05 2022

Corona Effects

After Prevention, Just In Time: Digitalization and Contact Phobias

Isabell Lorey

Translated by Nils F. Schott

Is it really that extraordinary to live in a time in which the future, near or distant, is unforeseeable? The impossibility of making long-term plans has determined the everyday lives of many people for quite some time. Precarity and precarization have become normal. This is not just employment insecurity; it renders all of life uncertain. This unsecured normality is the experience of many in the pandemic; some go through it anew, some for the first time: job lost, income not secure, no end to physical and mental insecurity.

Since the 1990s, finance and labor markets have been deregulated in Europe as well: workplace safety and safe jobs are dismantled in favor of limited term contracts and project work; the European welfare states have been restructured; the health care systems have been reorganized with the aim to generate profits—in the pandemic, we are paying a heavy toll for all of it.

In precarization, time does not run in linear fashion. The future is incalculable, prevention is hardly possible. Precarization means

improvising, being forced to live with the unforeseeable, living not in the moment but in the extended now.[1] In precarization, the old bourgeois-capitalist linearity, the fantasy of ever more continuous growth and progress, falls apart. Even in Europe, many have come to realize that it will not always go on like this, that time is not a straight line, that the imperative of growth and progress must be stopped, that radically different economic and ecological modes of living and producing, and thus also other, non-linear conceptions of time, must come to dominate. And yet the desire for prevention, prediction, and provision for a better future persists, especially in the middle class. The increasing precarization of bourgeois social strata, too, however, shows that there are no guarantees, no ultimate certainties, no purities, and no straight lines of time, only a continuing ambiguous becoming in the present, only a living together with and in environments. Isolation, retreat, and contact avoidance are ultimately impossible: life means exchange beyond purity and separation. Survival depends on socialities, institutions, and environments.

Prevention

What does this permanent pre-vention mean, this coming-before that is more than just prediction, this acting to weaken or preclude an unwanted, threatening event? State authorities practice such an approach when it comes to environmental disasters, terror attacks, crime, or pandemics. Preventive action is based on calculations of a possible future by means of which the present can be kept under control and legitimized by security technologies.

Yet prevention also affects everyday behavior and has become part and parcel of neoliberal subjectivation, so much so that some speak of a "preventive self."[2] Exercise and a healthy diet belong to

preventive behavior just as much as regular medical checkups, as does not using certain places and things. Prevention needs individuals, their self-discipline and responsibility, their making provisions and their anxieties. Prevention relies on fears that a negative event could occur or a disease break out. Prevention aims at minimizing risk. Such a self-government can become normal for a large number of people only if they perceive themselves as increasingly threatened and become ever more concerned. Preventive behavior shapes everyday modes of subjectivation to such an extent that it becomes part of the normalized conception of time potentially to anticipate the future and influence it in the present by appropriate behavior. Everyday preventive behavior must then be constant and repeated for the hoped-for risk minimization to prove sustainable in the linearity of time. Driven by fears and anxieties, controlling and disciplining interventions are thus legitimized in the present. And yet, despite all efforts at minimizing risk, there is no certainty that things will not happen. Prevention does not bring security.

All risk minimization is based on figures, on statistics and calculations, and thus on a knowledge production of probabilities and forecasts.[3] Models that construct and work on risks intervene massively in everyday life and in self-relations.

In epidemiology, prevention research works mainly along two tracks, via statistics and individual diagnostics. Figures on the frequency of an infection in the population correspond to rules of conduct, testing, and if possible vaccinations of individuals. In this two-track approach, prevention in the healthcare sector, on the one hand, is not interested in the concrete individual subject but in anonymous infection rates in a territory and in the calculation of probable risks. On the other hand, with strategies of prevention, epidemiology aims at each individual and their concrete behavior.

Already in the 1990s, health policy in the AIDS crisis showed that measures to serve public health aimed primarily at an individualized capacity and responsibility to reduce the risk of infection. A biopolitical transformation took place in the logic of averting danger: a danger that comes from the outside to which the individual is exposed becomes a risk that they themselves are responsible for if they do not follow official measures and medical guidelines. The neoliberal turn toward responsible risk behavior is closely interwoven with the assignation of individual guilt where risk minimization does not succeed. The public sphere begins at the "orifices of the body,"[4] the openings that, to avoid infection, must be closed with condoms or masks. Neoliberalism inseparably associates thinking in terms of risk with the state's appeal to "self-responsibility."

Risk factors were invented in the 1950s in a newly emerging field of medical research: the epidemiology of chronic diseases.[5] Originally, epidemiology is the study of the course infectious diseases take, but after the Second World War, medical research increasingly emphasized the ever more common cardiovascular diseases. Thinking with risk factors emerged in the context of this research. It refers to diseases that often take many years to develop and do not display the short incubation periods of the diseases classical epidemiology focused on.[6] The perspective of risk factors, in terms of medical policy, is conservative because the factors do not include conditions of inequality such as living situation or poverty but only the behavior of individuals. The assignation of individual responsibility can, quite simply, more easily be combined with medical treatment and prevention requirements. Social, economic, and ecological contexts were considered too complex for uniform health policy measures. The individualizing non-contextual approach came to shape health

policy, despite a great deal of criticism from leftist social medicine since the 1970s.[7]

In the neoliberal health policy of the last few decades, based as it is on self-responsibility for provision, the logic of prevention and risk has fully come into its own: the cut-back and profit-oriented welfare state pursued an individualizing strategy of reward and punishment that appeals directly to individuals self-responsible behavior.[8] The paradigm of prevention is deeply inscribed, above all also for financial reasons, in the neoliberal restructuring and reduction of European welfare states and has long become a normalized self-disciplining and self-control: a normalized part of governmental subjectivation.[9] When someone does not sufficiently care and make provisions for themselves, the fault is theirs; the bad conscience and dissatisfaction about insufficient self-regulation never cease.[10]

A governmental health policy oriented to such a degree by the autonomous, responsible individual impedes solidary behavior. At the same time, however, such policies are not concerned with everyone being protected and protecting themselves but with calculating, by means of statistics and probabilities, the costs for social security and administration in such a way that expenditures leave a profit. Such economized health policies produce uncertainties and precarizations already by the discourse of risk in fear-driven prevention. It is disciplined and self-governing individuals of this kind who now face the COVID-19 epidemic in Europe.

