

# AN UNPRECEDENTED ANTHROPOLOGICAL BREAK *UMA RUPTURA ANTROPOLÓGICA SEM PRECEDENTE* *UNA RUPTURA ANTROPOLÓGICA SIN PRECEDENTES*

David LE BRETON\*

**ABSTRACT:** The health crisis recalls the close interdependence of our societies, the impossibility of closing the borders, because the virus is already here. The pandemic imposes a biopolitics due to issues that go beyond countries' borders. The virus is the covert enemy from which it is necessary to immunize the social body through masks, physical distancing, and limited contact. The whole world has entered a phase of liminality that lacks instructions for use. A system of agreement that no trespass has been taken to its extreme enters the scene. This experience of the pandemic broke a certain carelessness in relation to the passing of days, brutally recalling the precariousness of existence. It reestablishes a scale of value hidden by our routines. The health crisis reminds us brutally and longingly of the price of priceless things.

**KEYWORDS:** Pandemic. Body. Rites. Catastrophe. Biopolitics.

**RESUMO:** *A crise sanitária lembra a estreita interdependência de nossas sociedades, a impossibilidade de fechar as fronteiras, porque o vírus já está aqui. A pandemia impõe uma biopolítica devido a questões que ultrapassam as fronteiras*

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\* Professor of Sociology at the University of Strasbourg, France. Member of the Institut Universitaire de France and the Institut des Études Avancées of the University of Strasbourg (USIAS). In Brazil, he has published several works, including: *Rostos: ensaio de antropologia* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2019), *Desaparecer de si* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2018), *Antropologia do corpo* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2016), *Antropologia das emoções* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2019), *Antropologia dos sentidos* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2016), *A sociologia do corpo* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2012), *Antropologia da dor* (São Paulo: FAP-UNIFESP, 2013), *Adeus ao corpo* (Campinas: Papyrus, 2003), *Condutas de risco: dos jogos de morte ao jogo de viver* (Campinas: Autores Associados, 2009). Orcid: 0000-0002-3000-0277. Contact: david.le.breton@unistra.fr

*dos países. O vírus é o inimigo dissimulado do qual é preciso imunizar o corpo social através da máscara, do distanciamento físico e de contatos limitados. O mundo inteiro entrou numa fase de liminalidade que carece de instruções de utilização. Entra em cena um sistema de acordo de não traspasse levado a seu extremo. Essa experiência da pandemia quebrou um certo descuido em relação ao passar dos dias, recordando brutalmente a precariedade da existência. Ela restabelece uma escala de valor ocultada por nossas rotinas. A crise sanitária lembra brutal e saudosamente o preço das coisas sem preço.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVES:** *Pandemia. Corpo. Ritos. Catástrofe. Biopolítica.*

**RESUMEN:** *La crisis sanitaria recuerda la estrecha interdependencia de nuestras sociedades, la imposibilidad de cerrar las fronteras, porque el virus ya está aquí. La pandemia impone una biopolítica debido a cuestiones que traspasan las fronteras de los países. El virus es el enemigo encubierto del cual es necesario inmunizar el cuerpo social a través de la máscara, del distanciamiento físico y de contactos limitados. El mundo entero ha entrado en una fase de liminalidad que requiere instrucciones de uso. Entra en escena un sistema de acuerdo de no traspasar llevado a su extremo. Esa experiencia de la pandemia rompió un cierto descuido en relación al pasar de los días, recordando brutalmente la precariedad de la existencia. Ella restablece una escala de valor ocultada por nuestras rutinas. La crisis sanitaria recuerda brutal y saudosamente el precio de las cosas sin precio.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Pandemia. Cuerpo. Ritos. Catástrofe. Biopolítica.*

## O preço da globalização

“The catastrophic event could mark the end of political civilization, or even of the human species. It could also be the Great Crisis, an occasion for an unprecedented choice. Predictable and unexpected, the catastrophe will only be a crisis, in the true sense of the word, if, at the moment it strikes, the prisoners of progress seek to escape from the industrial paradise, and a door opens to the confines of the gilded prison.” (Ivan Illich, *La convivialité*, our translation).

