

## When dissident bodies proclaim their places as dissonant bodies

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THEMATIC ARTICLE

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**Abstract** *This essay aims to present the concept of dissonant bodies and give visibility to these bodies in the field of public health from anti-colonial and queer perspectives. These bodies are often considered dissidents. Their existence is considered abject, disposable, and marginalized by neoliberal and necropolitical society. It is presented as another possibility in the face of the logic and political strategies of hegemonic reproduction of capital-life and health policies. It debates tensions of new possibilities and alternatives of other modes of existence and inclusive worlds, in which all lives are considered, in their singularities and differences, radically equal in the validation of their ways of living.*

**Key words** *Disparate, minority, and vulnerable populations, Gender-inclusive policies, Gender and health, Sexual and gender minorities, Value of life*

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## Introduction

What is the value of life? All life is precarious since we are all killable. However, precariousness distribution is unequal. Some lives are “deadlier” than others, in a society that normalizes deaths of transvestites and transsexual women at age 35<sup>1</sup>, that 0.5% of undergraduate students are people with disabilities (PwD)<sup>2</sup>, that less than 1% of formal workers in Brazil are PwD<sup>3</sup>, and who will be chosen to breathe in the acute treatment of COVID-19<sup>4</sup>. Who can breathe during police stops?<sup>5</sup> Who can live and who must die? As Judith Butler<sup>6</sup> warned us, which precariousness, public policies regarding education, work, food, health, and legal status are developed for social equity and equality? What are the “mournable” lives in our public world? What lives are worth mourning?

This essay brings to the debate the perspective that lives need their bodies to live. Thus, throughout the text, we will use the notion of “bodies” in all its variants in the Portuguese language instead of “subjects”. The notion of “subject” used most frequently in *Collective Health* is already a significant advance if we compare it to individuals as group units. Subjects like those who act because they think but also feel and assume their values and sexual, professional, family, and social identities<sup>7,8</sup>.

However, we understand the need to produce, from within this same space of collective health, a debate based on bodies and their singularities to enrich this field that, historically, is a producer of other ways of understanding the needs and health problems of society and the most appropriate coping strategies. “What a body can do is the nature and limit of its power to be affected”<sup>9</sup> (p.147). We start from the principle that each body is singularity and multiplicity; it is a novelty, a flow of intensities with continuous and unlimited subjectivation processes. It is constant motion – even if it does not move, like some bodies called “disabled”<sup>10</sup>.

Standards have been forged over the centuries for what an average, acceptable body would be, and bodies falling outside this “standard” are abnormal bodies<sup>11</sup>, and some bodies are made invisible in their singularities and differences because they produce discomfort. A body with the power to act and the power of life self-expresses through the affections of which it is capable. It is an ethical-aesthetic-political body and not a moral body from the incarcerating, prescriptive, and judgmental perspective, which disdains, seg-

regates, scares, attacks, humiliates, despises, kills, and categorizes such bodies as invalid, with no right to existence.

Bodies are ongoing projects in constant production and yet to be discovered: the exercise of powers, discursive practices, knowledge relationships, and the singular and plural establishment of different ways of existing as open-ended works. “The establishment of each always implies countless singular experiments (freedom), successive determinations (efficacy), and a profusion of mistakes (errability)”<sup>12</sup> (p.394). However, this production is captured by a production of subordinate bodies, an imperative logic of power over the existence of the other. A production of market-bodies cataloged within a normality interested in fulfilling a social function in neoliberal logic.

In an inverse and perverse logic, establishing ways of existing as bodies in the world have been confiscated and are pre-conceived within the place where we were born, in color marked on our skin, our biological sex, in each “absence of normality” emerging in our bodies. The construction is given, diminishes, kills, and chooses.

The naturalization we saw of people killed by COVID-19, for example, reveals how bodies are unworthy of mourning as they were condemned to death. Bodies of older adults with comorbidities and disabilities, poor, Black, favela residents, quilombola, inmates, Indigenous people, women, transsexuals, transvestites, queers... bodies that no longer had a livable life through the machinery of capital, resist, rise by own luck or through the power of social movements. Bodies are neglected by the hegemonic, hygienist, fascist public power, which deprives rights and slaughters dreams and new possibilities.