Exchange and air

In the midst of the plague, governmental individual responsibility reveals the impossibility of autonomy and dissociation. If the public sphere begins at the orifices of the body, then bodies must precisely not be understood as isolated, enclosed individuals. Bodies cannot survive without contact and exchange with others and environments, without socialities. No one exists wholly autonomously; (self-)protection from disease is as impossible as protection from accidents. Bodies emerge in the first place in being affected by social and ecological environments.

Against this backdrop of unavoidable vulnerability and of precariousness, the genealogical lines that can be drawn for the strategies of social distancing, contact reduction, and appeals to self-individualize that have imposed themselves in the course of the pandemic are remarkable. For centuries, rulers have dreamt of separating individuals and of partitioning space to be able not simply to control the exchanges and gatherings of the many to fight a plague but to prevent unrest and protest.[11] The fight against contamination and the fight against uprisings are old "civilizational" allies.

There also seem to be genealogical threads between these alliances and the stern injunction to air out rooms in the COVID winter of 2020–21. The appeal to ventilate regularly when several people are present in a closed space recalls the belief, popular all the way until the late nineteenth century, that the air is contaminated with infected matter, so-called miasma; it must therefore not be allowed to "stagnate" and instead be kept in circulation.[12] The pestilential breath of miasma inspired nineteenth-century hygienists in particular to concoct a host of rules of conduct and interior designs, from the segregation of classes and alleged "races" to the partition of private homes: the separation of individuals each in their own beds and rooms, the installation of toilets in every

house and for every apartment. Great breaches were cut into a large number of cities to allow the air to circulate via broad boulevards. At the same time, these circulation paths—exemplarily, Georges-Eugène Haussmann's urban planning in Paris—were meant to reduce the risk of uprisings and make it easier to control protests than it had been in working class neighborhoods' maze of alleys and the uncontrollable contacts they made possible.[13]

The fight against contamination reorganizes space to impose distance. It changes behaviors and lets new bodies emerge that become more sensitive in a variety of ways—in the form of perceiving foul odors as in the nineteenth century or in the form of the unease in situations where others are too close that is currently gaining ground. Fighting epidemics produces enormous sensitivity and high levels of stress due to their unpredictability and uncontrollability. Like miasma, infectious aerosols in the COVID-19 epidemic can "float" in every room, in every part of society, in every place, and everyone can already carry the virus, spread it by breathing, speaking, coughing, sneezing.[14] We move under the constant possibility of infection. Nothing is certain, nothing is safe. Delimitations, of inside from outside, of mobile, partying potential carriers of the virus from immobile, protected non-bearers, are illusory. They lead to loneliness, to the formation of closed communities, and render authoritarianism ever more acceptable. In the midst of the pandemic, we need both care for oneself and for others particularly vulnerable and an acute sense for the way in which distancing self-regulation fans contact phobias. For in the long run, all that remains is a life with the permanent possibility of infection, with contacts, pollutions, and contaminations.[15]

Experimental governing

In March 2020, no state and no economy were prepared—not with ICU beds, not with masks and disinfectants, not with knowledge of how to deal with such an outbreak.[16] Not having predicted the fast global wave of contagion means confronting a present in which there constantly are new risks to be counterbalanced. In a pandemic emerging this way, government action in the here and now necessarily becomes experimental. Time and again, scientists and politicians must make decisions based on facts that are not unambiguous. Ever new epidemiological insights demand constant readjustments.

Yet there is more to experimental governance: in the pandemic, it interlocks with economic dynamics and with the psycho-social temporal experience of an intensification of the now. It is a fast and agile governing that operates primarily via the executive and, by its very agility—the need to respond quickly to new events like hot spots, clusters, and so-called high risk areas—tends to marginalize the parliamentary legislative.[17] In experimental governing, ad hoc decisions are considered to be without alternative, the only kind of short-term prevention possible until new strategies have been tested.

Even if experimental governing appears as state action that does not always and necessarily impose measures in the name of the economy, it is absolutely compatible with a dynamic of economic growth that is transforming and becoming dominant. For growth is currently moving away from future and prevention—and thus from the promise of progress of liberal-democratic post-war orders that shaped the second half of the last century in the sense of a capitalist economy. In the midst of the pandemic phase, it is becoming obvious that for some domains of the economy, not being able to plan is no obstacle at all. On the contrary, unpredictability and contingency come to determine a capitalist

economy garnering strength with and after the crisis. That insecurity is increasingly part of the calculation is already quite evident in the aggravation of precarious living and working conditions. In the COVID pandemic, we experience in a compressed and accelerated way what is becoming "normal." For decades, not being prepared has been part of neoliberal economics and policies, in which public health care has been scaled back, restructured in the sense of a private sector logic of profit maximation, and provision signed over to individuals' responsibility. It was not in the interest of either the state or the economy to be (to have been) prepared: too much cost, too much standstill in circulation, too much stocking. The risk of having to fight the pandemic "just in time" was and is being accepted. That is one of the central reasons why the way COVID-19 is being confronted constitutes an "individualized just-in-time epidemiology"[18] and politics, which, experimentally, drives by sight.

