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## Closing remarks

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**Abstract.** On the basis of the uses of the concept of “containment” by the various participants in the conference, as well as the experience of certain “matters of containment” during the Covid-19 pandemic (especially prophylactic masks), the author pictures a broad perspective on the potential, intrinsically interdisciplinary, field of research that could be articulated around this idea.

### 1 Introduction

When we launched the call for papers for this conference, we had no idea that a global pandemic would bring to the fore not only the conference’s core theme, but also the subject of our research network, the Quarantine Studies Network. In planning this meeting, our objective was precisely to move beyond the somewhat limited framework of sanitary quarantines in order to expand the concept so that it became useful to other disciplines and research fields (see Opening address). This goal was motivated by the solid hypothesis that the logics, objects, tools, and ‘*dispositifs*’ that characterize quarantines were far from being confined to the field of health and disease. It was possible and necessary for us to think about containment as a practical tool for managing, governing, and controlling dangers of various kinds, whether sanitary, social, political, environmental, military, technological, or cultural.

At the beginning of 2020 the program of the conference was closed and the rooms at the Universities of Lisbon and Évora were booked. Then, the international situation became more and more delicate, and multiple announcements of confinement followed one after another in Europe. Once the initial moment of stupor and disorganization was over, our first reaction was to think about practicalities. Amid widespread uncertainty, we got acquainted with the growing difficulties of accommodation, the diverse and constantly changing sanitary regulations of each country, the strong probability that travel by plane would become impossible for most of us, etc. We also had to think about reimbursements and alternative solutions to organize the conference. Once the online option was decided upon, we needed to invent a new format, choose an online platform (we were all *beginners* on this subject at the time), and find a schedule that would suit several time zones. In short, it was the material aspects, in the most basic sense of the word, that concerned us the most.

More broadly, the matters of containment of Covid-19 were widely felt by all of us, in our lives and in our bodies. Our movements were restricted to the perimeters established by national and local authorities, basic products ran out in the supermarkets, the presence of the police or the army was omnipresent. It was precisely this materiality of containment that we wished to study during our conference. The objective was to put forward the objects,

techniques, tools, devices, but also the technological, ideological, or legal standards allowing the containment, sometimes with different ends.

Material aspects have been at the heart of our concerns in recent months. The use of both everyday objects and medical technologies has been the focus of attention and even of various tensions. Thus, shortages have dramatically affected ventilators in hospitals, toilet paper in supermarkets, and prophylactic masks everywhere. The mask is undoubtedly the object that represents, par excellence, this pandemic. However, this essential device has undergone a considerable evolution, as much in its uses and regulation, as in its materiality, and about that we wish to say a few words now.

## **2 Some thoughts on a matter of containment: the prophylactic mask**

In March 2020, the prophylactic mask, mandatory in the streets of China because of its protecting action against the diffusion of the newly arrived airborne disease, was the subject of contradictory injunctions in Europe. In France, the government spokesperson began by advising against it, arguing that it was useless in the street and that she herself would not know exactly how to wear one. [1]

The masks were to be reserved for professional caregivers, nurses, physicians and patients, and pharmacies were instructed not to sell masks to the general public. [2] The shortage of masks in France, as elsewhere, made the headlines. The international press has been plagued by colorful cases, such as the story of the United States seizing a shipment bound for France in extremis at a Chinese airport. [3] In the French case, the massive destruction of mask stocks between 2017–2020 and the non-renewal of the strategic stockpile despite recommendations by the WHO has been the subject of the strongest criticism of political leaders and of a commission of inquiry leading to the indictment of the former Minister of Health. [4] Faced with the shortage, there was no lack of initiatives, however. Some industrialists and farmers donated masks to hospitals in shortage of them. [5] This equipment, designed to protect workers in those sectors from multiple dangers related to industrial work, waste, pesticides and other toxins, found a new use, also for protection, but against the danger represented by SARS-COV-2 virus. In parallel, families set to make their own masks, taking advantage of sewing tutorials booming on the Internet. [6]

The mask has therefore become an essential part of everyday life during this period of adaptation when we are learning to live with the virus and to protect ourselves from it. Since the summer of 2020 in Europe, all cities and governments have progressively adopted the obligation to wear a mask, based on the ever-changing health recommendations of national scientific councils and the WHO.

