Article

EXPERIENCES OF SPACE AND TIME IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: LETTER FROM BILBAO

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The COVID-19 pandemic has become a global phenomenon with powerful effects. The deaths and suffering, and the measures taken to mitigate the propagation, are changing the way we relate, work, and enjoy ourselves. The psychological impact on individuals and groups can only be partially known yet, but deserves examination. We focus on the specific place where we live: the city of Bilbao in northern Spain. The response of its people could represent an example of the COVID-19 experience and its effects, and some aspects might be generalized elsewhere. This paper reflects on the influence of the pandemic on some relevant social dimensions: personal and public spaces, affected by estrangement, time, subject to a slower pace, which pushes us into a different contact with our internal world. It also addresses a social vision of the pandemic as a punishment for our errors in the socio-economic and environmental fields, the role of uncertainty that generates strong defensive movements at the group level, and the expressions of personal and group courage throughout the process. The intensity of the pandemic in Bilbao and many parts of the world still prevents reflection on the long-term effects, which will have to be investigated in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

The pandemic is a global catastrophe with hundreds of thousands of deaths across the planet. One after another, regions and countries have been affected and forced to fight, with the few weapons available, against an invisible and deadly enemy. This catastrophe undoubtedly challenges us all, and we have all reflected on its impact on the lives of our people, our society, and our small personal world. Some places have already begun to emerge from the well of pain and strangeness in which they have lived. When abandoning confinement, people go out into the streets winking, frightened by the light and amazed that the streets and buildings, mute witnesses of the plague, continue to stand, watching them as they are watched. We are experiencing a truly global event; every continent, every country has been affected and a tide of fear or denial is sweeping through the streets. Most of us have emerged weakened from the epidemic, physically and morally. This is an unprecedented experience and it is worth stopping to examine some of the reactions, individual and social, to this global and terrible phenomenon. One way of approaching this reflection is from a very local perspective, exploring what has happened in a very specific community, the area of Bilbao, a coastal city in the north of Spain, with a strong industrial past and today transformed into a city of services and attractive for international tourism thanks to its Guggenheim Museum and a successful redevelopment. Its limited size (one million inhabitants in greater Bilbao area) allows a more comprehensive view of the city and its people so that perhaps the conclusions of the reflection can be generalized to other places.

The "official" start of the pandemic was marked by some highly symbolic elements. In the vicinity of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, there was an installation by Icelandic artist Olafur Elliason. An artificial waterfall subjugated the spectator with its constant murmur and the curtain of water that fell incessantly. One could imagine the stream of water waiting eagerly for the one who would make it his by watching it, calling out to us in desperation with its deafening murmur. Just a few meters away there is a beautiful, life-size statue of a man walking. The gesture is vivid and almost seems to escape from the splashes of the waterfall, as it gets too close, distracted. Someone placed a mask over his mouth, signaling the beginning of a new era. The pandemic and confinement came, the museums closed and Elliason's waterfall continued to produce a liquid whisper that nobody heard.

PERSONAL SPACE

Decades ago, families in Bilbao gathered around the only television set where they could watch the programs of the only channel at nightfall. Thousands of families would listen to the same story in unison, which was then shared the next day. A community of stories and narratives presided over what for a large group of the population was a more uniform society, a more shared world. The settings were often similar and there were memories of past common dramas that had survived. Later, society became more complex and a multitude of minimal and isolated worlds emerged. Each of these worlds built its own stories, its own dreams, even its own memories. These common experiences were diluted to form faint veils. Suddenly the pandemic puts an end to that situation and composes a layer of pain that falls on everyone without distinction. Like the snow in James Joyce's story "The Dead" (1914), which falls on mountains and cities, streets and gardens, on the living and the dead. Its icy whiteness makes us equal and imposes a powerful narrative that incorporates everyone. We have lived, we are living, a great evil snowfall that has left the streets, the great avenues downtown and the narrow passages of the old quarters—empty. Perhaps for the first time since the Spanish Civil War we have experienced a common disaster, which has produced deaths and pain, which will generate shared memories and that peculiar sense of fraternity of those who have lived a simultaneous drama.

