

The Lockdown Diary

Crisis in Corona Fictions

Yvonne Völkl

Introduction¹

After the outbreak of COVID-19 in China and Italy, the WHO officially declared this health crisis as a worldwide pandemic on March 11, 2020. The ensuing pandemic crisis management and the measures to break the chain of infection and subsequently relieve the burden that was placed on healthcare systems disrupted the social life of whole populations in an unprecedented way. Many governments worldwide implemented a partial or full lockdown (cf. Dunford 2020; Ritchie et al. 2020) and urged their citizens to “stay at home unless [there was the] need to go out for certain reasons, such as going to work, buying food, or taking exercise” (Collins 2022).² Especially throughout the first collectively shared lockdown experience, which was largely believed to be a one-time event in the early stages of the pandemic, repercussions in the cultural realm regarding the reception as well as the production of fictional narratives could be observed (cf. Research Group *Pandemic Fictions* 2020; Nesselhauf 2023).

On the one hand, it was possible to discern a rapid increase in the reception of “pandemic fictions” (i.e., fictional narratives relating to historical or fictitious epidemics or pandemics). During the first lockdown, a new interest emerged, for example, in literary classics, such as Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decamerone* or Albert Camus’s *The Plague*, which were broadcasted for collective consumption via the Internet (e.g., #Décameron-19, #lirelapeste) and the radio (e.g., Camus’ 1947 classic was read on

1 Acknowledgments: This research was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF: P 34571-G) and was inspired by the observations my colleagues Julia Obermayr, Elisabeth Hobisch, Albert Göschl, and I made during and after the COVID-19 induced lockdown in the spring of 2020.

2 In addition to national lockdowns in which entire business sectors (e.g., restaurants, shops, cinemas, libraries) as well as educational institutions and nursing homes were closed, other mitigation measures such as border closings, travel restrictions, physical distancing mandates, or mouth and nose coverings, were also implemented on an international scale.

Austrian radio station FM4, was sold out in many bookstores, and even had to be reprinted by publishers). Even the French president and other politicians encouraged their fellow citizens to read while staying at home (cf. Stemberger 2021, 10–11). Furthermore, an increase in the consumption of cinematic pandemic fiction was observed; on the video-streaming platform Netflix, movies such as *Outbreak* (1995) or *Contagion* (2011) were among the frequently most watched films in March 2020 (cf. Clark 2020; Mann 2020).³

On the other hand, after the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the first lockdowns and other mitigation measures, authors and filmmakers – both professionals and non-professionals – began to produce their own fictional narratives about this specific time (cf. Guyenne 2021). These new “Corona Fictions” integrate contemporary media and political discourse on the pandemic crisis and reactivate structures and elements of pre-existing pandemic fictions, such as the classic “outbreak narrative” (Wald 2008) or themes of fear and anxiety (cf. Research Group *Pandemic Fictions* 2020, 322f.; Hobisch et al. 2022, 201). They direct the focus toward the COVID-19 crisis from a variety of perspectives and use different genres and media formats for this purpose.⁴ The first Corona Fictions mainly emerged as music videos (cf. Obermayr and Hobisch 2024), web and TV series (cf. Mateos Pérez 2021), as well as in prose and poetry anthologies (cf. Völkl 2025). In addition, among the immediate responses to the implementation of the first lockdown, the number of public diaries, so-called “lockdown diaries,” has mushroomed (cf. BnF 2021, 13; Fleury and Gateau 2022; Gammel and Wang 2022; Obergöker 2020; Schafer 2022; Stemberger 2021, 41–42; Yang 2021).

In this chapter, I start from the hypothesis that these publicized diaries, were produced at the beginning of the COVID-19 induced lockdown due to their positive

-
- 3 Other well-known examples of pandemic fictions in Western culture include the biblical passages which infer that God punishes the people by sending a plague, the first medical eyewitness report by Thucydides, and the fictitious eyewitness account given in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) by Daniel Defoe. More recent works also can be categorized as examples of pandemic fictions, such as the Canadian series *Épidémie* (2020/2021) or José Saramago's novel *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* (1995) (cf. Research Group *Pandemic Fictions* 2020, 322–323; Hobisch et al. 2022, 192). Regarding the role of the eyewitness in pandemic fictions, cf. Franziska Meier's contribution in this collection.
 - 4 A diverse corpus of Corona Fictions produced in the Romance languages can be accessed via the Corona Fictions OA bibliographic database (cf. Hobisch et al. 2021–2025). This material tends to appear in short, often collaborative formats and genres in early audiovisual and written Corona Fictions. Such tendencies “can be attributed to the demands of our social media-driven world, which prefers quick media [...] formats and genres, on the one hand, and to the sense of community that is created and strengthened by working together (although mostly remotely) on a common music, film, or book project, on the other [...]” (Völkl 2025, 92).

effects on the mental well-being of both their producers and audiences.⁵ Thus, in the following, I investigate how diaristic narration strengthens the resilience of those who create them and examine how resilience-strengthening capacities are transferred through the lockdown diaries to the audience.

Drawing on socio-psychological studies about trauma and resilience (e.g., Cyrulnik 2002; id. 2013; Engelhardt 2005; Ford 2009; Kast 1990), I elucidate psychological effects provoked by the crisis discourse that evolved in the political arenas and media during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also briefly outline reasons why some people seem to be more resilient than others in crisis situations and explain why (self-)narration is a useful coping strategy to which people are drawn to in and after unsettling experiences. Subsequently, the chapter addresses the subject of the lockdown diary and illustrates the extent to which diaristic narratives have opened up possibilities to increase resilience among those who produced (i.e., narrated) and those who received (i.e., read, watched or listened to) them during the first lockdown, citing – besides earlier studies on the topic – two striking examples of diaries created in the context of the European lockdowns that were explicitly addressed at an audience and also reference mental and physical health aspects. The first one is the Spanish *Diario de estar por casa, o “Mis conversaciones con un murciélago”* (*Diary of Being at Home, or “My Conversations with a Bat”*) by Fernanda Krahn Uribe, who published her “graphic diary” on her Facebook page. The second example is a personal lockdown diary in the French language by Prune Antoine, published under the English title *#My Funny Quarantine* on the public blog of the author.

