From Participant Observation to the Observation of Social Distancing: Teaching Ethnography, Blogging and University Education during the Pandemic

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Abstract:

This article draws from a collaborative blog *Our Quarantine Diaries* created during the first COVID-19 confinement in Greece in 2020. In a context of sharing, participation, and solidarity, the blog aimed to facilitate an online/synchronous shared space between students and educators during this period of social distancing. The blog was a way to experiment and reflect through an ethnography of the 'every day' to capture aspects of our experiences in quarantine and communicate them to one another. Through the blog we attempted to trace how participant observation can help us understand this new condition of social distancing, using (self)observation, memory and imagination to grasp experience. The result was eighteen multimodal recordings consisting of visual, sonic, musical and verbal information. By the end of the process, we realized that the experiment helped us, if not to overcome, then to engage and to a degree, 'exercise' the fear of this new type of 'evil' through digital communication, ethnographic observation and anthropological analysis. In this article, we reflect on the digital aspects of the affective and emotional modalities of teaching/doing ethnography via the use of *Our Quarantine Diaries* blog during this unusual time.

Keywords: pandemic, social distancing, digital anthropology, teaching ethnography, blog.

Introduction

> …ethnography is the practice developed in order to bring about empirical-based knowledge about human worlds according to certain methodological principles, the most important of which is participant-observation ethnographic fieldwork[1]. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (2018)

For years, the discipline of social anthropology has been identified with its method of ethnographic fieldwork, used to distinguish it from other similar social sciences like sociology. Although today, this is no longer the case, both fieldwork and participant observation remain significant to what social anthropologist do, despite also being used by several other social sciences (Mills and Ratcliffe, 2011, p. 1-18).

The pandemic put a tombstone on many ethnographic projects, and it forced others in progress to change their research design. Extra burden was put on researchers to take into account risks related to COVID-19 in the statements to their institutions' research committees. Besides research, teaching and learning social anthropology also had to change, as online teaching became the 'new normal' in university education wholly or in hybrid forms. For years, there has been a demand for innovative methods of teaching in our pedagogies and when the pandemic emerged, we were forced to become creative. However, many questions were raised. How could social anthropologists teach their methods in confinement or via specific educational platforms? How could they teach what fieldwork was when the field turned hostile for human life?[2]

Drawing from the first long confinement applied in March 2020 in Greece, our paper will show how the pandemic made us think outside the box and help to share a moment of intimacy – although at a distance – with our students through the creation of the *Our Quarantine Diaries* blog. This participatory project in which ourselves, as well as some of our students took part, was a space for communal reflection, a mediatized and mediated experiment aiming to capture our experiences in quarantine and communicate them to one another.

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[1] https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/ethnography
[2] Social anthropologists do fieldwork in hostile environment, for example, war zones but the pandemic and the security measures taken at a global level made not only research but even traveling impossible.

Those blogs reflected not only on the social conditions of our lives, such as class, gender, or position, but also gave an opportunity to more deeply reflect on our procedures of teaching and doing ethnography in university.

In this paper, we firstly discuss how our discipline addressed challenges regarding ethnographic methods and fieldwork before COVID-19. Drawing on anthropological practice during crisis such as the World Wars, we explore how the idea of 'social distancing' from the field was not something new to the discipline. We go on to consider the significance of the linguistic turn and how anthropologists understanding of 'experience' can help us address the exigencies regarding field work during the COVID-19 crisis. In the second section, we discuss the shared blog experiment that we did with our students, addressing the ways it helped us to create bridges with them during social distancing. We understand blog making as a way of dealing with confinement. In the final part, we discuss how the different blog entries and the different modalities used captured the impact of the pandemic at this moment of time. We end by describing the pedagogical benefits of our work, and the conclusion we drew from what our students and ourselves felt during this experiment and how it gave us ideas to strengthen and pluralise our teaching methods.

