

**Intergenerational Responsibility and the Covid-19 Pandemic /
*Responsabilidade intergeracional e pandemia de covid-19***

Marcus Vinicius Borges Oliveira*
Larissa Picinato Mazuchelli**

ABSTRACT

The pandemic caused by covid-19 has killed more than 150,000 Brazilians, among which more than 70% are ag(e)ing individuals. Although this disease's dynamics imply hindering the virus's transmissibility, there is an intense pressure to resume activities, which has revealed and reaffirmed a logic of indifference towards this population. We argue that controlling the pandemic requires another type of responsibility, of an intergenerational character. Therefore, in addition to reflecting on the relationship between identity and otherness in ag(e)ing, we draw from Bakhtin's reflections on the philosophy of act (answerable), emphasizing the concepts of architectonics and excess of seeing. Finally, considering otherness as a subjectivity constituent element, we reflect on the importance of the encountering among different generations in order to acknowledge the alibis that have exempted the subjects from taking the due actions to face this pandemic.

KEYWORDS: Pandemic; Language; Dialogism; Intergenerationality; Ag(e)ing

RESUMO

A pandemia da covid-19 já levou mais de 150.000 brasileiros a óbito. Destes, mais de 70% são idosos. Ainda que a dinâmica dessa doença implique evitar a transmissibilidade do vírus, há uma forte pressão para a retomada das atividades, relevando e reafirmando uma lógica de indiferença com os idosos. Argumentamos que a contenção da pandemia exige um outro tipo de responsabilidade, de caráter intergeracional. Para tanto, além de refletir sobre a relação entre identidade e alteridade no envelhecimento, nós nos valem das reflexões de Bakhtin sobre a filosofia do ato responsável, dando ênfase aos conceitos de arquitetônica e de excedente de visão. Por fim, pensando a partir da alteridade enquanto elemento constitutivo da subjetividade, refletimos sobre a importância do encontro entre diferentes gerações para o reconhecimento dos alibis que têm eximido os sujeitos de tomarem as devidas ações no enfrentamento desta pandemia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Pandemia; Linguagem; Dialogismo; Intergeneracionalidade; Envelhecimento*

* Universidade Federal da Bahia - UFBA, Instituto de Ciências da Saúde, Departamento de Fonoaudiologia, Vale do Canela, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7120-4527>; marcus.oliveira.fono@gmail.com

** Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso do Sul - UEMS, Departamento de Letras, Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil; Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo – PUC-SP, PEPG/LAEL, São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5253-7593>; lpmazuchelli@gmail.com

It is not I who is looking *from inside* with *my own* eyes at the world, but I am looking at myself with the eyes of the world, with the other's eyes;
I am possessed by the other. Here there is no naive wholeness of the outer and the inner. To spot one's own image at one remove. The naiveté of any fusion of oneself with the other in the mirror image. The surplus of the other. I do not have a perspective on myself from outside, I do not have an approach to my own inner image. Gazing out from my eyes are others' eyes.
*Mikhail Bakhtin*¹

In Auschwitz, I hid under the shed floor. It was my refuge. Just like down here. I was your age.
Aswithch?
That name means nothing to you. Better that way. Do not pay attention to what I say. I'm an old lady now.
Rosa and Momo

Introduction

2020 is a year that will not be forgotten. At the time of writing this text, Brazil accounts for more than 150,000 deaths due to covid-19. In this context, considering that the leading risk group is the ag(e)ing² population, we might have imagined that we should have been extremely cautious and planning, with great care, what kind of movement we could have been making as a society since the primary current way of fighting covid-19 is taking measures of social distance.

However, the ag(e)ing population, who have been the great victims of the pandemic and, among them, those who have aged with comorbidities, often due to a trajectory trodden amid vulnerabilities, still face the discrimination effects of ageism that have been discursively present in words like *expendable*, *stubborn*, or *naive* since the beginning of the pandemic. We also witnessed bars and restaurants reopening, often crowded, even with the death of more than 1000 people every day due to covid-19. The dynamics of this disease, which should imply, if not taking care of the other, avoiding the transmission of the virus, seem to have little effect on the demands to return to the economic activities that put possible lost lives in second place.

¹ BAKHTIN, M. M., [Chelovek u zerkala] "Man at the Mirror." In [*Sobranie sochineniy*] *Collected Works*, Moscow: Russkie slovari, vol. 5, p.71, 1996, *apud* NIKULIN, D. "The Man at the Mirror (Dialogue with Oneself)." In: *Iris. European Journal of Philosophy and Public Debate*, vol. 3, n. 5, pp.61-79, 2011.

² We use the neologism ag(e)ing to index notions of age, aging, and aged (Mazuchelli, 2019).

Considering such issues generated by the pandemic, we aim to discuss in this text what we call *intergenerational responsibility* based on the reflections of the Bakhtin Circle. Concerning conceptual breadth of answerable act, we broaden the understanding of intergenerationality, moving it beyond the strictly chronological barrier that differentiate generations to find it in another temporality in which different generations live together in the same subjectivity. Finally, understanding that the lack of intergenerational responsibility reveals our failure as a society, we discuss other possibilities for responsible actions to face the pandemic and care for the ag(e)ing.

1 On the Pandemic and the Need to a More Attentive Eye to the Ag(e)ing

The pandemic resulting from the Sars-CoV-2 virus has opened wide and deepened the country's inequalities, be it in education, health, or labor relations. Since March 2020, we have been appalled by the frailty of the State's political organization, which did not create a health plan, nor did it even use a third of the budget available to contain the pandemic.³ Similarly, we witness the suffering of school institutions without State support to overcome the moment of crisis while accompanying children and adolescents from public schools in poor regions of the country to lose access to school meals after their closing and many having classes discontinued. In contrast, children and teenagers from private schools are not at risk of missing the school year. We have also seen the *uberization* of labor relations systematization (Uchôa-de-Oliveira, 2020), the breach of service contracts, paid working hours reduction, and abusive dismissals by several sectors, including health, in which hospitals have dismissed employees who became infected while treating patients.⁴ Amid this economic constraint and ethical crisis scenario, a portion of the population enriched, and the search for mega yachts increased, heating the nautical⁵ market.