The pandemic caused by the coronavirus is a manifestation of planetary mobility that multiplies physical contacts across an increasingly interconnected world—a new form of McLuhan’s “global village.” Tourism, the economy, sports, and cultural or professional exchanges induce a porosity of all geographic spheres, even as,

paradoxically, separation walls against specific communities have never been more prevalent in history. The virus moves freely, rapidly traveling from one place to another, leaving no zone untouched. Species once protected by their remoteness from human habitation or activities now coexist due to deforestation, the industrialization of agriculture and livestock, growing urbanization, international circulation, etc. The artificialization of the environment thus facilitates the transmission of the virus from wild or domestic animal populations to human populations. The health crisis reminds us of the close interdependence of our societies and the impossibility of closing borders, for the virus is already here. Not even the biological boundaries between the components of countless living worlds, between the animal and the human, or with the environment as a whole, can be maintained. As early as 1978, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie spoke of the “microbial unification of the world.” We are immersed in the living matter of the world, with no natural boundaries separating humanity from the animal and plant kingdoms. In 1917-1918, the Spanish flu, caused by a similar virus, took two or three years to spread across the globe. It took only a few weeks for COVID-19, an explicit pathology of mercantile globalization under the aegis of contemporary techno-capitalism.

## **Social Ordeal**

In its spread, the coronavirus induces a democratization of danger. Like a tragically repeated refrain, in certain countries, the media announce daily the number of people affected and those who die here and elsewhere. Our societies are more than ever under the aegis of the ordeal<sup>1</sup>, a judgment by God that spares some, for whom the infection remains harmless, but severely affects others, who die even if they seemingly share the same physical condition. The randomness of individual constitutions and encounters plays a role in favor of the better or worse. The invisible threat is everywhere; it strikes blindly while following its logic, which escapes our common understanding.

A considerable number of people die from the coronavirus all over the planet—people of all ages and social conditions, although certain social groups pay a higher price than others. A single contact and a vulnerability, unknown in advance, are enough to become infected, and once infected, no one knows the consequences: almost imperceptible symptoms for some, or others, difficulty breathing, leading to emergency care and sometimes death. But in its most common forms, the virus robs us of the taste of the world with a certain perversity: loss of taste and smell that

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<sup>1</sup> On this notion of ordeal, see David Le Breton, *En souffrance. Adolescence et entrée dans la vie* (2007) and *Conduitas de risco. Dos jogos de morte ao jogo de viver* (2009).

renders all food bland and indifferent, loss of appetite, multiple pains, exhaustion... sometimes lasting for months and months.

A morbid lottery permeates the social fabric and imposes, in fact, confinement or strict health measures to avoid worsening the domino effect, in which an infected person unknowingly transmits the disease. It is also a tragic paradox that those closest to us can suddenly become those who pose the greatest risk to us, or that we may represent a serious risk to them. Ambivalence and uncertainty are at the core of the most intimate social relationships.

## **The Body as a Threat**

The pandemic imposes a biopolitics due to issues that transcend national borders. The virus is a concealed and cunning enemy from which the social body must be immunized through masks, physical distancing, and limited contact. Each individual, unknowingly, becomes a potential agent of virus transmission. The pandemic turns the body into a site of vulnerability, where disease and death lurk, ready to infiltrate through the smallest breach. It grants the body a status of dangerousness, embodying a threat—even the bodies of our loved ones, who may be asymptomatic carriers of the virus. Since antibodies alone are no longer sufficient to ward off the danger, artificial purification becomes necessary through protective measures for any interaction. A social immunology is required to compensate for the lack of physiological defense systems. COVID-19 is an invisible danger, yet it finds its preferred vectors on the surface of the skin or in respiration. Transformed into a besieged fortress, it is necessary to guard its borders, reinforce them, and build barricades against an invisible threat. The “phobia of contact,” once referred to by Elias Canetti (1966, p. 11), or what I called the ritualized erasure of the body in our societies (Le Breton, 2019), is further radicalized. The body must be washed, purified relentlessly, and contact with strangers avoided. Handshakes, hugs, and kisses are discouraged, and any contact with objects requires the use of hand sanitizer to cleanse oneself of harmful germs. No defense against COVID-19 is possible except to prevent it from passing through the strict protective measures.

