

To Think in the Eye of the Storm

MARCIA SÁ CAVALCANTE SCHUBACK

ABSTRACT: The article aims to reflect on the pandemic from the situatedness of being in the eye of the storm. It discusses the contagion between biological and digital viralization, and the politics and existential effects of the pandemic non-touching.

KEY WORDS: viralization, isolation, dis-socialization, between-being

How to think the pandemic, immersed as we are in it, while it is happening, spreading and contaminating here and now? It is thinking *in* the eye of the storm, which is not the same as thinking the eye of the storm. It is thinking deprived of the condition of detachment and distance, which for millennia has been considered necessary to *philosophy*, the way of a measured and distanced gaze, termed in Greek by *theoria*. This philosophical, or theoretical, distance has been described in various manners: as a looking up from the ground to see the world from the perspective of standing up, which in many languages designated both the erect position as well as the question of right and justice;¹ as a waking up from sleep, understood as an immersion in the indistinct, to reach the state of being awake and of the open eyes that, to be able to distinguish and discern, needs distance. After all, how does one see an object when the eyes are glued to it?, to put a question of which the artistic work *Tornado* by Francis Alÿs has presented powerful images.

Distance of the common sense, *doxa*, ideologies, that is, critical distancing, distance from estrangement, distance from oneself—these are all distances assumed as a condition of resistance against the cyclops of the immersive quotidian, of the “unclean” and “improper” world (*immundus*). This mythology, however, of the third distanced eye of the philosopher that observes the world from a central perspectivism where to all lines of absorbing reality direct themselves and where one can fix the Archimedean point to a consciousness of the totality of the world, is demolished and devastated when all of the real is infuriated in a tremendous

storm. Everything is affected and there is no point outside of its concentrically expansive circles. We are today facing a situation of urgency, that is, a situation of a real that itself has fallen into reality. The pandemic is in itself an eye: the eye of a storm.

To think the pandemic is to think it immersed in its contagion, to think it in the situation of a real that has fallen into reality. While following the discussion on the pandemic in various spaces and “channels,” it seems impossible to think the pandemic without making diagnoses of where we are situated. But to think the pandemic is not the same as diagnosing or vaticinating. Yet, thinking cannot stop situating-itself in the situation of the here and now of the world. Situated in a situation where the global acts on the here and now is where we find ourselves—the local fighting for its ability to act on the global. This is what the pandemic exposes in the clarity of its obscurity.

A virus contaminating all (*pan*) of the world, in the sense of all people (*demos*), is indissociable from globalization. The COVID-19 did not only become a pandemic because of globalization (as global communication, access and contagion) but it also made globalization appear as a pandemic virus. The issue of “the whole world” got stronger. This whole world, the world as a whole, showed itself in an even more emphatic way of not being the whole world of everyone. Not only was the difference between worlds and its peoples in each world enhanced, but even more so the difficult difference of defining the whole and all, between the whole, all and each and every one—a philosophical difficulty since its first Greek steps. The pandemic does not equal all nor does it “communize” us: it emphasizes differences, injustices and inequalities, since the virus lives and kills differently depending on the individual and political body it contaminates. This difference is reaffirmed on several levels: as physical, social, economic, cultural, political, and so on. In the pandemic quotidian, it shows itself in political differences as how to manage the pandemic in diverse countries, but also by the difference in social, economic and cultural conditions. The virus of globalization that exposes itself in the global contamination of the virus is one of inequality, injustice, racism, extermination, hunger, destruction. What exposes itself in the pandemic is the virulence of all virulence, the virotic itself as a mode of how virulence contaminates. As all modes of contamination are virotic, virulent and viral, the virus of globalization also operates, in its more immediate form in digital transmission. To think the virulence of globalization exposed in the globalization of COVID-19 is to think the hybridity of the biological and the digital virus and how one imitates the other—up to the point that it is difficult to know whether the biological virus imitates the digital virus or vice-versa. Innumerable questions raised since the irruption and irradiation of the pandemic are connected to this node between the biological and the digital, the molecular and the virtual. In the same way that the COVID-19 contaminates with a “digital” velocity of a “touch,” the management-politics of the pandemic, be

it to control or to uncontrol, appropriate or dis-appropriate, govern or dis-govern, save or kill, contaminate with the viralization of numbers, measures, strategies, through social networks and technologies of information. What suffices is a “touch” by the finger, by the digit for contagion of a virus: biological, digital or political.

This viralization was decisive for the election of a neofascist government that with its necro-politics seeks to destruct Brazil in all dimensions of existence: physical and psychological, emotional and rational, ethical and political, singular and collective, natural and cultural, aesthetic and metaphysical. It operates by mixing and confounding the senses in such a velocity and intensity that the senses are emptied. The strategy of the viralization in social networks operationalize a dis-socialization of society that occurs with a mask of a virtual socialization, because the virtual socialization depends upon social isolation. Each and every one finds themselves isolated in its cell-screen, separated from the space of the common even when physically sharing a common space. Independently from its message, ideological contents, manipulations, the “means” is itself a social isolator. The socialization that the means propitiates and foments is a dissocializing socialization.² The strategy of viralization is a mode of dis-politicizing through hyper-politicization.