As a real fashion item, it comes in all colors, shapes, and textures. It allows you to pass on messages, to display your tastes and opinions, and even for commercial advertising. As time goes by, health authorities have extended their recommendations, and homemade masks made of fabric are less and less accepted everywhere, while surgical masks and FFP2 masks are recommended. No need to worry about that, pharmacies sell now surgical masks of at least three different colors.

This tool of containment has also become a symbol of the pandemic and of health injunctions that are often perceived as authoritarian. The refusal to wear the mask is a reflection of an opposition to governments that can be extremely varied. However, sometimes it is also difficult or even impossible for some individuals to wear the mask, for social, professional, economic, or health reasons. This leads us to the problem of inclusion, which is particularly sensitive when we consider the difficulty of disfavored sections of society to assume its costs for instance.

Finally, all these geopolitics of the mask briefly outlined here should not make us forget the object itself, and its life cycle. This one has also varied, according to health recommendations and scientific studies that have determined the maximum hours to wear the same surgical mask, or the maximum washes for masks made of fabric. Disposable masks have now become a public health and environmental protection issue. They require the development of tools to contain the pollution they represent when they are thrown away in the city or the countryside, on the side of the road or on rivers and seas. From a tool allowing containment and protection, the mask becomes a dangerous object, which must, in its turn, be contained.

### **3 Convergences in matters of containment**

The purpose of these few remarks is not to draw up a study of the 'mask object', which has, moreover, been the subject of several recent works, some of them historical. [7, 8] If the story of the prophylactic mask overlaps wonderfully with the story of the COVID-19 pandemic, in these "Closing remarks" it serves above all to illustrate the relevance of the choice we made by focusing our attention on the materiality of containment. This seems to us to have paid off since the various conference papers addressed rather diverse matters, from the protective gear used by workers against poison gas in the early twentieth century production plants in Spain (Francisco Javier Martínez), to the administrative mechanisms established to regulate Portuguese emigration (Yvette Santos), or to natural elements such as airs, waters (Louis Fagon) or soils (Teva Meyer). The great diversity of matters studied uncovered the fact that the mechanisms of control of the various threats can be compared due the similarity of "*dispositifs*", tools and logic.

In the papers, the sources and vectors of danger that must be contained are diverse. They are firstly humans carrying diseases, subversive ideas, or various stigmas that could represent threats for different reasons. They are also animals, various objects – natural ones or artifacts – toxic elements. Finally, they can be elements for which the material reality is less perceptible such as information or data. These 'sources' endanger the delicate balance struck between health, politics, social, economic, and environmental issues. Containment is therefore a strategy for preserving this threatened order, and this is materialized through different mechanisms, objects, norms, regulations, etc. The spatial dimension is one of them. The camps described by Jonathan Cortez are placed far from the cities, echoing the location of hospitals (Margaret DeLacy) or other containment infrastructure such as lazarettos (Quim Bonastra), well known from abundant quarantine literature. The establishment of a buffer zone, a no man's land, serve to contain a risk. This is the case of the sanitary cordons described by Laurinda Abreu at the end of the nineteenth century on the Portuguese-Spanish border, of the security perimeters established around poison gas production sites in Spain during the Rif War (Francisco Javier Martínez), or of the quarantine measures taken by the Portuguese forestry administration to protect trees from the Pine Wood Nematode (Ignacio García Pereda).

Other tools and "*dispositifs*" also permit creating a distance between what risk management experts call the source and the vulnerability. These tools can be constructed through scientific expertise, as shown by the controversies on the causes of the epidemic of contagious fever in Lisbon in the early nineteenth century studied by Ricardo Cabral, those studied by Jon Arrizabalaga and Guillermo Sanchez-Martínez on the management of dead bodies in the battlefields, or those aiming to rethink urban planning in Istanbul in order to contain earthquake risk (Youenn Gourain). These instruments can also be administrative, as in the case of the emigration law and regulations studied by Yvette Santos in Portugal, or the international and Italian sanitary regulations determining the Italian management of epidemics in Alexandria between 1899 and 1902 (Daniele Cozzoli and Mauro Capocci).

