Grace W.

"Feeling guilty/embarrassed that I like the lockdown so much."

France, 2 March – 15 June 2020

I am a medical and dance anthropologist. I am Dutch but lived and worked in the UK since 2006, got my PhD there in 2013, two postdocs since 2014 of which the last one changed into a permanent contract. My partner is French, and I moved to France in 2018, with permission of my boss to 'work from home from France'. The university however pointedly does not tolerate this, and during the Covid-19 situation, this tension was more noticeable. These notes are part of my normal diary, and after Curare's wonderful call for autoethnographic Corona Diaries, I copied the relevant entries to this document. I have deleted people's names, use a pseudonym myself, and refer to people by first name initial only. I added some annotations in footnotes where I thought necessary.

Monday 2.3.2020

WhatsApp texts from a friend:[1]

> **E:** Bummer I have a sore throat now but otherwise very happy to be back home too!!!
>
> **W:** Well you were pretty busy … I'll pray it's not covid 19 … xxx Can you have a wee resty now you're back?
>
> **E:** No for the wicked (had the weekend off, but now working on a research proposal on early pregnancy loss and dance!
>
> **W:** Needs must when the Devil drives… gargling with lemon juice I find

miraculous

E: Yes I'm alternating between fresh ginger and lemon (tea or straight from spoon), ravintsara, and propolis super

Wednesday 11.3.2020

Okay, this morning I was crying over an email of KLM's CEO explaining all the special care they take to keep customers safe from Corona. Boohoo. No, it's not my periods… I'm really starting to get that the virus is something serious…

Email text, of course under a picture of a plane in bright blue sky…

Dear -Customer's Name-

As a frequent traveler with KLM, you trust us to not only take you where you need to go, but to do so safely, comfortably and responsibly. Today, as the world comes to terms with an unprecedented health scare in COVID-19 (Corona virus), these values are more important to us than ever. Therefore, I'd like to take this opportunity to share some insight into the different steps that we are taking to guarantee that our flights continue to meet and exceed the highest standards of safety and hygiene.

Safety & hygiene
Before each departure, our planes are always thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. These procedures are designed to the highest standards and include both your personal space - tray tables, seat armrests and headrests, seatbelt buckles etc. – as well as communal areas such as the galleys, carpets and lavatories.

Once in the air, our cabin crew works diligently to keep our planes clean. The air in the cabin is continuously refreshed with outside air and our hospital-grade HEPA filters are 99.99% effective in preventing the spread of airborne bacterial and viral organisms such as COVID-19. And in the event that a passenger does begin to show symptoms, all of our flights are equipped with special Corona-kits and our crew is trained in containment measures.

This strong focus on hygiene extends to our entire organization, including catering services. Ingredients are fresh and sourced locally, and our catering crew is also trained to meet the strictest guidelines for hygiene and safety. This short video provides more information about hygiene at KLM.

I fully understand the hesitation many people feel at the moment when deciding whether to book a flight or not. But you can feel secure in the knowledge that KLM has taken every precaution necessary to protect your health and the health of your loved ones. In this emotional time, you can be assured that we are guided and consistently act by fact-based, circumstance-driven decision making. On a daily basis, we work closely with the top experts at the World Health Organization and Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu (RIVM) in the Netherlands.

No change fee
I also understand that your concern may not be about your journey with KLM, but about the many unknowns about the situation on the ground at your destination. That's why you can book your KLM flight with the confidence of being able to change your booking without a change fee. We are in constant touch with all the relevant authorities to adjust our network as required. This means that we can immediately respond when new travel restrictions are announced. For the latest information on flight status, please visit our travel advisory page or use the KLM app and let us keep you posted 24/7 with push messages.

In 100 years of operations, KLM has faced many challenges and always emerged stronger. We were able to do so because we put you, our customer, at the heart of our operation. With that commitment in mind, I am confident that we will overcome this challenging time as well. As you know 33.000 KLM staff will go further to recognize your concerns and take care of you. Thank you for choosing KLM, and safe travels.

Sincerely,

Pieter Elbers

President & CEO KLM Royal Dutch Airlines

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Friday 13.3.2020

The university is starting to spout all sorts of Covid messages and regulations. Since last week our international travel was restricted. We now have a few additional sick-leave codes, self-quarantined without symptoms but working as normal, self-quarantined without symptoms but not able to conduct normal work, self-quarantined with symptoms, and I guess perhaps one for quarantined with confirmed diagnosis. My boss even emailed me directly that in the light of current sensitivities, I should tell no one that I'm actually in France. Of course, she knows I'm here, but since the university has never been keen on this, I should not tell anyone. I'm learning to play the English game, even though it still puzzles me... the institutional hierarchies, but especially the inflexibility when it comes to going beyond national territories... bizarre in our global day and age.