The pandemic has been treated as a moment of suspension of the world, as a suspension of the voracious dynamic of global capitalism. The isolation decreed and assumed in various countries, made a world without humans appear with its deserted streets, closed stores, suspension of the activities. With it, the dream of a world without capitalism. As if affirming that only the virus could save us. If a world of global capitalism is inhumane, the world without the human seem to be the signal of a reformulation of the relation between man and world. The deserted streets, the stopped activities, the frenzy of suspended production is not the same as a world without the dis-humanizing and predating human. On the contrary, it is a world of a hyper-humanization that a-humanizes. It is a reformulation that must be reflected upon with the issue of isolation and self-isolation.

With isolation, the physical contact is effaced. The body is no longer inside the body, because to be a body is to be with other bodies. Some epidemiologists have described the action of the virus on the body as the impediment of the body to be inside itself. Isolation not only separates a body from another, but also from itself and its presence. The body is outside and outwards: it is open. In isolation, the body is closed, it is cut from itself and not only from other bodies. What is effaced is not only contact, but also the co-incidence of the accidental: the rain that dampens, the sun that burns, the body that bumps, threatens, surprises. It is the incidence of the touch of the unexpected. Confined in the closed-body, the isolated body sees itself cut from others, itself and from *between-being*. It is not only the cut from the elasticity of living: inside, outside; us, them, but it is a cut from the pulse of *between-being*. More than the other, what disappears is the between.³

The eclipse of the “between” shows not only the “between” physical isolation and virtual “communism”; but that there is a living-between, pulsating and active. A between that is a verb, a “to between,” that once removed suffocates itself and asphyxiates the body and the spirit of the world.

In many countries, isolation was imposed by their governments. In Brazil, the isolation was disqualifed by the government. The isolation turned out to be the issue of each individual’s conscience and possibility, compromised as self-isolation. Regardless of all differences, we have already been living in isolation. But isolation has many meanings which in the pandemic situation of the world, it is important to distinguish. Following Arendt, isolation defines the destruction of the capacity of acting. One can object that physical isolation today is not a social isolation because the cell-screens communicate and promise a socialization with further irradiation and reaction. Indeed, important resistant voices and proposals are being done “on-line.” But Arendt insists that in states of terror, lived isolation is not only an imposed mode of collectivity, but of constructing an in-operating collectivity, which by collectivizing decollectivizes. The combination of physical isolation, *isolation*, and “socialized isolation,” *loneliness*, constitute the dynamic of desocialization by hyper-socialization, of dis-politization by hyper-politization. To face this combination, Arendt proposes a politics that reinvents the meaning of solitude rather than of the common. It is the solitude of thinking, she says, of the “two-in-one.” In it, it becomes possible to realize how in isolation, solitude isolates itself from solitude. As *modus vivendi* of modern society, centered on the idea of the desire of an individualized and atomized I, isolation is the central practice of narcissistic individualism and innumerable forms of egoism. It explains the contamination of meaning between isolation, loneliness and solitude, a contamination so chronic that maybe it would be needed to find another word for solitude in the sense of distinguishing it from isolation and loneliness.⁴

Despite the isolation and the disconnection produced by hyper-connectivity, despite the isolation of the body from the body, of solitude from solitude, despite the suspension and asphyxiation of the between-openness, there is still being in the movement of being. To be in the being—split, cut, isolated, confined, exposed to the immanence of the virus, of the hunger and of COVID-19, of the combination of both, massacred by the militia-police (neofascist) state—to be in the being means the connection of each one to existence, here understood as between-being, a connection that the word solitude could designate if it was not so ripped out of the opening of its meaning. Solitude, a word that comes from sole, sole as in the soloist of a song, for the voice that sings is enigmatically always soloist—each voice is always its own only for already being in itself outwards and beyond itself. Understood as opposed to isolation, solitude is perhaps nothing more than the instances in which the to be in being of each one is touched by the is-being. A touch of nothing, a pulse feeling the pulse, an instant of entire attention to the fact of to

be in being, to the is-being and is-existing of existence. As such, to be in being is always being in the eye of the storm. Difficult is to live from this touch of nothing, the touch of being in being in the between- and meanwhile-being. In this touch, touched by how the to be in being touches each one, one discovers solitude as an edge and the limit as a threshold. In the eye of the storm, what remains is the to be in being, to be in the is-being, to re-exist touched by the is-being, as edge and threshold. Here it cannot be racism, the ferocious hate to be touched by otherness.

Södertörn University

NOTES

1. For instance, in English: upright, right; in French, *droit, droit*.
2. It is somehow an inversion of what Kant's thinking in terms of a-social sociability: a socialization that comes about beyond the coercions and social rules, a species of spontaneous sociality. Immanuel Kant, "Ideas for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," in *Kant's Political Writings*.
3. More than the opening, what disappears is the between-opening, more than the seeing, the between-seeing, evoking here the unforgettable exhibition of the Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles at Sesc in. 2019.
4. The Brazilian writer João Guimarães Rosa may help us to formulate this enigma of the soloist voice's existence, that which is always mine for being outwards towards the other. He once said: "I am sole. The cat is sole. The trees are soles. But not the sole of solitude: the sole of solistence [*solistência*]."

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