Natalie Wind

“If there’s one thing I’ve learned about crisis, it’s that it usually comes hand in hand with absurdity.”

Germany, Freiburg, 19 March 2020 – 27 June 2020

At the time of beginning the diary: 21-year-old female student of cultural anthropology, living in student housing in Freiburg, Germany. Normally sharing accommodations with 3 flatmates, currently alone in the flat. Planning on remaining in isolation apart from grocery shopping until at least April.

19.03.2020

I spent a lot of time running errands outside today, more than I intended. Last night I couldn’t sleep, thinking about all the unknown variables of my current situation. Do I have enough supplies, should I go to my parents’ house or stay put in my own apartment, will there be a curfew in the near future?

Going outside meant I could finally get some of the errands done that were causing me so much anxiety, but also that I got a sort of “reality check”, after interacting only with my neighbors in the student dorm for the past few days. And the internet makes everything seem like end times, hearing about all the events being canceled, all the deaths and the steadily rising number of infections.

I was shocked by how normal things seemed. A lovely sunny day and people are sitting on the grass picnicking, playing with their children, eating in groups at outdoor cafes! It made me squirm with anxiety. And I felt guilty for being outside myself.

But I told myself I had to go out, to settle important matters of my everyday life. I submitted some paperwork for the Bachelor's thesis, which I'll be writing during the next few months, if I can.

Mostly I was trying to recharge my student ID which I use to do laundry in my dorm building. All the university buildings where you can charge your card are closed and I was scared I wouldn't be able to wash my clothes. A small detail in the grand scheme of things, of course I can wash clothes manually like people did for centuries, but it would mean a departure from comfort and normality. In my quest I came across a helpful janitor and fellow student who called a friend to ask for advice and gave me his number, offering to let me use his card if I needed to. I was able to recharge it and feel way more secure now. But I think it really did me good to experience some helpful, friendly interactions. That normalcy comforted me, that people haven't reverted to some kind of looking-after-#-1 mentality in times of crisis. Yet. And I keep asking myself: how long will I be open and helpful and compassionate? I'm happy to share food or to go shopping for a friend now, when things are mostly normal. I guess I'm not just curious to see how much solidarity the people around me show in times of crisis, I'm also waiting to see if stress will reveal that I'm actually way more selfish than I'd like to think.

I have anxiety, not just now, but in general. I worry a lot. I have recurring intrusive thoughts, reminding me of just how scared I am all the time. But this was true before corona.

> "I seem to be working harder to protect my mental health than my physical health which is, I'll admit, a pattern for me."

Of course going outside made me feel exposed. I brought disinfectant wipes (used up the last of my supply), and I've been taking zinc and vitamin C tablets for my immune system, given to me by my mother. What really struck me today is that I know that my protective actions are insufficient. I took the tram, I touched shelves in the grocery store and door handles and then forgot not to touch my face afterwards. I disinfected my cell phone and keys, but not everything I had on me outside. But I think it's not really about thoroughly destroying any possibility of infection, it's just about doing enough to calm myself. If I disinfect my phone, I can tell myself I'm protecting myself and deliberately ignore all the ways in which I haven't been perfectly careful. I seem to be working harder to protect my mental health than my physical health which is, I'll admit, a pattern for me.

Finally I had to say goodbye to a loved one today without physical contact. My closest friend and neighbor is going to stay with her parents in the north of Germany, she knows she'll receive help and supplies from them. And they want to see her. She wants to come back in a few weeks, but we both know if there's a curfew she could get stuck there. I really wanted to hug her.

We're young and healthy and have the luxury of worrying more about how this pandemic will affect our future plans, rather than about our immediate survival or financial stability. I'm grateful. And I'm scared.

