow and a box of trash flew towards us. I felt some particles in my eyes. In the supermarket, Volkan pushed me around (caringly) so I will not be too close to other people, while others seem to not care about squeezing past us. The floor was moist and covered with black prints of shoes. Shopping baskets were put onto the floor then stacked together at the entrance. It made me think of the Tsukiji fish market I once visited, when a friend had to push me all the time so I didn't get run over by the merchants' mechanic carts full of dead fish eyes staring at us.

After we returned to the apartment, I took a bottle and frantically sprayed everything: the door handles, the shoes, the shopping bags, the surfaces of every single grocery item. Volkan sighed as I stopped responding to him. My roommate's cat made a big fuss, meowing and jumping. I guess my roommates could only smell bleach instead of their food. With all reasons to feel bad, I was just glad I'm finally home.

[...]

2020.4.4 Sat

I woke up from bad dreams and felt extremely tired. Yesterday night at 10.04 I saw my mum's message that there is a 3-minute silence practiced in China for the dead from the pandemic. I missed it. Over this week people who I haven't spoken with for ages reach out to me and ask about New York. It's worse than Wuhan in January, they say. Hearing that the precautions in zero-increase cities are way more meticulous than New York at

the moment, the epicenter of Covid makes me worry more.

[...]

2020.4.6 Mon

I woke up feeling angry about my headache, my sore throat, and my hands and feet that never seem to warm up. Then I became determined to freak out about the apartment floor. My roommate's cat strolled into my room as usual, but this time I grabbed her and wiped her feet with my face cleansing cloth for sensitive skin (brutal, I know). She struggled out of my arms and licked her paw, her ears immediately turning backwards. *Disgusting!* She looked at me, left, and came back in five minutes. She walked along the edge of my room and sat behind me, a path without my arms' reach.

When I started the Zoom chat on collective diary writing, the cat cleaned herself with utter thoroughness and commitment. I am always amazed by how her sleepy drools smell yucky but when she showers her saliva has a flowery scent. Usually this is the time for petting. She would extend her neck and start purring. But this time she shunned from my hand. Then she fell asleep, a foot dangling out of the bed. I put my hand on her feet and she immediately put her hands over it. *Those are my feet. I take care of my own feet.*

2020.4.7 Tue

What was supposed to be a nap became a heavy dream. I was in a volley ball field, the ball flying high in the air, ready to drop towards me. I know it would break my arm but I have to take it for the team. Then I felt myself lying in the bed, the enormous heaviness of the volleyball pressing me into the depth of the mattress. I tried to move my lips and eyes, but they were sealed. I finally forced one eye open and saw my roommate soaking everything from the fridge in water mixed with soap and bleach. I wanted to get to the kitchen so I can sanitise my items on my own, but my arms are in the bed. I felt my muscles dissolving and bones softening.

I woke up with a worsened headache, my body without strength to move.

2020.4.8 Wed

Today at noon I saw a bug flying around in the bathroom. It made me realise it's already warm enough that insects are waking up, coming to life. Soon spiders and centipedes will start crawling into my room; I will have to count on my roommate's cat's hunter instinct to not encounter them. I remember at the start of the COVID outbreak, when it was only happening in places where winter is cold and long, everyone was hopeful about the warm weather killing the virus in a few months. Yesterday the WHO just published colourful leaflets saying it won't be the case. In an email exchange, my advisor mentioned that many of us might get COVID before having a vaccine. This seems to be a general belief now. I wonder what summer will look like this year. I wonder whether one day COVID will show up in an ethnographic story of multi-species coexistence.

[...]

2020.4.11 Sat

Skyping with my parents usually makes me feel more anxious about Covid than usual; they remind me too much of the numbers on the media and the details of daily life that I have already become numb to. There are always more precautions to be taken, and it's important that my roommates all follow the same standard. "Staying healthy is ten times more difficult for you than for us back then!" My mum said half-jokingly, then told me how I should develop my leadership and inspire my roommates to take care of each other. I don't know how to think about this suggestion-leadership? How am I going to ask my roommates for precautions that no one else thinks would be effective? Isn't leadership just arrogance? Maybe I will understand my mum if I went to business school instead.

2020.4.12 Sun

My prospect of going back to China is getting grim. I'm less worried about China's travel restrictions towards non-citizens. Even if they lift it, international flights are only getting riskier: yesterday there was a surge of imported cases of 52

people, 51 coming from the same flight. My dad also reminded me that if I go home over summer I might not make it back to school if the U.S. does not remove their travel restrictions. Am I going to spend the next three months in this house too? I enjoy spending time with my roommate's cat, my cooking skills are improving and I have started to sense myself getting into an organised routine, but the thought of spending the next three months without seeing my parents still hurts me.

[...]

2020.4.13 Mon

I really like the sound of rain. I woke up at 11 am. Outside the window is a perfectly grey sky; the only thing on schedule is cooking food and the Zoom meeting with fellow COVID diarists. I would take my time to finish "The Sick Rose" before looking at the online lectures for this week. I put on a sweater with a lot of colours.

At the Zoom meeting, we started with an exchange on recent interactions with COVID, mostly with the idea of it. Then an unfinished discussion on how to go about this omniscient narrator; Nick asked if anyone read the book he recommended and we shook our heads with guilty smiles. I can't tell if the meeting was frustrating or hopeful for each person, but the thought of writing something beyond my own universe at this time feels very fitting.

Half way through the meeting, the room became incredibly hot and humid; when I opened the window, I realised the rain had stopped yet the sky looked heavier. My roommate's cat woke up from the corner of my bed and jumped onto the window. Within a few minutes, rain started pouring down. The sound is so overwhelming, it makes all my thoughts silent. The cat rose her head towards the sky, her eyes slightly closed, breathing gracefully. The pouring sound disappeared. The sun gleams in the pale blue sky, pieces of white cloud move quickly. A cooling breeze comes in. The trees and flowers must look like crystals. Even the trash-infused roadsides will look shiny. Maybe this is the start of the summer days.

Volkan and I took a walk outside after the rain. It was warm (20C) and the streets were tranquil. So few people. The soaking wet trash stays on the ground. Out of the people we passed by, most wore a mask. We tried to open Duane Reade's door, a woman smiled and told us they are queuing, a short line where people are so far apart. After about 20 minutes, a staff with gloves, a mask and a sunhat let us in. We bought chips, milk, ice-cream, cookies, sparkling water, orange juice. Everything but essential goods. The counter staff were in masks and gloves too, wiping everything; we had to pass the items down the hole of the huge plastic board that blocks us and them.

It's my first time walking in my neighbourhood feeling safe and cheerful.

[...]

2020.4.21 Tue (written in retrospect)

The presence of home has been very strong in my apartment room lately. My mum has shipped three packages to me so far, full of masks and gloves safety goggles. The latest package had two protective suits in it, "wear it if you go on a plane," my mum says on Skype proudly. I have been seeing photos of students returning to China in white suits at the boarding gate and in the plane - looks like a shot from the movie "Contagion". My parents keep telling me reassuring things back home and we spend most of the time talking about protective measures, but I know little of their work situations. Are they really okay?

[...]

2020.4.26 Sun (written in retrospect)

I napped until 3.30 p.m., and Volkan suggested we should go out while the sun is still there. It shines beautifully outside, and there isn't any trash to bring down because my four roommates have already been out today; no one wants to miss the good sunshine. My head was still heavy and a bit painful from an excessive nap, but as soon as we went under the sun we were skipping and dancing in the street, my plastic gloves making a very funny sound. A man was sitting at the stairs with a big scary dog behind him; he said hi and wished

us safety. We ordered a huge pizza and discovered restaurants we have never heard of before. It was a nice sunny afternoon.

2020.4.27 Mon

I have been slacking the past two weeks. I'm pretty sure I've lost it. Instead of sleeping in the night and working in the day, I have been sleeping periodically like my roommate's cat, the "poor creature forever in quarantine". I stopped looking at the news. Reading for class goes into one of my eyes and immediately flows out from the other. I have no thoughts about them and no memories of them.

When I am awake, I spend a lot of time staring at my roommate's cat, crying a little bit when I want to. She is not even my cat, but I have spent the majority of my past year in this apartment with her. She is very vocal—I wake up with her meows and howls and wows, she purrs loudly, and when I run into her resting on Volkan's chest she will look at me with a sharp "Ah!" then run off. Her pupils can be very small like a hunter, and very big like a SnapChat filter. When I was writing my PhD applications at 4 a.m. last semester, she would come in, stare at me, go to sleep, then get crazy over the birds chirping outside the window. I decided I should write an application that a cat can understand, but that didn't work.

Before the quarantine, I would let her into my room and chase her out when my roommates are back home; in this way we all get to see the cat for a fair amount of time. With the lockdown, however, we are constantly at home and the boundaries have been breached. She is spending less time with her parents, and she would sleep at the mat or bench outside my room for a while if I keep my door closed. Maybe I should stop seeing her so as not to upset my roommates, but I really like watching her breathe in a ball shape when she sleeps, and I don't like the thought of her standing in the hallway on her own when no one pays attention to her. I can't believe if I move out after June this will be the end of it—no more meowing and barging into my room, no more furry face with so many questions and demands. I would occasionally visit my roommate, stroke the cat for a minute or two, and when I leave she will stand under a chair in the corner, eyes staring adamantly at the floor.

2020.5.1 Thu

On Tuesday I started the game "Ancestors: The Humankind Odyssey" and have been unable to stop. I probably slept for about 15 hours in total over the last four days. In the game I am an ape—or a clan of apes—in prehistoric times trying to survive the jungle, pass generations, and eventually evolve into other hominid species. I could hear nothing but sounds of animals howling, the trees and foliage in the jungle all looked the same, and before I could orient myself a wild boar dashed over and killed my clan members. Sometimes I get killed myself too; then the system immediately switches to the next surviving member trying to run away from blood and roars. It trains you to forget about the individual.

I have only felt this much fear and stress in nightmares. Crawling amongst the trees make me risk starving and falling to death; going by the stream for foraging makes me vulnerable to predators. I can hold certain keys to decipher my senses of smell and hearing, but that takes time too and the signals in my field are overwhelming. How did the first hominids ever make it out of the jungle? How many clans were killed, species went extinct before they figured out stone axes and wooden sticks to scare off predators? What did it take for evolution to take the path it has, so that now *Homo sapiens* can kill off their ape relatives? My fingers were sore and they were shaking with the PS4 handle.

After four days of almost non-stop playing I am still at a very elemental level in the game; my school work is lagged behind and I am rushing through my readings and writings; there is no way I could play this game in a normal semester. Is it laughable that I used the concentration window granted by Covid lockdown for a survival game rather than reading for my research? It probably is...I have to get back to work soon.

[...]

2020.5.9 Sat

I can't believe I am graduating next week; I said to my parents on screen.

2020.5.15 Fri

The graduation recognition ceremony yesterday was a good one: I put on my favourite dress, did make-up, made cocktails with Pimms, ginger ale and fruit pieces. The Pimm's bottle is a birthday present from two years ago, when my friends from the UK visited me for the first time. Almost half of the cohort is in my apartment; we decided to watch the ceremony together on TV in the living room and we laughed a lot at the disconnections, at the chat window (especially when Ann typed "We can't hear you!") and at each other. My parents were a bit upset about getting up at 6 am to find a bad streaming service that they can't open without a VPN. Oops.

Today's commencement is more or less similar, though it felt less intimate and relevant. Just two months ago, when I was in Juliana's car, taking a ride from Troy, we were talking about how we can buddy up at the ceremonies if our parents don't come along. Now Juliana is in Vermont with her family, her smile looking as peaceful as always on the video screen. I'm in my apartment with my cohort, typing things to our family on messenger apps. Volkan would have been back in Turkey, but here he is passing me cakes, holding my hand and taking photos of us. My roommate's cat sits at the corner of the sofa with a sullen face; she is obviously annoyed but she can't help but stay close to humans.

I still think it would be nice to dress up in our gowns, go up the stage and get our papers in a fancy auditorium. But this is good.

[...]

2020.5.19 Tue

I wrote my last final paper until 8 am on Monday and completed the bibliogaphy this afternoon. The professor for this course said everyone gets an A even if they do nothing, and my final project is more like a research assistance about a Chinese poet. But yesterday I realised its relevance to my research and became a bit absorbed in it. Hence the all-nighter.

I do think I deliberately left the project until the last minute for fun, since I haven't been sleeping so irregularly for a while. But I end up regretting

this: I feel terribly sleepy and dizzy all the time since Monday, and I feel like I have become stupid.

During the time, some kind of intense fear and pain were there. So many long-standing things get let out under the name of covid. It ferments and explodes in the apartment space like rotten fruit.

[...]

5.23 Sat

I woke up at 11, extremely sleepy, called off the Skype chat with my parents and went back to sleep. Then I woke up again at almost 3 and saw Volkan's desk almost completely empty: ants have invaded his room and no matter how many rounds of vacuum killing he does, they keep coming back. He had a packed day of readings planned out and seem very stressed. Someone jokingly said the cat isn't doing her job. When a cat that bites comes over we pet her and think she's adorable; when harmless ants crawl around we feel disgusted and obliged to kill them all.

We ended up buying insect killers from the grocery shops; everyone is wearing a mask now and more or less consciously walking in a distance from each other. But the shops have already cancelled the entrance limit, at least the two we visited. Things are relaxing very quickly.

[...]

5.24 Sun

My parents are very optimistic about flights increasing in June and school moving online in the next semester; they didn't complain when they saw my roommate's cat hanging out in my room, saying that she might know that we are parting soon.

5.25 Mon

At around 2 a.m. my roommate's cat suddenly became agitated and started pounding at the corner of my room restlessly and intensely. I turned on the lights and squatted beside her, but I couldn't see anything. After half an hour her mouth is full of dust and hair; I wiped them off and she looked

at me softly when I petted her, but as soon as I go back to bed (which is a futon spread on the matted floor) she turns to the corner again, eyes wide open, ready to jump.

I eventually dozed off with melatonin and woke up at around 10; the cat is fast asleep at the other corner of the room. There were brown, hard pieces scattered under my tea table, the spot where

she likes to rest at. There were also pieces on her fur. A black ink-like dot was on one of her paws; when I took her hand and wiped it with a facial cloth she didn't resist. Maybe there is an ant colony behind my wall; maybe she sees someone that we can't see. It's all a bit strange.

. . .

“I’m so consumed everyday with my kids, trying to get work done and just trying to get through the day.”

DANA

(Full name and biographical information excluded for reasons of anonymity.)

March 31, 2020

I’ve started to feel the anxiety creep in after 10 days of our quarantine. Luckily, I keep active by going on a run every other day and the occasional trip to the park right behind my mother’s house. But I still come back to the same thing. I’m finding myself easily bothered by silly things, and I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve put away the same toys. Why do I even put them away? I like order. There is no order in this.

I’m worried that the anxiety I’m starting to feel will hinder any possibility of productivity. This slowly starts to turn into doubt, which then increases the anxiety. There are four adults here, three work from home and one works outside. I feel guilty sometimes asking for time for myself (for work), particularly because that requires that someone else (my mom or husband) watch my kids. My mom hurt her hip last week and it’s been a slow recovery and that also meant that she couldn’t really help watch my 9 month old, who requires close watching. So I’m left with it by myself, my husband works everyday and even if I do get some time there is constant interruption. It’s a challenging time.

April 2, 2020

What is going on? I’m so consumed everyday with my kids, trying to get work done and just trying to get through the day. I forget that the world outside is fraught with uncertainties, frustrations, fear and death. But It’s like not much has changed for me, except that my normal anxieties about what I just listed above have only increased. When I take a moment to reflect about what we’re currently experiencing I can’t help to ask “What is going on?”

I just finished listening to Former VP Joe Biden on The Tonight Show and the very first thing he starts talking about is how ‘our president took too long to take this seriously’ which to be honest really annoyed me. I mean, it doesn’t shock me, he is running for president. But, that’s all he talked about, about how Trump is not doing enough even though he has the power to do so based on some act blah blah blah. No different than a debate, it all just starts to sound like a broken record. So that’s not all he talked about but it was more than enough.

One of my students talked about the virus as an ‘invisible enemy,’ and I think it’s accurate, it feels imminent and yet distant, avoidable. Sometimes I feel that it’s all fine, and I’ll go to the store and go through all the motions of keeping my distance from people and sanitizing and washing my hands. And then I read that here in Riverside county the number of cases is almost 1K and that the neighboring city just had its first death. And I ask myself again what is going on? There’s not enough masks and ventilators and other equipment; people are being ordered to stay home, businesses are closed, doctors are not going to resuscitate patients because there are just too many patients to treat? Is this really happening? Is this enemy really that threatening?

[...]

April 6th, 2020

We had a rough morning, C woke up really early and thus woke up E. But not only did she wake up early she also woke up in a lousy mood demanding cereal at 6 am. Mix that with the six hours I got of

sleep plus the 3 times I got up to soothe E and my day is already off to a rough start. I told my husband I wished I had twisted my ankle, he knew exactly what I meant. Now I have to care for him since he is unable to walk. He said that I am needed way more than he is so I'm spared (sort of). He likened it to Pokémon, if we were Pokémon cards I would be more valuable than him.

[...]

April 7th, 2020

Today I had the worst online class since we started, and it's only the third one! To start with, my mom went to the store and didn't come back until 4 hours later! She's usually the one who watches C & E because my husband, Deniz, also teaches a class at the same time. So I had to push back our meeting time by half an hour, hoping that either my mom would be back or my husband would end soon. I sent my students an email—and I'm always skeptical when I send my students an email because I just don't know if they're reading them—letting them know that I would be late. Around 11:15 my husband finished with his class and took over with the kids. Then I went to start the meeting, but after a couple of minutes no one was joining, and I thought, 'Great, now everything is just ditching the whole meeting!' I waited a couple of minutes more and then somehow realized that I had started a new meeting instead of the one I have set up recurring. Then I found everyone perplexed because they were trying to log in but they received a message saying that I was already in a meeting. Anyway, once I figured it out we all joined in and went on with the class. Though, we might as well not have met because despite 11 students showing up, only 2 spoke. Maybe this is just

a rookie thing, but I feel like I rely too much on them to engage in a discussion. Its usually the same 2-4 students who engage. The rest are just there floating in cyber space. So I asked them if they read the piece, or if they didn't like it etc. Silence. Then Julian, one of my more reliable students said "I think people read it but it's just one of those days where people don't talk." Thank you for the sentiment Julian, but its not just this day, its everyday. I left that meeting pretty disillusioned and bummed out. I think part of the issue too, was that I was so stressed out about getting someone to watch the kids that I was not able to focus during our meeting.

[...]

April 26, 2020

I wait too long to write an entry for this diary, by the time I get the chance to sit and write I don't know where to start. The most immediate thought that comes to mind is something I have been reflecting on for the past week. There are not a lot of interesting things happening where I am that would warrant any sort of ethnographic observation. As I have written before most of what I write about and reflect on has to do with my family and the dynamics at home while we are under a stay-at-home order. What I think is happening instead is a lot of inward reflection, a close look at my surroundings, my family, my present, etc. I wonder if this is such a time for all of us to do just that. This has certainly been the case for me even before the pandemic.

[...]

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FORUM
FORUM

Anleitung zum Sterbenlassen

Ein Dialog

ERHARD SCHÜTTPELZ & EHLER VOSS

A und B sind frei erfundene Figuren. Sie entsprechen weder realen Personen noch konsistenten Positionen. Ihre Gedanken beschäftigen allerdings auch uns in dieser Form. Der Text wurde Ende März 2020 geschrieben, und das macht ihn zum Dokument des Nichtwissens über das, was danach kam. Was er dokumentiert und noch dokumentieren wird, wechselt allerdings immer noch, auch nach der Publikation.

A: Die Ausrufung einer Pandemie aufgrund der weltweiten Verbreitung des SARS-CoV-2 genannten Coronavirus hat die ganze Welt in einen Ausnahmezustand versetzt, der wie alle Krisen durch eine grundlegende Unsicherheit und Unübersichtlichkeit geprägt ist. Gefordert sind Entscheidungen auf unsicherer Datenlage, die ihre Effektivität erst im Nachhinein erweisen können und aller Voraussicht nach auch in dieser Rückschau noch kontrovers bleiben werden. Dabei geht es um Leben und Tod, um die Wege der Ansteckung und ihre Vermeidung. Die Unsicherheit und Unübersichtlichkeit bezieht sich momentan auf die Identifizierung, Charakterisierung und Lokalisierung der Krankheit und ihre Bekämpfung, das heißt auf die Frage nach den Eigenschaften des Virus, seiner Gefährlichkeit und der bestmöglichen Weise, dieser zu begegnen. Dabei geht es weiterhin um die Frage, ob die pandemische Ausbreitung des Virus erhöhte Aufmerksamkeit verlangt oder die erhöhte Aufmerksamkeit den Tatbestand einer Pandemie erst erzeugt.

B: Was meinst Du mit „erzeugt“?

A: Ist jede Grippewelle in jedem Winter auch eine Pandemie, die aber nicht so genannt wird, weil sie unterhalb der öffentlichen Bewusstseinsschwelle verläuft und mit ihrer Sterberate nicht öffentlich diskutiert wird, so dass auch der Versuch einer gemeinsamen Verringerung der Sterberate kein Thema werden kann? Dann ergibt sich die Pandemie-Schwelle nur durch die Anerkennung, dass alle ihr Verhalten ändern sollen. Die Einschätzun-

gen schwanken derzeit noch zwischen der Annahme einer außergewöhnlichen und einer ganz gewöhnlichen Außergewöhnlichkeit des Virus, und die Unsicherheiten in der Beurteilbarkeit entstehen unter anderem durch vage und einander widersprechende Statistiken auf der Grundlage unklarer und unvergleichbarer Erhebungsmethoden. Die meisten Regierungen haben sich angesichts dieser Unsicherheit für eine Einschätzung der außergewöhnlichen Außergewöhnlichkeit des Krankheitserregers und damit für die Anerkennung einer Pandemie entschieden, die entsprechend außergewöhnliche Maßnahmen erfordert und teilweise von drastischer Kriegsmetaphorik und der Aussetzung gewohnter Freiheitsrechte begleitet wird. Allerdings hat jedes dieser Länder am Anfang nichts dergleichen getan, und auch jetzt gibt es mit Schweden noch ein Land in Europa, das sich ganz „normal“ – also ganz und gar außergewöhnlich – verhält. Während die anderen Länder nachrechnen und feststellen, sie hätten durch ihre vormalig „normale“ Gelassenheit vier bis sechs Wochen an Schutzmaßnahmen und vier bis sechs Wochen der Bewältigung und Anerkennung einer Pandemie verpasst. Das prospektiv-retrospektive Umarrangement ist jedenfalls unverkennbar und betrifft mittlerweile vermutlich jedes Land, jede Branche, jede Gruppe, jede Familie. Zeit und Raum sind aus den Fugen geraten, was sich daran zeigt, dass sie immer schon zu spät und zu früh aus den Fugen geraten sind.

B: Uns fällt das nur deshalb auf, weil wir uns an derlei Umarrangements gewöhnt haben, und weil

uns der Ländervergleich diese Veränderungen unter die Nase reibt. Auf einmal wurden wir in unsere Nationalstaaten eingeschlossen, und das ganz handgreiflich durch Schließung der Grenzen. Die Grenzen meines Körpers sind die meines Staates sind die der Gefährdung aller durch den Erreger SARS-CoV-2. Zumindest in meinem Leben bin ich noch nie derartig auf die Gleichung der Grenzen von Staat, Körper und menschlichem Kosmos reduziert worden. Wenn ich niese und das nicht in die Armbeuge, wackeln die Staatsgrenzen und kann mich die Obrigkeit zurechtweisen, aber auch die Öffentlichkeit im Namen des Staates und der Abwehr einer kosmischen Gefahr, die alle Menschen auf diesem Planeten betrifft. Alle Staatsbürger sollen möglichst schnell in ihren jeweiligen Staat zurückkehren. Es wäre ein Wunder, wenn dabei kein Messias geboren würde, denn Bethlehem ist momentan überall. Extreme Möglichkeiten der Überwachung durch Daten und anderswo auch durch Drohnen zwingen uns zu gutem Benehmen, und wir sind gleichzeitig Heiliger König und Sklave eines Regimes, das uns vor der Ansteckung mit einer unsichtbaren Macht schützen soll. Also eine Art Sklavenkönig.

A: Die Gefährdeten sind die Gefährlichen, schrieb Franz Baermann Steiner. Das betrifft auch den Wahnsinn. In Zeiten des Wahnsinns wird niemand wahnsinnig. Wenn das Gefährlichste, das die Wahnsinnigen verkörpern, die Ansteckung mit Krankheitserregern einer recht diffusen Diagnostik geworden ist, dann leben wir eigentlich in glücklichen, zugleich aber auch in zutiefst beunruhigenden Zeiten. Vor allem, wenn man sich vorstellt, dass all dies, diese Gedanken, diese Gefühle, massenweise und überall auf der Welt vorkommen müssen, dass sie überall aufgeschrieben und gedacht werden.

B: Eben deshalb sollten wir darüber nachdenken, ob das, was wir erleben, überhaupt noch unsere Welt mit ihren uns geläufigen Rollen, Arbeitsteilungen, Prämissen ist. Der jetzt entstandene Ausnahmezustand ist in dieser Woche noch die Erwartung eines Ausnahmezustands. Aber diese Erwartung hat in Deutschland eine Situation geschaffen, die unter anderem das für die meisten von uns herkömmliche Bild der Ärzt:innen verändert und ihre eindeutige Rolle als Heilende in

die ambivalente Rolle von Richter:innen überführt, die den Wert eines Menschenlebens bemessen und über Leben und Tod entscheiden sollen, und im Bedarfsfall auch müssen. Sicher, die Ärzt:innen sollen mit dieser Aufgabe nicht alleine sein, eigentlich sollen es drei Personen sein, zwei Ärzt:innen und eine Person vom Pflegepersonal, die zusammen entscheiden oder die das Geschehen gutheißen. Vor wenigen Tagen, am 25. März 2020, verabschiedeten und veröffentlichten sieben medizinische Fachgesellschaften gemeinsam im Internet unter dem Titel *Entscheidungen über die Zuteilung von Ressourcen in der Notfall- und der Intensivmedizin im Kontext der COVID-19-Pandemie* „klinisch-ethische Empfehlungen“, mit denen sie Ärzt:innen und die Öffentlichkeit in Deutschland auf ein mögliches Nullsummenspiel in der Intensivstation vorbereiten.¹ Das Dokument besteht aus drei Teilen, die eine Einheit bilden: Einem Leitfaden, einem Flussdiagramm und einem Formular, das die Befolgung des Leitfadens dokumentiert. Der Leitfaden ist zugleich ein Flussdiagramm und ein Formular, könnte man sagen. Der Leitfaden geht davon aus, dass eine Situation entstehen kann, in der die entscheidenden Behandlungen und ihre Apparate ein knappes Gut werden, er beinhaltet ein „image of limited good“. Es geht um die damit verbundene Notwendigkeit, bei der Zuteilung von Ressourcen zu priorisieren: „Wenn die Ressourcen *nicht* ausreichen, muss unausweichlich entschieden werden, welche intensivpflichtigen Patienten akut-/intensivmedizinisch behandelt und welche nicht (oder nicht mehr) akut-/intensivmedizinisch behandelt werden sollen. Dies bedeutet eine Einschränkung der sonst gebotenen patientenzentrierten Behandlungsentscheidungen, was enorme emotionale und moralische Herausforderungen für das Behandlungsteam darstellt.“ Schon in der patientenzentrierten Entscheidung sind Ärzt:innen mit Grauzonen konfrontiert, wenn es etwa darum geht, den „mutmaßlichen Willen“ der Patient:innen festzustellen, auch durch eine mögliche Befragung von Angehörigen und Freund:innen, oder um den Punkt zu bestimmen, ab dem eine Therapie medizinisch aussichtslos ist oder „der Sterbeprozess unaufhaltsam begonnen hat“. Unter den Bedingungen der Knappheit werden diese Grauzonen deutlich größer. In der Situation selbst ergeben sich außerdem lokale Ungleichgewichte, denn je

nachdem, wo die Krise ausbricht und behandelt werden muss, sind mehr oder andere Apparate vorhanden: in der Notaufnahme, im Klinikzimmer oder in der Intensivstation. Aber diese situative Ungleichheit kann kein Handlungskriterium sein, auch wenn sie nicht einfach konterkariert werden kann. Angesichts solcher Umstände verlangt die Empfehlung der Fachgesellschaften das Unmögliche: eine Priorisierung unter Anwendung des Gleichheitsprinzips. Auf den entscheidenden, auch juristisch relevanten Zwiespalt wird auch in der Empfehlung hingewiesen: „Aus verfassungsrechtlichen Gründen dürfen Menschenleben nicht gegen Menschenleben abgewogen werden. Gleichzeitig müssen Behandlungsressourcen verantwortungsbewusst eingesetzt werden. [...] Eine abschließende juristische Einordnung ist nicht Gegenstand dieser Empfehlungen.“

A: Vielleicht hat man dem Text einfach zu viel zugemutet, denn wenn man ein „image of limited good“ entwirft und damit Menschenleben gegen Menschenleben setzt, die nicht allesamt gerettet werden können, zumal wenn sie auf die Begrenztheit der letzten Rettungsmittel stoßen, dann kann man eigentlich nicht gleichzeitig schreiben, dass nicht abgewogen werden darf. Vielleicht sagt der Text damit auch einfach, dass nicht sein kann, was nicht sein darf, und dass es nicht vorkommen und daher auch niemals in den Dokumenten erscheinen soll. Immerhin handelt es sich ja um eine Anleitung zum Ausfüllen von Dokumenten.

B: Man kann sagen, dass entweder dem Text zu viel zugemutet wurde, oder den Ärzt:innen zu viel zugemutet wird. Oder die Ärzt:innen werden durch diesen Text entlastet, weil ihnen die Spielregeln verdeutlicht werden, nach denen die Texte verfasst werden, mit denen sie Rechenschaft ablegen können. Weder die Art der Krankheit, noch das Alter, noch soziale Kriterien sollen eine Rolle spielen und auch nicht der Ort der Versorgung – Notaufnahme, Allgemeinstation, Intensivstation –, sondern allein das „Kriterium der klinischen Erfolgsaussicht“.

A: Der Gleichbehandlungsgrundsatz bedeutet dann vor allem, dass man weiß, auf was man sich nicht beziehen darf. Zum einen bedeutet eine Verortung der Patient:innen in entweder Notaufnahme,

Allgemeinstation oder Intensivstation schon eine Kategorisierung, die von einer Priorisierung der Handlungsoptionen aufgrund des Ortes ausgeht. Eine Notaufnahme ist keine Intensivstation, und sie hat auch nicht die Aufgabe, die Handlungsweisen der Intensivstation in jedem entsprechenden Fall vorwegzunehmen. Wenn nur das Alter bekannt ist, entstehen Vermutungen über die Kategorien Gebrechlichkeit und Komorbidität. Und was macht man in Situationen der Abwägung, also des Vergleichs, mit jungen Müttern oder Familienvätern in ähnlich prekärer Lage? Über den Einfluss sozialer Kategorien lässt sich zum gegenwärtigen Zeitpunkt nur spekulieren, aber auch hier ist es unwahrscheinlich, dass sie keine Rolle spielen werden, wenn Leute aus ganz verschiedenen sozialen Lagen ihren Weg durch die Intensivstationen nehmen. Das Dokument verlangt das Unmögliche und das Notwendige und besagt vor allem eins: Diese Kriterien dürfen für die Entscheidung nicht geltend gemacht werden, egal wie wahrscheinlich oder auch unausweichlich diese Kriterien in die Entscheidung eingehen. Die Empfehlung und das Formular regeln den bürokratischen Ablauf des Sterbeprozesses, das heißt sie geben dem Pflegepersonal Anweisungen, wie der bürokratische Prozess für die Beteiligten abzulaufen hat, ohne dass sie für die Nichteinhaltung des Unmöglichen haftbar gemacht werden können.

B: Wenn ich diese Anleitung lese, frage ich mich nicht ohne Beklemmungen, warum ein solches Dokument überhaupt existiert, und wenn es existiert, warum es dann veröffentlicht wurde, und wenn es schon veröffentlicht werden muss, warum es dann fröhlich und sarkastisch im Radio diskutiert werden kann. Im Radio habe ich im Anschluss an diese Veröffentlichung tatsächlich Sachen gehört, die ich niemals für möglich gehalten hätte. So wurde eine Notfallärztin gefragt, ob es Situationen in der Unfallbewältigung gebe – etwa nach einem größeren Verkehrsunfall –, in denen man sich für jüngere oder ältere Patient:innen entscheiden müsse. Und tatsächlich lautete die Antwort, sie müsse lügen, wenn sie sagen würde, dass das in solchen Momenten keine Rolle spiele. Ich fragte mich in dem Moment allen Ernstes, ob es nicht für alle Beteiligten besser gewesen wäre, den Mund zu halten, oder zu lügen, oder die Aussage zu löschen, oder die Sen-

dung abzusagen, oder mir die Ohren zuzuhalten, oder zumindest die Ohren der Kinder, die das hören könnten. Sollte es nicht doch einfach Bereiche des ärztlichen Lebens geben, die so tabu bleiben, dass sie nicht durch einen Leitfaden durchdekliniert werden können? Oder dass diese Leitfäden nur handschriftlich weiterverteilt werden? So dass alle, die in ihre Anwendung initiiert würden, ihn erst einmal abschreiben müssten?

A: Warum sollte das tabuisiert werden? Schließlich befinden wir uns hier in einem der reichsten Länder der Welt mit immer noch einer der besten Gesundheitsversorgung der Welt, und es ist weltweit gesehen ein Luxus, dass sich die meisten von uns in Deutschland bisher über die beschriebenen Formen der Triage kaum Gedanken machen mussten. Das ist sozusagen unser blinder Fleck, denn Triage ist Alltag in den meisten Krankenhäusern des Globalen Südens, und das nicht nur in Pandemiezeiten. Und angesichts der weltweiten Verteilung von medizinischen und anderen lebenswichtigen Gütern stellt sich die Frage, wie weit man den Begriff der Triage ausweiten möchte. Das fängt bei der Beschaffung und Verteilung von Organspenden an und hört bei der ungleichen Verteilung von Nahrungsmitteln nicht auf. Auf jeden Fall ist Triage immer an Knappheit und Verknappung geknüpft, und diese ist immer erklärungsbedürftig: Wer ist wie betroffen und wer profitiert davon? Ihre Tabuisierung verhindert die Thematisierung ihrer Ursachen und damit die Möglichkeit zur Veränderung. Eine Tabuisierung der Triage naturalisiert und stützt die mit ihr verbundenen Ungerechtigkeiten. Wäre daher nicht gerade das Gegenteil angezeigt? Worin siehst Du das größte Problem bei einer öffentlichen Thematisierung von Triage?

B: Darin, dass diese Anleitung auch von allen gelesen wird, die es betrifft. Also all jene Leute mit Vorerkrankungen, die bei einer entsprechenden Aufnahme-Klassifizierung schon wissen, dass sie im Fall der Knappheit nicht bevorzugt werden. Dabei ist es erst einmal ganz egal, ob es sich dabei um ansonsten Privilegierte handelt, denn in dem Moment sind sie es ebenfalls nicht mehr. Diese Leute können sich überlegen, lieber zuhause zu bleiben, oder freiwillig zu verzichten, oder sie schauen mit Angst auf die Welle Neu-

kömmlinge, die dazu führen könnte, dass ihnen der Stecker gezogen wird. Oder ihre Angehörigen schauen mit einem analogen Misstrauen auf diese Welle. Ich kann mir die Situationen ausmalen, die Flüche, die Schreie, das Formular. Ich kann mir auch ausmalen, dass zum Schreien und Fluchen die Kraft fehlt, oder nur noch eine letzte infauste Greisenfaust anklagend zum Himmel – oder zur Deckenleuchte – gereckt wird, ohne weitere Worte. Meinem Empfinden nach sollte es keine Anleitung geben, die Ärzt:innen zu regelbefolgenden Entscheider:innen über Leben und Tod macht. Und wenn sie tatsächlich gezwungen würden, über Priorisierungen in dieser Hinsicht zu entscheiden, dass sie dann nicht von Fachgesellschaften abgesegnet „richtig“ handeln sollen, und zwar egal, ob diese Richtlinien so gestrickt sind, dass sie gar nicht falsch handeln können, oder so, dass sie genau wissen, dass sie auch falsch handeln können und das überprüfen müssen. Denn im ersten Fall sind sie auf viel schlimmere Weise Entscheider:innen über Leben und Tod, aber ihr Gewissen wird über Gebühr entlastet; und im zweiten Fall sind sie ebenfalls Entscheider:innen über Leben und Tod, und alle, auch die Patient:innen, soweit sie noch können, beobachten sie darauf hin, ob sie richtig handeln oder nicht. Und alles das kommt mir falsch vor, denn wenn es soweit kommt, dann hat eine Veröffentlichung unabsehbare Folgen für die Patient:innen, die das erwarten, und für die Ärzt:innen, die danach handeln sollen. Es ergibt sich ein unweigerlicher Verstärkereffekt für die Patient:innen, mit Erwartungen, die töten können; und einen Ambivalenzeffekt für die Ärzt:innen. Wir haben es mit Menschen zu tun, die sich überlegen, was sie aus einer Situation machen, die über Leben und Tod entscheidet. Und wenn sie wissen, wie diese Situation aussieht, werden sie versuchen, diese Situation zu ihren Gunsten zu gestalten. Das kann aber den paradoxen Effekt haben, dass sie die Situation als hoffnungslos empfinden und auf jeden weiteren Schritt verzichten. Oder dass sie in Panik geraten, weil sie Weggabelungen befürchten müssen, bei denen sie auf die falsche Seite geraten. Und was sollen Ärzt:innen tun, die mit Patient:innen rechnen müssen, die ebenfalls den Leitfaden gelesen haben? Gibt es dafür auch einen Leitfaden?

A: Der Leitfaden ist ein Teil unserer Bürokratie, der Erzeugung von Indifferenz. Er ist mit seinem Flussdiagramm und seinem Formular eine Ermächtigung zur Kontingenzeinschätzung, die den Handlungsspielraum des Personals erweitert. Und diese Kombination kann zur Entlastung von schlechtem Gewissen und schlechten Entscheidungen führen, wenn in dem Ablauf des bürokratischen Verfahrens die Entscheidung über Leben und Tod ohne Ansehen der Person nicht eingehalten wird oder werden kann. Mit dieser Offenlegung der bürokratischen Anleitung zur Einleitung eines Sterbeprozesses unter Bedingungen der Knappheit gerät eine Diskussion in die Öffentlichkeit, die bisher aus guten Gründen tabuisiert war: Es geht um die Bemessung des Wertes eines Menschen und die Frage des Menschenopfers. In den USA gerieten diese Fragen schon Tage vorher ins Zentrum der Diskussion, polemisch zugespitzt bis zu der Frage, ob man sich oder seine Großeltern für die Wall Street zu opfern bereit sei.

B: Eine entscheidende Frage bleibt für mich, wo die Kriterien dieser bürokratischen Anleitung bisher vermerkt waren. Offenbar wird nun etwas öffentlich verallgemeinert, was vorher als Arbeitswissen vorhanden war und nur in Einzelfällen zum Tragen kam. Die Frage bleibt, ob die Einschätzung der Fachgesellschaften, dass ein solches Vorgehen nicht nur die beteiligten Teams entlastet, sondern auch „das Vertrauen der Bevölkerung in das Krisenmanagement in den Krankenhäusern stärken“ wird, sich bewahrheitet. Eine Krise fordert Entscheidungen auf unsicherer Datenbasis. Die Entscheidungshilfen der Fachgesellschaften, die in Zeiten der Unsicherheit die Sicherheit auf Seiten der Ärzt:innen erhöhen sollen, reduzieren diese gleichzeitig auf Seiten der Patient:innen. Damit werden die *Entscheidungen über die Zuteilung von Ressourcen in der Notfall- und der Intensivmedizin*

im Kontext der COVID-19-Pandemie zur möglichen Todesdrohung für alle, die sich gesundheitlich zu Risiko- und sozial zu Randgruppen rechnen müssen. Natürlich nur, wenn die Ausrüstung knapp wird und alle wissen, dass diese Tatsache zu solchen Entscheidungen zwingt. Wir werden sehen, wie diese Drohung sich bewahrheitet oder nicht. Im Nachhinein werden wir einen Teil davon voraussichtlich an den Mortalitätsstatistiken und ihren Formularen ablesen können, und wir werden Anekdoten zu hören bekommen, in denen Menschen dem Leitfaden ausgesetzt waren. Es wäre ein Wunder, wenn dies auf allen Seiten der Formularausfüllung ohne Uminterpretationen und falsche Angaben ablaufen könnte.

A: Diese Uminterpretationen – zuerst wollte ich Lügen sagen – scheinen mir unausweichlich, und es fällt mir schwer, sie zu verurteilen. Und das, obwohl sie kaum zur Verteilungsgerechtigkeit beitragen dürften.

B: Im Gegenteil.

Anmerkung

1 Es handelt sich um folgende Fachgesellschaften: Deutsche Interdisziplinäre Vereinigung für Intensiv- und Notfallmedizin (DIVI), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Interdisziplinäre Notfall- und Akutmedizin (DGINA), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Anästhesiologie und Intensivmedizin (DGAI), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internistische Intensivmedizin und Notfallmedizin (DGIIN), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Pneumologie und Beatmungsmedizin (DGP), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Palliativmedizin (DGP), Akademie für Ethik in der Medizin (AEM). Veröffentlicht wurden die Entscheidungen über die Zuteilung von Ressourcen in der Notfall- und der Intensivmedizin im Kontext der COVID-19-Pandemie unter anderem auf der Seite der DIVI unter <https://www.divi.de/joomlatools-files/docman-files/publikationen/covid-19-dokumente/200325-covid-19-ethik-empfehlung-v1.pdf> [26.03.2020].

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Capitalism is the Virus

Witnessing Voices from Leipzig Opposing the German Corona Policy

EHLER VOSS

Abstract The proclamation of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has created a kind of asymmetrical duel situation internationally between supporters and critics of the various state-imposed measures. It has become a dramatic situation, a matter of life and physical as well as social death that puts work and family relationships as well as friendships to the test and sometimes even causes them to break. Many even see it as a threat to social cohesion, because behind the heated controversy over the question of how dangerous the virus is and what the best and most socially balanced way of reacting to it is, fundamental issues are quickly at stake: attitudes toward life and community, toward the state, science, disease, healing, and death. In Germany, too, a vivid and continually changing protest movement has emerged that the public mainly perceives as a diffuse mixture of right-wing and esoteric groups, but is actually much more heterogeneous. What is striking is the collage of left-wing and right-wing attitudes, actors, and goals, which is also confusing for many protesters themselves. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among members of this movement, this text presents the “natives’ points of view” in regard to their oscillation between different utopias and dystopias and analyzes this movement as part of a preexisting “conspiracy culture” with a specific combination of discourses and a specific history of stigmatization and counter-stigmatization. The descriptions focus mainly on examples from my city of residence, Leipzig. Since there are a lot of people in this region who explore the current situation against the background of their socialization in the German Democratic Republic, this text becomes not only a commentary on the pandemic year 2020, but at the same time one on the 30th anniversary of German reunification.

Keywords SARS-CoV-2 – social movement – conspiracy culture – stigmatization – German reunification

Le barbare, c'est d'abord l'homme qui croit à la barbarie.

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS 1952

“Wake up, no matter what the others say!” *Old and new doubts*

Because of a request to give a lecture at the University of Bremen on the topic of Corona from an economic anthropology perspective, I attend two different demonstrations at the end of May 2020 in Leipzig, where I live, hoping for inspiration. These demonstrations take place at the same time on the market square and both seem to make a critical reference to the current economic system against the background of recent developments. What had happened so far? The World Health Organization (WHO) had declared a pandemic, due to the worldwide spread of the coronavirus called

SARS CoV-2, and the German government had subsequently imposed a partial curfew on March 22. Leaving one’s apartment or house without a valid reason was prohibited. Valid reasons included going to work and shopping, sports, and other outdoor activities. Catering and service businesses were closed, public gatherings of more than two people were prohibited, and a minimum distance of 1.50 meters between people from other households was recommended. On March 25, Germany’s parliament, the Bundestag, passed the *Gesetz zum Schutz der Bevölkerung bei einer epidemischen*



Fig. 1 Leipzig-Plagwitz. May 16, 2020.