The entire world has entered a phase of liminality for which there are no clear instructions. An extreme system of non-transgression comes into play. We no longer know how to behave in our relations with others. Any encounter with loved ones imposes a difficult compromise between the principle of precaution and the impulse of affection or friendship that incites one to approach the other to shake hands or offer a kiss. A paradoxical but essential directive governed governmental prevention in France: “The virus is still circulating. When we love our loved ones, we do not get too close.” The threat of death entered even the most intimate social

relations. How can we stay close while respecting physical distance and wearing masks? This imperative of precaution clashed with the idea that emotional closeness was a protection against disease, implying: “Among us, we cannot harm each other; we love each other too much.” But the virus is utterly indifferent to the degree of affection between individuals.

The social bond enters an interminable zone of turbulence without any user manual. It is a period of in-betweenness to be tamed in order to provide new rituals of daily life or interaction with others. No one imagined such a rupture on a planetary scale with the ordinary events of existence, school, professional activities, family celebrations, travel. Only extraordinary, unprecedented measures can limit the spread of the virus. The risk of contagion leads to a proliferation of hygiene. Bacteriology supersedes sociology or politics, not completely nullifying them but subordinating them to its principles. The management of the epidemic erases the individual clinic or at least nuances it to highlight a biopolitics of populations to prevent the spread of the disease. In this sense, we are politically and clinically erased as individuals and reduced to our species. We are no longer even bodies; we are organisms. This shock strikes at a world where globalization and ultra-liberalism, combined with the individualization of the social bond, infinitely fragment the social bond, making each individual a world unto themselves in the assertion of their singular interests. COVID-19 reminds us that we are all members of a single species.

The body, which embodies the sovereignty of the individual and marks its boundary before others, has become the necessary site for self-preservation, the last obstacle before the virus’s penetration. Now, with the exception of the closest individuals, avoidance rituals are performed, what Erving Goffman (1974, p. 56, our translation) would call “a system of non-invasion agreement.” Confinement, “barrier gestures,” or the mask aim at purifying the social bond by breaking the chains of contagion. They establish a cleavage between two worlds repulsive to each other, the pure remains under the aegis of the “self,” in both senses of the term: that which is appropriate, but also that which belongs to each individual and is not contaminated by otherness. The impure is a realm of threats from which one must protect oneself. These measures are the necessary forms of civility in a context where everyone becomes a danger to the other, even without knowing it. All protective measures are intended to deceive the virus, to ritualize the disorder it creates within the social bond. The word “contagion” comes from the Latin *contagio*, from the verb *tangere*: to touch. Indeed, touch has long been intuitively perceived in our societies as embodying a fearful mode of transmission during epidemics.

Everyday life presents itself through countless forms of touch—not only physical touch but also contact in the social sense of the term. The vocabulary related to touch metaphorically conveys the perception and quality of contact (of the relationship) with others, extending beyond the exclusively tactile or skin-related

