

The Invisible Committee

Now

semiotext(e)  
intervention  
series □ 23





## SEMIOTEXT(E) INTERVENTION SERIES

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Translated by Robert Hurley

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## **TOMORROW IS CANCELED**

All the reasons for making a revolution are there. Not one is lacking. The shipwreck of politics, the arrogance of the powerful, the reign of falsehood, the vulgarity of the wealthy, the cataclysms of industry, galloping misery, naked exploitation, ecological apocalypse—we are spared nothing, not even being informed about it all. “Climate: 2016 breaks a heat record,” *Le Monde* announces, the same as almost every year now. All the reasons are there together, but it’s not reasons that make revolutions, it’s bodies. And the bodies are in front of screens.

One can watch a presidential election sink like a stone. The transformation of “the most important moment in French political life” into a big trashing fest only makes the soap opera more captivating. One couldn’t imagine *Koh-Lanta*

with such characters, such dizzying plot twists, such cruel tests, or so general a humiliation. *The spectacle of politics lives on as the spectacle of its decomposition.* Disbelief goes nicely with the filthy landscape. The National Front, that political negation of politics, that negation of politics *on the terrain of politics*, logically occupies the “center” of this chessboard of smoking ruins. The human passengers, spellbound, are watching their shipwreck like a first-rate show. They are so *enthralled* that they don’t feel the water that’s already bathing their legs. In the end, they’ll transform everything into a buoy. The drowning are known for that, for trying to turn everything they touch into a life preserver.

This world no longer needs explaining, critiquing, denouncing. We live enveloped in a fog of commentaries and commentaries on commentaries, of critiques and critiques of critiques of critiques, of revelations that don’t trigger anything, other than revelations about the revelations. And this fog is taking away any purchase we might have on the world. There’s nothing to criticize in Donald Trump. As to the worst that can be said about him, he’s already absorbed, incorporated it. He embodies it. He displays on a gold chain all the complaints that people have ever lodged against him. He is his own caricature, and he’s proud of it. Even the

creators of *South Park* are throwing in the towel: "It's very complicated now that satire has become reality. We really tried to laugh about what is going on but it wasn't possible to maintain the rhythm. What was happening was much funnier than what could be imagined. So we decided to let it go, to let them do their comedy, and we'll do ours." We live in a world that has established itself *beyond any justification*. Here, criticism doesn't work, any more than satire does. Neither one has any impact. To limit oneself to denouncing discriminations, oppressions, and injustices, and expect to harvest the fruits of that is to get one's epochs wrong. Leftists who think they can make something happen by lifting the lever of bad conscience are sadly mistaken. They can go and scratch their scabs in public and air their grievances hoping to arouse sympathy as much as they like; they'll only give rise to contempt and the desire to destroy them. "Victim" has become an insult in every part of the world.

There is a social use of language. No one still believes in it. Its exchange value has fallen to zero. Hence this inflationist bubble of idle talk. Everything social is mendacious, and everyone knows that now. It's no longer just the governing authorities, the publicists and public personalities who "do communication," it's every self-entrepreneur

that this society wants to turn us into who practices the art of “public relations.” Having become an instrument of communication, language is no longer its own reality but a tool for operating on the real, for obtaining *effects* in accordance with more or less conscious strategies. Words are no longer put into circulation except in order to distort things. Everything sails under false flags. This usurpation has become universal. One doesn’t shrink from any paradox. The state of emergency is the rule of law. War is made in the name of peace. The bosses “offer jobs.” The surveillance cameras are “video-protection devices.” The executioners complain that they’re being persecuted. The traitors profess their sincerity and their allegiance. The mediocre are everywhere cited as examples. There is actual practice on the one hand, and on the other, discourse, which is its relentless counterpoint, the perversion of every concept, the universal deception of oneself and of others. In all quarters it’s only a question of preserving or extending one’s interests. In return, the world is filling up with silent people. Certain ones of these explode into crazy acts of a sort that we’ve seen at briefer and briefer intervals. What is surprising about this? We should stop saying, “Young people don’t believe in anything any more.” And say instead: “Damn! They’re not swallowing our lies any more.” No longer say, “Young people are nihilistic,” but “My

lord, if this continues they're going to survive the collapse of our world."

The exchange value of language has fallen to zero, and yet we go on writing. It's because there is another use of language. One can talk about life, and one can talk *from the standpoint of life*. One can talk about conflicts, and one can talk *from the midst of conflict*. It's not the same language, or the same style. It's not the same idea of truth either. There is a "courage of truth" that consists in taking shelter behind the objective neutrality of "facts." There is a different one that considers that speech which doesn't commit one to anything, doesn't stand on its own, doesn't risk its position, doesn't cost anything, is not worth very much. The whole critique of finance capitalism cuts a pale figure next to a shattered bank window tagged with "Here. These are your premiums!" It's not through ignorance that "young people" appropriate rappers' punch lines for their political slogans instead of philosophers' maxims. And it's out of decency that they don't take up the shouts of "We won't give an inch!" by militants who are about to relinquish everything. It's because the latter are talking about the world, and the former are talking *from within* a world.

The real lie is not the one we tell others but the one we tell *ourselves*. The first lie is relatively exceptional

in comparison with the second. The big lie is refusing to see certain things *that one does see*, and refusing to see them *just as one sees them*. The real lie is all the screens, all the images, all the explanations that are allowed to stand between oneself and the world. It's how we regularly dismiss our own perceptions. So much so that where it's not a question of truth, it won't be a question of anything. There will be nothing. Nothing but this planetary insane asylum. Truth is not something one would strive towards, but a frank relation to what is there. It is a "problem" only for those who already see life as a problem. It's not something one professes but a way of being in the world. It is not held, therefore, nor accumulated. It manifests itself in a situation and from moment to moment. Whoever senses the falseness of a being, the noxious character of a representation, or the forces that move beneath a play of images releases any grip these might have had. Truth is a complete presence to oneself and to the world, a vital contact with the real, an acute perception of the givens of existence. In a world where everyone play-acts, where everyone puts on a performance, where one communicates all the more as nothing really is said, the very word "truth" produces a chill or is greeted with annoyance or sniggers. Everything sociable that this epoch contains has become so dependent on the crutches of untruth that it can't do without them.

“Proclaiming the truth” is not at all recommended. Speaking truth to people who can’t take even tiny doses of it will only expose you to their vengeance. In what follows we don’t claim in any instance to convey “the truth” but rather the perception we have of the world, what we care about, what keeps us awake and alive. The common opinion must be rejected: truths are multiple, but untruth is one, because it is universally arrayed against the slightest truth that surfaces.

All year long we’re pummeled with words about the thousand threats that surround us—terrorists, migrants, endocrine disruptors, fascism, unemployment. In this way the unshakeable routine of capitalist normality is perpetuated—against a background of a thousand failed conspiracies, a hundred averted catastrophes. As to the pallid anxiety which they try, day after day, to implant in our heads, by way of armed military patrols, breaking news, and governmental announcements, one has to credit riots with the paradoxical virtue of freeing us from it. This is something that the lovers of those funeral processions called “demonstrations,” all those who taste, over a glass of *rouge*, the bitter enjoyment of always being defeated, all those who give out a flatulent “Or else it’s going to blow up!” before they prudently climb back into their bus, cannot understand. In a street confrontation,

the enemy has a well-defined face, whether he's in civilian clothes or in armor. He has methods that are largely known. He has a name and a function. In fact, he's a "civil servant," as he soberly declares. The friend, too, has gestures, movements, and an appearance that are recognizable. In the riot there is an incandescent presence to oneself and to others, a lucid fraternity which the Republic is quite incapable of generating. The organized riot is capable of producing what this society cannot create: lively and irreversible bonds. Those who dwell on images of violence miss everything that's involved in the fact of taking the risk together of breaking, of tagging, of confronting the cops. One never comes out of one's first riot unchanged. It's this positivity of the riot that the spectators prefer not to see and that frightens them more deeply than the damage, the charges and counter-charges. In the riot there is a production and affirmation of *friendships*, a focused configuration of the world, clear possibilities of action, means close at hand. The situation has a form and one can move within it. The risks are sharply defined, unlike those nebulous "risks" that the governing authorities like to hang over our existences. The riot is desirable as a moment of truth. It is a momentary suspension of the confusion. In the tear gas, things are curiously clear and the real is finally legible. It's difficult then not to see who is who. Speaking of



the insurrectionary day of July 15, 1927 in Vienna, Elias Canetti said: "It's the closest thing to a revolution that I have experienced. Hundreds of pages would not be enough for describing all that I saw." He drew from that day the inspiration for his masterwork, *Crowds and Power*. The riot is formative by virtue of what it makes visible.

In the Royal Navy there was this old toast, "Confusion to our enemies!" Confusion has a strategic value. It is not a chance phenomenon. It scatters purposes and prevents them from converging again. It has the ashy taste of defeat, when the battle has not taken place, and probably will never take place. All the recent attacks in France were thus followed by a train of confusion, which opportunely increased the governmental discourse about them. Those who claim them, and those who call for war against those who claim these attacks, all have an interest in our confusion. As for those who carry them out, they are very often children—the children of confusion.

This world that talks so much has nothing to say: it is bereft of positive statements. Perhaps it believed it could make itself immune to attack in this way. More than anything else, however, it placed itself at the mercy of any serious affirmation. A world whose positivity is built on so much devastation deserves to have what is life-affirming

take the form initially of wrecking, breaking, rioting. They always try to portray us as desperate individuals, on the grounds that we act, we build, we attack *without hope*. Hope. Now there's at least one disease this civilization has not infected us with. We're not despairing for all that. No one has ever acted out of hope. Hope is of a piece with waiting, with the refusal to see what is there, with the fear of breaking into the present—in short, with the fear *of living*. To hope is to declare oneself in advance to be without any hold on that from which something is expected nonetheless. It's to remove oneself from the process so as to avoid any connection with its outcome. It's wanting things to be different without embracing the means for this to come about. It's a kind of cowardice. One has to know what to commit to and then commit to it. Even if it means making enemies. Or making friends. Once we know what we want, we're no longer alone, the world repopulates. Everywhere there are allies, closenesses, and an infinite gradation of possible friendships. Nothing is close for someone who floats. Hope, that very slight but constant *impetus toward tomorrow* that is communicated to us day by day, is the best agent of the maintenance of order. We're daily informed of problems we can do nothing about, but to which there will surely be solutions *tomorrow*. The whole oppressive feeling of powerlessness

that this social organization cultivates in everyone is only an immense pedagogy of waiting. It's an avoidance of now. But there isn't, there's never been, and there never will be anything but now. And even if the past can act upon the now, this is because it has itself never been anything but a now. Just as our tomorrow will be. The only way to understand something in the past is to understand that it too used to be a now. It's to feel the faint breath of the air in which the human beings of yesterday lived their lives. If we are so much inclined to flee from now, it's because now is the time of decision. It's the locus of the "I accept" or the "I refuse," of "I'll pass on that" or "I'll go with that." It's the locus of the logical act that immediately follows the perception. It is the present, and hence the locus of presence. It is the moment, endlessly renewed, of the taking of sides. Thinking in distant terms is always more comfortable. "In the end," things will change; "in the end," beings will be transfigured. Meanwhile, let's go on this way, let's remain what we are. A mind that thinks in terms of the future is incapable of acting in the present. It doesn't seek transformation; it avoids it. The current disaster is like a monstrous accumulation of all the deferrals of the past, to which are added those of each day and each moment, in a continuous time slide. But life is always decided now, and now, and now.

Everyone can see that this civilization is like a train rolling toward the abyss, and picking up speed. The faster it goes, the more one hears the hysterical cheers of the boozers in the discotheque car. You have to listen carefully to make out the paralyzed silence of the rational minds that no longer understand anything, that of the worriers who bite their nails, and the accent of false calm in the exclamations of the card players who wait. Inwardly, many people have chosen to leap off the train, but they hesitate on the footboard. They're still restrained by so many things. They feel held back because they've made the choice, but the decision is lacking. Decision is what traces in the present the manner and possibility of acting, of making a leap that is not into the void. We mean the decision to desert, to desert the ranks, to organize, to undertake a secession, be it imperceptibly, but in any case, *now*.

The epoch belongs to the determined.

## 50 NUANCES OF BREAKAGE

“Nothing’s right anymore,” say the poor losers. “Yes, the world’s in a bad state,” says the conventional wisdom. We say rather that the world *is fragmenting*. We were promised a new world order, but it’s the opposite that’s occurring. A planetary generalization of liberal democracy was announced but what is generalizing instead are “the electoral insurrections” against it and its hypocrisy, as the liberals bitterly complain. Zone after zone, the fragmentation of the world continues, unceremoniously and without interruption. And this is not just an affair of geopolitics. It’s in every domain that the world is fragmenting, it’s in every domain that unity has become problematic. Nowadays there is no more unity in “society” than there is in science. The wage-work system is breaking up into niches, exceptions, dispensatory conditions. The idea of a “precariat” conveniently hides the fact



that there is simply no longer a shared experience of work, even precarious work. With the consequence that there can no longer be a shared experience of its stoppage either, and the old myth of the general strike must be put on the shelf of useless accessories. In like manner, Western medicine has been reduced to tinkering with techniques that break its doctrinal unity into pieces, such as acupuncture, hypnosis, or magnetism. Politically, beyond the usual parliamentary messing around, there's no more majority for anything. During the conflict in the spring of 2016, precipitated by the loi Travail, the most astute journalistic commentary noted that two minorities, a governmental minority and a minority of demonstrators, were clashing in front of a population of spectators. Our very ego-self appears as a more and more complex, less and less coherent puzzle, so that to make it hold together, in addition to pills and therapy sessions, algorithms are necessary now. It's pure irony that the word "wall" is used to describe the solid stream of images, information, and commentary by which Facebook attempts to give a shape to the self. The contemporary experience of life in a world composed of circulation, telecommunications, networks, a welter of real-time information and images trying to capture our attention, is fundamentally discontinuous. On a completely different scale, the particular interests of the elite are becoming

more and more difficult to posit as the “general interest.” One only has to see how hard it is for states to implement their infrastructure projects, from the Susa Valley to Standing Rock, to realize that *things aren't working anymore*. The fact that now they have to be ready to bring the army and its special units into the national territory to protect building sites of any importance shows rather clearly that these projects are seen for the mafia-type operations that they are.

