

Lockdown : half-resonance with our degrowth

In France, it was on a Tuesday, at noon, and no one had predicted it. We accepted the upheaval with little resistance. A collective and then individual self-limitation, or the opposite. This is not sidestepping in the way we hoped for. We, advocates of degrowth. Isn't it obvious now? The failure of public policies that were prior to the pandemic? Obvious that they lead to the authoritarian and techno-scientist management of the crisis? These are both sides of the same biopolitics of growth. Managerial, elite, indecent and insensitive growth. Nevertheless, this lockdown tastes like suspension. Let's not to despise this feeling! After lockdown, there will still be recession, rebounds and aftershocks; but during this period of lockdown, there is some sort of conjectural degrowth. Definitely, but what kind of degrowth?

This is a historic moment : suddenly, the economic paradigm "faster, higher, further" is suspended, on a break. A break that started on March 17th 2020 in France. A break that will perhaps stop in May or June. But a real break, now, in the heart of globalization and throughout the world. More than half of the world's population is locked down! A break that makes this real : there is less manufactured production, less consumption, and therefore less extraction, less waste, less pollution, less travel, less noise, less work and therefore less income, but also no more vacation, no more museums or concerts, no more sporting events. Nothing left but what is "essential" (left to be defined)

Some quality of life remains, with very unequal degrees of "resilience" whether we live in the countryside or in the city, whether we have a garden, a balcony or a window. Suffering cannot be dismissed. This degrowth is hardly a choice. The most vulnerable experience even more difficult living conditions - especially especially in the case of family violence. Nevertheless, sobriety is surrounding us. Our social, family and friendly relationships are our precious medicine. We talk about producing locally, buying locally, slowing down. Solidarity and creativity are surrounding us. Spring is surrounding us. And we are taking the time to look at it. In short, we're merely enjoying Life, and we can do so thanks to... our common social organization, the fruit of a minimal democratic life since 1945, which still guarantees some sort of social peace. President Macron has declared "We are at war. ». But it is not a war because there are no enemies to defeat and no humans to kill. Unless you twist the meaning of words for biopolitical purposes. There are deaths : it may be half a war then. But there is no enemy coming. Half a war, and therefore half a peace. Peace made possible by public services and health services and caregivers who are limiting the pandemic. Public services, but also all these other jobs – these workers, many of whom were wearing 'yellow vests' yesterday. They're on the front line – holding on. It's not falling apart. Even the State is not falling apart, yet somehow dumbfounded to have taken the political decision to put a break on the economy. Unfortunately, in such a period of crisis, the State gets back to its authoritarian habits, using police powers and experimenting with legal limits.

Half-war with death around the corner. Half-peace because you're not free to go around the corner and beyond. Death - which is the limit of all life - is frightening. Especially in a political regime of supposedly infinite growth. Growth that can be interpreted as the social organization of the denial of death. Death can be scary, and a bad fear is always good for any power that wants to maintain itself: hence the half-war.

Lesson for degrowth: if it touches anything with a bad fear, then it collapses. Degrowth is a break but a break in peace time.

As we are locked down, let's take the time to think about this: "the unpredictable has happened". Let's acknowledge this: governments have chosen quarantine, meaning that governments have chosen to save lives rather than the economy. A break from shame? Whatever the diversity of our social living conditions,

and they are obviously far from being so easy for everyone, let's savor these moments : the lightening of the ecological footprint, the texture of the bonds that unite us, the thickness of the silences, the lightening air, the color of our lives, the rustle of the living. Carpe diem! Let's keep this flavor in mind, the flavor of salt, the meaning of our life together. *Carpe dies relegationis!*

In short, this lockdown is a half degrowth: dare we say that nothing has ever looked like degrowth more than this *consensual* moment of lockdown. All the more so as there is also a sort of rationing for (almost) everyone.

Our ecological footprint is decreasing. Worldwide and peacefully. This moment is actually a little more sustainable for humanity. This break is an undeniable ecological break: "a time of rest, a time of respite". But after lockdown, what is to be expected?

On an economic perspective, it will be a whole different story. On a social perspective, we have to strongly expose the dark side of this lockdown. Clearly, the pandemic will mainly affect the poor, the same ones already impoverished by the economic system. Above all, the indecency of the ultra-rich has not disappeared. No miracle on the part of governments. The idea to take from the rich has not (yet?) popped up. And yet, it has been used in post-war time: exceptional levies on wealth and property would make sure everyone of us lives in a socially decent society. Inequality is not degrowth.

It's rather a change of time... and a change of year on the calendar: 1984 here you are! *Big Brother* IS here, he is watching us, texting us, recordings us, talking to us from the top of his drone, tracking us via our computer, dissociating us, individualizing us. Technology is very political... working, studying, seeing a doctor, socializing... everything requires using some kind of screen. Screens narrow our sensitive worlds. Social media flourishes, but it connects only those who have been separated. No miracle as far as power sharing is concerned: governments keep making decisions on their own, without us, therefore against us. Democracy is quarantined. In France, orders are passed (away from the Parliament, away from any kind of vote)! Let's remember that, a few years ago, after the 2015 terrorist attacks, in a "state of emergency" orders had infiltrated ordinary law.

These are the first lessons from lockdown. a/ This lockdown has opened a parenthesis. Dear advocates of degrowth, let us keep it in mind. We are not dreaming: our dream of degrowth is therefore possible. We can imagine degrowth as some kind of a break, a self-organized journey towards a sustainable, socially decent and democratic society. A break from extraction, production, consumption, traffic and waste. b/ When the lockdown will be officially over, we know that we will not miraculously land in a world freed from the imaginary of growth. Economy will, once again, set its narratives, its debts, its readjustments. "Local economy" will be instrumentalized to the greater good of a biased sovereignty... But even when it all comes back, we will have a new argument: Yes, politics can make the decision to put a brake on the economy. We will have experienced it in our flesh.

Degrowth is the right direction to put our world back on tracks.

Olivier Zimmermann (Suisse), Élodie Vieille-Blanchard, Jacques Testart, Mathilde Szuba, Christian Sunt, Agnès Sinaï, Michel Simonin, Luc Semal, Onofrio Romano (Italie), Olivier Rey, Christine Poilly, Irène Pereira, Jean-Luc Pasquinet, Baptiste Mylondo, Karine Mauvilly, Vincent Liegey, Michel Lepasant, Bernard Legros (Belgique), Francis Leboutte (Belgique), Stéphane Lavignotte, Antony Laurent, François Jarrige, Mathilde Girault, Maële Giard, Loriane Ferreira, Guillaume Faburel, Robin Delobel (Belgique), Alice Canabate, Thierry Brulavoine, Thierry Brugin, Geneviève Azam, Alain Adriaens (Belgique).