Lage von nationaler Tragweite [Law for the Protection of the Population in the Event of an Epidemic Situation of National Significance], and at the same time declared the existence of such an epidemic situation, as a result of which the law went into force on March 28.¹ The Act empowered the Federal Ministry of Health to make far-reaching health policy decisions by statutory order without the consent of the Bundesrat, the upper house of the German parliament. The Bundestag can declare an end to the epidemic situation of national importance if the conditions for its declaration no longer exist (which has not happened yet in December 2020). On the same day, Anselm Lenz, Hendrik Sodenkamp, and Batseba N'Diay founded the initiative *Nicht ohne uns!* [Not without us!] in Berlin, set up the association *Kommunikationsstelle Demokratischer Widerstand* [Communications Office for Democratic Resistance], and regularly called for *Hygiene-Spaziergänge* [hygiene walks] on Saturdays in front of the *Volksbühne* [People's The-

ater], on whose model smaller demonstrations were held in many other German cities within a very short time. The demonstrations were initially most popular in Berlin, where the demonstrators distributed copies of Germany's constitutional Basic Law and the meetings were regularly terminated by the police. The association lists its goals on its website, which translates as:

Freedom, Equality, Siblingity!² 1. OUR GREATEST VICTORY WILL BE REGAINING OUR LIBERAL FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS! // 2. SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT RETURN THEM VOLUNTARILY, WE WILL HAVE DONE RIGHT // 3. HOWEVER, SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT TURN PERMANENTLY INTO A TOTALITARIAN REGIME—WE WILL HAVE BEEN NEEDED ALL THE MORE! WE SHOULD MAKE THE NEW RULES FOR OUR ECONOMY OURSELVES! A constitution for our new economic system: Do you have suggestions and experiences? Then write a mail with the subject *Let there be law...* to verfassung@posteo.de

In addition to the three listed initiators (of whom, however, only Anselm Lenz and Hendrik Sodenkamp appear in public), the Italian philosopher GIORGIO AGAMBEN is named as a co-editor of the weekly newspaper *Demokratischer Widerstand* [Democratic Resistance], which the association publishes and distributes free of charge. Since the pandemic was declared, AGAMBEN has published texts in various media in which he identifies the establishment of authoritarian state structures through the measures taken against the spread of the virus known as SARS-CoV-2; under the guise of claiming to protect “bare life,” crucial democratic freedoms were being restricted, and he fears the permanent abolition of these freedoms through the perpetuation of a state of emergency (AGAMBEN 2020a, 2020b).

In mid-April, the Federal Constitutional Court annulled bans on demonstrations in several cities. Among other people, Michael Ballweg, later the founder of the *Querdenken* [lateral thinking, or thinking out of the box] movement, was allowed to hold a demonstration to “end the state of emergency regime” scheduled for April 18, which the city of Stuttgart had initially banned. He had sued against the ban together with the Leipzig lawyer Ralf Ludwig, who later also became an important figure of the *Querdenken* movement. On April 20, various *Lockerungen* [easings] of the Corona protection measures went into effect. Stores up to 800 square meters in size were allowed to reopen, schooling resumed in Saxony with shortened class times, and Saxony was the first state to introduce a requirement to wear a mouth-and-nose mask in shops and on public transport, with the other states following suit a short time later.

One of the demonstrations on the Leipzig market square is organized by the newly founded *Bewegung Leipzig* [Leipzig movement], which until recently acted as the Leipzig offshoot of *Nicht ohne uns!* and distributed Germany’s constitutional Basic Law and the weekly newspaper *Demokratischer Widerstand* on their “hygiene walks.” Since gatherings were allowed again, there have been several public rallies with an “open microphone.” The *Bewegung Leipzig* calls quite simply for a *Versammlung für die Freiheit* [Rally for Freedom] followed by a “walk.”

The second demonstration was announced by the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz* [Action

network Leipzig takes a seat], which was founded in 2011 and has since then mainly carried out actions against right-wing actors. Its website displays the following message in German:

We want to [...] raise the question whether all the measures are really reasonable and whether all the selected procedures, despite the time pressure, are appropriate. The lack of monitoring of political actors’ encroachments on fundamental rights and the need for this to be communicated also merits critical consideration. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of transparency. On the sidelines, however, there is also a need for some self-criticism. We, who see ourselves as emancipatory forces, were and are too quiet on this topic. We are convinced: this should and must urgently change! So let’s take a closer look at the most far-reaching current restriction in Saxony, the general decree on restrictions on leaving one’s home in connection with the previous general decrees in force. These encroach on the following fundamental rights: physical integrity and personal freedom (Article 2 GG³), protection of marriage and family (Article 6 GG), freedom of movement (Article 11 GG), freedom of occupation (Article 12 GG) and, of course, freedom of assembly (Article 8 GG). The general decree lists a number of “valid reasons” when people are allowed to leave their homes. Unfortunately, this enumeration leaves too many questions unanswered. This alone raises doubts about legal certainty and, when individual aspects are considered, also about reasonableness (AKTIONSNETZWERK LEIPZIG NIMMT PLATZ 2020a).

At first glance, the two demonstrations seem to complement each other quite well. But the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz*, together with the initiative *Jugend gegen Rechts* [Youth Against The Right], has called to demonstrate against the demonstration of the *Bewegung Leipzig* and writes on their homepage:

[Regarding the demonstration of the *Bewegung Leipzig*], the initiative “*Jugend gegen Rechts Leipzig*” [Youth Against The Right Leipzig] declares: “For weeks, there have been demonstrations by Corona deniers in Leipzig. Among these demonstrators are also right-wing populists, Reichsbürger⁴, and neo-Nazis. These are often active in groups, ready for violence and contemptuous of humanity. That we as anti-fascists do not want to leave the street to such a toxic mixture of

actors of the new and old right, esotericists, and anti-vaccination activists, is one of our principles. At the same time, Corona shows once again how inhumane the capitalist economic system is. It is important to us to counter the simplistic criticism of ‘those up there’ or the ‘elites’ with a holistic one and to show that this system as a whole is not sustainable. That’s why we want to take to the streets together with you.” Irena Rudolph-Kokot adds for the Aktionsnetzwerk “Leipzig nimmt Platz”: “We use the necessary rallies against conspiracy ideologues, Corona deniers, and the hodgepodge of right-wing forces to make issues that the pandemic has pushed into the background present again. We also want to point out the social effects of the necessary restrictions. For example, many people are losing their jobs or livelihoods, are on short-time work, or have extensive psychological and social problems because of the restrictions. All these people need our solidarity, as do those who are particularly vulnerable to the virus. Just as we have critically accompanied the restrictions of fundamental rights, we will also critically accompany the further handling of easing measures and aid measures and point out gaps or undesirable developments, as well as standing in solidarity at the side of people who need that solidarity. Our weapon is solidarity!” (AKTIONSNETZWERK LEIPZIG NIMMT PLATZ 2020b).

About two hundred people gradually gather on Leipzig’s market square for the meeting of the *Bewegung Leipzig*. A microphone and several large loudspeakers are set up, rainbow and peace flags are waved, and the organizers have an “alternative” style of dress. Among the protesters, a woman wears a T-shirt with the inscription “conspiracy theorist” and a man has a tinfoil-covered sun hat on his head. On a side street, about 15 police buses are waiting. The song *Wir ziehen in den Frieden* [We march off for peace] by Udo Lindenberg is played over the loudspeakers. The lyrics translate as: “We are all blood sisters and brothers. We are a big human family. We don’t need power-hungry idiots. With their bribe money from the arms industry. C’mon, let’s march off for peace. We are more than you think. We are sleeping giants. But now we’re rising up.” One of the organizers steps up to the microphone and welcomes all those present to the “Rally for Freedom:” they are the *Bewegung Leipzig*; they do not belong to any group, party, or other current; they are, like all of us here, human

beings, belong to the human family, that means peace, connection, and friends; their wish is that we all work for a solidary, free, and just society.

While she is speaking, a demonstration procession of about 40 mainly black-clothed young people comes through the pedestrian zone at her back and heads for the marketplace. As a coherent marching bloc with masks, but without maintaining security distance, and with posters emblazoned with slogans like “Protect fundamental rights and keep your distance from anti-Semitism, right-wingers, and conspiracy idiots,” “Solidarity instead of right-wing agitation,” and “Mandatory vaccination for tinfoil hats,” it is accompanied by loud music. In front of a chain of police officers separating the marketplace into two halves, they stop and shout again and again in unison, interrupted by rhythmic clapping in the direction of the *Bewegung Leipzig*, “Alerta, alerta, antifascista!” The speaker on the side of the *Bewegung Leipzig* continues unperturbed, while the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz* brings its own loudspeaker van into position, so that both demonstrations hold their speeches virtually back to back: she herself is a creative trainer, she continues, and has been working in the health sector for 15 years; she stands here, like all those present, as an individual in this temporary community of courageous people, in which each and everyone stands for himself or herself, independent, free, and unique in his or her knowledge, thoughts and hopes. They want to invite everyone, regardless of age, gender, and nationality. They clearly distance themselves from racism, sexism, and violence in word, deed, and writing. At this point, applause set in.

After a short break, she continues: because this arises on the breeding ground of mental pigeonholes, but since we are all unique individuals, pigeonholes are only our mind’s desperate attempt to impose order; pigeonholes are thought constructs that need to be questioned and dissolved; you can find out what motivates another person’s actions only by approaching him or her openly and without judgment and listening to what he or she has to say; this seems to be very difficult in the current society; as an organizing team, they have one overriding, common goal, they wish for a free, democratic and peaceful society in the future, which would promote happiness and joy for



Fig. 2 Protest by Bewegung Leipzig. May 30, 2020.



Fig. 3 Counter-protest by Leipzig nimmt Platz. May 30, 2020.

all people and other living beings inhabiting this planet. Applause again.

But this can only work if each individual recognizes herself or himself and takes personal responsibility; this would enable people to find their place in the community again; people should have the opportunity to express themselves without being defamed, censored, or silenced; they see themselves merely as organizers who offer a platform for exchange; they are not responsible for the content of the speeches and do not necessarily agree with them, but they ask for absolute respect for those who have had the courage to present their thoughts, worries, fears, and visions for the future and to avoid any interruption of the speakers. She wishes everyone joy, open hearts, and lots of love.

A song follows, accompanied instrumentally by a CD and sung by another woman from the organizing team, to which the bystanders clap rhythmically. The lyrics translate as follows:

*Wake up, no matter what others say
 Wake up, finally start questioning
 Wake up, I'm telling you, you're not alone
 Wake up, the truth will always be the truth
 [...]
 Give a piece if you have too much... Accept different
 opinions
 Start discussing
 Accepting other points of view
 We shouldn't lose our freedom
 Now is the time to stand up for each other
 Politicians do not really want to see the misery
 Homeless people, food banks, and women's shelters,
 children in need, social workers, old people, the door
 must be open!
 How much is a life worth?
 What can you really give?
 All this becomes apparent when the curtains rise
 And what does "systemically important" actually
 mean here?
 Have we not yet recognized the value of each indi-
 vidual?
 [...]
 What would you feel? Forget fear and panic, use em-
 pathy instead.
 I'll stand behind you when the going gets tough and
 express my opinion
 Do not be deceived
 Awareness for the whole population!*

The first speaker is introduced as a physician from Hamburg. He is the internist Walter Weber, about 60 years old, who fiercely tells how he founded the initiative *Ärzte für Aufklärung* [Doctors for Enlightenment] with a colleague. In March, they realized that something was wrong in this country. He himself "woke up" when he heard a podcast by virologist Christian Drosten⁵ predicting 250,000 deaths and the president of the Robert Koch Institute⁶ Lothar Wieler talking about a possible 1.5 million deaths. But he completely woke up, he said, when Drosten advocated lowering the standards for approving a vaccine for the new coronavirus and leaving liability for any damages to the state. That would not work at all for a medical doctor. He and his colleagues said they had to take a closer look and see what really killed the people to see if it was really that bad. As it happens, Professor Püschl in Hamburg had performed corresponding autopsies against the advice of the Robert Koch Institute and had concluded that most had died with, but not from Corona. At the moment, we had the ridiculous number of 8,000 corona deaths, though we did not even know how many of them were not really Corona deaths. He had just learned that a doctor had been paid 5,000 euros to determine Covid-19 as the cause of death. In his research, he said, he tried to find out where this worldwide scaremongering suddenly came from, and in the process he came across a lecture from 2009 in which a public relations manager from the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) presented seven steps on how to increase demand for vaccines: 1. people circulate the idea that a killer virus is on the way. 2. renowned scholars scare people. 3. the press picks it up and carries it day after day and night after night. 4. horrible pictures of dead people and affected families are shown. Steps 5 and 6 were known from the book *Propaganda*:⁷ You always have to repeat and dramatize it. In seventh place would come the knight in shining armor. And who is that? The vaccination! He concludes each of the points mentioned with the question whether those present had heard this before, which they answer with shouts of "Yes!" He doesn't know if that's exactly how it's going to be now, but he has his thoughts. And then everyone always asks, "What about Italy?," where so many people had died. There, most of the Eastern Euro-

pean nursing staff had fled the country because of the scaremongering and the curfew threatened by the emergency government, leaving the nursing homes literally alone. Then, because of their panic, people ran to the hospitals, which were much more poorly equipped than ours, anyway; moreover, they had many more problems with hospital germs and antibiotic resistance there. The pictures of the piling coffins had come about because the funeral homes were forbidden to carry out the funerals due to the Infection Protection Act. It is not acceptable that the normal standards are suspended, he says: the development of new vaccines is always associated with dangers and needs a sufficient testing phase—especially if, as in the case of the planned vaccine, it is a completely new procedure in which humans are changed on the genetic level. After that, he became more and more involved in researching the new coronavirus. The collection of data is dubious, often no distinction is made between deaths from Corona and deaths with Corona and, in addition, doctors and hospitals earn more when they treat a Corona patient. To him, it looks as if the pandemic is being hyped for economic interests. Now, these strange masks are being forced on us. In March, he would have had understanding for that measure, but at this point in time, there is hardly any virus around anymore, and furthermore, even the WHO has already written that masks show no evidence of protection. He calls to give him names of the heads of the local authorities, they will be sued personally for coercion. They must know that they are executing nonsensical orders, everyone is responsible only to his conscience. In addition, there is another thing: it is currently slowly being prepared to make vaccinations compulsory. Politicians know that doctors won't cooperate, that's why pharmacists are being trained in fast-track courses. He can only advise the pharmacists not to be part of it, because they are being used! The new president of the Federal Constitutional Court said that after the so-called crisis the Basic Law will come back, but not in the same way as before. What does he mean by that? How can a supreme constitutional court judge say something like that?, he asks rhetorically, before concluding by coming back to the mask issue. He considers masks to be a humiliating gesture of subjugation; we are to be conditioned to ultimately accept ev-

erything. He is just interested in what comes next. We really need to stand up now, otherwise we will all soon be forcibly vaccinated and forcibly chipped. *Therefore, he concludes, stop the Corona dictatorship! We will bring those responsible to justice, you can count on that!*

Another speaker notes that certain experts are not be heard by the government and names the microbiologist and epidemiologist Sucharit Bhakdi⁸ and the physician Wolfgang Wodarg,⁹ as well as an employee from the Ministry of the Interior who presented a paper criticizing the exaggerated scope of the measures and warned of economic damage.¹⁰ The federal government was acting against its better judgment.

Meanwhile, an old acquaintance comes up to me; he had come with the counter-demonstration. What am I doing here, he asks. Since I wear a mask, unlike all the other bystanders, he immediately suspects ethnographic interest. He wears his mask above all to distinguish himself from the people here, he says. Then he talks himself into a rage about how bad it is here, all these conspiracy theorists, he can't stand it. What do all those people want, now they can finally go shopping again, so, what are they complaining about? And then this talk about compulsory vaccination and so on, has anyone ever announced that already? And anyway, it is complete nonsense that vaccination is dangerous. Somebody once claimed that vaccination causes autism; his PhD thesis was withdrawn long ago, but this belief persists. We have the best health care system in the world, people should be happy about that. And then over there, the two guys with the "Don't give Gates a chance" T-shirts, that's blatantly anti-Semitic.¹¹ And the five guys in front, they had always been at the Legida [anti-Muslim-immigration] demonstrations in the past.¹² This is a small, but loud and, above all, completely insignificant minority, to which far too much attention is already being paid. You shouldn't start talking to people like that, you should just exclude them and punish them with disregard.

The tenor of the speeches by the counter-demonstrators on the other side of the marketplace is similar to his stance: what is happening at the self-proclaimed hygiene demos has nothing to do with a rational discourse on the meaningfulness of measures, one speaker says. And Corona is not

a question of belief, but bitter reality. Anyone who ignores the hundreds of thousands of deaths or even dismisses them as lies is aiding and abetting the pandemic. Those who deliberately ignore essential measures of infection protection are acting irresponsibly and without solidarity. Throughout Germany, participants of these demonstrations carry right-wing and Shoah-relativizing images and anti-Semitic symbols or signs with conspiracy-ideological slogans, for example, about the alleged compulsory vaccination. Right-wing forces like the AfD have long since become part of these protests. Those who do not distance themselves from these right-wingers or take action against them should not be surprised to be lumped together with them. Something dangerous is brewing here. It is necessary to prevent a second Pegida. That is why they marked the red line. Covid-19 is a threat to the lives of many people. We all have to show solidarity and not Social Darwinism. Instead of returning as quickly as possible to the normal operation of fossil capitalism, they call for a transformation oriented toward the common good. Instead of pumping billions into climate-damaging car and aircraft companies, they demand the socialization of the health care system, the fair distribution of care work, and consistent climate justice. Instead of returning to the inhumane deportation process imposed on refugees, they demand decentralized shelter for those seeking protection at the Greek-Turkish border and as many sea rescues as possible.

Another young speaker asserts that the “conspiracy idiots” and the “aluminum bobble wearers”¹³ on the other side of the marketplace display structural anti-Semitism, above all in a reductionist form of criticism of capitalism.

I turn back to the demonstration of the *Bewegung Leipzig*. The woman next to me, around 50 years old, says that this Drosten podcast, which the physician had talked about, was also one of the turning points for her, when Drosten said, hmm, yes, the numbers are all not reliable at all, but he had calculated everything back and forth again and again and could only say: it will all be very, very bad and we need a vaccine as quickly as possible and must leave out the usual safety criteria, and the state must bear the risks. The latter is actually nonsense, she says, because it is already the case that the state, i.e., the general public, pays

for vaccination damage. At the beginning, she herself was also afraid of Corona, but she has long since stopped believing the tale of a killer virus. The goal of “flattening the curve” initially made sense to her, even though she was surprised by the lack of discussion about the fact that the population would now have to pay for years of austerity in the healthcare system. However, she quickly became suspicious of the way the data were presented. These would always be given in absolute and cumulative terms, so that the curves could never decrease. The numbers of infected persons are also not put in relation to the population or to the number of tests conducted, and the number of deaths is also never put in relation to the number of infected persons. And nothing is ever said about the hospital occupancy rate. The result is a lot of scary graphs with rising curves, most of which are colored red, which is totally unscientific. And when Bill Gates, without a single critical question from the interviewing journalist, got ten minutes in the news program *Tagesthemen* to create a worldwide horror scenario and to say that the goal is to vaccinate seven billion people in order to avoid endless deaths, she completely lost faith. Fortunately, she came across the website of the physician Wolfgang Wodarg early on, who put everything in a different context. And on the YouTube channel of the physician Bodo Schiffmann,¹⁴ who was a bit special, but at least authentic, she had followed his development a bit, how he had always wondered about individual aspects at the beginning and went deeper and deeper into the subject and everything became more and more monstrous for him. She recommends to me the documentaries “Trust WHO” and “The Profiteers of Fear”. The latter had been available in the ARTE media library for a long time and had now been taken out during the pandemic. In the first documentary, one can see that in 2009, silently and without being able to provide a reason even when asked, the WHO changed the criteria for declaring a pandemic. Before this was linked to a certain number of deaths and after the change only to the spread of a virus, completely independent of the incidence of disease or deaths. And shortly afterwards, swine flu was declared a pandemic, and it turned out that the vaccines had already been produced in advance and then ordered by the German government. The vaccine all had to be destroyed,

because the swine flue had not turned out as badly as announced. And already at that time the virologist Christian Drosten had been the one who had drawn up the worst scenarios and already at that time it had been Wolfgang Wodarg who had fought against that and had exposed the whole thing as a criminal action of the pharmaceutical industry. Only Sweden fell for it and vaccinated en masse with the vaccine, which led to a lot of neurological damage. That's probably why Sweden didn't participate this time, because they would have seen right away that this was just a new version of the swine flu scam. Anyway, why this focus just on vaccination? Vaccination and respiratory equipment are the only things that are talked about, as if only biomedicine and intensive care medicine can save us. No one talks about strengthening the immune system or the danger of civilization diseases that arise, for example, from an unhealthy diet and that also make you susceptible to such viruses. Instead, the politicians Renate Künast from the Green Party and Julia Klöckner from the Christian Democratic Union are currently running a campaign against vitamins because they are claimed to be so dangerous. She can't believe it! Why does everyone think that governments are suddenly concerned about health? Health has never been a big issue before. How many people die from hospital germs or diabetes or whatever, and what sustainable health measures could have been paid for with all the money that is now being thrown at pharmaceutical companies for the development of vaccines against a claimed killer virus that is not a killer virus? The whole thing is obviously not about health, but about something else.

The uniformity of the speeches alone must make one suspicious, they always say that we know nothing about the virus and at the same time the population is told from the beginning that nothing will be the same as before, they speak of the "new normal", and so on. How can you say something like that right at the beginning, when you don't know anything about the virus yet, you have to wait and see how the situation develops. And then the talk of systemically important professions, where did this term suddenly come from? We don't think that way at all here in Germany, it comes from somewhere else. It all seems to be scripted, as if it had been recited. What lies behind it is not clear, of course, but there are all

kinds of clues. At best, it is simply a matter of earning a lot of money with vaccines; at worst of population reduction and a transformation of all societies into a worldwide totalitarian system with total surveillance.

It is clear that the world cannot go on as before, but if the super-rich, who are not democratically legitimized, take up the cause, nothing good will probably come out of it for the populations. In the person of Bill Gates, Big Pharma and Big Tech overlap, which already indicates where the journey is going. Most likely, the whole thing will lead to a worldwide digitalized surveillance state in which the population is treated like cattle and in which people have to be vaccinated against the latest flu viruses every year in order to even be allowed to go outside. It frightens her how China is already being considered a role model in some talk shows. And when she first saw the reports about the starving day laborers in India, it occurred to her that this might not only be accepted as an accident, but perhaps even intended. After all, this will be the case not only in India, but also in many parts of the world, and it is probably just not being reported.

She doesn't understand why the left apparently doesn't see that, dismisses any criticism of the state measures as a conspiracy theory, and now has nothing better to do than to join in the general bashing of the protesters and demonstrate against these Corona rallies. Until now, she had always voted Green, but that would no longer be an option for her. The political opposition was just totally failing. The defamation of the demonstrations in the media and by politicians is already extremely blatant, which is why she has not been to such a demonstration until for the first time today. Just consider the designation "covidiot" and even more so "Corona deniers", as if it was about denying the existence of the virus, which places one in the vicinity of Holocaust deniers. The point is simply that the virus is obviously not as dangerous as the government and most of the media claim, and that the measures are doing more harm than good. And she finds her daughter's teachers, who pretend to be leftists and who get upset about the many "amateur virologists", really disgusting. In such a big crisis and with such blatant measures and restrictions on freedom, how can one simply rely on the people at the top to do everything

right? What kind of blind faith in authority is this that is being conveyed to the children? That is like Merkel, who in her television address to the nation said that from now on we should only believe the statements of the official institutions. What is that?! In such a serious crisis, you simply have to take a closer look and form your own opinion. As if there were not also different opinions among virologists. Apart from the fact that one should perhaps listen not only to one virologist, but also to other experts from the health sector.

How can it be that in the Western world, where there is such a high level of education and so much access to information, so few people take a closer look? It is simply obvious that the official narrative is not correct. And even the left-wing newspaper *taz* concentrates all its energy only on agitation against the Corona protestors. That is so self-righteous and at the same time so naive. And if the protestors are now defamed from all sides as totally leprous, that is for her not far from the category of the *Volksschädling* [a dehumanizing term that the Nazis used for “enemy of the people”]. She finds it so shocking that the left obviously has no fucking idea. They probably believe that when fascism comes, it would march lockstep through the streets with combat boots and brown shirts. And of course, then all the leftists would be in resistance. Don't they realize what they are doing? That's so stupid, she can't believe it. How stupid and naive one had to be. Hitler had also promised a good “new normality” for those who fit into the healthy body of the German people. And also he had described exactly what he was going to do, that could have been known before. The current leftists apparently only need to be told something about solidarity and about the need to protect the weak, and they will go along with anything. But it is above all the weak who suffer from the measures. When she hears that, and when people believe that now, at last, politics is attaching more value to the protection of the weak than to the oh-so-evil economy, and that politics is finally no longer following a neoliberal logic, then she can only grab ahold of her head. The opposite is the case; it looks like we will soon have a society that is subject only to the dictates of the economic interests of the super-rich and in which only those who are considered systemically important and maintain basic functions have any value. And probably most

people will not even notice that. As Orwell already put it in *1984*: they will love their oppression.

Another speaker says that, looking at the current statistics, the pandemic is already over, it had never been an infectious disease of national importance, and thus all measures had to be annulled immediately, as they are unlawful. It is the duty of every citizen to stand up against injustice, he said, and this has already happened once in Leipzig [referring to the demonstrations that helped weaken and ultimately defeat Socialist rule in East Germany], peacefully, with determination and vigor. We should repeat this and take courage from our own history, we should believe in the saying that history repeats itself; he prays that our history repeats itself.

Another speaker, like his predecessor around 50 years old, says he has been in the organizing team from the beginning, he has a son in the forest kindergarten and has to cry every time he sees people alone in the forest wearing a mask, crying about the stupidity of not recognizing what that means, or he goes to the supermarket and thinks he doesn't want to shop with a mask on anymore, he doesn't enjoy social life anymore, he wants to know from the government what the institutions were planning to do with us: what such a pandemic meant had already played out in 2012; in 2016, an EU strategy was developed that we should all be made aware of vaccination and be vaccinated, then there had been swine flu, and the bird flu, for which we should all be vaccinated, in 2019 there had been the so-called Event 201, where it had been played out exactly what is currently being done. In 2020, Bavarian State Premier Söder said that this was now a successful test, and now there was a warning of a bioweapons attack. The speaker asks the government to tell us the truth, he wants to know what is happening right now. He sees that all of alternative medicine is being pushed back, the midwives via their insurances, now he sees that homeopathy is being made to look bad, he is not in favor of it, but he finds it blatant what is happening, the alternative practitioners are being abolished, the medicinal plants are being catalogued, one is no longer allowed to use them and no longer allowed to sell stinging nettles. The authorities claim that only a vaccination can make us happy, and then somehow everything could be secretly mixed into this vacci-

nation without our knowing what it was. And he doesn't want that, he wants to know what it is and demands an official Corona investigation committee. He gets a big applause for that. He wants to know what is going on here; there are three pre-conditions for a dictatorship: the control of opinion, which we were experiencing via fact checks; website blocks like Dr. Wodarg's; and the network enforcement law. On the other hand, the distribution of wealth, i.e., the monetary system, the ownership of money, factories, real estate, and properties, promoted a dictatorship. He wants a different monetary system. And the most dangerous condition for a dictatorship is access to our bodies. And that is vaccination. Vaccination gives the dictatorship access to our bodies and it can do whatever it wants. But the point now is not to complain to the government, we have to empower ourselves, grow up, that's what we want, but peacefully, powerfully, and persistently. After enlightenment comes love, the current society is totally dysfunctional, destroys its own livelihood, the current crisis is much deeper than a political crisis, it is a spiritual crisis. What have we humans done with the earth and with ourselves, with the animals, our energy, and our thoughts? The current crisis offers us the chance to grow up, as humanity, to come into power ourselves instead of rebelling. Against the patriarchy, against the father as if it were symbolic, how do I deal with my father, what have I learned in the family, this is how I also deal with the government, so this is really a personal development process that is now pending for each individual; he no longer needs others to love him, but he begins to love himself.

At the end of the demonstration, when I return to my acquaintance from the counter-demonstration, who after one hour is still standing at the demonstration of the *Bewegung Leipzig*, he was in conversation with a man of about 50 years, whom he asks aggressively, *Are you a virologist? No, you are not a virologist, so what do you know? You can tell me whatever you want, I won't believe you anyway. You're going to tell me something you heard on KenFM¹⁵ about dark forces planning something, that's nonsense, I don't want to listen to that.*

I hear the man say quietly but firmly, *Drosten is paid by Gates.*

My acquaintance asks back, *Drosten is paid by Gates? Do you have a bank statement? Show me a bank statement!*

He has had enough now, he has to go home. The demonstrators of the *Bewegung Leipzig* just sang the song *Freiheit* [Freedom] by the German musician Marius Müller-Westernhagen. My acquaintance says that the AfD had also sung that song recently, and says goodbye, while the *Bewegung Leipzig* was getting ready for the parade through the city center, which was called a "walk".

A few days later, a video appears on YouTube with the title "Against right-wing agitation and anti-Semitism—Really?" It is a montage of the demonstrations, in which the movement portrays the *Bewegung Leipzig* as peaceful and the Antifa or rather the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz* as aggressors. In the *Leipziger Internet Zeitung*, an interview with the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz* appears after the demonstration, but without mentioning the name of the person answering:

[Question] Why did the "Aktionsnetzwerk" call for a protest against the Corona demos in Leipzig?

[Answer] At the beginning, the Berlin organizers aimed at a broad-based "liberal" protest. Soon, Reichsbürger, neo-Nazis, neo-Rightists, and anti-Semites started to gather at these demonstrations. In the Leipzig telegram groups preparing for the event, anti-Semitic narratives are now being spread on a massive scale. The urgently needed debate about restrictions of fundamental rights such as freedom of movement—I can stay where I want—or freedom of assembly must be conducted, and we want to conduct the debate as an action network. The openness of these Corona demos to any, even completely nonsensical criticism against the measures, especially from the right-wing camp, contaminates this debate. Under the pretense of wanting to discuss the sense of restrictions, mostly propaganda and the centuries-old narrative of global elites who are executing a plan prepared long ago are spread.

[Question] One accusation is that conspiracy theories are being spread there. Which ones are these specifically?

[Answer] It is often disseminated that some force—preferably the states China or USA—has spread the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which causes Covid-19, probably to attack each other. Besides, wireless towers of the fast 5G network are also suspected to cause viral infection. What

worries us even more are anti-Semitic explanatory patterns that are essentially aimed at “those at the top”, meaning a global elite that controls the world. This “global elite”, also “financial elite” or even “Soros, Gates, and the other 400 (richest) families” is plainly structural anti-Semitism. In addition, it is also the proclamations of Q, or QAnon [...], which are being spread in the preparation groups; their crude contents should actually be beyond any acceptability.

[Question] Many participants deny that the speeches had anti-Semitic content and would probably not describe themselves as anti-Semites. What exactly is anti-Semitic about certain contents?

[Answer] Since all too obvious anti-Semitism has a disturbing effect against the background of German collective guilt and lowers acceptability, it is paraphrased. The supporters ask, “Cui bono?”, i.e., “Who benefits?”, or say that they would like to check the “financial flows” of said elites—on the basis of these, they are convinced, a conspiracy can be proven. Besides the historical lie of the “well poisoners” (Corona), especially at QAnon the legend of (children’s) blood being misused for magical or medical purposes is spread. Such myths have often led to pogroms against Jewish people, with violence up to murder. It is precisely in times of crisis that anti-Semitism becomes evident.

[Question] In Leipzig, only a few hundred people have taken part in the demonstrations so far. In other cities, there are already several thousand. Can the “movement” also become so big in Leipzig?

[Answer] In times of change, people look for explanatory patterns. On the other hand, the “movement” is very heterogeneous and increasingly dominated by known right-wingers and Reichsbürger. The carrying of Reich flags and obvious racism lowers the ability to connect with people, because civil society clearly opposes this. We also see this as our task: to make the connections clear and to point out the danger of a “movement” that is not concerned with fundamental rights. Unlike, for example, the groups in Chemnitz or Zwickau, the “Bewegung Leipzig” originates from the educated middle classes, which see themselves primarily as left-liberal. It can be assumed that the “movement” is reacting to the constant warnings against the participation of overtly right-wing individuals. With a demarcation to the right, how-

ever, such pro-conspiracy demos lose most of their appeal.

[Question] “Leipzig nimmt Platz” also criticizes some of the Corona measures. How does this criticism differ from the criticism of the Corona demos?

[Answer] We do not presume to be virologists. We do not doubt the existence of the virus or the need for preventive measures against it. Our criticism of the decisions is on a constitutional level. We criticize that the restrictions of fundamental rights went too far, and we criticize that the primary logic of the state is not based on human lives, but on economics. However, we do not believe that there is a diabolical plan of an elite behind Corona protection measures or the slow withdrawal of them. At all times, people suffer from crises, and a few profit. But this is not the shady plan of some lodge; this is everyday life in capitalism (LOCH 2020, transl. by EV).

“Corona Deniers” vs. “Conspiracy Deniers” *The Great Divide*

The declaration of a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020 due to the worldwide spread of the coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 has led to an often undifferentiated polarization in Germany, but also in other countries. The result is a kind of asymmetrical duel situation that confronts one with the choice of either joining or letting oneself be coopted on the side of the majority of supporters or the side of the minority of critics of the various state-imposed protection measures. It is a dramatic situation, a duel for life and physical as well as social death, which puts work and family relationships as well as friendships to the test and not infrequently causes them to break. This is because this heated controversy quickly turns out to be not just about healing, but about “everything”, or at least almost everything, or rather—from the protester’s point of view—about everything but healing; in any case about fundamental issues: about attitudes toward life and community, toward the state, toward science, illness, and death, and about who is to be trusted.

The “small but loud” minority, which expresses its criticism primarily in social media and throughout Germany in both large and small street protests, faces serious accusations, as do

the counter-demonstrators who accompany them: that they are stupid, irrational, egoistic, irresponsible, unsolidary, fact-resistant, anti-scientific, following a faith reminiscent of religiosity, pursuing financial interests, masking themselves and hiding a political agenda or at least letting themselves be harnessed to political ideologues or economic interests, are obedient to authority, undemocratic, fascist, unhealthy, deadly. They are called old terms like conspiracy theorists, conspiracy narrators, or conspiracy ideologues, Nazis, fascists, anti-Semites, esotericists, confused mumbler, vaccination wackos, tinfoil hat wearers, covidiot and Corona deniers, not infrequently and increasingly also radicals, extremists, criminals, hazards, terrorists, or murderers.¹⁶

This has created a classic task for anthropology, which for a long time has dedicated itself to what a ruling majority regarded as foreign, leprous, unsavory, dangerous, irrational, and primitive: to engage in participant observation committed to the usual epistemological neutrality and to categorical openness to the emic perspectives of the marginalized actors and to portray them, among other things, in their differences from and overlaps with the majority. Based on the coincidences of my sometimes more, sometimes less sporadic following of the development of the protests since the end of March 2020—through online and offline readings of newspapers, magazines, letters to the editor, Telegram groups, YouTube videos, Twitter messages, and Facebook posts, through observations of and conversations with neighbors, friends, acquaintances, and strangers in everyday life and at demonstrations against the measures in Leipzig, Berlin, Chemnitz, Kempten, and Ravensburg, and through interviews with some of their participants—the core of the controversy seems to be the differing assessments of the meaningfulness and proportionality of individual or even all measures to contain the virus. The controversy comes to a head in the question whether the pandemic spread of the virus requires increased attention, or whether increased attention—through excessively implemented and inadequately applied and evaluated test procedures for the detection of infection, generous counting those who died both “from and with Corona”, and one-sided and dramatizing reporting—creates the facts of a pandemic in the first place. Whether, therefore,

the chosen therapy is not worse than the disease because of the worldwide “collateral damage” it causes. And whether not only the disease, but also the therapy harms above all the weak, and how this could best be countered. Whether the restrictions on fundamental rights are temporary measures to protect the population or whether some or all of the restrictions will become permanent. Whether the restrictions serve to preserve current economic and social forms or whether current forms of community life and economic life will change. And if they do change, whether this will lead to a more solidary and democratic or to a more unsolidary and undemocratic transformation of societies. And if the latter is the case, whether this is the desired or undesired effect of an abstract social development or whether such a transformation is being deliberately pushed or even induced by certain groups of people under the guise of health protection, and what can be done against that.

Behind this discussion, an intersection and consolidation of various controversies already existing before the pandemic becomes apparent. They encompass far more dimensions than immediate health and, in their potentially broadly effective interplay, should definitely be further researched anthropologically and by comparing countries. These controversies are about freedom of speech and the limits of tolerance, which in Germany, just like in the United States, are being conducted with the English catch phrases “free speech” and “cancel culture”; about political *Querfronten* [literally, cross-cutting fronts, i.e., groupings in which right and left are irrelevant] and the so-called horseshoe theory, according to which extreme left and extreme right positions overlap; about liberal and libertarian concepts of freedom and the relationship between the individual, crowds, and power; about the distinction between investigative journalism, power analyses, and conspiracy theories and the assessment of the danger of the latter for democracy and minorities; about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of comparisons between today’s German Federal Republic, formerly socialist East Germany, and/or the Third Reich¹⁷; about the extent of the impact of human activity on the earth, the associated consequences, and possible countermeasures; about the distribution of income and the excesses

and dangers of the current financial system and possible alternatives to it; about economic and political globalization and corresponding efforts at disentanglement; about the advantages and disadvantages of increasing privatization of public services, as well as the digitalization of most areas of life and its influence on individual freedoms and democratic participation; about lobbying, corruption, and the political influence of corporations, private foundations, and think tanks, and thus the question of the independence of politics, NGOs, the judiciary, the media, science, and medicine, and the balance of public-private partnerships; and last and first, about biomedical and alternative approaches to health and disease and the resulting question of individual health and physical self-determination.

That such a specific combination of controversies occurs not only in this Corona crisis became clear to me the moment when a catalog from the Kopp publishing house fell into my hands, which was enclosed with a used copy of the recently published book *Chronik einer angekündigten Krise—Wie ein Virus die Welt verändert* [Chronicle of an Announced Crisis—How a Virus is Changing the World] by the journalist Paul Schreyer, in which I recognized many topics and authors whom I had learned about only in the current context of the protests. Many of the books offered in the catalog are themselves from the Kopp Publishing House, but books from other publishers are also included if they fit the subject. *Books that open your eyes* is the advertising slogan of the publishing house, and the title page of the catalog advertises the book *verheimlicht—vertuscht—vergessen 2021. Was 2020 nicht in der Zeitung stand* [concealed—covered up—forgotten 2021. What was not found in the newspaper in 2020] by Gerhard Wisniewski, who apparently publishes such a book every year.

After this media-critical lead-in and an editorial by the publisher suggesting that the pharmaceutical industry deliberately orchestrated the Corona crisis, the first nearly 50 pages revolve around the topic of “Medicine and Health”, touting books on the broad spectrum of what is called alternative medical therapies and self-healing, on the dangers of electro-smog, environmental toxins, genetic engineering, vaccinations, and the corrupt medical system. Under the heading “Well-being”, nutritional supplements are advertised; under

“Art of Living”, essential oils and incense; under “Ambience”, books about angels, astrology, and neurolinguistic programming; under “Mystery”, about the opening of the Third Eye, reincarnations, population exchanges, secret technologies, artificial intelligence, the Bilderberg Conferences and three super-lodges that have guided the destiny of the world for at least 200 years, the plan of the elites to exterminate at least half of humanity and the role Corona plays in that, about Satanism, other dimensions, and the origin of evil, extraterrestrials, forbidden sciences, and the way to the space-time energy age; under “Revelations”, about the New World Order, the health dictatorship, Corona lies, Bill Gates’ attack on democracy and the transformation of Germany into a totalitarian state, about bullying and digital lynching by red-painted Nazis [i.e., leftists], fake news, the climate lie, and the state Antifa, unwanted truths, the One-World establishment fighting Donald Trump, the devil and how he rules the world, as well as 800 pages of hidden facts about Adolf Hitler; under “Financial World”, about the coming mega-crash and related expropriations, about gold, silver, and digital currencies and the upcoming great reboot of the financial system; under “Self-sufficiency”, about the art of fermenting, cooking, and gathering herbs; and under the last category “Crisis Preparedness”, there are hardly any books, but mostly outdoor and survival items from various stoves and emergency food to water and air filters to solar panels and self-defense utensils.

A look at this catalog shows that this complex is part of what has been first described in the U.S. (KNIGHT 2000; BARKUN 2003) and later in Europe (AUPERS 2012; HARAMBAM 2020a; SCHINK 2020) as “conspiracy culture”, which interprets George H. W. Bush’s speaking of a New World Order after the fall of the “Iron Curtain” as a threatening plot by an unelected transnational elite to undermine state and individual sovereignty (cf. SANDERS & WEST 2003), for whom Corona is only a further or rather the last and decisive stage of escalation of a long-running development.

This scene is usually attributed to a Euro-American pop culture and regularly makes outsiders wonder how big it is and whether it is more likely to gain or lose popularity. The answers are controversial and empirically difficult to assess. It can only be ascertained, on the one hand, that

the currently recurring assertion that conspiracy theories are extremely popular at the moment has been a consistent perception for decades and, on the other hand, that at least the political, journalistic, and academic monitoring of this scene has steadily increased and, in the latter case, has even established itself as a field of research in its own right (cf., for example, the international research network Comparative Analysis of Conspiracy Theories, founded in 2016, and the resulting edited volumes (DYRENDAL, ROBERTSON & ASPREM 2018; BUTTER & KNIGHT 2020)). This suggests that it is not so much the conspiracy theories that have increased as the accusations against people of adhering to conspiracy theories (KNOBLOCH 2018).

Stating that a person formulates a conspiracy theory, understood as an accusation, delegitimizes this person as a serious interlocutor today, since the accusation implies irrationality, resistance to argument, and paranoia (KNOBLOCH 2018). Thus, “conspiracy theory” and “conspiracy theorist” have become “contamination words” that, in contrast to a stigmatizing word, not only negatively frame the political program of the people it refers to, but also generally denies their ability to reason and engage in discourse (VOGEL 2020; cf. BRATICH 2008: 3). Conspiracy theories are seen as a threat to society primarily because they undermine the authority of scientific and medical experts as well as state institutions, leading to political disintegration, and quite often become conspiracies of their own, ending in self-empowering violence. For this reason, there is a large body of prevention literature that aims to educate about the dangers of conspiracy theories and provides advice on how to recognize them and how to discuss with conspiracy theorists (e.g. ALT & SCHIFFER 2018; BLUME 2020; LEWANDOWSKY & COOK 2020; NOCUN & LAMBERTY 2020).

This makes it obvious that a “conspiracy culture” can be understood only in relation to its counterpart, an “anti-conspiracy culture”. Because the formation of this scene arises from the well-known interplay of increasing stigmatization and self-stigmatization, i.e., a process of re-appropriation, in which the pejorative attribution to others becomes an identity that is at first predominantly rejected, but at the same time partially accepted and used for self-description with

diminishing irony—albeit, as will be seen in the following, with the opposite valuation.

This “anti-conspiracy culture” becomes understandable, among other things, through the awareness of the long history of persecution of the Jews, which has time and again been justified by conspiracy theories, not only, but also in times of epidemics (BENZ 2008; BERGMANN 2020, 2021; HAVERKAMP 1981). In his book about scapegoating, the French literary scholar and philosopher of religion RENÉ GIRARD (1988[1982]) shows how, given European history, group stereotypical suspicions, accusations, and persecutions are expectable effects in moments of social crisis. In anthropology, JAMES GEORGE FRAZER (1913) had already generalized scapegoating rites by placing them in a morphology of sacrifice and exorcism and treating them as an overlap of the two. In doing so, he distinguishes occasional from periodic and embodied from unembodied expulsion of evils. GIRARD focuses on the occasional and eruptive embodied expulsion of evil and develops a general theory of mimetic imitation, in which he sees in mimetic imitation not an urge to conformism and herd instinct whose outcome is pacification, but the origin of violence and thus a danger to social cohesion, conceiving mimetic imitation as a desire of the desire of others. According to GIRARD, human societies muster enormous forces to prevent all that might evoke mimetic conflict. The function of prohibitions, as well as that of scapegoating (the concentration of violence on an arbitrary victim), he argues, is to prevent the escalation of envy and thus mimetic violence, and, additionally in the case of scapegoating, to stop it once it has been set in motion. The inevitable interplay of exorcism and conjuration is also evident in GIRARD’s work on the scapegoat, for in the frenzies of purification from evil, violence is invoked in the form of all-against-one in order to dispel it and thereby bring peace, at least for a certain time (GIRARD 1983[1978], 2012[1961]).