³ News article available in Portuguese at: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/saude/ultimas-noticias/redacao/2020/06/23/pazuello-saude-nao-gastou-nem-um-terco-do-dinheiro-para-combate-a-covid.htm>. Access in: August 15, 2021.

⁴ News article available in Portuguese at: <https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2020/10/03/funcionarios-reclamam-que-demissoes-no-hc-durante-a-pandemia-continuam-hospital-diz-que-contratos-eram-temporarios.ghtml>. Access in: August 15, 2021.

⁵ News article available in Portuguese at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2020/10/com-direito-a-navio-de-r-55-mi-cresce-a-demanda-por-megaiates-no-brasil.shtml>. Access in: August 15, 2021.

The abyss of differences, therefore, gradually increases. Among so many struggles while the population seeks to orient themselves, protect themselves and watch over the dead, some issues have not gained strength in the public debate. One of them concerns the situation of the ag(e)ing population during the pandemic.

Brazil currently has about 33 million ag(e)ing individuals, according to data from IBGE (2019). This population, included in the group at high risk of developing the most severe form of the disease, experiences a perverse moment in the pandemic. Data made available by the Ministry of Health through epidemiological bulletins show that more than 72% of the victims of covid-19, about 60,500 Brazilians, are ag(e)ing. However, these data, which should cause us apprehension and lead us to seek ways to protect this population, seem to have an adverse effect, even today. Many feel safer and reassured when they know that the greater risk of developing the most severe form of the disease does not include them.

At the beginning of the pandemic in Brazil, when it was believed that the disease would fatally affect *only* those over 60 years old or those with comorbidities, and while Brazil was watching the Italian unpreparedness to contain the pandemic, news vehicles comforted portions of the population saying that those people would not be at the same risk. An example of such is the last item (number 5) of *Catraca Livre* [Open Turnstile], *5 reasons for not having a breakdown with the coronavirus* post, published in March 2020 on its Facebook and Instagram pages.⁶

5 reasons for not having a breakdown with the coronavirus:

1. China has managed to isolate the infected population, and for the first time since January, the new cases that appear in the country do not reach 100 per day, according to the National Health Commission of China. So far, 80,651 people have been confirmed to have contracted the coronavirus in mainland China, which shows that the percentage of infection per day has reduced by at least more than 10 times. (Source: BBC)
2. In 81% of cases, patients have no symptoms or only mild symptoms; in 14% of them, it can cause severe pneumonia; at 5%, it can be critical or lethal. There are 13 times more patients cured than dead. (Source: BBC)
3. The virus is easily inactivated. Always wash your hands with soap and water, walk with a hand sanitizer (62 to 71%) in the bag, and cover sneezing and coughing with your hands or arms. (Source: BBC)

⁶ Available at <https://www.facebook.com/145632722140414/posts/3477254085644911/>. Access in: August 15, 2021.

4. We know what we are dealing with and how to prevent it. In the 1980s, when there was an AIDS outbreak, medicine took over two years to identify the virus that caused the disease. The first cases of the new coronavirus were reported in China on December 31, 2019. On January 7 of 2020, the virus had already been identified. That is, we count on the advancement of technology to prevent the progress of the disease. (Source: BBC)

5. Coronavirus hardly affects minors. Only 3% of cases occur in people under 20, and the mortality under 40 is only 0.2%. In children, the symptoms are so mild that they can go unnoticed (Source: BBC).⁷

While the young population were instructed not to worry about the dangers of the virus (since mortality under 40 is only 0.2%, as the news vehicle pointed out), the ag(e)ing population were for not *understanding* the gravity of the situation and for *breaking the quarantine rules* (Mazuchelli et al., in press).

The widespread perception that such a heterogeneous population was not able to understand the gravity and the risks of the infection is an index of the ageism that crosses our society, and that is manifested in representations and stereotypes present in the most diverse activities and discourses, whether in the media, advertising, legal discourse or even in medical discourse and practices that often pathologize processes that are natural to ag(e)ing (Mazuchelli; Oliveira, 2020; Mazuchelli, 2019; Novaes-Pinto; Oliveira, 2016; Novaes- Pinto, 2008).

One of the effects of ageism is the homogenization of such a population that starts to be treated the same way and from a perspective that takes a phenomenon as characteristic of the whole process (Mazuchelli, 2019). Equating ag(e)ing with hearing loss, as we often see in media advertisements, is emblematic. The process is essentialized to a phenomenon that is neither universal nor homogeneous; that is, not everyone who

⁷ In Portuguese: “1. A China conseguiu isolar a população infectada e pela primeira vez, desde janeiro, os novos casos que aparecem no país não chegam a 100 por dia, segundo a Comissão Nacional de Saúde da China. Até o momento, 80.651 pessoas foram confirmadas como tendo contraído o coronavírus na China continental, o que mostra que o percentual de infecção por dia reduziu em pelo menos mais de 10 vezes. (Fonte: BBC); 2. Em 81% dos casos, os pacientes não apresentam sintomas ou apenas sintomas leves; em 14% deles, pode causar pneumonia grave; em 5%, pode ser crítico ou letal. Há 13 vezes mais pacientes curados do que mortos. (Fonte: BBC); 3. O vírus é facilmente inativado. Lave sempre as mãos com água e sabão, ande com um álcool em gel (62 a 71%) na bolsinha, e cubra espirros e tosse com as mãos ou os braços. (Fonte: BBC); 4. A gente sabe com o que está lidando e como se prevenir. Na década de 80, quando houve surto da Aids, a medicina precisou de mais de dois anos para identificar o vírus causador da doença. Os primeiros casos do novo coronavírus foram relatados na China em 31 de dezembro de 2019 e em 7 de janeiro desse ano o vírus já havia sido identificado. Ou seja, contamos com o avanço da tecnologia para impedir o progresso da doença. (Fonte: BBC); 5. O coronavírus quase não afeta menores de idade. Apenas 3% dos casos ocorrem em menores de 20 anos e a mortalidade em menores de 40 anos é de apenas 0,2%. Nas crianças, os sintomas são tão leves que podem passar despercebidos (Fonte: BBC).”

ages will have hearing loss, and those who do will not necessarily experience it the same way. Ag(e)ing, therefore, within the context of human development is unmistakably complex and diverse.