Crises and Adaptation in Ethnographic Fieldwork

> How differently a man imagines his life from the way it turns out for him!
> B. Malinowski (1989 [1967], p. xxv)

The sentence above marks the arrival of a young scientist to Papua. What young Bronislaw Malinowski wrote in the opening pages of his diary was not what he saw but how differently he had imagined his life in the academia. In the following pages, he often made references to imagination. Soon, after his arrival, he became prisoner of his Majesty after the outburst of World War I, given that he was a subject of the Habsburg Empire although ethnic-Polish. This forced confinement on the island made him creative and resourceful, resulting to a new method of empirical observation from a close distance. Creativity and imagination played an important part in his work on the island. For example, he admitted in his diary that to understand what the impact of the choice of sexual partners was for the Trobriand society, he made comparisons with his own life in Poland, "I imagined meetings with various Polish men and women. If I married E.R.M., I would be estranged from Polishness" (Malinowski, 1989 [1967], p. 174). Observing the experience of Trobrianders forced him to bring back memories and use his imagination to develop a cultural comprehension. Similarly, in his seminal monograph, *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski, 2002 [1922], p. 13), he invited the reader, "Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village".

Times of crises, such as World Wars, often demands creative solutions. However, if we consider what Malinowski did during his fieldwork and compare it to what his predecessors used to do, we could understand better the role of imagination in ethnography. In the empirical positivist framework of the 19th century, as Lienhardt (2003) argued, social anthropology was trying to trace the universal laws that determined the organisation of human societies. This aspiration was done through mediation and not through physical presence in the field, for example through bibliographical research, questionnaires carried to the places of interest by merchants, missionaries, or other categories of travellers to Africa or Asia. Gathering and providing information thorough this type of description was one thing, but there was also the works of imagination. Malinowski underlined the role of imagination in a letter he wrote to James Frazer, the author of *The Golden Bough* (1990 [1890]) and a leading figure of anthropology of those early days not only in Britain. In that letter, Malinowski commented on how Frazer's vivid description helped him get a grasp of the tribal life described in Frazer's book.

> I remember how helpful it was to find in your T&E [Totemism and Exogamy] a picturesque account of the country where the respective tribes live. In fact, I found that the more scenery and 'atmosphere' was given in the account, which you had at your disposal, the more convincing and manageable to the imagination was the ethnology of that district (Malinowski quoted from Thorton, 1985, p. 8).

'Armchair anthropologists', the term used to describe the lack of physical contact with the field, were doing ethnography from a distance based on available sources and accounts but also imagining the life 'out there' and trying to provide their readers with accurate and vivid descriptions. The problem with their research production was not the descriptive accounts but the epistemology, the conviction of scientific objectivity, lack of historical contextualisation and critical examination of their own voice and subjectivity in the construction of these texts. In a sense, the pandemic brought social anthropologists back to the origins of our discipline. We were all forced to become armchair anthropologists. But instead of an armchair in a library at Cambridge or Oxford, we had an

office-desk-chair in front of a computer; and instead of trying to deduct universal laws, we tried to position our experience within the process of situating, representing and writing our research.

After a decade from Malinowkski's fieldwork in the Trobriand islands, at the end of yet another global crisis of World War II, two female anthropologists, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, were asked to study "culture at a distance". The need to 'know the enemy' made ethnographic knowledge an asset both during and after the war period to understand geopolitical change.

> In 1944, I was assigned to study Japan. I was asked to use all the techniques I could as cultural anthropologists to spell out what the Japanese were like. (..) As a cultural anthropologist, in spite of these major difficulties, I had confidence in certain techniques and postulates which could be used. (Benedict, 1946, p. 164, 190).

Benedict, student of Franz Boas and a leading American cultural anthropologist, was the main advocator of gestalt (personality and national character psychology) in social anthropology. During World War II, the Department of the War asked for her expertise in the case of Japan. As Benedict discussed in the introduction of the book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (2005, [1946]), the 'assignment Japan' was not based on field work. Instead, as she admitted the numerous writings of westerners who travelled or live in Japan before the war were valuable sources of information. Furthermore, she watched Japanese movies and often watched these films with Japanese living in the USA so they could share their insights about these movies with her. She also compared her research questions with ethnographies from the same Pacific region to reveal connections of "isolated bits of culture" (2005, [1946]), p.255), which the untrained eye would have dismissed, as part of a wider cultural pattern and behaviour. Benedict went on to inaugurate a seminar at Columbia University to teach "wartime techniques" to study cultures from a distance (Price 2016, p. 99-101). Rhoda Metreaux and Margaret Mead followed up with studying culture at distance though partial clues (linguistic, literary, filmic, artistic, interviews, games, slang etc.) (Mead and Meteaux, 1949, p. 3-57). Throughout these various crises then, anthropologists have been cut off from their field sites. These emergencies forced ethnographers to adapt to more 'distanced' methods, but it did not impede anthropological research.