Saturday 14.3.2020



She saw the humour in it ◻

Re virus, I'm intrigued by the large-scale effects, but not personally invested in finding solutions (I first typed soulutions!). I cannot oversee the scope and measures and it feels like fearmongering but I also know we have to take it seriously…

Received a picture message from a friend this morning, which I passed onto my boss, since she requested per email that I do not speak to anyone about being in France, as it's officially not allowed, even though she is of course okay with it:

Sunday 15.3.2020

It is of course for an awful reason, but I feel that with all the containment measures for the Corona virus, such as closing restaurants, cafés, universities, cinemas, and

even entire countries, the world slows down to a speed I can relate to for the first time since my working life started 20 years ago. I can feel the spinning stop. All these 'oh so important meetings' cancelled. Social entertainment reigned in. That the world and the people can finally breathe. That I'm not spun off the surface of the earth because the world turns too fast. I know it will speed up again when all these measures cease, but I'm grateful for this chance to experience a rhythm that is bearable, that is on a more human scale, at soul speed rather than at the speed of stock markets and financial agendas, at the speed of frantic humans who have lost touch with body and soul speed. Maybe this just signposts I'm getting old – maybe younger or hipper generations can really function at this breakneck speed and not suffer from it – although I do question that... all the symptoms of disconnection...

Monday 16.3.2020

Wow, this is so surreal. I've just returned from my very first-ever hoarding experience, or 'hamsteren' as we say in Dutch (collecting food, like a hamster does in his cheek pockets!). D [my partner] was freaking out after having been on the phone to his Parisian friends.[2] Apparently, Macron is going to announce a complete lock-down tonight. People, who can, with a second home or family in rural areas, are fleeing Paris to avoid being stuck in a small apartment with the whole family for 45 days....

I was still pretty much tongue-in-cheek about it, maybe my Dutch down-to-earth-ness. People will have to eat, so there will be solutions, or else we can eat nettles and hawthorn leaves etc. We can use plants or newspapers for toilet paper, so what's the problem? But D, knowing the French mentality better than I do of course, thought that by tomorrow there will be nothing in shops anymore, and it won't be self-evident that stocks are replenished. He couldn't go, so I went as knightess in shining armour to come to aide to my dude-in-distress.

"Feeling guilty/embarrassed that I like the lockdown so much."
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Grace W.

Normally I take a light shopping trolley, but this time I took a deep one and by the time I was done, things were almost falling off the top. The bill came to 450 euros – which is indeed our average shopping budget times 4-5 weeks. I bought the same things we normally do (oats, pasta, rice, coconut milk, tinned tomatoes, almond milk, butter, some salmon, some bacon, but then times 4 or 5, because indeed the shelves were alarmingly empty already). I think the shop only had 25% left of its normal stock. Many shelves were completely bare showing the back walls. I chose most resilient vegetables like sweet potatoes, carrots, cabbage etc., and the only things I wouldn't usually buy were tinned pulses and fish. I'll keep the receipt for the record.

It was a really interesting moment for anthropological observation, of self and others. There were many more people than usual. The whole parking lot was full; I've never seen it this busy. People were watching each other, with mistrust in their eyes. I only heard one person cough, but it seemed as if people swarmed away from him at once. I whistled and had a smile on my face, nodding to people, helping people to reach something of the highest shelf. I think I went the other way – displaying more social awareness than I would normally have when food shopping.

At the till… my normally so ordered system of unloading and repacking was completely thrown off by the sheer quantities in my trolley. It made me sweat. Literally because the amount of physical work, bending, carrying, hurrying, trying to be as quick as possible, but I also felt guilty, for buying into the fear mongering. I'm not afraid for myself, but I do feel and understand D's distress, and I'm intrigued to observe the effects on the community. I imagined other people's eyes on me, judging, ridiculing.

Then the butcher's told me that he was only allowed to let four people in his shop, where indeed the supermarket had well over a hundred customers at a time. I hope the small artisan businesses won't suffer from this. He said they might start to do delivery soon, and he gave me the number for ordering in advance, also to speed things up.

I wonder if there are foodbanks here – there was a good call today on social media, to show solidarity with people who cannot hoard in advance. D didn't know if there are any here in France/in our area, I'll find out.

Apart from enjoying the pace of life to slow down, I'm going to enjoy some new cooking experiments – duck breast, lots of cabbage, perhaps starting to bake our own bread again. I joked to D that I'm looking forward to 'the cabbage and tinned salmon opportunities' There was a thrill of adventure of trying to buy smart – so that we can eat delicious food for as long as possible with enough vitamins and greens. Added some spirulina as well. Maybe I should have bought some vitamin tablets too. And I realised I forgot the condoms – we might have to get creative in different ways!

Evening

Okay, I admit, this was the first French presidential address I watched – it is seemingly a time for 'first times'. And boy, I'm shocked by the cultural differences. The song at the start of the address, the 'vive la republique', but especially the condescending tone of speaking to citizens as compatriots, and if I heard correctly even as children – something like 'a nation looks after its children'. I also noticed he used the word 'solidarity' three times, which generally does not seem part of the French mind-set. The other discrepancy was the repetition of paradox statements of 'we're at war' followed by 'don't panic'. If I were a French citizen, I think I would be marginally put at ease reassurances that there will be leniency in payments for independents and small business, and if I heard correctly even for normal households, which might struggle to pay bills due to income loss.

