

Chronicles of the Psycho-deflation



*You are the crown of creation
And you've got no place to go*
—Jefferson Airplane

“The word is now a virus. The flu virus may have once been a healthy lung cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk. That organism is the word.”—William Burroughs, *The ticket that exploded*

february 21st

Back from Lisbon, an unexpected scene at the Bologna airport: two persons in white overalls and yellow helmets approach the incoming passengers, and point a white pistol at their forehead to measure their body temperature. A presentment: are we going to cross another threshold in this process of techno-psychotic mutation?

february 28th

The city is silent—schools are closed, theaters as well. No students nor tourists around. Travel agencies are cancelling entire regions from the map.

Do these recent convulsions affecting the planetary body have provoked a collapse that obliges the organism to stop and slow movements down, to empty crowded places and pause frantic daily

negotiations?

This shock might be the way out we have been unable to reach before: a psycho-epidemics, a linguistic virus which grows out of a physical virus and mingles with it.

The collapse of the planetary body is the consequence of a biological virus that provokes a (not so) lethal affection, but also, and mainly, the effect of a viral agent whose action is yet unknown: neither the immunity system or the medical science know anything about the agent. This unknown stops the machine, as the biological agent turns into an info-virus, and the info-virus unchains a psychotic reaction.

A semiotic virus in the psycho-sphere has blocked the abstract functioning of the system, while bodies retract.

Can we imagine that?

March 2nd

Burroughs employs the image of the virus as a force hovering in-between an evolving being and a mere replicator. This way he questions the conventional definitions of living and non-living. The bio-virus is a living organism that emanates non living entities (info-virus), acting in turn on the psycho-sphere.

A semiotic virus in the psycho-sphere is blocking the abstract functioning of the machine, as bodies slow down their movements, finally giving up on action, and abandon their pretence of governing the world, swimming passively in the time flow. Nothingness swallows one thing after the other, and the anxiety related to keeping the world together—that used to hold the world together—unwinds.

There is no panic nor fear, but silence. In the last twenty years we have long rebelled not to avail, we have nervously mobilized our energies not to avail—so, let's stop.

How long will this psychotic fixation that we name coronavirus last? Experts say that springtime will kill the virus, but as far as we know it may boost it. We know nothing about the virus, how can we know what temperature it prefers?

The point is not how lethal the virus is, but the effect of the virus, which is not directly linked to the number of people it kills.

The effect of the virus lies in the relational palsy that the virus is spreading around.

The world economy has been stagnating for years, but we have been unable to recognize and

accept it and to deal positively with the secular stagnation.

Now the semiotic virus and the psycho-reset that it is bringing about is helping us in the transition towards immobility.

Can we imagine that?

March 3rd

How does the organism react after three decades of hyper-stimulation, ceaseless tension, war for survival and natural selection? How does the social body react, unable to set free from this addiction that transforms life into permanent stress? How does the planetary body react? How does the interconnected mind react?

During the second half of 2019, the planetary body has experienced some sort of spasm. A convulsion from Hong Kong to Barcelona, Santiago, Quito, Beirut—riots everywhere. The rebellion had no unifiable objectives, and the different riots did not converge towards any common goal. The mind was unable to direct all the diverse drives, so towards the end of the year, the fever raised.

Then Trump killed Soleimani, among his people's jubilation.

Millions of desperate Iranian marched in the streets crying, howling, promising a clamorous revenge. Nothing happened, Iranian army launched a bomb in their courtyard, and the artillery downed a civil airplane, in panic. Trump won everything, evidently God is with him. Americans get excited when they see blood, killers are their heroes.

Nazi-Trumpism, in an increasing nervous stimulation for everybody. Was this the end of the story?

Then the surprise came, an unpredictable overturning, the implosion.

After the convulsion, the hyper-excited organism of the human kind has finally been hit by a collapse. A sort of *gerontomachia*, killing mostly octogenarians, setting the global frantic machine of the accumulation economy on hold.

Capitalism is axiomatics. It is based on the indemonstrable hypothesis that boundless growth is possible and necessary. This presupposition renders accumulation possible and plus-value extraction mandatory. All the logical and economical concatenations are consistent to that axiom, and nothing can be conceived outside. No political way out of the capital axiomatics, as no language can say what is outside language and there is no possibility of destroying the system, as every linguistic process is deploying inside an axiomatics that makes extra-systemic enunciations

unworkable.

As Baudrillard guessed, the only way out is death. Life will be possible again only after death. The extra-systemic organisms will be allowed to start a new life after the death of the system—of course provided that they survive, which is not certain.

The coming recession can kill us, or it can provoke violent conflicts, epidemics of racism and war. It's good to be aware. We are not prepared to think stagnation as a long lasting condition, we are not prepared to think frugality, when sharing we are not prepared to dissociate pleasure from consumption.

March 4th

For decades we have been unable to find a way out from the corpse of capitalism, but the shock following the convulsion gives way to a psychological deflation. In order to counter the stagnation and to relaunch profits, capitalism was obliging us to constant competition, it was exploiting us to the bone in exchange for decreasing salaries. Now that the virus is deflating the bubble of acceleration, to face a common invisible enemy may raise a sense of nostalgia for social solidarity.

It has been clear in the last decade that stagnation is the future of the world economy, but capital was pushing us to run faster and faster, for the sake of the absolute dogma of Growth. Revolution was unthinkable, as subjectivity was confused, depressed, and the political brain was unable to govern the chaotic complexity of social reality in the networked age.

The virus is paving the way to a subject-less revolution, a purely implosive revolution based on passivity and surrender. Let's surrender. All of a sudden this slogan takes a subversive sound: down with excitement, down with the useless anxiety worsening life quality.

Literally: nothing can be done anymore. So let's do nothing.

