

<https://www.thelacanianreviews.com/covid-sadness-the-new-sorrow/>

COVID Sadness: The New Sorrow By [José Ramón Ubieta](#) | November 4th, 2020 | [LRO 254](#)

Circulated:

From: NLS-Messenger

Subject: [nls-messenger] 3569.en/ Lacanian Review Online 254: COVID Sadness: The New Sorrow

Date: 5 November 2020 at 15:58:44 GMT

See <http://www.amp-nls.org/page/gb/49/nls-messenger> / 2020/2021

COVID Sadness: The New Sorrow

José Ramón Ubieta



- [View Larger Image](#)

It's been almost a year since it all started. We have experienced strangeness, fear and anguish, anger, love, solidarity and grief. Now, at the beginning of autumn – and without the summer light – sadness strongly emerges. Its signs are clear: silence between friends, without the bustle of WhatsApp groups or face-to-face encounters; exhaustion and disaffection from creative or professional activities; sleeping problems; restlessness in the body; and an intimate sense of loss of meaning in many of the things we do, no longer having a clear objective or perspective.

L.– a patient who spends a lot of time with screens – expressed it with these words: “It’s like going by train and seeing how your life goes by, but you are outside of it.” This phrase reflects well the feeling of exile that each of us has experienced at some point in all this time. Exile from one’s own life.

Everyone has their own reasons, but some of them are shared by all of us. Among them, the disappointment for what does not arrive after the expectations of deconfinement. Or the losses that accumulate (lives, jobs, ties, resources). To which is added a growing social crisis with more and more evicted people, distrust in leaders, rejection of confusing and contradictory measures, and the exhaustion produced by so much uncertainty and changes that freeze us in an endless *stand-by*. [1]

Space and Time Coordinates

People are oriented by two basic axes, the coordinates of modernity. I mean space, which includes the bond to others, and time. It is enough to see the techniques of psychological torture to understand their importance. When a detainee is isolated and all temporal references removed (through sealed rooms or drugs), the immediate psychological impact is a confused state, with signs of depression and paralysis, after an incipient rage. Some of that, to a lesser extent of course, is happening to us.

There is something unreal in the landscape of facemasks in which we live that sometimes makes us not recognize the acquaintance who passes by right next to us, or that makes us not understand the page of the book we have just read (even if it is an easy text). Or that kisses and hugs from a movie surprise us, as if that already belonged to yesteryear.

Distance from others also distances us from ourselves. We also find it difficult to imagine the future post-COVID-19, and we resort more easily to feeding nostalgia. Some young people – not all – and a few adults, as we have seen, deny this present from the start and demand that everything be as if nothing had happened. It’s another defence against loss.

Sadness is Not Depression

What is happening to us is COVID sadness. And it should not be confused with depression or any other mental disorder, as some quickly predict whenever there is a crisis. “There are people who are depressed, but I come to find out more about why,” M. explains to me in the first consultation.

Sadness becomes a problem when it saves us the questions and whys, distancing us from knowing. For this reason, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan opposed, as an antidote to sadness, the *gai savoir* (“the joy of knowing”) [2] which is the result of the daring of each one to express what makes one sad. And to say it in such a way that, without aspiring to fully understand its causes, it may open up new questions about one’s joyful desire to live.

The key is to go from powerlessness or impotence (the feeling that overwhelms us in relation to what we cannot do) to impossibility (the recognition that there are things

that are impossible) without a programmed solution. A father or mother cannot explain the mysteries of sexuality to their children, not because they are incapable or ignorant, but because sexuality is not taught, it is experienced subjectively.

The same occurs in therapy, where not everything is “curable” because, beyond the capabilities and powers of the clinician, what counts is the consent of the patient. He decides the limit of what is possible. Banging one’s head against the wall of impotence leads to sorrow. On the other hand, accepting the limits allows us to do what is possible in each case.

It takes time and effort to shake sadness off, and for this the litany of self-help is of no use. Rather, it is about not remaining in the paralysis of the act or in the self-absorption of the virtual, rejecting nostalgia (always misleading) and favoring face-to-face encounters. All this without renouncing everyday pleasures or planned projects (even if we later have to adjust the initial goals), applying the necessary preventive measures.

Sadness pushes us to separate ourselves from life, like that train about which L. fantasized. And, although to the great Antonio Carlos Jobim (one of fathers of *bossa nova*) it seemed that, unlike *felicidade* [happiness], sadness had no end,[3]the truth is that he found a poetic way to translate it well. That’s what it’s all about, doing something with it in the time that remains until the end of the COVID nightmare.

[1] Published in Spanish in <https://theconversation.com/tristeza-covid-la-nueva-pesadumbre-147297> In English in the original. [TN]

[2] “The Gay Science (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*), occasionally translated as *The Joyful Wisdom* or *The Joyous Science*, is a book Friedrich Nietzsche, first published in 1882. [TN].

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKS0_9o7YoQ

By [José Ramón Ubieto](#) | November 4th, 2020 | [LRO 254](#)

Note :

A reference to Jacques Lacan is not given. A good starting point may be **Never give up on your desire**

See [Seminar VII: The ethics of psychoanalysis: 1959-1960: begins 18th November 1959 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=386](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=386)

Seminar VII : 3rd February 1960 : p129 Denis Porter’s translation : When I give you a formula such as "The desire of man is the desire of the Other," it is a gnostic formula, although Freud didn't seek to present it as such.

Sem VII 6 July 1960 p321 of Denis Porter's translation : Once one has crossed that boundary where I combined in a single term contempt for the other and for oneself, there is no way back. It might be possible to do some repair work, but not to undo it. Isn't that a fact of experience that demonstrates how psychoanalysis is capable of supplying a useful compass in the field of ethical guidance?

I have, therefore, articulated three propositions.

First, **the only thing one can be guilty of is giving ground relative to one's desire.**

Second, the definition of a hero: someone who may be betrayed with impunity.

Third, this is something that not everyone can achieve; it constitutes the difference between an ordinary man and a hero, and it is, therefore, more mysterious than one might think. For the ordinary man the betrayal that almost always occurs sends him back to the service of goods, but with the proviso that he will never again find that factor which restores a sense of direction to that service.

Other texts by Jacques Lacan available in English, see [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=235)
<http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=235>

[Julia Evans](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12365) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12365>

Practicing Lacanian Psychoanalyst, Kent & London