I equally regard both Krahn Uribe’s auto-fictional diary and Antoine’s (allegedly) factual blog diary as literary works. These and other lockdown diaries can be interpreted as “literarizations of life” (cf. Görner 1986, 31), since from a narratological perspective diaristic narration – like any other form of “cultural fact- and world-making” (Nünning 2023, 78) – involves “selection, deletion, abstraction, weighting and ratings of relevance, configuration, ordering, and emplotment, and, last but not least, the choice of point of view and the arrangement of perspectives” (ibid.).⁶ The

5 Although the reactions of the audience to lockdown diaries were both positive and negative, this article places a focus on the potentially positive effects. In France, for instance, the diaries of renowned authors Marie Darrieussecq and Leïla Slimani provoked an intense and black-hearted debate on social media, unearthing a deeply rooted hatred of the Parisian elite and bourgeoisie as well as misogynistic attitudes within certain sections of society (cf. Obergöcker 2020; Stemberger 2021, 42–43).

6 Ansgar Nünning (2023, 68) bases his profound reflections on the relevance of narratological considerations concerning writing as one of the most powerful ways of cultural fact- and worldmaking “on the insight that the chaotic events of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic or a war, for example, can only be made accessible and communicated in society after such chaotic happenings have been transferred into writing and comprehensible stories. This,

fact that the lockdown diaries were publicly disseminated on online platforms and thereby intentionally produced for an audience is just another factor that comes into play here (cf. Ainetter 2006, 31–34; Görner 1986, 37; Kalff and Vedder 2016, 235–236).

Pandemic Discourse and Management: Psychological Effects and Responses

At the beginning of the pandemic, political and “media reports embedd[ed] the [...] global challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms (and therefore also logics) of crisis when referring to it as ‘corona crisis’” (Research Group *Pandemic Fictions* 2020, 322) and used military metaphors to “trigger change in beliefs and behaviour in terms of undertaking specific measures” (Silaški and Đurović 2022, 275) in an attempt to counter the spread of the pandemic.⁷ This sort of crisis discourse in the political management of illnesses is not new; it has been used for centuries as demonstrated, for example, by Susan Sontag (1978, 65–66) and Richard Gwyn (2002, 110–111). In fact, whether a situation is perceived as unsettling depends largely on the extent to which it is communicated as critical or life-threatening. Undeniably, using military metaphors increases the threatening dimension of an illness through its “ability to arouse people into a state of fear and preventive activity, to mobilise against an emergency” (Gwyn 2002, 110). While a heightened awareness may indubitably be beneficial to encourage individuals in joining the collective fight against a specific threat, it may also be detrimental to the individual’s health and well-being. In fact, experiencing a life-threatening situation and being exposed to a (long-lasting) crisis discourse, may jeopardize the perception of being able to shape one’s life independently. In other words, experiencing the loss of individual autonomy – a value that is held very high in Western cultures – may stoke fears and anxieties (cf. Kast 1990, 16) and, at worst, may cause (re)traumatizing effects (cf. Ford 2009, 34).⁸

again, requires narratives and rhetorical strategies, which are by no means inherent to the events or facts as such but are imposed on them by the forms of the narrative discourse which functions as a shaping pattern.” Further discussions and explanations regarding the complexity, multidimensionality, and historicity of the notion of “fact” can be found in Susanne Knaller’s interdisciplinary volume on *Writing Facts* (2023), in which Nünning’s text also appeared.

7 For an overview of the public debates and language use in different countries during the first year of the pandemic, cf. the edited volumes of Musolff et al. (2022) or Blumczynski and Wilson (2023).

8 E.g., in her autobiographical account, Régine Robin (2020) – historian, novelist, translator, and professor of sociology – described the sudden lockdown, which she experienced in Paris, as having triggered her trauma as a Jewish child in Paris during World War II. She was not only triggered by the heavy restrictions of free movement, but also by the war rhetoric of French

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was not only accompanied by a crisis discourse that metaphorically framed the invisible coronavirus as a deadly “threat” or “enemy,” but also by general lockdowns and other mitigation measures, such as border closings and distancing mandates.⁹ Early on, psychologists and psychiatrists (cf. Ansermet 2020; Cottin 2021; Render Turmaud 2020; Tourette-Turgis and Chollier 2020, 195) perceived this crisis management strategy, which was applied transnationally at the beginning of the pandemic, as a traumatic rupture of life. The measures caused a lack of self-determination and generated great amount of uncertainty regarding how life will continue. This situation thereby exhibited all of the components of a trauma.

Previous socio-psychological studies on trauma and resilience show that some individuals survive the same crisis better than others (cf. Engelhardt 2005; Kast 1990; Cyrulnik 2002; id. 2013; Ford 2009, 60–94). Among many other factors (e.g., personal or environmental), the varying effects of traumatic experiences are attributed to the degree of resilience of individuals. Resilience in this sense is understood as “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands” (APA 2022). Numerous innate and acquired factors strengthen resilience and “contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them (a) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, (b) the availability and quality of social resources, and (c) specific coping strategies” (ibid.).

