Humorous Audio-Visual Lockdown Works

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Abstract

This article is dedicated to *humorous audio-visual lockdown works*—that is, to short video clips with humorous content that were produced and circulated during the first Corona lockdown in spring 2020. The exploration of the video clips takes place within an autoethnographic approach. It will be examined what kind of humor was included in the videos I received in my WhatsApp bubble.
By a rough division of recurring motifs, two exemplary analyses, and research results on humor from clinical psychology, I will describe the humor as *complex coping humor*. A further question relates to the functions the humorous audio-visual lockdown works were equipped with within the communication space of which I, myself, was a part of. Roger Odin's semio-pragmatic approach serves as a starting point for first reflections on the functions which the audio-visual lockdown works were able to deploy. Against the background of Odin's concept of reading modes and communication operators, the humorous audio-visual lockdown works will be conceptualized as *relational experience operators*. By utilizing social psychological approaches to the study of humor, the videos will furthermore be conceptualized as *stress-buffer operators*. The videos were used to unleash the communicative energy necessary for the production of a relational affirmation of a shared present, for mutual relief, and for a collective buffer against stress. Finally, I discuss that the humorous audio-visual lockdown works document the positive power of humor, community building, and care and, at the same time, reference a life that is characterized by specific privileges.

Keywords

Юмористический аудиовизуальный контент периода локдауна

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Аннотация

Эта статья посвящена юмористическим аудиовизуальным работам, а именно коротким видеоклипам с юмористическим содержанием, которые были созданы и распространены во время первого локдауна, связанного с коронавирусной инфекцией, весной 2020 года. Изучение видеоклипов происходит в рамках автоэтнографического подхода. Будет рассмотрено, какой именно юмор содержался в тех видео, которые я получил в моем WhatsApp. При помощи приблизительной группировки повторяющихся мотивов, двух образцовых анализов и результатов исследований юмора из области клинической психологии я буду описывать этот юмор как *многоцелевой юмор преодоления трудностей* (*complex coping humor*). Еще один вопрос относится к функциям, которыми юмористические аудиовизуальные работы времени локдауна наделялись в коммуникационном пространстве, частью которого был я сам. Семио-прагматический подход Роджера Одина служит отправной точкой для первых размышлений о функциях, которые удалось реализовать с помощью упомянутых работ. На фоне концепции Одина о режимах чтения и операторах связи юмористические аудиовизуальные работы времени локдауна будут концептуализированы как *операторы опыта поддержания связей* (*relational experience operators*). С использованием социально-психологических подходов к изучению юмора видеоролики будут концептуализированы как операторы стресс-буфера (*stress-buffer operators*). Видео использовались, чтобы высвободить коммуникативную энергию, необходимую для создания взаимного принятия разделяемого настоящего, для общего облегчения и для коллективной защиты от стресса. Наконец, я обсуждаю то, что подобные юмористические аудиовизуальные работы документально подтверждают позитивную силу юмора, построение сообщества, заботу, и в то же время относятся к жизни, которая характеризуется особыми привилегиями.

Ключевые слова

Introduction

In June 2020, Francesco Casetti linked the reception of films in the first Corona lockdown— which took place between March to May in about 100 countries in spring of that same year—with his theory of *relocation.* He wrote of a "panfilmic existence" which unfolds because "[m]ovies reach us where we are, and our lives move onto the screen" (Jacobs & Casetti, 2020). Due to the spread of social media in general (Schroeder, 2016) the evolution towards a panfilmic existence was already in process before the COVID-19 pandemic and the first lockdown. However, the need to keep social distance and the restrictions on public life worked to accelerate that process. The fact that much of the world's population had to *relocate* substantial aspects of their lives to screen-based media was a crucial factor in this acceleration (Parks & Walker, 2020; Denson, 2020).

What Casetti draws our attention to is that there is a connection between our individual handling with media texts at the time of lockdown and the characteristics of the unfolding panfilmic existence. Following Casetti's lead, I started to wonder about my individual experiences with media texts during the lockdown and about how and what kind of aspects of my life moved "onto the screen".

Apart from an increase in the number of movies and series that I received through VOD platforms and the necessity of holding job-related and private meetings via video-call, it was the many humorous short video clips sent to me and forwarded by me via WhatsApp that proved to be personally significant during the first lockdown. These short videos made me laugh despite all the worries and uncertainties and made me want to circulate them. I call these videos *humorous audio-visual lockdown works*. They were also accompanied by humorous memes addressing the pandemic.

