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Far Away, So Close: A Collective Ethnography Around Remoteness

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Prologue

We are five anthropologists from around the world, and this is our many-handed ethnography. Our topic is remoteness, the context, the global pandemic. We draw on our ethnographic skills to explore what is ‘far away, so close’ in this context. Together, with each other and our correspondents, we created a network of ethnographic relationships by proxy, as well as a polyphonic, sometimes multimodal story. We juxtaposed disparate voices and experiences of feeling far away and close. The gesture started with short ethnographic documentations around remoteness. Later, we distributed them among all contributors and gathered further ideas about different ways of editing it, experimenting with how to incorporate, compose and collate multiple insights into a single yet polyvocal article.

Our project sets out to participate in ongoing discussions around what collaboration might be, and open up or extend the doing of ethnography. Collaborative from the start, we are five voices and one anthropological problematique; many hands may make things harder, rather than—as the saying goes—making light work. Each ethnographer, now working ‘remotely’ from what is currently home, here shared their engagements with / dispatches from a correspondent (traditionally called informant) and/or a place. The project thus is an exploration in methodological innovation forced upon us by the pandemic, enabling multilinear forms of analytical experimentation. We wanted to see what could be generated together as anthropologists interested in methodology, and as our fieldwork positions us all as far away yet close in many ways.

Last but not least, we have tried to avoid erasing the accents of each story. Each of us had also to give up somewhat on the control we have become accustomed to: over which voices to include, in what order and with what level of contextualization, and in which emotional tone. Indulging by necessity a kind of haphazardness, it has at times felt like an

exercise of ethnographic promiscuity. Since it could only advance through generosity and open ways of incorporating each other's accounts, perhaps a many-hands ethnography must be – or feel – loose; a response to the risk of leaving things as we found them, an extension of trust that may go wrong, but also enrich the anthropological imagination in these times of confinement.

The Isle, The Haptic and I: A Letter

Rachel Harkness

Dear friend, Mo charaid ghràdach,

How are you?

These times of physical distancing and social isolation are strange, aren't they? I feel like a satellite: circling, but mostly staying out in distant orbit of the people and places important to me in my life... I also stay apart from any new places and people... there is a pause on encounters right now, it seems. If, spacecraft I am, I am no explorer. I am tethered by invisible ties, destined for the time being to orbit around and around in relative isolation.

These current circumstances, these stormy weathers, have often brought to mind John Donne's famous statement that 'no man is an island': a phrase alluding both to the commonness, perhaps, of feeling alone and cut off, as well as reinforcing the idea that social ties do bind us. We are 'a part of the main' and all 'involved in mankind', all diminished by the death of any other, as Donne suggests. It's interesting, as actual islands are more alike man here than not, I think. The island is not really remote nor alone. That is not to say that it is not a place that can be an 'away' for me. Islands, as I know them, are away from my everyday life and work in the city (even one that involves daily walks with my dog in parks, along waterways and sands); they are away from the physical make-up of the city and its infrastructure (even one as green and hilly as Edinburgh); they are away from the proximity of so many strangers (even though I know some people here).

Islands are also, I feel, places that are more coastline than land. More edge than not... I have been thinking about a particular and specific island called Eigg. Its name, Eigg, may be actually from the old Norse word for edge, meaning 'sharp', 'like a blade', whilst others argue that it may be from the Gaelic language word for notch. Either way, the island of Eigg has a very characteristic and sharp outcropping of rock called the Sgùrr which can be seen from all around and has been used for navigation for likely as long as people have been seafaring here. If Eigg is to be seen to be at the far edge of the country in which I live (as some do see it), then I see it as at the centre of an archipelago, and as fringe-ing the near edge of the Atlantic Ocean. From the vantage point afforded me by my satellite status, the island of Eigg is one of the Small Isles, four islands in the Inner Hebrides, part of the forty-plus islands that constitute the Hebrides (sometimes called the Western Isles), just next to the 'mainland' of Scotland, the most northerly part of the British Isles, which lie surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea in the northwest corner of Europe, planet Earth.

I'm telling you about Eigg as we had planned to take a group of students there last year. My two colleagues and I, teaching on a Masters programme called *Design for Change*, had planned to take our group of nineteen students from Edinburgh to Eigg in the Spring of 2020. We wished to do so as we wanted to give us all the opportunity to learn from the island community. Now that I am writing to you about remoteness, I have come to think about this planned trip and the island of Eigg; my thinking on remoteness all bound up now in this ill-fated field trip which was cancelled due to the spreading pandemic.

Before our trip was cancelled though, we decided to go to the island, as in 1997 it had been the first place in Scotland to see a successful community buy-out. Have you heard of these? This was a movement that had caught both a wave of dissatisfaction with Scotland's feudal system of land ownership (regrettably still in existence) and also one for decentralised governance, via Highland and Island development planning and enterprise funding. The islanders on Eigg managed to raise funds to buy their island from its private owner, and to 'clear' the island of its laird (landlord) for the first time in its history. As a recent letter writer in the *Financial Times* put it, the island then thrived, years of depopulation have been reversed, and there has also been a 'turn to enterprise and concern around culture and sustainability' (Ed Mayo, January 11th 2021). They also inspired many others in Scotland: now half of the landmass of the Western Isles, representing three quarters of its population, is under the control of the people, its residents. Apologies if you know this already, but the point is that my colleagues and I thought it would be fascinating to go and learn about community empowerment and alternative forms of land ownership and self-governance in a place such as Eigg. And luckily for us, some of the people on Eigg, now very much used to receiving visitors and tourists, were kind enough to say that they would act as our guides to the island and island life.

The islanders' concerns around culture and sustainability, and what they were doing about them, were also of interest to us. This was not least because one of my colleagues had spent a very happy writing residency in a bothy on the island: this small building a part of a wider artistic project to design and build a series of contemporary off-grid 'bothies' across Scotland (Bothies are traditionally simple shelters, often stone-built, that can be used by people walking in the landscape and needing a place to stay). We thought it not surprising perhaps that Eigg – open, alternative, enterprising, creative – was home to one of the three bothies that had been built by this project, The Bothy Project, so far. We also sought to learn about the island's self-sufficiency in terms of energy and its own innovative electricity grid powered by the three different renewables of wind, solar and hydro. We were interested to help in some tree seeding and planting as part of a new island initiative, and we wished to hear from islanders about some of their thriving business developments.

Having had classes earlier in the programme with our students about energy, environment, social change, we hoped that the island could become our outdoors classroom, if you like. The islanders, the animals, birds and other non-human inhabitants of the island, even the island landscape itself, would be our guides. In these times of ecological crisis, in the Anthropocene, I think we in the West need this sort of learning and teaching more than ever. One of the people whose works we had been reading in our seminars was Arturo Escobar. Do you know his work, maybe his book *Designs for the Pluriverse?* If yes, you'll know that he explains the notion of the pluriverse using the Zapatista phrase, 'a world where

many worlds fit'. This work of his is very much a collection of the already existing ways in which people, communities, decolonise themselves and build other, post-capitalist alternative worlds. Having spent much of my own work similarly feeling that it is really valuable to document and share the autonomous and alternative worlds that people are building for themselves, for others, with each other, I felt, and I still feel, that being able to expose students to these sorts of communities is a wonderful thing and a great learning opportunity.

So with all this in mind, we planned our trip. I lobbied for May as a good month to go and then crossed everything that the weather would be good!

We had planned to travel to Eigg by train and ferry: firstly a train from Waverley Station in the centre of Edinburgh, across the lowlands of central Scotland, to Glasgow Queen Street Station; then a five and a half hour journey on the scenic West Highland Line through national parks and across famous viaducts up to the port of Mallaig; after a night in Mallaig, we would then leave the 'mainland' and catch the ferry to Eigg. We opted for this mode of slow travel, seeing that the journey could become a part of the learning. We wanted the students, the large majority of whom were from overseas, to have the opportunity to see the different landscapes and livelihoods of the broader country beyond the capital city... and be in-amongst them, able to have conversations with strangers along the way.