Here, we are interested in highlighting the framework of failed, abject, and dissident bodies, not as successful as expected in the neoliberal world, in this sense, offering and debating other possible narratives, their powers, differences, inputs, utopias, alternatives for fully livable lives and other possibilities of the world. Furthermore, we propose activating the necessary plugs to expand the volumes of these diverse voices to open up possibilities of confronting “the grotesque inequalities of everyday life”<sup>13</sup> (p.23). Queer people have always been seen as failures. However, these failures are their power because being inadequate, in some circumstances, can be precisely the possibility of a more cooperative, creative, and surprising way of existing individually and collectively.

In these possible relational compositions in power games, looking at how dissident classified bodies live their lives in this dance, we just need to look, for example, at LGBTIA+ bodies (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transsexuals, Transvestites, Transgenders, Intersex, Asexual, and others more), queer bodies, or allegedly disabled bodies, madmen, Black, women, poor, fat, children, older adults, Indigenous, and other disposable bodies, according to the necropolitical classifications that attempt to vertically and mercilessly influence these existences, discipline, standardize, and exterminate them.

In this sense, the word *corpas* article is incorporated into the meanings of the words “*corpas*” and “*corpes*”, considering the fair demands of different social segments to deconstruct and give new meaning to the naturalized, verticalized, and colonizing grammar. The word’s gender tension brings linguistic constructions of control and exclusion to the fore. The nomenclature “*corpa*” is a claim of transvestites and transsexual women, who coined the word’s feminization<sup>1</sup>. “*Corpe*” has already been proposed by the non-binary language movement, in dispute for an inclusive language. The option to use the gender variants of the word “body” in this article alternately aims to elucidate the tensions to the norms of the Portuguese language by “*corpas*” and “*corpes*” not included in the so-called cultural norm since our language is alive and in constant construction.

Brazil is the country that kills the most LGBT and Transsexual and Transvestite populations in the world<sup>14</sup>, and one that kills the most social movement activists and women through femicide<sup>15</sup>. These bodies’ deaths are naturalized. There is generally no mourning or astonishment at the violence committed daily. Getting older would be a dream for lives that have always struggled to stay alive, from when they wake up until they go to bed. Death is a constant threat, and social death implies dismissing countless dreams, including that of growing old. These bodies are made invisible when they grow old and left to their own devices.

Bringing to the debate the need to see these allegedly dissident bodies aims to produce other ways of understanding existences and their several productions and needs, such as their health needs. It targets bringing different elements to produce coping strategies in harmony with these bodies, and not a coping practice that continues to discard and produce dissonant narratives for these bodies.

### The dissonant bodies

This article presents the dissonant body concept to bodies that the neoliberal, patriarchal, and necropolitical world positions as less valued, more or less human or inhuman, savage, monsters, aberrations, queer, worthless, and abject. The concept of dissonant instead of dissident bodies brings other chords of new arrangements that wake us up socially, that awaken in us other visions and possibilities of worlds, in musical compositions in which “perfect” chords, those limited to the classic intervals between notes (major and minor thirds and perfect fifths and sevenths), need the dissonant ones, those that experience all the other intervals since the composition’s beauty is also created with them in harmonious coexistence with the differences in another musical aesthetic of existence. We can extract the chords in the sound produced by the body-strings when they are stretched and vibrate, without breaking, in this boundary between stretching to meet the other in their difference, in the stretches necessary for resistance flexibility, like the walker’s tightrope, which can only support her when stretched at the right point, in tune: dissonant because it sounds by saying.

On the other hand, the invisibilization of dissonant bodies in producing their singularities and differences is very visible in the discomfort they produce. Dissonant bodies forge possibilities for other cartographies, between the lines, in the interstices, in between, rhizomatically and vibratically.

A rhizome neither begins nor concludes. It is always found in the middle, between things, inter-being, and intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance. The tree imposes the verb “to be”, but the rhizome’s fabric is the conjunction “and... and... and...”. This conjunction has enough force to shake and uproot the verb to be. “[...] The mean is not an average; however, it is where things acquire speed. Between things it does not designate a localizable correlation that runs from one to another reciprocally, but perpendicularly, a transverse motion that carries them from one to the other, a stream without beginning or end, which gnaws at its two banks and acquires speed in the middle”<sup>16</sup> (p.37).

