Introduction

Jeremy Hunsinger

The old normal is not the new normal, and neither normal should be normal at all. Our world was in crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic, and now we face increasing pressures to change our relationship with the world and each other. The challenge we are faced with is a challenge Ivan Illich discussed many times; we have built our institutions, tools, and institutions as tools in ways that have led us to this situation. Beyond that, these tools and institutions have momentum and institutionalize the problems they were created to address. Like medical care that has a lessened motivation to cure you in capitalism because medical care must pursue profit, other institutions are caught in the same bind and trajectories.

Before the pandemic, things were, in theory, normal. Normal in the sense that they were bounded by the amazing and profoundly abnormal. These abnormal situations were considered exceptional, but still happened enough to make us aware of it. Whether the abnormal event was; a one in one thousand year storm, a nuclear accident, a volcano erupting, a gas crisis, a neo-fascist uprising, various effects of global climate change, or the multiple messes around technologies and their incorporations. The normal wasn't normal, but the day to day was at most times for many people reasonably within their expectations, even if it entailed any number of sexisms, racisms, ageisms, capitalisms, or other oppressive/exploitative regimes within it. People knew to expect the everyday evils of their situatedness, and occasionally people organized to resist and foment change. People knew the 'law' and 'common-sense ethics' were

not always on their side, but at least they knew where they stood. They had a sense of what was changing and what could change, even if that sense was frequently wrong. In short, people had an operational sense of what they desired to be normal and operated within a world where those operations made them feel normal.

Reading Illich allows us to recognize the normally abnormal and abnormally normal situations, diagnose them, and blame the historical and contemporary contingencies that generated them. From Disabling Professions to Tools of Conviviality to his later works calling for institutional reform, Illich promoted an awareness beyond the situated normality of our everyday lives. He pointed out that the hegemony was not merely the operations of another, but an operation of ourselves to that other. Illich makes us realize that within the construction of the 'normal' our complicity is explicit. Our willful lack of awareness is diagnosed as part of our problem, and a deepening engagement and will to change would allow people to generate the alternatives to move forward with a better life.

After the COVID-19 pandemic passes, and currently, it seems that within a year or two, we will have opportunities to establish a normal that is both different from the pandemic normal and the old hegemonic normal. We are already practicing difference in our lives. Energy usage is down in the western world, for instance. Perhaps there is hope for a new normal. The question facing us is, what will that normal be?

This special issue challenged authors to confront the possibility of that normal, to reach beyond technological and social solutionism, and find a way forward in conviviality. It challenged the authors with a very complex set of questions, and the authors responded in greatly diverse and meaningful ways. Each takes their unique path to think about this new normal. Some of these paths open meaningful dialogues and theoretical trajectories to that new normal,

and others are fruitful in other ways. All are worthy of thoughtful engagement and

consideration.

Introduction

Gustavo Esteva

As we all know, Illich was a prophet. Not a man with a crystal ball, but someone who knew how to read the present and discover deep trends. And so he could anticipate what was going to happen.

In the time of the Cuernavaca pamphlets he could not have anticipated the end of the era of tools, but in the 1980s he knew already that people had been transmogrified into subsystems of systems, that we had entered the era of systems. And he thus anticipated, horrified, the time of Covid-19, the current time. He anticipated the unprecedented situation in which the majority of the people on Earth will passively submit to instructions reducing them to statistical bodies, for which they should care and protect.

In calling for papers for this issue we were fully aware of the highly controversial nature of the theme. First of all, there are many "deniers", people who pretend that the threat of Covid-19 does not exist or is irrelevant, and also those who resist the policies of the health authorities in the name if individual rights. On the other extreme, many of those confined voluntarily or forced to obey curfew rules and other instructions are really afraid of the danger of the new virus, a danger announced in the name of medical science. In the current social contexts, created by the government, the media and by the medical establishment, any critique of public policies is thus perceived as a kind of irresponsible behavior, which may affect the health of many people; often such critique is assimilated into the opposition of the deniers.

The current polarization of positions and the subsequent inability to forge a third way was one of the many motives to organize this issue. Illich fully anticipated such polarization, forging his own position between the "left-right" poles. Too, he was fully aware of the frequent misinterpretation of his ideas. What was previously rejected or misunderstood in Illich's thought can now be acknowledged and incorporated into general awareness. As Giorgio Agamben has written, the time of the legibility of Illich's writings has arrived.

In different moments, particularly in the last ten years of his productive life, Illich looked for ascetic practices "to keep alive our senses, in the lands devastated by the 'show', among overwhelming information, advice in perpetuity, intensive diagnostics, therapeutic management, the invasion of counselors, terminal care, breathtaking speed…" These phrases come from the preface to a collection of essays Illich published in French with the title *La perte des sense* ("The loss of sense", Paris: Fayard, 2004). Several essays of that book are especially pertinent for the current discussion.

In 1994, for example, he pronounced in a lecture[1] a devastating critique of the very idea of a "self-immune system". He explains that *Medical Nemesis* was written to justify the art of living, enjoying and suffering and dying even in the modern culture, shaped by the ideas of progress and comfort, and explains why, in the era of systems, he can no longer use the expression "autonomous coping". Four years later he spoke during a conference in Bologna: "Lead us not into diagnosis, but deliver us from the evils of health", as he explains how the pursuit of health dissolves our flesh and our self. In 1999, in his last conversations with David

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[1] The XII Conference of the Qualitative Health Research Association, at Penn State University Hershey Medical School, that is now the introduction for *Medical Nemesis* for the new edition of his collected works in French, German and Spanish. Additionally, see Illich's lecture, "Against Coping" at the Second International Interdisciplinary Conference, Hershey, PA, June 1994. Accessed 7 December, 2020 at https://chamberscreek.net/library/illich/against_coping.html

Cayley, he explained how "risk awareness"—which is today the very core of the policies and attitudes about Covid-19—generates the loss of the sense of our bodies and is "the most important religiously celebrated ideology today." As we currently observe every day, risk is a mathematical concept, which cannot be applied to any person in particular. It is applied to populations and what can happen to them is expressed in terms of probability. The now common idea of "flattening the curve" is but one instance of risk management applied to populations. To identify oneself with this statistical figment (as millions are doing every day) is to engage, Illich said, in "intensive self-algorithmization," the effect of which disconnects us from our own bodies, while reducing each to a collection of statistical elements.

In the last twenty years of his life, Illich expressed repeatedly his increasing concern with the condition imposed on the people, who can no longer die their own death, those denied a dignified death. In place of the art of dying, which in every culture always expressed a fundamental element of the art of living, an abstract medical intervention reigned. Only a month ago, a medical doctor, a sensitive woman who works in a Covid unit of a Mexican social security hospital, shared with me her anxiety, her suffering, when she was unable to respect the will of a 98 year-old guy who pleaded, from his bed in the hospital: "Please allow me to go to my home, to be with my daughter and my grandson. I don't want to live any longer. But I want to die in my bed, with my loved ones. I want to die in dignity." But he was not allowed to go. And the family was not allowed to accompany him in his burial. Against all cultural traditions, funerals were not allowed…to "protect" the people, the body of the beloved family member was deemed a threat.

In early April, David Cayley, the Canadian thinker and journalist, published the essay "Questions About the Current Pandemic From the Point of View of Ivan Illich"[2]. He recalls that

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[2] Accessed at https://www.quodlibet.it/david-cayley-questions-about-the-current-pandemic-from-the-point.

Illich's seminal book *Medical Nemesis* (1974) is a book about professional power. Cayley

describes how the everyday power of contemporary medicine "can be further expanded by what

Illich calls 'the ritualization of crisis.'"

> This confers on medicine 'a license that usually only the military can claim. Under the stress of crisis, the professional who is believed to be in command can easily presume immunity from the ordinary rules of justice and decency. He who is assigned control over death ceases to be an ordinary human… Because they form a charmed borderland not quite of this world, the time-span and the community space claimed by the medical enterprise are as sacred as their religious and military counterparts.

Cayley continues within a footnote to this passage and referencing Illich, "… he who

successfully claims power in an emergency suspends and can destroy rational evaluation. The

insistence of the physician on his exclusive capacity to evaluate and solve individual crises

moves him symbolically into the neighborhood of the White House."

In his article, Cayley also describes how, ten years after *Medical Nemesis* was published,

Illich revisited and revised his argument, explaining how he had been "blind to a much more

profound symbolic iatrogenic effect: the iatrogenesis of the body itself." He had "overlooked the

degree to which, at mid-century, the experience of 'our bodies and our selves' had become the

result of medical concepts and care". Cayley writes,

> *Medical Nemesis* had addressed a citizenry that was imagined as capable of acting to limit the scope of medical intervention. Now (Illich) spoke of people whose very self-image was being generated by bio-medicine. *Medical Nemesis* had claimed, in its opening sentence, that 'the medical establishment has become a major threat to health.' Now he judged that the major threat to health was the pursuit of health itself.

Cayley further explains in his article that Illich's change of mind emerged from the conviction

that the world had undergone an epochal change.

> 'I believe,' he told me in 1988, 'that…there [has been] a change in the mental space in which many people live. Some kind of a catastrophic breakdown of one way of seeing things has led to the emergence of a different way of seeing things. The subject of my writing has been the perception of sense in the way we live; and, in this respect, we are,

in my opinion, at this moment, passing over a watershed. I had not expected in my lifetime to observe this passage.' Illich characterized 'the new way of seeing things' as the advent of what he called 'the age of systems' or 'an ontology of systems…' A system, conceived cybernetically, is all encompassing – it has no outside. The user of a tool takes up the tool to accomplish some end. Users of systems are inside the system, constantly adjusting their state to the system, as the system adjusts its state to them. A bounded individual pursuing personal well-being gives way to an immune system which constantly recalibrates its porous boundary with the surrounding system.

Within this new 'system analytic discourse,' as Illich named it, the characteristic state of people is disembodiment. This is a paradox, obviously, since what Illich called 'the pathogenic pursuit of health' may involve an intense, unremitting and virtually narcissistic preoccupation with one's bodily state. Why Illich conceived it as disembodying can best be understood by the example of 'risk awareness' which he called 'the most important religiously celebrated ideology today.' Risk was disembodying, he said, because 'it is a strictly mathematical concept.' It does not pertain to persons but to populations – no one knows what will happen to this or that person, but what will happen to the aggregate of such persons can be expressed as a probability. To identify oneself with this statistical figment is to engage, Illich said, in 'intensive self-algorithmization.'… His horror was at seeing people reconceive themselves in the image of a statistical construct. For him, this was an eclipse of persons by populations; an effort to prevent the future from disclosing anything unforeseen; and a substitution of scientific models for sensed experience…. Increasingly people were acting prospectively, probabilistically, according to their risk… Individual cases were increasingly managed as general cases, as instances of a category or class, rather than as unique predicaments, and doctors were increasingly the servo-mechanisms of this cloud of probabilities rather than intimate advisors alert to specific differences and personal meanings. This was what Illich meant by 'self-algorithmization' or disembodiment.

Six months after that article, Cayley wrote an essay (re-published with permission in this issue), in which he elaborates on all those elements—a pertinent frame for the reflection we attempt here in the special issue of the *IJIS*. Illich's eyes throw a lucid light to understand what is happening.

In spite of the claims that most public decisions about the pandemic are based in "science", there is no scientific study supporting the idea that confinement and distancing of healthy people are the best or even the proper way to deal with Covid-19. Opinion, masquerading as science, now governs—the prejudices of some professionals who've abandoned any sense of justice and decency before the emergency.

Everywhere, adopted policies are destroying the livelihoods of millions of people, perhaps the majority of the population. Even as the number of deaths attributed to the virus is contested, increasingly, evidence is emerging that the number of deaths caused by the situation created by those policies is higher than those attributed to the virus. Death by policy rather than virus is the secret in plain view.

A new cult emerges—the general devotion to prescriptions given in the name of medical science—despite the ability of the medical system to deliver what it promises. A recent study of Oxford University found that only 1 in 10 drugs and treatments prescribed by doctors will work. Another study revealed that 70% of all medical research is fraudulent[3]. For Rob Verkerk, executive and scientific director of the Alliance for Natural Health International, "the official Covid 'cure' is turning out to be worse than the disease."[4]

Our main concern: the obedience of a third of the people on Earth, and in particular their conviction that they are doing the right thing before the so-called pandemic. It is indeed difficult, at this point, not to see the real nature of the current threat. What we now have is not only an immoral and irresponsible economic and political elite, ready to continue the destruction of the environment and the social fabric. We also have an enormous number of people already formatted as "cybernetic beings", too easily transmogrified into statistical pigments – the intensive self-algorithmization about which Illich warned us. We are just beginning to see the predictable and perhaps intentional consequences of all of this.

The consequences: the immense destruction of livelihoods, in many cases constructed through the patient and courageous effort of generations; the destruction of the social fabric that

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[3] "Doctor 10%: just one in 10 treatment Works", *What Doctors Don't Tell You,* November/December 2020, pp. 18-20.
[4] Rob Verkerk, "Adapt, Don't Fight", *What Doctors Don't Tell You,* November/December 2020, p. 23.

is the basic condition for a peaceful social coexistence; the systematic destruction of all the beliefs and institutions constructed in the last 200 years; the continuation and even the intensification of the accelerated destruction of all the gifts of nature; the increasing, obscene concentration of wealth in always fewer hands, thus deepening inequalities; the massive increase in the biased use of violence, making evident its racist and sexist character—all this and many other evils are now extended in the name of "saving lives." Even worse, the widespread and largely passive acceptance by a great number of people of the pandemic policies as the right thing to do by, demonstrate both the loss of their reasoning abilities—informing both their behaviors and their moral judgments—while revealing acquiescence to the rules of this new "cult", the biomedical catechism.

These elements are addressed in different ways in many of the articles included in this issue. Many of the articles offer a reflection about how to react in the face of current challenges, with clear emphasis on Illich's insights. To understand Illich's insights requires going beyond the right-left poles of the political spectrum in which contemporary issues are framed. To be among the Left is to be pro-science, to be all-embracing of quarantine policies, to advance liberal/neo-liberal and democratic interventions. To be among the Right is to be anti-science, to reject infringement of an unfettered individual "freedom," to exalt the Market and to impugn the State. Classifying Illich's insights—utilizing these two dominant polarities—obliterates possibilities inherent in them, while blinding us to the countless alternatives now manifesting around the world; the diversity celebrated in all his writing.

A glaring omission within this special issue is a collection of stories about how people around the world, particularly among indigenous communities, are demonstrating amazing resilience, responding to the 'new normal' with ingenuity, courage and lucidity. They are using

their traditions, their moral judgment, their rational evaluation and a fascinating juxtaposition of knowledge from different sources. Having discovered the very patriarchal nature of the Covid 'cure' they have instead opted for resisting it. These stories are indeed so abundant and impressive that we are now organizing a special issue to present them, separately. We are convinced that these initiatives clearly resonate with Illich's notion of conviviality and in a very real sense represent an institutional inversion as suggested by Illich in *Tools for Conviviality*.

We hope that the reader will find within this collection of essays alternative ways of thinking, of being in relationship to the "novel Covid-19" virus, of "conviviality for the day 'after normal.'"

<div align="right">San Pablo Etla, December 2020</div>

The Corona-Complex

Marianne Gronemeyer

Translated by Jutta Mason

Several attempts to get myself to write – in the midst of the babble of voices that surrounded me from morning to night in 'Corona times' -- quickly came to a standstill. My project could not withstand the almost hourly fluctuations in my mood and the discouraging volatility of 'valid' insights. So here is a new attempt to do what I promised Franz Schandl - perhaps a little prematurely - because the more information that flies around my ears every day, the less I know where my head is and what my heart is beating for. So all I can really do is document my confusion. In this situation, Ivan Illich would have exhorted us to take care of our eyes and ears, to guard the senses in order to resist the 'disappearance of reality' that threatens us. So we should stop paying attention to the barrage of news and instead gather around the hospitable table for convivial conversation -- to get to the bottom of things and find a ground on which we can stand and exist. But on the one hand, 'gathering' has become punishable, and on the other hand, there has been the seductive, if deceptive, hope that in this great confusion of the news flood, there would emerge a redemptive message that would put an end to this spook.

But how does it work: stop habits whose harmfulness one has recognized or at least suspected? By just letting them go? It's not that easy. Quitting is a fine art. In order to be able to stop something - in the sense of breaking up, ending (*finire*), one has to listen to something, in the sense of listening carefully, 'be all ears' (*audire*). So one should be trying to listen after all?

Yes, but not to get answers, to raise questions. The sphere of the unknown must not be impoverished by the ever-growing terrain of knowledge. wrote Elias Canetti. For each answer a question must sprout that previously slept unseen. And we really have no lack of ignorance. The medical experts want to prove the trustworthiness of their statements precisely by freely confessing to their ignorance, which lies in the nature of the matter, the unknown virus.

However, it's not the cheap, permitted questions that are at issue, but the well-kept secrets of our social functioning. This search for clues does not lead to the dark field of hidden masterminds with world power fantasies, but into the bright daylight of modern certainties. In the 'hidden certainties' (Canetti), the secret driving forces are almost undetectable because nobody is looking for them. What we have taken for granted has been reliably removed from what is worth exploring, and that's what matters. Conspiracy theories are far too weak to point the way to the important questions of the present and to the hiding places of the modern certainties.

So let's prick up our ears and listen into the babble of voices! Then a few basic motifs gradually emerge from the cacophony, which - persistently repeated - set the tone. There is constant talk of a return to normality, which everyone longs for, like paradise lost. At the same time, however, there is a suspicion that after the crisis things will never be the way they were. Current analysis interprets what is happening as a three-stage process: there is a before - normality. Then an "invisible external enemy", the virus, broke into normality, wreaked havoc and caused a temporary state of emergency. And then the aftermath will come - the so-called 'new normality'. Now the split arrives, and not only from person to person, or between friend and enemy. The conflict runs right through my person: 'two souls, alas, in my bosom, one of which wants to separate from the other'; the one which hopes it will be as comfortable as before, and the other which fears nothing so much as that everything will stay the same and a great

opportunity for radical change will be wasted. Even worse is the fear that the state of emergency, with all its restrictions on freedom and its other excesses, could become a cherished habit, as long as the security promised along with it does not waver.

This inner conflict opens a door to a different reading of what is happening: the virus is not the *cause* of the crisis, but only lets the crisis *show itself*. In this reading, the normality of the before was no normality at all. For a long time there was already a crisis, the peculiar feature of which was that we were spared having to deal with it. For decades, the crisis in which we are deeply involved in our way of life has been prevented from becoming acute. Our social arrangements were all aimed specifically at extending the crisis to a permanent crisis and repeatedly postponing its outbreak through accommodation and supportive measures. It's not impossible that this will work again this time, but with what consequences?

The "normality" has become dubious in this reading, therefore questionable. Which concept of normality do we actually use in our modern interpretations of the world? What is considered normal has changed fundamentally in the course of my life story. In the past, the notion of normality grew out of people's daily activities, the experiences they had, agreements on how to interpret these experiences, the recurring rhythms of nature and the festivals and rituals that symbolically structured the year. Things had their time. There was no normality. Normalities varied from place to place. Today, decree creates normality. A legitimated caste of experts has the power to set standards in their respective areas of responsibility; standards that determine what should be considered normal, what is merely a tolerable deviation, and which deviations go beyond the scope of the normal so that they have to be suppressed or treated. I call this power of the experts 'diagnostic' and it is more profound than the power of the rich.

Standards inevitably lead to the world of numbers, measurement outputs and calculations; what cannot be measured cannot be standardized.

Standards are an unbeatable instrument of equivalence/homogeneity, making it possible to for everything to be comparable and thus 'equally valid' in the double sense. They teach us to systematically refrain from uniqueness and to degrade human beings as being merely carriers of features. What happens to us in 'corona times' is an unprecedented lesson in the terms of standardization: incarnate people are assembled into the characteristics by which they are defined. For example, I must learn that because of my 79 years I am a member of a "risk group". And that's the only relevant thing about me in the public debate. My 79 years of experience? Irrelevant. My story, my desires, aspirations, dreams, failures, my preferences, the driving forces, fears, hopes, what I think, suffer, learn to say, what I seek, what I stand for, what I insist on, my talents, my failures and weaknesses? All irrelevant. Only my membership in the "risk category between 70 and 79 years old" is relevant and makes me suitable as a statistic. I did not choose this 'group', which I am stuffed into without being asked, I did not join it, did not found it, do not know anyone from it - because it is foreign for me to consider my peers as a risk group. I experience this attribution in its barbaric reductionism as an outrageous imposition and emphatically resign my membership. Because, according to the logic of the corona ethics, I am automatically identified as a defective being in need of care, one unable to defend itself from the protection that is now aggressively prescribed as an act of caring. And I should learn to appreciate that as a win-win situation, from which the risk of infecting and the risk of infection benefit equally.

We can observe a new "certainty in statu nascendi" with the corona proceedings. The notion is that physical - that is, real - reality can be reproduced infinitely more precisely by

dizzying number constructions, mathematical examples and statistics, by column diagrams and curves -- than our senses can take it in, than our looking and astonishment and our experience can ever grasp. It's not about human destinies, it's about "flattening" a curve that supposedly determines being or not being. The measured world, not the created one, is considered real. The measurement of the world leads to the presumptuousness of the scientific world-interpreter. The belief in the world represented by numbers has gradually taken hold of us in the digital age and is about to petrify into becoming a totalitarian, unquestionable matter of course. Perhaps the conflict that we can still experience at this moment is one of the few remaining chances to oppose this indoctrination, by thinking and feeling.

My fundamental concern is this loss of reality in the paid-up world; the world of limit-determinants hatched by circles of experts who cannot tell us anything about the good life, but teach us what is still allowable before our livelihoods collapse. In all policy areas, limit-determinants set what should or should not be allowed. And politics has long since degenerated into haggling and trade-offs, in school, where it is about the allocation of career opportunities, as well as in health care, and at climate conferences and now in the corona crisis, where it is all about survival.

My confusion and irritation arises, however, from the nature and quality of the figures that are given to us in the official statements to justify the restrictions on freedom imposed on us. I am admittedly a dyslexic in statistical matters, but the numbers with which we are 'informed' on a daily basis are so lacking in seriousness that they make unreasonable demands on even ordinary people. I feel I'm being sold a bill of goods. We are bombarded with naked numbers that are not related to anything and are therefore completely meaningless, although they are assumed to be of existential importance. The deaths are counted worldwide every day, but in

such a way that, for example, the absolute death rates of China and Austria are presented to me in ranking lists, as if it were irrelevant to my judgment that they are related to a 9 million population in one case and a billion population in the other case. Let alone that I might learn something about how many people normally die in Austria and China in the corresponding period. Or: The new infections are meticulously numbered down to the individual person (e.g. today May 16, 2020 for Germany: 174,478) although we are assured that we do not know anything about the actual number of infections. Why is accuracy insinuated when there is nothing but fog? I simply cannot imagine that such blatant violations of the simplest basic statistical rules will be overlooked by the decision-makers. But why are we (those affected by decisions) being fed such outrageous nonsense? In fact, these meaningless numbers have a remarkable effect: the thousand contextless dead teach people fear, and they should. There was talk of shock therapy, shamelessly. It aimed to quickly and reliably induce people to make profound changes in their behavior while maintaining the appearance of voluntariness. It is the opposite of education. I call it manipulation, and I don't even say that there cannot be dangerous situations where manipulation is the last resort to averting the danger. But I see my hypothesis confirmed in that the virus does not create an unprecedented new situation, but only brings to light what we have long been accustomed to, below the threshold of our perception, caught in the delusion of freedom.

How much conditioning did we already get, to adapt ourselves to "alternative" system requirements, so we could be educated so drastically to the ways of the pandemic? We had already come a long way in self-education and self-monitoring, even before the crisis. We live in a thoroughly educated society in which, in times of crisis, the tools of black pedagogy, which spread fear and terror with threatening gestures, can be used for the purpose of improving

people. Dark pedagogy is currently outstripping the much friendlier light pedagogy, which dominates in consumerist times and focuses on seduction, temptation and the stimulation of needs. Overall, however, we are very well positioned for this double strategy.

Today's human being tries "to create the world in his own image, to create a completely human-made environment. He then discovers that he can only do this under one condition: by constantly redesigning himself to adapt. We now have to realize that (at the same time) the person is at stake," wrote Ivan Illich back in 1971. Modern educational institutions are increasingly serving this program of adaptation, which is mistaken for education. Homo educandus, the deficient being in need of shaping, who believed himself to be sovereign, is now being freed from his pseudo-autonomy. And like any crisis and every bad awakening, it can turn out for better and for worse.

There is a certain irony in the fact that, while the 'de-schooling' of schoolchildren and university students is put in place everywhere, and the formal school reveals its dispensability in a way which that was not considered possible, the whole of society experiences its own disenfranchisement. Although I am still wondering how calmly and without grumbling the rapid transition from democratic 'normal state' to the prescribed state of emergency took place, I understand how well we were prepared for it long ago. It was the good sound of two sentences to which initially got almost everyone concerned to readily consent to this imposition. One reads "health has priority" and the other second: "it is about saving lives".

But what kind of 'health' is it that is given priority over everything else in the current crisis? The religious philosopher Raimundo Pannikkar distinguishes the eastern concept of health from that of the western culture (he was at home in both cultures because he had a Spanish mother and an Indian father). In the western culture health is defined as the ability to work, in the

eastern culture, one is considered healthy who can be happy. I am afraid that 'health', which is now a priority, has nothing to do with joy and not even work. It has hardly any relation to the state of mind which actual people have to endure or to bear well. It is assessed through objective findings that are measured and, depending on the measurement or test result, declared to be significant or insignificant by those whose profession it is to understand something about it. For example, someone can feel healthy and is still declared ill, without symptoms. And so it could happen that in December 2017, 30 million Americans went to bed healthy and – still in the same condition - woke up sick, because the normal blood pressure levels had been lowered overnight. (Incidentally, this sudden mass disease was not considered an epidemic.)

And the lifesaving? What kind of a life is this top priority to save? "Lifesaving", I think first of all of the SOS calls from people who are in distress at sea, the knocking signals of people who have been buried alive, accident and catastrophe victims who need help. I think with shame, admiration and gratitude of people who in extreme cases, risk their own lives to save the lives of others. In fact, I can hardly believe that there are always some who do that. There have been hundreds of such people in the regions particularly affected by Corona disease and many have died, others worked to the point of exhaustion to help, often without being able to help and often under miserable conditions. But when the sentence surfaces almost fanfare-like in the confusion of voices in the crisis, it has a completely different meaning. It is a programmatic declaration of war against death, the most threatening adversary of life. "There is only one good death, the defeated one," states Jean Baudrillard. "It should be possible for everyone to reach the limit of their biological capital and enjoy their life" to the end "without violence. As if everyone had their little scheme of a formal life, their 'normal life expectancy' and a 'life contract' in their pocket."

The conquest of death is the credo of the world improvers, who are working feverishly to create the 'second' man-made 'nature', which will be superior to the 'first' in every respect and in which, ultimately, there should be nothing that cannot be done that is not done by humans, neither life nor death. But: there is no life around which everything revolves. There are only living beings, be they plants, humans or animals. Life is a social construct, a phantom (I. Illich), but one that "we now take so for granted that we don't dare to seriously question it." Despite its unreality, life has a peculiar dual nature. It is said to be precious, endangered, scarce but of extreme importance, therefore worth protecting and in need of protection, a sparse something that must be taken care of, checked and constantly monitored by concerned experts, insofar as it is an object, a matter of concern. On the other hand, it is presented as a powerful subject, as the ultimate instance, which decides with great authority about right and wrong, superior and subordinate, being or not being, even about good and evil. This subject-object hermaphrodite is the ideal artificial figure to justify the transformation of our living environment into a "technogenic milieu", as Ivan Illich aptly called this second nature. The idolized life is enthroned as a suffering and almighty substitute for God, then followed by the technical production of human replacement by the robot. So we have to grasp that under the regime of life, life and death are at stake, the art of living (ars vivendi) and the art of dying (ars moriendi).

Death and life belong together like day and night, one condition requires the other and vice versa. The fight against death to save life puts them in an irreconcilable contrast. However: "If you split being in the middle, if you want to grab one without the other, if you stick to the good and not also the bad ... then the dissociated evil impulse (evil now in a double sense) returns. .. to penetrate the good ... and to make it what it is itself. The defeated death makes the victorious life atrophy into a single death avoidance procedure."

Facit: The driving forces of modernity are enormously strengthened by this crisis in their respective monopoly claim: only scientific knowledge is trusted to correctly interpret the situation. Everything that is not certified by science is referred to the realm of superstition. Only technical remedies were considered to deal with the crisis; everything else that could have been healing was defamed as superstitious nonsense. Only bureaucratic procedures seemed to be suitable for regulating unregulated conditions. But the economy with its world monopoly of distribution is pretty ragged. It was considered the primus inter pares in the quartet of science, technology, bureaucracy, and economics. Now we see its supremacy waver in favor of the science-and-technology complex. That is entirely in the logic of a man-made second nature, which ultimately also abolishes man himself.

But the crisis would not be a crisis if everything could not turn out surprisingly different.

Pandemic Revelations[1]

David Cayley

In an earlier essay, I tried to explain why a policy of total quarantine, the so-called

lockdown, could gain wide acceptance, despite its being highly destructive of livelihood, social

morale and, ultimately, public health. How could people even countenance a term like lockdown,

with its overtones of imprisonment and total control, let along coming to think well of it and

condemning and shaming its violators and critics? My argument was that societies like Canada

had, for a long time, been "practicing" – we'd already turned the concepts on which our

pandemic policies have been founded into common sense. These concepts include risk, safety,

pro-active management, science as a mighty oracle speaking in a single authoritative voice, and

above all, Life, as a quantum to be preserved at all costs. Gradual naturalization of these

concepts has made the policy that has been followed seem so rational, so inevitable, and so

entirely without alternative that it has been possible to freely vilify its opponents and largely

exclude them from media which might have made their voices politically influential. But

knowing this doesn't make it any easier to swallow. What has come into stark relief during the

pandemic may have been already latently there, but to see it actualized as the outline of a new

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[1] In early April I posted an essay called "Questions About the Pandemic from the Point-of-View of Ivan Illich." It was written mainly to clarify my own mind and to share my thoughts with a few like-minded friends, but, thanks to the good offices of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who reposted my essay on QuodLibet, a site where he blogs, the piece was widely read, reproduced, and translated. Since then I have been asked a number of times whether I have changed my mind about what I wrote in April. No. But I have continued to reflect on the meaning of what has overtaken us. One result is an article that I wrote for the Oct. issue of the Literary Review of Canada, which is available at: https://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2020/10/the-prognosis/. Here are some further reflections.

social order is still a compelling and somewhat frightening experience. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to look further into what the pandemic has revealed and brought to light.

Science

From the very beginning of the pandemic, there has been a steady drumbeat of scientific criticism of the policy of total quarantine – the name I will give to the attempt to keep SARS COV-2 at bay until a vaccine can be administered to all. The first instance to come to my attention was a paper by epidemiologist John Ioannidis, a professor of medicine at Stanford, particularly expert in bio-medical statistics. He warned of the "fiasco" that would result from introducing drastic measure in the absence of even the most elementary data, such as the infection mortality rate of the disease and the costs of immobilizing entire populations.[1] What some of these costs might be was spelled out in a May 16th article in the British journal *The Spectator* by Ioannidis's colleague, Jayanta Battacharya, writing with economist Mikko Packalen of Ontario's Waterloo University.[2] Entitled "Lives v. Lives" it argued that the deaths that would be caused by lockdowns were likely to far outnumber the deaths averted. They projected, for example, a massive increase in child mortality due to loss of livelihood – an increase completely out of scale with the effects of the pandemic. They also pointed out that lockdowns protect those already most able to protect themselves – those in comfortable situations for whom "working from home" is no more than a temporary inconvenience – and endanger those least able to protect themselves – the young, the poor and the economically marginal. By summer a stellar group of Canadian health professionals had recognized the same dangers as Battacharya and Packalen.[3] In their open letter to Canada's political leaders, they pleaded for "a balanced response" to the pandemic, arguing that the "current approach" posed serious threats to both

"population health" and "equity." This group included two former Chief Public Health Officers for Canada, two former provincial public health chiefs, three former deputy ministers of health, three present or former deans of medicine at Canadian universities and various other academic luminaries – a virtual Who's Who of public health in Canada. Nevertheless, their statement created barely a ripple in the media mainstream – an astonishing fact which I'll return to presently.

This pattern has continued – most recently with the Great Barrington Declaration. This was a statement, issued on Oct. 6 by Martin Kulldorf, a professor of medicine at Harvard, Sunetra Gupta, a professor of theoretical epidemiology at Oxford, and Jay Battacharya of Sanford, whom I introduced a moment ago.[4] Their statement deplored "the devastating effects on...public health" of the present policy and advocated "focused protection" – a policy of protecting those at risk from COVID while allowing everyone else to go about their business. In this way, they reasoned, immunity could gradually build up in the healthy population, without endangering those who are particularly vulnerable to the disease.

A little while after the Great Barrington Declaration was put into circulation, an article by a British immunologist and respiratory pharmacologist, Mike Yeadon, provided reason for hope that there might already be much higher levels of immunity than is commonly supposed.[5] Yeadon is a veteran of the drug industry where he directed research on new treatments for respiratory infection and eventually started his own biotech company. He argued that, even though SARS COV-2 was "novel," it was still a coronavirus and, as such, substantially similar to other coronaviruses. By his estimate, up to 30% of people may have possessed "reactive T-cells" capable of fighting off SARS Cov-2 infections when the pandemic began. This is startling information, because it shows that the hypothesis from which all governments began – that all

were equally vulnerable – was quite wrong. In support of his theory Yeadon asserted that "multiple, top quality research groups around the world"[6] had shown that such cross-immunities between coronaviruses are real and effective. His second move in this article was to try to establish how many people had been infected so far. This he did by reckoning backwards from the so-called Infection Fatality Rate (IFR), or the percentage of people who have had the disease who die from it. (If you know the percentage who have died you can derive from it the total number infected.) Here he relied on the work or John Ionannidis – he of the "fiasco" warning mentioned earlier – who had recently published in the *Bulletin* of the WHO a peer-reviewed meta-study – a study surveying other studies – in which he estimated the infection mortality rate of COVID-19, arriving at a median figure of .23%.[7] (This figure falls to .05% when deaths among those over seventy are excluded.). Applying Ioannidis's estimates to the British population, Yeadon calculated that up to 30% of the British population had probably been infected. Combining his two numbers – those with prior immunity and those with immunity acquired during the pandemic, he concluded that herd immunity was probably in sight.

The positions taken by Yeadon and the Great Barrington epidemiologists have been echoed or anticipated by many other health professionals. On September 20, a group of nearly 400 Belgian doctors, supported by more than a thousand other health workers, published an open letter pleading for an end to "emergency" measures and calling for open public discussion. [8] Ten days later more than twenty Ontario physicians sent a comparable letter to Ontario Premier Doug Ford. Whether all these people are "right" is not the question I want to raise here. Since only time will tell, and even when it does, probably not definitively, I don't even think that's the proper question. Better questions might be: is what they're saying plausible, is it well founded, is it worth discussing? Science supposedly works by a patient and painstaking process of

eventually getting things right by first being willing to get them wrong and then comparing notes in the hope of finally arriving at a better account. But what we have seen during this pandemic is something quite different: the strange spectacle of governments and established media trumpeting their attachment to science while, at the same time, marginalizing or excluding any scientific opinion not in agreement with their preferred policy. This is striking in the case of the discussion, or lack of discussion, of *herd immunity* – a natural fact which has somehow been vilified as a heartless "strategy" recommended by those who don't mind seeing a lot of their fellow citizens killed.[9] (In case this seems extreme I will provide evidence when I come to my discussion of media.). This began in March when the British government were held to be following a policy of herd immunity and immediately shamed into introducing the same stringent lockdown imposed by all comparable countries, with the qualified exception of Sweden. (Part of this retreat involved denying that there had ever been such a policy, so what the British government actually thought it was doing remains moot). The same arguments have recently been brought to bear against the Great Barrington Declaration. There was, for example, "the John Snow memorandum" in which a group of doctors denounced any "management strategy relying upon immunity from natural infections." This memorandum haughtily declined to mention the Great Barrington Declaration by name, as if even mentioning would give it an undeserved dignity, but was clearly a response to it nonetheless.

Three points stand out for me in the positions of the Great Barrington signatories. The first, which they have all reiterated almost plaintively, is that what they are recommending was formerly, in Jay Battacharya's words, "standard public health practice."[10] The novelty is not in the idea that humanity must come to terms with a new virus; it's in the idea that this process of reaching what epidemiologists call "endemic equilibrium" can somehow be forestalled,

postponed or avoided altogether. This hope has been fostered by the rhetoric of war that has supported total mobilization against COVID-19 from the outset, and this rhetoric has in turn depended on public ignorance of elementary virology. (By this, I mean, roughly speaking, the sheer number of viruses to which we are exposed, the role viruses have played in our evolution, the role they continue to play within us, and the robustness of our defences against viral infections.). "So powerful and ancient are viruses," says Luis P. Villareal, the founding director of the Center for Virus Research at the Irvine campus of the University of California, "that I would summarize their role in life as 'Ex Virus Omnia' (from virus everything)."[11] Appreciation that what we are currently going through with a new virus is natural and, historically speaking, normal, might do a lot to take the air out of the frequently repeated and self-dramatizing claim that it is quite "unprecedented," "the greatest health care crisis in our history"[12] (Prime Minister Trudeau) etc.

The second point is that herd immunity is not a "strategy" but a condition. Whether it's reached by vaccination or by immunity acquired through natural exposure, it is the way in which we get along with viruses. The idea that this process can be extensively reshaped by what the John Snow memo writers call "management strategy" seems fanciful to the Great Barrington writers. It is at least debatable. It might be true that isolation works to "flatten the curve, and that masks reduce viral load and thus sometimes transform a sickness-inducing dose into a beneficial "innoculum." But one still has to ask what is gained and what is lost by these interventions and postponements. Can we really circumvent nature and maintain control without violating the Hippocratic maxim that when the way is not clear one should at least refrain from harm?

This brings up the third and decisive point: the definition of public health. Can this definition be confined to the prevention of a single disease, however much of a challenge it

poses, or must it be conceived as taking in all the various determinants of health? If the second definition be accepted, then I think a case can be made that the policy of total mobilization against COVID has been a catastrophe. Consider just a preliminary sketch of the consequences. There has been widespread and potentially fatal loss of livelihood throughout the world, especially amongst economically marginal groups. Businesses that have taken years to build have been destroyed. Suicide, depression, addiction and domestic violence have all increased. Public debt has swelled to potentially crippling proportions. The performing arts have been devastated. Precious "third places"[13] that sustain conviviality have closed. Fear has been sown between people. Homelessness has grown to the point where some downtown Toronto parks have begun to resemble the hobo camps of the 1930's. There have been surges in other diseases that have gone untreated due to COVID preoccupation. Many formerly face-to-face interactions have been virtualized, and this change threatens, in many cases, to become permanent – it seems, for example, that "leading universities" like Harvard and U.C. Berkeley have enthusiastically adopted on-line teaching in the hopes of franchising their expertise in future. The list goes on. Is this a worthwhile price to pay to avert illness amongst healthy people who could for the most part have sustained the illness? The question, by and large, has not even been asked. We don't even know how much illness has been averted by our draconian policies, and we probably never will, since the experiment of comparing a locked down population to a freely circulating one would be impossible to conduct. In the absence of such an experiment most discussion will founder on the elementary distinction between correlation and cause – that a lockdown was introduced and the disease abated does not prove that the lockdown was the cause of the abatement.

This is a glaring issue. The course of the epidemic in different countries is almost invariably ascribed to the policy followed by its government: Jacinda Ardern saved New Zealand, Donald Trump sank the United States, the scientifically minded Angela Merkel brought Germany through much more safely than bumbling Boris Johnson did in Great Britain, etc. This overlooks a huge amount that is not in the control of politicians – New Zealand is comprised of two remote islands; the United States suffers from epidemic obesity; populations differ in their habits, susceptibilities and even their genetic makeup. Anyone who tries to understand why they caught a cold when they got a cold and why on another occasion they didn't while someone else did will recognize an element of mystery, or at least obscurity. We don't know, and yet it currently seems obvious to everyone that a straight line can be drawn from policy to the pattern of COVID infections.

But the main question here is why there has been no discussion of the public health implications of the policy that has been followed. I will try to answer this question as it touches on various institutions, notably media, but first I'll continue with my discussion of science. This word is, in my opinion, a source of fatal confusion. The basis of this confusion is that the term functions at the same time as a myth and as a description. Words possess denotations – the objects, real or imagined, at which they point – and connotations – the cloud of associations and feelings which they generate. The word science, in everyday talk, is all connotation and no denotation – the crucial attribute of those verbal puffballs that German scholar Uwe Pörksen calls "plastic words," and Ivan Illich "amoeba words."[14] It points to no agreed object – there are so-called hard sciences, and therefore, by inference, soft sciences, observational sciences and mathematical sciences, historical sciences and experimental sciences – and it possesses no agreed method. One often hears of "the scientific method" but even the most cursory survey of

the philosophy of science will yield multiple competing accounts of what it might be. Because of this the word science, when its meaning is not further specified, functions as a collage of meanings whose rhetorical purpose is very often to induce nothing more than a radiating field of positive connotations. It is, in in this respect, what French theorist Roland Barthes calls a myth.[15] Myths, according to Barthes, "naturalize" the phenomena they aggregate and summarize. In the case of science, a diverse, heterogeneous, and sometimes internally contradictory phenomenon is smoothed out and compressed into an apparent compact and consistent object which can be then made into a social protagonist and a grammatical subject: science says, science shows, science demands etc. An actual history, with all its twists and turns, has been replaced by what appears to be an unproblematic natural object – intelligible, obvious and at hand.

The result is that the myth obscures and absorbs the actual object(s). Actual sciences are limited and contingent, conditional and conditioned bodies of knowledge. These limits are of various kinds. Some are practical: evidence may be contradictory, insufficient, inaccessible, or impossible to obtain without exposing the subjects of the research to some unacceptable harm. Some are limits in principle: ignorance expands with knowledge, reductive methods will necessarily fail to disclose the reality of the whole phenomena which they disassemble analytically, all scientific procedures rest on philosophical pre-suppositions which cannot themselves be put in question and so on. During the last century, philosophers, historians and sociologists have undertaken many studies of what one of those philosophers, Bruno Latour, calls "science in action."[16] They have attempted, as historians Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer have written, "to break down the aura of self-evidence surrounding the experimental way of producing knowledge."[17] Through this work a detailed picture has been built up of

what is involved in producing and stabilizing scientific facts and then, as Latour says, "making them public."[18] I tried to give some idea of the range of these new images of the sciences in an epic 24-hour Ideas series called "How to Think About Science" that was broadcast in 2007 and 2008.[19] That these images of the sciences are of a constrained and situated object in no way undermines or denies their precious achievement in building up bodies of knowledge that are based on public and contestable evidence.

A realistic image of the various sciences as they are actually practiced is a necessary foundation for political conversation. The myth of Science on the other hand is utterly corrosive of politics insofar as it supposes a body of immaculate and comprehensive knowledge that renders politics superfluous. I do not think this is an exaggeration. Again and again in the last year I have listened to political statements that present Science as a unified, imperative and infallible voice indicating an indisputable course of action. The implication is that knowledge can replace judgment. But it cannot – because knowledge, as I have argued, is limited both in practice and in principle. Moral judgment is unavoidable, and is the proper domain of politics. To institute a lockdown which protects that part of the population able to shelter at home, while exposing another part to the harms that follow from lockdown, involves a political judgment. To disguise it as a scientific judgment is, in the first place, deceitful. At the time the decision was made no evidence whatsoever existed to support a policy of mass quarantine of a healthy population. Such a policy had never even been tried before and, even after the fact, is not really amenable to controlled study in any case. But more important was the moral abdication that was involved. Instead of an honest evaluation of the harms avoided and the harms induced, the public was told that Science had spoken, and the case was closed. The politicians and the media were then free to rend their garments and tremble in sympathy over all the harm the virus had done

without ever having to admit that much of this damage was politically induced. Where there was no science, the myth of Science became a screen and a shield behind which politicians could shelter themselves from the consequences of decisions they could deny ever having made.

It is fair to say, I think, that the various sciences that are involved in the continuing catastrophe of COVID-19 are deeply divided. Their voices have not generally been heard, but many hundreds of medical doctors, epidemiologists, virologists and former public health officials have spoken against a policy of indiscriminate quarantine. It's quite possible that many thousands more share their opinion and might have said so had the onset of the virus been met by a discussion rather than a stampede. It is after all true, as Jay Battacharya says, that what these scientists have recommended – "a balanced response" rather than a utopian pursuit of total control – was once "standard public health practice." But so far almost no hint of scientific dissensus has appeared in the Canadian media I have followed like the CBC and the *Globe and Mail*. What are the consequences? Some warn that "trust in science" will be impaired. This is the fear expressed by four medical scientists writing recently in *The National Post* on the need for what they call "healthy discussions."[20] But in the end these writers only want to foster freer expression in order to protect the authority of a unified subject called "science" which depends, in the last analysis, on trust rather than argument. The phrase is telling because it doesn't speak of knowledgeable assent to the findings of a particular science – for this no trust is necessary – but rather of a general disposition to believe whatever carries the imprimatur of some scientific institution and is authorized to appear in its livery. Science, in this sense, resembles Plato's "noble lie" – a fable told by the wise to prevent credulous citizens from falling prey to inferior myths.[21]

It is my belief that trust in a Science that stand above the social fray – immaculate, oracular, disinterested – is already fatally eroded – both by several generations of patient study of what the sciences actually do and actually know, and by the dogmatism of the noble liars who have driven unanswered skeptics into the desperate straits of conspiracy theory (more on that in a moment). I would like to plead for a new picture in which a mystified Science is replaced by diverse sciences, dissensus is recognized as normal, limits to knowledge are admitted as being in the nature of things, not a temporary always about-to-be-overcome embarrassment, and the rough and ready moral judgments that are the proper stuff of politics are flushed out of the cover currently provided for them by Science-as-myth. It has been my view for a long time that only after the myth of Science is overcome will we be able to see what the sciences are and escape the spell of what they are not. Unhappily one of the revelations of the pandemic seems to be that this myth is entrenching itself ever more deeply in our social imagination.

On the Need for Political Realignment

A figure of great pathos for me during the most recent phase of the pandemic has been the theoretical epidemiologist Sunetra Gupta, a professor at Oxford, the recipient of several prestigious awards for her scientific achievements, and one of the authors of the Great Barrington declaration. In her writings and statements she has consistently made three crucial points bearing on public policy: 1) "lockdowns only delay the inevitable spread of the virus" 2) "lockdown is a luxury of the affluent; something that can be afforded only in wealthy countries — and even then, only by the better-off households in those countries" and 3) that, under lockdown, "the poorest and most vulnerable people" will inevitably be made "to bear the brunt of the fight against coronavirus" with "the working class and younger members of

society...carry[ing] the heaviest burden."[22] She has publicized these ideas, expecting, in her words, "debate and disagreement" and "welcoming" such disagreement insofar as that is how, in her understanding, "science progresses." Early in the pandemic she also hoped, as someone who identified with the political left and had "strong views about the distribution of wealth [and] about the importance of the Welfare State," that others so identified could be brought to see that lockdowns were aggravating existing social inequalities as well as generating new ones. Neither her hopes nor her expectations have been fulfilled. In place of debate, the Great Barrington statement has generated, again in her words, "insults, personal criticism, intimidation and threats" – an "onslaught," she writes, "of vitriol and hostility" from "journalists and academics," as well as the public at large for which she was "utterly unprepared" and by which she has been "horrified." And all this for enunciating what she and her colleagues understood was formerly "standard public health practice" – that phrase of Jay Battacharya's that I keep repeating because I find it so evocative of the seemingly unnoticed novelty of the present moment.

Perhaps most striking of all, the Great Barrington Declaration was made in a handsome, converted mansion in bucolic Western Massachusetts, the home of the American Institute for Economic Research, an institute founded on a vision of a society of "pure freedom and private governance" in which "the role of government is sharply confined" and "individuals can flourish within a truly free market and a free society" – a view commonly called libertarian.[23] This was a rather discordant setting for Sunetra Gupta, avowedly "Left-wing" and a proponent of "the need for publicly owned utilities and government investment in nationalised industries." Among other things it allowed her opponents to associate her with "climate change denial" (though that is, in fact, something of a caricature of the AIER's actual position which questions climate policy more than denying climate change as such.) But more important for me is the transposition of

what, for Gupta, ought to have been a left-wing position into a right-wing position. What this illustrates, I think, is just how inept, deceptive and confining these antique political descriptions have become.