   All the technology we possessed was not able to protect us, imparting a great lesson of humility to our generation. Social distance, soap and alcohol, and a piece of cloth on our face were the great means that have allowed us to limit the effects of the pandemic. And the fundamental mechanism of social distance, and the so-called confinement, were not based on purely sanitary reasons, but rather on solidarity, and fraternity. We must isolate ourselves so as not to harm those who would suffer more than us if they fell ill. This is the great paradox of the pandemic: the best way to care for others is to get away from them (Žižek, 2020). This wave of brotherhood that has been seen in many communities around the world is certainly the shocking news of the pandemic. In Bilbao, as everywhere, solidarity had displaced a mere utilitarian conception, which involves giving up the weak and the elderly to death, and the maxim of the old French Republican tradition has been chosen: "one for all and all for one."

   At the same time, although the pandemic is a blanket of snow that covers everything, people are living very different situations underneath it. On the economic front, society has clearly been divided between those with secure, well-paid jobs or savings that enable them to cope with the new, difficult economic situation and the others. Those who live day by day, who

here and everywhere are now covered by transitory state aid of an uncertain duration. The new and unexpected solidarity arises in the context of a social climate of increasing inequality that is also being questioned by many economists everywhere (Kelton, 2020; Piketty, 2019).

One inequality that has manifested itself with intensity in this crisis has to do with age. The bulk of the suffering victims of the pandemic were the elderly. Their vulnerable bodies have not been able to resist the onslaught of the virus and many, especially those who are isolated in retirement homes, have fallen victims to the disease, dying in the solitude of their rooms, often without a farewell or a last embrace. During some periods of the crisis, the situation in the hospitals has also generated a necessary but ruthless triage, as the limited resources were distributed in the ICUs among those with the greatest possibility of benefitting from them. And that subgroup seldom included the elderly. The criteria that at the height of the crisis determined who might not be a candidate for a respirator is overwhelming and forces us to think about how easy it is to be excluded. One main criterion has been age. Pure and simple.

In this context, voices of elderly "opinion leaders" have emerged. Politicians or men of culture—we have not heard this from women—have gallantly declared their willingness to die and leave the world to the young. They believe the economy should not be stopped and if that means many old people die, beginning with them, so be it. Although admirable, these expressions of bravery must be heard in the context of hundreds dead and thousands sick or hospitalized, many in their 50s, 40s and even 30s.

Would this gallantry prevail when faced with death coming from extreme respiratory failure and thrombosis? The French philosopher Grimaldi (2020) points out a general cultural prejudice as cause for some skepticism: life lived is worth less than life to be lived.

PUBLIC SPACE

One of the most powerful impacts of the pandemic has been on public space: the isolation and the new emptiness of the city with its deserted streets. People have fought against that void, opening windows and balconies to allow the street to enter their homes and their confinement to become kinder. Or, in the opposite direction, sharing through social networks the landscapes that some lucky people could contemplate from their homes. This is what Žižek (2020), a Lacanian philosopher calls the *new communism,* set in motion by the epidemic, a new form of relationship based on greater solidarity.

We can consider the urban space as a transitional territory in which the interior and the exterior are delimited as are the rules to cross between them (Langan, 2000). It is a space that configures meeting areas which make possible creativity and favor interpersonal links (Angel, 2000; Jemstedt, 2000; Schinaia, 2014). Some people go so far as to say that urban space makes possible the appearance of the "true self" of the individual (Rodman, 2005). Each society constructs for itself a space that adjusts to its needs (Lefebvre, 1991) and that for Bollas (2000) represents the unconscious dispositions of the group that inhabits it. A defining space of the group in which can be perceived both the real territory full of limitations and sometimes threatening (Stein, 2019), and the longed for and searched for ideal space. The ideal space constitutes one more facet of the Ideal Ego constructed on the model of infantile narcissism (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). The ideal space is the context that surrounds the Ideal Ego and colors the object relations in which it manifests itself. Different societies have experienced the spatial impact of the pandemic in predictably different ways. The city is the place that has received the greatest impact. For some groups the empty streets awaken pain and loss, in others they evoke a mixture of relief because what is damaged is a hostile place that is perceived as alien. The familiar controversy between the city and the countryside (Bettelheim, 1991; Fors, 2018) is reproduced here.

Theoretical physics teaches us that space and time can be considered as a single dimension. Also, in the inner world space and time are closely linked. The spaces of the pandemic are largely waiting spaces, spaces linked to time. We wait until the confinement is over, until we return to normal life, until the pandemic disappears, until the treatment or vaccine arrives, until we are reunited with our friends, colleagues or loved ones, until the streets and buildings are once again overflowing with activity.