One of the first points to be thus considered in this discussion concerns treating the ag(e)ing process beyond a chronological and biological lens that tends to essentialize it, a fundamental issue for the studies on ag(e)ing that we defend. Biopsychosocial aspects are recurrent in works published in Brazil, (Prado; Sayd, 2006), but the concept of ag(e)ing is still strongly linked to purely biological terms. It is common, for example, in science and in society, to observe definitions of ag(e)ing as the following: “aging comprises the processes of transformation of the organism that occur after sexual maturation and that imply a decrease in the probability of survival” (Neri, 1991 *apud* Prado; Sayd, 2006, p.493).⁸

Hamilton (2001), discussing this conceptual inadequacy, argues that chronological age is *one* aspect of the ag(e)ing process, but it can become a problematic notion leading to hasty conclusions. Debert (1997) also argues that researchers interested in ruptures with modernity, which, according to her, constitute the experiences in contemporaneity, should seek to *dechronologize life*. The author argues that it is a question of “whether the age of sequenced roles, extremely divided by ages, would capture the social reality of a society that has reached the level of technological development of contemporary society” (Debert, 1997, p.4).⁹ Staudinger (2015, p.187; emphasis added), in the same direction, also states that:

Chronological age is but one, and not the most accurate, indicator of human aging. Multiple outside (i.e., objective) and inside (i.e., subjective) perspectives on aging need to be considered to do justice to the *multidimensionality of human development and aging*. Outside perspectives are, for example, biological, social, and psychological ages. A chronological age of 75 years, for instance, may be linked with a different biological as well as cognitive age. *Human development and aging is not only a biological process but is interactive in nature*. As a result, it is characterized by impressive plasticity which entails the relativity of the meaning of chronological age. Outside perspectives are closely linked with inside perspectives on aging such as societal

⁸ In Portuguese: “envelhecimento compreende os processos de transformação do organismo que ocorrem após o amadurecimento sexual e que implicam a diminuição da probabilidade de sobrevivência.”

⁹ In Portuguese: “se a idade de papéis sequenciados, extremamente divididas por idades, capturaria a realidade social de uma sociedade que atingiu o nível de desenvolvimento tecnológico da sociedade contemporânea.”

stereotypes, images about one's own old age and metastereotypes, that is, what we think others might think about old age. *These inside perspectives, even though "invisible," are very powerful and exert effects on biological, social, and psychological ages alike and are affected by them.*

The ag(e)ing body, in this context, is the entanglement of a complex process that is internal and external, as Staudinger (2015) points out. Therefore, the ag(e)ing experience and the phenomena associated with it demand a dialogical understanding that does not appear in the discussions that look for ag(e)ing models, nor in public and social care actions.

Therefore, thinking about ag(e)ing means, fundamentally, considering its *multidimensionality* and *situationality*. In other words, it is necessary to consider that ag(e)ing in São Miguel Paulista, in the East of São Paulo, where life expectancy at birth is 71.28 years, is not the same as ag(e)ing in Alto de Pinheiros, in the West, where life expectancy is 85.33 years, as revealed by the study carried out by the Municipal Human Rights Secretariat of the São Paulo City Hall (São Paulo, 2019). Likewise, ag(e)ing as a peripheral black woman is not the same as ag(e)ing as a white man. Territoriality, class, race, and gender must be fundamental elements when thinking about ag(e)ing's physical health and psychosocial aspects. It is only from these considerations that we can begin to understand the reasons that lead the ag(e)ing to break the isolation¹⁰ rules without homogenizing and scorning them.

¹⁰ As discussed in an article (Mazuchelli et al., in press), it is necessary to consider that a large portion of the ag(e)ing population in Brazil depends on informal work to support their families, which may explain, for example, the difficulty of many in following isolation rules. The case of the first victim of covid-19 in the city of Rio de Janeiro is emblematic. Cleonice Gonçalves, 63, traveled 120 km to work in the South of Rio de Janeiro. She contracted the virus from her employer and died three days after the first symptoms. On the other hand, the number of complaints increases, in the city of São Paulo, for example, of young people who even pay sometimes more than US\$100 Dollars to join in clandestine parties, as shown in the report available here: <https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2020/11/22/baladas-clandestinas-em-sp-tem-ponto-de-encontro-com-vans-e-endereco-liberado-1h-antes-da-festa-para-despistar-fiscalizacao.ghtml>. Access in: August 15, 2021. However, it is worth noting that only in the first case does age seem to have a homogenizing effect and sustain discriminatory practices.

2 Mikhail Bakhtin's Philosophy of Answerable Act - Responsibilities: From the Neoliberal Paradigm to Otherness

One of the current aspects that cross the ag(e)ing experience is the notion of *active ag(e)ing*, a model understood as a process of “optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age.” (World Organization of Health, 2002, p.12). Adopted at the end of the 1990s, the active ag(e)ing model is related to a movement, in terms of public and health policies, to provide opportunities for activities and environments that promote health, increase the quality and years of life, autonomy, and independence, also with the objective of reducing costs associated with the increase of longevity for the health systems (Ribeiro, 2012).

However, the term *active* has not yet been subject to more systematic reflections, especially if we consider other terms used, such as *healthy* and *successful* – the first consolidated in the biomedical context and the second disseminated in the social and psychological literature, as pointed out by Ribeiro (2012) – to think about an interesting model for ag(e)ing, given the advancement of longevity in Brazil and different parts of the world.

