

## Imagining Extinction inside Viral Body without Organs

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### Abstract:

Virus, in the form of a preassigned body without organs, predates the arrival of human species, and evolved on earth approximately three billion years ago, currently having an estimated variation of hundred million types. Humans form an insignificant subsection of the 'virophere' (Crawford). Equipped with the knowledge of all organisms, the SARS-CoV-2 (my focus in this paper) virus combines with angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) which in turn identifies the tissues vulnerable to the infection. Once in the cell, it expropriates the cell's mechanism, makes numerous copies of itself and invades other cells. Immune cells in the battle against the virus disrupt the flow of oxygen to all other parts of the body. In most cases, there is inflammation of the alveolus, its broken walls lessen oxygen intake, and the patient ends up in the ventilator. Eventually, the virus strikes all the organs with differing intensities– the lungs, the heart, the brain, the kidneys, the gut, the eyes. The animal virus merging with its human counterpart mirrors "interkingdoms, unnatural participations" where "Nature operates– against itself" (Deleuze and Guattari). Virus is anti-genealogy. Viruses bring the human and the non-human others together in a rhizomatic relation where genetic information and DNA are exchanged. Viruses, as BwO, de-structure the essential frame and subjectivity of humans. Both the human individual and viruses share a common plane where none possesses any essential reality and unfolds as an interactive space for multiple organic and inorganic exchanges. The only "enemy" of the virus is the organism, and as indeterminate, pure lawlessness it attacks the fundamental organization– the cellular and the molecular. Like the body without organs, viruses are anonymous/acephalous with its undying insistence to repeat/multiply and maximize connections.

Virus is pure desire oriented towards reducing the infected body to its elemental form (compost/ash and others). Each organ transmutes into a body reacting against other bodies and against the whole body containing all organs. Claire Colebrook observes that a virus is so alive, "so lacking in boundaries and limits" that it does not qualify as a living being. My paper seeks to investigate the role of the virus in reducing/expanding the human to such an extent that it becomes one with the ground, and returns to its originary existence. I further propose that pandemics throughout history have initiated a re-imagination of human continuance; pandemics activate the human-toward-extinction by inducing the immortal virus through (consumed/to be consumed/ living) animals within the human.

**Keywords:** virus, extinction, body without organs, organism, animal.

Viruses have existed on earth for the last hundred million years and will continue to do so as long as earth has life. They have been responsible for the construction and ruination of the biological human being. This paper desires to accentuate that every time there is a pandemic, human beings should reconsider the issues of extinction rather than concentrate simply on its socioeconomic upheavals. Viruses combine humans and non-human others together in a rhizomatic relation where genetic information and DNA are exchanged. On this plane, the curve of human growth is neither evolutionary, nor progressive; it is rather "a question of passages, bridges, and tunnels; a question neither of regression nor of progression but of 'becomings': 'There is no plasmic finality.... Life knows no finality, no finished crystallisation'" (Pearson 152). Therefore, all

organisms are without origins or distinct lineages; everything is “transversal assemblage” in which the crisscrossing of DNA form, deform and re-form living things– “small replicons: plasmids, viruses, transposons, and so forth” alter and transmute phyletic developments (Pearson 157). For germs, the human body, the earth’s surface, ocean gyres are all subterranean networks where they live and die, transform and get transferred, reproduce or lie dormant, without any direction or point of origin. The sole objective of parasitic viruses is to replicate, transcribe and heterogenize genetic materials. Evolution of life itself is a continuous and continuing process under the shadow of an ongoing pandemic which originated life and would eventually end numerous forms of living organisms including the human. We, the human, the virus, the microorganism, have never existed outside a pandemic.

As nucleic acid inside a skin, and simultaneously in its search for a host, a virus is both a full and a partial body (without organs). Weismann’s germ plasm gets metamorphosed into Deleuze’s body without organs and is further explicated in modern biology by Richard Dawkins’ selfish gene: “The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference...DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music” (Pearson 10). Dawkins is also introduced by Žižek in his *Organs without Bodies* while analyzing the emergence of “body in pieces” which is a “a composite of replaceable organs (pacemakers, artificial limbs, transposed skin, heart, liver, and other transplants— up to the prospect of genetically cultivated reserve organs)”: “...it is not that individual organisms use their genes to replicate themselves; it is, on the contrary, individual organisms that are the means for the genes to reproduce themselves” (68). Indifference then perhaps becomes an ethical component for earth and its inhabitants that keeps the ecosystem alive. Each species engages with the other by detachment, by separation, by respecting distance, until the human arrives with its technicity of encroachment– burning forests, depleting natural resources, poaching animals.