The terms left and right originated in the French National Assembly of 1789 when the friends or the revolution sat to the left of the chair and the supporters of the king to the right. Over time they evolved into signifiers of the balance of power between state and market according to which predominated as an allocator of resources and locus of social decision-making. Today they are verbal straitjackets and fetters on social imagination. Like the legendary Procrustes who chopped or stretched his guests in order to adapt them to the bed he had available, they distort our circumstances more than describe them. The pandemic has made this plain. It is demonstrable that lockdown and economic shut-down have been applied at the expense of those least able to protect themselves. Some former fat cats have suffered too, of course – airlines, travel companies and the like have been decimated across the board – but it is generally true that the poorer and weaker have paid a heavier price than the stronger and more well-to-do. Grocery clerks have stayed at work, while civil servants have worked from home; the working class have lost jobs while most professional employment has continued; small businesses have failed, while big businesses have held on; the economically marginal have been driven to addiction, homelessness and suicide while the well-heeled and well-housed have suffered little more than an excess of one another's company. Since the left ostensibly speaks for the less-advantaged, one might have expected anti-lockdown to become a left-wing issue but the case has been quite dramatically the reverse. Criticism has come almost exclusively from the right with only the bravest of leftists, like Sunetra Gupta, daring to cross the aisle.

Throughout the pandemic both political decision-makers and mainstream media have treated criticism of the policy of mass quarantine as either beneath mention or outside the bounds of rational discussion. When demonstrators in small numbers began to gather outside the Ontario legislature back in the spring, the province's Premier dismissed them as "yahoos." Even though a man of the populist right himself, Premier Doug Ford wanted everyone to know that these were not fellow-citizens but sub-humans – the original yahoos in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* were "brutes in human form" – whose opinions need not be recognized or taken into account. This abuse has continued. When the "second wave" began, critics pointed out, first, that the number of "cases" being recorded might be related to the number of tests being done; second, that positive tests were not actually "cases" in the sense of sick people; and third, that mortality had remained dramatically lower than in the spring, even as these "cases" had surged. These criticisms were quickly stigmatized by the *Globe and Mail*'s André Picard. The claim that the second wave was mainly a "case-demic," he wrote, was the work of "conspiracy theorists and 'fake-news' chanters."[24] Again the implication was that people like me, who had been struck by precisely these three features of the second wave, belonged to a class whose views were the result of some pathology, malice or social defect and needn't be considered. This mixture of condescension and contempt was later extended to the Great Barrington Declaration. *The Globe and Mail* did not, in fact, deign to notice the declaration as a news item. Since the paper had stated in its editorial columns that "Canada is at war,"[25] they were presumably under no obligation to report such treasonable views. Nevertheless, André Picard on Nov. 9th wrote about it in a vein that suggested that he thought his readers would know about it and would certainly share his distaste for it. The Great Barrington Declaration is entirely couched in terms of public health – building immunity amongst those at low risk while protecting those at high

risk, it argues, will achieve the best and "most compassionate" balance of harms under the current circumstances – but, in Picard's rendering it becomes incomprehensibly cruel and obtuse. "What the Great Barrington Declaration says," he writes, "when you got through the pomposity, is that profits matter more than people, that we should let the coronavirus run wild, and, if the vulnerable die in service of economic growth, so be it."[26] This is an astonishing misrepresentation – the more so as it directed against a sober and considered proposal from eminent and qualified scientists by a man who explicitly portrays himself as a friend and defender of threatened "science." What I want to emphasize here, besides its inaccuracy, is its sheer belligerence and incivility – as if opposing views had only to be mocked not argued with. Where in all this rage can a civil voice like Sunetra Gupta's hold a plea?

I see two great problems here. The first is the violent reciprocity that turns left and right into warring factions and confines each one ever more tightly in its proper box. What the enemy says is wrong – entirely and a priori – simply because the enemy has said it. Let me take an example. For some years the media have been building up a laughingstock called the "anti-vaxxer." This is not a person who questions some element or aspect of mass vaccination on some rational ground – those who hold the correct opinion deny in advance and on principle that there can even be such questions or such grounds – it is rather a social enemy, someone whom you know by definition to be unpardonably ignorant, selfish and irresponsible, and whose arguments you can therefore disregard. Having created this scarecrow, it then becomes quite easy to assimilate to it a new bogeyman called the "anti-masker." Now you have an instant characterization for all who may question the policy of lockdown. In actual fact the question of masks is scientifically quite murky. Until last spring both the W.H.O and Canada's chief medical officer, Teresa Tam held that they were of no utility in blocking an infectious agent as miniscule

and as wily as a coronavirus. On April 20th of this year, the Ontario Civil Liberties Association released a study by retired physicist Denis G. Rancourt, in which he reviewed the scientific literature on masks and concluded bluntly that "masks don't work." "There have been extensive randomized controlled trial (RCT) studies, and meta-analysis reviews of RCT studies," he wrote in his abstract of this article, "which all show that masks and respirators do not work to prevent respiratory influenza-like illnesses, or respiratory illnesses believed to be transmitted by droplets and aerosol particles."[27] Some contrary observational studies (i.e. without controls) have been presented since, and ingenious suggestions made that masks, by reducing viral load, may deliver what amounts to an inoculation dose and thus serve as a sort of proto-vaccine, but one can still say that the science is, at best, ambiguous and that most of the studies touting good effects like reduced viral load have paid no attention to potential ill effects – where do the viruses hypothetically blocked by your mask then go, etc.? The only randomized controlled trial made during the pandemic that I know of took place in Denmark in the spring. With more than 3,000 participants, it found no statistically significant difference in how many contracted COVID between those who wore masks and those who didn't.[28] Here one almost has to pinch oneself when contemplating the degree to which ritualism and superstition can be disguised as science. Rancourt's survey, and the more recent Danish study, if not definitive, should at least weigh heavily in public discussion, but instead the "anti-masker" has become the very epitome of the anti-social, anti-scientific rube. I do not intend here to speak against ritual – people were so badly panicked by the first phase of the pandemic, and made so afraid of one another, that some ritualization of that fear, like masking, was probably necessary if there was to be a return even to semi-normal social interaction. I'm only objecting to ritual behaviours being disguised as scientific mandates and then made a basis for ostracization and legal censure.

This is the first problem: making judgments whose only grounds are the dynamic of enmity: the enemy of my enemy is my friend, whatever the enemy says or thinks is wrong, and so forth. On this basis, once Donald Trump has said that the cure for COVID shouldn't be worse than the disease, as he did last spring, then this thought becomes unthinkable and unspeakable by his opponents simply because Donald Trump has said it. This inability to think the enemy's thoughts is fatal to sound reasoning. That the cure must not be worse than the disease is a principle that goes back to Hippocrates and remains true even in the mouth of a scoundrel. Reflexive polarization creates false dichotomies, cleaving opposites that should be held together into warring half-truths. The second problem that I want to highlight is the inadequacy of the left-right political map on which battle lines are currently being drawn. The difficulty lies in what is omitted when all political decisions are plotted on a single axis running from state to market, public to private provision, administrative control to the "pure freedom" espoused by Sunetra Gupta's erstwhile host, the American Institute for Economic Research. The first thing that is ignored is scale. This theme was introduced into contemporary political thought by the Austrian writer Leopold Kohr in his 1956 book *The Breakdown of Nations*. "Behind all forms of social misery," Kohr wrote, there is "one cause...bigness." "Whenever something is wrong something is too big."[29] With this book, Kohr founded a new school of political ecology that his student and successor Ivan Illich called "social morphology."[30] British biologists D'arcy Wentworth Thompson and J.B.S. Haldane had studied the close fit between form and size in nature and concluded that natural forms are viable only at the appropriate scale i.e. a hawk's form would not be viable at the scale of a sparrow, or a mouse's at the scale of an elephant.[31] Kohr was the first to argue that social form and size show the same correlation. E.F. Schumacher, another student of Kohr's, would later popularize the argument in his *Small is*

Beautiful. Illich also developed and extended Kohr's crucial idea in his book *Tools for Conviviality.*

Why does scale matter in the present case? Under cover of restricting the spread of COVID, emergency administrative regulation and control is being extended into areas normally outside the purview of the state – friendship, family life, religious worship, sexual relations etc. (One Toronto city councilor, in her newsletter to her constituents, recommended masturbation, under the slogan "you are your safest partner."[32]). In the past, prerogatives justified by war have often been retained even after peace has been restored, and it seems prudent to assume that elements of the current regime will outlast the present emergency. One can already see the emerging outline of what one might call, on the model of the National Security State, a new Health Security State. The modern image of a social body comprised of individual citizens associating freely with one another is being replaced by the image of a giant immune system in which each is obliged to the whole according to principles of risk and overall system integrity – an assembly of "lives" comprising ultimately one overarching Life. In the name of this new social body, any obligation whatsoever can potentially be interrupted and proscribed. The most shocking and telling example for me is the way in which the dying have been left alone – unaccompanied, untouched unconsoled. But this is not an issue on which the left-right diagram sheds any light whatever. The answer to such a state is not a market in which private rather than public actors keep us penned in protective isolation form one another. The issue is one of scale – the prerogatives of friendship, affinity, and mutual aid v. the imperatives of system health – and of culture – are we to be allowed other gods than Health?

A second issue that fails to compute in the prevailing left-right scheme is conviviality or liveability. This quality depends heavily on what American writer Ray Oldenburg calls "third

places" – places whose character is neither public nor private but an amalgam of both.[33] These places get left out of the account when public health is pitted against "the economy" and criticism of lockdowns – as in the statement I quoted earlier from André Picard – is equated with a willingness to sacrifice "the vulnerable in the service of economic growth." The butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker all contribute their mite to G.N.P. alongside Amazon and General Motors, but they don't really belong to the same world. Money may change hands, but many of the small enterprises that make localities habitable, hospitable and vivid belong more to the world of subsistence than to the grow-or-die world of The Economy. The performing arts also belong in this category. This whole dimension has been badly and, often enough, fatally injured during the pandemic. Undertakings patiently built up and patiently built into communities over many years are failing. At times, conviviality itself has been given a bad name, as it is in caricatures of the reckless young, endangering their elders by getting too close to one another. But none of this really registers on a spectrum on which the masked left is pitted against the unmasked right, conviviality is conflated with "economic growth," and civil liberty is consigned to the care of armed militias menacing American state legislatures.

What this points to – its "revelation" in terms of my theme – is the desperate need for political realignment. Left and right are very old wineskins that are exploding all around us as they are made to try and contain some very new wine.[34] Sunetra Gupta finds a platform only among libertarians who conflate freedom with free markets because there is no ground on the left for a position that punctures the dream-world of total safety and total control. The libertarians for their part affirm the indifferent operations of free markets as the only foundation for economic justice because they see a tyrannical state as the only alternative. The religious are driven to the

right because the left sees religious duty as no more than a revocable privilege granted by that "mortal god," the state.[35] The friends of the common good are driven to the left because they see nothing on the right but idolatry of the monstrous machinery of the market. They defend lockdowns as "care" while overlooking the collateral damage that care can do when it acts at the scale of mass quarantine. The right acknowledges the damage but can only enunciate a competing view of care in terms that reinforce an economic system that is rapidly chewing up the entire biosphere. Mightn't it be time to talk?

Conspiracy Theories

Earlier I noted *Globe and Mail* health columnist André Picard's willingness to condemn anyone who questioned a policy founded on "cases" (which are often – no one knows how often – not cases of illness but merely positive test results) as a "conspiracy theorist." Fed by the shadowy figure of QAnon, this has become a frequent term of abuse directed at those who have been unwilling to accept the idea that a victory over COVID is worth the ruin it may produce. The epithet is so convenient and so mystifying that I think it's worth exploring a little what is meant by it and what it may be hiding.

Let me begin with a story. Some years ago, in the long aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon, a CBC colleague and friend came to me with a request. Would I support his proposal, he asked, to do a series of broadcasts on *Ideas*, where I was then a producer, about what was wrong with the official account of the attacks. This account had been submitted in August of 2004 by the official inquiry, the bipartisan National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States (the 9/11 Commission for short). This colleague then issued a challenge: that before deciding I should at least read David Ray Griffin's

2004 book *The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions About the Bush Administration and 9/11.* Griffin, as I was to learn, was a distinguished professor of philosophy at the Claremont School of Theology in southern California, a hotbed in my mind of "process theology," rather than conspiracy theory. (Process theology, of which Griffin is as an exponent – he co-founded, with John Cobb, The Center for Process Studies at Claremont – is a school of theology that was inspired by the philosophy of A.N. Whitehead.) Intrigued, I complied with my colleague's request and was impressed and disconcerted by Griffin's temperate, well-argued and well-documented book. At that point there was no chance that *Ideas* was going to approve my colleague's proposal, since Griffin's book, despite its author's academic *bona fides*, still carried the full odium attaching to "conspiracy theories" in respectable journalistic precincts. But I got interested nonetheless. Up to that time, I had never taken the slightest interest in such theories, assuming them to be an obsession of cranks, but I was surprised to learn from Griffin that, in the similar case of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 – surprise attack serving as a wished-for *casus belli* – respectable historians had produced evidence that the U.S. sustained an attack it could have foreseen (and perhaps did foresee) in order to stir its population to war. (I don't mean that this is a widely accepted idea or that it has been convincingly demonstrated, just that some evidence along these lines has been admitted over time into the historical record. See, for example, John Toland, *Infamy: Pearl Harbor and Its Aftermath*, Doubleday, 1982)

I decided to conduct a little informal research, using the case of the assassination of John Kennedy in 1963 and the official account of it that was given by the Warren Commission the following year. Whenever I found an opportunity, I asked people I was talking with whether they accepted the Warren Report as the truth about Kennedy's murder. The results were another surprise: amongst those who had an opinion, I couldn't find a single soul who didn't think that

the Warren Commission had overlooked or concealed some or all of the truth about what happened in Dallas in November of 1963. Another striking case was the TV series "The Valour and the Horror" broadcast on the CBC in 1992. This series, in an episode called "Death by Moonlight," made the claim that Allied air forces had knowingly committed atrocities against civilian populations as part of the bombing of Germany during the Second World War. Older relatives of mine had participated in the air war, and I was swept up in the furor that followed the broadcast. Here the issue was partly about what people actually knew at the time and partly about how the "strategic bombing" of German cities was to be framed fifty years later. It wasn't news that German civilians had been incinerated in deliberately-set fire storms in Hamburg, Dresden and other cities. What was at issue was whether this could be faced as a crime or should remain protectively wrapped in the heroic narrative of necessity bravely borne in the defense of freedom.

What we can see and what we can say about the past varies with historical distance and with the intensity of the commitments with which we view it. It becomes easier with time to face the conspiratorial dimension in political decisions – that a few privately decide and many suffer in the execution of their decisions. How does this lengthy prologue relate to the pandemic? Well it seems to me that once the name of *conspiracy theorist* becomes a handy and liberally applied insult, as we saw earlier in the case of André Picard, a certain mystification is right around the corner. Ruling out conspiracy a priori is as fatal to unprejudiced investigation as assuming it. Take the strange case of Event 201, the pandemic planning exercise staged last October, on the very brink of the pandemic, by a partnership consisting of the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins, the World Economic Forum, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This was, according to the organizers, a "tabletop exercise that simulated a series of

dramatic, scenario-based facilitated discussions, confronting difficult, true-to-life dilemmas associated with response to a hypothetical, but scientifically plausible, pandemic"[36] During these discussions, many of the features of the pandemic that followed were quite accurately foreseen. According to the documentary *Plandemic* this was because the pandemic *was* foreseen and planned by a cabal of vaccine manufactures and vaccine promoters with Bill Gates as villain in chief.[37] This documentary shows many of the characteristics you would find in a textbook description of conspiracy theory: partial and ambiguous evidence is forced into neat, pre-conceived patterns; sinister motives are ascribed to the alleged plotters; a wised-up disregard is shown for competing explanations etc. Easy then to dismiss the film's whole argument, and, in the process, to overlook what is uncanny about Event 201 predicting the pandemic so precisely. One doesn't have to believe in conspiracy to see that many of the narratives that have guided SARS COV-2 policy were written in advance, or that the events of recent months have long been anticipated and planned for – Event 201, for example, was preceded by three earlier "exercises" going back to "Atlantic Storm" in 2005.[38] Events often fall into the shapes we have prepared for them, planned for them, dreamed for them. 9/11 may not have been an inside job, as David Ray Griffin claimed, but it was certainly the opportunity that the Bush administration, barely legitimate after its contested election, had been waiting for, and it wasted no time thereafter in initiating its catastrophic War on Terror. In the same way, the war on the virus, and the many experiments in social control it has empowered, seem to be thought forms long prepared and just waiting for their occasion.

My point here is similar here to my point earlier about political enmity and polarization destroying all ground for discussion. How many are called conspiracy theorists when they just want to ask a question, how many others are driven to real conspiracy theories when their

questions are not answered or acknowledged? Awareness of this problem began for me with the figure I mentioned earlier of the "anti-vaxxer," a belittling name that seemed to establish itself in public discussion almost overnight a few years back. It affected me because I had been reflecting on the question of vaccination for many years without being able to come to a firm conclusion – I was quizzical rather than pro or anti, a position that had been summarily driven from the field with the invention of the anti-vaxxer. My questions began when my infant son contracted a frightening, potentially fatal (but, in this case, happily not) cerebral meningitis at the age of eight months following his MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccination. My wife and I subsequently heard of other such cases. Anecdotal evidence, yes, but I began to wonder – could you really prove the connection, should there be one? Children and adolescents who follow recommended schedules receive up to sixteen different vaccines, many of which are boosted several times. Can anyone really say with certainty that they know all the effects or how they interact or how they are expressed? It should not be controversial to observe that this is a fairly massive attempt to supplement and manipulate the workings of the immune system. Is it impossible that the plague of allergies and auto-immune diseases that seem to characterize our time is related, as some suppose, to this systematic interference? Might we better off with less vaccines, while still recognizing that some have been invaluable?

To even begin to answer such questions it is necessary to recognize, first of all, that they have a philosophical, as well as an empirical dimension. There are limits to knowledge in the study of complex systems, but these are often denied in the effort to foster the "trust in science" I wrote about above. These limits to knowledge must be acknowledged, as must the consequent limits on what can be imposed on people in the name of science. Within that framework it may then be possible to shed some light on the empirical side of the questions I've raised. But the

omens in this respect are not good. Let me take a couple of examples. In 2016 a documentary film appeared called "Vaxxed: From Coverup to Catastrophe." It claimed that during the course of a CDC (Centers for Disease Control) study into a possible link between autism and the administration of MMR vaccine to infants, documents were destroyed and data fudged in order to make emerging evidence of such a link disappear. This claim was made by one of the scientists involved, William Thompson, in recorded phone conversations with environmental biologist Brian Hooker. Thompson's report could be false, or in some way manipulated, but, on its face, it is impressive and ought to have, at the least, led to wide public discussion. What has happened instead is that the film has been effectively suppressed. This began when Robert de Niro, under pressure, cancelled a scheduled screening at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2016. The film has since disappeared from the internet and is available only by purchase from the filmmakers' website.[39] The Wikipedia biographies of all the principals in the film show evidence of malicious editing with recurring references to fraud, false information, discredited views and the like. This does not give the impression of a fair, frank or open discussion but of a ruthless orthodoxy which ostracizes all dissent.

A second example: I have read countless times that British doctor Andrew Wakefield is the author of a fraudulent study, first published in *The Lancet* then withdrawn, purporting to show a link between autism and the MMR vaccine. Such repetition generally produces assent – if everybody believes it, it must be true – and I had unthinkingly accepted this claim until one day an old friend asked me if I had ever seen the discredited study. No. Might she send it to me? Yes, of course. I read it and found that Wakefield was only one of thirteen authors of this rather technical paper, and that it reached no definite conclusion beyond asserting that the enterocolitis

which the authors investigated in twelve young children "may be related to neuropsychiatric dysfunction" and that "in most cases, onset of symptoms was after measles, mumps, and rubella immunisation." The paper ends with a call for "further investigations."[40] This mild and rather tentative conclusion was the famous fraud? I was astonished. Further research revealed that Wakefield had gone beyond what the paper asserts in his public statements but only so far as to say that he was sufficiently worried by the suspected link that he recommended disaggregating the triple vaccine and vaccinating separately for each disease with a year's interval between shots. This was the extent to which he was "anti-vax." Nevertheless he was barred from medical practice – "stricken from the medical register" – and his name blackened around the world.

There's a lot of territory between the claim that the SARS COV-2 pandemic was a planned event whose viral protagonist was created in a laboratory in Washington or Wuhan, and the claim that vaccine manufacturers and their philanthropic friends in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are innocent altruists selflessly dedicated to a disease-free world. But discussion tends to get pushed to extremes. Conspiracy is one of the bogies that keeps it polarized in this way. As with my initial examples of Pearl Harbor, the strategic bombing of German cities, the Kennedy assassination, and 9/11, it's quite possible that stories that can't be told now will become more believable with time. Perhaps powerful vaccine manufacturers did conspire with British medical authorities to discredit Andrew Wakefield and cut short his research. I'm sure I don't know. Nor do many others who think they do. Perhaps, to complicate the issue further, public confidence in vaccination is so precious and so easily shaken, that slander and persecution of the occasional vaccine safety heretic is a small price to pay for it. After all, Socrates ascribes nobility to the "noble lie" and the "opportune falsehood" for a very well-argued reason. My conviction, as I've said, is that the lustre of "the guardians" – Plato's

name for those who in our time would advocate "trust in science" – is now impossible to restore. Our only hope therefore lies in an open, pacified and demystified discussion. What prospect of that? Am I not simply reiterating Socrates' impossible dream that philosophers will become kings, or kings philosophers – the only conditions, he says, under which there can be a "cessation of troubles."[41] One might as well hope that the meek will inherit the earth. [42] Only the extremity of our circumstances – humanly, politically, ecologically – makes it seem possible.

Protecting Our Health Care System

The pandemic has no stranger figure of speech than this one, and yet it seems to clang ironically on very few ears. We are in a "health crisis," the worst in our history according to our prime minister.[43] At such a moment one might hope that a health care system which absorbs nearly half the provincial budget in Ontario would mobilize to protect us – instead we are asked to protect it. That our health institutions should not be overtaxed, over-stressed, over-whelmed, pushed to a "tipping point," etc. has been one of the prime objectives of public policy from Day One of the pandemic. And, from the beginning, it has been generally accepted as a reasonable objective. That sickness should threaten the institution that is ostensibly there to deal with sickness is remarkable, I think, and constitutes yet another of the pandemic's revelations. How can this be?

Our health care system is not, in fact, a system of care, presuming that there could even be such a thing as a "system" of care. It is a giant bureaucracy set up to administer certain health interventions at its own convenience. That many of these interventions are ingenious, life-changing, and capably administered does not change this impersonal and industrial character. (Emergency departments are something of an exception here, and I'd like to record my gratitude

for the skillful and timely repairs I have sometimes received in various emergency rooms.) This means that hospital-based medicine has not been designed to deal with an emergency of the kind we are experiencing.

In the event, there seems to have been surprisingly little overtaxing of hospitals during the pandemic. Hospitals in New York, Montreal, and Milano certainly experienced short, well-publicized periods of strain in the spring, but in many other places the opposite occurred. In Toronto, for example, people were so effectively warned off hospitals, that hospital worker friends told me stories of empty beds and under-employed staff. Meanwhile, the grateful public outside the fortress walls were beating pots and pans and bringing pizza to hospitals in a show of support for their health-care "heroes" or "champions." Almost all other treatments and services not connected to COVID were drastically curtailed. It is quite likely that the adverse consequences of these foregone diagnoses with treatments will, over time, quite outstrip the damage done by the virus.

A further question is whether hospitals, except in rare cases, are the best place for people suffering from the illness induced by this new coronavirus. One thinks here of the panic about ventilators that took place in March and April. Would we have enough? Auto parts manufacturers in Ontario undertook to supply 10,000 ventilators;[44] an electronics manufacturer promised 10,000 more.[45] Then it began to emerge that ventilators might be actively dangerous to COVID patients, and that intensive care units might sometimes be using them to protect themselves from infection rather than in the best interests of patients.[46] One wonders if this story will ever be fully told. There has been a lot of talk about how treatment for COVID has improved – in Britain just 26% of Covid-19 patients were placed on ventilation after admission to intensive care in September compared with up to 76% at the height of the pandemic

[47] - but not so much about how much harm may have been done during the experimental phase. The CBC Radio program *Now or Never,* for example, recently reported on a 73 year-old man who spent 104 days on a respirator and is now an invalid who requires full-time care by his 29 year-old daughter. The broadcast focused on the daughter's heroic charity, and the challenges it poses, not on whether the father's treatment had been prudent.

Sick people need care. In hospitals COVID sufferers are isolated from all those who actually want to care for them because fear of the disease and its potential spread has overcome all other obligations. Might more have been cared for at home? The answer is probably yes, had the health care system been able or willing to reorganize itself in the interests of its patients. Instead doctors' offices largely shut their doors, appointments for other ailments were cancelled, and the hospitals pulled up their drawbridges. The health care system protected itself.

The Media

It's been more than forty years since I was persuaded by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, in their exemplary two-volume work *The Political Economy of Human Rights,* that an ostensibly free media can still function as a propaganda system – that there can be, as they say in their book, "brainwashing under freedom."[48] Media at all times are biased – by their own structure, as Harold Innis and his successors showed, and by the social, political and economic environments in which they operate. Fairy tales about a golden past, invented only to thrash a decadent present, are not a sound starting point for critique. And yet, even so, it seems to me that the media to which I have been exposed during the pandemic have risen to new heights of cheer-leading and uncritical "messaging."

It is in the nature of news media to disguise and dissimulate their own influence on what they report. News is not news, they insist, just because the news media make it news – it is already news — as a result of some inherent quality that the news media only recognize and reproduce. This is partly true of course. The news media do adapt to popular psychology, to established taste, and to pre-scripted narrative forms, more than they invent them. But the media also innovate – drawing attention to particular facts and reinforcing particular narratives while disregarding others. And, in the case of the pandemic – a novel phenomenon that might initially have allowed various constructions – their leading role has been striking. This began the day that the W.H.O announced that the spread of COVID-19 should be considered a pandemic. Blanket coverage began, implying that there was now nothing else of note happening in the world. A sense of precariousness and foreboding was generated. Everything was "unprecedented." "A new normal" seemed to fall from the sky almost overnight. A state of emergency and exception was declared. War metaphors were rife. When the *Globe and Mail* stated explicitly on Sept 21, in an editorial I cited earlier, that "Canada is at war" it was only spelling out the position taken by major news media from the beginning. Numbers were spun for maximum effect. Particularly egregious during the second wave has been the constant trumpeting of "cases," meaning positive test results, with little interest shown in how many are actually sick, how the number of cases might relate to the number of tests, how reliable the tests are etc.

This emphasis on whatever was most alarming helped to stampede a large part of the population into a state of panic fear that had little to do with the actual dangers facing them. It also severely constrained political choice. Politicians were praised for their leadership when they made strict rules and spanked for their laxity when they revoked them. A myth was promulgated that "we are," as another *Globe and Mail* editorial put it, "the masters of our pandemic fate."[49]

Here the idea is that everything that happens is produced by policy – there is nothing that must be simply suffered because attempting to counteract it would only induce worse harms – every COVID infection accuses a political leadership that, as the same *Globe* editorial says, "should be doing more." Lurking in the background is the long-gestated idea of zero tolerance, now translated into "Covid-zero" and other fantasies of total suppression of the virus.[50] (I am not denying here that some places – whether because of their size, their situation or the heavy-handed intensity of their regimes, like Melbourne's 100-day lockdown inside "a ring of steel"[51] – have achieved low numbers. The question is, for how long and at what cost?)

War imposes uniformity of opinion, and that has been particularly evident with the CBC and *The Globe and Mail.* Some dissent has begun to creep into the more conservative papers, the *National Post* and the *Sun*, but both the *Globe* and the CBC seem to conceive their role not as platforms for discussion but as guardians of correct thought. The listeners and readers are to be encouraged, edified, occasionally chastised for incipient "complacency,"[52] but at all times treated as unified and homogeneous mass – all in this together, all sharing the same sentimental regard for our health care champions etc. What this has meant, I think, is that an elite consensus, fortified by the elemental power of mythic tropes like war, solidarity in crisis, loyalty, heroism, and sacrifice, has imposed itself on the public. The result has been that two crucial realities have been hidden, overlooked or suppressed. The first is the scientific dissensus I spoke of earlier. The second is the residual popular common sense that instinctively prefers mutual aid and muddling through to centralized bureaucratic control. I realize that common sense is a tricky term, regularly coopted by right-wing populism, as it was in Ontario in the mid-1990's when the Conservative government of Mike Harris dressed up neo-liberal *laissez-faire* and municipal "amalgamation" as a "common sense revolution." But this apparent tendency of populism to

skew to the right precisely illustrates the difficulty we are in. Many historians, anthropologists and political theorists, in our time, have tried to describe forms of resistance to the state that do not terminate in an even more oppressive state, like Ontario's "common sense revolution," or a hundred other variants from fascism to Peronism to Trumpism. E.P. Thompson wrote of "the moral economy of the crowd"; James C. Scott has described various forms of ethnic and agrarian resistance; Christopher Lasch portrayed American populism as a defense of the moral and religious integrity of community life against elite and "meritocratic" disruption; and Ivan Illich tried to mark out a "vernacular" sphere in which both state and market are kept at bay.[53] But these forms of populism remain largely unrecognized in the journalistic discourse I have been talking about. The result is that populism is forced to the right and its dignity denied. The outright contempt that is regularly expressed for Trump voters – Hilary Clinton's "basket of deplorables" – illustrates this dynamic.

To be concrete, resistance to lockdown, masking and curbs on the right of assembly has steadily grown in Ontario, beginning with the demonstrators who began to gather at the legislature in the spring – the people, as I remarked earlier, that the Premier categorized as "yahoos." This fall, in Toronto, several thousand people gathered in Dundas Square. The breadth of the coalition that made up this crowd is hard to judge but civil liberty, religious freedom and ruined livelihoods seemed to be the main issues animating them. Remarkably, given the size of this demonstration, it was given, so far as I know, no coverage whatsoever beyond a brief mention as a traffic issue – Yonge St. was blocked – on the news channel CP24. This appears to be nothing less than censorship – who needs to know what the yahoos are up to? It certainly invites the nemesis I spoke of earlier – in which dissent deprived of a voice and a forum is driven into the more violent and destructive paths of political reaction.

Equally worrying is the failure to register or report the true variety of opinions amongst doctors, medical scientists and public health specialists – remember how many medical and public health luminaries were among the signers of last summer's disregarded call for a "balanced approach" to the pandemic. This does two things. First, it reinforces the obsolete image I criticized above of science as a singular and unanimous voice, standing above politics, capable of authoritatively settling all disputes, and requiring that the citizenry possesses an unquestioning "trust." Second, it casts media as guardians or shepherds of public opinion with a duty to withhold from a vulnerable and credulous public disturbing news about anti-lockdown protests, dissident epidemiologists or the actual science regarding the efficacy of masks. (This presumes of course that the bellwethers of public opinion are attentive enough to know these things themselves rather than being just as sheep-like as those they presume to lead.)

Ecology and the Pandemic

At the beginning of the pandemic some hopeful voices were raised in aid of the idea that it was, as George Monbiot wrote in the *Guardian*, "nature's wake-up call to a complacent civilization."[54] Climate change activist Bill McKibben, writing in the *TLS*, also read the pandemic as a warning – "a dry run" for a coming century of horrors in which "there is going to be nothing normal anywhere."[55] I call these voices hopeful, because they interpret the pandemic as a call to repentance. I would like to share this view, but I find it difficult to see in the "war" against the virus any relenting whatsoever in our civilization's animating passion for domination and control. It seems rather to bespeak the opposite – an intensified desire to become the "masters of our pandemic fate" and the conquerors of this inconvenient scourge, determined to save "lives" even if it costs us even more "lives" than we are saving – like the American

commander in Vietnam who told Associated Press reporter Peter Arnett in 1968 that it was "necessary to destroy the town to save it." This does not seem to me to presage the ethic of re-inhabitation that will at last bring us into harmony with our wasting world.

No one really knows where the new virus came from. To call it a product of "Nature" is probably a stretch. For, whether it came from a pangolin, a bat or a laboratory, as the producers of the documentary "Plandemic" hint, it is certainly a product of that hybrid nature/culture that has resulted from humanity's unremitting pressure on every part and particle of our earthly home. As such it is a part of our world, as viruses have been as long as humanity has existed. Viruses have helped us – some stitched over time into our very DNA – and they have hindered us – to such an extent that we possess very robust defence against the hail of viruses we encounter every day. This does not mean, of course, that COVID-19 is our friend, but it does mean that we are dealing with something primordial, and something that belongs to the wild and profuse creativity of the living earth, however malign it may be to our plans for next Tuesday. One might wish for more of this perspective in those who propose that we should achieve "zero COVID," become "masters or our pandemic fate," "conquer COVID," etc.

British biologist Mike Yeadon, whom I quoted earlier, is a veteran research scientist specializing in "inflammation, immunology, [and] allergy in the context of respiratory diseases." He recently made the following statement: *"The passage of this virus through the human population is an entirely natural process that has completely ignored our puny efforts to control it."*[56] My own amateur researches have gradually led me to a similar conclusion. But anyone whose views have been shaped by politicians, public health officials, or media pundits like André Picard is bound to regard such a view as arrant nonsense, not only erroneous but almost treasonably dangerous to the public weal. Everyone who drinks from these wells knows that

what a given country has been through is almost entirely a consequence of how politicians and

public health officials have "managed" or, in the case of Donald Trump, "calamitously

mismanaged" the pandemic. Countries are regularly compared as if the only relevant difference

between them were the extent of the restrictions imposed by their governments. Climate,

demography, geographical situation, health status, prior immunity – all have been more or less

ignored in favour of the idea that government policy is the key determinant in the spread or

containment of the virus. Let me take some examples. One is given by Mike Yeadon, in the

presentation I just quoted. He notes that countries with relatively high death rates due to COVID,

like Sweden, Belgium and the U.K. all had much milder than usual flu epidemics over the last

two to three years, while those with lower rates like Germany and Greece are coming off more

severe flu epidemics. This suggests that the difference between, let's say Norway and Sweden

which has again and again been ascribed to severity of lockdown is, in fact, a function of the

number of susceptible old people in each country. A second example: a recent paper in the

scientific journal *Frontiers of Public Health* found that, "[The] stringency of the measures [used]

to fight pandemia, including lockdown, did not appear to be linked with death rate."[57] Instead

the authors of this paper found that what best predicted the death rate was latitude (between 25°

and 65°), GDP, and health status (amount of chronic disease, inactivity, etc.) And, third, I would

point, as Yeadon does, to the degree of prior immunity in a given population.[58] Yeadon argues

that cross-immunity conferred by exposure to other coronaviruses – SARS COV-2 is 80%

similar to the first SARS virus – may have made a part of the population immune to COVID-19

at the outset. This is germane in the case of countries like Taiwan and Vietnam that have had

very few COVID deaths. Both had considerable exposure to SARS and so may have possessed

this prior immunity in much greater measure than worse-affected Western countries. This

suggests, again, that policy and popular compliance may have had less to do with lower death rates than has generally been supposed.

Whether Mike Yeadon's claim – that our "puny efforts" to contain the pandemic have been absolutely without effect – can eventually be proved remains to be seen. What it seems quite safe to say right now is that there is substantial evidence, first, that we are in the grip of a powerful and inexorable natural process and, second, that some considerable part of the pretense that determined leaders with bespoke policies ought to be able to dominate this process is mostly bravado, ritual and anthropocentric self-importance. The conclusions I draw from these two points are not comforting. Ivan Illich, speaking in Toronto in the fall of 1970, evoked the view of the earth from space that had recently been obtained by American men-on-the-moon. This image, he said, could be interpreted in two radically different ways. The first was as a call to repentance, a call, in effect, to sink back into the earth and to live within its affordances. The second was as a call to "manage planet earth," as *The Scientific American* would later say, or, with even greater hubris, to "save planet earth."[59] The first he saw as a choice to live freely, joyfully and even wildly, within our means; the second as a decision to perpetually skirt disaster, living always at the very edge of the biosphere's tolerances, and entangling ourselves in an ever more comprehensive net of hygienic and environmental controls in order to keep this precarious enterprise "sustainable." Today, looking out my door at the masked and fearful people passing on the street, it is hard not to think that Illich's prophecy has come to pass. From the beginning of the pandemic there were critical virologists, immunologists and epidemiologists who made three crucial points: first that no one knew the severity of the new disease, i.e. its infection mortality rate; second, that no one knew how different populations and different sub-groups within populations would weather it; and, third, that no one knew how the possibly devastating

consequences of prophylactic mass quarantine – lockdown – would compare with the suffering that might be caused by the disease. But these cautions, to the extent that they were even heard, did not seem to induce any hesitation or produce that alert but quizzical and deliberate attitude that ought to attend such ignorance. From the very beginning any idea of enduring, adapting or mitigating was condemned as fatalism or "yahoo" recklessness. The emphasis was always on control – "wrestling the virus to the ground"[60] – and on knowledge – gained by colonizing and appearing to tame an uncertain future with mathematical models founded on "educated" guesses. This posture was reinforced by media who stood by ready to taunt any politician who refused to accept these shibboleths or was unwilling to pretend that control was possible and that scientific knowledge was at hand. And these media in turn, as I wrote in an earlier essay, were acting as the agents of imperative concepts like risk, safety, management, and life – concepts that have by now entrenched themselves in our minds as unquestionable certainties.

What has all this to do with the ecological emergency on which I quoted George Monbiot and Bill McKibben at the outset? Well it seems to me that the attitudes brought to light by the pandemic do not offer much hope in the face of the catastrophic earth changes that both writers expect will be the result of rising oceans and a warming atmosphere – at least not for someone like me, who favours the path Illich recommended – conviviality within restraint – rather than the one he warned against – growth under intensifying control. And even for those who would affirm the necessity of strict control and dismiss Illich's vision of joyful austerity as a long-faded dream, there is the question of whether pandemic policy has fostered intelligent control. Consider: policy has been driven more by panic than by prudence; science has been at the same time idolized and ignored; the well-off have fortified themselves, while those with a more precarious hold on livelihood, shelter, and even sanity have been cast off; political enmity has

intensified; political categories have grown more rigid and confining; media have become more conformist and censorious; the sick and the dying have been denied comfort; and people have grown more afraid of one another. This does not promise the more sensitive attunement to our world that our ecological impasse asks for. It suggests an impenetrable human narcissism mesmerized by its own myths and sealed up in an increasingly artificial reality.

Agamben and Philosophy

The most ambitious attempt to draw out the epochal implications of the COVID-19 pandemic that I have seen is a short piece by Giorgio Agamben called "Medicine and Religion."[61] In this article Agamben argues that the pandemic has allowed science in the guise of medicine to occupy the entire space of existence, displacing every other human claim. In modernity, he says, "three great systems of belief" have uneasily coexisted. These are Christianity, capitalism and science, and they have achieved, through a history of conflict, intersection and negotiation, "a sort of peaceful articulated co-existence." But now bio-medicine has found the occasion to extend its "cult" even into domains where capitalism and Christianity formerly exerted their hegemonies:

> "[Medicine's] cultic practice was like every liturgy episodic and limited in time... [T]he unexpected phenomenon that we are witnessing is that it has become permanent and all-encompassing. It is no longer a question of taking medicine or submitting when necessary to a doctor visit or surgical intervention, the whole life of human beings must become the place of an uninterrupted cultic celebration. The enemy, the virus, is always present and must be fought unceasingly and without any possible truce."

Agamben uses the term "cult" here in the sense used by religious scholars to describe the devotional practices of any religion – the means by which a religion is *cult*-ivated – and not in the contemporary sense of a deviant group under the spell of some charismatic leader.

Medicine's cult is now total because it can prescribe every gesture we are to make and proscribe the practices of competing cults.

Agamben's acknowledged ancestor here is Walter Benjamin. In a gnomic fragment called "Capitalism as Religion" which was published after his death, Benjamin speculated about capitalism as a form of religion. Capitalism, he argued, has the same fundamental structure as Christianity but in a displaced or disguised form. As a result of this displacement, the structure is rendered inaccessible – the devotee of the cult no longer knows what they are doing. In this way it becomes a total cult. Every day is a holy day (and therefore no day). Sin and its forgiveness are effaced, leaving only an endless inexpiable guilt. The eschatological element in Christianity – the view that a judgment awaits us at the end of time – is dispersed and deferred as a crisis that is never resolved, a growth that is never enough, an innovation always requiring some further innovation.

Agamben doesn't spell all this out in his very short essay, but, in calling bio-medicine a cult that now aspires to a total jurisdiction, I believe he is imitating Benjamin's argument. (Agamben was the Italian editor of Benjamin's collected works, and he is the author of an essay called "Capitalism as Religion" which spells out the import of Benjamin's article much more lucidly than the original.[62]) It is clear enough, I think, that at least while the pandemic lasts, public health authorities are in a position to prescribe the gestures, all the gestures, we will make – where we can go, who we can see, how far away we should stand from them, what we should wear etc. – and to proscribe those we won't, including even absolute social and cultural fundamentals like care of the sick and dying, artistic performance, religious celebration, and the maintenance of family and community relationships. Whether these are only emergency powers, or, as Agamben clearly fears, the inauguration of a permanent state of emergency in which health

security will at all times trump other cultural and social obligations, remains to be seen. Meanwhile his argument – that science in the guise of bio-medicine now superintendents a comprehensive cult whose central object of reverence is life – is persuasive. People fail to see it or take it for granted only because life and the saving of "lives" has been so compellingly consecrated that it can no longer be examined or reasoned about.

What is important in Agamben's argument for me is the claim that we are witnessing the establishment of a new religion and the consolidation of its cult. To explicitly name this religion as science or medicine can be tricky because one is not just talking about the various practices of these fields, but about their presiding myths. The institutions of science and medicine supply this new cult with part of its priesthood but they are not what constitute the religion. What makes a religion, as Emile Durkheim argued more than a century ago, is the designation of a sacred dimension which is not to be touched, investigated or interfered with.[63] The sacred has the power to strike people dumb, to amaze them and, if necessary, to sacrifice them. This power now inheres in the demi-gods health, safety, risk awareness and, their epitome, life. So long as a certain course of action is seen to be saving lives, it's not really necessary to ask what else it might be doing.

This idea that we are faced with a religion and not just a contestable scientific point-of-view (though it is also that) has multiple implications. One is that this religion must be faced and criticized as such. This not to say that questionable scientific claims should not be challenged on scientific grounds, but only to recognize that ideas held, as it were, religiously, under scientific disguise, will not yield to scientific argument, however cogent. A second is that this new religion has not dropped from the sky but is derived from Christianity, the religion that so many think they have renounced, overcome and set aside. Benjamin argued in the essay discussed above that

capitalism-as-religion is a "parasite" of Christianity. Ivan Illich, my teacher on this point, made the same argument with respect to the new "religiosity," as he called it, of life. We would not now be bowing to this new idol, he wrote, if Christians had not for two millennia preached and sought the "life more abundant" that Jesus promised when he announced to his friend Martha, without qualification, "I am Life."[64] Agamben, too, shares this view, suggesting in his essay that "The medical religion has unreservedly taken up from Christianity the eschatological urgency that the latter had let fall by the wayside." ("Eschatological urgency" here refers to the quasi-apocalyptic, Armageddon-like character of our mobilization against the virus.) Two ideas follow: the first is that we are never more religious than when we think we have overcome religion; the second that our future is being determined, all unconsciously, by a disowned and disregarded past.

Agamben's concern, which he has bravely expressed since the beginning of the pandemic, is that the rule of the religiously-sanctioned health security state has become "all-pervasive," "normatively obligatory," and deeply corrosive of any form of life that stands on competing grounds – funeral rites are an obvious example of such forms of life, and the outlawing of such rites, along with the abandonment of the dying, was one of the first elements of the pandemic regime to shock and alarm Agamben. What is demanded in response, he says, is that "philosophers must again enter into conflict with religion," – something that has "happened many times in the course of history." I believe this to be so, and I believe that what he means by philosophy is not a professional discipline open only to initiates but the very practice of freedom insofar as that practice requires us to understand how we came by our ideas, the grounds on which we are governed, and other such elementary matters. What Agamben calls "conflict with religion" might also be understood as a claim for freedom of religion (since it is arguable that no

one can avoid having a religion, and therefore the best we can aspire to is to hold – and hold off – that religion freely). Long ago, in 1971's *Deschooling Society* Ivan Illich made the claim that compulsory schooling, both by its ritual structure and its vaunting spiritual ambition, constituted a church, and, as such ought to be disestablished. Had medicine then been compulsory, he would doubtless have made the same claim in his *Medical Nemesis* (1975) which criticized medical establishments on the same grounds as his earlier book had analyzed compulsory schooling. Agamben's argument is that medicine has now also made itself "normatively obligatory," and that this new power will not necessarily recede with the pandemic. In 1791, the United States adopted a first amendment to its new constitution forbidding any law "respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Section Two of Canada's Charter of Rights guarantees Canadians the same freedom. So far these freedoms have been understood as applying only to what are obvious, explicit and formally-constituted churches. If Illich and Agamben are right, the truly powerful churches – the ones that tell us not only how we ought to live but how we *must* live – exert their claims on us in the name of education, health, safety, risk reduction and other shibboleths of the new religion. It follows that we now need what Illich's dear friend, the American critic Paul Goodman, called a "new reformation."[65] The freedoms for which the first Reformation fought must now be fought for again.

Notes

[1] https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/17/a-fiasco-in-the-making-as-the-coronavirus-pandemic-takes-hold-we-are-making-decisions-without-reliable-data/

[2] https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/lives-vs-lives-the-global-cost-of-lockdown?utm_medium=email&utm_source=CampaignMonitor_Editorial&utm_campaign=WEEK%20%2020200516%20%20Fisher%20%20AL+CID_91ecdf3e8f5ee7b8abe842ca3cbf65e6

[3] http://www.balancedresponse.ca/

[4] https://gbdeclaration.org/

[5] https://lockdownsceptics.org/what-sage-got-wrong/

[6] Ibid.

[7] https://www.who.int/bulletin/online_first/BLT.20.265892.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=CampaignMonitor_Editorial&utm_campaign=LNCH%20%2020201016%20%20House%20Ads%20%20SM+CID_67ee9eb414f5b55517be202ffd3379bd

[8] Jutta Mason has made a compendium of links to these various open letters, pro and con, on the website of her Centre for Local Research into Public Space (CELOS). Both the Ontario and Belgian doctors' letters can be found there: https://www.celos.ca/wiki/wiki.php?n=BackgroundResearch.Covid19Quarantine

[9] Andrew Coyne, "Herd Immunity is a great strategy is you don't mind millions of dead," *The Globe and Mail,* Oct. 27, '20, D2

[10] He made this remark during an appearance with his two colleagues on Unherd: https://unherd.com/2020/10/covid-experts-there-is-another-way/

[11] https://medium.com/medical-myths-and-models/the-human-genome-is-full-of-viruses-c18ba52ac195

[12] "la plus grande crise de santé publique de son histoire" – statement in front of the Prime Minister's residence on March 25, 2020 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzRw-AIeNuY

[13] Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of Community*, Marlowe and Company, 1989

[14] Uwe Pörksen, *Plastic Words: The Tyranny of a Modular Language*, Penn State Press, 1995; Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Western Mind*, Vintage, 1988, pp. 106-107.

[15] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paladin, 1972

[16] Bruno Latour, *Science in Action*, Harvard, 1987

[17] Steven Shapin, Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life*, Princeton, 2011, p. 13

[18] *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour, Peter Weibel, M.I.T., 2005

[19] Broadcasts here: http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/how-to-think-about-science-part-1-24-1.2953274; transcripts here: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/542c2af8e4b00b7cfca08972/t/58ffb590db29d67edabd4e26/1493153189310/How+To+Think+About+Science.pdf See also *Ideas on the Nature of Science,* ed. David Cayley, Goose Lane, 2009

[20] Zain Chagla, Sumon Chakrabarti, Isaac Bogoch, and Dominik Mertz, "Healthy Discussions: Diversity of Thought Is Needed In Pandemic Response," *The National Post*, Nov. 6, 2020, A13.

[21] Socrates speaks of "the noble lie" in Republic, Book III, 414b

[22] Sunetra Gupta, "A Contagion of Hatred and Hysteria," https://www.aier.org/article/a-contagion-of-hatred-and-hysteria/ [23] https://www.aier.org/about/

[24] André Picard, "Don't be complacent about COVID-19," *The Globe and Mail*, Sept. 29, 2020, A13.