Independent of the Eurocentric optimism of progress and redemption shared by FRAZER with his evolutionary three-step of magic, religion, and science, and by GIRARD with his Christian apologetics, which with its gesture of superiority and claim to universality contains its own anti-Judaism and violence, GIRARD’s later reflections on what he called the stereotypes of persecution are

particularly interesting in the present context. According to GIRARD, in crises, which become triggers of broad collective persecutions, those affected experienced a demise of the rules defining the cultural order. This sense of radical loss of what is actually social can be found, for example, in the numerous accounts of plague from all centuries, and this is precisely where GIRARD sees a similarity of accusations: the fundamental crime is always seen in destroying the foundations of the social order. The persecutors are always convinced that a small group of individuals or even single persons could prove harmful to society as a whole. And the crowd, at such moments, always dreams of ridding society of the betrayers who infiltrate it. GIRARD notes that in the Middle Ages chemistry replaced the demonic, that is, the nature of accusations shifted from accusations of using occult powers for evil purposes to accusations of poisoning. Increasingly, accusations were less about witchcraft or the evil eye than about well poisoning, which in the long history of their persecution was attributed primarily to the Jews. The persecutors dreamed of poisons of such high concentrations that the persecuted could poison entire populations with the smallest amounts. Regarding the question of the potential victims of persecution, Girard sees a structural similarity in certain characteristics that are common to all victims of persecution. And these he recognizes in abnormality, as he calls it, which could be physical or social: the handicapped, foreigners, cosmopolitans, intellectuals, a sedentary or nomadic minority, the poor, and likewise the rich and powerful (GIRARD 1988: 23–38).

Thus, despite all the euphoria about the obvious will for solidarity in large parts of the population, it quickly became clear in the current crisis that the veneer of civilization is thin all over the world, and in the crisis old resentments surface and xenophobic statements and attacks accumulate. Worldwide, since the beginning of the pandemic, foreigners and foreign-looking people have been identified as virus carriers, threatened, and chased away (cf. *e.g.* BYUN 2020; FREVERT 2020; NOVIKOV 2020). In the case of the Corona protests, critics of the Corona measures associate above all a powerful cosmopolitan elite of politicians and the super-rich with the crisis and ultimately hold them, as an exceptional minority,

responsible for it. It is suspected that they either exploit the pandemic or even drew up a battle plan and are now implementing it to their advantage and to the detriment of the population. The critics of the measures also accuse the elites of destroying the foundations of the social order. Already in the beginning, the protesters hinted at the vague suspicion that Corona was to serve as a scapegoat for an already collapsing financial system, combined with the vague fear of totalitarian Chinese-style surveillance states governed by the interests of the pharmaceutical and technology industries, whose business model consists of regular compulsory vaccinations. This stance gained ever clearer contours in the course of the year, and the threat was given a name: The Great Reset. In the summer, the World Economic Forum first published videos under this title, and a little later, its founder and chairman KLAUS SCHWAB published an eponymous book (2020). Its thesis is that the world needs a new start due to man-made problems and that Corona offers the opportunity to shape a major social upheaval. What appears in the videos and the book as a utopia of a more ecological, sustainable, and just world is understood by many demonstrators as a dystopia, *i.e.*, as the realization of what has been associated in “conspiracy culture” for decades with the establishment of a New World Order.

The book thus serves as the basis of a “super-conspiracy theory” (cf. BARKUN 2003) that unites all current conspiracy theories in the idea that the different interests and powers of the elites converge in the planned Great Reset, that a complete takeover of politics by unelected and unaccountable corporations is imminent, and that, given today’s technical possibilities, this threat dwarfs even Orwellian totalitarianism. In these suspicions, the classic poison theme also comes to the fore in the form of vaccinations, because the protest scene often perceives the danger of vaccination damages as greater than that posed by the virus, and vaccinations are sometimes even interpreted as a potential vehicle for population reduction.

Bill Gates is probably one of the best-known persons who come into focus through conspiracy theories’ typical personalization of crises, conflicts, and their causes. He attracts slogans such as: “Don’t give Gates a chance!” or “Kill Bill!” But

for the most part, the group of people accused is broadened and the persecutory character becomes even clearer. This year, for example, at the large nationwide-organized demonstrations in Berlin, a group of people could regularly be seen with posters showing not only Bill Gates but also politicians and scientists such as Chancellor Angela Merkel, Health Minister Jens Spahn, SPD Member of the Bundestag Karl Lauterbach, or government-advising virologist Christian Drosten, dressed in convict clothes and stamped “Guilty!” The corollary is “No to lockdown. Yes to lock them up!”, as could be read on a banner at a Berlin demonstration on November 18—a demand, however, that many people I spoke to reject as too “PEGIDA-like”.

But what is special about the current situation is that the persecuted elites are theoretically in the minority, but in practice the accusing persecutors are also in the minority, because they are confronted with a majority of supporters of the measures, who, with the measures, also protect those elites and in doing so produce new collective accusations that lead the persecutors to see themselves as persecuted, as well. From the perspective of the supporters of the measures, the group of critics are looking for a scapegoat in a rich elite. But from the perspective of the critics, it is the supporters who have found their scapegoat in the minority of critics and have blamed them, as super-spreaders and pandemic-drivers, for the course of the pandemic. Accordingly, the protest scene in social networks repeatedly shares quotes from politicians in which they declare the protesters outlaws. While I am writing this text, Angela Merkel is quoted as saying that China is outperforming Germany economically because they do not have so many *Querdenker* demonstrations there (ASCHMONEIT 2020a).

What I already heard from an acquaintance at the end of October, namely that we wouldn't need a second lockdown now if all the critics of the measures had worn their “fucking masks” during the summer, is repeated a little later in a similar way by Katja Kipping from the party *Die Linke* [The Left], when she posts on Twitter on December 9:

If the #Lockdown has to be tightened or extended, it's also due to #Querdenken. They are to blame for the rise in the number of infections, because

with their call for recklessness they tear down what millions work out in everyday life with consideration (ASCHMONEIT 2020b).

The accusation is also that the *Querdenker* destroy social cohesion: those who deliberately ignore essential measures to protect against infections are said to be acting irresponsibly and without solidarity. The counter-demonstrators at a Corona demonstration in Leipzig at the end of May said that one should not respond to the pandemic in a Social Darwinist way, but only in solidarity. And also in December, Angela Merkel spoke of the protests as an “attack on our entire way of life” (ASCHMONEIT 2020c). However, instead of the poison issue, these accusations are primarily based on witchcraft. Based on the assumption that the viral load of asymptomatic people can be sufficient to infect others, every person potentially carries, as with the evil eye, a damaging and possibly lethal force, the outbreak of which can be prevented only by avoiding contact. While the supporters of the measures view the relativization of the virus' danger and the fear of vaccinations as superstition, the measures' critics view the assumption of a danger of asymptomatic infection as the actual superstition. This fits with the critics' self-identification as enlightened people, which is expressed in associations such as “Doctors for Enlightenment”, “Psychotherapists for Enlightenment”, “Lawyers for Enlightenment”, etc. This emphasizes the innocence of those who, in their view, are unjustly segregated by quarantine or—for example children—stigmatized as a potential threat, and makes the protest scene as a whole appear like an anti-witchcraft movement against the state.

A crucial question about conspiracy theories is that of their truth. There are two approaches to this question: one assumes that conspiracy theories stem from pure belief and are thus fundamentally false (e.g., BAKUN 2003; BUTTER 2018). ANDREAS ANTON & ALAN SCHINK (2019), on the other hand, use MICHAEL BUTTER (2018) as an example to question the suitability of this assumption, since this postulate can only become entangled in contradictions, and they refer to GEOFFREY CUBITT's (1989) definition, with the help of which inappropriate or “false” conspiracy theories can be justifiably distinguished from appropriate

ones, since there have always been conspiracy theories in the past that in retrospect proved to be true in such or such a similar way. JARON HARAMBAM (2020b), too, argues for a more differentiated view, since “providing uniform explanations for conspiracy theories fails to seriously consider their contents or underlying concerns”. However, the general stigmatization of conspiracy theories in the public sphere does not mean that every conspiracy theory is stigmatized, because regardless of their truth content, there are legitimate and illegitimate conspiracy theories, as SCHINK (2020: 191–219), for example, illustrates using the reporting by the news magazine *Der Spiegel*. A homogenizing view of “conspiracy culture” also obscures the observation that a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate conspiracy theories can also be found within this culture, and sometimes even the postulate that conspiracy theories are to be equated with a “false” belief.

The auto-ethnographic work of SCHINK (2020) provides acute insight into the recent past of the “conspiracy culture” in Germany, a thoroughly heterogeneous culture that divides itself into different factions: into political left and right, into secular and esoteric/religious, into male and female; and against the background of the interviews presented in the following, we can add the categories East and West. It is a culture in which these distinctions are cultivated, on the one hand, and repeatedly undermined, on the other, and that in a flexible and changing way makes any kind of combinatorics of these elements possible: first, within one person, and second—perhaps due to the marginalization of conspiracy theories and a feeling of loneliness and bitterness that often goes along with it for their adherents—it allows a great openness to other combinations of these elements to emerge, for instance at gatherings like street protests. The common ground is the tabooed doubt about the official “narratives”, the suspicion that various interests are hidden behind certain, mainly political events, to the detriment of the populations, and that these need to be uncovered and fought against—a goal against which, depending on the perceived urgency of the danger, other political differences fade into the background and so-called third positions [*Querfronten*] are accepted or even propagated. Outside observers are usually perplexed by this tolerance toward the most

diverse combinations of the aforementioned elements, which in the context of the Corona protests are often expressed by such phrases as “human family” or “openness to the right”. And apparently in this perplexity and against the background of the “anti-conspiracy culture’s” frequent equation of conspiracy theories with open or structural anti-Semitism, many observers tend to reduce the complexity and heterogeneity of this scene to a combination of the characteristics “right-wing” and “esoteric”, although a first non-representative study shows that a significant portion of the protesters come from the political green-left spectrum (NACHTWEY, SCHÄFER & FREI 2020). It is precisely this discrepancy of perceptions that has also confused many of the protesters’ own conventional categorizations, expressed for many in a lack of clarity “since Corona” about their own political location.

STEF AUPERS & JARON HARAMBAM point to other hybrid features of “conspiracy culture”. They describe it as “an unstable, multi-faced phenomenon that is situated at the intersection of three discourses: secular skepticism, popular sociology, and spiritual salvation” (2018: 64). Although it may be worth taking a closer look at whether these criteria do not also apply in part to political science, sociological, and other academic writings, they sum up: “Mixing up secular science and spiritual salvation and simultaneously assessing how the world ‘is’ and how it ‘ought’ to be, may be a horror to academics; for conspiracy theorists it is having the best of both worlds” (2018: 65). Thus, conspiracy theories can also be understood as a “boundary object” (STAR & GRIESEMER 1989) between skepticism, belief in salvation, and a social analysis shared with the majority which makes it comprehensible why, for AUPERS & HARAMBAM, the dismissive judgment of conspiracy theories, especially in academic writings, is explainable as “boundary work” (GIERYN 1983). What remains underdetermined in this boundary object is agency in the course of history. This can be attributed to one or more transcendent good or evil or ambivalent beings, to an abstract and anonymous structure or society of whatever kind, or to human beings and here to a chaotic cooperation or opposition or to a planned action of one or more good or evil or ambivalent individuals.

In the course of the Corona protests, numerous people have rapidly grown into the described “conspiracy culture” without prior association with it; they speak about their awakening experiences, about having woken up and stepped behind the mirror. A good example of this is Bodo Schiffmann, a doctor who became a protagonist of the Corona protests early on.¹⁸ At the beginning of the pandemic, he began to warn in one of his YouTube videos about the work of his “vertigo outpatient clinic” that overly alarmist reporting on Covid-19 could turn the feared overload of hospitals into a self-fulfilling prophecy by inducing too many people with unspecific symptoms to go to the hospitals. Then he came across more and more inconsistencies in the pandemic response, went from being a vaccination advocate to a vaccination opponent, and now, after a good seven months, has started talking about QAnon and seems to hope that “Trump and his troops” will save us all from a worldwide health dictatorship.

The awareness of being stigmatized leads many actors in the scene to a reflexivity that enables them to see in two ways. Corona becomes a *Vexierbild* [an ambiguously shifting image] in which most of the stigmatized, unlike most in mainstream society, are able to see both images, the “official narrative” and the alternative one hidden behind it. And many leave the two interpretations in suspension, as in fantastic literature; and behind the ordinary appearance, whose perception is shared with most, lies the horror of a terrible grimace (TODOROV 1970)—an element that, with the ambivalence of defense and desire, of detective search (cf. BOLTANSKI 2014) and creepy fright, may constitute an attraction of that scene.

Such an asymmetry of perception also affects the polarization between opponents and supporters. The asymmetry of perception reveals itself in the way that the “classical” public media of the majority society do not or hardly reflect on their own handling of polarization; at least in their publications they do not or hardly deal with the role they themselves play in polarization and that every invocation tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This contrasts with the ostracized, who, as can be seen in the following, are often quite capable of dealing “reflexively” with their career and can also speak and comment on it accordingly. And it is precisely this discrepancy between public non-

reflexivity and private reflexivity that contributes significantly to the polarization of the two camps, i.e., many protesters polarize themselves, among other things, because they are excluded and feel excluded, combined with a stereotypical and erroneous, because unempirical, attribution as being irrational, right-wingers, or right-wing esotericists.

When one is confronted as a tabooed minority with a tabooed majority (with state apparatus), there are not many possibilities for a “counter-asymmetry”. Turning stigma into privilege is a common procedure among minorities (cf. e.g. GOFFMAN 1963; VOSS 2013). And thus it is only a small step from the experience of one’s own stigmatization and tabooization to counter-attribution. Science and rationality are claimed as one’s own values and, by tabooing the position of the critics of the measure, the proponents’ irrationality and unscientificness is revealed to the critics. The accusations against the minority cited above are returned by the minority to the majority, which also tends to be constructed as a homogeneous unit: the majority is in the same way stupid, irrational, egoistic, irresponsible, unhealthy, lacking solidarity, and hostile to science, does not listen to facts, follows a faith reminiscent of religiosity, pursues financial interests, masks itself, hides a political agenda or at least allows itself to be harnessed by political ideologues or economic interests, and is obedient to authority, undemocratic, fascist, deadly. The minority, too, reacts by creatively insulting the majority to make their contempt known, calling them for example “conspiracy deniers”, “coronazis”, “Corona’s witnesses”, “systemlings”, and “sheeple” or reacts with the rhetorical question: “Who are the real covid-its?”¹⁹

In this respect, from an anthropological point of view, the social dynamics that result from the Corona protests are initially not unusual and are quite expectable. On this issue, however, that in one way or another engulfs all of society, in which one group’s utopia becomes another’s dystopia, in which groups are identified that others perceive as a mortal threat, and thus in which for many the attitude of the counterpart becomes a matter of life and death, an increasing polarization into “conspiracy and unreason” on the one hand and “science and reason” on the other runs the risk of

leading to a profound social divide, that in many cases actually seems to be based on a common ground of values.

Anthropology cannot promise a solution to these conflicts, but it can at least promise not to fuel the conflicts further, by neither joining in with any of the accusations in the field nor adding new accusations to the field. In this way, it can avoid deepening the rift between the positions by avoiding giving the impression that even the sciences are ignorant and uncomprehending.

The following is a first approach to document the “natives’ points of view” of critics of the German Corona policies, based on descriptions of street protests as well as in-depth interviews with two participants in demonstrations against the Corona measures in Leipzig conducted in German at the end of October and the beginning of November 2020. In the interviews, they explore the situation against the background of their socialization in the German Democratic Republic, making this text not only a commentary on the pandemic year 2020, but at the same time one on the 30th anniversary of German reunification. I already knew both interview partners before the protests and conducted tape-recorded narrative interviews with them. For this text, I sorted some of the statements by rearranging their content and slightly smoothed some of the sentences to make them more readable, but made sure that they retained their oral character. Both interview partners have agreed to an anonymized publication of the interviews. The descriptions of the observed scenarios at various demonstrations are meant to display a dystopia expected by many demonstrators, while the conclusion illustrates a dystopia of hopeless communication between supporters and opponents of the Corona policy that may have already occurred.

This approach is a matter of local snapshots and thus a small, but for this purpose detailed excerpt from a very heterogeneous movement, which, on the one hand, cannot be representative and, on the other hand, is probably already due for revision at the time of its publication, because it reports on a social event that is in full motion and of which no one yet knows what will develop from it and therefore what the present situation will once have been. But this is exactly why it is important to record moments of its course in

detail, because in retrospect hardly anyone will be able or like to remember these states, or these states will then only be reconstructable with difficulty and with the knowledge and under the conditions of the future, which is still unknown at the moment.

“Whatever left-wing and right-wing mean nowadays.” Annett

Born and raised in a small town in the *Land* [state] of Saxony-Anhalt as the daughter of a design engineer and a department head in a state-owned enterprise (VEB), Annett has lived in Leipzig since the early 1990s and works there as an educator. She is in her late 40s, has been divorced for several years, and has four children, two of whom are still living with her. The following statements are taken from an interview we conducted in Leipzig on October 22, 2020.

It took a relatively long time for her to *wake up*—until Easter 2020, approximately. When it all started with Corona, she still took it all very seriously: *the pictures from Bergamo and so on, the usual stuff*. She had been interested in Iran for a long time and had seen terrible pictures from there. In retrospect, however, she is now asking herself what kind of pictures they actually were and what really happened there. She had always said that before a lockdown was implemented in Germany like it was in China, before they closed the schools in Germany, the third world war would have to come. *And when the school closures started, I thought: “Oh shit, this is getting serious!” So, I didn’t research the facts at all, but simply had trust. In my rather left-wing circle of friends, everyone was of the same opinion, except for maybe one or two who were very esoteric. At that time, I still looked down on them a bit, like: “Well, you can’t just feel, you also have to look at the facts.” It was around April 20, when the lockdown was supposed to be over and Angela Merkel stood up and declared that suddenly the decisive criterion was no longer “Flatten the Curve”, but the reproduction rate. And I thought: that’s strange somehow. And then I started to do some research. An acquaintance had sent me a link to an interview by Ken Jebsen with Sucharit Bakhdi²⁰ with the comment: “Here, this made me think a lot, take a look at it.” I really had to overcome my prejudices to do that. Watching a video by Ken Jebsen—that just isn’t done! Because I come*

from the left spectrum and also my children are totally left-wing and it was clear that Ken Jebsen is somehow right-wing. Whatever left-wing and right-wing mean nowadays. I remember very well that I said to myself beforehand: "This is a memorable moment! Yes, I'll watch it now, but basically nothing can happen. I still have my brain to judge everything and that can tell me whether this is right or wrong." I watched that interview and found myself in agreement with it all. That was the beginning. And then I searched further and informed myself and found a lot. The critical stuff that I had previously received from others was more from some astrologers and who knows, so no facts. They were critical, but everything was somehow intangible. I couldn't get anything out of that. But what Bakhti said in the interview and in his open letter with five questions to Ms. Merkel at the time, I thought it all had a lot of substance. And yes, why doesn't the man get an answer? Something is fishy here.

Well, and then I thought: that's actually not possible. I really had the feeling that my brain was restructuring itself, that I could no longer think clearly, and that I could no longer get my everyday life in order because, for example, my right-left thinking pattern was completely shaken. I had the feeling that my former world had crumbled. And I thought, I have to dig deeper now and get more information, and I need time for that because it's so important. I was feeling really bad, and I took sick leave for a week, and I used that week intensively to get informed. I kept looking at the figures from the Robert Koch Institute and then came across the videos by Bodo Schiffmann,²¹ among others, who put it all into a different perspective. Or if any names came up, "the renowned whoever", I would look up and see who that was. Some Ioannidis from Stanford University for example, well, those names that are always circulating. And of course: Wolfgang Wodarg.²² At first, I thought, what kind of a nutcase is that? Then I looked at CORRECTIV²³ or something else, and they refuted what he said, then I looked at Wodarg again, and it went back and forth, and in the end I thought: yes, for me at least, Wodarg and the other critics of the measures are actually right.

But I also watched other things that weren't about Corona, for example a lecture by Daniele Ganser²⁴, which was about propaganda, that is, how propaganda works. I also read up on Ken Jebsen, because they always say he's a Holocaust denier. Yes, well, of course, I'm still not quite sure, but for example this sentence that they always hang on him, that the Holocaust is a

PR stunt: this interview, in which he said something like that, went on, and then I thought, this criticism is really a bit cheap. I mean, his way, okay, he's already an agitator somehow, I don't like that either, but that doesn't mean that everything he says is to be condemned. But I think that's what I used to do.

So, in the past, some people could have said whatever truths they wanted, and I wouldn't have listened to them. Also "Rubikon", this magazine: I was firmly convinced that it was right-wing, without ever having read through it. I knew it before only in the negative sense. Now I find "Rubikon" SUPER interesting, I mean, the contributions.²⁵ Until Corona, I always made it easy for myself with my classification. With Daniele Ganser, however, I had already begun thinking. He is Swiss, and years ago Swiss friends recommended him and said that he is considered right-wing, but that's total nonsense, he is not right-wing. And I listened to him back then and thought, yes, that's right, he's not right-wing. Well, you're already right-wing if you question the official narrative of 9/11.

In the course of the week, I have in any case gained absolute clarity [...] that the measures are not based on scientific findings. To order a lockdown when it was actually clear from the start that it would do more harm than good is absolutely criminal in my eyes. At first, I thought they were stupid or didn't know any better. But no, they could have known that, definitely. Specifically, every measure that is still in place now bothers me. The measures are just not justified, there's no reason. It's nothing different than other years: people die, yes, as always. They always pretend that the opponents of the measures are idiots, but actually they have many more facts to offer than the government.

And then, on a very personal level, I simply hate being disciplined; already when I was a child, that was always a problem at school: if a teacher wanted to dictate something to me and I was of the opinion, no, he's not right. Somehow, I can't get rid of that; that I am so quick to contradict what I'm told. When I know exactly that something is bullshit, that I have to wear this fucking mask, that I'm being forced to do something that not only doesn't help, but is even harmful: I just can't stand all that. [...] And that's just the way I am: once I've recognized something as the truth, I don't take it back, and I can't just keep it to myself in the closet. And when I found out at some point that there were demonstrations in Leipzig, I said to myself: Okay, go! I didn't expect that it would cause such a family rift. That was such a punch in the face. That happened

afterwards, within two or three weeks. I don't remember what the first demo was, but in any case, on May 1 I went with a friend. There was a lot going on in the city, there were several events of leftists in general, for example, free teachers, that they are paid shit, but directly against the Corona policy I found nothing.

I then went back home. But another friend was at Simsonplatz that day, where there was a demo with an open microphone, as they called it, where anyone could speak. She told me that the Antifa was there right away, especially Irena Rudolph-Kokot [the second chairwoman of the Leipzig Social Democratic Party], who really disturbed and insulted the people at the microphone, that they were structurally anti-Semitic, that they were worse than Holocaust deniers and so on. My friend is really left-wing; her grandfather was persecuted under National Socialism and sentenced to death. And what Irena Rudolph-Kokot said really hurt her. Afterwards, she went to her and said: "How dare you insult people here like that?" But I don't think that got through to her. When my friend told me that story, I thought: Damn! I didn't understand it. I mean, I think that people who think a little bit and are critical may not come to the same conclusion as I did, but they don't have the right to insult others because of that. I was still a bit naive back then, I think.

My personal meltdown was then a little later at a rally on Wilhelm-Leuschner-Platz. I didn't like this rally at all. At that time, as I said, there was still an open microphone and everyone who spoke at the front was really kind of Reichsbürger-like or just plain weird. There was maybe one contribution out of ten that I thought was good. I didn't clap for any of them. And I thought: Next time, you won't join that group anymore; it wasn't really my cup of tea. That evening, my oldest son called me, "Mother, do you have something to say to me?" I said, "No, not that I know of." He, "Well, I saw you in a video. Who was the girl next to you?" "Well," I said, "I think that's none of your business, but she's a friend." Well, and then he was like, "You are demonstrating together with Nazis—that's not acceptable at all." I felt like a child caught in the act. I was forced to justify myself, but at the same time I thought, why do I have to justify myself at all? I hadn't expected anything like that. And the last thing he said was, "Well, you live in Connewitz²⁶..." I asked, "What are you trying to say?" And he's like, "Well, maybe others have seen you, too. Not that there's going to be a tit-for-tat response." And then we hung

up and I was in shock: my own son literally threatened me.

I drank a bottle and a half of wine that evening and just cried. Well, the world really collapsed for me. We then stopped talking to each other for the time being. Actually, there is no contact at the moment. He no longer lives at home, he is 24, and we saw each other rather sporadically before, so I am able to mostly suppress that issue. Sometime later, we met again, on the marketplace at a demo: he stood on one side, I on the other. And then they shouted "Nazis out!" in our direction. That was really hard. [...]

With my other son, the 17-year-old, it also came to an argument. At some point, I made an ironic remark about the mask obligation, and he said, "Ey, I'm totally disappointed in you. At the beginning, you took the issue seriously, I was really proud of you, and now...—you're endangering people's lives," and blablabla. I was like, "What?" and tried to argue. And he said, "If you think like that, then you're a murderer!" And at some point I got so angry and said, I won't let him call me a murderer in my apartment, and I talked him down. Then we had one or two days of silence and then, well, we could at least discuss things a bit more objectively. I mean, in the end I think: my God, he is 17, he has no life experience. [...]

My youngest daughter is 14, she butts out. Only once, when we both were on the road together and I ranted something about masks, she said, "Well, I think masks are a good thing." Annett then said nothing, because her daughter would have her reasons and as long as she did not attack her, that was okay for Annett. In everyday life, they left the subject out. Annett also never explicitly talked about Corona with her older daughter, who lives in southern Germany and who also had not had any intensive contact with her before. But when she was in Leipzig the other day, we were in a kebab restaurant, and when we entered, she didn't have a scarf with her, and then she pulled her T-shirt up over her mouth and nose, and I said to her, "Oh, come on, you can leave that off." And she said, "No, I believe in it." For me I thought, yes, you said something right, "I believe in it." Because it's true: it doesn't matter at all whether you put the thing on or not. But it's not about the factual correctness, it's almost like a religion. Since then, I haven't heard from her. I wrote to her once, no answer. It's been two months now. I am not imposing myself. She had only seen that she had her Facebook profile picture with a mask on and therefore

assumed that her daughter was avoiding contact in order to avoid arguments.

She just wants the kids not to think badly of her only because of how she thinks. *And that's not too much to ask. I mean, I'm their mother and they know that I'm not a Nazi. We used to go to the same demonstrations together, whenever it was about xenophobia, against Legida²⁷, or when Mr. Poggenburg [until 2018 a politician from Saxony-Anhalt who belonged to the right-wing "wing" of the AfD, now independent] marched through Connewitz. We have always demonstrated together against right-wingers and they know that I am one of the "good guys", that I want the good—well, of course they all say that. [...]* When she thinks about the problem her children actually have, she thinks that for her family, it was just a total taboo to stand together with Nazis at a demonstration. That was not acceptable and could not be excused; one simply does not do that, no matter what the argument is. *Then I should organize something on my own, a demo where there are no right-wingers. But I mean, I can't prevent that either.* She also is bothered that there are right-wingers at these demonstrations. *But as long as nothing comes from the left against the Corona measures, then I have two options: either I stay at home, but then I do not know how I should protest there, or I stand there and bite the bullet that "they" are there too. [...]*

I then realized that I was not the only one who had this problem. For example, her mother's boyfriend, who comes from a left-wing Christian family, also criticizes the Corona measures, and his children don't understand the world anymore, with their father making common cause with right-wingers. And at a demonstration, she once heard from an organizer that his children had broken off contact with him because he was involved in the protests.

She thinks that the fact that so many young people can't relate to the demonstrations is perhaps because at the beginning there was always an appeal for solidarity and mutual consideration. *At the beginning, I also believed in that and took it totally seriously. And most young people want to be the good guys and want to show: we take responsibility, we care about the elderly, and so on. And that's why they find those who question the measures irresponsible, just like my children find me irresponsible now: we don't want to have anything to do with these egoists who don't want to accept the measures.* Annett assumes that they simply lack a bit of life experience, that

not everything is black or white or good or bad, and that people who question the measures are therefore not automatically bad. Perhaps it was also group conformity that made them not allow any doubt. *I think that wearing a mask also serves as a statement. It allows me to show the outside world that I am in solidarity, that I protect you, that I am a lifesaver.*

Perhaps something else also played a role, which she had already noticed in herself. *Sometimes you are in the mood of not wanting to be seen or just want to be left alone, and this mask in front of your face is then also an "Oh, no one can see me", for example in the big department store, which is then almost like hiding behind the mask. And sometimes I think, 14, 15 is a tough age, where you often like to sink into the ground, maybe that also suits some people a bit. I don't think that's reflected, but I can imagine that it plays a subconscious role. But it's just an idea.*

To this day, she wonders what being right-wing or left-wing actually has to do with questioning the Corona measures. *For me, that actually has nothing to do with being right-wing or left-wing. It's so idiotic. So, if I look around on the Internet, then I'm probably "New Right" now if I question the official Corona narrative. Yesterday or today I saw a video by a Naomi Seibt, who dismantled the PCR test and I thought, super-interesting, super-researched, and then I researched the name Naomi Seibt, and then yes: she questions climate change, is a member of the New Right, and so on. And then I thought: oh my God! Well, I've pretty much abandoned this left/right distinction, these terms are just stupid. If someone is xenophobic, then he's xenophobic, and I don't mind if they're also called right-wing. But what all is labeled right-wing nowadays, it's just ridiculous.*

Some people, and in the meantime I count my older kids among them, are so far to the left that they're already to the right. That may be a stupid saying, but what I mean is that some people are just so absolutely intolerant. And they had no idea what they were talking about. When she tells her children that they should at least take a look at this or that, they reply that it's a waste of time. And when she tells her younger son, for example, about the power of the pharmaceutical industry, he says that's not true. She simply hopes that her children will eventually understand why she thinks and acts the way she does. Not only for herself, but also for them. She would like her children to question more, to

inform themselves in many different ways and not always only from one side.

What I still don't understand is that these super-, super-leftists always dutifully do what the government wants! I just don't get it: supposedly so critical. And that made my world collapse a bit. [...] These slogans that are always shouted at the counter-demos by the Antifa, something like, "Where, where, where are your masks?" or something like that, you always stood there and thought, "Wow, where the hell am I now?!" On the other hand, I somehow understood that, because I was on their side myself before. I mean, we shouted: "Where, where, where were you in Heidenau?"²⁸ Towards the police, though. [...] I first had to figure out why they were calling us anti-Semites. In her self-understanding, she is actually criticizing capitalism. She criticizes that some people have so much money and thus so much power that they can buy entire governments. The name Bill Gates always comes up, but there are others who simply have so much money, so unimaginably much money, which makes something like that quite possible. She took the criticism of her as meaning that terms like financial elite used to be attributed to Jews, and if you use this image, then you are anti-Semitic. But I mean, I don't give a shit whether he is a Jew or an atheist or whatever. Such criticism makes me think, YOU are the ones who are harping about it all the time. But if you do not even think about whether that is a Jew or not, then you cannot accuse anyone of being an anti-Semite. [...] Is this to divert attention from something? I don't know. Or a Mr. Soros, who is obviously Jewish, am I not allowed to criticize him now, just because he is Jewish? With that, I don't take Jewish people seriously anymore. Of course, I am also allowed to criticize Jews. But not because he is Jewish, but for his behavior. But no, I'm structurally anti-Semitic and that makes me the lowest category, and that's why they don't talk to me anymore. [...]

I already once thought, maybe the reaction of Mrs. Merkel back then in the refugee crisis was just a move to get the left behind her. I remember thinking at the time that when she said, "Yes, open the borders, we'll take in all these people," I didn't really believe her when she said that this was really a matter of the heart. But I didn't question it any further, because I also thought that if no one lets them in, they'll die somewhere, that's not possible, Christian charity and all that. At the time, I said to myself, "Wow, this is the first time I've ever liked anything Angela Merkel has

said." And that was a bit of a consensus among my friends: we wouldn't have thought that. Gosh, hats off to Angela, she's standing up to all the critics. And those who criticized Angela Merkel at the time were the right-wingers. This has given Angela Merkel a kind of saintly status. And if you criticize Angela Merkel now, it is interpreted as if you are on the side of the right-wingers. Even though one thing has nothing to do with the other. But that, too, is just one attempt at an explanation.

In any case, she says, she is sure that the measures are not primarily about health. I think it's an interplay. I think that it is no coincidence that the same thing is happening everywhere globally. There is a plan by whoever and however. What they want to achieve with it, I have my suspicions. I assume that the people behind it are those who have the power and a lot of money. At school, we were taught Karl Marx: capitalism only works if everything keeps growing and growing, and I think they've come up with some way to increase their wealth even more or to eliminate competition. At the beginning, I always asked myself: what do they get out of it if the companies all go bankrupt now? But then I understood that companies go bankrupt, but the market segment remains. And people will take it over. We already know that: Amazon has made so much more in this time, and all these giants are profiting and the others are going bankrupt. And actually, that's what Karl Marx already said: monopoly capitalism and so on. I assume that this is the case. That's quite frightening. There is no endless growth, and capitalism only works if there is repeatedly a crash, for example due to a war. I think this time it is not a war, but simply a worldwide lockdown. Many things will be broken, shut down, and then there will be growth again. But only a few will grow, the others will go bankrupt. Well, and since there would have been a stock market crash this year or next year anyway, like in 2008, there are people who have calculated that, and they needed something to cover it up with. Now they can blame everything on a virus. Then it's not the capitalist system itself that's to blame, but due to the virus, we had to implement a lockdown to protect you. Something like that.

In the meantime, it is no longer just a few individual physicians who are calling for an end to the lockdown; even the WHO is now saying that a lockdown is nonsense. Or this head of the Bavarian health authority, who said, "Even if I now risk my career as a civil servant, what Mr. Söder [the Bavarian prime min-

ister] says is bullshit!"²⁹ So, criticism is coming from many sides in the meantime, and still they're doing their thing, the politicians. So, either they have nothing left to lose or they feel so secure and have some kind of ace up their sleeve, I don't know, but it's a bit weird somehow. And that reminds you quite fatally of the GDR [German Democratic Republic]. I mean, no one was interested in the GDR anymore, well, no one is not right, but the mass of people just smiled at what the government did and they still did their thing. So really completely detached and disconnected from the ordinary population. That's exactly how it is now. But if you say something like that, people immediately say, "No, you can't compare that, for God's sake, we have a democracy!" Of course, you can speak out that you think the government's measures are moronic. You'll just be looked at like an idiot. But depending on your position, you can also get into real trouble. Well, you can't deny that. There are now people who have become unemployed because they took part in such demonstrations.

And I think that being with other people feels the same as it did back then. Well, I know many people who see the measures the way I do, but they would never say that out loud. I mean, apart from my left-wing Connewitz acquaintances, who all agree with the measures. But at work, for example, where, let's put it this way, there are quite ordinary people, not left-wing, not right-wing: people now make fun of the mask obligation and the government, but they would never say that openly or go to a demo. They just swallow that. I think, okay, what else has to happen for them to take to the streets like they did in '89—where, by the way, many right-wingers were present, too, and they should stop pretending that this is something new and unusual. This opportunism, it's like back then. I think that's the way it is in every society: a certain percentage is against something, demonstrates on the street, risks their necks, and a large proportion also sees it that way, but yes, as long as I can still drive a car and the TV is on and there's beer on the table, everything's fine. And well, then there are always those who don't get it or profit from it.

And what is also like in GDR times: that people hang medals on each other. Now for example the Bundesverdienstkreuz [Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany] to Drosten³⁰, or these three policemen in front of the Reichstag. I thought, well, it couldn't get any more ridiculous. So, this whole show there with the Reichstag, and the so-called "storm"

at the end of August: that there were no policemen in front of the Reichstag, although it was announced that it will be stormed. I thought, how stupid do they think people are? Well, there should have been hundreds of police officers, if they are warned that the Reichstag will be stormed. But no, there are only three policemen and they get a medal afterwards. Or the one who got a medal at the same time as Drosten got it, a YouTuber, maiLab, I had seen her picture before.³¹ She had recently dismantled Bhakdi's book³². She pretends to be so scientific, but doesn't prove scientifically what's bad about the book. And then I looked further and found that, for example, her husband works at Merck and thought: okay, so somehow the same squad again—congratulations on your medal! In GDR times, the old men also always gave each other medals. The people laughed their heads off. And yes, it's a bit like that now, too. Well, it's actually ridiculous, if it weren't so bad...

When she looks at how the reporting on Corona is done and how one-sidedly the scientific opinions are presented and how dubious the whole thing is, she starts to ask herself whether the same happens other areas. About climate change, for example, she only knows what can be read in the newspaper about what science supposedly says about it. On the climate issue, I never expected a capitalist government to actually do anything about it. So, it's just superficial, pro forma, window dressing. Well, now electric cars are being totally propagated, and I've always wondered how that works. Okay, they are charged with electricity, so it would at least have to be green electricity for that to make any sense. But no, it doesn't matter which electricity. And then I think, that can't be the solution either, that now all cars with combustion engines have to disappear and instead thousands of millions of e-cars are produced. Behind this, there are again certain interests. The car-makers are now sensing their chance. I mean, anyone can buy an e-car if they want, but that's like throwing out a working refrigerator to buy a more efficient one. In the long run, electric cars may be a solution, but only if the electricity is produced in an environmentally friendly way. And although this is now subsidized with thousands of euros, she herself cannot afford a new car.

I just don't think the government is doing anything out of idealism. Well, the government as a whole. Individual members of parliament might. But the e-cars are not about saving our climate. Sorry, that's like

when Klöckner [the Federal Minister of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection] said the other day how harmful vitamin D is, high doses and so on. And then I thought, I just don't believe that you're interested in that. Then implement a "traffic light" nutrition label, that already exists in other countries, but not here. So just start somewhere else! Do they want to bullshit us or what? I assume that the pharmaceutical industry is behind such actions. Also this denigration of homeopathy for years, I mean, just let people take their globules as they like. But I think that has become competition for the pharmaceutical industry and so it has to be fought. And then they make an all-round attack, everything that is naturopathy is from and for idiots. If you propagate naturopathy, you are already a new-right-winger in the meantime. I am so annoyed about my children that they adopt this image so unreflectively. I feel attacked by this, too. I don't know how this is connected, the new right and naturopathy. Everything is lumped together. At the beginning, my daughter sent me an article by someone from the party "Die Partei"⁷³. There was still no mask obligation back then and the article started with masks and that in Asia people who are sick wear a mask to protect others, and that's actually solidarity but is always ridiculed here and so. That was okay as far as it went. And then the author got upset about the argument that Corona only affects old people, as if the old are not worth anything and so on. I could still go along with that. But then a sentence followed like: that the German Michel sits at home in the evening, reads his newspaper and throws in his white globules. All in one breath, in one sentence. And then I thought, what does one have to do with the other, you can't explain that at all. But it is thrown together more and more without any reason. And that has become so normal in the meantime, especially in left-wing circles. That really gets me down, because that's so stupid and ignorant. But the leftists are totally going after homeopathy now. Well, it's just stupid.

In the beginning, she used to think that maybe she would wake up in the morning and everything would turn out to be a bad dream, but she rarely has that hope anymore. In the beginning, she felt extremely alone, as if she was sitting on the fence, and she thought she would die old and lonely. Today, she knows that she is not alone. Fortunately, she can also talk about all these things with her mother and her sister and some of her friends, who see things the same way she does.

Thank goodness! At her work in the kindergarten, she says, masks are the main issue. So, the parents have to wear masks at our place, on the whole premises even in the garden. Then it is said that only one parent should come, so that there is no crowding in the dressing room. And then there was the question about siblings, because one mother said, I won't leave my 8-year-old standing outside alone. Okay, then they were allowed in too, but in this case, they have to wear masks too. Which, if you think about it, is insane, because they come from the same household as the younger siblings they're picking up.

And there was the situation: we were in the garden, which is relatively large, I was sitting with two colleagues relatively far back and then one of them said: look, there comes the mother with her two older children and they don't have a mask on, who's going to talk to them? And I said, well, I'm not going to, because I totally reject masks on children, no matter how old, I don't see why. And then one of us left, I didn't pursue it any further. And the next day, the other colleague came to me and said, "I wanted to let you know that I thought it was totally uncooperative of you to just make an exception of yourself. That's simply an order and we all have to go through it." And I said, "Well, I explained that to you yesterday: order or not, I reject that, that's not possible for me, and I can't reconcile that with my conscience."

Well, then the deputy boss came along, but she thinks the same as I do, and then we got to talking and it was okay. A third colleague came along and said, "But well, it's simply an order and we have to follow it." And I said, "No, we don't have to." And then I say, "Where is YOUR red line? I don't know, maybe next week they'll say that our kindergarten kids have to wear a mask. Do you then also still say, "It's an order!?" She looked at me, she didn't understand at all what I was talking about. This obedience to authority, wow, that can't be true, I can't believe that. So, that's why I also have discussions at work. But I'm good at debating.

However, it depends on how serious it is. If it is somehow about protecting children, I wouldn't shut up. But the other day I had an organizational team meeting, and our boss said that the business office had sent a new letter telling us to make sure that the children weren't so crowded, and we sat there and no one said anything. We also knew that our boss was initially very concerned about ensuring that the measures were followed. And then our boss said, "Well, we don't

have to debate the sense of it now..." That's when I noticed how some people looked up, "That's what the boss said?" But even I didn't dare to say, "This letter is just bullshit." I'm sure there would have been no consequences, they won't kick us out, because they're looking for kindergarten teachers. And I thought, next time you'll say something, because if you say something, others will join in. But very few dare to take the first step. But actually, yes, I can do that, that doesn't bother me that much. [...]

The moment when I realized that there was a rift through our family and that my children nearly hated me, I got really angry, not at my children, but at the government and the media, who created all this. So, I can't forgive them for that. It's somehow, maybe not intentional, but at least accepted that society is divided, that families, that circles of friends are divided, and that's actually really, really bad. [...] So what I would like to see is a Mrs. Merkel, a Mr. Söder, a Mr. Spahn stand up and say, "I think we messed it up, this and that was wrong and as a consequence we resign and leave". But not only that, in addition there should be an open discussion on the state and district level and that people on this level also leave." And that perhaps a platform is created where people can say this and that happened to me and that wasn't nice. A kind of working through things. Simply resigning is actually not enough. So many bad things have happened, that's definitely not enough. My case is still no big deal in this respect. I mean, just think of the people who died alone. I have a colleague who wasn't allowed to be with her father when he died. That's so bad for her, she was really knocked out for two weeks. I don't know how you can make up for that. At least you need an open discourse. I don't know, maybe I'm exaggerating, but I was just thinking that there was a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, that people really sit down at a round table and see how they can get back together. Yes, that would be good.