For Deleuze, the body without organs unfurls at the germinal level imploding with intensities and transformations. By remaining outside organization, the body without organs refers to the endless animations and Earth-becomings which are perpetually penetrated by “matters which are highly unformed and unstable, characterized by free-moving flows, ‘free intensities’ and ‘nomadic singularities’” (Pearson 153). The construction of organisms then is the result of multiple stratifications, codings, territorializations and structuration of molecular intensities. Bodies without organs do not predate the organism, but emerge alongside the proliferation of plants, animals or single-celled life forms. I would like to contend that virus, comprising only the singular desire to duplicate itself, reproducing, and conjoining with the cell of the host, is the most authentic form of body without organs. It is the desire of the non-life to enter life forms. In order to understand my association of body without organs with a virus, which is more a submicroscopic infectious agent than an organism, we can refer to the definition of Deleuze’s body without organs by Constantin V. Boundas in *The Deleuze Reader*:

Neither an organism nor a “lived body,” the body without organs is a series without organs, with indeterminate organs, or with temporary, transitory organs. Being the site of anarchy (its political function), of a Nirvana-like release from excitements and irritations (its schizoanalytic function), and the surface for the inscription of inclusive disjunctions (its ontological function), it appropriates organs in order to function, makes use of them, but also repudiates and takes its revenge upon them whenever it has enough of their aggression. It is clear that “body without organs” is a portmanteau word, the sign of an originary disjunction, the “somber

precursor" that gives rise to two distinct series, organic and anorganic, and brings them together in a resonant association-- nonsense generating sense. (13)

Viruses originate at a negative level, in that it doesn't possess a full cell and is genetic material concealed under a protein coating. They can only survive inside a living host, only by lessening the full organism to pure intensity, molecular variability, and rhizomatic abstraction. These are present both in the realm of circuits and conjunctions and at the level of hierarchized stratification. Viruses, as BwO, de-structure the essential frame and subjectivity of humans. Both the human individual and viruses share a common plane where none possesses any essential reality and unfolds as an interactive space for multiple organic and inorganic exchanges. The only 'enemy' of the virus is the organism, and as indeterminate, pure lawlessness it attacks the fundamental organization-- the cellular and the molecular. "The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism" (Deleuze and Guattari 158). Like the body without organs, viruses are anonymous/acephalous with its undying insistence to repeat/multiply and maximize connections. A virus then is a little machine charging against the organism machine with its "connection of desires" (to colonize the body of the other), "conjunction of flows" (to proliferate inside host bodies), and "continuum of intensities" (to cause continuous implosions within the subject) (Deleuze and Guattari 161). It dismantles and drags the body to a self-denying state where different strata fall over each other. The virus paradoxically highlights the suicidal tendencies of humankind which infiltrates and tears down its own places of habitation (akin to the computer virus). It reflects the inherent death drive in humans for it emerges from unethical capitalism, hyperconsumerism and exhaustion of the animal world. Inversely, the awareness of the existence of organs in our body manifests within us through the presence of pains and illness (Freud 155). Viruses surface as malignant bodies without organs as human bodies adjust to new form and demands generated by capital. Deleuze and Guattari further claim that

Even if we consider given social formations, or a given stratic apparatus within a formation, we must say that every one of them has a BwO ready to gnaw, proliferate, cover, and invade the entire social field, entering into relations of violence and rivalry....If the strata are an affair of coagulation and sedimentation, all a stratum needs is a high sedimentation rate for it to lose its configuration and articulations, and to form its own specific kind of tumor, within itself or in a given formation or apparatus. (163)

Following this line of thought, the sleeping virus is auto-summoned by capitalist infiltrations. For instance, the Corona virus trickles down from slaughtered bats and pangolins in Chinese wet markets. After the entry of the disease, the cancerous, viral body becomes a black hole devouring its own organs one after the other. Negative contagion, therefore, shrinks the human subject into an accidental event where devastating intensities collide and crack the body. Each organ transmutes into a body reacting against other bodies and against the primary body containing all organs. Viral bodies are altered bodies, unbelonging to anyone; it is just a body dancing down to its own destruction. However, this germinal life post-infection is also a perverse kind of creative becoming-- the body becomes one with the earth, with rhizomatic assemblages.

