Ivan L. Munuera
Voices (Towards Other Institutions) #16

Ivan L. Munuera & Manu Alba, Unzipped Parties.

Unzipped Parties

"We've been getting reports of 'coronavirus parties' where uninfected people are mingling with #COVID19 positive individuals intentionally, to try to contract the virus. Bad idea! This is dangerous and puts people at risk for hospitalization or even death."[1] This tweet was sent by the United States Department of Health on May 6, 2020. It was an effort to debunk ideas promoted all over the world by anti-vaccine conspiracists, who denied even the existence of the pandemic,[2] and herd immunity theories, in which people deliberately expose themselves to coronavirus to provoke an immune response—often with disastrous consequences.[3] But, mostly, the tweet resonated with an audience captivated by recent clips of young spring breakers dancing in summery destinations, and who thought they were safe because of their age (following the false claim that COVID-19 doesn't affect children and teenagers) and because government officials allowed them amidst fears of an economic backlash on the tourist industry

if these parties were shut down.[4] After months of lockdown, social distancing, and quarantine measures, these parties looked like an alternative present. Media uproar followed quickly.

One of the consequences of COVID-19 has been an increased demonization of parties, whether they are held responsibly—taking into account a collective caring—or recklessly, as in the case of spring breakers and the subsequent lack of state intervention. The global response to the pandemic has been concentrated on the dislocation of the human body: a reification of an anthropocentric notion of a self-contained body that should be isolated in

heteronormative, shared safe spaces, a.k.a., the "home."[5] For many, this hasn't been an option: victims of gender violence, the homeless, migrants, sex workers, "essential" workers—from people working on delivery services to public transportation drivers—couldn't find safety in the so-called "home"; or they had been forcibly pushed out from the domestic realm. Ultimately, the greatest nemesis of this "safe space," the home, should be found in the dangers of a collective body enacted in meetings among unknown subjects, from political demonstrations to raves. The result has been the characterization of social gatherings, and especially parties, as a locus of infection, nihilism, and irresponsibility.

Parties don't exclude caring. Parties could be the site of debates related to public health. They are arenas of discussion, spaces of political activism, channels of communication, and collective experimentation. This was the case with HIV/AIDS during the early 1980s when governments, medical institutions, and the general

media neglected a proper response to the crisis.[6] Meanwhile, in nightclubs all over the world, people spread information, shared available data, planned demonstrations, and organized an

intersectional caring among affected communities.[7] Parties provided ways to negotiate the terms to coexist with the virus. They created a notion of "body" far from the definition of a discrete and autonomous being: a recomposition between human and non-human agents that pushes for an interdependent, interconnected,

and not zipped-up forms of embodiments.[8]

Online parties, livestream raves, celebratory demonstrations in public spaces, and physical gatherings that take into account a coexistence with COVID-19 (e.g. usage of protective gear, safe distances) have shown ways of understanding parties in the age of this pandemic. The transition to a new citizenship involves the need for bodies to reconfigure and emerge as part of a world with COVID-19. It constitutes a sense of coexistence with non-human agents based on mutual caring, as well as a fight against environmental violence and an uneven balance of power based on econoracist and neocolonial concepts. The question is not to suppress celebration. We need parties more than ever. Parties that can coexist with COVID-19 in a collective bodily regime of techno-social experimentation.

Text by Ivan L. Munuera
Video by Ivan L. Munuera and Manu Alba

1 — @WADeptHealth Twitter. May 7, 2020
2 — Tim Adams, "5G, Coronavirus and Contagious Superstition," *The Guardian*, April 26, 2020
3 — Peter S. Goodman, "Sweden Has Become the World's Cautionary Tale", *The New York Times*, July 7, 2020
4 — Patricia Mazzei and Frances Robles, "The Costly Toll of Not Shutting Down Spring Break Earlier," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2020
5 — Andrea Bagnato, "Staying at Home", e-flux, May 4, 2020
6 — For more on this by the author: "HIV and AIDS Kin: The Discotecture of the Paradise Garage." *Thresholds*. N. 48. MIT. Spring, 2020. Pp. 133-147.
7 — From the meetings of Gay Men's Health Crisis to ACT-UP in different clubs, especially in New York.
8 — As Astrida Niemanis points out through a posthuman understanding of embodiment opposed to the neoliberal paradigm (Astrida Niemanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. p. 19).

Ivan L. Munuera is a New York-based scholar, critic, and curator

working at the intersection of culture, technology, politics, and bodily practices in the modern period and on the global stage. Since 2015 he has been developing his dissertation at Princeton University on the architecture of HIV/AIDS. His work has been published in Log, Thresholds, Folio, The Architect's Newspaper, Perspecta *(upcoming issue 53), and* El País*, among others; and developed a series of projects for international events, including Venice Architecture Biennale (2021), Istanbul Design Biennale (2016) and Seoul Biennial of Architecture and Urbanism (2017). He has curated exhibitions at Museo Reina Sofía (The Schizos, 2009), Ludwig Museum (*ACAX Residency*, 2010), Princeton University (*Liquid La Habana*, 2018), and CA2M (*Pop Politics*, 2012-2013), among others.*

Manu Alba is an architect, DJ and transmedia artist. Their work explores the construction of subjectivity and their environments through digital images.