

Transcorporeal politics in the COVID-19 health emergency: An essay on the body as collaboration and governance

Políticas transcorpóreas en la emergencia sanitaria de la COVID-19: Un ensayo sobre el cuerpo como colaboración y gobernanza

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Abstract: Two discursive categories triggered by the COVID-19 sanitary emergency are proposed: body-ecology and body-discipline. The first is intertwined with the affirmative concept of what Stacy Alaimo called transcorporeality in favor of an empathic action and management towards the environment. The second opens the way to a “dark” version of this same transcorporeality: the control, governance, and surveillance of the sick body. The analysis of both possibilities seeks to complicate (complexify) a vision of possibilities to overcome Western notions of individuality and essentialism (the body-identity) sustained by the extractivist environmental company (enterprise). This exercise considers the risks of governance (that is) still present in bodies sickened by another of the great forgotten pandemics of recent history: HIV-AIDS. Artistic projects analyzed by curators, producers, and academics are presented to crystallize in a practical way the ideas displayed in the text.

Keywords: Health crisis, pandemics, transcorporeality, governance, identity, virality

Resumen: Se proponen dos categorías discursivas detonadas por la emergencia sanitaria de la COVID-19: el cuerpo-ecología y el cuerpo-disciplina. La primera se entrelaza con el concepto afirmativo de lo que Stacy Alaimo llamó transcorporalidad en pro de una acción y gestión empática hacia el medio ambiente. La segunda abre el camino hacia una versión “oscura” de esta misma transcorporalidad: el control, la gobernanza y la vigilancia del cuerpo enfermo. El análisis de ambas posibilidades busca complejizar una visión de posibilidades para superar nociones Occidentales de individualidad y esencialismo (el cuerpo-identidad) sostenidas por la empresa extractivista del medio ambiente. Este ejercicio toma en cuenta los riesgos de la gobernanza aún presente en los cuerpos enfermos por otra de las grandes pandemias olvidadas de la historia reciente: el VIH-sida. Se presentan proyectos artísticos analizados por curadores, productores y académicos con la finalidad de cristalizar de manera práctica las ideas desplegadas en el texto.

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Palabras clave: Crisis sanitaria, pandemias, transc corporalidad, gobernanza, identidad, viralidad

1. Introduction

On March 15, 2020, a health emergency was declared in Peru due to COVID-19. Since that date, more than a year has passed in which confinement, biosecurity measures, and the latent presence of the danger of contagion are daily realities. In this essay, I want to elaborate on two fundamental elements to understand the health crisis regarding corporeality: the ecological and the disciplinary. Through a tiny invisible virus, the disease has unveiled inequalities and infrastructures of exploitation, but it has also created new spaces of possible emancipation from theoretical speculation.

First, it is necessary to provide a framework to the category of the individual body that will canalize (**channel**) and receive the two articulations that I propose. It is worth remembering the shocking images of the first infected, hospitalized, and dead people shown in the traditional media news programs. Those images began to appear next to the morbid tally of contagions and deaths, which was updated daily. It was not uncommon to see those numbers at the top right of the screens on newscasts and news programs. Like a taximeter, the numbers rose (**arose**) and interactively kept a synchronous report of lives lost (**lost lives**) and those in danger of being lost. With this, the concept of identity attached to each body also came into question. The absoluteness of the tragedy translated into abstractly comprehensible numbers (**numbers of abstract comprehension**) (**that**) suppressed any pretense of individualizing the victims. As in any great documented catastrophe, the piled-up bodies, the mass of corpses, and the oceans of sick people lead to questions about the concept of the individual linked to an identity. The self-perishes (**The Self perishes**) in (**under**) the form of the corpse or the moribund reduced to numbers; Didi Huberman called this the unimaginable of tragedy. This is the crisis of the body-identity that I will develop with the two proposed approaches.