"Just google Klaus Schwab, Agenda 2030, and project ID2020 and you will know what is waiting for us!" *The Great Reset*

On German Unity Day 2020 on the market square in Leipzig, the *Bewegung Leipzig*, which is now called *Bewegung Leipzig/Querdenken 341*, has called for another of the regular demonstrations for peace and freedom. Around 150 demonstrators are present; today there is no counter-demon-

stration. When I arrive, a doctor in her 50s talks on the microphone about her childhood in the GDR, where she was always very ill with asthma, allergies, and a constant susceptibility to infections: In the mid-1980s, she began to study Medicine in Leipzig and fled with her family in September 1989, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall, via Hungary to West Germany, where she still lives today and runs a medical clinic. She then treated her illnesses mainly homeopathically, with very good results. Today she assumes that her health problems resulted from the vaccinations, which were compulsory in the German Democratic Republic. She has treated thousands of patients, 80-90 percent of them children, and the children who have not been vaccinated, who have been breastfed for a long time, who have been fed naturally, and who have received a lot of love, are almost never ill and do not have to be afraid of any viruses or bacteria. When in November 2019 the German Bundestag decided to make measles vaccinations compulsory, she and others took to the streets for months beforehand because measles was suddenly elevated to a dangerous disease that should be avoided at all costs. Many of the older people, she says, who are standing here on the market square probably still went through measles as a completely normal illness and saw, okay, there's a high fever, you're sensitive to light, you lie down in a dark room, and if you don't suppress the fever and the rash comes out well, the whole thing is over after a few days. But suddenly it was suggested to us for months that measles was a very, very bad disease. And that a compulsory vaccination was absolutely necessary, with about 500-700 cases and a maximum of one measles death in Germany, whereby these deaths are mostly to be traced back to preexisting illnesses. She thought it would be impossible to get a mandatory measles vaccination passed in the Bundestag. But this is what happened. Nevertheless, she and the other protesters continued to take on the streets until the end of February 2020; at the beginning of March, the compulsory vaccination came into force. And then the Corona thing started. And she thought, "Oh my God, what's next? Are they really going to succeed this time with what they failed to do with MERS, with SARS, with bird flu, with swine flu, which is to scare us with a deadly pandemic?" And then it got worse day by day and they switched

from the anti-vaccine demonstrations directly to the anti-Corona demonstrations in Hanover. More and more people are realizing that we are dealing with a test pandemic with the help of an unvalidated test by Mr. Drosten that is meaningless. And it is clear that the pandemic will never end if we keep testing, testing, testing. Sometimes she feels the need to escape, but where are you going to go when the whole world has gone crazy. So she continues to stay. She talks about the euphoric experience of the August 1 demonstration in Berlin and her not so euphoric arrest at the August 29 demonstration. This reminds her of what it was like in the German Democratic Republic. When people are defamed and arrested just for speaking their mind and when doctors who provide mask exemption certificates or certificates that people cannot get vaccinated have their homes and medical practices searched, as has happened several times in the meantime, and when they are threatened with professional bans, then this is no longer democracy, then we have to do something about it. Even if the protest movement has achieved nothing so far, it is important to take to the streets as a human family for medical self-determination, a free vaccination decision, and the end of the measures to stop this nightmare, this science fiction movie. She reports on a demonstration in Hanover where they all properly adhered to the hygiene rules and yet were not allowed to demonstrate as planned. And when their leader complained to a police officer, he said that he knew that everyone was following the rules here, but they still weren't allowed to let them march because it was a decision from the very top not to let them demonstrate, it was a political decision, that now has nothing to do with the police on site anymore. And if that's the case, then we're living in a dictatorship. In addition, there's all the denunciation that's coming up again, it's like in Stasi times, people are looking if the neighbors don't have too many people sitting in the garden or the distance isn't kept correctly or the mask isn't worn. And all this will become even worse. Mr. Spahn will not get his hands dirty with the mandatory vaccination here in Germany, because the European vaccination passport has already been in the planning stage in Brussels since 2018. And in this European vaccination passport, there will be 10-12 compulsory vaccinations. They are currently waiting for the Corona vaccine to be

ready. And then we all will be forced to take the vaccinations. Without vaccinations, we won't be able to go to the supermarket or to the swimming pool. We are no longer allowed to travel anyway, everything is even worse than in GDR times, at least you could still travel to Warsaw Pact countries, but now we are not allowed to travel to 160 countries at all. Yesterday she read that, in Berlin, risk areas have been declared even within the city and that you can be quarantined if you leave this area. The Leipzig lawyer Ralf Ludwig always says they will not find any vaccine, they only want to coerce and blackmail us and to extend the measures endlessly. But with the money that has already been spent by the EU, they will definitely produce a vaccine and we will be the laboratory rats and guinea pigs who are forced to try it out; no matter if the vaccine is ineffective or if it only protects for two or three months, they will force it on us! Just like now with the masking obligation, this slave mask is only there to prove how obedient we are and what we are willing to put up with. Because masks don't make sense, we don't save a single life with them, we just breathe in carbon dioxide all the time, which we were told was dangerous just a few months ago. And if we have been cowed and we no longer dare to do anything, then they can easily coerce and blackmail us by preventing us from participating in public life under threat of losing our jobs. And they will get away with it. Most people will let themselves be blackmailed. But she won't. She keeps going. Otherwise, the only thing to do would be going underground. The powers that be won't get her, she ends.

Another speaker who is in his 30s refers to his last speech at the past demonstration, in which he compared the current legislation to the Reichstag Fire Decree of 1933. Meanwhile, the Nazi state seems to be becoming a greater and greater inspiration for our government. Because on August 29, for the second time in history, an attack on the Reichstag was staged to incite against a political movement. Why reinvent the wheel when it worked so well back then, he concludes.

On the sidelines, I join a conversation between an older woman, 70 years old as it turns out, without a mask, and two young people in their early 20s, wearing masks and dressed all in black, which is why I initially assume that they are from the Antifa, who want to argue with the protesters. But as

it turns out, they are visiting Leipzig and just happened to be passing by. The older woman had engaged the two in conversation, she says. The woman says that it doesn't feel right somehow when you look at the statistics, the way the infection and mortality rates are presented, it seems that the government is stirring up a panic that is not reflected in the statistics from the Robert Koch Institute. One of the two young people asks: *Why should a government do that, if it is not necessary, what interest could be behind it?* The woman answers that she thinks it's all about vaccinations, that vaccinations should be sold and that we have to get vaccinated whether we want to or not, that it's going to be like in the GDR.

The one young woman: *But who says that, has any official authority ever said that compulsory vaccination is planned?* A couple without masks, who also turn out to be 70 years old, joins the conversation. The man intervenes: There need not even be compulsory vaccination, it will be like this: if he wants to go to the *Gewandhaus* concert hall, he will have to show his ticket and his vaccination certificate, and if he isn't vaccinated, he won't get in, that's how it is going to work. There is no need for compulsory vaccination to force everyone to be vaccinated.

The young woman asks why they believe that vaccination is not good. Because the vaccine against Corona has not been tested enough, answers the older woman. And the older man says that he doesn't like vaccinations in general, that they are quite dangerous and that he has heard of many cases of vaccine damage. The young woman asks the older woman if she is not afraid of Corona. No, she is not afraid of the virus; it can be bad, yes, if you have preexisting conditions, which she also has, diabetes, but she actually does not think that the situation in general is that bad. If you look at the figures from the Robert Koch Institute, hardly any people die from it, and no one is in the hospitals anymore. That's why there's no need for these measures, which are in addition totally confusing, because people everywhere come up with their own rules and you have to look everywhere first to see exactly how you have to behave.

The young man replies that the low death rate is correct, but the fact that there are hardly any deaths is due to the measures. And that's how democracy works: if there is a social consensus that

the virus is dangerous and the majority considers measures such as vaccinations to be right, then that's the way things are done. The older woman says she doesn't see it that way, she wants to decide about her health herself. The young woman replies: but she believes in science, and if that is scientific knowledge, then so be it.

The 70-year-old intervenes in support of the older woman and also doubts the sense of measures and vaccinations. He says he doesn't wear a mask, it doesn't do him any good, and he also thinks it's useless. He also refers to "the numbers" and the low mortality rate. Besides, everyone has to die someday. The young woman says to the older man that if he doesn't wear a mask, then he's endangering others, because the masks are for the protection of others and that means that her mask is protecting him right now, because she herself is wearing a mask, but he's not protecting her because he's not wearing one.

He replies that when he goes to a store, he wears a mask because he wants something from those guys, not because he thinks it will do any good; the masks will keep out bacteria, but not viruses. And if we were outdoors here at the market place for example and had enough distance, as we do now, we need it even less. Why are they wearing masks outdoors right now, he asks the two young people. The young woman says that she wants to show that they don't belong to the people over there. She points to the demonstration. Ah, just as a political statement, sums up the 70-year-old. The young woman: yes; here outdoors, she doesn't think it's absolutely necessary either. Indoors, however, it is. And if you save only one person from death with the mask, then it already made sense. And what was so disturbing about simply putting on a mask in the supermarket? The 70-year-old asks the two if they actually know what all these measures mean for their lives. He actually couldn't care less, he might only have five years to live, although he does care about his children and grandchildren. The measures would ruin the economy, worldwide, and with it our entire social security system; what did they think their future would look like. The young man: well, everything is slowly being restarted again. The 70-year-old: and yet we are being made to fear all the time that things will change again and that there will possibly be another lockdown. The consequences of

this are unforeseeable; in any case, he does not see a promising future for the young generation under these circumstances.

On November 7, 2020, the third large nationwide-organized demonstration against the Corona measures will take place in Leipzig after the two previous demonstrations in early and late August in Berlin. In Berlin, the information on the number of participants at the first demonstration varied between first 17,000, later 40,000 as estimated by the police and up to 1.3 million by the organizers. At the second demonstration, there was talk of 38,000 participants. In Leipzig, the figures for this Saturday vary between 20,000 and 45,000 participants.

The night before, I cycle to Leipzig's Augustusplatz, where the stage is being set up, and meet a couple in their 50s from Lower Saxony. Demonstrations are not tourism, which is why it was difficult to find a hotel, because they are not allowed to rent rooms to tourists, but he was able to book one through his company. He works as a salesman in the computer industry, she in the youth social sector. So far, they have been to all the demonstrations in Berlin, Hamburg, and Hanover. After she had been at the first big demonstration in Berlin and her boss had heard about it, she had been allowed to walk around for two weeks only masked and with social distance. On the way to Leipzig, they listened to Paul Schreyer's *Chronicle of an Announced Crisis* as an audiobook, and it was frightening to think how long they had been planning what was going on now. The fight against terror had not really worked and should now be replaced by the fight against viruses, so one could perfectly restrict democracy and basic rights and gain control over all people. At the beginning the two were also afraid of Corona and liked Merkel's speech to the nation very much.³⁴ But then, from April on, it slowly became clear to them that this was obviously intentional. And the so-called conspiracy theorists had already predicted all along everything that has happened until today, so you have to fear that all other predictions will also come true.

In addition to his work, the man is training as a *Heilpraktiker* [an alternative medicine practitioner] and there he has learned what can be done against Corona and other viruses, including how to strengthen his immune system and prevent a severe course of the disease. *But instead, vacci-*



Fig. 4 Announcement. "Show your face! Rally for The Peaceful Revolution 2.0". November 2020. Leipzig.

nation is presented to us as the only way out. That is an excellent business model. The goal seems to be that we'll be vaccinated against new viruses every year. But they are both unsure whether vaccination will actually be compulsory. Health Minister Spahn had said that there would be no compulsory vaccination, but he had formulated it in such a way that there would be no compulsory vaccination in THIS pandemic. And according to Paul Schreyer's book, it looks as if we will have to prepare ourselves for new pandemics being continuously declared in the future. It would be enough, as is always said, if 55% of the population were vaccinated, but that would probably not be the case. Because even everyone they know who supports the Corona measures said they don't want to be vaccinated. Presumably, there would rather be an indirect vaccination obligation, i.e., the non-vaccinated would get more and more disadvantages until they would finally get vaccinated, because otherwise they would no longer receive social welfare or would no longer be able to go shopping or ride the bus.



Fig. 5 Counter-announcement. “Solidarity instead of *Querdenken*”. November 2020. Leipzig.



But what is really incomprehensible for them is how it all works. And that most people just let it happen to them. Her circle of friends has almost completely dissolved and there is a deep split in their family. When she posts something informative on social media, she immediately gets extremely harsh responses. And again and again, they ask themselves why the politicians participate in this, whether they were perhaps being blackmailed, perhaps they were being threatened: we have an even more severe virus up our sleeve here, if you don't go along with everything now, we'll let it out. She assumes that I know the video where Bill and Melinda Gates were sitting on the sofa talking about how the next virus is going to be bad and “really gets attention”, grinning

Fig. 6 Counter-announcement II. “Death to fascism—attack *Querdenken* demo”. November 2020. Leipzig.

to themselves. *I mean, if everything is so bad, then you are concerned from the heart. But not like that, with such a grin.* And it was indeed strange that the critic of the measures, Vice President of the Bundestag Thomas Oppermann, at the age of 66, suddenly collapsed dead shortly before a live TV interview the other day. And that the president of the German *Mittelstand* [mid-sized enterprises], Mario Ohoven, drove off the highway in his car on a straight stretch of road and thus died shortly after announcing a lawsuit against the Corona measures and a second lockdown.

On the way back, I pass the market square, where a group of music-playing protesters is facing a group of counter-demonstrators. The medical doctor Perin Dinekli from Offenburg, already familiar to me from YouTube videos, sings in German rhymes:

*Enough of the myth
that vaccination is sacred
You think we are stupid
and believe your ruse
Tell it to someone else
that you only care about us
You only want to earn
and it is power that guides you!*

*You powerful and rich
you are never interested in
300,000 corpses
by the wrong therapy
and 6 million children
who die every year
and because of your coldness
starve and freeze to death...*

*You should be ashamed of yourselves,
pretending that
you care about the elderly
go away with your praise
for tired nurses
whom you have been harassing
and have been exploiting for years
and whom you are suddenly courting...*

*What kind of people are you?
What shameless betrayal
What is with VW
and also with glyphosate?
You don't give a shit
if someone dies from it
as long as the industry
sufficiently woos you!*

*Do not play the Samaritans
who, full of compassion,
want vaccination for all of us
This is an evil game
You give all our money
to the richest people in this world
who do everything to ensure that it
deteriorates from year to year!*

*We will protest,
as long as we like
We believe in freedom
and a better world
Corona brings us together
in spite of social distancing... and
we are peacefully becoming more and more
and do not keep our mouths shut*

The woman next to me says that the counter-demonstrator from the Antifa over there are all so young and have no idea about life at all, and she adds ironically, *Forgive them, for they know not what they do.* She is a physiotherapist, around 50, and has come here all the way from Freiburg in Southern Germany. It is always said that the *Querdenker* are right-wing, but it seems to her that these *children from the Antifa* are actually the new right-wingers, so uneducated, intolerant and aggressive. The whole thing is not rocket science; you don't have to be a virologist to understand that positive PCR tests without consideration of CT value or disease symptoms cannot be equated with "cases" and you don't need to have studied statistics to realize that the portrayal of the pandemic by politicians and in the media is tendentious and alarmist and that the whole thing could be depicted in a completely different and much less dramatic way. Another problem with the measures is that no goal is set at all, and there is no criterion at all for when the whole thing will be over again. And she doesn't understand why everyone is only focusing on Corona now. *We have enough other diseases that we have to deal with. But it's only about the sacred cow Corona. And how long is this going to go on? Covid-19, -20, -21, -22 ... 30,000 and a new vaccination every year? We have to learn to live with this virus, just like with all the other 80 million viruses. Very few people seem to realize that.*

While I move on, a group from Cologne sings a modification of a famous German hit from the 1960s whose lyrics with the original word "love-sickness" they have replaced with "Corona anxi-



Fig. 7 “711 (=Querdenken) Fuck off!” Leipzig near Augustusplatz. November 7, 2020.

Fig. 8 Augustusplatz. Leipzig. November 7, 2020.



ety” and “your heart” that already tomorrow will laugh again with “another virus”:

*Corona-Angst, die lohnt sich nicht, my Darling
Schade um die Tränen in der Nacht,
Corona-Angst, die lohnt sich nicht, my Darling
Weil schon morgen ein anderes Virus lacht.*

[Corona anxiety, it's not worth it, my darling
Pity about the tears in the night,
Corona anxiety, it's not worth it, my darling
Because already tomorrow another virus laughs.]

The next day, the sun is shining and the mood among the demonstrators is good, although the conversations do not really offer any reason for this. For example, I get into a conversation with someone around 50 years old from Baden-Wuerttemberg, now living in Berlin, who is handing out flyers for the party *Widerstand 2020* [Resistance 2020], which was founded in the course of the protests. His style of dress would probably be described as alternative. In the meantime, the party has split up and now there is also *Die Basis* [the base]; he thinks both approaches are good, but he stayed with *Widerstand 2020* because he used to watch the YouTube videos of the party found-

Fig. 9 “What if the covidioters are right?”
Leipzig, November 7, 2020.

er Bodo Schiffmann a lot. He has been studying the financial system for 12 years now. It’s all about money and power, he says, and what we’re experiencing right now is a big robbery. The fact that people still believe that Corona is a terrible natural disaster and do not see what is destroyed by the measures is so blatant, he says. The leftists believed and celebrated that, supposedly for the first time, the economy was no longer given priority over politics. But the people simply have no idea about economics. Since after all, it’s the other way around. Everything had been said: Warren Buffet has said that there is a class war, but it is his class of the rich that is waging war, and they will win. And Bill Gates, too, has already said how he expects things to work out as he wants: first four years of measures, then 10 years of reconstruction! And, of course, the reconstruction would be carried out in accordance with the demands of the rich. We would then no longer be able to afford a



Fig. 10 “Waken up, start anew!”
Leipzig, November 7, 2020.





Fig. 11 The medical doctor and critic of the Corona policy Bodo Schiffmann stops on his bus tour through Germany near Augustplatz, Leipzig, November 7, 2020.

Fig. 12 "Corona-GDR". Leipzig, November 7, 2020.



welfare state. Buffet recently said in *Managermagazin* that he would like to buy the German *Mittelstand* [the mid-sized enterprises], but unfortunately, it is not for sale. It was already clear that there will definitely be new lockdowns in the winter. After a second lockdown, he says, Buffet won't be far from fulfilling his wish, because after a second lockdown, the *Mittelstand* will be definitely ruined and for sale. And that is certainly the goal of it all. And if many leftists believed that socialism would finally prevail, they are sadly fundamentally deluded, because instead the whole thing will probably lead to an oligarchy.

Later in the afternoon, a large black travel bus of the "Corona Info Tour" stops at the edge of the demonstration next to the Grassi Museum. For weeks now, the ear, nose, and throat specialist Bodo Schiffmann, the entrepreneur Samuel Eckert, and the lawyer Ralf Ludwig, who belong to the celebrities of the protest movement, have been traveling through Germany like itinerant preachers. They stop in several places during the day and inform the people gathered on site and on live stream about what they regard as Corona's harmlessness and the measures' dangerousness. Shortly after they start speaking to the surrounding 200 or so people, the demonstration on the Augustusplatz is disbanded due to general hygiene rules violations. Next to me stands Rhada, she is in her mid-40s, very well-groomed, conservatively dressed, and wearing a white mouth-and-nose protection previously distributed to those present by Bodo Schiffmann, on which the word "Diktatur" [dictatorship] is printed in black. She is a dentist from Hamburg and has taken part in demonstrations against the measures regularly since Easter. Her relationship was ruined by their different attitudes toward the measures and toward demonstrating together with right-wingers. She came to Leipzig with a few relatives and friends, most of them physicians, and wanted to meet a group of doctors who had written an open letter demanding an immediate end to all Corona measures and had arranged to meet here.

A passing older woman without a mask speaks to Rhada, slightly provocatively, as it seems to me, and asks why she is standing here with such a mask on which dictatorship is written. Rhada takes off her mask and speaks with a surprisingly kind and calm matter-of-factness and as if she

had only been waiting for this question: *We are standing here to protest against the dictatorship that is being established. It is planned to abolish all property of the people by 2030. To do this, everything we have at the moment must first be destroyed. Only the companies with an annual turnover of more than five billion will survive. Cash will be abolished and there will be a basic income for everyone and you will only be able to borrow everything from the big companies. But you will have access to this only if you behave socially, politically, and hygienically correctly. All this will be controlled by digital surveillance systems, with biometric recognition and probably also microchips or other markers inserted into the body for identification; privacy will then of course no longer exist, because that means total surveillance, control, and steering of the populations. In roughly the same way as it already works in many parts of China. But then it will be worldwide. This is not a conspiracy theory, it has all been announced. Just google Klaus Schwab, Agenda 2030, and Project ID2020, then you know what is waiting for us! Or simply Great Reset!*

The older woman tries to remember, asks again, but then follows her companion, who visibly impatiently demands that she moves on. Rhada gets laughing applause from the bystanders. *Wow, I haven't seen the whole thing in this clarity before, that's really COVID-1984, you can get really scared, says a woman, that reminds me on a banner I saw the other day, "We urgently need new conspiracy theories, our old ones have all come true!"* Rhada says with a smile, *Yes, and we are sold this as a green kingdom of happiness. I have stopped trying to convince people. Either they want to know, then they can read about it themselves, or they just don't do it. Everything else is pointless.*

"Now we have had 30 years of the new system, and now it reminds me of the old system."

Manja

Manja is in her late forties, lives in Leipzig with her teenage daughter, and works as a physiotherapist. Our interview takes place two days after the nationwide-organized Leipzig demonstration. She says she is still very impressed by the large crowd of demonstrators and that it was really very diverse. It was interesting to talk to the people, who had come from all over the country and included everything: from people with AfD

jackets to people who looked as if they could also have been at the Antifa counter-demonstration. And all classes and all generations. It was quite different at the end of August in Berlin, the only demonstration she had been to before. There, she had the feeling that it was mainly the old West German hippie generation that was on the road. *When I came back, I said I didn't see anyone with only two teeth, I didn't see much of the common people walking around, I saw a few poor and simple people, but the main picture was of people with a decent level of education.* In Leipzig, all generations were present, whereas in Berlin it was mainly people over 40, she thinks. And the police were much nicer in Leipzig than in Berlin. She only liked the speeches better in Berlin, which were really good, whereas in Leipzig they had a bit too much of an entertainment character.

When the police disbanded the demonstration in Leipzig after a few hours because of violations of the hygiene regulations, she had stood with a group from Dresden. *And these Osis [colloquial term for people from the former East Germany] then said: "I don't believe it, now they're all going home! If we had asked in '89 what we were allowed to do, nothing would ever have happened! Since when do we always have to get permits and comply with everything everywhere! What's wrong with them?" They were stunned.* Since she felt frozen and her daughter was waiting alone at home, she left before the demonstrators broke through the police line in the evening and illegally marched across the Leipziger Ring [the roadway that encircles Leipzig's city center] as they had done in 1989.

The disillusioning scenario in the media was to be expected, but it's always a new shock. Just images of fire, smoke everywhere, burning barricades. And then Radio Leipzig had the cheek to suggest that the massive riots in the Connewitz district on the evening of the demonstration, where the police used water cannons and so on, had something to do with the demonstration against the measures on the Augustusplatz. Some people say that the media are controlled and that journalists are not allowed to report differently, but she had just treated a patient who had worked for the media for a long time, who said that there were no orders, but that everyone still reported in this way. *He said that if someone would have the courage they could report differently. But that's not happening. And that is actual-*

ly frightening. She assumes that this is the case, on the one hand, because most people want to think like the majority and they notice what the majority wants to hear, and, on the other hand, because people do not dare to stand up because they are afraid.

She experiences the same thing with her daughter. Due to the mask obligation in school, she no longer drinks or eats anything, because to do so you have to take off the mask. You are allowed to go outside and take a breath, but who would actually do that, because that would be a sign of weakness. If you go by occupational health and safety guidelines, then it should actually be obligatory to remove the mask regularly, but that is not taken into account at all in the current regulations. Her daughter is doing very badly due to the lack of oxygen, but she does not want a mask exemption because she fears being bullied at school. *Young people today are growing up with these shitstorms, and they know that if I stick my head out somewhere, I'm screwed, and I'm screwed big time. It is completely different for them from what it was for us. Now everything is verifiable and someone has found something and can forward it. Back then, someone told us something, but whether it was true, whether he was really at the demonstration, that was all questionable. And today you can strip people naked in no time, among friends, in school. They know that, and maybe that's why they're so scared and don't dare to do anything. I noticed years ago that they were all so uniform. The girls all had almost the same length of hair, and their clothes were all very similar. And with regard to the Corona demonstrations, it was probably similar. Society is so divided on this issue, and since modern youth today tends to be pushed to the left, definitely at least those in the city, the Antifa is not far away. And if Antifa demonstrate against these people, then these people must be bad. And then, of course, they held back. Her daughter, for example, would certainly not tell anyone that her mother had been at the demonstration. That's how bad it is today. [...]*

And for us, that's like our childhood in the GDR. Because we knew exactly that there are things that we are not allowed to say. And our teachers, too, knew that they had to teach us things that were not true or that were not their opinion. And many, not all, made us question what they were saying. In a very clever way. By standing up and saying: Well, we can discuss that. You can see it this way and that way.

What would the point of view from the other side look like? [...] We knew that if we had classmates whose parents were completely red, or completely loyal Party comrades, or even in the Stasi, we knew exactly that you simply don't say certain things in their presence. But that was a minority. In retrospect, of course, it turned out that many more had such parents. But it didn't matter for their personal experience as children, because they didn't know that at the time. That made it more relaxed for them than it is today. We knew whom we were dealing with, the enemy wasn't lurking in no-man's-land. But at the moment, that's the way it is.

She knows current owners of mid-sized enterprises who would have liked to go to the big demonstration in Leipzig a few days ago, but didn't dare for fear of suddenly being shown on TV or in the newspaper and suffering disadvantages. However, such fear of expressing oneself politically existed even before Corona. She has heard reports from patients and friends who have made critical comments and attracted political attention. For example, in one case in a small village when someone said that he did not want to have more asylum seekers than inhabitants in the village and that the people coming here were not families and that there were attacks and acts of violence: *People said, they don't want that, and shortly thereafter the tax office and the tax audit came after them. Not verifiable, but strange. I think we East Germans are simply shaped by our experience and know that such things are possible and that there are people who know more about us than we think. We knew as children that we were being wiretapped; we grew up with that. I meet a lot of people who don't think such things are possible because they think they are so unimportant on a global scale, so no one cares. But I know that we all have cell phones, I know that it's possible to use cameras and microphones remotely, and I think that someone knows what I'm saying to patients. And if they do, that's the way it is. I do that consciously. I'll notice if they're going to do something with that knowledge and when I'm at the point where I'm dangerous, I'll find out in time, but I'm consciously exposing myself to that. Therefore, to refrain from everything now would be the last thing I'd do.*

She was born and raised with her two siblings in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. Her mother worked as a physician in a managerial position. *That was actually almost non-existent without party affili-*

ation. But she got the job without it and received a lot of humiliation and teasing for it, but she made up for it professionally in such a way that no one could mess with her. It was the same with her father: He had worked in an executive position in a chemical plant, also without party affiliation. My report cards always said that my attitude toward the socialist state left something to be desired. It was written every year. One little statement was enough. But as a child, I didn't care. Even though no one in her family had seen their own Stasi file, it came out after the fall of the Wall that a good friend of her brother had worked for the Stasi. And he had been in and out of their house from an early age. That was quite a shock, and her mother had always talked openly with him about her political views. But she herself did not condemn him. That's what she learned from her mother: to let others be who they are and to ask for their reasons. People were put under a lot of pressure, and if they didn't have a strong character, they just gave in. That would work the same way again today.

At that time, one could not have imagined how much the Stasi knew. Even during the protests in 1989, they were informed about everything. If people had known that, most of them would probably have stayed at home. The fact that she had crossed out her ballot in May 89, the last elections in the GDR, was also certainly recognized. *That was the revolution par excellence.* What works today with technology, worked back then with people; apartments were bugged, neighbors interviewed, and everything written down. *They knew everything and knew a weak point in everyone, with which they could blackmail you if necessary. And people did it for a good purpose, for the common good; they thought it was all right. That's how they were won over. Just like now.*

She had not wanted to continue school after 10th grade, but had started working in agriculture. Then she changed her mind and wanted to become a health and social care worker. To be able to do this, she first had to do a one-year internship in a children's hospital. That was in the time shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall. She was 17 years old at the time when the first demonstrations against the government took place. *When I was at the Corona demonstration in Berlin, I was immediately reminded of the demonstrations of that time. I haven't had that for years—decades, I can say*

now. And how it must feel to those for whom this scenery last Saturday in Leipzig, with such crowds of people, is familiar from back then?

Today, of course, many things are different. She still remembers exactly how it was back then: *What it's like to stand there, look into the eyes of the police, and know that they're going to hurt us. And they have no scruples. And there's no one to protect us, not even after the fact.* The memory of this propensity to violence came up again. Of course, that was quite different last weekend in Leipzig. *They were as gentle as a lamb.* In Berlin, however, she felt differently. She had seen how the police had already blocked the Brandenburg Gate in the morning and how they had lined up there, with what faces, it had been terrible. In her opinion, they were very much out to provoke. But the situation today is nevertheless quite different from what it was back then, because people's lives are not in danger at demonstrations today. *For the most part, I know what I'm getting into at such a demonstration. And if I don't behave in an extremely conspicuous manner and transgress boundaries, nothing will actually happen to me there, unless I get caught between fronts that are no longer manageable when something escalates. But nothing will happen to me there on the part of the state if I behave in a normal manner. And that was different in GDR times. But the crowds and the mood of change, that we can create something good, that's similar today. At the demo, I don't necessarily feel threatened by the police, but what I want to avert is much worse than what existed in GDR times. Because from my point of view, what we are threatened with is extremely inhumane. And that didn't exist back then.*

Turmoil had started after the last elections in the German Democratic Republic. She remembers only with difficulty the exact dates, she still remembers how they had learned at some point what had happened in China on Tiananmen Square. *We didn't learn that from the media, and it crystallized over time that you only hear and make such statements in the church. The fact that they dare to say things and call for prayers made it a central place where it was allowed to talk about things, they had an open door, even though I wasn't raised in the Church like most people there. Then, through my former classmates, I got involved in one of the church's student groups. [...] At that time, we had the shelter of the church; today there is no shelter.*

In September 1989, the situation became worse, there were the first demonstrations, to which they went with candles, and there were miserable attempts to massively suppress the turmoil. People were taken away from demonstrations in trucks, you did not know when they would ever see them again, and you heard terrible things about what was done to them. *From today's perspective, I am amazed. Because it was so brave. Because we didn't know if we would win. It's like today. The feeling that it's actually hopeless. It's just a drop in the bucket and they'll do what they want anyway. But at least we show them that we know. And for us it was clear at that time that things would not work out well. Nevertheless, it could not be tolerated any other way. [...]*

Most of her friends came to the 1989 demonstrations later, when there were already so many people at them. *It's the same now: who was in Berlin, and how many might be there in the future. And now people are also saying, "Oh, if you go, then I'll go, too."* And then, at some point, completely different people came to the 1989 demonstrations. *Then it was no longer these people who had put some thought into it and had ideas and actually wanted a different country. We wanted certain values to be realized; the goals that the GDR conveyed all the time with their nevertheless honorable communism. To this day, I still think that the values they taught us are not wrong. But they didn't live according to the values they claimed to espouse. They had completely different opportunities, I mean, the government and the high circles, all the people who belonged there, all those who had a function in the Party, they could travel as they liked and get everything, were supplied differently, got other goods, and so on. They always got the better things, the people got the worse. That was pretty awful.*

At some point, the direction of the protest movement changed. *I remember very well that in all these choruses there was always only the call: "We are THE people!" And all of a sudden, it was: "We are ONE people!" I remember exactly where I was standing, because that was the moment when I thought, "Eh? What have I just heard?" And from then on, it only went in a certain direction. For me, there were so many question marks. I also noticed that the people who had previously forbidden me to go to the demonstrations or who asked, "Are you crazy, what do you want there?"; or who made sure that my work schedule didn't allow me to go there on Mondays, were*

exactly the people who suddenly showed up at the demonstrations! That's when I lost faith. Then I thought, I have no reason to be here anymore, because they want something completely different than I do. Whereas before I had the feeling that people were thinking things the same as I was. It's going in the same direction. That was the experience of the plebs, as my mother would say. I never went back; by November, I wasn't part of that movement anymore. [...] The fall of the Wall didn't interest me at all anymore. I don't even remember looking at any of the pictures on television; I think I actually never even looked at them. That was no longer anything of interest for me. It turned out differently than expected. People were silenced. It was actually the idea to create something good.

And I always tell the people who are so disappointed today: Can't you remember? That's exactly what we learned about capitalism! Have you forgotten that? We all learned that in school! We actually know exactly how it works. And we always knew that this wasn't right. And we have never questioned that. What else they tell us and how they spin history is another thing, but we have always known that capitalism works that way! And so how can we be surprised now! And back then I really felt that the whole thing was going in a completely different direction and that there was as a bud with a really good core that had completely vanished. And then came this mass hysteria. It was really horrible. I lost faith, because people were only concerned with bananas and West German money. And I thought, are these your fellow human beings? That's not normal. Where do they want to go? What do they want? What is that supposed to be?

She then once went to visit a friend in the West who had left the East shortly before the fall of the Wall. And she enthusiastically showed me the supermarkets and so on and I just thought, why do I need 20 kinds of yogurt; that totally knocked me out. I really stood there as if they had taken me out of the jungle and I asked myself, what's all this about? I still don't understand it today. But at that time, I felt that very strongly and could not understand that they want all this.

In 1990, she went to the West once again for an internship. By train. I got into conversation with quite a few people. They always told us that you must have known about it, and you poor people, everything is really bad, and you couldn't do anything, and we can do everything here, and if you want, you can organize yourself here, you can found an animal protec-

tion association, an environmental protection association, and so on. And then I always looked at them and said, "What are you dreaming of? You can't really believe that you can change only one thing." And then I realized that they believe what they read in the newspaper. We, in contrast, grew up knowing that the newspaper wasn't telling the truth. I was completely annoyed. And then I had smart people in front of me who were studying some kind of thing and thought the world was open to them, and they really believed what was written there in the newspapers.

And they also believed everything they were told about the GDR. Then I thought: You are totally uncritical! In retrospect, I understand that. I mean, you grow up one way or another. It's weird to feel that. You're the same age and then you realize that they're totally convinced that they have absolute freedom. And I've experienced from the very beginning that that's not true. Anyone who tries to say that the highway won't be built here will be stalled until they have no more money, and then in the end it will be built anyway. Whether that's in 10 years or in 15, it doesn't matter for shit. And it doesn't matter if they find a bat or a frog. They have more staying power. The fact that the West Germans all believe in their freedom surprised me. That was such an aha experience.

But even among people who grew up in the GDR, many people have an uncritical attitude towards Corona, especially among the older generation. For the West, I can't say anything about the differences in the generations. I only know that our people, a certain generation, who grew up differently, who probably had this idea of reconstruction after the war, who went to school in the '50s and '60s, cannot imagine that a government does not want the best for a people. Especially not now that we are in the West. The others have only cheated us and enriched themselves. But not them. And then they had witnessed people like Chancellor Schmidt and Chancellor Kohl, and they always thought that they were all trusted people, that everything had to be completely reliable. And I just talked to a patient today who has a daughter who is the same age as me and she said, "My daughter says exactly the same thing as you, but somehow I still cannot believe that it's really that way. I can't imagine that and I don't know why." I say, "I can imagine why. Even back then you found it difficult to understand that the government is not telling the truth." I didn't notice it that time, but years later I read that it was almost only young people and young adults at the

initial demonstrations, so there were no people who were 35, 40, 50 years old. [...] I don't think there were many who joined the Party but didn't believe in the socialist project. [...] That's probably why there was this big personal breakdown in '89 for many people, which I can't confirm for my family, because they weren't disappointed by anything at all, because they knew exactly that it was crap. They were more disappointed by what came afterwards.

Because then came this hype that now, finally, we got what we wanted. They all took to the streets because they wanted West German money, and then all of a sudden they were all unemployed. Within a very short time. That was the time when I was already working as a physiotherapist and had a lot of contact to people. And many of them took early retirement in their early 50s. What did they do with their lives then? Now they could all travel, but on what money? I can still hear myself saying, in my early 20s, "That's what you guys all have learned in school, that's capitalism! That's where we are now, that's where you wanted to go, that's why everyone was on the market square or everyone was on the ring [the street that encircles Leipzig's city center] and we demonstrated for it. I don't understand that you are so surprised now." And they said, yes, but they didn't imagine that it would really be like that.

We had super-functioning companies here, which they all crushed in a very nasty way, via the Treuhand [the "Trust" that was instituted to privatize East German state companies]—there are enough stories about that. And brands that were world leaders were just unerringly loused up. And this system of maximum supply in the GDR, this securing of basic needs and this goal that everyone has a role in society and wants to have it. I can remember, for example, that the farmers I worked with were alcoholics who already had a "decent level" at 7 in the morning, and that was the only way they could operate their vehicles, but they all worked. Today I have the alcoholics on the street and they never work. They can't work anymore, they have no job and no social integration. Things have developed enormously in the other direction. In the GDR, the structure was much better. It was all about optimizing everything, work routes as short as possible, school routes as short as possible, child care, everything connected. There was nothing to complain about. No one had to pay. Large families got free meals at school. No one questioned that at all. [...]

Now we have 30 years of the new system, and now it reminds me of the old system. Above all, this obedience of the people, this: The main thing is that I have my nest feathered, I still have my work, so everything is fine, and the whole thing will pass somehow. So, just don't look past your nose. And not wanting to admit that something bad is happening. And all this against the background of the history of this Germany, where we have simply already experienced these things, or rather I have only read about it and heard about it from my parents. As a child, you always asked yourself, "Who does something like that?" [...] A patient has just told me that she was massively insulted by another woman, how could she go to this demonstration against the measures, it was someone from her circle of friends, how selfish that is and that you infect others. And then someone else told me today that a friend who lives in the West and saw pictures from Leipzig called him and said, "For God's sake, what's going on here? Are they all out of their minds?" Nobody asks why you're doing this, but judges you right away. And that this friend doesn't say, "Well, actually I know you, if you do something like that, you must have a reason, I'd like to hear it." And that was the same in the GDR: in certain situations, just not questioning anything and just doing what was expected and not to wanting to hear that anything was wrong.

But many things are wrong: What is not okay right now is that facts are being twisted, that we are only getting a small spectrum of information, and not what we should actually have available. And, from my point of view, fear is being deliberately stirred up, and the pretended interest in the health of the people has not yet shown itself anywhere else. To me, it's bad when a state fails to ban glyphosate, and now thinks we need to use a death rate lower than one percent as a reason to take such measures. Everywhere we know things contain harmful substances: that could be easily controlled, but is not controlled. Drugs that are clearly helpful are taken off the market, and those that clearly cause side effects are put on the market. This is evident time and time again. Medicine that can't make money should not be produced and should not be put on the market. The whole campaign against homeopathy and so on, it has been going on for a long time, that's not new to me.

I have been critical of the state from the very beginning; I have never been its friend. That's why I'm not shocked by the situation now. Only perhaps about the extent of what's happening. I have always calmed

down those who are now so very shocked: if we are honest, we have always known it on a small scale and now we have simply looked one step further behind the scenes. And now we are shocked, but we should have known that. I mean it was well camouflaged under the big democracy thing. We are not familiar with that, since we didn't have the possibility to vote at all. Well, we did vote, but there was only one party to vote for. Your cross belongs in the only existing box, and that's it. And then suddenly you have a choice and feel totally liberated, and at some point, you have to realize that we actually don't have a choice. They manipulate even that. And many people don't want to experience that disappointment. They have the feeling that everything is better than it was back then, and that's why it must be good. But if the general idea behind it is not good, then it can't be good in detail either. If I actually want to get rich at the expense of other people, nothing good can ever come out of it, because then I don't want the same for everyone. Then I want what capitalism wants. Then I want power, then I want territory, then I want capital, and that cannot be reconciled with anything else. [...]

She has the feeling that a loss of values is affecting society: You only have to look out the window to see what that means: that everyone only cares about themselves and you no longer have to adhere to a certain moral code, that you can always do what you want. You are told: "It's all about you and you are not accountable to anyone!" That has certainly happened with the removal of compulsion, that there is such a feeling of freedom: I can move how I want, I can dress how I want, I can just do what I want. I think that has something to do with that attitude. Limitations disappear and then it becomes unstable. The same happens in education: many say it doesn't work that way anymore, the children need rules nonetheless, otherwise it won't work with the children, otherwise they'll become bullies and just stand on their heads and they won't get healthy either. But nobody has shown us how it works without enforced respect. And that's on the small scale like it's in the whole society. [...] We also see that in terms of what's going on with the climate all over the world. And also with some wars, where they tell us that they are taking place somewhere and that they have to send weapons and how in the end everything is intertwined and interwoven and everybody earns something from it and nobody has any interest at all that something runs peacefully. That's really unbearable. [...]

Last year, when we had no inkling of this situation in 2020—well, some people already had a kind of premonition—I kept saying that I had the feeling that we were heading for an abyss at breakneck speed. We're all sitting in a car and we know the abyss is coming and the crash is coming and we can't imagine at all what it's going to be like, but it has to come. There's no other way. And we had not imagined that a few months later it would have a name, this thing. In that respect, I'm a bit relieved, actually. That it's now the way it is. Because this state from before, with this feeling that everything is going down the drain, that's also unbearable. Now I have at least a spark of hope. [...]

I can remember that the first critical thinking about Corona happened in an exchange with my mother, who is 84, when there was the first Corona case at Lake Starnberg in Germany, and the reactions that followed. My mother, as a GDR doctor, said, "We would have reacted differently, we would have immediately done epidemic control. There is something very dangerous, there are tough measures, they were all well-rehearsed, and everybody knows how it has to work. And that would have worked. It can be prevented." I was on winter vacation myself and, because I was feeling very bad that day, I had time to watch TV and saw what was going on in China, because I don't usually watch TV. It really frightened me, as all those who have a bit of medical knowledge, because they know what can happen with viruses. And then the first case appeared in Italy, when we just happened to be in Italy and I knew exactly: now it's going to start there. And I had the feeling that now something big is coming, and we are at the mercy of it and we can't change it anymore. But the measures were not appropriate. I mean, the measures in Italy were: the areas were sealed off and so on—for me completely understandable and logical. But not at all in Germany. They let Carnival take place, which I absolutely didn't understand at that moment. Well, then I thought, that's capitalism: I still have to earn a little money somehow, fuck how it will turn out afterwards, we'll do that now. At that time, I still believed that it was just money interests, but at some point I thought, "Wait a minute, I mean if I really want to protect the population and know how serious the situation is, then I can't afford another blunder now." And then still nothing happened. There were still no restrictions. That ran until the middle of March, that was four weeks! And then they pat themselves on their

backs and say that we acted much faster than the Italians and that's why our figures are not so high. But in Italy, they closed down immediately, which we didn't do. And that's when I started thinking something was wrong here. [...]

What also made me skeptical were the pictures from China, where people suddenly fall down one after the other, on the street, in the bank, and who knows where. That impressed me, too. But I never saw that again. I waited for such cases in Italy, I didn't see them. I waited for them in Germany, and I didn't see them. And then I asked myself, what did they show us? And who wanted that? The Chinese? Or the others who report on it? They scared people with these pictures, since they didn't have any pictures of intensive care units yet, that was just starting. That was also strange. [...] And then there was simply a lack of sick people. I heard reports from nurses who worked here in Leipzig in the hospital, and they said that the sick people who were flown in from Italy at that time, because here in Saxony we hardly had any cases, were all seriously ill, they die of any virus, it can also be a norovirus or any other virus that is currently circulating. [...]

In addition, the question of what other reasons there may have been. Then I was interested in the research on why this might have become so bad in Italy. This thing that there were these big vaccination campaigns and the people had all been vaccinated against meningococcus shortly before and what that does to an immune system, how stressful that is and so on. Interesting questions where you say to yourself, I don't have an answer now, but I'll think about it. [...]

Her brother lives in the western part of Germany. They were more affected and had already had more contacts and knew that the virus definitely exists. There are people who have cold symptoms, do not feel well, and have been diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2. That's it. But there were no seriously ill people there, either. And then I thought, okay, if it develops like this now, then we can be lucky that now more and more sunlight comes through, this wintertime passes, and people start exercising more again.

Nevertheless, the whole thing did not stop and she started to look into PCR tests. It was surprising that only absolute infection figures were presented. And then the question as to what percentage of the tests carried out these incidence figures are, it took ages before this was ever mentioned. She then looked up the data and calculated it herself and

concluded that only 0.6 or 0.7 percent of the tests were positive. And then they ramp up the testing to 1.5 million and now we ramp it back down to show that the lockdown is working. It's so simple that you don't have to be very smart. So, I'm assuming that it's being done on purpose.