20.03.2020

Starting tomorrow the city of Freiburg is prohibiting people from going out in public unless it's for work, grocery shopping or urgent business. The news is very

deliberately pointing out that it is not an “Ausgangssperre” (curfew), probably so people won’t panic. From my bedroom window I can see that the childcare center across the street is still open (!) so I guess a de facto curfew really would be for the best. I feel relatively secure in the knowledge that I’m stocked up on supplies. The more I think about it the more I’m glad, with the rate of infection in Germany rising as quickly as it is, it’s really only a matter of time. I only hope the rest of the country follows suit and quickly.

Scrolling through my social media feed I notice that at least three quarters of the posts are corona related, even though I haven’t made a habit of following news sites. A lot of corona memes.

I also received an email asking me to decline a refund for some concert tickets I bought back in September. My donation could help keep the venue and all the people involved in the entertainment business afloat. Haven’t decided what to do yet.

A friend just sent me a picture of her sister, who’s training in the Bundeswehr, suited up in full uniform with a helmet and gas mask, captioned: My sister is going out to buy toilet paper. Gallows humor has been my coping strategy so far as well.

My relatives in a Latin American country are more or less constantly exchanging health advice in our whatsapp group. Talking about where to buy food, whether or not to wear gloves and masks. They’re very concerned about whether the economy will survive an extended quarantine. Thinking of all the people in Latin American countries who make their living on a day to day basis, often due to tourism, street vendors for example is f***ing heartbreaking. A huge amount of the society’s most vulnerable will lose their means of living.

Asked my family for updates: My parents have quarantined themselves at home, are planning to turn the front hall into a “disinfection zone” and use only specific clothes and shoes to go outside. My father says playing piano helps to distract him from the

issue, but that he finds himself thinking about “the paradox of all of us worldwide working together against that invisible enemy and at the same time being required to stay away from each other while doing so”.

My mother, an American expat, has contact with other Americans around the globe and is noticing a wide variety of responses: “While a woman in Norway was talking about silver linings and used the term “flu” the rep from Florence totally flipped out. Totally stopped the meeting by repeatedly shouting “stay the f**k home ” until his mic was turned off. After he calmed down, he explained that people were constantly breaking the rules, sneaking out “for a quick Aperitivo with their friends”.

21.03.2020

Today was the first official day under curfew. Guess we’ll see just how hard isolation really is.

The number of infected in Germany jumped by thousands again overnight. When will the trend reverse? It’s overwhelming.

What helps is knowing what measures are being taken, knowing that at least somebody is making plans, building some kind of a dam against the rising numbers.

Grocery stores have started shielding their cashiers behind protective sheets of plastic. Stores and the tram have barriers and signs instructing people to keep their distance. On the other hand, someone I follow on social media just said they left their home quarantine and went to the store because they wanted some Nutella. If there’s one thing I’ve learned about crisis, it’s that it usually comes hand in hand with absurdity.

I think it’s important to think about the effects of this crisis on people’s *mental* health

as well as physical. I e-mailed my therapist today, she suggested I just call her for my appointment next week instead of coming in person. Hope other people have similar resources available, but I know it's not enough.

One more thing, I learned about an online tool called Folding at home: "Folding@home (FAH or F@h) is a distributed computing project for simulating protein dynamics, including the process of protein folding and the movements of proteins implicated in a variety of diseases. It brings together citizen scientists who volunteer to run simulations of protein dynamics on their personal computers. Insights from this data are helping scientists to better understand biology, and providing new opportunities for developing therapeutics" (About Page of their Website).

The idea is that private citizens provide additional computing power to support scientists researching things like the corona vaccine. Signed myself up. That and this diary project help me to feel less helpless. Of all problems I've always found it hardest to deal with things out of my control.

It's not purely selfish motivation, though. We know that history is the past interpreted through the lens of the present. It's extremely important to me to document what really went down in the weeks and months of the corona pandemic. So in the end no-one can lay blame at the feet of those who weren't responsible. So we don't forget who really saved our asses here: grocery store workers, doctors, nurses, people exposing themselves to risk every day to keep our society functioning. So we don't forget what we've learned: which people and industries are essential to our survival. Why universal healthcare is not only morally right but essential for a country to function.