The unity of the Republic, that of science, that of the personality, that of the national territory, or that of “culture” have never been anything but fictions. But they were effective. What is certain is that the illusion of unity can no longer *do its work of fooling people*, of bringing them into line, of disciplining them. In every domain, hegemony is dead and the singularities are becoming wild: they bear their own meaning in themselves, no longer expecting it from a general order. The petty supervisory voice that allowed anyone with a bit of authority to ventrilocate for others, to judge, classify, hierarchize, moralize, to tell everyone what they need to do and how they need to be, has become inaudible. All the “need-tos” are lying on the ground. The militant who knows what must be done, the professor who knows what you need to think, the politician who will tell you what is needed



for the country, speak in the desert. As things stand, nothing can match the singular experience where it exists. One rediscovers that opening oneself to the world doesn't mean opening oneself to the four corners of the planet, that the world is there where we are. Opening ourselves to the world is opening ourselves to its presence here and now. Each fragment carries its own possibility of perfection. If "the world" is to be saved this will be in each of its fragments. As for the totality, it can only be *managed*.

The epoch takes amazing shortcuts. Real democracy is buried where it was born two thousand five hundred years before with the way in which Alexis Tsipras, scarcely elected, got no rest until he had negotiated its capitulation. One can read on its tombstone, ironically speaking, these words of the German Minister of Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble: "We can't let elections change anything whatsoever." But the most striking thing is that the geopolitical epicenter of the world's fragmentation is precisely the place where its unification began under the name "civilization," five thousand years ago: Mesopotamia. If a certain geopolitical chaos seems to be taking hold of the world, it's in Iraq and Syria that this is most dramatically demonstrated, that is, in the exact location where civilization's general setting in order began. Writing, accounting,

History, royal justice, parliament, integrated farming, science, measurement, political religion, palace intrigues and pastoral power—this whole way of claiming to govern “for the good of the subjects,” for the sake of the flock and its well-being—everything that can be lumped into what we still call “civilization” was already, three thousand years before Jesus Christ, the distinguishing mark of the kingdoms of Akkad and Sumer. Of course there will be attempts at cobbling together a new denominational Iraqi state. Of course the international interests will end up mounting harebrained operations aimed at state building in Syria. But in Syria as in Iraq, state-directed humanity is dead. The intensity of the conflicts has risen too high for an honest reconciliation to still be possible. The counter-insurrectionary war that the regime of Bashar Al-Assad has conducted against his population, with the support that we’re aware of, has reached such extremes that no negotiations will ever again lead to anything like a “new Syrian state” worthy of the name. And no attempt at people-shaping—the bloody putting into practice of Brecht’s ironic poem after the workers’ uprising of 1953 against the new Soviet regime in East Germany: “The people through its own fault/ Has lost the confidence of the government/ And only by redoubling its efforts/ Can it win it back/ Would it not be easier then/ For the government to dissolve

the people and elect a new one?”—will have any positive effect; the ghosts of the dead won’t let themselves be subdued by barrels of TNT. No one who’s given some thought to what the European states were like in the time of their “splendor” can look at what still goes by the name of “state” these days and see anything other than failures. Compared to the transnational powers, the states can no longer maintain themselves except in the form of holograms. The Greek state is no longer anything more than a conveyor of instructions it has no say in. The British state is reduced to walking the tightrope with Brexit. The Mexican state no longer controls anything. The Italian, Spanish, or Brazilian states no longer appear to have any activity beyond surviving the continuous avalanches of scandal. Whether on the pretext of “reform” or by fits of “modernization,” the present-day capitalist states are engaging in an exercise of methodical self-dismantling. Not to mention the “separatist temptations” that are multiplying across Europe. It’s not hard to discern, behind the attempts at authoritarian restoration in so many of the world’s countries a form of civil war that will no longer end. Whether in the name of the war against “terrorism,” “drugs,” or “poverty,” the states are coming apart at the seams. The façades remain, but they only serve to mask a pile of rubble. The global disorder now exceeds any capacity

to restore order. As an ancient Chinese sage put it: “When order reigns in the world, a fool can disturb it by himself alone; when chaos takes hold of it, a wise man cannot bring back the order by himself alone.”

We are the contemporaries of a prodigious reversal of the process of civilization into a process of fragmentation. The more civilization aspires to a universal completion, the more it implodes at its foundation. The more this world aims for unification, the more it fragments. When did it shift imperceptibly on its axis? Was it the world coup that followed the attacks of September 11? The “financial crisis” of 2008? The failure of the Copenhagen summit on climate change in 2009? What is sure is that that summit marked a point of irreversibility in this shift. The cause of the atmosphere and the planet offered civilization the ideal pretext for its completion. In the name of the species and its salvation, in the name of the planetary totality, in the name of terrestrial Unity one was going to be able to govern every behavior of each one of the Earth’s inhabitants and every one of the entities that it accommodates on its surface. The presiding authorities were within an inch of proclaiming the universal and ecological *imperium mundi*. This was “in the interest of all.” The majority of the human and natural milieus, customs, and

forms of life, the telluric character of every existence, all that would have to yield before the necessity of uniting the human species, which one was finally going to manage from who knows what directorate. This was the logical outcome of the process of unification that has always animated “the great adventure of humanity” since a little band of Sapiens escaped from the Rift Valley. Up till then, one hoped that the “responsible parties” would come to a sensible agreement, that the “responsible parties,” in a word, would be responsible. And surprise! What actually happened at Copenhagen is that *nothing* happened. And that is why the whole world has forgotten it. No emperor, even of the collegial sort. No decision by the spokespersons of the Species. Since then, with the help of the “economic crisis,” the drive toward unification has reversed into a global everyone-for-themselves. Seeing that there will be no common salvation, everyone will have to achieve their salvation on their own, on whatever scale, or abandon every idea of salvation. And attempt to lose oneself in technologies, profits, parties, drugs, and heart-breakers, with anxiety pegged to one’s soul.

The dismantling of all political unity is inducing an evident panic in our contemporaries. The omnipresence of the question of “national identity” in the public debate attests to this. “La France,”

a world-class exemplar of the modern state, is having an especially hard time accepting its consignment to the junkyard. It's obviously because "feeling French" has never made so little sense that what we have in the way of ambitious politicians are reduced to embroidering endlessly on "the national identity." And since, despite those glorious "1500 years of History" which they keep harping on, no one seems to have a clear idea what "being French" might mean, they fall back on the basics: the wine and the great men, the sidewalk terraces and the police, when it's not quite simply the Ancien Régime and the Christian roots. Yellowed figures of a national unity for ninth-grade manuals.

All that is left of unity is nostalgia, but it speaks more and more loudly. Candidates present themselves as wanting to restore the national greatness, to "Make America great again" or "set France back in order." At the same time, when one is wistful for French Algeria, is there anything one can't be nostalgic about? Everywhere, they promise therefore to reconstruct the national unity by force. But the more they "divide" by going on about the "feeling of belonging," the more the certainty spreads of not being part of the whole they have in mind. To mobilize panic in order to restore order is to miss what panic contains that is essentially dispersive. The process of general fragmentation is so unstoppable

that all the brutality that will be used in order to recompose the lost unity will only end up accelerating it, deepening it and making it more irreversible. When there's no longer a shared experience, apart from that of coming together again in front of the screens, one can very well create brief moments of national communion after attacks by deploying a maudlin, false, and hollow sentimentality, one can decree all sorts of "wars against terrorism," one can promise to take back control of all the "zones of unlawfulness," but all this will remain a BFM-TV newflash at the back of a kebab house, and with the sound turned off. This kind of nonsense is like medications: for them to stay effective, it's always necessary to increase the dose, until the final neurasthenia sets in. Those who don't mind the prospect of finishing their existence in a cramped and super-militarized citadel, be it as great as "La France," while all around the waters are rising, carrying the bodies of the unlucky, may very well declare those who displease them to be "traitors to the Nation." In their barkings, one only hears their powerlessness. In the long run, extermination is not a solution.

We mustn't be disheartened by the state of degradation of the debate in the public sphere. If they vociferate so loudly it's because no one is listening anymore. What is really occurring, under the

surface, is that everything is pluralizing, everything is localizing, everything is revealing itself to be situated, everything is *fleeing*. It's not only that the people are lacking, that they are playing the role of absent subscribers, that they don't give any news, that they are lying to the pollsters, it's that they have already packed up and left, in many unsuspected directions. They're not simply abstentionist, hanging back, not to be found: they are in flight, even if their flight is inner or immobile. They are already *elsewhere*. And it won't be the great bush-beaters of the extreme left, the Third Republic-type of socialist senators taking themselves for Castro, à la Mélenchon, who will bring people back to the fold. What is called "populism" is not just the blatant symptom of the people's disappearance, it's a desperate attempt to hold on to what's left of it that's distressed and disoriented. As soon as a real political situation presents itself, like the conflict of the spring of 2016, what manifests itself in a diffuse way, is all the shared intelligence, sensitivity, and determination which the public hubbub sought to cover over. The *event* constituted by the appearance, in the conflict, of the "*cortège de tête*" has shown this rather clearly. Given that the social body is taking on water from all sides, including the old union framework, it was obvious to every demonstrator who was still *alive* that the feet-dragging marches were a form of



pacification through protest. Thus from demonstration to demonstration one saw at the head of the processions all those who aim to desert the social cadaver to avoid contracting its little death. It started with the high-school students. Then all sorts of young and not so young demonstrators, militants, and unorganized elements, swelled the ranks. To top it off, during the 14th of June demonstration, entire union sections, including the longshoremen of Le Havre, joined an out-of-control head contingent of 10,000 persons. It would be a mistake to see the taking over of the head of these demonstrations as a kind of historical revenge by “anarchists,” “autonomists,” or other habitués of the end of demonstrations, who traditionally found themselves at the tail of marches, engaging in ritual skirmishes. What happened there as if naturally was that a certain number of deserters created a political space in which to make something out of their heterogeneity, a space that was insufficiently organized certainly, but rejoinable and for the duration of a spring, *truly existing*. The *cortège de tête* came to be a kind of receptacle of the general fragmentation. As if, by losing all its power of aggregation, this “society” liberated from all quarters little autonomous kernels—territorially, sectorially, or politically situated—and for once these kernels found a way to group together. If the *cortège de tête* succeeded finally in magnetizing a

significant part of those combating the world of the loi Travail this is not because all those people had suddenly become “autonomous”—the heterogeneous character of its components argues against that—it’s because, in the situation, it had the benefit of a presence, a vitality, and a truthfulness that were lacking in the rest.

The *cortège de tête* was so clearly not a subject detachable from the rest of the demonstration but rather a *gesture*, that the police never managed to isolate it, as they regularly tried to do. To put an end to the scandal of its existence, to reestablish the traditional image of the union march with the bosses of the different labor confederations at its head, to neutralize this tête de cortège systematically composed of young hooded ones who defy the police, of older ones who support them or free workers who break through the lines of riot police, it was necessary finally to kettle *the whole demonstration*. So at the end of June there was the humiliating scene around the basin of the Arsenal, which was surrounded by a formidable police presence—a nice demoralization maneuver arranged jointly by the labor unions and the government. That day *L’Humanité* would run a front page story on the remarkable “victory” the demonstration represented—it’s a tradition among Stalinists to cover their retreats

with litanies of triumph. The long French spring of 2016 established this evident fact: the riot, the blockade, and the occupation form the *basic* political grammar of the epoch.