reference to express the meaning and quality of interaction. For example, one might say that a speaker has good contact with their audience. Having a thick skin protects against adversity, unlike those who are thin-skinned and react to events with heightened sensitivity. Fundamentally, we feel either comfortable or uncomfortable in our skin. We touch someone, evoking their emotion. We are touched at the heart by discourtesy or contact that repulses us, raises our hackles, or gets on our nerves; caustic remark wounds, scathes, shocks, or irritates. Many terms rely on touch or the skin to describe social relations. An unconscious aspect of language employs an implicit but perceptible anthropology, illustrating how relational contact is conceptualized through a vocabulary related to touch or the skin (Le Breton, 2016). Countless terms in the tactile-skin vocabulary speak to the modalities of encounters and the quality of contact with others. We are shaped by language; we use it as a tool, yet it interprets the world without our awareness. The need for contact, in the sense of relationship and presence with the other, is distinctly more prominent than contact in the physical sense. It is not so much the physical touch of others that is missing in the context of barrier gestures to prevent COVID-19, but rather their unimpeded presence, because, in principle, physical touch is limited and highly ritualized in our societies, except during moments of greeting or farewell rituals that involve handshakes, kisses, or embraces.

## **The Invention of New Rituals**

In normal times, interaction rituals constitute orderly and intelligible enactments of individual behaviors, relying on the precise use of distance with others and the lawfulness of bodily contact according to circumstances. They suggest a mode of employing the body, voice, and words in relation to others, defining what is permissible and what is forbidden in contact or relation to the body depending on the circumstances and the individual's style. The space of encounter is a structure of meaning that configures itself according to societies and groups, in line with differences in social status, gender, age, etc. A dialect of engagement determines the content of spoken words, their rhythm, the tone of voice, body movements, the subtle play of glances, facial expressions, postures, physical distance, and so forth. It also indicates the bodily zones of contact and those where contact is forbidden under penalty of causing discomfort or provoking an indignant reaction. The body designates the territory of the Self (Le Breton, 2019). Its physical boundaries are mirrored by equally compelling symbolic boundaries, distinguishing it from others and consecrating its personal sovereignty. Each individual is surrounded by a personal space, an invisible bubble that cannot be penetrated without consent. Physical contacts are oriented towards avoidance and the preservation of intimate

surroundings. The close physical contact of a kiss or handshake is an exceptional moment that regulates civility, a brief opportunity to access another's body that serves no other purpose than the swift satisfaction of a convention. Gestures of welcome involving bodily contact signify openness to the other, reciprocity of trust that lends a moment of intimacy to the other, mixing skins. When rejected, these gestures mark hostility. In the relational sense, the refusal of contact is preceded by the refusal of physical contact.

In this context, barrier gestures profoundly alter interaction rituals and the intuitive distance between individuals in social exchange (Hall, 1971). More than ever, according to Goffman's formula (1974, p. 81, our translation), "the Self is in part a ceremonial and sacred object that must be treated with the ritual care it demands, and that must be presented to others in an appropriate manner." When the rituals of contact unravel, it becomes important to be tactful (in French, "tact") to avoid plunging the other into embarrassment, for example, by extending a hand or offering a kiss without warning. Since the beginning of the health crisis, it has become common to approach others by saying: "we can't shake hands" or "We can't kiss, but the heart is there," a way of ritualizing a failure in familiar interaction by insisting that it is in no way a denial of the other, but rather obedience to a prophylactic necessity. The smile heard in the voice enhances the complicity. This is a reparative exchange that nullifies the alteration of previous civilities. These words of complicity regarding the impossibility of the familiar gesture redefine the meaning of the act and eliminate its ambiguity, justifying the distance and omission (Le Breton, 2018). The confirmation ritual is thus reformulated in this crisis context. The social bond is always in motion, always in ritualizing what emerges.

This suspension of physical contact has existed in certain sports clubs during seasonal flu periods for several years in North America. Clubs feared the handshakes after competitions, where close skin contact could spread potential germs that might affect players and disrupt competitions. They advocated abandoning the usual gestures of congratulations or farewell. Usual greetings at the end of games between players of the two teams then require a fist bump, as is common in many interactions today. This gesture, well-known within the Black American male community, has become increasingly common in North American sports' greeting or farewell rituals. Sometimes, the gesture involves touching elbows, which is considered even more hygienic. Or, this time, without physical contact, both teams face each other, as some Canadian hockey teams do, applauding one another or making symmetrical wave movements toward their opponents.

