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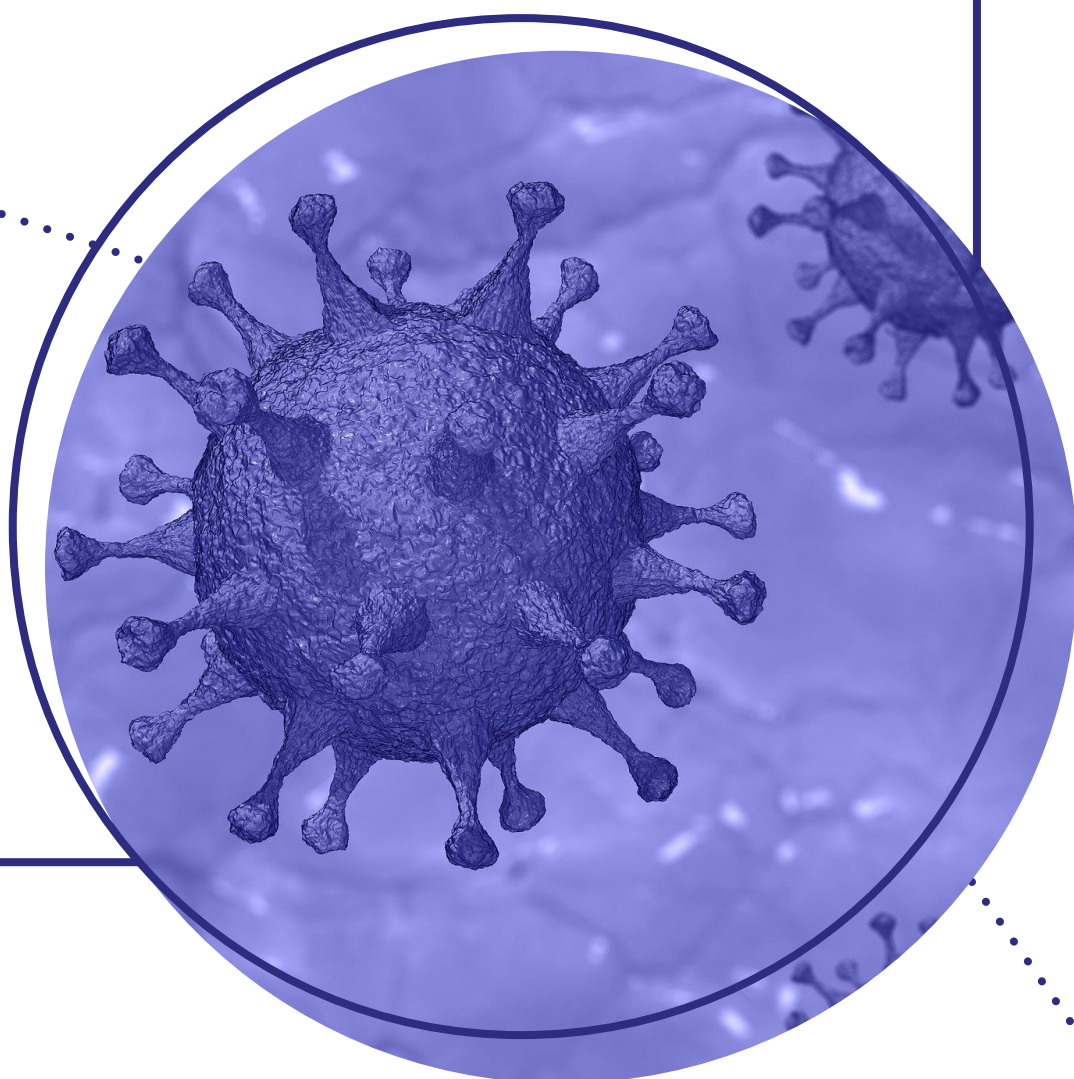
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Covid-19: Four post-crisis
scenarios

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COLOPHON

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1. Introduction

On the night of 7-8 March, faced with the exponential growth of Covid-19 cases, the Italian government took quarantine measures that were as exceptional as they were unprecedented, immobilizing sixteen million people in Lombardy and other northern Italian provinces in their homes. At the end of March, more than three billion people, nearly half of humanity, were in confinement. Faced with the worst fear of economic recession since the 1930s, most Western states have responded with support measures and stimulus packages that are also unparalleled. In just a few weeks, we have witnessed a shift of a nature and magnitude that was thought to be reserved for disaster films and end of the world fictions.