It is strange to me that different European countries have such different measurements – friends in UK and the Netherlands been 'much less' affected by it than here, although I don't know all the countries' different measurements.

I think the UK universities were faster to catch on than the UK government, and that

in itself is a strategy – doing nothing will have a faster and more severe peak, but then it will be over sooner, if I understand correctly.

It's amazing, from hearing messages from my Italian friend who had to cancel her holiday to Thailand, to the brother of a friend who lives in Israel who had to be quarantined after returning from a USA conference, to such drastic measures. I still don't 'grasp' the reach of this virus but, perhaps naively, I'm trusting the authorities to make decisions in our best interest.

Mom texted today that in Holland people are hoarding too, even though government cautions it's unnecessary. Supermarkets there are empty too. She said, "I just buy what I need." Going into town today, there was hardly anyone around, hotel/restaurants/cafes are closed, and it's "a strange atmosphere", she wrote.

Tuesday 17.3.2020

I started to feel guilty about not feeling so connected to all the waves of panic, but it feels very dramatised: the strong calls for instant 'online communities' 'because we can't meet in person and it is so needed', people sending poems and art work to keep the courage, and indeed funny/critical satire on the way various governments handle the issue (or not).[3] I do get the 'immediacy' of the threat, but really, for me it is 'just' another way to die, to pass over into our next adventure. I don't know why people 'cling' to life so much. Yes, life is sacred. It's a gift to make the most of when we can. But for all of us, no exception, there will be a time to leave this body. We can die of so many things, and this is simply another way. Also with our overpopulation, I don't think life is sustainable for all in the long run. Perhaps this is just an impersonal correction mechanism. Of course, it is different for people who care for small children. I am not. If it were possible, I would gladly lay my life down so that others could live. I danced with death very closely last year. It wasn't my time yet, but it will be one day. Does it make me a horrible person if I say I really don't care that much?

It's a bit of a 'so what' attitude. I feel deep compassion for people in challenging situations who might be in prolonged and more dangerous unsafe situations than usual, and indeed those who have to juggle many roles on top of an already intense existence (now working from home, plus home schooling, confined in a space with family members 24/7, plus caring responsibilities and potential worries for family member with symptoms). But that's the effects the measures create, not so much the possibility of death itself brought on by the virus.

I spoke to both my parents today. It was a relief to recognise their similar no-nonsense approach. Maybe the detachment I feel regarding the whole situation is part of my genes or part of Dutch pragmatism – I don't know. My mom continued with her earlier approach 'I only buy what I need. If there is nothing to eat anymore, I'll die' – as in 'big deal, that's the way of life, it will just be a bit sooner'.[4] My dad had a similar take on it in his usual blunt manner: 'well the people who die now won't die in 10 –20 years'... He does recognise that some people are in higher risk situations, his girlfriend included, but still. Panic and the collective grieve seem overrated.

He described how his (grown up) stepkids are so bored now they're home from work, that they are inventing the silliest pastimes (similar to what I've seen pass in some WhatsApp groups). It irks me that I have SOOO many things I would love to do. Boredom simply does not appear in my dictionary. If there would be a way to let me use their bored time, I would so love to make it happen. Or ask them to do the things I don't have time for... It reminds me of Michael Ende's children's book "Momo". Another view on cashing in people's time, a time bank, with time-loans or fines paid in time – it's a long time since I read it, so I might be making up the details, but the image returned today. I know it doesn't work like that. I'm just so aware of the preciousness of the time that is given to us. I want to say to people 'please don't waste it with meaningless silliness because you're bored of your rocker, do something special with this extra gift'. I perceive this as an amazing opportunity for

creative time, for finding sustainable long-term solutions for the many things we face as a global culture, to reconnect with ourselves, pay some holy attention to our bodies, to reinvent rituals and to slow down with awareness... Boredom is simply a waste of time, and in my view not an option. It saddens me that people apparently have lost touch with meaning, with art of living in the Socratic way. I'm almost pissed off that I can perform my work as normal, because I'm having far too much of it (have worked full time for the last 7 weeks, whilst only being paid for 3 days a week, simply because there is too much to do). I do want to carve out time over the next weeks to let the deep creativity bubble up, to formulate my own ideas for a sustainable business plan, to reach out to people with similar interests. Perhaps we can use this crisis as a momentum for positive change. To Wake Up.

Wednesday 18.3.2020

Surreal text from mom: "The copier (kopieermachine) is closed because of the virus" – she meant the print shop of course. Also, apparently I'm not the only one to start cleaning windows... D spoke to his friend F and he too was on it. I don't know if he found a nest of lizards in the window frames like I did... him and his girlfriend spend the days in their respective apartments, conform the confinement, but when night comes, they join each other. Not sure where that sits within the allowances of the lockdown and curfew restrictions, but hey, here we go. I am indeed very glad I returned from the UK before this pandemonium erupted. I would NOT be pleased to be separated from my love for an unforeseeable amount of time. I am grateful. I even thought of making an Instagram account with 'thanks Macron thumbs up' pictures, for all the wonderful things we get to do now – seriously, as an upbeat and playful contribution.

