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## Introduction

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Problems  
Sorgen  
Preocupações

All this could and should have been a time of reflection, of the sound of the tip of a pen moving over paper, of reading books that had been on the list for a long time, of chatting, of playing, of walking. Instead, it turned into a time of frantic screens, of noisy hoorays on the accomplished task of making the university more virtual and more efficient to the costs of all those who deserved better, of the neo-liberal and also, unsurprisingly, of unabashed hatred and racism. This time witnessed the production of rubbish and destruction, the creation of plastic copies of feudal monuments, of senseless waste and needless care-

lessness – and actually, the production of more distance. It should have been different, but it wasn't. The language that emerged during the pandemic certainly included imaginative ways of framing critique, but also countless forms of euphemistic denial. Zoom parties feigned togetherness, while one sat alone in one's kitchen or living room facing the dissonance created by digital presence and physical absence; virtual coffee breaks imitated the sounds of clanging dishes but left a bitter aftertaste; loads of virtual appointments and colloquia were intended to boost the administration but often led to dark screens

and echoing voices in times of connectivity problems. The words used, shared and that resonated were often a well-known chorus of “Can you still hear me?” “Tu m’écoutes?”, “Können Sie mich denn noch verstehen?” and less often actual content that was communicated. At the same time the virus continued to take the breath of many, and much of what could be said felt like a toxic drink. And a lot remained unnoticed, unsaid, or was cut from the online conferences or chats when the session was interrupted.

Academia is supposed to be a place of exchange, discussion, learning from each other, a place of generating inspiring ideas and futures. Young scholars and students fell silent in front of screens and forgot how to discuss among peers, where one word follows the other, where sometimes two voices could be heard concurrently. Silence was the result and very often invisibility followed. Precarious conditions for learning, exchanging ideas, and of work were also enforced during these times, which rendered the problems of the (academic) system strikingly and yet much remained unseen. Being better equipped in the digital classroom or still relying on unstable connections and shaking devices (for instance for those being based in less connected areas of the globe) thus marked a difference which was not announced nor anticipated in the high polish speeches, magazines and result reports of virtual teaching and interaction, branding these new modes of communication as “innovative”, “result-oriented”, “ecologically advantageous” – or describing them in many other flowery words.

How can we speak about the unbearable without losing stance and face? How can we express the sadness and the horrors we ex-

perience vis-à-vis the reckless continuation of the colonial, of imperialism and fascism? Speaking up is being easily turned down and dismissed as out of place, leaving behind a bad taste in the mouth. This bad taste is what gets embraced and dealt with in some detail in this issue of *The Mouth*. We have put together a collection of papers and other contributions in different formats, which engage with questions around language, and the ways in which we can or cannot use our language, in which the way we speak has become problematic, or is addressing difficult situations. Oftentimes, people seem to choose alternative, artful, indirect or subversive ways of expressing pain, sorrow or critique. This is also reflected in the current issue, where problems are addressed in multimodal, discursive and creative ways. Voicing out itself, in these times, has become an act of coping, yet access to the discourses and platforms that address problems has become a difficult undertaking itself – as patterns of privilege and gatekeeping are often reproduced and even enhanced in world of allegedly free interaction, quick communication and broad connectivity. Not everyone is connected, not all voices are equally welcomed, not all sorrows or problems are taken seriously. This issue of *The Mouth* intends to draw attention of otherwise unheard voices and forgotten *preocupações*.

Calling the practices of colonialism and plunder by their name, entering into a conversation on the limitations of sharing in an impoverished community just next to luxurious holiday paradises, speaking of the denial of experiences of violence, writing about ruination and structural racism, addressing the one thing that capitalism produces most, namely garbage: these are the topics of the present issue.