[25] "Forget Politics. It's time to fight COVID-19," *The Globe and Mail*, Sept. 21, 2020, A12

[26] André Picard, "Fasten your seat-belts," *The Globe and Mail*, Nov. 9, 3030, p. A7

[27] https://ocla.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Rancourt-Masks-dont-work-review-science-re-COVID19-policy.pdf

[28] Carl Heneghan and Tom Jefferson, "Do Face Masks Work?" *The Spec*tator, Nov. 19, 20

[29] Leopold Kohr, *The Breakdown of Nations,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957, p. ix

[30] Illich met Kohr in Puerto Rico in the 1950's, and they remained friends thereafter. lllich wrote the introduction to Kohr's book, *The Inner City* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 1989) and gave the *laudatio* at a celebration of Kohr's eightieth birthday. He speaks of their friendship in David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, House of Anansi, 1992, pp. 82-84

[31] See D'arcy Thompson, *On Growth and Form,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971 (first edition 1917) and J.B.S. Haldane, "On Being the Right Size," in James R. Newman, *The World of Mathematics,* Vol. 2, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1956 (originally published in 1928).

[32] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/sex-covid-19-councillor-calling-for-sexual-health-clinics-to-open-1.5662208

[33] See note 13 above

[34] Luke 5:37

[35] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed . Michael Oakeshott, Collier Macmillian, 1962, p. 132

[36] https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/event201/about

[37] https://plandemicseries.com/

[38] https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/events-archive/2005_atlantic_storm/

[39] https://vaxxedthemovie.com/

[40] The paper is here and still legible under the big RETRACTED stamp on every page: https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673697110960/fulltext

[41] Republic, Book V, 473 c-e

[42] Matthew 5:5

[43] See note 12 above

[44] https://canada.autonews.com/coronavirus/canadian-suppliers-team-help-produce-10000-ventilators-ontario;

[45] https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/vexos-to-manufacture-and-deliver-10-000-mvm-ventilators-to-the-government-of-canada-in-its-national-mobilization-to-combat-the-covid-19-pandemic-890140952.html

[46] See, for example: Dr. Matt Strauss, "The Underground Doctors' Movement Questioning the Use of Ventilators," *The Spectator*, May 2, 2020

[47] *The Spectator*, Oct. 6, 2020

[48] Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, Vol. I: *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism,* Black Rose Books, 1979, p. 71

[49] "We are the masters of our pandemic fate," *The Globe and Mail*, Nov. 3, 2020, A10

[50] "Covid-zero" is the brand devised by infectious disease specialist Dr. Andrew Morris and some colleagues for their proposal that Canada adopt an "aggressive national strategy" to fight

the pandemic: https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-monday-edition-1.5803690/you-don-t-copy-the-losers-says-doctor-pushing-covid-zero-strategy-1.5805367

[51] Kelly Grant, "How an Australian state beat back its second wave," *The Globe and Mail*, Nov. 14, '20, A14

[52] André Picard, "Don't be complacent about COVID-19," *The Globe and Mail*, Sept. 29. 2020, A11

[53] E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18th Century," *Past and Present,* No. 50, Feb., 1971 – reprinted in E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture,* New Press, 1993; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, Yale, 1999; Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites*, WW Norton, 1995; and Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work*, Marion Boyars, 1981.

[54] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/25/covid-19-is-natures-wake-up-call-to-complacent-civilisation

[55] Bill McKibben, "The End of the World as We Know It," TLS, July 31, 2020

[56] ttps://www.aier.org/article/an-education-in-viruses-and-public-health-from-michael-yeadon-former-vp-of-pfizer/

[57] https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2020.604339/full#SM6

[58] https://lockdownsceptics.org/what-sage-got-wrong/

[59] *Managing Planet Earth: Readings from Scientific American Magazine*, W.H. Freeman and Co., 1990

[60] Editorial, *The Globe and Mail*, May 12, 2020

[61] https://itself.blog/2020/05/02/giorgio-agamben-medicine-as-religion/

[62] Giorgio Agamben, "Capitalism as Religion," in *Agamben and Radical Politics,* ed. Daniel McLoughlin, University of Edinburgh Press, 2016

[63] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, The Free Press, 1995 (first published 1912)

[64] Ivan Illich, "The Institutional Construction of a New Fetish: Human Life," in *In the Mirror of the Past*, Marion Boyars, 1992; "life more abundant," John 10:10 – "I am come that they should have life and have it more abundantly."; "I am Life" John 11:25 – "I am the Resurrection and the LIfe."

[65] In 1970, two years before his death, Goodman published *New Reformation: Notes of a*

Neolithic Conservative (PM Press, 2010)

On Corona Days[1]

Sajay Samuel

Viruses

Viruses have been around far longer than humans and will outlast them. There are millions of types and thousands of species of viruses. In the argot of scientists, viruses are 'biological entities'. The modifier 'biological' distinguishes living from non-living entities; dogs and trees from rocks and benches. Since *life* scientists do not know what life is, they use more or less arbitrary criteria to distinguish animate from inanimate entities.[2] A virus does not reproduce but replicates on contact with a living cell. A virus is not capable of auto-mobility but must be transported between living organisms by direct or indirect contact. Using such criteria as reproduction and locomotion to distinguish slugs from stones condemns the virus into a liminal zone. Scientists do not consider the virus as dead or alive, as for example the poliovirus which, if stored at minus 20 centigrade, can be kept in suspended animation — inert yet potent — indefinitely.[3]

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[1] This paper was completed by May 5, 2020. But for light editing to improve readability, I have chosen not to change the original paper because it expresses the effort to grasp something utterly new. Consequently, some of the data and events described is already historical. However, none of the main arguments has been affected by subsequent events.

[2] Tirard, Stephane, Morange, Michel, Lazcano, Antonio (2010) *The Definition of Life: a brief history of an elusive scientific endeavor*, *Astrobiology* 10,10, p.1003. 'In spite of the spectacular developments in our understanding of the molecular basis that underlies biological phenomena, we still lack a generally agreed-upon definition of life, but this is not for want of trying.'

[3] Life scientists are too busy working to worry about whether viruses 'exist' when in a state of suspended animation. See the illuminating discussion of this point in Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (CA: Stanford University Press 2004); particularly pp 39-47

Crown of Spikes

Official rules for disease nomenclature forbid names that '…refer to a geographical location, an animal, an individual, or group of people' while requiring them to 'be pronounceable and refer to the disease'. Therefore, both Sars-Cov-2 and Covid-19 are acronyms, the first understood to cause the second.

The Sars-cov-2 virus belongs to a new class identified in1968 by a group of British virologists. Unlike other viruses, these had a distinct morphology — a fringe of spikes that project out from their enveloped surface. Reminded of the solar corona, the ring of light around the sun best seen during an eclipse, the scientists called them coronaviruses. The word corona derives from Latin for crown or wreath, 'the mark or emblem of majesty'. Thus, coronavirus: a class of virus named for its crown of spikes.

A Fearsome New King

A quarter century ago, the anthropologist Emily Martin described how scientists and laypeople conceived the relation between humans and viruses as an implacable war of two worlds.[4] Accordingly, viruses and other 'invading hordes' continuously 'attack' the human 'immune system' which, through antibodies, attempts to 'defend' itself.
On February 11, 2020, Sars-cov-2 was crowned an agent of global disease and death. From China to USA, all nations bowed before this coronated virus that colonizes its human hosts to propagate. All were aware that each could be a collaborator with this 'elusive' enemy. Deferring to the 'invisible threat' against all humanity, the Pope celebrated Easter in a church without a congregation. Politicians joined the people to fight, from behind closed doors, a

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[4] Emily Martin (1994). *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (Boston, Beacon Press).

world-wide war against the 'smart' and 'tough' foe.

Lockdown

Almost a third of the human species is under different levels of lockdown. Since April Fools' day, all Pennsylvania residents have been ordered to 'stay-at-home.' Whoever thought up this phrase is well schooled in public relations. 'Stay-at-home' makes 'house arrest' seem less confining. Once used to train a population to endure nuclear war, 'shelter-in-place' has been rebranded so that a coronavirus evokes an atom bomb. Obeying the order means that none can leave the house except for approved reasons (which includes walking the dog) and when out, to maintain the recommended distance of six feet between humans. It is an exaggeration to compare this situation with being locked up in prison, though minions of the law do enforce the order all over the world. Sirens blare warnings to stay at home on the streets of Bergamo, Italy, gun toting cops hand out fines and jail sentences in Washington, DC, constables wearing bright red corona helmets beat up pedestrians in Delhi, India.

Lockdown: Military Strategy

The lockdown is a phase in the war of humans against Sars-cov-2. It is designed to slow down but not to eliminate death and disease, and as such resembles a military strategy called 'defense in depth'. That strategy does not presume to stop or rebuff an overwhelming enemy force with a firmly defended front. Instead, the enemy is allowed to advance into the interior, inducing it to stretch and diffuse its forces. By delaying a frontal confrontation, the defenders get time to shore up defenses and mount counterattacks. The lockdown suppresses the spread of Sars-cov-2 by confining its potential agents. The period of confinement is used to increase the availability of hospital beds, ventilators, and protective equipment. The population is then

released from confinement at a rate never greater than the capacity of health facilities.

Science-based War

In the US, scientists are the generals of the war against Sars-cov-2. The lockdown was prompted by scientific data and evidence that the virus was an unusually effective killer of humans. Virologists and epidemiologists quickly established that Sars-cov-2 was novel, contagious, and lethal. A new virus is one to which humans have no immunity. A contagious virus infects a large number of humans and a lethal one kills its host. None of these three characteristics is of great concern if they occur individually. The Mers-cov virus was both new and lethal but not very contagious. In contrast, the flu virus is very contagious, though neither new nor thought sufficiently lethal to warrant a war. Sars-cov-2 is considered deadly because it exhibits all three characteristics at once — new, highly contagious, and very lethal. About 1 in a thousand die from the flu each year, up to half a million annually world- wide. The initial scientific data from Wuhan, China estimated a fatality rate thirty-four times worse than the flu, suggesting that Sar-cov-2 would kill millions.

Morbid Accounting

Scientists rely on the infection fatality rate (IFR) to measure the lethality of an infectious disease. The IFR measures the proportion of infected people who died from a disease over a specified period of time. The IFR is therefore composed of three data — the number of people infected by the virus, the number of people dead from the virus, and the time period over which these events occurred.

The IFR reported for Sars-cov-2 is unreliable because the data used to calculate it are incomplete, inaccurate, and imprecise. The actual number of humans infected by the virus will

never be known. Even statistical estimates of that number require testing the population widely

for both those infected by the virus and those who have recovered from the disease. In the US,

testing for Covid-19 is so far restricted to those who present severe symptoms. Severely

symptomatic patients are most likely to be suffering from the disease. The number of infected

Americans is undercounted because this testing regime leaves out those that have either

recovered or are asymptomatic. Consequently, the data on the number of humans infected are

incomplete. Small scale efforts to obtain a better estimate of the number infected paint a less

dire picture of the fatality rate. In Santa Clara county of California, random testing of the

population suggests the fatality rate there to be about that for the flu, a finding similar to that

in Iceland, the country with the most widespread testing.

Respiratory diseases are the third leading cause of death in the US, accounting for some

225 thousand deaths in 2017. Tests for Covid-19 should accurately register only those who are

infected by Sars-cov-2. They should not inaccurately register those suffering from the many

other infectious diseases that manifest with similar symptoms. Tests used to screen for breast

cancer have an error rate of 13 percent. The tests for Covid-19, a new disease, are not likely

have a lower rate of inaccuracy than that for breast cancer. Furthermore, Covid-19 patients can

take a couple of weeks to present symptoms, if at all, and a further couple of weeks to develop

a fatal disease, if at all. Counting the daily dead is an imprecise indicator of the fatality rate of a

disease that takes between two to four weeks to become fatal.

It is not only the number, accuracy and period of testing that contribute to the

unreliability of the infection fatality rate. That is exacerbated when those dying *with* Covid-19

are added to those dying *because* of Covid-19. If two persons testing positive for Covid-19 die,

and one is an elderly man with a history of bronchial infection, it is likely he died *with* Sars-

cov-2. The other, a marathon runner without any known illnesses, is likely to have died *from* it. Confounding the two conditions means that every dead person who tested positive for the virus would be counted as having died from it. The mortality statistics from New York City, the epicenter of the epicenter of Covid-19, not only ignores the distinction between dying from and dying with the disease when displaying the 'confirmed cases' of death from Covid-19. They no longer test if the dead had the disease. Instead, untested decedents are certified to have 'probably' died from Covid-19 or equivalent.

Obviously, the unreliability of data does not mean Sars-cov-2 is benign. It only means that policy makers who have begun a war against the virus cannot have been guided by scientific data in coming to that decision. Instead, they must have possessed the ability to see through the numbers.

Plastic Numbers

Even if most experts can agree that the IFR is unreliable because the data to calculate it are incomplete, inaccurate, and imprecise, few would argue it is useless. The honest admission of unreliable data should reinforce the irreducible need for prudent judgment in uncertain times. Instead, epidemiologists blur the distinction between foresight and fortune-telling by feeding such data into scientific models to predict the lethality of Sars-cov-2.

The results of a model made by a highly regarded scientific team from Imperial College, London predicted 510 thousand Britons would die from Covid-19 if no measures were taken to stem or stop the disease. A few weeks later a rival scientific model from Oxford predicted far fewer deaths. By assuming social distancing and recalibrating the model parameters, the original team reduced its own estimate of excess deaths from Covid-19 by 98

percent to about 10,000. Similarly, the results of a model by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) based in Seattle Washington, suggested between 100 and 240 thousand Americans would die from the virus even with social distancing policies in place. Ten days later, on April 11 the revised IHME estimate of the same number was 61,000. The wild swings in these estimates prove that modeled results should not be confused with evidence.

A model of a phenomenon is not the phenomenon itself. The results of a model are not evidence but, at best, a hypothesis to be verified. To use the results of a model as if they were adequate evidence for decision is to confuse evidence and speculation. This distinction is obscured by the aura of indubitable truth cast by mathematics, even when conducted in a speculative key. The results of scientific models are dependent on the raft of assumptions and quality of data used to make it up. In 2017, the most recent year for which US mortality data is readily available, a total of 2.8 million individuals died. The lockdown policy was partly justified by the scientific prediction that 2.2 million Americans would die from Covid-19. When speculation is mistaken for evidence it goes unquestioned that almost as many will die from one respiratory disease in 2020 as have died of all diseases in 2017. Scientific models do not change the principle well known to computer programmers: garbage in, garbage out.

Professionals as Propagandists

In the US, 'listening to science' has become both a weapon and shield. 'Science says', 'research shows', and 'health care professionals recommend' have become mantras that confer the halo of truth on the speakers' words and muffle disagreement. These phrases have also become shields against the uninformed opinions of talk radio hosts, TV show anchors, and their political puppet. Whether as weapon or shield, when white-coated scientists are given

speaking roles in public and when public health professionals are roped into selling public policy, they become unwitting propagandists.

Scientific knowledge is produced by narrowly specialized scientists. The virologist describes the morphology of Sars-cov-2, the epidemiologist explains the etiology and disease vectors of Covid-19, a public health professional evaluates the shortage of medical staff in the midst of a pandemic, the economist weighs the benefit of allowing the many to work against the cost of letting a few to die. Specialism can be at odds with each other — for the public health official, no price is too high to save a life. For the economist, cost-benefit analysis must prove that a life is worth saving. Moreover, each specialism is riven by debate and disagreement, particularly in the midst of an unfolding phenomenon. Respected bio-statisticians and experienced pathologists have repeatedly insisted that the data are too unreliable to unequivocally support the policy of lockdown.[5] Veteran infectious disease specialists from the US, Germany, and Sweden, have vehemently disagreed with the policy of suppressing a contagion that must inevitably spread.[6] At best, these scientific disagreements are muffled when public policy corrals specialisms into what 'science says'. At worst, counter-arguments are derided as conspiracy theories against the public good.

Moreover, the advice to 'prepare for the worst' or 'to continue business as usual' are

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[5] John Ioannidis 'A fiasco in the making? As the coronavirus takes hold, we are making decisions without reliable data,' <u>STAT</u>, 17, March 2020. John Lee, 'How to understand — and report — figures for 'Covid deaths'' *The Spectator*, March 29, 2020. See also by the same author, 'How deadly is the coronavirus: It's still far from clear' *The Spectator*, March 28, 2020

[6] Perspectives on the Pandemic II: A conversation with Dr. Knut Wittkowski, former chief biostatistician and epidemiologist at Rockefeller University Hospital, New York https://ratical.org/PerspectivesOnPandemic-II.html accessed on April 15, 2020. Comments by Dr. Sucharit Bhakdi, former director of Institute for Medical Microbiology at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany who claims the lockdown is 'grotesque, absurd, and very dangerous.' https://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2020/03/an-expert-says-the-current-response-to-the-coronavirus-is-grotesque-absurd-and-very-dangerous.html, accessed April 5, 2020. Interview with Prof. Johan Giesecke, advisor to the Swedish government and Chief scientist for the European Centre for Disease prevention and control. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfN2JWifLCY&feature=youtu.be accessed April 22, 2020. To glimpse the extent of disagreement among scientists about the public policy on Covid-19, consult the many video interviews of 'dissident' scientists conducted by Freddie Sayers of UnHerd.com

not scientific statements. They are nothing more than opinions even when pronounced by a bio-statistician or an economist. However, both can be turned into propagandists. When pressed into service as handmaidens of policy, their personal opinions are gilded by their scientific credentials. For example, Dr Fauci, the redoubtable face of public health in the US said on March 8 that 'there is no reason to be walking around with a mask'. A week earlier the US surgeon general Jerome Adams insisted in a tweet that 'masks are not effective in preventing the general public from catching coronavirus'. It was not until early April that it finally became good science to wear a mask to curtail an infectious disease spread by droplets sprayed when coughing or speaking. Public 'guidance' on wearing masks changed because experts were no longer afraid of a run on masks and because they began to teach on TV how to make home-made masks. Experts find it necessary to 'message' citizens because they believe that like children, citizens need to be guided. After 8 pm on Sunday April 19, 2020 it is a punishable offence in Pennsylvania not to wear a mask when shopping for groceries. Apparently, even coronavirus obeys the commandments of the law.

Despite the assurances of a scientifically grounded public policy, there is not much 'science' supporting the policy of a world-wide lockdown. The data are unreliable, evidence competes with speculation, and professionals struggle to keep aloof from propagandists. Yet, the invocation of 'data-driven, evidence-based policy determined by scientists and public health professionals instead of politicians' reverberates with suggestive resonances. The words exude a comforting connotation but denote little. The listener feels safe in blankets made of white-coated professionals, revelatory numbers, and effective cures. However, such 'sentences' are better understood as made from plastic words in the sense of Uwe Poerksen, who described

their political effects.[7] Plastic words are almost meaningless in themselves. Yet, strung together and wielded as clubs, plastic words can be used by managers to command uncomprehending listeners to fall in line with their plans and programs.

Frightening the citizenry into obedience with untruths and shocking acts is a political tactic at least as old as Machiavelli. A speaker need not believe the truth of what he says when speaking to persuade rather than to enlighten the listener. Truth and lie are of no concern to the propagandist who seeks to influence instead of to inform citizens. The professional who persuades the listener into obedience has turned into a propagandist.

Executives

The often-heard appeal that politicians should give way to professionals is to ask for government by experts. But an apolitical technocracy is not a democracy. Nor is technocracy a remedy for an oligarchy, much less for an incipient autocracy. At least notionally, modern political regimes acknowledge that the power of governments to make laws, implement them, and judge infractions against them must be separated. Hence, the well-known architecture of distinct but overlapping legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. There was no room for the executive power in Aristotle's understanding of political regimes. But he did acknowledge the need for executioners. In Machiavelli, there is little difference between a tyrant and the prince who is encouraged to commit ferocious acts of public cruelty to maintain order. The separation of powers in modern governmental apparatuses is intended to tame but not defang the Machiavellian prince.[8] The current president of the US is known for playing a

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[7] Uwe Poerksen, *Plastic Words: The Tyranny of a Modular Language,* (University Park, Pa: Penn State University Press, 2004).
[8] Harvey Mansfield, *Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power* (NY: The Free Press, 1989).

chief executive officer of a corporation on a reality TV show. The tag line of that show —

'you're fired!' — makes obvious the otherwise hidden link between executioners and

executives.

The rise of the executive branch of government reaches something of an apex with a

president who now claims 'total authority' to decide whether and how long the population

will remain confined to their houses. He brings to a head the generation-long paradigm of US

governance, that 'government is not the solution to our problems. Government is the

problem.' His former chief strategist is on record as calling for the 'deconstruction of the

administrative state'. The deliberate suffocation of the administrative apparatus of the state

over forty years included yoking to business interests, agencies that produce scientific data

useful to public policy. Debilitated by years of abuse and calumny, these institutions now

disintegrate.[9] Steadily, the executive branch of the US government has become something of a

fiefdom. Twenty years ago, a 'decider-in-chief' combated the crisis of terrorism. Ten years

ago, government by 'executive orders' combated the economic crisis caused by rapacious

finance capital and an uncooperative legislative branch. The slow erosion of the distinction

between office and office holders has culminated in the obscene cult of the individual now on

display. 'Morning in America' dawned forty years ago. We now live through its twilight, as

crises and the aggrandizement of the executive powers of government feed off and engorge

the other. The coronavirus pandemic fuels and entrenches the grip of executive authority, of

autocratic government.

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[9] For example, in early March 2020, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) further clarified its rule, ironically named 'Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science.' In the name of regulating corporations, it gives them freer rein to pollute. To supposedly permit the validation of scientific results, the rule requires that the raw data used in such studies be published. This is a perverse way to stop all epidemiological studies on the effect of pollution on health since publishing the raw data would violate medical privacy laws.

Two Pandemics

There are two pandemics underway. In the strict sense of all people (Greek: *pan demos*) Covid-19 is the lesser pandemic. The fear of sars-cov-2 is the greater pandemic. Far fewer people have been infected by the virus than are fearful of it. The fear of the pandemic has proven more contagious than the pandemic itself. The smallpox virus that decimated much of the aboriginal peoples on the American continents was carried from Europe at the speed of ships. Sars-cov-2 travels at the speed of jet planes. Throughout human history, infectious agents have been carried at the speed of human travel along trade routes. In the 21st century, the fear of the virus moves at the speed of what the lighted screen shows.

The Coronavirus Pandemic Show

A virus cannot be seen, either by the naked eye or through an ordinary optical microscope. For example, it is said the coronavirus is ten thousand times smaller than a grain of salt. Except for those looking through an electron microscope, none can see it. Yet almost all know what it looks like because they have been shown suitably doctored images of it. Seeing what they are shown is a training in how to see on command. Even a seven-year old child can now draw as a crowned circle the coronavirus he has been shown but cannot see. Viewers of the 'coronavirus pandemic' show on CNN forget they see neither the virus nor an image of it. Mesmerized by the visualizations they are shown, viewers confuse reality TV for reality.

The production of the coronavirus pandemic show is a global affair. From Wuhan China to Seattle Washington, king corona is beamed to all corners of the earth. Glowing TV,

computer, and phone screens display its message to billions. Like all kings, Sars-cov-2 has a retinue of courtiers and ministers that heralds its coming, tracks its movement, and attests to its power. Popularizing books by academics, movies about contagions, and TED talks by billionaire philanthropists prepared the psychological soil to welcome the king. Now, virologists and epidemiologists, public health officials and politicians, data analysts and statisticians occupy various rungs in the hierarchy of royal attendants that produce and disseminate the data stream needed for the show. TV program producers, newscasters, and social media influencers package bits and pieces of the data stream into segments that are stitched together as the coronavirus pandemic show.

Global maps colored in shades of red mark the countries, cities, and towns in which the coronavirus has taken residence. The number of confirmed cases infected by coronavirus pulse in threatening circles. Hotspots identify the cities where far too many suffer and die. Curves show the exponential speed with which the virus king moves through its subjects, histograms track the daily number of deaths, and pie-charts display the proportion of its dying population that is young or sick. Video clips of masked humans shuffling on empty streets reinforce the need to hide from the evil king. Death counters produced by reputable universities update the body count of the infected and dead, amplifying the dread of its implacable power. TV clips of patients on ventilators and in unburied coffins confirm the merciless tax exacted by the death dealing king. Reality TV does not illuminate reality but molds attitudes towards it. The coronavirus pandemic show generates fear of a shapeless menace, of a dreaded disease.

Obedience

Machiavelli recommended fear over love as the more potent tool of statecraft. For him,

when accompanied by the dread of punishment, fear is a reliable instrument with which to cow a populace into compliance. Dread is a bad counselor for citizens interested in government *by* the people. But spreading dread is useful for those interested in the government *of* people.

In this regard, Ivan Illich's arguments have lost none of their incisive lucidity.[10] He argued for the distinction between fright and fear analogous to Machiavelli's dread and fear. Fright is what animals and humans experience when confronting death. Fright is the irrational rebellion of the senses against annihilation. The specter of death by Sars-cov-2 frightens a population into more or less quiescent obedience. Instead of fear quelling fright because there is little to be afraid of, fright will overpower fear in a population frightened by the show.

Illich also argued that people can be habituated into obedience. Years of schooling train students to do what the teacher demands. Students study only to pass the test and lose their curiosity to learn. Habitual reliance on professionals who legally enforce the purchase of their services trains citizens to believe that experts know best. Citizens no longer bother to question the evidentiary worth of incredible speculations and confuse obeying incomprehensible orders with deferring to trusted good sense. The constant subjection to disabling technologies transforms the self-understanding of its users. Just as those who travel by plane come to believe they went somewhere when air-freighted there, so also those accustomed to the show come to believe they see what they are shown.

Obedience does not always require the specter of death or habitual submission to experts. Illich suggested an even more potent method to elicit ardent conformity. People can be

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[10] David Cayley (1992). *Ivan Illich in Conversation* (Toronto: Anansi Press) is an excellent introduction to the thought of Illich. Consult, concerning fright and fear, Rehearsal for Death in Ivan Illich: The Powerless Church and other selected writings, 1955-1985 (University Park: Penn State Press, 2018); oncerning technology, *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Marion Boyars, 1973); concerning professionals, (1977) *Disabling Professions* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977); concerning the show, Guarding the eye in the age of Show, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 1995, 28, 47-61; concerning life as a fetish, The Institutional construction of a new fetish: human life. *In the Mirror of the Past*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1992), 218-231.

seduced by manipulative marketers to chase after enticing phantoms. A well-designed fetish like 'Life' works well to extract popular obedience. Few can say what 'Life' is, least of all biologists who supposedly study it. Yet, all seem sentimentally attached to 'Life', to preserving, fostering, and saving it. However, this 'life' which none dare speak against, is not something definable or palpable but instead has the consistency of a doughy substance 'amenable to management, to improvement, and to evaluation in terms of available resources…'

Saving 'Lives'

It is precisely to show how well he manages this squishy substance in terms of available resources that Andrew Cuomo, the Governor of New York, holds a daily press conference.[11] It is aired by all the news channels. At the bottom of the TV screen are the phrases: Stay Home. Stop the Virus. Save Lives. The salvational intent animating the world-wide lockdown and related efforts to fight Sars-cov-2 could not be more obvious. The global lockdown cannot be fully explained as a scientifically informed and legally enforced response to an existential threat. Nor can it be fully understood as the result of a frightened population habituated to obeying experts.

Rather, the success of the global lockdown presupposes citizens who willingly commit themselves to a higher cause, to 'saving lives'. These 'lives' do not refer to concrete persons — a Mary or a Joe — but is the aggregate of biological entities with a human form. 'Life' vaguely conjures up his friend Mary, which is why Joe is sentimentally attached to saving it. Joe confusedly glides over the chasm that separates Mary from 'lives'. He feels that by

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[11] Through much of April and May 2020, Andrew Cuomo was the favored politician on matters Covid-19.

participating in the program of 'saving lives' he is attending to his friend Mary. Joe thinks he saves himself when he enrolls in the program to 'save lives.' Joe can switch between being himself and seeing himself as an epidemiologist does. He makes the switch between being Joe and being 'a life' without noticing the change. Understanding the program of 'flattening the curve' is sufficient to grasp that 'saving lives' has little to do with either Mary or Joe. 'Saving lives' is a method to manage 'life' by regulating the number of deaths.

Managed 'Lives'

'Flattening the curve' is the popular way to explain the mechanics of managing death by Sars-cov-2. A curve shows the expected number of infected humans over a period of time. By instituting such behavioral controls as 'handwashing, teleworking, limiting large gatherings…', the 'number of cases' can be kept at or below 'the healthcare system capacity', which includes nurses, doctors, ICUs, ventilators and the like. Calibrating the number of expected deaths by available hospital resources is an exercise in supply chain management, well known to industrial engineers. Just as the number of shoes manufactured can be calibrated by the amount of leather available, so also the number of covid-19 cases can be restricted to the available hospital beds and medical personnel. It was this style of just-in-time management that previously gutted the facilities so much that it caused New York hospitals to be almost overwhelmed by sick patients during the flu season of 2018. Then, excess capacity was reduced. Now, excess infections are flattened.

The technique to manage a population was best explained by the Governor of California, Gavin Newsom, when he described the 'exit strategy' from the lockdown. He thinks an exit strategy is necessary not only because the lockdown has finally begun to pinch the wallets of

those who could, until now, afford to shelter in place. It is also prompted by the fear of a restive

population that is unlikely to sit on its hands until a vaccine is invented. Mr. Newsom warns

that ending the lockdown is not like turning on a light switch. This is because the death rates

will soar if all restrictions are lifted at one fell swoop. Instead, the only way out of lockdown is

to manage it as one would 'operate a dimmer'. He intends 'to toggle that dimmer, so that we get

exactly the appropriate lighting, so that we can transition to herd immunity and that vaccine.'

During a storm, engineers regulate the flow of water from a dam so it does not breach the banks

of a river. Newsom wants to control the flow of humans in and out of their houses so that the

resulting illnesses and deaths do not breach the medical system capacity. Like a good scientist,

he takes an experimental approach to solving the problem. He will try lifting a restrictive

measure, say opening businesses on Sundays only. Then check the infection rates. If too high,

he will reimpose that restriction and try easing another, say reopening high schools. If the

resulting death rates are still unacceptable, loosen one constraint. Expand the capacities of ICU

beds and ventilators. Check again the death rates. If now less than expected, cut back on

medical capacities to save money. In the age of logistics, 'saving lives' is a management

program that jointly optimizes both human and technical resources. 'Saving lives' elicits

mawkish attachment from only those blind to the distinction between concrete persons and

human resources.

This exercise in population management *may* increase the number of 'saved lives'. But

it *surely* reinforces the illusion that life is a scarce resource, maintained by machines and

metered out by professionals. As argued by Michel Foucault, these contemporary methods of

population management derive from a long-standing belief that the purpose of government is to

care for the lives of all and of each. He describes the detailed, fussy, and meticulous techniques

of public health surveillance prescribed at the end of the seventeenth century to combat a plague. Quarantines, contact tracing, self-isolation, immunity passports — none of these are anything but 21st century avatars of the three-hundred-year-old logic of biopolitics, a politics geared to administering and fostering lives.[12] When life becomes an administered object, death becomes the consequence of administrative incompetence or neglect. 'Flattening the curve' is a euphemism for managing the deaths from coronavirus, which presupposes and reinforces the fantasy that dying is the consequence of mismanagement.

Bare Lives

Flattening the curve is a technique by which some humans control the behavior of others. Self-isolation and social distancing are techniques by which people manage themselves, to do to themselves what population managers demand of them.

'Self-isolation' was a nineteenth century term that referred to countries unwilling to trade or negotiate with other countries. It now refers to the willing confinement of residents to their quarters. A common example of this is the number of people who have barely stirred out of their houses for more than a month. They have reconfigured their residence into a fortress against viral invaders, replete with portholes to receive inputs and expel outputs. Money comes in to those still receiving an income for delivering work products, even if these are screened meetings. Nutrients are ordered online, prepared with minimal human contact, and left at the doorstep. Entertainment is piped in through cable wires while excrements are piped out through sewers. Muscles not needed for work or play are toned indoors on fossil fueled machines. With its inhabitants on life-support systems, the house functions as an ICU for the healthy. As Marx

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[12] Michel Foucault, (1995) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (NY: Vintage Books). Also, *The History of Sexuality,* v.1 (NY: Vintage Books, 1990).

prophesized, the freedom of a privatized life is expressed in the management of its animal functions. And outside the house turned fortress, the animal that speaks screens itself from others of its kind.

In sociology, the phrase 'social distance' is a quasi-technical term indicating the snobbery with which one social class keeps itself aloof from another. It now refers to the physical gap, measured by the distance spit travels, between humans. By learning social distancing, people are habituated into being separated from one another. 'Alone together' has become a popular meme carrying the mushy feeling of camaraderie in trying times. It is the title of a book by Sherry Turkle, who studies the psycho-social condition of humans online. What she once decried has now become a comforting Twitter hashtag. Those trained to play multi-person video games know well the paradoxical condition of being alone together. None is alone since there is always some other with whom to interact. This other could even be a computer program called ELIZA, which mimicked a Rogerian psychotherapist who only repeated back to the patient as a question what it was told. To the chagrin of its inventor Joseph Weizenbaum, the program induced 'powerful delusional thinking in quite normal people' who knew Eliza was a programmed respondent and yet felt 'she' understood them.[13] Equally, none is together online because each is beyond the reach of the other. In the 1980s, AT&T had a TV ad that sold its phones as instruments to allow people to 'reach out and touch someone.' In Corona days, togetherness is experienced in Skype parties and Zoom dances with people who are separated by less than a mile. Those who have learned to be alone together fulfill, without irony, the techno-utopian life promised by Silicon Valley.

The human species was thought social and mortal. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben

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[13] Joseph Weizenbaum (1976). *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgement to Calculation* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman)

has shown that 'Life' has always carried a political signature and names the condition of bare human survival, the ghostly human remnant, the precipitate left behind after the social has been politically leached out of men and women.[14] It is this 'life' — withered of social bonds and kept functioning until turned off — that the lockdown seeks to save. Sanjay Gupta, the doctor on call to CNN sought the counsel of an astronaut, Scott Kelly, on how to deal with the physical and psychological effects of human isolation. It is not without interest that a man who spend time in a technological womb in outer space should now offer advice on how to live on earth.

The Religion of 'Life'

Agamben also helpfully clarifies that religion does not signify that which binds the human to the divine. Instead, as the etymology of the word reveals, religion refers above all to 'stance of scrupulousness and attention that must be adopted in relations with the gods…' Religious acts do not unite but instead divide humans from the gods. Gods become sacred because ritual observances and approved intermediaries remove them from everyday human contact. The exact and punctilious performance of rites supervised by priests both separates and makes accessible the very objects — the gods — they bring into being. The religious Brahmin must place the white thread he wears around his torso over the right ear before he urinates. This act removes the thread from contact with excreta. This separating act simultaneously sacralizes the thread and transforms urine into a contaminant. Rituals that separate and fence off not only produces the spheres of the sacred and the profane. They also ground religion understood as that which 'removes things, places, animals or people from

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[14] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (CA: Stanford University Press, 1995)

common use…'[15]

In this sense, 'life' is a religious fetish even more powerful than the commodities of capitalism. A fetish is an object venerated for its salvific powers. Commodities and services are sold on the promise of bringing happiness, health, and pleasure. But since 'life' is thought coextensive with existence itself, it can recode old and new commodities and activities in its image. Old commodities like toilet paper have been hoarded because they are vital to 'life'. Consumers are being gouged for new commodities like plastic face shields because these protect 'life'. Old activities have gained new meaning — handwashing is 'life-enhancing', handshakes are 'life- threatening'. New activities such as being masked in public preserves 'life' while self-isolating is feared for possibly diminishing the 'quality of life'. The subsumption of commodities and activities under the sign of 'life' institutes it as the supreme commodity.

Flattening the curve, social distancing, and self-isolating are rituals that separate humans from each other and from things. Flattening the curve presupposes 'life' as a commodity because it is made dependent on other scarce resources, like ventilators and tests. Medical devices and services are separated from common use by the medium of money. Bank balances and professional decisions control access to 'life' no less than to commodities and services. Medical protocols define who can get a test while medical exams certify who cannot operate a scanning machine. Administrative rules govern how far to stand from one another while laws stipulate which factory must shut its doors. When the doctor does triage she must compare 'expected life years' or 'quality of adjusted life years' to determine who is worth saving. Flattening the curve requires the fastidious performance of rites and the intercession of

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[15] Giorgio Agamben, 'In praise of profanation', in *Profanations* (NY: Zone Books, 2007), pp.73-92

anointed intermediaries, both of which control access to 'life' and make it sacred.

The rituals of social distancing and self-isolating are no less efficacious in sacralizing 'life'. Prudent actions can be easily distinguished from deadening rituals. Obeying an order to wear a mask on Sunday but not on the previous Saturday as if the virus obeys Sabbath is the sign of ritual observance. Such behaviors are conducted with more or less scrupulous solemnity. The educated classes are particularly finicky practitioners of the purificatory rituals conducted for the sake of 'life'. When shopping for groceries, they maintain the officially prescribed distance from attendants and other shoppers, clean their hands after contact with all objects, remove and separately wash away contaminants from both clothes and shopping bags on returning home. The war against coronavirus sacralizes 'life' by prescribing the rituals necessary to access it. Illich warned years ago that 'life' was becoming a sacred if spectral object, a fetish. The religion of 'life' may not be obvious in the sneer of moral superiority with which the faithful practitioners of approved behavior pressure others to follow. But the attempt to hug a friend should suffice to convince doubters of the power of the global religion of 'life'.

Sacrifice Zones

The religion of 'life' is not only instituted through the separations that isolate individuals and demarcate things. It is also reflected in the division of one group of humans from another. By legal order in early March 2020, a new category of Americans called 'essential workers' came into existence. Why the CEO is not an essential worker while the janitor is one was left obscure. Why Main Street comprises far more 'essential workers' than Wall Street remains unanswered. Essential workers comprise about half of the population of working Americans. They are overwhelmingly minorities, they live paycheck to paycheck, the

majority are women, and most need food donations two weeks into the lockdown. They are the garbage collectors, the instacart deliverers, the emergency room nurses, the doctors, the fire fighters… they are the ones who keep the lights on, the roads clean, the shelves stocked, and the machines humming.

The category of 'essential workers' implies the existence of 'non-essential workers' and conceals the category of 'non-workers' —the unemployed, the unpaid, and the institutionalized, whether in nursing homes, prisons, or camps for undocumented immigrants. Curiously, there is loud chatter about essential workers but little about non-essential workers. If the essential workers are those who are necessary and indispensable, then the others must be relatively unnecessary and dispensable. Not much has changed in the life of non-essential workers. The truly dispensable among them were able to slip away from crowded, infection-ridden cities to restful solitary retreats by the mountain or the sea. Other non-essentials who could not afford that luxury, continue to sit unblinking in front of screens at homes instead of at the office. They do occasionally complain about the increased number of non-essential meetings.

Paradoxically, it is the essential workers who labor on the front lines for a pittance while the non-essential workers hide out in their houses. It is the essential workers who toil in dangerous conditions to 'save the lives' of the non-essential workers. Essential workers feel themselves exposed in a sacrifice zone from where they maintain the life-support systems needed for the survival of non-essential workers. Alain Colombié, the French doctor who went naked to protest the lack of sufficient protective equipment, described himself and his colleagues as 'cannon fodder' in the war against Sar-cov-2.

It has become something of a comforting fad for non-essential workers to pay lip service to their human life-lines by donating money, singing out of windows while banging

pots and pans, and sending grateful emojis to their saviors, all the while gravely intoning 'we are all in this together.' De la Rouchefoucauld said hypocrisy was the tribute vice paid to virtue. Whether or not the praise of essential workers is hypocritical, it is they who are forced to occupy the sacrificial zones in the war against a virus.

The Law to Care

Ivan Illich noted that care for the oppressed was the mechanism by which oppressors hid the truth that their oppression usually requires society's victims to be agents of their own destruction.[16] The *C*oronavirus *A*id, *R*elief, and *E*conomic *S*ecurity (CARES) Act is a law that cares. It cares for the 27 million Americans (as of April 21, 2020) who filed for unemployment benefits because they lost their jobs and must stand in bread lines in a matter of weeks. It cares much more for the corporations whose sales have plummeted. It cares most of all for the banks and Wall Street firms whose stock market machinations continue to depend on taxpayer support. The gradient of those most needing the caring hand of government inclines steeply towards the rich and powerful. But the CARES act is not the only act of care. Dan Patrick the Lt. Governor of Texas, is willing to personally 'sacrifice' himself and other elderly people for the economic wellbeing of his grandchildren because he cares. Others, like Eric Garcetti the Mayor of Los Angeles, are moved by the spirit of compassion and love for neighbors to support and enforce the lockdown. It is because you care for others that you should wear a mask. It is because you care for your own well-being that you should stop friends from meeting you. It is because of your love for others that you should not share a meal with them and not visit them in the nursing home or hospital bed. One may be forgiven for thinking with John McKnight that

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[16] Ivan Illich, 'Shadow Work', in *Shadow Work* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981), pp.99-116.

such acts of care are a perverted mask of love.[17]

Apocalypse Now

The feeling of doom is in the air. The lockdown has exacerbated the sense of catastrophe. Whether they are the migrant workers massed on the borders of Indian states, or the millions in the US who have lost their jobs, innumerably many are suddenly cast adrift without a livelihood. Countless more experience the menace of an invisible pestilence, not knowing when they will be released from confinement, anxious about ever being freed from continuous and intimate surveillance. A low-grade fever of panic and consternation afflicts many millions across the world. Some have begun to express this in acts of surly rebellion. Others mutely comply waiting for the ill-wind to blow over. Many, if not all, wish the program to save lives will work swiftly and that life will return to normal.

Rain Dances

Management programs rarely fail. This is not only because they are like those who leave the battle field as victors by simply claiming victory. In some months, scientific facts like the infection fatality rate will show that the war against Sars-cov-2 is a qualified success. Management programs rarely fail also because they function as do rain dances. Anthropologists discovered why the rain dance always works. If it rains after a dance, then the dance worked. If it does not rain after a dance, then the solution is to dance harder. In either case, there is no questioning the causal efficacy of the rain dance. There is little doubt that the lockdown and related efforts will be successful, for similar reasons.

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[17] John McKnight (1995) *The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits* (NY: Basic Books).

The success of the lockdown will coincide with opening up the economy. Idling machines will be cranked up because hunger, anger, and lost profits will pose a greater threat to 'life' than covid-19. Many lessons from this world-wide experiment — immunity cards, working from home, contact tracing, refinements of statistical methods and population management techniques — will be smoothly integrated into the operations of the economy. While the population managers — economists, bio-statisticians and the like — will attempt to commensurate 'saved lives' and 'excess deaths', there will be no balance-sheet to chalk up two sides of this world- wide experiment, because there can be none. No comparison is possible between the dread of millions and the satisfaction of self-congratulatory population managers; there is no scale to weigh the increase in domestic violence against the decrease in pulmonary infections.

Sars-cov-2 has interrupted the tick-tock of the world clock. The clock will soon restart. Before this tear in time becomes a rabbit hole papered over by the official keepers of memory, it is helpful to consider a second meaning of 'apocalypse'. It did not originally mean a great cataclysm, a final catastrophe, the end of time. Instead, apocalypse means unveiling or disclosing; the act of uncovering or revealing. In this sense we can ask what corona days disclose.

Full Disclosure

Most wish to return to normal life though some fear a new normal after corona days. But there will be neither a going *back to* normal nor an *entering into* a new normal. Corona days are not abnormal. They are only atypical. On corona days, living is explicitly managed so 'life' can fit the capacity of technical life-support systems. On normal days, 'life' is less visible

but no less captured in an interlocking web of technological life-lines. On all days, living is caught and molded into 'life'. Corona days only throw into sharp relief what is normally overlooked.

Normality is the almost complete dependence on commodities and services, which is to say the techno-scientific economy. Without working and consuming, the overwhelming majority of the human species cannot obtain food, clothing, shelter, or pleasure. Those who yearn for the freedom of normal life do not imagine liberation from locked down lies in being better functioning workers and consumers. The migrant worker in India and the unemployed in the US know that normal life is a game that stakes their very survival on a paycheck or a handout. They protest their enforced idleness during corona days because they are forced to work to eat during normal days. As Illich argued, the economy now exerts a radical monopoly over human existence. It is this thoroughgoing addiction which has come into clear view during corona days. Flattening the curve, self-isolating, and social distancing expose for all who can see, that 'life' is a religious fetish more powerful than mere commodities. As with any fetish, 'life' is venerated for its salvific powers. A fetishized life saves only those willing to function on life-support.

Sar-cov-2 is neither alive nor dead. It transitioned out of suspended animation to infect its human hosts. In their fight against it, humans parodied the virus and made obvious that the condition of suspended animation is not aberrant. The question is whether the normalcy of a fetishized life and its supporting apparatuses will remain at the epicenter of what is to come.

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Dancing in the Street: Convivial Medicine at the End of Normal

D. Brendan Johnson

One of the really hard issues, and it is a cultural issue, we don't need to think of everything as pure material politics, but can the kind of changes we're talking about feel to people not like austerity but as some kind of moral crusade, can they feel somehow nourishing instead of depriv[ing]?"[1] –Ezra Klein

Ivan Illich, the prominent 20th century Jewish-born Catholic priest, insightfully submitted modern Western medicine to deep critique based on its own stated goals and values. A polyglot European educator, writer, and cultural critic, his growing dissatisfaction with the trajectory of institutional and cultural life coalesced in the 1970's around the concept of *nemesis*. As in its eponymous Greek myth, the phenomenon of nemesis refers to the human tendency to overshoot and pay a price. Illich argued that, after finding incomplete success in an endeavor (e.g. improving health), we do not reconsider or refine our method but blindly intensify the efforts by which we first attempted the task, thereby endangering the very good we attempted to augment. Illich perceives "this self-reinforcing loop of negative institutional feedback"[2] in multiple fields: 'education' threatens genuine learning, 'transportation' threatens autonomous movement, and industrial medicine threatens health.[3] Indeed, the contemporary interlocking crises of, inter alia, the COVID-19 pandemic, looming climate collapse, neoliberal social atomization, and rising

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[1] Wendy Brown and Noah Smith, interview with Ezra Klein, "Neoliberalism and its discontents," *The Ezra Klein Show* (Vox), podcast audio, October 24, 2019, https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/vox/the-ezra-klein-show/e/64811077.

[2] Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 34.

[3] Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 7-8.

authoritarianism all share a common nemesis character; any movement beyond the deadly 'normal' which led to the present moment must both analyze its roots and offer convivial alternatives. In this paper, I argue that Illich's thought offers a cogent analytic lens for contemporary social challenges and that his concept of conviviality helps us to reimagine medicine for passage through the current confluence of crises, offering a new imagination for how medicine may participate in a hoped-for world of flourishing.

Illich's critique is elucidated and contextualized by Gerald McKenny's historical framing of modern medicine. McKenny describes how the modern thought, especially in the work of Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon, shifted medicine's thought structures and values. No longer was medicine the pursuit of health contextualized within a larger pursuit of a good life, itself possible only within limits set by fate and finitude; medicine instead becomes the imperative to "eliminate suffering and to expand the realm of human choice – in short, to relieve the human condition of subjection to the whims of fortune or the bonds of natural necessity."[4] At first glance these goals do not seem objectionable, yet this philosophical conception of medicine has unintended negative consequences. McKenny claims contemporary philosophical bioethics is uncritically engaged in this 'Baconian project' and thus unable to provide perspectival distance. McKenny's hesitancy in using the professionalized and mainstream language of the field is helpful as we consider reading McKenny's helpful description alongside Illich's critique. McKenny's account offers a complementary account of an Illichian philosophical threshold contemporary medicine has overstepped. Most importantly, bringing these two critiques of modern medicine into conversation will let us begin to construct a vision of 'convivial'

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[4] Gerald McKenny, "Bioethics, the Body, and the Legacy of Bacon," in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical* Ethics, ed. M. Therese Lysaught and Joseph Kotva (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 398.

medicine, which uses the best of modern medicine while submitting it to higher values that transcend it and are buried within its long tradition. Illich aids us in retraining our vision of medicine. The future of medicine must be neither a return to the past, nor an intensification of the processes of the present.

In part I, we will consider issues facing modern medicine and their interlocking social problems, consider the importance of limits in Illich and McKenny, and draw out Illich's critique of tools and tool culture. Pivoting, part II explores Illich's concept of conviviality and its centrality in facing any one of the major social challenges he considers. Finally, part III considers what a convivial medicine would entail: its ability to meet the challenges of (medical) nemesis, its requirements for change in our institutional, social, and professional conceptualizations, and its call to finally be true to medicine's role of healing and not harming.

