

Doing nothing: Anthropology sits at the same table with contemporary art in Lisbon and Tbilisi

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Abstract

In this article, doing nothing is presented as both an artistic output and a mode of research, which helps to enhance the effect of an embodied presence, re-embed ourselves into a setting, and allow a sense of slow time that seems to be missing from our everyday life. Here anthropology and contemporary art merge in a form of ethnographic installation by sitting in semi-public spaces of Lisbon and Tbilisi for 35 hours without any laptop or mobile phone. Through the repeated effort of doing nothing, the author reminds us that observation is a tiring physical experience and shows how different roles in the field activate the ethnographic material differently. Doing nothing appears thus as a form of intervention, a slow time being in front of others, which enables a break of consciousness, suspends politics of relevance, and leaves space for serendipity and embodied imagination.

KEYWORDS: Ethnographic Installation, Art and anthropology, Urban ethnography, Experimental methods, Conceptual fieldwork, Performative site noting, Pessoaan anthropology.

Introduction

Doing nothing is here used as part of an experiment in order to enable a break from consciousness and create a state of suspension and indeterminacy out of which new forms of ethnographic knowledge may arise. Hence it is not about knowing more, but knowing differently (Stengers 2005; Strohm 2012; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2015). In my ethnographic

installation, I sat for seven hours a day for five days in a row of a café of Lisbon and of Tbilisi without a laptop or phone. This strategy was designed to capture moments of being that escape theorization as well as to reflect on the very process of capture. In that sense, the experiment addresses a specific setting and it is reshaped by that specificity, which gives another layer of meaning, as a reflection on the processualness of fieldwork.

The experiment of doing nothing troubles the usual relationship between (ethnographic) site notes and (anthropological) arguments. The field notes taken during the experiment are not meant to be considered as a thick description to be used later for building an ethnographic argument; instead, this experimental exercise of taking field notes is proposed as a useful phase and a complementary mode of research that produces dialogic embodied knowledge (Collins and Gallinat 2013; Hartblay 2017). One of the paradoxes constructed by this article is therefore that site notes are not being used as evidence of whatsoever: neither is there a conclusive argument done through them, nor do they represent the places they refer to, nor they account of the impact of digital culture in everyday life. By doing nothing, I do not simply illustrate a supposed Portuguese or Georgian character or address the cultural geography of the cities, neither I do compare them through field descriptions. Furthermore, doing nothing is not participant observation; neither collaboration between art and ethnography (Foster 1995; Sansi 2015), nor relational aesthetics (Bourriaud 2002).

Instead, the proposed ethnographic installation is a performance of fieldwork, set up to reflect on how it is done and what it does, and the myriad of roles it can generate. Specifically, doing nothing is a strategy beyond action that implies a lack of ultimate purpose, reflexivity and public performance. The exercise helps to bring the impress of inactivity into anthropological studies (O'Neill 2017); to interact with our surroundings in a different pace, and to understand the way the research process itself is cultural performance (Hartblay 2017). The research follows on contemporary epistemic debates which describe methods as being performative – they are said to ‘alive’ (Back and Puwar 2012), ‘inventive’ (Lury and Wakeford 2012), and laboratory-like (Macdonald and Basu 2007), producing knowledge through the creation of phenomena.

Pessoan Anthropology

Doing nothing answers to the increasing digitally-mediated nature of social life by forcing

a slowing down of thought and action. The localizing strategy appears thus as *para-digital*, in the sense of functioning alongside, forward, through and besides digitality, rather than against or after it. The research draws on the assumption that there is a cost to be paid for communicating more intensively and to multiple audiences, hence a different slow attention is proposed to foster a wider sense of possibilities for broadening and diversifying ethnographic knowledge, open to unexpected encounters, juxtapositions and research questions to be followed (Greverus 2002a). Also it assumes that the here and now of everyday interactions requires rather eclectic methods, as this object of study is inherently vague, without any clear boundaries.

So I decided to set up my own ethnographic installation in order to be present differently and weave fragmented observations through a game of proximity and repetition (Macdonald 2011). Aware of the effects of social acceleration and assuming that digital media influence our being in front of others and within the world, by doing nothing I tried to dwell in a slowed para-technological time that might help to understand what is lost in the process of digitalization and which phenomena resist a binary datafication and representation, considering not that digital technologies might be a problem (in the sense of deliberately practicing a sort of analogue anthropology), but that the attentiveness to computing correlates to inattentiveness to everyday nuances (Rapport 2003).