23.03.2020

A three way phone call with my sister and mother made me feel more human. From what I hear from them plenty of people still aren't taking the situation seriously, but my parents are being hyper-cautious. There's such a wide range of reactions. Apparently some people believe we shouldn't quarantine because the virus can be healed by positive energy, or because we if we let it run its course we will simply develop herd immunity.

Over the past few days, I've been driving myself crazy by overanalyzing everything my body does. Sleepiness? Could be a sign of Corona. Coughing once in an evening? Must be getting the virus. Feeling kind of warm? Corona.

Seriously though, I think I'm going to get the virus eventually. I probably already have it in my system, so right now my main worry is not passing it on to anyone else. I let someone in my dorm borrow tools from me today but placed the tools in front of my door, rather than answering in person. I couldn't bear the idea of being responsible for spreading the disease. I'm young and healthy, I'll survive, if I take care of myself, but who knows about the constitution of those around me?

I read an article that described in excruciating detail just how the virus affects and eventually kills you. All about how it destroys cells in your lungs, filling them up with debris that makes it hard to breathe, how it can permanently damage your organs. I'm definitely taking it seriously now. On the other hand I've heard of cases among young people that were so mild the affected barely knew they were affected. So many question marks around this disease.

I spent the morning battling software, trying to find the perfect app to record phone conversations so I can do interviews and continue my research for my bachelor's thesis. Had to delete several apps on my phone to make room, including a dating app – won't be using that anytime soon, will I? Actually it would be quite interesting to see how people are presenting themselves and chatting on a dating app these days, love in the times of Corona.

Obviously I am coping well today using humor. The one thing that really hurt me was that when talking to my mother, it became clear that she's depressed and terrified by the situation, but feels like she has to put on a brave face and not let anyone know she's suffering. My sister and I tried to convince her that we're all scared, that it's okay for her to cry, or show fear and anger. I screamed into a pillow just the other day, when the fear and uncertainty got too much for me. I think she still believes crying would be a sign of weakness, that she would make her husband worry, that she has to act bright and cheerful for him. I hope she finds an outlet for her emotions.

Before quarantine began, I gave away a bottle of alcohol, because I was afraid, I'd start drinking as a coping mechanism. Instead I'm stress-eating. But there are worse ways to cope, right? I'm trying to just take things one day at a time, so as not to get overwhelmed. I think you can deal with the present if you take it in tiny, bite-sized pieces, it's just the future that's really scary.

24.03.2020

And suddenly, I spring back into action. One of the weirdest things about this crisis is the feeling of acceleration and stagnation, or "hurry up and wait". You spend days at a time spinning your wheels, because you and everyone around you is uncertain of how to proceed, and then suddenly you (have to) move to adjust to the newest change. For example, when they announced a curfew I spent a day and a half rushing around trying to get errands done and get all my preparations for quarantine settled, and then the days since then have been sort of slow and casual. The only thing driving me to do things was internal motivation.

This morning a discussion has started about how to proceed with the summer semester at the University of Freiburg. As a member of a student representative

group I've been communicating with others about what we students want – it seems our nightmare scenario would be a complete cancellation of the semester. And that option is on the table. We're currently drafting a letter with our suggestions. As always, actively DOING something about the situation feels empowering, but being confronted with the uncertainty (even the university doesn't know what to do! Nobody knows, not even the "authority figures") is causing me a lot of anxiety.

25.03.2020

Grocery stores seem to be well-stocked again, I was impressed by how quickly they've adapted with new precautions (signs to keep distance between customers or reminding people not to hoard). Apart from the grocery store being emptier than usual, things look basically the same as always.

26.03.2020

A friend shared some articles with me that offer valuable perspectives on the Corona situation.

Scott Berinato: That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief (March 23rd, 2020).

The author illustrated how going through the Corona crisis can feel like going through the stages of grief. What can be especially hard, and what I believe I am also feeling is "anticipatory grief", knowing that hardship lies ahead but not knowing exactly when or how.