Today there was a call on the Anthropology-Matters mailing list for ethnographic

diaries to document the corona situation. What a great initiative. I copied the entries I already wrote to a separate document and annotated a bit if necessary.

Thursday 19.3.2020

I printed some of the 'attestation de deplacement derogatoire', the forms we need to have on our person if we leave the house, so we have them by the door in case we want to go out for a walk or need to go food shopping. Other reasons are caring for a sick relative, personal medical reasons or if unavoidable for work.

I realise how terribly easy we have it. Since we both work from home, not much has changed in our daily routine. I feel for P [childhood friend], who has now 2 kids to homeschool, her partner sick in the bedroom with symptoms that may or may not be Covid (fever and coughing), her father in law just moved to a larger more specialist hospital (after his bladder operation he is now scheduled for a heart operation, which was delayed because he wasn't doing so well as they first thought), but now he has to wait longer and no one can bring him extra clothes, her mentally ill mother in law is at home with her husband gone, AND P has just started her new job this week (after 13 years in the previous one, so a BIG shift). I feel helpless and have sent flowers as colourful encouragement and to keep heart. I asked if the kids understand. They do, the 6-year old son even built a one-person hut to contain spreading of the virus.

Good to see messages appearing on social media regarding being extra alert for home abuse. How awful if your normal home situation is not steady and stable, and it is a place of fear and trauma, and now you're confined with the perpetrator. Pffff. I joked earlier that the divorce rate is likely to go up, just like normally in holidays when partners who are normally living their own life all of a sudden have to spend 24/7 time together... But this of course is much more serious. Sending prayers.

Friday 20.3.2020

5.000 fines have already been issued for breaking the restrictions, and the price has gone up from 30-something to 135 euros.

Saturday 21.3.2020

Dad told me that their village in Sri Lanka (where they spent 4 months each year) does not feel safe anymore. It looks like outsiders are being scapegoated. Earlier this week, there were 20 Covid cases on the island. None of them were foreigners but all were Sri Lankans who had come back from travels and brought the virus home with them... so painful, short-sighted and scary, how the scapegoating works. He said last week their B&B guests had been asked to leave by the villagers, and now even him and his girlfriend get funny looks, while they normally get on really well with the people and are well integrated. He said it felt 'unheimisch' and unsafe, so they are returning home 3 weeks earlier than planned.

Monday 23.3.2020

I'm curious to what for long term changes this situation will lead. Many initiatives for online meetings, even dance classes! Most of my dance colleagues have converted their weekly classes from studio to zoom, with participants dancing in their own living room. It remains strange that different European countries have such different measures. No lockdown in Holland yet, nor in England, although there they're talking about it. UK universities thankfully have caught on. Consensus seems to be that no enforced measures lead to heavy peak, bad, but over quickly. However, new virus strains are already developing so that's probably not going to be just one outbreak.

I'm so glad I'm not a politician, would be awful to make such decisions.

At home, we have amazing food; I'm enjoying playing around with the storage. I'm always enjoying cooking, but now meals have become an extra important part of the day. Sensory-wise, health-wise, but also to smart use of first week binge buying and making sure nothing goes to waste.

We seem to be one of the few couples who are not stressed or challenged by having so much "couple time". Everywhere online there are courses how to keep your relationship going in these times of confinement. Of course, we have the benefits of a large house, with plenty of space to withdraw and take our own time. Not all my friends are so lucky, and need to share small apartment without balcony, with partner, noisy neighbours, and noisy neighbourhood. I wonder how many more incidences of violence, divorce or mental illness will go up. For us not much has changed, as we are working from home as a rule. The only difference is that D doesn't leave for fortnightly for a few days of work away from home, and that I don't leave for UK, which I usually do bi-monthly for 10-14 days. The only tricky thing for us is that internet is noticeably slower, it was always touch and go here in the countryside, and now it's sometimes hardly working at all now everyone is at home, surfing.

Thursday 26.3.2020

Kinda weird – took Tuesday and Wednesday off, had a really nice time, opened my computer again for work today and completely crashed, energetically exhausted. It's a bit worrying – the complexity of life in general, and mine in particular… so many choices still to make (job, my business, country, bureaucracy…). I don't think my 'mood' is COVID related (apart from this being another example of not having much hope for and trust in humanity and old soul fatigue being amplified) although it seems to make decisions more poignant and life just that bit more unstable… don't

quite know. Also really struggle with clock time, have cancelled all my appointments this week apart from one this morning… but I don't seem to be the only one – several people 'stood me up' without warning, and that's annoying as it 'costs' me to follow clock time at the moment. I need 'breathing' space for my soul it seems…

Lockdown in England since Monday, although M [friend] says not everyone sticks to it. She has gangs of late twenties/early thirties around their flat block, with motorbikes, loud voices and lots of hugs. It's not even the brashness of teenagers, which perhaps can be expected. But even at that age – some more responsibility might be expected. How bizarre. Maybe they think they don't risk dying if they catch it – but still, how can education be improved so that they are aware of the risks of others with hospitals that can't tend to the demands, etc.?