The first approach derives from COVID-19 as a result of contemporary environmental crises. The appearance and mutation of viruses are entirely normal in the history of any species. Still, we would not have reached the global pandemic with the expansion speed it had if it were not for the human superstructures that make possible the accelerated extraction, dissemination, and consumption of materials. The virus is not a direct product of global warming, but it is the result of the commercialization of mammals in black markets, of the enormously polluting air transport networks, and the measures taken for the benefit of an economic model. The history of natural exploitation goes back several centuries and is sustained by Cartesian binomials, especially that of subject and object. Understanding the ecological as the outside-passive and the human as the inside-active has hastened the deprecation of non-human territories and communities with a recent and alarming acceleration. The disease has brought these two worlds together. The outside takes over the inside, the planetary has infected culture, and human bodies are necessarily understood as interconnected not only with each other but also with invisible polluted airs. I propose to think of the sick body as a figure of self-consciousness of such imbrication: a body-ecology rather than a body-identity.

The second approach goes hand in hand with the beginning of the emergency measures taken at the global level. The administration to contain the COVID-19 pandemic made

it possible to reveal the state apparatus's control, regulation, and surveillance structures towards the population. The appearance (**emergence**) of plastic fabric objects to regulate the interaction between bodies, the constant testing, and the use of purifying gels (**hand sanitizers**) were and continue to be great allies for controlling contagions; however, they raise a series of questions about governance. These questions are not new. In a historically heteropatriarchal environment, the AIDS pandemic has been poorly understood at the level of governance and power, and the conservative vision has relegated this syndrome as a second-level emergency. It is necessary to adopt critical visions that narrate and develop the complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic to better understand its future in terms of body politics. Thus, in the second part of the essay, I propose to think of the sick body as a critical figure: a body-discipline.

Both bodies are interwoven by the concept of transcorporeality of Stacy Alaimo's eco-cultural theory: the first shows a vision of possible emancipation and ecological consciousness, and the second has a darker and more critical aura. It is necessary to dialectically discuss these two corporeal pathways that present themselves through the crisis. I propose problematizing the notion of the sick body as something more than a victim of biological contingencies. The massive loss of individuals due to the pandemic cannot be weighed theoretically, but we can think about what kind of figures can survive the current crisis in order to understand better the interrelation of categories, such as nature and culture, health, and illness, or (**the**) environmental and (**the**) political.

2. The sick body as ecology

In this first part, I take the sick body as a discursive field to understand its vulnerability and constant exchange with the surrounding environment. To deepen the critique of the body-individual canon, I use the text *Subjects, Identities, Bodies and Selves* by Patrick Murphy (2009). For an intersection with more contemporary concepts that understand the body in the way I want to propose, I take Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality through Julia Kuznetski's (2020) writings in conversation with the author. These notions are collated with notes from Judith Butler's (2003) thoughts developed in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. The selection of authors allows me to navigate the problem of the body understood as a subject and at the same time endowed with an essentialist identity detached from the environment through contemporary Western thought.

The term ecology comes from the Greek root *oikos*, which means home; the *oikos-logos* is then the study of the home understood as the world or, rather, the planetary since it is what sustains the environment and the relations between the entities that conform it. Murphy (2009) urges us to think this home elastically, in the face of the severe and hard category of subject. "Everywhere, the subject is more than human, and the human is more than the subject of its own narrative, and it always responds not only to one human recipient but also to many others who require or request mutual recognition and interaction" (p. 122). Who are these others who require recognition and interact in and with the human body? Murphy proposes to think of the body as an *oikos*. More than half of the cellular and microbial entities that make up the body are not of human genetic origin. From the intestinal floras to the tiny single-celled microbes on the skin of our faces, the human body is an ecology of non-human bodies that reside in and shape the "subject."

The natural sciences consider and understand this figure. Without intestinal bacteria, we would not be able to digest food. The probiotic models of many products are based on that; they are pro bacteria. However, there are other more violent figures that end up shaping the human body. Virological diseases enrich and oxygenate genetic diversity through generations in such a meaningful way that we could say that we would not be here without viruses. This information is not new or shocking to anyone who knows biology or human medicine, but how has the body been understood in the Western world? While I do not embark on a genealogy of the notion of the subject, I mention its birth through processes intimately related to the environment that it denies so much. From the medieval worldview crises in the face of the Copernican discoveries to the colonization of America by European powers, the body as identity has been reinforced as an axiomatic cultural category. Even well into the twentieth century, the body-identity will maintain an essential, incorruptible and unique character only with the currents of continental and analytical philosophies. In this regard, Murphy (2009) states: “This supposedly stable core that most people want to imagine is what constitutes their identity and remains unchanging over time and within experience. In terms of ego identity, then, the ‘self’ represents identity as self-perceived; how stable is that ‘self?’” (p. 123) Later, the author answers himself: such a category is quite unstable. The body-ecology (the one conscious of its conformation totally imbricated in the environment) versus the body-identity (the essentialist and individual one) are not opposite notions, but the former seems not to be as evident as the latter. How is the biological reality of the body constituted of other bodies unveiled?