Although it is not the objective of this work to reflect on the meanings resulting from this adjective, the concept of *active ag(e)ing* is structured based on a character of mutual responsibility, in which individual (self)responsibility to “reach higher levels of functioning (e.g., through enjoying the opportunities that are provided to individuals at the educational, social participation, well-being promotion, and health status levels)” is articulated to society, primarily represented in government managers whose responsibility would be in “promoting responses that make the options for a healthy or active lifestyle the best and ‘the easiest choice’ for the individuals” (Ribeiro, 2012, p.38).¹¹

Although the conceptualization seems to be established between these two in charge, government actors and society seem to be accountable only for promoting responses that make the options more accessible. This results in reinforcing individual choices and the idea that unexpected issues associated with an ag(e)ing that was not

¹¹ In Portuguese: “atingir níveis de funcionamento mais elevado (e.g. através do usufruto das oportunidades que são dadas aos indivíduos ao nível educativo, de participação social, de promoção do seu bem-estar e estado de saúde)” [...] “promover respostas que tornem as opções por um estilo de vida saudável, ou ativo, a melhor e ‘de mais fácil escolha’ para os indivíduos.”

regarded as active and that could materialize in different health problems will be the individual's responsibility, who preferred not to choose the most appealing options for *active ag(e)ing*; that is, successful and healthy. As Ribeiro (2012, p.36) points out:

According to some authors, the conviction that “being active” or “staying active” is sufficiently clear and obvious has seconded the need to explain what is at stake or what the concept effectively encompasses. In other words, it has been delegated to a secondary plan the necessity, on the one hand, to scrutinize the potentially divergent understanding that politicians, professionals, researchers, and common sense may have of the term, and, on the other hand, the necessity to place this designation in a more comprehensive sphere than that eminently related to the labor market, which is mainly concerned with the “younger” older individuals (legitimizing wide-ranging discussions around the extension of working life and retirement) and where the distinction between “active” and “passive” behavior will eventually turn out to be as problematic as the definition of people who embody, in a clear way, this aging.¹²

The problem with models such as *active ag(e)ing*, in addition to homogenization, lies mainly in the *individualization* of the process, which results in its multidimensionality's erasure. It erases aspects of the process that are not related to direct choices, but to the living and working material conditions of these subjects (for example, 12 long working hours that inevitably mark the bodies and diminish the possibilities of “easier choices”; the increase in food prices, such as vegetables, and the indiscriminate use of pesticides in the plantation, thus preventing *better choices*). Although the positioning of those who defend the idea of active ag(e)ing is founded on the search for better living conditions and education so that better decisions are made, the model strengthens the neoliberal belief in the accountability of the individual because individual decisions are highlighted and de-historicized; that is, they do not encompass the social and historical complexity of these choices.

¹² In Portuguese: “Segundo alguns autores, a convicção de que ‘estar ativo’ ou ‘permanecer ativo’ são suficientemente claros e óbvios tem secundarizado a necessidade de explicitar aquilo que está em causa ou o que o conceito efetivamente abarca. Ou seja, tem-se delegado para um plano secundário a necessidade, por um lado, de esmiuçar o entendimento, potencialmente divergente, que políticos, profissionais, investigadores e o senso comum poderão ter do termo e, por outro, a necessidade de colocar esta designação numa esfera mais abrangente do que aquela eminentemente relacionada com o mercado de trabalho, que se preocupa sobretudo com os idosos ‘mais novos’ (legitimando amplas discussões em torno do prolongamento da vida ativa e da passagem à reforma) e onde a distinção entre comportamentos ‘ativos’ e ‘passivos’ resultará, eventualmente, tão problemática quanto a definição das pessoas que personifiquem de modo claro esse envelhecimento.”

In the pandemic context, we observe the deepening of the effects of this neoliberal ideology of individualization of responsibilities on life histories, which is reinforced, politically, in the discourse that circulates in governmental spheres on the absence of care for the ag(e)ing. It is in this context that the discourse “each one takes care of their own” gains even more strength, intensifying, as signaled by Ponzio (2014), the breakdown of social relations and the centrality in identity and the labor market, which the author identifies as two mechanisms of the same decoy. For the author:

There is a very close relationship between *identity*, being if individual or collective, and *indifferent work*, quantified work, counted in hours, the *commodity type of work*. Concerning *individual identity* (which is ultimately collective, requiring being regarded as equal), not only because *work is the condition for* such (lack or loss of work as a lack or loss of identity); or because *the community is a working community* (in such a way that, as happened in Nazi Germany for the Hebrew [see Spielberg *Shindler’s List* film], even today the work certificate also allows the “non-belonging” - the extra-community - to be still accepted), but also because *all the indifferent-differences* on which individual or collective identities are based *presuppose the social form characterized by the labor market* (Ponzio, 2014, p.49).¹³

Still, in this perspective linked to *functionality*, the discourse about active ag(e)ing, in line with the discourses of *self-care*, instead of *caring for the other*, are articulated and show the prevalence of identity relationships over relationships of otherness, beyond a neoliberal perspective.

The consequence, as Debert (1999) states, is that such new individualized ways of experiencing ag(e)ing, very often materialized in a wide range of activities such as travel and dream fulfillment, do not necessarily lead to a more receptive attitude towards the ag(e)ing, but rather, and above all, to the commitment to a particular type of positive ag(e)ing (Debert, 1999). For the author, new ag(e)ing representations emerge in a context

¹³ In Portuguese: “Há uma *relação muito estreita entre identidade*, seja individual ou coletiva, e *trabalho indiferente*, trabalho quantificado, contado em horas, o *trabalho-mercadoria*. Não só porque, no que se refere à *identidade individual* (que, no fundo, é sempre coletiva, requerendo pertencimento a um igual), o *trabalho resulta na condição para tal* (falta ou perda de trabalho como falta ou perda de identidade); não somente porque a *comunidade é uma comunidade de trabalho* (de modo que, como acontecia na Alemanha nazista para o hebreu [v. o filme de Spielberg *Shindler’s List*], ainda hoje o certificado de trabalho permite também ao “não pertencente” – o extracomunitário – ser ainda aceito). Mas também porque *todas as diferenças indiferentes sobre as quais se baseiam as identidades individuais ou coletivas pressupõem a forma social caracterizada pelo mercado de trabalho*.”