What's the world going to be like after this? The question may seem premature at a time when so much uncertainty remains about the long-term effects of the health crisis, which will depend on its duration, the effectiveness of the measures taken to contain it, and the intensity of the epidemic peak(s) that may follow. Very quickly, however, visions of the world, scenarios and hypotheses of evolution for the post-crisis period multiplied in the public space. As the first pandemic experienced and commented on live by humanity, such an event disrupts how we see ourselves and our societies. For some, it offers an opportunity to review the order of our priorities, to profoundly *transform* our individual and collective behaviours. For others, it is a fact, a formidable ordeal, but one that we will overcome so that we *can get on* with our lives - hoping to learn from it to prevent a recurrence of the crisis and strengthen our *resilience*. Finally, for others, by affecting the chains of interdependence that make up the very fabric of our mode of production and consumption, it exposes the vulnerability of the international trade system, to the point that it could experience a total or partial *collapse*.

Transformation, a return to normal, resilience or collapse: these are the four scenarios around which, during the first month of the crisis, the majority of the positions taken by those who have tried to imagine what will happen afterwards, seem to have gravitated.

In this note, we propose to explore these hypotheses, the grouping of which is the result of daily monitoring of the event and the comments it generated during the first month of post-crisis debates (open letters, carte blanches and institutional positions, but also initial analyses and interventions by experts, with an assumed bias for the sociologists of public action and risk). The choice of these four models is based on a specific organisation principle borrowed from the American Futures-studies researcher Jim Dator¹. For him, narratives about the future are distributed in a small number of preferred forms. It is these forms (*Transformation*, *Continuation*, *Discipline* - here translated into resilience -, *Collapse*) that governed the processing of information for this brief. Designed to reflect this particular period when public opinion must give meaning to the crisis and project itself into the aftermath, they seemed stable enough to us to allow for a structured follow-up of the debate (subject, as we shall see, to one adjustment or another)².

Three important clarifications. Firstly, we must be careful not to attach strictly positive or negative connotations to these forms. If the "Transformation" scenario corresponds well, for its proponents, to a set (moreover heterogeneous) of visions of improvement for the post-crisis period, the other three are profoundly ambivalent. The order in which the scenarios are presented here should

¹ Dator, J. (2009), "Alternative Futures at the Manoa School", *Journal of Futures Studies*, 14(2), pp. 1-18.

² The exercise proposed here therefore differs from [the reflection proposed by Futuribles on 2 April, 2020](#). This consists of a morphological analysis which, although it is intended to be "simple" and "evolutionary", nevertheless aims to propose scenarios "that explore the field of the possibles in the horizon 2021-2022". These scenarios will be subject to re-evaluation "as events and data open and close possibles".

therefore not induce a narrative arc from best to worst - even the collapse has characteristics that do not strictly assimilate it, for those who defend this hypothesis, to a worst-case scenario. Secondly, these scenarios are not mutually exclusive: they are in constant conversation, sharing problems, arguing over common issues that they polarize in their own way. So we're not dealing with four separate routes that would be available to us, but a series of paths that may overlap and lead to different destinations.

Thirdly, from a prospective point of view, these four progression hypotheses give rise to as many *possible futures*. Even if we will try to give some weak signals for each scenario that might feed them, assigning degrees of plausibility or probability (let alone desirability) to these possible futures would make little sense. It is therefore not an exercise in forecasting or futurology. The interest of these visions lies in the fact that they are also, and perhaps above all, privileged representations of the future: if they have any value for the world afterwards, it is in giving us an idea of how the public debate could be structured in the months to come.

2. Four scenarios

2.1. TOWARDS A CORONARESET? REVEALING AND ACCELERATING EFFECT

" [Pause. Reset](#) ", " [deceleration](#) " ... The health crisis and, more particularly, confinement represent for the proponents of this scenario an opportunity to question a model that they believe to have run its course. The strength of this register, which has been very present since the beginning of the crisis, is that it can be used as a model to explain the crisis: the current situation may be the culmination of an unsustainable trajectory, which already bore the seeds of a major upheaval. The pandemic acts here as a "revealer": there can be no return to normal, because it shows to what extent the previous situation was not normal. The direction of the desired transformation therefore depends closely on the prism through which observers looked at the world before.