In Heidegger’s well-known hammer metaphor, the body-ecology is only revealed when it “fails.” In the philosopher’s case, the tool shows itself as effects and uses and hides its material qualities of assemblage. The hammer is above all utility, never wood and metal. I propose to think that, in the conception of the body, something similar happens: the assemblages and non-human collaborations in the body (bacteria, viruses, etc.) are not noticed or recognized until the moment when the body “fails.” If we understand this “failure” as an error in its platonic virtue (being a social entity, a producer, etc.), then the body lays bare its material, bacterial and viral ecology when it becomes ill. Murphy (2009) notes, “I want to consider the ‘self’ of identity not in terms of an autonomous self, or a unique self, or even an individually constructed self, so much as a self-in-the-world, in specific environments, specific relationships, in location, in movement, in time” (p. 124.)

This ‘self’ in the world dialogues directly with a second author. Stacy Alaimo’s (2014) concept of transcorporeality will serve to further critically delve into this “healthy” resistance of the body-identity in the face of the unveiling of the body-ecology at the hands (**by the means**) of illness. “Tracing intra-actions and other modes of entanglement between substances and systems allow for political critique and the development of ethical and political modes that do not separate the human from the material world” (p. 15). The health emergency of COVID-19 has not only made visible the assaults, oppressions, and abuses between classes, states, and economic models but could also allow spaces to critically speculate new ways of intertwining the body with the environment. The body-ecology, unveiled thanks to the disease, would allow an empathetic understanding of the indiscernible relations between the human and the non-human, between the outside and the inside, between the big *oikos* and the small *oikos*.

This implies a call for possibilities. In the climate crisis we are going through, the pandemic is neither **(a)** planetary revenge nor a theistic lesson but simply an example of how these two “homes” are deeply interrelated. Judith Butler (2003), a leading feminist theorist and gender scholar, comments:

We must recognize that ethics forces us to take risks precisely in moments of unknowing when what forms us departs from what is in front of us when our willingness to undo ourselves concerning others constitutes our opportunity to become human.

I highlight Butler’s decision to speak of humans (as a species) rather than subjects or persons (legal concepts). “To claim subject status or be treated as a subject, an individual must be able to generate or demonstrate an identity” (Murphy, 2009, p. 122). This performativity that Murphy refers to enters in good sync with Butler’s proposals in her well-known work *Undoing gender* from 2014. The body-identity demands to perform, it is focused on a public outside, but it is not aware of an ecological inside. Is it possible to understand this public outside as an equally ecological space? Is it possible to reconcile the *polis* and the *oikos*?

On this, Greek curator Iliana Fokianaki comments on a recent art project by Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson based on the articulation of what could be understood as the body-ecology towards a specific socio-political action: “The long-term project *In Search of Magic: A Proposal for a New Constitution for the Republic of Iceland* calls for the implementation of a new Icelandic constitution that was approved in a national referendum in 2012, but never came into effect” (2021). The artistic duo develops the project collectively with the communities of the Icelandic capital and employs such ancient systems of public enunciation as the choir or the band. The curator continues, “their project is a collectively conceived and performed rendition of musical scores that recite and explain the articles of the new constitution.” This performative event of the community of human bodies to create the social body is just another *oikos* within an *oikos*. The notions of transcorporeal action do not stop at an abstract theoretical development but can and should land in proposals that articulate the ecologies of bodies as a constituent matter of a larger body: the social body through the invisible, in this case not the virus, but music.

