

For a Few Spits More

Un rétif

Summer 2021

“This period that we entered created the need to rethink any revolutionary intervention, to understand the important changes that are at stake now, to grasp how new authoritarian mechanisms go together with older mechanisms to shape a world where the configuration of domination and exploitation becomes even more dense, conquers even more terrain.” - Un rétif, “J’irai cracher sur vos masques”, Soleil noir, Issue 1, July 2020

“What does this new life actually consist of, inspired by the catastrophist discourse in which some see the opportunity to create “a new humanism with Fukushima”, probably meaning a humanism that’s finally at the level of the human who’s totally submitted to their condition of survivor?” - Thierry Ribault, “Contre la résilience à Fukushima et ailleurs”, 2021

There we have it. It continues. New lockdown, new health emergency measures. It has been months that it lasts and it keeps going. The authorities confine and de-confine us according to their own interests, they order us or don’t to wear a mask, to fill in forms, they multiply the paradoxical orders. Most of the time when we go out on the street we don’t even know what we’re allowed to do or not.

These measures leave us lost, dazed, in shock, isolated, atomised, broken by the monotonous and stifling repetition of our lives under sanitary constraint; metro, work, confinement!

We have to make do, it’s now in the name of health and life that we’re disciplined and blamed. It’s in the name of health or environmental safety that the few freedoms that this society is still capable of promising us are cut down even more drastically.

It’s the very nature of the catastrophist discourse. The last decades there has been a persistent attempt to impose this logic on us by some elites that have timely been won over by the environmental transition theories to extend more sustainably and effectively their domination.

The catastrophe isn’t anymore – like it was for many years – denied, but on the contrary it has become inherent to our existence. It’s not anymore about avoiding disasters – that our societies mass-produce, but to live in the middle of the rubble, of the radio-active waste left by the nuclearists of the whole world and of the consequences of climate change that only a couple of fanatics still dispute.

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It’s hard to estimate what will last of this mass subjection when the epidemic recedes. A slowly absorbed and sustainable obedience or a reinforced distrust towards authority? Without a doubt a bit of both.

What's clear is that the experience is so total that it extends the shock wave to every fold of our lives. In the countryside, the real estate prices already shoot up, which will change lifestyles and landscapes. Everywhere everyone is called to withdraw into their personal sphere and the troika of work, family and economy (so dear to all authoritarian regimes) is making its big comeback. Every gesture is subject to increasingly invasive rules of behaviour. The traceability of beings is imposed in the name of life. The dematerialization of our relations and of work produces an increasingly distant world.

Of course this disciplining of bodies and ideas isn't applied everywhere and to everyone with the same strictness. Weekends at the countryside and holiday homes for the bourgeoisie, the hell of cramped apartments and bans on gatherings for the poorest...

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Does a society have to be paralysed with fear to treat its youth and the poorest as a criminal class? Parties and the smallest sparks of social life have been transformed in the span of some months into "endangering the life of others". Does an era have to be out of promises when gathering and breaking the greyness of confinement becomes an offence?

These are the essential crimes of a century that however doesn't lack in real mass criminals: industries destroying lives, forests, lakes to plunder some rare minerals for the roll-out of the infrastructure for their global trade, predatory states bombing populations in the name of peace, bosses pushing their employees to suicide and misery, racists methodically preparing a civil war, religious fanatics seeding their holy wars with explosives and kalashnikovs, males beating to death those who they consider "their women", judges mass-incarcerating to uphold the order of the world...

Cherishing ad nauseam an eternal promise of safety – that this era totally submitted to the only freedom of goods seems to be incapable of fulfilling, our dear rulers profit from it to sacrifice the most basic of our freedoms on the altar of this illusion. Ours more than theirs, that goes without saying.

For the occasion the eternal scapegoats appear again, those which anthropology has systematically and methodically recognized in every period of epidemics. In the obscure times of the big plagues, it was the non-believers, the godless and the blasphemers who are hunted or made responsible of the spread of the epidemic. Today, it is those who didn't give up on making good use of their freedom in these disastrous times who are continually tracked or subjugated to the mob trials of the small screen.

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This subjugation of time to a normality under sanitary constraints still tempts to spit on the masks that cover faces, on the social distancing that they practice.

Not to spit on the objects that allow to legitimately protect against sickness, but on the social and human relation of which they are the omnipresent symbols, from the street to the workplace. To spit to rebel against our effective dispossession faced with the sicknesses that this world possibly doesn't create, but at least spreads. To spit on the masks that the state obliged us to wear under threat of sanctions in certain places or refused to supply in other places. To spit on the traceability that the submission to the medical order tries to justify, on the temperature takings imposed in certain spaces, on the sanitary brigades, on the digital applications and their tracking of the sick. In short, on this life under sanitary constraints that is legitimised by the epidemic.