in which a set of widely publicized media discourses strives to destabilize expectations and images traditionally associated with the advancing of age, disseminating “a series of recipes, such as techniques of body maintenance, healthy meals, gymnastics, medicines” dances, and other forms of leisure that seek to show “*how those who do not feel old should behave, despite their age*” (Debert, 1999, p.72; emphasis added).¹⁴ It is what the author calls “the reprivatization of old age,” a process in which:

*Dramas become the responsibilities of individuals who neglected their bodies and were unable to engage in motivational activities. [...] The central argument is that the assessment of the character of transformations in the course of life – of the delusional or realistic suggested libertarian promises – only makes sense if attention is turned to how from these changes, solidarity between generations is redefined and to the social hierarchies that these transformations put into action (Debert, 1999, p.72; emphasis added).*¹⁵

Therefore, the neoliberal paradigm, centered on identity relations, reinforces the individualization of the ag(e)ing process and an individualistic responsibility. To reflect on other paths, based on otherness, we return to the Bakhtinian architectonics, considering the effect of the different positionalities in the enunciation and, therefore, in life; a path we consider crucial to talk about another responsibility:

The highest architectonic principle of the actual world of the performed act or deed is the concrete and architectonically valid or operative contraposition of I and the *other*. Life knows two value-centers that are fundamentally and essentially different, yet are corelated with each other: myself and the other; and it is around these centers that all of the concrete moments of Being are distributed and arranged. One and the same object (identical in its content) is a moment of Being that presents itself differently from the valuative standpoint when correlated with me or when correlated with another (Bakhtin, 1999, p.74).¹⁶

¹⁴ In Portuguese: “uma série de receitas como técnicas de manutenção corporal, refeições saudáveis, ginástica, medicamentos” [...] “como aqueles que não se sentem velhos devem se comportar, apesar de sua idade.”

¹⁵ In Portuguese: “*Os dramas se transformam em responsabilidades dos indivíduos que negligenciaram seus corpos e foram incapazes de se envolver em atividades motivadoras. [...] O argumento central é que a avaliação do caráter das transformações no curso da vida do caráter ilusório ou realista das promessas libertárias sugeridas só ganha sentido se a atenção se voltar para o modo como a partir delas a solidariedade entre gerações é redefinida e para as hierarquias sociais que essas transformações põem em ação.*”

¹⁶ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Translation and notes by V. LIapunov. Edited by V. Liapunov and M. Holquist. 1st edition. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999.

In general, Bakhtin characterizes the moments of this architectonics in terms of dialogic otherness. In each time-space of I-other, the I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and the I-for-the-other will inevitably be arranged. It is important to emphasize that the I and the other are not interchangeable, as commonly presented within certain theories of linguistics/communication since they assume unrepeatable positionalities in the unique enunciative moment. In addition, the architectonics between an 'I' and all the others that do not constitute it is never passive and casual but has a dynamic character since it is a positioning always *in relation to*.

For Bakhtin (1999, p.75),¹⁷ “this architectonic [valuative architectonic division] is something-*given* as well as something-*to-be-accomplished*, for it is the architectonic of an event;” that is, in contrast to a finished, ready, and consolidated architectonic division of an event, it is “incessantly and actively realized through my answerable deed, upbuilt by my deed and possessing stability only in the answerability of my deed.”¹⁸ This answerable act is only possible in the unique place and in the once-occurrent event of Being as event, which is precisely the only one that holds a singular position in a given space and time, without an alibi.

In the given once-occurrent point where I am now located, no one else has ever been located in the once-occurrent time and once-occurrent space of once-occurrent Being. And it is around this once-occurrent point that all once-occurrent Being is arranged in a once-occurrent and never-repeatable manner. That which can be done by me can never be done by anyone else. The uniqueness or singularity of present-on-hand Being is compellingly obligatory.

This fact of *my non-alibi in Being*, which underlies the concrete and once-occurrent ought of the answerably performed act, is not something I come to know of and to cognize but is something I acknowledge and affirm in a unique or once-occurrent manner (Bakhtin, 1999, p.40).¹⁹

However, it is essential to remember that living from yourself is not the same as living for yourself or on your own, nullifying the fundamental role of the other. As stated by Ponzio (2010, p.22), what the Bakhtinian theory emphasizes is that it is only from this unique place that it becomes “possible to recognize the impossibility of non-indifference

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 16.

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 16

¹⁹ For reference, see footnote 16.

towards the other.”²⁰ It is precisely for this reason that, for Ponzio, the Bakhtinian revolution takes place in the positional shift in which the construction of the world is placed on the horizon of the Other, and no longer just on the ‘I’ (Ponzio, 2008).

Such an architectonically positioned “I without alibi” has an excess of seeing over the other, making it possible to have *another* horizon, *another* axiological view that allows assigning meanings where would not be possible otherwise. As Novaes Pinto (1999) argues, this excess of seeing is not only aesthetic but profoundly ethical as it allows us a double exotopic movement to go to the other and then return to our position, now also supplied with the meanings of the other. This movement, therefore, moves us, ethically, to go beyond *identification*, as Bakhtin points out:

I must empathize or project myself into this other human being, see his world axiologically from within him as *he* sees this world; I must put myself in his place and then, after returning to my own place, “fill in” his horizon through that excess of seeing which opens out from this, my own, place outside him. I must enframe him, create a consummating environment for him out of this excess of my own seeing, knowing, desiring, and feeling (1990, p.25).²¹

In the field of studies on ag(e)ing, it is interesting to observe how the concept of *active ag(e)ing*, although seeking to bring important aims, ends up leading to *a closure of the individuals in themselves* by centralizing the practices and understandings that neutralize, obscure, and erase the traits of the other. In dehistoricizing the choices and life, ag(e)ing is transformed into a controlled experience determined by conscious choices, closing itself to what pervades it: the relations with the world, that is, the historical and situational conditions of class, gender, race, and geography that influence the ag(e)ing population to follow (or not) the parameters of active ag(e)ing. Bakhtin’s responsive-active movement is contrary to such process that crosses the other without being influenced by it.