Again the ethical call to rethink the closed categories of the human body, subject, and identity must be understood in Butler’s spirit and perhaps in tune with the sounds of the Icelandic multitude. The problematization of the identity category developed here is not intended to undermine the important advances in terms of the recognition of decolonial, feminist, queer, and anti-ableist struggles; rather it aims to open up a space of speculation in which environmental crises are also political and cultural concerns. Identity as a currency of theoretical discussion in the academy in recent decades cannot subsist self-critically if it does not recognize its entire ecological construction. Given the vulnerability of the body-identity as it becomes and is understood as body-ecology, it is the relationships of non-human entities (from fungi in wounds to bacteria feeding on layers of dead skin) that would themselves form a subject. In this sense, Murphy (2009) comments:

If we recognize the symbiotic relationship of eukaryotes and prokaryotes, as described by literary ecocritic Louise Westling (2006), then we have to rethink a very

basic conception of what constitutes life and, from that, perhaps we can rethink what shapes our identities and what that might mean and even what claiming an identity might mean. (p. 124)

To speak of human identity should not imply the gratuitous link to the body according to Western positivist tradition. Nor should identity be thought of as those few cells that contain human DNA. In such a case, human identity would be a weak colony of organelles incapable of navigating the world and succumbing to the first contact with another entity. A function of interspecies diplomacy is necessary to ground the essential disembodied identity. On this, Murphy (2009) opines:

Identity might better be referred to as co-identity, adding to the conception of identity the material world in which all social formations operate with, through and upon a person, and begin to include the category of the body: both the immediate, personal and the personal-environmental. (p. 125)²

The author articulately points to the body as the product of a myriad of non-human relations and agencies for the sake of common survival. If we understand that, identity cannot fall into a fragment of such an assemblage. This leads us to think, through Alaimo's notions of transcorporeality, that identity is the sum of relations, and not the isolated bodies that make up such relations.

The isolation of bodies in the face of the invisible threat is brilliantly captured by philosopher and member of the Russian art collective Chto Delat Oxana Timofeeva through a Freudian analysis of the figure of the rat in the plagues of Werner Herzog's film *Nosferatu the Vampire* (1979). She comments on the diversity of survivals between those who perish and the "people who can afford not only to lock themselves in their homes, maintaining contact with the outside world through delivery services but who also try to protect their face and body from possible external dangers, using medical masks, disposable gloves and antiseptics" (2021). In Timofeeva's words, the figure of the rat featured in *Nosferatu* is aligned with almost constituent traits of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) that requires the performance of rituals and obsessions when faced with the perennial fear of invisible infection. Through the case of the rat-man taken from a well-known practice by Sigmund Freud, these obsessive character impulses are analyzed with segments from Herzog's film. "In hysteria, the rule is that the triggering causes of the disease are overcome by amnesia, with the help of which the triggering causes can transform their affective energy into symptoms" (Freud, 1955, p. 55). In Herzog's film, the rats are a necessary collectivity for confronting and processing trauma as ambassadors of illness. The small rodent bodies "immunize" the social body both literally and figuratively in a bittersweet experience. Both bodies need the relationships they propose to each other; they feedback on each other in a vicious ecological cycle. Murphy takes the reins of the idea: "The body is not a predetermined fixed entity, but a process, changing over time, responding to internal changes and alterations at the genetic, cellular, organic and systemic levels" (2009, p. 128).

2 The notion of body-ecology that I share in this article comes from the category that Murphy calls personal-environmental. I consider, however, that body-ecology emphasizes more the material aspect of such a link.

The body-ecology responds to the agencies of other bodies that contain their own internal ecologies.

Returning to the thematic track towards the present day, in this first part of the essay, it can be concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic is an event that continues to set milestones in the contemporary paradigmatic discourse on various topics. About the body and the environment, there is still much to delve into. By failing its social functions, the sick body unveils the ecology of biotic and viral collaborations that shape the life of the human being. Keeping this vision under discussion could allow for more empathetic management of the environmental and even social crises we are experiencing and will surely experience in the future, as it throws into crisis the harsh anthropocentric division of subject and object. Moving the cherished concept of identity to the interrelationships between human and non-human bodies would possibly facilitate a deconstruction of the Western notion of the individual to allow for one more coherent (**a more coherent one**) with contemporary social and planetary urgencies that require more of a trans-species interrelationship than of an essential individuality.