Home confinement, while maintaining continuity in relationships through remote communication tools, has transformed populations into an archipelago of countless isolated individuals. It's a communication of specters, each in front of their screen, becoming, against their will, like the Japanese youth known as *hikikomoris*

who voluntarily live in seclusion while continuing endless exchanges with others through social networks. These postmodern monks are simultaneously separated from and connected to the entire world. A new form of distant sociability has developed through interposed screens, even encompassing moments of festivity, such as aperitifs, family gatherings, meetings, seminars, conferences, and classes, all devoid of physical presence. With the impossibility of leaving confinement to engage with the world, physical presence with others vanishes, as does conversation, replaced by communication without a body, without a face, without contact, and sometimes even without a voice (unless amplified by a smartphone or computer). There is no more face-to-face interaction—no more “*vis-à-vis*” (Le Breton, 2019).

Confinement increases dependence on smartphones and further erodes conversation, meaning the full recognition of the other through attentive interaction. It is the triumph of a social puritanism, a world at a distance—without bodies, without sensoriality, without sensuality, except in the form of a simulacrum. In this context of health threats, these tools are undoubtedly indispensable for the continuity of social or professional relationships, thereby promoting an inevitable world where the physical presence of others will become increasingly unnecessary, and where one can have the world at their disposal without leaving their room. This is the transhumanist dream (Le Breton, 2016; 2018).

## The Mask in the Time of Covid-19

The face is the locus of mutual recognition. Through its exposure, we are recognized, named, judged, and identified by sex, age, and skin color; we are loved, despised, or rendered anonymous, lost in the indifference of the crowd. Entering into someone’s knowledge involves revealing and interpreting a meaningful and valuable face, which resonates with our face as an equally significant and interesting site (Le Breton, 2019). The reciprocity of exchanges within social bonds requires the mutual identification and recognition of faces, an essential support for communication. Facial expressions indicate the resonance of our words; they regulate social interaction. The uniqueness of the face corresponds to that of the individual. No other part of the body is as suitable for marking individual uniqueness and signaling it socially. The social and individual value that distinguishes the face from other body parts is expressed in the games of love through the attention lovers give to it. The face is the radiant figure of the presence of loved ones. Similarly, hatred of the other, as seen in racism, involves the denial of their face, reducing them to bestiality.

The face is a site of meaning, translating the absolute of individual difference into a living and enigmatic form, however slight. An infinitesimal deviation, it quickly grasps the mystery that lies within, so close and yet hidden. The narrowness

of the facial scene is by no means an obstacle to the multiplicity of combinations. An infinity of forms and expressions arise from a disarmingly simple alphabet: facial expressions, appearance, eyes, lips, nose, etc. The face connects to a social and cultural community through the shaping of features and expressiveness; its expressions and movements refer to social symbolism, yet it also carves out a path to distinguish the individual and translate their uniqueness. The more a society values individuality, the more valuable the face becomes.

Our daily interactions are impaired by the use of masks, which standardize faces, rendering them anonymous and disrupting social bonds. This concealment exacerbates social blurring, fragmentation, and the ambient anxiety of our societies. The price to pay in terms of social ties is considerable, even if necessary.