Just in time supply flows

The virus is part of a global supply flows, of supply chains, and logistics, in which storage times in the production and delivery of commodities become ever shorter and goods are produced, transported, and distributed on demand. Storage has been replaced by the constant movement and interlinking of supply chains such that production and distribution move ever closer in time to consumer's desires. Ordered and delivered as fast as possible: just in time. The need, the desire is to be fulfilled immediately, the lack remedied at once. Delivery does not lie in the future, service is in the now. Demand is difficult to calculate, which is why on-call jobs are on the rise.

Contrary to Fordist mass production, which operated with manufacturing large amounts of goods and storing them and was able to calculate with a demand for such large numbers, the logistics economy inverses the relationship between production and consumption. Demand determines production, factories can operate without storage. Goods are not produced in one place but, across logistic spaces, in several places. Transportation, infrastructure, and communication, as data transfer, become part of production. The time that lies between production and consumption shrinks; goods are produced just in time. As a result, the global movements of the supply chains have grown enormously. What appeared in the 1980s as the "Toyotist model"[19] in factories has come to shape modes of living and expanded into society, along with new conditions of inequality.

The extreme increase in online purchases since the outbreak of the pandemic is just one more boom of this logistics economy that is becoming hegemonic and has been for quite some time.[20] The flows that secure, among other things, the food supply are not to be interrupted. Even if during the pandemic, the borders were initially closed in an old nationalist reflex, the transnational logistical movements are of "systemic importance." More than that: the dynamic of this global economy fundamentally depends on the proliferation of logistical spaces, which is to be secured, not least of all, by national governments—something understood at the latest in the second round of shutdowns in the fall of 2020: national borders remained open.

Threats to circulation, such as blockades or strikes, have repeatedly been treated as criminal acts.[21] Time and again, labor and human rights are being violated along logistics chains, and extreme exploitation is practiced. Frequently, temporary jobs subject to flexible regulation combine with temporary labor migration; they

are an inherent part of the just in time production of goods as of care and cleaning services.[22] Logistics is not a tightly organized productive machinery but a management of "contingency, experimentation, negotiation, and unstable commitments."[23] Logistics is the management of the unforeseeable with just as unpredictable precarious jobs.

The coronavirus is part of this worldwide logistics. It "emerged at one terminus of a regional supply line in exotic foods, successfully setting off a human-to-human chain of infections at the other end in Wuhan, China."[24] The virus is inscribed in wildlife trade, which, far from informal, is an increasingly formalized and capitalized worldwide sector.

> As industrial production encroaches on the last of the forest, wild food operations must cut farther in to raise their delicacies or raid the last stands. As a result, the most exotic of pathogens, in this case bat-hosted SARS-2 [i.e., COVID-19], find their way onto a truck, whether in food animals or the labor tending them, shotgun from one end of a lengthening periurban circuit to the other before hitting the world stage.[25]

Capital-controlled deforestation in the tropics, meanwhile, intervenes in ecosystems to such an extent that "wild" viruses are no longer regulated by ecological complexities and disappear but expand to human populations. Zoonotic pathogens enter the food chain and spread via supply chains. Mobility and logistics increasingly turn what used to be endemic outbreaks into epidemics and pandemics. The entire chain of production integrates practices that favor and accelerate the development and transmission of pathogens.[26] This includes the agricultural and cheap meat industry with its exploitative project-based contracts

for abattoir workers, the majority of whom, in Germany, migrate from eastern Europe. The production of cheap meat, too, counts as "systemically relevant" and continues during the lockdown. Yet in the first months of the pandemic, there was practically no health care for the workers; the virus spread easily, especially in the inhumane accommodations. The production and consumption of cheap meat, with its cost dumping, goes on unabated. The profits go to the meat industry, retailers, and the agrobusinesses producing animal feed. In turn, the cultivation of, in particular, cheap soybeans destroys rainforests in the Amazon and increases the risk of zoonotic pathogens entering the food chain. Meat has become an overly abundant junk good; eating it regularly still is part of a dominant lifestyle, a conception of freedom and prosperity that came to be established as the regime of food supply in the industrialized countries in the second half of the twentieth century.

Yet it is not just in the meat industry that, for the sake of consumption, inhuman conditions dominate, especially in the housing of workers. On the vast Spanish fruit and vegetable plantations that ensure that strawberries are available in the North even during the winter, seasonal workers—largely illegalized workers from Africa—generally live in improvised tent cities, without electricity, running water, or toilets. Labor and migration are *on demand*, life and habitation remain improvised. The conditions in the EU's harvest camps are dehumanizing. The situation has long been known. Yet only once there was in increase in COVID infections in the crammed quarters and the stuffy greenhouses, where masks cannot always be worn, were they discussed publicly again.[27]

Cheap food—be it meat, fruit, or vegetables—and the delivery of goods to private homes—be it food, clothes, or books—are based on bad and extremely exploitative working conditions beyond a

minimum wage and beyond any norm of "free" wage labor. Human beings and goods are increasingly subject to a "logistification."[28] Not just trade in expensive wild meat or cheap pork, intra-European migration and migration from the Near and Middle East, too, can no longer be separated from logistics—as management and as world-encompassing mobility of people, things, capital, and data.[29]

Booming stock markets, shuttered restaurants

Interestingly, the usually so overly sensitive emotionalized stock markets remained largely immune to negative news in the pandemic. After a lightning fast crash in March 2020, the markets recovered quickly. It was not a longer process as in the bursting of the dotcom bubble 2002–3 or of the housing bubble 2006–8, which led to the global financial and economic crisis. The abrupt first worldwide lockdown due to the pandemic spread of the coronavirus lasted many weeks and has led to a massive, enduring downturn in the "real" economy. In the financial markets, however, it prompted merely a punctual, momentary crash. The changed needs and behaviors in the lockdown and the techniques for preventing infection immediately registered in the financial markets. The pandemic, too, offers room for growth: for pharmaceutical companies, especially those involved in the development of a vaccine; for companies that produce protective gear, such as masks or single-use gloves and gowns, on a large scale; for car makers, because car sales are on the rise in times of privatized and individualized mobility; for online retailers and delivery services, because shopping increasingly means ordering online and by phone; as well as for RV and furniture makers, energy companies, and above all, of course, the technology sector. Early fall 2020 saw the highest number of IPOs in twenty years.