3. The sick body as discipline

Through key concepts of Patrick Murphy and Stacy Alaimo, we have reviewed the discursive possibilities for a better management of the environmental crisis through the transfer of identity to the more-than-human relations that shape the body. In this second part of the essay, I propose confronting those potentialities to power tensions rooted in recent history. While the pandemic might allow us a vision intertwined with the planetary in a more empathetic way, it might also deploy an apparatus of control, surveillance and censorship. I start from some specific ideas of the philosopher Paul Preciado about the bi-security measures deployed during the critical point of the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s and 1990s. I then quote some lines from Susan Sontag's *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1988) to contextualize Preciado's insights. Finally, I make use of Nathan Lee's contributions in his article *Becoming-Undetectable* (2013). This alarming comparison intend not to cast a shadow over the possibilities through speculation that have been opened up above, but rather to dialectically review the more politicized turns that pandemic management has taken in the past to warn of possible structural replications in the present and future measures. I consider it pertinent to open with a quote from Preciado (2020):

If Michel Foucault had survived AIDS in 1984 and had stayed alive until the invention of effective antiretroviral therapy, he would be ninety-three years old today. Would he have agreed to confine himself in his apartment on rue de Vaugirard in Paris? The first philosopher of history to die from complications resulting from the acquired immunodeficiency virus left us with some of the most effective tools for considering the political management of the epidemic—ideas that, in this atmosphere of rampant and contagious disinformation, are like cognitive protective equipment.

Preciado comments on one of the first figures to emerge when we think about discipline and power from the perspective of academia. At the same time, one of the first public figures to live with HIV-AIDS during the early stages of the pandemic and who thought critically about sexuality, control, and surveillance based on his condition. Preciado's quote

is provocative. Beyond any healthy openness to debate this past year's confinement measures, Preciado introduces two discursive concepts that I want to recover and deepen: AIDS and surveillance/control. I believe that in order to navigate these waters better, it should be considered that the peak of mortality and contagion occurred 30 years ago. The emergence of rapid (**quick**) tests and the progressive (but still insufficient) destigmatization of the disease together with the enormous progress in the treatment of immunosuppression, have appeased the urgency to talk about HIV-AIDS, even when the virus is still in active circulation. Curator Nathan Lee, dedicated to raising awareness and open-up information on the subject, allows us to enter a little more into the genealogy of the virus:

First diagnosed as a disease afflicting North American gay male communities, AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) was initially called GRID (gay-related immune disorder) and immediately marked as a specific problem of these communities. Despite its persistence to this day, this association was revealed as a historical contingency unmoored from a true viral genealogy. (2013)

This genealogy that Lee refers to is not neutral. The case of COVID-19 has not been neutral either, as its link (**it links**) to specific nationalities and cultures has triggered and sustained migratory vetoes (**travel bans**), reconFiguretions in global transit, and even hate crimes against the Asian community in the Euro-American diaspora. Returning to HIV/AIDS, Lee comments on the clear discursive connection of the virus with the homosexual population in the United States. It should be mentioned that this population was marginalized because of their sexuality and because they were mainly African-American gay men or Puerto Rican immigrants living in precarious conditions in the large cities of the country. Racism and classism led HIV-AIDS to be understood primarily as a disease of the marginalized. The acronym GRID, mentioned by Lee, reveals that the supposed scientific rigor in analyzing and studying this syndrome was anything but objective. The cultural prejudices of a strongly conservative and heterocentric society stigmatized HIV-AIDS victims from day 1 as marginal in every sense of the word, succumbing to the consequences of their own "unnatural" desires.

The pandemic of this virus has touched on sensitive issues in Western societies: sex, the anal, marginality, migration, and race. In its beginnings, bodies sick with HIV-AIDS were the symbol of everything considered useless in the literal sense of non-producer: it does not produce capital, it does not re-produce, it does not produce consumption, nor does it reproduce establishment. "The very task of political action is to fabricate a body, to put it to work, to define its modes of production and reproduction, to foreshadow the modes of discourse by which that body is fictionalized to itself until it can say 'I.'" (Preciado, 2020, p. 164).

In the first half of the article, that "self" Murphy refers to could be linked to this strange producer (**producer/productive**) "self" that would not exist in a normative way in the racialized and homosexual populations victimized in the early stages of the pandemic. That "sick self" becomes pathological through a series of artifacts and measures of control and monitoring. In this regard, Lee (2013) comments:

The development of an antibody test for HIV in 1985 inscribed a new form of identification: the categories of “positive” and “negative.” In the vernacular of sexually transmitted diseases, one may say they “have” herpes or hepatitis, but it is only with HIV that the presence or absence of a virus so forcefully marks one as a specific type of being. From a semantically neutral perspective, “What’s your status?” is a question so open-ended as to be meaningless.