In the last years, there have been heated discussions about the influence of technologies in our agency, tolerance and sense of empathy. For instance, Vincent Miller foregrounds that our increasingly mediated activity leads to a 'crisis of presence' (2012) and Sherry Turkle (2011) gives examples of the expansion of social disconnection and how on-line connectivity might result in a decline in the quality of communication, particularly in the attention given to the here and now and to face-to-face interactions; whilst Horst and Miller (2012) argue against the romanticization of the pre-digital and claim that the rise of digital technologies has created the illusion that they were more authentic.

And yet, it seems to me that we have to learn how to switch off, recover the control over life pace, sensually slow down and better process information. Slowness seems to need protection, to make place for it (Eriksen 2001). In his latest project, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2016) notes how accelerated changes and the intensification of interconnectedness and global circulations resulted in an existential ‘overheating’ eventually reshaping out conceptions of locality. Also Hartmut Rosa has described how social acceleration is experienced in three dimensions: technological development, social change and the pace of life (2013). Nonetheless, Sarah Sharma (2014) challenges the speed theories characterizing late-modern life around the binaries ‘fast’ and ‘slow’, calling instead for attention to the micro-politics of temporal coordination.

The lack of technological mediacy helps my work of noticing; also, it makes me available to those who surround me. Sometimes we have to disconnect in order to connect better with our surroundings. I guess this is one of the reasons why my ongoing experiment makes sense: the way I expose myself and interact with my surroundings is qualitatively different.

A laptop and a smart phone are distracting devices, in the sense that one is not open to conversations, and neither that attentive to the surrounding environment. While I seemingly do nothing, I remain involved in many actions.
(Tbilisi)

To study all these nuances as well as the underlying disorder that seems to pertain to everyday life in Lisbon and Tbilisi, I decided to carry the experiment of doing nothing at the Kaffa of Telheiras and the Entrée of Sololaki. I have chosen these places because of their proximity to where I was staying in the city; and also because the site appeared to me as a vantage point from which to observe inter-generational, inter-classist, and local-global dynamics. Site notes were taken between the 9th and 13th of November 2015. Entrée is a

French chain of cafés, present in Tbilisi many years. There, waitresses were not allowed to accept tips and have to wear black clothes. So called ‘expats’ came often, so the waitresses were compelled to speak English or Russian too. For instance, during my ethnography I heard at least 5 languages spoken in the café (Georgian, English, Russian, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish) every day. Another important reason is that in this café I can also look at the street and see street scenes. Fieldwork notes in Lisbon were taken between the 11th and 15th of July 2014. There are 12 tables in the terrace. In this little street there are 6 bars. This is the leisure center of Telheiras, a suburban neighborhood of Lisbon. Telheiras used to be a village, but the growing of Lisbon in the second-mid of the XX Century swallowed it into the city. We are talking about processes of rural emigration, yet this area is mostly inhabited by middle-class and white-collar workers.

At the terrace, people seem to know each other. They greet each other and ask how they are doing, yet as a pure formality: “tudo bem? Obrigado. E convosco? Bem. Tudo. (How are you? Thanks. And you? Good. All)”.

Three women sit behind me. One of them says “que calor, meu Deus!” (It is hot, my God!). They may be my age, but look older. In Portugal, people look older and not as healthy as in Nordic countries.

The waitress says sorry for bringing a beer 15 min. after my order; then she smiles and adds “since you’re at the corner it takes more time to come”. Waiters at the terrace constantly ask for permission for this or that and apologize for insignificant reasons.

Some people take more than an hour to lunch. A woman over 40 years old walks in a rush. I think she has been the first person I saw in a rush in my 4 days of fieldwork.

There, in front, there is the first person I saw multi-tasking, I mean eating and working on a laptop simultaneously.

Portuguese TV says that the normality demonstrated by Pope Francis is scandalous.

Multiple temporalities and rhythms are found at the terrace: fast food, traditional recipes, i-pads and Macbooks, lunch time, football matches on TV, music songs, job schedules, people walking dogs, grandmothers sat with grandchildren, newspaper reading, Internet ... (Lisbon)



Figure 1. Entrée, perspective from the corner where I sat. Photo by the author.