I.   Limits and Tools

American medicine is experiencing the erosion of gains in vital statistics, increasing costs, a small political discursive field for changes, and a restrictive philosophical imagination. The average life expectancy at birth in the United States has decreased since 2016 and is primarily driven down by overdoses, liver disease, and suicide, the so-called "deaths of despair."[5] American healthcare spending has reached approximately 18% of GNP,[6] nearly double that of its rich industrial peers. While the United States spends significantly more for a variety of unique historical, commercial, and political reasons, its rate of annual increase is

[5] Saiidi Uptin, "US Life Expectancy Has Been Declining. Here's Why," *CNBC*, July 9, 2019. https://www.cnbc.com/2019/07/09/us-life-expectancy-has-been-declining-heres-why.html.
[6] "National Health Expenditures Data (Historical)," Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, December 11, 2018, https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/NationalHealthExpendData/NationalHealthAccountsHistorical.html.

comparable to peers and is driven by such universals as increasingly expensive medical technologies.[7]

In American political discussion, 'health' is reduced to 'healthcare', and 'healthcare' reduced to 'healthcare access' (or insurance coverage). Mainstream political opinion is primarily concerned about inclusion and access. Medicare for All, a popular progressive political position, and the Affordable Care Act both aim to increase healthcare coverage. Conservative opponents to these positions would prefer to decrease the costs associated with medical care or insurance, thereby hoping to increase its availability. Both imaginations are constrained by the focus on access. Yet this approach does not align with empirical data. The contribution of restricted health care to premature death and unwanted health outcomes is only roughly 10%, and is greatly outweighed by behavioral and structural influences.[8] For the obvious importance of healthcare in the lives of individuals, our conceptions what leads to health must be much broader.

Medical advances are often assumed to have caused our general increase in life expectancy and decrease in mortality. Yet, Illich informs us that it was as late as the 1910's that a generic patient (with a medically recognized disease) would be more likely than not to receive a specifically effective treatment from a physician.[9] Thomas McKeown's careful historical study of recent centuries has determined that the influence of medical intervention on disease process was not the driver of the population-level improvements: "The improvement of health during the past three centuries was due essentially to provision of food, protection from hazards, and limitation of numbers."[10] With the additional factor of lifestyle in developed countries, these four

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[7] Daniel Callahan, *Taming the Beloved Beast: How Medical Technology Costs Are Destroying Our Health Care System* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[8] Robert M. Kaplan and Arnold Milstein, "Contributions of Health Care to Longevity: A Review of 4 Estimation Methods," *The Annals of Family Medicine* 17, no. 3 (2019): 267–72, https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.2362.

[9] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 1.

[10] Thomas McKeown, *The Role of Medicine: Dream, Mirage, or Nemesis?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

together will continue to be the primary drivers of health and disease in the future. The progress in increased life expectancy and decreased mortality had largely preceded the advent of the powers of modern medicine. While even in an ideal environmental and behavioral milieu medicine has a beneficial role, the fact remains that historically, medicine cannot be cast as the health's only, or even the most powerful, beneficent force. The larger dynamics and crises which threaten individual and community health must be included into medicine's analytic and therapeutic framework if it is to do justice to its pursuit of health and flourishing.

Medicine's current self-conception, however, is not limited to merely being providers of health, even in a limited way. Since Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon, medicine has taken on the tasks of furnishing choice and relieving suffering as its primary objective. [11] Contemporary medicine does have an expanded imagination as to its role, but it is, at present, focused on the wrong moral pursuit. As McKenny, following Charles Taylor, recounts, European Protestantism began to see ordinary life as theologically as valuable a vocation as previously had been restricted to priestly or monastic vocations in Catholicism; this is reflected in the wide contemporary use of the word 'vocation'. The work of ordinary life is that which meets the needs of one's neighbors, and if one desires to be disciplined and effective in one's work, what is ultimately required is an instrumental approach to nature to fulfill this new moral project. It was for this reason Bacon praised the mechanical arts over the speculative. The medieval conception of teleologically-ordered nature shifted to a Protestant vision of creation as a law-governed mechanism susceptible to human control and neutral regarding ends. The Baconian project is then the fulfilment of Protestant moral and religious aspiration, even as other secular Enlightenment figures like Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Newton stripped the theological

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[11] While this section largely follows McKenny's critique, Illich also highlights Francis Bacon as a pivotal figure. Cf. Illich, *Tools for Conviviality,* 30.

justification and radicalized Protestant instrumentalism. Good and evil become simply equated to pleasure and pain, and thus the relief of suffering becomes a moral obligation. The new mechanical and value-neutral worldview both requires the elimination of suffering and makes it possible. Three major changes emerge: first, the body becomes not a source for the practice of wisdom but rather technical control; second, health becomes an end in itself (along with the elimination of suffering) rather than a constitutive part of a virtuous, good, and integrated life; and finally, rules or prohibition over what is to be done with the body are considered (cruelly) insensitive or arbitrary in the face of a potentially curable disease.[12]

Without restraint on the unleashed powers of medicine, the human person becomes an object of technique and control. Further, the imperative to relieve suffering combined with a Romantic notion of the unique creativity of the individual means medicine should "eliminate whatever anyone might consider to be a burden of finitude or provide whatever anyone might require for one's natural fulfillment."[13] A grand project to relieve unnecessary pain has turned into justification for an extension of medicine's authority into new areas of life. This view of human life, while purportedly neutral, carries significant philosophical content. Ethically and empirically, medicine's project and self-conception are not as simple, beneficent, and neutral as they may appear.

McKenny's intuition of the role of limits is more clearly seen through the conceptual framework Illich developed. For Illich, a trajectory of development is charted in relation to two historical watersheds. After the first,

> new knowledge is applied to the solution of a clearly stated problem and scientific measuring sticks are applied to account for the new efficiency. But at a second point, the progress demonstrated in a previous achievement is used as a rational for the exploitation

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[12] McKenny, "Bioethics, the Body, and the Legacy of Bacon," 400.
[13] McKenny, "Bioethics, the Body, and the Legacy of Bacon," 401.

of society as a whole in the service of a value which is determined and constantly revised by an element of society, by one of its self-certifying professional elites.[14]

In medicine, Illich frames these as roughly 1913 and 1955: in the beginning, water was purified; aspirin, quinine, and sterile surgeries controlled disease; and fresh air, exercise, a balanced diet, and hygiene were popularly linked to health. Yet since roughly the middle of the century, while there have been true breakthroughs for many diseases and conditions, the medical establishment's success was now measured by its own hand (increased discoveries, and increased costs), and the social costs of medicine's monopoly rose:

> The second watershed was superseded when the marginal *dis*utility increased as further monopoly by the medical establishment became an indicator of more suffering for larger numbers of people … Society can have no quantitative standards by which to add up the negative value of illusion, social control, prolonged suffering, loneliness, genetic deterioration, and frustration produced by medical treatment.[14]

Resonating with McKenny's concerns of medical materialism overrunning traditional limits, Illich's *Medical Nemesis* describes medicine as past the second threshold injuring health in three specific arenas: clinical iatrogenesis, social iatrogenesis, and cultural iatrogenesis.

Most immediately, clinical nemesis describes the increasing number of side effects and direct or indirect physician-caused suffering. This is concomitant with the increasing power of biomedical intervention. Beyond the side effects of desired treatment or the varieties of malpractice, clinical iatrogenesis also includes the unnecessary care given to avoid litigation.[15] Medicine also shapes society socially: some who now survive can only live in institutions, while others with medically-endorsed symptoms are exempted from work and from a political struggle to reshape the conditions which made them ill. Finally, the most subtle effects are found in the broad cultural sphere. As industrial medical language and technique becomes our exclusive

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[14] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 7.
[15] Illich, *Medical Nemesis*, 32-3.

language and means of relating to its subject, individuals are unable confront their human weakness, vulnerability, and uniqueness in a personal and autonomous way. This paralyzes healthy responses to suffering, impairment, and death. 'Better health' is not an engineered product.

Illich is clearly interested in matching our proper human finitude and autonomy to the systems and tools we create, and for all his critical language he is not completely skeptical about technology. His dating the moment of the second watershed to 1955 is likely too early and too precise. Nevertheless, he identifies the second half of the 20th century as the moment when many fields crossed the second threshold and beginning to threaten six areas: the ecological environment on which we depend, the right to convivial work, human creativity (through required overprogramming for an artificial environment), the right to participatory politics, and the right to tradition through enforced obsolescence, and genuine equanimity (through pervasive frustration from engineered satisfaction).[16] Thus, his analysis of medicine is inseparable with analogous phenomena in other realms which have converged in the interlocking present crises. Philosophically modern modes of thought, in some sense inaugurated by Baconian and Cartesian thinking, placed too much emphasis on the linear regimes of progress, ceaseless growth, and control. These trajectories allowed for the overstepping of the crucial limits which delimit the possibilities for human and non-human flourishing.

Moreover, one of the distinctive features of Illich's convivial thought is his critique of the tool. By comparison, McKenny describes our tool use as secondary to our philosophy, for "modern technology does not render traditional moralities obsolete … so much as it expresses and carries out an existing (modern) morality."[17] Illich would reverse the priority, for his

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[16] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 47-8.
[17] McKenny, "Bioethics, the Body, and the Legacy of Bacon," 402.

"subject is tools and not intentions" and would focus "on the structure of tools, not on the character structure of their users."[18] Tools are not neutral; they have distinct input systems and output systems, and are built to be operated in specific ways. Tools have an intrinsically social, and therefore ethical, character:

> To the degree that he masters his tools, he can invest the world with his meaning; to the degree that he is mastered by his tools, the shape of the tool determines his own self image. Convivial tools are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision. Industrial tools deny this possibility to those who use them and they allow their designers to determine the meaning and expectation of others.[19]

Tools, defined broadly enough to include screwdriver, factory, or social institution, should be designed to allow its members autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others. The modern dream of machines as mechanical slaves to replace human labor was more literal than metaphorical; humans are not meant to be slaveholders, and justice is not an equal distribution of slaves.[20] Ideally, humanity would work *with* its tools instead of tools working *for* their owners.[21]

Non-convivial industrial production, favoring centralization of control, generally requires a small number of credentialed professionals with the liberty of its use; contra Marx, the issue is primarily not the ownership of said tools.[22] The threat is that their inputs and outputs come in such large quanta that, for Illich, they threaten healthy human society. Only inhumanly large, technical, and standardized organizations are able to arrange the inputs and handle the outputs. A simple example would be the way that large-scale and destructive monoculture farming facilitates and requires such large plots of land, abundant fluxes of fossil fuels, and complex

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[18] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 14-5.
[19] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 21.
[20] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 20.
[21] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 10.
[22] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 26, 42.

agricultural equipment such that human-scale farming – much more in touch with the

possibilities and limits of land and community – is effectively prohibited. Another example is the

way in which industrial production modernizes poverty. Illich recounts how a Mexican

campesino could *house* himself well enough, but is too poor to purchase standardized *housing*;

thus, housing becomes not an endogenous activity but an identifiable 'problem' for managerial

control.[23] He is thus furnished housing (or not) by government social programs and, if so, must

receive social work visits to learn to appropriately live in public housing. This dependency

becomes hereditary as his children lose the skills to house oneself.

Industrially created needs and products (e.g. education, transportation, housing) are too

expensive for all but the rich, and yet they threaten everyone's ability to learn, move, and house

oneself, and threaten the six previously mentioned arenas (resilient ecology, convivial work,

human creativity, participatory politics, tradition, and equanimity). Moreover, industrialized

products are homogenized; roads, hospitals, classrooms, apartments, and stores across the world

look the same.[24] Their homogenization of personality and relationships flatten the resplendent

diversity of culture. Non-convivial tools, finally, can exert a 'radical monopoly': any specific

automotive company may not have a monopoly, but the car-road system itself does. Fast cars

eventually require freeways which cut off other forms of traffic. Thus, industrialized

transportation prohibits a farmer's natural *movement* to his field, or a student's movement to

class, by bike or by foot. Although admitting the necessity and desirability of certain industrially

produced goods (if their social cost is not too high), Illich nevertheless proposes we pursue a

balance tipped towards primarily non-exclusionary, democratic tools for human flourishing.

Convivial tools generally multiply human force, are broadly accessible, and do not destroy

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[23] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 39.
[24] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 15.

human sociality. While he explicitly offers a method to analyze tools instead of an itemized list, tools such as (powered or unpowered) bicycles, public transportation, telephones, sailing ships, the mail system, libraries, and open-source laboratories would be considered convivial. The creation of the internet was influenced by Illich's writings. At the speed of a bicycle or sailing ship (Illich's proposed maximum speed), one can still travel around the world in forty days.[25] Compulsory standardized education, nuclear reactors, strip mines, and multilane highways are not convivial, for they hinder social interaction and stifle autonomous capability.

II. Conviviality

Yet, who has forty days to travel around the world? While Illich denies being utopian, as we have seen he offers 'conviviality' as a desirable trait in tools. It is also the criteria for larger social flourishing. Conviviality is not only possible and desirable, it is necessary for the survival of our culture:[26] "A convivial society is one in which people *eat*, people die when they are *fed*,"[27] which is to say when they are made dependent on inhumane systems which flatten the world and are unresponsive to the dynamics of genuine life. At present, our world is "divided into those who do not have enough and those who have more than enough, those who are pushed off the road by cars and those who drive them."[28] As he presciently foresaw, this takes special meaning when rich minorities (of people and countries) cause most ecological damage, yet the poor majorities are those who will most suffer. As it stands, our world will not survive if the poor become rich, a reality which negates the dreams of mainstream economics, the basis of which is

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[25] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 82.
[26] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 44.
[27] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 44.
[28] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 15.

the logic of indefinite exponential growth on a finite host – the same logic shared by cancer. The hope for rich and poor alike is conviviality.

A convivial society's members "know what is enough [and] might be poor, but … equally free," able to enjoy the "sober joy of life in this voluntary though relative poverty."[24] Warped industrial minds may have a hard time imagining this world of "rich texture of personal accomplishments, within the range of modern though limited tools … a society in which members are free from most of the multiple restrains of schedules and therapies now imposed for the sake of growing tools."[24] Yet just as premodern Thai rice farmers seasonally rested during the dry season, a convivial society "that can afford long holidays and fill them with activities is certainly not poor" in what matters most.[29] As Illich foresaw, a world of justice, discovery, community, and beauty is pursuable. It is one of creative exchange among persons with each other and environment, instead of the conditioned responses made upon one by others in a man-made environment eventually ending in the "amorphousness and meaninglessness that plague contemporary society."[30]

It should be clarified, however, that while this is a departure from economic dreams of unlimited wealth, it is certainly not what we know as 'austerity,' the enforced social reality of neoliberalism. Yet, a decreasing GNP and 'degrowth economy', which climate scientists say is necessary to avoid ecological catastrophe, accompanies this shift from exchange-value to use-value.[31] Planning for such a future is not the domain of a professional elite but must reflect democratic political control over tools and institutions.[32] Societies, just like tools, are to be

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[29] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 38.
[30] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 11.
[31] Jason Hickel and Giorgos Kallis, "Is Green Growth Possible?" *New Political Economy*, 2019, 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2019.1598964.
[32] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 12.

judged by survival, justice, and self-defined work leading to participatory and distributive justice.[33] Human self-image and imagination must be liberated from the present structure. To merely intensify current efforts is the deep logic of contemporary 'normalcy,' a deadly logic.

III.   Convivial Medicine

Can medicine have a convivial future at the "end of the world"? Answering this requires the admission that the end of the world seems to be already here. This paradoxical situation, as Timothy Morton has described, requires an ethical

> strategy […] to awaken us from the dream that the world is about to end, because action on Earth (the real Earth) depends on it. The end of the world has already occurred.[34]

As our multiple crises have shown, we are not approaching the cliff (most worryingly, of climate collapse) so much as already falling; we must awaken to that reality and act ethically in light of it. An ethical approach cannot act with the optimism of preventing the end of the world, nor the pessimism our situation suggests. Rather, it walks in hope by resisting systems of death and finding a way through them in community, minimizing further damage, gingerly stepping through the wreckage, and dancing a vision of flourishing and beautiful interrelation into being. For Illich, three obstacles stand in the way of ethical and convivial progress: the idolatry of science, the corruption of ordinary language, and the loss of respect for the process by which social decisions are best made.[35] Even in light of its many benefits, it is clear that widespread, intensive, expensive biomedicine will not guarantee health; the hospital is not a factory of good health. As has been implied, ordinary language, not technical jargon, must be the lingua franca of

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[33] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 13.
[34] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2013), 7.
[35] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 85.

public discourse on medicine. Finally, a truly democratic process must determine medicine's course and role; professions (to be clear, not professionals) have often been more invested in cementing their continued legitimacy when it conflicts with their public mandate. Community members and community health workers should sit on the boards of healthcare institutions like medical school and hospitals, and outnumber their physician peers. Human rights, interrelated flourishing, solidarity, justice, and dignity must serve as the deep values instead of profit and prestige. Dignified medical care should be considered a human right and provided as such, with this right vociferously protected by healthcare professionals. If private medical systems continue to exist, they should be owned primarily by the healthcare workers themselves, cooperatives, or communities themselves instead of finance capitalism.[36] Yet the institutions of medicine are not the only culprit, for patients must also change their expectations of healthcare.

In Illich's *Medical Nemesis*, human societies must grapple not only with neighbor and nature in its search for flourishing and health, but also with the myths through which they understand the world.[37] McKenny focuses on the creation of a community to recognize the limits of medicine and weaves sacred narratives of the good life enabling a loving community and resisting popular norms.[38] However, Illich believes we are past mythic justification (religious or ecological) and must rationally realize we would be "happier if [we] could *work* together and *care* for each other."[39] Illich's suspicion about the general utility of exclusivist narratives in a moment of crisis is appropriate. To take merely the example of religion, it is impossible to expect religious individuals and communities to become secular, or vice versa. Nevertheless, modernity

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[36] Contemporary examples of such inspirational institutional models include the Basque Mondragón model, the Italian co-operative movement in northern Italy and Emilia-Romagna, the integrated and publicly-funded Harris Health System, Cooperation Jackson in the state of Mississippi, and in Latin America, Cecosesola.
[37] Illich, *Medical Nemesis*, 261.
[38] McKenny, "Bioethics, the Body, and the Legacy of Bacon," 407-8.
[39] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 50.

has not flattened and secularized societies as it globalized them, as the once-popular

secularization thesis suggested. Meaning-making traditions will continue to stimulate activity

and create traditioned, coherent, moral communities. Thus, convivial alternatives require rooted,

yet open, sacred narratives. I suggest Nicolas Wolterstorff's description of *shalom* as a

thoughtful orienting concept for animating and directing social change, action, and research:

> The goal of human existence is that man should dwell at peace in all his relationships: with God, with himself, with his fellows, with nature, a peace which is not merely the absence of hostility, though certainly it is that, but a peace which is at its highest is *enjoyment*. … A condition of shalom is justice, and a component in justice is liberation from oppression. Never can there be shalom without justice. Yet shalom is more than justice. Justice can be grim. In shalom there is delight.[40]

Though it emerges from Jewish and Christian theological tradition, *shalom* is

comprehensible and accessible to all and serves convivial imaginations by critiquing present

failures in light of a rich and nuanced vision of flourishing.

Medical research may begin to change by taking up what Illich's terms 'counterfoil

analysis,' which weighs increasing marginal disutility against growth, and discovers general

institutional approaches to optimize convivial production. Counterfoil analysis relates society

and its tools and holds the consequences of their use before the public eye.[41] In a convivial

medicine, there would still be room for bioscientific non-convivial research, yet its goals must be

pursued by community-led and shalom-oriented processes. The most prominent and supported

area of research is one that is a nonpriority in contemporary research: 'appropriate' or

'intermediate technologies' as described by E.F. Schumacher in *Small is Beautiful*.[42] Being

people-centered, such technology is decentralized, environmentally benign, inexpensive,

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[40] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 114.
[41] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 82-3.
[42] E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper Collins, 1974).

autonomously built and operated, open source, and small-scale. As an example, Practical Action is a non-profit which designs intermediate technology and does quality engineering for conviviality instead of high-dollar high-tech industrialism. Analogously, appropriate medical research would focus on areas such as nutrition and agriculture, appropriately scaled medical technology, active transportation, community building, built and natural environments, and behavioral change. This would be much better suited to the true determinants of human well-being.

The structures of medicine and role of a physician would also be recognizable but altered. The Kerala model of healthcare, with its focus on education, primary health care, nutrition support for infants and new mothers, and universal health care financing bucks international trends: its population is that of California, its annual per capita income is roughly $300, its size is that of Switzerland, yet its nearly universally literate population lives almost as long as anywhere in the Global North.[43] Similarly, Costa Rica has community-based teams of public health workers, nurses, and physicians who are geographically assigned and cover the whole population. The Cuban healthcare system assigns primary physicians to a distinct neighborhood with a small medical office to serve its residents.[44] We do need secondary and tertiary care hospitals and the specialists and surgeons to staff them, but this must be demoted to a minor (yet legitimate) form of medicine. The paradigmatic physician must be communally embedded: conversing, diagnosing, and treating, rather than a subspecialist institutionally holed away with the newest technology. Her vocation includes empowering the community to take care of its own in a real sense, and thus to spend a significant amount of time educating, collaborating, and

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[43] Bill McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild: True Stories of Living Lightly on the Earth* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2007).

[44] A common theme between these examples is their attempt to practically enact the human right to health.

capacity-building – this is medicine as an enabling profession. The ratio of primary care to

specialists would dramatically shift as would their pay, but this is only a minimal beginning.

Illich goes so far as to endorse the "progressive expansion of lay therapy and the parallel

progressive reduction of professional medicine."[45] One may apprentice modern "barefoot

doctors" as lay extenders,[46] increase the number of Community Health Workers via New

Deal/Works Progress Administration-like programs, and build on the "Friendship Bench" model

of easily-accessible mental health interventions. Bonds across various divides would be built for

mutual education, financial support, and service to one another.

For Illich, the practice of basic medicine may not be limited to the credentialed

employees of corporation or state – for medicine is not to be the final arbiter of health. As a

physician-in-training, this lack of credentialing worries me (there are many abuses that can be

prevented by professional self-policing) but his challenge still stands: there must be a vision of

the healing profession(s) beyond self-interested monopolistic exclusion by a professional group.

Amongst the non-medical laity, communities must again learn the art of the *ars moriendi* and the

practice of dying well as a human and cultural skill, with medical comfort through that terminal

process as necessary. Even if all of this were to be accomplished, a necessary level of advanced

professionalized medical care and industrial pharmaceutical production would still be required.

Medicine will be decidedly less 'glossy' in its convivial future but will be truer to itself and more

honest in its charge. These healers will work

> In a society in which people can once again be born in their homes and die in their homes
> and in which there is a place for cripples and idiots in the street, and where a distinction
> is made between plumbing and healing, [and] quite a few people would grow up capable
> of assisting others to heal, to suffer, or to die.[47]

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[45] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 35.
[46] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 34.
[47] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 35.

This social change will be necessarily accompanied by a change in consciousness: we must desire health in the confines of a good life in the confines of a good society in the confines of a good environment. This is the challenge McKenny's account raises as well, for in raising the ramifications of a medical culture outside of a robust conception of 'a good life,' he thereby draws our attention back to the place of medicine and healing in a larger system of meaning and flourishing. Society must learn to love, care for, and engage the "cripples and idiots" in the street (dancing and playing, not without shelter), and develop the habits of heart, mind, community, and purse to joyfully welcome, rather than terminate or cloister, those who visibly remind us of our own frailty. This, along with communal practical responses to suffering, are broad tasks that can especially be undertaken by religious communities, as Stanley Hauerwas and John Swinton have detailed.[48,49] Our way of social life must change, for conviviality among fields is linked: "Professional goal-setting produces goods for an environment produced by other professions. Life that depends on high speed and apartment houses make hospitals inevitable."[50] Ever increasing speed, intensity, and efficiency will not magically and technologically unlock a key to utopia; conviviality is not achieved simply through the logic of *more*. The emerging concept of *buen vivir* – the indigenous concept which offers a socioeconomic alternative to traditional Western economic development approaches[51] – is a conceptual parallel to conviviality which could also encapsulate medicine's ideal focus on both the mere fact of life and a qualitative sense of integral value.

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[48] Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

[49] John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

[50] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 41.

[51] Eduardo Gudynas, "Buen Vivir: Today's Tomorrow," *Development* 54, no. 4 (2011): 441-447. doi:10.1057/dev.2011.86.

The formation of those training in healthcare is locus for change. Not only must the curricula change (education, tools, and assessment), the culture of medicine must stop glorifying prestige or income as a marker of success in the field; this is the task of mentors and leaders. Enlightenment idol like unceasing progress and limitless control must relinquish their hold on medicine's imagination, which must turn instead to "accompaniment" of the sick and poor as the fundamental moral thrust of medicine.[52] Care and cure – currently professional goals which have been split along gendered lines into medicine and nursing – must come together once again, as their common etymological Latin root *cura* suggests. Medicine must not be seen as an insular and value-neutral set of skills, but rather as a unique yet humble piece of an intimately interrelated yet kaleidoscopic social pursuit of *shalom*, the flourishing of human and non-human individuals and communities. In a moment of multiple-collapse, *shalom* and conviviality are both means and ends, they allow both surviving and thriving. Medicine's moral task, then, includes addressing questions of justice, racism, environmental destruction, economic exploitation and inequality, anti-democracy, militarism, and so on, for these – like suffering and death – threaten flourishing life. Training to be a healer should imply a deeply philosophical and humanistic understanding of our work, as Galen endorsed.[53] One possibility is to more explicitly affirm a human rights framework – which integrates the right to health with other fundamental civic, human, social, and economic rights – as Paul Farmer has encouraged[54] and as the 1978 WHO

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[52] Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutiérrez, *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez*, ed. Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

[53] Galen, *Selected Works*, trans. P.N. Singer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 60.

[54] Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), xxiv, 18.

Alma Ata Declaration affirmed. Financing must be such that it does not bankrupt our patients[55] nor chain trainees to the pursuit of high-paying careers via educational debt.

Finally, medicine must grapple with its fundamentally political character. Politics means engagement in the life of the *polis* and life of the people, and this does not simply mean partisan politics. This is one of the most insightful critiques Illich makes, for political life refers to a vision of how we as living creatures should live together. He speaks of the subjugating effects of "professional imperialism" over forms of knowledge and legitimating discourse,[56] a reality explaining the sociocultural forms of iatrogenesis, even as it conceptually generalizes the dynamic beyond medicine. Physicians qua professionals are not only individuals trying to do good but exist as members of a social class with certain responsibilities to the rest of society. Illich would have medicine deprofessionalize to avoid a culture of authority and exclusion, yet while his critique of professional authoritarianism stands, the American response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its interlocking crises expose the mirror danger of the distrust of expertise and wisdom. Thus, as a tentative start, physicians could start by using their present authority to become explicitly involved with political life on behalf of, and in coordination with, our patients.

Illich's eventual goal is the conscientization of society regarding health. Living lives of communion in our patients' communities – living where they live, eating together, and facing challenges together – actualizes the ideals of accompaniment and avoids professional mystique. Indeed, political engagement by healthcare workers – active life in the *polis* – is not a foreign imposition of outside considerations into the pure and objective field of medicine, but rather an extension and outworking of medicine's basic commitment to life and flourishing. Physicians

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[55] Gilligan, Adrienne M., David S. Alberts, Denise J. Roe, and Grant H. Skrepnek, "Death or Debt? National Estimates of Financial Toxicity in Persons with Newly-Diagnosed Cancer," *The American Journal of Medicine* 131, no. 10 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2018.05.020.
[56] Illich, *Tools for Conviviality,* 43.

observe from the front lines how social problems manifest in clinics, hospitals, and emergency rooms. This fundamental posture of 'witnessing' brings with it a responsibility to speak out for our patients' health and against our own attempted professional monopoly on the means and ends of health. Physicians have responsibilities as individuals to use their voices, lives, and authority to critique the social injustice easily seen in medicine, and especially when injustice is caused or exacerbated by medicine itself.

Rudolf Virchow presciently remarked in 1849 that "if medicine is really to accomplish its great task, it must intervene in political and social life. It must point out the hindrances that impede the normal social functioning of vital processes, and effect their removal."[57] We must have imagination enough for creative intervention on the entire biopsychosocial spectrum, for, after all, insufficient healthcare is only roughly 10% of premature death and undesired outcomes. The necessary changes in medicine will require new conceptualizations and constellations of formation, research, tool use, the role of medicine, our institutional structures, and our broad sociopolitical frameworks. This paper has laid out ways in which conviviality and medicine intersect, even as it takes occasional leave from Illich's analysis. A move towards convivial medicine will require meditation on our deepest dreams for society and our hopes for *shalom*, and the realization of the interlocking nature of both threats to, and the possibility of, thriving life. Even in the face of present crises, as we look through Illich's eyes a possibility of conviviality beckons.

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[57] Quoted in Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 323.

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Coronavirus and Enaction of Human-made Complexity Paradoxes

Nicola Labanca

1. Introduction

In this paper I discuss some key characteristics of current societies as more sharply emerging during the coronavirus pandemic. Going beyond the specificities of the virus, I argue that 'human-made complexity' represents the cultural milieu within which this pandemic is developing and focus on the technical and conceptual equipment this cultural context provides to manage extreme events, including pandemics.

Without entering debates concerning whether this equipment is being properly used or not in present circumstances, I highlight how societies frame and react to systemic challenges in the light of human-made complexity and associated implications. This leads me to identify a series of key logical paradoxes that are being permanently enacted. "Managing the unexpected", "isolating interconnection", "rational irrationality", "relying on invisibles" and "deadly vitality" are expressions to render the constituting antinomies. I then discuss how living within these paradoxes entails a kind of societal blindness to their inherent bipolarity and the possible generation of intolerable situations of stress and systemic crises. The final sections of the paper provide instead some food for thought on how to sidestep or escape these antinomies.

2. Assumptions About Human-made Complexity and Its Naturalization Processes

The contemporary moment can be named the *age of (complex) systems*[1]. This age generates a specific type of human-made complexity relying on naturalization processes occurring around information and computer technologies. It is experienced as a collective ritual administered by specific experts (i.e. biologists, ecologists, cyberneticians, engineers, physicists, etc.[2]) through given narrations (i.e. narrations generated around information and complex systems theories) that are embodied by all participants while using the material artefacts (i.e. information technologies constituting the materiality of complex systems) this collective ritual relies on.

For three reasons, this ritualized behavior is permanent and not episodic like a religious ritual. Complex systems technologies have become our naturalized environment. They have assumed a "radical monopoly"[3] over human actions and access to some of these technologies can nowadays be claimed as a key means to exercise the human right of freedom of opinion and expression[4]. Constant participation in the associated ritual may then be enforced by law[5]. In addition, there are fears and mimetic mechanisms that operate among participants by generating uncomfortable feelings and situations of danger and anguish in case of ritual exit.

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[1] See Illich's illustration of the systems age as reported in Cayley (2005).

[2] The following paragraphs will discuss why *war* experts have also to be included in this list.

[3] The concept of radical monopoly is taken from Illich (1973).

[4] See e.g. what stated about *the internet* in 2011 report on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression by the United Nations Human Rights Council as available at https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf

[5] I refer to situations where the employment of information technologies becomes mandatory (e.g. in relation to contact tracing as enforced in countries like South Korea or China during the current pandemic) or to how digital technologies and associated calculation algorithms are generally used by governments worldwide for security reasons to limit free movement. In general, these are situations where the supply of resource flows (e.g. water flows, energy flows, information flows) as mediated by global supply networks and infrastructures constituting the materiality of contemporary complex systems becomes subject to mandatory regulations.

As happens with other naturalization processes generated around techno-science[6], the complex systems ritual relies on a double bind. On the one hand, it operates retroactively by transforming a newly created scientific abstraction (i.e. information in the case at hand) into an entity that has always existed in nature so that natural systems are being increasingly identified with information processors[7]. By doing so, it creates the illusion that technologies produced by relying on this abstraction just replicate natural processes, sometimes by activating them, as, for instance, in the case of the social imaginary that has developed around the circular economy[8], so-called artificial intelligence, and genetic science. These two social dynamics reinforce each other and permanently constrain people within specific social practices. Despite how the associated ritual tends to blur key distinctions, the type of social complexity created in this way remains nevertheless radically different from natural complexity.

3. Warning: Human-made Complexity Exhibited by Social Systems is Different from Physical and Ecosystems Complexity

Although formally exhibiting same phenomena of non-linearity, emergence, hierarchy and scale[9], the kind of complexity which is at stake with natural systems has nothing to do with social systems complexity generated through current global supply and information networks. The latter is produced through processes of deep and extensive homogenization and

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[6] Labanca (2017) discusses for example similar collective rituals and naturalization processes generated around the energy concept and associated technologies.

[7] See e.g. Chiribella et al. (2011).

[8] See e.g. https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/

[9] A general characterization of physical complex systems may be found for example in Broska et al. (2020). There, it is stated that "*Complex systems* can be characterized as a set-up of systems, which are determined by systems' elements, i.e. components, and their *numerosity* as well as their correlations […]. Interdependencies between elements can create *nonlinearity* via *feedback loops*. Because of a *lack of central control* these systems exhibit *spontaneous order*, which also leads to a certain level of robustness. The level of robustness can differ between the systems […]. The *emergence* of higher levels of organization through the interaction of systems creates a *hierarchical* structure of systems within complex systems. A biological organism is such a complex system, its elements, or components, are the organism's cells; likewise, cells are complex systems […]".

standardization that concern its material components and are completely absent in the former. Contrary to what happens with ecosystems flourishing, an intensification and complexification of activities is achieved within modern socio-technical systems through technologies and communication protocols that create a kind of underworld made of standardized currencies (e.g. information bits, energy units, time units, monetary values, etc.) on whose exchange the overt systems rely[10]. In addition, when it comes to explaining the deep uncertainties affecting the evolution of socio-technical systems, ecosystem thinking becomes practically useless. Complex systems principles drawn from the observation of physical phenomena cannot indeed tell anything about human violence, desires and the way in which these drive change within systems where humans are involved.

However, the most important difference between human-made complexity and natural systems complexity is represented by the role that "control" plays in the former. Social systems complexity has always been generated, among other things, by how societies have tried to control themselves from the outside. In the past, this has happened through imagined deities or by looking for universal laws to maintain and reproduce the natural order. Contemporary societies try instead to achieve control by establishing extensive communication and surveillance systems whereby it is assumed that imagined social development scenarios can be implemented, or that demand and supply of services can be constantly matched, or that social-ecological systems can be closely monitored. Though natural systems show that control cannot be exercised

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[10] When focusing on the interface between this underworld, the upper world made of functions reproduced by people (e.g. walking, listening, speaking, but also products purchasing, text processing, etc.), it becomes interesting to observe how these functions are being progressively reproduced through computer run information by creating kinds of artificial prostheses. As discussed in Labanca (2017), this result is achieved by adopting arbitrary solutions to otherwise unsolvable allocation tasks that magnify some aspects of these functions and neglect others, allowing the mocking of them by running pieces of standardized computer software. Functions reproduction through these pieces of information inevitably entails a *discretization* and s*tandardization* of an otherwise continuum spectrum of unique functions that human beings and nature can generate. Human-made complexity seems to increasingly invite us to take arbitrary decisions in relation to these types of unsolvable allocation problems.

from the outside and prove their vitality precisely by adapting to unexpected exogenous changes, contemporary societies presume that they can transcend themselves by driving the increasingly complex socio-ecological systems they have created[11].

In this respect, it is for example very hard to understand how complex systems scientists and scenario developers typically pretend to apply phenomenological principles like those of resilience, adaptability, diversity and self-organization (as derived from the observation of natural systems that do not exercise any form of control outside their physical boundaries[12]) to develop exogenous management strategies relying on close surveillance of large, if not planetary, socio-technical systems[13]. These strategies are reminiscent of the behavior of persons who conduct themselves based on what they can observe in a mirror that constantly reflect their image (See Figure 1). This kind of human-made complexity seems to enclose people and their environment in a kind of hall of mirrors where the self-referencing and large-scale control practices developed to cope with unexpected events acquire a masturbatory character and, as explained in following sections, become inevitably destined to generate paradoxical situations.

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[11] Global trends presently observed towards implementation of biosecurity measures most probably represent just one dimension of this multifaceted phenomenon.

[12] On this point see e.g. Maturana & Varela (1980). Considerations being presented here have matured after having attended a presentation held by Mario Giampietro. See the presentation entitled "The problems experienced by conventional scientific approaches because of complexity" as available at https://e3p.jrc.ec.europa.eu/events/workshop-extreme-events-and-energy-transitions-tackling-challenges-climate-change-integrating

[13] See e.g. Moench (2014). Strategies like the ones mentioned in the present paper are now being proposed to increase resilience of medical systems against future pandemics. See e.g. Tsipursky (2020).

Figure 1: Contemporary human-made complexity

Therefore, there are good reasons to think that attempts to create an external referent through auto-referential approaches drawn from ecosystems phenomenology can be both misleading and highly dangerous.

4. How We Lose Sight of This Key Difference

Three interlaced factors are mainly responsible for the blurring of key differences between contemporary social systems complexity and eco/physical systems complexity.

The first factor is a programmatic blurring of boundaries between living and not living beings. Complexity science is indeed rooted in cybernetics whose reductionist aim is the study and development of common communication and control mechanisms operating among and within machines, humans, and biological entities in general.

The second factor is represented by the ambivalent role played by 'information' and by how it has blurred boundaries between everyday life and laboratories. As explained in Poerksen (1995), information has undertaken a round trip started from everyday life during the second decade of the 20th century. At that time, information still only made sense through human action.

It had several meanings and could take additional ones depending on how it was used in a context by people. Its three basic meanings were generally related to *instruction* (in the domain of education), *inquiry, investigation* (in jurisprudence) and *message, report, evaluation* (probably in the area of institutional assignments). When it reached the laboratories of cyberneticians and biologists around mid-20th century, its meanings were completely reshuffled. There, information became a measurable and autonomous entity that can equally regulate the functioning of organisms and machines without needing any person who reads it. Its new and very abstract meanings became those nowadays associated e.g. with genetic information, information bits, information entropy. Subsequently, this cybernetic version of information returned to everyday life and was popularized as the constituent of everything in the world around us. In colloquial language, information has become in this way a kind of floating signifier without signified. It can nowadays acquire a variety of connotations depending on the associations it evokes, but it does not designate anything people can have experience of in everyday life because the place where it is defined is elsewhere.

Key differences between natural and human-made complexity have gone therefore out of sight by unduly positing an identity between information made and everyday life entities. This has been made possible by a neglect of boundaries and differences existing between laboratories and outside world that has involved both the material and the discursive level.

Finally, a third factor is represented by the ritual enactments I discussed earlier. Permanent participation in the above-mentioned ritual generates a kind of collective blindness to existing contradictions between what is expected from ritual actions and what can be actually achieved through them. Ivan Illich has described this kind of blindness as akin to the ritual of the rain dance where, rather than questioning the underlying logic, participants attribute the failure

(i.e. the fact that rain does not come) to a dancing that is not properly performed. Societies engaged in complexification are living under the illusion of generating an indefinite and artificial multiplication of natural entities through cybernetic information and associated technologies. In the face of unexpected manifestations or disasters, they do not question the possibility of keeping this multiplication under control. Instead, they react by extending and fine-tuning information feedbacks to supposedly improve their control capability. This reaction can generate disasters as serious as those sought to be prevented and engagement in this kind of ritual can literarily drive people crazy.

5. Human-made Complexity Seen Through Its Extremes

Increasing complexification of socio-ecological systems[14] is responsible for the increasingly frequent materialization of large-scale correlations and dynamics that can put the survival of these systems at risk. Phenomena like climate change, pandemics, energy systems black-outs, financial crises, etc. can be included among those. Developments that have been occurring since the 1940s indicate that these systemic crises are being increasingly considered as events to which we inevitably have to adapt. Rather than focusing on *prevention*, societies have quite recently moved to developing strategies to *prepare* for inevitable systemic crises and have, at the same time, created the conditions that make these strategies more and more necessary. In the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki[15], we became conscious that humans can generate events capable of destroying themselves and have started implementing countermeasures based on extensive anticipatory surveillance. Another significant step has been made with the end of the Cold War during the 1990s when Western societies transitioned from a

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[14] A description of what is meant by socio-ecological systems is provided e.g. in Glaser et al. (2008).
[15] See Arney (1991).

social imaginary of liberation from one main enemy (the so called "Evil Empire"), to an

imaginary based on ideas of diffuse uncertainty, unpredictability, instability and vulnerability

whose construction has been shaped also by the terroristic attacks of the 2000s. Patrick

Zylberman has mapped this transition in the field of war from approaches based on risks

calculations to those based on surveillance, alert systems and scenarios developed through

imaginative exercises and games carried out by key stakeholders.[16] Since then, many other

similar global strategies for a large variety of extreme events have been created including the

Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network being developed by the World Health

Organization since 2000 to respond to threating pandemics[17]. It is through such transformations

that, among others, disease mutated into a national security threat[18].

These transformations mark the definitive entrance into a complex systems age that

accepts the intrinsic vulnerability of societies. By adopting this posture, societies accept that

rather than prevent extreme events or engage in precautionary strategies against calculated risks,

they must prepare to face inevitable catastrophes. With complexity, societies somehow enter a

new and paradoxical logic of war without an enemy. It is as if they must constantly live under

the menace of a very dangerous enemy that cannot be known beforehand[19]. When you know that

a catastrophe is coming, but you don't know exactly when, from where and how it will come, the

only thing you can do is to try to prepare for what you imagine might happen while remaining

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[16] I am drawing here from Zylberman (2013) and the interview available at https://www.iris-france.org/43427-la-politique-de-securite-sanitaire-du-monde-transatlantique-vers-ou-nous-mene-la-logique-du-pire/

[17] For an overview, see e.g. https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/metadata/adaptation-options/establishment-of-early-warning-systems. For an interesting analysis of how techniques initially developed in the military and civil defense have been extended to other areas of government intervention and research in the US context, see Lakoff (2007) pp. 3-4.

[18] Lakoff (2007), p. 15.

[19] On this point see e.g. what is reported in Lakoff (2007), p. 2.

constantly alert by expanding your surveillance systems as much as you can[20]. Most probably, the ongoing expansion of scenario building exercises and of surveillance systems represents the reaction of control addicted societies to unpredictability and increased perception of vulnerability[21]. If this is the case, strategies and emergency measures being implemented as a reaction to the current pandemic have to be considered on a time horizon that goes well beyond the systemic crisis of the moment. What I discuss in the next sections shows that, rather than reactions to a single event, these strategies and measures reveal permanent paradoxes of contemporary human-made complexity.

6. Facing Pandemics by Enacting Human-made Complexity Paradoxes

a. Managing the Unexpected

Complex systems approaches are framing the actions and reactions by experts, governments, business and civil society during the current pandemic. Two aspects emerge in this respect very clearly. The first concerns the application by experts and governments of a logic of "flows-in and flows-out" that is based on the extensive employment of surveillance and monitoring systems and that is typical of complex systems approaches. Whether it is the question of "flattening the curve" of contagion or of deciding how many persons can have access to so-called intensive care in hospitals in case of infection, the underlying logic is that of the management of demand and supply, which is applied in many areas including on-demand

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[20] Possibilities disclosed by current technologies are generally shifting the focus of techno-science from prediction to surveillance and algorithmic elaboration. This shift is particularly evident within behavioral science, but can generally be detected also in geography and in many other areas studying social processes. What is generally happening is also a progressive enlargement of spatial scales of the phenomena being addressed, e.g. through big-data. This enlargement is being necessarily accompanied by a progressive reduction in the possibility to predict the temporal evolution of addressed phenomena.

[21] On this point see again Lakoff (2007).

products manufacturing, energy systems management, etc.[22] Complex systems approaches typically reduce a given problem to one of resource flows management by identifying the system at stake with a kind of water supply network whose flows have to be controlled by selectively opening and closing its faucets.

The second aspect concerns how indications received from experts on measures to prevent contagion have changed with time (for example in relation to the need to use masks, or to keep given distances from other people, or to the contagiousness of the virus). Part of these observed and highly distressing changes are doubtless due to a still incomplete knowledge of the coronavirus, of its transmission mechanisms, etc. However, it should not escape attention that information to be provided by experts has also to obey the above mentioned managerial logic based on estimates of available resources and of the number of potential "consumers" these can satisfy. From that point of view, the fact that experts may decide to not indicate that masks can potentially help prevent contagion in a phase when their supply is not able to fulfill potential demand and encourage to employ them when the available supply has been rendered sufficient, becomes much more understandable.

Behind complex systems there is no *truth* to be discovered besides the socially constructed and variable constraints established within their supply chain. They generate a kind of sudoku game[23] whereby processed resources are allocated to people according to variable and sometimes hard to uncover rules, which are the outcome of a social construction reflecting how the different parts of the system have to fit to each other. What is becoming increasingly evident

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[22] I owe this observation to Sajay Samuel in his enlightening text, "On Corona Days." For further information on the complex systems approaches being described here see e.g. Forrester (2013).
[23] On this point see Giampietro et al. (2012). Chapter 7.

during this crisis is that, if these rules establish that you be forced to go out of the game, you might be condemned to death.

This situation reflects a first paradox related to how people relate to the *unexpected* in the complex systems age. The *unexpected* has always represented both a source of creativity and destruction for individuals and collectivities. It is not accidental that the main research question complexity science aims to answer relates to how living beings cope with the unexpected[24]. By trying to find operative answers that can be equally applied to machines, humans, animals and societies, this science closely echoes questions that for centuries have created disquiet among philosophers who speculate on the dyadic relationships linking stability and change, identity and difference, potentiality and actuality[25]. What has radically changed since Aristotle is that at his time people were still assumed to relate to the unexpected with a feeling of hope, openness and a capability of being constantly surprised while coping with its pleasant or unpleasant manifestations. At that time, the unexpected still had a strong *exogenous* component.

Hope, care and sensibility have nowadays been substituted by *expectations* from science. The curious thing is unfortunately that, in the age of complexity, the unexpected becomes mainly *endogenous*. It mostly comes from the inside of societies due to how they have created global and increasingly interconnected socio-technical-ecological systems that make their management practically impossible, as small perturbations generated in any part of these systems can unpredictably and ever more frequently amplify and propagate through them. Despite science and the extensive technologies that have expanded monitoring and surveillance capabilities,

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[24] See for example, Weick & Sutcliffe (2015).
[25] See Aristotle's *Physics, Metaphysics, Nicomachean Ethics* and *De Anima*.

policy makers cannot have certainties[26] on the evolution of complex systems. With complexity, we are, therefore, induced to live within the paradox of looking for strategies, procedures and mechanisms that can be individually or collectively operationalized to manage the unexpected, while it is complexification itself that is determining an ever more frequent generation of unexpected systemic events[27].

The adopted strategies generally consist of the following five elements: 1) development of scenarios by key stakeholders; 2) implementation of technological solutions enabling the detection of early warning signals of the forthcoming crisis; 3) increased support for basic research into the determinants of extremes; 4) identification and neutralization of critical situations emerging during the crisis; and 5) reconstruction[28]. The lamentable irony is that in a complex environment these strategies can cause disasters as grave as those for which they should prepare. As already noted, scenarios that can be conceived to face extremes can in no way be considered as the outcome of calculated risks. Moreover, the irony of extreme events is that, among all the scenarios that might be considered to be prepared to future events, they prompt the selection of the *worst-case* scenarios[29]. The more intense and disruptive the expected impacts of an event, the more important it becomes to be prepared for it, even in case the estimated chance

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[26] This has become particularly clear since science and policy have started dealing with climate and other systemic dynamics that, by their nature, cannot be addressed through counterfactual approaches. Counterfactual approaches are intervention approaches whose effectiveness can be assessed by comparing what actually happened with what would have happened in the absence of the intervention. Unfortunately, these approaches cannot be applied in case of systemic dynamics because we do not have another planet earth to perform this comparison.

[27] One aspect of this paradox concerns the huge efforts usually spent to identify single events and responsibilities that might have triggered systemic crises (see e.g. efforts being spent to understand where and because of whom the current pandemic might have been originated). While leading to neglect that systemic crises emerge primarily because of strong and intricate couplings that constitute complex systems, these efforts induce to forget that the identification of triggering events in a complex environment might be impossible or even nonsensical.

[28] These elements have been derived from existing literature on management and complex systems (see e.g. Schoemaker, 2004), from https://www.iris-france.org/43427-la-politique-de-securite-sanitaire-du-monde-transatlantique-vers-ou-nous-mene-la-logique-du-pire/ and from Lakoff (2012).

[29] See what discussed on this point in Zylberman (2013). An example of how worst-case scenarios are usually implemented to be prepared to pandemics is provided also in Lakoff (2012).

of its manifestation will be assumed to be relatively small and preparation will prove extremely costly. Constantly living under the worst-case scenario might however entail the creation of very strong and intolerable social constraints put in place because of a devastating threat whose materialization remains uncertain.