Individual identity is the result of a complex, lifelong process, the key elements of which are personal, emotionally significant attachments. Our internal world is thus delimited by the representations of self and object, linked by a specific affect and interacting between them (Kernberg, 2006). It is tempting to think that the environment, the backdrop of this link, might represent yet one more element. A setting that acts as a "stain of color" that somehow "tinges" all that is strictly related and which, at the same time, is a repository of projections as it is loaded with history, with the past. We could conjecture that the environment, the urban space that surrounds us, complements that object configuration of our internal world by constituting a repository of projections loaded with history that somehow involve the relational (Gonzalez-Torres & Fernandez-Rivas, 2020). This way, the distance imposed on us by the pandemic also calls into question our own identity. If I separate myself from others, I separate myself from myself. That

is why, together with the separation from people, there is a rapprochement in the internal space resulting from the need to protect our identity. Every feeling implies a mutuality and every encounter, in real or imaginary space, not only makes the representation of the object more solid, but also that of the self. COVID-19 empties the cities and confines us at home, isolated and afraid. In this way, when we move away from others, it questions our identity and forces us to protect it.

In the midst of confinement if we must go out into the streets in our city, we find an oppressive, strange, disturbing, inhuman void. What is human is the crowd of the city. We have a general tendency to gather in order to learn, to work, to enjoy. Little by little the empty streets of the city are populated by other inhabitants: doves, seagulls, or even rats at their leisure where they would never have dared before. It is a suggestive image: the forces of the unconscious manifest themselves little by little once our absence opens the barriers that limited them. These primitive forces are always on the prowl and they gain great strength in some confined groups generating a resurgence of violence within the home, such as child and spousal abuse. And the children are confused by the empty and dangerous spaces. The playgrounds closed before an invisible enemy that they do not understand but that frightens everyone. Bruno Bettelheim (1991) empha- sizes how the city does not consist only of streets and buildings, however significant these may be, but also of the people around us. Bettelheim quotes Shakespeare: "the people are the city" and Thucydides: "it is men who make the city, not walls or ships" (p. 177). The city possesses a maternal tint for its inhabitants and, especially for the child, a tint of both a protective and an asphyxiating womb. And suddenly the pandemic pushes us towards a story reminiscent of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) or Lars Von Trier's *Dogville* (2003). An almost empty space where identity is sustained by intense passions that manifest themselves in a climate of absence. Absence of scenarios that modulate, nuance, and connect.

This new role of space has also affected therapies. There were recommendations from the authorities to reduce face-to-face contacts as much as possible. In some cases, patients were relieved to hear the news because they saw offices and hospitals as dangerous places to spread the disease. Others experienced it as an unfair loss that took them away from the therapist in times of special suffering. In general mental health work, telephone calls were often chosen, especially with patients who were already known and stable. Interestingly, many patients live with appreci- ation for this peculiar inversion of initiative. The clinician "visits" the patient at home through the phone call, which is often perceived as a gift from the practitioner. In the field of psychotherapy and specifically psychoanalytical work, many have discovered the possibilities of online work. Even very

experienced colleagues, not at all used to new technologies, have found to their surprise that quality work is possible. Different but certainly "good enough." Obviously, there are repercussions at the transferential and countertransferential level that are perhaps most clearly perceived with patients with severe personality disorders in which the intensity of these phenomena is greater. The lack of physical presence and the very real possibility that only by pressing one key the other disappears introduces new elements that modify the existing analyst-analysand dynamics (see Harris *et al.*, 2021). Without a doubt, the long experience with online supervisions with colleagues from other parts of the world has been very useful to many of us, facilitating a certain familiarity with online contact. It is early to assess the negative impact of these changes, which have undoubtedly existed within and outside of mental health and psychother-apies. Patients who required detailed in-person evaluations have only received calls, long delayed consultations, hospital admissions that could have been avoided, non-urgent surgery postponed *sine die*. Even in places like Bilbao, with an advanced universal public health system, the pandemic has directly and indirectly endangered the health of citizens.

