

My commentary on the epidemic situation

by Paula B. Hochman

Without being a biologist, or a virus specialist, or a medical doctor, being that this virus exists, spreads and produces deaths, my commentary has to do with the discourse in which this is happening.

The first thing to note is the total disproportion between the technological arrogance of current times and the capacity of a little germ to render the world defenseless, all of a sudden. The technological apparatus is left unmasked, a giant with clay feet.

And this domineering germ was able to stop what no ethical scruple managed to stop. Millions of people ravaged by hunger, the planet on its way to environmental destruction, and yet nothing, until now, could hinder the right held by an extreme minority to keep accumulating wealth and power, mountains of money that will never translate into any jouissance other than the jouissance of greedily hoarding treasure, even if it means the slaughter of millions. A way of civilization organized for the satisfaction of the greedy jouissance of a few and wholly un-illustrious people with power, as they live alongside an unjustified and moribund majority.

The world was still going in this disgraceful manner, with majority's complicity; otherwise, things would have changed. There is no violence without a pact, wrote Lacan.

And now, because of the action of that uncontrollable germ, that infernal machinery has stopped in its tracks. But precisely because what is holding back the global state of injustice is an external element, it is not due to a change in the discourse. This is no overcoming of the social psychosis.

A Canadian filmmaker, Naomi Klein, said that in order to stop environmental destruction it is necessary to change everything.

Today there is consensus to leave behind and let go of everything, in the service of what Lacan called 'primum vivere': first, live. Like in a science fiction

movie, cities are emptied, everything is blanketed in silence and sinking into the past. What accomplished this incredible feat of power? The fear of death, the priority of survival.

The ethics of psychoanalysis do not reduce the value of the actions taken in lieu of survival, and neither does it promote the fear of death or the aversion to risk. Freud once quoted the motto of the Hanseatic League: “it is necessary to sail the seas, it is not necessary to live”. Because if we live in language, it is desire that moves us to venture forth.

So, the current planetary consensus to stop everything and safeguard life is not an ethical turn of the wheel for civilization, it only shows us that the *primum vivere* takes precedence before the hoarding of wealth and privilege. Freud pointed out the disappointment that World War I had provoked in his contemporaries. For us, on the other hand, in the climate of generalized incredulity, there is no disappointment, but a fearful amazement.

What is the social psychosis? It is the attempt of replacing the subject with a machine and the ideology that goes with this pretended substitution. In modern times there is currently the illusion of having delegated our subjective fragility to electrical instruments that each one wields, as if each were a pilot behind the wheel of a moon-bound rocket or a supersonic airplane, with the illusion of becoming possessors of resources that can replace us. But the problem is that there are no technological prostheses that can replace us when it comes to love, to desire, and to enjoying life. You can travel in a rocket to the ends of the universe, take technological innovation to spectacular magnitudes. But there is no tech that can program the *jouissance* of life; on that front, the subject is irreplaceable.

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Buenos Aires, March 20th 2020

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