

Fragilities

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Imagine a country where suddenly, brutally everything changes. A people goes out into the street and in doing so transforms the idea it had of itself; encounters, assemblies, and committees multiply. Imagine a country which, after many years of dictatorship, finally manages to speak publicly about politics, living conditions, where the word precarization (until recently absent) is now on everyone's lips. In taxicabs, grocery stores, or coffee shops people speak with hope laced with anxiety. What will come might not be the revolution (and yet one never knows, there are no possible calculations) but at the very least a radical transformation of how collective life is conceived.

Imagine a country where everything is put into question, even and especially the way questions are asked. The walls of the city center are filled with graffiti, posters, instructions. "El Pueblo Unido" is the new national anthem, the flag of one of the country's most oppressed and discriminated against indigenous peoples is present at every protest, the capital city's most important square is renamed the "Square of Dignity." One leaves for work in the morning without knowing whether there will be a protest, a gathering, people wounded, or death on the way home. Everyone has an opinion about what is happening, no one is in agreement and this makes dialogue possible. The police, this will not surprise anyone, attends to its work with familiar

ferocity: 352 people were wounded in the eye, 34 are dead. We do not forget their names.

Imagine a student who, having obtained his doctorate, comes home to his country. This country is Chile, this former student is me.

I returned to Santiago in December 2019, when the situation had somewhat quieted down. To tell the truth, it felt like a kind of pause or ceasefire: summer vacation, fatigue, and the deal brokered between the parliamentary left and right to write a new constitution had contributed to an abatement of the contestation, but the “Chilean spring” was far from over. We spoke of March like D-Day, an offensive was in the works. I remember the words of the neighborhood’s cheesemonger, a lady in her seventies: “I hope something will happen in March, it doesn’t matter whether it is violent or not, whether I need to close my shop and lose my job for things to change, I will do it willingly. It’s March or nothing.” Yet, we all know what happened. A week after March 8th, one of the largest protests in Chile since the dictatorship, confinement measures were adopted. No one goes out to protest, the people is no longer in the streets, the facades of buildings have been repainted. So, nothing? It has been two months since I last saw my cheesemonger, she belongs to the “population at risk” and decided to temporarily close her shop.

In Chile we thus went from the experience of finally living together to living with the pandemic in the absence of others and maybe even in the absence of the world. Since the beginning of confinement, the question is asked: how to continue? Yet, it might be that the challenge is not to continue but to interrupt; not to gather one’s force but to open oneself to the fragility we all share. Against this fragile background a new force can spring forth, from uncertainty we can build something new. In October, we lived together for the duration of a protest, of a neighborhood assembly, of a student committee, we had an idea—even approximate—of what we wanted. We shared the rage, some positions, a few hopes of transformation. We stood in solidarity with the misery of others. It is now about everyone’s fragility, without

exception. What binds us now is not a set of ideas guiding action but the lack of bearings, of orientation. And precisely, the pandemic now forces us to question everything we thought safe: what “living” and “together” mean. It shows us the extent to which what feminism has taught us to call “social reproduction” is central to understanding labor. It is not that we know, now that we are risking it, what life is, or that separation is teaching us the importance of being together, of touching, listening, or looking at one another. Precarity did not appear in March 2020. However, a deep engagement with our relationship to death, life, and labor has become necessary. It is from this engagement, which accepts no final, closed, or definitive answer, that we will build a way, always fragile, to “live together.” This is not an optimistic vision. It is especially not about turning crisis into an opportunity. The pandemic is not a chance occurrence. This is maybe a hyperactive kind of pessimism, something which is neither sad nor fatalistic, but which sets itself the goal to continually change the problematization, and which thinks that this re-problematization—even as it leaves us defenseless—is also creative work.

In December, on the walls of Santiago, we could read: “Now that we have found each other, let us stick together.” True, it gave us courage, but everything has changed. So what? So, let us let go of each other to find ourselves elsewhere, differently, with renewed energy. We will not be the same, we will need to reinvent everything. We will do it, I am sure of it.