For some, Covid-19 interrupts a system that was causing environmental destruction and accelerating global warming. From this perspective, to use the expression of Jonathan Piron (from the environmental think tank Etopia), [it is more of an "exit plan"](#) than a recovery plan that we need. On the environmental front, figures and maps showing a significant drop in pollution in the Hubei province, and then in Italy, soon made some observers say that confinement will not only slow down the spread of the virus, but will also [prevent deaths related to air quality](#). Politically and socially, the shortage of masks, including for front-line staff, as well as the inability to systematically test the population (as the Asian countries that preceded us in the crisis were able to do), are seen not only as a lack of foresight, but also as the failure of a certain way of managing public affairs.

For others, the pandemic reveals the impasse of a governance model that has seen the State divest itself of its public service missions, at the risk of compromising the health of its citizens. Faced with these shortcomings, they see the health crisis as an opportunity for a [return to the welfare state](#). The first weeks of the pandemic saw some glimpse of change that might lend credence to this scenario: as Spain went into lockdown, [it nationalized all its private hospitals](#); in the United States, [Trump administration is considering restoring Obamacare](#); [Germany is said to be considering the introduction of a universal income](#), while [Portugal is temporarily registering illegal immigrants and asylum seekers](#) to enable them to receive health care. For its part, despite the disagreement over the issue of «[Corona Bonds](#) »³, which is causing rifts comparable to those between Northern and

³ Bonds* that would allow euro area Member States to raise money on the cheap markets. Instead of being indexed to the financial health of the borrowing country, interest would be linked to that of the euro area as a whole. It would be a kind of great mutualized loan with the aim of creating a common pot from which the States could draw according to their needs* (["The "corona bonds". a new standard of solidarity at the time of Covid-19?"](#)).

Southern European countries at the time of the sovereign debt crisis, the European Commission has agreed to relax its budgetary discipline by giving Member States the possibility of allowing their deficits to exceed 3% of their GDP.

The many historical parallels already drawn by observers with the recession of the 1930s find a continuation in the calls by the Chair of the Committee to conclude [a Marshall Plan for Europe](#), or by the Secretary General of the OECD for a ["New Deal" at world level](#). Without mentioning [deglobalization](#), such a [Keynesian moment](#) could imply a partial renationalization of certain strategic activities or productions [that are too dependent on market uncertainties](#)⁴ - which is not, however, incompatible with [global coordination](#).

Finally, the refusal to return to normal can take both more [programmatic](#) and [radical](#) forms, in line with positions and sensitivities already formed before the crisis. However, some more original or unexpected initiatives stand out against this backdrop. Widely disseminated on social networks after the first week of confinement, an open letter entitled ["For a CoronaReset"](#), emanating from a "group of citizens from civil society and the cultural sphere", thus develops a much more utopian tone in its call for a "paradigm shift", to "bounce back differently, to do better, to create a fairer world for us". As part of this, the document echoes the call of the philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour to become "globalisation interrupters", by imagining ["protective measures \(...\)"](#) against every element of the mode of production that we *don't* want to see coming back".

The addition or convergence of these transformation requirements (environmental on the one hand, economic and social on the other) could lead to an increased awareness of the need to [take the long term](#) into account in areas such as the environment, energy, health or mobility, and push the public player to relaunch ambitious economic and social policies (with, in particular, a refinancing of scientific research).

One factor could even have an accelerating effect on this scenario: the potential transformation of the crisis into a health *scandal* in the post-crisis period. According to European Commission estimates, the capacity of the Member States will be able to meet only [10% of the demand for protective and medical equipment](#) (in particular ventilators, necessary for the care of patients suffering from severe respiratory distress). Most European countries (with the notable exception of Germany) face the same shortage situation. In France, the unpreparedness of the authorities was denounced very early on by the stakeholders on the ground, who were all the more shocked to pay the price because the martial metaphors of their leaders transformed them, *de facto*, into unarmed soldiers on the front line of a "war" against an invisible "enemy". The causes of the incompetence of the French government are well documented. Paradoxically, they draw on what may have appeared to be [the excessive precautions taken during the H1N1 flu crisis in 2009](#): accused of having done too much when faced with a risk that some may have considered to have been overestimated, the authorities let their guard down, neglecting, in both France and [Belgium](#), to build up or renew the equipment needed to deal with a crisis of this type. But in the United Kingdom, the same sense of improvisation dominates among healthcare workers. According to statements collected by the editor-in-chief of the British medical journal *The Lancet*, the deafness of the authorities to the alerts issued by epidemiologists during the month of February [will cost lives among both patients and carers](#). This is the breeding ground for [national health scandals](#), the seriousness of which is far from being realized.