These *intermezzos* are immaterializable but inhabitable by dissonant bodies and can correspond to silences in music. In many types of music, such as samba, the music is often accented before the downbeat, and the downbeat is reached by already sounding the notes that had

been growing in intensity, anticipating the downbeat, and paving the way for it. This is syncopation, which deconstructs the rigidity of four by four – a type of time signature typical of Western music. It is a break in rhythm.

In samba, we have an instrument called “*cuica*”: a rod attached to a skin that produces sound when sliding over this rod, vibrating the skin of the *cuica* that cries happily, with its sound also sliding along the four by four tempo, not discriminating the strong and weak, just as the dissonant bodies slide crying happily between the beats. Not every body is silence or syncope all the time, and not every body is time all the time. The dissonant bodies in motion are valued under interests that cross the power games that take place in action, all the time being captured in our ultraliberal existence. When this happens, samba is crossed, but a new break can be made, subverting interests, making power structures gradually collapse, and resuming the musical flow. There is a constant game of capturing and leaking in dissident bodies, as no frame can fit a body that leaks in an activist production of existence.

Reading the lines without interlines is impossible when transporting the logic of samba syncopation to the text. The interlines are the breath of letters, words, gaps, blanks, intervals, and a ditch of “between” that enables a different understanding of the scriptures. It would not be the same reading in a textual layout process without the between, blank, and interlines. Bodies-discursivity needs vacuums, voids, backbeats, and in-betweens so that they can read and be read. Dissonant bodies are never static, catatonic, framed, and unreactive. On the contrary, in the worst things that stigmatize them, in their most singular differences, this is where their dissidence pulsates to disentangle and subvert the impositions that attempt to imprison them<sup>6</sup>.

Their desires to be/exist in the world, with their differences valued in full, make the dissonant bodies subvert the imposed frames. Not that subversion is optional, but it is a matter of survival. Either subvert or die. So, when these bodies decide to live, subversion is an inevitable tsunami that disrupts and deconstructs the order imposed on them to rebuild a life for themselves. What was devalued by the imprisoning and necropolitical system of normalizations and norms becomes, from the dissonant queer power, the driving differential of the turning point: difference as a driving force, a disruptive power for a humanity that is less reproducing of norms, systemic repetitions of standardized models in the

wake of serial productions of life, as in a factory of people and relationships that do not deviate from the quality control standard. Quality here is understood as docile and standardized bodies that respond to subjective and submissive rationale. Being non-standard ceases to be a factory defect. It becomes a contributory difference in the dislocating and necessary creativity for new possibilities and experiences and the production of life and health, in another search outside the serial patterns, the little boxes, the fittings, but looking for unusual encounters new, other states.

The issue that permeates such subverting possibilities is knowing which musicality can produce dissonance in bodies captured by overwhelming classifications. What chords awaken their dissonances in the dissident body? How can we awaken devalued bodies and subvert defects into powers? How can we transform them so that what was previously a defect becomes their principal value as a constitutive singularity of other shifting, questioning, and disruptive rationales?

What can dissonant bodies do? Composing only with other dissonant bodies? Perhaps they alone did not form the harmonies necessary for aesthetic composition and ethically essential for other possible worlds. The aesthetics of the possible requires all bodies, bodies that are not always the same thing, as they sometimes vibrate resonantly and are some other times also “perfect”, like conventional chords, and, thus, produced in desire and existential immanence.

The composition only makes sense when it touches and vibrates: a vibrating body. When playing in the sense of sound execution. When it touches toward affections that enhance the power of existing, since the...

*...vibrating body – is touched by the invisible and knows: a first movement of desire is now triggered. In their power to affect and be affected, bodies attract or repel each other in the encounter. Effects are generated from the movements of attraction and repulsion: bodies are taken over by a mixture of affects. Erotic, sentimental, aesthetic, perceptive, and cognitive... So, their vibrating body goes further: such intensities, when they arise, already outline a second movement of desire, as imperceptible as the first. They keep rehearsing, albeit clumsily, manners and mannerisms, gestures, facial expressions, words... It is just that, you know, intensities seek to form masks to present themselves [...] Affects only gain actual thickness when performed<sup>7</sup> (p.31).*

When it touches, in the sense of vibrating touch. When it touches, in the sense of shelter.