“Kettling” does not simply constitute a technique of psychological warfare which the French order belatedly imported from England. Kettling is a dialectical image of current political power. It’s the figure of a despised, reviled power that no longer does anything but keep the population in its nets. It’s the figure of a power that no longer promises anything, and has no other activity than *locking all the exits*. A power that no one supports anymore in a positive way, that everyone tries to flee as best they can, and that has no other perspective than to keep in its confining bosom all that is on the verge of escaping it. The figure of kettling is dialectical in that what it is designed to confine, it also brings together. It is a site where meet-ups take place between those who are trying to desert. Novel chants, full of irony, are invented there. A shared experience develops within its enclosure. The police apparatus is not equipped to contain the vertical escape that occurs in the form of tags that will soon embellish every wall, every bus shelter, every business. And that give evidence that the mind remains free even when the bodies are held captive. “Victory through chaos,” “In ashes, all

becomes possible,” “France, its wine, its revolutions,” “Homage to the families of the broken windows,” “Kiss kiss bank bank,” “I think, therefore I break”: since 1968, the walls had not seen such a freedom of spirit. “From here, from this country where it’s hard for us to breathe an air that is more and more rarefied, where each day we feel more like foreigners, there could only come this fatigue that eroded us with emptiness, with imposture. For lack of anything better, we paid each other in words, the adventure was literary, the commitment was platonic. As for tomorrow’s revolution, a possible revolution, who among us still believed in it?” This is how Pierre Peuchmaurd, in *Plus vivant que jamais*, describes the atmosphere that May 1968 swept away. One of the most remarkable aspects of the fragmentation that’s underway is that it affects the very thing that was thought to ensure the maintenance of social unity: the Law. With the exceptional antiterrorist legislation, the gutting of the labor laws, the increasing specialization of jurisdictions and courts of prosecution, *the* Law no longer exists. Take criminal law. On the pretext of antiterrorism and fighting “organized criminality,” what has taken shape from year to year is the constitution of two distinct laws: a law for “citizens” and a “penal law of the enemy.” It was a German jurist, appreciated by the South American dictatorships in their time, who theorized it. His

name is Günther Jacobs. Concerning the riffraff, the radical opponents, the “thugs,” the “terrorists,” the “anarchists,” in short: all those who don’t have enough respect for the democratic order in force and pose a “danger” to “the normative structure of society,” Günther Jacobs notes that, more and more, a special treatment is reserved for them that is in derogation of normal criminal law, to the point of no longer respecting their constitutional rights. Is it not logical, in a sense, to treat as enemies those who behave as “enemies of society”? Aren’t they in the business of “excluding themselves from the law”? And so for them shouldn’t one recognize the existence of a “penal law of the enemy” that consists precisely in the complete absence of any law? For example, this is what is openly practiced in the Philippines by its president Duterte, who measures the effectiveness of his government, in its “war against drugs,” by the number of corpses of “dealers” delivered to the morgue, which were “produced” by death squads or ordinary citizens. At the time of our writing, the count exceeds 7,000 deaths. That we’re still talking about a form of law is attested by the questions of the associations of jurists who wonder if in this instance one might be leaving the “rule of law.” The “penal law of the enemy” is the end of criminal law. So it’s not exactly a trifle. The trick here is to make people believe that it is applied to a previously

defined criminal population when it's rather the opposite that occurs: a person is declared an "enemy" after the fact, after being phone-tapped, arrested, locked up, molested, ransomed, tortured, and finally killed. A bit like when the cops press charges for "contempt and obstruction" against those they've just beaten up a little too conspicuously.

As paradoxical as this assertion may appear, *we're living in the time of abolition of the Law*. The metastatic proliferation of laws is just one aspect of this abolition. If every law had not become insignificant in the rococo edifice of contemporary law, would it be necessary to produce so many of them? Would it be necessary to react to every other minor news event by enacting a new piece of legislation? The object of the major bills of the past few years in France pretty much boils down to the abolition of laws that were in force, and a gradual dismantling of all juridical safeguards. So much so that Law, which was meant to protect persons and things faced with the vagaries of the world, has instead become something that adds to their insecurity. A distinctive trait of the major contemporary laws is that they place this or that institution or power above the laws. The Intelligence Act eliminated every recourse for dealing with the intelligence services. The loi Macron, which was not able to establish "business secrecy," is only

called a “law” by virtue of a strange Newspeak: it consisted rather in undoing a whole set of guarantees enjoyed by employees—relating to Sunday work, layoffs or firings, and the regulated professions. The loi Travail itself was only a continuation of this movement that had started so well: what is the famous “inversion of the hierarchy of norms” but precisely the replacement of any general legal framework by the state of exception of each corporation? If it was so natural for a social democratic government inspired by the extreme right to declare a state of exception after the attacks of November 2015, this was because the state of exception already reigned *in the form of the Law*.

Accepting to see the world’s fragmentation even in the law is not an easy thing. In France we’ve inherited nearly a millennium of a “rule of justice”—the good king Saint-Louis who meted out justice under the oak tree, etcetera. At bottom, the blackmail that keeps renewing the conditions of our submission is this: either the State, rights, the Law, the police, the justice system—or civil war, vengeance, anarchy, and celebration. This conviction, this justicialism, this statism, permeates the whole set of politically acceptable and audible sensibilities across the board, from the extreme left to the extreme right. Indeed it’s in line with this fixed axis that the conversion of a large portion of

the workers' vote into a vote for the National Front occurred without any major existential crisis for those concerned. This is also what explains all the indignant reactions to the cascades of "affairs" that now go to make up the daily routine of contemporary political life. We propose a different perception of things, a different way to apprehend them. Those who make the laws evidently don't respect them. Those who want to instill the "work ethic" in us do fictitious jobs. It's common knowledge that the drug squad is the biggest hash dealer in France. And whenever, by an extraordinary chance, a magistrate is bugged, one doesn't wait long to discover the awful negotiations that are hidden behind the noble pronouncement of a judgment, an appeal, or a dismissal. To call for Justice in the face of this world is to ask a monster to babysit your children. Anyone who knows the underside of power immediately ceases to respect it. Deep down, the masters have always been anarchists. It's just that they can't stand for anyone else to be that. And the bosses have always had a bandit's heart. It's this honorable way of seeing things that has always inspired lucid workers to practice pilfering, moonlighting, or even sabotage. One really has to be named Michéa to believe that the proletariat has ever sincerely been moralistic and legalistic. It's in their lives, among their own people, that the proletarians manifest their ethics, not in



relation to “society.” The relationship with society and its hypocrisy can only be one of warfare, whether open or not.

It’s also this line of reasoning that inspired the most determined fraction of the demonstrators in the conflict of the spring of 2016. Because one of the most remarkable features of that conflict is the fact that it took place *in the middle of a state of emergency*. It’s not by chance that the organized forces in Paris who contributed to the formation of the *cortège de tête* are also those who defied the state of emergency at the Place de la République, during COP21. There are two ways of taking the state of emergency. One can denounce it verbally and plead for a return to a “rule of law” which, so far as we can recall, had always seemed to come at a heavy price in the time before its “suspension.” But one can also say: “Ah! You do as you please! You consider yourselves above the laws that you claim to draw your authority from! Well, us too. Imagine that!” There are those who protest against a phantom, the state of emergency, and those who duly note it and deploy *their own state of exception* in consequence. There where an old left-wing reflex made us shudder before democracy’s fictitious state of exception, the conflict of the spring of 2016 preferred to counterpose, in the streets, its real state of exception,

its own presence to the world, the singular form of its freedom.

The same goes for the world's fragmentation. One can deplore it and try to swim back up the river of time, but one can also *begin from there* and see how to proceed. It would be simple to contrast a nostalgic, reactionary, conservative, "right-wing" affect and a "left-wing," chaos-inflected, multiculturalist postmodernism. Being on the left or on the right is to choose among one of the countless ways afforded to humans to be imbeciles. And in fact, from one end of the political spectrum to the other, the supporters of unity are evenly distributed. There are those nostalgic for national greatness everywhere, on the right and on the left, from Soral to Ruffin. We tend to forget it, but over a century ago a candidate presented himself to serve as a universal form of life: the Worker. If he was able to lay claim to that, it was only after the great number of amputations he required of himself—in terms of sensibility, attachments, taste or affectivity. And this gave him a strange appearance. So much so that on seeing him the jury fled and since then he wanders about without knowing where to go or what to do, painfully encumbering the world with his obsolete glory. In the time of his splendor he had all manner of groupies, nationalists or Bolsheviks even national-Bolsheviks. In our day

we're observing an explosion of the human figure. "Humanity" as a subject no longer has a face. On the fringes of an organized impoverishment of subjectivities, we are witness to the tenacious persistence and the emergence of singular forms of life, which are tracing their path. It is this scandal that they wanted to crush, for example, with the jungle of Calais. This resurgence of forms of life, in our epoch, also results from the fragmentation of the failed universality of the worker. It realizes the mourning period for the worker as a figure. A Mexican wake, moreover, that has nothing sad about it.

To think that, during the conflict of the spring of 2016, we saw something unthinkable a few years ago, the fragmentation *of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) itself*! While the Marseille CGT used its tonfas against the "young people", the Douai-Armentières CGT, allied with the "uncontrolled ones," came to blows with the Lille CGT security crew, which is more hopelessly Stalinist. The CGT Énergie called for sabotage of the fiber optic cables in Haute-Loire used by the banks and the telephone operators. During the whole conflict, what happened in Le Havre bore little resemblance to what was happening elsewhere. The dates of demonstration, the positions of the local CGT, the caution imposed on the police: all this was in a

sense *autonomous* from the national scene as a whole. The CGT in Le Havre passed this motion and called the police forces and the prefect to advise them of it: “Every time a student is summoned to police headquarters, it’s not complicated, the port will shut down!” Le Havre had a happy fragmentation. The frictions between the “cortège de tête” and the union security personnel led to a remarkable improvement: the strictly defensive position of many of the CGT security services from then on. They would cease to play a police role in the demonstrations, no longer beating on the “autonomists” and handing the “crazies” over to the cops, but would focus instead solely on their section of the procession. An appreciable, perhaps long-lasting shift, who knows? Despite the communiqué condemning “acts of violence,” a must after the demonstration against the National Front at Nantes on February 25, 2017, the CGT 44 had organized for that occasion together with Zadists and other uncontrollables. It’s one of the fortunate effects of the spring 2016 conflict, and one that will definitely worry some people on the side of the government as well as inside the unions.

As something endured, the process of fragmentation of the world can drive people into misery, isolation, schizophrenia. It can be experienced as a senseless loss in the lives of human beings. We’re invaded by

nostalgia then. Belonging is all that remains for those who no longer have anything. At the cost of accepting fragmentation as a starting point, it can also give rise to an intensification and pluralization *of the bonds that constitute us*. Then fragmentation doesn't signify separation but a shimmering of the world. From the right distance, it's rather the process of "integration in society" that's revealed to have been a slow attrition of being, a continuous separation, a slippage toward more and more vulnerability, and a vulnerability that's increasingly covered up. The ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes illustrates what the process of fragmentation of the territory can signify. For a territorial state as ancient as the French state, that a portion of ground is torn away from the national continuum and brought into secession on a lasting basis, amply proves that the continuum no longer exists as it did in the past. Such a thing would have been unimaginable under de Gaulle, Clemenceau, or Napoleon. Back then, they would have sent the infantry to settle the matter. Now, a police operation is called "Caesar," and it beats a retreat in the face of a woodland guerrilla response. The fact that on the outskirts of the Zone, buses of the National Front could be assaulted on a freeway in the style of a stage-coach attack, more or less like a police car posted to a banlieue intersection to surveil a camera that was surveilling "dealers" got itself

torched by a Molotov cocktail, indicates that things have indeed become a little like the Far West in this country. The process of fragmentation of the national territory, at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, far from constituting a detachment from the world, has only multiplied the most unexpected circulations, some far-ranging and others occurring close to home. To the point that one tells oneself the best proof that extraterrestrials don't exist is that they haven't gotten in touch with the ZAD. In its turn, the wresting away of that piece of land results in its own internal fragmentation, its fractalization, the multiplication of worlds within it and hence of the territories that coexist and are superimposed there. New collective realities, new constructions, new encounters, new thoughts, new customs, new arrivals in every sense, with the confrontations arising necessarily from the rubbing-together of worlds and ways of being. And consequently, a considerable intensification of life, a deepening of perceptions, a proliferation of friendships, enmities, experiences, horizons, contacts, distances—and a great strategic finesse. With the endless fragmentation of the world there is a vertiginous increase in the qualitative enrichment of life, and a profusion of forms—for someone who thinks about the promise of communism it contains.

In the fragmentation there is something that points toward what we call “communism”: it’s the return to earth, the end of any bringing into equivalence, the restitution of all singularities to themselves, the defeat of subsumption, of abstraction, the fact that moments, places, things, beings and animals all acquire a proper name—*their* proper name. Every creation is born of a splitting off from the whole. As embryology shows, each individual is the possibility of a new species as soon as it appropriates the conditions that immediately surround it. If the Earth is so rich in natural environments this is due to its complete absence of uniformity. Realizing the promise of communism contained in the world’s fragmentation demands a gesture, a gesture to be performed over and over again, a gesture that is life itself: that of *creating pathways* between the fragments, of placing them in *contact*, of organizing their encounter, of opening up the roads that lead from one friendly piece of the world to another without passing through hostile territory, that of establishing the good *art of distances* between worlds. It’s true that the world’s fragmentation disorients and unsettles all the inherited certainties, that it defies all of our political and existential categories, that it removes the ground underlying the revolutionary tradition itself: it challenges us. We recall what Tosquelles explained to François Pain concerning the Spanish

civil war. In that conflict some were militia, Tosquelles was a psychiatrist. He observed that the mental patients tended to be few in number because the war, by breaking the grip of the social lie, was more therapeutic to the psychotics than the asylum. "Civil war has a connection with the non-homogeneity of the Self. Every one of us is made up of juxtaposed pieces with paradoxical unions and disunions inside us. The personality doesn't consist of a bloc. If it did, it would be a statue. One has to acknowledge this paradoxical thing: war doesn't produce new mental patients. On the contrary, there are fewer neuroses during war than in civil life, and there are even psychoses that heal." Here is the paradox, then: being constrained to unity undoes us, the lie of social life makes us psychotic, and embracing fragmentation is what allows us to regain a serene presence to the world. There is a certain mental position where this fact ceases to be perceived in a contradictory way. That is where we place ourselves.