One significant coping strategy that can activate and even increase resilience is the act of narration – all the while recognizing that also personal (e.g., age, physical condition) and environmental factors (e.g., living conditions, income) as well as other coping strategies (e.g., relaxation techniques, eating meals on a regular basis, or taking breaks of negative news) have an influence on an individual’s resilience capacities. The testimonial narrative (as product of this narration) is a means of establishing a logical and coherent narrative link between different (traumatic) experiences and events in one’s life. At the same time, it is a means of bearing witness to the crisis and remembering what has happened – both for oneself and for posterity. In other words, trauma and resilience studies associate the act of narration with therapeutic, testimonial, and commemorative functions (cf. Cyrulnik 2002, 110; id.

politicians and in media, their infantilization of adult citizens, media censorship as well as people’s reactions to the crisis discourse (e.g., panic buying or a climate of denunciation).

- 9 Although the distancing practices called upon in the course of the pandemic management were mostly referred to as “social distancing,” they fundamentally aimed at the body and are therefore more accurately described as “physical distancing” (cf. Klein and Liebsch 2020; ead. 2022).

2004, 194; id. 2005, 49; Herman 1992; Pennebaker 2004; Tourette-Turgis and Chollier 2020).

Diaries represent such individual testimonial accounts of events that interrupt daily life in a striking way. By making notes daily, the diary keeper can record impressions which impact their life so much faster than under normal circumstances (cf. Boerner 1969, 17). From a historical point of view, the use of the diary to bear witness to a crisis is not unusual. An increase in the number of published diaristic narratives was observed at the beginning of World War I and at the end of World War II; thus, diaries written in the 20th century have been considered as a “medium of crisis” (cf. *ibid.*, 63). Generally speaking, this increasing use of the diary may be explained by examining the crises that affected the subjects; these, in turn, are linked to the political and historical past, to war, dictatorial regimes, or strong restrictions on possibilities of free self-expression (cf. Kalff and Vedder 2016, 239–240). In summary, the traumatic scope of experiences and events that affect individuals plays a crucial role, encouraging them to take up pen and paper or, today, move to the keyboard and monitor.

Diaristic Narration during the First Lockdown

As indicated in the introduction, diaristic narration and diaristic narratives proved to be very popular at the beginning of the pandemic crisis.¹⁰ Their self-denomination mostly as “lockdown diary” (*journal de confinement* in French and *diario de confinamiento/cuarentena* in Spanish¹¹) reveals that these narratives are situational products born out of the health crisis, such as the diaries produced during World Wars I and II, which would not exist without these unsettling events. As products of the first general lockdowns, they share the chronological structure of the entries, which are assigned to a specific date or day, thereby bringing some kind of order into this unprecedented and unsettling time.

Many diaristic narratives produced during this period appeared in a written form and were published either analogue or digitally in newspapers, anthologies, blogs, or on social media platforms as also observed by Jonas Nesselhauf (2023, 344–345). Numerous audiovisual lockdown diaries also exist, including the Spanish sitcom *Diarios de la cuarentena*, broadcasted as a kind of *docu-ficción* on public TV

10 In France, e.g., the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Association pour l'autobiographie and other institutions collected and archived digital diaries of the first lockdown (cf. BnF 2022; Schafer 2022, 185). The Corona Fictions Database (cf. Hobisch et al. 2021–2025) also exhibits a large number of lockdown diaries in various languages

11 Although both Spanish terms refer to the lockdown phase, “confinamiento” has widely been used in Spain while “cuarentena” has been more prevalent in Latin American countries (cf. Pineda 2021).

during the first lockdown in Spain; audio podcasts, such as the *Journal de confinement* created by Lebanese-Canadian writer and stage director Wajdi Mouawad; or danced video podcasts, such as the one produced by choreographer Maud Contini based on Prune Antoine's readings of her blog diary. As argued above, they can be interpreted as conscious "literarizations of life" (cf. Görner 1986, 31) since every writing and storytelling process – be it fictional or factual – "is a performative act that constructs and establishes the very facts that texts seem to merely represent" (Nünning 2023, 54).

Previous research on lockdown diaries indicates that they serve the above-mentioned therapeutic, testimonial, and commemorative functions which explains their phenomenal popularity. However, the terminology used by researchers has sometimes differed, with additional functions being highlighted, such as enhancing agency or community-building.

In "Online Lockdown Diaries as Endurance Art," Guobin Yang (2021), for example, investigated lockdown diaries produced in the city of Wuhan, which was the first city to be sealed off abruptly on January 23, 2020, to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. Yang interprets the writing and online posting of lockdown diaries practiced during this early phase as "acts of *personal* agency in an otherwise contingent, uncontrollable reality, one that depended on the ability to make this repeated gesture in a consciously collective context – in this case, social media [*italics in the original*]" (ibid., 2). The public sharing of the lockdown diaries and the interactions that subsequently occurred between diary keepers and readers, enabled them to develop a "sense of community" (ibid., 3). Therefore, Yang understands the online lockdown diaries as an "art of endurance" (ibid., 7) or a way to more effectively cope with the lockdown since no one knew at the time that this lockdown in the city of Wuhan would last for 76 days until April 8, 2020.

