

Making a Front With Our Backs- Marie Bardet Translator: Ellen Heaghney

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We know that the attacks are coming from everywhere,

We understand that losing ourselves in the TV screens turning the (foretold) tragic disappearance of a submarine into the latest TV series is a strategy of anesthesia.

And that by looking towards the periphery, we let in those intensities that mark in-between states of lightness and darkness;

It is only in this way that we can make our vision tangible and tangential,

Turning our backs into fronts.

They killed him with his back turned. The Albatross Unit killed Rafael Nahuel with a bullet to his back.

This too, we know and feel. And it is unclear to us what we are to do with this knowledge/feeling. What do we do with this knowledge and feeling that does not give us a clear idea what do do?

Yes, we know this fact is evidence for that day when justice will be done, when justice returns. When we uncover the covering of the legal process performed by political powers. Uncover the fact that Nahuel died in a hunt, a racist hunt that defines state politics.

Yes, this fact, the absolute vulnerability of that child fleeing under those bullets running over our skin, adds to our fear. What do we do with this skin, bristling with the horror of all that we know?

Within our skin, with its power to listen and to articulate in every direction, we ask ourselves if the era to appeal to vulnerability (and here we have the echo of Suely Rolnik's¹ voice) as a political strategy did not come to its end when we crossed the threshold into violence and repression, death and disappearance, where we currently dwell. The question becomes insistent: Is it not time to arm ourselves with a shield? Can this vulnerability of the back be a strength?

If instead of speaking about bodies we speak through the knowledge and feelings that circulate within our corporal and stage practices the question becomes more acute: Can we back (up) our backs, in their extreme vulnerability, as they escape our field of vision? When a gaze focused on a central point begins to spread across the skin, reaching the edges; when the skin and the eyes make an alliance with the ears (those that listen and maintain the proprioceptive² meta-balance) when the attention is shifted to the sides and to behind, thereby dislocating the frontality and the specificity of a focused gaze as obligatory modes of knowledge; when we allow ourselves to know from within our shivering backs... are we hinting at a way to make a front out of our backs?

It implies a rethinking of what we understand as vulnerability, but also of what we understand as strength. Vulnerability is not an apology of fragility, nor a surrendering to things as they are. Vulnerability is accepting the fragility that comes along with the fact of existing (Silvio Lang), and from there, creating an alliance with the insistence of persisting to live.

We must investigate this question about vulnerability in the singular power of soft tissues that open up other paths besides those of hyper-elongation, or the strength of armored contraction and muscular hypertrophy. We must do it in the voluminous and redistributed body/space that neither releases nor grasps: it vibrates (Amparo González). If we continue speaking of vulnerability as a strategy of resistance, it is perhaps insofar as it is neither porosity nor a wide opening; it is a such to the extent that it is not opposed to a great and active force, because this would be a passive surrendering. It will be present with every gesture, every gaze, every act of speech, with its imperative containing the question “and? (will you be) active or passive?” (which plays perfectly into the idea of “winner or loser?” that comprises neoliberal discourses and politics).

This power of recognizing the position of vulnerability redistributes roles and ways of taking the public space, which are neither an absolute retreat, nor an advance blinded by the final reckoning or the return of paradise.

We can mobilize the corporal knowledge of bodies that turn their backs into areas of learning, into authorizations to escape the mandates of what could be and what should be, allowing us to flee sideways. We can do so beginning with the aesthetic-ethical compass of the colorful chaos that Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui recounted (in the the Assembly of the School of Collective Practices in April of 2017) having received not under the gaze but rather in the back of Rosa between the grazing and flashes of colors of the *aguayo*. We can do so through the anal thinking of the Preciado-Hocquenghem pamphlets.³ We can do so through multiple squares with their embraces, the webbed #acuerparnos during the marches of Ni Una Menos, the hashtags #estamosparanosotras,⁴ the women’s strikes that have been happening for more than a year now... but also by passing through all the workshops of movement, dance, corporeal and stage practices where we weave together ways of knowing and making alliances between gestures and knowledge.