Dissonant bodies are touchable bodies. It is necessary to establish new modes of existence in an art-movement and music-bodies, not the disciplinary ones. However, that body-movement that comes from its essence, ways of moving and being moved, the movement of bodies based on the musicality and genuine movement of each, with other bodies/*corpas/corpes* in its multiplicities; from each body/*corpa/corpe*, strings that sound, stretched leathers that produce the drumming.

### Captures and ruptures - other compositions

As early as in the 1940s, Canguilhem alleged that “normal” could no longer be restricted to a statistical average because, when it comes to life, what matters is the plastic and autopoietic capacity to establish new adaptive norms for oneself whenever new situations require it<sup>18</sup>. “Normality”, that which is still imposed today, is that of some statistical average of being that interests the imposing social groups and their white, elitist, Eurocentric, colonizing capture production, interdicting existences, rights, and possibilities of being and living in difference. Thus, the norm is based on the dominance and control of bodies, normalizing them to perpetuate power in neoliberalism.

This essay aims to give visibility to bodies/*corpas/corpes* thrown outside a specific normality, which are not accepted as powerful bodies but seen as obligated, abject bodies. Therefore, they must remain on the sidelines, hidden, silent, but clinging to the right to their existence, in their dissonance vis-à-vis the so-called “normal” serialized bodies. They are bodies that “sully” the world just by existing, which is why their existence is “allowed” in some specific places, such as in rehabilitation centers and “special” schools for bodies with disabilities, in concert spaces for transvestite bodies, prisons, favelas and ditches for Black bodies. At the same time, the absence of these bodies in other places where lives happen is naturalized, such as schools, universities, the legislative, executive, and judicial spheres, in places of work, leisure, and all others. These bodies are allegedly less competent for life and rejectable and disposable existences.

Thus, the production, control, and surveillance of these bodies is a political construct as a dispute over ways of living and the policies of existence, intending to manufacture docile bodies that must have a normative and normalizing function for capitalist society, devices of a bio-power to control individuals, populations, and docile and fragmented bodies<sup>19</sup>.

Thus, the compulsory consonance of each body in the normative, disciplining, regulating, and classificatory lens is framed as dissonance, disconcert, maladjustment, and excessiveness. However, it asserts itself in its genuine and singular nature. Bodies are stigmatized when they should only be nuanced, without those who classify realizing that stigma is the body’s constitutive sign. Which body does not have a scar? Just the dancer’s, reminiscent of Chico Buarque’s song.

### Decolonizing bodies

The debate on decoloniality and counter-coloniality helps us understand society’s troubling indifference to violence systematically inflicted against the “different”, “non-human”, “without culture”, “without knowledge”, and “without power”, the dissonant.

Coloniality did not disappear with the end of historical colonialism. It remains a pillar in the ways of thinking, the preferences-behaviors-attitudes circulating in our society, and, more than that, it represents a thought that keeps overshadowing and repressing any other way of thinking, seeing, and acting outside the norm. Pure production of knowledge-power that remains alive and produces “shadow” in knowledge, politics, social organization, work relationships, the production of thought, education, health, everyday life, culture, beliefs, common sense, and self-image, that is, in the way of producing life.

Colonialism consists of a movement of domination towards the establishment of colonies. It remains alive and intense in social relationships, even after “independence” has been proclaimed. However, it is now updated under a “new guise”. From this perspective, coloniality is more permanent, a continuous “mark” in discourses, and consolidating itself in preferences-behaviors-attitudes and practices that mainly aim to preserve the eternal subordination of colonized peoples.

“Coloniality” is an essential concept in the discussion of dissonant bodies, as it does not only refer to racial classification but is a broader situation, one of the axes of the knowledge-power system, because, as such, it traverses the control of access to gender, collective authority, work, and subjectivity/intersubjectivity<sup>20</sup>. María Lugones also proposes gender coloniality, which is relational, and for this reason, a subjective mode of domination, crossed by gender and race intersectionality<sup>20</sup>.

It is necessary to contest all colonizing forms so that bodies can “change the game” and decol-

onize knowledge and beings, opening up possibilities of listening to the voices of non-humans, the invisible, women, Black people, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTIs+<sup>20</sup>.