⁴ In his [address to the French on March 12](#), Emmanuel Macron said: "What this pandemic reveals is that there are goods and services that must be placed outside the laws of the market. Delegating our food, our protection, our ability to take care of our living environment to others is madness. We must regain control of it, build even more than we already do a France, a sovereign Europe, a France and a Europe that firmly hold their destiny in their hands. The coming weeks and months will require decisions to break with the past in this direction. I will take them. "

The [relative decline in the financing of health care](#), the injunction for hospital structures to work on a just-in-time basis to meet profitability objectives, and above all the confidence of state actors in the capacity of the international market to respond to any supply demand – with some exaggeration, everywhere the same New Public Management reference framework seems to have produced the same effects. From this point of view, the [group immunity strategy](#) initially adopted by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (and kept in place by Sweden) appears to be an extension, in times of crisis, of a [laissez-faire](#) management style. In this context, the [British reversal](#), in the face of increasing criticism of this choice (and the unbearable burden it places on the health care system), can be interpreted as a response to a demand for protection of individuals and return of the State.

2.2. BACK TO NORMAL OR HEADLONG RUSH? REBOUND EFFECTS AND WINDFALL EFFECTS

Other observers are sceptical about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the ability of States to profoundly transform their frames of reference for action and to effect a social shift. For the philosopher Jean-Claude Monod, the break displayed by Emmanuel Macron would thus respond more to a ["pragmatic need" to adapt to a state of emergency](#), the transitional nature of which will become clear once the crisis is over.

Moreover, the return to normal corresponds to a wish expressed by many economic and financial players. Already today, many of them are showing their full confidence in capitalism's ability to overcome the crises that periodically call it into question. Billionaire entrepreneur Mark Cuban is one witness to this state of mind, saying that [it is "capitalism that will save us"](#) when the world emerges from the pandemic - which does not prevent him from adding that the current crisis offers a "chance for a reset". For the most active promoters of liberalism, the crisis is moreover not the result of an absence or bankruptcy of the State, but the opposite, as Jean-Philippe Delsol (president of the Institute of Economic and Fiscal Research, a liberal think tank) asserts, of ["decades of health nationalisation"](#) – putting forward as proof that the States that seem to have best managed the crisis, South Korea and Taiwan, have a largely privatised health system. And to predict the advent of a "new religion of precaution". There is an ideological consistency that will weigh heavily in the post-crisis debates: like the market, viruses are facts of nature, a ["fatality"](#) that no State can anticipate, and especially not by curbing the economy through excessive procedures and costly regulations.

Similarly, from an environmental point of view, it would be misleading to see the crisis as an opportunity for the environment. The political scientist François Gemenne thinks the opposite that, despite "positive short-term effects", confinement will be [«a disaster for the climate"](#). On the one hand, we can expect a rebound in emissions after the end of confinement; on the other hand, it is highly likely that the States concerned will be keen to revive their oil industries and sectors that have been massacred by the crisis (such as tourism and commercial aviation) - or even to "call into question the few measures taken to fight climate change in the name of economic recovery". Not to mention the ambiguous message to consumers that the way to fight climate change is to "shut down the economy, limit trade and lock down at home". Despite many commonalities, both the health crisis and the climate crisis require urgent but different responses.

All these arguments plead for a continuation, in the post-crisis period, of the heavy trends that were already predominant before. In such a scenario, there is a good chance that once the confinement period is lifted, individuals, all too happy to get on with their lives, will go back to travelling and consuming as before. Far from marking a ["return to reality" that would require us to "rethink our relationship with the environment"](#), the crisis could be nothing more than a parenthesis that will soon be closed. Business as usual.

In reality, this continuation scenario is more ambivalent than it seems. On the one hand, few observers have expressed their vision of a world that is perfectly back to normal - if only because

the health crisis will have long-lasting effects and any recovery is bound to be slow and painful. Apart from the banal and understandable wish that the crisis should end as quickly as possible, there is no clear "Business-As-Usual" hypothesis that really emerged during the first month of the crisis.