Interview with Rutger Bregman by Daniel Graf: Das Wichtigste ist: Nicht nur das Virus ist ansteckend, sondern auch dein Verhalten (March 19th 2020).

The historian Bregman points out how, despite a prevailing image of humans as inherently selfish, in times of crisis people tend to come together and help each other survive.

I also spoke to my therapist on the phone, she made the very valuable suggestion of trying to maintain a routine. Even though we're sort of living in our own world, it's good to run on the same clock as those around us.

And finally, I received a mail from my university stating that the start of the summer semester will be postponed, but that classes should all still take place online. I'll sleep better in the knowledge that I don't have to worry about the semester being canceled completely.

27.03.2020

My social media feed is full of commentary (serious and in meme-form) about the US republican politicians claiming it's necessary to sacrifice lives for the sake of businesses and the economy. It's making me wonder if perhaps a candidate like Bernie Sanders does have a chance of winning the upcoming election. If ever there was a time to vote for free health care this is it. But I'm decidedly not getting my hopes up, since we've ample evidence of voters (especially American voters) voting against their own best interests.

I feel like I could easily be fully occupied with academic work during quarantine, but I've started browsing through work opportunities related to the crisis. Maybe I'm just restless, but it somehow doesn't feel right to "sit this one out". There's a platform for example, connecting people in search of jobs with those seeking agricultural workers. Now that the borders are closed there's a shortage of those workers too. (Bit ironic, considering that right-wing parties like the AfD have been bleating about closing the borders for years now.) I'll be honest – I am just not cut out for

agricultural labor. But I might have other skills to offer, for example tutoring kids stuck at home? Warrants more research.

I feel like the initial shock of this new situation is passing and now it's all about "what can we do during/about Corona". People are sharing lots of petitions too, e.g. for bonuses or better working conditions for hospital employees. I think it's incredibly telling that right now most people seem to be scrambling for something to do, some way to help. I'm reluctant to make sweeping statements about the "nature of humankind", but it does seem that for the majority, sitting on the couch is counterintuitive.

29.03.2020

One of the more common sentiments heard these days (as in many times of crisis), is newfound appreciation for things that were previously mundane or trivial. Personally, I can't wait to eat in the university cafeteria, to drink overpriced tea in a café with an acquaintance, to hug a friend, to travel by bus or train to another city. Banal and unoriginal maybe, but it's true.

In the realm of humorous responses, a friend shared a Corona Bingo chart with me. A few hours later, she texted me about a german politician who committed suicide, citing he couldn't see a future for our economy and society.

Harsh, horrible news and absurd gags chase each other around in a circle.

> "If I stay home and wash my hands then the virus can't get me. Except of course

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that the economic and political implications of this pandemic will affect us all.”

30.03.2020

Had a long conversation with a friend about all sorts of things, which of course looped around to Corona most of the time. We’re both almost done with our bachelor’s degrees and worried that we won’t be able to graduate as planned. After we speculated and commiserated for a while she finally expressed frustration at the attitude of minimizing the disturbance caused by corona, of sticking to established rules and plans. “Everyone’s life has been disturbed. Everyone is going to have a gap in their curriculum vitae – so what?! The point of life isn’t to adhere to some strict plan.”

Today while walking through a public park, one of the more popular places where people are still meeting and exercising or going for walks, I spotted colorful stones painted with messages like “Stay home” and “Wir halten zusammen”. The message really has become omnipresent – STAY HOME. Heard it in a PSA in between listening to songs on Spotify too. It’s starting to feel like something to cling to, like the kind of magical thinking you had as a child: If I stay in the light or under my blanket the monsters can’t get me. Of course the whole stay at home thing is based on science and facts. And it’s important, so important! But it also feels like a kind of mantra an individual can use to reduce the complexity of the situation. If I stay home and wash my hands then the virus can’t get me. Except of course that the economic and political implications of this pandemic will affect us all, even those of us who don’t get sick. Focusing on one’s own actions and choices can feel more empowering than worrying about things outside one’s reach.