²⁰ In Portuguese: “possível o reconhecimento da impossibilidade de uma não indiferença pelo outro.”

²¹ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Translated by V. Liapunov. Edited by M. Holquist and V. Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.

3 Dialogizing Generation - Intergenerationality in Otherness.

When we speak of a responsibility based on otherness, one of the critical points concerns the term *generation*, which, although familiar in common sense, raises important considerations given the very polysemy of the term. According to Motta (2010, p.226):

Interestingly, in the case of the use of the concept of generations, even though being so enlightening, there are no middle ground adherences to it. Either its usefulness or analytical indispensability as a catalyst for the relations between age groups in historical time and social change has been overtly perceived; or the collective social connections referred to the experience in historical time have been left “forgotten” because they seem excessively fluid or changeable, of an exaggerated dynamism that seems to contradict some of the objective “certainties” of science.²²

For Motta (2010, p.229), the scientific use of the term can be synthesized in different perspectives; however, the more fully sociological meaning of generation “designates a collective of individuals who live in a certain period or social time, are about the same age and share some form of experience, or have the potential to do so.”²³ For the author, generations do not exist in isolation but in a power play of mutual reference, contraposition, or even opposition to each other.

Although the concept can be used to reflect on aspects related to human development and the ag(e)ing process, it should be taken into account the inherent variability of historical and social nature within the term *generations*, as proposed by Motta (2010), since the experiences and memories of collective character, shared or not, are lived in different ways. When regarding social, class, race, territorial, and gender cuts within these *generations*, it becomes problematic to consider, for example, that the experiences endured by the generation that lived through the Second World War in

²² In Portuguese: “Curiosamente, no caso do uso do conceito de gerações, mesmo sendo tão iluminador, não se encontram adesões de meio termo a ele. Ou tem-se percebido claramente a sua utilidade ou indispensabilidade analítica como catalisador das relações entre grupos de idade no tempo histórico e na mudança social; ou se tem deixado as conexões sociais coletivas referidas à vivência e experiência no tempo histórico ‘esquecidas’, porque parecem demasiado fluidas ou mutáveis, de um dinamismo exagerado que parece contrariar algumas das ‘certezas’ objetivas da ciência.”

²³ In Portuguese: “designa um coletivo de indivíduos que vivem em determinada época ou tempo social, têm aproximadamente a mesma idade e compartilham alguma forma de experiência ou vivência, ou têm a potencialidade para tal.”

Europe and Latin America are the same. Similarly, it is arguable to treat it as a category of analysis, as is still observed in worldwide cohort studies that seek to understand the effects of major historical events on life experiences.

The mobilization of memory here refers, therefore, to the impossibility of its individualization – that is, to understand it in purely biological and neuronal, intimate and particular terms – or its reduction to a certain identity group, given its indispensable collective nature, as pointed out by Halbwachs (2017). From the Bakhtinian perspective, in the dialogical and enunciative scope, the memory that the other keeps of me appears as fundamental for the construction of my unity:

My memory of the other and of the other's life differs radically from my contemplating and remembering my own life. Memory sees a life and its content in a different way formally: only memory is aesthetically productive (the constituent of content can, of course, be supplied by the observation and recollection of one's own life, but these cannot provide the forming and consummating activity) (Bakhtin, 1990, p.107).²⁴

In each of the positions previously described around architectonics, we can distinguish the memory that I have of me, that I have of the other and that the other has of me. Thus, this architectonics presupposes qualitatively different memories, not coinciding, since the same data receives different axiological evaluations as a result of our positioning.

Within such architectonics, it is implied that the memory of the other provides boundary, is situated in the past, and has an aesthetic character, while my memory is always unfinished and is made up in the future. Therefore, according to Bakhtin, “memory is for me the memory of the future; for the other—it is the memory of the past” (Bakhtin, 1990, p.125).²⁵

one can speak of a human being's absolute need for the other, for the other's seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity—the only self-activity capable of producing his outwardly finished personality. This outward personality could not exist, if the other did not create it: aesthetic memory is *productive*—it gives birth, for the first time, to the outward human being on a new plane of being. (Bakhtin, 1990, pp.35-36)²⁶

²⁴ For reference, see footnote 21.

²⁵ For reference, see footnote 21.

²⁶ For reference, see footnote 21.

Given this temporality, in which memories of the past and the future coexist simultaneously, we understand for the sake of this text that intergenerational responsibility is not restricted to the binarity of the *young/old* pair, but to the fact that there must be a responsibility that exceeds the limits of identity – an intergenerational *responsibility* base on otherness. It is about the possibility of recognizing in me and the other the intersection of generations that constitute it and, above all, of acting, without alibis, in relation to this encounter.

In this sense, the notion of intergenerationality is made both between individuals and internally, in each subject, in the coexistence of different temporalities; that is, as constitutive of a single, singular, and unrepeatable subject, these temporalities contain within themselves intergenerationality, regardless of age.

Therefore, when we evoke the notion of generation here, we are by no means reducing it to the present of relations in an established period. On the contrary, recognizing the constitutive character of intergenerationality means realizing the presence of other temporalities that intersect at all times, allowing the chronotropic space of memory to present itself in its temporal texture.

In this way, we answer not only for what happens today but also for the past (and here we remember the trivialization of the horror of dictatorship or slavery) and the future (and here we think that future generations may not have an inhabitable home). For the purposes of this article, we prefer to say that generations share the dialogizing of a non-compartmentalized and clocked time, of representation and projection, which allows the subjects to be, at the same time, coexisting in different generations.