For an epidemic to reach massive proportions a virus or bacterium must enter bodies which have no preexisting immunological defense and consequently infect all others coming into contact with the 'first' bodies. Beginning with the speed of modern transportation resources and services, and ending with rapid genetic mutations and rearrangements it becomes impossible to resist the flow of virus from the part of the globe to the other. Virus, in the form of a preassigned body without organs, predates the arrival of human species, and evolved on earth approximately

three billion years ago, currently having an estimated variation of hundred million types. Humans form an insignificant subsection of the “virophere” (Crawford 35). Equipped with the knowledge of all organisms, the SARS-CoV-2 (my focus in this paper) virus combines with angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) which in turn identifies the tissues vulnerable to infection. Once in the cell, it expropriates the cell’s mechanism, makes numerous copies of itself and invades other cells. Immune cells in the battle against the virus disrupt the flow of oxygen to all other parts of the body. In most cases, there is inflammation of the alveolus, and its broken walls lessen oxygen intake, and often the critical patients end up in the ventilator. Eventually, the virus strikes all the organs with differing intensities– the lungs, the heart, the brain, the kidneys, the gut, the eyes. The animal virus merging with its human counterpart mirrors “interkingdoms, unnatural participations” where “Nature operates– against itself” (Deleuze and Guattari 242). Deleuze and Guattari express it succinctly in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “We form a rhizome with our viruses, or rather our viruses cause us to form a rhizome with other animals” (31). Virus is anti-genealogy. The closed body is fragmented, deterritorialized, its assemblages and circuits fractured, and opened as a field where organs rebel against each other. A virus, therefore, is always democratic in nature; it doesn’t differentiate between classes and genders, and penetrates all equally with equal amount of violence. Žižek aptly quotes the Iranian deputy health minister, Iraj Harirchi in his recent book *Pandemic* where in a press meeting on the meteoric rise of coronavirus cases he states that “This virus is democratic, and it doesn’t distinguish between poor and rich or between the statesman and an ordinary citizen” (42). In a classic subversion, the pandemic has united us under a medical canopy with all its spikes pointing toward death/recovery, and parallelly re-defined isolation and distancing as social necessities. One can only stay alive by forcefully forgetting the ways of staying alive. The infected is the leper, the cured Lazarus.

A virus does not possess an embodied intellect, borders for protection, or language of life and death. Claire Colebrook and Jami Weinstein in their preface to *Posthumous Life* contemplate a “deep geological time” (ix), a time before the dangerous arrival of humans, and a future time when humans would cease to exist. They posit a posthumous time when humans would survive only as readable matter, discerned from the scars left by them on the surface of earth (Colebrook and Weinstein x). The focus is on humans, neither as transhumanist overreachers, nor as events endlessly becoming, but as post-death inscriptions (Colebrook and Weinstein xvii). On the other hand, the inhuman and anti-human viruses will transcend the marks made by humans. Claire Colebrook in her *Essays on Extinction* points out that

...a virus cannot be defined as a form of life on the Maturana and Varela model; its lack of a border or membrane means that it cannot be considered in relation to its milieu. It does not maintain itself, and is not a living system precisely because it is only in its parasitic capacity to open other life forms to variations that would not be definitive of an autopoietic relation.... It could not suffer trauma, could not be subject to an excess of influx that would destroy its living balance” (136).

Colebrook asserts that due to its unbounded, non-relational, mutational nature “it is only viral life that has a future: both in the sense of being able to live on...without its own world, and in the sense that ‘our’ future, our world in all its bounded and delicate attunement, is not really a future so much as the maintenance of the same through the constant warding off of a future that would be other than our own” (Colebrook, “Extinction” 136-137). Virus is pure desire oriented towards reducing the infected body to its elemental form (compost/ash and others). Colebrook further observes in *Deleuze and the Meaning of Life* that a virus is so alive, “so lacking in boundaries and limits” that it does not qualify as a living being; it is rather “an event that occurs to the living”

(39). Therefore, the unique function of a virus is to reduce/expand the humans to such an extent that they become one with the ground, and return to their originary existence. The essential role of pandemics throughout history should have been to initiate a re-imagination of human continuance; pandemics in the human mind must activate the human-toward-extinction by inducing the immortal virus through (consumed/to be consumed/ living) animals within the human. It is the urgent need of the Anthropocene era to re-consider human life in an altered form shorn of its anthropocentric memories. Extinction thorough viral infestation is not only a philosophical problem, but a hammering on the image of the Cartesian, technocentric man. Facing extinction, “the human organism” can either hide within and maintain its “normative image of dynamic, self-furthering, interconnected and sympathetic life”, or ask “what is life such that it generates capacities for self-annihilation, malevolence, inertia and theoretical detachment?” (Colebrook, “Deleuze” 61). Virus is the pre and the post-human, the future geologist misreading the history of mankind, the after-man that would carry remnants of genes or cells of humans who once roamed the earth.

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