### **Mouths that imprison**

The enunciating mouths that regulate, discipline, classify, monitor, and punish such bodies are those of the colonizers and their servants, the holders of established powers, who decide punishments for lives that they consider to be outside the rules they impose. They operate in a productivity system based on the repetition of serialized lives for existences that adapt to the logics and political strategies of hegemonic reproduction of capital-life, without tensioning or demanding other possibilities and utopian alternatives of other modes of existence and inclusive worlds, in which all lives are considered in their singularities and differences, radically equal in the validation of their ways of living.

The mouth that speaks about the other's body colonizes and imprisons with its slogans, using all the machinery and artifacts available to publicly punish them, making it evident in the discourses that imply stigmatization, denial, exclusions, and deaths. Besides thinking about whose mouth speaks, let us consider how that mouth says, what functions it operates, and from what places and what is being engendered by and with that mouth. What tone and rhythm determine the sonances and dissonances, marking which rhythmic spaces and which slowness? What does the normative mouth of the liberal world say and not say? Many tools are used in these processes, creating inaccessibility and classifications in comprehensive health, hindering rights to life in exercising their citizenship. The mouth that says and classifies the other as "dissident" is never categorized as such, placing itself in a position of superiority vis-à-vis the classified, now subordinated. Therefore, it is necessary to tension the orders put into play and highlight the power of mouths, sayings, statements, and failed existences. As Butler<sup>1</sup> points out, the very human construction also produces the more or less human or inhuman, the humanly inconceivable, and the unintelligible and abject bodies.

This foundational repudiation portrayed by Butler is linked to the imperative of success and failure based on neoliberal settings, which impose rules for games of power relationships and falsely highlight the notion of efforts to bodies that will manage to be successful, whether through dedi-

cation, overcoming, or merits and as per different marketing ideals, colonizers, Euro-centered, North-centered, white, Christian, that is, under disciplinary logics, frameworks that normalize/standardize specific bodies as capital-bodies. The bodies of those who are unequal do not have or deserve the same places in the relational game of power since they have not achieved merit. In this logic of producing social abysses, many die trying to fit in to belong to a place they will never access. The focus is abandoning collective and community logic to center on individualism, personal overcoming, effort, and self-help that the system tries to impose as solidarity replacement<sup>13</sup>.

How do mouths classify bodies/*corpas/corpes* as dissonant? Through their mouths, but much more by repeating what the mouths of the hegemonic media, Medicine, laws, legal system, the global north, white people, colonizers, and bourgeoisie say. They make use of toxic strategies of overcoming, persuasion, and alienation in the disproportionate personal effort to achieve a specific successful end and cause lives to be subjectively dismantled, offering themselves to a voluntary servitude of endless sacrifices that do not lead them to places of production of shared meanings and possible worlds, but lives monetarily considered in the perverse liberal world game. On the other hand, the bodies that achieve success and the desired market success produce failures. Over how many bodies does it need to go, and how many failures does this ideal produce? Queer theorist Jack Halberstam says failure allows lines of escape from punitive norms, in escapes from controlled, disciplined lives, making holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life based on individualized success at the cost of the intersectional imbalance of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and geopolitical location<sup>13</sup>.

### **Health, bodies, and other worlds**

A 21-year-old girl is treated in a hospital in rural Brazil with life-threatening injuries. The doctor realized that it was a matter of abortion complications and, in defiance of the law and, mainly, of his code of ethics, he reported her to the police and testified against his patient. Thus, the young woman was handcuffed while still in the hospital to respond for double homicide<sup>21</sup>. One of the most significant fields of life's needs, health paradoxically bears this mark of coloniality, marking bodies, managing the production of bodies based on a set of supposedly impartial bio-knowledge, with its technologies for manipu-

lating life. It has been building great strategies to monitor and control some corporate groups over time: classifying, disciplining, and regulating. This war apparatus of which health is a part produces a necropolitical logic in the sense of bodies that can and should be eliminated. It exponentially inflates an immense population made very vulnerable by the neoliberal way of building societal policies and impoverishing lives.