Friday 27.3.2020

Yessss. Yessss. Macron just announced two more weeks lockdown, what a joy for me, even though I'm aware of so many people who are in severe distress or danger (physical, emotional, financial)…. Feeling guilty / embarrassed that I like the lockdown so much. It's such a time of deep solace and retreat and creativity and life review. Will try and write a blog post on that. I think I already wrote that for the first time since starting work twenty years ago, the world spins at a speed that I can relate to. That I am not constantly 'running to catch up', or 'justifying my slower pace'… It's actually quite amazing.

Tuesday 31.3.2020

Something is brewing inside me but I don't know what… there is a movement to an unusually introspective and deep place within me, even more hermit like and reflective than usual. I don't feel like talking to anyone, I can't bear clock time at the

moment and have a strong aversion towards my computer. I don't know if it's a reflection of the Corona virus situation – M's text about the general mental field affecting us. It feels like a period of rememberment, of recalibrating, of getting to my true core and hopefully emerging into more of who I am. Sense of accepting that I am different from the mainstream, not for the first time, but perhaps with more permission. Perhaps this reflects a larger consciousness at work at the moment, to which all of us are connected. Or perhaps it's simply individual, I don't know.

I'm feeling dreamy and sleepy. Went to bed at 7pm. I felt like being on my own and in bed early anyway. Nice to simply be and stare at the sunset, write some reflections. I also feel I'm learning to find the button of 80% speed only. I really have given and worked too much for 7 weeks and it seems like now I'm paying for it with exhaustion that results in complete lack of interest and motivation. It's like I'm either more than on, or completely exhausted. Not sustainable. Irritates me that at 42 I still haven't cracked this nut… D said he hoped it wasn't the corona virus that makes me so tired today, as I've done the bi-weekly shopping yesterday and might have contacted it. Doesn't feel like it but I was cold all day, and extremely tired, and one never knows, of course…

Wednesday 1.4.2020

I saw an image on Facebook referring to the Covid-19 situation, something along the lines of 'With this open time, you do not have to write the next bestselling novel, or start that podcast…' instead invite being, pausing, curious without agenda, creating art for the sake of creating not the outcome, etc. And my first response was 'oh but I have to… write that children's book, my academic monograph, edit my first dance video performance and of course figure out what my business is about. If not now, then when? No pressure'.

Thursday 2.4.2020

Nice not feeling so exhausted anymore. And immediately possibility opens… space opens… even though I STILL don't know what my calling is (ha, will I ever, I wonder?)… It is a bit of a conundrum – this feeling of not having much confidence in the human race whilst at the same time contemplating to make a meaningful contribution to growth – or is that two sides of the same coin?

Sunday 5.4.2020

Strange for my mom to celebrate her 72nd birthday without any guests. Even though in Holland gatherings of up to three people are still allowed, her brother and his wife didn't feel like making the trip from Alkmaar to Arnhem. I hope it helped that I sang to her over WhatsApp, sent flowers, and that we spoke several times during the day via Zoom. Looks like she was able to enjoy the day anyway. I'm so glad she's not pining away. For her too, not much difference to normal life, although she does notice that the streets are quieter. She transferred to online church services, and will even take a dance class with one of my Dutch colleagues. I'm teaching her to use Zoom. She's very much missing her rowing activities.

Our parcels backward and forward have not arrived. Strange, as the French mail system does deliver letters once a week, but no parcels. I hope they aren't lost. To be sure, we are doing our regular correspondence via email now instead of snail mail. Or at least, I make pictures of the letters I write, and email them; her letters have still arrived as normal.

I'm concerned about my UK friend who was in the process of getting his arm diagnosed – MRI scans weren't conclusive. Now all the diagnostic stuff in UK seems to have shut down, and his arm is diminished in muscle mass, so much it's now only half the size of the other one. I hope this doesn't create an irreversible situation later

on. I imagine such trajectories are already scary – people finding out what is ailing them – but now they don't even feel like it's being looked at. Also, many hospitals have chucked patients out who aren't terminally ill, but with serious conditions – cardiovascular, cancer, etc. In France, you're not even allowed to visit your dying relatives. Pfff. That will create a lot of extra trauma, on top of the natural grief cycle if you can't say goodbye properly. Also funerals allow for three people maximum. On the happier life transitions, I realised that weddings will have to be postponed too – perhaps some will be cancelled altogether?

It's so bizarre that really no one has any idea how long this situation is going to last. Masks are advised (slogan: "I protect you, you protect me") but there aren't enough (most are made in China, stock has gotten out of date, etc.).

Wildlife is thriving, when I did my shopping last week, there was much more game on the road.