In the 1960/1970s, another crisis was in the making, this time 'from within'. The 'linguistic turn', the new understanding of reality as constructed through linguistic and cognitive categories, generated a reconsideration of the production of ethnographic knowledge. This pivotal shift had an impact both in the ways social anthropologists understood experience and later on, in the way they practiced ethnographic methods and writing. Jason Throop (2003) argued that fieldwork and participant observation helped the ethnographer access the singularity of the moment – the experience of a unique encounter between the researcher and the field, where their senses could grasp words, images, sounds, smells, touch, tastes *and* where they developed emotions or affective intuitions of what, how and when the 'local' and the 'global' was produced.

In the past, within a structuralist framework, the 'singularity' of the fieldwork experience was considered the vehicle through which the invisible and underlying structures of culture and human thought could be revealed. However, in that period, social anthropologists did not look for universal laws and systems of thoughts. Instead, both schools, the British Symbolic Anthropology and the American Interpretive Anthropology considered cultures as networks of interwoven symbols and meanings. The leading figures of both schools, Victor Turner for the former and Clifford Geertz for the latter, tried to redefine the notion of experience.

For both, experience was of a fleeting and transient nature. What the ethnographer's experience can grasp was lost and became mediated (thus distanced) moments, immediately after its observation. In this understanding, sensory impressions were immediately filtered when we take notes, write diaries, make sketches and drawings, take pictures or filming. In other words, the raw experience of the field turns to a 'signifying' act for Geertz and a 'structured' one for Turner in order to create ethnographic knowledge. For both, experience cannot be reduced but is part of a circuit of symbols and meanings; "all experience is construed experience" (Geertz quoted from Throop, 2003, p. 226). In this way, 'being there' is not a guarantee of understanding cultures. It is only a small, but significant, part of the methods that social anthropologists could use. In the same period of time, the development of cultural studies, shifted the attention to studying culture without using field work (Longhurst et al, 2016). The emergence of multimodality challenged logocentrism in social sciences (see Kress, 2003) and its use as a methodological tool to capture the growing mediatic and digital mediations, challenged the pre-eminence of fieldwork.

This brief historical account postulated the ways social anthropology, methodologically and theoretically, approached 'the real' and the way the discipline challenged and reflected upon the empirical reality of the 'field'. Observation and experience from an immediate and sensorial practice gradually became understood as a constructed and mediated outcome of research, where imagination and memory are integral elements of fieldwork production. Memory and imagination contributed to the formation the ethnographer's subjectivity and the way they produce categories of knowledge. Furthermore, that new understanding of experience combined with the post-colonial and cultural critique (Fisher and Marcus, 2003 [1986]) gave rise to an increased sensitivity and problematisation of ethnographic writing – writing that relied on particular modalities of representation which contributed to the production/construction of the 'real' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). In the last decades, digital ethnography or hybrid forms of ethnography combining different methods of fieldwork in online research, have created new understandings of the mutual, interwoven production of Subject-Object (Latour, 2012 [1993]). As a result, the pandemic did not find social anthropology without tools to examine this 'new' reality, despite the scale, duration and total impact, COVID-19 had on our everyday life.