Against the possibility of communism, against any possibility of happiness, there stands a hydra with two heads. On the public stage each one of them makes a show of being the sworn enemy of the other. On one side, there is the program for a fascistic restoration of unity, and on the other, there is the global power of the merchants of



infrastructure—Google as much as Vinci, Amazon as much as Veolia. Those who believe that it's one or the other *will have them both*. Because the great builders of infrastructure have the means for which the fascists only have the folkloric discourse. For the former, the crisis of the old unities is primarily the opportunity for a new unification. In the contemporary chaos, in the crumbling of institutions, in the death of politics, there is a perfectly profitable market for the infrastructural powers and for the giants of the Internet. A totally fragmented world remains completely manageable cybernetically. A shattered world is even the precondition for the omnipotence of those who manage its channels of communication. The program of these powers is to deploy behind the cracked façades of the old hegemones a new, purely operational, form of unity, which doesn't get bogged down in the ponderous production of an always shaky feeling of belonging, but operates directly on "the real," reconfiguring it. A form of unity without limits, and without pretensions, which aims to build absolute order under absolute fragmentation. An order that has no intention of fabricating a new phantasmal belonging, but is content to furnish, through its networks, its servers, its highways, a materiality that is imposed on everyone without any questions being asked. No other unity than the standardization of interfaces, cities, landscapes; no other continuity

than that of information. The hypothesis of Silicon Valley and the great merchants of infrastructure is that there's no more need to tire oneself out by staging a unity of façade: the unity it intends to *construct* will be integral with the world, incorporated in its networks, poured into its concrete. Obviously we don't feel like we belong to a "Google humanity," but that's fine with Google so long as all our data belong to it. Basically, provided we accept being reduced to the sad ranks of "users," we all belong to the cloud, which does not need to proclaim it. To phrase it differently, fragmentation alone does not protect us from an attempt to reunify the world by the "rulers of tomorrow": fragmentation is even the prerequisite and the ideal texture for such an initiative. From their point of view, the symbolic fragmentation of the world opens up the space for its concrete unification; segregation is not contradictory to the ultimate networking. On the contrary, it gives it its *raison d'être*.

The necessary condition for the reign of the GAFA (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon) *is that beings, places, fragments of the world remain without any real contact*. Where the GAFA claim to be "linking up the entire world" what they're actually doing is working toward the real isolation of everybody. By immobilizing bodies. By keeping everyone cloistered in their signifying bubble. The power play of

cybernetic power is to give everyone the impression that they have access to the whole world when they are actually more and more separated, that they have more and more “friends” when they are more and more autistic. The serial crowd of public transportation was always a lonely crowd, but people didn’t transport their personal bubble along with them, as they have done since smartphones appeared. A bubble that immunizes against any contact, in addition to constituting a perfect snitch. This separation *engineered* by cybernetics pushes in a non-accidental way in the direction of making each fragment into a little paranoid entity, towards a drifting of the existential continents where the estrangement that already reigns between individuals in this “society” collectivizes ferociously into a thousand delirious little aggregates. In the face of all that, the thing to do, it would seem, is to leave home, take to the road, go meet up with others, work towards forming connections, whether conflictual, prudent, or joyful, between the different parts of the world. Organizing ourselves has never been anything else than loving each other.



## DEATH TO POLITICS

If politics were only the politics of “politicians,” it would be enough to turn off the TV and the radio to no longer hear it talked about. But it so happens that France, which is the “country of human rights” only for show, is well and truly the *country of power*. All *social* relations in France are power relations—and in this country what has not been socialized? So that there is politics at every level. In the associations and in the collectives. In the villages and the corporations. In the milieus, all the milieus. It’s at work everywhere, maneuvering, operating, seeking appreciation. It never speaks honestly, because it is *afraid*. Politics, in France, is a cultural disease. Any time people get together, no matter what’s at issue, no matter what the purpose is and provided it lasts for a while, it takes on the structure of a little court society, and there is always someone who takes himself for the Sun

King. Those who reproach Foucault with having developed a rather stifling ontology of power in which goodness, love of one's neighbor, and the Christian virtues have a difficult time finding their place should reproach him rather with having thought in an admirable way, but perhaps in a way that was a bit too French. France thus remains a *court society*, at the summit of the State even in the milieus that declare its perdition the most radically. As if the Ancien Régime, as a system of mores, had never died. As if the French Revolution had only been a perverse stratagem for maintaining the Ancien Régime everywhere, behind the change of phraseology, and for protecting it from any attack, since it's supposed to have been abolished. Those who claim that a local politics, "closer to the territories and the people," is what will save us from the decomposition of national politics, can defend such an insanity only by holding their noses, because it's evident that what they offer is only a less professional, cruder, and, in a word, degenerate version of what there is. For us, it's not a matter of "doing politics differently," but of doing something different from politics. Politics makes one empty and greedy.

This national syndrome obviously doesn't spare the radical militant milieus. Each little group imagines it is capturing parts of the radicality market from

its closest rivals by slandering them as much as possible. By lusting after the “pieces of the cake” of others, it ends up spoiling the cake and smelling of shit. A clear-headed and completely unresigned militant recently gave this testimony: “Today, I know that disinterested militancy doesn’t exist. Our upbringing, our schooling, our family, the social world as a whole rarely make us into well-rounded and serene personalities. We’re full of hurts, existential issues to be resolved, relational expectations, and it’s with this ‘inner baggage’ that we enter into a militant life. Through our struggles, we’re all looking for ‘something else,’ for gratifications, recognition, social and friendly relations, human warmth, meaning to give to our life. In most militants this search for gratifications remains rather discreet, it doesn’t take up all the space. In certain persons, it should be said, it occupies a disproportionate space. We can all think of examples of militants constantly monopolizing the talk or trying to control everything, of others putting on a performance or always playing on peoples’ feelings, of others who are especially sensitive, very aggressive or peremptory in the ways they express themselves... These problems of recognition, gratifications, or power seem to me to explain single-handedly the majority of conflicts in the radical groups [...] In my view, many apparently political conflicts mask conflicts of ego and

between persons. That's my hypothesis. It's not necessarily correct. But from my experience, I have the strong feeling that something else is at play in the meetings, the mobilizations, the radical organizations, 'something else' than the struggle properly speaking, a veritable human theater with its comedies, its tragedies, its smooth *marivaudages*, which often push the political objectives which supposedly brought us together into the background." This country is a heartbreaker for sincere souls.

Nuit debout, in Paris, was many things. It was a rallying point and a starting point for all sorts of incredible actions. It was the site of wonderful encounters, of informal conversations, of reunions after the demonstrations. By offering a continuity between the leapfrog demonstration dates which the union confederations are so fond of, Nuit debout enabled the conflict triggered by the loi Travail to be something altogether different, and more, than a classic "social movement." Nuit debout made it possible to thwart the mundane governmental operation consisting in reducing its opponents to powerlessness by setting them at odds with each other, under the categories of "violent" and "non-violent." Although it was rechristened "Place de la Commune," the Place de la République was not able to deploy the smallest embryo of what was Commune-like in the squares



movement in Spain or in Greece, to say nothing of Tahrir Square, simply because we didn't have the strength to impose a real occupation of the square on the police. But if there was a fundamental defect of Nuit debout from the start, it was, on the pretext of going beyond classic politics, the way in which it reproduced and staged the latter's principal axiom according to which politics is a particular sphere, separate from "life," an activity consisting in speaking, debating, and voting. With the result that Nuit debout came to resemble an imaginary parliament, a kind of legislative organ with no executive function, and hence a manifestation of powerlessness that was sure to please the media and the governing authorities. One participant sums up what happened, or rather what *didn't happen*, at Nuit debout: "The only shared position, perhaps, is the desire for an endless discussion [...] The unsaid and the vague have always been privileged to the detriment of taking a position, which would be selective by definition, hence supposedly non-inclusive." Another offers the following appraisal: "A succession of speeches limited to two minutes and never followed by any discussion could not fail to be tiresome. Once the surprise had worn off at seeing so many people excited about expressing themselves, the absence of anything at stake started to empty these meetings of the sense they appeared to have. [...] We were here to be together, but the

rules separated us. We were here to exorcise the curse of our respective solitudes, but the assemblies gave the curse a glaring visibility. For me the assembly should be the place where the collective is experienced, felt, explored, confirmed, and finally, if only in a punctual way, declared. But for that, it would have been necessary for real *discussions* to occur. The problem was that we didn't talk *to each other*; we spoke one after the other. The worst of what we meant to avert on the Place unfolded there in a general incomprehension: a collective impotence that mistakes the spectacle of solitudes for the invention of an active collective [...] A conjuration of blockades finally got the better of my patience. The key person of our committee, no doubt without any intentional ill-will on her part, had a special gift for discouraging with all sorts of logistic and procedural quibbles every attempt to reintroduce some stakes into the functioning of the assemblies." And finally: "Like many others, I sometimes had the impression that there was a kind of opaque power structure that furnished the major orientations of the movement [...] [that there was] another level of decision-making than that of the ordinary assemblies." The micro-bureaucracy that ran Nuit debout in Paris, and that was literally a *bureaucracy of the microphone*, was caught in this uncomfortable situation that it could only roll out its vertical strategies hidden

behind the *spectacle of horizontality* presented each day at 6 pm by the sovereign assembly of emptiness that was held there, with its changing walk-on actors. That is why what was said there basically didn't matter much, and least of all to its organizers. Their ambitions and strategies were deployed elsewhere than on the square, and in a language whose cynicism could be given free rein only on the terrace of a hipster café, in the last stage of intoxication, between accomplices. Nuit debout showed in an exemplary way how "direct democracy," "collective intelligence," "horizontality," and hyperformalism could function as means of control and a method of sabotage. This might seem dreadful, but Nuit debout, nearly everywhere in France, illustrated line by line what was said about the "movement of the squares" in *To Our Friends*, and was judged to be so scandalous by many militants at the moment of its publication. To the point that, since the summer of 2016, every time an assembly begins to turn in circles, and nothing is said beyond a rambling succession of leftist monologues, there's almost always someone who will shout, "No, please! Not Nuit debout!" This is the huge credit that must be granted to Nuit debout: it made the misery of assemblyism not just a theoretical certainty but a shared experience. But in the fantasy of the assembly and decision-making there's clearly something that escapes any argument.

This has to do with the fact that the fantasy is implanted deeply in life, and not at the surface of “political convictions.” At bottom, the problem of political decision-making only redoubles and displaces to a collective scale what is already an illusion in the individual: the belief that our actions, our thoughts, our gestures, our words, and our behaviors result from decisions emanating from a central, conscious, and sovereign entity—the Self. The fantasy of the “sovereignty of the Assembly” only repeats on the collective plane the sovereignty of the Self. When one knows all that monarchy owes to the development of the notion of “sovereignty,” one is sometimes led to wonder if the myth of the Self is not simply the theory of the subject that royalty imposed wherever it prevailed in practice. Indeed, for the king to be able to rule from his throne in the middle of the country, the Self must be enthroned in the middle of the world. One understands better, therefore, where the unbelievable narcissism of the general assemblies of *Nuit debout* comes from. It’s the thing, moreover, that ended up killing them, by making them the site, in speech after speech, of repeated outbursts of individual narcissism, which is to say, outbursts of powerlessness.

From “terrorist” attacks to the Germanwings crash, people have forgotten that the first French

“mass killer” of the new century, Richard Durn, at Nanterre in 2002, was a man literally *disgusted with politics*. He had passed through the Socialist Party before joining The Greens. He was an activist with the Human Rights League (Ligue des droits d’homme). He had made the Genoa “alter-globalization” switch in July of 2011. In the end, he had taken a Glock and, on March 27, 2002, opened fire on the municipal council of Nanterre, killing eight elected officials and wounding nineteen others. In his private journal he wrote: “I’m tired of always having in my head this sentence that keeps repeating: ‘I haven’t lived, I haven’t lived at all at the age of 30.’ [...] Why continue pretending to live? I can only feel myself living for a few moments by killing.” Dylan Klebold, one of the two conspirators of Columbine High School confided to his notebooks: “The meek are trampled on, the assholes prevail, the gods are deceiving [...] Farther and farther distant...That’s what’s happening... me and everything that zombies consider real...just images, not life. [...] The zombies and their society band together and try to destroy what is superior and what they don’t understand and what they are afraid of.” There you have some people who clearly took *revenge* instead of continuing to stew in their resentment. They dealt death and destruction because they didn’t see life anywhere. A point has been reached

where it's become impossible to maintain that the existential pertains to private life. Every new attack reminds us: the existential has a power of political eruption.

This is the big lie, and the great disaster of politics: to place politics on one side and life on the other, on one side what is said but isn't real and on the other what is lived but no longer can be said. There are the speeches of the prime minister and, for a century now, the barbed satire of the *Canard enchaîné*. There are the tirades of the great militant and there's the way he treats his fellow human beings, with whom he allows himself to conduct himself all the more miserably as he takes himself to be politically irreproachable. There's the sphere of the sayable and the voiceless, orphaned, mutilated life. And that takes to crying out because it no longer serves any purpose to speak. Hell is really the place where all speech is rendered meaningless. What is called "debate" nowadays is just the civilized murder of speech. Official politics has become so manifestly a repugnant sphere of deception that the only events still happening in that sphere reduce down to a paradoxical expression of hatred *of politics*. If Donald Trump is truly a figure of hatred it's because he is first and foremost a figure of the hatred of politics. And it's this hatred that carried him to power. Politics in its totality is

what plays into the hands of the National Front, and not the “*casseurs*” or the banlieue rioters.