The mask only reveals the forehead and the eyes, disfiguring the individual because the face is a gestalt; if the nose, lips, or mouth are missing, only a ghost remains. Behind the masks, we lose our uniqueness, but also part of the pleasure of looking at others around us. Public transportation, stores, and streets are populated by masks, no longer by men and women with faces to recognize and hold accountable for who they are. The person is no longer recognizable; moreover, it is no longer possible to follow the echo of their words in their features. Familiar marks are disappearing. The mask dissipates gestures and imposes a need to pay attention to the tone of voices to better follow the attitudes of the interlocutor. The forehead and eyes do not have the expressive leeway of the entire face. Even the smile cannot be seen (Le Breton, 2022). Wrinkles on the forehead can indicate a smile, irritation, anger, fatigue, or a yawn. We seek in postures and gestures, especially in the voice, signs of the other's commitment. The alteration of features disrupts the social figure of the individual. A class or conference in this context introduces a troubling feeling of strangeness. Deprived of a face under the mask, the audience seems curiously inert, as no one can see the mobility of features, only the growth of an enigmatic gaze. The speaker is left without the references that nourish attention and empathy for their proposal. Therefore, the intervention is exhausting and ungrateful. Raising the voice and accentuating intonations try to mitigate the disappearance of facial signals (Le Breton, 2021). This banalization of the mask, which induces widespread anonymity, is an anthropological rupture infinitely more significant than the suspension of handshakes or kisses.

## **Crisis of Authority**

In this context of health danger, the price of preserving health requires a necessary restriction of public freedoms, just as a patient is sometimes reluctantly forced to stay in a room before their recovery. Anyone who does not play the game

of protecting themselves and others unknowingly participates in the spread of the virus. The fight against the pandemic implies a civic principle of solidarity and responsibility. The ethical and normative framework established by doctors and health precaution policies, although generally respected, has been contested on its margins, with the support of populist leaders, notably in Brazil and the United States. Doctors, infectious disease specialists, and politicians involved in insisting on protective measures are denied by some, their knowledge contested.

The hyper-individualization of social bonds marks the end of authority supported by status and implies a multiplication of power relations if discussion and argumentation are rejected. The verticality of knowledge that confers legitimacy to those with the necessary training is swept away by a desire for horizontality, where everyone believes they possess knowledge that others do not. The intellectual or social hierarchies that were based on legitimacy or moral authority are now challenged in the name of an egalitarianism that, on the other hand, dissolves general culture, turning thought into slogans and political action into immediate recipes. The hatred of authority is, first and foremost, the resentment of finding oneself in an unequal position before a person is considered similar, regardless of their training or social position. All verticality is refused. A refusal to be led by another without having made one's voice heard. Even though, as experience shows, the permanent claim for debate is a disguise for refusing any compromise. Authority is seen as power, or even imposture, constantly confused with authoritarianism and, therefore, without legitimacy, always inclined toward the idea of domination. The authority conferred by studies, by a function, by-elections is no longer guaranteed. In many countries, the protective measures taken were challenged, and the scientific advice on which governments relied was constantly contested, even by other doctors, sometimes over nuances or predictions that no one could know in advance. The confrontation of viewpoints disappeared, and the debate became a battle.

Paranoid-style testimonies proliferate through social media, driven by an obsession to reveal the malicious intentions of certain political groups or individuals. According to these testimonies, the world's misfortunes stem from hidden manipulations that are recognized through an analytical subtlety that eludes everyone else. The facts to be examined are secondary to the emotion experienced. We have entered the era of post-truth, a world where a single assertion serves as proof, where emotion prevails over reasoning: "It's not COVID that kills, it's the vaccine," and so on. "I'm not a doctor, but it's impossible to have a vaccine in such a short time," etc. Ignorance has become a powerful legitimacy to oppose epidemiologists. Conspiracy theories have found fertile ground in the denial of the pandemic or vaccination, giving the impression of being a privileged knower surrounded by naive individuals, enjoying the satisfaction of understanding things that others do not. These conspiracy theories or post-truth assertions serve the political function of

destabilizing democracies, providing cheap explanations for events, and expressing resentment. They offer psychological comfort by pretending to reveal a truth in the apparent chaos of the world. For some populist leaders, COVID-19 was merely a “flu,” harmless, at the heart of an international lie to subjugate populations (for what purpose?). Their countries are the most affected by the pandemic, and their denial has been disastrous for their populations.