Creating 'Our Quarantine Diaries'

Drawing from this understanding of experience as always mediated and mediatized, and from the prior challenges within social anthropology, when the pandemic started, we proceeded to create a small project. Our first year-class, *Introduction to the Methodologies of Social Sciences,* at the department of Balkans, Slavic and Oriental Studies, where one of us taught the formation of the anthropological thought and methods from different schools of sociology, critical thinking and social anthropology, and the other did lab-oriented activities (shaping a research question, developing the research design, academic writing etc), brought us together. When the first confinement was enforced in Greece in March 2020, we were in the beginning of the spring semester. In that semester, we did not share a class, but we shared the desire to explore the ways that confinement and the enforced social distancing affected our students. We were motivated by personal, academic and pedagogical reasons. First, we needed to address the fears and awkwardness we felt dealing with this unprecedented condition. Sharing a digital space was a way to substituted what we missed the most, going to our classes, talking to our students and colleagues. It was a psychological support and catharsis, implying that we are here, we the teachers, we the students, we the humans. Second, we wanted to explore how this new space of teaching and sociality –the e-academic space – can work in practice as an ethnographic field and space for reflection. Third, we tried to explore how digital methods can become embedded in the pedagogy of university teaching.

This desire urged us to create a shared blog *Our Quarantine Diaries*. We used blospot.com because it was one of the most accessible, easy to use platforms. In our call, which ran in English and Greek, we asked three key questions that Our Quarantine Diaries aspired to answer:

- How can personal experiences, knowledge and feelings of everyday life in quarantine be transformed or at the same time be commonplace?
- What are the aspects of our experienced reality? from home, balcony, self and companionship? What are the dimensions of "free time" in quarantine and how is the space we live and share valued?
- What are the dynamics and power of capturing our experiences?[3]

We circulated the call among our department's students at different levels as well as among alumni. We also included the students –asylum seekers- of Solidarity Now, an NGO we collaborated with and had been planning a common class activity to bring together and sensitise both groups to stereotypes, intercultural communication and volunteering, just before the pandemic. The call ran for less than a month and we collected 18 blog entries of various forms and content. We invited our students and alumni to choose the way they would contribute to the blog, stating that this could be a verbal text, a video, a series of photos, an audio document, or a painting. We mentioned that our target was to capture our experience during confinement without necessarily excluding fictional aspects in blog entries. All submissions were accepted for publication, and we did not reject any. However, we noticed that although there was significant interest, many of the people who responded to our first call later wrote to us that due to the increasing burden of their work, they could not submit anything. These responses coincided with our own observation that working from home increased our 'office' hours and duties as the compartmentalization between work and private life dissolved, giving the impression that being confined at home meant immediate availability at any time (Manokha, 2020).

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[3] https://ourquarantinediaries.blogspot.com/

The choice of a diary was not coincidental. The use of fieldwork diaries are often the first texts where social anthropologists can process the 'raw' experience, the first space for mediation through memory and cognition in which anthropological experience is constructed. Moreover, it was a genre of writing that all students had come into contact with as it was covered in prior compulsory anthropology classes in our department. What our small experiment postulated, and the following analysis will illustrate, was that 1. multimodality is much more embedded in our realities than we expected (pictures, sounds videos, photographs are part of students' construction of the 'real' etc), 2. the boundary between reality and fiction is much more challenged and transgressed. The blog entries showed that fictionalised reality made the understanding of the 'new reality' easier and maybe more tolerable. Finally, creativity through which emotions vis-à-vis the cognitive understanding of the pandemic and the 'real' was bought into view, emerged as an important strategy of knowledge production.

Analyzing the blogs

Blog entries tried to capture and conceptualise 'the moment', life, doing, feeling or imagining during confinement. At the same time, they raised questions connected to the potential relations between realism and fiction as part of our ethnographic recordings. Actually, these were some of the questions we asked ourselves at the beginning of the first COVID-19 confinement in Greece. It was the same questions that we tried to raise and analyse through our common digital project. "Our Quarantine Diaries" as a digital shared archive contained a mosaic of different voices and perceptions of experience with regard to the quotidian in confinement. However, these entries and their analysis were produced at the very beginning of the quarantine. It is possible that more recent descriptions about confinement would lead to totally different conclusions. For archival use, nevertheless we believe that our experiment although short and fragmented gives a sense of that challenging moment. There are descriptions about the shock of living in confinement, displays of fears, practices of daily lives in quarantine, as well as recordings of anticipation for our world to change. Such material could serve as a supplemental archive that can be studied/analyzed in the future together with other recordings about the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. What follows is our initial analysis of the blog entries, which is divided in two broad categories: how people write and what people write. The repetition of certain topics and manners of description led us (Sideri and Kapetanaki) to aggregate blog entries into style categories, but how do we comprehend these multimodal texts produced in the blog?