Taking students to experience the Western Isles also chimes with my childhood past and family camping trips to the islands of Mull and Iona. I've returned as an adult from time to time... visiting Coll, Skye, Lewis and Harris, Mull and Iona again... always wishing I hadn't left it so long between trips... somewhat feeling like city work-life keeps you there with some sort of weird centripetal force. I can make no great claim to the islands then. I and my family are not 'from' there, as far as we know. I have never been to Eigg. However, I suspect a lot of Scots do this lowland-highland back and forth. When I wrote of the ferry there just a moment ago, I thought about the fleets of them carrying people back and forth across the Hebridean and Clyde waters between the islands, and I am nostalgic for those holidays, for that travel. The clanging metallic sounds of the vessel and its cargo of people and vehicles, the particular somewhat aged aesthetics of the observation lounges and onboard cafeterias, the steep stairs up from the humming car deck, the crew's brightly coloured uniforms, the familiar Cal Mac (short for Caledonian MacBrayne) logo and the safety notices, and the heavy doors with high thresholds keeping the rain and wind and cold out. Perhaps a bit of a leveller, it seemed to me that all who travel on these ferries share these same spaces as equals for a while.

Another reason to take the students to Eigg is the idea that self-displacement is a potentially valuable and illuminating thing. This is the sort of displacement or dislocation that is key to the anthropological method. Quite distinct from being displaced in a way that you do not consent to, this is the intentional use of a move, a shift, a displacement of self in order to illuminate and highlight difference (between) and thus, of course, similarity too. I wanted us to all displace ourselves to the peopled Isle of Eigg for a while, in order to see what we would perceive differently in this temporary new or other place, to see what would grab our attention. So yes, I hoped to exploit our relative newness to specific place whilst indulging my longing to return to these sorts of familiar (island) places. I (and my colleagues too, I reckon) thought our intentional journeying and visiting of a place called Eigg, an island

and thus usefully delimited, would allow an opening of a space there: of learning, inspiration, challenge and connection...

Up out here in my pandemic-induced satellite orbit, the sense of longing for touch (down) is palpable. My satellite status probably makes me an unreliable witness, perhaps magnifying the importance of this mode or these modes of perception, but our witnessing is always unreliable, I suppose, always 'partial and situated', as the great feminist minds say. These modes of haptic perception are grounded in the body-in-place, the body-amongst-others. I recognise a longing to be on the island and perceive it through the sense of touch in particular, a longing to touch and for the touch of:

different textures underfoot, from springy heather moor to basaltic laval rock;

different rains lashing down;

different vistas of the world around us, felt as much as seen;

different fragrances in the air (saltwater, gorse-flower, peat-smoke);

different histories haunting, and as shaping forces in the landscape;

different bird and human songs;

different-sounding stories told by different tongues;

different bodies perceived in constellation to mine in the train carriage, hostel, rockpool, cave;

different bodies meeting in handshakes, hugs and the ceilidh dance's turns.

But back to my satellite orbit...

I am trying to write 'from the heart as much as from the head' here, as my own teacher, Tim Ingold, puts it in the second page of his book *Correspondences* (2020). I think that maybe doing this is opening us up to the risk of me getting carried away with the tides of memory or attempts at lyricism. But perhaps it is OK to diverge for a while as long as I come back to you? I have written this by hand, on paper, inspired by Tim as he says that handwriting has a quality of both care and spontaneity to it, and I do agree. Hopefully I can preserve that as I type this up! Holding the pen, writing as if talking to you, feeling memory's pull, I think this corresponding is touching. It feels as if it has brought you, the islands of my past, the isle of Eigg, the beautiful-illuminating-challenging displacement of travel and ethnography, all close. Tim writes something lovely about corresponding: he says, 'For life on earth to carry on, and to flourish, we need to learn to attend to the world around us, and to respond with sensitivity and judgement. Corresponding with people and things – as we used to do in letter-writing – opens paths for lives to carry on, each in its own way but nevertheless with regard for others'.¹

I think once I've finished this letter to you, I might write to Eigg! I'll ask it if it might be willing to receive new groups of students once these pandemic times are over and it has once more opened up to visitors. I'll see if it might be willing to teach a new group—this

¹ To preserve the letter form, the reference to Ingold's work is added here: 2020: 3.

year, maybe next—about how to attend to and respond to the world around us, and how to flourish.

It would be lovely to hear from you too, when you have time. Maybe you know an island and could tell me about it? I'd love to hear what you make of my musings on remoteness, on the weaving of near and far, on island figure and ground – the complexities and wonders.

Yours warmly,

Rachel

Less Remote Control

Eeva Berglund with Eila Valtanen

Below are fragments of an email correspondence that unfolded between two of the luckiest among the luckiest, by our own admission. Finland has done exceptionally well in the COVID-19 pandemic, at least in terms of morbidity (mental health—we wait to see), and while I'm writing in central Helsinki where the numbers have consistently been the highest in the country, *Eila*, as you'll see, has barely noticed it where she lives².

Yet the pandemic has unleashed so much damage. We learn through our exchange that although things are clearly wrong and bad, just to compare experiences of remoteness now yields a sense of shared, collective, sorrow. Marjorie and Maritza enter our reality too. But I'm trying to avoid the binaries, to acknowledge that even the lucky hurt.

With some shock, I notice this fits what I've been doing with anthropology for a long time—at home, with people like me, learning *with* as much as learning *about* (though that too). Learning from the principled way that decolonising scholarship embraces layering, and benefits from 'both-and', I've posited something like an anthropological 'comfortable slot'. It's where I have done ethnography, the 'down to earth', even subtle, end of social movements, where energies are invested in shaping society whether as activists or administrators, and not just in order to assuage middle-class guilt (Berglund 2019).³

² This was the case in December 2020. By March 2021 things had changed and Eila too was being forced by the pandemic to adjust in significant ways.

³ The idea of a "comfortable slot" is rooted in the study of small everyday mutinies, not by the oppressed but by people who are usually deemed successful. It derives, in a roundabout way, from Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1991) critique of anthropology as preoccupied with the "savage slot".



Fig 1. A good sized reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus fennicus*) known to wander Eila's village, meandered into her yard in the summer of 2020. Photo by Eila Valtanen.

So, in December 2020, I started up an email dialogue with an old friend in Kainuu. A 'remote' province of Finland, I did fieldwork there some twenty years ago, centred on shifting economic imperatives, mostly around forestry and land use, that still trouble the region.

Eastern Lapland now attracts a growing population while Espoo (Helsinki region) is losing population.

On most days, to me, Kainuu is remote and Helsinki is central. Kainuu exports natural resources and for decades its population has been declining. Helsinki is a European capital, deemed successful, a secure place to lodge spare financial capital.

Corona feels sometimes like a nightmare. Spring came to the shores of Lake Lentua, winter ice was better than ever, people went on the lake in spiked shoes, on skis, toboggans, snowmobiles. Summer brought the heat, a lot of rain and a lot of berries, since the snow melted late and there were no spring frosts to damage the cloudberry and bilberry. I saw more people fishing off their boats than in 15 years. From the paradise that is our old people's homes here in Lentua, the news that came from Brazil, North America and Sweden was crushing. Many who had fled decades ago to Sweden in search of better jobs, died of corona. In North America the numbers of those going hungry has climbed up to 17 million.

During fieldwork in Kainuu in the late 1990s, one of the jokes my host (not Eila) used to make was that it was a suitable place to develop elder care. Finnish language calls toxic waste 'problem waste'. My friend said his home was now a site for 'problem waste' in human form. The economy in much of rural Finland now struggles with the politics that comes with Chinese investments in mining.