4 Final Considerations: The Covid-19 Pandemic and Intergenerational Responsibility

During the pandemic caused by covid-19, it has been possible to observe many discourses directly related to the ag(e)ing individuals that point to a contradiction. On the one hand, there is a significant concern for the ag(e)ing, especially for their fragility against the virus. On the other hand, there is an attitude of discrimination and violence, especially regarding their decisions about the pandemic since they are often considered either stubborn, for supposedly not respecting the rules of social distance, or naive, for

not being able to understand the severity of the situation and the risks of the infection. This contradiction becomes even more remarkable when we see discourses that want to force the ag(e)ing to stay at home while defending the return of economic activities. Such disputes show how the discourses used to blame the ag(e)ing for their choices, either because of their possible naivety or intransigence, are nothing more than subterfuge; expressions that reveal the ageism that the pandemic has been exposing since the critical entanglement of this pandemic is that the death of the ag(e)ing results from the transmissibility that everyone can cause.

On *Encontro com Fátima Bernardes* [Meeting with Fátima Bernardes] show, aired on October 19th,²⁷ journalist Luiza Zveiter talks to pedestrians to survey their behavior during the pandemic, with the following question: “Who are you in this pandemic, are you still at home or have you resumed your activities?”. In this report, the testimony of a middle-aged man in an establishment in Rio de Janeiro draws attention:

Interviewee: “I’ve been going out, really enjoying ... the spree, the parties. And ... I come home, my mother is 78 years old, she doesn’t catch covid. I believe that this disease is for those who are already fragile. It is not for those... already spiritually strong, nothing will happen to those who are well.”

Luiza: Have you lost a relative? Do you know of a friend who has lost someone?

Interviewee: “I did... I’ve already lost two aunts, but they are 80, more than 70 years old.”

Luiza: “But what about your mother, aged 78? Isn’t she then in the risk group?”

Interviewee: “She doesn’t get it, no!”²⁸

Initially, it can be asked about how the ag(e)ing individuals can be labeled due to their age and choices, while others are not held accountable in the same way.²⁹ In other

²⁷ News report available in Portuguese at: <https://observatoriodatv.uol.com.br/noticias/entrevistado-do-encontro-diz-que-corona-nao-e-para-quem-esta-forte-espiritualmente-e-a-web-se-revolta>. Access in: August 15, 2021.

²⁸ In Portuguese: Entrevistado: “Eu tenho saído, curtido muito... as baladas, as festas. E... volto para casa, tenho uma mãe de 78 anos, ela não pega covid. Eu acredito que essa doença é para quem já está fragilizado. Ela não é para quem... já está forte espiritualmente, não vai acontecer nada com quem está bem.”

Luiza: “Já chegou a perder algum parente, sabe de algum amigo que perdeu?”

Entrevistado: “Perdi... Já perdi duas tias, mas são tias de 80, mais de 70 anos.”

Luiza: “Mas e sua mãe com 78? Ela então está no grupo de risco?”

Entrevistado: “Ela não pega não!”

²⁹ It is noteworthy, for example, the growing scandals of clandestine parties organized in different cities across the country (see footnote 9) and the crowded gatherings in bars in upscale neighborhoods in Rio de

words, while we continue to hold the ag(e)ing responsible for their individual choices, dehistoricizing them, either through discourses that reinforce the meanings of *active ag(e)ing* or in the pandemic, associating their “poor decisions” to the overburden health systems, we continue to feed a system of accountability based on self-care and the alienation of the - radical - presence of the other. With its contradictions and refractions of meaning, the pandemic leads us to demand, today, a kind of responsibility that is not limited to the protection of the self because it includes the protection of the other.

However, for the interviewee, despite recognizing the loss of two ag(e)ing relatives, it seems that there is no need to worry about those who are *spiritually strong*. In his belief system, this reference appears as an *alibi* that allows him to live without the hassles generated by social distance measures. Even if it were true, we ask ourselves about the others, those considered weak. Would these lives be expendable? Or rather, how is it possible that the idea that covid-19 would take only those considered weak can be formulated to justify the continuity of activities?

The interviewee’s speech refracts and reinforces other discourses that circulate, whether being from the president-in-office who stated that the pandemic is a *mere cold* and that *athlete’s bodies are not at risk*, or that *those who wear a mask in Brazil are sissies*,³⁰ whether from news and social networks that minimize the impact of the disease by (re)affirming the need to resume school activities.³¹ It is in this movement of

Janeiro at the reopening of activities. See report available at: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2020/07/03/reabertura-bares-rio-de-janeiro-aglomeracao.htm>. Access in: August 15, 2021.

³⁰ The statements of the president-in-office, with a strong eugenic root, can be found in Portuguese here: “After the stab, it won’t be a mere cold that will knock me down.” <https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/leonardo-sakamoto/2020/03/20/gripezinha-menosprezo-de-bolsonaro-por-coronavirus-o-tornou-cumplce.htm>. Access in: August 15, 2021. - “I won’t feel anything, I was an athlete, and I was stabbed.” - <https://exame.com/brasil/bolsonaro-sobre-covid-19-nao-vou-sentir-nada-fui-atleta-e-levei-facada/>. Access in: August 15, 2021. - and “It has to stop being a sissy country.” - <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/tem-que-deixar-de-ser-um-pais-de-maricas-diz-bolsonaro-sobre-covid-19-1-24739111>. Access in: August 15, 2021.