Not part of my, so to speak, "private" digital bubble during the lockdown—but brought to my attention by my professional interest in media texts—were videos and pictures of people clapping for healthcare workers and other (staged) signs of solidarity that circulated through social media. In addition, there were fictional miniseries addressing the lockdown situation, produced via video platforms and designed for circulation via Instagram. Also beyond my "private" digital bubble were videos that denied the reality of the pandemic or stigmatized those said to be responsible for its spread. Furthermore, there were conspiracy videos, memes, and pictures circulated by "risk-takers" (Ölcer, Yilmaz-Aslan & Brzoska, 2020; Cummins, 2020), as well as those works published by video activists to draw attention to existing social inequality in the treatment of Corona victims and to highlight what they regarded as faulty crisis management. All of the aforementioned videos, memes, and pictures that circulated during the lockdown—as well as many others I have not seen and therefore have not listed here—are part of what has been described as "pandemic media." With this term, the editors of the book of the same name found an umbrella concept for all "media forms and formats, content and

narratives, exhibition and distribution, locations and settings, practices and uses, as well as analogies and metaphors that have made the invisible virus and its consequences perceptible" (Keidl & Melamed, 2020).

The numerous (audio-)visual lockdown works designate the Corona pandemic as a "heavily mediated event" (Keidl & Melamed, 2020) and document a surge of (*audio-*)*visual crisis creativity*. The production of (audio-)visual works during a crisis is, of course, not a new phenomenon. Nor is it surprising that a crisis should stimulate media text creators to respond in creative ways to such unique circumstances. Olga Kourelou, Mariana Liz, and Belén Vidal (2014), for example, have explored the creative responses to the Eurozone crisis by European cinema in Portugal, Greece, and Spain. Despite an almost complete collapse of state film funding and the closure of many cinemas, a new form of art-house filmmaking emerged which addressed the crisis. Under the name *The Greek New Wave*, Greek art-house productions found their audience through social networks, VOD platforms, and festivals, attracted attention through film prizes and promoted the internationalization of the Greek national cinema culture (Kourelou, Liz & Vidal, 2014). Such (audio-)visual crisis creativity almost always involves not only serious but also uplifting or humorous responses to a particular crisis. In the case of COVID-19 however, what might be unique is the rapidity of the humorous response and its global scale.

According to a current paper (Mustafa, Ansari, Mohanta & Balla, 2020) humor, although not the dominant form of public response to the pandemic, was a very noticeable trend, for example on Twitter. Moreover, in an analysis of TikTok videos that circulated under the hashtag #Corona, it was found that besides (supposedly) enlightening, informative, documentary and racist stigmatizing videos there were humorous videos among the 100 most popular clips (Ackermann, Dewitz & Makulik, 2020). In this context, we can consult further papers offering in-depth analyses of humorous memes from Pakistan (Khan, Ali, Hussain & Noreen, 2020) and Kenya (Oduor & Kodak, 2020), articles on Corona cartooning by Nigerian cartoonists (Raj & Ahembe, 2020), and an exploration of COVID-19 mask memes (Dynel, 2020). We can read an article on Corona and humor by Mette Møller (2020), addressing memes and cartoons, as well as a paper by Oluchi Gloria Ogbu (2020) on TikTok videos from Sarah Cooper and Maria DeCotis. The existing studies from different research areas such as population science, linguistics, sociolinguistic, anthropology, and media studies, support my impression that the pandemic was accompanied by a high proportion of humorous media texts. Perhaps the Corona pandemic will go down in history as the first crisis that was accompanied on a global scale by humorous communication. But it will take many more studies from various disciplines to confirm or disprove this impression and to develop generalizing statements of the role of humor in the Corona crisis.

