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That Rebel. To change our life and not just save it

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And it happened. The same body that just days ago filled the streets, that went on feminist strike, the one that danced at a party, that produced discourse, orgasms, and life, is today under suspicion. Because it transmits everything – culture, defenses, affects – its capacity to carry and spread a virus poses it as an enemy. *Obligatory social isolation, disengagement, red zone, quarantine, cancellation, ban, shutdown, geo-reference, state of exception, swift security measures, national networks, a matter of the state.* The army policing the virus, the police patrolling meetings, preventative quarantine, biopolitical control; the virus is a terrorist organization, and every being a suspicious cell. Many of us have been talking about the body; about its centrality and about its neglect; about the necessity of liberating and listening to it, or of disciplining and controlling it, depending on the ideology. Now, when the entire situation is organized around it, we have no fucking idea what to do with it.

We create symptoms psychologically. The dubious sensation of a congested throat, a rough voice, the dry cough described on TV. At the market our trembling hands rummage through the fruit as if engaged in a forbidden act. Hours overinforming ourselves on

social media; snooping around the news of other countries, suspicious of everyone and everything; afraid of anxiously eating the food the paranoia says we will cease to have; the inevitability that every conversation ends with “coronavirus”; afraid of not stocking up, leaving everything to the rich and regretting it later; rejecting the xenophobia that roves with a free pass; nightmares where you are locked in quarantine crying “I don’t have it!”; unable to have one useful thought; assessing what we could do, deciding to stay at home and watch a series, and now those things we thought about are no longer possible; the anguish of not knowing.

I write with doubts. Shaking. Disconcerted. Watching the world crisis from my home. It’s surprising what a microorganism can make us see. China is so near. The body is a social body; there is not one without others. The virus shows us our vulnerabilities and our strengths. The pregnant cashier at the supermarket, the old people at risk and who are pillars of care; the workers at markets without rights, for whom stopping means not being paid. We are not equals in the face of the virus, and much less so in the face of the crisis that it already unleashed. The precarity of life and of the economy measured by structural adjustment are a sickness, also known as neoliberalism, that will, if the mechanisms of social containment are not deployed, take more lives than the bug itself. But the virus also shows us that the oppressions against which we struggle are held together by fragile threads. That the bodies of the powerful are also helpless against infection and fear. And that the bodies of the most vulnerable can become powerful, together and in action.

Isolating in community. The system is falling apart to inequality, and while biopower hovers over our conduct, we are the flesh behind the numbers: when these fall, we determine the course of the recession and the crisis. The precarized bodies that sustain life

are also those that make revolutions, because they can't take it any more, they no longer endure, they get sick, they are hungry, they have less to lose each time. The virus reminds us that we are interdependent and that the liberal "to each his own" does not exist, and that the cruel competency is not our "natural state." As Roberto Espósito has said, if we fall prey to the error of thinking that others destroy us, then we will destroy our relationship with them. This is why immunity is the reverse of community: in community we are together in the face of death.

Recycling hygenicism in the twenty-first century is another grand triumph of capitalism. In the era of wifi and hyperconnectivity, the fear of germs produces obsessive and isolated forms of life on the part of individuals totally and singularly engaged in their survival. Lives that are shit, but also long. Lives in which there is no drama in letting the environment go to shit, but everything is wrong when the environment retorts and attacks. Of course the preservation of some lives at all cost does not meet us united: man is the virus of man. Social classes unequally distribute roles. There are bodies of class and classes of bodies. *The cleaning woman called, she said she was going to work from home today and will send us instructions about what to do.* Humor decompresses, but it does not evade or ease panic. *Diplomatic bodies travel.* It's not all a conspiracy, it's also not ceasing to be one. And what does an invention matter if its effects already hurt.

Isolate with others, for others, for myself? And who cannot? Isolate until when? Will it be the survival of the most apt? We are habituated to doubting the information of the mainstream media and the state (even more so with a right-wing government, and much more when the minister of health integrates a military party). So the announced measures leave us wracked in anomy. On the one hand, there is the instinct to disregard and the intuition

that the calls to isolate have the purpose of halting social mobilization, in order to adjust without brakes, in order to vacate the spaces of resistance, in order to expand injustices, in order to diffuse revolts. At the same time, we have never seen an infection so quick, so vast, even suspecting for some time now that something like this would come. Deactivating the alarmism we defend ourselves from a sensationalist world that wants us frightened, but maybe denying the catastrophe when it is in front of us can aggravate it more. *The first phase of mourning is denial, a friend says over the phone. I only think about ways of being able to breathe, and about burying things that will never return to how they were. And about the people who will never come back.*

Transforming in order to save. Touch is dangerous. Kissing is outlawed. Hugging, limited. Loneliness hits. How did we not feel it before it was obligatory? Exceptionality has that quality of making us see normality as if it were something very strange. The real always escapes us, and it is more reassuring to live in a stable fiction than to touch, see, feel the extreme contingency. This is not just a "problem of health"—as if life and the body were an entity distinct from our existence: this crisis makes us see that our desire was in isolation and security. This makes us see that the crisis is not an abstraction, but a series of decisions. It makes us see the free fall that produces the destruction of spaces of community. So the urgency is to exchange competency for cooperation; individual control for collective vulnerability; protection and obedience for self-management and solidarity. Bodies sustain the system and are that which can make it fall.

If everything goes to shit, everyday obedience will be suspended and we can think about what we need. For this reason it's surprising that we repeat the scripts of the films of catastrophe. Uncertainty is costly. Will it be for this reason that we prefer

capitalism instead of changes that could bring something better? *I want a stockpile of you, a car full of what we could do together.* It is time to invent collective tactics. If language is a virus, let the virus not be the language that speaks for us. *The virus speaks and it says: capitalism kills, stop blaming only me.* The destabilization of the system puts us at risk because we are part of it. The challenge is how to transform this crisis into the beginning of a revolutionary process.

When will we cease to be this little human frustrated by our inability to restrain the body? For how long will it be manipulated, and for whom? When will we admit that it is the key part that sustains? When will we stop thinking that we could live uncontaminated by our environment or, in fact, without perceiving that *we exist* with the environment? In the face of so many questions the only reasonable medicine is to not forget that although the news, the authorities, and our fears say the contrary, what strengthens us always is being with others, never the opposite. And since no one knows what a body can do, everything is possible, including inventing other forms of coming together. Including exchanging facemasks for balaclavas. In the meantime, no one can ban us from dancing in the living.

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