The Internet, by giving voice to everyone and fragmenting social bonds, turns many individuals into relentless commentators on even the smallest occurrences, searching for flaws that validate their testimonies. Numerous social networks help to level opinions, with each person projecting their personal analysis of events with varying degrees of confidence. Anyone can say anything without knowledge, contributing to an unprecedented relativization of any information. In most countries, the management of health crises has been in a permanent state of controversy. The claim for freedom, understood here as a detachment from the collective, disregards the civic duty required by health authorities, reflecting a moral disengagement. Social bonds tend to fragment into a mosaic of individuals pursuing their interests with indifference to the whole. “Together” has often become a term of convenience when it comes to sharing a moment or private interests. The individual feels increasingly disconnected from others, no longer considering themselves responsible for them. The growing individualization of meaning and relationships transforms social bonds into mere utility and less into moral obligation. An individualism of disjunction and self-singularization makes societies difficult to govern. The sovereign individual struggles to tolerate limits. The pandemic is a social revealer that exposes the contradictions of our societies, where the solidarity of some accompanies the indifference of the majority. Clandestine or unsafeguarded parties are another illustration of the playful aspect of this indifference.

## **Transgression**

A party that suspends all health precautions during the pandemic operates as an exception to ordinary life, a time of exception precisely defined by transgression. It is a way to “lift the prohibition without abolishing it” (Bataille, 1965, p. 41, our translation) and to hunt in the territory of the sacred. The movement of transgression gives power but requires the limit that provides meaning and value, imposing a return to the norm. For a moment, we live beyond our means, leaving protection needs in the locker room. Everything that is repressed in ordinary life during these difficult times resurges with force: alcohol, drugs, the pleasure of prohibited physical contact in dance, hugs, romantic encounters, etc. It is a quest for indulgence after a long period of saving and routine, a way to lose oneself rather than to maintain

oneself, seeking vertigo against the need for control. It is an ironic provocation to medical and political authorities advocating physical distancing.

Festive gatherings have multiplied despite the demands for mutual protection. A strong ambivalence is expressed almost naively when revelers, indifferent to any protective measures, declare their understanding of the need for masks or barrier gestures while shopping or in enclosed spaces, yet claim the right to breathe freely at certain moments during these festive occasions. An “I know well, but still...” governs their behavior. The party is an enchanted parenthesis that momentarily suspends the sense of identity with its inherent concern for others. Unprotected gatherings are potential breeding grounds for contamination. The freedom to “enjoy life,” as some claim, echoes as the freedom to spread the virus without accountability.

The play with social prohibitions nurtures the creation of the sacred. It involves a detachment from oneself and daily routines, granting access to another dimension of existence. The intention is not to establish oneself in transgression or abolish limits but to question them, to play with them, and thus feel existence resonating within oneself as an irrefutable proof of presence in the world. Transgression is always a source of power; it certainly exposes one to danger, but by placing the individual outside common laws, it provides a power and intensity of being.

## Resistance Humor

In this grave context, humor abounds on social media and everyday sociability. Jokes are exchanged, kind words are highly successful, and loved ones are filmed in hilarious situations. Humorous videos are shared on social networks or among friends, and cartoons and funny stories depict the virus or the restrictions of isolation, the conflicts arising from promiscuity, or the inability to have a place of one's own.

Laughter allows for a symbolic grasp of the event. It breaks the virus's tendency to impose its viewpoint, and although it does not necessarily change the course of things, it at least alters the perspective on the virus. It changes the meaning to make it tolerable. It restores initiative to the individual. It recalls the possibility of another world and the joy of being continuously alive. The virus no longer dictates the exercise of daily life; we play with its severity to neutralize its arrogance. Humor is a countermeasure against the violence inherent in the situation, a tool to regain one's place in social bonds. It restores a complicity that temporarily breaks the isolation induced by the pandemic's consequences. Finding amusement in circumstances initially perceived as painful or dangerous helps to avoid taking them too seriously and becoming trapped by their appearance. Freud expressed it

in his own way: “Look, here is the world that seems so dangerous. A child’s play, therefore, the best thing is to play” (Freud, 1930, p. 408, our translation).