What the media, the card-carrying militants, and the governments cannot forgive the so-called “*casseurs*” and other “black blocs” is: 1. proving that powerlessness is not a destiny, which constitutes a galling insult for all those who are content to grumble and who prefer to see the rioters, contrary to any evidence, as infiltrated agents “paid by the banks to aid the government”; 2. showing that one can act politically without doing politics, at any point in life and at the price of a little courage. What the “*casseurs*” demonstrate by their actions is that acting politically is not a question of discourse but of *gestures*, and they attest this down to the words they spray paint on the walls of the cities.

“*Politique*” should never have become a noun. It should have remained an adjective. An attribute, and not a substance. There are conflicts, there are encounters, there are actions, there are speech interventions that are “political,” because they make a decisive stand against something in a given situation, and because they express an affirmation concerning the world they desire. Political is that which bursts forth, which forms an event, which punches a hole in the orderly progression of the disaster. That which provokes polarization, drawing

a line, choosing sides. But there's no such thing as "politics." There's no specific domain that would gather up all these events, all these eruptions, independently of the place and moment in which they appear. There's no particular sphere where it would be a question of the affairs of everyone. There's no sphere separate from what is general. It suffices to formulate the matter to expose the fraud. Everything is political that relates to the encounter, the friction, or the conflict between forms of life, between regimes of perception, between sensibilities, between worlds *once this contact attains a certain threshold of intensity*. The crossing of this threshold is signaled immediately by its effects: frontlines are drawn, friendships and enmities are affirmed, cracks appear in the uniform surface of the social, there is a splitting apart of what was falsely joined together and subsurface communications between the different resulting fragments.

What occurred in the spring of 2016 in France was not a social movement but *a political conflict*, in the same way as 1968. This is shown by its effects, by the irreversibilities that it produced, by the lives that it caused to take a different path, by the desertions it determined, by the shared sensibility that is being affirmed since then in a part of the youth, and beyond. A generation could very well become ungovernable. These effects are making themselves



felt even in the ranks of the Socialist Party, in the split between the fractions that polarized at that time, in the fissure that condemns it to eventual implosion. Social movements have a structure, a liturgy, a protocol that define as excessive everything that escapes their bounds. Now, not only did this conflict not cease to outstrip all the constraints, whether political, union, or police in nature, but it was basically nothing but *an uninterrupted series of surges*. An uninterrupted series of surges, which the old worn-out forms of politics tried hopelessly to catch up with. The first call to demonstrate on March 9, 2016 was a bypassing of the unions by YouTubers, where the former had no choice but to *follow* the latter if they meant to preserve some reason for being. The subsequent demonstrations saw a continual overrunning of the processions by “young people” who positioned themselves in the lead. The Nuit debout initiative itself went beyond any recognized framework for mobilization. The free marches starting from the Place de la Republique, such as the “aperitif at Valls’ house,” were a spillover from Nuit debout in their turn. And so on. The only “movement demand”—the repeal of the loi Travail—was not really one, since it left no room for any adjustment, for any “dialogue.” With its entirely negative character, it only signified the refusal to continue being governed in this manner, and for some the

refusal to be governed *period*. No one here, neither from the government nor among the demonstrators, was open to the least negotiation. Back in the days of the dialectic and the social, conflict was always a moment of the dialogue. But here the semblances of dialogue were simply maneuvers: for the state bureaucracy and the union bureaucracy alike, it was a matter of marginalizing the party that was eternally absent from all the negotiating tables—the party of the street, which this time was the whole enchilada. It was a frontal shock between two forces—government against demonstrators—between two worlds and two *ideas* of the world: a world of profiteers, presided over by a few profiteers in chief, and a world made up of many worlds, where one can breathe and dance and live. Right at the outset, the slogan “the world or nothing” expressed what was at issue in reality: the loi Travail never formed the terrain of struggle, but rather its *detonator*. There could never be any final reconciliation. There could only be a provisional winner, and a loser bent on revenge.

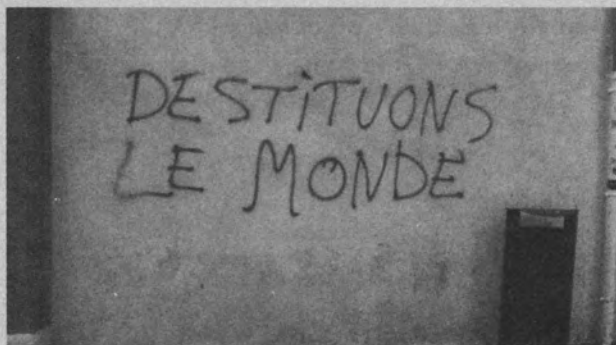
What is revealed in every political eruption is the irreducible human plurality, the unsinkable heterogeneity of ways of being and doing—the impossibility of the slightest totalization. For every civilization motivated by the drive toward the One, this will always be a scandal. There are no

strictly *political* words or language, There is only a political use of language in situation, in the face of a determinate adversity. That a rock is thrown at a riot cop does not make it a “political rock.” Nor are there any political entities—such as France, a party, or a man. What is political about them is the inner conflictuality that troubles them, it’s the tension between the antagonistic components that constitutes them, at the moment when the beautiful image of their unity breaks into pieces. We need to abandon the idea that there is politics only where there is vision, program, project, and perspective, where there is a goal, decisions to be made, and problems to be solved. What is truly political is only what emerges from life and makes it a definite, oriented reality. And it is born from what is nearby and not from a projection toward the far-distant. The nearby doesn’t mean the restricted, the limited, the narrow, the local. It means rather what is in tune, vibrant, adequate, present, sensible, luminous, and familiar—the prehensible and comprehensible. It’s not a spatial notion but an ethical one. Geographic distance is unable to remove us from that which we feel to be near. Conversely, being neighbors doesn’t always make us close. It’s only *from contact* that the friend and the enemy are discovered. A political situation does not result from a decision but from the shock or the meeting between several decisions. Whoever

starts from the nearby doesn't forgo what is distant, they simply give themselves a chance to get there. For it's always from the here and now that the far away is given. It's always *here* that the distant touches us and that we care about it. And this holds true in spite of the estrangement power of images, cybernetics, and the social.

A real political force can be constructed only from near to near and from moment to moment, and not through a mere statement of purposes. Besides, determining ends is still a means. One uses means only in a situation. Even a marathon is always run step by step. This way of situating what is political in the nearby, which is not the domestic, is the most precious contribution of a certain autonomous feminism. In its time, it threw the ideology of entire leftist parties, armed ones, into a crisis. The fact that feminists subsequently contributed to re-distancing the nearby, the "everyday," by ideologizing it, by politicizing it externally, discursively, constitutes the part of the feminist legacy that one can very well decline to accept. And to be sure, everything in this world is designed to distract us from what is there, very close. The "everyday" is predisposed to be the place which a certain stiffness would like to preserve from conflicts and affects that are too intense. It's precisely that very cowardice that lets everything slide and ends up making the everyday

so sticky and our relations so viscous. If we were more serene, more sure of ourselves, if we had less fear of conflict and of the disruption an encounter might bring, their consequences would likely be less disagreeable. And perhaps not disagreeable at all.



## **LET'S DESTITUTE THE WORLD**

Even though 80% of French people declared that they no longer expect anything from the politicians, the same 80% have confidence in the state and its institutions. No scandal, no evidence, no personal experience manages to make a dent in the respect owed to the institutional framework in this country. It's always the men who embody it who are to blame. There have been blunders, abuses, extraordinary breakdowns. The institutions, similar to ideology in this respect, are sheltered from the contradiction of facts, however recurrent. It was enough for the National Front to promise to restore the institutions to become reassuring instead of troubling. There's nothing surprising in that. The real has something intrinsically chaotic about it that humans need to stabilize by imposing a legibility, and thereby a foreseeability, on it. And what every institution provides is precisely a

*stationary* legibility of the real, an *ultimate* stabilization of phenomena. If the institution suits us so well, it's because the sort of legibility it guarantees saves us above all, each one of us, from *affirming* anything whatsoever, from risking our singular reading of life and of things, from producing together an intelligibility of the world that is properly ours and shared in common. The problem is that choosing not to do that is the same as *choosing not to exist*. It's to resign from life. In reality, what we need are not institutions but *forms*. It so happens, in fact, that life, whether biological, singular or collective, is precisely a continual creation of forms. It suffices to perceive them, to accept allowing them to arise, to make a place for them and accompany their metamorphosis. A habit is a form. A thought is a form. A friendship is a form. A work is a form. A profession is a form. Everything that lives is only forms and interactions of forms.

Except that, voilà, we are in France, the country where even the Revolution has become an institution, and which has exported that ambivalence to the four corners of the world. There is a *specifically French* love of the institution that must be dealt with if we wish to talk again about revolution one day, if not make one. Here the most libertarian of the psychotherapies has seen fit to label itself "institutional," the most critical of the sociologies



has given itself the name “institutional analysis.” If the principle comes to us from ancient Rome, the *affect* that accompanies it is clearly Christian in origin. The French passion for the institution is a flagrant symptom of the lasting Christian impregnation of a country that believes itself to be delivered from that. All the more lasting, moreover, as it believes itself to be delivered. We should never forget that the first modern thinker of the institution was that *lunatic* Calvin, that model of all the despisers of life, and that he was born in Picardy. The French passion for the institution comes from a properly Christian distrust towards life. The great malice of the institution idea is in its claiming to free us from the rule of the passions, from the uncontrollable hazards of existence, that it would be a transcendence of the passions when it is actually just one of them, and assuredly one of the most morbid. The institution claims to be a *remedy against men*, none of whom can be trusted, whether the people or the leader, the neighbor or the brother or the stranger. What governs it is always the same idiocy of sinful humanity, subject to desire, selfishness, and lust, and who must keep from loving anything whatsoever in this world and from giving in to their inclinations, which are all uniformly vicious. It’s not his fault if an economist like Frédéric Lordon can’t picture a revolution that is not a new institution. Because all economic

science, and not just its “institutional” current, has its basis finally in the lessons of Saint Augustine. Through its name and its language, what the institution promises is that a single thing, in this lower world, will have transcended time, will have withdrawn itself from the unpredictable flux of becoming, will have established a bit of tangible eternity, an unequivocal meaning, free of human ties and situations—a definitive stabilization of the real, like death.

This whole mirage dissolves when a revolution breaks out. Suddenly what seemed eternal collapses into time as though into a bottomless pit. What seemed to plunge its roots into the human heart turns out to have been nothing but a fable for dupes. The palaces are vacated and one discovers in the prince’s abandoned jumble of papers that he no longer believed in it all, if he ever had. For behind the façade of the institution, what goes on is always something other than it claims to be, it’s precisely what the institution claimed to have delivered the world from: the very human comedy of the coexistence of networks, of loyalties, of clans, interests, lineages, dynasties even, a logic of fierce struggles for territories, resources, miserable titles, influence—stories of sexual conquest and pure folly, of old friendships and rekindled hatreds. Every institution is, in its very regularity, the result of an intense bricolage and, as an institution, of a *denial of that*

*bricolage*. Its supposed fixity masks a gluttonous appetite for absorbing, controlling, institutionalizing everything that's on its margins and harbors a bit of life. The real model of every institution is universally the Church. Just as the Church clearly does not have as its goal leading the human flock to its divine salvation, but rather achieving *its own salvation* in time, the alleged function of an institution is only a pretext for its existence. In every institution the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* is re-enacted year after year. Its true purpose is to persist. No need to specify how many souls and bodies must be ground down in order to secure this result, and even within its own hierarchy. One doesn't become a leader without being basically the most ground down—the king of the ground-down. Reducing delinquency and “defending society” are only the pretext of the carceral institution. If, during the centuries it has existed, it has never succeeded at these things—on the contrary—this is because its purpose is different; it's is to go on existing and growing if possible, which means tending to the breeding ground of delinquency and managing the illegalities. The purpose of the medical institution is not to care for people's health, but to produce the patients that justify its existence and a corresponding definition of health. Nothing new on this subject since Ivan Illich and his *Medical Nemesis*. It's not the failure of the

health institutions that we are now living in a world that is toxic through and through and that makes everyone sick. On the contrary, we've seen their triumph. Quite often, the apparent failure of the institutions is their real function. If school discourages children from learning, this is not fortuitously: it's because children with a desire to learn would make school next to useless. The same goes for the unions, whose purpose is manifestly not the emancipation of workers, but rather the perpetuation of their condition. What could the bureaucrats of the labor unions do with their life, in fact, if the workers had the bad idea of actually freeing themselves? Of course in every institution there are sincere people who really think they are there to accomplish their mission. But it's no accident if those people see themselves systematically obstructed, are systematically kept out of the loop, punished, bullied, eventually ostracized, with the complicity of all the "realists" who keep their mouths shut. These choice victims of the institution have a hard time understanding its double talk, and what is really being asked of them. Their fate is to always be treated there as killjoys, as rebels, and to be endlessly surprised by that.