On the other hand, some fear more explicitly that the crisis could lead to a headlong rush, i.e. a worsening of previous trends. The extension of [the state of emergency](#) and the special power regimes it entails carries a [risk of irreversibility](#). The metaphor of the entry into "war" against the coronavirus, used by many heads of state, is a good illustration of this: far from signifying a return to the welfare state, the conversion of certain sectors into a "war economy" amounts to a considerable relaxation of labor law and collective agreements (for the management of working hours and overtime). One thinks, for example, of the appeal by the French Minister of Agriculture to the temporarily laid-off workers to work in the fields, in the name of solidarity and the collective war effort.

Some express similar fears about the [restriction of civil liberties brought about by the crisis](#) – we will come back to this in the third scenario. Ironically, some observers in [African countries](#) who are terrified of the spread of the virus, invite us today to look at our situation as Westerners as an inverted mirror of theirs: "The rest of the world is having a taste of what it feels like to live with human rights limitations. (...) The world is realising what many African leaders have known all along, they can argue: human rights are overrated and may stand in the way of 'efficiency' ". Some weak signals are already fuelling this scenario - for example from Hungary, whose President Viktor Orbán has assumed full powers during the confinement of its population.

Governments are not the only players for whom the health crisis could give rise to windfall effects or other attempts to ["sneak in" \(such as ONDRAF's decision](#) to launch, in full confinement, their public consultation on the future of radioactive waste management). From this point of view, it is not insignificant for a communications operator such as [Proximus to test 5G in thirty Belgian municipalities](#) during the confinement period. These suspicions give rise to fears of a ["shock strategy"](#), to use Naomi Klein's expression. In the same vein, the essayist and statistician Nassim Nicholas Taleb, to whom we owe the concept of the "black swan", returns to the management of the financial crisis of 2008-9 to remind us that [the financial rescue will mainly benefit large companies](#): "We should learn from the Geithner episode [U.S. Treasury Secretary during the 2008-9 crisis] that bailing out individuals *based on their needs* is not the same as bailing out corporations *based on our need for them*." By the way, the author invites his readers to abandon the metaphor of the black swan to describe the present crisis, which was, on the contrary, like a white swan: an event that is certainly random, but whose occurrence can be taken for granted and which requires measures to be taken to prepare for it.

Strictly speaking, this scenario of headlong rush, which corresponds to deliberate transformation projects, should lead to its classification in the first group. Here we are undoubtedly touching on the limits of the exercise: the continuation of trends depends closely on the diagnosis made by observers of the previous state. For some, the last few years were already those of the end of [an economic cycle](#) and the transition to new relations between the State and capitalism. From this perspective, it is therefore the return of public regulation that would constitute the ultimate trend scenario, with the pandemic serving only as a catalyst for a process that has already begun.

2.3. RESILIENCE? LEARNING EFFECTS, RETURN OF PRECAUTION AND NEW FORMS OF CONTROL.

This scenario, while not always explicitly held by commentators during the first month of the pandemic, can be developed from their often critical observations of current crisis management. For its description, therefore, more use will be made here of the present narrative. It assumes a way out from above and the achievement of a new balance, which does not mean a return to the

previous state. Because it has produced *learning effects*, the crisis will lead to greater resilience of national and international governance systems that have been severely tested.

The lessons of the crisis are deeply ambivalent. Despite the suffering and death caused by the pandemic, humanity realises in retrospect that global coordination and mobilisation efforts, in spite of many discrepancies, have enabled it to win its struggle against its "[enemy](#)". We welcome the early detection of the first cases, the [rapid development of shared epidemiological knowledge](#), the exchange of good practices: compared to the years needed to identify the AIDS virus, the diagnosis of the coronavirus "(...) was established by molecular methods in a few days if not hours, [thanks to the progress of deep sequencing known as new generation sequencing](#)". After years of post-truth and disregard for science, the experts are making a comeback.