In my enactment of a method, ‘nothing’ is done with embodied dedication, letting boredom and back aches filter through my notes. As pointed out by Dawn Nafus, “doing nothing is not the same as wasting time, just as it is not the same as working or resting” (2008, p. 6). In doing nothing, people rescind relevance and purpose to the minimum, appearing as a part of life that is unscheduled, vague, aimless, yet put to particular social uses nonetheless (ibid, p. 92). Martin Demant Frederiksen has recently shown (2017) how “having time” can be a cause of social suffering, turning “doing nothing” into a characteristic of life on the margins. In my case, I increasingly got anxious of both being disconnected and

exposing myself constantly in the public space; on the other hand, my site notes were directly influenced by my own imagination, feelings and personal disposition, which became a crucial part of what I was studying. Also my own body became an (irritant and problematic) ethnographic site in this research (Greverus 2002b), since my back pain, my gestures and posture, my need to drink and eat, were meaningful and useful (tool-like) to access to tacit knowledge and a sense of empathy.

After 6 hours sitting here I start feeling pains in my back. I decide to take a short break. So I order a beer and pick up the newspaper. Then I start taking notes again.

This fieldwork is becoming a sort of therapeutic exercise, and as such it is emotionally tiring. The heat is an extra tiring factor. How are these people able to wear a tie with such heat? I can hardly take more notes, even keep any concentration. Doing nothing produces both physical and mental restlessness. Or is this rather boredom? ...

Today there are no ashtrays on the tables; people nonetheless smoke and throw the ash to the floor. I smoke my first cigarette today and do what people around me do: throw the ash to the floor. (Lisbon)

Religion seems performative in Georgia; people emphatically make the sign of the cross in public spaces. I think it is related to a long tradition of separation between public forms and private practices, in which the roots might go deep into the servitude of Georgian aristocrats to Iranian Safavids, Ottoman Sultans, and Russian viceroys.

Also, Georgians talk in a monastic way, as if hiding some ancient mystery, which gives them an air of dignity and temporal perspective. (Tbilisi)

I inserted myself into the Portuguese and Georgian everyday as a ‘quotidian detective’, investigating the empirical mundane to gain access to popular mythologies, processes of social self-regulation, and meaning-making activities, in a sort of theatre in passing (Moran 2007), a laboratory of the minimal elements of everyday life (Sansi 2015) and the minor-key variations of reality (Piette 2009). Following Pessoa’s factless autobiography in *The Book of Disquiet*, Albert Piette has suggested the practice of a ‘Pessoan anthropology’, in which the ethnographer observes, describes and analyses the social world in the process of existing, accounting of the detailed complexity of presences. This existential approach to fieldwork is also shared by anthropologist Michael Jackson (1995), who foregrounds that knowledge is implicit, incorporated, embodied, and refined through inter-subjective dynamics which make in turn the process of research an experiential participation in itself.

At the corner, there is an elegant man reading. He disagrees with what is written and shakes his head, willing to make public his disagreement I guess.

I also saw people reading twice the same newspaper. Is it boredom?

In a ritualistic way, the waitress puts the tablecloth on all the tables of the terrace. When she comes to mine, she lays the tablecloth on the chair. I guess she expects that I’ll leave soon.

I ask the waitress for a glass of tap water and she serves it with ice.

Today is Saturday, a day of reading press. Many people hold a plastic bag with papers, take a seat at the terrace and order a coffee. It is ‘O Espresso’, a weekly publication composed of several newspapers.

People get suspicious if I smile. They don’t know how to react and turn the head aside with a manifest discomfort or shyness. In Lisbon, people seem to have a fine sense of the ridiculous. (Lisbon)

The poorer the client is, the more they tend to show the money at the counter – as a material proof that they can afford what they are ordering.

Local Georgian clients display arrogance while ordering at the counter, as if needing to show off a pretended social status. Half of the clients wear sunglasses, despite not being sunny anymore outdoors. Black clothes also seem to be popular among the clientele. Georgians use elements of individual surplus –beards, sunglasses, black clothes, posturism... but not tattoos, why?

A group of men step in as a gang, wearing black Soviet leather jackets; they seem to be out of place; walk dubitatively, check around, look at the products offered at the counter; then look at each other and suddenly turn around 180° degrees and go out.

Waitresses treat me as if they know that today it's my last day here. Or is it just me who imagines this? (Tbilisi)

An invitation to extend the possibilities of play

But who is here the actor and who is the observer? Am I collaborating with my informants, or rather stalking them? Is the ethnographer wanted there and by whom? In a way, I do build collaborative relationships and my fieldwork is a shared practice; the matter is that the people I am observing are not aware of that. This obviously creates an ethical dilemma, and perhaps also a concern to the funding agencies. Doing nothing is akin to be compared to *flânerie* as a public embodiment of idleness, at least with regard to the production of socio-economic value; however, the *flâneur* is most often understood as a mobile pedestrian (Laviolette 2014; Coates 2017), whilst doing nothing entails a lack of action.

