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Co-creation as im/mediate/d caring and sharing in times of crises: Reflections on collaborative interactive documentary as an agile response to community needs

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Abstract
During the COVID-19 lockdown the community experimented with alternative forms of doing documentary, e.g. social media initiatives with a documentary impetus and collaborative web projects. Apart from the participants' urge to document and share their experiences in unprecedented times, these platforms were created to feel connected and to self-reflexively cope with a confined lifestyle. This article takes the *Corona Haikus* project as a case study to discuss co-creation as a form of care. As a way for 'im/mediate/d caring and sharing' the project goes beyond the mere act of documenting but combines creativity with connectivity and connectiveness.

Keywords: co-creation, community building, interactive documentary, participation, social media

Introduction

Co-creative documentary practices based on collaboration with and within communities have a long tradition. Documentary filmmakers with the goal of social change recognised early on that it is not enough to make films about those affected, but that much more is achieved when they are made with them. New technologies in the digital era, especially the internet, enable new

forms of collaboration and emphasise the shift from a representative paradigm to a performative paradigm, in which doing documentary together with others becomes at least as important as the documentary 'product': '[f]rom the static, fixed objects of analogue film and video, documentary is now redefining itself as a fluid, collaborative, shape-shifting, responsive environment for encounters [...].'[1]

Creative co-creation, participation, and interactivity[2] in different phases of media projects affect the traditional roles of authors, audiences, and subjects of documentary. Instead of producing products as authors and directors, doing documentary collaboratively is more about initiating projects in which different actors work together in dynamic processes of creation rooted in reality. Doing documentary can thus itself be a means of building communities and bringing people together for dialogue and expressions of solidarity.[3]

The potentials of collaborative, interactive documentaries for promoting solidarity become particularly evident in times of crisis. In difficult times dominated by uncertainty, bonds between individuals and communities pursuing the common goal of collective well-being are more important than ever. Such a crisis arose with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. In many countries the lockdown has not only been accompanied by an upheaval of all so-far assumed certainties and our complex socio-cultural infrastructures – it has also brought about deep permutation in our professional lives and – above all – personal, private, intimate lives. Apart from individual concerns, the desire for collective well-being, for an exchange of thoughts in these difficult times, and for a sense of community has united those affected by the crisis worldwide.

Given the community-building impetus of especially engaged or committed documentary practices, all this has not been without effect on what it means to make documentary. During the lockdown, the community experimented with alternative ways of doing documentary in the form of online practices, e.g. social media initiatives with a documentary impetus as well as collaborative web projects. In the *Corona Diaries*[4] project (initiated by Francesca Panetta et al., 2020-ongoing), for example, which is one of the many projects created during the pandemic, people from all over the world were invited to share their experiences during the crisis using sound recordings that they uploaded to the website. Another project, *coronarchive*[5] (initiated by Thorsten Logge et al., 2020-ongoing), with the motto 'become a part of history' focused on archiving the different facets of the crisis and collected

and shared the participants' texts, photographs, videos, chats, voice messages, and more.

The impetus and the motives of the different projects are various – and often, one and the same project serves different needs at the same time for different user-participants: apart from the urge to document unprecedented times and share one's experiences, they are platforms to reach out and feel connected. And as means for mediated self-care, they are spaces to self-reflexively cope with a confined lifestyle and to develop a form of community care by linking the experience of the self to the multiple.

Social media, when used to both document and share daily insights, has afforded an 'open space new media documentary'– a space where documenting the isolation of the single becomes an 'embodied microterritor[y], rejecting enclosure and open to permeability and mutability'.[6]A project that emerged during the COVID-19 lockdown with these goals was *Corona Haikus*, initiated by Sandra Tabares Duque and Sandra Gaudenzi. The co-creative practices of this project began in a Facebook group[7] open to contributions to the lockdown from around the world – in the form of visual haikus and poetry. Later, the project was continued on a separate website,[8] where a selection of Corona haikus chosen by the community has been archived and presented as a co-creatively curated gallery.

The project *Corona Haikus* seems to be one way of 'im/mediate/d caring and sharing': 'mediated caring', as the network of solidarity emerges out of visual practices in networked online media; 'immediate', as it was developed as an agile response to urgent community needs; 'caring', as both self-care and the *bienveillance*, as holding, for others; and 'sharing', as the longing for connectivity during the period of social distancing.

This contribution examines the potentials of co-creative documentary practices in times of crises. It investigates which community needs have existed during the crisis, and how the collaborative and interactive documentary project *Corona Haikus* answered them. Are experimental emerging forms of documentary-making able to respond more swiftly to community needs than traditional practices of doing documentary? The focus of the study lies on co-creation as a form of self- and community-care, and on the question of the way in which a community could be created across barriers. Besides, the contribution examines the haiku as a poetic and therapeutic form, as well as the use of mobile phones converging communicative connectivity and creativity – which are all aspects that contribute to the practices of 'im/mediate/d caring and sharing'. The overarching question however is: How does

the *Corona Haikus* project go beyond the mere act of documenting, therefore expanding the representative impetus of documentary?