Aim of the article, research questions and method

As a contribution to the development of generalizing statements, the current article offers an exploration of the *humorous audio-visual lockdown works* within an autoethnographic approach loosely inspired by Annette Markham and Anne Harris (2020). With their "21-day autoethnography challenge" Markham and Harris have developed an innovative approach to a research-based collaborative handling of the Corona crisis. The research questions are (1) *What kind of humor was included in the videos I received?* and (2) *What functions were the humorous audio-visual lockdown works equipped with?* The idea is that by describing the humor that was included in the videos I received and the functions the videos have fulfilled for me and my communicative counterparts, an answer can be reached to the question implied at the very beginning, namely: *What kind of aspects of my life have moved onto the screen with the emergence of these humorous audio-visual lockdown works?*

To answer the questions set, the following section will address the nature of the humor deployed in the videos. I will present six recurring motifs. The complex structure of humor will become apparent and I will introduce "complex coping humor" as a generic term. By describing the characteristics of the communication space, of which I, myself, was a part of, I will be able to elaborate the functions of the humorous audio-visual lockdown works. I will conceptualize them as *relational experience operators* and *stress-buffer operators*. Roger Odin's semio-pragmatic approach will serve as a launching pad, while social psychological approaches to the study of humor and results on humor from clinical research will be central to the theoretical work presented here. By linking back to Casetti in the concluding part of this article, I hope to show that the life that moved onto the screen with the humorous audio-visual lockdown works was not only a life solely concerned with mutual support but also one of structural privilege and exclusion.[1]

Nature of the humor deployed in the audio-visual lockdown works I received

The videos I received during the lockdown were formatted in many ways: they included music clips, played jokes, TikTok clips, short fictional works, ironic mash-ups from news broadcasts or from other preexisting films, television footage, or YouTube content situated within the context of Corona by a diversity of means (for instance, by adding subtitles or voice-overs). This body of material included not only newly created pieces but also material that was "retrofitted" (Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013, p. 6) to suit the new situation. I was able to identify six recurring motifs. The following photos represent videos that exemplify the six motifs.[2]

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1   Please note that I will cite non-English language sources in my own translation.
2   I have refrained from stating the source with regard to the senders due to data protection considerations. The original producers of the videos could not be identified for this article.

Recurring motifs in the humorous audio-visual lockdown works

1. The new value of toilet paper

In these videos the phenomenon of toilet paper being "sold out" during the lockdown is addressed. Toilet paper, in these media creations, becomes a treasure that is fought over, defended, hoarded, or transformed into a form of currency that can be used to pay for other commodities. In the chosen video the precious object is shown locked up in a safe (figure 1).

Figure 1. This precious good comes under lock and key

2. Wearing masks

These videos address the variety of uses to which a mask can be put, or present masks that have been fine tuned to work in various ways (while eating, for

example). In one of the clips, a man concludes that his beard is better suited to function as a mask than the one normally recommended (figure 2).

Figure 2. Instead of a mask, the beard should protect against infection

3. Predictions on the physical and emotional consequences of the lockdown

In these audio-visual works, predictions are made about how the lockdown will affect both the physique and the psyche. States of physical decay, unbearable boredom, and madness are described but also predictions of the moment of liberation from the virus. The before-and-after images predict that the lockdown will effect a marked physical change (figures 3a and 3b).

**Figure 3a and 3b. A before-and-after confrontation predicts
a strong physical change caused by the lockdown**

4. Social distancing and hygiene rules

These videos show how the principle of social distancing can be achieved and demonstrate measures for implementing the new hygiene rules. All kinds of objects and actions are used to keep the distance of 1.5 meters between people. An example of the latter is provided by a video in which the 1.5-meter distance recommendation is realized in a hairdressing salon by "washing" the hair from a distance. Water is poured over the customer. As a result, not only the customer's hair but the client herself ends up getting a soaking (figure 4). Hygiene rules are addressed by people and (animated) animals alike, demonstrating, among other things, how one should properly wash one's hands.
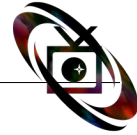
Figure 4. Hair washing at the hairdresser in the times of Corona

5. Parodies on politicians and their comments on the pandemic

Besides a few (TikTok) Trump parodies, my WhatsApp bubble featured a TikTok parody on the German chancellor, Angela Merkel (figure 5), making fun of the Corona recommendations of political figures. The few videos in this category I have received represent only a minuscule proportion of TikTok videos produced for example by Cooper (https://www.tiktok.com/@whatchugotforme?lang=de), DeCotis (https://twitter.com/MariaDeCotis/status/1328831751536455680), and Dave Jorgenson (https://www.tiktok.com/@washingtonpost?lang=de). Ogbu has

offered an insightful analysis of the videos by Cooper and DeCotis. Ogbu's analysis shows how both actors and comedians use their bodies, voices, and props to lip-synch Donald Trump and Governor Andrew Cuomo, thus producing videos rich in context. Their "pandemic-related comedies" (Ogbu, 2020, p. 82) are not only entertaining but also express, by implication, the producers' political views.