My experiment could also be akin to stalking, as not all cases of stalking involve literal pursuit but rather an unlicensed watching of others. However, isn't ethnography an art of people watching after all? Furthermore, feelings of innocence for voyeurism are related to a safe distance, one which I did not respect and which acted back upon myself, not simply

feeling observed in the field, but also noting a cold scrutiny from the reader of this article, which act as a third witness of the *crime*.

I guess as Sophie Calle felt while presenting her *Venetian Suite*, an artwork documenting in an ethnographic present tense her pursuit to Venice of a man she had briefly met at a party in Paris. She shadowed him for two weeks, compiling a photographic and written dossier about both his movements and her experiences tailoring him. Her disclaimer was however that she was not interested in the person, but in pinning down the mystery of the other (Calle and Baudrillard 1988; Kuchler 2000; Nicol 2006) and the very art of following and seduction, the attachment to a getting to know someone, as “a micro form of kinship in a public and anonymous setting” (Hand 2005, p. 477).



Figure 2. My table at the Entrée. Photo by the author during the process of fieldwork.

Apparently, the computer at the counter broke down. The manager complains to the waitress: “What did you do!” I guess this is a universal approach to the boss-employee relationship.

At 13:02, fifteen clients suddenly step into the café, as if their lunch time was synchronized or staged. I feel as if looking toward a stage upon which well prepared performances going on.

Some of the clients, after lunch –I guess on the way back to their offices– buy something extra (usually sweet). (Tbilisi)

I sit at the terrace of the Kaffa café at 11 am. When I open the notebook, I remember that I did not send an important mail this morning and think, for a few seconds, of going back home and sending it. But I finally stay. Then my thoughts start wondering about different topics, most of them personal issues unrelated with this ethnography.

A waitress goes out with a coffee and hides herself behind the building. Then she lights a cigarette and looks at her phone. Perhaps she envies my 'doing nothing'. Do I envy her job (accomplishing a practical task)? I would say no. The waitress comes back and soon she changes her clothes. Her journey is over. And so is mine.

My bill: 2 coffees and 2 beers: 2.80 euro. (Lisbon)

Another inspiring artist in the endeavor of doing nothing is Tehching Hsieh. In his *One Year Performance 1980-1981*, this Taiwanese artist made himself punch a clock every hour for a year, subjected himself to restricted conditions of movement, interaction and sleep to investigate the nature of time and to methodologically observe its passing. Each day he took a film strip, showing an increasingly long-haired and bleary-eyed Hsieh. Of the possible 8,760 hours of a year, the artist missed only 133 punch-ins. In his *One Year Performance 1981-1982*, Hsieh remained outside for a year without taking any shelter. He documented his vulnerability, physical degradation and threatening encounters meticulously, transforming the performance into a radical experience of the present and a

sustained exposure exceeding homelessness. In this sort of endurance, time appears as something to be found, a thought thing that shows the temporalities of duration (Heathfield and Hsieh 2017).

Spending timeless time, observing, writing ... all this provides a chance to reflect about my personal stuff. Different thoughts come and go, appearing within notes, emerging in my observations, intermingling my personal background with what I see.

Grandmothers come with their grandchildren to drink a coffee and chat. Does it work as a rite of passage? As a way of learning a sort of 'savoir vivre'?

This morning I went to Espigasol, the bakery at the corner, to get a piece of bread and a 'pastel de nata', as I do every morning. In spite of not having been here for two months, the seller remembered me and said "Tudo bem rapaz?" (Are you good, boy?). It is the familiarity of the strangers.

Most of the sweets displayed at the bakery are name after religious motives (toucinho do céu, bolachas do bom Jésus, pasteis de São Francisco, cavacas de Santa Clara, pitos de Santa Luzia, Bolo de São Vicente ...) (Lisbon)

I have written myself an argument in tune with anthropological habits of disciplined inquiry, hoping it serves as an invitation for extending the possibilities of play/perform during fieldwork and for taking up the idiom of contemporary art into ethnographic research. Doing nothing eventually shows how daily life is experienced as a series of significant routines and eventful junctures, which appear interpreted according to the life experience and frames of understanding of the ethnographer.