In "Why Has the Outbreak Turned so Deadly?": Diary from a Quarantined City," Irene Gammel and Jason Wang (2022) regard the lockdown diary as "pivotal tool during crisis," situated "at the intersection of the diaristic truth-telling, traumatic narrative, history, and the pandemic," and remark that it shares "key features with the traditional diary such as its focus on truth-seeking fueled by frankness" (ibid., 29). Moreover, they interpret the lockdown diary as "an 'outbreak narrative,' whose rhetorical and narrative goal is the containment of a pandemic" (ibid., 30), thereby also bestowing a certain agency upon the diary keeper. The focus of their analysis is directed toward the most famous and one of the earliest examples of the lockdown diary: Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary* (2020). The renowned Chinese novelist documented her observations and reflections during the first Chinese lockdown from the inside of the quarantined city on the social media platforms Weibo and WeChat. Her diary entries were read, shared, and (both positively and negatively) commented upon by millions of followers in real-time. Shortly after the end of the lockdown in Wuhan, they were published in the form of a book, which was translated into 18 languages

(cf. *ibid.*, 28). Gammel and Wang also emphasize the therapeutic and testimonial functions of Fang's lockdown diary by indicating that its writing and posting served the author "[a]s a self-reflexive way of coping by bearing testimony during a historic moment" (*ibid.*, 28). The cathartic function of Fang Fang's inner "urgency of communicating" (*ibid.*) is also highlighted by Martina Stemberger (2021) in her literary history of pandemics where she quotes directly from the German edition of the *Wuhan Diary*, "Ich konnte nur jeden Tag schreiben, schreiben, schreiben..."; literarische 'Anstrengung, mir selbst freien Atem zu verschaffen', die auch 'anderen beim Atmen' zu helfen erlaubt [...]" (38).¹² Fang's aspiration to support her readers with her diaristic narration is also signaled here.

The last study mentioned in this context is the analysis of French online lockdown diaries by Cynthia Fleury and Valérie Gateau (2022). In "Récits et fonctions psychiques de la narration dans les journaux de confinement," they describe four writing functions (i.e., sharing, cathartic, imaginative and political, and historicizing) for three different groups of diary keepers (i.e., general public, health care workers and their patients, and intellectuals). The public mainly used the sharing function of diaristic narration, which resembles the community-building function in that these diary writers mostly attempted to reduce their loneliness by sharing their daily lives with their readers and proclaiming their solidarity with others to "hold on" during the lockdown. For healthcare workers and their patients, diaristic testimonial narration served a cathartic function. It enabled them to describe the challenging aspects of care during lockdown and the suffering experienced by caregivers. It also highlighted the sense of solidarity that emerged between caregivers and patients. Intellectuals, as the third group of diary writers, had recourse mainly to the imaginative and political functions of the lockdown diary. These functions are similar to the agency function, as they called for more united political and democratic responses to the crisis. Finally, all of the groups investigated had recourse to the historicizing function of the testimonial narrative, by which the individual stories are inscribed into the collective history, thereby one day taking on commemorative function.

In the following, two examples of online lockdown diaries, which explicitly address aspects of mental and physical health, will be given in order to illustrate how – on a thematic and formal-aesthetic level – lockdown diaries open up possibilities for increasing the well-being and resilience of the diary keepers and their recipients.

12 "I could only write, write, write every day...; literary 'effort to give myself free breath' that also allows 'others to breathe'" (author's translation).

Diario de estar por casa

The first of the two examples of diaristic narratives developed in the context of the first European lockdowns in spring 2020 is the auto-fictional lockdown diary of the Austrian-based and Chilean-born author Fernanda Krahn Uribe, published under the title *Diario de estar por casa, o “Mis conversaciones con un murciélago”* (*Diary of Being at Home or “My Conversations with a Bat”*). This “graphic diary” with handwritten pages and colored hand drawings tells the exceptional lockdown encounter between a single middle-aged woman and her strange visitor – an elderly bat – in the style of a serialized story. Starting from March 15, 2020, Krahn Uribe published one diary page per day on the social media platform Facebook over 40 days, then also longer diary entries at increasingly irregular intervals until July 12, 2020. The entries clearly show aspects of (emotional) support as well as enjoyment in their production and as the author describes in her preface,¹³ her diaristic creation was, in fact, all about “priorizando el disfrutarlo antes que crear algo ‘perfecto.’”¹⁴

The first diary entry was written on “Domingo 15 de marzo 2020” and introduces *in medias res* the female first-person narrator and protagonist, who spends the lockdown alone in her apartment and can be interpreted as the author’s *alter ego*. She addresses the readers directly in an informal style, telling them both timidly and excitedly that she has recently noticed something strange on her coat rack during a meditation practice: there, where her umbrella usually hangs, she has discerned a bat. While she was frightened at first and thought she was hallucinating, she admits to having entered into a dialogue with this bat in the next day’s entry. In the subsequent conversation with the animal, which extends over several months, the readers accompany the narrator and learn about her and, nearly simultaneously, about the life of this bat named Yi Qui, who is already several hundred years old. Yi Qui “tells” her about the plague he experienced in 17th century Italy, emphasizing the terrible circumstances under which his human friends survived this epidemic at the time. This “eyewitness account” of a previous epidemic adjusts the narrator’s perspective of the world as it reminds her (as well as the readers) that deadly epidemics have been omnipresent throughout history and that, even in times of crisis, there are always ways to maintain one’s agency.

The conversation between the narrator and Yi Qui, during which he relates his adventures and those of his friends during the plague, is occasionally interrupted by the depiction of the narrator’s mental and physical well-being during the lockdown. On the one hand, her emotional distress to this entirely new situation be-

13 This (textual) preface was appended to the subsequent manuscript of the graphic diary, which Fernanda Krahn Uribe kindly made available to the author of this chapter for research purposes, and which forms the basis of the present analysis.

14 “[H]aving fun rather than creating something ‘perfect’” (author’s translation).

comes apparent through vivid drawings ranging from nightmares to hysterical crying, or through the narrator's confession that she finds online teaching very stressful. On the other hand, coping strategies for this exceptional situation are presented in addition to the illustration of the narrator's meditation practice at the beginning of the graphic diary: these drawings show the narrator how she accesses social resources by talking on the phone with her friends or taking part in an online yoga class. Other drawings, in turn, show her taking a walk, doing gardening activities, or refraining from reading apocalyptic news before she goes to bed to avoid having nightmares.