31.03.2020

Against my original intentions to stock up on supplies and then not leave the house for weeks at a time I find myself confronted with the need to go out more frequently. To mail some paperwork to a doctor, to renew the credit on my cell phone plan.

In a lot of areas people are being forced to think on their feet and are proving their flexibility and adaptability. In the span of about two weeks restaurants have turned into drive-in and delivery services, supermarkets have put up Plexiglas walls to protect their cashiers; teachers have started receiving and grading homework via e-mail. Not to paint everything in a rosy glow – I just guess our society is more adaptable and quicker than I thought.

Conducted a phone-interview for my bachelor's thesis. I'm glad my research is progressing and isn't dependent on face-to-face contact, though it does make some things harder.

01.04.2020

A little while back I joined a Facebook group where people can offer and exchange help with grocery shopping and so on, today the administrator posted a warning about a member who had tried to take advantage of someone stuck at home and get paid for delivering groceries, although they'd originally agreed to provide help free of charge. The comment section was filled with people expressing dismay at how people could be so immoral and others replying that throughout history some people have always tried to profit off of others misfortune in a crisis. Generally, the prevailing sentiment was quite misanthropic.

Some acquaintances sent me a picture of 400€ worth of groceries in the trunk of their car, supplies for at least three weeks. Prominently placed were wine bottles and

package of Baldrian (valerian) to soothe the nerves.

03.04.2020

I've been trying to limit the time I spend consuming corona news, feel like I'd drive myself crazy hearing about all the terrible things that are out of my control. But there are a lot of rumors flying around. People talk about people deliberately spitting at others as a prank, about delivery trucks for grocery stores being robbed. On one Facebook thread I read the theory that the government and media in Germany deliberately downplayed the usefulness of facemasks because they knew there wasn't enough supply. At the moment I lack the energy to trace every bit of corona-related information and find out if it's true.

Meanwhile I peer out my bedroom window and see families taking walks, students carrying groceries, people walking their dogs. It's a sunny day, at one point I counted fourteen people out at once. Mostly two at a time, the only larger groups were adults with children.

My only contribution today was to write a pandemic related short story. Entirely fictional. It was sort of cathartic. But I guess that didn't leave me with much energy to focus on the diary.

05.04.2020

I believe it's time to say that quarantine is getting to me. I've tried to ward off cabin fever or more accurately cabin depression as best I could. Stay in contact with people over the phone, work in a different spot from usual, exercise, try to do something fun or relaxing, even treated myself to a little junk food. But for the past

few days I've been getting more and more listless, bored and frustrated. I went out in the sunshine today, just a short walk around my building. That at least made me feel better for a little while. I don't want to sound overdramatic, a little boredom isn't so bad after all. But my imagination tends to picture worst case scenarios and I can't help wondering *how much longer will I be stuck here*? I like to joke that, like a zoo animal, I need enrichment to stay happy. They might toss an elephant a pumpkin filled with treats, make it work for its food a little to keep it from getting bored. My equivalent of a pumpkin would probably be going to an interesting lecture, to see a movie, going shopping, grabbing coffee with a friend. Even just walking through a part of town I've never been in before can work wonders sometimes, when my brain is screaming for new input. I'll get over it, find myself a pumpkin in my own four walls somehow. This feeling – that nothing is interesting, nothing matters, there is nothing to look forward to and even the things in my future just seem burdensome rather than exciting – won't last forever. I just wish it would pass already! Thank God next week I can go to the grocery store at least.

06.04.2020

A trip to the grocery store revealed that the shelves are indeed reassuringly full, but the checkout was abnormally long due to customers buying in bulk and a decreased number of cashiers. While standing in line for about 30 minutes I read an anthropological article on rituals in the context of corona, and their reassuring properties. I haven't developed any rituals myself, outside of striving to maintain regular working, sleeping and relaxing rhythms. Towards the beginning of the crisis I made a habit of checking the number of infected every day but eventually stopped, because it was basically the same disturbing news every day. I took zink and vitamin c tablets each day until I ran out too. Not sure those count as rituals though, since I wasn't imbuing them with any higher meaning.