... Globalisation... Business... natural resources... Looking for the best possible environment... What can we give up?

The way we name certain things transforms them into a problem of thought.

Brain researchers say it's not competition that motivates, it's belonging.

Living in Kainuu you have to be a nature person. We hunt, fish, pick berries and mushrooms, hike, cycle, swim. In the pandemic this hasn't changed.

The long-term unemployed here are poor and they live in a different bubble [from mine]. Then, again, I know that many live well, on the family farm, living off their own lands and from the nature all around, social ties taken care of through the hunting association, the village hall and so on.

When conservation meets tourism in this part of the world, things get tricky. It has opened up research opportunities for people like me. Reading Eila's dispatches, I hear that being remote from global hubs is almost all good.

What I miss is going to church.

This is a surprise and a mystery, which we pursue in our subsequent exchanges. Finland has a long border with Russia, so I start to think about how religious and other traditions slip through geopolitics.

Eila's links to her church, though, through her family and the institution, transport us to Greece and Cyprus. Contrasting landscapes present themselves in my mind as I read her messages.



Fig. 2. Church of the Holy Enlighteners of Karelia in Kuhmo. Photo by Eila Valtanen.

The Russian border... is not very far, yet on its other side is a mysterious elsewhere. Remote and near to Finland in so many ways, stories of life across that border still feed Finnish nationalism.

We discuss culture shock. This furthers an anthropologist's "ex-centric studies to inform theorising and draw new lines of comparison" (Martinez 2019: 168).

I have found Texas easier to understand than 'Viena Karelia' (Russia) only 50 km away.

This is in response to my noting that when I used to travel from London to Helsinki and then to Kainuu, I felt more cultural difference—and a need for adjustment—between the last two than between London and Helsinki.

Folks up north can also put on a show when southerners show up, I could give you some juicy examples.

I guess the show or performance is even more intense and absurd when the one visiting is an anthropologist seeking to spend time with natives.

Oh, and what was I supposed to write about? Corona. It will pass. Being asthmatic I live in hope that I'll get vaccinated in February.

Online working suits my family. We have also been in Lapland. We have a season ticket to the theatre. The virus doesn't spread at concerts or the theatre; it's bar evenings and family members that pass it on. And nobody does it on purpose. One hell of a virus.

Eila mentions that the chamber music festival her town is known for has changed the place but allowed it to stay the same. She moves on to Orthodox Christianity:

Three days after death you say goodbye to the places you lived, after nine days you get to know the virtues (Grace, comfort, truth, love, generosity et cetera)... Interesting.

We talk about what the pandemic brings to the surface. We know the safety of our own homes is worth noticing and being grateful for.

It has increased poverty among women. I'm a feminist, always have been, my mother raised three girls up to be feminists without ever using the F Word. A woman must have her own income, said my small, frail mother.

Facts and fates, meanings and numbers, mingle fluently through her text.

What has the year 2020 seen around the world's streets and highways ... women selling their bodies.

There's so much more. Eila's writing is clear, vivid, it comes from experience. She blogs (the texts also get printed in the local paper). She is almost 64. Her CV is mind-blowing, I had no idea. Though I did know she was mayor of her small town (8 000 inhabitants) at one point.

Eila claims for her right to remoteness to be respected. Remoteness can be a resource (Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk 2019), and not just for marketing a music festival, which is part of the story of how Eila and I are now corresponding.



Fig. 3. Lights and colours of the summer sky above Lake Lentua. Photo by Eila Valtanen.

More than that, the right to (prosperous) remoteness is part of our challenge here: of comparing and juxtaposing five ethnographic cases with one single approach by five different people. If it is not being too blunt—I wonder could landscapes near Eila be rendered as uninhabitable as the parts of Estonia that Francisco has travelled?

Eila is also intrigued. She has productive ideas about where we go with all this experimental writing. And she is curious about lives in pandemic times elsewhere.

Threading Relations: Home is Where You Feel Safe

Marjorie Murray

Maritza's iterations

Maritza is a bright 37-year-old woman who grew up and has lived in several houses and apartments in the *comuna* of Peñalolén in the city of Santiago de Chile. In the good times, her mother rented an apartment in the blocks by Tobalaba Avenue. In harder times, they lived with Maritza's maternal grandmother and her other children at her grandmother's house. As an adult, she has also experienced various house moves, moves that follow

relationship arrangements, money availability and break ups, and that are always in the same area and close to her grandparents, mother and siblings.

For eight years she has lived with her current partner Pedro, a builder, working at finally settling down and consolidating her relationship, hopefully finding a place to stay for years. She negotiates ambivalent feelings around not having raised her older daughter Cecilia (18), who lives with Maritza's mother, and Eloy (9), who lives with his father's family. For two of their years together, Maritza and Pedro have lived in a first floor flat in a block built in the early nineties. Pedro has two sons from a previous relationship who live with their mother nearby.



Fig. 4. Scene of the film *Chacotero Sentimental* referred to by Maritza as “Rumpy’s film”.

“These blocks are from Villa xx. Did you see Rumpy’s film, in which Tamara Acosta makes love in the middle of the field?... Why am I telling you this? Because in these blocks everything is heard. That is precisely why they had intimacy in the middle of the field, in the open ground. Here you hear the noise. It can be heard when I go to the bathroom, when the neighbour turns on the washing machine. The material is not the same, as Pedro says.”

The block’s apartments are 42.5 sqm. Many have expanded irregularly (‘monkey law’, figure 4) due to the lack of space and the large number of people. Maritza’s apartment has an extension towards the street, leaving an interior bedroom without a window (figures 5 and 6).



Fig. 5. Block building showing how the bricks are standing up rather than placed horizontally, evincing cheap construction and thin walls

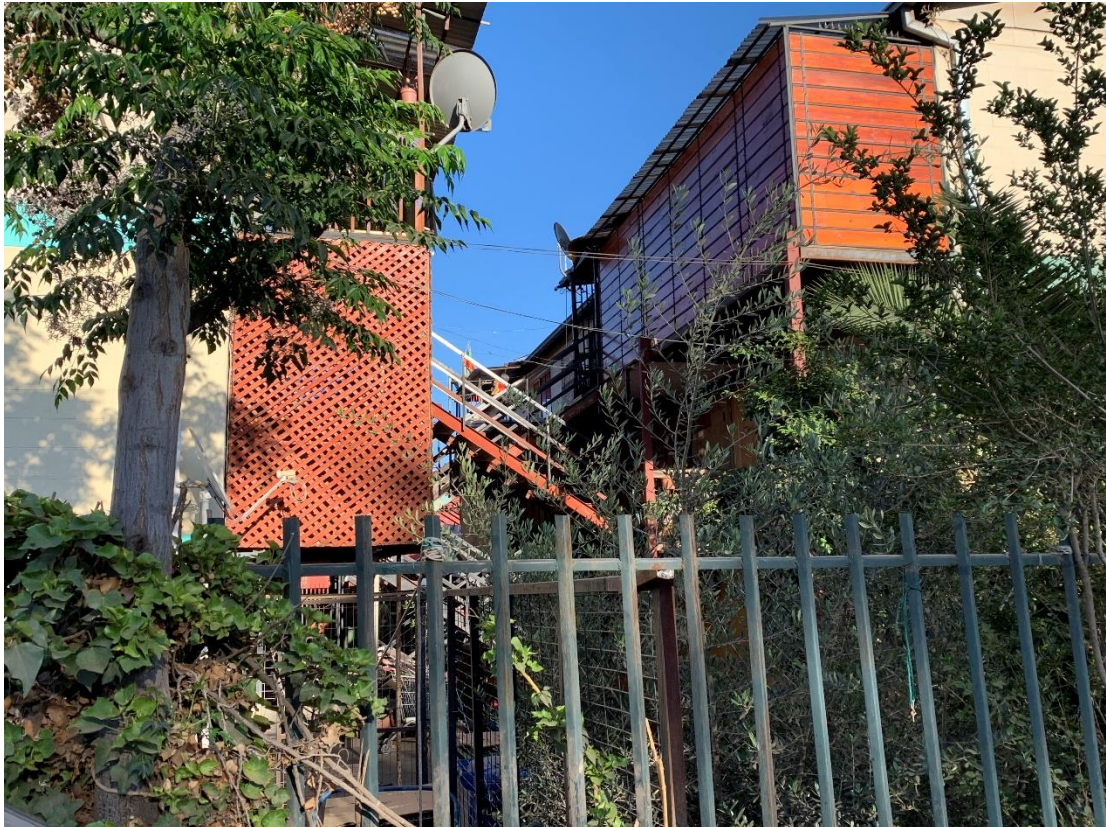


Fig. 6. Wooden illegal enlargements of flats.