Co-creative and participatory documentary practices: Early and contemporary forms and functions

Today, the term documentary is used to describe a wide spectrum of projects and practices that are not limited to specific forms of production, distribution, and reception. Moreover, the term no longer needs to refer to linear films. What was once known as documentary text has 'become interactive, hybrid […], fragmented and multimedia'.[9] In the digital age, one new form with such a fragmentary nature is the co-creative social network documentary, which will be discussed later in this chapter. With the term 'documentary' we describe a mode of expression and the gesture of referring to reality, regardless of the medium and form of expression.[10] As a socio-cultural practice, it can be expressed in different medial forms. New ways of constructing reality through interaction in web-documentaries are as possible as collaboratively shaping reality.[11] However, co-creation and participation in the documentary field is not exclusively a phenomenon of the digital age but has pursued various objectives throughout the history of documentary film. Early participatory documentary projects increasingly arose with the development of the portable camera in the 1960s and often aimed to 'give a voice' to marginalised people in public, to enable them to represent themselves, and to promote the building of geographically-based communities by working with them.

Participatory projects are defined by Cizek et al. as 'projects in which the actual tools of production, most often the camera, are directly controlled and operated by community members',[12] but handing over the camera to the subjects does not necessarily mean that they are empowered. Examples of participatory documentary can be found in the so-called *Cinéma Vérité* of the 1960s, which stood in the tradition of ethnographic film. Writing about *Chronique d'un été* (Jean Rouch & Edgar Morin, 1961), Bill Nichols speaks of collaborative interactions between the filmmakers and the subjects;[13] yet, the anthropological approach is also critiqued for assuming a superior position of the observer.[14] Cizek et al. refer to the problem of the 'unidirectional gaze' and 'inequitable power relations of maker and subject'.[15] This problem, however, can be solved through co-creative approaches.

The concept of co-creation has been examined by Cizek et al. in its various facets in their study *Collective Wisdom*. While co-creation with experts, for example, are also possible, this chapter focuses on co-creation within and with communities, because the collaborative social media documentary *Corona Haikus* emerged as a project in which the community is at the centre, and in which the initiators become participants like everyone else.

Co-creation is used to describe a collective working with each other within a community, or across communities. It can mean professional media-makers working with non-professionals – with people formerly known as subjects and audiences.[16] Co-creative projects emerge from processes that are not outcome-driven.[17] They intend a power-sharing between professional creators and subjects.[18] The focus is not on the perspective of individual authors, but on the needs of the community: 'The concept of co-creation reframes the ethics of who creates, how, and why.'[19] Such co-creations can mobilise communities to deal with their concerns and problems in a creative way.[20] Dialogues can be initiated not only between those formerly known as subjects, but also with those formerly known as audiences – if this distinction is still useful at all.

An early example of the use of co-creation is the documentary *Challenge for Change* series by the National Film Board of Canada (1967-1980). The programme had the aim of promoting the participation of minorities in Canada in solving social problems, not only by enabling them to make films themselves, but also by offering them editorial control to present the social problems from their perspective. The focus of the *Challenge for Change* series was rather on processes than products, as can be seen from the fact that much of the film material was never transformed into a final product but was used in working with the community.[21]

Colin Low and Bill Nemtin wrote about one project of the series called 'The Fogo Process' (Colin Low & Don Snowden, 1967) that their aim was 'to facilitate communication between individuals and between communities' and 'to generate confidence in people to formulate and express their problems as they see them'.[22] 'The Fogo Process' already pursued a goal that plays an important role in digital interactive and co-creative documentaries and especially in times of crisis, namely encouraging dialogue and creating a sense of community.

Though as seen, the concept as such is not exclusive of the digital age; with the rise of the so-called web 2.0 and social media, co-creative documen-

taries have gained momentum by appropriating digital technologies, platforms, and tools for the collaboration of the different actors and for the production, distribution, and reception of (user-generated) content. For example, the internet enables the formation of virtual communities[23] across geographical distances. More important than the technologies, however, is the question who uses them and for which goals. In co-creative projects, the initiator should be 'a community designer for human-focused, screen-enabled, open-ended gatherings'.[24]

Still, contributions of user-participants in web-documentaries within a given framework and on a given topic do not mark a co-creative project if a single-author vision remains explicit, and if the participants are not involved in decision-making processes concerning the overall concept. Rather, this is a form of 'participation *within* networks'[25] by contributing user-generated content to a database. Co-creation, on the other hand, can be described as 'participation *through* media networks'.[26] Mandy Rose describes the qualities of co-creations as follows:

> In taking part participants become a community to interrogate a theme of shared concern. The significance of these co-creative projects is not then reducible to the presence of do-it-yourself, participatory content. It derives instead from the ways that the projects open out the range of voices that get to speak with authority and purpose within the documentary project. What's at stake is documentary as catalyst for conversations, debates, understandings among participants, communities, audiences – its role in the public sphere.[27]

An example of a co-creative documentary project presented interactively online is *The Quipu Project* (Maria Court & Rosemarie Lerner, 2015)[28] about the victims of forced sterilisation in rural communities in Peru. With the aim of creating collective memory and achieving justice, an infrastructure was created together with those affected, enabling them to report on their experiences via a phone line on the basis of IP telephony technology and also to receive answers from the recipients of the audio testimonies presented interactively on a website. Typical for co-creation is the 'shift from an *authorial* vision to a *plurality of perspectives*',[29] in that a polyphony of voices can be heard in the project. Mostly, however, the participants maintained – and partly also regained – the authority over their narratives, as only minor edits were made to the audio material, while at the same time were marked as such in the web-documentary.

Besides co-creative web-documentaries that create their own websites for their projects, social networks can also be used for co-creative documentary

endeavours, as Zimmermann and De Michiel state for open space new media documentaries: '[a]s social media applications and platforms proliferate, new media makers design ways to work in these open spaces, boosting documentary practice into a robust dialogic sphere.'[30] In her article about the collaborative Facebook documentary *Goa Hippy Tribe* (Darius Devas, 2011), Kate Nash argues that Facebook 'has the potential to introduce collective knowledge creation and community in the documentary context'.[31] Starting from the observation that Facebook is increasingly used to co-create content, she demonstrates, using the example of *Goa Hippy Tribe*, how such a project can look in a documentary format:

> The *Goa Hippy Tribe* project has its origins in a community of Goan hippies who had begun to reconnect on Facebook. Documentary-maker Darius Devas, himself a part of the community, decided to document this virtual reconnection and the real-world reunion that ultimately would result.[32]

The project consists of a group site, where the former hippy community and an extended group of them contributed content, private pictures, etc. and documented the reunion for the members. The closed group was accompanied by a fan site, where posts and videos by Devas, but also content from fans, were distributed to a general audience, to which they could react with comments and chats.[33]

Nash identifies the aims and functions of the *Goa Hippy Tribe* project as 'documenting, preserving and interpreting the history of the hippy community'.[34] This places the project in line with a number of co-creative documentary projects with similar intentions. In most cases, the focus has been on the classic functions of documentary (film). Michael Renov distinguishes between four functions: 'to record, reveal, or preserve', 'to persuade or promote', 'to analyse or interrogate', and 'to express'.[35] John Corner names as classical functions of documentaries 'the Project of Democratic Civics', 'Documentary as Journalistic Inquiry and Exposition', and 'Documentary as Radical Interrogation and Alternative Perspective'.[36] Often, co-creation, which brings together a plurality of voices, is used to record and preserve memories around a topic or past event and to foster civic participation. What is striking about this is that these co-creative projects usually emerge within communities that already exist in some way – not necessarily explicitly. In the documentary project, these communities are reconstructed to document something, or their members are brought into conversation with each other. 'The Fogo project' of the *Challenge for Change* series wanted to bring the islanders

into dialogue with each other to share the problems of their community as a first step towards social change. *The Quipu Project* was a collaboration with the victims of forced sterilisation to create collective memory. And even though the fan site was open to a general audience, *Goa Hippy Tribe* was primarily concerned with bringing together the Goa community that had existed decades before. In the following, we will show how the co-creative documentary project *Corona Haikus* builds on the tradition of engaged documentary and how it goes beyond the classical functions of documentary – with a different drive for co-creation.

The Corona Haikus project

The *Corona Haikus* project started on 3 April 2020, when most countries in the world announced that lockdown measures would be taken to fight the COVID-19 health threat. Sandra Tabares Duque, a transmedia producer from Medellin (Colombia), and Sandra Gaudenzi, an interactive narrative specialist and academic based in London, had to cancel their plans to meet at the i-Docs conference to work together. Their disappointment led to a long online call where they somehow decided to resist the world movement towards stillness. They questioned what would allow them to survive the months ahead and to make it to the other end of this period with the feeling of having learned something through the process. Their conclusion was that they had to find ways to feel creative, connected, and somehow mindful, even during isolation.

This is how the *Corona Haikus* project started: through the need to feel alive using creativity as an internal movement, and the need to feel connected as an outward movement. It was an act of resilience while the world was shutting down. The format chosen was the visual haiku, a self-invented digital iteration of the well-known Japanese poetic practice.[37]

In an article for *Immerse News*, Tabares Duque and Gaudenzi write:

> We had both indulged in the pleasure of doing visual haikus on our Instagram accounts for a while. The simplicity of the three photos accompanied by a short text format had proven to be a source of pleasure and creativity for both of us. Three photos do allow for the dimension of time: a beginning, a middle and an end.