[30] And it looks as if China is unlikely to enter a recession: in fall 2020, the Chinese economy was already growing again. Fighting the virus with rigid measures such as isolating entire cities, rigorously enforcing quarantine, and massive technological control quickly had positive effects on economic growth. Authoritarian-populist positions enviously eye China, where surveillance and restrictions have been established to a degree not (yet) possible in most of Europe.

Those businesses in the service sector that depend on physical presence and contact—restaurants, tourism, entertainment, etc.—are threatened by permanent closings and bankruptcy, which primarily affects, and not just as job loss, women and part-time or otherwise precarious workers. In the service sector, too, just in time jobs are on the rise: jobs on demand that depend on how many orders come in. Here, too, many migrants are working.

Where working conditions in the meat and food industries are concerned, politics often looks the other way, not least because otherwise, prices would go up. That is why those extremely precarized by just in time jobs will continue to be hired by the day, the week, or the month—used briefly, fired cheaply, increasingly also without even a limited-term contract in their pocket, even without wages being paid. Poverty is on the rise everywhere because there are no legal restrictions to these practices of using labor. Economic growth and the survival of business is given priority. There still is no meaningful universal basic income to compensate for extreme precarization. The pandemic is massively boosting the deregulation of the labor market; precarious jobs are already normal, including for those with higher levels of education. [31]

Corona apps

To prevent further lockdowns that not only burden the economy but massively restrict personal freedoms as well, many governments, administrations, and epidemiologists across the globe have placed their hopes in automated decision making systems to control the spread of the disease. Contact tracing apps, QR codes, thermographic cameras, sometimes equipped with face recognition software, were quickly employed to implement quarantine orders or to monitor access to places like restaurants, supermarkets, sports stadiums, and museums, as well as arrivals at airports and train stations. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, "artificial intelligence" has been massively deployed to process anonymized population data for monitoring the behavior and health condition of large numbers of individuals in real time, for marking hot spots and high risk areas, and for quick policy interventions—with in part grave consequences for human rights, health policy, and democracy.[32]

Contacts with carriers of the virus are to be traced in order to establish paths of transmission over the previous fourteen days. A contact tracing app is intended immediately to notify every person exposed to the risk of infection so that they can then get tested or go into quarantine.

In Europe, two different technologies are most commonly used—one that gathers movement and location data via GPS and another that collects data about proximity to other smartphones via Bluetooth. Each has quite different consequences as to surveillance, control, and effectiveness. Authoritarian populist governments tend to use location detection technology, liberal governments so far tend to use data emerging from proximity. Generally, of course, the

same technology can be used for different purposes depending on the interests pursued.

Data from Bluetooth apps can be shared voluntarily and anonymously (insofar as data security can ever be ensured) with a central server or, in decentralized fashion, with the smartphones of other users who have also downloaded the app. A "risk encounter" remains anonymous to the authorities and the app users notified, only the date of the encounter is communicated. Simultaneously, there are no sanctions yet for not installing the app. Technologies intended to detect contacts with infected persons via data measurement through proximity can at most support the work of public health departments but not replace it. For data privacy reasons, such contact tracing apps, precisely because they are organized in a decentralized way and depend on the voluntary signaling of infections by individuals, are intentionally no sole means for detecting a risk of infection.

Yet where digital contact tracing does not depend just on the exchange with other smartphones, not just, that is, on proximity, but is combined with GPS to continuously notify authorities of a person's location, which in turn is often coupled with sanctions for rule infractions, such surveillance technology constitutes a massive interference with the rights of individuals.[33] In Poland and Hungary, for example, GPS-based apps are combined with face recognition technology to ensure that (potentially) infected persons are quarantined.[34] Downloading the app is obligatory. Pandemic-fighting health policies make digital mass surveillance the "new normal." This strategy is restrictive and exceptionally prone to error; many technologies not only make wrong decisions concerning the health condition of individuals but can also signal an infection, which entails obligatory quarantine, where there is none.[35] Security lapses, moreover, create massive data privacy

problems. Liechtenstein, for example, began a pilot study on detecting COVID-19 infections early, even without the typical symptoms, via tracking wristbands that capture skin temperature as well as heart and breathing rate. The goal is to collect the data of all of Liechtenstein's citizen to be able to recognize an infection with the virus even *before* symptoms develop or if the infection does not entail any symptoms at all.[36] The risk here is detected no longer via numbers alone, numbers that serve to declare high risk areas when a certain threshold is passed, the figure of fifty new infections per one hundred thousand inhabitants, for instance. The risk prognosis the Liechtenstein project aims for starts one step earlier and seeks to identify an infection before symptoms emerge as everyone can already carry the virus and represent a potential risk. It is the technological capture of a permanent suspicion, not of infections manually proven by testing.