**Figure 5. A TikTok video in which a woman lip-synchs
Angela Merkel who is speaking about the Corona virus**

6. Comparisons between countries in how they deal with the pandemic

The Italians party on the balcony and the Poles use alcohol to internally disinfect themselves. The Germans, on the other hand, do not tolerate public singing as a sign of solidarity. In these videos, the country-specific handling of Corona is negotiated against the background of existing national stereotypes. Figure 6 illustrates a video that stages a comparison between Germany and Italy, framed in terms of a major competition.

Figure 6. The title of the video and the added emoji indicate that a humorous comparison between Germany and Italy in their handling of the Corona pandemic will be shown

The above observation of six recurring motifs is partly in agreement with that of Møller (2020). In her article on Corona and humor she develops a general overview of COVID-19 jokes primarily with regard to memes and cartoons. Møller identifies wordplay, Corona beer, mask-wearing, and the hoarding of toilet paper as motifs associated with humorous Corona media texts. Some agreement can also be found with regard to the analysis of popular TikTok videos conducted by Judith Ackermann, Leyla Dewitz, and Alexandra Makulik (2020). Among the clips they studied, there were videos that take a humorous approach to the crisis with the help of Corona beer, videos with humorous depictions of measures to comply with hygiene rules, and various humorous presentations of unusual masks (Ackermann, Dewitz & Makulik 2020, p. 21, p. 23).

Similarities with the research results of Lubna Akhlaq Khan, Ghulam Ali, Aadila Hussain, and Khadija Noreen (2020) can also be found: The authors have studied memes addressing the pandemic that circulated in Pakistan and have proposed thirteen categories (Khan et al., 2020, pp. 98–106). The most frequent memes are those addressing gender. In these videos, for example, women are depicted forcing their men to do housework. In the next most frequent category

we find memes addressing the supposed lack of seriousness with which indigenous people undertake precautionary measures and lockdown compliance (p. 98). In other categories we see food made to represent masks and biscuits that look like the virus (p. 99). There are memes on online classes and political figures, political satire, and posts that "make fun of the police department's physical punishment for those who violate the lockdown stay at home policy" (p. 102). The authors found a number of memes speculating that the lockdown might trigger a baby boom. Others deal with the shopping behavior of people. In what are described as self-depreciating memes (pp. 103–104), depreciating comparisons between countries are made with regard to their handling of the virus, among other things. Finally, there are memes about overeating and getting fat during the lockdown, memes about China, about ethnic slurs, and about news channels. The authors conclude that this humorous repertoire has revealed the "cultural grammar" (p. 107) of the Pakistani people, inclusive of the "real-life situations and concerns and doubts and belief systems of the current social media users" (p. 98).

Resonance of horizontal and vertical humor

If one wants to do a film analysis of the videos in terms of their humorous structure there is no shortage of literature to consult. Dirk Eitzen (2012) has evaluated this literature and found that, in general, it takes one of two approaches to the analysis of humor in film. On the one hand, there is research that explains filmic humor by focusing on stories and characters. This research is largely based on a sociological approach. Eitzen (2012, p. 3) characterizes such film analysis as contextual. Humor in movies originates in depicted stories and situations (p. 5) in which social transgressions accrue (p. 4). "Humor is supposed to exist to relieve the stresses of social life" (p. 5) and the social order (p. 4). According to Eitzen, this approach emphasizes the horizontal dimension of comedy (p. 3).

On the other hand, there is a strand of film studies research focusing on jokes and gags (p. 3). This analysis contends that certain types of humor cannot be explained only contextually but must be accompanied by a conceptual supplement based on psychological theories (p. 3). It argues that some jokes and gags are independent of social transgression and are, nonetheless, perceived as funny (p. 4). The comic effect is created by incongruity in a scene or in a picture: elements that do not fit together or are contradictory or juxtaposed within the same scene (p. 4). This kind of humor is about playing with different interpretations. Humor "is supposed to exist to reward conceptual play" (p. 5) and often stems "from playful performance" (p. 5). According to Eitzen, such analysis addresses the vertical dimension of comedy (p. 3).

Eitzen emphasizes that finding an integrative approach is not easy because we are dealing with different kinds of humor: "Humor might involve two or more response systems in the brain, with different evolutionary origins and discrete social and cognitive functions" (p. 8). Eitzen's remarks, however, make it clear that

an integrative approach is necessary not in spite of but because of the "two discrete humour systems" (p. 12). Media texts are perceived as funny precisely when both humor systems are simultaneously deployed and resonate with each other (p. 15).