In most cities there are "highly cathected" spaces that are part of the memory of many and contribute especially to the identity of the city and its inhabitants. They are spaces that have often constituted the stage of our memories, the backdrop of relational encounters that have gradually shaped basic elements of our identity. In some cases, these spaces belong by right to the Ideal Ego of the social group in question since they give rise to ideal visions of the group with which its members identify. They occupy the role of social or cultural amplifiers (Volkan, 2019, 2020) that individuals in the group consider to be representative of the collective identity. An example could be the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, which in a few years has won not only the approval but also the enthusiasm of the conservative population of Bilbao, which has embraced its new museum with passion. The presence of this museum and its rooms full of visitors contribute to the new identity of the city that is escaping from a painful past of loss and ruin (Gonzalez-Torres & Fernandez-Rivas, 2020). The empty museum during the confinement is not only the reflection of a disappearance of the visitors but also an attack against the identity of the citizen group. If the functioning museum points to a new group identity, what is the impact of the empty space? Rooms full of works of art waiting to be observed. It could be said that the identity of the city is therefore suspended, all pending the reunion with that which granted a new identity to repair. Empty streets, closed cinemas, museums without visitors force us to the difficult task of representing absence (Green, 2005) and can push us to identify with that

strange and sad scenario that now surrounds us. A place with life in suspense, waiting for an undated change.

Žižek, in his recent book on the pandemic (2020), describes how Christ, in St. John's Gospel, warns Mary Magdalene after his resurrection: "Noli me tangere," "Do not touch me." It is love and not the certainty of touch that, according to the Gospel, will make Christ present. The sanitary chaos that we are experiencing pushes us to seek contact with the other through distance, that famous social distance that in some sense has brought us closer. Confinement has distanced us physically from some loved ones, but instead it has provoked calls, contacts, long conversations always postponed with distant friends, genuine concern for the well-being of others, real pain for the suffering of friends. Like the Magdalene, the prohibition of direct contact has forced us to think about the others, about those we miss or those we love. The kiss and the embrace have disappeared but perhaps this imposed distance has led us to a different treatment perhaps, paradoxically, closer. The pandemic produces a new and double conception of space. An external space in which individuals move away from each other to protect and shelter each other. Another internal one in which distances are shortened and ties are tightened.

COURAGE AND HEROISM

There are people who at the dawn of the crisis disappeared to take refuge in the most protected trench they could find. Cowards are frequent characters. Profoundly human in their decision to avoid danger, they exhibit that tendency to flee that we all carry within us to some extent. An old sage used to say that "it is better to say that a coward lives here than a brave man died here." Cowards are a mirror in which we contrast our image. Their presence, or rather their absence, relieves us by showing us what we are not, at least for now.

On the contrary, the pandemic has made us encounter a multitude of daily heroes. Ordinary heroes in the sense of Grand (2010), which somehow point out that the heroic is within each of us. People who are often proud of their daily work, who face it with conviction because they feel that it is their duty. But there is a clear perception of moral obligation, of inner strength that awakens pride in doing something painful but at the same time full of value and that, for us analysts, implies deliberately submitting to the command of the Superego. It is the daily, routine work, without great gestures and carried out not by isolated characters in critical moments, but by the overwhelming majority of people who had to be there and have been there. There is something heroic in doing what must be done

when it must be done, assuming the risks of the profession that each one has chosen. Weiss (1965) pointed out that courage and the control of fear implies a regressive attitude that includes a denial of reality, and its replacement by a system of delusions that protect the subject's narcissism at risk and deny danger and death. Fortunately for us this "socially healthy" flight from reality has affected many people, especially among health workers.

Here, and in many other parts of the world a specific social group has taken on the role of designated heroes: the health care workers. They have often paid a high price for their efforts. During the first wave of the virus in Spain, 20% of those who were ill with COVID-19 were health professionals. Personnel from the Pneumology, Infectious Diseases and ICU teams ended up admitted as patients in the wards prepared for COVID-19. Every day at 8 P.M., people in confinement went to their windows, balconies or to the entrance of their houses and applauded for a few minutes to these health workers, who took care of everyone in those difficult moments. It was somewhat overwhelming to witness this unanimous ovation. These public ceremonies of gratitude for health workers may reflect the manifestation of an "exoskeleton," a valued behavior, that helps to avoid the anguish of the present, providing capacity for resilience (Benasayag & Del Ray, 2011).

But these ceremonies might also express an idealized and protective bond that will help us overcome the epidemic. If we carefully examine the scene and what it represents, we can observe in that collective action the manifestation of a relational dyad composed of an idealized object, the health workers, showing sacrifice, energy and dedication, taking the place of a saving, sacrificial, and generous parental figure. In parallel we can perceive a representation of the collective self as being cared for, protected, fraternal. The predominant affect that links both representations is gratitude or love. This is an ideal family scenario that comforts everyone. Perhaps this role of the health professional in many places is equivalent to that occupied by the firefighters of New York after the 9/11 terrorist attack (Goren, 2007), a repository of both loss and social resolve to resist pain and death. As designated heroes, they assume a position of omnipotence to embark on his task and then abandon it in order to return to normal life (Steiner, 2015). But nobody here is sure about when that will happen.