In his work "*Emergent forms of life: Anthropologies of Late or Postmodernities*", Fischer (1999) talks about different perspectives on recording, analyzing and expressing the fragilities of contemporary via the poetic procedure of ethnography. According to him, those virtual worlds of cyberspace, as well as films "*have become increasingly strong sinews of our social worlds*". Within this article, those different ways of recording fragments of the contemporary life in quarantine are described as different *styles* of the blog entries. Thus, blog style can be textual, visual, sonic or hybrid and constitute glimpses of what is conceived as 'real' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) in confinement. According to Fischer (1995), through such material, consisting of visual, sonic, musical and verbal information, it is possible to describe aspects of the everyday in a more "complicated" and less "linear" way. The results of which differs from the result that would have been achieved if the recording was based only on the written word. We consider this multimodal form of blog entries as a poetic manner for the bloggers to express their subjective perceptions of pandemic, particularly when it comes to feelings and ideas that are not easy to verbally record. Importantly, though we describe them separately, blogs entries may fall across one or more styles.

How people write:

a. Reflection-diaries

Reflection-diaries are descriptions and re-productions of the everyday that were recorded in different combinations and variations. Here, we follow the thoughts of the blog writers, the internal dialogues they have with themselves, fragments of their fears, needs and questions for the future. These confessions in confinement sometimes become deeply affective. As one of the contributors of the blog wrote, "*then I realized that it was not the first time that I felt insecure, since, due to precarity, insecurity constitutes part of my life during the last years*". Sometimes, through their recordings, bloggers narrated stories about their confrontation-encounter with illness and healing, or even about their desire to overcome the limitations of their bodies. In other cases, the writers described the process of communicating and meeting again with family members after a long time.

In the reflection diaries, we meet aspects of the blog writers' lives, experiences and fragments of lived realities of time, space, interactions. For example, we follow them moving from inside home to balcony, and from loneliness to sharing, in procedures reflected through different modalities. At this point, self-referentiality becomes a major voice in the blog's recordings. As Madianou (1998, p.367) stated, reflexivity refers to a process returning to

oneself. This happens when researchers studing culture and possible "others", finally result in examining the familiar, their own exercise of power and responsibilities. This is why, some of the blog's contributors asked why and how this or that happened in regard to the pandemics. In that sense, confinement, according to their voices, was thought to be "*our chance to realize who we are*".

In that way, reflexivity becomes a way for one to talk and visualise oneself in this world, while in the blog, this Self is described as a "*field of chances*", "*a better place to live in the future*", or "*a place that is fading*". As one of the writers states, confinement could be our last chance to realise that "*a 'belle epoque' is being demolished*" and it is our own responsibility now to act.

There were eight reflection-diaries entries. Five of them were written by women, while three were written by young men who were at the time seeking political asylum from Greece.

b. *Fictionalised diaries*

Some of the blog writers highlighted the need to reflect upon the style of our writings. The challenges and the need to reconsider the scientific agenda of ethnographic writing regarding "objective" knowledge through the genre of realism was something postulated in the 'crisis of representation' in the 1980s. Drawing from that we traced the anthropological interrelations with fiction in at least four of the contributions to our blog.[4]

Those fictional diaries sometimes narrated stories of people enclosed in small apartments at the center of a big city, or maybe told stories of people returning to small towns, or to the villages they were born in. We could not draw conclusions regarding the exact geographic location of these personal places, but this was not significant. The importance must be placed on the often-hypochondriac attitudes and practices and the routines of "producing" spatial distance, in order to be protected from the virus, to feel secure from the danger of the pandemic, that mattered the most in the construction of these 'safe' places.