Dimitris Xygalatas: Explaining the emergence of Coronavirus rituals (01.04.2020).

Despite feeling guilty about it I agreed to meet a friend for a walk in a public park tomorrow. It should be possible to keep some distance and avoid contact with more than one person at a time, since I won't be taking public transportation. I guess I weighed the risk of infection against the mental health benefits of vitamin D, some company and a much needed change of scenery, and caved.

07.04.2020

Getting real sick of uncertainty.

Tried to find out if application deadlines for master's programs at my universities of choice have been changed, but their websites have not been updated since the corona crisis.

I have an appointment with a psychiatrist tomorrow to discuss getting a prescription for antidepressants, but I'm not completely sure they're even seeing patients, wasn't able to reach anyone over the phone. I'll just have to hope for the best and go. This crisis has been hell on my mental health which was not the greatest to begin with.

And now I'm trying to figure out how to install what feels like the tenth different application to converse with people. Why does everyone need a different platform, can't people just agree on zoom or webex or whatever?

Yeah, sorry, it's not been a good day. Let posterity know that. In a crisis sometimes you react with grace and courage and sometimes you just want to cry.

> "I'm worried this is just one more time in

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history when the working poor are the first to die.”

09.04.2020

People are adjusting. Our university library is now offering a delivery service to students who badly need literature for their academic writing, and the department of ethnology announced that no scheduled classes will be canceled in the upcoming semester, just moved online. Every time I set foot in a grocery store I see more plastic barriers, more markers to keep your distance, even people standing at the entrance, monitoring how many customers can enter the store.

Boris Johnson seems to be recovering and Bernie Sanders is making way for Joe Biden to become the democratic nominee. Of course I’d hoped the pandemic would lead to meaningful political change, especially in the US, where the federal government’s incompetence and corruption are becoming more evident with each passing day. I hope that change will still come, when things have calmed down a bit, when people are not so imminently preoccupied with survival.

The tone in discourse surrounding workers is shifting too. More and more I’m seeing scathing or outright angry responses to the term “hero”, which was being used so liberally to refer to people who are on the “front lines”, grocery stores and hospitals mainly. More and more “heroes” or their family members are speaking up about how many of them are forced to work under these dangerous conditions to survive financially, and how little is being done to compensate them. I’m worried this is not the time when we finally step up as a society and show appreciation for those in low-paying low-prestige jobs who keep our society running by actually making their

working conditions and remuneration better. I'm worried this is just one more time in history when the working poor are the first to die. To paraphrase a furious series of tweets by the mother of a grocery store cashier: Don't say heroes when you mean sacrifices.

11.04.2020

Had a four way video-call with my family last night, sort of interesting to compare observations. We wondered how many of the current changes would be permanent. Will people work from home more in the future, and if they do, will they be easier to exploit? Not so easy to leave work at work when you work from home. Right now everyone signs off on communications with: Stay healthy or: Hope you are healthy. Normally it would be a weird thing to say to a stranger, but it's become a habit. Wonder if that will stick?

In parts of Asia wearing a face mask was not an unusual sight prior to Corona. I certainly wouldn't mind that becoming a more common sight here too. I bowed to my parents' concern that I'm not being careful enough and made myself a mask out of a bandana.

Sorry if I lack coherence today, got a pretty bad headache. Apparently that's a very common side effect of starting a new medication.

12.04.2020

I don't know who worries me more, people who are taking the corona pandemic seriously enough to start apocalypse prepping, including stockpiling guns to ward off anyone who might be coming for their toilet paper supplies, or the ones who leave

their shelter in place every other day cause they got a sudden craving for a hamburger. Both seem to have adopted a “looking out for # 1” mentality.