They are technical devices too, whether the infrastructure of sanitation technology installed in Ottoman ports in the nineteenth century (Ufuk Adak), the instruments in Spanish customs laboratories (Ignacio Suay-Matallana), or the techniques of surveillance and bacteriological examinations for the sanitary border control in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century (Shiori Nosaka). When the threat comes from information, containment is achieved through techniques which redefine, in different ways, the well-known censorship. Beatriz Medori shows that the Portuguese Oncology Institute intended to “erase” the negative image of radioactivity in the 1940s by producing reassuring information. Louis Fagon explains how the technical nature of the reports on the radioactivity of the Rhône River in France contributed to keeping troubling information within circumscribed circles of experts. The construction of the invisibility of radioactivity is also at the heart of the interrogations of Jaume Valentines on the experimental nuclear reactor that existed at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya in Barcelona. Silence, blindness, emptiness are therefore practical techniques to contain information that could lead to disorder – only apparently immaterial, though actually achieved by materialities (pictures, news, words, architectures that help to hide the various threats).

The papers also showed that these matters of containment intersect and overlap. The same object or tool can be used to contain very different threats. The curfew is a good example, since this containment tool in a military context has been widely reused in the different phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another example is barbed wire, which has been the subject of several works and is a material used in the construction of confining facilities for different purposes. [9, 10] Barbed wire is notably used to build camps, a typology of temporary (sometimes long-lasting temporary) detention places for different reasons, as Irene Peano and Jonathan Cortez have shown in this conference. Sometimes these multiple uses are concomitant. For example, the retention of migrants in the port of Lisbon was driven by both health and economic injunctions (Yvette Santos). This was also the case for foreign goods controlled in Spanish customs laboratories, which represented both a threat for public health and economic development of Spanish products (Ignacio Suay-Matallana). The “containment building” studied by Jaume Valentines had the primary function of limiting potential risk linked to radioactivity, but its camouflage in the public space also obeyed to the will of containing the possible contestation that its existence could have triggered. Several logics of containment often collided too, as we can see in Quim Bonastra’s contribution, which articulates a sanitary containment building and other mechanisms used to contain the fear that it generated.

In general, matters of containment are at the heart of various arbitrages and interests. The historiography of quarantines, on which this conference is partly based, has clearly shown how the containment measures put in place and their evolution responded to so many attempts to reconcile economic and health interests. [11] In their paper, which studies the quarantine measures in the Suez Canal over a long period of time, Costas Tsiamis, Chrisoula Hatzara and Georgia Vrioni, highlight these multiple issues, as does the paper of Daniele Cozzoli and Mauro Capocci, which emphasizes the issues of imperial domination in relation to sanitary questions. Fatima Ouaryachi also shows how the strategies of confinement of the Moroccan feminist movement emerged in the midst of social, cultural and political issues that are sometimes contradictory.

Temporalities are, finally, a crucial question to address when drawing a larger picture of matters of containment. After being deployed at some specific point in history, what becomes later of the tools, objects, beings, and any other elements that participated, in one way or another, in these enterprises of containment? Irene Peano finds in the camps for African migrants in Italy the genealogical traces of sanitary quarantines. Jonathan Cortez also studies the morphology of migrant camps in the US, showing their transformation process into prison spaces dedicated to different populations, spaces that follow one another and are deemed

threatening for reasons of race, economics, social politics, etc. Teva Meyer deciphers the fate of nuclear waste in French Polynesia, showing how the reasons for containment are evolving from a health and environmental issue to a historical and symbolic issue. As for the Rhône River, studied by Louis Fagon, its role in containment also evolved. From being a natural barrier to contain the radioactivity of nuclear power plants, it gradually became a space to be protected from this radioactivity, in connection with environmentalist claims emerging in the 1960s and 1970s.

As organizers of this conference and members of the Quarantine Studies network, we are proud to have successfully conducted a contained conference. The quality and richness of the papers, in addition to demonstrating the relevance of the proposed theme, have in our view opened new doors for research. The interdisciplinary approach to containment also drove to the formulation of new or re-defined concepts. Uncertainty, fear, atmosphere, blindness, or spatial script, all could lead to renew and rethink quarantine studies within our research network.

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