My experiment was inspired by Sophie Calle's strategies to inject herself into the life of strangers and bring back ethnographic reports determined by rules and rituals she made up

(Calle and Auster 2007), George Perec's (1989) inquiries into the infra-ordinary, and the performance done by the Spanish writer Enrique Vila-Matas in the festival of contemporary art *Documenta 13* (an experience later described in the novel *Kassel no invita a la lógica* ['Kassel Does Not Call for Logic'] 2014). Vila-Matas' performance consisted in being seen writing at a Chinese restaurant in the suburbs of Kassel. However, my case was a little different. First nobody invited me. Second I was at the café for a dedicated observation of how 'my' audience acts and interacts. In this sense, it was a sort of self-imposed discipline to gather ethnographic material about the intricacy of ordinary daily life in Lisbon and Tbilisi.

One of the waitresses asks me if I'm writing a novel. "Something like that", I respond surprised for being discovered that easily. "In this café, wow!" She innocently comments... I then think about the strange intimacy established between us. From one day to another, I appear in their café and sit here for hours. They don't know who I am, where I come from, what I do for a living, and nonetheless, we intensively gain some familiarity. Soon, I'll finish this project and we won't see each other again.

Research and interventions have their timing and context – a historicity. (Tbilisi)

My ethnographic installation has been a sort of conceptual fieldwork (Jarillo de la Torre 2013; Ringel 2013; Ssorin-Chaikov 2013), turning everyday life into a laboratory (Sansi 2015) and bringing "new ways of seeing" (Schneider and Wright 2010). One of the pioneers in this matter, Joseph Kosuth described anthropologized art as a "socially mediating activity", which "'depicts' while it alters society" ([1975] 1991, p. 117–124). Both anthropologists and artists have been rather interested in looking at each other practices simply as sources of inspiration, instead of creating 'reflexive fusions' (Schneider and Wright 2010). However, the synergies between art and anthropology are not simply

increasing but also being more and more discussed and practiced, exploring the possibilities of cross-fertilization (Schneider and Wright 2013), establishing “a bridge that can be crossed in both directions” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013b, p. 168).

Nonetheless, these endeavors are not free of criticism. In his article ‘The artist as ethnographer’ (1995), Hal Foster claims that there has been a series of misrecognitions between art and anthropology and ignorance about each other methods and traditions. For instance, he argues that artists initially approached anthropology because it was perceived as self-critical and counter-hegemonic, yet ignoring one of the main implications of the discipline – awareness of how our work affect the other and critically questioning our own authority to do so.



Figure 3. My table at the Kaffa. Photo by the author during the process of doing nothing

Today I had to sit at the table next to the entrance of the café. One of the owners stands there. I offer a cigarette to him. He smiles and declines it: “I am working”. I smile back and reply: “me too.”

I count the hours until I can finish, as if this ethnography were a 'real' job. One of the owners brings my coffee to the table. He is not that kind today. Is he tired or rather annoyed with me sitting here for hours, taking notes and not consuming much? Also I think about a lot of stuff I have to do on my laptop.

This is my third day of doing nothing and I start thinking about possible tricks of labor absenteeism; my own 'perruque', as de Certeau put it. I start feeling stressed. I guess it is the fixity of being in one place for hours.¹

After drinking a beer, the old owner changes his clothes once again. He puts on the uniform and starts working. Job and leisure seemingly require different clothes. Wearing a simple black t-shirt becomes a sort of rite of passage. (Lisbon)

Strangers in the day

What does it mean to observe and how do we really observe? Ethnography claims to be generated from the ground, but what kind of ground is it when I cannot stop sweating and I get pains in my back? Already Bronisław Malinowski (1922) admitted that boredom pervades the experience of conducting fieldwork; and Claude Lévi-Strauss described ethnographic routines as daily 'fatigues', which made the ethnographer's profession look like an imitation of the military service (1955: 9). Ethnography is most often a non-demanded intervention into a collectivity, and yet there could not be anthropological knowledge without intervening, without involving people and being involved in the world (Mier 2002), combining an experiential description with an effort to contextualize a given problematic (Sarró and Pedroso Lima 2006).

It is me who gets exhausted, but not the place. Every morning I discover

¹ *La perruque* is the way a worker disguises as work for the employer what is not actually work. As explained by de Certeau (1984) this may be for instance a secretary writing a love letter on "company time" or a carpenter "borrowing" a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living house. *La perruque* mostly diverts time or scraps, rather than goods, so it is not directed towards profit.

something new. I guess I pay attention to different details depending on my mood and on what I have done the previous journey. But how true are my notes? Are they conditioned by over-generalizing and the search of literary effects? Shall I talk about a 'doped quotidianity', whereby I see more than what is there in reality? What is the effect of my presence in this setting? Do they recognize me as a foreigner and as a researcher?