> They allow for a narrative arch in poetic form. They offer the possibility of creating meaning with very little effort. Why not extend this format to a wider community? Why not use it to feel connected and learn from each other on a global scale?[38]
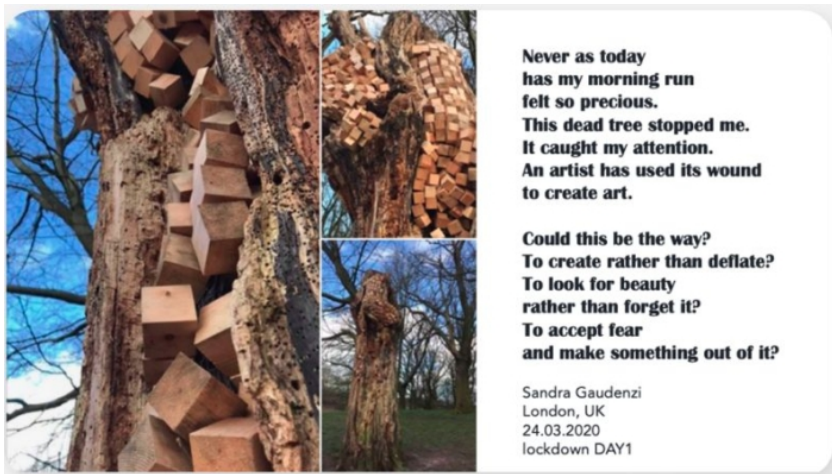
Fig. 1: The first visual haiku published in the Corona Haikus Facebook group.

In order to respond to the immediacy of their need and wanting to build an international community in little time and with little money, they decided to reach their friends where they were already: on Facebook. On 3 April 2020 they launched the *Corona Haikus* collaborative project, by creating a Facebook group and inviting all their friends to join them in the act of re-discovering their private space through the poetic form of visual haikus. The call to action, posted as a pinned announcement, was:

> The *Corona Haikus* is a collaborative project. It is about documenting together our experiences of the Corona lockdowns, feel connected, inspired and, hopefully, learn something valuable from it.

The contract, or the 'term of the exchange'[39] with the Facebook community was something along the lines of:[40] we propose you a poetic format to engage with your private space, you post your haikus, we do the same, we inspire and hold each other, and in exchange we all accept that our creations might be used elsewhere beyond Facebook, within the *Corona Haikus* project, and strictly in a non-profit way.

The project lasted the whole ten weeks of the UK lockdown, gathering an international community of more than 1,000 people coming from 30 different countries on four continents. During these ten weeks, the whole community co-created a space of documentation of their lockdown feelings and experiences. The initiators were also participants; everybody was experimenting with a new narrative form, breaking the professional/non-professional

division of more traditional forms of documentary. There was no division subject/maker either, since each maker was also the subject of his/her visual haiku. The community was autonomously deciding on the topics to be exposed, on the timings to retrieve and to say good-bye; and finally, it was a group of volunteering members of the community that curated the 361 visual haikus that were archived in the coronahaikus.com website. This mode of cocreation allowed for a healthy plurality of perspectives through deep listening and shared decision making.

Stopping, feeling, and connecting: Making haikus as an act of self-care

Haikus have been used in the Zen tradition as a practice for mindfulness.[41] A 'haiku moment' is a moment of personal experience that precipitates the writing of a poem 'that aims to reduce the complexity of the experience to the level of perfection of simplicity and the original nature of the thing revealed to the consciousness'.[42] Making a haiku necessitates stopping other things, taking the time to clear the mind and shift the attention to the sensory world to 'capture the moment and be aware of her inner-self'.[43] It is a creative act that asks the author to slow down, look with fresh eyes at what is around, connect with the inner-self, and grasp the moment. By doing so, it can generate feelings of calm, peace, and, often, a sense of perspective. It is a tool that 'helps find that forgotten place where hope still resides'.[44] This connects the practice of the haiku to the philosophical as well as psychological concept of mindfulness and its calming, healing, and soothing effects. Bringing together formal and informal Buddhist meditation practices, neurosciences, psychology, and psychotherapy,[45] there have been different applications of mindfulness developed such as mindfulness-based stress reduction[46] and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy.[47] Moreover, there exist various studies on the general beneficial effects of mindfulness[48] as well as the specific benefit in the treatment of anxiety, trauma, or depression – a factor that should not be underestimated in such stressful times such as the period of social distancing during the lockdown and the general fear and uncertainty in this unprecedented situation of personal and social crises.