There is a differentiating aspect to this pandemic situation. Unlike other situations that make possible the appearance of heroic figures, there is no villain, there is no public enemy that the hero faces with gallantry. Or there is, but it is an invisible virus without a conscience. The heroes here take a masochistic position because they will expose themselves to outside aggression and their appeal lies in their determination to face pain and risk in our place, not to destroy the evil that can eliminate us.

PUNISHMENT

Historically, epidemics were considered the just punishment for our sins, for lack of faith, for adoring new gods. The French philosopher Francis Wolff (Wolff & Compte-Sponville, 2020) points out how we still function like that today, only our sins have changed. Now the epidemic is the punishment for our attitudes towards the environment, for our neoliberal policies, or for a combination of both.

Freud (1920), when proposing the existence of a death drive and later on, authors such as Fenichel (1928) or Alexander (1929) pointed out that the problem of the need for self-punishment constitutes one of the most remarkable aspects of the psychic life of man. Today most authors link punishment fantasies with a response to "forbidden" childhood wishes or direct expressions of the death drive. Interestingly, Carveth (2006) suggests that sometimes such fantasies, rather than being a manifestation of guilt, can serve as a defense against it. They involve the persecutory anxiety and shame characterizing the paranoid-schizoid position and are a manifestation of narcissism and hate. Thus, the immediate social reaction to the pandemic, such as the appearance of guilt and the corresponding punishment, would reflect not so much a mature and healthy reparative attitude linked to Eros, but rather an attempt to evade our responsibility and promote the necessary social and individual changes. Punishment would then fall on both the self and the object, thus creating its own vicious circle (Smith, 2008).

We can consider the need for punishment as a result of a profoundly human movement. This magical belief gives us potential control over the disaster. If we pay more attention to nature and do not destroy it, or if we abandon Milton Friedman's monetarism then we will be saved, there will be no pandemics, no pain, and no catastrophe. Just as centuries ago there were processions with priests and sacred images in front imploring God's protection from the plague, today we march together to the sound of promises of respect for the environment and wrapped in Keynesian passion.

Then and now we elude a deep terror in front of the randomness that rules our world. The real fear is that we have no control over our destiny. The most disturbing nightmare is that one day an errant comet will crash into our planet and destroy it. And the whole universe will remain silent after the explosion of our civilization without shedding a tear for the loss of so many lives, for the disappearance of Cervantes and Beethoven, of Einstein and Kubrik, of the Guinea mahogany, of the Bengal tiger, or of the California redwood. The philosopher wonders if the fall of a tree in an uninhabited forest makes noise. Who will hear the din of our disappearance, will we have existed if no one remembers us? Randomness is the true

horror and our desperate search for a deserved punishment is nothing but the way to find a certain solace in the midst of the terrible emptiness of chance, the supreme God.

Maybe we should surrender to that God of chance, but why does submission cause so much trouble these days? Life demands a pertinent degree of submission to at least two factors: time and other people. Time passes relentlessly and anyone who has lived a little is fully aware of how fleeting it is. We are older, we are weaker, we become sick and, most certainly, we die. Most of us definitely live our lives as if we were immortal. And now an invisible force has appeared that subdues us, the global pandemic that forces us all and reminds us that time, its sister death, and the others, are there whether we want them to be or not, and they limit us.

Salman Rushdie (2020) elegantly points out in his latest novel how we humans are forced to choose between a vision of the world based on mistrust and suspicion (paranoia, in his terminology) and one presided over by entropy or a natural and inexorable tendency towards disorder. The chaos we have experienced, and which has not yet ended in the management of the pandemic at a local and global level, with disconcerting figures, shocking statements, chaotic measures, and general unpredictability. It pushes us to choose between one or another conspiracy theory involving an individual or collective entity that manipulates our world for its own benefit, or the familiar absurdity of improvisation, clumsiness or simple ignorance. Again, what is on the table is the possibility of maintaining some control over our lives.

