

Summoned! : 17th April 2020 : Jean-Daniel Matet [here](#)

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Summoned!

Summoned: it starts when you list your symptoms to several different people after dialing 15—the French medical emergency number—also known as SAMU. You are taken more and more seriously and then summoned urgently to the nearest center. Everything changes, you stop being a man with the flu, and become a sick person, at risk... of dying, ... of contagion, etc. My memory of these first hours is vague, caught up in the contingency and the materiality of things.

Thirty-six hours later, my state of health is considered alarming and I am offered the possibility of being admitted to a new top-rated intensive care unit that has just opened. I do not hesitate. Would you like to sign the agreement that grants you access to experimental treatment? Hydroxychloroquine? Yes, of course! I just want to pull through and the night call to the consultant, at 3am in the morning, announcing the urgent need to put me on a ventilator did nothing to reassure me. Nothing is likely to reassure you at this time of your life.

Abandoned to the other of technology and science, to this medicine, the one that I chose not to pursue, and which today provokes not only the 8pm clap for carers, but also the limitless admiration of media. We had never previously heard a Prime Minister say: “I am not a lawyer, a financier, Enarque,”^[1] ... but repeated throughout the whole length of his speech “I am not a doctor”. I agree with him, this medicine of good students who did not choose to go into finance, who conserved a part of the ideal that seeks the well-being of others, deserves our respect and admiration.

But to experience it is something else: have you ever wondered how you live through such an experience? There are certainly technical answers in medical literature. What happens to these bodies manipulated, turned over—as I was later told—to allow this intensive care.

I had been kidnapped by crooks, who dragged me from one country to the next. Exchanges took place in all languages, those I could understand, like Spanish and Portuguese, but also in Asian languages that were incomprehensible to me. Finally, their objective became clear—it was to make me shoot a film. At this point in my life, wasn't it about time for me to show what I knew in such a context? For this, it was necessary to undergo certain transformations and to resist a kind of poisoning that entailed changing my blood with ever more modern technologies. Attempts were made with yellow, blue and finally colourless blood, which was essential.

What struck me, as soon as I woke up and I was able to tell my loved ones, was to what degree I had had to construct a delusion in order to be able to accept my situation.

A delusion in the sense of a neo-construction, which is not a dream whose meaning remains to be interpreted, but a series of assertions, a translation of signs. For the psychotic subject, being confronted with reality doesn't change a thing. I was fortunate that it was otherwise

for me, allowing me to recount this attempt to preserve a body as the place of psychic and subjective experience.

During the time of a “disconnection” [*débranchement*] (curarized to allow artificial respiration) I was at work on a delusion. Was it not a dream with its Freudian unconscious work? No, it was a solid construction, where zones of perplexity attempt to fill themselves with cores of meaning that are always ineffective. But the delusion was trying to create a way through for this subject artificially deprived of a body.

I speak of delusion because I was caught in a story whose inconsistencies I was trying to resolve. No care structure had been accessible on French soil and I therefore found myself, by the mere fact of the initial abduction, in a distant land, an island with a great capacity for care and even for body transformation, a kind of Foundation of the AP-HP^[2] abroad, supported by private funds. Springs which I later identified as the tubes attached to the mask of the respirator invaded my head. The most important thing was to work out how I was going to get back to Paris, when I was so far from it, also by technical conditions. By plane, boat or ambulance? Nobody answered me and I was made to understand that we were not there. Was I going to die far from those dear to me? But what were they doing to get me out of there, all those I knew capable of appealing to those in the highest spheres of influence? Had they abandoned me? At other times, it was enough to wait for the other to take me home. Half cultural trip half business trip, everything was also done to make my life pleasant including getting me to take part in theater shows from times gone by, with old actors who had sought refuge in these distant lands in their advanced old age, earning their fee and seeking to amuse the bizarre tourist that I was. Something like Sacha Guitry in an old boulevard theater.

Everything lasted a long time, the shows, the organization of trips, etc. In one I had to play a part, the other was boring and pathetic. No answer came concerning my return to Paris. And then came a period when the nurses, the nursing staff, confirmed the idea that I was abroad with their clothes (disposable clothes, tightly tied hygiene caps, gloves of a sort of Klein blue), because I had never encountered these uniforms designed to protect against the contagiousness of the virus. Where are you? people kept saying to me. I don't know. It looks like the La Pitié hospital, its architecture, its buildings, but since it is so far away from Paris it can only be a copy. Lights, mobile platforms, like the decks of aircraft-carriers, made these hyper-technical buildings very different from my idea of this Parisian hospital.

I tried to read on the logo of the bed linen or of the equipment “*Oumany* Foundation or something like that”—Assistance Publique de Paris—an invention which implied a link between this establishment and the AP-HP. But it remained mysterious. And these clocks, the ELAMI clocks (that's their brand), whose big hand was almost as short as the little hand, which stood out much more, could only correspond to a local custom. Still when I awoke, the “caregivers’” insistence that I was at La Pitié only reinforced my perplexity.

Now, afterwards, I can see the level of signs I was trying to interpret, despite my “disconnection.” The smells, those of the resuscitation products, seemed to me very strong and persistent. The innumerable noises of the machines, and this degree of patient care by these admirable people who provide the most basic as well as the most technical level of care. Unable to stabilize a response to this emergence of perplexity until I awoke, I have the clear conviction that this delusion is what allowed me to maintain a kind of psychic unity, which might otherwise have exploded.

When I woke up, counting on an imaginary perception of my body, I said I was ready to jump on my bike; but at the same time, I was no more than the reality of a body scattered in each of its functions, incapable of any coordination. Raising my hand or my foot felt like the exertions of an astronaut on a planet with no gravity.

Renouncing the need to find a means of transport and finally recognizing the architecture of this hospital where my student training had taken place, the threats subsided.

A nurse, who finally heard my testimony, suggested I watch a bit of television and I discovered, three weeks after the start of this exile, an all but uninhabited planet, its inhabitants confined in a way that I could never have imagined. (March-April 2020)
Translated by Philip Dravers

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[1] tn: A term for a graduate of the *École nationale d’administration*.

[2] The AP-HP (*Assistance Publique–Hôpitaux de Paris*) is a large hospital trust operating in Paris and the surrounding area.

By [Jean-Daniel Matet](#) | May 28th, 2020 | [COVID-19 / 2020 #104](#)

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