Data privacy activists, meanwhile, seriously doubt that either wristbands or GPS apps can contribute much to containing the virus. Rather more important are widespread testing, manual contact tracing, and, moreover, the right not to use such technology. Disease control can quickly lead to general population control and thereby create "new normalities." That is why there must be strict legal limits to government use of data for this kind of risk prognosis, in order for arguments of urgency in unprecedented extreme situations like the first worldwide lockdown in March 2020 not to create opportunities for governments to engage in comprehensive surveillance.[37]

Digital tracing of exchanges and contacts with others does not stop at detecting possible infections. Fighting plagues and fighting uprisings can combine today as well. When many people gather and have contact in a public or private space, infection risk assessment detects a cluster; yet it could also be a gathering of

protest, a demonstration. Contact tracing technology has already been used in Minnesota, for example, to get a picture of who is protesting and monitor the contagion of resistance.[38]

It is only a matter of time when it will be possible to interlink EU countries' different national apps. What if, on crossing the border, they link up automatically such that travelers are guided to a country's official COVID app without being asked? What if this country is one that collects contact data via GPS and moreover deploys thermal scanners and facial recognition software? Or what if the facial recognition system of cameras set up in public places exchanges data with contact tracing software to detect potential COVID-19 infections?[39] In that case, a local "hot spot" or regional "high risk area" might overlap with a "risk zone" marked as insurrectional. Where there is a risk of proximity and exchange, the government-ordered disguise with masks is no protection from facial recognition cameras. In 2020, the masks did indeed for a short while baffle the algorithms who did not recognize "faces" because they had not been fed faces wearing masks. But that was quickly fixed. Meanwhile, the global marked for thermal imaging and facial recognition software has entered a boom. The devices are marketed aggressively as tools in fighting COVID-19 to be deployed in supermarkets, cinemas, theaters, hospitals, and public places with many people.[40]

Mass surveillance based on "artificial intelligence" is not event-driven, it takes place continuously. As in epidemiological prevention research, it is not concerned with the concrete person but first of all with its (supposed) membership in a group based on age, sex, physiognomy, or skin color, that is, with automated identification, attribution, and contextualization via so-called pattern recognition. Those screened have no control over the classifications, especially where these are combined and compared

with data flows from several sources. The decision is made automatically by "artificial intelligence" according to the data sets with which a given algorithm has been fed. Supposedly evident behavior and lifestyles are constructed technologically according to whatever dataset is used. Racist categorizations by algorithms are on the rise; some faces are even refused recognition as human because the scanners in the "global North" often do not recognize non-white faces. Many of the new images used to train pandemic-compatible algorithms come from freely accessible social media platforms like Instagram; mask selfies are the *dernier cri* among the people feeding the algorithms.[41] If only because of this infinite voluntary supply of images from those who are then surveilled by them, facial recognition technologies and their applications in surveillance are here to stay.[42]

China is the uncontested pioneer in facial recognition technology that is not only part of the fight against the current pandemic but has for some time been fundamental as much in smart city conceptions as in gigantic trade and infrastructure projects like the New Silk Road that is gradually implemented in Europe as well. Such global logistics projects, including many European partners, play a decisive role in increasing the hegemony of the logistics economy and the number of precarious just in time jobs.[43]

The new petty bourgeoisie of the home office

The COVID pandemic has rapidly changed the way we work, live, shop, and move. Digitalization clearly shapes our everyday life, not just in contract tracing apps and facial recognition cameras. Working from home was suddenly possible very quickly and wanted by many: a global experiment in digitalization. Nine to five has definitively been dismissed as the norm of working time.

Another turn of the screw of neoliberal labor: the entire person is now being capitalized, including their social environment, in their own homes. Clear boundaries no longer exist between labor and reproduction. Precarization continues to rise.[44] Spare time becomes a relic from Fordist times, a point made evident (once more) in the normalization of the home office. Nonetheless, ever more people can imagine working from home in the long term, although within the home, there is no longer any possibility of retreating from work to private life. Suddenly, telecommunications allows glimpses of spheres of privacy never designed to be seen by colleagues. Who has a table to work at in their home that is not being used to eat and play as well? Who has the calm required for focused work?

There are many who say that requiring workers to be physically present in the office is antiquated, that productivity takes place in the home as well. After all, many work more and work longer hours at home, some even with less stress. Less stress, however, is something women do not benefit from since they continue to be the main providers of care and reproduction work, especially when there are children in the house.[45] The increase in working from home is unlikely to a more just distribution of care work. Others say, against working at home, that creativity arises only from exchanging with colleagues. Both arguments are concerned with economic productivity and growth. Working from home saves companies and institutions a lot of money: office space can be reduced and work stations be deployed more flexibly. Having one's "own" desk or office will soon be a luxury and a reward. The use of co-working spaces (in the sense of rooms being used for work successively by different individuals) continues to rise, commuting and business travel continues to fall. Offices tend to become places of contact with colleagues rather than work places. The digital

infrastructure is becoming ever more reliable in ever more places. This digital boost in the home has already brought extreme profits for tech giants like Microsoft and companies like Zoom; Netflix and Disney are replacing cinemas; and Amazon tripled the previous year's revenue already in the third quarter of 2020.

At the same time, many are beginning to garden at home, even if it's just on the balcony. In Berlin, COVID has led to an unprecedented run on allotment gardens such that waiting times for a plot can reach twelve years.[46] Books on self-sufficiency and gardening guides are selling far better than they have in years.

Yet not working at the office has risks of its own: Does insurance cover working on the bed, balcony, or even on the beach? Who is paying for equipment in the "anywhere office"? And who decides in which places outside the office one is actually allowed to work? The difference between those who (must) remain mobile, and who often guarantee mobility, and those who become largely immobile, becomes greater. Immobility applies not only for salary workers, civil servants, and project workers with college degrees. Factories and artisan workshops, too, increasingly seek out possibilities for working at home: camera monitoring of production processes or controlling 3D printers is possible from home as well. As production chains are being relocated back to Europe (because in an emergency, supply chains and just in time production of things like protective masks create supply shortfalls and too great a dependency on countries outside Europe), it is possible to reactivate the precarious work in the home primarily performed by women. This home office trend, however, does not particularly affect those who work in infrastructure, logistics, and transportation, or in care and nursing professions; on the whole, they still earn less than those working in the anywhere office. For many in the middle class, the balcony is no longer enough; they

move from the city to the countryside, into a “little” house with more space to fit in everything and everyone in a time of ever more work in the home. Those who can afford this increasingly find the many people in the cities hard to deal with: much too dangerous, opportunities for contact everywhere.