In one of these stories, we had a snapshot of the life of two women at home. One of them was old and not able to move outdoors easily. She could hardly see the sea from her balcony whenever she felt strong enough to move outside her room. In the story of illness and old age and the pandemic, we can trace the conditions, due to certain medical reasons in the narrated story, that our lives can be found on a permanent quarantine, restriction and surveillance. Then, quarantine seemed to refer to the confinement within the limits of a human body that cannot or should not move. Making this comparison the blog entry transformed the pandemic to an embodied experience from which memory could provide a testimony of endurance and survival.

Here, the personal and internalised knowledge of the writer seemed to abolish the borders between real and fictional. Sometimes both anthropology and literature may have a common target. In both cases, writings may aim to bring to light symbols of everyday routines that give meaning to human lives. The writer underlined that the boundaries separating the genres of speaking, writing and recording of the manifestations of the 'everyday life' are not anymore static and entrenched, rather flexible and creative.

c. *Visual-Stories*

Eight recordings of the blog are visualised. These included visual stories of a beauty routine under the circumstances of confinement, and stories displaying time passing indoors while playing with the kids, drinking coffee, washing one's teeth, or doing muscle-strengthening activities. Other stories visualised aspects of virtual communication while in quarantine.

This multimodal material takes the form of information that is given through collections of photos, videos, music, and texts that could take us to the homes and villages, yards, fields and streets that the blog's contributors captured with their camcorders and cameras. It is this multimodal information of the everyday on the internet that can capture fragments of the desires, thoughts and communications of internet users. At the same time, according to Athanasiou (2004) and the theory of constructivism, bloggers are actors who may invent aspects of themselves and their lives through internet use and narrate them in a way that everyday life in confinement matters to them. In the context of the pandemic, the enforced 'new real' led many of us to reinvent not only ourselves but also the 'everyday'.

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[4]The possible connection of anthropological writings with fiction was put forward in the context of the "Crisis of Representation" (Marcus and Fischer, 1986). It was the uncertainty of capturing the lived experience and interpreting social condition that criticized the value of realism in the anthropological writings.

d. Hybrid Contributions

Visual stories may simultaneously be reflective and fictional. In the blog there are five hybrid entries that capture, in a fragmented way, aspects of our lives in the first period of quarantine in Greece. They lead us to reflect upon the concepts of time and space, working conditions, studies and free time in confinement. In general, while reading the texts, looking at the photos or watching the videos, one may realise that we move away from a crude realistic self-reflection/self-observation of auto-ethnography (Hastrup, 1992). Capturing the everyday appears to be an experiment combining narration and personal experience with fiction, history, and routines that symbolically matter to us. These different but interconnected blog styles indicated the intense ways multimodality has entered the (re)production and (re) construction of selves, challenging the boundaries reality and fiction.

'Our quarantine diaries' consequently raised many questions with which anthropological theory is already familiar, but ones we continue to revisit. More precisely, regarding the significance of one's physical presence during the fieldwork and what should be considered 'real', and how in turns we conseptualise the word experience. Thesereturning dilemmas triggered by Covid-19 may foreshadow another crisis for the anthropological theory and practice, or they may simultaneously reveal a procedure of ethnographic renewal (Athanasiou, 2004).

What people write:

As per the stylistic modalities of expression in the blog, what people write about is related to the re-presentation of oneself and the narration of his/her experiences of the everyday. These narrations, take place in the cultural and historical context of confinement and produce aspects of that experience as perceived by the blogger. According to Bruner (1986, p. 4-5) experiences are not mere data but, drawing on Dilthey (1976), they are at the same time emotions and expectations. Thus, in sharing experience, bloggers are sharing these personalised realities. Four key themes emerge in what is described by the content of the blogs.

a. Curating the quotidian/the self as actor

In Quarantine Diaries, the contributors are actors curating their own perspectives of the everyday. One of the writers states that "*it may be sound funny but I enjoy staying indoors [..] I play the trumpet, sing and watch movies. In general, we practice whatever we didn't have the time to do before. This is how time passes by creatively for me*". Other contributors narrate how they learnt Greek. Another asks themselves if they only wait for better days to come. While others sterilize everything or take care of themselves and others, so as to be healed or recover from chronic health issues.