During the lockdowns, people suddenly had to change their daily routines and found themselves confined to their private houses – with limited mobility, social interaction, and physical isolation. Within this context, co-authors

Tabares Duque and Gaudenzi thought that allowing people to make haikus could be a form of self-care. Since they both work in the digital creative field, they decided to twist the original written haiku format and use mobile phones to create a new form of digital visual poetry. The format they proposed – three smartphone photos and a text – invites participants to look around their close surroundings using their phones as a creative tool, rather than a device for receiving and consuming media. Taking photos allows participants to look around, re-frame their attention, and potentially re-discover their own private spaces. Since 'seeing comes before words'[49] taking three photos often comes as an impulse with no clear reason, nor link between them. But since the visual haiku format does ask for a text to link the photos, the act of enunciation brings to consciousness something that was just an embodied feeling when expressed in visual form.

Thus, the effect and the impact of making a visual haiku is not just the satisfaction of bringing some creativity to one's day, but also to reconnect to the 'here' and 'now' with both feelings and consciousness, allowing for meaningful learning – in the sense of the ability to look anew. Art critic Berger reminds us that 'we only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice.'[50] In other words, even before sharing their visual haikus with the Facebook community, *Corona Haikus* participants were engaging in an act of mindfulness and self-care using 'photography and haiku-writing as means of self-expression and development of outward and inward contemplation'.[51]

In the form of a Corona haiku, participant Aashish Kumar shares:

Living as reflection, as present, past, and anticipated future. It is only when one mindfully registers that these dimensions are revealed, and for this I am thankful for this space which has afforded these freeze-frame moments in an unstable time.[52]

Sharing on Facebook: Going public as an act of self-empowerment

The moment participants decide to share their haiku on the *Corona Haikus* Facebook group, they accept to be seen. What was before a private act of creativity and mindfulness, becomes a public enunciation and a moment of psychological empowerment. Empowerment is here understood as a process of personal development. A process, as community sociologist Sadan specifies,

that involves both a development of skills and abilities, and a more positive self-definition. People testify to a better feeling about themselves, a sense of more self-respect and self-esteem. A new self-confidence and a feeling of self-efficacy are connected with a redefinition of the self, and the latter is closely linked with a real improvement in personal knowledge, abilities, skills, resources and life opportunities.[53]

It takes guts to publicly display moments of doubts, fear, vulnerability, and even contemplation, but it also gives the opportunity to feel connected and respected by others. A certain self-esteem emerges from the position of the self in relationship to the group.

The *Corona Haikus* public Facebook group mixes personal friends with professional relationships and total strangers. Still, why would participants want to disclose the photos of their intimate houses, and share their very private feelings outside of their secure networks? This is a question that co-authors Tabares Duque and Gaudenzi asked themselves at the beginning of the project. What they observed throughout the unfolding of the projects is a certain snowball effect of mutual trust and a reassuring feeling of mutual acceptance mixed with the holding clarity that we were all in this together. In an article about her experience of the *Corona Haikus* project, Cypriot participant Maria Christoforou speaks of the unifying role of the shared online community space:

> Corona Haikus gave me a lot. First of all, it gave me hope.

> During these strange times, Corona Haikus opened the door to creativity. Cyberspace became the stage for expression and creativity that can unite people around the world. I felt a bond with everyone, we shared the same strong emotions such as fear, humour, anxiety, desperation, sadness... It is amazing how technology can unite people and its tools became a form of expression for each individual. [...]

> It seems to me that people around the world are united since they are facing simultaneously the same enemy, and they share the same emotions, fears, problems while they are all located at their homes. For me, Corona Haikus was a journey that taught me to listen to silence and see the big picture.[54]

Overcoming the initial shyness of personal exposure and finding a voice within a welcoming community created a supporting network among strangers that had in common an overflow of emotions sparked by the lockdown.

Canadian participant Sophia Son speaks of a form of 'group therapy' that clearly helped her to feel accepted and connected. Sharing, and discovering

the realities of others, gave a sense of perspective that could be seen as 'community caring'.[55] Interestingly, as the days were passing, a few participants started incorporating visual haikus in daily tasks, new routines emerged, people started sharing at regular hours, while they were doing their daily walks – or as Mafe Quintero, participant from Colombia, noted: 'Corona Haikus has helped me, yesterday and today, to redefine my daily life.'[56] Moreover, taking three pictures and connecting them in a sensual moment of mindfulness and creativity exercised not only their own poetic eye; due to the possibility of genuine personal expression, it allowed each co-creating participant to gain their space in the online community: each post expresses a personal aesthetic style. This gives rise to an 'aesthetic experience' – a term coined by Dewey – 'an experience of awakening, pleasure and curiosity which includes the senses, creativity, emotion and memory – all within social interaction'.[57] The very fact that so many different styles emerged within the group gave both a pleasurable aesthetic complexity to the project and a personal ownership of their own glance to individual participants that could now recognise themselves as unique within a group – being through the act of a creative intervention a distinctive, valued member in a greater community. Thus, sharing with others the individual, sometimes very intimate experience transformed into an aesthetic expression and contributed to the building of a community in the co-creative digital space – despite social distancing in the physical world. Though being situated in a still rather atypical media environment for documentary, linking these observations back to the ethic impetus of fostering solidarity and bonding through co-creative documentary practices shows that the *Corona Haikus* project can be seen within the tradition of committed and engaged documentary making.