Contact phobias proliferate. In 2020, no cash no contact digital payments became more popular, including payments via smartphone or smartwatch offered by Apple or Google. In many moments of everyday life, digitalization supports contact avoidance. Another digital trend in life without contact is the worldwide increase in sales of AI sex robots and in brothels that provide them. [47]

To evade infection in stores and in the public, the new work-home is supplied by delivery services. Public infrastructure seems threatening, encounters with others who do not belong to a select proximity are largely avoided. Just in time deliveries to the work-home of higher income earners lead to massive growth of precarious just in time jobs in the mobility-based logistics sector. Immobility in the home is not possible without the mobility of supply logistics. The temporal experience of being caught in the now is compensated by real-time deliveries—all just in time. The now is the capitalist best seller.

What will city centers look like in ten years? Will there be an increase in “pandemic resilient” architecture that works largely via contact avoidance?[48] Who will be able to afford that? Will shopping change, beyond online purchases? Will (owner-run) retail concentrate in the neighborhoods, where distances are short and one knows the owner? Will city neighborhoods become villages of comfort, where every stranger is recognized?

The new retreat into work-privacy, accessible only to family and select friends, is predestined to cement old gender models as much as traditional notions of family, community, and belonging. Others are primarily a possible threat, and when they have parties and boisterous contact, there are recurrent complaints that they do not care for the welfare of the community, communities that are becoming ever smaller and ever more closed off. They are treated like escapees and dangerous persons, and the question is raised—for example, by the Minister President of the Rhineland-Palatinate, Social Democrat Malu Dreyer, in October 2020[49]—how they can be brought *back* into the community. The answer quickly becomes: through discipline, punishment, and authority. As the loss of control endures, the confrontation with ever-rising infection numbers changes language and ways of thought. Problematically, the communities of the home, the family, and close friends correspond to renationalization across Europe—out of nowhere, national borders are back, and the freedom of movement guaranteed by the Schengen area is suspended. The focus on the home and the nation massively works in favor of the rising authoritarian populism and its alliances.[50] Authoritarian governance on the state and the institutional levels is above all an attempt at regaining control in uncontrollable, unplannable, radically contingent times. To discipline the population, fears are being stoked that are meant to restrict contacts and mobility and promote restricting oneself to the home.

In the digitalized private sphere, we witness the return of a kind of Biedermeier lifestyle that—in conjunction with increasing authoritarianism and expanding phobias about contacts with people one does not know, and be it the neighbors one block over—leads to a worrisome mixture. Comprehension for everything outside one's own bubble is on the wane. This Biedermeier longing to shut

out the world and the other is rampant in all social strata and all political camps. This longing seems to grow stronger with every crisis. In crisis situations, (en)closure and authoritarianism become legitimate modes of communication. But when will there be no crisis? “After” COVID, how quickly will a new pandemic threaten the national community?

In the current COVID pandemic, behaviors and longings for a new phase of capitalism are being rehearsed in an enormously compact and accelerated way. This new phase depends essentially on each and every individual learning to deal with extreme unplannability and extreme insecurity. Growth is most likely for those companies that profit from the current enduring change, and it is these logistics and technology companies that further advance the normalization of extremely precarious just in time jobs.

Instead of seeking an impossible control and security in enclosure and immobility, the new temporal experience of the now should serve to change social conditions fundamentally—not to preventively avoid a catastrophe in the future but because things cannot go on like this in the present. The pandemic is not a time of exception we all have to make it through somehow. It is less an exceptional phase than an acceleration and amplification of existing capitalist, ecological, and social conditions: the fight against COVID-19 continues governmental governance via fear; it reactivates misogynous, racist, homophobic and transphobic conditions of domination; it expands precarization and poverty; and makes exploitative and destructive economies and relations to nature even more visible than before. The COVID-19 pandemic is not simply caused by a very contagious new virus; it is deeply entangled in old and new ways of living and working. Climate change may have been moved to the background but is permanently present throughout the pandemic, for the spread of

the virus cannot be understood without looking at ecological and economic devastations.

Even if at the height of the pandemic there is, time and again, good reason to isolate and avoid contacts, this practice especially must not come to determine our lives in the long term. It will take a much better understanding of global connections and entanglements for radically different ways of living and working to become dominant that place the vital dependencies of proximity, exchange, and ecologies at the center.

It has long been clear that the virus does not come from outside, that it cannot be externalized, but spreads with socialities and prompts us to focus on the now. That is good news because the time we can shape is the time of the now, not the future. The future is only a crutch we dream up to bend the unpredictability of life into a continuous line and thereby to make it controllable, supposedly. Losing the old orientation is necessary to put a radical end to this time of progress and growth. In dealing with unplannability and precarization we learn to get "ahead of the curve" of capitalist transformation and finally think ecology, health, and care together without preventive thinking, surveillance, and control.

(finished beginning 2021)

(first published in Isabella Kohlhuber, Oliver Leistert (eds.), Hamburg Maschine revisited: Artistic and Critical Investigations into Our Digital Condition*, Hamburg: Adocs 2022)*

[1] On the conception of an expanded present, see Isabell Lorey, *Demokratie im Präsens; Eine Theorie der politischen Gegenwart* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020), as well as *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, trans. Aileen Derieg (London: Verso, 2015).

[2] Martin Lengwiler and Jeanette Madarász, eds., *Das präventive Selbst: Eine Kulturgeschichte moderner Gesundheitspolitik* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010).