Let's not be misunderstood, it's neither about denying the real effects of the epidemic, nor to give some kind of moralistic lesson and to give rise to a counter-blaming of those who wish to

meticulously follow the health recommendations of the scientific authorities, and even less about imposing counter-norms like the refusal of wearing masks or transforming such counter-norms into essential acts of rebellion.

On the contrary, it's about refusing that a lifestyle under sanitary constraints would be imposed on us and that a world under a glass dome becomes our daily scenery, reducing our existence to biological survival and the reproduction of our work force.

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The coronavirus crisis that has hit the planet head-on, has hastened the appearance of this society under sanitary constraints. Far from protecting our lives, the measures the state rapidly took were aimed at preserving the economy and their own interests.

From that moment on, the authorities have only statistically and predictively managed – based on a costs benefits calculation – the resources and work force that we are. They have taken away from us every possibility to take our own decisions right into the most intimate aspects of our lives. We have since become, even more than usually, spectators to a world that evades us.

It's once more a generalised active separation that dominates our era. We are prompted to give up again a part of our autonomy and the state is offered the occasion to interfere even more in our lives through its social and repressive function.

As we are separated from what we produce at work and what we consume during time off, we are now dispossessed of our conditions for survival. That's why everything that surrounds us appears to us even more foreign than yesterday. Cities and the countryside transform in huge sleeping quarters under supervision, with certificates for movement, with curfews. Our lives are still a bit more distorted from their essential meaning.

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In the name of health and life and backed by the medical and scientific authorities, the conditions of a new and sustainable subjugation have taken shape; traceability of the human livestock, expansion of management techniques based on the individual responsibility ethic, development of the digital enclosure, implementation of surveillance of movements and protective measures, improvement of new management techniques of work, hardening of working conditions, dramatic reduction of the most basic of freedoms...

After several months that looked like a "release on parole", a second confinement resumed. It was clear again that the survival of the economy is more important to our rulers than human life. To metro, work, confinement/de-confinement followed metro, work, curfew and then again metro, work, confinement so that again metro, work, de-confinement can follow. But the priority of our pandemic managers is to save the economy from a pandemic shock. Plainly, that we give up on life in order to avoid sickness and absenteeism, and to guarantee the reproduction of our work force.

In the name of the protection of biological life, confinement and curfew demand our total submission to the security of their economical interests.

Once more, it is the most precarious, the poorest, as well as the most recalcitrant, who receive the blows; crammed in prisons, psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, factories, public transport, apartment blocks or schools. And outside, it's repression at work.

Of course, domination seizes the opportunity to hasten its blows and to prepare the repressive arsenal capable of answering to a social and economical crisis: comprehensive security law, new plan for the building of prisons, reform of the unemployment insurance, etc.

The announced economical changes are also there. The 5G antennas – part of the technological infrastructure of this terrifying new world – spring from the ground at a stunning speed. They announce the acceleration and the generalisation of new forms of work and management captivated by algorithms. But they are also the expansion of that same management ideology of the preservation of our collective health. We are transformed in little epidemic managers, pushed to measure the costs-benefits ratio of every gesture, to accept to take distance from our loved ones and our feelings, to “self-manage” that which the authorities authorize us to self-manage: our smooth running and our integration in the production and consumption line.

Just as the new management logic which fakes horizontal organization and is evermore present in companies, it has nothing to do with deciding for yourself but it's to reach goals set elsewhere and to keep up the profit margins.

In this society of permanent crises, there also emerges the deepening and generalisation of a liberal insurance system of health and social credit. Our insurance coverage will without a doubt be increasingly submitted to the traceability of our behaviour and to the calculation of our potential risks...

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On this occasion, the state as well as capital expose how capitalism and the bourgeoisie perceive the inferior human species to which we belong. Working plebs or reserve army, we are reduced to the most basic of needs for the survival of the economy. We are confined to our essential usefulness: to consume and produce.

For the rest, it's over and out with culture, social life, desires and the free lifestyles that supposedly had to be saved from terrorism in 2015. The psychological and human damages are already significant and the anger is brewing more than in March and April 2020. However, the situation stays mainly under control. It is often lines of flight that prevail; mutual aid, solidarity, coping instead of conflict and revolt.

Even so – as was already said in the text “J’irai cracher sur vos masques” published in the previous bulletin – the situation is far from being decided: “Because of its excess of administration of lives and domination, its greed for surveillance, but also because of its increase of exploitation and precariousness, this crisis sparks the escalation of tensions that are sometimes old, sometimes new, and it's still hard to measure the explosiveness.”

These tensions that seem to stay under the radar of the ideological software of the ruling or radical left, could shape new revolts and stimulate a regained taste for freedom.

A poster – seen on some walls and signed by some enemies of the best of sanitary worlds – incited to: “Become again the lovers and masters of freedom that we should never have stopped to be, and let's feed the fire that maybe smoulders under the ashes.”

(I'm grateful to the zine *Quetton l'Arttotal* for inspiring the title of this text.)

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