

# Coronavirus and Production of Subjectivity. Me and Humanity in the Face of the Unexpected

Marcelo N. Viñar

In the days when there was time for leisurely and anodyne talk, in one of the last conversations I had with my elderly father, a phrase appeared whose age gave it testamentary value. He solemnly said something like this:

I was a foresighted man: I always worried about anticipating and preparing for tomorrow. But that morning never fit my prediction. There came another with its surprises, good or bad... so I no longer encourage or advise you to be foresighted.

Surely his status as an emigrant from distant lands and cultures, sealed a childish mark of insecurity or fragility where it germinated into a reaction formation of being cautious.

With this legacy, I can think of reaching the think-tank about the future of psychoanalysis having lived a life whose logic and commitment was effective in placing myself on the enjoyable side of the human condition, avoiding the chasms of precariousness and exclusion, unemployment and marginality.

Arriving safely to the final stretch of our lives, the Covid19 virus burst into our lives, cancelling habits, longings and projects, which we had designed and were working on in the current year; in addition, except for Mariano Horenstein, the rest of us are inscribed in the highest risk area, which underlines the adherent to the only measure that has been recognized as effective and active to reduce contagion: quarantine and social confinement. Hence Jonathan Sklar's testament as he wrote that to diminish the virus' spread we must mitigate in isolation, testifying to the experience we are all experiencing, spontaneously and in the heat of the moment.

Badiou calls the *event* a derailment that derails the expected and forces us to invent and design other itineraries of life. Learning, Heidegger says, is not to inform someone of something he didn't know before, but to make of someone a being who didn't exist before. Infatuation, falling in love, the birth of a child, are universal models of this experience. Prison during the dictatorship and subsequent exile were for me experiences of that kind. I suppose the emergence of a serious illness can be added to the list.

Social isolation is an imperious necessity and a painful experience; it pushes us to the condition of the lepers of the Middle Ages. The price of preserving health maims us in the most human way of the human condition, our condition of relational beings. Perhaps for young people, the natives of the digital revolution, the code-changing will be less violent. In what is personal to me, the virtual encounter is radically different from the face-to-face encounter. But if there is no bread, cake will do, and today thanks to the informational venues we can be less alone than years past.

The first reaction to the epidemic is egocentric, self-referent, as if it had been conceived by a diabolical being to interrupt our lives, our longings and our projects which we had undertaken to feel alive.

Between negotiations and denials, we know that aging and dying are part of life. But this experience –

like love – is conjugated in the singular. The pandemic comes to beat down that singularity and plunges us into the plural, the massive into being an anonymous number and to rob me of my singularity, at the very least, it comes to dilute it.

Almost immediately, the shame of egocentrism and self-centeredness erupts, ashamed of feeling unique (and privileged) in the abolition of the collective dimension of a historic trauma... After a short silence, we call upon humanity as a restorative remedy of repugnant egocentrism. I have a home, food, books, money to get through the tragedy, where there are millions of people that lack what I have. Consolation is necessary, but shortly after we begin to navigate it becomes overwhelming when humanity becomes present in its massive and opprobrium inequality, which the pandemic stresses.

I understand that confinement is not the same in the favela as in a comfortable house, I think of the posters of Bolivia's slums in dictatorship, writing posters and shouting, 'Better to be killed by the virus and not hunger'. How can I combine the gaze towards the intimate and the world without falling into the cheesiness of humanism? Since human diversity is infinite, each one is entitled to his own version.

As Bifo Berardi says in the compilation entitled *Wuhan Soup*, the extreme pandemic experience will leave indelible marks on the planetary village and presumably it will not be the same before and after the extreme experience, the little 'Jair B flu' experience, will leave its deep footprints. I leave to political scientists and sociologists the analysis of the ongoing phenomena that forces the rethinking of the damage of an extractive and always expanding economy and its replacement with the difficult balance between ecology and a sustainable economy.

I read that the epidemiologists think that the genesis of the latest pandemics can be attributed to a combination of human factors, a demographic and an ever-expanding economy that destroys forests in their ecological diversity in order to encourage agricultural production and the exponential growth of large cities that squeeze millions of inhabitants in limited space. I leave this specialized knowledge for the epidemiologists, virologists, political scientists and economists. Let's go back to the specific field of construction of subjectivity. In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault gives us some clues or walkways: the school, the factory, the hospital, the asylum, are common spaces or scenarios that sentence the uniform, to think about breaking that barrier of uniformity and assuming the limits and pains of confinement, and to do with these creative elaborations.

The real-time and experiential experience of confinement is slower. Between delight and boredom, we realize to what extent we were addicted to epileptic rhythms that devoured us and now we recover moments of silence and loneliness. Although reading, music and cinema accompany us – hooray for modern life – nonetheless, the painkiller does not calm the total of what we have lost, forbidden to come close, to embrace, to kiss, especially and above all with our loved ones. We evoke Walter Benjamin's reflection here: sharing experiences and day-to-day life experiences and narrating them is as necessary for the soul as drinking and eating is for the body.

Perhaps the time has come in this psychoanalysis of the 21st century not to be cloistered in the world of internal objects that founds the psychic of reality but instead open our minds and ourselves to the multi-determination of cultural and sociopolitical realities, while maintaining customs open between the two registers.

Translation: Monica Lachman