Just as a paranoid patient finds a certain balance in his delirious construction, which reveals a controlled and understandable world (Kernberg, 2019), so people and groups today take refuge in a vision of the world based on the projection of negative parts on the object, generating a stable and threatening perspective that is easy to understand and before which the subject identifies with a persecuted self, full of anger and united with other abused brothers. The early Kleinian world of the schizo-paranoid position (Klein, 1946) is more present today than ever before. We could say that Rushdie's "paranoia" is a way of reacting to chaos to avoid feeling dominated by chance and the anguish of uncertainty. It is better to see ourselves subjected to powerful forces that oppress us than to assume our total powerlessness in the face of destiny. Randomness simply terrifies us.

TIME

Movement has stopped; we are no longer travelling. The airports are almost empty, and the highways offer an unknown fluidity. The frenetic pace of our

world has stopped. The pandemic has therefore affected space and time. A new and not unpleasant slowness accompanies us. Sten Nadolny (1983) wrote a beautiful novel, *The Discovery of Slowness.* In it the protagonist assumes his deep and varied slowness and ends up making it an unquestionable virtue. Evenings that slip away quietly, Saturdays in which one has only to be at home, reading, dreaming, watching those television series we all follow now, as if they were on the remote television sets of the 60s. Was it necessary to hurry, to jump constantly from one activity to another, from a distant place to another more distant one? Today, that many of us have rediscovered a certain vital slowness, a fear assails us in the de-escalation. Can we avoid returning to that former frenetic, and tragic, pace? What will the legacy of the pandemic be?

Thomas Mann describes in *The Magic Mountain* (1924) a sanatorium where time seems to have stopped, where patients and doctors, healthy and sick, live with a different speed than the inhabitants of the valley. It is a slower time in which everything, even death, seems to arrive quietly, almost ceremoniously. The pandemic and confinement have severely altered not only space but also time. As in Mann's sanatorium in the Alps, we hope that the very slow pace of our new life will help us to stop the process and keep the ghost of death away. We are facing a new time, a different time.

Liberman (1955) proposed that time also reflects an object relationship. He states along with Rosenfeld that distance from the object is intimately linked to the knowledge of the passage of time; as soon as an object is desired, the immediate gratification of this desire is requested. It may be that, in the same way, a slowed down time necessarily influences the way in which we link to our objects and with it to our own identity. Fontana (1960) pointed to projective identification as a mechanism aimed at denying the passage of time. It is possible to use this idea to help us understand the social regressive phenomena that affect us these days.

Time and history also go together in terms of our psychic historicity (Rosemberg, 2002) that is, the chain of psychic states that determine our vital process and our identity. A stopped time is therefore a stopped history. As in *The Magic Mountain*, history slows down until it almost stops in the middle of that suspended time that delays death. This timeless social situation presents points of connection, with the process of analysis, in which therapist and patient build "an island in time" (Gonzalez-Torres, 2007, p. 252) that allows an exploration of past, present, and future outside the usual rules of storytelling. Quinodoz, in a beautiful article (2013), talks about the "seconds of eternity." When we think about our whole life, we realize that certain brief moments lived intensely have animated our whole existence, since they condensed a consciousness that would remain subtly present all our life. Time, at least psychic time, is elastic and does not

conform to the limitations of rational daily experience. It remains to be seen if this time, detained from confinement, lived and perhaps to be lived, will constitute one of those enlightening seconds of eternity that determine significant and lasting realizations.

Kernberg (2008) deepens the relationship between the organization of the personality of an individual and his way of conceiving and managing the subjective time of our psyche. He considers that especially narcissistic patients, with their great difficulties to accept dependence and the limits imposed by death and the others, are forced to destroy time to maintain the stability of their internal world. It is tempting to consider the possibility that our current narcissistic society is in a real process of time destruction, proposing an "endless summer" that denies any limitation. The current stand-by period provoked by the pandemic may be allowing a certain denial of reality, postponing the assumption of a painful dependence on factors beyond our control. We call our era "Anthropocene," standing on top of our great and fragile self, a sign of the gigantic vanity of our species.

After the return to a sui generis normality, people stop again to observe Eliason's cascade, which flows imperturbably, like a real waterfall, indifferent to what is happening around them, as a reminder of the smallness of our human existence. At his side, the bronze walker no longer wears a mask and seems to welcome the splashes.

COVID modifies space. No one knows if it will do so forever. It is impossible to say today whether we will ever see full stadiums again, mass shows, or hugs and kisses at meetings. No doubt this new external distance will modify our internal world. The direction of change is not yet well known. In the meantime, life awaits us. Different perhaps. The wise Montaigne warns us that above all else, we must prepare ourselves against preparations for death. Or to put it another way, to live-every moment.

NOTES

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