Humor, in this context, clearly embodies a courtesy of despair, an elegance in the face of the blows of fate. An antidote to death or anxiety that does not disarm, laughter is an alchemical transmutation of fragility or horror into strength, liberating meaning and making the situation less opaque. It rejects resignation, sadness, or lamentation, transforming bitterness into pleasure by putting danger at a distance, as one laughs at it (Le Breton, 2017). This circumstantial humor of the coronavirus is far from being burlesque or merely refreshing; in this sense, it is closer to a smile. It reveals an unexpected characteristic of reality through a deviation. An exercise in lucidity, it dismantles the meaningful order of the world, lifts the mask, and asserts that things are not as serious as they seem.

## Opening

The pandemic serves as a warning for the future, a crisis in the etymological sense of the term: crisis. This word derives from the Latin *crisis*, through Greek *krisis*, which means to choose and weigh the pros and cons of a situation. It demands decisions not only at local or national levels but also on a global scale. By brutally highlighting the social consequences of globalization and ecological disaster, the pandemic compels us to question and make firm decisions in the face of what is revealed as destructive not only for human conditions but also for the preservation of the planet. It calls for a redefinition of politics and its moral orientations. After years of real indifference to social demands, this pandemic reminds us of the anthropological necessity to share resources, to ensure the conditions necessary for the preservation of a dignified social life. We are interdependent for better or for worse. Restoring the social humanism violently attacked worldwide by triumphant and cynical capitalism is imperative to rekindle the love of life, protect the planet’s ecological diversity, support the most vulnerable, and strengthen the social foundation of democracy. A significant political and social risk would be generalized surveillance of populations and refined biopolitics using digital tools, as implemented by China. The pandemic has significantly increased the social, economic, and political power of the GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft). Moreover, it has intensified the dominance of ultraliberal capitalism, which finds in these tools a radical way to reduce labor costs by minimizing physical interactions through dematerializing relationships within the company.

The health crisis raises many doubts, forcing each person to become an anthropologist of themselves: what are we most deprived of? What ultimately dictates the price of our lives and values the contact with others? The pandemic

reminds us that individual existence oscillates between vulnerability and security, risk and prudence. Since existence is never given in advance in its development, the love of life accompanies it and recalls the flavor of everything. The response to life's fragility precisely consists in this attachment to a world never given all at once. Only what can be lost has value, and life is never given once and for all as a totality enclosed. Furthermore, security stifles the discovery of an existence that is always partially stolen and becomes aware of itself only through an occasionally unexpected exchange with the world. The inherent danger of life, undoubtedly, lies in entering the game without ever seeking to invent one's relationship with the world or with others. Thus, neither security nor risk are modes of self-realization and self-creation. The taste of living involves a dialectic between risk and security, between the ability to question oneself, to be surprised, to reinvent oneself, and to remain faithful to the essence of one's values or identity structures. Due to the possibility of losing it, existence is worthy of value.

This experience of the pandemic has shattered a certain disregard for the passage of time, brutally reminding us not only of the precariousness of existence but also of the fleeting nature of the moment. A certain banality once characterized our behaviors, which now find their personal sacred dimension: having coffee outdoors, walking in a park or forest, meeting friends, going to the theater or cinema, crossing borders without accountability, or simply leaving the house without a set return time. The act of moving from one place to another was so obvious that it was no longer perceived as a privilege. The health crisis is, in this sense, a *memento mori*, a planetary reminder of our incompleteness and fragility we continuously forget. It reinstates a scale of value obscured by our routines. The health crisis brutally and nostalgically reminds us of the worth of things without a price. These seemingly insignificant daily activities, performed without much thought, flow spontaneously but whose sudden deprivation endows them with infinite value. This is the account that no one should forget in their relationships with others and with the world. The *memento mori*, then, is a "never forget that you are alive."

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