Estallido Social, COVID19 Pandemic and the arrival of Esmeralda

When we started talking over the phone in May 2020 about Maritza's experience through COVID19, she always talked softly from the silence of her bedroom, in what, I learned, was her refuge from the loud noises of everyday street demonstrations and conflict between the police and neighbours and other quotidian noises. Furthermore, it was the site for her search for calmness, isolation, and some comfort.

Since the social explosion of October 2019, her local police station —a few meters away— had been the focus of protests, while their hard repression led to a constant tense situation. I learnt from my conversations with Maritza how tear gas, stones, barricades are part of the everyday, even in times of lockdown and curfew.



Fig. 7. Children's playground with painted eyes signalling the ocular damage caused by police weapons during the Estallido social. This is one of the routes used by demonstrators to escape from the main road when police appear.



Fig. 8. A pic sent by Maritza in October 2020 from her neighbourhood.

Maritza supports the demonstrations and, at first, participated in several. But the overall situation since the social explosion, including her place of work shutting and making her unemployed and the constant looting...’, affected her mental health badly.

The fact that she had opted for a distant relationship with neighbours since she arrived at the block was not helpful. Unlike most of the women I know in the area and other low-income neighbourhoods in Santiago, Maritza does not participate in a neighbours’ WhatsApp group and always avoids local gossip. Still, she is close friends with one couple, originally friends of Pedro, whom she calls “my friends of the pandemic”, who live in the neighbouring Villa, just across the main street barricaded as it is.

“I mean, I have war every day on my block. If we, like us, do our normal life (...) Pedro goes to do sports... and after sports he comes home, bathes, eats and then goes to bed. And then we close everything, and then we lock ourselves in our nest, which is the bedroom. Which is the room that, in the end, protected us from all the tear gas and all that.”

Just as COVID19 landed in Chile in March, Maritza was shocked to hear from the doctors that she did not have appendicitis as she had thought, but that she was, in fact, pregnant. The news arrived at a very bad moment. She and her partner had already been severely impacted economically and had suffered from mental health problems. The supermarket where she worked closed down, and construction slowed down too, which limited Pedro’s capacity to pay the expenses of his other children.



Fig. 9. Pedro painting Esmeralda’s crib, August 2020. This is the first time she has a crib for a baby.



Fig. 10. Maritza holding Esmeralda, showing her living room's unlockable window, which allows police tear gas in.



Fig. 11. Maritza's radio set.

Throughout lockdown, Maritza went to visit her son Eloy regularly in the area of La Faena. She felt that it was simply impossible for her not to spend some time with him, regardless of the legal and sanitary restrictions in place:

“Then I arrived, and the explosion was in full here. Many times I had to run between bombs. Taxis don’t get here, but I never stopped seeing him (Eloy) during the pandemic. I can’t spend more than seven days without seeing him.”

Home is where you feel safe

“I take my radio set with me every year (everywhere I go). It is a lifetime company. I’ve been changing my things. In the previous apartment I lost almost all of them (...) And the trunk where I have the photos of the children. Pictures of my son. I used them many times as a chair when I didn’t have chairs. And the TV.”

In her moving in and out of houses, the radio, TV set and photos have provided her a sense of continuity and companionship. Today, as in other times, her radio player and the Carolina radio station provide a sense of safety and a little bit of distance as the music fills the space and protects her from otherwise disruptive sounds. The porous, light materials of her flat are thickened through music like a second skin, as perhaps the only way to achieve a precarious ‘right to a little distance’ from the outside in a context in which the remote is hardly graspable. Then, there was the room for the afternoons and evenings to spend watching broadcast TV (not able to afford cable TV).

But, to what extent is this her home?

“My home, right now, is my grandmother’s house. The place where I have felt the most protected all my life is my grandmother’s house. I was practically brought up there, spent part of my adolescence and my adulthood there, and I have always had to go back there. There is security in moments of weakness and it gives me the push, to carry on, to continue later. Beyond the comforts, home is where they give you affection, protection, that gives you strength to continue. It is the place where you sit and it gives you peace.”

In a sense, this is what she has searched for, in an extreme way, in her refuge/bunker room in her flat. But this is not her home. It is a refuge that allows survival and a semblance of what a “nest” is—she actually referred to the blind room as a nest. She missed her loved ones and loved spaces comforting her and providing shelter, and she felt tired of comforting and advising Pedro. She told me many times that for him the COVID19 situation (meaning economic scarcity and distance from his children) had been harder to confront than it had been for her, and that she used the advice she received on the phone from psychologists and counsellors to help deal with and support him in his problems.

For Maritza, the invisible and quiet virus that circulated heavily in the area where she was living (as it did in most low-income and crowded neighbourhoods in Santiago) never appeared as a ground-breaking health threat per se. This was the case even as gestational diabetes was making her pregnancy riskier. Rather, COVID19 confronted her with scarcity, precarious coping, food insecurity and a constant lack of what she considers a home.

Together with the street and repression unease throughout lockdown, and the need to comfort Pedro, she confronted hunger and shame:

“I didn't buy eggs the whole month. No avocado at all. Too expensive. 4 onions, 1 lettuce, and now I even have no potatoes. I have some frozen things, but I don't have cucumber or any vegetables. I have the oatmeal, but I don't have the dairy”. Maritza (phone call July 2020)

Maritza and Pedro preferred stuffing themselves with bread than participating in the *ollas comunes* (neighbours organised cooking and provision of free meals for those in need in the area), reinforcing their distance and lack of sense of belonging as neighbours.

At the same time, Maritza did not stop visiting her mother and daughter, grandmother and son, no matter the situation. So, in a way, the pandemic and the *Estallido* actually allow for tackling the density and gravity of her circulating body and few belongings orbiting around the above mentioned restricted geographical area. Perhaps home or what is homey for Maritza matches the centripetal force of those rather restricted but existent spaces and persons where she feels safe, not only from actual danger but from concern for others in a way that appears as non-reciprocal, as in the case of Pedro. Relative remoteness from these forces is felt as unbearable or impossible: “If there is nothing (means of transport), I walk. Throughout pregnancy (and lockdown time). Pedro didn't want me to. I walked.” Put another way, Maritza is aware that she has not been able to build a home—in the sense of the abovementioned centripetal force—but she knows that she needs to provide, or at least share, something ‘homey’ for/with her children, Eloy in particular. She feels safe and tranquil, at home, in the shared moments with Eloy and his unconditional love.

Many of Maritza's friends and family members were diagnosed with COVID19. There was a *foco de contagio* in her street as the grocer's family were infected and spread it everywhere. Her sister's father-in-law died from a COVID-related complication with his asthma. Her cousin's husband also had the virus and is still not recovered. Her son and all her ex's family also had COVID19. Her mother's husband was also ill and was sent to a sanitary residence for two weeks. As she once mentioned: “*this is real, we saw it*”. Considering Maritza's overall situation, however, it is somehow not surprising that the virus was not important per se. She had to deal with giving birth on her own due to the ongoing restrictions on numbers of people allowed to be present in the maternity wards because of the pandemic. She had to think about where they would be living in a few months, and had to survive as they lived from her severance pay of 350 000 pesos (450USD), while Pedro only recently started to work again .

