



Eremu magnetiko lehor bat (A dry magnetic field)

An exhibition by Santiago F Mosteyrín
curated by Garazi Pascual and Iván Gómez

The gazelles were dying.

The sun was scorching the plains of Kruger Park. The sky, clear and cruel, stretched over a land that longed for rain. In these conditions, life was a fragile balance: the gazelles craved the green leaves of the acacias; the trees, in spite of everything, offered their delicacies to the animals.

But something strange began to happen: the gazelles were dying. It was not hunger that had killed them, nor the predators that lurked hungrily. The gazelles, paradoxically, lay with full stomachs.

The mystery was hidden in the leaves of the acacias, wise trees that had learned to survive in a hostile environment. The gazelles were dying because the acacias held a secret, a silent weapon.

With the drought, the gazelles crowded around the acacias, devouring their leaves. The acacias, exhausted, defended themselves. In an act of self-protection, they began to flood their leaves with tannins. And the gazelles began to die. The poison of the tannins acted silently, preventing the nutrients from being absorbed.

The cruelty of nature showed no mercy: the gazelles, satiated and satisfied, died without being able to digest the food they had so desperately sought. On the horizon, the acacias remained indifferent, though haughty. And an ancient lesson resonated in the wind: life must be preserved at any cost. In nature, there is no such thing as a moral balance: it is a dance where life and death are inseparable.



Immunity protects the individual and the social body from external risks, through legal, political and biological barriers; it is a strategy that allows the preservation of life, and is necessary and oppressive in safeguarding our own existence. At the same time, it implies the danger of isolating or excluding the other, leading to a denial of the logic of community. Modernity is marked by an expansion of immunity that weakens openness to communal life. The Italian thinker Roberto Esposito discusses immunity in the context of biopolitics, that is, the management of life by power. Esposito emphasizes how the logic of immunity can lead to destructive processes that end up attacking the very life they seek to protect.

Fragility is inherent to the human being; overcoming this fragility has been a constant obsession in the history of humanity and is still with us today. Historically, this vulnerability has been addressed from the perspective of immunity, that is, through the creation of technical, biological or political devices for our protection. However, attempts to overcome fragility become devices of control and biopolitical practice: immunity marks the political body and the singular; the cracks of our humanity deepen, community erodes, and the body shatters.

It is in the contradiction between that which protects and constrains at the same time (*immunitas*) that the community acquires its political character as a place of resistance against excessive immunisation. Questions therefore emerge in the dialectic between community and immunity: how to make a dent in the immunisation of life without this becoming a deadly act? The paradigm of self-immunisation helps us to understand the structural link between modernity and biopolitics and, synchronically, highlights the difficulty of postulating a merely relational ontology:

“By placing the body at the centre of politics and the potential for disease at the centre of the body, it makes sickness, on the one hand, the outer margin from which life must continually distance itself, and, on the other, the internal fold which dialectically brings it back to itself.”¹

¹ Roberto Esposito: *Immunitas. The Protection and Negation of Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press (2011), page 15



In the heart of the Sahara, where the world is only sand and silence prevails, lived the Tree of Ténéré, a solitary acacia that reigned over 800 kilometres of emptiness. Witness to travellers and the passing of time, impassive in the face of the hostility of the desert. However, it was not the storms or the drought that felled it. In 1973, a drunk driver, in his pathetic humanity, crashed into the tree and extinguished its kingdom. Thus, the solitude of the desert became absolute.

For Esposito, the community is not a closed space or a self-sufficient totality, but a bond based on exposure to the other. Etymologically, *munus* refers to an obligation, to a shared debt². In this sense, the community is based on openness to the other and on sharing that common debt. However, this openness also implies a vulnerability that can be conflictive, since being part of a community means always being “incomplete”, linked to others in a relationship of reciprocity.

Santiago F Mosteyrín, in *Eremu magnetiko lehor bat* (A dry magnetic field), places us before these apparent contradictions, face to face with violent fragilities and atmospheric bodies. Through the possibility of breaking magnetic fields, symbolised by the desert, he takes us into a hostile environment where human shortcomings become almost insurmountable. Using colours, patterns and subtle environments, Mosteyrín takes us to these fateful places: the works create spaces or bring together overwhelming myths and news for bodies and landscapes. The desert becomes the dry magnetic field where the fragility of the human being is exposed, the exhibition warn us about the inherent weakness of humanity. In an unprotected scenario, we experience the wound, we assume the fragile.