Hardly the social organism will recover from this semio-psychotic virus, and the capitalist economy seems to be doomed.

March 5th

At first sight of the financial system yelling, economists remark that—differently from what happened in 2008—this time the Central Bank and other financial institutions have no tools for relaunching the system.

For the first time the collapse did not come from financial—or strictly economic factors: the crisis comes from the collapse of the body. As the mind has decided to slow down the rhythm, the general demobilisation is a symptom of surrendering: both an effect and a cause.

The very biological function has entered the passivity mode, for reasons that have nothing to do with a conscious will nor a political project. Tired of processing more and more complex, faster and faster neuro-stimula, humiliated by impotence in front of the omnipotent techno-financial automaton, the mind has lowered the tension. A psycho-deflation.

March 6th

I am aware of the fact that one might assert the exact contrary of what I have just said: meeting the ethno-nationalist rage, neoliberalism needs to upgrade the process of total abstraction of life. The virus is forcing everybody to stay home, but commodities keep circulating. Bio-political control of populations and restrictions on mobility can help techno-capitalism to get free from social resistance.

In Srečko Horvat's words, "This is the political danger of coronavirus: a global health crisis that suits both the ethno-nationalist goal of fortified borders and racial exclusivity, and the aim of ending the free movement of peoples (especially those from developing nations) but ensuring that the flow of goods and capital remains unchecked. At present, the rising pandemic of fear is more dangerous than the virus itself. The apocalyptic imagery in the media hides the deepening relationship between the far-right and the capitalist economy. And in the same way that a virus needs a living cell to replicate, so will capitalism adapt to the new biopolitics of the 21st century. Coronavirus has already impacted on the global economy, but it won't stop the never-ending circulation and accumulation of capital. If anything, we might soon be facing a darker, and even more dangerous form of capitalism, one that relies on the stronger control and purification of populations." ([Srečko Horvat, New Statesman, February 19th, 2020](#)).

However, I think that this realistic hypothesis is not realistic enough, because it is not considering the subjective side of the collapse, and the long lasting effects of the psycho-deflation in terms of economic stagnation.

Capitalism survived the financial collapse of 2008 because the conditions of the collapse were all inside the abstract relation between language, finance and economy. But it may not survive the collapse that comes from the epidemics, because an extra-systemic factor enters the fray.

March 7th

My mathematician friend Alex writes to me from Toronto “all the computing centres of the world are engaged to find the antidote to coronavirus. Tonight I have dreamed of the final battle between natural bio viruses and artificial info-virus. In any case the human is not in the game, apparently.”

The bio virus proliferates in the stressed body of mankind. It seems that the lungs are the weak point. In the last years respiratory infections spread all over, due to the irrespirable air.

When meeting the media system and connecting with the semiotic net, the virus has transferred its debilitating power to the nervous system and to the collective brain.

The health system has been weakened by the cuts to the public spending, imposed by the financial system. The number of general practitioners has decreased, at least in Italy. So now the problem is that there are not enough intensive care units.

The automaton enters, and the global computing machine is hunting the formula, to counter the bio virus with the info-virus.

Meanwhile energy is withdrawing from the social body and politics is revealing its impotence: the will has no grasp on the replicating info-virus.

March 8th

Today I had to cancel a dinner initially planned with my brother and sisters. Old people like us are in danger. In Italy the average age of people who die for the virus is 81.

I understand that, and I am dwelling in a sort of double bind: if I do not cancel the dinner I might be the bearer of the physical virus that may kill my brother, who suffers from diabetes. If I do cancel the dinner I become a spreader of the psycho-virus, the virus of fear and of isolation.

For the first time I ask myself, what if this nightmare will last long?

March 11th

The stock market is crashing everywhere. In Milano it is 17 points down, in its deepest precipice ever.

March 12th

All of Italy has been quarantined. The virus is running faster than containment measures. I wore the sanitary mask, took my bike and went out to buy newspapers. Kiosks are open, and pharmacies, and food markets. Also tobacco stores are open. I buy rolling papers to roll joints during the night. But hashish is running low in my small box. Soon I'll run out of dope, and all the young pushers have vanished from the streets.

I've heard Trump using the expression "foreign virus."

All viruses are foreign, but surely the president has never read William Burroughs.

March 13th

Workers are on strike because, despite the general quarantine, they must go to the factories and work at the assembly line, with no sanitary mask nor safety distance.

Nobody can say what will happen next—within one month, or six months.

Maybe a techno-totalitarian state is the future. In [Black Earth, Timothy Snyder](#) explains that there is no better condition for the emergence of totalitarian regimes than situations of extreme danger, in which survival is at stakes for all.

AIDS prepared virtualisation by spreading the fear of bodily contact. Now we might step into a condition of permanent isolation, the new generation might internalise the terror of the other's body.

Terror is when the Imaginary totally prevails over Imagination.

The Imaginary is the fossil energy of the collective mind, as images sedimented there by experience, in a limitation of the imaginable. Imagination instead is the renewable energy of the psychosphere. Not an utopia, but a recombination of the possibilities.

Here we find the possible split, meaning we might come out from the nightmare thanks to the concrete imagination of a possibility that yesterday was unthinkable: frugality, reduction of work time, equality, abandon of the paradigm of growth, investment of the social resources into research, education, health and pleasure.

We cannot know how we'll come out from the pandemics whose conditions have been prepared by the neoliberal cut to the public health system, by the air pollution and the exploitation of our nervous energies.

We might come out in a condition of extreme loneliness and aggressiveness. But we might also come out with the desire for embracing, caressing—and for laziness.

The virus is a condition for a mental jump that no political preaching could ever produce. Equality is back, at the centre of the scene.

Let's imagine it as the starting point for times to come.