The clinical condition becomes the same as the “self.” The validation elements and apparatuses are presented as neutral and scientifically objective. You are, or you are not; you have it, or you don’t have it. This viral and binomial ontology of HIV-AIDS is a dark version of Alaimo’s transcorporeality. The identity is fully aware of the non-control of its own body (just talk to anyone living with HIV and HAART therapy to confirm this). External conditions become palpable, the entrance and expecoration of other bodies and entities are taken with awareness, and the drug’s rituality deploys new ways of understanding time. This dark transcorporeality touches a new level that directly echoes the conditions of contact that exist in the present with COVID-19: the mediating objects.

In the case of HIV-AIDS, the pandemic caused an upsurge in the production of synthetic and generally plastic intermediaries to interact between bodies. At the beginning of the pandemic, ignorance about its transmission meant that every sick patient was quarantined. It was not uncommon to see doctors approaching the deathbed of a virus victim in full plastic suits (like those of March 2020) or to see celebrities playing the role of benefactors approaching the diseased with surgical gloves and masks.

However, when the channel of HIV transmission became known, a mediating object became the only way to contain the spread of the disease. Latex condoms were a viable option for birth control and later for preventing sexually transmitted diseases (bacterial and viral). During the 1980s and 1990s, condoms were the means to ensure safe sexual encounters in gay communities. It is a sanitary wall, a thin layer of plastic covering the penis to prevent actual contact between mucous membranes. The condom became a weapon to exist in society without falling into the social and clinical stigma of HIV-AIDS. The cohabitation of homosexual groups in a heterocentric society needed a polymeric mediator, and the fact is that “Roberto Esposito analyzed the links between the political notion of community, and the biomedical and epidemiological notion of immunity. The two terms share a common root, the Latin *munus*, the duty (tax, tribute, gift) someone must pay to be part of the community.” (Preciado, 2020). The control apparatus stopped at the segregation between positives and negatives and made inroads into the constituent core of the affected communities: sexuality. However, over the years, the virus managed to evade the desired viral control by the States. The ontological pathology of positive and negative was no longer eternal nor 100% reliable.

Even if someone infected never developed any symptoms, that is, if the infection remained inactive or could be rendered inactive by medical intervention, the viral enemy would be inside forever. In fact, so it is believed, it is only a matter of time before something awakens (triggers) it, before “the telltale symptoms” appear (Sontag, 1989, p. 20).

Susan Sontag wrote *AIDS and its Metaphors* in the hard years of the viral chaos. In 1989, antiretroviral therapies were not sufficiently developed, and being positive implied a death sentence within an indeterminate period. The “contamination” was eternal and shaped the patient’s identity until his/her last days, depriving him/her of all intimate encounters and relegating his/her body to plastic mediators. The latency of the virus and its spontaneous appearance only added another layer to the paranoia that justified state surveillance of patients. Prophylactic use spread even in hetero-white communities in the United States and disciplined desiring bodies through guilt. In the case of HIV-AIDS, there is no one born after the 1980s who exercises his or her sexuality without knowing what a condom is. From being an element of sporadic control to being a necessary object in sex, the condom became an obligatory facilitator in one of the most important human activities to create transcorporeal relationships.

Lee notes that:

There was no halcyon “before” of unprotected sex for my generation. We have inherited an official safer sex discourse with little but condemnation for sexual contact unmediated by prophylaxis, and a cultural *ethos* that sanctions unprotected sex principally as something “earned” in the context of a committed relationship subject to rigorous testing—of boundaries and trust no less than antibodies. (2013).

Using protection is a double gesture: to not transmit to the sexual partner the invisible latency of the disease and to not receive from that same partner the risk of being a carrier without knowing it. In this analysis, we can locate several instruments used to contain COVID-19 contagions: face masks as new polymeric bodies that act as intermediaries in the most basic human activities to block contaminated fluids. These polymers no longer operate only in the intimacy of sex, but operate at the macro level in every social platform. This turns the mediating object into a kind of communal discipline. Kuznetski says in this regard (2020):

“An epidemic radicalizes and displaces the biopolitical techniques applied to the national territory to the level of political anatomy, inscribing them in the individual body,” Preciado points out at the same time, an epidemic allows extending to the entire population the measures of political “immunization” that had been applied until now violently against those who had been considered “foreigners” both inside and within the limits of the national territory. (p. 167)

From racialized homosexual men to Asian citizens, pandemics have made it possible to erect state control apparatuses at the territorial, institutional and individual levels. The passport with proof of vaccination, biosecurity protocols for entering a shopping mall and the use of face masks in a casual conversation in the street are elements that denote Foucauldian biopolitics. This does not entail giving space to conspiracy theories that obey more to conservative interests than to the benefit of the community, but rather it calls for the exercise of critical thinking about which doors are opened when faced with the constant state of exception and emergency that pandemics bring about.