Although there is a capture and desire to colonize and cancel these existences, the dissonant bodies/*corpas/corpes*, in their life productions, leak from exercising the sovereignty of the disciplinarians<sup>22</sup>. In other places, the forces of production of life escape while the forces of body subordination and docility operate. We have the becoming, the creation of networks of existences to live in, the production of more life in life, in precariousness. Such bodies affect and are affected. They produce the strength to exist and the power to act. They are movement and composition<sup>23</sup> and resistance.

The so-called “disabled” or dissident bodies that dare to break the bonds of normative strings or that break these bonds simply because they exist as a race, gender, or class, can take advantage of the strings as devices for resignification and production of other sounds outside the bonds of denials that were imposed on them to, authentically, create more lives in their lived lives, producing other meanings for themselves in the relational field with others.

These new sounds are produced all the time, but they are only sometimes heard. When heard, they are not always considered in a process of reproducing the hegemonic power that is somewhat impregnated in our genetic code, but that we need to break with an art of establishing new modes of existence, as proposed by Peter Pál Pelbart<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, bodies can leak in between, in the fold, and another establishment of ways of existing that emerge in resistance and fissures. Other possible worlds seek to establish other perspectives for existence that do not respond to a natural evolutionary and universal pattern. What can a dissonant body do in society? How far can it go? Existence, the production of life and the becoming escape, as new authenticities are established: rebellion, resistance, insurgency, subversion, essential movement in the production of more life in itself, and strangeness that produces other aesthetic concepts.

May these dissonant bodies produce themselves in action through life in the writings of the heart and speak and sound in compositions

necessary for new future aesthetics through exacerbated precariousness and fragilities: this is the driving force for producing folds, holes, and escape lines.

### Concluding, opening

Dissonance is linked to the classification of the body that speaks, the statement that counts, and the bodies that count. Who can work? Who can live? Who can breathe? Who deserves punishment? Who deserves to die? Who represents an expense for the State? Who is the sinful body? Who can live? The mouths of decolonial bodies can and must speak for themselves. However, by what means or vehicles if the mass ones derive from colonial mouths? Hence the need to tension dominance in the most diverse fields, with the production of other discursive regimes: in radical media, in mediativism, in free-mediatism, in popular, community, collaborative, participatory, and democratic communication; in Medicine, there are many more; in human rights; in the rights to comprehensive health, social security, and political participation; in access policy, in all fields of rights; and in the public health community.

Decolonized mouths should compete for meanings and spaces and the power of being able to talk about themselves in the production, circulation, and recognition of these narratives, participating not in a passive relationship of subject and object but in a legitimate space to build their existences in circulation with other knowledge and practices: a relationship of symmetry, as proposed by Latour<sup>24</sup>, in difference and singularities, recognizing multiplicities and these mouths, bodies/*corpas/corpes*, these other narratives and many other existences. May collective health also bring these other narratives to the debate to produce care for all possible bodies.

May the dissonant bodies live wholly in an art composition that establishes diverse and plural modes of existence beyond ableist, sexist, feminist, classist, machismo-based, racist, LGBTphobic, transphobic, and colonial terrorism.

*The ideal game is without rules and winner-loser. It is the affirmation of all chance. It is a game of nonsense, as it does not place a set of distinct objects whose agency would organize a meaning under the sign of the shining star or good luck. The objects of the ideal game are impersonal, not organized by the winning formula that would give the dice but by the throws of the dice each time. The sea has no grammar, only an orphaned alpha-*

*bet: its only truth is the ephemerality of truth. This denial of the traditional game imposes the affirmation of the proscribed chance without annihilating the game: it elevates it to its full power of chance. The wave is the surfer's chance, just as the tube is the experiment of immanence for him. The surfer is the wave with the wave, not wave upon wave; he does not exist only for that which will make him victorious but is realized by affirming chance; we certainly have a beautiful definition of being, always in becoming. He is pure and sensitive to listening to the environment where he dances with*

*his wave-body so as not to "dance" in life. To slide is first and foremost to reduce the mop, the fall, and the "wipe out"<sup>25</sup>.*

We must persist in re-existing, producing multiple and diverse lives! There, where normalizing regulations only see weaknesses and flaws, revealing that they are also strengths! From dissident bodies to bodies that live by the writings of the heart, sayings that are resonant, decolonial, and dislocating. May each body explore its intensive powers to invent anti-capital ways of life.

## **Collaborations**

All authors participated in the article's conception, writing, and review.



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