Different to the invasive tear gas, nearby street fights, and sounds of screams or even neighbours flushing their toilets, the flat was somehow safe from COVID19 by taking rather easy and well-known measures. Different to the always-invasive noises and odours, the virus respects distance in a way that none of these do, so the refuge worked well, without the need for further thickening of barriers. The problems with COVID19 are of a different kind. COVID19 related measures—particularly lockdown and curfew—set obstacles for Maritza's metabolic relationship with the way she understands, needs and lives home. COVID19 confronts her with not having been able to build a home or offer what she finds at her grandmother's; she experiences remoteness if she has not seen her child in more than a week.

Her own biological mother has been in charge of raising, comforting and providing shelter to Maritza's elder daughter. "The story is repeated: the worthy woman is the grandmother for refuge" (*Se repite la historia: la mujer valiosa es la abuela para refugiarse*), she said once, with a subtle but evident recriminatory tone towards her own ever hard-working mother who was absent for her. The second part of the sentence, "to refuge/para refugiarse" carries with it the weight of something that she has not been able to provide for her own children. Maritza, Pedro and Esmeralda are leaving the flat and moving into a room at her grandmother's house, where the only residents now are an aunt and her partner. The house is located a few blocks away from the flat, in a slightly quieter area with *ladrillos acostados*, or better construction materials. Perhaps from this place and this point of view Maritza will get further in her own dream of building a home. For this purpose, her mother has offered Maritza to build a first floor in her house.

What Used to Be (Viivikonna)

Francisco Martínez

Remoteness is not just geographical; it is also sensed affectively and temporally in the absent presence of something.

Once, Viivikonna was a 'central' mining town in Estonia; today, it is a remote village full of emptiness. Walking around the place, you can still hear the metallic sound of a train (of modernity?) just beyond a hill: so close and simultaneously so far, as it does not stop here anymore. The train connects a new point of extraction with an old area for processing and distributing, leaving behind sacrificed, non-inhabitable landscapes.



Fig. 12 Train passing next to Viivikonna. Laura Kuusk, 2021

The first settlements here were established in 1935, next to an oil shale mine. They started by the interwar Estonian Republic (1920-1939), and under the Soviet Regime, the settlement became a town. Its growth was linked to producing 200 000 tonnes of oil shale annually for use all across the Soviet Union. The town grew rapidly and was populated by people arriving from every corner of the USSR. In the 1950s, Viivikonna already had a population of 1 800 inhabitants.

Most of its architecture, or the now strange materialities that used to be buildings, is indeed Stalinist. Solid, monumental housing for an intrinsically temporary and exhausting project. As the quarry and mining moved further to find new territories for exploitation, the town of Sirgala, had to be created, this time with *Khrushchyovkas*, low-cost, concrete-panelled apartment buildings that were developed in the USSR during the 1960s.

The downfall of Viivikonna started in 1974, once the mine dried and people started to move away. It happened slowly in the beginning, and entropically after the Soviet Union broke up. Originally, the decay of the town had to do with the exhaustion of resources rather than the collapse of socialism. Then, the collapse of socialism exacerbated the decay, for there was no Soviet system that could keep up towns and settlements that had lost their initial purpose.

In the last few decades, the population has decreased from 2 200 to barely 50 inhabitants. As a number, 50 does not say much. As a community of neighbours, each of them is deemed very important to keep the town inhabited. Indeed, as you walk around, you do find different signs of human life. A dog moving restlessly, the imprints of human steps in the snow, the floating sounds of a radio (like an ancestral echo).

During my first visits to Viivikonna, post-apocalyptic images came to my mind such as the Zone from *Stalker* (a 1979 film by A. Tarkovsky), with wilderness after civilization and decaying infrastructures standing as evidence of modern devolution; I was also reminded of Agdam, a town of nearly 40 000 inhabitants, totally destroyed in the first war of Nagorno Karabakh (which I visited in 2015). I believe one could feel the same around Pripjat, abandoned but not vanished.

These are landscapes of 'no more', removed from the possibility of a future, yet with many things still going on there. They might be almost empty of inhabitation, but not of relations and problems. We encounter these landscapes of displacement as residual and excessive, with trees growing inside former houses, now carcasses; filled with solitude, fear and the melancholia of non-creative destruction.



Fig. 13. Strange materialities between nature and culture. Francisco Martínez, 20



Fig. 14. A dog in front of a house. Francisco Martínez, 2021

In Viivikonna, however, History has no record of war, plague or nuclear explosion. The urbanity of the town simply vanished, as quickly as it had come. Viivikonna's emptiness comes into view because its past fullness is not gone, but rather retreated (Dzenovska 2020). The remote here appears as a strange in-between, neither belonging to the realm of the urban nor the rural, the material becoming of absence. And yet, with repeated visits, Viivikonna becomes less exotic and frightening; one could even imagine living there.

"These days, nobody uses this road much", says a local. Some roads are almost gone, vegetation has taken over the pavement. Remoteness is felt in used-to-be paths and roads, in liminal mistrust and what endures against the grain. In Viivikonna, cars appear as signs of civilisation and inhabitation. When there are no cars around a building, it means no-one lives there. No footprints around it means no one has walked there today, or this week. Still you walk on the main street, *Rahu* (peace), and suddenly find an orange mail-box on the façade of the former post office.



Fig. 15. A 'private property' sign (eramaa) with steps around the door and Tina Turner sounding through the windows. Francisco Martínez, 2021



Fig. 16. Mail-box. Francisco Martínez, 2021

Some modern infrastructures still work, even if precariously. Water, electricity and heating systems do. Communism was, first of all, Soviet power plus electrification. Nevertheless, the village is poorly connected with public transport. Only bus #33 runs between Sillamäe and Viivikonna, four times a day. As there is no grocery store, some of the neighbours that don't have cars (many of them elderly) take the bus to Sillamäe (11 km away)⁴ and come back by taxi, at a cost of 7 euros.

Viivikonna has become popular among bohemian strangers wanting to contemplate the broken dreams of modernity and the spectacle of decay (DeSilvey 2017). For decades, the only visitors were thieves coming to remove valuable construction materials such as metal from the existing houses. However, in the last few years we have seen an increasing number of voyeurs following dark tourism postulates (some websites labelled Viivikonna as a [“cool place”](#) and as an [“Off-the-beaten-track ghost town”](#)).

⁴ Sillamäe is a former atomic town that has also been losing population: 20 104 inhabitants in 1994; 12 480 inhabitants in 2020.



Fig. 17. Bus stop. The graffiti reads in Russian: “Беги отсюда” (Run away from here). Francisco Martínez, 2020

Though people from Kohtla-Järve (other former mining area of Eastern Estonia) refer to Viivikonna with sorrow and apprehension, as an example of des-urbanisation that could come to them if they do not take preventative measures (in a new take on *horror vacui*, or fear of the empty space). There are those who even say that the place is cursed. Around World War II there were several concentration camps in the area, built by both the Nazi army (with Jews sent from Vilnius and forced to work in the mines), and by the Soviet army (with German POWs made to build the settlements and work in the mines).