Against the slightest revolutionary possibility in France, one will always find the institution of the Self and the Self of the institution. Inasmuch as "being someone" always comes down finally to

the recognition of, the allegiance to, some institution, inasmuch as succeeding involves conforming to the reflection that you're shown in the hall of mirrors of the social game, the institution has a grip on everyone through the Self. All this couldn't last, would be too rigid, not dynamic enough, if the institution wasn't determined to compensate for its rigidity by a constant attention to the movements that jostle it. There's a perverse dialectic between institution and movements, which testifies to the former's relentless survival instinct. A reality as ancient, massive, and hieratic as that, inscribed in the bodies and minds of its subjects for the hundreds of years the French state has existed, could not have lasted so long if it had not been able to tolerate, monitor, and recuperate critics and revolutionaries as they presented themselves. The carnivalesque ritual of social movements function within it as a safety valve, as a tool for managing the social as well as for renewing the institution. They bring it the flexibility, the young flesh, the new blood that it so cruelly lacks. Generation after generation, in its great wisdom, the state has been able to coopt those who showed themselves amenable to being bought off, and crush those who acted intransigent. It's not for nothing that so many leaders of student movements have so naturally advanced to ministerial posts, being people who are sure to have a feel for

the state, that is, an appreciation of the institution as mask.

Breaking the circle that turns our contestation into a fuel for what dominates us, marking a rupture in the fatality that condemns revolutions to reproduce what they have driven out, shattering the iron cage of counter-revolution—this is the purpose of *destitution*. The notion of *destitution* is necessary in order to free the revolutionary imaginary of all the old constituent fantasies that weigh it down, of the whole deceptive legacy of the French Revolution. It is necessary to intervene in revolutionary logic, in order to establish a division *within* the idea of insurrection. For there are constituent insurrections, those that end like all the revolutions up to now have ended: by turning back into their opposite, those that have been made “in the name of”—in the name of whom or what? the people, the working class, or God, it matters little. And there are destituent insurrections, such as May ‘68, the Italian creeping May and so many insurrectionary communes. Despite all that it may have manifested that was cool, lively, unexpected, *Nuit debout*, like the Spanish movement of the squares or Occupy Wall Street previously, was troubled by the old constituent itch. What was staged spontaneously was the old revolutionary dialectic that would oppose the “constituted powers” with the “constituent power” of the people

taking over the public space. There's a good reason that in the first three weeks of *Nuit debout*, Place de la République, no fewer than three committees appeared that gave themselves the mission of rewriting a Constitution. What was re-enacted there was the old debate that's been performed to a full house in France *since 1792*. And it seems there's no getting enough of it. It's a national sport. There's not even any need to spruce up the décor to please today's taste. It must be said that the idea of constitutional reform presents the advantage of satisfying both the desire to change everything and the desire that everything stay the same—it's just a matter, finally, of changing a few lines, of symbolic modifications. As long as one debates words, as long as revolution is formulated in the language of rights and the law, the ways of neutralizing it are well-known and marked out.

When sincere Marxists proclaim in a union leaflet, "We are the real power!" it's still the same constituent fiction that is operating, and that distances us from strategic thinking. The revolutionary aura of this old logic is such that in its name the worst mystifications manage to pose as self-evident truths. "To speak of constituent power is to speak of democracy." It's with this risible lie that Toni Negri begins his book on the subject, and he's not the only one to trumpet these kinds of inanities that defy good sense. It's enough to have opened

the pages of *Constitutional Theory* by Carl Schmitt, who can't exactly be counted among the good friends of democracy, to realize the contrary. The fiction of constituent power suits monarchy as well as it suits dictatorship. Doesn't that pretty presidential slogan, "in the name of the people," say anything to anybody? It's regrettable to have to point out that Abbé Sieyès, inventor of the disastrous distinction between constituent power and constituted power, that brilliant sleight of hand, was never a democrat. This is what he said in his famous speech of September 7, 1789: "The citizens who appoint representatives refrain and must refrain from making the law themselves: they do not have any particular will to impose. If they dictated wills, France would no longer be this representative state; it would be a democratic state. The people, I repeat, in a country that is not a democracy (and France cannot be one), the people cannot speak, cannot act, except through its representatives." If to speak of "constituent power" is not necessarily to speak of "democracy," both these notions do, however, always lead revolutions into a cul-de-sac.

*Destituere* in Latin means: to place standing separate, raise up in isolation; to abandon; put aside, let drop, knock down; to let down, deceive. Whereas constituent logic crashes against the power apparatus it means to take control of, a



destituent potential is concerned instead with escaping from it, with removing any hold on it which the apparatus might have, as it increases its hold on the world in the separate space that it forms. Its characteristic gesture is *exiting*, just as the typical constituent gesture is taking by storm. In terms of a destituent logic, the struggle against state and capital is valuable first of all for the exit from capitalist normality that is experienced therein, for the desertion from the crappy relations with oneself, others, and the world under capitalism. Thus, where the “constituents” place themselves in a dialectical relation of struggle with the ruling authority in order to take possession of it, destituent logic obeys the vital need to *disengage from it*. It doesn’t abandon the struggle, it *fastens on to the struggle’s positivity*. It doesn’t adjust itself to the movements of the adversary but to what is required for the increase of its own potential. So it has little use for criticizing: “The choice is either to get out without delay, without wasting one’s time criticizing, simply because one is placed elsewhere than in the region of the adversary, or else one criticizes, one keeps one foot in it, and has the other one outside. We need to leap outside and dance above it,” as Jean-François Lyotard explained, by way of recognizing the gesture of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*. And Deleuze made this remark: “Roughly speaking, one recognizes a Marxist

by their saying that a society contradicts itself, is defined by its contradictions, especially its class contradictions. We say rather is that in a society everything is escaping, that a society is defined by its lines of escape [...] Escape, but while escaping look for a weapon.” It’s not a question of fighting *for* communism. What matters is the communism that is lived *in the fight itself*. The true richness of an action lies within itself. This doesn’t mean that for us there’s no question of the observable effectiveness of an action. It means that the impact potential of an action doesn’t reside in its effects, but in what is immediately expressed in it. What is constructed on the basis of effort always ends up collapsing from exhaustion. Typically, the operation that the cortège de tête causes the processional setup of union demonstrations to undergo is an operation of destitution. With the vital joy it expressed, the rightness of its gesture, its determination, with its affirmative as well as offensive character, the cortège de tête drew in all that was still lively in the militant ranks and it destituted demonstrations as an institution. Not with a critique of the rest of the march but something other than a symbolic use of capturing the street. Withdrawing from the institutions is anything but leaving a void, it’s suppressing them *in a positive way*.

To destitute is not primarily to attack the institution, but to attack the need we have of it. It’s not

to criticize it—the first critics of the state are the civil servants themselves; as to the militant, the more they criticize power the more they desire it and the more they refuse to acknowledge their desire—but to take to heart what the institution is meant to do, from outside it. To destitute the university is to establish, at a distance, the places of research, of education and thought, that are more vibrant and more demanding than it is—which would not be hard—and to greet the arrival of the last vigorous minds who are tired of frequenting the academic zombies, and only then to administer its death blow. To destitute the judicial system is to learn to settle our disputes ourselves, applying some method to this, paralyzing its faculty of judgment and driving its henchmen from our lives. To destitute medicine is to know what is good for us and what makes us sick, to rescue from the institution the passionate knowledges that survive there out of view, and never again to find oneself alone at the hospital, with one's body handed over to the artistic sovereignty of a disdainful surgeon. To destitute the government is to make ourselves ungovernable. Who said anything about winning? Overcoming is everything.

The destituent gesture does not *oppose* the institution. It doesn't even mount a frontal fight, it neutralizes it, empties it of its substance, then steps to the side and watches it expire. It reduces it down

to the incoherent ensemble of its practices and makes decisions about them. A good example of the indirectness of the action of a destituent potential is the way in which the party then in power, the Socialist Party, was led in the summer of 2016 to cancel its *université annuelle*, the party's summer school at Nantes. What was constituted in June within the assembly called "Attack!" ["À l'abordage!"] did something the cortège de tête couldn't manage to do during the whole spring conflict: it got the heterogeneous components of the struggle to meet and organize together beyond a movement time frame. Unionists, Nuit-deboutists, university students, Zadists, lycée students, retirees, community volunteers, and other artists began to put together a well-deserved welcoming committee for the Socialist Party. For the government, the risks were great that the little destituent potential that had spoiled life for it throughout the spring would be reborn at a higher degree of organization. The convergent efforts of the confederations, the police, and the vacations to bury the conflict would have all been for nothing. So the Socialist Party withdrew and abandoned the idea of doing battle faced with the threat posed by the very positivity of the bonds formed in the "Attack!" assembly and the determination emanating from them. In exactly the same way, it's the potential of the connections that are formed around the ZAD

that protects it, and not its military strength. The finest destituent victories are often those where the battle simply never takes place.

Fernand Deligny said: “In order to fight *against* language and the institution, the right phrase is perhaps not to fight against, but to take the most distance possible, even if this means signaling one’s position. Why would we go and press ourselves against the wall? Our project is not to take and hold the square.” Deligny was clearly being what Toni Negri cannot abide, “a destituent.” But observing what happens when a constituent logic of combining social movements with a party aiming to take power, it does look like destitution is the way to go. Thus we saw, in the last few years, Syriza, that political party “issuing from the movement of the squares,” becoming the best relay for the austerity policies of the European Union. As for Podemos, everyone no doubt can appreciate the radical novelty of the quarrels for its control, which pitted its number 1 against its number 2. And how could one forget the touching speech of Pablo Iglesias during the legislative campaign of June 2016: “We are the political force of law and order [...] We are proud of saying ‘our country.’ [...] Because our country has institutions that enable children to go to the theater and to school. That is why we are defenders of the institutions, defenders of the law, because the poor only have

the law and their rights.” Or this instructive tirade of March 2015, in Andalusia: “I’d like to pay a tribute: long live our democratic servicemen! Long live the Guardia Civil, those policemen who put handcuffs on the corrupt.” The latest deplorable political intrigues that now make up the life of Podemos moved certain of its members to make this bitter observation: “They wanted to take power, and it is power that has taken them.” As for the “citizens movements” that decided to “squat power” by taking possession of the Barcelona mayor’s office, they’ve confided to their former friends of the squats something they still can’t declare in public: by gaining access to the institutions, they were indeed able to “take power,” but *there was nothing they could do with it* from there, apart from scuttling a few hotel projects, legalizing one or two occupations and receiving with great ceremony Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris.

Destitution makes it possible to rethink what we mean by revolution. The traditional revolutionary program involved a reclaiming of the world, an expropriation of the expropriators, a violent appropriation of that which is ours, but which we have been deprived of. But here’s the problem: capital has taken hold of every detail and every dimension of existence. It has created a world in its image. From being an exploitation of the existing forms of life, it has transformed itself into a total

universe. It has configured, equipped, and made desirable the ways of speaking, thinking, eating, working and vacationing, of obeying and rebelling, that suit its purpose. In doing so, it has reduced to very little the share of things in this world that one might want to reappropriate. Who would wish to reappropriate nuclear power plants, Amazon's warehouses, the expressways, ad agencies, high-speed trains, Dassault, La Défense business complex, auditing firms, nanotechnologies, supermarkets and their poisonous merchandise? Who imagines a people's takeover of industrial farming operations where a single man plows 400 hectares of eroded ground at the wheel of his megatractor piloted via satellite? No one with any sense. What complicates the task for revolutionaries is that the old constituent gesture no longer works there either. With the result that the most desperate, the most determined to save it, have finally found the winning formula: in order to have done with capitalism, all we have to do is reappropriate money itself! A Negriist deduces this from the spring of 2016 conflict: "Our goal is the following: transformation of the rivers of command money that flow from the faucets of the European Central Bank into money as money, into unconditional social income! Bring the fiscal paradises back down to Earth, attack the citadels of offshore finance, confiscate the deposits of liquid returns, secure everyone's access to the

world of commodities—the world in which we really live, whether that pleases us or not. The only universalism that people love is that of money! Let anyone wishing to take power begin by taking the money! Let anyone wishing to institute the commons of counter-power begin by securing the material conditions on the basis of which those counter-powers can actually be constructed! Let anyone preferring the destituent exodus consider the objective possibilities of a withdrawal from the production of the dominant social relations that are inherent in the possession of money! Let anyone in favor of a general and renewable strike reflect at the margins of the wage autonomy granted by a socialization of income worthy of that name! Let anyone wishing for an insurrection of the subalterns not forget the powerful promise of liberation contained in the slogan “Let’s take the money!” A revolutionary who cares about their mental health will want to leave constituent logic and its rivers of imaginary money behind them.