Even a very rough analysis of the audio-visual lockdown works reveals that, despite their short duration, these works are characterized by a resonance of horizontal and vertical humor. Two examples must suffice to make this clear: The first video, which has a length of just thirteen seconds, addresses the hoarding of toilet paper as a moment of collective transgression of social norms during the lockdown (figure 7). An alienation effect is woven into the situation in which the incongruity of the size of the toilet roll in relation to the normally proportioned toilet contradicts our expectation of spatial and object proportionality. This resonance of the two types of humor is reinforced at the auditory level. An audible laugh from two people binds the two types of humor together and acts as a cue to promote a humorous reading of the video.

**Figure 7. The recording of a huge roll of toilet paper,
next to a normally proportioned toilet, is accompanied by laughter on the auditory level**

The second video, thirty seconds long, shows an old man dancing with sticks in his hands (figure 8). Around him couples dance standard steps. To a swelling disco beat, the old man throws his sticks on the floor and starts to dance wildly, tousling his hair and turning himself around. Above the picture, the text "2045… Ausgangssperre endlich aufgehoben" ("2045… lockdown finally lifted") was placed. The video can be read as a reaction to the Corona coverage in which there was a constant discussion about the extent and duration of the pandemic. The video picks up on *premediating* Corona reporting—a reporting that did not leave it at simple predictions but premediated possible future scenarios of the pandemic with those formal features "almost indistinguishable from the way the future will be mediated when it happens" (Grusin, 2004, p. 29). Here too, the uncut scene exploits a notion of social transgression in which an old man—who has presumably aged in the decades of lockdown—is expected to dance in a way appropriate to his age but falls out of the implicit norm conditioned on the setting and "goes off" like a young person on the dance floor. The humor arises from the incongruity of the combination of physical infirmity, agility, and playful performance.

Figure 8. After 25 years in lockdown, a now old man celebrates the end of the cur-few

Complex coping humor

In response to the first research question raised, I would like to conclude that, despite their short length, the humorous audio-visual works show a great complexity, characterized by a variety of formats and motifs and the inextricable

interweaving of horizontal and vertical humor. Stories of transgression of social norms are told, reflecting how the exceptional situation of the lockdown destabilized social routines and value relations. The videos react to the media coverage, to the political discourse, and to national differences in dealing with the crisis. At the same time, the videos rely heavily on incongruence. This is not only because this kind of humor, circulating across social networks, allows for a quick grasp but also because it opens up a playful space of possibility for different interpretations of the crisis situation.

As a generic term, I would like to suggest the phrase "complex coping humor". As studies from clinical psychology show, "coping humor" (Martin & Ford, 2018, p. 290, p. 298, pp. 304–305) is characterized by the fact that it is not used in everyday situations but addresses a particularly stressful situation in a very concrete way. Coping humor usually arises simultaneously with the stressful event or at most shortly after. Such humor not only aims to improve the mood of the communicative counterpart in the sense of cheering them up but is also designed to ensure one's own well-being (pp. 304–306).

Humorous audio-visual lockdown works as relational experience and stress-buffer operators

Before the lockdown, I didn't use to share short videos very often. During the first lockdown, however, I did so almost daily. For the first time in my life, I became a very engaged "grassroots intermediar[y]" (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013, p. 11) or a "grassroots agent" (p. 15) choosing to forward videos to friends, family members, and colleagues. The same applied to my communicative counterparts: before the pandemic, they sent me videos very rarely, too, but during the first lockdown they sent them almost daily. In agreement with Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, I do not want to describe the situation as a moment in which people could be characterized as "going viral" (Parks & Walker, 2020). We are rather dealing with a period in which people who normally are not intensive users of social media and messenger services became active spreaders of media texts (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013).

To answer the second research question raised, I refer to Odin's semio-pragmatic approach. The characteristics of communication spaces are central to his approach and Odin's concept of reading modes and the concept of the communication operators seem to be very useful for developing hypotheses about the functions to which the humorous audio-visual lockdown works were attributed in my digital bubble.