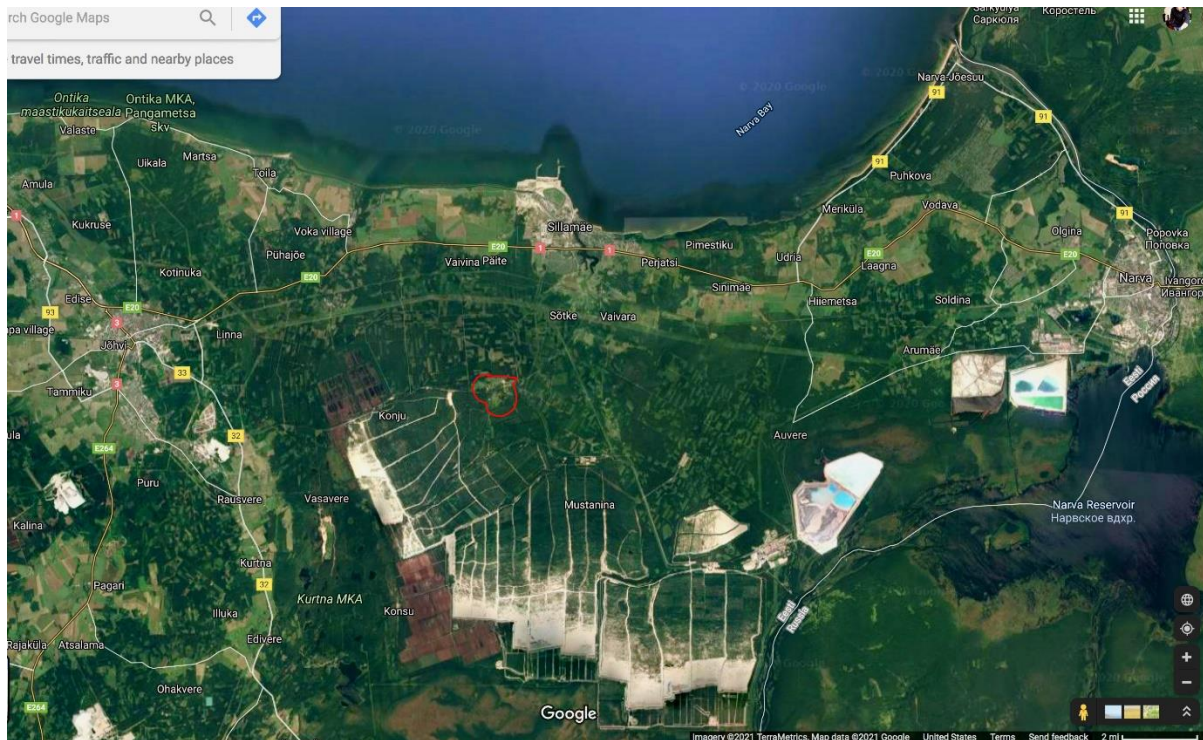


Fig. 18. Map of the area. The red circle indicates the location of Viivikonna, the white traces show the quarry.

You keep walking, however, and encounter mundane signs of life. You find small gardens, vegetable fields, a green house, a snowman, a self-made heating system behind semi-inhabited houses... they are all affirmative forms of world-making. Not long ago, [Liina Hallik](#), [journalist of the newspaper *Õhtuleht*](#), published an article talking to a family who decided to move in when everybody was leaving. Liina starts with these words:

“I arrived in Viivikonna with certain prejudices. A ghost town. A former mining town. Extinct. Broken. Terrifying. Empty streets loom before my eyes, and crows are ominously creaking at the top of wooden clogs. It is as if dark blue clouds are floating in the sky to confirm the foreknowledge. Driving into the infamous ghost town, we are greeted by cheerful wooden figurines and a romantic well with a cake in the middle of a carefully mowed lawn”.

Then she tells the story of Valentina and Nikolai, who moved to Viivikonna twenty-four years ago. “When normal people started moving out of the town, we came here. We left the apartment in Sillamäe to my daughter. She got married and children were born”. Years later, their daughter also moved to Viivikonna, buying the house next to her parents (real estate is cheap and plentiful in the village, because most don’t want to live there). However, most of the inhabitants stay because they don’t have anything better, as Dasha –a local neighbour– explains: “Originally, we didn’t have money to buy an apartment somewhere else, so we stayed. Then, you get used to the idea, and carry on living”.

Here, not only does real estate have little value, moving to Viivikonna is seen by some like a punishment or forced retreat. Elena, a neighbour in Sillamäe, has just such an opinion: she says that the town of Viivikonna is for those who barely work, for pensioners and

drunkards. “When someone is not able to pay for rent and utilities here, then they are sent to Viivikonna”. But what kind of debts? “Heating, rent, utilities...” And how do they make a living there? “I don’t know, still they find money to buy alcohol”.



Fig 19. Former school of Viivikonna with ‘школа’, ‘1954’, and a Soviet star on the façade. Francisco Martínez, 2021

For me, the former school, now in ruins, is one of the most symbolically charged buildings. On my first visit, I saw a few children hanging around the bus stop. They go to the school in Sinimäe (9 km away).⁵ Basic services like this have been closed down. Ambulances come from Sillamäe to Viivikonna, but only in the case of an emergency. In the neighbouring village of Sirgala, the situation is even worse, as there are people who live in apartment buildings without electricity, central heating, water and sewerage.⁶

As in Maritza’s story, it is hard to imagine social reproduction happening in certain contexts. In these times of pandemic and confinement, remoteness might be an advantage, though. You can grow vegetables in your little garden and tinker around without worrying about

⁵ Sinimäe has over 300 inhabitants and it’s known because of an important battle in WWII: The [Tannenberg Line](#).

⁶ Sirgala is just 4 km away and shares the same history, yet the material conditions are worse than in Viivikonna and around 20 people live there.

keeping physical distance. Local people do not need to wear a mask; there is little contact with the outside world and its affairs, with History and Politics.

Global flows only pass by: on a train with oil-shale that does not stop here anymore. The optimism of modernity and of socialist visions of progress has long vanished in this town, leaving behind strange in-between materialities, neither belonging to the realm of the urban nor the rural. Decay has its organising principles; yet the decay of these settlements has not been a *post-mortem* act of justice against the Soviet regime, but of neglect and political abandonment.



Fig. 20. A bridge near Viivikonna, broken decades ago and not repaired since. Francisco Martínez, 2020

Life on a Faraway Planet

David Jeevendrampillai

“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time”, T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets

On October 24th 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first man-made Earth-orbiting satellite into space, kick-starting the ‘space race’. The satellite orbited the globe for around

21 days. It emitted a radio signal between 20 and 40 Mhz. Anyone with a short-wave radio could “tune in” to its ‘beep beep beep’. It was first recorded at Riverhead, Long Island, New York, USA. The signal was soon broadcast over popular radio in America and worldwide. Whilst the event, Sputnik 1, may have been forged in the bi-polar ideological world of the Cold War, the Space Race was a global event. Objects circulated the globe and leaders spoke, fighting over the narrative of the future of humanity. In his ‘Moon Speech’ of 1962, John F. Kennedy launched the Apollo era missions declaring “We set sail on this new sea [...] for the progress of all mankind”. Space, with its attendant grand narratives, has always come hand in hand with declarations of universalisms. A unified future, a common goal, one humanity.

Historian Robert Poole (2010) argues that one of the most profound outcomes of the early Space Race was less that humans landed on the moon, and more that they got to look back at the Earth from a new perspective. On December 24th 1968, Bill Anders captured NASA image AS08-14-2383, popularly known as the ‘Earthrise image’ (Fig. 21). The image shows the $\frac{3}{4}$ illuminated Earth rising over the Moon’s surface. The original orientation of the image saw the Moon looming large to the right of the frame whilst the Earth was actually ‘setting’ behind the celestial body. Nature photographer Galen Rowell described it as “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken”. Poole states that this image is one of the most circulated and reproduced images in the history of humanity, perhaps only matched in its fame by NASA Image AS17-148-22727, otherwise known as ‘The Blue Marble’ (Fig. 21). This image was taken on December 7th 1972 by the crew of Apollo 17, some 18 000 miles from Earth. The image shows the whole Earth surrounded by the darkness of space.