She then talked to her mother, who insisted that the virus was dangerous anyway. Funnily enough, as an 84-year-old smoker, she did not see herself as a risk group. *She doesn't want to hug me to protect ME. She always has ideas about how to do better with virus control, but doesn't question the whole thing, even though she is very interested in politics. But she didn't want to believe it was that bad. In the meantime, I think she is ready. The last week and all the political events must have convinced her, now she has woken up. Now she sees that logical steps that should be taken by the government are not being taken. And I think maybe what tipped the scales was my report from Berlin at the end of August. She didn't know I was going there, I deliberately didn't want to tell her. [...]* Afterwards, she sent her mother pictures and her mother let her tell how it was, read all kinds of reports from different sides and probably realized that something wasn't true here at all. Especially the thing with the so-called storm on the Reichstag. The demo in front of the Reichstag had nothing to do with the *Querdenken* demo in front of the Siegessäule. On the way back to the train station, she had passed that demonstration, and a lot of police had cordoned off the area of that demonstration, but not the Reichstag. And then a woman with dreadlocks promoted the event and said that they would need them later in front of the Reichstag. That seemed strange to her: *That wasn't authentic. But that was not the woman who later gave that speech about Trump being in town and saving us and we had to take our house back: that was completely bizarre! [...]* That demonstration was obviously organized by some *Reichsbürger*, so I wonder who authorized it. *It was like putting the ball in front of the goal and now only someone needs to accidentally fall on it and it's a goal. And that's how it happened.*

She had been looking for a way to protest against the Corona policy for a long time. *In the beginning, I said to my friend, who is a doctor, "You have to speak up now, you're the only ones anyone listens to. If you were to say now, "That is not true!" Or, "The measures are dangerous to health!" If you were heard, then perhaps a question mark would be*

put behind the whole thing. Where are all the doctors? This just can't be!" And then she said that it was very difficult, because everyone was so hesitant and didn't trust themselves. Because the government and the experts who had been consulted had pushed ahead so quickly. They were so unsettled, since they saw things differently, and they couldn't even find each other. And then I often said, "We have to do something about this. Actually, effective protest can only come from doctors and lawyers. Who else is supposed to have any power here, except the whole people, but the people obviously doesn't recognize the problem."

For a long time she did not notice the small demonstrations against the Corona politics in Leipzig. She forgot how she heard about the first nationwide-organized demonstration on August 1 in Berlin. She had actually wanted to participate, but had been on vacation. *And the question was: Do I now travel from the Baltic Sea to Berlin and then leave my child there alone, without knowing what will happen at the demo? That's what I blamed them for back then, that they didn't go to the demos in '89, but when I later had a little child myself, I also thought, I'm not going anywhere now! And apparently, that's still the case if you have teenage kids.* But then she went to the second nationwide-organized demonstration on August 28—even if she was very skeptically, because she had heard that the *Querdenken* movement had been founded in the West. *And I've never had the feeling that West Germans are very critical of the system as such. That is much more common in the East. One of my patients, who also comes from the West, was very upset because she had been feverishly anxious day and night that Trump shouldn't win these elections, and then I asked her what she thought was so bad about that. She said that Trump can simply do everything he wants, and that the people are not even asked, and then I asked, "Is it different here?" And she said, "Yes, because we can elect the parliament."* Manja had noticed that this West German woman had a completely different feeling about the state than she did. And then she told her patient about how she had once observed an election in our current system and then came across the fact that there was a column for losses, through which votes could simply be manipulated, and that she did not believe in elections. The patient had then asked what she would change. *That was a good question. I said I would take the money out. No politician should earn so much money that personal*

interest can become more important than the interest of the people. [...] The argument she then brought up, that politicians had to earn so much because otherwise they would go into private business or so that they wouldn't become corrupt, was still based on the acceptance of this money system. *If it were generally not necessary to buy things, then corrupt politicians would not be a problem either.*

The money must also be taken out of the health sector. I have physicians as patients here who are pensioners and they are appalled that doctors today just do a job and no longer look at whether it is still in the best interest of the patient. If the ward has to perform so and so many hip operations per year to get its money for the next year, then five more hip operations will be performed, regardless of whether the patients need them or not. And our doctors wouldn't have done that because they were raised differently. [...] Maybe that's the difference, because my West German patient grew up in the money system and doesn't question it, just as we from the East took it for granted that we had social security, because we didn't know it any other way. [...]

*We just see that earning money has no upper limits. They don't just want to have a fancy limousine and a great house, in addition, there have to be vacation homes here and there and another yacht and another investment and I don't know what else they have to have, it just doesn't stop. That is the system. And that's why, when I saw this West German *Querdenker* movement, I actually thought it couldn't be a good thing. They probably won't criticize the important issues. I was totally astonished that this was exactly what was being addressed at that Berlin demonstration, that the only solution to the world conflict lies in every detail in exactly this point: in the capitalist system that functions in such a way that it ruins so many people and things in order to enrich so few individuals. [...]* Our prosperity is the poverty of the other. That is the insight that completes the circle. *And I was amazed to hear this at the demo. I thought it was much more narrow-minded. I was afraid that they would just stick to the masks issue.* In addition, she was surprised at the number of West Germans at the demonstration; she had actually expected to find mainly East Germans there. *That was really a big thing. And to experience that there were so many nationalities; that really impressed me. I saw Balkan people there, Czechs, Russians, Turks. And all of them with this enthusiasm. [...]* We are all together here, [...]

we are all one, we are tolerant, we accept every culture.

That's how we grew up as children, for us these were the images of peace.

Apart from demonstrations, she sees her role in showing her critical patients that they are not alone. *I can't do anything else right now. It can't be a coincidence that they come to me and talk openly about that issue. Even if, of course, this is a selective place. So, what anesthesiologists report about seriously ill Corona patients is obvious, because they don't see anyone else. And I also have a certain selection of patients who take more responsibility for themselves than others, who look exactly at what is good for them, or what they invest their little money in, what really gets them ahead. That goes through all generations, well, the younger ones maybe not so much, they are not quite that critical. She guesses 80 percent of her patients are critical of the official narrative. Maybe not in all details, maybe they don't want to admit the final consequences, but basically, they ask themselves a lot of questions, are very attentive, do a lot of research, evaluate the media and come up with ideas themselves. But most still assumed that these were simply mistakes, and that the government was just misadvised. Many still don't want to believe the big idea that all this is happening deliberately. Thankfully, because otherwise that would make them all sick. Because that's hardly bearable. Most would already recognize the problem with the orders: Now people are wearing masks, even though many scientists say that this is unhealthy. Common sense already tells me that it's unhealthy, and I don't have to be a trained physician to see that. We all know that we need oxygen and we all know that it's not good to breathe your own air, especially for such a long time. And most people already knew in March that all the disinfectant stuff on the shopping carts and the hands was going to backfire, because within two weeks they had cracked skin, and I said, "Great, that's the entry point for our virus, isn't it? What's going to happen now?" Now we all have inflamed skin and the skin is tearing and bursting everywhere, which is actually the worst thing that can happen to us. That is no longer healthy. Just like restricting people in their exercise and everything that's good for their health, actually everybody knows that. And that's what they've taught us for decades, what you have to do to stay healthy, and that's not mentioned at all anymore. That's being massively cut. That can only be on purpose. Otherwise, it would be discussed differently. Otherwise, people would ask, what else can be done? [...] We can get infected at any*

time and our immune system depends on so many factors and also so many mental factors, so we get sick especially in fear, especially under stress, that's obvious. Anybody who just wants to understand that can experience it in their own body. And it's crazy that this isn't being addressed.

She thinks the measures served to create fear. To make us compliant for what they have in mind: to restructure, perhaps to kill several problems with one stone in the end. Obviously, this is not about a single government, because things are similar in many countries. No matter where we look. So, it must be something bigger behind it, whatever. But that it has to do with money... what else? So, just power alone doesn't work. It doesn't work without money. And I think that's where the main interest lies. We destroy everything, then we can buy up everything, companies for example. And we can make whole countries dependent with loans and so on. So, everything that is possible in this financial economy, which I never wanted to know before because I never thought much about money. I have friends who watch the financial system very closely and come up with the scariest scenarios, and then I always say, "Please leave me alone, I don't want to bear that right now!" Because in the end I don't care. I lived with nothing before and I can live with nothing again. I don't have much to lose. I don't have a house with a loan that I have to pay off and three big cars in front of the door.

Of course, I have something to lose, but not these material values, I can live well without them. But if somehow something like that happens, then we lose more than that. Then we lose freedom. And in some form self-determination. And possibly health. In this regard, she has heard the worst scenarios. Then it gets really creepy, you don't want to imagine that. But the interests can only lead in this direction. There is no other conclusion. And all my patients are like: But how is this supposed to make sense? And then I say, we can twist and turn the puzzle now; it only fits in one direction. And in my opinion, only in this one. I haven't found another one yet. And I don't have to read up on it or anything. I'm just a type of person who tries to figure it out on my own, because everything else can always be wrong, I don't trust anyone, not even books, while others always read this and that. First of all, I don't have the time for that, when I'm exercising I can't read up on things. And second, my feeling tells me that this is the way things are. [...]



Fig. 13 “1933: ‘Decree for the Protection of the People and the State’ - 2020: ‘Act on the Protection of the Population’”. Berlin. November 18, 2020.

Fig. 14 “Guilty”. Berlin. November 18, 2020.





Fig. 15 No. Heart. Consciousness. AfD. Berlin. November 18, 2020.

Fig. 16 Water cannons against the protesters. Berlin. November 18, 2020.



For me, it's just interesting how things develop, and whether they manage to get the people to solve the matter among themselves, so to speak, through those in the population who are now ranting so vehemently about the demonstrators, or whether even more people will wake up and rise up. This morning on Radio Leipzig, the moderator in the news said about the demonstrators, "What an irresponsible bunch of weirdoes this is, why can't you just ban these demonstrations?" He was stunned. And the other moderator, the only female, there were three of them, said very carefully, "Well, listen, that's not possible, we have a democracy and everyone has to be able to speak their mind!" But that was immediately totally destroyed by the two men. "Germany, stay at home!" I think the problem is that there are so many people out there who still think we'll just hold our breath until it's over again.

"Did you say he is a virologist?" *The Great Confusion*

On November 18, 2020, the German Bundestag passes the third version of the Infection Protection Act, which many in the protest movement compare to the Enabling Act of 1933 that gave the Nazis unlimited power. As one of the more than 10,000 demonstrators in front of the Brandenburg Gate on that day tells me: *It seems to me as if the government is just staging a coup against itself. The current and any future government can now suspend all civil rights at any time at the push of a button by arbitrarily declaring an infection alert based on a vaguely formulated 'threatening' situation, deploy the military inside the country, and suppress any protest, and even more any uprising, with ease. And they can pick up the last stubborn people from their homes to carry out forced vaccinations by military doctors as a supposed protective measure.* Accordingly, one demonstrator carries a self-written cardboard sign with the inscription: "Forever state of emergency", and another had a poster with a photo of Willy Brandt and a sentence with which, as Foreign Minister and Vice-Chancellor, he commented on the German Emergency Acts of 1968: "Whoever should once play with the state of emergency to restrict freedom will find my friends and me on the barricades in defense of democracy, and this is meant quite literally." In passing, I hear someone say that he had quit his last friendship today, that people

just didn't want to look and see what was happening, that he couldn't bear it and couldn't accept it anymore.

In Leipzig, three days later, another smaller demonstration against the Corona measures is being held with about 500 participants. After the police declared this one terminated due to violations of the hygiene requirements, groups of Corona demonstrators, counter-demonstrators, and city visitors on shopping tours mingle everywhere in the city. In some cases, it comes to scuffles and fights between demonstrators and counter-demonstrators. At Brühl, I come across an Antifa demonstration. I speak to a young woman who explains to me that some of the demonstrators are surrounded by Antifa further up the street, and that the police are keeping the two groups apart. We get into a conversation, she says that, since we are in a pandemic, the demonstrators endanger other people by their behavior and furthermore, on the one hand, they pretend that they want to protect their children from the measures, and on the other hand, they take their children to such demonstrations. In her opinion, it is okay to criticize the measures, but not together with Nazis. And that some of the protesters accuse Antifa, which is fighting against fascism, of fascism, is of course complete nonsense.

On the market square, I come across a group of seven people, four men and three women, all around 20 years old, dressed in Antifa style and wearing masks. In front of them is an alternatively dressed couple around 50 years old without masks, who apparently belong to the demonstration against the Corona measures. The atmosphere is aggressive.

The female Corona demonstrator asks the group:

Why are you wearing a mask?

Male Counter-demonstrator 1: *To protect you.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Well, do you know the size of a virus?*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *Yes, a bit bigger than your brain.*

Female Corona demonstrator (unperturbed): *It's so small, your balaclava won't help at all.*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *Oh man, ey, put on your mask when you talk to us, otherwise I won't talk to you anymore!*

The whole group chants: *Mask on! Mask on! Mask on!*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *Come on, get lost, ey!*

Female Corona demonstrator: *You don't want to hear that? Democracy lives from different opinions, ever heard of it?*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *But in a democracy there are also rules, and one of these rules is to wear a mask. Besides, I thought you didn't think we lived in a democracy.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Yes, that's true, not since Wednesday.*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *I think you have to make up your mind: Do we live in a democracy or not?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *On Wednesday a law was passed, since then we no longer live in a democracy, from now on a state of emergency can always be declared without us having our basic rights, do you even know that?*

Male Counter-demonstrator 3: *That's not true!*

Female Corona demonstrator (ironically): *Really? Why not?*

Male Counter-demonstrator 3: *The parliament always has to decide first whether such a state of emergency exists and it has to be justified, and besides, it's always only temporary. That's why it's democratic.*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *Oh come on, get lost, ey!*

When the Corona demonstrator turns away, she encounters another group. As it turns out, they are pupils. Here, too, the atmosphere is aggressive. Someone from the group asks her why she didn't put on a mask.

Female Corona demonstrator: *Because it's pointless. That's even written on every package: these guys don't protect against viruses. Moreover, they make you sick. The kids have to wear them all day at school.*

Schoolgirl 1: *I also go to school.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *And because the mask dehumanizes, look at yourselves. Why do you wear a mask?*

Schoolgirl 2: *Hey, we're protecting you, don't you understand?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *You don't need to protect me, thank you. I have an autoimmune disease and I've been to so many demos and I'm still fine.*

Schoolboy 1: *The hospitals are full.*



Fig. 17 "Love wins!" Leipzig near Augustusplatz. November 21, 2020.

Female Corona demonstrator: *What nonsense, take a look at the website of the Robert Koch Institute.*

Schoolboy 1: *Paris!*

Schoolboy 2: *Hey, I had Corona and was in the hospital for two weeks.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *With an ordinary flu, you also feel bad for two weeks.*

Schoolgirl 1: *Do you actually know how many dead people there are?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Well, how many? Do you know?*

Schoolgirl 1: *Millions!*

Female Corona demonstrator (ironically): *Oh, millions, well, who says that?*

Schoolgirl 1: *The people who have finished their occupational training.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *That's worldwide, man, and not millions, but one million. In Germany we have just 10,000, that's much fewer than during an ordinary flu.*

Schoolboy 1 to schoolgirl 1: *Come on, stop it, they have an answer for everything and don't change their minds anyway.*

Schoolgirl 2: *But that the virus exists, you believe, right?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *At least it hasn't been proven. Dr. Fuellermich is preparing a lawsuit against Dr. Drosten and Merkel because of the PCR test.*

Schoolgirl 2 (takes out her cell phone): *What's his name again?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Dr. Fuellermich.*

Schoolgirl 2: *Ah, I found him: Fuellmich. Did you say he's a virologist?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *No, I didn't say that.*

Schoolgirl 2 (triumphantly): *Do you know what he is? He's a lawyer!*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Yes, he is a lawyer, google him and see what he says!*

Schoolgirl 2 (turns away to follow her departing group, but then turns around again): *I just did, he's a lawyer! But you don't have a clue, he's not a doctor at all, oh man, you really don't get it!*

Female Corona demonstrator (also walking away, shouting): *Yes, he is a lawyer and works with Doctors without Borders!*

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Notes

1 The law passed with the votes of the CDU/CSU [Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union in Bavaria], SPD [Social Democratic Party], FDP [Free Democratic Party], and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen [Alliance 90/The Greens] parties and the abstention of the far-right AfD [Alternative for Germany] and Die Linke [The Left]. It was modified twice: on May 19, 2020 and on November 18, 2020.

2 In German: Freiheit, Gleichheit, Geschwisterlichkeit!

3 GG is the abbreviation for the *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* [Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany].

4 Reichsbürger means “citizens of the Reich”; the term refers to a movement rejecting the legitimacy of today's German republic.

5 Christian Drosten (*1972) is a German virologist who has been a professor at the Charité hospital and research institute in Berlin since 2017 and is also head of the virology department of Europe's largest commercial clinic laboratory, Labor Berlin—Charité Vivantes Services GmbH. He was involved in the development of the world's first test for the diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 and became known in Germany through his advisory activities for the government and his weekly podcast “Corona Update”, which has been broadcast by the radio station Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) since the end of February 2020.

6 The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) is a research institute under the authority of the Federal Ministry of Health and headquartered in Berlin with public health care as its central task.

7 He refers to the book *Propaganda* by Edward L. Bernays from 1928.

8 Sucharit Bhakdi (*1946) is a German specialist in microbiology and infectious disease epidemiology who was Professor at the Institute of Medical Microbiology and Hygiene at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany, from 1991 until his retirement in 2012. Together with his wife, the German biochemist Karina Reiß (*1974), in 2016 he published the book *Schreckgespenst Infektionen. Mythen, Wahn und Wirklichkeit* [Bogeyman Infections. Myths, Delusion, and Reality], which critically examined the fear of viruses. In March 2020, he published several videos in which he relativized the danger posed by SARS-CoV-2 and warned against scaremongering. In June 2020, he and his wife published the book *Corona Fehlalarm? Daten, Fakten, Hintergründe* (translated as *Corona, False Alarm? Facts and Figures*), in which he argues against the federal government's Corona policy and novel vaccines against SARS-CoV-2. The German-language book was number one on *Der Spiegel* magazine's bestseller list for weeks and reached number one on the bestseller lists in Austria and Switzerland. The book and his videos have become a widely cited reference in the protest movement, but are mostly criticized and dismissed by the established media outlets, which the protesters usually refer to as “mainstream media”.

9 Wolfgang Wodarg (*1947) is a German physician. From 1994 to 2010, he was a member of the German Bundestag for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe responsible primarily for security, medical, and health issues. He was the initiator of the Council of Europe's investigations into pandemic H1N1 2009/10 and the role of the pharmaceutical industry and WHO. Along with Sucharit Bhakdi, he was one of the first to speak out critically, mostly on various YouTube channels and on his website wodarg.com, against the measures taken by the German government to contain SARS-CoV-2. In his view, the virus was no more danger-

ous than other coronaviruses, the reporting was scare-mongering, and the measures were disproportionate; just as with swine flu, the main aim was apparently to sell vaccines. Wolfgang Wodarg thus also became a leading figure in the protest scene and at the same time was strongly criticized in the official media and institutions. Among other things, Transparency International, of which Wolfgang Wodarg was a board member, distanced itself from him and suspended his membership. Later, he became part of the *Stiftung Corona-Ausschuss* [Corona Committee Foundation] founded by lawyers Antonia Fischer, Viviane Fischer, Justus Hoffmann, and Reiner Fuellmich, who have been providing critical commentary on corona policy since July 2020 in the form of live sessions lasting several hours, broadcast on YouTube, during which they invite and interview numerous guests. These “committee meetings” also have a great impact on the protest scene (cf. <https://corona-ausschuss.de>).

10 This refers to the report *Coronakrise 2020 aus Sicht des Schutzes Kritischer Infrastrukturen. Auswertung der bisherigen Bewältigungsstrategie und Handlungsempfehlungen* [Corona Crisis 2020 from a Critical Infrastructure Protection Perspective. Evaluation of the Coping Strategy to Date and Recommendations for Action] by Stephan Kohn (*1962), a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and senior government advisor in the KM 4 Department of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior. He worked in the Department of Crisis Management and Civil Protection, where he was an advisor in the area of critical infrastructures. His May 7, 2020 report takes a critical look at the measures taken to protect the spread of SARS-CoV-2. According to the report, the Robert Koch Institute is not producing a valid database, the pandemic is a false alarm, and the “collateral damage” of the measures exceed the damage caused by the virus. The report was designed as an internal document, but was made public by the right-wing online magazine *Tichys Einblick*. The Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Government distanced themselves from the report, saying it was the private opinion of an employee who had acted without a mandate. Kohn was subsequently relieved of his duties with the argument that, by using the Ministry’s letterhead, he had created the false appearance that his private opinion reflected the official view of the authority (Cf. *BUNDESMINISTERIUM DES INNERN, FÜR BAU UND HEIMAT 2020*; *KOHN 2020*).

11 This slogan refers to the *Gib AIDS keine Chance* [Don’t give AIDS a chance] campaign, which was initiated by the German Federal Center for Health Education in 1987 and ran until 2016 to raise awareness among the population about the dangers of HIV infection.

12 Legida is the abbreviation for *Leipzig gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* [Leipzig Against the Islamization of the Occident]. Legida is an offshoot of the political movement Pegida, which is the abbreviation for *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* [Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident]. This movement began with demonstrations in Dresden at the end of 2014 and has formed nu-

merous offshoots with modified names in various cities besides Leipzig.

13 Bodo Schiffmann, a physician who became very well known due to his early criticism of the Corona policy (cf. footnote 14), reacted in his YouTube videos to the designation of the critics as “tin foil hats” with the call to make small balls out of aluminum foil and to use them as a sign and expression of protest. At the beginning of the movement, many protesters did this.

14 Bodo Schiffmann (*1968) is a German ear, nose, and throat specialist, specialized in the treatment of vertigo. In this role, he runs the YouTube channel *Schwindelambulanz Sinsheim Dr. Bodo Schiffmann* with advice for patients. Shortly after the pandemic was declared, he began to critically examine the government’s protective measures in the videos and later opened the YouTube channel *Alles außer Mainstream*, where he regularly commented on the current situation. In the protest scene, his assessments became an important reference. He was a co-founder of the party *Widerstand 2020* [Resistance 2020], which was established in the course of the protests. He left the party a short time later and co-founded the party *Wir 2020* [We 2020], from which he also left a short time later.

15 KenFM.de is a web portal, launched in 2012, of a journalist with the pseudonym Ken Jebesen (*1966). Jebesen also runs a YouTube channel of the same name that already focused intensely on conspiracy theories long before Corona.

16 In German: mit alten Begriffen wie Verschwörungstheoretiker, -erzähler oder -ideologen, Nazis, Faschisten, Antisemiten, Esoteriker, Schwurbler, Impfspinner und Aluhuträger oder mit neuen Begriffen wie Covidioten und Corona-Leugner, nicht selten und zunehmend auch als Radikale, Extremisten, Kriminelle, Gefährder, Terroristen oder Mörder.

17 Surprisingly, the current situation is only rarely compared to the old Federal Republic and the protests against the Notstandsgesetze [German Emergency Acts] in Western Germany in 1968.

18 See footnote 14.

19 In German: *Verschwörungslügner*innen, Coronazis, Zeugen Coronas, Systemlinge oder Schlafschafe*. The English version of *Schlafschafe* is *sheep*, a portmanteau of “sheep” and “people” that refers to people who tend to blindly follow the crowd.

20 See footnote 8 and 15.

21 See footnote 14.

22 See footnote 9.

23 *CORRECTIV. Recherchen für die Gesellschaft* [Research for Society] is a foundation-funded journalism project in Germany that started in 2014 and, according to its website, currently has 45 employees. It describes its goal as to “conduct long-term investigations in the public interest and uncover systematic abuses, corruption and unethical behavior. Our investigations are characterized by depth and factual accuracy. This is more important than ever in a digital society and today’s globalized world. Whether it is tax fraud, illegal party financing or intentional fake news—we want to make visible where power is being abused. In doing so, we always keep an eye on the global dimensions of corrup-

tion, exploitation and the undermining of democratic processes. With our investigations, we bring important issues into public discourse” (cf. <https://correctiv.org/en/about-us/>). Correctiv is thus one of the so-called “fact checkers” and, among other things, has been working with Facebook since 2017, checking posts that users have reported as fake news.

24 Daniele Ganser (*1972) is a Swiss historian who in 2001 published his doctoral thesis on *NATO's Secret Armies. Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe*. He works as a freelance author and is a much-cited reference in German conspiracy culture, especially with regard to his texts and lectures on the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. He has also been critical of the Corona measures.

25 *Rubikon* is a donation-funded website from Germany, founded by Jens Wernecke (*1977) in 2017, that publishes contributions from various authors mostly on current political events. Sorted by the keywords Facade Democracy & Deep State, Media & Ideology Criticism, War & Peace, Poor & Rich, Education & Welfare, Nature & Environment, Hope & Utopia, the contributions have been widely cited in what is called here conspiracy culture (cf. <https://rubikon.news/>).

26 Connewitz is a traditionally left-wing district of Leipzig.

27 See footnote 12.

28 Heidenau, a town of 16,000 people in Saxony near Dresden, was the scene of riots against asylum seekers in 2015.

29 Friedrich Pürner, as head of the public health department in the Bavarian district of Aichach-Friedberg, has criticized the Corona measures and the statements from Prime Minister Markus Söder several times, including publicly, and was subsequently transferred to the Landesamt für Gesundheitsamt und Lebensmittelsicherheit [State Office of Public Health and Food Safety] (LGL) in the fall of 2020. Pürner himself interpreted the transfer as punitive (SEBALD 2020).

30 See footnote 5.

31 *maiLab* is a multiply award-winning YouTube channel founded in 2016 by the German chemist Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim (*1987). In collaboration with an editorial team, she regularly covers topics from the field of natural sciences. The channel is produced by “Funk”, a “content network” of the German public broadcasters ARD and ZDF, which is designed to appeal to young people aged 14-29 (cf. <https://funk.net/>). She was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany on October 1, 2020 for her work in communicating science, which extends beyond the YouTube channel to podcasts, books, and television appearances.

32 See footnote 8.

33 *Die Partei* [The Party] is a party founded by members of the German satirical magazine *Titanic* in 2004, whose actual name is *Die Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und Basisdemokratische Initiative* [The Party for Labor, the Rule of Law, Animal Protection, Elite Promotion, and Grassroots Democratic Initiative].

34 On March 18, Federal Chancellor Angelika Merkel gave a speech on television in which she forcefully tried

to make clear to all citizens the seriousness of the situation. Among other things, she said the sentences that were widely quoted afterwards: “This is serious. Since German reunification, no, since the Second World War, there has not been a challenge for our country in which action in a spirit of solidarity on our part was so important.” Getting the coronavirus epidemic under control was “a historic task—and it can only be mastered if we face it together”(MERKEL 2020).

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Lehrforum

Wir fragten Medizinethnolog*innen nach Texten, Büchern, Filmen oder anderen Medien, die sie in der medizinanthropologischen Lehre immer wieder gerne einsetzen. Uns interessiert: Warum eignet sich der Text bzw. das Medium besonders gut für die medizinanthropologische Lehre? Was kann an ihm gut aufgezeigt oder diskutiert werden? Zu welchen Einsichten führt dies bei Studierenden? Und inwiefern lässt sich mit den diskutierten Texten bzw. Medien gut weiterdenken?

Wir freuen uns, dass wir mit diesem Anliegen auf so positive Resonanz gestoßen sind und präsentieren hier den ersten Teil einer als lose Folge geplanten Serie, der kurze essayistische Texte, theoretische Review-Artikel und persönliche Rückblicke auf langjährige Lehrerfahrung einschließt. Wir hoffen, dass die Beiträge den Anfang eines längerfristigen Austausches und gegenseitiger Inspiration bezüglich medizinanthropologischer Lehre darstellen werden. Wer Interesse hat, für eines der folgenden Curare-Hefte einen Text auf Deutsch oder Englisch zu schreiben, ist herzlich eingeladen, sich bei der Redaktion zu melden: curare@agem.de

Teaching Forum

We asked medical anthropologists about the texts, books, films or other media that they like to use in teaching. We were interested in the following questions: Why is a specific text or medium especially suitable for teaching medical anthropology? What can be demonstrated or discussed particularly well using the text or medium in question?

We are pleased to have received such positive responses and present here the first part of a series, which includes short essayistic texts, theoretical review articles and personal reviews of many years of teaching experience. We hope that the contributions will be the beginning of long-term exchange and mutual inspiration regarding medical anthropology teaching. Anyone interested in writing a text in German or English for a forthcoming Curare issue is welcome to contact the editorial board at curare@agem.de

Covidography

Teaching Ethnographic Methods in a Pandemic

RACHEL IRWIN

Introduction

In this article, I introduce the idea of *covidography*, arguing that ethnographies of Covid-19 offer an opportunity for methodological innovation. I discuss the practical case of an undergraduate assignment in the course “Cultural Perspectives on Health, Lifestyle and Medicine” at Lund University. The students typically write a short ethnography based on in-person fieldwork. However, due to Covid-19 the assignment had to be re-oriented so that much of the fieldwork could be done online. I reflect on teaching online ethnographic methods and discuss practical considerations, many of which relate to working with international students. Additionally, by **modifying the assignment**, I was forced to engage more systematically with the literature on online ethnographic methods. This offers a reminder that teaching has the potential to reinvent our research.

In early spring 2020, I was excited to take over the course “Cultural Perspectives on Health, Lifestyle and Medicine” at Lund University from a colleague who had recently moved on to a different position. The course is a general medical ethnology course for undergraduates, which also draws upon anthropology, history, art history and the medical humanities in general. I had taught the course previously, but I was looking forward to taking on the course coordination responsibilities and making a few changes. Since the course always runs from March to June, I had plenty of time at the beginning of the term to calmly plan.

However, the 6th of March 2020 was hardly a good time for a new course to start, certainly not one popular amongst exchange students. Already that week a handful of students had notified me that they were being recalled by their home universities, and this continued into the following week. I did not fully grasp the seriousness of what

was to come until our neighbours, the Danes, announced on the evening of the 11th of March that they were closing public universities and schools, along with non-essential public services. On the 12th, we awakened to the news that the US would be implementing a travel ban. While it was later clarified that the ban did not include US citizens, this was not communicated initially and many of my American students rushed to book flights before the ban went into effect. Finally, on the 18th of March our university moved to online teaching at the recommendation of the Swedish government.

In the midst of the chaos, I needed to modify one of the course’s main assignments: the students work in groups to carry out an ethnographic project in which they observe, describe and analyse a health or wellness-related phenomenon in society. For many students this is their first experience of ethnography. In previous years, examples of their projects have included participant observation at yoga studios, vegan restaurants and doctor’s offices. They present their observations in a short paper and a 5-minute presentation.

In the sections that follow, I discuss how the assignment was re-oriented so that the students could still complete the project. I reflect on teaching online ethnographic methods, and discuss some practical considerations, many of which relate to working with international students. I also introduce the idea of *covidography*, suggesting that ethnographies of Covid-19 offer an opportunity for methodological innovations.

Covidographies

Anthropology is not short on jargon, so I hesitate to introduce *covidography* as a new term. However, I think it is useful to differentiate between ethnographies of Covid-19 and ethnographies of oth-

er pandemics, epidemics and disease outbreaks. Excellent ethnographies have been written about infectious disease, not least the recent Ebola in West Africa (2014-2016) in which anthropologists played a role in the public health response (ABRAMOWITZ 2017; VENABLES & PELLECCCHIA 2017). However, with very few exceptions (VENABLES 2017), the practicalities of conducting fieldwork whilst minimising the risk of contagion are not discussed. This is perhaps in part because too often in journal articles we gloss over our methods, eager to get on to the findings. Other research has taken place after the risk for contagion was over, for instance in BRITTA LUNDGREN's work on narcolepsy as a side effect of the H1N1 vaccine after the 2009-2010 pandemic (LUNDGREN 2017). Some diseases, such as AIDS, are not spread via respiratory contact or objects so in-person fieldwork does not present the same sort of risks. Anthropologists have also studied the work around a pandemic, for instance political decision-making or public health bureaucracies. Others have focussed more on the theoretical aspects of infectious disease, rather than collecting new empirical material. In much of the literature, there may be allusions to adapting fieldwork when in-person access is not feasible, but the practicalities of this are rarely discussed.

Covid-19 is different. While not everyone is equally at risk for infection or severe disease, everyone can be infected. Many of our in-person methods are not feasible or even legal under various restrictions. The world is more digital than in previous outbreaks, which means we also have new tools for field work as well as new venues for data collection, such as social media platforms. For these reasons, a *covidography* is not simply an ethnography about Covid-19, but rather it presents a platform for methodological innovation.

The Covidography assignment

On the 13th of March, my colleague gave a lecture on medical ethnography, and I came to the lecture hall to check on the students and address their concerns. At that time we were still doing in-person education, so I talked about ways of doing the assignment while also maintaining physical distance during participant observation. Howev-

er, once we moved to online education the following week it was clear that the assignment would need to change and that in-person participation observation would not be possible in many cases.

I sent a request for good sources on online ethnography to the *Anthropology Matters* mailing list, and immediately had nearly 100 responses: this sense of community is one of the best things to have happened in this awful situation. HEIKKI WILENIUS, from the University of Helsinki, put together the responses in a Google Document (WILENIUS 2020) Through these exchanges, I also was alerted to Deborah Lupton's Google Document on doing fieldwork in a pandemic, which includes links to practical fieldwork advice (LUPTON 2020). Since much of the research on infectious disease lacks in-depth discussions of methods, the Lupton document is particularly helpful.

The crowd-sourced documents are quite substantial, but there were so many resources that I felt it may have been overwhelming, especially for students new to ethnography. I summarised some of the main themes in the literature in a short video uploaded to our online learning platform, *Canvas*. I also provided two readings: DANIEL MILLER's entry on "Digital Anthropology" in the Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology (MILLER 2018) and an article by LEESA COSTELLO and colleagues on netnography from the International Journal of Qualitative Methods (COSTELLO *et al.* 2017). These were both open access publications, so there were no problems with the students accessing them remotely. I also chose them because they are clearly written: not all ethnographers write in a way that is accessible for people new to the field!

While I have used the term online ethnography in this short piece, there are many terms that are often overlapping but also distinct: digital ethnography, virtual ethnography, cyber ethnography, or what PETER LUGOSI and colleagues have called "investigative research on the Internet (IRI)" (LUGOSI *et al.* 2012). In their article, COSTELLO and colleagues start with the history of the term "netnography," drawing upon ROBERT V. KOZINET's 2002 definition to describe it as a qualitative research methodology "that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through

electronic networks.” (KOZINET in COSTELLO *et al.* 2017: 2). Their article also provides an overview of the debates on terminology and offers inspiration for different ways of approaching data collection and analysis.

MILLER’S chapter takes a broad approach to “the digital” as a concept, covering the ways digital technologies are used by anthropologists and the people we study and how social relations are restructured around them. The chapter also uses many examples to explain why we “can only understand new digital worlds in the context of wider social relations and practices” (MILLER 2018:1)

Of the 14 submissions by the students, 13 were about Covid-related phenomena. The submissions included material from Canada, Sweden, Spain, the US, Austria, Turkey, France, Norway, Japan, Singapore, Iceland, Italy, the UK, Germany, and South Korea. Some reports compared the restrictions and norms in different countries, such as mask wearing, shopping behaviour, and the way health workers have been celebrated. These were short undergraduate assignments and not systematic studies, so one should hesitate to draw conclusions. However, I was struck by the universality of the themes: while there is a range of lived experiences during Covid-19, the students—regardless of country-context—focussed on similar topics: isolation, stress, uncertainty and frustration. More positively, they also looked at successful internet socializing and the way people organized to help those in risk groups.

Students studied their topic using a mix of approaches. Some focused on social media (including memes) and looked at platforms such as Tiktok, Instagram and Facebook. Many carried out interviews via online tools, but also drew upon informal conversations, physically distanced observations (for example, in parks), and online surveys. One student was a health worker and offered autoethnographic insights from her experiences in a nursing home. Returning to the idea of *co-vidography* as methodological innovation, these are ways in which some of the projects hinted at unconventional approaches to gathering data and engaging with communities via the internet.

Practical considerations

Teaching during a pandemic requires practical considerations, just as much as methodological ones because of the way it has re-arranged our social relations. For example, our closest international airport is across the border in Denmark (40 minutes by train). Because the Danes had shut the border, many of my students had trouble getting home and had to rebook flights via Stockholm, a journey that required at least 5 hours on two trains in the middle of a pandemic. This was very stressful and meant I needed to be flexible with deadlines and expectations.

In moving the course online, I also had to consider time zones. I decided against holding live online lectures and instead recorded lectures so that students could watch at their convenience. I also struggled to move some material online. Normally, several copies of the course textbooks are available in the library as references. I contacted the author of one textbook who was unable to provide a digital copy of the book due to legal restrictions. A further complication was that I could not formally make any changes to the reading list during the term. Looking forward, as many of us are moving to online education for the near future, it is important to make sure that seminar readings and textbooks are available online and open access.

Finally, the students were living in different countries with various public health restrictions. Some were self-isolating, while others were in quarantine. This meant that they had different opportunities to collect and analyse data. I also choose not to require a presentation, so that the students only submitted a paper. This was easier for them to work on in groups when, for example, five people could be in five different time zones. If it had been an individual assignment, then short video recordings would have worked well.

Conclusion

For too long, I saw online ethnographic methods as an add-on to “regular” ethnography. Yet, our world has changed to the extent that in most cases, it would be difficult to do ethnographic research without engaging with the internet. This is exemplified by Covid-19: our views of the pandemic are

mediated through internet media, including the news, and we communicate via online tools. By modifying the assignment, I was forced to engage more systematically with the literature on online ethnographic methods. As I have been researching how the international media has reported on Sweden's handling of the pandemic, this has been incredibly useful for my own work (IRWIN 2020). Many of us at some point have felt that teaching gets in the way of time spent researching, but my experience with this course provides a reminder that teaching can also reinvigorate our work. What is more, I appreciated the insights from my students and reading about their experiences from across the globe helped me to feel connected during a stressful time. Finally, although the pandemic is undeniably horrible, I also see it as an opportunity to energize anthropology and ethnography. At times, online ethnographic methods have been sidelined or stereotyped as “not real research” (GÓRALSKA 2020:48). *Covidography* presents a methodological wake-up call for all of us to rethink our fieldwork methods and our relationship to the online world, and to learn from colleagues who have many years of experience with online ethnographic research.

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Teaching Medical Anthropology in Front of the Screen

A Short Essay on Online Teaching With Medical Students During Summer Term 2020 in Austria

MARGRET JAEGER & AFSANEH GAECHTER

Introduction

The SARS-Cov-2 pandemic has created new challenges for teaching. The goal of this paper is to analyze and reflect on the previously unknown measures we have taken and the problems we have encountered teaching the module “Diversity in Medicine” during the national lockdown at a university in Austria. The module “Diversity in medicine” is aimed at medical students in their 6th semester and is organized for a maximum of 245 students. Between February and April, medical students (including dental medicine) followed a course in diversity competence. The prevention measures implemented by the Austrian government in March 2020 led to a large part of the teaching being done online, but this caused some problems for teachers and students. The text reflects on some general issues related to this and then illustrates the specific situation in which teaching took place during the summer term 2020 (February to April). The authors are the module coordinator (Jaeger) and one of the teachers (Gaechter).

In the module, social sciences, especially medical anthropology, are taught to medical students according to the requirements of the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME). They state that the “behavioural and social sciences, medical ethics and medical jurisprudence would provide the knowledge, concepts, methods, skills and attitudes necessary for understanding socio-economic, demographic and cultural determinants of causes, distribution and consequences of health problems as well as knowledge about the national health care system and patients’ rights.” (WFME 2015: 22). These standards are mandatory for any new programme that wants to obtain international accreditation by the WFME.

The module “Diversity in Medicine”

Under the umbrella of “Diversity in Medicine”, 115 units (synchronous and asynchronous learning situations) are allocated to transmit knowledge, create awareness and enhance the competences of medical students to deal with patients and colleagues in a globalized world (see also CARRESE & MARSHALL 2003; DOGRA, REIMANOVA & CARTER-POKRAS 2009). Physicians are amongst the most mobile professionals worldwide (IOM 2014; JOURDAIN, PHAM & SAUL 2017) and patients also seek healthcare in public and private institutions throughout the world (GLINOS *et al.* 2010; LUNT & MANNION 2014). Training of this kind is therefore fundamental for the provision of high-quality care.

A maximum number of 245 persons in their 6th semester attend the module between February and April of each year. The group of students itself is framed by diversity: at least 50% of them have German citizenship, most of whom came to Austria for education. The gender balance is more or less equal; there is little ethnic diversity with a focus on white Europeans, but at least 30% of the students stated that they have parents or grandparents who were not born either in Austria or in Germany. The religious background, when asked, shows a majority of non-practising Christians.¹

While the planning for this module starts every October, the summer term 2020 turned out to be different, as it was at many universities worldwide. In the following section we talk about the difficulties that arose as a result of the lockdown due to the SARS-Cov-2-pandemic emergency regulations in Austria. These regulations were in force between 16 March and 30 April, which meant that Austrian universities finished the semester online.

Consequences of the pandemic containment restrictions in March 2020

The module was started normally with an inaugural lecture on diversity on 17 February. Other course content was taught in the classroom until 13 March, including group sessions for discussion (max. 20 students and a moderator) about “death and dying in a cultural/religious context”. As this is a sensitive topic, it seemed important to us that these group sessions still took place in person.

For the group of students affected by the 2020 COVID-19 measures, the module ended under great difficulties. While an online teaching platform was quickly established, no training was offered to us as teachers. Fortunately, the free Moodle platform and our knowledge about its use, together with some YouTube tutorials helped us to offer learning opportunities for the students. As there was a significant increase in the production of COVID-19-related social sciences content which was freely available on the internet, often within blogs, we were able to create a separate section about the ongoing pandemic with Moodle.² Due to the high (organizational) workload of all this, it was not possible to include any lecture about epidemics for this year.

One important factor that had a major influence on how things developed, a factor that we did not immediately recognize, was that at least one-third of all students became engaged in “COVID emergency” help in hospitals in Austria and Germany. They were therefore rarely available for synchronous online teaching situations. Having a high number of students who had migrated in order to attend university here also meant that many of them, originally from Germany, moved back to Germany during the summer term to work or study at or from home. This physical disintegration of the group made it impossible to offer in-house teaching in small groups after April. The official position of the faculty was in favour of online-teaching and therefore the teaching had to be adapted to this reality. As personal experience improves the comprehension of reality, in this case medical practice, the medical students acquire an insight into the challenges of decision-making and ethics related to the pandemic. To support the reflection process and to offer a forum for questions, a planned lecture on intercultural ethics

was adapted. A teacher from Germany, namely a physician and researcher locally and regionally involved in clinical ethical discussions about therapy decisions for Covid-19 patients, offered an online discussion on this issue. Synchronous online teaching, as officially required, offers new opportunities that had not been possible before, as inviting guests that lived far away involved costs that would be too high to bring them in in person. Recording lectures in advance also meant an opportunity to be independent of any person-related teaching impairment. As the module takes place in winter moving into spring, there is always a higher risk of a teacher ill health (influenza season, and now SARS-Cov-2) that requires a decision to cancel on the day or to find a quick substitution, which is stressful for everybody. From this point of view, the pandemic created more openness and flexibility for teachers and the coordinator.

During different online sessions, it was evident that students with previous experience in healthcare (either nurses or paramedics) or current experience in COVID-19 emergency response were more active in the sessions. The reported cases from their colleagues’ practical experience helped others to grasp different notions of practising diversity management in healthcare. This is especially important to students in the 6th semester who often still do not have internship experience and can hardly relate to different life realities outside their own milieu. In a hospital, whether publicly or privately funded, the patients’ backgrounds are most probably marked by diversity and therefore an excellent learning setting. The existing diversity in the hospital is at the same time an optimal field practice for students to get to know the various factors of socio-cultural heterogeneity by means of concrete communication models and to become familiar with the topic. Such case-based teaching is a standard in medical education that has proved to be very effective (THISTLETHWAITE *et al.* 2012). One aspect that is particularly interesting for anthropologists/social scientists is raised by Jaeger on the basis of her 10 years of experience using cases from practice in teaching health professionals: as social scientists we are interested in the whole story of a case and we try to be as holistic as possible in our description of it. Health students and health professionals in practice often bring cases into the classroom

that, from our perspective, lack information. That means in practice that we might not have information on some social determinants of the patient and often do not learn how the situation ended – it ends for us when the night or day shift ended or when the patient was handed over from the Emergency Room to the ward. This seems to be frustrating, but it is real life data, and sometimes information is missing (often the context of a patient’s current health status).

While writing this text, the faculty’s plan for teaching for the winter term offers the possibility of teaching in-person groups of up to 20 persons. Organizing teaching in these uncertain times also means including uncertainty in planning, a challenge for every coordinator that should be acknowledged much more by institutions, so that they can determine what support is required.