In addition to the intrinsic uncertainties of scenarios, there are uncertainties associated with the information provided by surveillance and early warning systems. These can make this information highly inadequate to decision making, notably when decisions concern actions that might affect the survival of whole nations or of the entire planet[30]. A very serious danger of this complexity is therefore either that actions with devastating effects are undertaken based on unfounded information or probabilities, or that increasingly frequent and devastating events suddenly emerge without detection or foreknowledge. Societies should more honestly reflect on the actual possibility of being prepared for global disasters in a complex systems world where a sneeze[31]in Italy can quickly cause a catastrophe in New Zealand; and where the next pandemic might have ten or twenty times higher mortality rates.

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[30] In 1956, four independent events happened in a short period of time and risked to set in motion the NATO plan to unleash a nuclear attack (a radar picked up a flight of jet aircraft over Turkey, one hundred soviet MiGs were reported over Syria, a British Canberra bomber was downed in that area and the Soviet fleet sailed through the Dardanelles). All these events were luckily discovered to be independent and benign by a concerned general before the activation of the NATO plan might have been possibly detected by Soviets monitors and generated a dangerous escalation in the American and Soviet alert systems (see Arney, 1991, p. 108).
In January 1976, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in US reported that a soldier at Fort Dix had died of an unfamiliar strain of swine flu and that there were several other cases of same flu. After a CDC meeting held on March 10, CDC officials decided for a technical option that had never been available for similar events before: vaccination of the entire US population. Fields trials of the vaccine were launched in April. By June the epidemic had not yet appeared, but the vaccination program began on October despite major logistic problems. On October 11, three elderly vaccine recipients died soon after receiving their shot. By December 40 million citizens had been immunized despite in the meanwhile it had become clear that the expected epidemic would have not come. Health officials reported multiple cases of Guillain-Baré Syndrome, a sever neurological condition among vaccines and the Times editorialized: "Swine Flu Fiasco" (see Lakoff, 2007, pp. 6-9).
In 2009, the closure of schools and the mass prophylactic administration of Tamiflu in response to a novel influenza virus (H1N1) brought costs, risks and disruptions outweighing those wrought by the virus itself (see Barker, 2012).
[31] A "sneeze" metaphorically explains how a small perturbation can quickly propagate within strongly coupled complex systems. A sneeze can also literally generate a viral load which propagates coronavirus from a country to another through the transmission chains of present complex systems.

b. Isolating Interconnection

Global supply chains and information networks constituting contemporary complex systems are not only highly interconnected but also physically separate people from others and from their local environment. The internet brings people together virtually while favoring physical isolation from next door neighbors. The TikTok generation is separated from "Instagram" people, grandparents are isolated from grandchildren, just as cities are separated from the nearby countryside. While enabling forms of socialization where individuals remain constantly apart, social practices associated with these networks are generating, besides undeniable benefits, hypermobility, deep inequalities, and polarizations within social groups and territories together with new forms of surveillance.

The potentially disastrous consequences of these *antinomic dynamics* (of increased separation and increased interconnection) are now coming to the foreground and the current pandemic is just one of them. Somehow the present pandemic might also have created the best conditions for their long-term consolidation. The atomized interconnectivity enabled by present communication technologies might be ideal to re-start markets growth and associated intensification of material, energy and persons flows in a world where people have to stay continuously isolated from each other. It is, in principle, even possible to conceive a very dangerous situation of positive feedback loops between systemic crises and expansion of what might be named "a distancing interconnectivity". An initial push towards distancing interconnectivity as achieved for instance through biosecurity measures, teleworking, digitalization of health services, etc., could enable the intensification of global flows which would then provoke further systemic crises. It is not fanciful to assume that the managed prolongation of the pandemic, besides hopefully saving lives, can increase the possibility of

these mutual reinforcements. At the same time, it should not escape attention that increasingly isolating interconnection goes exactly in the opposite direction of changes needed to prevent intensification of systemic crises, these changes being generally represented by an *intensification of local* and meaningful productive and re-productive social interactions that, while reducing social distancing, can *reduce large scale* material exchanges.

c. Rational Irrationality

Human-made complexity leads societies to a world where rational and selfish behaviors may accumulate to produce outcomes which are opposite to what is expected. These perverse situations emerge during crises when people adopt selfish behaviors that can put collective survival at risk. So-called panic buying of personal protective equipment and toilet paper as often observed during the current pandemic are examples of this kind. Such "rational" and selfish behaviors by populations might also adversely affect societies when a vaccine for coronavirus is produced. In this case the hope can only be that current fears, the climate of urgency and competition created around on-going research for a vaccine and the huge economic interests at stake will not determine the type of situations being discussed here.

Then there are the similar, more permanent, though not sufficiently discussed effects generated by increasingly isolating interconnection. The solution of non-cooperative games[32]

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[32] As reported at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner%27s_dilemma, "The **prisoner's dilemma** is a standard example of a game analyzed in game theory that shows why two completely rational individuals might not cooperate, even if it appears that it is in their best interests to do so […]".
Two members of a criminal gang are arrested and imprisoned. Each prisoner is in solitary confinement. The prosecutors lack sufficient evidence to convict the pair on the principal charge, but they have enough to convict both on a lesser charge. Simultaneously, the prosecutors offer each prisoner a bargain. Each prisoner is given the opportunity either to betray the other by testifying that the other committed the crime, or to cooperate with the other by remaining silent. The possible outcomes are:
- If A and B each betray the other, each of them serves two years in prison
- If A betrays B but B remains silent, A will be set free and B will serve three years in prison

represented by the Nash equilibrium is usually used to explain how, contrary to the Smithian presumption that selfish behavior leads to collective wellbeing through an invisible hand, individually rational behaviors can produce a collectively bad outcome. Non-cooperative games are a kind of congestion game[33] where rational and selfish players act according to rules that disallow knowledge of the decisions taken by other players and thereby damage themselves and the collectivity.

Increased complexification of sociotechnical systems is what can nowadays create the situations modeled by these games. To address this kind of irrational rationality by adding visibility (e.g. through additional data flows) is the paradox of solving the problem of human-made complexity by adding complexity. Human-made complexity cannot unfortunately produce any kind of collective intelligence. This should raise serious doubts about the possibility that trends towards increasingly isolating interconnection encouraged by the pandemic can foster the kind of politics, collective learning processes, and social activities that help societies face the global challenges looming on the horizon.

d. Relying on Invisibles

When referred to contemporary complex sociotechnical systems, it is very hard to reject Rosa Luxemburg's thesis of the original accumulation of capital[34]. This thesis tells us that the imperative of systems' growth and expansion prompted by capital relies on the free

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- If A remains silent but B betrays A, A will serve three years in prison and B will be set free
- If A and B both remain silent, both of them will serve only one year in prison (on the lesser charge).

Because betraying a partner offers a greater reward than cooperating, all purely rational self-interested prisoners will betray the other, meaning the only possible outcome for two purely rational prisoners is the worst possible for both.

[33] These games simulate situations described by the *Braess' paradox* where adding one or more roads to a network can slow down the overall traffic flow through it.

[34] I owe this insight to Robert (2009). See section of chapter 4 discussing how to re-establish the broken relationship between the emerging forms of complexity and their base.

appropriation of natural resources and of non-capitalist modes of life made of subsistence practices and material cultures whereby populations have managed to carry on under conditions of relative autonomy for millennia.

Delegation mechanisms whereby global supply chains are nowadays realized together with their wide geographical coverage and intricacy renders this appropriation invisible to most of the people integrated therein. Their extractive nature is typically obvious when looking at the peripheries of these chains where the extraction of primary material resources used to fabricate supplied products takes place or when new opportunities emerging for the global market alters the material culture of involved communities[35]. Growth driven extraction of economic values from goods and resources freely available within nature and cultures does not however only takes place in peripheries. It is also evident in the cities and resources of so-called developed countries, where the extraction of shadow work[36] is a necessary support for the production and use of industrial products. In general, shadow work concerns all those informal activities still entailing a certain degree of autonomy, gratuity, and human care for other people and the natural and technical environment, as for instance activities ensuring physical health as carried out by nurses, cleaning ladies, etc., or activities carried out by people providing maintenance of machineries, local farmers, physicians, and, more generally, activities linking the body of people to other people and the body of people to the earth.

The current pandemic is making visible these invisible foundations of the modern economy. It is even possible to hypothesize that the visibility of these foundations (and that of

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[35] These alterations can lead to increased activity and are not necessarily affecting involved communities for the worse. You might however think of what happening with Coltan extracted from mines in Congo and used worldwide for high-tech devices.

[36] Shadow work can be defined as "that entirely different form of unpaid work which an industrial society demands as necessary complement to the production of goods and services" (see Illich, 1981, pp. 99-100).

the human potential constituting them) increases with the number of social practices that are reconfigured to compensate for the interruptions caused by a virus. However, measures implemented to counteract the pandemic will likely cast these foundations back in the shadows. Thus, the actual starting point to conceive serious alternatives to present ways of life and any truly preventive measure against future extreme events will be hidden precisely when they are most needed. This paradoxical situation results from integrating the above- mentioned practices into the abstract and reified entities that are the key contribution of techno-science and constitute complex systems (e.g. monetary values, energy units, time units, information bits, molecular codes and combinations thereof). Rather than being retreats as the very peculiar abstractions they are[37], these entities are taken to be equivalent to any of the other actual entities people deal with during their everyday life.

Human-made complexity generates therefore a paradoxical inversion between materiality and immateriality. Increased complexification of social systems takes place by giving further reality to immaterial abstractions and this happens by rendering the role of material and bodily entities increasingly invisible within these systems even though the reliance on them grows in proportion. The increasingly material invisibility that subtends the expansion of the visibly immaterial should be carefully considered in public policy, as for instance, when governments pump cash into economies to counter the expected impacts of coronavirus[38].

e. Deadly Vitality

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[37] As pointed out by Robert for monetary values, although presenting themselves as objective data, these abstractions represent exteriorization phenomena, kind of co-ordination agreements among a multiplicity of individual acts. As such, they are hence not provided with an "ontological autonomy". Robert mentions in this respect the example of the shape of the "flame of a candle" which can exist only as long as there is a material flow that dissipates within. See Robert (2009).

[38] For an interesting description of monetary policies being currently implemented see e.g. https://www.ampcapital.com/europe/en/insights-hub/articles/2020/april/magic-money-tree-qe-and-money-printing

Human-made complexity most probably consists of mutually reinforcing homeomorphisms which are artificially established and maintained among the realms of economics, physics, biology[39] and, more recently, information science. In the complex systems age, the concept of life is operationalized by science through ideas of molecular codes and processes of homeostasis where biological organisms emerge from self-organizing dissipative structures according to mechanisms which are homeomorphic to those whereby the input and dissipation of energy enable the emergence of convection cells within heated water or the value of commodities is generated within markets. Everything becomes a matter of circulation, interconnection, stability and instability.

As discussed by Nicolas Rose[40], in the age of complexity, viruses, pandemics and associated biosecurity concerns contribute to generate a scientific vision of life and the human body as made of sub-cellular processes. Similarly, Kezia Barker[41] argues that in the biosecurity context generated by viruses and pandemics, life becomes "molecularized" and characterized and constituted through circulation and interconnections established among molecules and micro-organisms. In this perspective, the distinction between emergence of life and emergence of disease becomes very hard to be drawn, as "being healthy may not simply mean being free from pathogens, but a matter of immunocompetence; that is the ability to live with a variety of other organisms that are always in circulation"[42]. Diseases emerge and dissipate as viruses circulate, drift, mutate, evolve and re-assort. Because diseases occur through "a continuous mixing and

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[39] This hypothesis is taken from Mirowski (1989).
[40] See e.g. Rose (2007).
[41] See Barker (2015).
[42] See Hinchliffe (2001).

enmeshing – of bodies, environments, hosts, viruses"[43] the divisions between life-forms and the divisions between conditions of health and disease are blurred by the circulatory model.

This circulatory view where life and diseases emerge from mobility and interconnections automatically leads to the typical uncertainty regime and control approaches associated with complexity. Due to this kind of complexity, generation of microbial disease becomes highly unpredictable and this situation calls for the implementation and constant maintenance of the emergency strategies to manage the unpredictable. The move to this complex systems perspective entails then a process of internalization already discussed. Rather than being an external threat disease becomes an internal threat. Rather than an exogenous factor, disease becomes endogenous. This aspect is particularly important in the light of the mutual reinforcement existing between capital circulation in markets, matter circulation in physical networks and molecular codes circulation within and among biological bodies. As pointed out by Barker, a focus on bodies as hosts of disease reveals how circulation of capital, circulation of physical bodies and circulation of disease can reinforce each other in several ways. The increased circulation of capital which is linked to the manipulation and circulation of animal bodies (as happening for instance with intensive farming) can indeed generate the conditions for disease emergence. This fact points to an existing contradiction and possible counterproductive character of biosecurity practices that are informed by neoliberal approaches and focus on sorting and reinforcing desired circulations by enclosing them within "disease-free conduits"[44]. Rather than an external threat, disease generation is also an internal threat and a distinction between disease production and distribution can therefore become impossible because circulation

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[43] Barker (2015), p. 359.
[44] Barker (2015), p. 358.

has its own productive potential. The creation and extensive diffusion of disease-free conduits might therefore serve to generate the very problem they apparently aim to solve.

The mutual reinforcement that can occur among capital circulations, physical bodies circulation and microbes circulation can become even more perverse. As stated by Barker, "by removing problems of scale, flowing easily across territorial boundaries and trade barriers, and through the ever-generative rationalities of anticipatory action, enjoying a constant and limitless captive market, [viruses and microbes] might well be regarded as the ideal commodity"[45]. Capital circulation is therefore not necessarily impeded by viruses and pandemics. Under specific conditions, the persistence of viruses might even enhance this circulation. The amount of technologies and profits involved in a construction of a technocratic answer to ever more frequent viral events are hence sufficient elements to be concerned about the biosecurity exercises that are being carried out during the current pandemic. When life becomes just a matter of increasing circulation, either secured within virus-free conduits or not, it inevitably becomes source of ever more frequent diseases. The paradox of the circulatory view associated with social complex systems vitality lies in how this vitality can suddenly and unexpectedly turn into death of the whole system.

7. Little Inspirations to Escape Extremes by Escaping Human-made Complexity

a. Proportions Re-established

As Jean Robert has pointed out[46], to have a tsunami you need a sea that is sufficiently large. You cannot have a tsunami in a pond or in a lake. A tsunami needs hundreds or thousands of kilometers to achieve its momentum. In the same way, extreme events like pandemics need

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[45] Barker (2015) p. 361.
[46] Robert (2009). See the concluding section of chapter 3.

very extensive and closely interconnected networks to spread out. The condition *sine qua non* for the generation of an extreme event in a system is represented by its achievement of given critical dimensions. Jean Robert refers in this respect to the concept of social morphology as introduced by Leopold Kohr[47] to frame systemic problems as problems generated by disproportion within modern societies. He notes how, in the same way as horses and human beings could not survive if their size were two or three times bigger, social institutions and associated service infrastructures cannot function properly if too big because they end up generating problems that cannot be dealt by their members. Kohr's theory of social morphology represents a warning about the fact that most of the greatest threats for societies are generated by issues of excessive dimension that cannot be dealt by people. It can therefore be argued that, rather than by increased interconnection, a wiser approach to prevent current and future extremes is represented by some kind of re-scaling and down-sizing of service infrastructures to allow that most of the problems generated by these infrastructures can be easily dealt with at the level of household, district or city.

b. Re-Composition

Human-made complexity generates invisibilities and inversions between worlds made of abstract flows of information, energy, material resources and the world people can experience through their body and their senses. At the same time, it determines a condition of interconnected isolation while re-designing geographies of cities, rural areas and their mutual relationships. These separations have to be recomposed through a return to *earth* that can bodily re-connect people to people and people to their environment. This return to earth passes necessarily through

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[47] See Kohr (1957).

a revised relationship with food and rural areas that should be informed by principles of increased autonomy and new notions of usage.

The fact that farmers and people generally involved in agricultural activities to sustain bodily life are often subject to level of exploitations bordering enslavement represents an astonishing aberration. Our personal relationship with earth and the territory needs to be completely revalued by enabling higher level of autonomy and lower level of instrumental use of natural and human resources compared to those currently generated by global markets. Intensive and homogenizing agriculture practices would have to leave the floor to material cultures and modalities of life that can re-design urban and rural areas by re-configuring their relationship to generate higher integration and intensification of mutual and socially useful exchanges. Artificial separations between demand and supply, producers and consumers, governors and governed which contribute to current situations of political and environmental stress must be re-composed and their re-composition most probably requires that the societal role of agriculture is fundamentally revised so that local farmers and farming can gain higher autonomy and dignity.

c. Fragility

Ideas of control as currently materializing from the planetary to the atomic scale need also to be radically revised. Energies and intellectual efforts should be devoted to imagine how the acknowledgment of the impossibility of driving global change can modify human action and its impact on our environment. A wider acknowledgement of this impossibility might for example serve to create higher awareness about the fragility of human life and environment, about the inevitable and constant risks to lose own dears, about inevitability of and need to give sense to death and pain, and hence about the necessity of having more care for all beings around

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us and of relating to them with a sentiment of hope, respect and not appropriation due to the uniqueness they represent. It could serve to inform less leaning forward and less future oriented policy approaches that are more focused on preservation and history. It could serve to rediscover the Epimethean ethos of hope and trust in the goodness of nature against a Promethean ethos of planning and control[48].

8. Closing

Human-made complex systems consist of relational entities constituted through information flows. Within them, stasis as well as material and energy storage represent an inefficiency while survival is a question of being equipped to be informed and quickly adapt to the latest changes of an ever-changing environment. The hypermobility induced by the mutually amplifying cycles of monetary, material and information flows generate a blind industriousness where the production of single means enables the achievement of a multiplicity of ends rendering these means necessary irrespective of their actual usefulness or harmfulness for people. Governments, notably those that seem to better keep the pandemic under control, appear eager to re-start and reinforce capital, goods and people circulations augmented through a biosecurity paradigm. Either a vaccine for coronavirus will be finally produced or not, it is not unlikely that already existing biosecurity measures will have to be strengthened to create virus-free conduits wherethrough these circulations can increase in a context of augmented insulation from the external environment. These measures will probably produce effects of life suspension not so different from those nowadays experienced by world populations for the first time because of the lockdown.

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[48] See Illich (1971).

The suspension through insulation represents a perversion of another type of life suspension that deserves careful consideration. The former type of suspension is a manifestation of the expansion of biopolitical regimes aiming to regulate every aspect of private and public life. Coronavirus is just one of the systemic events whereby this expansion is being realized. No matter whether they are supposed to produce or to prevent global disasters for humanity, climate change, the transition to renewable energies, or cyber and bio-terrorism might for example also induce stricter biopolitical control of people's actions. No less jeopardized are the dominant social imaginaries that rely on an ethics of work and ideas of freedom that function by integrating individuals' desire and the possibility of self-realization into competitive markets. For many decades, these ethics and ideas have contributed to progressively reduce human life to production and consumption activities and have legitimized the expansion of enabling biopolitical interventions.

In such a context, a political claim to suspension, inactivity and contemplation could instead at least partially deactivate biopolitical power and pave the way for a politics that prevents a temporary interruption of production activities from putting societies' survival at risk. It is probably under a suspension perspective that notions of sharing and usage without appropriation of natural resources might take hold within new types of communities revealing the fundamental role suspension can play to open up new possibilities for societies and well-being.

As pointed out by Giorgio Agamben, a proper human life is the one that makes human beings' works and functions inactive and by doing so opens up new possibilities. "Contemplation and inactivity free humans from any biological or social destiny and from any predetermined

task and make them available to those absences of work that we usually call 'politics' and 'art'"[49].

The suspension enforced during the current pandemic has partially encouraged this contemplation and deactivation. As such, it could still contribute to disclose new possibilities for the future. If this will be the case, this will have been unfortunately achieved through forced reclusion, isolation and sufferance. If, as maintained by Aristotle and reminded by Illich[50] and Agamben, the greatest good for humans consists in the happiness arising from contemplation of themselves and of their potentiality to act, it should instead be hoped that societies will manage to create conditions that can render moments of deactivation desirable as a celebration of the human condition.

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[49] Author's translation of the sentence available in Italian in Agamben (2018), p. 1279
[50] See the concept of *conviviality* understood as austere playfulness in Illich (1973).

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Learning from Ivan Illich to Embrace Vision and Eschew Plans

Robert Austin

As I write this, the world is deep within the grip of a global pandemic, and our society has taken extreme precautions to preserve human lives. During the first nine months of 2020, less than 0.013% of the global population has died from a disease that brought the world economy to its knees. If the coronavirus continues to *ravage* the global population at the average rate that it has since January 2020, its death toll will rival, and perhaps even surpass the annual number deaths due to automobile accidents worldwide. (Djurkovic, 2020) Meanwhile, according to a recent report by the World Wildlife Foundation, monitored wildlife species have experience a 68% global average decline in number between 1970 and 2016. (Living Planet Report 2020, 2020) As is usually the case, the report ends with a "Roadmap For People And Nature," with suggestions, based on "Pioneering modelling" that provides a "proof of concept" that we can *bend the curve* to "restore biodiversity and feed a growing human population." This is just what we need, a diagnosis of a serious problem and proposed, science-based solutions that halt and perhaps reverse much of the damage we have done while feeding an ever-growing human population. In other words, with a few tweaks, we can save the world and continue down the path we have been on at least since the Industrial Revolution. Independent of whether it was truly uttered by Marie Antoinette, the adjuration, "Let them eat cake!" certainly captures the spirit of our time. It is fine to desire cake but let us not lose our heads over it!

The most destructive effect of development is its tendency to distract my eye from your face with the phantom, humanity, that I ought to love.

— Ivan Illich speaking to Majid Rahnema (Rahnema, 2008)

To not be distracted from concentrating on the person you are with reminds me of Leopold Kohr's comment about how bigness makes you worry about what is happening across the country in a place that has no direct connection to what is going on around you.

> Sparks kindled by some spontaneous combustion of minds and flitting aimlessly through people's brains which act as involuntary conductors because in modern crowd life we stand too closely together to escape infection. They are uncontrollable phenomena of large-scale existence, transmitting themselves across the entire surface of the globe and creating the necessity in those they brush of participating intellectually in whatever movement may arise in whatever corner of whatever continent. (Kohr, 2001)

In these words, I see a clear parallel between a viral pandemic and a sort of intellectual pandemic brought about by globalism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the weakness of the many systems that were developed during the last century to manage our society. The vulnerability of our heavily interconnected world to shocks such as the pandemic was revealed in a thorough network study conducted by economists of the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences in Marseille, France, and of the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa, Italy. (Maciel, 2014)

In the wake of COVID-19, will we return to normal, much like we did after the Great Recession of 2008, with minor adjustments here and there, applied like bandages to a festering wound, or will we have learned something from our experience with the pandemic and search for new solutions to problems that plague society?

Expecting Solutions is Part of the Problem

> Illich might have said more about those fugitive 'stories, skills, and senses of form"; he might have tried harder to sketch in the details of a society based on 'nonmarketable values. (Scialabba, 2017)

Critics of Illich often criticize him for diagnosing societal ills without prescribing remedies, but just as he felt that doctors' prescriptions often made illnesses worse, Illich understood that any solutions he might propose would likely have unforeseen dire consequences. Rather than come up with plans and programs for change, perhaps it would be best for us to "learn to laugh at accepted solutions in order to change the demands which make them necessary." (Illich, 1978) Instead of looking for new ways to satisfy old demands, we should start by examining the very demands that we traditionally have aimed to satisfy. Like a latter-day Till Eulenspiegel, Illich mocked even seemingly sensible demands such as those from the left, which he characterized as "more jobs, equal pay for equal jobs, and more pay for every job.", because for him "these demands were beside the point." (Scialabba, 2017)

Are We Trapped in a Destructive Spiral?

Since many on the right consider redistribution of wealth an unwelcome intrusion of the government into private affairs, they encourage economic growth on the assumption that "a rising tide lifts all boats." This can only work assuming there is an unlimited supply of natural resources. For most of human history, economies were local and they aimed at subsistance. Since the industrial revolution, the economic aim has been perpetual growth, but this economic model is unsustainable and spirals outward beyond Earth's ability to replenish the natural resources we are consuming. The economic growth spiral began expanding outward around 1870, thanks to technological innovations like the steam engine that were quickly followed by electricity.

Following the analysis of the economist Robert Gordon (Gordon, 2016), innovation initially

drove economic growth and was at least as important as advertising up until 1970, after which

time the rate of major innovation declined, and advertising took the lead in created the demands,

practically out of thin air, that are now driving growth. To defend the excessive consumerism

that perpetuates the rapacious capitalism characterizing our age, one needs to justify or at least

tolerate the ever increasing loss of wildlife habitats, the opressive ugliness of our built

environment, the inexorable increase of the amount of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere, the

exponential growth of human population, the widening gulf between rich and poor, the rise of

terrorism, and the general feeling of loss and emptiness felt by so many in advanced industrial

societies.

When we go back to the start of the industrial revolution, there was a problem in search

of a solution: the flooding of coal mines. The solution was the great innovation of the steam

engine. As we follow the spiral outward, we encounter new problems and their solutions: a need

for cleaner, more convenient lighting led to the electric light bulb, city streets clogged with horse

manure led to street cars and automobiles, etc. However, we soon confuse problems with

solutions, and the solutions themselves become problems. Do more jobs drive a need for more

workers or do more workers drive a need for more jobs? We even find that improvements in

efficiency deemed necessary to preserve increasingly scarce resources, ironically lead to

increased rates of usage of those scarce resources (i.e. Jevons' paradox (Owen, 2010)).

The Situation We Are In

Society has been warned of the "population bomb" over and over by the likes of Malthus

and Ehrlich (Ehrlich, 2007). However, their catastrophic predictions have yet to be realized,

because the population bomb was always defused by human ingenuity. Many claim the *population problem*, assuming one exists, will take care of itself. Societies with high standards of living naturally choose to limit the growth of their populations. Look at many of the countries in Western Europe, for example, whose native populations are shrinking. The world already has more than seven billion people, and if demographic trends continue, the global population will likely peak at 10 billion around the middle of this century (Fengler, 2016). It appears our population is nearly as high as it will ever be. So, perhaps population is not a problem. In fact, some people even argue that population needs to grow in order to have more smart people to come up with new and better solutions to the problems we have created for ourselves. They are of course assuming that human intelligence is cumulative, which is by no means self-evident.

Depending on what you consider to be a sustainable world, population might already be too high by far. Humanity has bought itself time by having access to a source of abundant solar energy that was stored over the course of eons in the fossils of ancient organisms. Even if all people in the world's highest consuming nations reduced their consumption down to the level of the average Bangladeshi, the Earth couldn't sustain the current human population of over seven billion at even the current rate of resource consumption indefinitely.

Let us, for the sake of discussion, take as an axiom that all living cells are equal, independent of how they are packaged into multicellular organisms. By "equal," I mean they are equally entitled to their share of the power delivered to Earth by the sun. For want of a name, I have chosen to call this axiom *the principle of biocellular democracy*.

The sun provides the world with around 1370 watts/m^2. The total power spread over the globe that is available for life is then 1.22×10^{17} watts, and that power must be shared by all living things, and the basic constituent of all living things, the quantum of life, is the cell. The

amount of power that the sun provides, as huge as it is, must nevertheless be shared by an even more astronomical number of cells. According to this principle, humans are entitled to a fraction of that total power that is equal to the fraction of all living cells that comprise humanity. In a state of equilibrium, this idea should lead to a rough equipartition of energy between species. If more than three billion years of evolution have *wisely* apportioned that power between the over one million species living on Earth, then humans are entitled to about one millionth of that total power. If humans use much more than that, their activities will throw the entire biosphere out of whack.

Since the time they learned how to harness fire, humans have tended to use more energy than required to sustain their metabolisms. This imbalance of energy usage between metabolic and non-metabolic processes has exploded since the industrial revolution and the large-scale use of fossil fuels, and the degree of imbalance varies widely, depending on which nation you live in, and your economic status within that nation. The principle of biocellular democracy therefore demands a limit on per capita rate of energy consumption that is largely determined by population.

For instance, in the United States, the per capita consumption of power is more than sixty times the power needed to sustain a human metabolism, whereas in a country like Bangladesh, the per capita consumption of power exceeds the average human metabolism by only a factor of about two. So, if the world were populated by Bangladeshis, the world could support a population of around 300 million people, the current population of the United States, without disturbing the ecological balance. For Americans, their greedy use of power implies that the ecological balance that has held sway up until the industrial revolution couldn't be maintained if their population exceeded a mere 13 million, roughly the current populations of

Guinea or South Sudan. The graph in Figure 1 shows the population consistent with cellular democracy principle according to the per capita power consumption of most of the Earth's major nations; national flags indicate the results for Bangladesh, Mexico, and the United States. There was a number left off the graph, the population permitted if humans lived only on the power needed to sustain their metabolisms (i.e. a power overhead of 0 watts). That number turns out to be 1.2 billion. So, if you accept this principle of biocellular democracy, and if we all lived like our ancestors did before the harnessing of fire, the world could, at most, handle a human population just short of what it was in 1850 without disrupting the diversity of nature that so enchanted our distant ancestors. The world's richest countries, the countries that support a standard of living below which their citizens would probably prefer not to live, have a combined population of around a billion people, and according to this argument, that is eighty times more than Earth can be expected to handle in the long term – at least if we care about sharing the world on an equal footing with rest of the biosphere.
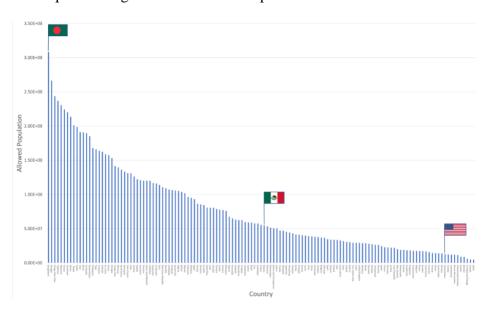

Figure 1 Population allowed according to the principle of biocellular democracy.

Acceptance of this argument hinges on whether one chooses to accept the principle of biocellular democracy. However, do we not always start an argument with something that seems self-evident, like the principle that all persons are created equal or that we have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Such principles have not always been and are still not accepted universally, yet many people find them fundamental for a society to consider itself modern and civilized. Should we go on living as though the cells that comprise human beings are entitled to more of the sun's power than say the cells of elephants, cats, iguanas, cockroaches, or algae? As principles go, it sounds about as reasonable as most of the principles we take for granted. The problem with principles is that if you take them seriously, you must face the consequences resulting from their acceptance.

So, what are some of the consequences of the preceding argument? One might be tempted to think I am invoking Malthus here, but I most assuredly am not. In fact, my point of view is decidedly Illichian in the sense Illich expressed in "Energy and Equity" (Illich, Energy and Equity, 2013), though I am taking a more expansive view of the sources of psychic harm high energy usage can impose on humans beyond the sociological ones that mostly concerned Illich to include the irredeemable loss of so much of the biodiversity that not only provides humans with physical sustenance but also the spiritual nourishment that is frequently left out of analyses by contemporary economists and ecologists.

Is Innovation Running Out of Steam?

There is little we can reasonably expect to do about population over periods less than several generations, so declines in population growth that result from standard of living improvements cannot compensate for the increased consumption rates that seem to inevitably

accompany rising wealth. I hope few will dispute that the global situation that I have depicted above is dire, but many thought leaders in our society are optimistic about the future and confidently claim that if it is technological innovation that got us into the current mess, then we only need further technological innovation to get us out of it.

Elon Musk, no idler he, has given the world the Tesla PowerWall (Powerwall: Tesla, n.d.). Thanks to brilliant producers like him, many think a better world is sure to come. Technological enthusiasts in government and education often seem to collectively shout, *Wow, isn't our technological progress amazing*? They encourage us to believe the possibilities for improvement are endless, but are they? Most people wouldn't have imagined the internet 60+ years ago, but the internet we have today lies well within the limits imposed by the science we had that long ago. Current technology and the technology of the foreseeable future is running on the fumes of early 20th century science. For technology to go much further, apart from sexier more powerful internet capable watches, implantable brain enhancements, etc. we need new science. To makes optimistic projections on technological advancement is like talking about architecture using only bricks and mortar. You can make amazing structures with those materials: medieval cathedrals, baroque palaces, etc., but there are limits that you cannot exceed unless you employ steel beams and modern materials. It is that way with our current technology. We are doing impressive things with the science we have, and we will continue doing more, but the future innovations will be incremental improvements at best. We can't have radical new technology without new science - we need to go beyond the "bricks and mortar" of current science if we want to avoid running into a technological brick wall in the next few decades.

I think we will hit that brick (Power?) wall, because I doubt we will produce major new fundamental insights into the workings of the world (at least not according to the standard set by

relativity and quantum theory) that will be amenable to practical utilization for the benefit of humankind. Meanwhile, population grows, and resources become increasingly scarce. By the way, let us not forget the other inhabitants, plants and animals, that we share this planet with. No matter how clean and efficient our technology becomes, increasing numbers of us will result in more space occupied by humans and less habitat for our fellow earthlings. Isn't that a consideration that we should not lose sight of?

Growing up in the latter third of the 20th century, my outlook was formed by a zeitgeist commanding us to innovate our way out of our problems. We have been mesmerized by technological progress, but hasn't this technological triumphalism – the idea that technology is fundamentally good and every problem calls for a technological solution – revealed itself to be a false religion, or even worse, is it a pied piper leading us to drown in a river of misbegotten dreams?

Our leaders, both on the right and left sides of the political spectrum, parrot the quotidian call for ever more growth. Can they not see that growth is the problem? Unchecked growth is cancer. As much as we innovate, our problems will forever outpace our innovations if we continue to be seduced by the lure of ever more growth. These problems are driven by our growing population and its ever-expanding demands on Earth's resources. Benevolent technology, green technology if you will, is only a treatment for the disease of consumption overshoot, and though it may delay collapse, in the long run green technology will likely just raise the height from which we will ultimately fall. The only cure is to curb our addiction to growth. Otherwise an apocalyptic global crash lies inevitably around the corner.

Our current paradigm is to produce - produce more stuff for ever more people, train more workers to produce that stuff, and produce more consumers to consume that stuff. As Illich so

rightly observed, institutions that were designed to serve us have morphed into entities that exist primarily to perpetuate themselves, and to do so, they must indoctrinate us to a world view that only allows most of us to see problems and solutions in terms of how we can best use those institutions.

> Schooling I increasingly came to see as the ritual of a society committed to progress and development, creating certain myths which are a requirement for a consumer society, for instance, making you believe that learning can be quantified, learning can be sliced up into pieces and can become additive, that learning is something for which you need a process, within which you acquire it. But in this process, you are the consumer, and somebody else organizes the production of the thing which you consume and interiorize, which is all basic for being a modern man, for living in the absurdities of the modern world. (Cayley n.d.)

To imbue this worldview, we are encouraged to want things – more cars, more phones, more health, more education.... In fact, wanting is perceived as a public good. In this time of pandemic, I see people overcoming their commonsense desire to stay home to indulge their appetites for consumption by going to restaurants and stores, justifying this activity by the public good resulting from spending money that provides income for proprietors and their employees. Apart from the psychological damage this perpetually unsatisfied desire does to people, it is having a catastrophic impact on all living things. Our universities are filled with students desperate to earn degrees and pursue careers but who are bored by education. Their vision of the good life doesn't extend beyond having a high paying job. The sense of ennui the pervades our society, with so many earning good but meaningless livings in *bullshit jobs* has been perfectly described by David Graeber (Graeber, 2019).

Breaking Out of the Paradigm

> More than any time in history mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness, the other to total extinction. Let us pray that we have the wisdom to choose correctly. (Allen, 1979)

As funny and depressing as Woody Allen's words are, they will ring true so long as we continue to think and work within the current paradigm centered on needs, innovation, and growth. As much as I dislike it, I find it exceedingly difficult to think outside this paradigm - I frequently catch myself wondering "can't we make solar panels more cheaply from renewable resources, can't there be a killer app that will curb humanity's compulsive acquisitiveness, is there anything more adorable than a new baby…?" I need to get these thoughts out of my head as surely as the protagonist of Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* felt he needed to stifle the sound of the beating of the dead man's heart to keep from going stark raving mad. Rather than produce, we need to **reduce**. Instead of celebrating producers, we should revere the **reducers**. When will we hail reducers as heroes? Illich referred to the type of work these reducers would engage in as *counterfoil research*.

> The energy crisis cannot be overwhelmed by more energy inputs. It can only be dissolved, along with the illusion that well-being depends on the number of energy slaves a man has at his command. For this purpose, it is necessary to identify the thresholds beyond which energy corrupts, and to do so by a political process that associates the community in the search for limits. Because this kind of research runs counter to that now done by experts and for institutions, I shall continue to call it counterfoil research. (Illich, Toward a History of Needs, 1978)

What kind of economy could reward a reducer more than a producer? We must find a new way of thinking and a new system of values. Otherwise, we will be doomed to repeat our mistakes and to make things worse. E. F. Schumacher perfectly expressed this quandary by

saying that it is "of little use trying to suppress terrorism if the production of deadly devices continues to be deemed a legitimate employment of man's creative powers." (Schumacher, 2014)

We Need to Take the Consumption Bull by the Horns

The new normal must be shaped out of a concern about the global climate and a reevaluation of what it means to have a good quality of life. Improved efficiency, carbon sequestration, nuclear power, elimination of regulations, carbon fees or more tax incentives for renewable energy, and more regulation have accomplished far less than hoped, and science and technology, which have made such tremendous strides since the Enlightenment will likely not take us much further.

> Today, industrial societies are constantly and totally mobilized; they are organized for constant public emergencies; they are shot through with variegated strategies in all sectors; the battlefields of health, education, welfare, and affirmative equality are strewn with victims and covered with ruins; citizens' liberties are continually suspended for campaigns against ever newly discovered evils; each year new frontier dwellers are discovered who must be protected against or cured of some new disease, some previously unknown ignorance. The basic needs that are shaped and imputed by all professional agencies are needs for defense against evils. (Illich, *Toward a History of Needs*, 1978)

After introducing the term crisis in a negative way, calling "a call for acceleration" that justifies "the depredation of space, time, and resources for the sake of motorized wheels" doing so "to the detriment of people who want to use their feet." Illich sees opportunity in crises like the current pandemic as an "instant of choice, that marvelous moment when people suddenly become aware of their self-imposed cages and of the possibility of a different life. And this is the crisis that, as choice that confronts both the United States and the world today." (Illich, 1978)

The difficulty we face is not only a lack of effective solutions but the lack of a proper framework that facilitates us to ask the right questions. The current paradigm cannot be the only one consistent with advancing the human condition, assuming it even does, and it surely is not the best one. We know that there exist alternative ways of doing things that are consistent with a happy and fruitful existence. People led worthwhile lives centuries before we were born. They lived fulfilling lives without cars, planes, 3D printers, and the "green revolution." Judging by the greatness of their painting, sculpture, literature, music, and architecture compared to our own, life perhaps seemed worth more to our remote ancestors than to ourselves.

Can We Accept Limits?

Illich advocated "limits on the maximum amount of instrumented power that anyone may claim, both for his own satisfaction and in the service of others." (Illich, 1996) Though Illich was speaking specifically about medical interventions, one could describe all technological interventions in this way:

> Most of the remedies proposed for reducing iatrogenesis are engineering interventions, therapeutically designed in their approach to the individual, the group, the institution, or the environment. These so-called remedies generate second-order iatrogenic ills..." (Illich, 1978)

Limits should not only be accepted for technology and power; we should also accept limits on the size of human communities.

> Until late in the eighteenth century, more than 99 percent of the world's food was produced inside the horizon that the consumer could see from the church steeple or minaret. (Illich, 1978)

I have always had a soft spot for small nations, perhaps most for the smallest nations of all, the city states. It is the city states of Athens, Milan, and Florence to which we owe the greatest aspects of western culture. The German kingdom of Saxony gave us Bach, the German duchy of Saxe- Weimar gave us Goethe. Goethe, the poet, philosopher, and scientist - the German Shakespeare and more - opposed the German unity movement, feeling that Germany was fine as a loose association of kingdoms and duchies that shared much in culture and commerce but fiercely maintained their political independence. Below, I quote the text of a letter expressing Goethe's opinion on German National Unification (Hoppe, 2018).

> I do not fear that Germany will not be united; … she is united, because the German Taler and Groschen have the same value throughout the entire Empire, and because my suitcase can pass through all thirty-six states without being opened. … Germany is united in the areas of weights and measures, trade and migration, and a hundred similar things … One is mistaken, however, if one thinks that Germany's unity should be expressed in the form of one large capital city, and that this great city might benefit the masses in the same way that it might benefit the development of a few outstanding individuals. … A thoughtful Frenchman, I believe Daupin, has drawn up a map regarding the state of culture in France, indicating the higher or lower level of enlightenment of its various Departments by lighter or darker colors. There we find, especially in the southern provinces, far away from the capital, some Departments painted entirely in black, indicating a complete cultural darkness. Would this be the case if the beautiful France had ten centers, instead of just one, from which light and life emanated? — What makes Germany great is her admirable popular culture, which has penetrated all parts of the Empire evenly. And is it not the many different princely residences from whence this culture springs and which are its bearer and curators? Just assume that for centuries only the two capitals of Vienna and Berlin had existed in Germany, or even only a single one. Then, I am wondering, what would have happened to the German culture and the widespread prosperity that goes hand in hand with culture. — Germany has twenty universities strewn out across the entire Empire, more than one hundred public libraries, and a similar number of art collections and natural museums; for every prince wanted to attract such beauty and good. Gymnasia, and technical and industrial schools exist in abundance; indeed, there is hardly a German village without its own school. How is it in this regard in France! — Furthermore, look at the number of German theaters, which exceeds seventy … The appreciation of music and song and their performance is nowhere as prevalent as in Germany … Then think about cities such as Dresden, Munich, Stuttgart, Kassel, Braunschweig,

Hannover, and similar ones; think about the energy that these cities represent; think about the effects they have on neighboring provinces, and ask yourself, if all of this would exist, if such cities had not been the residences of princes for a long time. — Frankfurt, Bremen, Hamburg, Lübeck are large and brilliant, and their impact on the prosperity of Germany is incalculable. Yet, would they remain what they are if they were to lose their independence and be incorporated as provincial cities into one great German Empire? I have reason to doubt this.

If only the Germans had heeded Goethe's wise counsel, how different our history would have been! The most prosperous and peaceful places on Earth tend to be the smallest. The best pages in our history were written in small places: the city states of Greece and Italy, the kingdoms and duchies of old Germany, etc. Goethe saw the threat of unity on too large a scale, and history has proven him right. All peoples should follow Goethe's admonition, especially in this day of internet connectedness. We can achieve prosperity within small political entities. As E. F. Schumacher said, "Small is beautiful!"

How Can We Get to Where We Want to Be?

If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life ... (Thoreau, 1986)

Given that the terrible state of the world that I have outlined above is a consequence of the paradigm that fosters the needs that drive our society and the institutions we rely upon to satisfy those needs, the best I have been able to do is to follow Illich, Schumacher, and Kohr to recommend that our needs and our living arrangements be much more circumscribed than western societies have considered desirable or even acceptable for well over a century. Again, the problem lies with the paradigm within which we all think and act. If so many economic and

environmental problems plague society, then our paradigm insists upon solutions offering step-by-step plans. Illich, Schumacher, Kohr, and others like Thomas Merton who defended *contemplation in a world of action* (Merton, 2003) have failed to make much of a dent in the global psyche, because they were reaching beyond the current paradigm, like the sphere in Flatland, who tried to explain the three-dimensional world to two-dimensional creatures (Abbott, 1991). The new paradigm they sought has no use for plans. In fact, plans are anathema to a real paradigm shift, since most people do not like other people's solutions to be imposed upon them.

So, how do we get to this new paradigm without some sort of plan or map? To even ask this question is fruitless, since no major paradigm shift in the past was facilitated by the issuance of any plans. What we need Illich has already provided. We have a *vision* of a better, more convivial world, which is far more potent than any prescription or plan, since necessary details will follow from the minds of the many individuals who share the common vision. We have only to think of great paradigm shifters like Christ, The Buddha, Mohammed, and Lao Tzu to understand how vision can transform the world. Vision leads, action follows.

A Personal Testament

Ivan Illich's observations about the plight of modern man are among the most important ever expressed. Before becoming familiar with Illich, I was much influenced by Christopher Lasch, who was also a sharp critic of what most people see as social progress, but his analysis was not nearly so radical as Illich's. Lasch's scholarly approach rather gently suggested changes were needed for a better society, whereas Illich screamed for a complete overhaul. We are trapped in a hamster wheel that rotates around an axis of progress. We must jump off the wheel. Those of us who agree with Illich's critique of modernity are faced with a seemingly impossible challenge: how can we help society move towards greater conviviality when every exercise of

our talents inevitably leads us further away from the improvements to society we are trying to achieve?

For most of my adult life, I have looked on the project of human progress with the same sense of confusion that one might look upon a friend who is in love with someone who does not seem at all right for him. I have been engaged in a nearly lifelong struggle between my unquestioning intellectual acceptance of the rightness of Enlightenment goals and accomplishments and my instinctive, heart-felt doubt about them.

Here is what I mean. I am a physicist, and it is in my nature to want to identify problems and come up with solutions. I exist within a culture, and I am shaped by a society that is predicated upon technological triumphalism, even though most of today's ills trace back to earlier technological remedies. I see problems all around me, and my instinctual reaction is to try to innovate solutions. I sympathize with Illich, so I attempt to come up with simple solutions that can make the world a better place and perhaps make me a little money, since I cannot deny the need of an income to survive in our capitalist society. I then inevitably come to the realization that we simply do not need more new technology, no matter how well intentioned. New antibiotics lead to more resistant germs, better security scanners lead to innovative ways to get around those scanners, better fuel efficiency leads to more driving, better medical imaging leads to more anxiety and invasive therapies, etc. The upshot of this painful realization is we do not need more technology, we need less. We need to limit rather than expand. We need to withhold rather than to offer.

> The researcher must first of all doubt what is obvious to every eye. Second, he must persuade those who have the power of decision to act against their own short-run interests or bring pressure on them to do so. And finally, he must survive as an individual in a world he is attempting to change fundamentally so that his fellows among the privileged minority see him as a destroyer of the very ground on which all of us stand. He knows that if he should succeed in the

> interest of the poor, technologically advanced societies still might envy the 'poor' who adopt this vision. (Illich, 1978)

We cannot bring about necessary change by force; nothing good can come of that. All this honesty leaves me paralyzed. I feel compelled to do something yet doing nothing is perhaps a better course of action. The disturbing truth of Illich is that any exercise of my skills is probably antithetical to bringing about a better, more convivial society. My struggle, and the struggle of others equally well intentioned, is to figure out how to foster the emergence of a more convivial society, while surviving in the current one. Is there a resolution to this paradox?

I oftentimes feel powerless due to an overwhelming sense of cognitive dissonance. How can life become more convivial? I am a physicist. I was drawn to my profession, because as a very young man, I believed it was a profession that would allow me to experience the natural world at a very deep level. Unfortunately, I have found professional science to be quite at odds with that naive desire. Society has little use for physicists who devote themselves solely to delving into the mysteries of nature. Very little money goes towards that. At best, such quests are a sideline for researchers who are employed to develop new technologies that lead to new products to further transform us all from citizens to mere consumers. In other words, I am chained to a profession that pulls us away from conviviality. What I struggle with is how to earn enough to support my family without being overwhelmed by a feeling of existential nausea. I look at the world's problems, and I always want to come up with technical solutions - technical solutions to solve problems that are themselves brought about by technology. I can see the futility of that approach, and I either give up on my project or work on it only halfheartedly. What the world, at least the rich world, needs is not more technology but less, but how can we realize that truth when we are trapped within, contribute to, and profit from a system that is

founded on the eternal growth of unfulfillable needs that are stimulated by ever more technology? We are taught to produce - that satisfaction comes only from producing things, from making a mark. It may seem rather prosaic, but after so much discussion and soul searching I can offer nothing more and nothing less than this suggestion: to achieve conviviality for the day after normal, we must in all humility let go of the material world like the conscientious wanderer who, out of respect and love for the forests, streams, mountains, and valleys that adorn his wanderings, takes nothing and leaves nothing behind, no sign of his presence, no initials carved into a tree or stones stacked in a cairn, or any other hint of ego.

