

SLANT

THE LOSERS CONSPIRACY

March 26, 2020 • Paul B. Preciado on life after COVID-19



I GOT SICK IN PARIS on Wednesday, March 11, before the French government ordered the confinement of the population, and when I got up on March 19, a bit more than a week later,

the world had changed. When I went to my bed, the world was close, collective, viscous, and dirty. When I got out of bed, it had become distant, individual, dry, and hygienic. During the sickness, I was unable to assess what was happening from a political and economic point of view because the fever and the discomfort took hold of my vital energy. No one can be philosophical with an exploding head. From time to time, I would watch the news, which only increased my discontent. Reality was indistinguishable from a bad dream, and the front page of the newspapers was more disconcerting than any nightmare brought on by my feverish delusions. For two whole days, as an antianxiety prescription, I decided to not visit a single website. I attribute my healing to that and to oregano essential oil. I did not have difficulty breathing, but it was hard to believe that I would continue breathing. I was not scared of dying. I was scared of dying alone.

Between the fever and the anxiety, I thought to myself that the parameters of organized social behavior had changed forever and could no longer be modified. I felt that with such conviction that it pierced my chest, even as my breathing became easier. Everything will forever retain the new shape that things had taken. From now on, we would have access to ever more excessive forms of digital consumption, but our bodies, our physical organisms, would be deprived of all contact and of all vitality. The mutation would manifest as a crystallization of organic life, as a digitization of work and consumption and as a dematerialization of desire.

The first thing I did when I got out of bed after having been sick with the virus for a week that was as vast and strange as a new continent, was to ask myself this question: Under what conditions and in which way would life be worth living?

Those who were married were now condemned to live twenty-four hours a day with the person they had wedded, whether they loved each other or hated each other, or both at the same time—which, incidentally, is the most typical case: Couples are governed by a law of quantum physics according to which there is no opposition between contrary terms, but rather a simultaneity of dialectical facts. In this new reality, those among us who had lost love or who had not found it in time—that is, before the great mutation of COVID-19—were doomed to

spend the rest of our lives totally alone. We would survive but without touch, without skin. Those who had not dared to tell the person they loved that they loved them could no longer make contact with them even if they could express their love and would now have to forever live with the impossible anticipation of a physical encounter that would never take place. Those who had chosen to travel would forever stay on the other side of the border, and the wealthy who went seaside or to the country so as to spend the confinement period in their pleasant second homes (poor them!) would never be able to return to the city. Their homes would be requisitioned to accommodate the homeless, who, indeed, unlike the rich, lived full-time in the city. Under the new and unpredictable form that things had taken after the virus, everything would be set in stone. What seemed like a temporary lockdown would go on for the rest of our lives. Maybe things would change again, but not for those of us over the age of forty. That was the new reality. Life after the great mutation. I therefore wondered if life like this was worth living.

The first thing I did when I got out of bed after having been sick with the virus for a week that was as vast and strange as a new continent, was to ask myself this question: Under what conditions and in which way would life be worth living? The second thing I did, before finding an answer to that question, was to write a love letter. Of all the conspiracy theories I had read, the one that beguiled me the most is the one that says that the virus was created in a laboratory so that all the world's losers could get back their exes—without really being obliged to get back together with them.

Bursting with the lyricism and anxiety accumulated over a week of being sick, afraid and uncertain, the letter to my ex was not only a poetic and desperate declaration of love, it was above all a shameful document for the one who had signed it. But if things could no longer change, if those who were far apart could never touch each other again, what was the significance of being ridiculous in this way? What was the significance of now telling the person you love that you loved them, all while knowing that in all likelihood she had already forgotten you or replaced you, if you would never be able to see her again in any case? The new state of things, in its sculptural immobility, conferred a new degree of *what the fuck*, even in its own ridiculousness.

I handwrote that fine and horribly pathetic letter, I put it in a bright white envelope and on it,

in my best handwriting, I wrote my ex's name and address. I got dressed, I put on a mask, I put on the gloves and shoes that I had left at the door, and I went down to the entrance of the building. There, in accordance with the rules of confinement, I did not go out into the street; rather I headed toward the garbage area. I opened the yellow bin and I placed the letter to my ex in there—the paper was indeed recyclable. I slowly went back to my apartment. I left my shoes at the door. I went in, I took off my pants and I placed them in a plastic bag. I took off my mask and I put it on the balcony for it to air out; I took off my gloves, I threw them in the garbage and I washed my hands for two unending minutes. Everything, absolutely everything, was set in the form it had taken after the great mutation. I went back to my computer and opened my email: and there it was, a message from her entitled, “I think of you during the virus crisis.”

Paul B. Preciado is a philosopher, a curator, and a trans activist. An Apartment on Uranus: Chronicles of the Crossing, a collection of his columns between 2013 and 2018 for Libération and other media outlets, was published in 2019 by Semiotext(e).

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