Here the descriptions in regard to the curation of the quotidian resemble an autobiographic, confessional and autoethnographic text that communicates to us an internal, and, sometimes, fictional world. It is the time that space does not bear specific dimensions, nor can be limited in the context of a house. Rather it is creatively determined by one's activities in confinement. Then, quarantine may be thought to be a "blessing", a kind of "science fiction", or an "Orwellian scenario".

b. A creative self is being revealed through Irony and Humour

There are also humoristic displays of the everyday depicting a depository of toilet papers located under the bed of the protagonist of a video. In another case, the photograph of one of the blog's narrators is being displayed next to a collage of logos of new media platforms, such as Zoom, Facebook, frequently used in communication during confinement. In the same collage of pictures, the places that one should definitely visit during the summer of 2020 are written as the platforms of electronic communications displayed in the constructed image.

On another picture in the blog, the protagonist of the scene is a pair of plastic gloves with polished fingernails. Plastic gloves are the product used the most widely during the first months of the quarantine in Greece. In this picture, there is a simultaneous display of a beauty "ritual" in confinement, together with the presentation of a variety of tools that may be used for disinfection, thus protecting from COVID-19.

In some video-narrations we may trace a playful kind of video editing that is fast, ironically revealing an everyday life condition that seems to dispel fear and play with the unknown, while in other video-narrations the choice of music used is composed of alternating sounds. These sounds may be similar to a horn, while the sound suddenly shifts to a major scale expressing joy and satire.

c. Eschatology: The end of the world as we know it

For some of the "Our quarantine diaries" blog writers, confinement signals the end of the world as we know it. One of the writers, who lives and works in Central Europe, mentioned, the balance in her work was interrupted after the first new reports of the pandemic. Some of her colleagues asked for permission to work from home so as to avoid being contaminated with COVID-19. Simultaneously, other colleagues were neglecting the new virus and were fearlessly laughing. This was a period where quarantine seemed to be just an unusual solution for protecting people from the virus, re arranging professional habits and creating new divisions (the fearful vs. the fearless). Then, the writer mentions that "*Here comes the disaster, in a totally unexpected way*". Her colleagues continued laughing in ignorance at the breaking news in regard to the virus, while she, having access to reports from the Greek media, was wondering whether their ignorance reflected "arrogance" or was just a "prophet of doom".

In other cases, the end of the world was revealed as part of fading cities that may never have existed, at least in the way the specific blog writer had wished for. It was also portrayed in a series of photos entitled "*the melancholy of catastrophe*" drawn from the eschatological film of Lars von Trier, *Melancholia* (2011). In another case, the difference between the condition of free movement and life in quarantine, was highlighted through the montage of video scenes from media reports regarding the pandemic showing beaches full of people, followed by empty streets, where the only visitors are wild animals or lonely runners.

Other writers state that the end of the world as we know it is the chance of humanity to create a "*better world, self, or energy footprint on our planet*". There are also critical recordings on the neoliberal state, connecting affect with experiences in confinement, captured in texts, photos, videos – including video editing, which reflects insecurity, precarity and crisis. Then, possibly our angry Self shouts, in the same blog-entry: "*Please don't fuck up! Maybe it's our last chance*".

d. Memory and time/the mourning self

"*What about remembering what was left behind? Quarantine brings us face to face with our mourning*". Some of the blog writers mourned over previous life conditions that were left behind. They compared the past to the present and shared fragments of their memories. Some referred to their previous health condition, which was experienced similar to a confinement, but it was not so restrictive to their activities, others referred to loved ones that had passed away, or to cities that they are not allowed to visit any more.

Some of the writers confess their adaptation to stillness, writing, "*It is not coincidental that the etymology of the word "quarantine" already gives an indication regarding the movement. It indicates cultural practices of isolation, deprivation and excess of the established conditions of life*". Then, this forced immobility may become a source of sorrow, or a state of life that they desire to overcome.

In such cases, according to Bruner (1986, pp 4-5), memory makes an interesting connection between experiences, narration, and time, while people may highlight, according to their own experiences, specific entities of time. Thus, their narrations related to their experiences and what is meaningful to them turn to meaning memories. In this manner, as states, memory becomes a way in order one to deal with the past. Eventually, memory seems to constitute a means to interpret circumstances and deal with oneself, especially in critical moment like mourning where identities seem to become reconstituted (Lambek, 1998, pp 106-127).