> Whom God would show the highest favor,
> He sends into the world to rove;
> He grants him every wondrous savor
> Of stream and field and hill and grove.
>
> The dullards in their houses lying
> Are not refreshed by morning's red:
> They only know of babies crying,
> Of burdens, cares, and daily bread.
>
> The brooklets from the hills are springing,
> The larks are soaring high with zest:
> Why should not I join in their singing
> With open throat and joyous breast?
>
> To God I leave the rule unswerving:
> Who brooks and larks and wood and fell
> And earth and heaven is preserving,
> Will safely guide my course as well.
>
> (Eichendorff, 1981)

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Towards Illich's 'Legibility":
Returning to Ivan through the Mirror of the Past

Le Goliard[1]

Introduction

In 2013, in an Italian reissue of *Gender,* Giorgio Agamben told us that "perhaps only today the work of Ivan Illich is getting to know what Walter Benjamin called 'the hour of legibility'"[2]. There he spoke to us of the relevance of re-reading Illich from our present. Seven years later, the world is going through an unprecedented global crisis, which the elite of professionals and experts have called a *pandemic*. An *amoeba word*[3] from our Newspeak *uniquack*[4] has been coined to expand this mental state to the so-called global society and it is multiplied by the force of electrons in human-cyborgs-screens: COVID-19.

In what follows, we take up Agamben's thesis from other angles to arrive at a common challenge: the factual possibility of Illich becoming legible in all its full dimension in times when Ivan's work itself appears trapped by the same evils that he denounced. This is an incomplete essay that is presented as a prelude and invitation to subversive action, understanding that returning to Illich is both pertinent and urgent.

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[1] A collective, nomadic and de-professionalized intellectual wandering erratically outside the dominant certainties and institutions. For more about our work, reach us at: goliard@riseup.net
[2] Giorgio Agamben, *"Introduzione"* in *"Genere"* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2013)
[3] Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind,* (San Francisco, Ca: North Point Press, 1988)
[4] Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind* (San Francisco, Ca: North Point Press, 1988)

An Urgent Reading

Illichean thought is presented today in a diverse set of post-capitalist narratives, struggles, disciplines and fields. Sometimes this is explicit, but most of the time there are clear connections without a direct reference. Examples abound: the so-called *degrowth* paradigm; the various initiatives that promote various forms of *deschooling*; and the increasingly vigorous movement for *open access to scientific knowledge*. In all of them we find links and direct connections to ideas that run through several of Illich's works. Many times this link is not explicit and on a few occasions the authors refer occasionally to some passages of the so-called "Cuernavaca pamphlets". We believe that this is a problem: we do not want to point out the need to vindicate his figure or proclaim a certain academic purism. What we see is that behind this "tangentiality" hides a certain form of superficiality, a rhetoric that loses sight of the deep and systemic criticism that was the backbone of its intellectual edifice. The general ignorance of the entirety of it finds an explanation, albeit partially, in the current difficulty to *read* in depth the complete set of his work. This is directly linked to a problem of *inaccessibility*, as well as the need to generate dynamics and relationships with its most lucid interpreters.

At the same time, a reading of Illich today deserves to understand the context of the production of meaning where his work originally took shape. This is necessary as a way of recovering the central conceptual knots of the critique of modernity, those same ones that today are already exploded, far beyond any possible threshold of tolerance. Otherwise, we run the risk that these narratives become fossilized as pieces within an intellectual museum, frequented by a few sporadic visitors.

Retrieving *Philia*

A deep, rigorous and action-oriented recovery process of Illich's thought over mere bookish or intellectual elaboration requires a return to its sources, to the contexts where the web of meanings that make up each of the pieces of the puzzle were woven. The lines of construction of each of them show that Illich never worked alone, he knew how to surround himself with friends and collaborators, whom he invited to his table ready for convivial conversation. Such gatherings were a breeding ground for his reflections, taking shape in incomplete texts, as well as in drafts which circulated in those circles of friendship to later appear in diverse types of compilations in book format. This collective, dialogical, cumulative, incremental and creative process requires itself to be studied, in the light of the current time where collaborative writing, versions of texts and always imperfect rewriting are some of the pillars of the so-called "Wiki culture," supporting the most extensive collective intellectual production in the history of mankind.

Leaving this last methodological aspect aside for now, when reviewing the names of those who were part of Illich's table, we find one of several reasons for an urgent return to Illich's thought. Friendship, *philia*, a central issue in Ivan's life and thought, enabled the meeting of dozens of thinkers and activists who are absolutely fundamental for the construction of a critical narrative about Development and Modernity. These men and women are essential today for understanding that past that contained the keys to anticipate a future that arrived and today constitutes our present. Several of these people have already died and many of them are going through the final stage of their lives. They were part of the collective conversations and reflections that help us to understand the contexts where each of the pieces in Ivan's collection took shape. Never was the collaboration that of disciples or vertical relationship structures—

typical of the academic production model prevalent within universities—despite Ivan's strategic "milking" of Alma Mater without being trapped within them.

At the same time, each of these Illich friends developed their own intellectual work, linking, intertwining and expanding aspects addressed by their shared work. Illich's complete readability will unfailingly imply the direct collaboration of his friends, both for accessing materials that are now almost lost or limited to a privileged few, as well as for the guidance and orientations for a deep understanding of his positions.

The intergenerational exchange characterizing Illich's "method" was based on deep friendship and collaborative relationships, beyond all those dynamics of plunder, appropriation and opportunism that not infrequently underlie the motivations of "the thought professionals" who live in the Ivory Towers. In the same vein, it will be necessary to critically review the recent intellectual production that emerged from there at the hands of young academics who cast their gaze on the "Illich subject" when it was convenient for their own professional careers. A reading situated in the present and oriented to action for transformation of the world must go much further than that. Inescapably what is revealed is both an interpretive and action incapacity toward which the school-minded position leads. It becomes critically necessary, then, to revisit the concepts of "counterfoil research" and "convivial tools" toward retrieving ways of dialoging and revisiting Illich's work.

It is not about "reading Illich", but about "reading from Illich" to enable a live dialogue with him in order to understand the world around us. The vast majority of us, who were unable to meet Ivan in life, may perhaps be able to dialogue with him by emulating him in his relationship with Hugh of St. Victor, Abelard and other of his 12th century friends.

This exercise of recovery, reconstruction, reconnection and reinterpretation is presented as an urgent and extremely important task for those of us who seek to exercise activism based on deep critical reflection. As has already been said: reading Illich today should not have the purpose of promoting a debate for a few enlightened interpreters. Neither should a retrieval of Illichian thought feed sterile reflections disengaged from real processes—those inhabited by ordinary people who, as Ivan said two decades ago "get to see what scientists and administrators don't see." For this reason, it is imperative to explore specific ways to make Illich's thought profusely legible in times where the overabundance of discursivities, narratives and information block our collective capacities to distinguish the banal from the really important.

In Search of Lost Texts

Some reasons why and from where to read Illich have been outlined so far: the importance of completing the map of meanings that surrounded each of his contributions; the urgency of intergenerational dialogue between readers and collaborators; and an action-oriented search that goes beyond prerogatives of the Academy. At this point, our collective task is confronted by a series of difficulties of a theoretical and practical nature that have as their starting point the very end of Ariadna's thread of the question: if the moment has arrived for Ivan's legibility, then we must begin by being able to read him—this in the most literal and practical sense of the task. To move our eyes over those words, paragraphs, chapters, footnotes and general structures that shaped the texts from what he made known as "Pietro Lombardo's

generation"—the subject to which Ivan dedicated various reflections in his quest to elucidate the origin of the textual culture that has shaped our way of reading and thinking[5].

Illich's texts—recorded on the page in the form of articles, drafts, pamphlets, books and compilations—were codified with the use of that instrument known as the alphabet, the same one that fascinated him. There are tens and hundreds of them, some of them accessible, some others kept as treasures within the reach of a few, with many still unknown and hidden. Originally written in several languages, rewritten or partially translated in many others, his texts are partly scattered, fragmented and, in the case of his most famous pamphlets, mediated by the commercial imperative.

Making possible a "legibility" that contributes to our collective and urgent need to multiply "other possible worlds" seems to need to confront several of the problems to which Illich himself devoted a large part of his efforts. It is then a question of returning to Illich from Illich. Below we will refer to only two of those problematic nodes that are essential to explore in order to outline responses to the challenge posed. In the first place the issue of scarcity, on the other the issue of "the digital".

Scarcity as an Avoidable Destination

The issue of scarcity is present in one way or another in the different stages of Ivan's intellectual journey. To begin, Illich identified modern institutions as producers of demands and needs anchored in scarcity[6]. Of institutions, he described them as a "theater of the plague, a spectacle of shadows producing demands that generate scarcity". Later, he would promote what

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[5] Ivan Illich, *"En el viñedo del texto: un comentario al 'Didascalicon' de Hugo de San Victor"*, (México: FCE, 2002)
[6] David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, 154

he called a years-long research endeavor in which he shaped "a history of scarcity", a project that

he began fully in his books *Shadow Work* and *Gender*. There the relationship between education

and the economy becomes explicit, which led him to the concept of *homo educandus* based on

the prior idea of *homo economicus* that he took from Polanyi.

For our case, we can think about Illich's work as a "means of knowledge" and the scarcity

which governs access to it, following Illich. Much of his work has become artificially scarce—as

merchandise, the "intellectual property" of certain elite publishing circuits (e.g. commercial

ebooks). Some require special privileges to access (e.g. academic libraries in the global north).

Still others are in the hands of private companies (e.g. CIDOC materials). Though many

unpublished works exist, much of Illich's work that has been published has become scarce by

power structures whose existence is based upon the limitation or inaccessibility of those

materials. Illich put it in these terms:

> The economic sciences always assume a postulate of scarcity. What is not scarce
> cannot be subjected to economic control. This applies to goods and services as well
> as to work. This postulate has permeated all modern institutions.[7]

Thus, it seems that Illich's legacy has fallen into the same modern traps that he sought to

denounce: counterproductive libraries, commercial publishers, techno-monopolies that engulf the

memory of the once-held realms of communality. Prisoner of the regimes of scarcity—read

intellectual property or digital rights management systems (DRM)—Illich's work has become

itself scarce in educational curricula:

> I came to understand education as 'learning,' when it takes place under the assumption
> of scarcity in the means which produce it.[8]

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[7] Ivan Illich, *"El trabajo fantasma"*, (México: FCE, 2008), 153
[8] Ivan Illich, "A Plea for Research on Lay Literacy" in *In The Mirror of the Past*, (New York, N.Y.: Marion Boyars, 1992), 159

From our perspective, this issue cannot be fully explained because of "a lack of interest" in Illich or only an issue affecting his "unpublished works". Rather, we must look at the power structures, the modern institutions and educational mythologies that base their existence in the limitation to access and the creation of scarcity.

The Digital Paradox

In the final stage of his life, Illich witnessed the end of the bookish culture and the first effects of what he called "the era of systems", the algorithmization of life, the passage from page to screen, *La perte des sens*. It was "a cyber nightmare state for the 21st century"[9]. He argued that an epoch had ended during his lifetime, and that he as a historian and archaeologist saw more clearly than ever the mirror where the textual past gave way to a future of *cyborgs*, similar to the moment when orality gave way to writing. At his own funeral some of his words about this were read:

> What has been composed can decompose. The past can be re-evoked. But Paul Celan knew that only smoke remains from the world-dwindling that we have experienced. It is the virtual drive of my computer that serves me as the symbol for this irretrievable disappearance, and through which the loss of world and flesh can be envisaged[10]

The fragments of Illich's legacy have also been scattered in that dark digital world that he understood as inhuman and as inevitable. Today some of his best-known books, the ones he told to Cayley that were "dead," are being offered commercially in e-book format through Amazon. The book Illich considered his best work, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, is not available for sale in

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[9] David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, 198
[10] Ivan Illich, "The Loss of World and Flesh", (1993). Accessed at
https://www.pudel.samerski.de/pdf/IllichBecker_en.pdf

paper while the most direct form of access is through a digital version scanned without much care, and barely legible (the same thing happens for the original version in English and for the edition in Spanish). Meanwhile a huge number of Illich's texts are lost, as many are hidden in long abandoned websites, falling victim to a digital death at the rate of the advance of the digital monoculture of Google, Amazon, Facebook and other titans of the so-called "corporate technocapitalism."

Faced with this scenario, we might wonder to what extent "digital" can bring us Illich without further increasing the opacity and distance from the real meaning of his word. At the same time, it seems necessary to navigate the waters of virtuality while walking the corridors of deserted analog libraries to get back to that intellectual legacy that has the clues to escape the cybernetic nightmare that surrounds us. In that sense, the paradox becomes twofold when it is essential to read Illich in order to make him legible for this century.

Through the Mirror of the Past

We conclude this brief essay by stating that the problem requires deploying a collective creative action in the face of the challenges posed. That is the guideline of our search, to find in Illichean thought the scaffolding to recover and "democratize" it, to free it from the condition of artificial scarcity and darkness in which it has plunged. It is not about limiting ourselves to seeing through that mirror of the past, but about traveling through it. Move between the two waters. If the epistemic rupture that Illich described is irreversible, something of what was is also contained in what is. We think that *something* is *the text*, and he also identified it:

The world of cybernetic modelling, of computers as root metaphors for felt perception, is dangerous and significant only as long as there is still textual literacy in the midst of it.[11]

Thinking about "the text" as a tool for conviviality, takes us back to looking at the word in a living sense forged in the heat of the art of conversation. Going back to review the process of collective intellectual creation that took place in Cuernavaca—the circulation of drafts, translations and re-adaptations—reveals a form of relationship with the textual that was there all the time; the living text, the printed word that circulates around the table of friends. From the marginal notes in the mythical and almost inaccessible CIDOC *Cuadernos,* to the exercise of commenting on Hugh's *"Didascalicon"*, Illich showed us the capacity of the text to weave a relationship of senses and affections in all directions: from the past to the present, from the superficial to the deep, from the *I* to the *we*.

It is worth wondering about the possibilities of appropriating the digital, from a convivial doing, outside of institutional contexts, in order to create in a vernacular sense, the re-invention of the relationship that is contained in that juxtaposition called "digital text". Returning to Hugh of St. Victor with Illich, we confront this ubiquitous modern that places technology at the service of domination, with that other conception where the tool can be, instead, a remedy for the recovery of what some call "lost paradise"[12].

It will be our task, sons and daughters of computerized text, to retrace our steps, shake off all the certainties of the catastrophic world that surrounds us in order to inhabit it and transform it with our eyes on the past, our hands on the ground and our readings on the roots. Illich's

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[11] David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, (Toronto, CA: House of Anansi Press, 1992), 382

[12] Ivan Illich, *En el Viñedo del Texto: Un Comentario al 'Didascalicon' de Hugo de San Victor*, (México: FCE, 2002)

readability for our time will only be possible if we throw ourselves into the radical act of renouncing what is presented to us as self-evident. We must make tools from *philia*, in the interstices of systems and subsystems, that allow us to read and converse in the complete history of our tragic civilizing course. We should focus our efforts on the creation of an international network of intellectuals and *hacktivists*, beyond the conventional institutional and academic dynamics, that pursues the recovery, digitization, interpretation and dissemination of the entire intellectual heritage of Ivan Illich. Such a network can be the framework for the creation of various convivial tools that aim to this end. Our task is to think and do beyond the logic of the market, the liberal ideology of Rights, to build our own open digital technologies.

If the time has come for Illich to be legible, we will have to go to meet him: on the one hand, the young, famous and explosive Illich of the 70s who instigated subversive action against all the established powers; on the other, the old, intimate and warm Illich who in his humble self-criticism guided us to the depths, roots and origins of all the certainties of the world that surrounds us and oppresses us.

To begin to draw up a plan of how to recover his enormous intellectual production, let us return to the young Illich:

> As the library got 'better' the book was further withdrawn from the handy bookshelf. The reference librarian placed himself between people and shelves; now he is being replaced by the computer (…) a library is a model of a convivial tool, a site that offers free access and does not obey rigid programs, a site where you take or leave what you want, beyond all censorship.[13]

To understand the political dimension of taking matters into our own hands, let's remember that old Illich who once said:

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[13] Ivan Illich, *"Tools for Conviviality"*, (USA: Harper & Row, 1973), 77

> I was lacking in trust in the extraordinary creativity of people and their ability to live in the midst of what frustrates bureaucrats, planners, and observers …. We now live in a world in which most of those things that industry and government do are misused by people for their own purposes.[14]

Our political action should be radical, subversive and *descheoled*, in the deep and complete sense of the term. Those convivial tools that we must co-create will combine orality, textuality and digitality, allowing us to "go through the mirror" to find Illich in the same way that he did in his travels in time. Along with Illich, we will have to make readable the texts that

> became projections of my (Illich's) thought, and texts in which others could perceive the structure of my (Illich's) thought. I want those who are willing to study with me (Illich) to engage in the exegesis of these old texts, to move into this foreign milieu, to move into the magic circle which is surrounded by the dead who for a moment come alive as shadows, as skeins.[15]

With Illich we must return to words, return to friends, return to the dead. And when we return from the other side of the mirror, to find ourselves again in this present of pandemics and catastrophes, we come "back into the present, not to abdicate but to assume fully the destiny."[16] Our time cannot be understood from the present, since we can hardly live in it. That is why we will need to go through Illich's mirror.

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[14] David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, (Toronto, CA: House of Anansi Press, 1992), 197
[15] David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, (Toronto, CA: House of Anansi Press, 1992), 378
[16] David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, (Toronto, CA: House of Anansi Press, 1992), 379

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Revisiting Tools

Joey Mokos

If you are trying to make sense of the pandemic, escalating racial justice movement, schooling issues and ecological crises abounding, there is no better place to start than *Tools for Conviviality*. It is as relevant now as when it was first published in 1973. Illich invites us to peel back the layers of oppression and injustice to consider what ideologies led to the crises that beset our current era. He suggests the fundamental social structure to consider is our relationship to our tools. Tools for Illich includes both the artifacts and the processes we put in place to organize and act individually and collectively. Some tools allow for a variety of uses – i.e. a pencil, while others are more likely to be limiting by their design – i.e. a nuclear weapon. But for Illich, tools should allow people to think and act creatively and provide for a good life. Our use of tools should be limited by the extent to which they infringe on other people's ability to use tools for their ends. This combination of creative action limited by shared claims to use of tools is what Illich calls "conviviality" –living well together. Illich believed that too often tools have limited personal creativity and action toward a good life and that it was possible to change our relationship with tools to recover conviviality as a core social structure. This framework provides a lens for looking at the present moment. By tying together disparate social, political, financial, and environmental crises, Illich invites us into a deep dive into the ideology at the root of these issues.

This shift in our relationship with tools requires a change in legal and political procedures and will lead to changes in our relationships with each other and the world around us. Tools for Illich are human products (not in the sense of a commodity, but rather the result of human thought and action). At the same time, society and tools shape the humans we are becoming. We use the tools we have created for thinking and analysis, but when the tools become the water we swim in, so to speak, we risk losing the ability to see them for what they are and re-take control. Peter Berger's dialectical framework can help illustrate this point. As he writes in The Sacred Canopy, "The two statements that society is a product of man and that man is the product of society, are not contradictory. They rather reflect the inherently dialectic character of the social phenomenon." (page 3). This dialectic process is composed of three moments: 1. Externalization, 2. Objectivation, 3. Internalization. These correspond to 1. The creative thought and action of people, 2. The observable results of that thought and action, 3. The way we turn the external structures of the objective world into a structure of the subjective consciousness. It is precisely this process that Illich is trying to interrupt before it leads to social, economic and environmental collapse.

Illich describes three challenges to expressing limits to tools and industrial production: 1. demythologizing science, 2. rediscovery of language (revivifying language), 3. recovery of legal procedure. Each of these may help us understand current social political conflicts in the present moment: 1. statements about "what the science says" and climate change denialism, 2. confusion about the difference between 'learning' and 'schooling' or between 'healthcare' and 'healing', and 3. Black Lives Matter and Defund the Police movements.

Demythologizing Science

"This term (science) has come to mean an institutional enterprise rather than a personal activity, the solving of puzzles rather than the unpredictably creative activity of individual people." (Tools p. 85). We have turned scientific knowledge into a commodity to be consumed or rejected. However, consumption of this knowledge leads to a stripping of personal decision making. Knowledge becomes an input to determine the proper decision. Illich states, "Overconfidence in 'better decision making' first hampers people's ability to decide for themselves and then undermines their belief that they can decide." (Tools p. 86). Further on he states, "Recourse to better knowledge produced by science not only voids personal decisions of the power to contribute to an ongoing historical and social process, it also destroys the rules of evidence by which experience is traditionally shared." (Tools p. 87). When we hear people say, 'the science says…', regarding mask-wearing or climate change, it makes some people bristle because they feel it is an affront to their ability to make a personal decision or to contribute to the decision making. The knowledge itself is not a problem, it is the exclusivity of that knowledge that then strips people of the ability to contribute to the decision. We have lost agency and therefore reject it. Demythologizing science by personal pursuits could restore the usefulness of the knowledge produced by scientific pursuits. Reject, "The science says…" in favor of "This is what I learned by doing x, y, z." This would invite people into a mutually beneficial discussion about how to engage with new evidence.

Rediscovery of Language

How we speak about things both reflects and shapes how we think and act. There seems to be an increasing shift from verbs to nouns as we turn activities into commodities. "Healing"

becomes "healthcare"; "learning" is confused with "school." As a parent of school age children, I've heard countless times that school professionals worry about how much learning has been hindered or lost due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our family even received a robocall from the school superintendent thanking us for taking care of their students during the pandemic: not only has learning become a packaged commodity of schooling, but my children have become 'students' belonging to the school district! Illich writes, "In a society whose language has undergone this shift, predicates come to be stated in terms of commodity and claims in terms of competition for a scarce resource. 'I want to learn' is translated into 'I want to get an education.' … 'I want to walk' is restated as 'I need transportation.'" Further on he writes, "In some societies the corruption of language has crippled the political fantasy to the point where the difference between a claim to commodities and a right to convivial tools cannot be understood. Limits on tools cannot be publicly discussed." (Tools p. 90-91). We must recover a common language with precision, avoiding turning activities into commodities, verbs into nouns, in order to have a public political discussion about proper limits. I posit it is precisely this issue that has led to healthcare delivery for allopathic acute care far outpacing spending on public health or popular education programs. This could be said about many other sectors of the economy.

Recovery of Legal Procedure

"Along with the idolatry of the scientific method and the corruption of language, this progressive loss of confidence in political and legal processes is a major obstacle to retooling society. People come to understand that an alternative society is possible by using clear language. They can bring it about by recovering consciousness of the deep structure by which, in their society, decisions are made." (Tools p. 92) Black Live Matters and Defund the police are

current examples of this loss of confidence and an attempt to recover consciousness of the deep structures by which decisions are made. Where the rubber hits the road for our legal system - the police - Black people are challenging the obvious discrepancies in treatment that call the system into question. Our legal system tends toward favoring corporations and wealthy light skinned people over other individuals. A legal system is made up of three components: 1. A set of laws set by a governing body, 2. Peer review and consent to how those laws are applied to a specific situation, 3. Consistency with past decisions to establish fairness over time. This system can be used as an oppressive tool or a convivial one: there should be constant assessment of the tool, setting limits on its use to prevent it from infringing on personal liberties, or promoting one group over another.

Illich anticipated that a massive political and economic inversion would be necessary and inevitable if we are to survive. This is the true sense of apocalypse. Some define this word as "the end of the world," but it is more properly understood as an end of an epoch, the inversion of a political and economic system. Illich is hopeful that a tool like language, "possesses a fundamental structure that misuse cannot totally corrupt." (Tools p. 106). Further, "… the transformation of catastrophe into crisis depends on the confidence of an emerging group of clear thinking and feeling people can inspire in their peers." (Tools p. 106). This is our call to action. Illich described a problem he saw in 1973, that is just as relevant today as it was then. Understanding that problem and engaging our peers to describe the problem clearly creates the possibility of recovering our tools and ourselves.

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Conviviality after Social Platforms: Toward an Amateur Way of Dealing with the Internet

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Introduction

There is no doubt that many ways of living are performed through "social networks." These ways become even more usual as the current pandemic of Covid-19 forced socialization to be made mainly through digital means. And despite this mediation of life becoming increasingly regular, it is not a new phenomenon. It comes from, at least, the 1970s, as late industrial capitalism emerges. In this process, the old Taylorism-Fordist model gives space to a flexible way of accumulation of capital, with immense financial concentration (Harvey, 1989; Bolstanski & Chiapello, 2005).

In this essay, we want to explore why digital platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, Snapchat, Twitter, so on…) became só prevalent and relevant in our world. Our hypothesis, based on Illich's oeuvre, is that we are becoming part of the cybernetic text as tools deeply embodied in the systems.

Our hypothesis is based on how Illich[3] understood the idea of contingency. Based on that, how he understood modernity's formation as the change in, first, *causa efficiens* in *causa principalis* plus *causa instrumentalis* to, then, the current extinction of the former. In

this logic, hierarchy is a consequence of a new understanding of the tools and techniques. With this, Illich proposes an ontology of the tools, which can sound like a paradox at first glance, but it is where his synthesis leads us. In modernity, the being becomes the tool.

For conviviality, we may require a new way of dealing with technique and tools, including social platforms. For this, we propose an amateur approach to the Internet as social distancing continues as the pandemic discourages us from returning to *conspiratio*.

The Formation of Hierarchy as the Formation of Animated Tools

The idea of science, initially, as *Scientia*, was originally a division of the four causes to Aristotle (1999):

- *causa efficiens* (why something happens, the agency process)

- *causa materialis* (on what materiality is made, the matter)

- *causa formalis* (the *reason d' être*)

- *causa finalis* (the end, purpose, or objective)

That division seems to last for more than a millennium. Nevertheless, as Illich (2005a) argues, as a result of a change in how humankind perceived reality, *causa efficiens* is split into two different causes: *causa principalis* (as the leading agency process) and *causa instrumentalis* (as the tools used by the agent).

In other words, there was a perceptual division of the agency in the world. That happened because it was created a *distality* (in Illich, or "mediality" in Agamben) in the use of tools. Before, the tool (*organon*) was not conceptually different from a human organ, like the hand or the month. The hammer, for instance, was seen as an extension of the hand. That is why both the hammer and the human who used the hammer were analyzed inside the *causa efficiens*. However, by the beginning of the second millennium after Christ, a perceptual

division as tools became more prevalent as time goes by. As such, man, on one side, and tool, on the other, began to be seen as separate causes: *causa principalis* and *causa instrumentalis*.

For a modern human, that can sound odd or even silly. But the relationship between humans and tools are not transhistorical; it changes over time. The creation of distality between humans and tools was, on the one hand, an assertion that tools became increasingly relevant and, on the other, an effort to separate who we are from what we use. As Agamben (2016) points out, the technique creates an autonomous sphere. The tool begins to be seen as neutral, independent of its user.

In this sense, tools ceased being part of the human intention and began to exist in a separate *plateau*. This separation imposes an ontological rupture in human existence. From this, it becomes possible for the tool to be a different being, even a human being. As Agamben points out, even the slave in classical Greece was not a modern understanding tool, but part of the owner's use. The modern worker, on the other hand, is a tool for the owner of the company. The human body is not used anymore; it is instrumentalized; it becomes a tool.

We want to explore the idea that the typology Illich develops in *Tools for Conviviality* makes possible this reification of the human body. For Illich (1973), we can, analytically, separate tools into two groups: the *power tools* and the *hand tools*. The latter are tools that can be used, that can be an extension of our bodies, what was before the organon. However, the former is a new form of tool that emerges in the second millennium after Christ. It is a kind of tool that can exist and operate almost without external human energy. If hand tools are bicycles, power tools are cars. If hand tools can be things like hand plows, power tools are ox plows. We can even use a shovel to take dirt from a place, but we can pay a man to do the same. A shovel is a hand tool; the man is a power tool.

Illich realized that conviviality could only be achieved when hand tools are predominant since power tools are, in a way or the other, ways to exploit (nature or other

human beings). In an exploitative system, there is the creation of a hierarchy, and, thus, conviviality becomes impossible.

In his reflection on public options, Illich (1979) describes three interrelated axes of choices: a) the justice of social class, as the X-axis; b) the usage of technologies (light or heavy) as the Y-axis; and c) the subsistence/commoditization as the Z-axis.

A convivial society should be socially distributed, without classes, with light use of technology, and highly based on subsistence. After all, if conviviality cannot be achieved by power tools, which manipulate humankind, communism is rendered impossible.

After all, "progress," as what becomes understood in modern days, is not a dream: it is a threat. As Esteva (1987) reminds us, "development" was historically seen as a threat by peasants and vernacular communities. Moreover, as we see in Latin America in the current days, most large-scale atrocities are made in the name of development or progress. The most successful movements in our present time are based on this vernacular understanding, as the Zapatistas or the Rojava revolution.

So the creation of distality and the consequent split of *causa efficiens* in *causa principalis* and *causa instrumentalis* made possible an organized way to exploit humankind and nature. The body ceased to be of use to become, progressively, a means to produce, a means to an end. The end, in modern days, is the market.

But more than this, this split in the causes and the fact that humans begin to be tools open the possibility to an inversion in the agency system. As more and more people become tools for others, humankind loses its ability to act and create progressively and evolves, more and more, into a tool. At first, this happens with institutions that introduce what Weber (2014) described as bureaucracy: an impersonal system that instrumentalizes humans to produce something. For Illich, these institutions are a set of rules that transform human agency within predefined organizations. As humanity seeks guarantees, humans lose

autonomy.

Illich describes this process happening in a wide range of institutions, as in the case of medical corporations, that work against the health by reifying the body. While doing so, the medical corporation produces iatrogenesis, a process that creates more harm than good (Illich, 1974; 1975). He also showed how educational institutions are a propaganda machine for the capitalist system, producing skilled workers rather than anything else (Illich, 1971).

The widespread omnipresence of institutions, based on a creed of development that became hegemonical in the post-war occident, created the modern man: *homo miserabilis*. From the primary desires, like surviving, until the most complex wishes, like to love, humanity has been replaced by needs sustained by institutions. As parts of a complex industrial apparatus, men and women have needs, like machines have (Illich, 1996). That is why the modern body is "freightable": even our need to move, to be free, can be replaced by a set of needs (Illich, 1986).

The technological hypothesis Illich offers makes it possible to understand the creation and legitimization of modern hierarchy within an ontology of tools. After all, if modernity is the historical realm where human exploitation is possible by their reification as a *power tool*, the process of agency is set in reverse order, rendering humans as tools instead of users. It's not only that *causa efficiens* splits in two, but that for most modern humans, it becomes *causa instrumentalis*. The agency process is transferred to institutions - or, in the late 20th century, social systems - through contingency. If, in the pre-modern world expressed by Aquinas, "God uses [angels] as instrumental causes towards the desired end" (Illich, 2005a, p.79), in the secularized world, as God's realm transposes to Earth, humans assume angels' position and institutions plays God's role. As Agamben (2019) notes, secularization is not, by any means, a rupture with religious thinking but a transposition of religious thought into a mundane one.

To more fully understand the historical transformation that occurred in the aftermath of the bifurcation of *causa efficiens*, one must also consider symbolic fallout. Contingency, originally in Aristotelian logic, was a sentence whose capacity to be true depended on another sentence's truth. For instance, the sentence "the name of our nearest star is Sun" is true but contingent on the sentence "we are on Earth - or in the solar system." Later, in Augustine, contingency becomes something more metaphysical. It is everything that happens outside our will, outside our agency. It's God's will (Illich, 2005).

In this metaphysics, contingency is the constant and omnipresent will of God. In this sense, everything that is not made by us, humans, is made by God. That's why leaves fall, why the Sun appears at the beginning of the day, why it winds or rains. If I can't say who did something, it's a contingency. It's God's providence. It's God's agency. By this pre-modern definition, contingency is everything that I can't change, where agency meets its limits. Illich shows us there is something relevant here in the change of how humans perceive reality: why something happens begins to be a question, a problem. Our *reason d'être* is not a given anymore (Illich, 2005).

But in the second millennium, something happened that made possible a change in contingency's interpretation. According to Illich (2005a), Thomas Aquinas changed the understanding of what is contingency. It's not God's will all the time, but God's will through a complex network of envoys - angels, archangels, the agency of its own creations on his behalf. This new interpretation made possible modernity and its way of dealing with tools, splitting *causa efficiens* into the two new causes: *causa principalis* and *causa instrumentalis*. More than this, a being can be *causa instrumentalis* sometimes and *causa principalis* at other moments. An angel acting on God's will is a tool, an *instrumentum animatum*, what Agamben (2016) calls an *automaton*. But, let's say, hypothetically, this same angel has free

time: what he does as a free angel, if such a thing would be possible, is part of the realm of the *causa principalis*. So he is both a being, an agent, and an animated tool, an automaton.

God's providence carried out by animated tools have consequences in the way modernity is based. The first one is the naturalization of an idea of hierarchy. After all, if God can create something to produce his will, there is an omnipresent natural chain of command, a universal hierarchy that acts upon us all. As Illich presents us with the hypothesis of Aquinas's new way of understanding contingency based on modernity, hierarchy in an ontology based on *animated tools* can be seen as the kick-off to modernity. This makes it possible to understand natural laws as extensions of God's will too.

A second consequence is the secularization of hierarchy. If there is God and, below him, archangels and then angels, at some points, this chain of command reaches humans. Firstly, a man that cannot be wrong would interpret God's will, like the Pope, and then bishops and priests until this long chain reaches the average person. In the end, it would be fair to say that everyone, from the highest authority on Earth to the blue-collar worker, becomes an *instrumentum* of God's will. And that's why, as of late modernity approaches with what Illich called The Age of Systems and reached its full potential, human agency is lost, and *causa principalis* is obliterated by *causa instrumentalis*. We are all tools now.

The Age of Systems

In *Medical Nemesis*, Illich (1975) describes how medical institutions create more harm than good, in what he calls iatrogenesis. He proposed there are two thresholds of healthcare. The first one was significant improvements, like clean water, sewage systems, basic hygiene, and the knowledge to deal with pain and diseases. That first watershed, once crossed, marked a notable life improvement. But, once crossed, it made it possible to believe that ailments and death could be beatable.

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Legitimized by the first, a second threshold, then, was crossed. It is a counterproductive one that created terrible effects on everyone's lives. When medical advancements developed beyond the second threshold, human lives became delivered to institutions, to medical corporations, to formal organizations. What could be seen as a significant victory of modernity over death is, actually, a victory over our bodies. Despite the few years gained with these advancements, life is increasingly no longer a product of desire but production. Modern life becomes a very productive enterprise at the expense of autonomous or vernacular ways, reducing the body itself to its possibilities as a tool. To these terrible consequences, Illich (1975) proposed the concept of iatrogenesis, which he split into three types: the clinical, the social, and the structural[4].

Clinical iatrogenesis is more easily understood, as numerous medical mistakes or procedures are considered correct but are doing more harm than good. Shortly, clinical iatrogenesis is, as Cayley (2020) points out, when "you get the wrong diagnosis, the wrong drug, the wrong operation, you get sick in hospital etc." It is when someone becomes infected with Covid because he went to the hospital to be checked for a minor issue.

Social iatrogenesis occurs when medical knowledge is considered objective truth, above choice, above us. For instance, when a fatal disease acts upon a patient and the medical facilities act in the way of capturing his final energy to deal with ineffective treatments instead of having the final moments with its dear ones. This iatrogenesis weakens social ties and turns social and personal issues into treatable health issues. In an iatrogenic society, sadness and even grief are seen to be health issues - not existential ones. In this way, social iatrogeny is a development of institutions where the medical corporation is an interpreter of reality. As such, the doctor is the one who can tell you who you can see, what to do, and how

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4 In some translations (i.e., Illich, 1978), "structural" iatrogenesis appears as "cultural" iatrogenesis.

to interact with people.

But the third type of iatrogenesis is even more harmful: it's what Illich called structural iatrogenesis. It is when cultural abilities are replaced by what is assumed as objectively better.

Structural iatrogenesis is the concept that describes the injury inflicted by healthcare services to all modern humans. It happens when humans begin to believe their ways of dealing with problems, like grieving for lost ones or psychologically helping friends are not correct. When we can no longer ask for help among friends or neighbors, but only to specialized services, structural iatrogenesis can be noted. As time goes, this iatrogenesis produces a progressive replacement of collective abilities for institutional services. People inflicted by this iatrogenesis lose abilities, no longer having autonomy in dealing with pain, diseases, or mental distress. But since such a concept can only appear in the absence of a vernacular ability, one can seldom note it.

As even grieving became something contemporary humans understand they should abdicate, death began to be perceived as a problem to be solved in the future. Ultimately, death became a production problem, not a issue of life (Casagrande & Freitas, 2020). As we became tools, social and structural iatrogenesis is consequent. The human body is delivered to medical institutions, undermining autonomy's possibilities, destroying vernacular values. In the context of the current pandemic, Agamben (2020) proposes the following question:

> How could we have accepted, solely in the name of a risk that it was not possible to specify, that persons who are dear to us and human beings, in general, should not only die alone but — something that had never happened before in history, from Antigone to today — that their cadavers should be burned without a funeral?

After the war, under the hegemonical ideology of development, the human body became the iatrogenic body, mediated by experts, doctors, and institutions. Even though most

of the popular books written by Illich were denouncing the problems that institutions create in modernity - as most of his thinking in the 1970s - his criticism evolved as times presented us with a new kind of modernity. If medical institutions create structural iatrogenesis, in the 1980s, Illich pointed out that "today's major pathogen is [...] the pursuit of a healthy body" (Illich, 1986). The medical doctor is inside us now. The structural iatrogenesis grew inside us.

In this way, we internalize the institutions. We replace our desires with the projection of what our desires should be. The new *homo miserabilis* is not someone that separates its needs, recognized by institutions or formal organizations, from itself. He became what would be recognized as a being with needs.

As both an institution and, then, part of a cybernetic text, health became a project to transform our bodies into information, a form of profound disembodiment. As tools, our bodies become a limiting factor in the conduct of work (training, retention etc), whose loss in death translates to the loss of decades of training. As *instrumentum animatum*, humanity seeks to lose mortality and even to lose the ability to die. In this interim, we also lose the ability to live. Samerski (2018) notes, life is now equivalent to risk management. In the current pandemic, every interaction we can possibly have is calculated by the risk of being infected (or infecting). To see a dear one, is it worth the risk of 1% of this chance? And 01%? Maybe 0.01%? In the end, we can assure ourselves that no risk is acceptable and, then, interaction can only be mediated by digital means.

Social platforms - or networks - in the current days are part of this structural iatrogenesis. According to Boyd and Ellison (2006), the social network websites are based on public (or semipublic) profiles. Each profile is displayed to others. In this way, people can "walk" through other people's profiles, finding these even more profiles on a geometric scale. Boltanski & Chiapello (2009) points out that creativity, reactivity, and flexibility are the main natural laws of this capitalism based on connectivity. They analyze how labor became a

project-based career. In these kinds of jobs, employability is based on the idea of how well connected is someone. "Network," in this way, replaces stable structures anchored in a fixed point, like State, family, church, or other institutions.

On the one hand, this offers flexibility and new adventures in life, seen as a fluid process. On the other hand, nothing appears to be stable anymore. Since flexibility is rendered possible, these changes can be seen as desirable. The *status quo* sells it as an emancipatory way of living as if institutions' goal is to end oppression, which is illusory at best.

As such, the distinction between professional and personal life is blurry. On the one hand, capitalism puts under tension the division between true friendship (as in *philia*) and what Granovetter (1973) called "weak social ties," fickle companies based on shared interests. On the other hand, the rupture with the industrial Fordist model, as an impersonal one, makes necessary new organizational devices that demand competencies. These competencies are not objective skills or knowledge, but the subjective self-giving in favor of the labor or the organization. Humans are not impersonal tools anymore, but subjective tools in a complicated and vast system.

In these new labor relations, communication possibilities are crucial. And that's why social platforms are so relevant: they provide multiple possible connections. But as any social relationship becomes a possible project required to survive, people's subjectivity becomes increasingly more instrumental. Everyone should be open, available, in a good mood, and all these become 'relational competencies' required to work and survive.

Rodrigues (2010) understands that, within this cyberspace, there is a constant process of construction and expression of identity. This identity is not a personal identity but a worker role identity. We all became profiles or even brands. The logic of digital platforms promotes a convergence to a single space of all information and references about someone. Through its

digital profile, this reference is made by a persona that presents the world with narratives about itself.

Like power tools, we became part of a giant cybernetic network. In this sense, we think that in the same way *lay literacy* (as in Illich, 1986) changed subjectivities consequent to the achievement of mass literacy in former centuries, there is a new subjectivity arising from our historical time. As social networks and the Internet turn us more and more into tools to their ends, we internalize how these tools use us.

Simondon (2007) highlights that every invention (ethics, technical and scientific) that begins as a means of liberation and rediscovery of man becomes, through historical evolution, an instrument that turns against its own ends. It becomes a sphere of control of human actions, limiting agency to the symmetry between machines and humans. Such symmetry can already be seen with the Internet and social platforms, where algorithms and human decisions are intertwined.

Institutions are now integrated into a cybernetic text, and the separation between tools and users are lost. If *causa efficiens* was, back in Aristotle's days, the sole agent of reality, since *organon* were both hand and tool, now *causa instrumentalis* is the agent - and we are tools. This produces a deep ontological jump to understand our 21st-century reality, as cybernetic personality reaches the subjectivity of us all.

Social platforms are part of this dystopian nightmare where we are not our bodies anymore, but a reflection of what our mediated senses understand we should be.

> This brings back to the fore the idea of managerial fascism found in the first texts of Illich from the 1970s. It is the idea of internalization, through cooptation or the kidnapping of the individuals' subjectivities, the values and ideals of the company and its members, namely, of maximization of efficiency and maintenance of safety and order. In this sense, the jogging apps, the online publications of visits to certain places (through "check-ins," "stories," and different social media posts) and other ways of reporting personal life strengthen mutual control and quantify lives to the point of achieving omnipresence of competition and of the conception of risk, which leads to burnout, fear, anxiety, and depression (Casagrande & Freitas, 2020,

p.267).

The problem of social platforms is that we are, in fact, the tools of it – and not the other way around. The platforms and their algorithms play us. Our behavior, especially in social isolation times, can be predicted until a certain point. We are watched all the time. Agency is not ours anymore, but c*ausa instrumentalis*. The world is out of our hands, and social platforms are one step farther in the transitioning to the *homo miserabilis*, the *instrumentum animatum*. Our body is not ours anymore: it is a *power tool*.

In opposition to this, Illich presented conviviality to be understood as a postindustrial possibility in our time (Esteva, 2014). Far from an impossible utopia, conviviality is experienced by many communities, like the Zapatistas, as described by Callahan (2012; 2019) and Esteva (2014, p. 151): "In liberating hope from its intellectual and political prison, the Zapatistas created the possibility of a renaissance, which is now emerging in the net of plural paths they discovered or is invented daily by the imagination they awakened."

To live in a convivial society requires recovering the commons, fighting social injustice, and rediscovering subsistence. One could only achieve genuine conviviality absent the human body's reification, which means no human could be a power tool. For this, power tools could not be the main way we technically deal with the world around us.

To eventually achieve a convivial society, we want to explore the possibility that we should invert the relationship between cybernetics and us. If lay literacy was an introjection of the text into the reader, we could say the lay cybernetics is the same in this new age. Instead of lay cybernetics, we should seek clerical cybernetics in the same sense clerical literacy was the ability to read and write. For this, we believe the Internet should be seen as an amateur[5], a playful place. Since our bodies' transformation into social system tools was

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5 By "amateur," we mean a set of practices that are not subject to professionalization, that mixes ludic with production, relatively subsistent ways of producing information. We sense that, if a convivial community is desired, probably the first achievable characteristic of it is the possibility to deal in a more amateur way with the

made possible by the historical secularization process of contingency, a way out could be to profane it (as in Agamben, 2019). As the author points out, it is not an easy task, but it should assume playfulness instead of production. There is no prescription or model to profane and, then, restore the use of our bodies. It's only by experimentation, playfulness, and discovery that one could profane contingency, as Agamben remember us kids do.

If there is any chance of a cybernetic space that allows conviviality, it is only through non-professional ways. Instead of companies and corporations that control information production and consumption, convivial possibilities redirect us to self-made websites, home web servers, blogs instead of Facebook profiles, and "timelines." Indeed, such kinds of alternatives are not so economical, take time, and, ultimately, do not always produce a well-finished product. But, at the same time, it creates numerous possibilities, including, we hope, convivial possibilities.

One counterargument to ours' could be that convivial possibilities require *conspiratio*, to breathe the same air, to feel the same physical environment. And while we are inclined to agree with this, two problems come to mind. The first is the pandemic context, which requires, at least at some level, social distancing. The second is a broader historical context in which we are all contained when the Internet became unavoidable in our daily lives. In a way, our suggestive argument does not intend to solve the structural problems Illich wrote about contemporary society, but to mitigate its deepening seeking to possible future yet unknown alternatives to our bodies reduction to system's tools.

An amateur way of dealing with the Internet could create new possibilities but also produce knowledge about how the cybernetic text operates and its nature. Simondon (2007) argues that the most significant cause of alienation in the contemporary world lies in this

tools that surround us.

ignorance of the machine resulting from the lack of knowledge of its nature. For Simondon, technical objects are both reflective of our agency over the world as they produce their relationship with humans. In this way, to solve the alienation problem, humans should assume tools are handled and handle us. As social isolation persists relative to pre-pandemic social interactions, a conviviality project should rethink the ways we use the Internet in favor of less professional, more amateur, ways of dealing with our physical distance. Otherwise, we sense that social platforms will instrumentalize us even more, creating a new kind of dystopia inconceivable even for Orwell or Huxley. In engaging in an amateur Internet, we don't suggest the profound crisis of modernity and the reduction of the human to system's tools will be superseded. Still, we sense this is the immediate alternative to create better alternatives eventually. Then, maybe one day we can rethink and rebuild the social ties based on community, commons and subsistence.

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Deschooling and the Ascendant Technosophy

William Kuehnle

Introduction

"Children should sometimes be released from the narrow constraint of school, otherwise their natural joyousness will soon be quenched. When the child is set free, he soon recovers his natural elasticity" (Kant 2001, 92). On the surface, these musings might seem like the stirrings of deschooling sentiments such as those pronounced and refined by Ivan Illich. At some later date, the Kantian overtones of Illich's work might make for an intriguing study. However, the peril of the present is such that one feels compelled to put aside discretionary curiosity in favor of the imminent critique. The imminent critique, in Freire's terms, consists of a dialogic relation (Freire 2017, 79). Under scrutiny in the pages that follow is not the relation of the revolutionary subject to the dehumanized community, per Freire's original meaning. Nor does this paper intend to demonstrate the asymmetric returns in the relation between technology and education. Rather, what follows concerns strictly the relation between Ivan Illich's concept of deschooling and the present crisis in education. Has the distance learning revolution instigated by the pandemic perverted the ideas presented in *Deschooling Society*, thereby demonstrating the limits of deschooling? If so, how does this fulfill or illuminate Illich's later reflections on schooling and society?

These questions arise from a moment in time Ivan Illich anticipated decades ago. This is a moment of medical, technological, and educational crisis. Parents and guardians of

schoolchildren in such a time as this might find themselves wondering whether Kant's notion of joyous and spontaneous children was prescience or delusion. This past year, tens of millions of American school children found their daily institutionalization relocated from the symbolic structure of incarceration, the school, to the intimacy of their own homes. Hundreds of millions of children around the world found themselves in possession of a disfigured freedom. Admittedly, these young people were released from the narrow constraints of their daily schedules, their creaking desks, and their aging school buildings. However, schooling left the building with the students. Aphorisms like the one quoted at the outset of this paper refract in a subsequent crisis in one of two ways: as prophecy or irony. A stupefying liberator has, in fact, arrived to release the young from the "narrow constraint of school." But, sending students home has hardly opened the way to a deschooled utopia. Instead, in a monumental stroke of irony, the distance learning revolution resembles deschooling, but only as a distorted parody. Observant parents, teachers, and students see the educational response to COVID-19 not only as a colossal step away from freedom in education, but as proof of Illich's mantra "*Corruptio optimi quae est pessima* [the corruption of the best is the worst]" (Cayley and Illich 2005, xv).

Without a bit of additional context, any analysis that addresses this corruption is senseless. Both Illich's educational vision and the crisis unfolding before us warrant elaboration. Prior to the publication of *Deschooling Society* and Illich's crash into education theory, observers of education saw schools undertaking ever greater schemes of disproportionality. This increasing disproportionality was the immediate context of Illich's philosophy of education. In the terms Illich later used to define proportionality, "the appropriateness of [the] relationship" in schools was decaying beyond remedy (Illich 1994). Illich surveyed the relationships between student and school, student and teacher, student and peer, and student and curriculum, and saw that each was

disfigured. The peril posed by this disintegration compelled the publication of *Deschooling Society* five decades ago, a text which students of Ivan Illich consider an indispensable introduction to the themes of his philosophy. *Deschooling Society* offers a diagnosis for this disintegration, a discussion of the illusions and alienations innate to the schooling system, and a handful of modest proposals toward a society without schooling.