[3] See Reinhart Koselleck, "The Unknown Future and the Art of Prognosis," trans. Todd Presner, in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts,* 131–47 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[4] Brigitte Weingart, *Ansteckende Wörter: Repräsentationen von AIDS* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002), 119.

[5] See Carsten Timmermann, "Risikofaktoren: Der scheinbar unaufhaltsame Erfolg eines Ansatzes aus der amerikanischen Epidemiologie in der deutschen Nachkriegsmedizin," in Lengwiler and Madarász, eds., *Das präventive Selbst*, 251–78, here 252.

[6] See Timmermann, "Risikofaktoren," 253.

[7] See Timmermann, "Risikofaktoren," 257 and 268–72.

[8] See Robert Castel, "Von der Gefährlichkeit zum Risiko," in Manfred Max Wambach, ed., *Der Mensch als Risiko: Zur Logik von Prävention und Früherkennung*, 51–74 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983), as well as Ulrich Bröckling, "Prävention," in Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, eds., *Glossar der Gegenwart*, 210–14 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), 213–14.

[9] The concept of governmentality, which describes the interlocking of state regulation and self-government, was developed by Michel Foucault; see his *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[10] Prevention constantly fails, because of its insatiable longing for unequivocalness, security, and permanence. Some risk always remains and new risks can arise. At the same time, prevention in the health sector is weakened by the fact that many people do not (want to) develop a preventive health-political relationship with their body through, for instance, a healthy diet, exercise, or abstention from smoking and alcohol. See also Bröckling, "Prävention," 214–15.

[11] See Isabell Lorey, "The Dream of the Governable City: On Plague, Policey and Raison d'état," trans. Aileen Derieg, *transversal texts*, June 2007, online, https://transversal.at/transversal/1007/lorey/en.

[12] Miasma theory goes back to Hippocrates of Kos in the fourth century BCE and describes the evaporation from the ground of toxic matter then distributed by the air. In the Middle Ages, fear of miasma led to quarantine measures against the plague. Plague physicians' beak-like masks containing herbs and vinegar were to protect their wearers from patients' toxic exhalations. Because of lacking knowledge about bacteria and viruses, attempts at explaining the emergence of various plagues cannot be disentangled from miasma theory well into the twentieth century.

[13] See Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, trans. Miriam Kochan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

[14] On the specifically German practices of *Stosslüften*, impact ventilation, and *Querlüften*, cross ventilation, not just in times of COVID, see Kate Connolly, "Germans Embrace Fresh Air to Ward Off Coronavirus," *The Guardian*, 30 September 2020, online, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/30/germans-embrace-fresh-air-to-ward-off-coronavirus

[15] This is neither a plea for "herd immunity" via infection without protective measures, which simply accepts the death of large numbers of people, nor does it in any way seek to accommodate conspiracy theorists and COVID deniers.

[16] "No health system was prepared. In the future, we must have a crisis mechanism that allow us to switch over immediately," as WHO's Regional Director for Europe Hans Kluge puts it in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (July 20, 2020).

[17] The legal rectification of these quickly issued directives is up to the judiciary along: a risky move for liberal democracy.

[18] Rob Wallace, Alex Liebman, Luis Fernando Chaves, and Rodrick Wallace, "COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital," in *transversal*, April 2020, online, https://transversal.at/transversal/0420/wallace-etal/en.

[19] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 289.

[20] Since the 1960s, the meaning of "logistics . . . has been expanded to refer to the management of the entire supply chain,

encompassing design and ordering, production, transportation and warehousing, sales, redesign and reordering. . . . It is this shift in perspective that we refer to as the logistics revolution" (Edna Bonacich and Jake B. Wilson, *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 3.

[21] See Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 2–3.

[22] See Moritz Altenried, Manuela Bojadžijev, Leif Höfler, Sandro Mezzadra, and Mira Wills, "Migration, Arbeit, Logistik: Theoretische und historische Perspektiven," in Moritz Altenried et al, eds., *Logistische Grenzlandschaften: Das Regime mobiler Arbeit nach dem Sommer der Migration*, 15–41 (Münster: Unrast, 2017), 33–44. Nonetheless, the COVID pandemic has adversely affected worldwide container shipping and thus supply chains. Until late fall 2020, quarantine measures, border closures, and air travel restrictions led to about four hundred thousand sailors, primarily from the Philippines, India, and Indonesia, being "stranded" on container ships without being allowed to go ashore, because of, among other things, lacking medical care, expired visas, and, in some countries, closed consulates. Long international negotiations were required to facilitate crew changes during the pandemic; see Anna Reuß, "Matrosen auf viel zu langer Fahrt," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, online, October 19, 2020, www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/corona-frachtschiffe-seeleute-1.5082781.

[23] Anna Tsing, "Supply Chains and the Human Condition," in: *Rethinking Marxism* 21, no. 2 (April 2009): 148-176, here 151; see also Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2013), 118–22.

[24] Wallace et al., “COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital.”

[25] Wallace et al., “COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital; see also Alessandro Broglia and Christian Kapel, “Changing Dietary Habits in a Changing World: Emerging Drivers for the Transmission of Foodborne Parasitic Zoonoses,” *Veterinary Parasitology* 182, no. 1 (November 2011): 2–13.

[26] Wallace et. al., “COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital.”

[27] Weeks before the fires in the refugee camp Moria on the Greek island of Lesbos in early September 2020, there were multiple successive fires in the Andalusian camp of Leve, near Huelva. Its inhabitants marched to the square in the center of town and camped there. Only then did the Spanish government have a new camp built to meet minimum standards of hygiene; see Sebastian Schoepp, “Seuchenherd Obstplantage,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, online, 31 July 2020, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/spanien-seuchenherd-obstplantage-1.4985126

[28] Altenried et al., “Migration, Arbeit, Logistik,” 17.