Generally, the changing well-being of the protagonist in this exceptional situation is underpinned by a nuanced artistic depiction of both her good and poor states of mind. For example, while the depictions of her nightmares are represented through a chaotically arranged interplay of scribbled handwriting and color-intensive hand drawings in the March 20 entry, the depictions of her coping strategies are pastel-colored and the handwritten text and drawings are rectilinear and more evenly distributed in the March 18 entry. However, the longer the lockdown and the conversation with Yi Qui lasts, the more the narrator is absorbed and distracted by his story. On a formal level, this is noticeable in that Yi Qui's story becomes more and more central by literally taking up more and more space in the diary entries, while references to her own life and well-being become shorter and shorter as the graphic diary (i.e., as time) advances.

The animal interlocutor, which is not accidentally a bat – after all, the political and media discourse also initially circulated the accusation that the coronavirus originated from either bats or pangolins – can be interpreted as a zoomorphological fear of the virus, which seems otherwise invisible. However, the bat not only metaphorically stands for the fears that the pandemic discourse, the lockdown, and the ensuing additional mitigation measures bring to light; it simultaneously represents the “cure” to it. Through her constant conversation with the bat, the narrator is not only distracted from and can forget about her negative feelings; she also confronts her fears as she gradually becomes aware of them and can finally free herself from them. As a result, at the end of the graphic diary, the bat leaves, but promises to come back, thereby reminding the fact that the emergence of epidemics and pandemics is rather normal in the course of human history.

#My Funny Quarantine

The second exemplary lockdown diary created in the context of the first European lockdowns is the French-language blog with the English title *#My Funny Quarantine* written by the Berlin-based writer and journalist Prune Antoine over a period of 28 undated days, starting with *Jour #Un* (Day #One) to *Jour #Vingt Huit* (Day #Twenty-

eight), concluding with *fin* (the end). Although the personal diary usually is of a private nature and not intended for publication, Antoine already had defined a specific purpose and, therefore, also had an audience in mind when narrating and posting it publicly. As insinuated by the title and revealed in the meta-reflexive passage of the fourth day, Antoine's motivation for its creation is geared towards providing enjoyment for her quarantine blog readers. She directly addresses them in a formal style, as evinced in the passage "[S]i cela peut vous amuser, vous distraire, cela sera ma modeste contribution à cette expérience collective que nous traversons"¹⁵ (Jour #4). Moreover, Antoine addresses her audience from the perspective of a freelancer and mother, describing the disturbing effects on the individual and the collective experience of the mostly unprecedented restrictions to the freedom of movement. She evokes, for example, the hardships associated with being confined around-the-clock to a small city apartment with her partner and child and addresses her experience of the chaos the COVID-19 crisis has brought to European societies in general. She also writes about the consequences of the crisis management for women in particular, such as experiencing cabin fever or mental overload when together 24/7 with her family; or falling into the traditional female roles of housewife and mother as childcare centers and schools stayed closed.

On a formal level, the experience of confusion and disorientation is related by the seemingly erratic associations and loose paragraphs, which are conveyed in an informal style. This style is endowed with words and phrases in German and English, as well as with French argot, such as *meuf* (Fr.) for *femme* (Fr.) (woman) or *reum* (Fr.) for *mère* (Fr.) (mother). Moreover, at the beginning, Antoine has a hard time finding an appropriate expression for the new situation, writing "[c]omme vous tous, je m'appête à vivre un truc d'ouf, 24/7 avec mon mec et ma fille à la maison pour une durée indéterminée, confinés *inside* comme des bâtonnets Findus, [...] [italics in the original]"¹⁶ (Jour #1). Readers not familiar with these languages, registers, or cultural references – and thus left only understanding half of what is said – receive a comprehensible impression of her troubled state of mind through the hindered reading. Other readers may be confirmed in their own feelings about the lockdown experience and exhilarated by the frank choice of words used to express those feelings. Especially the metaphorical comparison with the French fish-stick brand called Findus illustrates Antoine's feelings of helplessness and powerlessness towards the lockdown situation.

15 "If it can amuse you, entertain you, it will be my modest contribution to this collective experience we are going through" (author's translation).

16 "Like all of you, I'm about to go through something crazy, 24/7 with my boyfriend and my daughter at home for an indefinite time, confined inside, like Findus fish sticks" (author's translation).

Prune Antoine also regularly refers to the crisis discourse in the political arena and media channels. She contrasts, for example, the haunting war rhetoric used by the French president, which mainly triggered fear, with the unemotional rhetoric used by the German chancellor, who attempted to invoke a collective sense of responsibility.¹⁷ The fear-generating nature of the crisis discourse is placed in the foreground through the use of repeated quotations of official infection statistics and mortality statistics, as well as the use of sensational quotes from politicians and media representatives in both countries. Antoine also openly relates that she feels distressed by the macabre statistics and scary reports. Like the narrator of the graphic diary, she soon realizes that the only way to overcome her feelings of paralysis and fear is to reduce media consumption, which she announces by making an open call for “Débranchons”¹⁸ (Jour #5).

One distinct characteristic of diaries is their continuous chronological progression, usually headed by exact date specifications as in the case of Krahn Uribe. Prune Antoine’s blog diary, however, lacks any date references. Her only attempt to keep track of this exceptional period, consists in the sequential numbering of the entries, headed with *Jour #1*, *Jour #2*, etc., and occasional references to the months of April or May and the spring season within the entries. The longer the lockdown lasts and the more her routine in the private sphere becomes monotonous, she manifestly loses sight of how the days pass by: “[J]e ne sais même plus quel jour nous sommes”¹⁹ (Jour #10). From the tenth day on, she writes only every second day, meaning that the blog entries are reduced by half. Such a cognitive change in the perception of time also becomes evident in Krahn Uribe’s graphic diary, when, after about a month, the narration of the events that occur over several days or even weeks is contracted. In other diaristic narratives, the sense of time dissolves almost completely; this occurs, for example, when entries suddenly start lacking date indications and are only entitled “Sunday” or “morning,” as in the case of the short diaristic lockdown story “La vida en cuarentena” (Engl. *Life in Lockdown*) by Maria del Rosario Lara (2020).