But of course it’s easy to be cynical. A cousin of mine in the US is getting married in about two weeks and has had to uninvite most of her guests, but even with only closest friends and family there will be about 20 people there. Makes me grimace to think of the infection potential, but of course I can empathize. Wonder when it will be possible to travel internationally again?

One very minor change: I’ve had to purchase a new cell phone contract because in the last few weeks I’ve used up more phone minutes than in the past year.

13.04.2020

I’m not from an especially religious family, but I think we all felt a degree of disappointment at not being able to celebrate easter together this year. I felt the need to mark the occasion somehow, if only by treating myself to a slightly nicer meal. Observing holidays, albeit in the most casual way seems to make the passage of time more palpable. Paradoxically the time in quarantine, a little over three weeks at this point, sometimes seems to have passed very quickly and sometimes very slowly. More and more the reality is sinking in that this pandemic is going to change our lives forever.

I think my journal entries have become shorter because I’m rapidly adjusting to the new normal. Yeah I miss hugging friends and going to class, yeah I’m horrified by the rising death toll, but to complain about it seems redundant. And I can’t plan for the future, so I try not to think about it, focus on the now. We are humans, we adapt. Not necessarily a good thing, but something that’s become very clear lately.

14.04.2020

I keep wondering if I'm asymptomatic. Corona seems so omnipresent, it feels like I *must* have picked it up somewhere, even though only a relatively small percentage of the population has been infected so far.

Saw an absolutely heartbreaking video of a nurse from the US speaking about her experiences, how everyone in the health care field is completely overworked, how they're gutted by losing more and more patients but try to keep up a brave front. The woman was sobbing, saying "We're human too" about health care workers, that they suffer just like "ordinary" people. With all the talk of heroes going around social media maybe it's necessary to see a reminder of that. Also odd to see a person say they have no one they can share their fear and anguish with in a video that's broadcasted to millions worldwide over facebook. But I guess we all have specific people in our lives who we want to protect, who we don't want to burden with our pain.

If I hadn't already been feeling rage and disgust towards that useless, self-obsessed buffoon calling himself president of the United States I certainly would have after watching that video.

15.04.2020

Was on a phone conference this morning with several others as representatives of the student body in a discussion about holding exams via video-conference in the coming months. The university wants to issue a new charter as soon as possible, but is still waiting for information from the state government. There was uncertainty on behalf of all involved – students, teaching staff and administrators, but also a general sense of tolerance and goodwill, a sense that people genuinely want to help each other out. And here as well, the new formula for saying goodbye: Bleiben Sie gesund!

I left my apartment for the first time in six days, but only to get my mail. Got a letter confirming the deadline for my bachelor's thesis – exactly three months from now. So that clock is ticking. Really Corona doesn't make that much of a difference, I would have had as much time under normal circumstances, and I would also have had to write the damn thing on my own, but I still feel a bit like I've been locked in a cage alone with a beast. Oh well, I'll manage.

17.04.2020

An academic conference I was planning to go to in May was postponed by a year – which is less surprising in and of itself than the fact that it was only announced yesterday. While it's been decided that social distancing measures will be continued in Germany until next month I'm hearing from my sister in Austria about some very incremental shifts back to normal life. Certain stores are permitted to open again, though masks are a requirement. The impression she gives me of our neighboring country to the south is that they have the situation pretty well organized.

Another kind of weird corona-times phenomenon: watching television comedians without audience laughter in the background. I thought the host of ZDFs *Heute Show* managed to minimize awkward silences between gags pretty well, but between that and the bits of cautionary instruction woven into the comedic material even televised satire has a grim flavor these days.

It's now been 8 days since I last went outdoors.

18.04.2020

My special treat for the day – I went outside, sat on the lawn outside my building and

read a book alone. The air outside smelled dusty and sweet and sunlight on my skin was the best thing I've felt in a long time. Honestly, I don't want to sound overdramatic, but I couldn't stop thinking about the physical sensations, prickly grass, soft breeze, almost uncomfortable heat from the sun on the back of my neck. At least a dozen people passed me by, but always no more than two people at a time.