Monday 6.4.2020

Yesterday I received an extra issue of the newsletter of the Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies, such a breath of fresh air and spaciousness, to read. They describe the etymology of the word Krisis as a "turning point in a disease, that change which indicates recovery or death'... in other words, 'Crisis is the time when there is no choice but change. It is a moment of deep healing possibility'. It is interesting that I have turned to my shamanic practice much more than to my dance/movement practice. As if it is now more than ever important to communicate with the spirit world. It's indeed an opportunity "to work with and for rather than fight against", as they write. This way we can flow with, rather than block. Such a relief also, to hear them rephrase 'working for healing, not against the virus' – healing of course is seen different to curing in shamanic views. Also that 'we cannot go back to what was, because that contributed to making us unwell'. So it's a matter of dancing with love,

compassion and kindness, asking what will help us to move forward. This is so supportive to me as I'm in the process of developing the foundations for my own business – and to counter the many reasons that it wouldn't work, won't make a difference, and who am I to offer anything anyway... It's an invitation to step through the fear, rather than hide from it. I think this was one of the most empowering pieces of texts I have read in a long time. And I would like my work to encourage and empower people in a similar way. [addition 21.4.20 they've now made it into an article: Shamanism in Times of Crisis][5]

As I wrote elsewhere, it is such an invitation to create new forms, structures away from the familiar, the bureaucratic, and the unchallenged. How can we think about economy, health care, spirituality, and education differently? Indeed many new words are invented or re-established. That working from home is the 'new normal' for example. What are other changes that we are going to see? I am aware of so many initiatives popping up online, musicians offering life stream concerts from home, others selling their music for a lower price via Bandcamp, others again offering things for free because they know content is sorely needed yet finances are tight for many. I witness many different approaches to online classrooms, all the way up until PhD viva's. My partner is developing a platform where movement and spirituality teachers can safely and hassle free stream content as well as upload videos on demand; which has a much safer environment than for example Zoom – that suffers from lots of ridiculous pranks right now, not making it an appropriate place for therapists for example to create a client-safe room. I also heard an awful story of a primary teacher who was delivering content material live to her students and was physically abused by her partner in front of the computer so that all her young students witnessed it – although that of course had nothing to do with the (un)safety of zoom as a platform.

Monday 13.4.2020

Grace W.

Lockdown Haikus

Lock-down paradox
stimulates online structures
as the new normal

Lock-down paradox
stimulates online structures
as the new normal

collaboration,
connection intensifies
creativity

working from abroad
not merely tolerated
turning a blind eye

each Skype a favour
an unusual request
a statement of gap

now commonly shared
I no longer need to hide
and can be present

in the team again
I feel less isolated
displaced no longer

greater acceptance
I hope this will continue
when the dust settles

It was so funny, I came home from the third food shopping trip since the lockdown, and with a sincere sigh of relief I said 'oh it's so good to be home', ironic. Since two weeks, the barricade fences have gone up outside the supermarket, as they only allow a specific number of people in at the time. There was a line of 15 people outside, neatly spaced using the parking demarcations. Interesting to see the different use of public/spatial architecture. It took me 20 minutes to gain entry. The shop itself was better stocked than the first two times, less empty shelves although there were still some. But everyone was much more alert. People scooting down the other end of the isle to avoid coming close to others. There was definitely more space everywhere, but also the pace was slower than usual. People navigate the space differently, which reminds me of an article in the New York Times on social distancing as choreography.[6] How dance can be of use in unexpected ways.

Thursday 16.4.2020

It's funny that on one hand we have oceans of times, while on the other time-keeping becomes so much more important for me. Not always easy, living in France. But there is only so much 'online' time that I can cope with, and then if people turn up late (or not at all), or go over the allocated time, it really irks me. It rattles me; I can't find my own groove so easily.

Monday 20.4.2020

Of course, this Covid-19 situation presses many buttons. I guess any prolonged

stressful situation does. I recently had a spell where I felt almost OCD in my peculiarities of how I want things – mostly around food, or housekeeping. When I'm relaxed I have much more leeway than when not. I'm also learning to ask for space. And I'm noticing that regardless of not seeing much of my partner during the day as we each work in our own office, I still might need more space (solitary breakfast, or going to bed early and sleeping separately). Stress is this feeling of always dancing on the edge of almost too much, whether an unexpected thing appears on the desk, whether it's a request from a colleague that I can't say no to, whether it's a health concern. And now we do have Covid as an enormous stress-factor in the collective conscious… in a way 'overshadowing' any personal issues, while at the same time fuelling introspection and reflection on existential questions. Indeed, a time full of possibilities and potential, while also needing to stay kind and compassionate towards our limitations.

Tuesday 21.4.2020

It's weird, in the night I had the sense of all the days being the same and the futility of life, eat (again), sleep (again), all the things we need to do stay healthy and be a good citizen. That sense of pointlessness, why are we here? Yes, love is a blessing and there are so many things to be grateful for. But what is this human existence about? I really do not believe in creating more awareness on a large scale. I think that's a utopian view of a white, well off, middle class bubble. Hunger, rape, torture, war, disease, corruption seems to be the norm… How can we be as kind as possible in this overwhelming human experience? What is Covid teaching me about this?