Concluding Discussion

Due to the sudden, massive appearance of diaries in the wake of the first COVID-19-induced lockdown in various countries in spring 2020, this chapter drew on trauma

17 For an analysis of the different communication strategies used by German, French, and Spanish politicians and media representatives at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, cf. Schmelzer (2020).

18 “Let’s disconnect” (author’s translation).

19 “I don’t even know what day we have” (author’s translation).

and resilience studies in order to find explanations for the popularity of the lockdown diary. As was resumed from previous studies on lockdown diaries (cf. Yang 2021; Gammel/Wang 2022; Gleury/Gateau 2022) and could be demonstrated on the basis of two lockdown diaries' examples, the diaristic narration largely directed the focus of the audience toward the depiction of the narrator's experience of not being allowed to leave the home, as well as the depictions of the negative effects on the mental and physical health resulting from the sudden and unprecedented disruption of everyday life and their responses to it. By narratively formulating individual and collective anxieties, stressors, and coping strategies, the diary keepers engaged in a narrative process of shaping, translating, and containing this first shared lockdown experience for themselves, their audiences, and for posterity. Thereby, these diaries fulfil a testimonial function for their contemporaries and will assume commemorative function for future generations who wish to learn more about the lockdown experiences from a personal perspective. Furthermore, the act of narration enabled the authors to relativize the threatening nature of the crisis, shifting the audience's focus away from their emotional distress and feelings of helplessness towards their (i.e., the narrator's and the reader's) own ability to act. In the preface of her *Diario de estar por casa*-manuscript, Fernanda Krahn Uribe even describes her diaristic narration explicitly as a consciously adopted coping strategy:

[Durante el confinamiento] [m]e amenazaba una avalancha de temores, preocupaciones y demás elementos del bloque del boicot interior, ese que conozco bastante bien y que tanto me paraliza. [...] [El murciélago] significó la salvación de una depresión en ciernes. A partir de ese día, se reactivó en mi interior el espíritu de la niña que fui.²⁰ (Krahn Uribe, preface)

Starting to narrate on a daily basis and describe what was going on inside her fulfilled a personal therapeutic function. It not only allowed her to introduce structure into her monotonous lockdown days and distract her, but also helped her to regain some form of agency in a time in which self-determination and any sense of certainty about the future was scarce.

Manifold lockdown experiences throughout all social groups are reflected in the large pool of lockdown diaries. Some of these diaries were produced, as illustrated by the two diaristic examples given, by single women, mothers, and migrants, but also by healthcare workers and members of minority groups, whose perspectives were

20 "During the lockdown, I was threatened by an avalanche of fears, worries, and other elements of the inner boycott, the one I know so well and that paralyzes me so much. The bat meant salvation from a beginning depression. From that day on, the spirit of the girl I used to be, was reactivated inside me" (author's translation).

largely absent from the political and media crisis discourse in spring 2020. This diversity of the diary keepers and their respective lockdown situations (in the two examples given: living alone vs. living together with the family) enabled the recipients to recognize or even identify themselves with the authors and their situations. It enabled them to see that they are not alone with their emotional responses to the lockdown situation; that others are suffering as well, maybe suffering differently or even more. This recognition thereby opened up the possibility for (more) mutual understanding, acts of solidarity, and social cohesion. Moreover, the reception of the lockdown diaries allowed the readers to see how others had coped with similar situations and to receive impulses that they could use to strengthen their own resilience.

Concurrently, we must not forget the motto of ancient poet Horace, that literature should not only be instructive, but also entertaining for its audiences (cf. *Ars poetica*, v. 333). This entertaining or distracting aspect was also explicitly addressed by Prune Antoine and given as the reason for her lockdown diary *#My Funny Quarantine*. Although she was well aware that this unprecedented situation might (re-)traumatize some people, she wanted to alleviate their destiny with her diaristic narrations. In this sense, similarities between Antoine's diary and Krahn Uribe's diary become apparent: the conversation between Krahn Uribe's narrator and the old bat distracted and relieved her as well as the readers. Both lockdown diaries thereby also fulfill a therapeutic function for their audiences.

To conclude, one can argue that, indeed, the lockdown diaries of the first COVID-19 induced lockdown strengthened the well-being of both their producers and recipients in multiple ways, thus, being one explanation for their popularity in this exceptional and unprecedented time.

Bibliography

- Ainetter, Sylvia. 2006. *Blogs – Literarische Aspekte Eines Neuen Mediums: Eine Analyse Am Beispiel Des Weblogs Miagolare 5*, LIT.
- American Psychiatric Association (APA). 2022. "Resilience." *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. <https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience>.
- Ansermet, François. 2020. "Entre Vie Et Mort: Destin De La Pandémie." https://www.puf.com/actualites/La_collection_Questions_de_soin_sengage.
- Antoine, Prune. 2020. *#My Funny Quarantine*. Blog diary. <https://plumaberlin.com/2020/03/01/my-funny-quarantine/>.
- Blumczynski, Piotr, and Steven Wilson, editors. 2023. *The Languages of COVID-19: Translational and Multilingual Perspectives on Global Healthcare*, Routledge.
- BnF. 2021. "L'épidémie De COVID Et Le Premier Confinement: Un Parcours Guidé Dans Les Archives De L'internet." <https://www.bnf.fr/fr/parcours-guides-archives-de-linternet#step19>.