The reading modes—of which there are several—regulate communication spaces. They represent complex processes in which different activities must come together. The reading modes are approaches that the creators of media texts can suggest and the recipients can apply to a media text. In the fictionalizing mode for example the recipient constructs a world (a diegesis) and resonates to the rhythm

"of fictively recounted events" (Odin, 2008, p. 255). As origin of the utterance the recipient constructs a fictive enunciator, "which means that the spectator knowingly accepts the particular status of fiction and its mode of address" (Kessler, 2017, p. 127). In the private reading mode a group will read a film or a video as a return to a shared past. On an affective level, it is a matter of a sense of belonging to a community. Furthermore, a real collective enunciator is constituted. Odin describes the private mode on the basis of the family and the communication space of the family memory. The family uses home movies, for example, as a way of returning to the family members' shared past (Odin, 2019, pp. 114–118). The content of the home movies is not so important; they often appear highly standardized anyway. More important is that the images of the home movies function "as *index* inviting the family to *return to a past already lived*" (Gracy, 2017, p. 106).

Odin describes the communication operators as what is used by the creators of media texts and the recipients "in a given space, given the chosen relevance criteria, to enable communication" (2019, p. 118). He explains the communication operators using the example of the family and the communication space of family memory. Within the family, a family film or a photograph can function as a memory operator because it is consciously produced to stimulate intrafamily communication about the family past (Odin, 2019, p. 119). In this context, Odin (2019, p. 122) also uses the term relationality to emphasize the community-building function of the operators.

My hypothesis is that in the communication space of my "spreader" lockdown community the humorous audio-visual lockdown works were primarily read in a sort of merged reading mode, bringing together elements of the fictionalizing reading mode as well as elements of the private reading mode, and that they functioned as *relational experience operators*: the audio-visual lockdown works came along in an impressive abundance of forms, but due to their production for social media and messenger services they are quite standardized for quick sharing, e.g. in terms of length, small file size, and quick comprehensibility of the comic content. Jenkins, Ford, and Green call this "easy-to-share formats" (2013, p. 6). The audio-visual lockdown works triggered intense affects and, above all, a sense of belonging to a community, but I assume that a fictive enunciator was constructed. They stimulated us who were isolated by the lockdown to communicate with each other about the lockdown experience by commenting, linking, and forwarding, thus establishing a relationship in which a sense of community and a shared experience were collectively created. The conditions in the communication space of my lockdown community, with its explicitly connecting dispositive, thus resembled the communication space of family memory. As Odin puts it, using the example of a home movie, a lot of *communicative energy* is expended "to [jointly] produce the meaning of the film (the family myth)" (2019, p. 193, see also p. 194). The difference, however, is that in my communication space we did not return to a *shared past* but rather constituted a *shared present*.

I have found support for this hypothesis in Møller's (2020) article. She argues that "humor connects us to the present" and "forms a community; when we laugh at the same thing, we affirm each other in a shared experience of a situation." Furthermore, one can find diverse studies in social psychology confirming that, among groups, humor produces and maintains a sense of solidarity and closeness (Martin & Ford 2018, p. 265). With reference to a group of studies sharing a social psychological approach Rod A. Martin and Thomas E. Ford explain that "humour transforms *individual* experience into collective or *shared* group experiences" (2013, p. 265).

In addition to their function in affirming a shared present, the humorous audio-visual lockdown works can be seen as an interpersonal "coping mechanism" (Martin & Ford, 2018, 305; Zahoor, 2020, 16; Oduor & Kodak, 2020, p. 2). According to Asma Zahoor (2020) and Møller (2020), one could argue that the humorous audio-visual lockdown works functioned as *relief operators*. Referring to the relief theories originating in the work of Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud, Zahoor and Møller describe how Corona humor functions as a release valve or outlet for nervous energy. Relief theories, as formulated in the second half of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, are at least partly outdated but still represent an important basis for contemporary research on humor, well-being, and the consequences on the psyche of stressful events (Møller, 2020; Martin & Ford, 2018, pp. 36–46). Martin and Ford (2018, p. 285) name a number of studies from clinical psychology that have shown that comedy videos, for example, induce positive emotions, cheerfulness, and hopefulness. "Exposure to humorous stimuli can *diminish* the experience of *negative emotions.*" (p. 285). In experimental settings it was shown that comedy reduces depression (p. 285) and inhibits negative thoughts (p. 287). Congruent with this general positive effect of comedy material on the well-being of people, there is evidence that, especially in stressful situations, humor is an "effective coping skill" (p. 295), helping to "elicit… positive emotions that counteract negative feelings that stressful events otherwise elicit" (p. 297). Exposure to humorous videos offers a "positive lens" (p. 297) though which the stressful event is reframed (p. 295) opening it up for a "more light-hearted" (p. 299) interpretation. One is able, to a certain extent, to distance oneself from the situation (p. 299), and because of this, the situation loses some or all of its horror (p. 295).