³¹ In a recent article, Julián Fuks speaks of the urgency to resume school activities due to the immense sadness that children suffer from prolonged isolation. Although the article presents fundamental points about the lack of reflection regarding the grief that children experience at this moment, it is necessary to point out the erasure of the complexity of school life when thinking about school only from the child’s point of view, especially if we consider the effect of the rapid transmissibility of the virus. By not complexing the school, also formed by workers who can be part of risk groups, Fuks reinforces the discourse of resuming activities and sustains the primacy of childhood over other groups by stating that “research from all over the world shows that children are infected less, with fewer severe cases, and they also contaminate less. Therefore, to our surprise, they are not as vulnerable, nor are they terrible agents of infection.” The effect of the reopening of schools has already been felt in several cities, either with the increased stress of professionals who have their schedules modified with each newly infected child and

discourses based on the survival of the strongest and on individual needs that the alibis of a responsibility of identity are reinforced, which allows the formulation of arguments such as the interviewee's when commenting on the loss in his family: *they are 80, more than 70 years old.*

In another report from TV Cultura in Goiânia, the journalist interviews passers-by about the resistance to wearing masks in parks in the capital. One of the interviewees, an ag(e)ing woman, says she does not think it is fair that, if infected, she will have to dispute with young people. She argues:

These unfortunates must not have a mother; they were born in an incubator because if they do not protect their own mother, how can they protect me? During the week, when the influx here is little, you see six young people, between 20 and 30 years old, either with or without the mask or with the mask on their chin. What is it for? I use mine, protect myself, and protect them. Tomorrow I will fight with them for the respirator at the hospital. They, as they are younger, will have the preference. Is it fair? I mean, I don't know if that is disrespect, lack of culture or if they're a follower of the president's philosophy. I don't know what they are, but they lack respect.³²

The point of the interview is precisely the erasure that several ag(e)ing people have been suffering in this pandemic, which is based on the primacy of youth culture, in the belief that the ag(e)ing does not understand the situation of the pandemic, and that their eventual deaths are understandable, either because of their advanced stage in life or because they have already reached a chronological mark that would justify the losses. Therefore, there is still a very veiled belief that ag(e)ing is nothing more than waiting for death. Adding to that, we have the idea of caring only for one's own, for oneself, in terms of identity, and little concern for the other; as the interviewee argues, *I wear the mask, I protect myself, I protect them.* Even so, in the balance of ages, the fact that she has already reached a certain chronological age puts her at a disadvantage in this policy that determines who lives and who dies, when what we should discuss is why we do not have

quarantined groups, or the expressive increase in cases of deaths of education professionals. Fuks's article can be found in Portuguese here: <https://www.uol.com.br/ecoa/colunas/julian-fuks/2020/08/15/sobre-a-tristeza-das-criancas-e-a-urgencia-de-priorizar-as-escolas.htm>. Access in: August 15, 2021.

³² The interview is available in Portuguese here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=13&v=vIBg2g6OBCI&feature=emb_logo. Access in: August 15, 2021.

assistance for everyone, or even, what public policies should be created so that there is no need for narrow criteria like these to be used to decide who lives and who dies.

The way out of the responsibility of identity, we believe, is the responsibility over otherness. Even though responsibility, based on Bakhtin, is based on alterity and dialogism, the context of the pandemic and the gaping Brazilian age lead us to adjectivize it as a strategy to make visible the importance of a group that is constantly being erased and silenced. That is why we defend the need to speak of an intergenerational responsibility because it reinforces the character of otherness and points to the difference of generations, marking this necessary relationship with our memory and with the future.

Therefore, it is necessary to create spaces for these encounters to fight identity and ageist narratives. That is the case, for example, of an outreach project at the State University of Bahia,³³ in which health professionals and students concerned about the ag(e)ing in an impoverished region of Salvador have developed health-promoting actions. One group, named *Ligações Afetivas* [*Affective Connections*], offered to listen to or have a conversation, or share a song, a poem, a story. And so, health residents heard how each of the ag(e)ing people were facing this pandemic, but they also talked and shared stories. The other group, called *Afeto nas Redes* [*Affection on the Networks*], produced audiovisual material specifically for these ag(e)ing people, based on the dialogues carried out, talking about the pandemic, isolation measures, mental health, among other issues. In both cases, the services provided were constantly in dialogue with the health units of reference for the ag(e)ing, strengthening the link with the Sistema Único de Saúde [Unified Health System] (SUS).³⁴

These dialogues allow students and residents to get closer to the realities and experiences of these ag(e)ing people, which significantly contribute not only to their training in the health field since many will work directly with this population, but also to

³³ The State University of Bahia (UNEB) developed the UNEB Outreach Project Against Coronavirus, articulating a series of actions in partnership with two Family Health Units (FHU) in the Cabula / Beiru Health District, in the city of Salvador, between May and October 2020. The project had the coordinated action of several axes; however, the actions described in the text were developed by the Mental Health group. This axis had the participation of teachers (including one of the authors of this text), residents of the Professional Residence in Mental Health, monitors, and students.

³⁴ We should remember that we lost count of how many ministers the Health Ministry had this year, in the middle of a pandemic. In a country where three out of four ag(e)ing people have no alternative to health care other than UHS, the current minister of health, Eduardo Pazuello, stated categorically in October: “I didn’t even know what UHS was.” A news report available in Portuguese at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/equilibrioesaude/2020/10/pazuello-afirma-que-nao-sabia-o-que-era-o-sus-ate-este-momento-da-vida.shtml>. Access in: August 15, 2021.

break stereotypes and representations of the ag(e)ing process that characterize it from deficient lenses (naive, stubborn, who do not understand, and so on). It is also a response without *alibis* to the pandemic, respecting social distancing measures, but trying to bring together, embrace differences, and promote health through dialogue. It is an intergenerational response not only because the encounters between generations took place but because each person had to deal with their expectations of the future, with the memories of a life of other ag(e)ing people, and with the other ag(e)ing people worldwide.

The strength of these encounters and of this responsibility that we claim intergenerational leads us to what Marilena Chauí asserts in the presentation of the work of Ecléa Bosi, *Memória e Sociedade [Memory and Society]*, “the social function of the old man is to remember and advise – *memini, moneo* – unite the beginning and the end, linking what was and what is to come” (Chauí, 2016, p.18).³⁵ As Ponzio puts it, these encounters allow that affections be born out of difference and not identity, so that it makes it possible to move away from the *sole care of oneself* to the *care of the other*. These encounters bring into dialogue Rosa, an ag(e)ing Holocaust survivor, and Momo, a Senegalese immigrant boy, and create the possibility of different, intergenerational responsible futures.

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³⁵ In Portuguese: “a função social do velho é lembrar e aconselhar – *memini, moneo* – unir o começo e o fim ligando o que foi e o porvir.”

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