So the revolutionary gesture no longer consists in a simple violent appropriation of this world; it divides into two. On the one hand, there are worlds to be made, forms of life made to grow apart from what reigns, including by salvaging what can be salvaged from the present state of things, and on the other, there is the imperative to attack, to simply destroy the world of capital. A



two-pronged gesture that divides again: it's clear that the worlds one constructs can maintain their apartness from capital only together with the fact of attacking it and conspiring against it. It's clear that attacks not inspired by a different heartfelt idea of the world would have no real reach, would exhaust themselves in a sterile activism. In destruction the complicity is constructed on the basis of which the sense of destroying is constructed. And vice versa. It's only from the destituent standpoint that one can grasp all that is incredibly constructive in the breakage. Without that, one would not understand how a whole segment of a union demonstration can applaud and chant when the window of a car dealership finally gives way and falls to the ground or when a piece of urban furniture is smashed to pieces. Nor that it seems so natural for a cortège de tête of 10,000 persons to break everything deserving to be broken, and even a bit more, along the whole route of a demonstration such as that of June 14, 2016 in Paris. Nor that all the anti-smashers rhetoric of the government apparatus, so well-established and normally so effective, lost its traction and was no longer convincing to anyone. Breaking is understandable, among other things, as an open debate in public on the question of property. The bad-faith reproach "they always break what is not theirs" needs to be turned back around. How can you

break something unless, at the moment of breaking it, the thing is in your hands, is in a sense yours? Recall the Civil Code: “As regards furniture, possession can be taken as ownership.” In effect, someone who breaks doesn’t engage in an act of negation, but in a paradoxical, counterintuitive affirmation. They affirm, against all appearances: “This is ours!” Breaking, therefore, is affirmation, is appropriation. It discloses the problematic character of the property regime that now governs all things. Or at least it opens the debate on this thorny point. And there is scarcely a different way to begin it than this, so prone it is to close back down as soon as it is opened in a peaceful manner. Everyone will have noted, moreover, how the conflict of the spring of 2016 served as a divine lull in the deterioration of public debate.

Only an affirmation has the potential for accomplishing the work of destruction. The destituent gesture is thus desertion and attack, creation and wrecking, and all at once, *in the same gesture*. It defies the accepted logics of alternativism and activism at the same time. It forms a linkage between the extended time of construction and the spasmodic time of intervention, between the disposition to enjoy our piece of the world and the disposition to place it at stake. Along with the taste for risk-taking, the reasons for living disappear. Comfort—which clouds perceptions, takes pleasure

in repeating words that it empties of any meaning, and prefers not to know anything—is the real enemy, the enemy *within*. Here it is not a question of a new social contract, but of a new strategic composition of worlds.

Communism is the real movement that destitutes the existing state of things.



## **END OF WORK, MAGICAL LIFE**

During the conflict triggered by the loi Travail, it seemed to be a question of government, of democracy, of article 49.3 of the constitution, of violence, migrants, terrorism, of whatever one prefers, but of work itself almost not at all. By comparison, in 1998, during the “movement of the unemployed,” it had paradoxically only been a question of that, of work, even if it came down to refusing it. Not so long ago, when one met someone it was still natural to ask: “So what do you do in life?” And the answer came just as naturally. One still managed to say what position one held in the general organization of production. That could even serve as a calling card. In the time since, the wage-earning society has imploded to such an extent that one avoids questions of this sort, which tend to make people uneasy. Everyone patches things together, gets by, branches off, takes a break,

starts up again. Work has lost its luster and its centrality, not just socially but existentially as well.

From generation to generation, a larger and larger number of us are supernumerary, “useless to the world”—in any case, to the economic world. Seeing that for sixty years there have been people like Norbert Wiener who prophesy that automation and cybernatization “will produce an unemployment compared to which the current difficulties and the economic crisis of the years 1930-36 will look like child’s play,” it eventually had to come to pass. The latest word is that Amazon is planning to open, in the United States, 2000 completely automated convenience stores with no cash registers hence no cashiers and under total monitoring, with facial recognition of the customers and real-time analysis of their gestures. On entering you make your smartphone beep at a terminal and then you serve yourself. What you take is automatically debited from your Premium account, thanks to an app, and what you put back on the shelf is re-credited. It’s called Amazon Go. In this shopping dystopia of the future there is no more cash money, no more standing in line, no more theft, and almost no more employees. It’s predicted that this new model, if implemented, will turn the whole business of distribution, the greatest provider of jobs in the U.S., upside down. Eventually, three quarters of the jobs would disappear

in the sector of convenience stores. More generally, if one limits oneself to the forecasts of the World Bank, by about 2030, under the pressure of “innovation,” 40% of the existing jobs in the wealthy countries will have vanished. “We will never work,” was a piece of bravado by Rimbaud. It’s about to become the lucid assessment of a whole generation of young people.

From the extreme left to the extreme right, there’s no lack of bullshitters who endlessly promise us a “return to full employment.” Those who would have us regret the golden age of the classic wage system, whether they are Marxists or liberals, are not averse to lying about its origin. They claim that the wage system freed us from serfdom, from slavery, and from the traditional structures—in sum, that it constituted a “progress.” Any somewhat serious historical study will show on the contrary that it came into being as an extension and intensification of prior servitude. The truth is that making a man into the “possessor of his labor power” and making him disposed to “sell it,” that is, bringing the figure of the Worker into everyday life and customs, was something that required a considerable quantity of spoliations, expulsions, plunderings, and devastations, a great deal of terror, disciplinary measures, and deaths. One hasn’t understood anything about the *political* character

of the economy until they've seen that what it hinges on as far as labor is concerned is not so much producing commodities as it is producing *workers*—which is to say, a certain relationship with oneself, with the world, and with others. Waged labor was the form by which a *certain* order was maintained. The fundamental violence it contains, the violence that is obscured by the broken-down body of the assembly-line worker, the miner killed in a methane explosion, or the burnout of employees under extreme managerial pressure, has to do with the meaning of life. By selling their time, by turning themselves into the subject of the thing they're employed to do, the wage worker places the meaning of their existence in the hands of those who care nothing about them, indeed whose purpose is to ride roughshod over them. The wage system has enabled generations of men and women to live while evading the question of life's meaning, by "making themselves useful," by "making a career," by "serving." The wage worker has always been free to postpone this question till later—till retirement, let's say—while leading an honorable social life. And since it is apparently "too late" to raise it once retired, all that's left to do is to wait patiently for death. We will thus have been able to spend an entire life without entering into existence. There is a good reason why Munch's painting, *The Scream*, portrays, still today, the true



face of contemporary humanity. What this desperate individual on their jetty doesn't find is an answer to the question, "How am I to live?"

For capital, the disintegration of wage-earning society is both an opportunity for reorganization and a political risk. The risk is that humans might devise an unforeseen use of their time and their life, that they might even take to heart the question of its meaning. Those in charge have even made sure, therefore, that we humans having the leisure are not at liberty to make use of it as we please. It's as if we needed to work more as consumers in proportion as we work less as producers. As if consumption no longer signified a satisfaction, but rather a social obligation. Moreover the technological equipment of leisure increasingly resembles that of labor. While in our fooling around on the Internet all our clicks produce the data that the GAFA resell, work is tricked out with all the enticements of gaming by introducing scores, levels, bonuses and other infantilizing caveats. Instead of seeing the current security push and the orgy of surveillance as a response to the September 11 attacks, it would not be unreasonable to see them as a response to the economically established fact that it was precisely in 2000 that technological innovation started to decrease the volume of job offerings. It's now necessary to be

able to monitor en masse all our activities, all our communications, all our gestures, to place cameras and sensors everywhere, because *wage-earning discipline no longer suffices for controlling the population*. It's only to a population totally under control that one can dream of offering a universal basic income.

But that's not the main thing. It's necessary above all to maintain the reign of the economy beyond the extinction of the wage system. This has to do with the fact that if there is less and less work, everything is *all the more mediated by money*, be it in very small amounts. Given the absence of work, the need to earn money in order to survive must be maintained. Even if a universal basic income is established one day, as so many liberal economists recommend, its amount would need to be large enough to keep a person from dying of hunger, but utterly insufficient to live on, even frugally. We are witnessing a change of regime within economy. The majestic figure of the Worker is being succeeded by the puny figure of the Needy Opportunist [*le Crevard*]*—because if money and control are to infiltrate everywhere, it's necessary for money to be lacking everywhere. Henceforth, everything must be an occasion for generating a little money, a little value, for earning “a little cash.” The present technological offensive should also be understood as a way to occupy and valorize*

those who can no longer be exploited through waged labor. What is too quickly described as the uberization of the world, unfolds in two different ways. Thus on the one hand you have Uber, Deliveroo and the like, that unskilled job opportunity requiring only one's old machine as capital. Every driver is free to self-exploit as much as they like, knowing that they must roll around fifty hours a week to earn the equivalent of the minimum wage. And then there are Airbnb, BlaBlaCar, dating sites, "coworking," and now even "cohomming" or "costorage," and all the applications that enable the sphere of the valorizable to be extended to infinity. What is involved with the "collaborative economy," with its inexhaustible possibilities of valorization, is not just a mutation of life—it's a mutation of the possible, a mutation *of the norm*. Before Airbnb, an unoccupied room was a "guest room" or a room available for a new use; now it's a loss of income. Before BlaBlaCar, a solo drive in one's car was an occasion to daydream, or pick up a hitchhiker, or whatever, but now it's a missed chance to make a little money, and hence a *scandal*, economically speaking. What one gave to recycling or to friends one now sells on *Le bon coin*. It's expected that always and from every point of view one will be engaged in *calculating*. That the fear of "missing an opportunity" will goad us forward in life. The important thing is not working for one

euro an hour or making a few pennies by scanning contents for Amazon Mechanical Turk, but where this participation might lead someday. Henceforth everything must enter into the sphere of profitability. Everything in life becomes valorizable, even its trash. And we ourselves are becoming needy opportunists, human trash, who exploit each other under the pretext of a “sharing economy.” If a growing share of the population is destined to be excluded from the wage system this is not in order to allow it the leisure to go hunt Pokémons in the morning and to fish in the afternoon. The invention of new markets where one didn’t imagine them to be the year before illustrates this fact that is so difficult to explain to a Marxist: capitalism doesn’t so much consist in selling what is produced as in *rendering accountable whatever is not yet accountable*, in assigning a measureable worth to what seemed to be absolutely unsusceptible to that the day before, in creating new markets. That is its oceanic reserve of accumulation. Capitalism is the universal expansion of *measurement*.

In economics, the theory of the Needy Opportunist, the Crevard, is called the “theory of human capital,” which is more presentable. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines it these days as “the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and

economic well-being.” Joseph Stiglitz, the left-economist, estimates that “human capital” now represents between 2/3 and 3/4 of the total capital—which tends to confirm the correctness of Stalin’s unironic title: *Man, the Most Precious Capital*. According to Locke, “Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his” (*Treatise of Civil Government*), which in his mind did not rule out either servitude or colonization. Marx made “man” the proprietor of his “labor power”—a rather mysterious metaphysical entity, when you think about it. But in both cases man was the owner of something that he could alienate while remaining intact. He was formally something other than what he sold. With the theory of human capital, man is less the possessor of an indefinite cluster of capitals—cultural, relational, professional, financial, symbolic, sexual, health—than he is *himself* that cluster. He *is* capital. He constantly arbitrates between increasing what he is as capital, and the fact of selling it in some market or other. He is inseparably the producer, the product, and the seller of the product. Football players, actors, stars, and popular YouTubers are logically the heroes of the era of human capital, people whose value fully coincides with what they are. Micro-economics thus becomes the general

science of behaviors, whether this is in commerce, at church, or in love. Everyone becomes an enterprise guided by a constant concern with self-valorization, by a vital imperative of self-promotion. In essence man becomes the *optimizing creature*—the Needy Opportunist.

The reign of the Needy Opportunist is an aspect of what the journal *Invariance* called, in the 1960s, the *anthropomorphosis of capital*. As capital “realizes, on the entire planet and in the whole life of every person, the modes of total colonization of what exists that are designated by the terms *real domination* [...] the Self-as-capital is the new form that value aims to assume after devalorization. Within each one of us capital is summoning the life force to work (Cesarano, *Apocalypse et revolution*).” This is the machination by which capital appropriates all the human attributes and by which humans make themselves into the neutral support of capitalist valorization. Capital no longer just determines the forms of cities, the content of work and leisure, the imaginary of the crowds, the language of real life and that of intimacy, the ways of being in fashion, the needs and their satisfaction, it also produces *its own people*. It engenders its own *optimizing* humanity. Here all the old chestnuts about value theory take their place in the wax museum. Consider the contemporary case of the dance floor of a nightclub: no one is there for the

money but to have fun. No one was forced to go there in the way one goes back to work. There is no apparent exploitation, no visible circulation of money between future partners who are still moving and grooving together. And yet everything going on there has to do with evaluation, valorization, self-valorization, individual preference, strategies, ideal matching of a supply and a demand, under constraint of optimization—in short, a neo-classical and human-capital market, pure and simple. The logic of value now coincides with organized life. Economy as a relationship with the world has long surpassed economy as a sphere. The folly of evaluation obviously dominates every aspect of contemporary work, but it also rules as a mistress over everything that escapes that sphere. It determines even the solitary jogger's relationship with themselves, the jogger who, in order to improve their performances, needs to know them in detail. Measurement has become the obligatory mode of being of all that intends to exist socially. The *social* media outline very logically the future of all-points evaluation that we are promised. On this point, one can rely on the prophecies of *Black Mirror* as well as those of this analyst who is enthusiastic about contemporary markets: "Imagine that tomorrow, with every little word posted on the Web, for no matter what online babble, exchange, meeting, transaction,

share, or behavior, you will need to consider the impact this might have on your reputation. Consider next that your reputation will no longer be a kind of immaterial emanation that certain people will be able to inquire about with your friends and professional partners, but an actual certificate of all-round ability established by complex algorithms based on the intersection of a thousand and one pieces of information about you on the Web...data which are themselves cross-referenced with the reputations of the persons you have rubbed shoulders with! Welcome to an imminent future, where your “reputation” will be concretely recorded, as a universal file accessible to all: a relational, professional, commercial door-opener, capable of allowing or preventing an opportunity for car sharing on Mobizen or Deways, a romantic meeting on Meetic or Attractive World, a sale on eBay or Amazon... and more, this time in the quite tangible world: a professional appointment, a real estate transaction, or a bank loan...increasingly, our appearances on the Web will constitute the foundation of our reputation. Furthermore, our social value will become a major indicator of our economic value.”