Unfortunately, this knowledge has not been translated into an alert system, except in Asian countries that have been able to use their experience of these new pathologies to act as "[pandemic sentinels](#)", in the words of anthropologist Frédéric Keck. A key factor explains this inaction in Western countries: [the progressive oblivion of the precautionary principle](#), stigmatized during the 2010s for its supposed obsession with "zero risk" and its [irrational hostility to cost/benefit calculations](#). We can thus see that governments found themselves improvising their crisis management, whereas it would have been wiser (and better "governance") [to be pre-active](#) by thinking, well in advance, in terms of contingency planning. The systems in place have been designed and sized for small-scale crises, which, according to risk sociologist Olivier Borraz, are aimed at "[prolonging the normal functioning of organisations in a situation that is presented as extraordinary](#)". They thus cultivate a "false impression of preparation": "Far from preparing these organisations and their members to face radically new situations, they are mainly meant to reassure them of their ability to continue their activities in a degraded environment, to preserve existing rules and procedures, to maintain routine operations. "

The post-crisis period thus has the effect of restoring precaution as a government principle and, more generally, marks the return of risk in politics. Humanity is becoming more aware of its vulnerability: the flows of exchange of goods, services and people also represent vectors of propagation for hosts with whom it must (re)learn to live. The application of the precautionary principle, however, does not imply an impediment or limitation to movement in an economy that it would be even more costly to "deglobalise". Simply, health warning and monitoring systems, as well as public health measures, are intensifying. Everyone has learned to change their habits: masks are becoming more common, presentism (going to work with a cold) is socially disapproved of, physical distance during seasonal flu peaks is becoming the norm.

Inspired by South Korea's effective management of the pandemic, tools for monitoring and tracing infected people proved their worth during the second peak of the epidemic⁵. In this way, they saved the population from a new confinement which, in addition to aggravating the economic and social crisis, would have been seen as a terrible admission of powerlessness and an unbearable ordeal. [By handing over their \(anonymized\) location data to mobile phone operators](#), the majority of citizens have clearly opted for [partially monitored freedom of movement](#). Resilience comes at a price. But an intensification, in the name of security, of digital mass surveillance, in the context of an indefinite extension of the state of emergency, remains an authoritarian temptation for many States, encouraged by the speed with which the majority of their citizens have accepted unprecedented measures to restrict their freedoms (which brings this hypothesis closer to the "windfall effects" described in Scenario 2).

⁵ As early as the end of March, the survey carried out by the University of Antwerp on the life of Belgians during confinement included a question on the social acceptability of an application designed to track (anonymously) the movements of the person's contacts, so as to send them a warning if the person presents symptoms.

2.4. COLLAPSE, DRESS REHEARSAL? DOMINO EFFECTS AND LIFE IN DEGRADED MODE.

For some, the health crisis gives a foretaste of what collapsologists have been predicting for several years, namely the inevitable collapse of industrial civilisation, most of whose indicators have irreversibly exceeded warning thresholds. Because of its global and systemic nature and the way it exposes the vulnerabilities of our model of society, the current crisis is fuelling an [already well-prepared thoughts of disaster](#) by the increasingly tangible signs of accelerating climate change.

The question is whether or not the pandemic marks the beginning of this process. For some, such as the French ecologist Noël Mamère, the health crisis represents a kind of ["dress rehearsal before the collapse"](#). For others, such as the sociologist Dominique Bourg, the process has already begun, even if the [destabilisation underway](#) could take several more years. Indeed, contrary to the images spontaneously associated with the idea of collapse, it will not be sudden, but gradual, according to a step-by-step degradation starting from a tipping point which ends up, [by causing domino effects](#), spreading to the whole system, to the point of compromising the continuity of public services and basic infrastructure (water and electricity distribution, energy supply, etc.). Moreover, collapsologists insist at least as much on the process of collapse itself (which can take multiple forms) as on the emergence of new forms of production, consumption and sociability in the post-collapse period, which we must start preparing for now.

The collapse hypothesis remains marginal in the debates that animated the first month of the health crisis. It is, however, taken seriously enough to make its entry in the columns of a magazine such as *Foreign Affairs*: because the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is both a demand and a supply shock, it [must create fears of social collapse](#). Similarly, certain emblematic sectors of the thermo-industrial civilisation, such as aviation or oil, are now seriously questioning their resilience. The collapse of the price per barrel, caused by the double shock of the pandemic and the price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia, has led some observers to say that the oil industry will never fully recover. Asked by a journalist from *The Guardian*, Mark Lewis, head of climate change research at BNP Paribas, sees at least in the post-crisis period a [return to the great story of peak demand](#): "This is particularly true if long-haul aviation fails to recover. This has been a very strong source of oil demand growth in recent years but the longer we are at home – remote working, using video conferencing – the more people will wonder: do we really need to get on a plane?" In March, the problems in the industry became such that [producers are paying their customers to not to have to store their barrels](#).