The peril of the alienation that results from such disproportionality has been amplified to new extremes in the wake of COVID-19. The crisis in education now is not one of gradual disfigurement, but a rapid transmutation of one kind of institution into another much more sinister kind. Illich identified the universalization and compulsion of schooling as the reasons for its disorientation, but the menace that has appeared today as students are schooled in utter alienation brings with it the dawning of a new, all-encompassing disfigurement. In Illich's time, the school had taken part in the institutionalizing trend afflicting medicine, vocational work, and society at large. In our time, novel forms of oppressive institutionalization, the imperializing tentacles of technology, and the stakes of global health have empowered the greatest possible perversion of deschooling.

As state and local governments shuttered schools, these institutions were compelled to change in a manner more rapid and dramatic than any other time in the century and a half of compulsory schooling. Despite the fact that commentators and analysts concurred that the "US education system was not built to deal with extended shutdowns like those imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic," American schools were unwilling (or unable) to leave schoolchildren alone (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, and Viruleg 2020, 2). In the process, schools found an even bolder means of oppressing the individual: direct invasion of the home. Technology has been promoted from a privileged flourish to the sole medium of instruction. In this sense, the

pandemic now presents to the coteries of institutional education and their technocratic friends a most powerful ally, as this new context has catalyzed a technological imperialism over schooling, home, and society. In short, the threat of the normality facing Illich in 1970 quickly evolved this year into the gravest educational crisis since *Deschooling Society* was published.

The analysis that follows aims to consider the problematic implementation of distance learning-as-deschooling within several frameworks. First, it is timely to ask whether the events of the past year and the new normal of distance learning in any sense followed the prescriptions of Illich's first critiques in *Deschooling Society*. Second, it is proper to ask how Illich's later reflections and concessions regarding the limitations of deschooling – especially as expressed in *Imprisoned in the Global Classroom* - explain the dysfunction of the educational services offered in the spring and fall of 2020. Third, it is worthwhile to remark on the ways in which the transformation of our social imagination regarding knowledge in the age of digital learning parallels the transformation of our social imagining of water as Illich described in *H_2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness.* Finally, some conclusions and cautious gestures forward might be achieved through consideration of what Illich himself might say to this crisis.

Mechanisms of *Deschooling* and Distance Learning

In 1970, the rebuked radical Monsignor Ivan Illich published his diagnostic critique of and propositions regarding the emerging normalcy of compulsory institutional education. His concerns bear repeating, and the provisions offered in *Deschooling Society* regarding a path toward deschooling are especially timely. The question in discussion in the passage that follows is whether Illich's suggestions in that text in any fashion resemble the present educational

landscape. If so, does the ersatz solution of distance learning resemble the guidance recommended in *Deschooling Society* out of sincerity, or as a parody?

Illich's basic critiques in *Deschooling Society* continue to ring true, despite later retractions from Illich himself. Recent scholarship on the evolving philosophy of Ivan Illich notes his shifting attitude toward those initial criticisms: "in the early 1980s… he refocused his quest toward the roots (origins) of modern certitudes, such as those related to education by engaging himself in historical analysis rather than concentrating on responses to specific contemporary problems" (Bruno-Jofré and Zaldívar 2012, 575). Illich himself even went so far as to say later of his work, "While my criticism of schooling in that book may have helped some people reflect on the unwanted social side effects of that institution — and perhaps pursue meaningful alternatives to it — I now realize that I was largely barking up the wrong tree" (Illich 1996, vii). Even so, the principal relevance of *Deschooling Society* in this paper prioritizes the relation between the learning webs proposed in its latter passages and the digital communities formed to replace schools shuttered by the global pandemic. The two may, in fact, relate to one another perversely, as will be demonstrated.

The proposals offered in the 1970 pamphlet represent a rehabilitation of education in four parts. Each of the components for deschooling explicated in *Deschooling Society* aims to introduce students to the tools, wisdom, and connections that could, as Gert Biesta might say, help along in the formation of "a human being who exists differently in the world" (Biesta 2019). The four alternatives to "schooling" are, in order, Reference Services to Educational Objects, Skill Exchanges, Peer Matching, and Reference Services to Educators-at-Large (Illich 1972, 34). The purpose of these mechanisms was to free the world of the crippling restraints of education: in other words, to facilitate the deschooling of society. Widely available educational objects and

networks might help reorient education away from the limits of the school toward the freedom to learn: "It must not start with the question, "What should someone learn?" but with the question, "What kinds of things and people might learners want to be in contact with in order to learn?" (Illich 1972, 34). It is now fitting to ask: has the new normal of at-home education made use of these "learning webs," or merely warped them in order to further the disproportionality of education?

Briefly, let us consider each of the four deschooling mechanisms and its relation to the new distance learning systems implemented across the United States, even around the world. First, the Reference Services to Educational Objects. "Things are basic resources for learning" claims Illich, but what of "things" in a pandemic (Illich 1972, 34)? What becomes of "things" When "things" might carry the contagion? Schooling placed things – lab equipment, textbooks, even basic toys for games – within the circumscribed authority of the institution. "Control of school over educational equipment" represented to Illich, as it still does to many, the counterproductive supervision typical of disproportionality (Illich 1972, 35). Limited access to educational objects persisted as the reigning normality into the 21st century, but with the arrival of this pandemic, has distance learning created a system for interacting freely with these tools?

Not quite. Ironically, school districts throughout the United States and around the globe instituted compulsory tool distribution. Students were not offered the freedom of choice in the context of their home to learn, touch, or experiment according to the movements of their mind. Rather, schools extended the most extreme form of technocratic intervention in modern educational history. Primary and secondary schools distributed millions of laptops in order to extend their direct control over the contours of learning, even within the home (Herold 2020). Microscopes and globes and jump ropes sat unused for months at a time while students (many of

whom still lack access to the internet) found themselves waiting in long lines to pick up laptops they did not ask for, the targets of ever-increasing technological deployment (Puranam 2020). Schools have been closed, and many remain so, yet deschooling with respect to educational objects has not been accomplished, but perverted.

Second, Illich proposed Skill Exchanges as a convivial means of deschooling societies. The new normality of remote teaching might have forced a question into the civic sphere: are teachers still the best means of educating children? Ivan Illich understood the natural assumption that teachers ought to represent the ordinary means of educating, but questioned the universality of this perspective. *Deschooling Society* proposed new kinds of networks which might connect learners to an individual "who possesses a skill and is willing to demonstrate its practice" (Illich 1972, 38). The repudiation of teachers as educational autocrats would, according to *Deschooling Society*, represent an opportunity to introduce new figures into the educational regime. On the utility of these individuals, Illich observed,

> The parents' insistence that the teacher and the person with skills be combined in one person is understandable, if no longer defensible. But for all parents to aspire to have Aristotle for their Alexander is obviously self-defeating. The person who can both inspire students and demonstrate a technique is so rare, and so hard to recognize, that even princelings more often get a sophist than a true philosopher. (Illich 1972, 38)

If such exchanges had been broadly implemented in the 20th century, the normalcy left behind by the pandemic might have been a better one and one more readily maintained in quarantine.

However, through the end of the 20th century into this one, schooling remained disproportionate., the teacher-student relation perhaps most of all. The new normal of distance learning has only made this even more so. Skill exchanges could exist easily in the world of Zoom, Teams, Skype, and Hangouts. These channels and others allow millions to contact strangers simply on the condition that one desires to learn and the other desires to teach. Yet, as this new era in education dawns, one notes a stale and stolid reality: no new actors have been introduced. With the near endless possibilities opened by tools like Zoom, schooling has gone on as before. Teachers control student learning, gauge student success, and pass on to them the skills and content determined by state agencies as best they can. So, with respect to Illich's

second deschooling mechanism – Skill Exchanges – the crisis of distance learning has created an opportunity but squandered it by maintaining the role of old pedagogues.

Third, Peer Matching. Much the same can be said regarding this proposal as was said above. Even as young people were set free by the pandemic to pursue their own aims, the system in place to connect students to their peers remained unchanged. Millions of elementary school children saw the same faces that they saw in a classroom only weeks prior now looking bewildered back at them through a screen. The methods of selecting and aggregating peers have remained the same, even as the means of interaction have changed dramatically. Ivan Illich imagined a world in which someone, animated by the freedom of the Good Samaritan, identifies and loves his or her neighbor in freedom. Yet, such freedom to identify and love one's classmates at will remains out of reach for students, despite the opportunity this pandemic presents.

Deschooling has very near its center the availability of Peer Matching networks. In the most succinct terms, "To deschool means to abolish the power of one person to oblige another person to attend a meeting. It also means recognizing the right of any person, of any age or sex, to call a meeting" (Illich 1972, 40). Yet, in the hopeless pursuit of normalcy, meetings were called by the same authorities each week, or even each day, to the same networks of peers. This perversion represents, in view of Illich's proposal, a parody of the deschooling mission.

Fourth, and finally, *Deschooling* Society recommended Reference Services to Educators-at-Large. Though the work of these entities are anomalous, certain reference services to join educators and students have grown during this pandemic. One example of such a service is the SchoolHouse microschool initiative (Keates 2020). Such initiatives connect individual families and local, highly qualified educators. If, in freedom, the two choose to enter a relationship as

teacher and class, then a microschool is established. Ventures like this deserve attention from devotees to deschooling, as one can speculate with some confidence that Ivan Illich would have considered such an endeavor promising. Aspiring toward a deschooled future, Illich wrote, "As citizens have new choices, new chances for learning, their willingness to seek leadership should increase" (Illich 1972, 42). This willingness is given a vehicle through initiatives like this one, although they remain far from common. School districts, dioceses, and private school networks have kept clutched hands around educational objects, control of peer groups, and educational hierarchies. Thus, a relation between deschooling and the present crisis can only be properly described with a single term: perversion.

The new normal is a perversion, or at best a poor imitation, of these deschooling mechanisms. Rather than allow students and educators to connect freely, the compulsion and assignment of relations remains. Rather than connect students to the tools and individuals who might help them learn on their own terms, the imposition of the school system goes on through technological means. The technological dimension of this new normal constitutes the second portion of this analysis.

Limitations of *Deschooling* and the Technosophic Ascendency

If the tools to create a deschooled society are so easily distorted, does this undermine Ivan Illich's entire educational perspective? Given Illich's own admission of this possibility in *Imprisoned in the Global Classroom*, contemporary commentators ought to read his later sense of the limitations of the deschooling concept sympathetically. Along with Etienne Verne, Illich begins the opening passage of *Imprisoned in the Global Classroom* with a dreary admission: "An analysis of the defects of the school system no longer stirs anyone to action" (Illich and Verne

1981, 9). The reigning normality of the preceding decades was one of change – namely, increasing technological dependence in the classroom. Observers of this change cried out, but as Illich predicted no one was stirred to action (Young 2006). This gradual transformation, however, has been surpassed by a new normal. In light of the current pandemic, technology is not simply one tool among several available to the educator. As stated above, remote teaching looks to the machine as the indispensable medium through which education takes place. This is not merely a mutilation of deschooling, but consideration of this technological dependence will prove the limits of the deschooling concept and identify the rise of a "technosophic" perspective, both of which Illich anticipated clearly.

Imprisoned in the Global Classroom includes reflections on lifelong learning, a concept used by many and rebuked by a few. Beyond Illich and Verne, contemporary scholars such as Gert Biesta as well as David and Catherine Matheson have also contested the legitimacy of this notion (Biesta 2017, Matheson and Matheson, 1996). The two essays of *Imprisoned in the Global Classroom* specifically question the utility of new compulsory training for French workers, and Illich uses this development as an occasion to reflect back on his claims about deschooling from the decade prior. In the course of this reflection, he not only names some of the limitations to deschooling afflicting current distance learners, but also identifies an entirely novel threat, one most relevant to the educational norms of 2020: the technosophic illusion.

First, as stated earlier, Illich himself repudiated at the very least the broader aims of *Deschooling Society*. In *Imprisoned in the Global Classroom*, Illich and Verne anticipate certain shortcomings or possible abuses in projects to deschool society, and these shortcomings align precisely with the failures of the new normal which is virtual education. In particular, Illich and Verne note that "deschooling" understood in a vacuum might allow for the complete imperialism

of educational institutions over one's life. This process was underway in France in the form of new, ongoing training standards required of industrial workers. Comparing the plight of such a worker with that of the student, Illich sees that the threat of deschooling is that it might invite "permanent education" as a new norm (Illich and Verne 1981, 11). One alternative to schooling, Illich foresaw, was the introduction of a new regime without buildings or walls to restrain it. The schooling regime Illich warned of in this text would require that schooling follow the individual for the rest of his or her life, as he saw before him: "two complementary aims: the deschooling of educational processes and the introduction of permanent education" (Illich and Verne 1981, 11).

While distance learning has yet to require permanent diligence of its students, the prediction that deschooling can be warped was made by Illich decades prior to the consequences on schools brought about by the coronavirus pandemic. "Education without schools and schools without walls" might be adopted as the slogan of the technocratic elites benefitting the most from universal dependence on their products, but this is a phrase introduced critically by Illich in *Imprisoned in the Global Classroom* (Illich and Verne 1981, 12). One reads this text and comes away with an overwhelming sense of Illich's foresight of the perversion of deschooling. The trap whereby deschooling opens a kind of Pandora's box was visible to Illich in 1981, as he wrote of "a most dangerous and well-concealed trap, laid for it by those who wish to utilize it to justify the educational mega-machine of the year 2000" (Illich and Verne 1981, 12). Here in 2020, the educational mega-machine has placed machines in every home.

The passages quoted follow references to various parties invested in bringing about this parody of deschooling. Often, Illich describes these individuals simply as "technocrats", but in the latter portions of the text Illich ascribes to these individuals a particular mythology which he terms "technosophie" (Illich 1981, 43). Technosophy instructs its adherents in a simple truth: the

victory of technology is achieved when that technology necessitates universal, compulsory use. "Technosophs would like to do away with cars to improve transportation," Illich writes, just as the technosophs of the present crisis would like to do away with schools to improve education (Illich 1981, 45). While some technosophs are simply technocrats, both iterations of the technocratic elite have profited immensely and will continue to profit in the midst of this new normal. Technosophs and technocrats around the world have increased their wealth by billions of dollars during the pandemic, and technology corporations have increased their value as a result of the new, universal dependence of students on virtual learning (Rushe and Chalabi 2020).

The ascendant technosophy represents an illusion, a trap. The trap is tempting: why not put aside obsolete institutions if we have the technology to accomplish their goals more effectively? Illich might pose an unnerving question in response to such thinking. Which is truly the more insidious contagion: COVID-19, or the technology societies have relied upon in order to keep themselves safe from it? While the impassioned and myopic perspective would note that COVID separates students while technology brings them together, Ivan Illich would find this dichotomy too simple. Technology, as evidenced in the current crisis, is a kind of contagion of its own. The infection began through small exposures, and the period of incubation was long. And yet, in the new normal of pandemic pedagogy, one sees that the deeper invasion is perhaps not the virus which has infected tens of millions, but the technologies suddenly needed by hundreds of millions simply to see the face of their friend, read a text, or go to school. The technosophic ascendency is, in these terms, a contagion deserving its own concern.

Readers of Ivan Illich find precisely this concern guiding the claims of *Imprisoned in the Global Classroom*. This work of mid-career Illich represents an evolution, and an acknowledgement of the potential abuse of deschooling mechanisms as described above. While

Deschooling Society posited the means and channels whereby 21st century technocrats could extend their reach into the homes of schoolchildren, *Imprisoned in the Global Classroom* shows an older Illich foretelling and warning against such a future.

The New Waters of Knowledge

The final analysis of this discussion proposes a relation between Illich's later work on the of philosophy of science and a change taking place in this new educational model. By the middle of the 1980s, Illich's work turned to urban planning, social imagination, and the common sense of "stuff" to answer questions about the assumptions of society. One example of this study is Illich's work with the Dallas Institute of the Humanities and Culture, which produced the research which became *H₂O And the Waters of Forgetfulness: Reflections on the Historicity of "Stuff"*. This work offers a final opportunity for speculative reflection, as the transformation of water noted in that address parallels a present transformation of knowledge in the new normal of pandemic schooling.

Throughout his works, Illich often turns to the concept of "imagination". Even in *Imprisoned in the Global Classroom*, Illich recognizes the power of collective social imagination as the freedom of a people to think and aspire to other ways of life (Illich 1981, 49). Relatedly, the notion of imagination in *H₂O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* owes much to Gaston Bachelard, who Illich writes noted a "formal" and "material" basis for imagination (Illich 1985, 6). Imagination in these two senses refers to the capacity of a people to think of new structures, models, or forms, and the basis of their current thinking about structures, models, or forms. In both senses, Illich argues that water has undergone an imaginative revolution. Likewise, the

social imagination of "knowledge" is undergoing an imaginative revolution due to the technological means by which students around the globe are continuing their schooling.

In *H₂O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, Ivan Illich extended his incisive analysis to the change of water in the social imagination of modern people. In short, Illich argues that where water once represented a barrier or repository, it has come to be nothing more than a fluid which bears particular duties and functions. Whereas to the Greek of antiquity water possessed a "dual nature" with the capacity "to purify as well as to clean", to the modern individual water exists simply and flatly as just another commodity (Illich 1985, 27). Water had, in Illich's analysis, lost its potency, meaning, and gravity in its movement from antiquity to the present. Water was, Illich claimed, an "elusive" thing that might be "divided" in the imagination of the ancient and medieval person, but in the modern era it was now imagined merely as H₂O. Water is now merely a chemical, distinguished only by function and method of transport.

Before concluding this paper with the humblest of gestures toward the future, the role of knowledge in the social imagination must be placed alongside this change in the conception of water, as the two run parallel. Specifically, how will the new mode of acquiring knowledge, contemplating knowledge, and disseminating knowledge change its place in our formal and material imagination? Prior to the present peril, knowledge has been imagined and described by poet and pauper alike as "power" – the adage "Knowledge is Power" adorns the walls of countless school buildings in the United States. Knowledge, by this reckoning, was imagined as a thing with potency, or the means of agency. Knowledge, like a barrier, distinguished the scholar from the amateur. In the formal imagination, knowledge occupied a role like water; knowledge and water both could be imagined as a barrier, a repository, or as something elusive. Knowledge, furthermore, offered itself as a component of the material imagination. In the

material imagination, various cultural traditions around the world ascribe to deities or other mythical figures associated with knowledge a subtle wisdom and power. Yet, like water, it seems inevitable that remote learning will complete the commodification of knowledge, whose mythical embodiments in the future – and, in fact, already include - the likes of Tim Cook, Mark Zuckerberg, and Eric Yuan. Hardly figures of wisdom and power.

As students use electricity to connect virtually to a poorly animated class of peers, the knowledge shared between teacher, student, and peer is like a poorly flowing fluid. One wonders how this generation of young people will grow up to imagine the knowledge given to them as children during this pandemic. As potency and barrier? As a repository and means of agency? Or, perhaps this pandemic will succeed in ushering in a new normal: knowledge as a fluid commodity. This new normal must inspire a critical response. The devolution of such a powerful imaginative entity as knowledge to the level of mere digital fluid transferred from pedagogue to virtual peer group and back again cries out for a modern Illich to name and deconstruct this system.

Conclusion

The preceding arguments of this paper related Illich's notion of deschooling to the new normal of remote learning, acknowledged Illich's sense of the limits of deschooling and the rise of a technosophic elite, and made a speculative comparison between Illich's sense of the imagination of water and the emergence of a new role for knowledge in the imaginative scheme. These arguments rest on nothing other than the material produced by Illich himself in the past five decades, and the purpose of this discussion is simple: to show once more the clarity and foresight of Illich's criticism, especially in the realm of education. The imminent critique of the

new normal in education is best served by employing the same frameworks utilized by Illich in *Deschooling Society*: a consideration of proportionality, freedom, and learning in order to exist rightly in the world.

What might Illich say to the perils of the present? This speculation is surely outside a strictly academic line of inquiry, but his suggestions might look something like these. Reestablish vernacular modes and methods of learning. Eschew the technosophic illusion that technology can always replace the physical institution with a permanent, omnipresent option. Finally, Ivan Illich would have us reorient our genuine, well-grounded fear. The new normal has brought with it a terror, a sense of popular horror at the unknown, and for many around the world this virus has brought unspeakable loss. As Illich would say, this is nothing short of a true crisis: an opportunity to make a decision. This is an opportunity not just for educators, but for all. Will this fear and atomization remain the new normal, or might this be an opportunity to pursue an authentic deschooling of society?

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He Is Not a (neo)Liberal: Revelations of a Pandemic and the "Prophecies" of Ivan Illich[1]

Edson Pereira de Souza Leão Neto[2]

Preamble

The COVID-19 pandemic is apocalyptic. For decades, the social imagination has been shaped by the spectacle of the end times, whether through the aesthetic elegance of Tarkovsky's "Sacrifice" or the cool cybernetics of the Matrix trilogy. The culture industry's ceaseless stream of mediocrity whose core plot is a virus, a fatal disease, or an alien attack reinforces the feeling that industrial civilization is stumbling into a hecatomb.

Apocalypse, however, is the Greek term for revelation. The most famous book in Western literature on this theme is undoubtedly the Apocalypse/Revelations of Saint John. In the biblical text, we find a conceptual architecture elaborated and convincingly translated into a comparable code of images (Lourenço, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic is apocalyptic not as much for its eschatological features as for its revelatory aspect. This revealing is not to be understood in the sense of bringing to light what is hidden, but in the sense of highlighting what is ignored or forgotten.

The pandemic is, above all, a revealing experience replete with narrative and supporting images. A palimpsest contains layers of text where the prior is only

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[1]This paper has its origins in the conversations around Samar Farage and Sajay Samuel's table. I owe to them and to my wife Isabelle, the probing questions that sharpened the arguments.

[2] I have taken my last two names, Neto Leão, for my signature. I am finishing a PhD in Environment and Society in the State University of Campinas, Brazil. My dissertation is dedicated to the works of Illich, above all, to an analysis which elaborates a conceptual triad, conviviality-commons-vernacular. Alongside my companion, the artist Isabelle Cedotti, we search for the vernacular in the corners of society. Inspired by the encounters with Illich's friends and collaborators, we hope to foster/document conviviality. See more on: www.gazeproject.com.

incompletely hidden by the overwriting. The pandemic is as a palimpsest, in and

through which the text structuring industrial society is still legible. I argue, after Illich,

that the pandemic makes visible, above all, two major lines that crisscross the fabric of

contemporary societies. First, the almost total capture of the planet by property, whether

private and public, which leaves nothing to the commons or in common. This 'tragedy

of the (un)common' finds its zenith in 'Life' understood as property. Second, the rituals

of fostering, protecting, and saving lives makes 'Life' sacred. The sacralization of life

creates a new religious fetish, which few can oppose. The transformation of the

commons into property and the fetishization of 'Life' are ignored or overlooked by

those caged within the two polarized worldviews of the present: the neoliberal and the

liberal.

In this paper, I show that Illich's core arguments and his analytical diagnosis of

industrial society does not conform to either the liberal or the neoliberal position. Only a

careless reader can mistake Illich for an intellectual companion of Milton Friedman, and

his writings as supporting the program to dismantle education in Brazil which

Bolsonaro has started since 2019.[3] It is precisely this confusion that accounts for the

rediscovery of Illich, after 50 years of ostracism, in the form of *Deschooling Society*,

published by Vozes in 2018 as *Sociedade sem Escolas* (*Society without schools*). I argue

it is the inability of both the liberal and neoliberal thought collective to escape their

mental categories that make them blind to Illich's convivial dimension, a radically

distinct third way.

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[3] See the article "A negação da escola como projeto do Governo Bolsonaro" (The negation of schools as Bolsonaro's Government project) by Christian Lindberg. Written for the magazine "Portal Vermelho: esquerda bem informada" (Red Portal: left well informed) in 2019, the writer argues that Illich's ideas of vouchers and his radical critique of institutions are precursors of neoliberalism. To access it: https://vermelho.org.br/coluna/a-negacao-da-escola-como-projeto-do-governo-bolsonaro/.

In presenting this argument I suggest that Illich can be read as if he were a prophet. Todd Hartch, in *The Prophet of Cuernavaca*, has explicitly recommended such a reading (Hartch, 2014). I do understand Illich as a prophet of modernity, but on a register quite different from that adopted by Hartch. The prophetic vision of Illich is not because he could see into the future. Instead, I understand Illich as a prophet in the sense of one who reveals what he sees in the present. I believe that the prophet makes visible what is not widely acknowledged, exposes what is papered over by the shiny surfaces of the present and is therefore generally neglected. Illich did not predict the coronavirus. What Illich saw was the underlying shape of contemporary society now exposed by the coronavirus.

First Line: The Tragedy of the Uncommon

The COVID-19 pandemic starkly reveals the 'tragedy of the uncommon'. With the advent of industrialism and the enclosure of pastures, one's surroundings gradually became hostile to common use. This transformation of the commons into an environment, which is an economic resource, has occurred in all spheres of experience. Formerly, the commons was that to which people "had recognized rights of use, not to produce goods, but to provide for their homes" (Illich, 1992). It was neither enclosed by private fences nor policed by public law. The suffocation of the commons by private and public property leaves people very little on which to freely subsist. However, the distinction of the commons from the regimes of private or public property is invisible to the field of political economy in both its historical and contemporary forms.

Sajay Samuel and Jean Robert have already demonstrated that the origin of political economy, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, is based on a decisive overturning of the Aristotelian tradition. Rather than basing his arguments on the

question of what is good and just, Adam Smith legitimizes the art of economic enrichment. Under these conditions, political economy is the science that enables the wealth of individuals and nations (Samuel & Robert, 2010). For the structure of Smith's arguments to stand, it was necessary for him to explicitly ignore any and all activities that are rooted in use value (see chapter 2 of book I of *The Wealth of Nations*). Smith thus bequeaths to neo-classical economics its blindness to all but private or public ownership regimes.

What is true of neo-classical economics is also true of Marxist economics. In Chapter 1 of *Capital,* Karl Marx elaborates the function and origin of the commodity in the mode of industrial production to examine the fundamentals of exchange value. Despite rescuing the distinction between use value and exchange value, Marx devotes the rest of his work to a critique of the commodity understood as exchange value. Both Smith and Marx, although only partially, thereby ignore as historical detritus the commons – the zone beyond all ownership whether private or public – wherein people do for them and/or by themselves.

Similarly, the American ecologist, Garret Hardin, changed the historical meaning of the commons when he argued that the "tragedy of the commons" would be an inevitable result when the scarce resources were not controlled by the property regime – private or public (Hardin, 1968). Hardin's argument that access to resources that are not part of the property regime would lead to environmental collapse has become dogma. His work, which reinterpreted the commons from the perspective of acquisitive property regimes, legitimized a race to appropriate what remained of the commons.

Approximately twenty-two years later, Elinor Ostrom – Nobel Laureate in economics – partially challenged Hardin's thesis. For her, the "tragedy of the

commons" is not a necessary result of access to resources that are outside the property regime. For Ostrom, environmental abuses can be contained and avoided through sensitive methods of governance of the commons through institutions in collective action (Ostrom, 1990). She argued that the arenas of environmental conflict should be seen as the meeting place and occasion for the construction of collective institutions of sustainable governance, based on the rational action and interest of economic agents.

Both authors correctly understood the commons as an alternative to property. But neither escaped the shadow thrown by the economy. While Hardin sought to excise the commons to avoid the supposed tragedy of overuse, Ostrom sought to extend modes of economic governance to ensure the efficient use of the commons. In sharp contrast to these economistic interpretations of the commons, Ivan Illich proposed the commons as the inverse of the economy. In his many books such as *Tools for Conviviality* (1973), *Shadow Work* (1981) and above all in the essay titled, "*The Three Dimensions of Public Option*" published in *In the Mirror of the Past* (1992), Illich argued for extricating the commons from an economic or propertied reading.

Thus, Illich revived the term vernacular[4], whose etymology designated everything that was woven, cultivated, made at home, as opposed to what was sought through exchange. That is, vernacular named a way of life born of structures of mutual dependence inscribed in each aspect of existence. In such a world, there was no possibility of 'the economy' being disembedded from its deeper social matrix (Illich, 1982). Samuel has elaborated the scope of the vernacular in Illich, which does not only refer to things, places and activities, but also to ways of knowing (Samuel, 2016). The

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[4] The reader might be more familiar with the term vernacular within linguistics. Ivan Illich, however, breathes "new life into the old word". According to him, vernacular "is a technical term that comes from Roman law. It can be found there from the earliest records up to the codification by Theodosius. It designates the inverse of a commodity… Vernacular means those things that are homemade, homespun, home-grown, not destined for the marketplace, but that are for home use only" (Illich, 1981).

example of roads is instructive of the destruction of the commons by property. Today the streets are either public or private property. The streets are owned and the law of the road determines who and how they shall be used. There is no street, highway or road, within the industrial mode of production, that, like a path – hundreds of kilometers made by different peoples, like the *Guarani* in South America or the *Zapotecas* of Oaxaca – has been shaped by the communal effort of many steps. Though the use of what is in common is not without any rules, there is a gulf between communal self-determination and the myriad impositions of the law

During the pandemic, the planetary social confinement together with the emergency stoppage of the economy offer stark evidence of the disappearance of the commons. Who can supply themselves with food, basic hygiene, or shelter outside dependence on economic resources and the regimes of private and public property? Which woods, pastures, roads, and small plots still belong to the commons? And what about those who live on the exchange value earned day after day, who eat at the end of each day only if they get paid for work? Could it be that what we have left of the commons lies in the cemeteries where the countless bodies, victims of the new coronavirus are dumped? It is in this sense that the COVID-19 pandemic reveals the tragedy of the uncommon.

The social confinement and the collateral suspension of almost all social and economic activities are evidence of the complete dependence of modern industrial societies on commodities. Satellites show the sharp drop in pollution generated by China; California residents reported the excitement of seeing stars in the sky for the first time; and fish were seen after decades in the Venice canals. Such reports demonstrate the planetary violence of the industrial mode of production and confirm the environmental crisis in which we live. Property regimes have destroyed the commons.

Every property, public or private, is defended by the police. Public and private property promote exchange value. They appropriate the environment and transforms it into goods, commodities, resources. Property whether public or private, is owned and therefore governed by the rights of use. Some can be excluded from using private and public property which makes them scarce and therefore an economic resource. Twenty-eight years ago, Illich warned us that "the transformation of the environment from a commons to productive resources constitutes the most fundamental form of environmental degradation" (Illich, 1992). His prophetic remark reveals Illich is not a Luddite, but the contrary. His understanding of mature societies is based on a political struggle to seek a balance between industrial tools that promote exchange value and convivial tools that foster use value, aware that only within a certain limit and scale can they coexist (Illich, 1973; Illich, 2005).

To start regaining the commons we must first abandon the fruitless dilemma that animates our political imagination. Liberals want to restrict market forces and private property to protect society against rapacious capital. They recommend strengthening the public sphere with a stronger safety net including welfare programs for the poor, universal health and schooling, and legal protections for the environment. In contrast, neoliberals want to expand the realm of the market and restrict the public domain. They recommend abolishing welfare programs, privatizing healthcare and schooling, and selling public lands to private interests.

Illich's third way, what Gustavo Esteva calls commonism, opens a window through which one can see the flourishing of the vernacular. Autonomous communities, such as the Zapatistas of Chiapas (Mexico), the Zapotecas of Oaxaca (Mexico), or the fishers of Marujá in Ilha do Cardoso (Brazil), have abandoned the premises of scarcity[5]

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[5] lllich used the term scarcity in a very precise sense, that which was also used by the economists since Walras: the field in which the laws of economics relate subjects, institutions and commodities "within an

which define economic society and the assimilation of resources through the market or the planned economy. Avoiding the idea of technology as a means to achieve political ends and also of any belief in a technological imperative, these communities are building convivial societies, founded on the limits of proportionality (Esteva, 2018). The tragedy of the uncommon reveals how uncommon it is to imagine such a vernacular solution, based on *savoir-fare* (know-how) or what André Gorz called "spontaneous protest against the destruction of everyday culture by the devices of economic and administrative power" (Gorz, 2010).

Perhaps, this pandemic also reveals what should be obvious, what Illich stated together with some friends, thirty years ago: "we stand on soil, not on Earth". Illich's '*Declaration on Soil*' is an invitation to be with the neighbor who stands within the grasp of our hands; to engage socially and politically with those with whom we can share a piece of bread right after walking a hundred steps. To regain neighborhood communality is a far more profound and radical revolution than the advocation for the 'global commons'. Hundreds of empty schools are sitting on fertile soils. In my village, the school is becoming a garden of manioc, beans and all sorts of leaves. Reading groups and movie clubs have been formed at the local square. People are regaining the trust in their own ability to shape their surroundings according to a local proportionality. To not rely only on the commodity is the beginning for the day after 'normal'.

Our political task, what Illich suggested back in the eighties, is to defend and to regain what was lost of the commons. The ongoing crisis, now crystallized in a frozen economy and a distanced society, is an opportunity to abandon the premises of scarcity and progress and start concretely reanimating forms-of-life that are outside a commodified world of both liberals and neoliberals. As Illich had already pointed out,

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environment in which the commons have been transformed into resources, private or public." For more of Illich on scarcity, see footnote 11 in the book *Gender* (1982).

the war against the vernacular started with commodifying language (Nebrija)[6]. He further argued that these 500 year-long wars now culminate with the ultimate commodification, that of 'Life', which the pandemic has nakedly exposed for all to see. Illich pronounced the words, 'to hell with "Life"!'. I suggest this statement be read with great care.

Second Line: The Religion of 'Life'

The sacralization of 'Life' as the new idol is perhaps the most overlooked facet of modern industrial societies. The COVID-19 pandemic puts a spotlight on this topic. There is no life outside the lived. Living is a verb, a human activity and not a thing. Living presupposes actions, attitudes and activities. Just as there is no dance outside the act of dancing, it is only possible to live living. 'Life' as a noun, as an abstract substance, conceptualized and managed outside the realm of living entails idolatry in the Judeo-Christian tradition. To attribute divine power to abstract properties is to engage in idol-worship and it is in this sense that Illich argued that 'Life' created as an institutional object had become an idol (see Illich's *The Institutional Construction of a New Fetish: Human Life*, 1989).

In contemporary medicine, ecology, law, politics, and even the church, references to life occur in essentially ethical terms (Illich, 1989). The first Franciscan Pope in history celebrated Easter in St. Peter's Cathedral without the congregation assembled, for the sake of 'Lives'. Ecologists remind us that the earth breathes while the global machine is in suspension. Judges sanction laws of social distance, a concept that once meant a social gap between classes. One of the largest Brazilian newspapers *O Estadão*, in its editorial of May 16, 2020, categorically warns us: "Isolation is Life".

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[6] See Illich's essay "Vernacular Values," in *Shadow Work* (1980).

Who would have dared, only a few months ago, to answer the question of what life is with such statement?

According to Ivan Illich, the historical root of 'Life' as a substantive is to be found in the perversion of Christ's announcement to Martha, 'I am Life' (Gospel of St. John 11:25). The discussion of life which was confined to theological or philosophical reflection transformed it into a substantive only around the year 1801. The term biology, coined by Lamarck in the same century, inaugurated a new field of studies, "the life sciences". Since then, a formal, mechanistic and abstract terminology has assumed to describe what mainly defines 'Life' and what it needs to exist (Illich, 1989).

In modernity, living is transformed into a scarce resource, an economic condition, from womb to tomb. Housing is scarce, a product of the housing industry. Taking care of yourself is scarce, a service of the health industry. Coming and going is scarce, a product/service of the transport industry. Learning and knowing is scarce, a product/service of schools and the professionalization of specialists. Empathy and sympathy are scarce, a product of the culture industry and life coaches. Breathing is scarce, because ICUs lack respirators. Dying is scarce, because you can no longer bury your own dead but depend on the services of the funeral industry. Dressing, eating, having fun, all aspects that make up the human condition are scarce, either in the form of products or services. Living is thereby made scarce, transformed into a series of economic commodities and services, things and actions to be bought and sold. Living is thereby transformed into 'Life' – a national resource, a right – and made almost impossible outside the limits of the market or the planned economy. The illusion that capitalist societies are the kingdoms of abundance should fall apart. Life is the object of government and legislation. Everywhere, biocracy[7] — managing life through the

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[7] A term coined by Illich, to designate a specific form of medical-sanitary power, in an article entitled: "Brave New Biocracy: Health Care from Womb to Tomb," (NPQ 1994).

mechanisms of the State and the market — has become the norm. The idea of authorizing or disallowing killing, protecting, saving, or sacrificing Lives has become acceptable. The Jair Bolsonaro government authorizes the death of people through neglect[8] while the Angela Merkel government protects life through medical management. Dull doctors authorize chloroquine, evangelical mercenaries disallow quarantine.

Abundance is found when people construct the autonomous way of life ingeniously, when most of the time their activities do not impose restrictions or oblige others to do other activities. Thus, the vicinity that surrounds abundant living bears the marks of their hands, imprinted with the gestures of those who do for/by themselves and/or for the other. Confusing abundance with the number of yachts or cars in the garage is the signature of capitalism. Under these conditions, 'Life' can only be lived religiously. According to Agamben, the term *religio* does not derive, as customarily thought, from the vernacular *religare*, that is, the experience that connects and unites the human to the divine; religion understood as a rope that binds. Instead, religion stems from *relegere*, the "restless hesitation (rereading)", reading and rereading the norm, interpreting and reinterpreting the rules, being attentive, observant, and respectful of all the innumerable rites — washing your hands with scruple, two meters away, isolation for ten days — that constitute the sacred (Agamben, 2007).

In this sense, the rituals of Covid-19 have the function of separating people, things, animals, places from the common and ordinary condition. The sacred is

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[8] I agree with the article by Cícero Castro, "*Viva a morte, abaixo a inteligência*" (Long live death, down with intelligence), in which he says that Jair Bolsonaro preached death throughout his career. Therefore, Bolsonaro does not discredit the existence or lethality of the virus, on the contrary, his social security policy is death – the symbol of his campaign, the gesture of the weapon with the fingers of the hand. Covid-19 exposes the truth that not all property is the same, the death of some is useful for the profit of others. Trump/Bolsonaro disagree with shutting the economy in the name of health because the regime of the commodity is restricted (profits are reduced).

everything that is ritually separated from the commonplace while acquiring extraordinary status (Agamben, 2007). In the age of Corona, the gel alcohol bottle might be on its way to becoming a sacred object, requiring a series of ritualistic gestures that prescribe where and how it is placed in public and private spaces, how the bottle must be touched, the liquid in it used, to be touched, to be used, all of which are rituals that transform a bottle of gel alcohol into a sacred object.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposes the essentially religious condition of modern industrial societies. In the realm of scarcity, 'Life' is fabricated through the rites prescribed and supervised by professionals, one for each ritual. It is in the guise of priest turned professional in a white coat that health experts now teach us the pandemic rites: wash your hands for more than twenty seconds, rub well between your fingers and spread below the wrist. How many times? Whenever you leave the house, following each sneeze, after any and all minimal contact with others. Always maintain safe distance between humans, defined as two meters.

Liberals believe the economy should be shut down to save 'Lives' from succumbing to the virus. Only a few essential workers need to be sacrificed and their sacrifice must be publicly acknowledged in celebratory rituals. In contrast, neoliberals urge that the economy be opened, also to save 'Lives'. They believe widespread exposure to the risk of disease is necessary so all who depend on the commodities of the market and the state will not starve to death. In the name of 'Life', liberals want experts to dictate the rhythm of deaths by quarantining the risk of disease. In the name of 'Life', neoliberals want to reanimate the economy by socializing the risk of disease.

Illichian thought, from a different *topos* of argument attracts the anger of both neoliberals and liberals (to mention just a few, see David Cayley's article on the

pandemic[9], Agamben's series of reflections on the plague, Sajay Samuel's essay on the crowned virus and Gustavo Estevas' [COVID-19 Pandemic: Worlds Stories from the Margins] The day after). Neither liberals nor neoliberals distinguish 'Life' as property from the existential experience of forming one's own way of living, what Illich calls 'the vernacular'. Both liberals and neoliberals agree on one point, that property is sacred. Liberals see 'Life' as the most sacred of all property whereas neoliberals sacralize money as the property needed for maintaining their 'Lifestyle'. Unlike Illichian thought, both liberals and neoliberals believe in the rule of experts. Liberals want the expert to explicitly manage the coronavirus crisis from the perspective of science by defining the rules of behavior for the masses to follow. In contrast, neoliberals want people to manage themselves using apparatuses that obscure the coded instructions of the experts who rule them. Smart watches that measure your blood pressure and urge you to walk 10,000 steps exemplify the hidden expert shackled to one's wrist.

Both liberals and neoliberals are fixated on 'Life' as property. In this sense, capitalism is not opposed to religion. Planetary capitalism is the great sect of the 21st century, and this pandemic shows that, from India to the United States, people kneel before the priests of modernity, whether these appear as experts or talking watches, both products of the religion of science. In opposition to both liberals and neoliberals, Illich argues against such fetishization of life.

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[9] I disagree with one argument in David Cayley's otherwise illuminating paper "*Questions About the Current Pandemic from the Point of View of Ivan Illich*". He argues for the opening of small businesses and for the closing of hockey arenas. By suggesting saving the 'small' exchange value and not the 'big' exchange value, I thought he would have engaged with Illich's balance of industrial and convivial tool (the 'small' can coexist with the commons whereas the "big' is necessarily destructive of the commons – Illich's notion of scale and limits). However, this major distinction does not pertain to his paper. There are basically no arguments evoking the commons. Cayley's signature is his clarity and sharp reading of Illich's ideas, which one can easily see in his analysis of *Medical Nemesis* and the lines dedicated to the embodiment of systems and risks. However, in the particular argument aforementioned, I hear more the voice of a liberal than that of what I am trying to define as a position influenced by Illich's thought.

Profanations

Profanation, in these conditions, is the free and 'distracted' attitude of detaching oneself from norms. Not accepting the sacred, dissolving the separating function of rituals defines the act of profanation (Agamben, 2007). To profane is to dissolve the religious, which was arguably why the first Christians were persecuted as irreligious. To profane 'Life' in the time of Corona is to take on the most cherished religious object of our time. The COVID-19 pandemic represents a historical milestone. It exposes two fundamental lines that crisscross the fabric of modern industrial societies. Their entanglement constitutes the spindle on which liberals and neoliberals weave their narratives. Illich's ideas run orthogonally to these arguments. His insistence on the vernacular that is antithetical to both the realm of the technological and the economic *per se* confronts the homogeneity of managed 'life' with the tapestry of the myriad possible forms of living. Ivan Illich witnessed, during his life as a social thinker, the weaving of the suit into which peoples from all over the world are now fitted. The vernacular is being suffocated by both liberals and neoliberals.[10]

Illich's call for celebration does not invoke the *carpe diem* of the end times, quite the contrary. Aware of the demons that are running freely through the industrial tool and its services, he invites the careful reader to open him/herself to the surprise awaiting in the corner of conviviality, where neither public or private properties, welfare-state or free market are able to dampen the flourishing beauty of regaining the trust in one's abilities to shape the environment according to a proportional fit. While liberals call for a stronger state and neoliberals urge for more 'individual freedom',

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[10] Illich argued, almost thirty years ago, something quite similar regarding the commons: "anti-capitalist politics so far have bolstered the legitimacy of transforming commons into resources". Illich, Ivan. "Silence Is a Commons," in *In the Mirror of the Past: Letters and Addresses 1978-1990*. New York: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1992.

those shaped by Illich's thinking should engage themselves with the vernacular form-of-life and focus on building the third way which at this very moment can sprout through the ashes of burning lands and forests.

Illich is against all property if it exceeds the possibility of the commons; of a flourishing vernacular. His arguments and ideas invite one to question the naivety of liberals and the blindness of neoliberals. To write after Illich requires the courage to take the stance against all forms of fetishizing 'Life', aware that one might be mistaken for a Bolsonarian from the left, or for a knight of chaotic anarchism from the right. To write after Illich, therefore, might also mean to live accordingly, to walk the walk of one's own words. Perhaps that is the reason why Illich has been obscured for so long. Perhaps, Agamben is right, the time for the legibility of Ivan Illich's work has arrived.

According to some, the book of Revelations discloses, through the prophet St. John, the fall of the Roman Empire. It is too strong to say that the COVID-19 pandemic Apocalypse reveals the collapse of capitalism. Nevertheless, if Ivan Illich should be read as a prophet, then he saw, during his lifetime (1926-2002), what is widely visible today: the tragedy of the uncommon and the religion of a new commodity: Life. We are all witness to the escalating authoritarianism that rises to fill the space left by the decline and fall of capitalism. On the other hand, this pandemic has also revealed the possibility of reanimating the commons and resurrecting concretely forged communal relationships. Lest it remain forgotten, Illich's third way for modernity is sprouting all around the world; it is now more feasible than ever before[11].

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[11] To avoid confusion regarding this statement, I believe that what Illich said of Leopold Kohr in 1994 suits, today, and also to him: "He [Leopold Kohr] never attempted to seduce people into utopia, which is always a misplaced concreteness. He fostered a vision that could be realized because it fell within limits, it remained within reach."

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**Democracy without Technocratic Constraints -
A Reflection Growing Out of an Extended Conversation
with Chinese and German Colleagues**

Carl Mitcham

To people in China or Germany (or anywhere else, for that matter) America's response to the coronavirus pandemic must seem bizarre. President Trump has veered from denying the problem to blaming the media, China, and the World Health Organization; hiring and firing a suite of adviser sycophants; saying it is under control or will disappear naturally in warm weather; and touting fake cures such as hydroxychloroquine, even suggesting at one point the possible "injection" of heat or disinfectants into covid-19 patients. But it is important to recognize that Trump, although an extreme case, is not a complete anomaly. He represents a major strain in American social history and retains a base of strong popular support, generally estimated at between 35% and 45%.

Understanding this unique situation depends on recognizing the deep anti-intellectual tradition in American public life. Much more than China or Germany, the United States is an artificial construct, founded only a few hundred years ago by Europeans imagining an escape from the constrictions of their home cultures. Enacting Christian fundamentalist assertions of white individualist liberties, while denying the same to native inhabitants and African slaves, the United States was cobbled together by a few American *philosophes* who recognized its fragilities. In response they sought to found a democracy with technocratic constraints, that is, a republic. In line with the classical Western teaching that political stability was best achieved through a government combining democracy, aristocracy, and kingship, the new republic was given a democratic House of Representatives moderated by an elitist Senate competing with an aristocratically selected President and a semi-independent Judiciary to create what James Russell Lowell once described as "a machine that would go of itself."

With the 1828 election of Andrew Jackson as President the order of the founding technocrats began to fray in the face of an anti-intellectualism inherent in America's imaginative individualist rejection of the state and apotheosis of the pioneer and cowboy culture. Alexis de

Tocqueville sensed this during his 1830s visit. From its beginnings the struggle in American history has been to create "E pluribus unum" (from many, one) while largely failing to do so. Post-Civil War fights over immigration only made things worse. In the social ontology of radical libertarians, society is an epiphenomenon. As British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had it, "There is no such thing as society." As President Ronald Reagan echoed, "Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." Post-Jackson suspicion of elites and experts may have been moderated during the years of the New Deal, but Trump is much more representative of an American bimodal heritage than is commonly recognized.

In contrast to China and Germany, there is no consensus about the existence of a society that needs protection from the coronavirus. When libertarian Americans say they want to protect the American way of life, what they want to protect is the rights of individuals to do as they please and to make their own decisions about how to protect themselves. The counter view that we are all in this together exists but its supporters are decidedly less energetic and fight an up-hill battle, precisely because they need to use technical knowledge to support their case. In a country where ~35% of the people do not believe in biological evolution and only ~25% accept the scientific consensus about climate change (with widespread limitations placed on the teaching of such issues in schools) it is inherently difficult to make a broadly persuasive case for collaboration. Indeed, because of the character of advanced technoscientific knowledge, which is dependent on increasingly complex instrumentation rather than on direct human perceptions, and the phenomena often described are remote in space and time, it can be hard for even sympathetic non-scientists to understand what is going on. The inherent challenge of living in an engineered and engineering world is dramatically on display in the dominant North America polity.

Against all technoscientific advice rather than in accord with it, there are protests in the United States against social distancing and the temporary closing of non-essential businesses. It is one thing to adopt a technocratically mediated policy of measured experiments in re-opening the economy and allowing more freedom in daily affairs. It is another to reject with a sense of resentment efforts to take into account what technoscientific expertise might be able to contribute to grasping the complexities of our symbiotic techno-social reality. The Revolutionary Era slogans such as "Don't tread on me" and "Give me liberty or give me death" have been redeployed in public protests against stay-at-home orders along with demands for opening up the economy. (Note too that it is "me" not "us" in these slogans.) "I have the right to decide for myself how I want to protect myself. Get the authoritarian government off my back."