Commenting and liking in the *Corona Haikus* Facebook group: Presence as an act of community care

While the act of making their haikus helped participants to look at their daily life differently (stopping time to re-connect, using photos to see anew and words to find self-awareness), the act of sharing their haikus expanded the motion of self-caring into a motion of personal empowerment (finding a voice, a personal style, and daring to share). But since the affordances of Facebook groups include the possibility to comment and like other participants'

posts, the web of interaction that follows each haiku post allows for a form of mediated intimacy and solidarity to develop within the community.

Even if not neutral to the pressure of getting more or less likes for a post, the *Corona Haikus* community used the comment option to respond spontaneously, engage in mundane chit chat, but also to support each other. In a *Corona Haikus* post on 20 May, participant Tereza Stehlikova from the UK shares her feeling of sadness and grief through the poignant images of dark empty spaces in between rays of reflected light on her wall. 'The empty space is painful', she writes in the text of her haiku. The answer she receives is not a question about her grief, but rather an invitation to look differently at her very own images (and therefore at her environment). Could she look at the shadowy gaps as pauses before the lights start again, rather than a sign of emptiness?
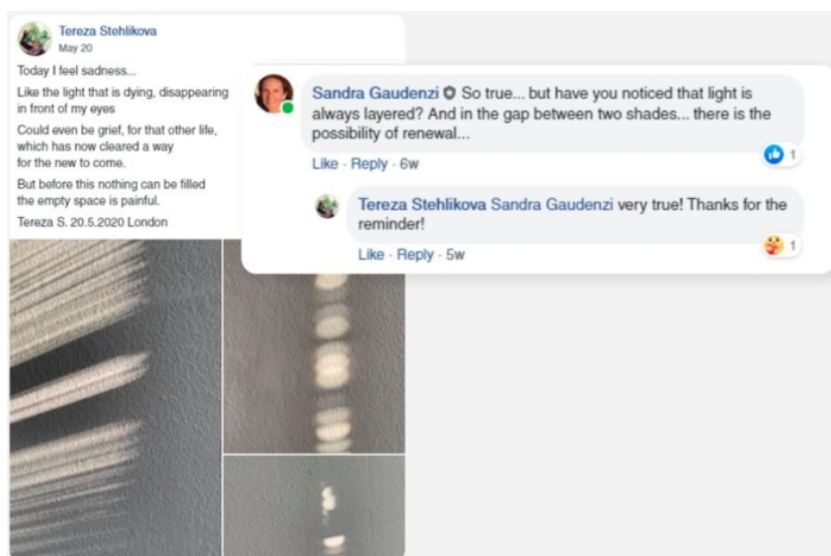

Fig. 2: Slide from the 'Co-creating in times of Corona pandemic' presentation on 2 July 2020.

The next day, 21 May, Abhilash Mallick from India reflects in a post on the toll that 60 days of indoor living had on him and on us as a society. 'Will we appreciate the human contact more or has the lockdown conditioned us to stay alone?' Such a deep question is clearly difficult to answer in the superficial tendency of Facebook comments. Nevertheless, the comments manage to acknowledge the importance of the question itself and open up an indi-

vidual concern at a global level, offering resonant voices from the UK, Colombia, and Georgia. Although no answer can cover such a question, what the community did is to echo the concern and hold it as valid and important. Also, mere acceptance can be seen as an act of care: to react with caring concern for the other but also with self-compassion for oneself. Hence, although the discussions inspired by the project certainly did not provide definite answers, it provided a space for exchange – which in fact fully stands in the tradition of co-creative documentary practices: aiming not to impose one view or to provide one solution, the multiple perspectives of the participants encouraged instead discussion. This created an open dynamic of 'intersubjective dialogue'[58] of mutual care and concern. Thus, though situated on the Facebook platform, *Corona Haikus* employs the service quite differently from its common usage, adapting it to the (also changing) needs of the forming community.

Fig. 3: Slide from the 'Co-creating in times of Corona pandemic' presentation on 2 July 2020.

A lot of the interpersonal communication through the project created a space where personal voices were heard, respected, understood, sometimes challenged, and ultimately always held as valid and important. A form of belonging started to emerge, to the point that some participants felt proud of being part of the community.[59]

> I will always be grateful to Corona Haikus for giving me the opportunity to reflect daily on a great little thing of my day. Thank you for greeting us in such a poetic way and for proving that beauty can be found in anything and at any time. Feeling proud to be part of the Corona community!