Fig 21. NASA Image AS17-148-22727, aka The Blue Marble

Around the same time that these images were being taken, the dominant approaches to humanity in the discipline of anthropology were also adopting a universalist position. In 1974, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that, despite cultural differences, all humans were united by their structuralist logics of cognition. Historian Benjamin Lazier (2010) states that such imagery and global thinking gave rise to ‘globe talk’, where the whole Earth was

drawn into a social imaginary with a common humanity. This 'globe talk' finds form in things such as the 'global economy', 'global warming', 'global humanity', and global problems (see Berglund's correspondence here before).

At its heart, my scholarly interest concerns the question of how people form a subjective sense of self through their relation to territory. More specially, how do people go about producing the political and social efficacy needed to control the material conditions and social narratives of place? My current work follows the ways in which the emergent visual culture from space travel, and in particular images from the International Space Station, inform, influence, and give credence to claims to global thinking, common humanity and super-cosmopolitan subjectivities. I follow the crafting of a subjectivity that places one in relation to the whole Earth, as the basis of a common social world, as a key aspect of one's cosmological orientation.

When, in conversation, I tell other anthropologists of my research, I am often met with the same sort of jokes: something along the lines of 'so are you going to space?' or 'how big is your grants' travel budget?' Behind the jokes lies an assumption about the nature of anthropological research—that I must go to a specific place from which a particular form of social thinking emanates. Of course, I cannot go to space, nor is it appropriate for the research. Space is far away, inaccessible, isolated. But it is not remote. It may be distant, but space is intimately connected to the everyday lives of many people. From getting up with the sun, to the use of satellite data on your phone, space informs an everyday aspect of our sense of self and our relations to others. For my interlocutors, this is very much the case, in a very conscious sense. Consciousness is the key word here.

My interlocutors call themselves 'overviewers'. Currently, my fieldwork consists of weekly online meetings in which I meet with around 50 overviewers, who describe themselves as both experts and enthusiasts, to join a discussion of their work regarding the 'overview effect'. This term, coined by journalist Frank White (1998), refers to a 'cognitive shift' reported by some astronauts as a result of seeing the Earth from space. My interlocutors invariably work in the space industry or are space enthusiasts. In these meetings they discuss the importance of the overview effect. For them, the cognitive shift brings about an awareness of the fragility of the globe, the common humanity of personkind. My interlocutors aim to promote the overview effect as a form of awareness to a common, 'borderless' humanity that is 'in tune' with—and I paraphrase— 'the ecological, social, and spiritual interconnectedness of all humans'.

The overviewers are based around the globe but they are predominantly from the USA, with a few based in the UK. They discuss how they can bring about the overview effect, or its affects and social impacts, on Earth. Each week's meeting has a different theme. These have included guided meditations where the group imagines going to outer space; presentations about virtual reality platforms that are being developed so people can experience the overview effect through a headset; presentations on how the overview perspective is being used in therapy and is influencing artworks; and there have been many discussions of how the overview perspective can be used as a political tool to bring attention to ideas of a 'common humanity' and a 'shared Earth'.

Here in this many-handed ethnography, my online ethnographic technique, somewhat brought about through the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, is shared with other anthropologists in this discussion of remoteness. The questions arising from this virtual method are clear and obvious. Can one do ethnography online? What does one gain from the virtual and miss from the non-virtual? Such questions have been on the minds of anthropologists for a while now. Danny Miller (2018), in conversation with Tom Boellstorff (2016) about the gaming platform Second Life (an online social world where one lives a 'second life' as an avatar and builds relationships with other players), asks if one can do ethnography entirely online. Boellstorff argues that one can—and to some degree that he *should* do ethnography through the Avatar of his character in second life—whereas Miller asks what happens away from the screen? How do choices such as the avatar design, time spent on the game and so on, intersect with aspects of daily life away from the game?

Shireen Walton (2017), in her ethnography of bloggers in Iran, asks how an anthropologist should do ethnography in situations where meeting others may put them in danger. Her ethnography of anonymous online blogging has to be done anonymously online too. Furthermore, we could ask how doing ethnography of a group that congregates online and is physically located in many places requires rethinking the forms of armchair anthropology that Levi-Strauss was so famous for. Here I mean to think through the ways in which we can think about not only 'overviewers', but the anthropology of outer space as a place. Outer space is constituted as a place, not only through the experience of going there, which few people have done, but rather through its Earthly impacts in terms of the ways outer space is imbricated in the relations between people, people and planet and people and technology (see Messeri 2016). This occurs through things such as the alignment of radio dials, narratives of all humanity, and enthusiast groups advocating for cognitive shifts in human thinking via the off-earth perspectives afforded by space imagery. As such, is physical co-presence with my interlocutors as necessary, or even as possible, as it would be for a traditional 'go there and do it' ethnography? Here, my 'there' is constituted through the remote, via zoom links, space photographs and live video links to space stations.

Whilst the ability to gain a perspective on the Earth from space is remote for most, for the overviewers, it can be brought about through acts of attentiveness, such as through the meditations. Much of the activity of the overviewers, I ascertain from my research, aims to bring about a consciousness of the unity of humanity through this cognitive shift. Implicit in this work is a notion of the unity of man, as if all within our species were aligned, like the dials on a radio, to the same frequency in terms of our past experiences, our present conditions, and our possible futures all alike. However, as authors such as Kathryn Yusoff (2018) have noted, and despite the claims to a common experience of the Earth within aspects of the narratives around the anthropocene, climate change and globalisation, for instance, the experience of the Earth is radically different for different people. Often ways of being human are being closed off, land is being lost, the feeling of colonial power is being extended. With regard to space science and one's relation to the cosmos, scholars such as J. Kehaulani Kauanui⁷ writing in regard to the controversies at Mauna Kea, Hawaii, have argued that whilst space research telescopes, planned to be built atop sacred mountains,

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/04/science/hawaii-thirty-meter-telescope-mauna-kea.html>

may open up knowledge of one cosmological origin story, they may close down others (see also Redfield 2000).

The question of remoteness I want to ask, then, is not so much about place but concerns the remoteness of ways of living that are far from the hegemonic narrative (with its constative exclusions). Ethnography, it has been said, is about getting at that which is remote and strange and making it familiar, and getting at the close and familiar and making it strange. Anthropology, for me, is less about who or what people or concepts are. It is more about how people construct authoritative narratives (and political force) that allow particular forms of life to be lived whilst others are closed down.

Epilogue

All storytelling is collective and extends back in time even to centuries past. For us authors, to nurture human learning through stories in this self-consciously collective way was to entertain some hope that it would foster an un-judging promiscuity and epistemic generosity.

In all the switches this produced, we hope the reader did not get lost (despite our inclination to disturb hegemonic frames). Certainly, in reading each other's texts, as co-writers we found ourselves able to create links that illuminated the remote rather than obscured it. Juxtaposing these stories and their corresponding locations, we circumvented an academic tendency to generate hierarchical dualisms—centre-periphery in particular—that then serve up only binary choices. To resist such either-or readings, a plethora of viewpoints is not mandatory, but it seems to help. No view, even the supposed God's Eye perspective of the 'overviewers', has traction outside a meshwork, web, network—many metaphors suggest themselves—implicating the reader as well. In turn, the 'thickness' of our ethnography comes from the juxtaposition and comparison that we were able to make across different sites, participating—from a number of positions—in current debates on how the virus outbreak animates different practices of separation and detachment (Brown and Marí Sáez 2021).

The contemporary moment, we feel, has provided us insight into the long-standing (though never static) concept of remoteness. In speaking to the contemporary pandemic experience, then, we are also contributing to the literature on peripherality and remoteness. In the last decade, remoteness has been approached by anthropologists as being a signifier of alterity and a framework to describe planning and policy (Pezzi and Urso 2016); as a historico-geographical constellation of power (Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk 2019; Brachet and Scheele 2019); and as a zone for negotiating norms such as autonomy and isolation (Ardener 1987; Scott 2009; Harms et al. 2014). They all suggest analysing remoteness beyond notions of spatial distance and difficulty of access, thus allowing for improvisation, concealment, redefinition, evasion, new relationalities, and other cultural constructions. This is an impulse we wanted to push further, drawing from our correspondents and from each other.