If we are speaking of “knowledge of the body,” we are not speaking of a knowledge that comes from “the body” as the ultimate source of revealed truth. Nor are we speaking of a perfect knowledge about the body (as if such an “object” of knowledge existed, and as if it were an abstract universalization of the trajectories of life that it composes and of which it is composed). Instead, we speak of a knowledge of the back, of a situation, of having our backs in the back, and not having our gaze fixed on a clear hope or promise.

Advancing backwards or sideways like crabs, we disarm everything we believed to know about the vertical conquest, the correct “rightness,” and the axis of good. We take it upon ourselves to look from the edges that do not have to be soft or open, but that patiently undo the powers of having everything clear and distinct. We take it upon ourselves to feel, to know, and to act in an opacity, a clear-obscurity, perhaps (just before it takes an exact form; it is better thought of as a deformed tension-alliance between the “right to opacity” from the Treatise on the Whole World of Edouard Glissant anchored in the Antilles and the Day of

Gay Opacity created by Nicolás Cuello and a group of protesters occupying the Plaza Giordano Bruno). We extend the domain of the weight of thought beyond the limits of the visual field that positions the clear and the distinct, the well-clarified and the not-blurry, as the only ways of knowing and doing.

We will turn our backs into a front, many fronts, where we will not hope that our vulnerability will turn itself into an all-powerful shield, but rather that we will know, and that we will put into circulation all that we know and have for the knowing about the alternative networks of care that both escape and connect, together with the emergency room and outpatient treatments at the Alvear Hospital. This care is not a retreat nor a self-righteous control over own own practices, guided by paranoia. Instead it is a way of facing reality, affirming that some part of our fragility can also be the very strength for transformation(s).

This implies rethinking the temporalities of our actions. When moving forward has stopped being a clear-cut program, how do we continue? While making the long list of all that was done this year, the sensation of “all that was done” defies the sensation of absolute impotence (Alejandra Rodríguez). We ask ourselves: What rhythms? How long do they last? Which modes of insistences? And these unknown temporalities that connect past experiences as future and the images of the future as past echoes, to what extent do they imply an anchoring in a certain concrete relationship with being now, with suspending some of our anxiety and ridding ourselves of the projection of results? (Nicolás Cuello) The idea appears that these actions that escape the grand narrative of victory can also become only repetitive acts where the ritual of the public space becomes an experience of impotence. However, they inscribe themselves as continuous recipes (Verónica Gago), acts of maturation, of conspiracy and conversation in spaces that are less visible and more opaque; processes of inventing actions that do not presuppose a hierarchical difference between an investigation and a direct action, or sustaining an occupation.

And if we speak of the long-term future, we know that it is not by fixing our gaze on a paradise-to-come of perfect tomorrows, but rather by “looking backwards and forwards (to the future-past) that we can walk in the present-future.”⁵

We must know, weave, and arm fronts with our backs, together.

Endnotes

¹ Rolnik is a Brazilian cultural critic who has also worked as a psychoanalyst and curator. Her research has focused on the politics of subjectivization. She writes on the concept of “body-knowing,” which she defines as utilizing “bodily power to listen to the diagram of the forces of the present.” For Rolnik, the fundamental undertaking of any micropolitical movement of resistance must be the mobilization of the body and with it, body-knowing.

² Proprioception is the the body’s sense of the relative positions of its own parts as well as the relative force or effort being exerted in moving those parts. Mechanisms within the inner ear help maintain our sense of balance and equilibrium.

³ The author refers to queer theorists Paul Preciado (néé Beatriz) and Guy Hocquenghem. Hocquenghem, writing in France in the mid-20th century, is best known for his work “Homosexual Desire” which addressed themes such as

the relationship between capitalism and sexuality, the political force of queer group identities, and the dynamics of anal desire, critiquing well-known theorists such as Freud and Lacan. Preciado's "Anal Terror" engages in a dialogue with Hocquenghem's original text, reformulating his ideas in even more radical terms.

4 The two hashtags can be translated as #backsup and #weareforourselves.

5 Translation of an aymara aphorism, "Qhipnayra uñtasis sarnaqapxañani," taken from Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's *Sociología de la imagen* (Sociology of the image) published by Tinta limón.