Experts may belittle Trump as much as they want, but he offers a master class in Machiavellian politics. LIBERATE MICHIGAN. LIBERATE MINNESOTA. LIBERATE VIRGINIA he tweets in support of breaking stay-at-home orders in these states. The simple truth is that many Americans are driven by a fundamentalist commitment to individual freedom that undermines citizen-driven technocracy and any call for the most limited technocratic delimitation on individualism. To realize that this is not just a right wing phenomenon, recall the hippy rebellion against businesses that declared "no shirts no shoes no business" and the right to smoke anything they wanted.

One spillover effect of American libertarian ideology is a hermeneutics of suspicion of any community of experts such as that which obtains among scientists. American scientists can easily feel they have more in common with German or even Chinese scientists than they do non-scientist Americans. Scientists are regularly accused if not of treason of disloyalty and/or suspected of not being true Americans and so sometimes bend over backwards to proclaim their American-ness, which cannot help but look awkward if not like special pleading. "Our loyalty and utility should justify continued research funding." The fact that coronavirus research has tended to enhance international cooperation among scientists only makes the situation worse. The American base feels the experts may ganging up on them — because, in fact, to some degree, they are. Although they would not use these terms, there is a felt need for expertise (or technocracy) to restrain democracy. For most Americans epidemiological models are more foreign than German or Chinese and yet such models are necessary if not sufficient for orientation in the new pandemic world.

Despite what I agree is the manifest need to do so, I am extremely skeptical of any truly effective international or global response, especially of advanced countries helping poor and developing ones. European countries even have trouble helping each other. America has always been ambivalent about one part of the country helping another part (a conflict that goes back to the founding and the effort to unite the 13 colonies) and even more so about helping other countries in its own sphere of influence (the Americas). One of the consistent public objections to the federal budget is the miniscule amount dedicated to foreign aid.

The need for cooperation and collaboration has never been more necessary than with climate change, but at the same time has never been (I fear) less likely. The current pandemic is demonstrating this in spades. Some kind of global technocratic collaboration and cooperation was never more needed but never less likely. The pandemic foretells a future much worse.

Ivan Illich, Thresholds, and the Climate Commons

Vijaya Rettakudi Nagarajan

In this essay, I propose to explore how Ivan Illich, a Catholic priest, social historian and cultural critic, from the 1950s through the 1990s, investigated the rich history of needs and its relationship to industrially constructed desires. The questions I seek to understand are the following: How does the history of needs relate to climate commons? What are the multiple ways in which the issue of climate is related to the commons? How do we parse the problem of the climate, both in understanding it and in responsibly responding to it? (Ghosh 2016, Hawken 2017).[1]

I knew Ivan Illich for over twenty years, from 1982 to 2002 (Nagarajan 2003). He was an iconoclast, a fiery, controversial intellectual, a historian of ideas, and an outspoken social critic of our most treasured certainties. From the early 1950s until he passed away in late 2002, Ivan Illich had firmly and insistently woven together fields of religion, sociology, technology, ethics, equity, ecology, commons and economics, a feat rarely done then or now. He is not as

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well-known today as he was fifty years ago; nevertheless, I think it is important to bring his ideas more to the fore, as I believe they can be useful and helpful in our muddling through our present predicament.

Ivan Illich and the History of Needs

Ivan Illich (1926-2002) was born in Vienna, Austria to a Catholic father from the Dalmatian Islands in Croatia and a Jewish mother who came from a converted Catholic family, originally from Germany. In the spring of 1984, he related to me the terrors he felt when Nazism arose and took over his worlds in Vienna when he was a teenager from the 1930s to the early 1940s.[2] He described in an anguished voice, decades after it had happened, the force with which he was humiliated in elementary and middle school because of his Jewishness and the terrors of that time. As a teenager, in the early 1940s, during the height of the takeover of Austria by Germany, he helped his family---his mother and his younger twin brothers---escape Vienna, Austria to Florence, Italy. Once he finished his high school in Florence, he trained intensively at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in theology and felt the intellectual force of another Catholic priest, Jacques Maritain. Illich subsequently received a Ph.D. in history at the University of Salzburg after WWII. Throughout Illich's life, he actively linked the worlds of the spirit and the material in unique and distinguished ways.

There were three phases to his adult life which were not distinct and separate but rather overlapped with each other. From 1951 to 1968, he moved in the world primarily as a Catholic priest. He worked with a Puerto Rican community in Harlem in the 1950s. He became fascinated by the ways in which they had come to Catholicism with their own unique cultural gifts. He

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[2] Personal Conversation, Spring 1984, Pitzer College, Claremont Colleges.

organized one of the biggest Puerto Rican-American Catholic festivals on the Fordham

University campus. Subsequently, he became the Vice Rector at the University of Puerto Rico in

Puerto Rico. Then, he moved to Cuernavaca, Mexico and started an organization called the

Center for Intercultural Formation (CIF) in 1961 which later merged into another organization

called CIDOC (Centre for Intercultural Documentation). CIDOC was a Spanish language

training center for those in the United States who wanted to learn Spanish. Simultaneously, it

was a center that ran seminars and courses on the sustainability of contemporary institutions, the

ideas behind western civilization and the unrecognized strength and vitality in traditional,

vernacular cultures. For nearly its entire existence, CIDOC became very famous and attracted

students from all over the world. CIDOC lasted until 1976.

Ivan Illich, during this heyday as an activist Catholic priest working for the Church in

Mexico, was in an uneasy relationship with the Church at times, as he was outspoken about the

western solipsism sometimes embedded within the thinking and acting of the Church when

approaching work in the "third world."[3] He did not see the southern countries as

"underdeveloped or third world" or as the sole criterion to see people from those lands. He

believed in the dignity and spirit of people who had not yet become industrialized and he

constantly advocated a third way for those not yet under the spell of the necessity of the

industrial complex.

The second phase of Illich's life involved giving public lectures on what he was thinking

about and the writings which emerged from these popular lectures. Illich became a prolific writer

during the last decade of CIDOC. His first essay "The Seamy Side of Charity" was published in

the Jesuit magazine, *America*, in 1967 on January 21, 1967. It was one of the earliest essays

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[3] Personal Conversation, Spring 1984, Pitzer College, Claremont Colleges.

criticizing the implicit American cultural hegemony at the root of the "desire to help the third world." It is not that Illich advocated to not help those countries outside of the modern-industrial fold, but rather that he believed that we needed to actively recognize that the act of "helping" itself was deeply problematic to begin with, given the different cultural and economic locations of those of us coming from the United States. He believed one needed to be very careful and aware that one's good intentions may very well cause more harm than good and that our own deep American imperialism may be invisible to ourselves. This essay is now regarded as such a classic that it has become required reading in many different fields.

His subsequent collections of essays included *The Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution (1970), De-schooling Society* (1970), *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, *Tools for Conviviality (1973)*, and *Energy and Equity* (1974). These controversial books were sharp, incisive and devastating critiques of key aspects of industrial civilization, especially in the fields of education, medicine, health, technology and energy.

He thought in the 1960s and 1970s, like Gandhi, fifty years before, that if everyone in the world consumed at the rate of the western world, it would not be sustainable. Gandhi had said, in the newspaper he edited, *Young India*, in 1928, "God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts." Instead, Illich advocated for everyone, both in the west and in the south, to rethink the assumptions of the ill thought out industrialized path that seemed nearly messianic in the 1950s and 1960s. He labelled the unquestioned industrialized path as the "idol" moderns worship without thinking. He was not against modernity, as many have misunderstood him. He was for a kind of critical modernity, a modernity which we question even as we enter each new unfolding, that we keep everyone in

view when we evaluate each new technology and we keep a sharp eye on its invisible assumptions and hegemonies. He was afraid of the implicit "goodness" we believed lay in modernity. He argued again and again that we were proselytizers of a new way of life, without knowing or realizing the rich values and assumptions of other ways of life we were destroying and moreover how much these other cultural ways could teach us where we were, in fact, blind and deaf.

Next, in his third life phase he began his sharp turn in writing towards history. He moved away from current issues and looked for the sources of our cultural assumptions in historical texts, archives, and other materials. He tried to understand where we had come from, how the very modern assumptions we lived became naturalized into unspoken and hidden (even to ourselves) certainties. For example, in *Towards a History of Needs* (1978), he turned towards understanding the deeper history of our cultural assumptions of actual needs and constructed needs; he traced the conversion of artificially induced desires into culturally necessary needs served by excessive consumption. How did a car become the definition of transportation? He argued consistently for a society organized around the speed of the bicycle, rather than the car. In the phenomenal book, *H20 and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (1985), he presented a history of the sacredness of water in the west, from ancient Roman fountains to the representations of water in paintings in the 19th century. He set out a more nuanced understanding of the history of smells, the toilet and industrial sewage systems. It is a brilliant book, bringing together the history of the toilet and the parallels between the ways in which cities developed their water systems and how we came to understand the fluid runways inside our own bodies. How did sewage and waste get to be seen in the ways that they were?

During the 1980s, Illich became a historian of ideas. I met him in 1982 in Berkeley when he taught a course on Gender based on his book of the same name. I did not think his notions of gender were as well thought as they could have been. This book was built on history of feminist thought, but it strangely undercut them, as he bluntly battled feminism and women's increasing power as another aspect of the modern. In this argument, I could not follow him and my arguments with not just what he was saying but also the certainty with which he was saying it provoked me into intense discussions within the Illich circle of friends that Illich had come to Berkeley with. And yet, through these conversations with some of the key interlocutors, I also came to remember my paternal grandmother and the stories of my dead maternal grandmother, who were powerful in their families and households and ran them with an iron hand, with power to the point that my grandparents, father, and uncles were full of respect, awe and subservience in their presence. I had seen their gendered worlds and lived in them for months and years at a time. Sometimes I got a glimpse of Ilich's perspectives of gendered worlds, of bypassing the modern lens through which we usually look at the past as incomplete or a shadow of modernity. It sometimes made sense.

Throughout the 1980s, he tried to articulate a unique perception of our industrial civilization from the view of the 12th-13th century in Europe. He wanted to know how we got to this point. How did we come to believe the ideas we as a culture hold close to our hearts? He was engaged in unpacking the deep assumptions with which we all live in the world, which we are mostly unaware of. He lectured widely in the 1980s and 1990s. He moved amongst three places: Cuernavaca, Mexico; Penn State University, State College, PA; and Bremen, Germany.

He questioned the central assumptions of the industrialized west. He battled the rigidification of the industrialization of our certainties in these times. He argued that we as a

society needed to and should exercise much more choice in our selection of what tools we use to satisfy our needs. He argued that we as a society should decide what we actually needed, rather than believing in the advertised articulation of our needs or self-serving needs of professionals who wanted us to become dependent on what they were experts of, whether it was education, medicine, technology, or energy. In this phase, he turned to the 12th-13th century to give himself a different vantage point to understand contemporary modern society and its underlying assumptions and beliefs.

He constantly seemed to ask the vital, important question: How did we get here? If we are here, we can get out of here, by thinking and acting together to a different understanding of our actual needs. His training as a Catholic priest, I believe, gave him a strong basis of asceticism, of advocating a radical simplicity of living, of realizing how little one could actually live with and be content. He lived simply and he advocated a "liberating austerity" in order to live one's life without imposing on the poor. His work emerged out of his theological, historical training, and his genuine curiosity of other cultural understandings of the world. He was critical of entrenched hierarchies and abuses of excessive power wherever he found them.

Unfortunately, for the most part, the world is still under the spell of industrialized lifestyles which uses far more energy than needed and it is possible for all of us to have, given the excessive carbon we have released into the world. It was not that Illich or Gandhi was completely against industrialization or modernity, but rather they both thought as a society, we needed to slow down and contemplate, to discern, to figure out whether that was the best direction to go. If so, what did we actually need and how were we going to get there in terms of a fairer sense of ecology, equity, and economics that did not leave huge shadows of inaccessibility, poverty and inequality in their wakes?

In the 1990s he became focused on the notions of proportionality.[4] Most of us did not understand quite what he meant back then. We would walk away from his erudite lectures on the history of proportionality in music and art and shake our heads, wondering, what did he mean? Now, I think he meant the following: What is the appropriate proportion of the use of energy, technology, institutions for a convivial society? How do we know when we have gone too far in our practices of knowledge, rituals, and culture; how can we recognize as a culture when they become threatening rather than liberating? How do we know when we are using too much carbon and make the necessary adjustments to our actions? How do we recognize this and move together on containing the damage? It was another way to expand his earlier idea of "thresholds".

He also believed in the power of friendships, the table around which food is served and ideas are shared, in conviviality. In the fall of 1999, I invited him to come to the University of San Francisco as a part of my Davies Forum on the theme: *Voice, Memory and Landscape*. We had over 1000 people at the Presentation Theater (now the Gershwin Theater) and people lined the walls and the steps; they stayed for nearly three hours, listening to him while he swiftly moved amongst his twelve languages and his ideas. He was clearly in pain as he was battling a deadly cancer and we all sensed it may be the last time we see him. It was to be one of his last public lectures in San Francisco. The following year, during the fall 2000 and the spring 2001, Jerry Brown, when he was Mayor of Oakland, in between his two stints as Governor of California, brought Ivan Illich in a public collaboration he called, *The Oakland Table*.

Ivan Illich died peacefully the next year on December 2, 2002 in Bremen, Germany. He left a legacy of deep insights on our need to lessen our energy use as a way to enhance equity.

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[4] Illich moved deeply into the history of music, especially the notion of proportionality in music and how that radically changed from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century. He argued that the music itself became "even tempered". This change paralleled the movement of industrialization of society. We were not all convinced. I found it hard to follow his argument, though there were many who did.

His advocacy of a "celebration of awareness", of being alert to those who would cunningly make us believe we needed more than we actually needed at a societal level, brought his Catholic priestly values in conversation with secular thinkers for over sixty years.

David Cayley's two brilliant books on Ivan Illich and his ideas do the impossible: They focus on the complex relationships between Illich's social critiques and his theological understandings. In *Ivan Illich: In Conversation*, David Cayley lets his own questions to Illich help unravel Ivan's own insights into his life work. In some ways, it is easier to understand the range of Illich's ideas in this book as it moves in the rhythms of conversations. Cayley, in his second book on Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future*, goes deep into Illich's theological awakenings to help reveal the strong links to his social critiques of aspects of western modernity in its present form. In this book, Illich expounds the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan and reveals the new kind of love that entered with this story of Christ, the Samaritan who goes beyond his duty to help this stranger on the road and the ambivalent, metaphoric and civilizational consequences of that beautiful story he loved so much.[5] (Cayley 2005, 1992)

Embodied Thresholds of Industrial Production: A Personal View

From September 1984 to January 1985, I worked various jobs at the Red Star Yeast factory in West Oakland. During that time, Ivan came and visited us in Berkeley. When I had to go early at 3:30 am for an early morning shift, he wanted to come with us to drop me off. On the way there, his eyes glittered with sparkling interest and he flooded me with incisive questions about the nature of the work I was doing, what it felt like, the specific tasks I was made to do.

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[5] See also Todd Hartch's *The Prophet of Cuernavaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West* (2015).

Throughout that period, I became more and more aware of the ways in which this industrial production system inscribed itself onto my own body.

I moved large four feet high cylindrical bins full of small brown yeast modules across the factory floor. I slid gigantic waffle-shaped iron plates dripping with wet yeast streams, which fell furiously into a trapezoid-shaped trough gurgling with fast moving water. I was constantly afraid I would somehow trip and fall into that gushing sound, as we were standing on rickety ladders. Like everyone else, I had a white cap tightly covering my hair so not one strand could escape; thick goggles covering my eyes, a white chlorinated apron that covered my sweat-filled blue jeans and t-shirt. I moved always in a rush, as if I was constantly running out of time, no matter the task I was doing. Every two hours we had a fifteen-minute break. This was heavy, physical work, like which I had never done before. It was exhausting and wore me out. I had no energy to think before and after work.

A few weeks later, I was assigned to the assembly line at the center of the factory, behind a swiftly moving rubber sheet waist-high. It was a classic factory scene, one that reminded me of films with Charlie Chaplin, or I Love Lucy, where at some point in the story, the assembly line would go too fast and all of whatever they were helping make, whether chocolates or other objects would fall apart and a mirthful chaos would ensue. Except in this real-live scene, there was no laughter or comedy to relieve the tension. Here, a long, continuous bar of wet yeast packed tight but still tenderly soft to the touch, almost like soft tofu, would pass by in front of us. The main goal was to take out the badly damaged yeast bars.

In the central area of this assembly line work space, there was a two feet high set of blades moving swiftly in the shape of a Ferris wheel. The long rectangularly shaped yeast bar would be cut by each swiftly revolving knife and our job was to put our hands quickly into the

rolling knives and clean out the crumbly pieces of yeast that was stuck on the knives. The main reason was so that the machine would not stop. It was always a dangerous task. We were all aware of how sharp our attention had to be, so that we could withdraw our hands a split second before the next sharp knife blade could come down accidentally on our fingers.

Once the yeast was cut into one-pound bars, each yeast bar, one after the other, would go by, serenely as if eagerly waiting to be selected and picked by a customer. We were to examine each one for flaws and take the gentle, broken ones out and throw them into waiting containers. Then the final step was to have the plastic wraps roll around the yeast bars and get glued on. We would then take each of the wrapped yeast bars and pack up one cardboard box after another. After a few weeks of working on this factory line, I noticed that the factory engineer would come by, without looking over at us, and quietly crank up what looked like a wheel on a concrete pillar some distance away. I learned quickly that twice a day, he would speed up the machine. Months rolled by. (One night when I had to go to a very early morning shift, Ivan Illich, who was visiting for a few days, came to drop me off at the factory and during the half hour ride to the factory, he bombarded me with questions about the factory, how it worked, what I did.)

One day in early January 1985, despite our cautions, I heard a piercing scream from my fellow worker, also a University of California, Berkeley graduate. She had been a nationally ranked shot-put player and athlete and also worked another job at UPS. She must have been especially tired that day and the machine may have been cranked especially high. From the corner of my eye, I saw that blood sprayed and shot through the yeast near the rolling blades. My fellow worker was holding her hand, screaming with the pain and horror of it all; her fingers had been cut off. We stopped the relentless machine and searched for the bits of her hand

through the yeast bits. We found as many pieces as we could. Eventually over the following days and months ahead, they were sewn back together as best as it could be; her right hand would never be the same. It was horrifying and we were all devastated from this terrible accident. How did this happen to our fellow factory worker friend? We were aware that the accident could have happened to any one of us. It just happened to be her that very hour. A few days later, when we could not work on the factory floor because of the trauma involved, I was transferred to a cleaning section. Here, I lost the use of my eyes for a few hours because of a strong acid we were using to clean some products. I stopped working there a few days later, realizing that the $10.45/hour I was getting paid was not worth the potential cost of losing a hand or an eye.[6]

I tell this story to illustrate the idea of "threshold" that Ivan Illich speaks often of. How do we recognize the thresholds beyond which we should individually and together decide to not cross? When a human life is threatened with disability in the business calculus of a huge corporation, one should be able to say no. Speed as the indicator of success is what Illich objected to. He often called it a key modern addiction. Whether it was time, or space, industrial productivity demanded a certain demand for unquestioning speed. Speed for the sake of speed was the enemy of the good, Illich would argue. It was a factory floor engineer upping the speed of the conveyer belt in order to make more one-pound yeast bars, without considering the health and safety of the workers making those yeast bars. This made me realize this fact in an embodied way. The bottom line did not register the wounds of the factory workers creating the yeast. The human being on the factory line was not a consideration, except as a means to an end; the human being was just a means to earn the profit, not a consideration in their own right.

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[6] Vijaya Nagarajan's personal experience echoed the ways in which Ivan Illich had documented and analyzed the invisible assumptions of the industrial way of life.

It was on that concrete floor of the huge Red Star Yeast factory just abutting the West Oakland Bart Station that I encountered with my own bodily experience some of these root metaphors of industrial civilization. The rule my body learned to embody during those four months: Speed of production for the sake of speed without any regard to the safety of the human beings who created the industrial product.

I was reminded recently of this story with the two Boeing airplane accidents in Ethiopia and Indonesia. The speed of creating the design of this new type of airplane won over the possibility of death of hundreds of passengers from falling airplanes. I think of the increasing number of whale carcasses coming onto our shores; these whales have hundreds of pounds of plastic in their stomachs. They were starving. Somewhere our culture's calculus has failed us. The speed of instant convenience we get every time we use plastic to wrap, to extend the life of food, becomes a killing knife in the stomachs of large and small creatures, creating death wherever it lands, sometime soon after our daily use.

Recovering the Commons

Illich provided a new kind of language to understand the predicaments we found ourselves in, then and now. He spoke often in his public lectures and his writing of the following ideas: thresholds, liberating austerity, recovery of the commons, and proportionality. The climate problem can be seen as a classic problem of the "tragedy of the commons" variety, espoused by Garrett Hardin. The more cows you put in the pasture, the less grass there is for the cows to eat. And each cowherder, Hardin argued, will keep putting more and more cows until there is no more grass left. The Nobel Prize winning political economist, Eleanor Ostrum, argued against such a stark reality as oversimplified and distorting. She, as a researcher, discovered that the

commons was a much more convivial place, where communities can meet, organize themselves and create their own blueprint for sustainable survival, whether it be fisheries in Central America or irrigation water rights in Asia. She uncovered thousands of examples she helped document of successful commoning. So, the central question, she argued effectively is the following: how do we create shared local, regional, national, and global governance rituals, rules, and regulations for lowering carbon in the atmosphere? Illich, too, believed that each one of us as well as groups of us have an ethical responsibility to "recover the commons" in all its aspects as one strategy to deal with the history of scarcity. Illich's landmark essay, "Silence is the Commons" appeared in the *Whole Earth Review* in 1983 and was later published in his *In the Mirror of the Past* (1990).

Inspired by Ivan Ilich's work on the commons, in January 1984, Lee Swenson and I co-founded *The Recovery of the Commons Project,* a small, non-profit, grassroots organization in Berkeley, with a launch event involving a public conversation between Gary Snyder and Lee Swenson called, "Anarchism, Buddhism, and Political Economy". This work later became incorporated into the chapter, "The Place, The Region, and the Commons" in Gary Snyder's excellent book, *The Practice of the Wild* (1990:25-47). We also created a small organization, Institute for the Study of Natural & Cultural Resources, where we organized dozens of encounters amongst workers: activists, writers, artists, and scholars who were recovering the commons in some way or another. We conducted weekly study groups, monthly public lecture series, annual visits of Ivan Illich, luncheon seminars, organized trips with community organizers to Mexico, India, Santa Fe, New England, Hawaii, etc.

A few months later, in Claremont, CA, Ivan Illich was working on a draft of his brilliant landmark book, *H20 and the Waters of Forgetfulness*. During dinner, his eyes excited, he asked for my help on a footnote on the ritual construction of space in India. Early the next morning, I

drew some of the ritual designs called *kolams* with rice flour I had learned from my mother and my grandmother on the front threshold of the house. He plied me with questions I could not answer for many hours. This seed grew into my research into gender, thresholds, ritual art, India and led to the publication of *Feeding A Thousand Souls: Women, Ritual, and Ecology in India, An Exploration of the Kolam* (Oxford University Press, 2018). These rice flour designs performed by millions of Tamil women every day in Tamil Nadu on the thresholds of their homes, temples, and businesses in southern India demarcated the separation between the private sphere of the household and the public nature of the street, acting almost as a doorway into the commons. It also became a mirror into my own past and led me subsequently to an exploration of the many "languages of the commons".

Thresholds

Illich's threshold concept comes out of the context of the "development" decades following WWII. The word, "development" was referred to as a metaphor for a living, growing form and yet, after WWI, it was used as a hierarchically, naturalized construction to elevate modern people as "developed" and the non-modern peoples as "underdeveloped", "primitive," "savage", etc. This was especially done after WWII with Truman's call to help develop the rest of the world, so that they can become more and more similar to the west. The western model was considered the pinnacle of the achievements of human beings. Ivan Illich, along with Wendell Berry, Leopold Kohr, Paulo Friere, and Rachel Carson, questioned these central assumptions of modernity. This is the core critique of Ivan Illich's insights into "needs". He argued in different ways and in different fields, that there is a history of needs, a history of

constructed needs and it behooves us to become familiar with its mechanisms so we recognize it when it comes down the road again, which it inevitably will.

In *Energy and Equity*, he states: "It has recently become fashionable to insist on an impending energy crisis. This euphemistic term conceals a contradiction and consecrates an illusion. It masks the contradiction implicit in the joint pursuit of equity and industrial growth. It safeguards the illusion that machine power can indefinitely take the place of bodily power…. To face this contradiction and betray this illusion, it is urgent to clarify the reality the language of crisis obscures: high quanta of energy degrade social relations just as inevitably as they destroy the physical milieu." (15)[7] He elaborates on the notion of the social threshold in the use of energy:

> "The possibility of a third option is barely noticed. While people have begun to accept ecological limits on maximum per capita energy use as a condition for physical survival, they do not yet think about the use of minimum feasible power as the foundation of any of various social orders that would be both modern and desirable. Yet only a ceiling on energy use can lead to social relations that are characterized by high levels of equity. The one option that is presently neglected is the only choice within the reach of all nations…. What is generally overlooked is that equity and energy can grow concurrently *only to a point. Below a threshold* of per capita wattage, motors improve the conditions for social progress. Above this threshold, energy grows at the expense of equity." (Emphasis added) (17)

What is this third option? The "minimum feasible power" that would be both "modern" and desirable" is critical in Illich's world-view. So, though he is falsely accused of being against modernity, he is clearly not. He is saying that the improvement of tools works to improve peoples' lives "up to a point" and it is up to us in society to figure out how we understand when equity gets overshadowed by increased energy use. He notes that "equity and energy can grow

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[7] See Ivan Illich's *Energy and Equity* (1974) for chapters on "The Energy Crisis," "The Industrialization of Traffic," "Speed-Stunned Imagination," "The Elusive Threshold," among others.

concurrently only to a point. Below a threshold of per capita wattage, motors improve the condition for social progress. Above this threshold, energy grows at the expense of equity." (17) He is making explicit that this knowledge of when this threshold is approached for any tool is important to become aware of as a society. We need to track when each new technology comes into being, and when the tool becomes counterproductive to society. Technology has not had many limits put on its development or creativity. Elsewhere, he speaks of a bicycle speed society. He also saw the bicycle as a metaphor for lots of other technologies. How do we individually and collectively find the "bicycle" edge for our use of technologies? And when the use of technologies become counterproductive to the continued use of the climate commons, or any other kind of commons.

Illich also speaks of the term, "radical monopoly" as referring to "when one industrial production process exercises an exclusive control over the satisfaction of a pressing need, and excludes nonindustrial activities from competition." (52) He explains how a radical monopoly emerges as a way by substituting one type of product for another more traditional use. For example, the car exerts a radical monopoly on traffic, "practically ruling out locomotion on foot or by bicycle in Los Angeles. … That motor traffic curtails the right to walk,…". This car-focused planning emerged as a need for transportation, thereby negating the use of feet or bicycles for moving ourselves around. Feet become lesser than, and because moving feet takes longer to get somewhere, cars monopolize the space that earlier were filled with walkers, making the use of feet obsolete. (52)

In 1983 in a working document, Illich spoke of the disillusionment from the enlightenment goals of yesteryear: "In fact, the ideal of the enlightenment… is now fading. It is fading for two reasons: first because many of us recognize that it has a dark future and second

because we understand that its descendance from past ideals is much less legitimate than we assumed." (1983: 9) He asks himself:

> "How shall I call the opposite project: the reconquest of the right to live in self-limiting communities, that each treasure their own mode of subsistence. Pressed, I would call this project the recovery of the commons. Commons, in custom and law, refer to a kind of space which is fundamentally different from the space of which most ecologists speak. … The public environment is opposed to the private home. Both are not what "commons" mean. Commons are a cultural space that lies beyond my threshold and this side of wilderness. Custom defines the different usefulness of commons for each one. The commons are porous. The same spot for different purposes can be used by different people. And above all, custom protects the commons. The commons are not community resources; the commons become a resource only when the lord or community encloses them. Enclosure transmogrifies the commons into a resource for extraction, production or circulation of commodities. Commons are as vernacular as vernacular speech. I am not suggesting that it is possible to recreate the old commons. But lacking any better analogy, I speak of the recovery of the commons to indicate how, at least conceptually, [it can be understood]… Truly subsistence-oriented action transcends economic space, it reconstitutes the commons. This is as true for speech that recovers common language as for action which recovers commons from the environment." (9-10)[8] (Brackets added.)

Illich further argues for a "recovery of the commons" in subtle and explicit ways throughout the rest of his work and his life.

Gandhi and Illich

Bapu's Hut. It is hard to leave Gandhi out of our picture today. He was another thinker-activist who saw through the consequences of our shared industrial dreams. He learned much from Thoreau. Thoreau, following Emerson, read many of the earliest English translations of Hindu texts such as the *Upanishads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita,* becoming one of the Transcendentalists. Thoreau also witnessed the beginnings of the industrial civilization. In some ways, I think of him being at the beginning of the parenthesis of ideas that we are trying

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[8] Illich, Ivan. 1983. Eco-Pedagogics and the Commons. April 1, 1983. 1-10. Cuernavaca, Mexico (Unpublished Draft of paper for discussion with Jerry Morris in Techno-Politica series).

desperately to parenthetically close. Strikingly, even as Thoreau was writing *Walden* in his hut near Walden Pond, he heard the whistle of the train going by every afternoon. Laura Walls says in her brilliant biography of Thoreau, "In writing Walden, Thoreau encouraged his readers to try the experiment of life for themselves, rather than inheriting its terms from others…Thoreau is often said to have turned to "Nature," but what he actually turned to was, more exactly, the "commons"—spaces that, back then, were still open to everyone: woods, fields, and hilltops, ponds and blueberry thickets, rivers, meadows, trails up nearby mountains, the long open beaches on the Atlantic shore. Nearly all his writings use landforms and watersheds to explore the commons, expanding our shared natural and intellectual heritage until it touches the Cosmos itself." (xiii)[9]

Gandhi, himself, some decades later combined Thoreau, Christianity, and the *Bhagavad-Gita* to understand how to wrest India from the British colonialists and created the political tools of satyagraha (truth-force), swaraj (self-rule), ahimsa (nonviolence), among others. Ivan Illich went and stayed briefly in one of Gandhi's ashrams in the 1970s and wrote a beautiful essay, *Bapu's Hut.*[10] Illich was deeply influenced by his Catholic priestly life, and with Gandhi's insights into the failures of western civilization, of excess desires constructed around a wasteful economy, the artificial creation of envy, and the lack of awareness of setting social limits. Illich states, in one of his many travels in India:

> "It is only the people who have some vested interest who refuse to understand it. The rich do not want to understand. When I say rich, I mean all those people who have got conveniences of life which are not available to everybody in common. These are in living, eating and going about. Their modes of consumption are such that they have been deprived of the power to understand the truth. It is to these that Gandhi becomes a difficult proposition to understand and assimilate. They are the ones to whom simplicity does not make any sense. Their circumstances unfortunately do not allow them to see the

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[9] See Laura Wall's *Thoreau: A life* (2017), for one of the most moving biographies of Thoreau. It is exquisitely written and charts his intellectual and spiritual journey through his writings and activism.

[10] Illich, Ivan. *Bapu's Hut*; See: https://www.mkgandhi.org/museum/msgofbapuhut.htm

truth. Their lives have become too complicated to enable them to get out of trap they are in."[11]

He reveals who the "rich" are in this context: They are the ones that use convenience that are not accessible to all. He adds:

> "This hut connotes the pleasures that are possible through being at par with society. Here, self-sufficiency is the keynote. We must understand that unnecessary articles and goods that a man possesses reduce his power to imbibe happiness from the surroundings. Therefore, Gandhi repeatedly said that productivity should be kept within the limits of wants. Today's mode of production is such that it finds no limit and goes on increasing uninhibited. All these we have been tolerating so far but the time has come when man must understand that by depending more and more on machines he is moving towards his own suicide. The civilized world, whether it is China or America has begun to understand that if we want to progress, this is not the way. Man should realize that for the good of the individual as well as of the society, it is best that people keep for themselves only as much as is sufficient for their immediate needs. We have to find a method by which this thinking finds expression in changing the values of today's world. This change cannot be brought about by the pressure of the governments or through centralized institutions. A climate of public opinion has to be created to make people understand that which constitutes the basic society. Today the man with a motor car thinks himself superior to the man with a bicycle though, when we look at it from the point of view of the common norm, it is the bicycle which is the vehicle of the masses. The cycle, therefore, must be given the prime importance and all the planning in roads and transport should be done on the basis of the bicycle, whereas the motor car should get a secondary place."[12]

Thoreau, Gandhi, Illich, and Pope Francis articulate with deep clarity what we as a society need to do. Reducing our energy desires for the sake of convenience at a collective level, so that the excess production of energy for some is reduced and the not enough energy situation is increased for millions of others on the same planet. We no longer can remain on the path we have been on. The Green New Deal proposed by the new Congress in February 2019 reflects the moral imperative of Pope Francis's *Encyclical on Climate Change and Inequality* and Ivan Illich's long ago call for a discernment of our energy needs.[13] It is a response to the potentiality

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[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Green New Deal; https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/109/text Accessed on April 22, 2020.

of collective death induced by climate change. Ivan Illich's collective work could not be but a critical voice that speaks clearly to our present moment of climate chaos. The "recovery of the commons" as Ivan Illich called for so many decades ago is not a vague possible option, but a necessary imaginative tool to work ourselves towards a way out of this predicament of runaway "needs" and desires.

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Insubordinate Conviviality and COVID-19[1]

Manuel Callahan

There is no escaping COVID-19. And by now, most agree we all must contribute what we can to minimize the impact of this pandemic. Unfortunately, there is less agreement about what has changed and even more uncertainty about what will be our "new normal" as we pass through this crisis. The battle lines over what is or isn't "normal" have never been more clearly drawn. Do we return to the system as it once was, resurrecting what brought us to this moment, or do we engage some other way of living, working, and celebrating together? As far back as March of 2020 many believed we would be well past the crisis by the end of summer. As we fast approach the winter holidays, we are told by state authorities to brace for another onerous three-week lockdown. The production of a vaccine and its eventual distribution promise some relief, but the confrontation with the pandemic has exposed the ill health of capitalism raising critical questions about our system and our humanity. "It is not wrong to say then," declares Sandro Mezzadra, "that the current pandemic has hit a point of no return in the development of global capitalism."[2]

Despite the grim reality of the outbreak and its spread as well as the insufferable response of political leaders in the U.S., from venal attempts to profit from the virus to outright denial,

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[1] An earlier version of this essay first appeared in *Convivial Thinking* at
<https://www.convivialthinking.org/index.php/2020/04/24/insubordinateconviviality/>.
[2] Sandro Mezzadra, "Politics of Struggles in the Time of Pandemic," Verso blog
<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4598-politics-of-struggles-in-the-time-of-pandemic>, accessed December 7, 2020.

what we have observed more and more, and may have forgotten was possible, are people

cooperating and working together, affirming that we are and always have been connected. Part of

a dense web of relations, we no longer have "the luxury" to imagine ourselves outside a thick,

tangled skein of sociality. Before COVID-19, our interdependence may have been less visible,

poorly understood, or dismissed as a result of the relentless interference typical of commodity

intensive society. Although we are mired in the static from everything in place to prop it up, we

remain connected. COVID-19, and, more importantly, the failed institutional response to it has

not only revealed our underlying habits of cooperation and shared desires, it has also brutally

exposed the limits and corrosive impact of racial patriarchal capitalism as a social mediating

system.[3]

Even before the virus started to wreak havoc, capitalism had been dying.[4] Robert Kurz

and the *wertkritik* school of Marxist critique, for example, have long since warned that the shelf

life of the current mode of production has expired.[5] Autonomist Marxists of different stripes

have also been sounding alarm bells about capitalism's final stage.[6] "If capital is to function as a

historical concept," McKenzie Wark suggests, "then the question of how and when it ends has to

be an open one."[7] COVID-19's rapid spread has not only disrupted just in time production and

supply chains, it has also exposed the system's multiple, intertwined fictions, especially, and

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[3] By referring to capitalism as a social mediating system, I am drawing from the work of Moishe Postone. See, for example, Moishe Postone, "The Task of Critical Theory Today: Rethinking the Critique of Capitalism and Its Futures," *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 33 (2015): 3-28.

[4] There has been some disagreement about whether or not capitalism is actually dying, or what we are experiencing is simply a "crisis."

[5] For a succinct introduction to the work of *wertkritik*, see Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinson, and Nicholas Brown, eds., *Marxism and the Critique of Value* (Chicago: MCM', 2014). Anselm Jappe, *The Writing on the Wall: On the Decomposition of Capital and Its Critics* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2017).

[6] The archive of autonomist Marxism is extensive, however for a discussion of capitalism's most recent crisis from an autonomist Marxist perspective, see for example, Sandro Mezzadra, "Politics of Struggles in the Time of Pandemic," Verso blog <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4598-politics-of-struggles-in-the-time-of-pandemic>, accessed December 7, 2020.

[7] McKenzie Wark, *Capital is Dead* (London: Verso Books, 2019): 12.

most importantly, that people's worth only depends on what they earn or consume. Western governments like the U.S.'s mad scramble to send out checks to everyone they can along with subsidies and loans for businesses, small and large, further undermines that fiction, even if lawmakers still can't agree who is worthy and who is not, and how much people deserve or should be allocated to keep the system functioning. The point remains: if people don't buy stuff, especially buying stuff that they don't really need, the system collapses. And now, they can't get stuff, especially the basic, life-saving items people actually rely on. The neoliberal conceit that there is no alternative to capitalism and the renewed faith in the free market and the entrepreneurial individual by neoliberal shamans seems foolish now that there is talk of the need for a universal basic income and better coordination within and across industries while also facilitating public and private cooperation to produce badly needed personal protective equipment (PPE) and therapies to confront the COVID-19 threat.

The rush to produce a vaccine illustrates the point. Industry can be put in service of the common good, but the specter of profit haunts the effort. Early in the crisis, Trump's limited application of the Defense Production Act, some argue too little too late, revealed the system's contradictions. Initially it seemed the world's industrial leader and the center of world consumption could not produce sufficient amounts of ventilators, PPE, swabs, and other medical equipment to protect first responders and slow the spread. Even the limited number of hospital intensive care units (ICU) and beds indicates the limits of a system designed around commodities for the privileged few and not health. We have been content to build "a world," according to Max Brooks, "built on comfort and not resilience."[8] While it is beyond the scope of this essay to

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[8] "'All Of This Panic Could Have Been Prevented': Author Max Brooks On COVID-19", *NPR Fresh Air*, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/24/820601571/all-of-this-panic-could-have-been-prevented-author-max-brooks-on-covid-19> accessed on December 7, 2020.

interrogate President Trump's handling of the Covid-19 moment, it is clear as more information

surfaces that Trump and many people in his inner circle may have attempted to profit from the

production and distribution of PPE. More to the point, beyond Trump's corruption and

ineptitude, health care and even disasters have long been treated as sources of value. Bonds for

disasters often interfere with the needed response to save lives. As the pandemic advanced and

demands for PPE increased, supply-chains became, according to Angela Mitropoulos, opaque,

underscoring that "PPE is a commodity."[9] The twin snakes of the caduceus converted into bio-

capitalism and financial capitalism.[10]

Of course, the absurdities of neoliberal planners and the brutalities imposed by state and

supra-state institutions on ordinary people have long been contested. When the Zapatistas

entered the world stage in 1994 they helped mark an entirely new collective refusal, one that

advanced in conjunction with a succession of convergences and rebellions that accumulated

definitive force in 1999, again in 2006 with the massive migrant marches and Oaxaca commune,

and with the Occupations of 2011, up to the present—these few notable moments unfolding

alongside the countless insurgencies across the globe contesting structural adjustment,

extractivist predation, and operational warfare.

Not surprisingly, governments across the globe, especially highly industrialized ones like

the U.S., have followed the well-worn ruts of "war thinking" —mobilizing against COVID-19 as

an enemy of the state. Bureaucrats and pundits alike easily mouth the bellicose rhetoric,

ballyhooing about wartime sacrifices and cajoling a collective austerity secured through

affirmations of national identity to defeat the newest threat to the people, even if the "we" is

overdetermined by race and gender and other technologies of difference. As Shaun Ossei-Owusu

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[9] Angela Mitropoulos, *Pandemonium*, (London: Pluto Press, 2020): 99.
[10] Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

reminds us, "Covid-19 is not discriminatory as a biological matter, but history and available accounts indicate that the epidemiological fallout has been and will continue to be weighty and uneven."[11] But zealous, national chauvinism can't hide self-serving interest. The two trillion dollar bailout steered through Congress by Trump's cabinet and the new package currently under consideration promise to be a massive bailout for industry and as many warn, a transfer of funds to the lever pullers with little to no safeguards. The 2008 crisis is replayed as farce barely a decade later.

More to the point, these are the same self-serving paid spokespeople, politicians and pundits alike, who relentlessly promoted a complex, interconnected series of seemingly endless wars: the war on drugs, the war on terror, war against immigrants, and a series of wars on crime. But, it's really one war, what the Zapatistas call the Fourth World War.[12] It is war fought out to ruthlessly extract what can be taken, one where the U.S. military dollar backs up the new world order of a divided globe organized through what W.E.B Du Bois called a democratic despotism, that is an armed national association propped up by a collaboration between capital and labor that systematically exploits the "darker nations" of the world, at home and abroad, for the luxury of a select few in the global north.[13]

A generation before the Zapatistas issued their clarion call that another world is possible, Ivan Illich warned against a relentless war against subsistence, a war where we are less and less able to recognize the battle lines and determine the real enemy, much less how we are being defeated. A war against subsistence targets the vernacular, the competencies of everyday people

[11] Shaun Ossei-Owusu, "Covid-19 and the Politics of Disposability," in Politics of Care (Cambridge: Boston Review, 2020): 116.

[12] El Kilombo Intergaláctico, *Beyond Resistance: Everything, An Interview with Subcomandante Marcos* (Durham: Paperboat Press, 2007).

[13] Du Bois, W.E.B. "African Roots of War" *Atlantic Monthly* 115:5 (May 1915).

and the knowledges and practices they exercise on a daily basis to live in the localities they claim.[14] This war has been executed since the dawn of capitalism through intertwined criminalizations and pacifications, but more recently has become particularly destructive for targeted groups increasingly treated as disposable. In the U.S. case more so since Vietnam, it has been executed through low intensity warfare and counterinsurgency mostly, but not always, managed through proxies, like the state of Israel, or where governments prosecute it themselves as in India's ongoing occupation and persecution of Kashmir. At home in the U.S., counterinsurgency unfolds through a matrix of state and state-manufactured violence often made more visible in the moment of a police shooting and the repression that follows.

In the end, it is the imposition of market logics and commodity intensive regimes accompanied by a discipline of individuating practices and a repressive apparatus to enforce the production of difference that rip apart the social fabric. It isn't enough that there should be a Walmart on every corner in America, there have to be Walmart Super Centers and Targets across the globe. Illich presciently warned that "even when price tags are attached that reflect the environmental impact, the disvalue of nuisance, or the cost of polarization, we still do not clearly see that the division of labor, the multiplication of commodities, and the dependence on them have forcibly standardized packages for almost everything people formerly did or made on their own."[15]

In California, the state government's order for citizens to shutter-in exposes the contradictions neoliberal planners refused to accept. In this new world, grocery store clerks, stockers, and deliverers have been designated emergency or essential personnel. Of course, those able to work at home and shelter in place somewhat comfortably are able do so because of those

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[14] Ivan Illich, "War Against Subsistence," in *Shadow Work* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981).
[15] Illich, *Toward a History of Needs*, (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1977): 7.

who are more easily put at risk as front-line workers in health care; picking, packaging, and serving food; and even working in Amazon warehouses. Not only precarious and necessary workers but also those outside the labor force all together and on the streets or living along creeks and parks who are more likely to be folks of color and "have been delivered to disease by their history—U.S. history."[16] When we are forced to stay off the streets, shop close to home, labor from within our homes, and entertain ourselves within confined spaces we are confronted with the excess and waste of a commodity intensive society organized around individual consumption and pleasures even as we may long for a return to normalcy.

The excesses and destructive force of what Illich called industrial mode of production, a.k.a capitalism, have long been known. Worried about over dependence on commodities, Illich proposed a "counterfoil research" to differentiate between industrial and convivial tools and to uncover the corrosive impact of those commodities and industrial systems that impose and circulate them, e.g. transportation, education, and health industry to name just a few. Industrial tools rob us of our ability to subsist outside of market logics and commodity discipline. The battle is to reclaim convivial tools, or those practices and strategies of self-organization that insure all members of a community are involved in the process of coming to agreement about and for the community's regeneration. We are reminded of our desire to cooperate —"mutual aid!" is now shouted by more than just anarchists across America.

The COVID 19 conjuncture requires a counterfoil research. As we discover new ways to cooperate and reclaim what had been mediated, we rebuild our social networks, increase our interactive capacities, and expand our reservoir for empathy taking advantage of whatever platforms and spaces might work. Zoom is overwhelmed, but it has been commandeered to bring

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[16] Colin Gordon, Walter Johnson, Jason Q. Purnell, and Jamala Rogers, "Covid-19 and the Color Line," in *Politics of Care* (Cambridge: Boston Review, 2020): 119.

together the dense network of relations we often take for granted or forget about when we are stuck in traffic and isolated in our cars in the race to get to our jobs. Our appropriation of that and other digital platforms can be an opportunity to seek out non-privatized alternatives, as May First Movement Technology (https://mayfirst.coop) proposes. The proliferating digital encounters not only map out our need to be connected, even if only virtually for the time being, they have also been used to organize —to postpone or end rent, student loans, and other usurious debts, as well as coordinating efforts to get food, shelter, and health care to those who desperately need it. But, it is also an opportunity to reorganize life outside of commodities— food, shelter, health, and learning claimed as human rights, not operated as markets.

The challenges of working from home or virtual learning, as companies, school systems, colleges, and universities desperately try to maintain their authority and control over laborers and learners, expose a critical dilemma in this particular conjuncture, namely the challenges we face in managing information and converting it into knowledge to insure, for example, we are all well informed and able to make effective, collective decisions as we navigate the COVID-19 conjuncture. As privatized and government systems break-down, we are tasked with reclaiming commons, e.g. knowledge commons, as so many have been advocating amidst the long-standing environmental catastrophe that has been further laid bare by COVID-19. The question of how we will organize our learning to intellectually enrich ourselves, serve our communities, and collectively steward the planet becomes more urgent as we confront university degrees increasingly commodified and education converted into a site of consumption on campuses shamelessly privatized. How might we learn what we need to learn to survive? More importantly, how do we learn, as Fred Moten asks, to tread lightly on the planet?

The lesson of COVID-19 is not demanding universal health care, although that is long overdue. It is making clear we need to more fully, collectively transition to a new comprehensive system that is not racial patriarchal capitalism. In this breach, we should consider conviviality, not as the alternative or the teleological end to capitalism's demise, but as a praxis to facilitate our transition. Conviviality's focus on interrogating the current system, distinguishing between corrosive and convivial tools, and emphasizing community regeneration is vital as we research, learn, and experiment with new tools, systems, and practices in our shared effort to rebuild the social infrastructure that was brutally destroyed by phases of capitalist accumulation. Modes of conviviality that include a commitment to interrogate the epistemology of the current system through, for example, convivial research and insurgent learning, a commitment to distinguish between corrosive industrial tools and those convivial tools that make community regeneration possible, and an embrace of a politics of (re)subjectivization, or the possibility of a radical transformation, can point to autonomous alternatives. It can re-orient us to the self-organized efforts of (re)building a social infrastructure of community that includes practices, knowledges, grassroots institutions, and convivial tools. Conviviality embodies the circulation of reliable information, informed collective decision making, shared obligations of coordinated action, and deliberate assessment of success which are not separated and carried out by bureaucracies, corporate/non-profit boards, or CEOs outside of a self-organized community.

The point is that there must be a strategy for active members of a locally-rooted community to generate their own information determined by local experiences, filter competing knowledges, determine shared obligations, make strategic decisions, act out of "fierce care," and assess the success of the strategy.[17] Decisions that impact a community cannot occur at the top or

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[17] Callahan, Manuel and Annie Paradise. "Fierce Care: Politics of Care in the Zapatista Conjuncture." *Transversal* (2017), <https://transversal.at/blog/Fierce-Care>.

outside of the community nor exercised exclusively by elites. All elements have to be integrated.

A community, or as Wendell Berry describes it, that "commonwealth and common interests, commonly understood, of people living together in a place and wishing to do so," is necessarily a decision-making body. Conviviality is about reclaiming or inventing tools, that is tools that make it possible for a community to claim and assert its dignity and regenerate itself while insuring everyone in the community is able to participate making informed decisions and entering into agreements that advance the community without negatively impacting any one member. One prominent example of a convivial tool is the assembly. Not an organization or congregation, not an aggregation of individuals, not an event, but a collective subject. Now, more than ever is the time to relearn the habits of assembly.

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