Preciado (2020) states: “the virus actually reproduces, materializes, widens, and intensifies (from the individual body to the population as a whole) the dominant forms of biopolitical and necropolitical management that were already operating over sexual, racial, or migrant minorities before the state of exception.” Who lives and who dies, basically the core of biopolitics and necropolitics (Mbembe), are questions that far from being abstracted in theory were, unfortunately, constitutive of the first stage of AIDS and COVID-19. Let us recall the hospital collapse in Italy in the first semester of COVID-19 in 2020. Life-and-death decisions were made in haste and not by heads of state but by public servants.

In the Italian case, the country was the first in the West to quarantine entire cities and provinces. Italy was the indicator of a future that would affect all nations globally. To a large extent, the factors in making such major decisions were numerical. The morbid counting mentioned at the beginning of the text is not exclusive to the present pandemic. As Sontag (1989) puts it:

This epidemic (HIV-AIDS) is now seen as consisting of an estimate of a larger number of apparently healthy (apparently healthy, but doomed) but infected people. Estimates are being made and remade all the time, and the pressure to identify those people and label them increases. (p. 33).

The logic behind the incessant and public counting (there were even real-time videos with statistical information by country on platforms such as YouTube) is closer to financial aesthetics than to clinical control strategies. The visibility of data or necro-data served many companies to decide on the feasibility of layoffs or labor maintenance. Numbers enable the conversion of bodies into masses.

Ana Vujanović (2021), concerning the above, points out that:

Some populist critiques of quarantine measures posit a unified collective social body against a privileged minority (governments and economic elites). This rhetoric is interesting because it implies that only ordinary people are part of all humanity, not the people in power.

The body politicized through discipline finds these fractures in the discourse when faced with events such as pandemics. A common enemy for the State is glimpsed, but the population is biased by the differences in the capacity to confront it. War language is not uncommon either. In this regard, Vujanović (2021) says:

This notion of “not-really-everything-everything” excludes and criticizes the authorities by employing the same imaginary used by the authorities themselves: the “collective body” of society as a whole, which the authorities seek to mobilize in a “war” against the common enemy that is the virus.

The playwright analyzed that body through the 2013 film *Yugoslavia: How Ideology Moved Our Collective Body* by Marta Popivoda. The scenes in the film bring together old records from the history of the former Yugoslavia in terms of the social body performing ideology in public space. When speaking of ideology, it is essential to open up the capacity

for meaning in order to understand that the collective body viralized in the COVID-19 pandemic is equally disrupted by its relation to public space.

Returning to the problem of the forgotten pandemic, Preciado warns around the notions of collectivism that Popidova proposes that “the community/immunity model of AIDS has to do with the fantasy of male sexual sovereignty understood as a non-negotiable right of penetration, while every sexually penetrated body (homosexual, woman, every form of the anal) is perceived as lacking sovereignty” (Preciado: 2020, p. 171).

The discursive figures around the subject of sexuality (because of the specificity of the commentary on the AIDS pandemic) should not avoid extrapolating the central ideas to the current pandemic of COVID-19. Governance over interbody relations generates a monopoly of solutions for a sanitary life. There is an exercise of power strongly linked to the consumption of products specifically created to protect the individual and the community. Viral conceptions begin to fade, both in AIDS and with COVID-19, and the word ‘contamination’ seems to appear more ambiguously in press releases and colloquial speech. This contamination has an empirical and material basis. There is a virus, but there is also a governance apparatus constructed with such density that it probably divorces or alienates the notion of contamination with **(as)** an elastic signifier. A signifier that could be used as a basis for the state of exception to the normative state of affairs.