The horizon of the collapse also appears to be in the hollow as a result of more specific reflections on the stability of certain infrastructures. In an interview on our relationship with digital technology in times of crisis, sociologist Antonio Casilli reminds us that [the systems managed by GAFAMs have switched to "downgraded mode"](#): "they're not necessarily designed to be resilient. If overloaded, they fall without the possibility of finding an alternative. (...) This is evident in another context, that of Amazon, whose supply chain is collapsing under demand, under strikes by warehouse workers and the closure of dozens of distribution centers due to contamination." More generally, Casilli continued, it is the last links in the supply chains that are being weakened by the crisis. From delivery networks to supermarket employees to healthcare professionals, we realise that entire categories of workers, often invisible in the new discourses on work behind a mirage of platforms and algorithms, are vital to the production apparatus that would otherwise collapse.

In reality, it would be more appropriate to speak of a *differentiated collapse*, since the health crisis is making certain groups of the population or certain geographical areas more precarious. One of the most highlighted effects of the pandemic is the way in which the crisis and its management through confinement reveal inequalities and intensify vulnerabilities. This register, close to that of collapse, is extremely present in the first month of the crisis. While the [wealthiest Americans](#)

[organised their confinement](#) for themselves, it is estimated that [17% of Parisians left the capital because of Covid-19](#), while caregivers, civil servants (teachers, policemen) and the urban working class (garbage collectors, security guards) [contain the epidemic and ensure the continuity of social life](#). In addition to this divide between mobile and non-mobile workers, there is also [the divide between those who can telework and those who must continue to commute to work](#), including in conditions that endanger their health. As for the people confined to their homes, [the indignation aroused by the "confinement journals"](#) that soon began to flourish shows to what extent its romanticization is a "class privilege", to use the words of the screenwriter Antoine Germa from the city of Brescia in Lombardy, which, at the same time, was counting its dead.

For many women, too, confinement marks a terrible regression, not only [in the domestic sphere](#) (household chores and care of out-of-school children), but also [in sectors where female employment is predominant](#), such as care, on the front lines during the pandemic - not to mention domestic violence and the [windfall effects in some parts of the world to limit their rights](#). The pressure on parents, who are often forced to combine working from home with home schooling or childcare, raises fears that the number of burn-outs will increase when the economy recovers⁶. In some cases, confinement has [more immediate psychological effects comparable to those of post-traumatic stress](#), which will need to be taken into account in the post-crisis period. As with the increase of working from home, distance learning during confinement also reveals deep disparities. According to initial surveys, [higher education students](#) are far from being in the material or psychological conditions necessary to follow online courses, [making the very notion of "educational continuity" perilous](#).

While these reflections centered on inequalities during the period of confinement probably take us away from a scenario of collapse in the strict sense for the post-crisis period, a more accurate idea of what a differentiated collapse may represent can be gained by thinking of the consequences of the pandemic in Africa, India or South America. Or by remembering that the struggle between States (or even between regions, as in Italy) for acquiring medical equipment [appears to be like something in the Wild West](#) (the strongest stakeholders paying cash for goods they have not checked), the consequences of the explosion of all public procurement procedures in Europe.

Some observers have not failed to point out other, more unexpected effects of the health crisis. All over the world, [initiatives attest to the solidarity](#), generosity and inventiveness of people to make up for the lack of medical equipment, distribute food to the most vulnerable, or keep in touch with isolated people. We would have been wrong about the collapse: "The horror films got it wrong. Instead of turning us into flesh-eating zombies, the pandemic has turned millions of people into good neighbours". If it is counter-intuitive, this scenario of a "return of the Commons" is, in fact, not incompatible with that of collapse - nor, moreover, with that of a return of the social state, whose impotence or failure is evident from its actions. It is even favoured by [the collapsologists themselves](#), who see no fatality in a return to the natural state and, on the contrary, are betting on increased cooperation within local and supportive communities. Similarly, for sociologist Dominique Bourg, the current crisis, by taking the form of a pandemic, ["forces us to be civic-minded"](#). This ["mini-collapse"](#), by transforming us into ["collapsonautes"](#), is also an invitation to a democratic response to the crisis.