At the same time, I am sooo deeply appreciative of my life – a conundrum / paradox with the perhaps bleak thoughts I describe earlier. I am so happy with D, deeply grateful for our life together, that he is by my side; it is the most precious feeling. I cherish every moment we have. When I can't, it's because I'm in the way, caught up

in a worry pattern or something. So I'm learning :-).

I heard a metaphor in the "Accidental Gods Podcast" with Manda Scott and Ya'Acov Darling Khan (episode 15). To change our societies in order to turn the tide of climate change etc. would have been like changing a Boeing 747 into a Helicopter, mid-flight. It is impossible. But now, through Corona – the plane has landed. So we have another chance.

Friday 24.4.2020

Forgot my iPad to read in the queue for the supermarket... bit of meditation and 'participant observation' instead, haha.



Photo taken by the author.

Friday 1.5.2020

Was in a bizarre mood. Very stressed and almost survival angst. Was able to go out for a walk and meditate by the water because there wasn't any immediate reason for this. Don't know if it was a wave of collective Covid panic or had to do with the choices still to make re my work.

Saturday 2.5.2020

Doesn't often happens that I'm fantasising about food – most in Paris; pizzeria near H; le Cambodia for Natin, and Angelina for Mont Blanc or Mont Blanc ice cream… not giving it a lot of thought (what's the point if it remains a phantasy?) but it does cross my mind every now and then. Or a dinner at Koko's Japanese restaurant.

I've been out of my favourite teas for ten days or so as moms parcel still hasn't arrived. Hope they haven't chucked it, wouldn't put it past the French mail. I'm rationing my last box of Chocolate Sprinkles. Enjoying even more than usual.

Looks like things are intensifying. I panicked on Thursday and Friday. Mostly work related but perhaps also the confinement and the collective Covid-19 field. France is now divided in three zones – we're in green with least Covid-19 cases, and hopefully we gain more freedom soon (probably phased release of confinement after 11.5.).

Sunday 3.5.20

Really enjoy the rhythms of both of us being at home, neither leaving. But I do start to wonder if part of my stress is not having any solitude. In pre-Covid times, D would regularly leave for a few days for various work commitments, giving me 2-3-4 nights and adjoining days to myself, with my own rhythms. A few times, I noticed my stress was related to watching something I didn't really want to watch, which was a compromise. Yesterday avoided that by going to bed before was a good choice. I wonder how couples fare who don't have so much physical space as we do, or lo and behold who have children in the equation too, pffff, hats off to all parents.

Monday 4.5.2020

It's been a really lovely day. Calm mind, joyous heart, got the shopping, a laundry and lots of writing done. Efficient and effortless. I think this is how I would like all my

days to be. I wasn't super rested but at least not debilitatingly tired which makes a nice change. Felt last week was so intense emotionally. So yes, felt good and optimistic and playful and balanced. I'm probably in for trouble if I say that I'd like this to be the status quo, or that I measure my days against this as ideal. Buddhists will probably say that's a recipe for suffering.

I'm learning so much about myself, continuously, and how I can and can't maintain equilibrium. Pain is definitely a spoilsport. Bad nights too. Stress seems to creep up on me at times, while at others I can keep it at bay. Is it a matter of how big/calm/centred/worried I feel? One thing is about being asked more than I can give. The other thing is about knowing I'm investing in the right things. I don't mind working hard as long as I'm behind the outcome, so that I feel my life energy is well spent. I guess that sense is challenged now.

Other smaller stressors: different rhythms with D can freak me out / throw me off balance in terms of noise, technology, talking/relating at uninvited moments (asked more than I can give). Health concerns can freak me out (including tax/social system). Wastefulness freaks me out.

Tuesday 5.5.2020

Had three panic attacks in 6 days. Don't know what to do. So much going on. I'm starting to crave space with the ongoing lockdown. It's not a big difference because both of us work from home usually, but still every 10-14 days I would normally be on my own for 2-3 days and I'm missing that. This is just a bit scary, am I going crazy... how to breathe with it... The 'causes' for the panic attacks seem random, once after virtual work meeting, once with scary TV episode, today with overwhelm that my new computer (bought online) was different to how I expected. Am never good with technology and I feel I'm just able to hold life together at the moment (doing everything I need, I mean), and then if something unexpected happens it's simply too

much to dance with. I screamed and slammed doors and 'fled' the house'. It was sheer helplessness. Like a wild animal, trapped... rats in a cage...

Saturday 9.5.2020

No new panic attacks happened... Perhaps, coming out on 'the other side', I'm now in a deep space of reflection, creativity, dreaming, re-memberment (as in the shamanic dismemberment-rememberment), and really feeling I'm gearing up for the second half of my life. I'm starting to dare to step into who I am – and trusting that there is 'space' for me... I'm in a fountain of creative outputs – lots of painting, drawing, dancing, photography and so on... Although it's easy, of course, to take everything personally (as in 'it's probably just me that can't cope, or it's just me who's going through unrelated midlife musings that have nothing to do with Covid), in talking to people I get a sense that many balance on this edge of transformation, sheer panic on one side and deep creativity on the other. Perhaps that leads to good things coming out of Covid...