Ultimately, through its interaction, the community acquired a voice on itself. Reading through its shared images and texts one can see a meta-narrative emerge. The focus is not only on the perspective of individual authors, but also in the expression of the needs of the community as a whole. In a post (while discussing if the community should start a Corona Haikus Phase 2) participant Maria Christoforou asks: 'what are our common needs?' She then publicly shares her position by stating her needs: 'for catharsis, to feel connected, to redefine our senses, to philosophical expression, for rhetorical questions, to use our strength to strengthen others and to question what is freedom'.[60] Fitting with the characteristics of co-creation in participatory documentary, this overall narrative emerges from the community, not from the project's authors, while the documentary space becomes a catalyst for conversations and a space for debates.[61] Thus, it was a matter of consistency that it was also the community which decided in which direction the project should evolve after the end of the first lockdown, and it was also a question discussed in the community how to find an end; and still, it was up to each participants to find the right moment and the right way to take their goodbye when they felt that they did not 'need' the project any longer. As such, the project can justifiably be called a 'living documentary'[62] in the sense Sandra Gaudenzi uses the term: 'a living entity' which is 'self-organized and in constant relation [..] with its environment', which can adapt to it and change it. All this can be said of the *Corona Haikus* project – which in fact germinated into unforeseeable directions of a community organism once launched.

The position of the observant: The act of aesthetic immersion

It is difficult to know how many people did follow the *Corona Haikus* project without actively posting, because it is a public group open to all. A total of 1,188 visual haikus were created between 3 April and 15 June 2020. Around those, 2,146 comments and 22,644 reactions were recorded. But how many people did look at the page without leaving any trace? That is impossible to

know. In a personal e-mail to one of the co-authors, Diana Orozco comments on the positive effect of visual poetry on the observer:

Although I have not published any haiku, today that I am filled with the nothingness of hopelessness, I see the poetry of the Corona Haikus and I feel that beyond the stillness and the paralysis of the uncertainty that inhabits us, they emits [sic] a ray of light. That takes me out of inertia … Nothing is inert, life will always look for a way to emerge.[63]

It seems plausible that the aesthetic pleasure of the *Corona Haikus*, and the attention that most authors did put into finding some lightness even if in isolation, had a wider effect than anticipated. Outside of the act of making, sharing, and commenting (that is only available to the active community) there is also the act of aesthetic immersion that is opened to all digital flâneurs. An unquantifiable number of Facebook strollers, total strangers, or friends of friends have seen on their 'walls' visual poetic reflections on life while in isolation, and this precisely in a timeframe where lockdowns would have touched them too. This passive audience is not part of the creative force of the collaborative project itself, but it is nevertheless part of its impact.

The shared concerns dictated by the world paralysis would have made the *Corona Haikus* relevant to all digital flâneurs. Whether their poetic force and personal aesthetic has moved them is difficult to know. But it is possible to think that being exposed to other people's creations always has an opening effect of some sort, and that the visual haikus might have inspired, touched, expanded, and ultimately given a sense of perspective to a wider community than the one that does result from the group's analytics.

The particularity of the *Corona Haikus* project is that it does not just document a specific moment in time through social media collaboration. It is not a project that uses user-generated content to create an archive of the past. The *Corona Haikus* project is born in a time of urgency and asks participants to create in order to feel engaged with life as it unfolds. It is a space of action that allows participants to reconnect with their present in an act of self-care, to a community to support itself through the motion of community-holding, and that welcomes the external observer.

Conclusion

The investigation of the practices behind the *Corona Haikus* has shown how the co-creative project developed into a form of 'im/mediate/d caring and

sharing' and transformed into an ecosystem for individual and communal change in a time of crisis. The COVID-19 lockdown has created various community needs such as the desire to express oneself creatively and to feel connected. The *Corona Haikus* project was able to satisfy these needs in their different facets – always while dynamically unfolding thanks to its co-creative open design.

As such, the project can be considered as a form of digital documentary practice with the impetus to create a sense of interdependent belonging. It is moved by a desire for collective well-being that is rooted in individual well-being. Individual self-care is fostered by the act of making the visual haiku itself (regardless of sharing it), as this is a private act. The collective well-being is fostered by the creation of a community that de facto holds a safe space of grief for the communal loss of freedom but also hope. Solidarity and community care are about linking the experience of the self to the one of the multiple. The interdependence between the individual level and the collective one is put in motion by the very act of sharing and commenting, a dynamic interaction that allows a multiple-way dialogue that is potentially transformative at all levels.

The double level of care – as individual self-care and community care – that can be found in the *Corona Haikus* project exemplifies how this co-creative and interactive documentary project goes beyond the mere act of documenting. The focus was not only on creating a visual archive in the time of crisis, but on promoting the self-empowerment of the participants and on making the difficult time more bearable through the sense of connectivity and community created by co-creation. The potentials of the project as a co-creative social media documentary in contrast to traditional approaches of co-creative documentaries are obvious: people from all over the world with a common concern could be brought into dialogue with each other across barriers without much prior planning of the project, which would need too much time and resources.