Conclusion and reflection

To conclude, managing diversity training during a pandemic is difficult because it needs personal interaction between people to guarantee learning outcomes such as developing communication skills. Interactions between teachers and students is currently limited to computer screens, it is dependant on the (in)stability of internet connections and shaped by different and sometimes conflicting working schedules. The switch to online teaching has fundamentally changed communication between students and teachers. In face-to-face teaching, students have the opportunity to share their experiences in small groups through case studies they analyse or experience and provide helpful feedback for their fellow students and teachers. Teaching in times of a pandemic is, for both sides, students and teachers, tiring, demotivating and reduces interaction between participants. This needs to be addressed at the beginning and strategies to diminish these aspects should be applied, as some colleagues recently suggested in a paper called “How to Combat Zoom Fatigue” (FOSSLIEN, L. & DUFFY, M. W. 2020). Online teaching challenges us to rethink the way we have been teaching until now and to develop new forms so that we are not relegated to a kind of teacher-centred ‘chalk-and-talk’ with learning outcomes that are assumed to be poor.

Notes

- 1 It is part of the module to ask about student diversity at the beginning of each course using the software poll (internal documentation).
- 2 Cf. these sources: <https://www.coronatimes.net/>; <http://somatosphere.net/tag/covid-19/>; Journal Open Anthropology Research with two special issues about Covid-19: <https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/opan/opan-overview.xml?lang=en>

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Zu Besuch beim Hausarzt

Dr. Perino über die Schulter schauen

MARGRET JÄGER

Die Vermittlung medizinanthropologischer Grundlagen ist bedeutsam für die gute Praxis in der Aus- und Weiterbildung von Gesundheitspersonal und weltweit bereits teilweise fixer Bestandteil der Bildungspläne. Filme und Videos sind in der Lehre eine gute Möglichkeit, Themen rund um Gesundheit und Erkrankung zu beobachten und zu analysieren. Weiter lassen sich anhand von Filmen gut Gruppenarbeiten organisieren und Endergebnisse in Diskussionsrunden präsentieren, wobei fachliche Argumente ebenso Eingang finden wie persönliche Erfahrungen und dem jeweiligen Gesundheitsberuf zugeordnete Handlungskompetenzen.

Der französische Dokumentarfilm „La Consultation“ (2006) eignet sich besonders für den Einsatz in der Lehre mit Gesundheitspersonal in unterschiedlichen Aus- und Weiterbildungsstufen, vor allem für den europäischen Raum. Er präsentiert in 15 Sequenzen den Arbeitsalltag von Dr. Luc Perino in seiner Hausarztpraxis in Lyon. Es werden Konsultationen von Patient*innen, teilweise in Begleitung von Angehörigen, sowie ein Besuch in einem Pflegeheim in Sequenzen zwischen 5 und 12 Minuten gezeigt. Medizinanthropologische Themen wie biomedizinische Erklärungsmodelle, gesellschaftlicher Umgang mit psychischen Erkrankungen, Stigma, Körpererfahrungen, Arzt-Patienten-Kommunikation, „cultural formulation of distress“ (ARNAULT & SHIMABUKURO 2012) sowie Alter und Sterben lassen sich ebenso diskutieren wie Gesundheitssystemrelevante Aspekte und Gesundheitspolitik. Darüber hinaus wird über die filmische Darstellung ärztliche Praxis und das Verhalten, die Meinungen und Wertvorstellungen von Patient*innen und Angehörigen beobachtbar und analysierbar, und kann so als Grundlage für die Entwicklung von Verbesserungsvorschlägen dienen.

Die Regisseurin Hélène de Crécy begleitet den französischen Hausarzt Luc Perino bei seiner Arbeit inner- und außerhalb seiner Praxisräumlichkeiten in Lyon. Er ist auch Spezialist für Tropenkrankheiten und hat berufliche Auslandserfahrungen. Ein Teil seiner Patient*innen hat einen Migrationshintergrund. Die Filmsprache ist Französisch, es besteht jedoch die Möglichkeit, Untertitel in Deutsch oder Englisch einzustellen. Die 15 Sequenzen des Films lassen sich unabhängig voneinander abspielen.

In den Sequenzen werden alltägliche Praxiskonsultationen gezeigt. Die Filmemacherin ist während der Filmsequenzen nicht sichtbar. Manchmal spricht der Arzt jedoch nach den Konsultationen Kommentare direkt in die Kamera, sodass das Gefühl entsteht, dass hinter dieser jemand steht, an den oder die die Worte gerichtet sind. Diese Kommentare sind aufschlussreich für die Analyse seiner persönlichen Haltung als Arzt gegenüber den Patient*innen und Angehörigen und lassen Rückschlüsse auf seine Meinungen und Werte zu. Als Betrachtende des Films sind Studierende und Lehrende als Dritte nicht physisch involviert und können daher mit Distanz über medizinische Praxis reflektieren.

Ein weiterer Vorteil des Videos ist die Möglichkeit, dieses anzuhalten und Sequenzen teilweise oder ganz zu wiederholen. Es hat sich bewährt eine Sequenz zuerst im Ganzen zu zeigen und danach Beobachtungsrollen an die Studierenden zu vergeben: Ein Teil der Gruppe achtet auf die Patientin/den Patienten bzw. die Angehörigen und der andere Teil der Gruppe achtet auf den Arzt. Das Anhalten der Sequenz ermöglicht außerdem Verständnisfragen ad hoc zu klären, z. B. bei Erklärungsmodellen der Patient*innen oder auch Fragen zu Besonderheiten des französischen Gesundheitssystems, um den Fortlauf weiterhin zu verstehen.

Je nach Zielgruppe eignen sich die Sequenzen für die Diskussion unterschiedlicher Themen, die sich auch überschneiden:

Arzt-Patienten-Kommunikation bzw. Kommunikation mit Begleitpersonen: Folgende Szene verdeutlicht dies: Ein bi-kulturelles Studentenpaar kommt mit dem Wunsch zum Arzt, die für eine Abtreibung nötige Überweisung zu erhalten. Das Paar hat sich bereits entschieden, muss jedoch argumentieren, und nach dem Verlassen des Raumes ist ein stark wertender Kommentar des Arztes zu beobachten. Hier sind Fachkenntnisse zum Thema Abtreibung in Frankreich nötig, die sich jedoch rasch recherchieren lassen.

„*Cultural formulation of distress*“ (ARNAULT & SHIMABUKURO 2012): Ein Patient nordafrikanischer Herkunft mit einer psychischen Erkrankung schildert seine Symptome in einer Sprache voller Metaphern, die auf andere Konzepte und Werte hindeutet als die des Arztes. Das Unverständnis des Arztes gegenüber den Erklärungen des Patienten ist durch seine Nachfragen und seine Mimik zu erkennen. Das ärztliche Ziel *Compliance* des Patienten bei der Einnahme von Medikamenten zu erreichen und der Weg dorthin sind ebenso beobachtbar. Hier lassen sich die Themen Kommunikation, Vorstellungen von Krankheiten und Therapie sowie das therapeutische Verständnis des Arztes diskutieren. Wichtige Aspekte in der Ausbildung von Mediziner*innen sind ärztliche Handlungskompetenz und eine gemeinsame Entscheidungsfindung. An dieser Sequenz lässt sich *bad practice* für die genannten Bereiche beobachten und lassen sich Verbesserungsvorschläge diskutieren.

Agency, Beziehungen und Heilung: In einer weiteren Sequenz sucht die Mutter des oben genannten Patienten den Arzt auf. Sie sorgt sich um ihren Sohn, schildert jedoch auch eigene Gesundheitsprobleme. Der Arzt geht nicht auf ihre Gesundheitsprobleme ein, sondern konzentriert sich ausschließlich auf die Verbesserung der Versorgung des Sohnes. Hier zeigt sich ebenfalls *bad practice* in der Kommunikation und es lässt sich die Bedeutung des Einbezugs des familiären Umfelds in der Therapie und Betreuung von psychisch erkrankten Personen diskutieren.

*Psychische Erkrankungen, Erklärungsmodelle der Schulmedizin versus der Patient*innen, Stigmatisierung:* In unterschiedlichen Sequenzen sind so-

wohl die Erklärungsmodelle der Patient*innen als auch des Arztes zu hören, die einen spannenden Einblick in die Lebensrealität und damit auch das französische Gesundheitssystem bieten. Die Sequenzen lassen es zu, in der Analyse in die Tiefe zu gehen und auch die systemische Sicht zu beleuchten. Als Beispiel sei hier das der jungen Frau anzuführen, die mit Halsproblemen kommt, als Raucherin identifiziert wird und daraufhin vom Arzt Stigmatisierung erfährt.

Körperlichkeit und Gesundheitspolitik (Mutterchaft, Erwartungen an Mütter, Medizin und Geschlecht): eine Mutter mit einem 10 Tage alten Baby sucht Hilfe bezüglich der Bauchschmerzen des Kindes. Sie wird mit einer stark abwertenden Haltung konfrontiert, weil sie das Baby nicht stillt. Sie schildert, dass sie sich nicht traute und vom Gesundheitspersonal im Krankenhaus nicht dazu angeregt wurde. Hier treffen Erwartungen der, nicht nur, französischen Gesundheitspolitik und die körperlichen Erfahrungen und damit verbundenen Ängste einer Frau, die sich noch in der Post-Partum-Phase befindet, aufeinander. Zu sehen ist auch wie routiniert der Hausarzt mit einem Neugeborenen umgeht, was auf seine Kenntnisse und Erfahrungen mit pädiatrischen Patient*innen verweist, eine Kompetenz die vor allem ältere Hausärzt*innen und auf dem Land Tätige noch besitzen.

Alter, Bilder vom Altern und Versorgung von kranken, alten Menschen, Pflege: Der Arzt besucht in einer Pflegeeinrichtung einen alten Mann, der in seinem Bett liegt, sich nicht bewegt und außer röchelnden Geräuschen kein Wort von sich gibt. Die Sequenz zeigt die prekäre Situation in französischen Pflegeheimen, verweist auf Einsamkeit im Alter und regt zur Reflexion bezüglich Altern, Erkrankung und Versorgung an.

Ich setze den Film „La Consultation“ seit sechs Jahren in der Lehre für die Bereiche Medizin, Pflegewissenschaft und Ergotherapie an unterschiedlichen Hochschulen ein, um die einzigartige Situation des Arzt-Patienten-Gesprächs aus einer beobachtenden Position heraus vielfältig mit Studierenden zu diskutieren sowie unterschiedliche Themengebiete der Medizinanthropologie anhand eines Beispiels aus der Praxis anzusprechen. Dabei lassen sich auch Reflexionseinheiten zum Rollenbild der ärztlichen Tätigkeit mit Medizinstudierenden gut thematisieren. Es hat sich

zeigt, dass Gesundheitspersonal in der Weiterbildung anders auf die Sequenzen reagiert als Studierende in der Grundausbildung. Das Ideal von guter Kommunikation der Studierenden konträrkt hier immer wieder mit der teils jahrzehntelangen Erfahrung von Gesundheitspersonal, das die Realität kennt und weniger offen für andere Perspektiven auf Situationen ist. Diese Herausforderung macht den Einsatz des Filmes jedoch umso bedeutsamer in der Weiterbildung von Gesundheitspersonal. Die Reaktionen der Studierenden auf den Film beweisen immer wieder, dass er eine gute Lernmöglichkeit darstellt, sowohl für die präsentierten Themen als auch viel allgemeiner für die Frage von der ärztlichen Konsultation als relationale Situation. Die eigene Erfahrung mit ärztlichen Konsultationen lässt sich hiermit auch

gut mit Studierenden aller Studienfächer reflektieren, und so ist das pädagogische Konzept Paulo Freires von der Erfahrung der Lernenden auszugehen gut anzuwenden, dass meinen Zugang zu Lehre prägt (FREIRE 1973).

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Teaching COVID-19 in a Multidisciplinary Team

Emphasizing Holism and the Relevance of Anthropology

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Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in widespread uncertainty in the United States (US) that is partly fueled by a lack of clear, credible information. At institutions of higher education, these factors have led to students seeking clarity about the pandemic, necessitating a holistic approach to teaching about COVID-19's origins and societal impacts. In this article, we show how we responded to students' interest in understanding COVID-19 through a multidisciplinary, short-term COVID-19 course that ultimately imparted to students the value of a holistic perspective and medical anthropology overall. Our course was led by an eight-person team comprising medical anthropologists, biologists, economists, and humanities scholars, and we taught the course twice during the spring and summer of 2020. In each rendition of our course, we described COVID-19's zoonotic origins; compared COVID-19 to previous pandemics; examined the global financial impacts of COVID-19; and explained the relationship between COVID-19 and longstanding social inequities in the US that underlie health disparities, with particular attention to racial inequality. We organized the course to feature a combination of scholarly and popular sources, and structured the course around the disciplinary expertise of the collaborators while intentionally creating deep transdisciplinary learning through a novel component that we called "corona hour." Through this course, we showed undergraduate students the importance of a holistic understanding of disease and thereby emphasized the value of an anthropological perspective without teaching an exclusively anthropology course, and also provided each faculty collaborator with a meaningful professional development experience.

Introduction

In the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in widespread uncertainty fueled by an inconsistent patchwork of state and federal government responses and a concomitant deluge of information with varying degrees of credibility (Mheidly & Fares 2020). The uncertainty at a national level is mirrored in institutions of higher education, creating a demand among university students to deeply understand the pandemic and its multiple consequences. As faculty at a liberal arts college, we felt compelled to respond to the pandemic in the way we best knew how: by designing a multidisciplinary four week "Coronamester" course that we taught in April and August of 2020—respectively coinciding with several states entering a "lockdown" phase of the pandemic and before our college began its fall semester. Our eight-person faculty team represented disciplines including biology, business, English literature, and medical anthropology. As a team, our course provided students with a holistic understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic that included historical comparisons, understanding its biological origins, assessing its micro and macroeconomic consequences, and highlighting the broader societal implications for vulnerable and marginalized populations. Through this multidisciplinary approach, we ultimately provided students with an understanding of COVID-19 rooted in the core principle of anthropology—holism—without teaching an exclusively anthropological course. This approach resulted in meaningful learning outcomes for students and provided the co-authors a purposeful collaborative professional experience.

The Class: Four Modules and Weekly “Corona Hours”

For our Coronamester course, we designed four modules around our disciplinary foci, each of which lasted one week. The modules included daily reading assignments and a combination of activities such as watching recorded lectures, short videos, and full-length films. Readings included a combination of peer-reviewed sources and popular materials related to the course and intended to be accessible supplements to the assigned peer-reviewed content. In the first iteration of the class, students were assigned to participate asynchronously in daily chat-room style discussions using Microsoft Teams software. In the second version of the class, we required students participate in discussions synchronously during a predetermined time of the day and allowed for discussions to occur via video and text-based chat. The first time we taught the course a total of 149 students enrolled, and the second time we had an enrollment of 61; in each iteration, students represented a variety of majors or intended majors, and the second iteration of the class was reserved for incoming, first-year students.

As part of the course design, we reserved one hour on Friday afternoons for the class’s unique feature: an hour-long discussion session we titled “corona hour.” We organized the corona hour as a townhall style meeting where faculty who designed the modules for the week asked the other instructors questions related to relevant news stories, directly tying in the course content to current events as they unfolded and emphasizing opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange. We also fielded questions from students, allowing them opportunities to ask questions related to breaking COVID-19 news. The corona hours modeled to students what transdisciplinary academic engagement around a particular topic looks like and showed them how to engage in civil dialogue around a contentious topic—a necessity given the heightened political polarization in the US, even around a public health crisis (JIANG *et al.* 2020). Further, the corona hours allowed for a deeply integrative, transdisciplinary, rather than serially interdisciplinary, approach to the course since it synthesized faculty members’ disciplinarily-informed perspectives on a weekly basis.

As students progressed through the course, they completed a summative assessment for each weekly module. In the second iteration of the course, the first three modules also included formative evaluations and a final evaluative assignment asking students to reflect on the course as a whole and what they gained from the multidisciplinary perspective. This reflection assignment provided us an opportunity to determine what students found valuable about the comparative nature of the course.

Course Outcomes

Upon completing our Coronamester courses, we found that students reported a deep understanding of COVID-19 through multiple disciplinary perspectives. As one student succinctly described their learning, “this course made me think about how the pandemic would affect me from every angle. Not just my physical health, but in terms of my mental health, financial stability, and my culture.” Further, some students noted that the course directly piqued their interest in social sciences, including anthropology. This was made possible in part through a deliberate focus on using key academic texts¹ and accessible sources² that aligned practical and theoretical concepts we determined students should have in understanding COVID-19.

The judicious selection of popular sources and films, coupled with a select number of academic and peer-reviewed publications, aided students’ understandings of complex issues related to the pandemic. For example, the team that taught on economic consequences of the pandemic included brief lectures and podcasts that provided a foundational understanding of economic principles needed to assess the financial implications of the pandemic that concerned students starting their college careers, including price gouging and shortages of necessities such as toilet paper (HAMILTON 2020). This approach also allowed for briefly describing the diversity of economic recovery possibilities and potential for governmental intervention that responded to students’ existing understanding of economics and also assuaged some of their personal concerns about future economic prospects.

In some modules, we strategically used lectures and discussions to not only provide founda-

tional knowledge needed to understand COVID-19, but also to make the content approachable. For example, biologists who taught the biological origins of COVID-19 were mindful that for many students in the US, biological sciences are intimidating. Faculty in that unit therefore used the opportunity to teach the students about zoonosis and coronaviruses generally, while also imparting to them lessons on scientific literacy, the processes of rigorous peer review, and how to understand information reported in popular media.

Moreover, through comparing the COVID-19 crisis to previous pandemics, our class fostered a comparative way of thinking. For example, colleagues from the humanities included first-person historical and fictional accounts of living through medieval plagues and the early days of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the US, comparing contemporary reporting on college students' corona parties to medieval festivals described in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death." Further, we aimed to ensure students had a timeline of previous pandemics from the late 19th century to present, comparing COVID-19 to the 1918 influenza and showing how pandemics are related to xenophobia and racism. These efforts situated the pandemic in a historical context and also countered some of the political narratives in the US that such a pandemic could have never been anticipated (BLAKE 2020). Additionally, as the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in tandem with renewed and pressing attention on structural racism in the US, we further aimed to emphasize how health disparities related to COVID-19 and other diseases are linked to anti-Black racism and systemic disenfranchisement. This comparative approach rooted in historical awareness emphasized a foundational characteristic of an anthropological perspective.

Lastly, through teaching this course, we as instructors found meaningful value in our work. Non-anthropologist faculty colleagues professed understanding the value of medical anthropology in examining the relationships between health and complex social structures. For example, one of the instructors and co-authors noted that the anthropological perspective of the course allowed them to consider the implications for humanity outside of the biological understanding of disease. As a team, we all expressed a mutual appreciation for having an opportunity to work together

and learn from each other's perspectives. This included learning different pedagogical techniques from one another and personal teaching styles, demonstrating that the course not only had beneficial learning outcomes for students, but also resulted in positive moments of professional development for the faculty involved.

Teaching an Anthropological Perspective but not Anthropology

Overall, our brief, team-taught course successfully fostered core elements of anthropological perspectives among students without teaching an explicitly medical anthropology class. The holistic, comparative, and historically-deep approach to understanding COVID-19, its biological genesis, and its numerous social and economic consequences, fostered anthropological ways of thinking without being an anthropology course. Our approach to teaching COVID-19 was particularly necessary given the national and institutional contexts in which our class was designed. In the US, COVID-19 misinformation continues at the highest levels of government (HATCHER 2020), which may result in broader public confusion and a crisis of trust in public health institutions, necessitating institutions of higher education be sources of clear and robust information for students seeking answers. At our institution, which has a reputation for excellence in teaching business and accordingly attracts students interested in pursuing business degrees, students can easily miss opportunities to take anthropology courses that provide them deep understandings of complex problems, such as a novel communicable disease pandemic. Overall, then, our course points to how medical anthropologists in similar institutional contexts can simultaneously impart anthropological perspectives to students through multidisciplinary, team-taught courses, and also provide important COVID-19 information to students eager to understand the impacts of disease that has disrupted every facet of their lives and lead to numerous types of instability for the unforeseeable future.

Notes

1 For example, we wanted students to think about how the US market-based medical system is partly responsible for inequalities related to COVID 19, so we assigned: RYLKO-BAUER, BARBARA, PAUL FARMER 2002. "Managed care or managed inequality? A call for critiques of market-based medicine." *Medical anthropology quarterly* 16(4): 476–502. When then paired the article with news stories about ventilator shortages due to a supply and demand logic shaping hospital supplies in the US, such as: FELDMAN, AMY 2020. "States Bidding Against Each Other Pushing Up Prices Of Ventilators Needed To Fight Coronavirus, NY Governor Cuomo Says" <https://www.forbes.com/sites/amyfeldman/2020/03/28/states-bidding-against-each-other-pushing-up-prices-of-ventilators-needed-to-fight-coronavirus-ny-governor-cuomo-says/#4a589d27293e>.

2 For example, we paired about racism during pandemics and how Trump administration officials continually refer to COVID-19 as the "China Virus" with a medical anthropological article about the SARS pandemic and the politics of blame in the US. The online periodical was: LEÓN, FELICE 2020. "Your Racism Is Showing: Coronavirus and the Racist History of Pandemics." *The Root* <https://www.theroot.com/your-racism-is-showing-coronavirus-and-the-racist-hist-1842412528>. The academic article we selected was: EICHELBERGER, LAURA 2007. SARS and New York's Chinatown: the politics of risk and blame

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Medizinsysteme in Afrika

Kommunikationstheoretische und kulturalismuskritische Perspektiven

KATHRIN STIEGLER

Anhand des Aufsatzes „Krankheit und Gesundheit in Afrika: Aspekte an der Schnittstelle von Anthropologie und Medizin“ von RUTH KUTALEK (2013) kann Studierenden in den Anfangssemestern unter Bezugnahme auf die Einführung in die Medizinethnologie von HANSJÖRG DILGER UND BERNHARD HADOLT (2017) gezeigt werden, wie medizinethnologische Texte aus einer Metaperspektive gedeutet und verstanden werden können und warum kulturalistisches Denken kritisch betrachtet werden muss. Kulturalisierung geht nämlich davon aus, dass das Subjekt lediglich eine Folge der Kultur ist und vergisst dabei kommunikative und soziale Prozesse in den Blick zu nehmen (HALL 1999).

Der Text KUTALEKS macht deutlich, wie koloniale Machtstrukturen das traditionelle Medizinsystem Ostafrikas zu unterminieren versuchten und welche fatalen Auswirkungen es hatte, wenn Missionare Biomedizin für Zwecke der Missionierung eingesetzt haben (S. 105–123). Meist haben diese nämlich kulturspezifische Kontexte nicht oder unzureichend berücksichtigt (ebd.). Es ist deshalb ausgesprochen wichtig, religionsethnologische und religionswissenschaftliche Methoden und Theorien in medizinethnologische Analysen einzubeziehen, da diese ermöglichen religiöse Phänomene von einer nicht-normativen „Außenperspektive“ zu betrachten, bei der Wissenschaftler*innen deskriptiv und selbstreflexiv arbeiten. KUTALEKS Ausführungen zeigen zudem, dass individuelle wie kollektive Akteure der Biomedizin, z. B. Bio- und Naturwissenschaftler*innen, Biotechunternehmen oder biomedizinische Fachgesellschaften und Verbände, versuchen traditionelle Medizinsysteme nach ihren Vorstellungen zu formen, indem beispielsweise nur Heilpflanzen entnommen werden, andere für die Bevölkerung Afrikas aber zentrale Aspekte wie das Charisma von

Heiler*innen und performative Praktiken wie Rituale vernachlässigt werden (S. 107). KUTALEKS Ausführungen machen deutlich, dass Medizinsysteme komplex sind und aus vielfältigen miteinander verwobenen sozial-kommunikativen Aspekten und Praxen bestehen, die nicht einfach voneinander isoliert werden können. Am Beispiel von Tetanus-Impfungen, welche ohne vorherige Aufklärung bei Mädchen an Schulen in Kamerun durchgeführt wurde und die aufgrund der Unwissenheit über die Wirkungen und damit verbundenen Folgen zu Angst vor Unfruchtbarkeit führte, zeigt, wie traditionelle Heilmethoden konkret unterhöhlt wurden (S. 110–112). Studierende können hier kritisch diskutieren, was dies für die Konstruktion der Kategorie Gender bedeutet. Weiter wird Student*innen auf abstrakter Ebene klar gemacht, dass Krankheit und Heilung nicht ohne ihren kulturspezifischen Kontext zu denken sind und dass die Mikroebene der Akteure neben der Meso- und Makroebene stets zu berücksichtigen ist (ebd.). Zudem wird deutlich, dass Medizinsysteme von Machtstrukturen durchsetzt sind, welche die Medizinethnolog*innen analysieren und aufbrechen müssen. Mit ihren Ausführungen untermauert KUTALEK, dass Medizinsysteme – auch traditionelle – nicht isoliert betrachtet werden sollten, (S. 108), da zwischen ihnen – auch zwischen Biomedizin und traditioneller Medizin – Interferenzen vorherrschen. Diese finden sich sowohl unter den Ärzt*innen und Heiler*innen, dem Pflegepersonal als auch unter den Patient*innen und umfassen damit neben übergeordneten politischen und staatlichen Ebenen sämtliche Akteure (DILGER 2012).

Darüber hinaus geht KUTALEK in ihrem Text auf Krankheitskonzepte ein und betont, dass Krankheit einerseits individuell erfahren wird, andererseits in einen umfassenderen soziokulturellen Rahmen eingebettet ist (S. 113). Auf diese

Weise kann Studierenden erläutert werden, dass es verschiedene Ebenen und Perspektiven von Krankheit gibt: *disease*, den gestörten physiologisch-psychologischen Prozess, *illness*, als die subjektiv wahrgenommene Krankheit, die kulturell konstruiert ist (KLEINMAN 1980) und *sickness*, welche betrachtet, wie Krankheit im sozialen wie gesellschaftlichen Kontext ausgebildet wird (YOUNG 1982). Interessant und äußerst hilfreich ist KUTALEKs Verwendung zahlreicher Interviewauszüge, die die Sicht der Akteure anhand eines traditionellen Heilers und einer Patientin schildern. Der Heiler betrachtet Biomedizin als Symptombehandlung, nicht aber als Therapie der Ursache, wie z. B. Hexerei, die der Medialität des Heilers, transzendentaler Kräfte und rituelspezifischer Dinge wie des Reibeorakels bedarf (S. 113–115). Für den Heiler spielt sich Krankheit demgegenüber nicht nur körperlich im Sinne von *disease* (DILGER & HADOLT 2012: 339), sondern auch in sozialen Beziehungen ab, weshalb neben dem Heilungsprozess auch die Betrachtung kommunikativ-sozialer Prozesse in der Familie unentbehrlich sind (KUTALEK 2013: 118). Studierende kann dadurch zudem nahegelegt werden, dass neben menschlichen Akteuren und ihren religiösen Vorstellungen, auch materielle Dinge – sog. Aktanten – bedeutsam sind (KUTALEK 2013: 119), mit denen Heiler relationale Akteur-Netzwerk Verbindungen, sog. Hybride im Sinne der Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie BRUNO LATOURS, eingehen (LATOUR 1996 und PEUKER 2010). Studierende können hieraus lernen, dass die Medizinethnologie immer auch Fragen nach kommunikativ-sozialen Prozessen zwischen verschiedenen Akteuren und Aktanten stellen sollte, um Phänomene bestmöglich verstehen zu können. KUTALEK geht abschließend auf den Medizinpluralismus ein und macht deutlich, dass unterschiedliche Medizinsysteme miteinander verwoben sind. Akteure handeln in traditionellen als auch biomedizinischen Systemen, die nicht einfach als abgrenzbare, abstrakte Blöcke nebeneinander existieren, sondern auch auf der Mikroebene plural sind (BIERLICH 2007). Ein Beispiel hierfür ist das sog. „healer-shopping“, bei dem Patient*innen sich verschiedener Systeme und Experten bedienen; auch das Gesundheitspersonal gehört oft mehreren Systemen an (KUTALEK 2013: 122–123.). Studierende können daraus folgern, dass die Aufgabe von Medizineth-

nologen hier darin besteht, grenzüberschreitende Prozesse zu betrachten, so dass der Ansatz der angewandten Medizinethnologie (DILGER & HADOLT 2017: 346–347) und die darin gewonnenen Erkenntnisse, für eine Zusammenarbeit der Systeme bereichernd sein kann (KUTALEK 2013: 124). Zu KUTALEK wird ergänzend die Lektüre von HANSJÖRG DILGERS Aufsatz “Targeting the Empowered Individual: Transnational Policy Making, the Global Economy of Aid, and the Limitations of Biopower in Tanzania” (DILGER 2012) empfohlen.

Ein Zusammenlesen beider Texte eignet sich besonders deshalb, da DILGER (2012) den Schwerpunkt auf nicht-staatliche Institutionen und deren Verbindung zu staatlichen Institutionen legt, wodurch die Perspektive auf Medizinsysteme in Afrika erweitert wird. Er fragt danach, welche Diskrepanzen es zwischen beiden gibt und welche Bedeutung Transnationalisierung und Globalisierung hierbei spielen. Konkret wird am Beispiel von Konzepten von *Nongovernmental Organizations* (NGOs), die sich aus sozialen Gründen im ruralen Tansania für Menschen einsetzen, veranschaulicht, dass der politische und wirtschaftliche Kontext der Gesundheitssysteme stets zu berücksichtigen ist (S. 63). Weiter wird dargestellt, welche Auswirkungen dies auf die Mikroebene und das soziale Leben der Betroffenen hat (ebd.). So wird die Frage gestellt, wie transnationale Strukturen, die dadurch gekennzeichnet sind, dass Gesundheitssysteme stärker individualisiert, fragmentiert und extern finanziert werden, auf die regionale Gesundheitspolitik und die Patienten wirken (S. 65). Hierbei wird zuerst in diachroner Perspektive aufgezeigt, dass sich AIDS-Programme ändern und in einen historischen Kontext einzubetten sind. DILGER verdeutlicht dies an Transformationsprozessen von NGO-Ansätzen weg von einer informationsbasierten, abschreckenden generellen Zugangsweise, hin zu individuellen, differenzierten Ansätzen, die den Blick auf gesunde Liebesbeziehungen und Vertrauen setzen (S. 68). NGOs fokussieren in jüngerer Zeit darauf, beim Individuum anzusetzen, um so Selbstermächtigung und Selbstreflexion zu fördern und den emotionalen Status zu stärken (DILGER 2012: 66–68). Hierbei stehen die NGOs im weiteren Kontext von staatlichen Institutionen und wirtschaftlichen Faktoren (DILGER 2012: 83–87). Dieses positive Selbstbild kann jedoch nur in sozialen Kontexten

und Beziehungsgefügen entstehen (DILGER 2012: 72). Prozesse und Praktiken des tansanischen Gesundheitssystem sind im Kontext der Globalisierung und der transnationalen Gesundheitsprogramme zu betrachten (DILGER 2012: 76). Gerade im ruralen Tansania spielen Kirchen wie die *Full Gospel Bible Fellowship Church* (FGBFG) eine wichtige Rolle. Sie propagiert, dass eine aus ihrer Sicht richtige Lebensweise, zum Heil führe, was jedoch zu Konflikten zwischen den Logiken dieser „moralischen“ Netzwerke und den öffentlichen Strategien führt; denn die AIDS Industrie (DILGER 2012: 74) produziert Dichotomien wie z. B. Medizin vs. Religion, was zu Diskrepanzen zwischen ihr und Familienvorstellungen führt (DILGER 2012: 82). NGOs verändern die Medizin, indem sie soziale Konstellationen nur bruchstückhaft verändern (DILGER 2012: 82). Patienten stehen staatlichen Programmen daher oft kritisch gegenüber, während nichtstaatliche Institutionen kaum über biopolitische Autorität verfügen (DILGER 2012: 86). Studierenden wird anhand des Textes die Vielschichtigkeit von Krankheit und Medizinsystemen deutlich, indem sie erkennen, dass diese sowohl auf Mikro- (die Akteure) und Meso- (NGOs und andere AIDS-Programme) und Makroebene (Staat und Phänomene wie Transnationalisierung und Globalisierung) miteinander verwoben sind, sich teilweise bedingen, aber auch konträr zueinander verhalten. Es wird deutlich, dass es sinnvoll ist, in einer globalen Welt – wenn möglich – alle Ebenen in die Analysen einzubeziehen. Ferner lernen Studierende, dass Krankheit keinesfalls nur eine physiologisch-biochemische Störung ist, sondern, dass soziale und kommunikative Prozesse eine bedeutsame Rolle spielen.

Insgesamt befruchten sich beide Texte gegenseitig, da sie mit unterschiedlichen Schwerpunkten die Komplexität des Feldes beleuchten. So fokussiert KUTALEK auf die Bedeutung von Krankheitskonzepten und traditioneller Therapie, die sie mithilfe von Auszügen aus transkribierten Gesprächen aufzeigt (S. 113–119). Auch DILGER arbeitet mit Interviewauszügen, betrachtet das Thema jedoch aus anderer Perspektive, indem er die zivilgesellschaftlichen NGOs in den Blick nimmt und davon ausgehend komplexe transkulturelle und

globale Prozesse erläutert. Anhand der Lektüre beider Texte wird deutlich, dass es problematisch ist, kulturalistisch davon auszugehen, dass durch Kultur ein einheitliches Subjekt gebildet und stabilisiert wird, ohne soziale und kommunikative Prozesse zu betrachten (HALL 1999).

Für die Zukunft der medizinanthropologischen Lehre ist es deshalb wichtig, vermehrt Kommunikationsprozesse in den Fokus zu nehmen und diese mittels kommunikationstheoretischer Perspektiven zu betrachten. Kultur wird dann als kommunikativ konstruiert betrachtet, so dass soziale Interaktionsprozesse zwischen Aktanten sowie ihre Einbettung in institutionelle, aber auch transnationale wie globale Dynamiken umfassender beleuchtet werden können.

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Emily Martin “The Egg and the Sperm”

Zur Gemachtheit biologischer Wissensbestände über Geschlecht

JANINA KRAUSE

Einer meiner Lieblingstexte für die medizinanthropologische Lehre ist der im Jahr 1991 im Journal *Signs* erschienene Artikel „The Egg and the Sperm – How Science Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female-Roles“ von Emily Martin, die als Medizinanthropologin die feministischen Anfänge der Science and Technology Studies ab den 1980er Jahren mitgeprägt hat. Dank des unprätentiösen, Empirie orientierten und humorvollen Stils eignet sich Martins Artikel gut, um Studierende und Studienanfänger*innen an die Gemachtheit biologischer Wissensbestände über Geschlecht heranzuführen.

Emily Martins “The Egg and the Sperm”

Auf 16 Seiten beschreibt Martin die sozialen Implikationen, die medizinisch-biologische Wissensbestände über Reproduktion und insbesondere über menschliche Keimzellen strukturieren. Sie vertritt dabei folgende Auffassung: “the picture of egg and sperm drawn in popular as well as in scientific accounts of reproductive biology relies on stereotypes of our cultural definitions of male and female” (MARTIN 1991: 485). Ihre These belegt sie anhand verschiedener Quellen, die sie diskursanalytisch untersucht. Hauptsächlich handelt es sich dabei um Texte aus Lehrbüchern, die im Medizinstudium verwendet werden und um Artikel, die in (Fach-)Zeitschriften erschienen sind.

Gleich zu Anfang betont Martin ihre geschlechterpolitische Motivation. Ziel ihres Artikels ist es, “to shine a bright light on the gender stereotypes hidden within the scientific language of biology“ (486). Anhand von Beispielen aus Lehrbuchtexten, die Menstruation beschreiben, macht sie diese verborgenen Stereotype sichtbar. Ihre präzise Analyse, gespickt mit knappen, ironischen Kommentaren, enthüllt die Lächerlichkeit, aber auch den misogynen Subtext des Quel-

lenmaterials. Demzufolge dient der monatliche Zyklus dem Zweck der Eizellproduktion und gewährleistet eine passende Umgebung, um die Befruchtung und das Wachstum von Eizellen zu fördern. Solange der Zyklus aber als produktives Unternehmen in patriarchal-industrieller Terminologie erfasst wird, wird Menstruation zwangsläufig zum Scheitern dieser Produktion:

Medical texts describe menstruation as the ‘debris’ of the uterine lining, the result of necrosis, or death of tissue. The descriptions imply that a system has gone awry, making products of no use, not to specification, unsalable, wasted, scrap. (486)

Im Gegensatz dazu verweist Martin auf verschiedene Beispiele, die den **“remarkable’ process of making sperm”** (487) beschreiben. Anschließend geht sie dem Einwand nach, dass die Ovulation und nicht die Menstruation der analoge Prozess zur Spermatogenese sei und zeigt an eindrücklichen Beispielen die herabwürdigende Sprache, mithilfe derer die Ovulation beschrieben wird: “Textbook descriptions stress that all of the ovarian follicles containing ova are already present at birth. Far from being produced, as sperm are, they merely sit on the shelf, slowly degenerating and aging like overstocked inventory” (487). Letztlich kommt sie aufgrund der unzweideutigen Formulierungen zu dem Schluss, dass die als produktiv bezeichnete Spermatogenese stets einer als **“wasteful”** (488) beschriebenen **Ovulation** gegenübersteht: “It is still a mystery why so many eggs are formed only to die in the ovaries” (488), so eine ihrer zahlreichen Quellen.

Es ist einer der sympathisch provokanten Höhepunkte des Artikels, wenn Martin im Anschluss daran fragt:

The real mystery is why male's vast production of sperm is not seen as wasteful. Assuming that a man 'produces' 100 million [...] sperm per day [...]. [F]or every baby a woman produces, she wastes only around two hundred eggs. For every baby a man produces he wastes more than one trillion sperm [...]. How is it that positive images are denied to the bodies of women? (488f.)

Um diese Frage zu beantworten, analysiert sie schließlich Darstellungen von Ei- und Spermazelle und arbeitet pointiert heraus, wie diese sich an geschlechtsspezifischen Stereotypen orientieren. Das Ei wird als groß und passiv beschrieben, das sich weder bewegt noch auf Reisen geht ("move or journey"), "but passively 'is transported', 'is swept', or even 'drifts' along the fallopian tube" (489). Demgegenüber wird die Spermazelle als aktiv und energetisch charakterisiert: Sie vermag das "developmental program of the egg" zu aktivieren und mithilfe der Ejakulationskräfte in die tiefsten Winkel der Vagina vorzudringen, "into the deepest recesses of the vagina" (489). Aus der verwendeten Terminologie geht die Eizelle als "Sleeping Beauty" hervor, während das Spermium, ganz in der Tradition hegemonialer Männlichkeitskonstruktionen, erobernd seiner „Mission“ folgt (490).

Im zweiten Kapitel des Hauptteils nimmt Martin Publikationen zu damals neueren Forschungen in den Fokus, die die aktive Teilhabe der Eizelle belegen. Doch auch hier greifen die Autor*innen auf Metaphern zurück, die soziale Geschlechterstereotype (re)aktivieren. So zeigen Studien, dass die Außenhülle der Eizelle eine aktivere Rolle beim Verschmelzen der Keimzellen spielt als bisher angenommen, indem sie die Spermazelle mithilfe bestimmter Moleküle anbindet. Dieser Vorgang wurde in den Fachzeitschriften jedoch nicht gleichberechtigt beschrieben, sondern mit Rückgriff auf eine Metapher, die eine weitere stereotype Frauenfigur – die *femme fatale* – sichtbar werden lässt. Die Eizelle erscheint dann als "aggressive sperm catcher [...] that can capture a sperm [...] and clasp it to the zonal surface" (494). Einer dieser Fachartikel räumt ein: "recent research suggests the almost heretical view that sperm and egg are mutually active partners" (ebd.). Trotzdem ist auch hier die Rede vom aggressiv-männlichen Spermium, das sich mittels einer dünnen Faser, in der Sprache des Artikels einer Harpune, mit dem Ei ver-

bindet: "from the tip of the sperm's triangular head, a long thin filament shoots out and harpoons the egg" (ebd.). **Martin fragt, wieso dieser Vorgang nicht als eine-Brücke-bauen oder als eine-Leine-auswerfen beschrieben wird** (vgl. ebd.). Offenbar führt die Gewinnung neuer experimenteller Daten nicht dazu, dass Geschlechterstereotype überdacht oder gar revidiert werden (vgl. 498).

Die besondere Problematik der von Stereotypen durchtränkten Sprache liegt Martins Auffassung nach aber nicht allein in der impliziten Geschlechterungerechtigkeit, sondern in den sozialen Konsequenzen dieser Terminologie. Metaphern in wissenschaftlichen Texten bringen, so Martin, soziale Wirklichkeit hervor. Die Übertragung von sozialen Konzepten von Geschlecht "into the 'personalities' of gametes" (500) bewirkt die Naturalisierung und Verfestigung ebendieser Stereotype.

"The Egg and the Sperm" in der Lehre

Auch wenn sich Studienanfänger*innen in der Regel mit englischsprachiger Literatur schwertun, eignet sich der Text aufgrund seines überschaubaren Umfangs und seiner leicht verständlichen Sprache, um Studierende an die überwiegend englischsprachige Fachliteratur heranzuführen. Bachelorstudierende sind angesichts des Textes gefordert, aber nicht zwangsläufig überfordert. Zu komplexe und umfangreiche Pflichtlektüren hingegen lösen gerade bei Studienanfänger*innen häufig Überforderung aus und wirken demotivierend (BRAUER 2011: 19).

Martin schreibt in der Ich-Form aus ihrer Perspektive als Anthropologin: "As an anthropologist I am intrigued by the possibility that culture shapes how biological scientists describe what they discover about the natural world" (MARTIN 1991: 485). Auch Ihr Ehemann tritt in Erscheinung – als Wissenschaftler in einem biologischen Labor und als Autor einer von Martin analysierten Quelle (494). Neben diesen persönlichen Einblicken kommentiert Martin ihr Material mit Witz und Raffinesse. Durch ihren besonderen Schreibstil zeichnet sich zwischen den Zeilen eine greifbare Forscherinnenpersönlichkeit ab, die demonstriert, was ethnografisch arbeitende Disziplinen seit der Writing-Culture-Debatte fordern: ein The-

matisieren der Anthropologin als Autorin, als Konstrukteurin von *Kultur*. Martin bemüht sich gar nicht erst um den Anschein eines wissenschaftlich-neutralen Textes, der objektiv, frei von Stilmitteln und unabhängig von ihrer Autorinnenschaft ist. In diesem Kontext verstehe ich Martins Aufsatz als Gegenprogramm eines anonymen, elitären Schreibstils, der die Fachliteratur lange Zeit dominiert hat. Auch in dieser Hinsicht eignet sich ihr Text für die medizinanthropologische Lehre: als Dokument der Fachgeschichte, das die feministische Strömung der Medizinanthropologie repräsentiert, die ab den 1980er Jahren einforderte, Wissenschaft als Bestandteil von Kultur zu analysieren und nicht unhinterfragt als vordiskursiv stehen zu lassen (vgl. BECK *et al.* 2012: 14). Durch die Mühelosigkeit des gewählten Schreibstils enttarnt sie die exklusive Sprache des wissenschaftlichen Experten, auch in den Reihen der eigenen Disziplinen, als Distinktionsmittel.

Der Text lädt dazu ein, die vermeintliche Neutralität von wissenschaftlichen Texten auf verschiedenen Ebenen zu diskutieren, sowohl mit Blick auf Martins eigenen Stil, als auch mit Blick auf die Inhalte ihrer Untersuchung. Außerdem nutze ich den Text gerne, um Studierende zu befähigen, alltägliche Wissensbeständen über Geschlecht zu hinterfragen. In Feldern, in denen Studierende sich nicht dezidiert für Genderthemen interessieren, provoziert der Text erfahrungsgemäß vereinzelte Stellungnahmen zum Thema Gleichberechtigung. So wird regelmäßig von Studierenden darauf hingewiesen, dass Martins Inhalte überholt seien, da wir heute, fast dreißig Jahre nach Erscheinen des Artikels, bereits in einer gleichberechtigten Welt lebten.

Lehrende müssen weder viel Zeit noch Mühe investieren, um zeitgenössische Quellen zu finden, seien es YouTube-Clips oder Passagen aus aktuellen Lehrbüchern, die eingesetzt werden können, um zu demonstrieren, dass Martins Ergebnisse noch immer aktuell sind. Mithilfe von

solchen ergänzenden, eigenen Primärquellen können Aktivitäten durchgeführt werden, die auf der Lektüre des Textes basieren und so dessen Inhalte festigen (BRAUER 2011: 20). Studierende können angeleitet werden, die verwendete Terminologie der zeitgenössischen Quellen mit Blick auf die Darstellung von Geschlecht zu analysieren. Dies gelingt in der Regel übrigens am besten in Duos oder in Kleingruppenarbeit.

