

This text is born from the need to communicate and debate amongst comrades. It is born from the need to fight physical distance and the lack of face-to-face debate and it seeks to put onto paper some topics for discussion and analysis without any pretension of absolute truth. Most of all it's a summary of certain discussions that happened within different groups and that, to us, seem important to share with a wider group of comrades.

The process unleashed by the burst of corona virus has left the world, particularly the northern hemisphere, literally connected to machines; connected to machines at hospitals, connected to machines at home. Even Capital itself found its way of reproduction and sustenance through the machines.

This text is an attempt to open a discussion starting from a concise and eventually mechanistic analysis on how the redefinition of life has been generated, how it is being politically managed through the introduction of a disturbing agent in the social body, and what the eventual consequences are, in daily life (many of which are already perceptible).

We are interested in discussing how the declaration of a pandemic allowed for a set of freedom restraining processes and individual conditioning to be put into practice and what instruments have aided such a political program to be so efficient.

We think that it's in the passing, from the biological moment (the bursting of a virus), to the political answer given to it, that a whole architecture of fear is built. If in the past this construction was based on an external enemy, that in a way, was perceived as tangible (ie. "the terrorist"), nowadays it is based on an invisible and unpredictable enemy, that due to its biological characteristics, permits management based on physical imprisonment.

Without wanting to debate the existence of the virus here, or its higher or lower levels of danger (we are not scientists and we don't think that is the main issue anyway), it seems to us to be of extreme importance to discuss the political effects that arise from the response of the State and society, their immediate consequences in day-to-day life, and the changes that these will provoke in the way life is perceived and on the way social space is inhabited in the future.

Since the very beginning of the so-called covid-19 crisis, one could witness the use of war-like speeches by the authorities, in the manner of a war that is created by the simple fact that is declared by alarmist speeches. This bellicosity of the speech seems to serve several, more or less obvious, functions besides the creation of fear in society. First of all this speech justifies the adoption of extraordinary measures that, in a so-called normal situation, would hardly be accepted. All the practice of confinement and restriction of life is justified by that exceptional moment of being at war with the virus.

On the other hand, the perception of being at war leads society to congregate around the State and consequently around governments as the only pillars that can guarantee life on earth and protect the individual. It seems to us that this fact exists even when National Health Services collapse as was the case in Italy or Spain. Besides the catastrophic management of the situation, the State keeps on being the only cardinal point which society turns to.

At last, the socialization of the warlike speech collectivized in the sentence "WE ARE at war against the virus", also allows the perception of the one who revolts against the state of exception (lockdown) to be transformed and seen not as enemy of the State (by breaking its laws) but as an enemy of society and as a potential infectious agent. It is at this point that one can see the creation of a new internal enemy, not anymore as an enemy of the State but as an enemy of society and potentially of Life itself.

Regarding the quarantine measures and the so-called “moral obligation of staying at home”, it seems to us that such procedures are only possible due to all the technological apparatus that surrounds us. The Internet and all the electronic gadgets make staying at home more bearable due to their ludic function and by allowing the individual to keep in contact with their loved ones and therefore to forget, to a certain point, their own isolation. These gadgets have also particularly been used to increase a collective feeling of panic. After going through the traditional media, it is through the social media networks and the Internet in general that a politics of fear manages to be implemented. All the “Stay at Home” speeches and the sentiments of policing one another, find in these apparatuses the perfect means for propagation, permitting a discourse created by official institutions to be felt as if they were something started by the general population and strongly defended by the ones “impacted” by such discourse.

The quarantine and the so called State of Emergency provoke two kinds of movement: on the one hand, that of atomization through the reduction of the individual’s life to their more restricted space (home) and, on the other hand, that of a mass socialization of panic through the State’s war speech and through the amplifying of fear through the mass and social medias. It seems to us that it is in these two movements that the political project of fear put into circulation by authority is really played. When real life is based on the confinement of the individual and, simultaneously, social experience is managed by and lived through technological gadgets, this leads to a schizophrenic and paranoid existence.

We think that it is in this duality that life will be based upon in the foreseeable future, even after the hypothetical end of the restrictive measures that are imposed on us now; the transformation of public space as a focus point of disease and, the atomization of daily life, no longer based on the classic capitalist atomism but in a new way of perceiving others, and space, as potential dangers to the individual’s life.

We are not very interested in discussing here the technological hyper-surveillance that will follow the end of the covid-19 crisis because it seems to us that such surveillance and the means to put it into practice are already here. We also think that those discussions have been based more on a dystopic pessimism than on a will to analyse the causes and the mechanisms that are “injected” into the social body and that make individuals demand such vigilance or at least make them complacent with it. Surveillance and control have been around for a very long time and it was not the virus that created them. It is clear that there’ll be an increase of life’s robotization and an expansion of surveillance mechanisms, but it seems to us that these phenomena would happen with or without a pandemic crisis and at most, crisis can only accelerate them.

What we would like to discuss is the way anarchists perceived the crisis and the possibilities of action inside the social standstill that we were forced to live. Obviously panic and fear also hit us in one way or another, to some more than others, and maybe it was inevitable to be that way. As much as we would like it to be otherwise, anarchists are not a category apart from society and untouched by what happens outside our circles. It’s exceptional moments like the one we are now living in that better highlight our flaws as a movement and the lack of tools that we have in order to fight against what is imposed upon us. Proof of this is that, more or less everywhere, the majority of responses given by the different anarchist groups were nothing more than charitable actions. This critique is as valid for the groups that created structures of collection and distribution of food whose result is nothing more than the substitution of the charitable role of the State, as well as for all the other groups, in which we include ourselves, that due to inoperability didn’t manage

to sketch or even debate strategies of action to confront the confinement. The incapacity to fight against a discourse that became the dominant discourse and to put out another version of things, another vision of the process, revealed once again our lack of coordination and how the absence of continuous debate and practice amongst comrades can become flaws that cost us a lot in moments like these.

Lets take this exceptional situation as an opportunity to re-think our practices so far and to allow us to find more efficient ways of communication and political action in a way that, when the bill of the months of confinement starts to be charged, anarchists can intervene to demonstrate different paths and practices. Keeping our spaces going will be of extreme importance in the near future as well as the creation of production and consumption networks that move towards independence from the usual circuits of consumption and collective production and action that might spark revolt by creating political structures that would allow an attack to a new world that is already here; these are all proposals that, according to us, should start to be collectively worked on and this text is a call for that start.

Because in a pandemic world, the only possible virus is Revolt.

Some Anarchists from OPorto
April 2020