4. Towards a coexistence of both models? Conclusions

Finally, how to reconcile these two approaches developed in the text? On the one hand, the sick body allows us to understand the interrelation of the human being with environmental conditions and consolidates what I would call a body-ecology. On the other hand, the sick body is a space of control and surveillance through reasoning of community and immunity that gives rise to the body-discipline. The two paths of a possible viral future seem to bifurcate without a common point. However, I believe that Alaimo’s concept of transcorporeality is present in these two paths in front of us. One of them is a transcorporeality of potentialities to overcome an individualistic, deeply anthropocentric, and positivistic view of the human body and achieve a more intertwined understanding between culture and nature for better management of the environmental crisis. The other is a dark transcorporeality that renders the sick body vulnerable to being objectified as pollution and a risk to the community. I consider it necessary and responsible to trace these two pathways on the basis of the analysis of the speculative possibilities in the face of the pandemic and the management of governance based on it. The common point, transcorporeality, is not a neutral discursive element; like many others, it will depend on how it is adopted and executed to conceive its scope better. Kuzneski (2020) extracts the following quote from Alaimo:

I have been thinking about COVID-19 in terms of transcorporeality and exposure, for the virus dramatically underscores both concepts as it puts our bodies in interconnection with other people, with the air, and even with inert objects that suddenly become invisibly dangerous. An unsettling strangeness reigns when you recognize that unseen dangers lurk within the banalest aspects of ordinary life. Ironically, as many of us consider the Anthropocene and theorize the immense geographic temporal scale

of human impact on “the planet,” something minuscule suddenly topples life as we knew it. (p. 145)

I would like to close with a film project by Amanda Strong and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, who illustrate Alaimo’s quoted lines much kindlier. Bidabaan is a young non-binary Anishinaabe young person who carries on the tradition of maple honey harvesting in the urban areas of the city of Ontario in Canada. The film, made with stop motion technique, emphasizes the character’s relationships with their natural, supernatural and human environment. Pre-colonial traditions and Western modernity settled in what is now Ontario are in constant conflict. In the final scene, Bidabaan is caught between two worlds: they are present in the residential suburb of a Western city and they are also present in the forests that shelter First Nations traditions decimated by colonization; everything revolves around the small resistance of extracting honey from urban maple trees. Strong and Betasamosake Simpson represent relations of transcorporeality as proposed in the first part of the article (body-ecology) but embedded in the risks and tensions of macro-level surveillance and control (body-discipline). This path may illuminate future analyses to further deepen the discursive changes at the corporeal level that the COVID-19 pandemic brings without falling into an irreconcilable polarization of these possibilities.

One thing is sure, the line drawn with certain inertia since the beginning of the 20th century regarding how we manage environmental resources and how we conduct community in a nation-state has entered a strange partial *deja vu*: on the one hand, it resumes past forms, such as a assembly-like vision in which the human being is a body within bodies and, on the other hand, it returns to strangely reactionary forms in hyperconnected times. Still, being consistent with the two pandemics I have tried to articulate, the possibilities for new and alternative understandings of how we exist in the environment (whether natural or social) intersect the administration of the body. How we understand the body (as collaborations or as producer) will designate the form of crisis it will take as it falls into disease (as ecology or as discipline). LGTBIQ+ populations have resisted the scourge and stigma of HIV-AIDS for decades and have found a point of community and support, and have also deployed resources for cohabitation with that disease. This vision does not romanticize the disease at all, but rather finds empowerment processes with a better understanding of the viral genealogy that Lee mentions as narrated from those affected to a more complex understanding of social and environmental interdependence. Kuzneski (2020) again quotes Alaimo:

Transcorporeality does the opposite of distancing or dividing the human being from external nature. It implies that we are literally entangled in the physical material world, so environmentalism cannot be a kind of externalized, optional pursuit, but is always present, always at hand. (p. 139).

In Foucault’s last days, the inside was completely dependent on the outside, from ways to access devices of pleasure or his viral survival to winters bearing risks of pneumonia and the use of pesticides in the ingredients of food. Transcorporeality renders the hard

construction of the closed and hermetic Western body vulnerable and turns it into anonymous cooperations deeply dependent on interaction with other cooperations. Whether it is a vulnerability that awakens political empathy towards the environment or one that detonates powers of discipline and surveillance, the body may no longer be automatically understood as autonomous, independent, and isolated in these times of virality.

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