Es lässt sich außerdem fragen, welche Annahmen sich hinter der Vorstellung verbergen, die Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter sei erreicht. So lassen sich Alltage und Wissensbestände der Studierenden selbst als Forschungsgegenstände thematisieren bzw. sich eine ethnografische Erforschung der Wissensbestände über Reproduktion im nahen Umfeld anschließen. Hier kann nahtlos eine Lehrsicherheit über Antifeminismus folgen, der sich auch mithilfe zweifelhafter biologischer Annahmen stabilisiert und die ethnologische Geschlechterforschung derzeit offen bedroht. Studierende können so motiviert werden, tagespolitische Ereignisse empirisch in den Blick zu nehmen (DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR VOLKSKUNDE 2019).

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Der Benjamin'sche „Chock“ in der Lehrdidaktik

EBERHARD WOLFF

Gewohnte Denk- und Argumentationsweisen gegen den Strich zu lesen kann Lehre ungemein beleben. Hierfür eignet sich ein Vorgehen, das Walter Benjamin – in anderen theoretischen Zusammenhängen – als „Chock“ bezeichnet hat. Benjamin findet den „Chock“ in der reproduzierbaren Kunst seiner Zeit im Dadaismus, Chaplins Filmen oder der Synkope des Jazz. Mit einem „Chock“ werde die Aura des Kunstwerks vernichtet. Tradierte Assoziationsabläufe würden gebrochen. Die „Chockwirkung“ werde durch „gesteigerte Geistesgegenwart“ aufgefangen.¹

Ein Thema, bei dem ich den „Chock“ gerne einsetze, ist das „Self Tracking“.² Dies ist der Oberbegriff für neuere Praktiken, die physische Aktivitäten und Zustände mit am Körper tragbaren digitalen Geräten dokumentieren (durch so genannte „Wearables“ wie Armbänder, Smartphones etc.). Solche Selbstvermessungen werden häufig im Überschneidungsbereich von Sport, Gesundheit und Fitness angewandt. Ein nicht geringer Teil der geistes- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung sieht darin – zugespitzt – Formen eines neoliberalen Fremdwangs zur Selbstoptimierung – ähnlich wie er sich im wertenden Begriff des „Fitnesswahns“ spiegelt. Im alltäglichen Diskurs wird das Zählen gerne nur als Reduktionismus verstanden. Um solche Analysen zu diskutieren, bringe ich in Lehrveranstaltungen zum Thema dann gerne meinen Lieblings-Selftracker mit, den ich vor einigen Jahren in der Kaffeekette Tchibo erstanden habe. Es handelt sich um einen „Mitzählenden Flaschenöffner“ (Abb.) mit dreistelligem digitalem Zählwerk, der bei jedem Öffnen ein „Plopp“ und nach jedem sechsten Öffnen ein „Wow“ digital erklingen lässt. Es bereitet eine besondere Freude, alle Formen Foucault'scher Bio-Macht, gouvernementaler Fremdsteuerung oder gar die Agency von Dingen im Sinne der Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie an diesem andernorts

auch „Beer-Tracker“ genannten Produkt unserer digitalen Leistungsgesellschaft durchzuspielen. So kann mit „gesteigerte Geistesgegenwart“ gegenüber dem Unerwarteten die vorgeprägte „Aura“ durchbrochen, und neue Wahrnehmungen und Assoziationen generiert werden: (Selbst-)Quantifizierung muss nicht zwangsweise eine kulturelle Verarmung nach sich ziehen. Sie kann auch als kreativer Akt verstanden werden. Quantifizierung kann nicht nur für Gesundheitszwecke eingesetzt werden. Man kann auch „Ungesundes“ quantifizieren. Selbstbeobachtung ist nicht zwingend verknüpft mit Fremdkontrolle. Und schließlich: Wer quantifiziert, muss sich damit nicht automatisch fremder Macht unterwerfen. Quantifizierung kann sogar subversiv eingesetzt werden.

Die Methode funktioniert auch mit anderen „Chockern“. In einem medizinhistorischen Kurs lasse ich zum Beispiel Medizinstudierende in Form eines Quiz ausgewählte und durchmischte Zitate aus zwei ärztlichen Standesordnungen zuordnen. Die eine ist über einhundert Jahre alt, die andere aktuell. Die alten und die aktuellen Zitate sind sprachlich angeglich. Ich schaffe so produktive Verwirrung, weil es kaum herauszufinden ist, ob die dortigen Aussagen von heute stammen oder einhundert Jahre alt sind. Beruft sich nur die heutige oder bereits die alte Standesordnung auf ärztliche Ethik? Zielt auch die heutige Standesordnung noch auf den Wert der „Ehre“ ab? Wann wurde das Abwerben von Patienten und Patientinnen als nicht standesgemäß eingeschätzt? Wann wollte die Ärzteschaft Freiheit vor äußerer Kontrolle und wann forderte sie „Corpsgeist“ nach innen? Daraus ergeben sich unerwartete Beobachtungen wie diejenige, dass bereits vor einhundert Jahren das Argument ärztlicher Ethik eine standespolitische Funktion hatte; oder dass professionelles ärztliches Selbstverständnis auch heute noch mit

dem für die Studierenden oft fremden Begriff der „Standesehre“ argumentiert. Die Studierenden lernen: In der Gegenwart steckt viel Geschichte. Geschichte lässt Gegenwart besser verstehen. Nebenbei: In dem verwirrenden Quiz kann eine falsche Lösung (z. B.: Standesehre ist nur in alten Dokumenten ein Thema) durch die Studierenden auch das Produkt kluger Überlegungen sein. Auch dieser „Chock“ kann schematisches Denken überwinden, was nicht nur im Medizinstudium mit seinen oft einfachen Richtig/Falsch-Dichotomien einen subversiven Mehrwert darstellt.

„Chockierende“ Brechungen sind in sehr vielen Varianten denkbar. Man kann die zur Debatte stehenden Phänomene von den Rändern her, oder vom Gegenteil aus, denken. Auch Parodien können helfen, gewohnte Deutungssysteme unerwartet aufzubrechen und aus der Verstörung die Komplexität von Phänomenen besser zu erkennen. Ironie und ihre Verwandten können sogar grundsätzlich als „Chock“-Formen bezeichnet werden. Sogar „schlechte“ Aufsätze können in der

von uns herangezogenen Sekundärliteratur produktiv, nämlich im besten Fall verstörend und dadurch wiederum erhellend sein. Dies setzt allerdings voraus, medikalkulturelle bzw. allgemein kulturwissenschaftliche Lehre nicht als statische Wissensvermittlung, sondern als Prozess zu verstehen, der erst dann effizient ist, wenn die Inhalte gemeinsam erarbeitet werden.

Anmerkungen

1 WALTER BENJAMIN. Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. In: DASS. *Drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie*. Frankfurt a. M. 1977 (erste Aufl. 1963, verfasst 1935), Kap. XIV, S. 38f.

2 vgl. EBERHARD WOLFF. Problemlagen kompetitiver Figurationen. Am Beispiel des „Mitzählenden Flaschenöffners“ (= Quellen zu Wettbewerb und Konkurrenz des DFG-Netzwerks „Wettbewerb und Konkurrenz: Zur kulturellen Logik kompetitiver Figurationen“, 1. Mai 2015). Internetpublikation. <https://www.konkurrenz.uni-freiburg.de/quellen-zu-wettbewerb-und-konkurrenz/problemlagen-kompetitiver-figurationen-am-beispiel-des-mitzaehlenden-flaschenoeffners>.

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REZENSIONEN
BOOK REVIEWS

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EDO SHONIN, WILLIAM VAN GORDON & MARK D. GRIFFITHS (eds) 2016. *Mindfulness and Buddhist-Derived Approaches in Mental Health and Addiction*.

Heidelberg: Springer, 420 pp.

The editors of this volume support the exploration of *mindfulness* as a therapeutic practice at the intersection of Buddhist knowledge and psychosciences. The contributors identify as researchers and therapists within biomedicine, psychiatry, psychology, psychotherapy, psychosomatics, psychoanalysis, neurosciences, and social work. Developing different perspectives on how to integrate practices of mindfulness in their respective fields of interest, they jointly refer to JON KABAT-ZINN's "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction" (MBSR, cf. 2003) as the integration of Buddhist-derived techniques into health, healing, and wellbeing in divergent "Western" settings. Some articulate difficulties in the "translation" from "Eastern" to "Western" contexts regarding language, concepts, and cosmologies as related to socio-cultural experience and knowledge. Others describe tensions between secular and spiritual approaches to mindfulness and different perspectives in assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and the patient's engagement. As I will argue at the end of this review, these concerns are not properly reflected and dissolve in the course of this volume.

In their introduction, EDO SHONIN, WILLIAM VAN GORDON, and MARK D. GRIFFITHS (*Chapter 1* "Mindfulness and Buddhist-Derived Treatment Techniques in Mental Health and Addiction Settings") define mindfulness as a 2500-year-old Buddhist practice fundamental for *the path to spiritual awakening*. Core components are: paying attention, in a non-judgmental way, to the present moment. Some authors translate it into engaging a full, direct, and active awareness of experience that is 1) spiritual in aspect and 2) maintained from one moment to the next as con-

tinuous training of perception. They identify this approach as one of the fastest-growing areas of mental health research to 1) find alternatives to pharmacological treatment, 2) augment the efficacy of psychopathology treatments, and 3) offer culturally syntonetic treatments to service users from increasingly diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. They claim that in psychotherapy, they observe therapeutic success in mood disorders, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, gambling disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, eating disorders, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorders, and schizophrenia. They also declare that healing cooperation of the psychosciences with mindfulness practitioners has constantly developed worldwide for over 30 years as a technique at the intersection of spiritual and secular approaches. It is worth noting that the editors argue that "Western" research on mindfulness practices should have its legitimation, but that therapy success should also be accepted without questioning it too much. This statement leaves me suspicious of this contribution's academic value, but I will leave my discussion and criticism for the end of this review. First, I will introduce and summarize the divergent lines of argument organized in three parts with 19 chapters (including the introduction).

Part I ("Mindfulness in Clinician-Patient Setting") focuses on the effective use of mindfulness and derivative Buddhist techniques in diagnosis and therapy. BRENDAN D. KELLY (*Chapter 2* "Compassion, Cognition and the Illusion of Self: Buddhist Notes towards more Skillful Engagement with Diagnostic Classification Systems in Psychiatry") suggests an integration of classifi-

cation categories at the intersection of religion (Buddhism) and psychiatry (ICD, DSM). The concept of “non-self” clearly constitutes a challenge here, as do “skillful cognition” and “deep compassion” (p. 18ff). KELLY suggests a revision of categories and integration in terms of flexible, individualized interpretations. Unfortunately, it remains unclear how an approach of “non-self” could be addressed within “individualized” interpretations. DONALD MCCOWN (*Chapter 3* “Being is Relational: Considerations for using Mindfulness in Clinician-Patient Settings”) and JACOB PIET, LONE FJORBACK, and SAKI SANTORELLI (*Chapter 4* “What is required to teach Mindfulness effectively in MBSR and MBCT?”) dedicate to the training of mindfulness trainees. They stress the aspect of patients and practitioners learning together and that it starts with setting up relationships (an insight I deem crucial for any therapeutic constellation) in terms of a “social constructionist view [...] in which relationship defines who we are and what we do in any situation” (p. 30). I must admit that this quote leaves me confused: “social constructivism,” to my understanding, is more than just acknowledging that social relationships shape our identity and action. It seems to be this significant misconception of “self” and “social relations” as constitutive for “practice” that makes it difficult to establish common sense among psychologists and anthropologists when it comes to (mental) health/care. However, both contributions suggest to “unlearn” previously incorporated diagnostic practices and habits regarding clinician-patient relationships and “learn to teach” mindfulness as a continuous development on both sides. CHRISTOPHER J. MAY, KELLI JOHNSON, and JARED R. WEYKER (*Chapter 5* “Experimental Approaches to Loving-Kindness Meditation and Mindfulness that Bridge the Gap between Clinicians and Researchers”) turn their focus to the patients, addressing different effects within and between individuals. They suggest single-subject experimental designs on a quantitative basis to further explore these observations, an endeavor I perceive as a caricature of what I take as a mindfulness approach in a Buddhist frame and context.

Part II (“Mindfulness for the Treatment of Psychopathology”) reflects aspects of wellbeing and/or treatment regarding categories and experiences of psychopathologies. JON VØLLESTAD (*Chap-*

ter 6 “Mindfulness- and Acceptance-Based Interventions in the Treatment of Anxiety Disorders”) discusses diagnoses of anxiety disorders, panic disorders, social anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and hypochondriasis). WILLIAM R. MARCHAND (*Chapter 7* “Mindfulness for the Treatment of Depression”) is one of the few authors of this volume who reflects on the development of mindfulness from classic Buddhist practice toward treatment of depression as disengagement from ruminative self-referential thinking in meditation, resistance to physical and emotional pain, and “spiritual awakening”:

A more straightforward interpretation in the awakening is simply developing the ability to see life, as it really is, not obscured by one’s ego-based irrational thinking patterns. In other words, awakening is the process through which one comes to the understanding that unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life come from the workings of the mind and not the external circumstances of the moment. [...] However, it is important to note that in many Buddhist traditions, the goal is awakening for oneself and for all sentient beings (p. 144f).

I consider these insights crucial in our discussion of cross-cultural psychotherapy and the transfer of related cultural practices as they not just address the individual but also its relations to its environment. The author also makes some other relevant points here, namely that the psychological components of mindfulness are *intention*, *attention*, and *attitude* – that is, agency. Accordingly, “acceptance” in the context of mindfulness does not propagate passivity but appropriate action of reflection and *re-perception*. It would also affect neural mechanisms. KAREN J. PALLESEN, JESPER DAHLGAARD, and LONE FJORBACK (*Chapter 8* “Mindfulness for the Treatment of Stress Disorders”) relate to such neuroplastic changes in stress disorders. SEAN D. HOULIHAN and JUDSON A. BREWER (*Chapter 9* “The Emerging Science of Mindfulness as a Treatment for Addiction”) apply to this focus on neural mechanism but relate it to addiction: “There are few conditions that cause as much suffering on a personal and societal level as addictions” (p. 191). It is the first contribution in this volume (except, between the lines, *Chapter 7*) that articulates social environment as an aspect

of the illness experience. It explores mechanisms of “craving” and its interpretation in Buddhism, questioning how a “sense of self” is related to craving and clinging to specific experiences (and how “non-self” might contradict it). Moreover, and this is crucial, they state that while “mainstream addiction treatment” would suggest passivity in terms of “avoidance,” mindfulness approaches support agency. ÁLVARO I. LANGER, JOSÉ A. CARMONA-TORRES, WILLIAM V. GORDON and EDO SHONIN (*Chapter 10* “Mindfulness for the Treatment of Psychosis: State of the Art and Future Developments”) take another direction in their appraisal of quantitative and qualitative literature on the topic: they postulate mindfulness training especially for clinicians to be able to understand the inner worlds of patients. They also mention the danger of mindfulness training for patients regarding how far it might induce psychotic episodes. Similarly, ANKA A. VUJANOVIC, BARBARA L. NILES, and JOCELYN L. ABRAMS (*Chapter 11* “Mindfulness and Meditation in the Conceptualization and Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder”) review theoretical and clinical work on post-traumatic stress disorder and discuss a limitation of extant research along with several future research directions. They refer to different approaches, such as transcendental meditation, stress-reduction, cognitive therapy, mantra repetition, stretching, deep breathing, or yoga, especially in substance abuse and the treatment of children and adolescents. They argue for more differentiated research regarding variables like ethnicity, age, types of trauma exposure, and treatment settings. Somewhat apart from the focus on pathologies, the last three authors of this section address more or less “common” experiences. JOANNE CACCIATORE and JEFFREY B. RUBIN (*Chapter 12* “The Last of the Human Desire: Grief, Death, and Mindfulness”) explore the possibility of mindful bereavement care:

Some resist and avoid [grief], some deny and repress, and yet others turn toward grief. [...] As the post-industrialization era has taken death and grief out of personal [sic; social?] tragedy and into the private sector, they remain largely unexplored territory in contemporary Western culture (p. 247).

They postulate a compassionate response to grief where “culture” does not provide it. CHRIS-

TOPHER A. PEPPING, PENELOPE J. DAVIS, and ANALISE O'DONOVAN (*Chapter 13* “Mindfulness for Cultivating Self-Esteem”) discuss mindfulness training in prevention by strengthening self-esteem as related to a stable personality. I will return to this topic, but it seems evident how cultural concepts of *self* and *personality* do not cope along the lines of Buddhist mindfulness and Western systems of knowledge. The authors aim to practice “labeling self-critical thoughts” that I deem as opposed to the idea of not evaluating thoughts and feelings. Contrarily, TIM LOMAS and ITAI IVTZAN (*Chapter 14* “Beyond Deficit Reduction: Exploring the Positive Potentials of Mindfulness”) argue for positive psychology and potential for wellbeing not addressing deficits:

Unfortunately, it could be argued that, by being filtered through this clinical context, the great potential for mindfulness to facilitate psychological wellbeing and development has been somewhat limited. [...] these interventions have been constrained by one crucial factor: this clinical context is fundamentally based on a ‘deficit’ model of human psychology (p. 278).

They address another aspect I agree with, namely that we must critically reflect the history and transmission of mindfulness with its original potential of a psycho-spiritual transformation toward the purpose of individual happiness, freedom, success, or performance (cf. Kirmayer 2015). An overemphasis of certain aspects of Buddhist knowledge paired with fading out others would not serve spiritual balance, but a lifestyle of self-optimization within a realm of adaptation to Western sciences (or Easternization of Westerners?), New Religious Movements, consumption in a spiritual marketplace, and, I want to add, strategies of disciplining.

Part III (“Mindfulness in Other Applied Settings”) verifies my doubts and further elaborates strategies of categorization and fragmentation as opposed to an original (w)holistic approach. ANDREW DAY (*Chapter 15* “Mindfulness and Forensic Mental Health”) refers to risk management regarding violence, especially in the forensic context. With no single word, he addresses “structural violence” as a relevant factor, and it seems symptomatic for the psychological discourse in this volume that we have to locate our problems in our

selves: “Contemporary theories of aggressive and violent behaviour all highlight the importance of dysphoric emotion” (p. 301). As I understand it in its original context, mindfulness aims to non-judgmental feelings, but here “negative” and “positive” emotions are tracked down. MARYANNA D. KLATT, EMALINE WISE, and MORGAN FISH (*Chapter 16* “Mindfulness and Work-Related Well-Being”) move on by discussing cost-effective interventions for organizations and institutions to promote wellbeing at work in “first world nations” (p. 313). Apart from the fact that their language reflects a (post)colonial attitude and discourse, they appear ignorant of an ongoing global health-related dynamic and its anthropological investigation since the 1970s, when, apparently proudly, stating that “Americans already use CAM approaches to manage symptoms of underlying diseases in conjunction with conventional western medicine” (p. 315). This lack of reflection and differentiation disturbs me, especially when addressing their concern of raising the efficacy of workers (*e.g.*, nurses, physicians, police officers, firefighters, teachers, lawyers). It displays contemporary attempts of ongoing disciplining, optimization, and adaptation to a “new world order,” which I guess Buddhist masters of mindfulness did not envision and neither aimed for, but which appears more accurate than ever since the Covid19-Pandemia has shaped our daily practice and experience. I can only guess, but if this volume would have been published in 2021, there would probably also be a chapter on how to have populations cope with Corona-related restrictions.¹ Whereas this is pure fiction, the last three chapters of this volume stress coping, optimizing, and (passive) acceptance in different contexts and thus support my assumptions. LUCIA MCBEE and PATRICIA BLOOM (*Chapter 17* “Is Aging a Disease? Mental Health Issues and Approaches for Elders and Caregivers”) want to cultivate equanimity among elders and caregivers and support mindfulness training to experience a “good death” (p. 345f), a topic we should further discuss but maybe not within this review. KOA WITTINGHAM (*Chapter 18* “Mindfulness and Transformative Parenting”) moves on in fragmenting mindfulness by focusing on the “wellbeing” of parents and children, which would be mainly grounded in acceptance and avoidance. CHRISTOPHER A. PEPPING and W. KIM HALFORD (*Chapter 19* “Mindfulness

and Couple Relationships”) transfer this perspective towards the challenge of “cultivating healthy couple relationships” by “individual adjustment,” “emotion regulation,” “acceptance,” “enhanced self-reflection and self-regulation” etc.

I want to clarify that I see potential in mindfulness training in the “Western” psychological context, but it needs more discussion on adapting, integrating, and transforming it in different contexts. The editors of this compilation of mindfulness-related approaches and articles claim that

[t]he current volume provides what we believe to be a comprehensive overview of recent developments in the research and practice of both mindfulness and related Buddhist-derived approaches within mental health contexts. We hope that the book will serve as a valuable resource for researchers and mental health practitioners wishing to keep up to date with developments in mindfulness clinical research, as well as any professional wishing to equip themselves within the necessary theoretical and practical tools to effectively teach or utilize mindfulness in mental health and addiction settings (p. 5).

I miss the discussion on socio-cultural, political-economic, or religious-spiritual frames and contexts. It appears that most authors relate to mindfulness as a *technology of the self*, imposing an alleged universal valid psychological model of the person on a practice that as a core element questions “the self” and supports notions of “non-self.” Some authors even to some degree reflect on “culture,” “social relations,” and “environment,” but none investigates the impact of divergent concepts of “self,” “person,” “explanatory models,” “idioms of distress,” or other socio-cultural and structural aspects regarding health and wellbeing. My review of SUSANNAH DEANE’s contribution to translocal Buddhist-inspired Tibetan medicine (in this issue of *Curare*) illustrates that these are significant components to understanding (healing) practices and transcultural transfer, especially in the context of medical diversity. It also implies shifting the focus from the practitioner to the patient. Some authors even mention the necessity of mindfulness training for clinicians to understand their patients better, but I wonder if notions of “mindfulness” and “empathy” are not simply confused here. The entire volume represents the prac-

titioners' attitude of guiding their clients instead of outlining agency potential for the patients. It is a problem of methodology: working with statistics and quantitative categories circumvents qualitative approaches that pay attention to the concerned and affected patients' narratives.

Many authors also refer to "the Buddha" but do not reflect related knowledge and practice to different cultural, religious, or spiritual contexts. Instead, they reduce contents and forms until they fit their point of view and therapeutic approach. These failures and gaps in the transfer of Buddhist mindfulness practices to Western psychotherapy have already been a prominent critic of trans/cultural psychiatrist LAURENCE J. KIRMAYER (2015), and the editors and authors of this volume should reflect on it. Accordingly, comparable publications on mindfulness of Springer and cooperate publishers, including the hybrid/open access journal *Mindfulness* (since 2010) should also be critically reviewed (cf. MCCOWN *et al.* 2010; OSTAFIN *et al.* 2015; FATEMI 2016; PURSER *et al.* 2016; WISNER 2017).

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Notes

1 To provide some related examples for critical discussion, I share the links of websites I visited:
<https://childmind.org/article/how-mindfulness-can-help-during-covid-19/>
<https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/covid19-mindfulness>

<https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/psychiatry/michigan-psychiatry-resources-covid-19/adults-general-resources/mindfulness-managing-stress-during-covid-19-pan-demic>
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.589365/full>
<https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/mindfulness-covid>
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211335520302047>
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/irish-journal-of-psychological-medicine/article/benefits-of-meditation-and-mindfulness-practices-during-times-of-crisis-such-as-covid19/076BCD69B41BC5A0A1F47E9E78C17F2A>
<https://www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/guide-to-mental-health-resources/mindfulness>

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- PURSER, RONALD E.; FORBES, DANIEL & BURKE, ADAM (eds) 2016. *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context & Social Engagement*. Springer International.
- WISNER, BETSY C. 2017. *Mindfulness and Meditation for Adolescents*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

HELENE BASU, ROLAND LITTLEWOOD & ARNE S. STEINFORTH (eds) 2017. *Spirit & Mind. Mental Health at the Intersection of Religion & Psychiatry*.

Berlin, Münster: LIT, 284 pp.

This volume presents the outcomes of the International Conference on Religion, Healing and Psychiatry held in Münster, Germany from February 23–25, 2012.

The World Psychiatric Association published a Position Statement on Spirituality and Religion in Psychiatry (MOREIRA-ALMEIDA *et al.* 2016) which states that Religion and Spirituality have significant implications for the prevalence, diagnosis, treatment, outcomes and prevention of mental disorders, as well as for quality of life and wellbeing. This statement was made in 2016, four years after the meeting in Münster.

Even before I opened the book I was moved by the black and white cover photo by James Wilce which was obviously taken in India. It shows a puzzled, dishevelled lady carrying stones surrounded by laughing and smiling bystanders.

At first glance one might wonder at religion's influence on psychiatry. Later on it is clear that religious beliefs shape not only attitudes, instil faith and hope but also help patients to bear and accept hardships in life. People who are religious will always resort to religion, whatever their faith is, while simultaneously seeking modern modes of treatment. In this volume the term of religion is used heuristically to refer to traditions of faith associated with world religions, local cosmologies and contemporary new age spirituality. In their introduction of this book Basu and Steinforth state:

This volume explores the complexities involved in localising interactions between religion and psychiatry within discourses of mental health. These are played out in diverse sites such as in clinical and pastoral care in Ireland and Ghana, in the psychiatric institutions and cosmological rituals of healing in Malawi, India and the US and in the religious and spiritual practices that have positioned themselves as alternatives to psychiatric care.

They make it clear that many of the tensions between secular and religious worldviews are closely related to a familiar anthropological problem, namely, the contrary between knowledge

and belief. I enjoyed the introduction by Basu and Steinforth, which offered a good overview and insight into the historic and cultural dimension of this important topic. It's a pleasure to read the introduction with its excellent references.

In the first chapter Roland Littlewood cites the "Seligman-Error." Seligman, an anthropologist and physician, published an article in 1929 where he argued that severe mental illness was unknown in early contact New Guinea except in situations of considerable Westernization. Littlewood discusses the origins of schizophrenia and I enjoyed his comments on this dispute where academics like Wolfgang Blankenburg, George Devereux and Erwin Ackerknecht are quoted and discussed, a debate that is presently not en vogue.

Andreas Heinz and Anne Pankow start their article introducing the 19th century concept of „degeneration“ and describe the role that colonial and social hierarchies played in shaping the modern understanding of mental disorders. They discuss anti-colonial and anti-psychiatric ideas that questioned such hierarchical ideas about mental health and "normal development" and they try to describe the complex space occupied by modern discourses on "spirituality" and religious values in psychiatry. They demonstrate that from neurobiology to psychoanalysis it was believed that modern western mankind, which was limited to the white man, represented the peak of human development, while children, women and subjects suffering from mental disorders as well as colonized people were all supposed to represent more primitive stages of development. They close their article with an invitation to revitalise critical theories to cope with reactionary tendencies in current Western societies.

In his article "On the Notion of Social Pathology" Alain Ehrenberg notices a change in certain psychiatric syndromes. His sociological approach about mental health is more in terms of transformation of ideals than of power relationships. He stresses that there is a double process of psychologization as a result of weakening social links, and from the decline of the public man in favour of the

private man. In Ehrenberg's view, there is a difference of how the self is formulated in the US and in France. He argues that there is no such thing as a self in France, rather it's a secondary value. His conclusions are interesting: "In the US, narcissism appeared as a lack of responsibility of the self, a decline of individual autonomy. In France it appeared as a deinstitutionalization process, which meant a receding of the state, whose consequence, the exact opposite of American way, has been conceived of as an excess of responsibility on the self, an excess of autonomy."

Ellen Corin and Ramachandran Padmavati present their important research on schizophrenic patients in Montréal/Canada and Chennai/India. I find the article extremely helpful and interesting. To explore the roles of religion and spirituality in the expression and elaboration of the experience of psychosis, they collected data in Chennai in a pilot research study on young patients who had been diagnosed as schizophrenic. In many patients the narratives were coloured by religious or spiritual connotations which seemed to help them find some peace and relief. Corin and Padmavati are illustrating the role of religion in two case reports. In the first example, religious signifiers are employed in a struggle: on the one hand religious signifiers are employed to halt a sense of general failure and inadequacy, and in the other case they are used to safeguard the self from fear and confusion. Religious frontiers also manifest themselves as being fluent and crossable, particularly when one is searching for expression, help and relief. Though they are comparing data collected in Chennai and Montreal, the authors are cautious in drawing conclusions.

Gerard Leavey discusses the involvement of faith-based organisations in mental health and suicide-prevention programs in Ireland. Suicide is a major public health problem throughout the world and in Ireland the second biggest cause of premature death among young men. Leavey presents a study on in-depth interviews with 39 ministers from different Christian churches who are dealing with suicide prevention. Though secularism appears to be reality in much of Europe, the reasons for religious help seeking behaviour are various; these include personal trust and familiarity, a cultural religious explanation of the problem, for example spirit possessions' sinfulness

and punishment, or fear of being stigmatised when in contact with psychiatry. In almost all interviews with the clergy they admit that they are completely unprepared for the problems now confronting them. Collaboration between religion and psychiatry is not seen as uncomplicated despite the fact that clergy and psychiatry inhabit the same world of healing.

The article by Thomas Csordas describes an inpatient psychiatric unit specialising in the treatment of Native American adolescents. In this unit, indigenous therapeutic resources are integrated with resources of conventional psychiatry. He explains the modes of treatment where about 2/3 of the staff members were ethnically indigenous. The Native American staff members expressed different degrees of conformity with tribal cultural values and practices. The most prominent traditional feature of the therapy was the "sweat lodge ceremony" which is described in detail. Though there were differences in the opinion of certain procedures by the staff, in general Csordas views this mode of treatment as a successful model that integrates cognitive, sensory, emotional, biological and cultural interventions in a culturally sensitive way.

Johannes Quack draws on his experience of ethnographic fieldwork in different healing shrines which included Hindu, Muslim and Christian places in India. An interesting result of the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews in different healing shrines showed that around one quarter of the patients represented a scholastic mode of religiosity, two fifths a pragmatic mode of religiosity and about one third could not be assigned to either of the two. Patients and their families have often been ambivalent and change perspectives with respect to the dominant religious boundaries. The health seeking practices of the patients clearly showed that they did not decide whom to approach for help on the basis of a difference between established religious boundaries, rather they tended to approach any expert who was available, affordable and endowed with a certain reputation.

Some insights from Ghana are given by Ursula Read in her article "Doctor's sickness" or "Pastor's sickness?" During her own ethnographic research she approached over 60 people with mental illnesses in shrines, "prayer camps" and

households, and conducted formal interviews. Like in most Sub-Saharan African countries, the influence of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana attributes illness and misfortune to malign spiritual forces framed within the biblical cosmologic of magic and spiritual forces of the demonic. NGOs and donors promote a view of mental illness as a “medical disease” with psychotropic drugs as the only genuine treatment. But side effects of psychopharmacological drugs such as stiffness, feeling of drowsiness and weakness lead many to discontinue the drugs. Read’s article clearly shows that patients and their families are pragmatic in their way looking for help and they choose what helps them most. I agree with Read when she states: „The promise of mental health for all cannot be realised without addressing the complex social and structural determinants of mental illness whose solutions lie beyond the realm of individualised treatment whether from healers or psychiatrists.” Arne Steinforth shares in his article: “The Person in Between: Discourses on Madness, Money and Magic in Malawi” the experiences of his field research in rural and urban settings in Southern Malawi. For the sake of analysis he found it helpful to classify local aetiological models into three main categories: Notions of structural, spiritual and personal causation of mental disorder. He discusses the social transformations that took place in postcolonial and post-dictatorial Malawi and its influence on shaping mental disorders. He also mentions the rise and influence of Pentecostal churches, similar to what Ursula Read observed in Ghana. Steinforth cites one of the first experiments in Africa of trying to integrate the traditional village community with traditional healers and modern psychiatry, the “Aro village system” in Nigeria, developed by LAMBO (1966).

In this chapter Simon Dein demonstrates how the Pentecostal movement has grown during the last decades from 72 million in 1960 to 525 million believers in 2000 with the majority of growth occurring in non-western countries in the Caribbean, South America and Africa. In the following, Dein briefly outlines the history of the Pentecostal movement. According to him the movement has been closely aligned with charismatic individuals and the style of worship is emotional with music, clapping, caressing and dynamic preaching. Healing is one of the most constant activities in

the history of Christianity. Dein examines the role of healing in the Pentecostal movement, he argues that the provision of healing has played a significant role in its growth and worldwide popularity.

The last two chapters of the book report healing practices from Finland. James Wilce describes the so-called lament revival and healing lament courses in Karelian, Finland. These share features with other New Age healing courses. In the 19th century lament played a vital role in rural Karelia, especially funeral and wedding laments as well as “recruit” laments (for the men who were conscripted to the army). Course participants are almost all middle class women who have the time and the money to take part in such courses. Choosing elements from disparate traditions is a feature of post-secular spiritualities. Wilce points out that the new combination of the sacred, the therapeutic and the psychological aspects are new ways of understanding the self and that such local traditions are waiting to be re-contextualised and put to service in our post-modern world.

Also from Finland is the article “Healing enchantment: how does Angel healing work?” by Terhi Utriainen. One feature of the present day popularity of angels is the combination of Christian and esoteric spirituality. Angel healers are understood as working together with angels. Angel healers and their “clients” emphasize that angel-healing, along with other kinds of alternative healing is often more subtle and effective than either the pastoral care or the social and therapeutic services that are provided today. At the end of her article Utriainen remarks that more attention has to be given to the growing supply of commercial spiritual culture with its commodities and methods of enchantment.

When I was doing my residency in psychiatry at the beginning of the 1980s, culture and religion were not seen as important, and standard textbooks in psychiatry did not cover these topics. Modern psychiatry was secularized and religion was thought to have been superseded by science: neurotransmitters, psychoanalytic and psychological explanations were thought to be the scientific explanation for mental illness. Even today, few medical schools or specialist curricula provide any formal training for psychiatrists about how to properly address religion and spirituality in research and clinical practice.

That so-called scientific psychiatry excluded religion was not to the advantage of the psychiatric patient. Religiosity can be considered as a normal personality trait and cannot be disregarded by psychiatrist whatever their own idea on religiosity might be. But luckily many clinical psychiatrists did not practice only biomedical psychiatry but were open to the ideas of their patients. They never disregarded their patients' religious convictions.

The strength of this book lies in the different articles from four continents. There is one critique I would like to make—all authors are either from Europe or North America with the exception of Ramachandran Padmavati who comes from South India. In a volume spanning four continents, it would be suitable to have more “local” authors. This book makes an effort to equip mental health professionals with a better understanding of their patients and the religious behaviour embedded in the patients' local culture. The fieldwork observa-

tions especially are helpful for clinicians to reconsider their own stance.

I think that this book is important for all mental health workers who are working with patients from different cultural backgrounds, like psychiatric nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers as well as for anthropologists, sociologists, and for all who are involved in Global Mental Health and last but not least, for spiritual leaders like pastors and imams working in the field of mental health.

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DEANE, SUSANNAH 2018. Tibetan Medicine, Buddhism and Psychiatry. Mental Health and Healing in a Tibetan Exile Community.

Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 248 pp.

SUSANNAH DEANE is a British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Department of Religion and Theology of the University of Bristol (UK), focusing on a (medical) anthropological approach to the study of religion, in particular to Tibetan Buddhist perspectives on mental health, illness, and healing. With this monograph, she publishes her Ph.D. thesis (2015, University of Cardiff) as the result of qualitative ethnographic fieldwork among Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling, India (two six-month periods of fieldwork in 2011 and 2012). She investigates Tibetan therapeutic practices in the translocal frame of migration and medical diversity and focuses on mental health categories regarding socio-cultural concepts of personhood, self, and the body. Some crucial observations address the similarities of Ayurvedic and Tibetan humoral ideas (e.g., that “wind” [*rlung*] can be related to “Western” psychiatric concepts such as depression) and the perception of *subtle bodies*, *channels of energy*, and the involvement of *spirit* in human life processes. With my research interest and experience in Kardecism and related Brazilian Spiritist psychiatry, I spot various examples that illustrate the historical conceptual appropriation and acculturation of Buddhist knowledge and practice in the past and a certain correspondence in form and content of aesthetics and experiences of healing in the present. This personal remark does not intend to promote early phenomenological approaches to the comparison of religions but instead to add an aspect to DEANE’s other argument: biomedicine/psychiatry as cultural sets of practices are not as invariant or monolithic as they appear once practiced in different cultural contexts and models of *healing cooperation* (cf. *Curare* 41[2018]1+2), and medical diversity. Neither are “religious/traditional” healing practices and systems of knowledge which in DEANE’s example transform within a rather low-scale context of political escape of Tibetans from Chinese occupation to Indian refuge; they also do so in the large-scale distribution of so-called *complementary and alternative medicines* (CAM) worldwide, like e.g., mindfulness-training and yoga. It is, thus, another strength of her approach to not address

and compare *explanatory models* of health, illness, and healing in terms of culture-bound knowledge systems but instead *exploratory maps* as quests for pathways out of affliction and as an ongoing process of making sense/seeking meaning.

DEANE explores treatments of “madness” as located at the intersection of religious blessing and ritual, love and care, family and community support (an informant’s definition, p.3), and Tibetan perspectives on causation, management, and treatment of mental illness within an exile community in Darjeeling, India. She observes divergent perceptions of mental illness and healing and, accordingly, deviant health-seeking behavior in the context of medical diversity. In her point of view, professional healers’ perspectives, especially concerning *global (mental) health* strategies, have been highlighted in former research agendas. Accordingly, she turns to laypersons and patients with their experiences, e.g., mediumship, spirit possession, and transformational healing.

Apart from her introduction, conclusion, and thirteen illustrations, DEANE’s contribution consists of nine chapters divided into three parts with four thickly described and thoroughly analyzed case studies. *Part One* (“The Setting and the Approach”) delivers an overview of the field site and qualitative methodology (participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews). *Chapter 1* (“Residents, Migrants, and Exiles: A Brief History of Darjeeling and its Communities”) discusses historical, geographical, economic, and political implications, including aspects of structural violence, stigmatization, negotiation of identity, and coping strategies. *Chapter 2* (“Medicine and Healing in Darjeeling: Practitioners, Practices, and Institutions in Darjeeling and Around”) focuses on the diversity of populations and therapeutic facilities (governmental and private biomedical clinics and hospitals, ayurvedic, homeopathic, and Tibetan clinics as hybrids religious-spiritual and biomedical-psychiatric approaches). *Part Two* (“Medicine, Mental Health and Healing in the Tibetan Context: Theories & Practices”) introduces Tibetan approaches to mental health and illness, the role of spirits and deities, and biomedicine in

Tibetan contexts and policies. *Chapter 3* (“Tibetan Approaches to Mental Illness”) dedicates to discussions on body-mind-constellations, humors, and subtle bodies as an arena of contesting divergent perspectives on somatic-emotional afflictions and their relatedness to cognition/consciousness, cosmology, and the “self” as connected to certain environments and epistemologies. *Chapter 4* (“Spirits, Mental Health and Healing”) then focuses on spirit-mediumship as a causative explanation for affliction and explores the fundamental role of spirits in everyday life and resulting human-non/human relationships affecting health, illness, and healing. *Chapter 5* (“Biomedicine and the Tibetan Context”) serves as a delimiting ordering of the before-mentioned discourses to locate the following case studies within a frame of biological hegemony vs. therapeutic cooperation, professional vs. lay perspectives, curing vs. healing. *Part Three* (“The Case Studies”) compares experiences of DEANE’s research partners to “Western” notions of psychiatric categories (*Chapter 6* “Depression,” *Chapter 7* “Madness and its Causes,” *Chapter 8* “Belief, Faith and Healing,” and *Chapter 9* “Possession and Mediumship”) and considers contemporary uncertainties and conflicts.

In her conclusion, SUSANNAH DEANE remains humble, outlining strategies of navigating pluralistic medical systems between faith, belief, religion, tradition, and related communal and individual experiences (even though these terms seem to contradict her elaboration of deviant models of “self”). She describes dynamics of “mix and

match” (p. 198), “managing diverse worldviews in a medically pluralistic context” (p. 201) regarding experiences of distress. She discusses related strategies of health-seeking behavior at the intersection of ideology, pragmatism, political and economic frames, and transforming socio-cultural contexts towards diversity, contest, and integration of therapeutic approaches. I want to add that she also stresses the agency of *patients* who do not remain passive but develop coping strategies and specific *aesthetics of healing* (cf. *Curare* 42[2019]1+2) to negotiate experience and knowledge in sensory and spiritual terms. I take it as a strength of her argument to not refer too much to established *explanatory models* or *idioms of distress* but instead to *exploratory maps* as means to navigate in the realms of local and global (mental) health care challenges. It is one of the very few weaknesses of this monograph that these aims remain not clearly articulated in the introduction, which, naturally, causes confusion and inevitable ups and downs in her juxtaposition of approaches. I have missed a clear argument and, thus, maybe some innovative insight. However, her exciting thick description invites cross-cultural comparison and asks for further exploration, especially in terms of sensory ethnography. Further, it makes me declare it a “must-read,” at least for students of medicine and medical anthropology, when discussing health, illness, and healing in (trans)local/cultural contexts.

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KOFAHL, DANIEL & SEBASTIAN SCHELLHAAS 2018. Kulinarische Ethnologie. Beiträge zur Wissenschaft von eigenen, fremden und globalisierten Ernährungskulturen.

Bielefeld: transcript, 317 S.

Das hier besprochene Buch versammelt Beiträge, die im Rahmen von Workshops und Panels der „AG Kulinarische Ethnologie“ der „Deutschen Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde“ (DGV) seit ihrer Gründung 2009 als Vorträge gehalten wurden und nun gebündelt zur Verfügung stehen. Auch die Herausgeber wundern sich – mit der Rezensentin – über die Spärlichkeit der Publikationen zur deutschsprachigen kulinarischen Ethnologie. Immerhin erschien doch schon 1993 der grossartige, von Alois Wierlacher im Berliner Akademie-Verlag herausgegebene Sammelband *Kulturthema Essen: Ansichten und Problemfelder*, mit der eine interdisziplinäre Kulturwissenschaft des Essens begründet werden sollte, in der Ethnologen, Historiker, Germanisten, Mediziner, Wirtschaftsgeografen und andere zusammenarbeiteten. Offenbar schief das von der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) geförderte ambitionierte Projekt ein, wie leider so häufig in interdisziplinären Forschungsfeldern. Neben anderen kulturwissenschaftlichen Beiträgen findet sich dort der immer noch herausragende Aufsatz von Gerd Spittler zum „Lob des einfachen Mahles: Afrikanische und europäische Esskultur im Vergleich“.

Das zu rezensierende Buch schliesst hier an, insbesondere in seinem ersten Teil der „kulinarethnologischen Fallstudien“, die nach Mumbai, Indien (Pablo Holwitt), in die Anden Perus (Antje Baecker), nach Papua-Neuguinea (Anita von Poser) und Japan (Cornelia Reiher) entführen, worauf Überlegungen zur sog. „Mediterranen Diät“ (Ferdaouss Adda), zum Fast Food (Markus Kügle) und zur Küche der Indigenen in Kanada (Sebastian Schellhaas) folgen. Nicht alle Beiträge können hier im Einzelnen gewürdigt werden – wie bei jedem Sammelband –, vielmehr versucht die Rezensentin einen Überblick zu geben. Die kulinarethnologischen Fallstudien beruhen in der Regel auf Feldforschungen, wie sie für die Ethnologie prägend und bezeichnend sind. Damit können lebensweltliche Realitäten abgebildet werden, die ansonsten oft komplett unterbelichtet sind. So zeichnet etwa Holwitt für Mumbai nach, wie Vegetarier (bzw. eine bestimmte „hohe“ Kaste) darüber bestimmen, wer in welches Haus ziehen darf und

darüber Kontrolle ausüben, wer zu ihnen gehört oder eben nicht. Dabei scheint der Vegetarismus eher vorgeschaltet zu sein, um nicht nach Kasten- und Religionszugehörigkeit zu argumentieren und ihrem entsprechenden Kontrollsystem.

Mit dem Phänomen des Fast Food befasst sich Markus Kügle, der es aus dem Geist der „Cuisine Moderne“ entstehen sieht. Immerhin beschäftigen sich spätestens seit den achtziger Jahren des letzten Jahrhunderts verschiedene Gesellschaftswissenschaftler damit (vgl. PATER 1989), und es entstanden auch soziale Bewegungen, u. a. in Deutschland, die gegen McDonalds, den übermässigen Fleischverzehr und entsprechende Umweltprobleme (Müll, Abholzung von Regenwald in Südamerika für Sojafelder (sic!), usw.) vorgingen. Aber Kügle geht es stattdessen um das aus der Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie bekannte sog. Blackboxing, des Unsichtbarmachens von gesellschaftlichen Prozessen.