Pedagogical benefits, or some thoughts as Conclusion

Discussing with one of the participants in "Our Quarantine Diaries", she told us*, "I was mortified because of that situation and because I had a similar experience due to a health problem. The call woke me up and reactivate me*".

The nurturing of ethnographic research and writing is a common target among the anthropological lessons offered in our Department. To that end, during that first long confinement applied in Greece due to covid-19 pandemic, we and some of our students experimented with ethnographic writing via the creation of an anthropological digital diary, named 'Our quarantine diaries' blog. Our target was to record through a collaborative blog, our shared and individual on the experiences of the pandemic. Although our blog, as a modality of ethnographic recording, was not used as a source for further analysis with our students, it provided a basis for us to reflect on our future practices for teaching and doing ethnography. For some students the experiences served as a catalyst for further engagement. One used it as an an energy boost to "wake up" and use

writing as action. Another joined another class and submitted a graphic reflective diary as a semester assignment. A third MA student joined the Huffington Post-Greece and follows blogging through investigative journalism. In a sense, our blog played different roles for participants depending on the life paths of each one of us and exceeded our expectations.

In a symposium organised by the University of Amsterdam in 2011 on subjectivity and ethnography, the organisers, Athena Mclean and Annette Leibing, called for the need of an ethnography "as a way of gaining personal knowledge and understanding ourselves via the roundabout way of the other" (van der Geest, Gerrits, Aaslid, 2012, p. 6). Ethnographic methods urge us first to scrutinize and face the prejudices involved in the formation of the 'Self' and then, to understand the ways these prejudices shape the process of Othering. Moreover, the impact of ethnography can have long-term results as it forces us to reconsider who we are or what we want to do. In this sense, ethnography becomes a process of 'selfing', a creation in connection to critical engagement and not pre-constructed ideal and thus, it can have inspiring and lasting results for our students and us as well.

We have since used this experiment (blogging) in other classes on urban anthropology.[5] From October 2022 to April 2023 both authors we will also be working together on the creation of a collaborative digital repository that relate to migratory/refugee flows and women's work on the production of clothes in the historic center of the city we both reside (research project "Dressmakers"). Narrations of women working in clothing industry will be recorded by us and the students of Dr Sideri and some of them will constitute a digital repository that will be granted to the "Refugee Museum" of Thessaloniki. Our aim is that our ethnographic work may be part of a public anthropological knowledge repository that can interact with the social environment we live.

According to our digital diary, we have played the trumpet, we have cooked, mourned, studied and polished our nails, while we have felt melancholy, insecurity, fear, or we were even ready to fight for our last chance to change ourselves, our societies and the planet. At the same time, we thought our cities may be collapsing, quarantine may be a chronic condition due to a biological disease, or that now we should surpass ourselves and be creative. Blogs turn to a space of collaborative teaching and learning both for our students and ourselves in terms of endurance, compassion, fear management, care, political critique of neoliberalism. In a sense this digital space became a momentary and contextually specific space and time of empathy, one of the main goals of fieldwork.

Nevertheless, we understand that we may have all been included in a certain condition, though not in the same way. Conditions of confinement in the cases we presented above may differ due to our past and present social positions, our class, age, and gender. Furthermore, both educators and students were involved in a condition that they were trying to understand what was on going. There was a need to ask why this happened, how we can comprehend the reasons or its evolution and its impact. To do so, we used different modalities like remembering, mourning, exercising and reflecting our thoughts and feelings. In this unprecedented situation there may be social and spatial distancing but, at the same time there was a need to examine it further so it could become better understood by us. In this collective examination, (self)observation, memory and imagination collaborated like they do in fieldwork in order to grasp our experiences. Finally, one may say that this highly mediative and cognitive experience is also affective and emotional, and this may be a good starting point to teaching /doing ethnography.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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[5] Creation of blogs and podcasts by the students of Dr Sideri took place as part of the course "Ethnography and the city" that Sideri teaches at the department we collaborate.

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