- Boerner, Peter. 1969. *Tagebuch*, J.B. Metzler.
- Clark, Travis. 2020. "The Movie 'Outbreak,' About a Deadly Virus, Is Now One of Netflix's Most Popular Titles in the US." *Insider*, March 13, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-outbreak-one-of-netflixs-most-popular-movies-2020-3?r=DE&IR=T>.
- Collins Dictionary. 2022. "Lockdown." <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/lockdown>.
- Contini, Maud, and Prune Antoine. 2020. "Jour 1 # Podcast Dansé / Prune Antoine Chronique Et Voix." *Podcast dansé*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4EGPCH_bdMY
- Cottin, France. 2021. "La Pandémie Présente Toutes Les Composantes Du Traumatisme." *Le Monde*, April 15, 2021. https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2021/04/15/la-pandemie-presente-toutes-les-composantes-du-traumatisme_6076929_3244.html.
- Cyrulnik, Boris. 2002 [1999]. *Un Merveilleux Malheur* 78, Jacob.
- Cyrulnik, Boris. 2004. "La Mémoire Traumatique." *Jeunes, Ville, Violence: Comprendre, Prévenir, Traiter*, edited by Norbert Sillamy, 194–201, Questions contemporaines, L'Harmattan, 194–201.
- Cyrulnik, Boris. 2005 [2002]. *Le Murmure Des Fantômes* 163, Jacob.
- Cyrulnik, Boris. 2013. "La Résilience: Un Processus Multicausal." *Revue française des affaires sociales*, vol. 1, no. 1–2, 15–19.
- Dunford, Daniel et al. 2020. "Coronavirus: The World in Lockdown in Maps and Charts." *BBC News*, April 7, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52103747>.
- Del Rosario Lara, Maria. 2020. "La Vida En Cuarentena." *La Vida En Tiempos Del Coronavirus: Antología*, edited by Guadalupe Avalos, s.l. Nordlys Publicaciones, 43–53.
- Diarios De La Cuarentena. Series. Spain: Morena Films, 2020. Weekly Sitcom. <https://www.rtve.es/alcarta/videos/diarios-de-la-cuarentena/>.
- Engelhardt, Dietrich von. 2005. "Coping." *Literatur Und Medizin: Ein Lexikon*, edited by Bettina von Jagow and Florian Steger, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 159–163.
- Fang, Fang. 2020. *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City*, Harper Collins Collection.
- Fleury, Cynthia, and Valérie Gateau. 2022. "Récits Et Fonctions Psychiques De La Narration Dans Les Journaux De Confinement." *Revue française d'éthique appliquée*, vol. 12, no. 1, 87–100. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfeap.012.0087>.
- Ford, Julian D. 2009. *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Scientific and Professional Dimensions*, 1st edition, Elsevier.
- Gammel, Irene, and Jason Wang. 2022. "Why Has the Outbreak Turned so Deadly?: Diary from a Quarantined City." *Creative Resilience and COVID-19: Figuring the Everyday in a Pandemic*, edited by Irene Gammel and Jason Wang, *The COVID-19 Pandemic series*, Routledge, 27–38.

- Görner, Rüdiger. 1986. *Das Tagebuch: Eine Einführung*, Artemis-Einführungen 26, Artemis.
- Guyenne, Lisa. 2021. "Au royaume du Covid, L'écriture est reine." *France Culture*, February 14, 2021. <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/au-royaume-du-covid-l-ecriture-est-reine-4900080>.
- Gwyn, Richard. 2002. *Communicating Health and Illness*, Sage.
- Herman, Judith Lewis. 1992. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, 13th edition, Basic Books.
- Hobisch, Elisabeth, Yvonne Völkl, and Julia Obermayr. 2021–2025. "Corona Fictions Database." *Zotero Group Library*. https://www.zotero.org/groups/4814225/corona_fictions_database/library.
- Hobisch, Elisabeth, Yvonne Völkl, and Julia Obermayr. 2022. "Narrar la pandemia. Una introducción a formas, temas y metanarrativas de las Corona Fictions." *Pensamiento, Pandemia y Big Data: El impacto sociocultural del coronavirus en el espacio iberoamericano*, edited by Ana Gallego Cuiñas and José A. Pérez Tapias, de Gruyter, 191–211.
- Horace. 19BC. *Ars Poetica*. <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/arspoet.shtml>.
- Kalff, Sabine, and Vedder Ulrike. 2016. "Tagebuch Und Diaristik Seit 1900: Einleitung." *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, vol. 2, no. 26, 236–242.
- Kast, Verena. 1990 [1987]. *Der schöpferische Sprung: Vom therapeutischen Umgang mit Krisen*, 5th edition, Walter.
- Klein, Gabriele, and Katharina Liebsch. 2020. "Herden unter Kontrolle: Körper in Corona-Zeiten." *Die Corona-Gesellschaft: Analysen zur Lage und Perspektiven für die Zukunft*, edited by Michael Volkmer and Karin Werner, transcript, 57–65.
- Klein, Gabriele, and Katharina Liebsch. 2022. "Ansteckende Berührungen: Körper-Ordnungen in der Krise." *Covid-19: Sinn in der Krise: Kulturwissenschaftliche Analysen der Corona-Pandemie*, edited by Jan Beuerbach, Silke Gülker, Uta Karstein, and Ringo Rösener, de Gruyter, 133–147.
- Knaller, Susanne, editor. 2023. *Writing Facts: Interdisciplinary Discussions of a Key Concept in Modernity*, transcript.
- Krahn Uribe, Fernanda. *Diario De Estar Por Casa*, O "Mis Conversaciones Con Un Murciélago." Graphic diary. Facebook page of the author and copy provided by the author.
- Mann, Court. 2020. "Coronavirus Side Effect: The Movie 'Contagion' Is Super Popular Again." *Deseret News*, March 10, 2020. <https://www.deseret.com/entertainment/2020/3/10/21172795/contagion-movie-where-to-watch-stream-download-free-coronavirus-covid-19-cinemax-hulu-amazon-prime>.
- Mateos Pérez, Javier. 2021. "Narrativas Televisivas En Contexto De Crisis. El COVID-19 En Las Series De Ficción Televisiva Española." *IC*, no. 18, 131–153. <https://doi.org/10.12795/IC.2021.I18.08>.