19.04.2020

My best friend came back to town after over a month with her parents. Corona-related highlights of our conversation:
Her: I washed my hands can I give you a hug?
Me: That's the first time I've hugged someone in over a month, that was like crack!

She has to keep a job in which she is treated poorly because we're on the verge of a financial crisis and it's one of the few jobs you can do from home.

For the first time in my life I find myself agreeing with a conservative politician (Markus Söder) over the Linke on how to deal with Corona, since he is more cautious.

For about the 100th time we considered ourselves lucky to be living in a country with a good healthcare infrastructure.

And of course we shared corona memes.

21.04.2020

So today I found out it will soon be mandatory to wear a facemask in stores and public transportation. As I had to go outside anyway I tested a self-made contraption

with a handkerchief. Stayed in place but made it so difficult to breathe I had to take it off after about 20 minutes. That definitely requires more work...

It's now been a solid month since lockdown began for me. Maybe I'm just feeling calm because I've had a pretty good day, but I'm surprised at how quickly the crisis has become routine. And somehow I still don't know anyone in my circle of acquaintances who's gotten sick! It seems too good to be true – but who knows how many have been asymptomatic?

23.04.2020

A friend of mine has a sewing machine and has offered to make me a face mask (she's getting pretty good at it).

I've decided to step up my exercise regime as I'm really getting tired of mostly sitting at my desk all day. I wasn't a terribly athletic person before the lockdown, but back then at least I got in more movement just by going about my daily life.

I'm really sort of shocked that I'm still healthy. Honestly had expected to get sick before now.

My sense of time has gone completely out the window though.

> "I ended my diary in April, because I felt that I was repeating myself, that there really was nothing new to say about Corona that hadn't already been said by someone

Natalie Wind

else.”

27.06.2020

I ended my diary in April, because I felt that I was repeating myself, that there really was nothing new to say about Corona that hadn’t already been said by someone else.

Reading this back in the process of anonymizing the entries, I surprise myself.

My fear seems overblown and I am ashamed of how dramatic I was. But I know that those were my genuine feelings at the time, and I think I wasn’t alone. There were days at the beginning when we really were afraid we would run out of food, that none of us would be spared by the illness, that we would all lose loved ones. Before reading this I had almost forgotten that. Many things are almost back to normal, cafés and movie theaters have opened, although with restrictions of course. I have a whole collection of face masks to cycle through.

At first glance it seems like a story with a happy ending, especially because on a personal level I can tell that my mental health is much improved compared to march. It’s almost embarrassing to me how depressed and anxious I was a few months ago, and it certainly helps to contextualize this diary.

But I feel a different kind of shame when I realize that my behavior has reverted in many ways. I am used to wearing a mask and washing my hands and all that, not shaking hands or hugging people. But I find myself complaining about wanting in-person-classes again, and taking public transit for convenience, despite the heightened infection risk.

Natalie Wind

If I had to draw some sort of conclusion I would say that the corona crisis has "taught me" that individuals and societies can change and adapt more quickly than I expected, but that many changes happen on a subconscious level you aren't aware of until you reflect on it with some distance.

It unsettles me that I feel like a different person from the author of that first entry. I don't like it, because I'm not sure the experience changed me the way I wanted it to. I think a romantic part of my brain wanted hardship to reveal some core of hidden strength or virtue. I think I wanted an opportunity to be heroic. Instead, my life has continued to be mundane. Instead I feel like a rat that survived the sinking of the Titanic.

Human lives were sacrificed for the economy, for political agendas, for ignorance, for greed. And while many of us were shocked, we were too busy with our day to day lives to stop it from happening. Maybe we adapt too well, find it too easy to accept a loss and move on. Maybe it's far too early for me to draw any kind of conclusion from a crisis that isn't over.

And maybe – probably – I should leave the philosophizing to future historians.

So to them: I wish you good luck deciphering what went down in the first half of 2020. Because I lived through it – and I don't understand it at all.