With reference to the studies in clinical psychology evaluated by Martin and Ford, I do not want to contradict the conception of Corona humor as "relief therapy" (Zahoor, 2020, p. 16) but would seek to supplement it by offering a somewhat broader concept: I argue that the humorous audio-visual lockdown works functioned as *stress-buffer operators*. As described by contemporary relief theories, they can lead to the release of nervous energy and enable new perspectives, allowing for a more detached attitude and contributing to the production of positive emotions. I argue that in addition to eruptive mechanisms of relief, it was precisely the constant circulation of humorous audio-visual lockdown works, that is to say,

our establishment of a flow of humorous communication that enabled a gradual reframing of the situation and provided a general reduction of the stress level in the longer term.

With regard to Odin's example of the home movie, whose meaning—the family myth—is produced jointly by the family members under expenditure of a lot of communicative energy, I posit that *the humorous audio-visual lockdown works in my communication space released a lot of communicative energy. The humorous audio-visual lockdown works were used for the relational affirmation of a shared present, for the joint provision of relief and as stress buffers. Therein lays their meaning.*

This is in line with the conclusions that Ackermann, Drewitz, and Makulik (2020, p. 19, p. 25) formulated on TikTok videos in general: online networks acted as media for building resilience during the COVID-19 crisis. According to the authors, the videos opened up spaces of interaction, of revaluation of the situation, and of coping.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to return to the starting point of my considerations, namely, Casetti's link between the reception of films in the first Corona lockdown, his theory of relocation, and his reference to the panfilmic existence. Through the analysis of my personal WhatsApp communication space of which I was a part during the first lockdown, I was able to work out that it was mainly humorous audio-visual lockdown works that reached me. As further work on COVID-19 and humor shows, this was not a singular but a widespread phenomenon. Against the background of a surge of audio-visual crisis creativity, I was a part of the circulation of complex coping humor. Together with my communicative counterparts I used the videos to affirm a shared present, provide each other with relief, and buffer our stress levels.

As Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013, p. 13) have emphasized, when we "choose to spread any media text" this moment is based on "series of socially embedded decisions" we have to make. I argue that in the communication space described, my contribution to a panfilmic existence was, due to my social embeddedness, characterized on the one hand by the positive power of humor, of community building, and care and, on the other, by a specific form of life which moved onto the screen, namely, a life of privilege.

As studies on vulnerability have shown, crises are experienced differently by different groups depending on their biophysical, social, and economic conditions; in broad terms, those who live in a state of inequality before a crisis fare worse (Zaman, 2020, pp. 163–164; Weare, 2020, pp. 143–144). This also applies to the Corona crisis. Neta Alexander (2020) has pointed to the fact that "limited access to high-speed internet; lack of digital literacy; and inability to pay for data packages or premium services, to name but a few examples" have led to the COVID-

19 restrictions being perceived in a more negative light by those who are not on the credit side of the digital divide. The chance to relocate substantial parts of life using screen-based media is limited to specific living and working contexts. Juan Llamas-Rodriguez (2020) also draws attention to the need to admit that "there are at least two worlds suffering the pandemic, producing a social and interpersonal rift—a rift the pandemic only further exacerbates". This is exactly what Lisa Parks and Janet Walker (2020) are aiming at with their "disaster media" heuristic: the investigation of the Corona crisis is about structures of inequality that were not created by the Corona pandemic but are "ongoing disasters in and of themselves" that only come to light through the Corona lens, as if through a burning glass.

With access to digital tools, a home in which I found shelter, and the financial security to withstand the threats posed by the pandemic, there was enough time and possibilities in my communication space for a constant flow of humor. In relation to another crisis, comedian Jon Stewart once pointed out that comedy is a luxury that not everyone can afford (Harris, 2020, p. 73). My lockdown community, unlike other communicative constellations, was one of relative luxury based on structural inequalities and power imbalances. As Lynn Harris (2020) puts it "comedy [as] balm excludes many in crisis or on the margins. It's funny until someone loses … everything." (p. 74). In the further investigation of the humorous lockdown or COVID-19 phenomena, this aspect, in particular, should be examined in greater depth.

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