- Mouawad, Wajdi. 2020. *Journal De Confinement*. Podcast. <https://www.colline.fr/spectacles/journal-de-confinement-de-wajdi-mouawad>.
- Musolff, Andreas, Sara Vilar-Lluch, Kayo Kondo, and Ruth Breeze, editors. 2022. *Pandemic and Crisis Discourse: Communicating COVID-19 and Public Health Strategy*, 1st edition, Bloomsbury Academic.
- Nesselhauf, Jonas. 2023. "Viral Narrations: Aesthetic Knowledge and the Co-presence of a Pandemic." *Pandemisches Virus – nationales Handeln. Covid-19 und die europäische Idee*, edited by Dominik Brodowski, Jonas Nesselhauf and Florian Weber, Springer, 331–351.
- Nünning, Ansgar. 2013. "Wie Erzählungen Kulturen Erzeugen: Prämissen, Konzepte Und Perspektiven Für Eine Kulturwissenschaftliche Narratologie." *Kultur – Wissen – Narration: Perspektiven Transdisziplinärer Erzählforschung Für Die Kulturwissenschaften*, edited by Alexandra Strohmaier, transcript, 15–53.
- Nünning, Ansgar. 2023. "Writing as a Cultural Way of Fact-Making. Modest Reflections on the Genesis, Role, and Status of Facts." *Writing Facts. Interdisciplinary Discussions of a Key Concept in Modernity*, edited by Susanne Knaller, transcript, 53–84.
- Obergöker, Timo. 2020. "Les Journaux De Confinement De Leïla Slimani Et De Marie Darieussecq – Histoire D'un Malentendu." *PhiN-Beiheft*, no. 24, 371–382.
- Obermayr, Julia, and Elisabeth Hobisch. 2024. "Uplifting Corona Fictions: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Representations Encouraging Well-Being in Music Videos." *Re:visit. Humanities & Medicine in Dialogue* 3, 75–97.
- Pennebaker, James W. 2004. *Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma & Emotional Upheaval*, New Harbinger.
- Pineda, Luis Gabriel. 2021. "Confinamiento Y Cuarentena." *Lengua Suelta. Aprendemos español*. <https://www.lenguasuelta.com/palabras-confinamiento-y-cuarentena/>.
- Render Turmaud, Danielle. 2020. "Trauma of Pandemic Proportions." *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifting-the-veil-trauma/202003/trauma-pandemic-proportions>.
- Research Group *Pandemic Fictions*. 2020. "From Pandemic to Corona Fictions: Narratives in Times of Crises." *PhiN-Beiheft* no. 24, 321–344. <http://web.fu-berlin.de/phn/beiheft24/b24t21.pdf>.
- Ritchie, Hannah, Edouard Mathieu, Lucas Rodés-Guirao, Cameron Appel, Charlie Giattino, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Joe Hasell, Bobbie Macdonald, Diana Beltekian, and Max Roser. 2020-. "Policy Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic." <https://ourworldindata.org/policy-responses-covid>.
- Robin, Régine. 2020. "La Réactivation D'un Traumatisme De Guerre: Paris Confiné." *Récits Infectés*, edited by Léonore Brassard, Benjamin Gagnon Chainey, and Catherine Mavrikakis, s.p. Montréal.

- Schafer, Valérie. 2022. "Préserve-Moi ! Des Journaux Intimes À Ceux De Confinement Dans Les Archives Du Web." *Le Temps des médias*, vol. 38 no. 1, 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.3917/tdm.038.0175>.
- Schmelzer, Dagmar. 2020. "New We. Die Diskursive Performanz Gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalts in Corona-Zeiten – Ein Deutsch-Französisch-Spanischer Vergleich." *PhiN-Beiheft* no. 24, 129–148. <http://web.fu-berlin.de/phn/beiheft24/b24i.htm>.
- Silaški, Nadežda, and Tatjana Đurović. 2022. "From an Invisible Enemy to a Football Match with the Virus: Adjusting the Covid-19 Pandemic Metaphors to Political Agendas in Serbian Public Discourse." *Pandemic and Crisis Discourse: Communicating COVID-19 and Public Health Strategy*, edited by Andreas Musolff, Sara Vilar-Lluch, Kayo Kondo, and Ruth Breeze, 1st edition, Bloomsbury Academic, 271–284.
- Sontag, Susan. 1978. *Illness as Metaphor*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Stemberger, Martina. 2021. *Corona im Kontext: Zur Literaturgeschichte der Pandemie*, Narr Francke Attempto.
- Tourette-Turgis, Catherine, and Marie Chollier. 2020. "L'impact Psychosocial Du (Dé)Confinement : Repenser L'accompagnement De La Population Générale En Période De Crise." *Psychotropes*, vol. 26, no. 2, 191–207. <https://doi.org/10.3917/pst.262.0191>.
- Vökl, Yvonne. 2025. "Corona Fictions Anthologies. On the Compilation of Hispanophone and Francophone Corona Fictions During the First Lockdown." *Coming to Terms with a Crisis. Cultural Engagements with COVID*, edited by Martin Butler, Sina Farzin, Michael Fuchs and Fabian Hempel, transcript, 91–113.
- Wald, Priscilla. 2008. *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*, Duke UP.
- Yang, Guobin. 2021. "Online Lockdown Diaries as Endurance Art." *AI & Society*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-020-01141-5>.