Could the consideration of a collapse scenario lead to a surge in public opinion which, instead of preparing for it as if it were an inevitable event, would require strong measures to try to counteract it (see scenario 1)? One of the paradoxes of collapsology is that, contrary to catastrophist rhetoric, it aims less to warn of the imminence of the collapse (in order to influence its course) than to predict

⁶ An [online petition](#), supported by the Ligue des Familles, is already circulating to ask for their situation to be taken into account, for example through a specific holiday.

its occurrence in the short or medium term. From this point of view, the voluntarist call for a ["European Green Pact"](#), recently sent to European finance ministers by several members of the Club of Rome, contrasts with the message that Dennis Meadows, co-author of the 1972 report on the *Limits to Growth*, has been addressing for several years [on the irreversible nature of the collapse](#). Despite the ambivalence of his report in the future, the collapsologist discourse could, with the health crisis, gain in credibility and offer new arguments for a major change of civilization.

3. What's next?

3.1. TRANSVERSAL READING

The four visions we have just described (transformation, continuation, resilience, collapse) do not, of course, exhaust the field of futures. We can trust the human imagination to always invent new ways of projecting ourselves into the future. On the other hand, while the elements of these narratives remain open and unpredictable, the same cannot be said of their structure and their relationship to each other. From this point of view, the Jim Dator archetypes used to circulate post-crisis visions have made it possible to "saturate" the information gathered during this first month of the pandemic.

A transversal reading of the scenarios also shows that they do not develop in an independent and compartmentalized manner. On the contrary, they get involved with each other, enter into tension around the same issues, with some posing as a problem (the State, the market or precaution) that, for others, would be a solution to the crisis. This dialogue is sometimes made difficult by the different *time horizons* and *deadlines* attached to each of the scenarios. Not all of them give the same scope to the post-crisis period. If the major transformation hypothesis ("Towards a CoronaReset?"), with its opening in the distant future, corresponds best to a "Big Picture" type approach, the others are more anchored in the medium term, that of recovery (scenarios 2 and 3) or the uncertainty of reconstruction (scenario 4).

Internally, it should be remembered that all these scenarios present the same heterogeneity. The "transformation" at the heart of the first should be written in the plural, according to the environmental, economic or social inflections of its proponents. In their ambivalence, the three others each give rise to bifurcations: a return to normal or a headlong rush? A return to precaution or an intensification of social control? A partial collapse or a return of the Commons? These multiple uncertainties reflect those of commentators grappling with a ["total fact"](#) that affects society and its institutions simultaneously in all their dimensions.

This is what we have tried to translate over the course of these scenarios through the series of "effects" that they involve: revelatory and accelerating effects (Transformation); rebound and windfall effects (Continuation); learning effects (Resilience) or domino effects (Collapse). Regardless of the scenarios into which they fit, these effects are in themselves good "descriptors" of the post-crisis period for commentators. The evolution of these effects and their combination will be the focus of attention in the coming weeks and months.

Finally, a word on the adopted framework. It will have been noted that most of these scenarios focus on an important aspect of the post-crisis period, namely the form that the State or public authority will take following the pandemic. The terms we have used to characterize this form refer, for each scenario, to an already known configuration (or its degraded version), expressed as a "return": return to the welfare state; return to the neo-liberal model (possibly degraded into authoritarian liberalism⁷); return to a precautionary state (possibly degraded into societies of

⁷ Grégoire Chamayou, *La Société ingouvernable. Une généalogie du libéralisme autoritaire*, Paris: La Fabrique, 2018.

control); return to the commons (possibly degraded back to the state of nature). In other words, the tools mobilised today are still dependent on models from the past, which continue to structure thinking about the future. Only time will tell whether, by reopening the possibles, the crisis will make it possible to invent new forms that are up to what we are going through.

3.2. THE NEW COORDINATES OF THE PUBLIC DEBATE

The crisis we are going through is a moment of reconfiguration where a society exposes and calls into question the major orientations it sets for itself - what sociologist Alain Touraine calls *historicity*. The way a society represents itself and produces its understanding of itself is a struggle issue. From this perspective, the narrative lines identified here could become the outline of the dividing lines on which conflicts and social movements in the next world will be built. The dialog that is now beginning between these scenarios would then mark the beginning of a struggle for the dominant narrative.

In this moment of reconfiguration where the new coordinates of the debate are being drawn, it is highly likely that the justification constraint will weigh comparatively more heavily on the supporters of the continuation model, which was already contested before the crisis. Those who will want a return to normal will have to justify it, because this choice will no longer be self-evident.



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