Monday 11.5.2020

Just heard about the first death in my (very) extended family, brother in law to my uncle. He was in a nursing home already, with Alzheimers, and I didn't know him very well. But still... as the lockdown rules in France are eased a bit (we can now travel 100 km from our home)... It's such a strange time...

Even now I feel I'm letting D down by asking for space/feel guilty for adding to his overwhelm – the conversation itself freaked him out to tears. He is incredibly overwhelmed too, but I'm also no longer coping and something needs to change. I shared that craving solitude, am scared to talk because everything I say seems to trigger him and it's easier not to speak, I also need space – him coming in the

bathroom this morning, or hearing his music just before bed (after we'd already said goodnight, I suggested one of three options

1. Silence like on a meditation retreat, we can pass each other, be with each other or whatever but simply not speaking

2. In addition, follow our own rhythms and not eat together or not hang out

3. In addition, if really pushed, we could use dedicated spaces – him top floor, me downstairs, him lounge, me office, whatever, simply to create some physical space.

I said I didn't know what to do anymore, because every interaction seemed to aggravate one or both of us. If I could, I would book an Airbnb somewhere, just to have space. But they aren't open yet. Then he suggested going to the cottage of friend.

Evening

So this was the first 'silent' day between us, and it was a bit awkward but also worked well. Week 8 of the lockdown :-). It reminds me of those Mona Lisa pictures with her hair getting funnier and her look more crazed as the lockdown continues, which are circulating online. I don't understand the reasoning behind lifting the house arrest for 100 km., but I'm sure someone has a reason.

Wednesday 13.5.20

We've followed up and the cottage is free, but it's much further than 100km from where we live. I don't want to disobey the rules and contribute to unsafe Covid behaviour but at the same time they feel arbitrary and having some solitude would be wonderful for both of us. However B&B and campsites are all still closed... so... I don't know another way to get some space... I could camp in the garden but I'm just tired of interacting. The slightest thing irritates me so much. I'm just on edge... and it seems he is too. All normal insecurities and irritations are magnified, leading to some tensions coming to the surface. I imagine many couples will go through this magnified space. The sad thing is that we've been doing really well until last week and now the lockdown has eased off we are just completely worn out, super irritable and overwhelmed.

Thursday 14.5.2020

Yes, we really don't have much skin left at the moment, everything is like sand in shoes, grating all the time.

Friday 15.5.2020

Ohhh solitude is SO good. I hadn't realised it is actually a life essential. I always knew I liked lots of it, but this time has made it clear that I cannot go without for more than 4 weeks ideally, 6 at a push, but beyond that, as we've seen, rats in a cage, skinless. Covid-19 itself an intense situation, but add in my midlife musings, the choices-to-be-made re work and enterprise (what, where, how, when), the deep personal work I'm doing to make sure I'm ready to step into my offering, the return of the not-dying last year, and D's stress... a potent gun powder situation!

Monday 15.6.20

Traveling and Covid-19 masks

It's a strange thing to wear masks. I have a dislike of traveling on a good day, but this makes it so much worse. The recycled air gives me a headache (both yesterday and today, and it leaves within minutes when I take off the mask). I wonder how this is for people with breathing difficulties like asthma. Also, the obstruction of my view makes me dizzy and hurts my neck for the exaggerated movements needed to see things, look down in my back etc. And the elastic bands hurt my ears.

On the other hand, there is something more 'private' about it. Only now I realise that it does take energy to plaster a pleasant expression on my face. It's nice to be bland, no need for looks of encouragement, gratitude, affirmation 'yes I'm doing well', 'yes I acknowledge you'. I can be bluntly disinterested and ignoring. Didn't realise there was energy invested in this before.

I wonder how it affects women feeling eyed up, I did receive a few poignant looks yesterday in Paris, feeling the curiosity of gaze 'what she would look like under the mask'. Yuk. M (friend) already texted she felt 'safer and more sheltered' in London, wearing a mask. I wonder how she normally feels; I don't feel unsafe as a rule...

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[1] I originally didn't copy these texts in as I considered them to be hypochondriac worry texts... But after the request for the Curare Corona Diary for ethnographic documentation, I traced it back, as this was the moment when it started to come alive in our collective awareness, I think.

[2] We live in the countryside, 1.5-2 hours west of Paris.

[3] Funny videos are starting to appear such as from the JuiceMedia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hks6Nq7g6P4&feature=youtu.be, [17.3.20].

[4] My mom is a nurse, and loves life, so it is not at all coming from a depressed angle...

[5] Available online at: http://www.shamanism.dk/crisistimes.htm

[6] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/31/arts/dance/choreographing-the-street-coronavirus.html

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Preview-Picture by Katharina Sabernig. She creates, knits and photographs medicinal objects to make medical content accessible to the senses (https://www.knitted-anatomy.at/).