I dunno the time, 15:00? 16:00? Or maybe 14:00?

I start feeling tired. Also I notice pain in my back. I have been here for 4 or 5 hours already; I drank 2 coffees, an orange juice and a beer. All the glasses are still on my table. I increasingly feel disquiet for having to stay here a couple of hours more. I would like to talk with somebody. I put my sunglasses on to disconnect...

People walking across are dressed up in a stiff way, imbued with a fake presumptuous elegance. The clothing is kind of conservative; both parents and children wear it; I read it as a sign of a stagnated mindset.

Luckily, o senhor Francisco (Marcos' father) comes to my table, I really needed to talk to somebody. He tells me about his experience in the colonial war; Francisco served 25 months in Guinea Bissau and describes with detail the way the guerrillas acted. We also talk about the financial crisis, the Troika and, of course, about football. O senhor Francisco is a supporter of the Sporting de Lisboa.

In his view, Portuguese people are afraid of conflicts: "The Portuguese are mild people. We don't take to the streets to protest so much". (Lisbon)

In this research, I have used myself as a device for showing how a priori interpretations, field roles and my own in/ability to 'accurately' record what I see influence my fieldwork. It shows thus that site notes occur too, revealing as much about the observer as it does about the observed. Site notes are generally considered more chaotic and subjective, and in that

sense less analytical and elaborated as a writing; yet their transparent and raw quality also gives access to an intimacy and processualness that is most often filtered out in the post-fieldwork... and paradoxically, these site notes are a material symbol of our occupation and professional identity, legitimizing our belonging to 'the tribe' of anthropologists (Jackson 1990).

The moments of writing in the field distill different observations and dialogues into separated texts, inscribing social events and discourses, so translating what is passing into writing, turning anthropology into a graphocentric discipline (Clifford 1990) and fieldwork into an exercise of I-witnessing and being there (Clifford and Marcus 1985). However, the claims to truth that anthropologists make are usually not based on the act of interpretation of site notes but, rather, on the laying of groundwork necessary to get to that point (Fabian 2008). Likewise, site notes have their own spatio-temporal setting and mode of explanation, which too often tends to ignore the subtlety of the unseen, the unspoken and the absent, as



well as how a thought occurs in relation to a complexity of presences,.

Figure 4. A scene during the process of performing fieldwork in Lisbon. Photo by the author.

Revisiting my site notes, I am even surprised of them; what these notes actually describe is a stream of consciousness and the relationship between my interiority and the surrounding setting. In his study of Mauss' work (1983), Lévi-Strauss foregrounded how the observer tends to reveal and apprehend himself through the act of observation, becoming an instrument of fieldwork. In spite of the appearances, my five days of doing nothing were prepared during several months. And yet, over the time of being there, I let the focus of my investigation evolve to follow the small moments of rupture, disappearance and interiority (Doty 2010); being affected by discovery; reshaping what I chose to describe; asking myself what are these people around me thinking of themselves, the world, the sport news, the coffee, the dress of the waitress, the guy here taking notes...

Concluding Considerations

The experiment of doing nothing has helped to capture scenes of mundane life through my subjective lens and embodied descriptions, framing this writing-as-thinking with anthropological ideas in an exercise of *montage* meant to take the reader along within my research process, open-ended reflections and inactive exploration. And yet this has been not exactly an exercise of transparency pretending to show the ambiguities of fieldwork, but a play of mirrors with an anthropological outcome (hence site notes were preserved and the article went through a peer-review process, been eventually published, making sense elsewhere and potentially referred or forgotten).

Doing nothing is presented as both an artistic output and a mode of research, which helps to enhance the effect of an embodied presence, re-embed ourselves into a place, and allow a sense of slow time that seems to be missing from our everyday life. The experiment has been thus practiced as an intensified awareness of the surrounding environment, noting the non-anticipated feelings, reflections, memories, reveries and anxieties that different

presences surrounding me express and awake in myself, influencing therefore my analytical process and understanding. I suggest therefore not to reduce fieldwork to controlled learning and systematic accumulation of information, and rather defend it as a lived experience in itself, cathartic, porous and serendipitous.

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