A catalyst of this multi-ethnographer experiment was another moment of inquisitive experimentation: *A Collective Act: An Ethnography Made by Five Ethnographers at Once*,⁸ was a workshop that Rachel created for the first Colleex conference in Lisbon (2017).

Interestingly, this was an exercise focused not on remoteness but on the idea of the collective and its ability to produce work together. As described by Rachel, processes of acting collectively are sometimes equally joyous and difficult, making us think about the diversity and creativity of ethnographic fieldwork practices. Here, we five set out to explore doing research through documenting, sharing, connecting with many “hands”, re-training ourselves as a response to being forced into online life and its novel forms of urgency, inter-connection, and place-attachment. The separation enforced by various national health restrictions catalysed both our attempt to work together and to analyse a concept that seemed hugely relevant.

The experience has been enriching but not without moments of friction: to work in this way takes generosity, time and willingness to sometimes give up your contributions. At least, we openly gave up on the always-already compromised fantasy of having complete control over them. Together we’ve shaped a lateral composition, and through this the article has brought together sites that are spatially disconnected and culturally distinct. They all imply some form of epistemic de-centredness and hint at ways that the lateral composition enriches our pursuits (see Martínez, Di Puppò and Frederiksen 2021). We thus explore the relationship between unlike conditions by juxtaposing forms of knowledge formation and by switching familiar frames of reference, combining ‘experience-near’ and ‘experience distant’, the macro and the micro, the scientific and the biographical, the intuitive and the analytical (Geertz 1983; 1988).

Our attempt at crafting something ethnographic together also invokes other ways to understand research, and engages with contemporary discussions arguing for new forms of correspondence that foreground co-dependence and mutual learning in the field. Gay y Blasco and De La Cruz (2012), for instance, have called for ethnographies not merely oriented to extract information and write knowledge, but instead, for those foregrounding complicity, tensions and the collaborative nature of fieldwork. Likewise, our experiment also echoed recent discussions of epistemic juxtaposition, rendering situations comparable through partial connections: constructed from elements that are not confined to a single geographical setting to use difference and estrangement as modes of analysis (Strathern 1991; Pál 2013). Thus, in our piece, we collect together rich descriptions of places we have been, combining them with narratives that rely on the teaching of others. We embark on imagined journeys with others telling their stories, and weave the auto-ethnographic with the voices of interlocutors. Maritza, for instance, offering rich analysis, Eila pushing the dialogue in substantial ways.

⁸ Itself inspired by Koki Tanaka’s series (2013) of performance events called ‘Collective Acts’ (e.g. A Pottery Produced by Five Potters at Once, A Poem Written by Five Poets at Once, A Piano Played by Five Pianists at Once, or A haircut by nine hairdressers at once) foregrounds the importance of sharing experiences. See Harkness, R. (2017). ‘A Collective Act: An Ethnography Made by Five Ethnographers at Once’, Open format proposal for the 1st Colleex workshop in Lisbon. Taken from <https://colleex.wordpress.com/2017/06/30/1st-colleex-workshop-programme-andabstracts/>

Furthermore, across the differences of our contributions we see partial connections, including: observations on the expansiveness or proliferating nature of correspondence (Rachel and Eeva's pieces); the way in which remoteness (as a label but also a condition) is connected to the socio-economic tides of de-industrialisation, depopulation and marginality across places (Francisco, Rachel and Marjorie's pieces); the power and breadth of popular metaphors for remoteness such as the idea of satellite orbit (David, Rachel and Marjorie); the notion that remoteness is something that is felt, perceived and embodied (Rachel, Francisco, Marjorie); that remoteness can be fruitfully considered through the prism of touch or the haptic (Rachel and Marjorie); the idea of the refuge and safety of the remote (Eeva, Marjorie and Francisco); and the insistence that we (as anthropologists) consider ways of living that are far from the hegemonic narrative and perhaps even flourish there (David, Rachel, Eeva, Marjorie, Francisco).

In our somewhat kaleidoscopic picture of remoteness, we can see that it might refer to a felt, (non-essential) condition of the self (see Rachel), to a special relation with a beyond (see David), to a place and individuals subject to extra-local processes (see Marjorie), to temporal marginality, political neglect and the leftovers of the modern project (see Francisco), and, finally, to the economically struggling national peripheries where life is felt as good (see Eeva). Not definitions, these are glimpses of how remoteness can be understood. There are some more commonalities too: as writers we all use the image (visual or textual) to conjure senses of places at once close and yet still far away; many of our pieces speak to the relationship between remoteness and the idea of perspective (or vantage point); and there's a strong drive, explicit in how the island of Eigg is held up as place from which others (even from the capital) can learn, to disrupt fixed centres of authority. This relativising is implicit throughout the pieces, countering what Peter Schweitzer and Olga Povoroznyuk (2019) call the modernist paradigm of 'bringing civilization to the peripheries'.

Interestingly, our different pieces also refer to diverse centripetal forces colliding, like multiple satellite orbits, with similar metaphors that emerged "naturally" previous to reading each other. Remoteness also expands to attachment and moral values as in the "right to remoteness" (ibid), the impossibility to afford it, and in some cases unbearable remoteness and/or the refuge of it (as in the double case of Maritza, and to a lesser extent, Rachel, as she considers her self-isolation).

In our article, the word correspondence in the overall piece is not trivial. And yet, not all of us had something like a 'real correspondence'. Whether Rachel's autoethnographic and creative writing piece is 'real' because it is a letter is playfully debateable. With Eila and Eeva we catch elements of their dialogue which seem a correspondence, with its crucial back-and-forth-ness. With Maritza and Marjorie's relationship, Marjorie would say that in many ways there was a "fluent, yet many times uncomfortable non-correspondence", as she heard and accompanied Maritza through last year from the comfort of her own house, located just a 20 minutes-drive from Maritza. So the fluid horizontality of Eeva and Eila's relationship cannot be compared with this correspondence, it seems: correspondence as symmetry was only glimpsed here, the relationship developing shyly, with women sharing details of their own experience through COVID in their unjust, unequal society.

Marjorie and Eeva invoke questions about gender (and the importance still of Virginia Woolf's call for "a room of one's own" [1929]) in their noting that remoteness can also be

approached as an answer and not just as a question—as a refuge, for Maritza, and as a right, for Eila, pulling both women towards new survival strategies. The study of something as elusive as remoteness also means that some of our questions point in different directions. Rachel suggests that the journey could become a part of the learning, and Francisco observes that remoteness is felt in a landscape of displacement that is now forming strange materialities between nature and culture.

Perhaps it is only right that our many-hands ethnography is rather promiscuous or loose, and that it has that generative quality of the correspondences we considered in the course of this work-together. A promiscuous ethnography refers to a hold on authority that is more loose than we are used to in single-authored pieces; we found that a many-handed ethnography doesn't work if those involved are all holding the work tightly to themselves. There has to be a giving and taking here, a passing of the work between us and a collective care of it that remains open and generous. In a similar manner, eventually, one loses something while going remote, yet this giving-up makes room for the gaining of something else along the way. Both highlight the relevance of being open to the unknown.

We propose to think about anthropological knowledge less as an extractive endeavour, whereby the ethnographer goes to a place, returns to the academy and reports on a 'culture', and more as a form of curation whereby we bring ethnographic vignettes, theory and readers into relation. In this vein, David questions if going to a specific singular place is the best way to think through modes of social life, and rather asks about how we make relationships proximate or keep them remote. The field thus appears to us as a place that is less geographical, and more about curating our understanding of difference. As we show, this can be found in multiple places and thought about via bringing different social worlds (that are remote from each other) into relation in our ethnographic practice.

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