Der zweite Teil des Buches „Kulinarische Forschungsfelder“ bietet eher theoretische Themen wie etwa „zur sozialen Konstruktion von Fisch“ (Tobias Lasner), zur „kulinarischen Multiplizität der westkenianischen Luoküche“ (Mario Schmidt), über „Ontologie in der Küche“ (Thomas Reinhardt) und „Functional Food“ (Daniel Kofahl) sowie zwar zuletzt, aber sicher nicht als letztes Forschungsfeld, die „Drinking Skills“ (Mareile Flitsch, Maike Powrozniak, Martina Wernsdorfer), einem Rückblick auf eine völkerkundliche Ausstellung in Zürich.

Die Einleitung der beiden Herausgeber bettet das Buch in seine aktuelle Forschungslandschaft ein, die eigenartigerweise, wie schon zu Beginn bemerkt, im deutschsprachigen Raum seltsam unterbelichtet ist, auch wenn es hier und da Ausnahmen gibt. Ganz anders dagegen die französische Ethnologie, die sich schon seit längerem (etwa Claude Lévi-Strauss) mit kulinarischen Fragestellungen beschäftigt, zumal schon lange gilt, was umgangssprachlich mit „man ist, was man isst“ bezeichnet wird. Hier wird deutlich, dass Essen, Trinken und die entsprechenden Vor- und Zubereitungen unbedingt zu Menschen und ihren Kulturen gehören und damit ethnologischer Betrachtung

tungsweise grundsätzlich zugänglich ist, wie dies ja auch für die Medizin und die Medizinethnologie gilt, die sich langsam ihren Raum erobern musste. Insofern liegen kulinarische Ethnologie und Medizinethnologie nicht weit voneinander entfernt.

Was allerdings der Satz bedeuten soll, dass Kofahl in seinem Beitrag „... mittels eines formtheoretischen Analyse kalküls in eine alimentäre Ethnosoziologie ein(führt), in der *Essen und Trinken* (kursiv im Original) als basales Letztelement soziokultureller Organisation verstanden wird“ (S. 22), bleibt der Rezensentin auch nach längerer Überlegung ein Rätsel.

Insgesamt ist es also ein sehr heterogenes Buch, das im Übrigen von der „Deutschen Akademie für Kulinaristik“ und der „Deutschen Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie“ (früher: DGV) gefördert wurde. Es gibt einen guten Überblick zum Thema.

KATARINA GREIFELD, Frankfurt am Main

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DOROTHEA LÜDDECKENS, MONIKA SCHRIMPF (eds) 2018. *Medicine – Religion – Spirituality. Global Perspectives on Traditional, Complementary, and Alternative Healing.*

Bielefeld: transcript, 420 pp.

This volume of essays is concerned with a contemporary approach of interdisciplinary research in the Study of Religion, dealing with various appearances of modern healing-systems from Africa, Asia and Europe. Most significant is the fact that most of the authors do not have a background in medical education; it unites scholars from the Study of Religion with different regional as well as interdisciplinary specializations (for example, Japanese Studies, Social and Cultural Anthropology of India, History of Medicine in Africa, Psychology, and others) approaching the “medical field” from this perspective, except for W. BRUCHHAUSEN who is a physician as well as ethnologist and theologian. (It should be mentioned that there was a debate going on in the past about considering “medicine” as a “discipline of Cultural Studies” among scholars of the Study of Religion, initiated by Burkhard Gladigow who is in charge of the paradigm shift within the Study of Religion no more clinging to the category of the “holy”: away from a theological or religious understanding of the issue “religion” towards a cultural one, cp. GRIESER & KOCH 2021). The introduction presents a survey of a much contested working-field where medicine, religion and spirituality are deeply entangled together. Basically, the editors are attached to the contemporary paradigm of the differentiation between medicine and religion. The focus lies on the entanglement between both. DOROTHEA LÜDDECKENS draws the attention to a “linguistic minefield” concerning this area of research (this minefield being most likely not restricted to pure terminology only). – WALTER BRUCHHAUSEN starts with the differentiation between medicine and religion via politics and science in East Africa. He analyzes medical and religious traces of healing in contemporary Tanzania on an ethnographical basis. In East Africa, a variety of religiously oriented healing-systems exist next to the “modern biomedicine”, as he names the secular medicine being mostly influenced by Western and Arabic medicine. Traditionally, medicine here is understood in an all-covering way, including also the “healings” of private, professional as well as

educational problems. All ideas are common whereas Islamic and Christian experts were trying to free the healing system from these in a colonialist manner. The acceptance of exorcisms of spirits and similar phenomena can be observed and were integrated by Sufi-Muslim groups, Pentecostals, Zionists or charismatic Christians – groups being refused not only by the medical, but also by the religious orthodoxies. The separation of the “medical” aspect from the “ritual” or “traditional ones” in regard of witchcraft seems to be problematic: The general destruction of “traditional medicine” by colonial officers in the South of Tanganyika had not been the intention of these people; their aim was only directed against witch-finding, not against the treatment of the sick (38), and a distinction between “black art” and “benevolent witchcraft” (37). The scientific research of local herbal medicine remains untouched here, gaining a lot of attention and acceptance. MONIKA SCHRIMPF engages in the medical discourses and practices of contemporary Japanese religions, presenting two case studies on Buddhist medicine (Kageyama Kyōshun) and the new religious movement “Perfect Liberty Kyōdan”, two streamings located at the fringes of religion, according to the scholar of Sociology of Religion, STEVE BRUCE, because it is only here where one propagates therapeutic practices. SCHRIMPF resumes that traditional Japanese religions are claiming healing possibilities for themselves applying medical as well as scientific terminologies in order to legitimize their claims within the religious field. This linguistic scientification serves to strengthen the position and the influence of religious traditions in contemporary Japanese society. In the Buddhist sphere, traditional medical knowledge acquires its meaning only via the fact of being validated by contemporary medical scientific knowledge. – With NINA RAGETH, the reader remains in Asia. She works on the semantic structure and structuring conditions in Tamil medicine of two Siddha practitioners. India is not only the country of numerous gods, goddesses and languages, but also of a number of healing systems. The Siddha med-

ical system is a special case: Having gained recognition by the Indian government and being integrated into the public health sector, it seems to have lost some of its empowering effects and authority to hereditary Siddha practitioners, because they were then restricted in their activities, in opposition to college-trained practitioners. They now stand in a symbiotic relationship, and only in this opposition the religious semantics become effective and the hereditary Siddha practitioner himself meaningful. So, the college-trained practitioner seems to have more medical authority whereas the hereditary practitioner having more religious one, both sharing the same field with different impacts and sometimes opposing focuses. – ANTHONY PATTATHU deals with a case study of Ayurveda in Germany and discursive formations between religion, medicine and embodiment. Ayurveda has become an enormously attractive healing practice in Germany since a while. The author describes the historical development of Ayurveda-reception in Germany which began with the introduction of Transcendental Meditation by GURU MAHARISHI in this country, and the foundation of the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ayurveda” in the year 1983, being the official representative. Together, they developed the “registered trademark Maharishi Ayurveda”. Since then, the German Ayurveda-market has multiplied, offering a broad variety of training programs for Ayurveda consultants (Ayurveda Fachberater), being certified by the Saarland Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IHK) – a combination of institutionalization as well as quality management. Nevertheless, the development of Ayurveda in Germany often was under severe critique, causing even highly political debates. PATTATHU refers to the conceptual frame being developed by ANNE KOCH, differentiating three phases: a) homogenization, b) popularization, c) diversification. The author resumes that Ayurveda, as an originally Indian healing system, is very useful to satisfy the needs of religiously sensitive people in the sense of a religious embodiment of healing, which is definitely the case with Maharishi Ayurveda, being a “holistic” healing system. It depends on the original application and the relationship between the Ayurveda practitioner and his patient/client whether the element – medical healing system or religious embodiment – is in the center-focus. Indologist KENNETH GRE-

GORY ZYSK describes Western Ayurveda as “New Age Ayurveda” with strong spiritual elements; whereas the medical doctor and chief physician at the Habichtswald Klinik Kassel, ANANDA SAMIR CHOPRA, strongly speaks up against him, calling Ayurveda a very old medical system that has nothing to do with wellness or spirituality (147). The potential for religious embodiment in Ayurveda clearly shows in the application and combination with the dosha-concept which is applied directly by some “Heilpraktiker”.¹ It is understood as a possibility for “self-empowerment” by the patients in these cases. – D. LÜDDECKENS presents the theoretical foundation of this volume, it could have been placed at the beginning, after the introduction. Being placed in the centre though makes sense, too, since it is a centre issue. Her aim here is to suggest an explanation for the question why “Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) is attractive in certain medical contexts. She resumes that the increase of complementary and alternative healing systems in contemporary western countries indicates increasingly blurred borders between the sections “religion” and “medicine”. She interpretes this circumstance as a sign of growing self-consciousness and autonomy of patients. CAM, as heterodoxy, is being integrated and institutionalized in many areas of established conventional secular (bio)medicine – as a medical system based on the principles and academic knowledge of natural sciences, the “orthodoxy” – which she understands as being a reconciling de-differentiation. She basically and essentially refers to developments and observations in Switzerland, including some other European developments. The fact of the tools of CAM being a somewhat “esoteric instruments suitcase” – rather based on ideological elements of esotericism and New Age or similar – could have undergone some more critical reflections, according to my opinion. LÜDDECKENS clearly expresses though that “(Bio) medicine became confined to the empirical level, often being perceived as fragmentary and mechanistic. Patients became bodies, and bodies were seen as matter” and, quoting ATZENI/VON GRODDECK, 2015: “Doctors save bodies, not souls.” (174). The most important aspect here is that in CAM, there is no more differentiation between “medicine” and “religion/spirituality” in some cases – which might be in opposition to healing in some

areas. Medical “counter-culture” (190) can show problematic features when the state withdraws from essential medical treatment and care which is, for example, the case in Great Britain in oncological care, as far as I got some private information from English friends. Therefore, in my opinion, the evaluation of “spiritual medical counter-culture” asks for strict quality management before being acknowledged from health-insurance companies; otherwise, the risk of a “happy dying” (Euthanasie), or, in severe cases, even “mercy killings” might increase significantly and faster – probably not always in accordance with the will and wish of the patient in question. - Overlapping fields in the section of anthroposophical end-of-life care and self-empowerment at the end of life in Switzerland is the subject of an article by the editors together with BARBARA ZEUGIN on the basis of her case study in an anthroposophical hospital. At the beginning, they step into the area of debating the recognition and covering of costs of so-called CAM procedures which was decided positively via “Volksabstimmung” (people’s voting): the Swiss people voted in favor of integrating anthroposophic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy, neural therapy, and herbal medicine into the official list of services covered by compulsory health insurance (202). The authors call this a “growing social acceptance” of CAM. As a result, they find that anthroposophic end-of-life care can be conflictious, because it follows two different patterns of rules: The academic medical one and the anthroposophic spiritual one. The latter should be shared with and by the patient. All this as well as the various functional roles of physicians and health care-personnel can be conflictious, because anthroposophical care is more time-consuming than conventional one – an economic factor of interest for the hospital administration. – The last and maybe most controversial as well as challenging contribution is presented by STEPHANIE GRIPENTROG. She tries to map the boundaries between science and religion with the examples of Psychology, Psychiatry and Near-Death-Experiences (NDE) – a complex, difficult as well as taboo-inflicted undertaking. Her fundamental literature is based on the writings of heterogenous “Transpersonal Psychology” of psychiatrist and LSD researcher STANISLAV GROF who founded this “psycho-spiritual practice” in the

year 1987. There are three different approaches of analysis from the Study of Religion for this topic: 1. JAMES with his approach of such experiences as “religious ones;” a key idea of Psychology of Religion, 2. GLADIGOW’s critique of this as being “a too religious interpretation,” and KRECH’s approach to look at such “Near-Death Experiences” through the lense of “communication” instead of “experience” in a reconciliative manner. JAMES brings the religious experience close to a pathological one (245); at his time at the beginning of the 20th century, there seems to have been no other possibility to make a clear difference between pure imagination and real experience, whereas GROF believed to combine and unite Medicine, Psychology and Religion in his “psychedelic therapy with people dying”, taking LSD himself for experimental purposes. She presents GROF’s ideas in a visual manner with systematic illustrations. One can assume that this practical approach with the dying in their last phase of life could not be the worst solution; additionally, the nearness between Science and Religion or religious feelings here show as clearly as can be: It concerns a “ritual of transition” at the end of the cycle of life. Patients reported afterwards – after the taking of psychedelic drugs as well as without those at NDE – that they felt much more at ease, much stronger and in a much better mood. In respect of this background, the therapeutic potential of LSD to create “model psychosis” under certain controlled conditions might be of importance, and here, LSD maybe recognized as a helpful substance. An unconventional, provocative approach under completely modern (including medical psychological) preconditions. – Altogether, this volume 13 of “Religious Studies” is rich, inspiring, sometimes irritating as well as sufficiently differentiating in dealing with an enormously diffuse contemporary phenomenon which asks for further research, contests and evaluation. Grey zone areas in medical care can be highly interesting, but also full of risks, when excellent academic knowledge in combination with practical experience, observations and evaluations shall be replaced by lay healers or spiritual care-takers. Scholars of the discipline “Study of Religion” are no physicians, but, instead, academically educated and trained specialists differing from theologians (at least, they definitely should so). This borderline may some-

times be blurring, but it should definitely remain recognizable. MONIKA SCHRIMPF expresses this with ROTHSTEIN's words: "Religion has the ability to transform science into something useful for its purpose, while science usually is deprived of the possibility of transforming religion into something scientifically meaningful" (83). DOROTHEA LÜDDECKENS emphasizes that CAM offers a "selective appropriation of meaning" by integrating metaphysical or transcendent aspects which is mostly important in palliative care where conventional medical reason has reached its limits (191). Interesting is the all-over differing use of the term CAM: While it refers to those measures that we usually call "alternative medicine" (or practices) in the Western context, it is mostly "traditional medicine" (or "practices") in the African and Asian context. The age of the practices seems to be the key issue here: Actually, homeopathy, anthroposophical medicine and Transpersonal Psychology (the latter representing a very special case within modern academic psychological research according to GRIPENTROG) are much younger – if not to say: modern – than the ones described and scrutinized in the African and Asian context. – The cover design reflects the colorfulness of the issue and the center aspect: Dhanvantari, an embodiment of the god Vishnu, is connected to Ayurveda. The Divine and the Religious appear in a colorful human-like form. The fact that the publishers use the term "Religious Studies" for this editorial line challenges the ongoing debate about terminology, but it should be acknowledged that the term "Religious Studies" is of common use in wide parts of the English speaking world, seeming to mean something different from "Theology." It seems to be rather compatible with what quite a number of colleagues prefer to use in order to be more precise: "Study of Religion" or "Comparative Study of Religion." The reviewer considers the term "Study

of Religion," "Comparative Study of Religion," "Science of Religion" or "Religion Studies" to be far better, more precise and, therefore, more suiting than "Religious Studies" since the latter appears to be too close to a theological or religious understanding of the discipline, as many of us have debated in a number of cases and conferences where, for example, JENNY BERGLUND from Sweden (EASR) suggested to use "Religion Education" rather than "Religious Education," drawing the attention to the same problem, and parallel to the ongoing discussion concerning the problematic term "Islamic Studies", being too close to a theological or religious understanding of the non-devotional discipline of "Islamwissenschaft" (History and Cultures of Islam).

This new collection of essays is also available as "open access" publication.

ASSIA MARIA HARWAZINSKI, Tübingen

Notes

1 PATTATHU does not translate the German word „Heilpraktiker“ which makes sense to me, since „healing-practitioner“ in other areas of the world does refer to different applications, characteristics, models and concepts of healing or medical personnel, and cannot be translated directly into „Heilpraktiker,“ even though it often does have substantial overlappings in the understanding of such practitioners.

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DEBORA FROMMELD 2019. Die Personenwaage. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Soziologie der Selbstvermessung.

Bielefeld: transcript, 370 S.

Das zu besprechende Buch wurde 2017 als Dissertation von der Universität Ulm angenommen. Im Transcript-Verlag ist es zu Recht in der Reihe „Körperkulturen“ erschienen. Es ist eine akribische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Instrument Personenwaage, das seit etwa 150 Jahren existiert und verschiedene historische Phasen durchlaufen hat. Nicht nur wurde sie immer kleiner – von der grossen Waage auf Marktplätzen zur kleinen transportablen –, sondern sie veränderte ihre Bedeutung im Leben von vielen Menschen. Zunächst eher zur Gaudi und allgemeinen Belustigung aufgestellt, wurde sie ein medizinisches Instrument und heute ein Life Style-Element in vielen Badezimmern bzw. für gestählte Körper („bodies“). Es werden nicht mehr nur Kilos gewogen, auch anderes wie z. B. Fettanteile werden elektronisch ermittelt. Vom alleinstehenden Instrument hat sie sich zu einer potenziell vernetzbaren Maschine entwickelt, die nicht nur Freude auslöst, sondern auch Frustration und Enttäuschung, etwa wenn eine Diät nicht zum sehnlich gewünschten Erfolg geführt hat.

FROMMELD verwebt die historische Geschichte einer Instrumentenentwicklung mit einer sensussoziologischen Untersuchung und verwendet für beide die Diskursanalyse. Einen grossen Raum nimmt daher die Analyse der Patentanmeldungen von neuen oder scheinbar neuen Entwicklungen ein, da bei diesem Vorgang „technische“ Entwicklungen mit „neuen“ Bedeutungen und Erklärungen für die Personenwaage präsentiert wurden und werden. Heute kann die Personenwaage auch direkt am Körper als App in einem „Wearable“ getragen werden und damit auch als Modeaccessoires dienen.

Körpergewicht ist nicht nur eine Messgrösse für sich, wie FROMMELD zeigt, sondern seine Messung mit der Personenwaage ist aufs Engste mit „Schönheitsempfinden“ und dem Gefühl des „Richtigseins“ verbunden. Daher sind Diäten (insbesondere die „Brigitte“-Diät) und Diätclubs ein weiterer Baustein in ihrer Untersuchung. Es geht dabei nicht nur um Technik, sondern auch um Wissen und Macht und damit auf Zugriffe auf das Individuum und seinen Körper. Aus dieser Pers-

pektive wurde die Foucaultsche Diskursanalyse als Untersuchungsansatz gewählt.

Im 1. Kapitel geht es „Mit der Personenwaage Schönheit und Gesundheit messen?“ um die grundlegenden Fragestellungen, Quellen und Aufbau der Untersuchung, worauf sich das 2. Kapitel zu „Methodologie und Forschungsdesign der diskursanalytischen Studie“ naturgemäss anschliesst. Das 3. Kapitel zeigt schliesslich die ersten Anfänge zu „Von der Idee zur Personenwaage“, das 4. Kapitel diskutiert „Die Vorgeschichte eines Wissenregimes: Messen und Wiegen von Individuen bis 1918“. Hier folgt eine Einführung in die anthropometrische Vermessung und einen Diskurs um Standardisierung (Body Mass Index – BMI, wozu die Autorin schon publiziert hat, vgl. FROMMELD 2018) bis zur Einführung von ersten öffentlichen Waagen. Das 5. Kapitel nimmt sich „Das Wissensregime von Zeiger und Display: Die Personenwaage wird privat (1919–1989)“ vor, worauf das 6. Kapitel in der historischen Verlängerung aufbaut über „Das Wissensregime von Apps und Sensoren: Die Personenwaage 24/7 am Körper tragen (seit 1990)“, wobei jetzt nicht mehr nur das Körpergewicht analysiert wird, sondern eine „grenzenlose Selbstvermessung 2.0“ stattfindet. Das 7. Kapitel, „Die Regierung der (Selbst-)Vermessung“, resümiert die Befunde mit einem Zwischenresümee zur „Genealogie der Personenwaage“ und einem „folgenreichen Spiel um Wahrheit“, worauf das 8. als Schlusskapitel „Die vernetzte Macht der Personenwaage“ thematisiert.

Die Rezensentin hätte sich gewünscht, wenn die Darstellung und Auseinandersetzung mit den verschiedenen Patentanmeldungen etwas kürzer ausgefallen wäre. Immerhin umfasst das Buch rund 300 Seiten und befasst sich ausschliesslich mit einem Instrument. Auch wenn damit „auf komplexe Prozesse von Technisierung, Individualisierung, Normalisierung, Medikalisation und Ästhetisierung“ (Klappentext) verwiesen wird, hätte eine Straffung dem Buch gut getan.

Die Personenwaage ist also nicht nur ein technisches Instrument, sondern ein Artefakt als Teil einer Gesundheitsgesellschaft: „Ein gesundheitlicher Imperativ richtet sich nicht nur in histori-

scher Hinsicht, sondern auch heute an ein präventives und unternehmerisches Selbst, was unter anderem durch ritualisierte Körperhandlungen zum Ausdruck kommt“ (S. 299), etwa der täglichen Auswertung von Kalorienzufuhr und Nahrungsabbau vulgo Ernährung und Nutzung entsprechender Apps zur Selbstvermessung mit anschließenden Handlungsempfehlungen zur Selbstoptimierung.

Der Ansatz, historische Dokumente und Entwicklungen mittels Patentanmeldungen zu untersuchen, ist ein origineller Zugang, der mit Sicherheit viel Arbeit verursacht und Energie verbraucht hat. Allerdings hätte er in der vorliegenden Buchform etwas kürzer ausfallen können. Die Auseinandersetzung mit den diskursanalytischen Fou-

caultschen Ansätzen ist der Autorin gut gelungen. Überhaupt scheint die Untersuchung von Artefakten in Bezug auf Körperkulturen und Wissensregimen ein interessanter Weg zur Generierung von Erkenntnissen zu Wissen und Macht. Vermutlich wird schon heute in Reflektion auf die Covid-19-Pandemie an entsprechenden Untersuchungen etwa im Zusammenhang zum Impfen geforscht.

KATARINA GREIFELD, Frankfurt

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KEVIN FEENEY (ed) 2020. Fly Agaric. A Compendium of History, Pharmacology, Mythology, and Exploration.

Ellensburg, WA: Fly Agaric Press, 508 pp.

After his earlier contributions to the research of *Amanita muscaria* (FEENEY 2010, 2013) and other entheogens (e.g., FEENEY 2014), Kevin Feeny has delivered as editor a voluminous vademecum for each person interested in the ethnomycology of this fabulous fungus. Here a mushroom is presented that has deep roots in traditional Siberian ethnomedicine and inebriation (BATIANOVA & BRONSHTEIN 2016; GORDEEVA 2017; VERESHCHAKA 2014), but, contrariwise, is elsewhere solely deemed good to look at when a wide berth is given and generally feared on account of its (widely-presumed) inherent toxicity, if not lethality, upon consumption. While the research of the fly agaric was in the ascendant in the 1960s (WASER 1967; WASSON 1967) and 1970s (e.g., OTT 1976) (along with the then wholesale interest in entheogens)—briefly resurfacing in the 1990s (vide, e.g., contributions in RÄTSCH 1995)—, few fresh endeavours have since complemented to our still inchoate and, indeed, biased attitude towards it (KALLWEIT 2021). It is therefore high time for a volume that compiles what is known about *A. muscaria* and defines the extant research lacunae. Fortunately, Feeny and the contributors have put forth just that.

The volume is organised into five parts (Mushroom Hunting & Identification; Religion, Culture, & Folklore; Archaeological Evidence; Diet & Cuisine; Pharmacology & Physiological Effects) and, due to the interdisciplinary nature of this field of research, a great many authors contributed thereto; hence it will be concisely described chapterwise hereinafter. To confer the grass roots of the topic, the volume begins with three chapters on identification and gathering, wherein a particularly handy “Amanita Basics” mycology-starter-kit chapter is provided followed by an illustrated and detailed guide to the sundry subspecies of psychoactive (North American) *Amanitas* and how to tell them apart.

Thereafter, in the second part, the “murkier territory of religion, culture, history, and folklore” (xiii) is tackled, starting with the contested but in scholarly depth hitherto unsurpassed identification of the ancient Vedic entheogen Soma as *A.*

muscaria by R. GORDON WASSON. This contested claim Feeny & T. Austin reassesses biochemically with *Lactobacillus* bacteria (usually present in milk) used as enhancer of fly agarics’ decarboxylation, also readily brought about through a range of other techniques reviewed by the authors. In accord with their caveat, however, further such research is warranted. In chapter 5, Millman picks up the oft-rehearsed presumption of Santa Claus having originally been a (fly agaric using) shaman. Whichever thoughts one harbours about it, the novel ethnomycological titbits he provides from Lapland’s Sami are intriguing. This is followed by a chapter composed of originally two hard-to-get yet pivotal articles of fly agaric use among the Koryaks as of mid-1990s by Salzman and colleagues. Other reissued articles are included in chapters 8, 9, and 11, covering, respectively, entheogenic mushroom use among the old Scandinavians (by S. Leto); a translation of Ödman’s berserker-used-fly-agarics hypothesis (which reverberates until today, vide BLUMENBERG & HOROWITZ 2020); and, an equally putative utilization of *A. muscaria* as might be exegeted in Celtic legends (by E. R. Laurie & T. White). In a similar vein, chapters 10 (“the berserkers” by M. A. Hoffman & C. A. P. Ruck), 12 (“fly agaric motifs in the Cú Chulaind Myth Cycle” by T. J. Riedlinger), and 13 (“bride of brightness & mother of all wisdom” by P. McCoy) complement the “murky” myco-mythological manifestations as surmised in this volume. Rather novel and indeed worthwhile appears the connection between the Russian Baba Yaga and *A. muscaria* F. M. Dugan traces in chapter 7. Appearing somewhat out of place to me, chapter 14 features an interview between Feeny and M. Niemoller, the founder and proprietor of the now defunct company “poisonous non-consumables” that, among others, also sold dried fly agarics for explicitly non-consumption purposes such as laboratory analyses. Finally, part two terminates with the fly agaric’s manifestation as *Glückspilz* (“The Lucky Mushroom” by Feeny) which looms large in a well-known German fairy tale reproduced in translation (by M. Meissner, K. Schickantz & S. Grecki); a trait of *A. muscaria* that lingers on in

the minds of the contemporary German populace (KALLWEIT 2021).

In part three of the volume, archaeological ethnomycology is pursued with almost equal share to species of *Amanita* and *Psilocybe*. Initially, G. Samorini draws attention to rock art sporting mushroom images in the Sahara, northern Asia and south India. C. de Borhegyi, then, focuses on Mesoamerican mushroom artefacts and related phenomena that can purportedly be ascribed to the aforementioned species.

The fourth part, about diet and cuisine, is ushered in by an excerpt from an article by F. V. Coville (1898) which tells of fly agarics being thoroughly prepared and thereafter consumed by a woman in Washington, D.C. An ensuing article of fly agarics used as food in one particular family (by D. Curry) chimes in neatly with the excerpt by Coville and the more detailed chapter 21 about the very same utility. Therein, Feeney puts forth a nutritional vignette of *A. muscaria* and outlines his experiences with diverse recipes in which this mushroom occupies centre stage. I find especially his nutritional comparison with more common searched-for mushrooms intriguing.

The final and fifth part of the volume opens with a meticulous state-of-the-art review (by E. Maciejczyk) of the fly agaric's chemical makeup, the research of which, however, remains largely incomplete in spite of the knowledge that this very mushroom "has been used as a 'miracle cure' for many diseases" and has thus far proved a genuine cornucopia of pharmacological lead compounds. Also one steady mirage, the role of muscarine in the fly agaric's folklore and toxicology, while for too long assumed to be solely responsible for its effects, is duly revisited in an updated article of 2010 reproduced in chapter 23 (by Feeney & T. Stijve) by opting for a more differentiated discourse on the inherent compounds. Differentiation is indeed indicated, since *A. muscaria* has long been known as homeopathic remedy the beginnings of which are discernible in H. P. Holmes' (1894) "Agaricus Muscarius" chapter, whereas Feeney & B. Mann's contribution beforehand discuss this utility in a more contemporary light. This is further enlarged upon in chapters 26 and 27, wherein Feeney describes matter-of-factly in which fields of application *A. muscaria* has traditionally been used for as a remedy and how to make some such

medicinal preparations. In non-therapeutic doses, however, *A. muscaria* may evoke psychoactive effects as elucidated in chapter 28 and since these are notoriously elusive the final chapter queries whether there might be a formula with which to pinpoint a somewhat predictable outcome.

In describing the overall impression one gets of the volume, many benefits and few shortcomings can be discerned. Starting with the latter, the mythological part is fairly large and speculative (pace the authors' efforts and expertise), albeit discreetness is being voiced. However, these fastidious remarks are far outweighed by the advantages the volume provides, among which one, at the very least, can find (a) a highly instructive introduction part, (b) new vistas on the Soma enigma, (c) many reissued articles that are usually scattered or hardly obtainable, (d) an up-to-date review of the mushroom's biochemistry, and (e) the compiled recipes for nutritional and medicinal ends, as well as the manifold bioassays. Some contributions appear particularly outstanding to me. Firstly, the detailed and richly illustrated guide to the various psychoactive *Amanitas*. Secondly, the culinary aspects which might instigate anew the debate about the fly agaric's toxicity. Finally, and related to the latter, the updated viewpoints about the medicinal and inebriatory utility which are direly needed, due to their outdated nature in the conventional discourse. It must be stressed that at no time does any contributor encourage the consumption of *A. muscaria*.

All in all, Feeney and the contributors are to be applauded for having furnished a long overdue, state-of-the-art book about the fly agaric that hopefully kindles "future investigations, research, and explorations of this remarkable fungus" (xix).

TRISTAN T. KALLWEIT, Greifswald

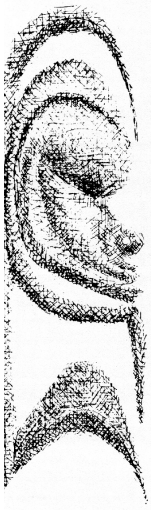
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Articles



Paul Hockings: The Amateur Anthropologist. G. W. Willis and His Precursors

Nicholas S. Hopkins: A Muslim Shrine in Tunisia. Sidi Ali el Arian in Testour in the 1970s

Kalid Mouna et Kanza Afsahi: La légalisation du cannabis. Une ethnographie d'un débat politique dans le Rif du Maroc

Joachim G. Piepke: The Yeti Does Exist after All. Franz Xaver Eichinger's Field Notes about His Encounter with the "Abominable Snowman" in 1949

Darius J. Piwowarczyk: Family Transformation in the Colonial Context of German Togo

Michael Singleton: St. George and the Dragon – the Self and the Other

Han F. Vermeulen: Anthropology and Ethnology in Europe Today. Review Essay

Book reviews by:

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNGEN
ABSTRACTS
RÉSUMÉS

Zusammenfassungen der Beiträge der *Curare* 43 (2020) 1–4

Curare Corona Tagebücher I

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON KATRIN AMELANG, CLEMENS EISENMANN, JANINA KEHR,
HELMAR KURZ, MIRKO UHLIG & EHLER VOSS

JULIANA BEECHER, LEE BRANDO, VAIDA NORVILAITĖ & SONIA YUHUI ZHANG: Schreiben wir uns selbst aus. Kollaborative Autoethnographie aus dem Epizentrum einer Pandemie S. 17–86, verfasst auf Englisch

Der folgende Text ist das Produkt einer kollaborativen Schreibgruppe, den Aufruf der *Curare* nach dem Verfassen von Coronavirus-Tagebüchern im malinowskischen Stil aufgegriffen hat. Als die Vereinigten Staaten im März 2020 zum Epizentrum von COVID-19 wurden, trainierten neun Wissenschaftler (Doktoranden und ein Professor an der New School for Social Research) ihre Beobachtungsfähigkeiten und zeichneten ihre Introspektionen über ihre Erfahrungen von innen auf. Obwohl verschiedene soziale Distanzierungsmaßnahmen ihren zuvor mobilen Lebensstil beeinträchtigt hatten, nahm das digitale Schreiben und Treffen kathartische Resonanz auf und bot ein Mittel zur Verbindung. In diesem Text präsentiert eine Untergruppe von vier Tagebuchschreibern einige herausragende Aspekte des Lebens während der Pandemie, da die Rekursivität des gemeinsamen Schreibens und Lesens uns nicht nur über unsere Innenräume hinaus schob, sondern auch unsere singulären Perspektiven in einen geschichteten Text verbreitete, der Grenzbildung, Wartung und Verhandlung von uns verlangte.

Schlagwörter Autoethnographie – kooperatives Schreiben – COVID-19 – Tagebuch – Grenzerhaltung / -aushandlung – Masken – Hygiene – Gesellschaftsvertrag

Jeder Abschnitt hat einen anderen Autor, enthält jedoch ethnografische „Daten“ von anderen Tagebuchschreibern. Das erste Stück ist eine metakognitive Reflexion über die Methodik des Tagebuchschreibens seitens der Anthropologen, die ihre Positionen als entfernte Beobachter steuern. In den folgenden Abschnitten werden global relevante Themen zu den Bedeutungen und Materialitäten des Tragens von Masken lokalisiert sowie die Herausforderungen und Dilemmata, die sich aus einer lauwarmer Politik der sozialen Distanzierung ergaben. Vorgestellt werden auch die Vorstellungen von Multi-spezies-Interaktionen, die durch Hygiene-/Reinigungspraktiken rund um COVID-19 eröffnet wurden. Dieser Text stellt reflexive und kollaborative Arbeit dar. Die Ethnographen selbst bewegen sich zwischen Subjekt-/Objektpositionen. Umfang, Tiefe und Zeitlichkeit sind nicht festgelegt, was ein Gefühl für dynamische Kollektivitäten und neue Möglichkeiten vermittelt, die sich in Inhalt und Methode zeigen.

EHLER VOSS: Der Kapitalismus ist das Virus. Stimmen des Protests gegen die deutsche Corona-Politik aus Leipzig S. 95–148, verfasst auf Englisch

Die Ausrufung der Corona-Pandemie hat ein häufig undifferenziertes Lagerdenken und daraus resultierend eine Art asymmetrische Duellsituation entstehen lassen, die einen vor die Wahl stellt, sich entweder auf die Seite der Mehrheit von Befürworter:innen oder die Seite der Minderheit von Kritikern:innen der unterschiedlichen staatlich verordneten Maßnahmen zu stellen oder stellen zu lassen. Es ist eine zum Teil dramatische Situation,

ein Duell auf Leben und physischen wie sozialen Tod, welches Arbeits-, Familienbeziehungen und Freundschaften auf die Probe stellt und teilweise zerschlagen lässt. Viele sehen darin sogar den gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalts gefährdet, denn in dieser aufgeheizten Kontroverse geht es schnell nicht nur um Heilung, sondern um „alles“, oder zumindest fast alles, auf jeden Fall um Grundsätzliches: um die Einstellung zum Leben und

Zusammenleben, zum Staat, zu Wissenschaft, Krankheit und Tod. Auch in Deutschland ist eine lebendige und sich ständig verändernde Protestbewegung entstanden, die von der Öffentlichkeit meist als eine diffuse Mischung aus rechten und esoterischen Gruppen wahrgenommen wird, tatsächlich aber viel heterogener ist. Auffällig ist die selbst für viele Protestierende verwirrende Collage aus linken und rechten Positionen, Akteuren und Zielen. Auf der Grundlage ethnographischer Feldforschung unter Mitgliedern dieser Bewegung stellt dieser Text Binnenperspektiven von Protestierenden hinsichtlich ihres Oszillierens zwischen verschiedenen Utopien und Dys-

topien dar und analysiert diese Bewegung als Teil einer bereits existierenden "Verschwörungskultur" mit einer spezifischen Kombination von Diskursen und einer spezifischen Geschichte von Stigmatisierung und Gegen-Stigmatisierung. Die Beschreibungen konzentrieren sich hauptsächlich auf Beispiele aus meinem Wohnort Leipzig. Da es in dieser Region viele Menschen gibt, die sich mit der aktuellen Situation vor dem Hintergrund ihrer Sozialisation in der ehemaligen DDR auseinandersetzen, ist dieser Text nicht nur ein Kommentar zum Pandemiejahr 2020, sondern zugleich zum 30. Jahrestag der deutschen Wiedervereinigung.

Schlagwörter SARS-CoV-2 – soziale Bewegung – Konspirationskultur – Stigmatisierung – Deutsche Wiedervereinigung

Article Abstracts of *Curare* 43 (2020) 1–4

Curare Corona Diaries I

EDITED BY KATRIN AMELANG, CLEMENS EISENMANN, JANINA KEHR, HELMAR KURZ,
MIRKO UHLIG & EHLER VOSS

JULIANA BEECHER, LEE BRANDO, VAIDA NORVILAITĖ & SONIA YUHUI ZHANG: Writing Ourselves Out. Collaborative Autoethnography from the Epicenter of a Pandemic pp. 17–86, written in English

The text is the product of a collaborative writing group, who took up *Curare's* call for coronavirus diaries in the Malinowskian style. As the United States became the epicenter of COVID-19 in March 2020, nine academics (graduate students and a professor from The New School for Social Research) trained their observation skills and recorded their introspections about their experiences from within. Though various social distancing measures stymied their previously mobile lifestyles, writing and meeting digitally took on cathartic resonance and provided a means for connection. In this text, a subset of four diarists present a few salient aspects of life during the pandemic, as the recursivity of writing and reading together not only pushed us beyond our interior spaces but also diffused our singular perspectives into a layered text that interrogates boundary formation, main-

tenance, and negotiation. Each section has a different author but includes ethnographic "data" from other diarists. The first piece is a metacognitive reflection on the methodology of diary writing and anthropologists navigating their positions as remote observers. The following sections localize globally pertinent topics on the meanings and materialities of mask-wearing; the challenges and dilemmas that emerged from a tepid social distancing policy; and the imaginaries of multispecies interactions opened up by hygiene/cleaning practices around COVID-19. This text represents reflexive and collaborative work. The ethnographers themselves move between subject/object positions. Scope, scale, and temporality are unfixed, lending a sense of dynamic collectivities and new possibilities that are evident in content and method.

Keywords autoethnography – collaboration – COVID-19 – diary – boundary-maintenance/negotiation – masks – hygiene – social contract

EHLER VOSS: Capitalism is the Virus. Witnessing Voices from Leipzig Opposing the German Corona Policy pp. 95–148, written in English

The proclamation of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has created a kind of asymmetrical duel situation internationally between supporters and critics of the various state-imposed measures. It has become a dramatic situation, a matter of life and physical as well as social death that puts work and family relationships as well as friendships to the test and sometimes even causes them to break. Many even see it as a threat to social cohesion, because behind the heated controversy over the question of how dangerous the virus is and what the best and most socially balanced way of reacting to it is, fundamental issues are quickly at stake: attitudes toward life and community, toward the state, science, disease, healing, and death. In Germany, too, a vivid and continually changing protest movement has emerged that the public mainly perceives as a diffuse mixture of right-wing and esoteric groups, but is actually much more heterogeneous.

What is striking is the collage of left-wing and right-wing attitudes, actors, and goals, which is also confusing for many protesters themselves. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among members of this movement, this text presents the “natives’ points of view” in regard to their oscillation between different utopias and dystopias and analyzes this movement as part of a preexisting “conspiracy culture” with a specific combination of discourses and a specific history of stigmatization and counter-stigmatization. The descriptions focus mainly on examples from my city of residence, Leipzig. Since there are a lot of people in this region who explore the current situation against the background of their socialization in the German Democratic Republic, this text becomes not only a commentary on the pandemic year 2020, but at the same time one on the 30th anniversary of German reunification.

Keywords SARS-CoV-2 – social movement – conspiracy culture – stigmatization – German reunification

Résumés des articles de Curare 43 (2020) 1–4

Les journaux covid de Curare I

SOUS LA DIRECTION DE KATRIN AMELANG, CLEMENS EISENMANN, JANINA KEHR, HELMAR KURZ, MIRKO UHLIG & EHLER VOSS

JULIANA BEECHER, LEE BRANDO, VAIDA NORVILAITĖ & SONIA YUHUI ZHANG: S'écrire soi-même. Une auto-ethnographie collective depuis l'épicentre de la pandémie p. 17–86, rédigé en anglais

Le texte qui suit est le produit d'un exercice d'écriture collective motivé par l'appel à carnets du coronavirus dans le style malinowskien lancé par Curare. Alors que les États-Unis devenaient l'épicentre de la pandémie de Covid-19 en mars 2020, neuf universitaires (étudiants de second cycle accompagnés d'un professeur de la New School for Social Research) ont affûté leurs techniques d'observation et documenté leurs expériences de l'intérieur. Bien que leurs vies new-yorkaises aient été bouleversées par diverses mesures de distanciation sociale, les rendez-vous d'écriture en ligne ont offert une forme de catharsis et l'opportunité de créer du lien. Dans ce texte, quatre diaristes présentent certains aspects marquants de la vie en temps de pandémie. Lire et écrire ensemble nous a fait sortir de nos espaces personnels et a

permis la diffusion de nos perspectives singulières dans un texte qui interroge la formation, la conservation et la négociation des limites. Chaque section a été composée par une auteure différente mais présentent des données ethnographiques issues d'autres carnets. Le premier essai est une réflexion métacognitive sur la méthodologie du genre diariste et sur le positionnement de l'anthropologue en tant qu'observateur. Les sections suivantes abordent tour à tour les significations et matérialités du port du masque; les défis et dilemmes générés par une politique de distanciation sociale tiède; et les imaginaires d'interactions multi-espèces rendus possibles par les pratiques d'hygiène/nettoyage déployées autour du Covid-19. Ce texte est issu de travaux d'introspection et de collaboration. Les ethnographes se positionnent

tantôt en tant que sujets, tantôt en tant qu'objets. Dimensions, échelles et temporalités restent indétermi-

nées, au service de collectivités dynamiques et de possibilités nouvelles, tant dans la forme que dans le fond.

Mots-clés auto-ethnographie – collaboration – COVID-19 – carnets – conservation/négociation des limites – masques – hygiène – contrat social

EHLER VOSS: Le capitalisme est le véritable virus. Des voix de Leipzig se soulèvent contre la politique anti-covid allemande p. 95–148, rédigé en anglais

La proclamation de la pandémie de SARS-CoV-2 a créé une sorte de situation de duel asymétrique à l'échelle internationale entre les partisans et les détracteurs des différentes mesures imposées par l'État. Cette situation est devenue dramatique, une question de vie et de mort – à la fois physique et sociale – qui met à l'épreuve les relations tant professionnelles et familiales qu'amicales, provoquant parfois même leur rupture. Beaucoup y voient même une menace pour la cohésion sociale, car derrière les débats houleux sur la dangerosité du virus et de la façon, la plus adaptée socialement, d'y réagir, des problèmes fondamentaux apparaissent rapidement: les attitudes envers la vie et la communauté, envers l'État, la science, la maladie, la guérison et la mort. En Allemagne aussi, un mouvement de protestation vivide et en perpétuel changement a émergé. Perçu par l'opinion publique comme un mélange diffus de groupes d'extrême-droite et ésotériques, il s'avère en fait beaucoup plus hétérogène. Ce qui est frappant, c'est le collage d'attitudes,

d'acteurs et d'objectifs de gauche et de droite, qui est également déroutant pour de nombreux manifestants eux-mêmes. Basé sur une recherche ethnologique de terrain auprès de membres de ce mouvement, ce texte présente les «perspectives autochtones» en ce qui concerne leur oscillation entre différentes utopies et dystopies et analyse ce mouvement comme faisant partie d'une «culture de la conspiration» préexistante avec une combinaison spécifique de discours et une histoire spécifique de stigmatisation et de contre-stigmatisation. Les descriptions se concentrent principalement sur des exemples tirés de ma ville de résidence, Leipzig. Comme de nombreuses personnes dans cette région étudient la situation actuelle dans le contexte de leur socialisation dans la République démocratique allemande, ce texte est un commentaire non seulement sur la pandémie de 2020, mais aussi sur le 30^e anniversaire de la réunification allemande.

Mots-clés SARS-CoV-2 – mouvement social – culture de la conspiration – stigmatisation – réunification allemande

Aims & Scope

Die Zeitschrift *Curare* bietet seit 1978 ein internationales und interdisziplinäres Forum für die wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit medizinanthropologischen Themen, die sämtliche Aspekte von Gesundheit, Krankheit, Medizin und Heilung in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in allen Teilen der Welt umschließt.

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