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Liberation through Consumption: Six Hypotheses on the Passage from Exclusive Neoliberalism to the New Runfla Capitalism

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1. Throughout this last decade and a half, and in parallel to the general crisis of global capitalism, a wide popular urban sector of the periphery (from Argentina but also from elsewhere) sought a favorable cycle that included themselves in consumption. One could think of this new access to wealth as a process of liberation (unlike the orthodox critique that interprets it as *alienation*), with the caveat of amplifying the very notion of “liberation”.

2. With the increase of consumption there are new modes of sensing, desiring, thinking, socializing; but also other ways of being, loving, enjoying, and dying that have been radically altered. New possibilities emerge and the traditional knowledge of governing populations radically breaks down. Far from pointing to a decline in the old forms of social organization, collective action opens a new gap in a time that is unprecedented and incalculable. The feast of consumption and the social conflict are the new promiscuous standards that enable the transfiguration and organization of the everyday. Many actors belong to this new process, more often than not against their will, such as the unions, the NGOs, the grassroots and social movements

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² This article was translated by Gerardo Muñoz. It was originally published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/6/21/liberation-through-consumption-six-hypotheses-on-the-passage-from-exclusive-neoliberalism-to-the-new-runfla-capitalism> on June 21st, 2016.

(whether in alliance with the State or not) and citizens in pursuit of justice.

3. The old neoliberal regime that produced social exclusion was destroyed, first and foremost, from below; that is, from the daily experience of the great majority that populates the periphery. *Runfla*³ capitalism was built on its corpse. *Runfla* capitalism entails a new superior stage of consumption, of popular stability that is both festive and inclusive. The 'good government', parallel to this stage, was its necessary accomplice by unleashing a populist rhetoric that took great efforts in sustaining and fomenting its participation in this process.

4. If we posit the idea of liberation at the center it is because the engine of *runfla* capitalism is consumption by those from below. This took place, mainly, in the spatial periphery of the world-system, as it was called in the past but that in our times has transformed into the effective BRIC axis. The success of *runfla* capitalism depends, I want to emphasize, on its access to consumption as the authentic political kernel of the current transformations underway in the region. The new government of 'restoration', at least in Argentina, challenges these transformations, even though they are defended on a daily basis in the streets by *runfla* lives.

5. This process of liberation always has to be understood ambiguously and in constant dispute. It is true that this process of consumption can also be interpreted on the basis of creating new dependencies (in the "objective" sense: global markets, financial, and technological systems; but also in the "subjective" sense, such as the pattern of consumption or the constant subordination of time to guarantee the vitality of consumption, etc.). Nevertheless, we insist on the fact that these processes contribute in vitalizing *runfla* lives through consumption. Those from below (the youth, the thieves, the immigrants, the *cholas*) without ever abandoning being so, learned to exploit the social hierarchies for their own benefit. They do did so through the technique of permanent transgression in the territories to the point of making the

³ Translator Note: *Runfla*: The term *runfla* is not easy to define or translate, and thus we have chosen to retain the original Spanish term. According to the *Diccionario etimológico del lunfardo* (Penguin, 2011), *runfla* is characteristic of the plebe, "gente de mal vivir", referring to the lumpen and the indecent. In an exchange with Valeriano, he reminds me that it also has the connotation of 'obscure business', 'illegality', and 'low life'. Valeriano wishes that this term were not reduced to its *lunfardo* etymology. According to Valeriano, *runfla* necessarily lacks conceptual definition and should be understood just by its sound.

territories incomprehensible, irrational, extensive, festive, and ungovernable (at least from the point of view of the old art of governing).

6. This force will not cease, since the '*runfla* vitality' is confronted from multiple registers: statistical indexes, imposed restoration, solidarity and depolitization, and a recycled Franciscan poverty. Isn't the emphasis on Christian 'love' an attempt to capture the liberating force of this process? These struggles for the process of liberation are waged furiously on a daily basis. Today these are more sharply expressed due to the new political scenario. We have reached the exhaustion of 'good' and permissive governments. There is a long lasting confrontation between the *runfla* lives and the repressive state (and privatized) apparatus, and from what can be seen today there is no truce in sight. In any case, *runfla* capitalism is inseparable from a generalized form of urban micro-guerrillas, and the micro-politics of life, where consumption, the feast, and the new conflict open worlds to come. These worlds are far more interesting than the previous ones, but less comprehended by the standardized and conventional forms of analysis.