With co-creation as a form of care, the *Corona Haikus* project goes beyond the functions of previous (digital) co-creative documentaries. It is a further example that underlines a more universal tendency that is emerging in documentary practices: the before-mentioned paradigm shift from representative to performative, from authoring and directing documentary to enabling documentary, from producing documentary with a fixed filmic outcome in mind to doing documentary – and to doing it with others.

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Notes

[1]   De Michiel & Zimmermann 2013, p. 355.

[2]   'The Interactive' is understood here as interaction with a website or among people, as ways of creative participation through the contribution of content and as ways of co-creation in which participants are also involved in decision-making processes (cf. Wiehl 2019, p. 8).

[3]   Cf. Fox 2017, p. 265.

[4]   https://coronadiaries.io/index.html.

[5]   https://coronarchiv.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/projector/s/coronarchive/page/welcome.

[6]   Zimmermann & De Michiel 2018, p. 12.

[7]   https://www.facebook.com/groups/226094118756231/about.

[8]   https://coronahaikus.com/.

[9]   Nash 2012, p. 31.

[10]   Cf. Weber 2013, p. 103; Kermanchi 2019, pp. 34-35.

[11]   Cf. Gaudenzi 2013.

[12]   Cizek et al. 2019a, p. 17.

[13]   Nichols 2001, p. 118.

[14]   Cf. Cizek et al. 2019a, pp. 5-6.

[15]   Ibid., p. 5.

[16]   Cizek et al. 2019b, p. 11.

[17]   Ibid., p. 58.

[18]   Longfellow 2020, p. 59.

[19]   Cizek et al. 2019b, p. 5.

[20]   Fox 2017, p. 265.

[21]   Cizek et al. 2019c, p. 26.

[22]   Nemtin & Low 1968, p. 1.

[23]   'Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.' (Rheingold 2000, p. xx)

[24]   Zimmermann & De Michiel 2018, p. 37.

[25]   Wiehl 2019, p. 10 (original emphasis).

[26]   Ibid. (original emphasis)

[27]   Rose 2014, p. 208.

[28]   The project is also produced by Sandra Tabares Duque, one of the initiators of the *Corona Haikus* project.

[29]   Wiehl 2019, p. 33 (original emphasis).

[30]   Zimmermann & De Michiel 2018, p. 2.

[31]   Nash 2012, p. 30.

[32]   Ibid., p. 34 (original emphasis).

[33]   Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[34]   Ibid., p. 37.

[35]   Renov 1993, p. 21.

[36]   Corner 2002, p. 259.

[37]   According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a haiku is an 'unrhymed poetic form consisting of 17 syllables arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively. The haiku first emerged in Japanese literature during the 17th century, as a terse reaction to elaborate poetic traditions, though it did not become known by the name haiku until the 19th century'.

[38]   Gaudenzi & Tabares Duque 2020.

[39]   Dovey 2014, p. 22.

[40]   *Corona Haikus: what is it, why doing it & terms and conditions* is available at https://www.facebook.com/groups/226094118756231.

[41]   Harris defines mindfulness as 'consciously bringing awareness to your here-and-now experience with openness, interest and receptiveness' (Harris 2006, p. 2). There are many facets to mindfulness, including living in the present moment; engaging fully in what you are doing rather than 'getting lost' in your thoughts; and allowing your feelings to be as they are, letting them come and go rather than trying to control them.

[42]   Tamari 2015, p. 58.

[43]   Exploringyourmind 2017.

[44]   Ibid.

[45]   Brown et al. underline that 'whereas psychological science has conventionally focused in one way or another on the contents of consciousness (e.g. cognitions, emotions, and their somatic and

behavioral consequences), mindfulness fundamentally concerns consciousness itself. While there is no single definition of mindfulness, fundamental to classical and other definitions is clear-eyed attention to the workings of the mind, body, and behavior. This attentiveness to what is present appears to yield corrective and curative benefits in its own right' (Brown et al. 2015, p. 1).

[46] Kabat-Zinn 1990.

[47] Segal & Williams & Teasdale 2002.

[48] Didonna 2009.

[49] Berger 1972, p. 7.

[50] Ibid., p. 8.

[51] Gil 2019, p. 363.

[52] Aashish Kumar, Corona Haikus Facebook group, 26 May 2020.

[53] Sadan 2004, p. 84.

[54] Christoforou 2020, p. 1.

[55] Son, Corona Haikus Facebook group, 9 May 2020 – translated from French.

[56] Mafe Quintero, Corona Haikus Facebook group, 5 April 2020 – translated from Spanish.

[57] Gil 2019, p. 361.

[58] De Michiel & Zimmermann 2018, p. 82.

[59] Sara Albo, Italy, private communication, 27 October 2020 – translated from Italian.

[60] Maria Christoforou, Corona Haikus Facebook group, 10 October 2020.

[61] Rose 2014.

[62] Gaudenzi 2013, pp. 16-17.

[63] Diana Orozco, 12 April 2020, private communication.