The contemporary genealogy of community addresses the concept in a non-substantialist manner, while otherness, in contrast, is constitutive of the self (being-in-relation or being-in-common). Thus, community moves away from the impolitical: starting from the Latin root of *communitas*, as a notion that renounces individual identity, the

² See pages 3 to 6 of Roberto Esposito: *Communitas. The Origin and Destiny of Community*. Stanford University Press (2010). Here the author reviews the etymology of “community,” emphasising the relationship between the gift and the obligation to share it. For example: “(...) once someone has accepted the *munus*, an obligation (*onus*) has been created to exchange it either in terms of goods or service [servizio]. Once again the superimposition between “gift” and “office” comes into view (...)”. Page 4.



process of opening up to otherness begins: “*Community understood as a relationship of exposure in the context of the empty place of a gift (munus) that is shared.*”³

The dream of aseptic modern reason isolated the individual in cold Kantian ethics. But scientific progress did not bring the intended moral and social progress. The world wars left a broken humanity; the categorical imperative became impossible. From now on, we must therefore understand ourselves as passive and active agents of pain and fragility.

Santiago F Mosteyrín unmaskes the structural processes and dangers of contemporary and digital immunisation and, at the same time, by uncovering these processes and by having dismantled the consensus of modern dichotomies, his practice presents us with a constant tension.

From these cracks emerges the relational and communal need: care for the self, care for the other. This volte-face presents fragility not as that modern and negative idea of a condition to overcome, but instead as the power thanks to which collectivity and commitment to a common world are recovered. With the political reappraisal of the world-in-common comes the responsibility to understand the concept of us-others and to attend to the wounds inflicted by the normative discourse. From this gaze towards the margins, power is eroded and coexists with strange, digital and prosthetic bodies. Thus, an organic sense of the technical emerges, latent from its very conception: to tear, suture and erode the interstice between (im)material categories and to regard the relational capacity of the medium as its own organism.

To remain in the community is to inhabit a place of resistance, to inhabit the foreign; that is, a space where immunitarianism does not build individual and collective protection devices against otherness based on singularities. Resistance requires an active political position; it emerges from the need for an affirmative biopolitics where life becomes the subject of politics and not the object. Through the space of the common, the dialectic between immune protection and destruction must be separated. Therefore, in order to escape from control devices, politics must be situated in spaces of common dimensions, in such a way that it cannot be appropriated by individuals or states.

³ Marina Garcés:
Un mundo común.
Barcelona: Bellaterra,
2013, pág. 125.

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These spaces of resistance must be located at the communal level. This entire process must be set in motion without having mechanisms to protect the common from the private, the own, and the immune, and also without having a feasible language of the in-common displaced by the process of modernisation or globalisation (it must be taken into account that the common is not the public nor is it the global, it is something unknown and refractory to the conceptual categories that are organised by the general immune apparatus). In effect, the commitment to affirmative biopolitics is based on this possibility of operating and thinking beyond this horizon, through the impersonal or foreign.

Santiago F Mosteyrín builds spaces of resistance where he forces us to look at our relationships with bodies outside discourse: liminal, (in)organic, prosthetic. He takes us into voids where violent sensualities lurk, exploded bodies that violate our protective barriers. Stitches that immerse us in distorted landscapes; manual glitches for hallucinogenic topographies.

We let the fracture permeate our presence and mark our body. Hear, listen and feel the vibrant matter of erosions and frictions from which misfortune emerges. Wounds in a desert, resistant and sensual, part of a dry landscape that exhausts our bodies.

Garazi Pascual

In Donostia-San Sebastian, January 23rd, 2025.

The exhibition **Eremu magnetiko lehor bat (A dry magnetic field)** by Santiago F Mosteyrín arises, at the same time, as a preamble and annex to **Forzar lo frágil**, a research project by Iván Gómez and Garazi Pascual based on the concept of fragility and how it permeates contemporary artistic practice.