[29] See Altenried et al., “Migration, Arbeit, Logistik,” 17.

[30] See the Reuters dispatch in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “So viel Börsengänge wie seit 20 Jahren nicht,” online, 7 October 2020, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/anleger-so-viele-boersengaenge-wie-seit-1980-nicht-1.5057294

[31] For background, see the IMF’s World Economic Outlook from October 2020, https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2020/October.

[32] See the report compiled by the Bertelsmann-Stiftung in cooperation with Algorithm Watch, *Automated Decision-Making Systems in the COVID-19 Pandemic: A European Perspective*, online, September 1, 2020, https://algorithmwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ADM-systems-in-the-Covid-19-pandemic-Report-by-AW-BSt-Sept-2020.pdf, especially the introduction by Fabio Chiusi, 3–15.

[33] Chiusi, "Introduction," 4–5. As Chiusi notes (10), Apple and Google have modified their operating systems such that the signaling of "risk encounters" works even without installing a tracing app. Both companies declare that not location data is being collected, yet as late as July 2020, both requested users to turn on GPS.

[34] Freedom House, a US nonprofit, has noted the repressive application during the pandemic of laws allegedly intended to combat fake news. In at least thirteen countries, internet access was shut down at least temporarily. In at least thirty countries, surveillance measures were taken in direct partnership with telecom companies. In Hungary, for example, a man was arrested for "inciting panic" after he had called Viktor Orbán in a Facebook post a "cruel tyrant" for his COVID-policies. See Freedom House, *Democracy under Lockdown: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Global Struggle for Freedom*, online, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/COVID-19_Special_Report_Final_.pdf. On the use of facial recognition software in China, Russia, India, or South Korea during the pandemic, see Chiusi, "Introduction," 5–6.

[35] GPS technology is far from safe and reliable. It only works outside; localization precision goes from five to twenty meters; and GPS signals are thrown off by large buildings, in bigger cities, and in bad weather like thunder and snow storms. See Chiusi,

"Introduction," 12, as well as the overview of the literature by Isobel Braithwaite, Thomas Callender, Miriam Bullock, and Robert W. Aldridge, "Automated and Partly Automated Contact Tracing: A Systematic Review to Inform the Control of COVID-19," *Lancet Digital Health* 2020; 2: e607–21, August 19, 2020, doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500(20)30184-9.

[36] See Chiusi, "Introduction," 6. Chiusi notes that anti-COVID wristbands are used to enforce quarantine orders and other restrictions primarily outside Europe, for instance in Singapore, Hongkong, Saudi-Arabia, Jordan, and the UAE.

[37] The EU's current recommendation concerning tracking apps and data privacy are online: "Digital solutions during the pandemic," https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/digital-solutions-during-pandemic_en.

[38] Chiusi, "Introduction," 8.

[39] Facial recognition cameras have been sighted in the advertising billboards in London's Piccadilly Circus as well as in Manchester, Nottingham, and Birmingham. They have been used to place ads "to fit the age, sex, but also mood on the faces of passers-by"; see Bernd Graff, "Die Anonymität der Zebrafinken," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, online, August 9, 2020, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/gesichtserkennung-die-anonymitaet-der-zebrafinken-1.4993828. Security reasons are usually cited for installing such cameras in shopping malls, museums, or sports stadiums; airports have long been hotspots for such devices.

[40] Chiusi, "Introduction, 13-15.

[41] Graff, "Die Anonymität der Zebrafinken."

[42] According to the Freedom House report, monitoring the quarantine in China has even led to being asked to install facial recognition cameras in their homes or in front of their houses. The Russian app that shares data with the authorities demands, at infrequent intervals, that users take selfies of themselves to prove they are abiding by quarantine measures. These technology and surveillance developments are by no means limited to authoritarian; see Freedom House, *Democracy under Lockdown*.

[43] On this point, see the project documentation *Logistical Worlds: Infrastructure, Software, Labour,* online, https://logisticalworlds.org/; as well as Brett Neilson, Ned Rossiter, and Ranabir Samaddar, eds., *Logistical Asia: The Labour of Making a World Region* (Singapore: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018).

[44] On this transformation of labor under neoliberalism, see, for example, Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004); and Isabell Lorey, "Gefangen im Jetzt: Prekäres in der politischen Gegenwart," *Agora 42: Das philosophische Wirtschaftsmagazin*, no. 4/2020: 13–16.

[45] During the COVID pandemic, mothers look after children more often than fathers, even if their professional workloads are equal, as the National Education Panel Study (NEPS) at the Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories notes in a study from October 13, 2020: "Kinderbetreuung in Corona-Zeiten: Auch bei gleicher beruflicher Belastung betreuen Mütter häufiger allein als Väter," https://www.neps-data.de/Neuigkeiten/Archiv/udt_1582_param_detail/20458.

[46] rbb24, “Der große Run auf das kleine Grün,” online, https://www.rbb24.de/panorama/beitrag/2020/09/kleingaerten-in-berlin-brandenburg.html

[47] On humanoid robots in sex technology and the ensuing practices, from misogynous violence to child pornography, see Boris Hänssler, “Karriere der Sexroboter,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, online, July 9, 2020, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/wissen/sexualitaet-roboter-ethik-1.4961199?reduced=true

[48] Modern urban planning is—as the examples of the reconstruction of London after the plague and devastating fire of 1666 and the transformation of Paris and other cities after the cholera outbreaks in the 1830s show—an effect of hygiene measures.

[49] Malu Dreyer, “Das ist kein Kuddelmuddel,” interview, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, online, October 17-18, 2020, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/malu-dreyer-interview-corona-massnahmen-1.5075395?reduced=true

[50] See Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Manuela Freiheit, and Peter Sitzer, *Rechte Bedrohungsallianzen: Signaturen der Bedrohung II* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020).