What is new in the current phase of capital is that it now has the technical means at its disposal for a generalized, real-time evaluation of every aspect of



beings. The passion for rating and cross-rating has escaped the classrooms, the stock market, and supervisors' files and invaded every area of life. If one accepts the paradoxical notion of "use value" as designating "the very body of the commodity [...], its natural properties [...], an assemblage of multiple characteristics" (Marx), the field of value has been refined to the point that it manages to achieve a tight fit with that famous "use value," places, the characteristics of beings, and things: it conforms to bodies so closely that it coincides with them like a second skin. This is what an economist-sociologist, Lucien Karpik, calls the "economy of singularities." The value of things tends not to be distinguishable from their concrete existence. A French-Lebanese financier, Bernard Mourad, made this into a piece of fiction: *Les Actifs corporels* [corporeal assets]. It may be useful to know that the author went from the Morgan Stanley commercial bank to the directorship of the Altice Media Group, Patric Drahi's holding branch that controls *Libération*, *L'Express* and i24 News in particular, before becoming Emmanuel Macron's special adviser during his campaign. In the novel, he imagines the entry of a person into the stock market, a banker obviously, with his psychoanalytic and professional profile and biological checkup in support. This story of the insertion of a "society-cum-person" into a market position in the context

of a “New Individual Economy” was futuristic upon its publication in 2006. Currently the employer federation MEDEF is proposing that a SIRET number, a business identification number, be assigned to every French citizen at their birth. The value of beings becomes the set of their “individual characteristics”—their health, their humor, their beauty, their know-how, their relations, their “social skills,” their imagination, their creativity, and so on. That’s the theory, and the reality, of “human capital.” The value field has incorporated so many dimensions that it has become a complex space. It’s become the whole ensemble of the *socially* sayable, legible, and visible. The value that was social in a formal sense has become social in a real sense. As money lost its impersonal, anonymous, indifferent character to become traceable, localized, personalized, currency came alive as well. “The modern world,” wrote Péguy, “is not prostitutional through lust. It is quite incapable of that. It is universally prostitutional because it is universally interchangeable.” Something prostitutional enters in wherever our “social value” reigns, wherever a part of ourselves is exchanged for the least remuneration, be it financial, symbolic, political, affective, or sexual. Contemporary dating sites form a remarkable case of mutual and fun prostitution, but prostitution happens everywhere, and all the time, whenever people *sell themselves*. Who can

say, nowadays when all reputational capital is so easily convertible into sexual surplus value, that we are not in “a phase in industrial production where producers are able to demand objects of sensation from consumers as a form of payment. These objects would be living beings. [...] Living currency, even if it existed in parallel with the market of inert currency, would be fully capable of being substituted for the role of the gold standard, once it was implanted in habits and instituted in economic norms.” (Pierre Klossowski, *Living Currency*).

The giddiness associated with money derives from its nature as pure potential. Monetary accumulation is the postponement of any actual enjoyment; since money brings into equivalence as possibilities the whole array of things that can be bought with it. Every expenditure, every purchase is first a forfeiture, relative to what money *is capable of*. Every specific enjoyment it allows one to acquire is first a negation of the set of other potential enjoyments it contains within it. In the epoch of human capital and living currency, every moment of life and every real relation are haloed by a set of possible equivalents that gnaw at them. Being here involves the untenable renunciation of being everywhere else, where life is apparently more intense, as our smartphone has charged itself with informing us. Being with a particular person is an unbearable

sacrifice of all the other persons with whom one *could* just as well be with. Every love is vitiated in advance by all the other possible loves. Hence the impossibility of being there, the ineptitude for being-with. Universal unhappiness. Torture by possibilities. Sickness unto death. "Despair," as Kierkegaard diagnosed it.

Economy is not just a system we must exit if we are to cease being needy opportunists. It is what we must escape simply in order to live, in order to be present to the world. Each thing, each being, each place is immeasurable inasmuch as it is there. One can measure a thing as much as one likes, from every angle and in all its dimensions, its concrete existence is eternally beyond all measure. Each being is irreducibly singular, if only from the fact of being here now. Ultimately, the real is incalculable, unmanageable. That is why it takes so many *policing measures* to preserve a semblance of order, uniformity, equivalence. "The confusing reality of things/  
Is my everyday discovery/ Each thing is what it is/  
It's hard to explain to anyone how much that pleases me, and how sufficient it is for me/ It's enough to exist to be complete. [...] If I extend my arm, I reach exactly where my arm reaches./ Not even a centimeter farther./ I touch there where I touch, not there where I think./ I can only sit down where I am./ And what is truly laughable is that we're always thinking of something else and roaming

far from a body” (Alberto Caeiro) As its guiding principle, the economy makes us scurry about like rats, so that we’re never *there*, to uncover the secret of its usurpation: presence.

To leave the economy is to bring out the plane of reality it covers over. Commodity exchange and all that it comprises in the way of harsh negotiation, mistrust, deceit, and *wabu wabu*, as the Melanesians say, is not exclusively Western. In places where people know how to live, one only practices this type of relations with outsiders, people one is not connected with, who are distant enough so that a mix-up cannot develop into a general conflict. To pay, in Latin, comes from *pacare*, “to satisfy, to calm,” for example by distributing money to soldiers so they can buy themselves some salt—thus a wage. One pays *in order to have peace*. The whole vocabulary of economy is basically a vocabulary of avoided war. “There is a link, a continuity, between hostile relations and the provision of reciprocal prestations: Exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions.” (Levi-Strauss). Economy’s defect is to reduce all possible relationships to hostile relations, every distance to foreignness. What it covers over in this way is the entire gamut, all the gradation, all the heterogeneity among the different existing and imaginable relations. Depending on the degree of proximity between beings, there is a

commonality of goods, a sharing of certain things, exchange with an adjusted reciprocity, mercantile exchange, or a total absence of exchange. And every form of life has its language and its notions for expressing this multiplicity of regimes. Making the bastards pay is good warfare. When you love you don't count the cost. Where money talks, words are worth nothing. Where words matter, money's worth nothing. Thus, exiting the economy is being able to clearly distinguish between the possible divisions and, from where one is, to deploy a whole art of distances. It's to push the hostile relations—and the sphere of money, accounting, measurement—as far away as possible. It's to banish to the margins of life that which is presently its norm, its core, its essential condition.

There's a boatload of people nowadays who are trying to escape the rule of the economy. They're becoming bakers instead of consultants. They're going on unemployment as soon as they can. They're forming cooperatives, SCOPs and SCICs. They're trying to "work differently." But the economy is so well designed that it now has a whole sector, that of the "social and solidarity economy," which runs on the energy of those escaping it. A sector that merits a special ministry and accounts for 10% of the French GDP. All kinds of nets, discourses, and legal structures have been put in place to capture the escapees. They

devote themselves in all sincerity to the thing they dream of doing, but their activity is socially recoded, and this coding ends up overshadowing everything they do. A few people take collective responsibility for the upkeep of their hamlet's water source and one day they find that they're "managing the commons." Not many sectors have developed such an obsessive love of bookkeeping, out of a concern for justice, transparency, or exemplarity, as that of the social and solidarity economy. Any small to medium business is a bookkeeping bordello by comparison. However, we do have more than a hundred and fifty years of experience of cooperatives telling us they have never constituted the slightest threat to capitalism. Those that survive end up sooner or later becoming businesses like the others. *There is no "other economy," there's just another relationship with the economy.* A relationship of distance and hostility, to be exact. The mistake of the social and solidarity economy is to *believe* in the structures it adopts. It's to insist that what occurs inside it conforms to the statutes, to the official modes of operation. The only relationship one can have with the structures adopted is to use them as umbrellas for doing something *altogether different than what the economy authorizes*. So it is to be *complicit* in that use and that distance. A commercial print shop tended by a friend will make its machines available on the weekends it is

idle, and the paper will be paid for under the table so there's no record. A group of carpenter friends will use all the equipment they have access to in their company to build a cabin for the ZAD. A restaurant whose name is known and respected throughout the city hosts after-hours discussions among comrades that musn't be heard by the intelligence services. We should make use of economic structures only on condition that we *tear a hole in them*.

As an economic structure, no business has any meaning. It exists, and that is all, but it *is nothing*. Its meaning can only come to it from an element that is foreign to economy. Generally it's the task of "communication" to clothe the economic structure in the meaning it lacks—moreover, the exemplary moral significance and reasons for being that the entities of the social and solidarity economy are so fond of giving themselves must be considered as a banal form of "communication" intended for internal consumption as much as it is directed toward the outside. This makes some of those entities into niches that allow themselves to practice oddly expensive pricing on the one hand, and on the other to be exploitative in a way that's all the more brazen as it is "for a good cause." As for the structure with holes in it, it draws its meaning not from what it communicates but from what it keeps secret: its clandestine participation in a political



scheme immeasurably larger than it, its use for ends that are economically neutral, not to say senseless, but politically judicious, and for means that as an economic structure it is designed to accumulate *without end*. Organizing in a revolutionary way via a whole resistance network of legal structures exchanging between themselves is possible, but risky. Among other things, this could furnish an ideal cover for international conspiratorial relations. There's always the threat, however, of falling back into the economic rut, of losing the thread of what we're doing, of no longer seeing the sense of the conspiracy. The fact remains that we must organize ourselves, organize on the basis of what we love to do, and provide ourselves the means to do it.

The only gauge of the state of crisis of capital is the degree of organization of those aiming to destroy it.



## **EVERYONE HATES THE POLICE**

It resembles a physical law. The more the social order loses credit, the more it arms its police. The more the institutions withdraw, the more they advance in terms of surveillance. The less respect the authorities inspire, the more they seek to keep us respectful through force. And it's a vicious circle, because force never has anything respectable about it. So that to the growing debauchery of force there is an ever diminishing effectiveness of the latter in response. Maintaining order is the main activity of an order that has already failed. One only has to go to the CAF, the family assistance fund, to take stock of things that cannot last. When an agency as benign as that must surround itself with guards, ploys, and threats to defend itself from its clients, one realizes that a certain rationality has come to an end. When the orderliness of demonstrations can no longer be assured

except by means of sting-ball grenades and ketlings, and the demonstrators are forced to flee the green lasers of the Anti-Crime Brigade's LBD 40s, targeting its future victims, this is an indication that "society" has already reached the stage of palliative treatment. When the calm of the banlieues comes at the cost of arming the CRS with automatic rifles, we know that a certain figure of the world has faded. It's never a good sign when a democratic regime takes up the habit of having its population fired upon. Since the time when politics started to be reduced, in every domain, to a vast police operation conducted day after day, it was inevitable that policing would become a political question.

Let's go back a few months. After the declaration of the state of emergency, the Forfeiture-of-Nationality Bill, the Intelligence Act, the Macron Law, the killing of Rémi Fraisse, the Competitiveness and Employment Tax Credit and its millions offered to the bosses, the loi Travail was meant to complete the ultimate demoralization of a "left-leaning people" supposedly brought to the edge of the abyss. What the powers-that-be could not understand is that the loss of every hope also forms the precondition for pure revolt—the revolt that no longer seeks support in the thing it is negating and gets its warrant only from itself. What crystallized in the conflict against the loi Travail was not

the partial refusal of a disastrous reform, but the massive discrediting of the government apparatuses, including the union ones. It's not surprising that the banner of the French spring, "Soyons ingouvernable," rendered as "Become ungovernable," re-emerged in Washington in the protests against Donald Trump's inauguration. Since within the governmental apparatus the police have the function of ensuring individual submission in the last instance, of producing the population as a population, as a powerless, and hence governable, depoliticized mass, it was logical that a conflict expressing the refusal to be governed would begin by laying into the police and would adopt the most popular slogan: "Everybody hates the police." Escaping its shepherd, the flock could not have found a better rallying cry. What is more unexpected is that this slogan, appearing in the demonstrations following the killing of Rémi Fraisse at Sivens eventually reached all the way to Bobigny after the police rape of Théo, as a slogan of "young people" there, thrown in the face of the uniformed brutes who were eyeing them from a raised metal passageway turned into a mirador.

"*Tout le monde déteste la police*" expresses more than a simple animosity towards cops. Because for the first thinkers of sovereignty, at the beginning of the 17th century, policing was nothing other than the constitution of the state, its very form in fact.

At the time, it was not yet an instrument in the hands of the latter, and there was not yet a police lieutenancy in Paris. So that during the 17th and 18th centuries, “police” still had a very broad meaning: thus *la police* was “everything that can give an adornment, a form, and a splendor to the city” (Turquet de Mayerne), “all the means that are useful to the splendor of the whole State and to the happiness of all the citizens” (Hohenthal). Its role was said to be that of “leading man to the most perfect felicity he can enjoy in this life” (Delamare). Policing had to do with the cleanliness of the streets and the provisioning of markets, with public lighting and the confinement of vagabonds, with the fair price of grains and the clearing of canals, the healthiness of the urban environment and the arresting of bandits. Fouché and Vidocq had not yet given it its modern, popular face.

If one wishes to understand what is at stake in this eminently political question of policing, it’s necessary to grasp the conjuring trick operating between policing *as a means* and policing *as an end*. On the other hand there is the ideal, legal, fictitious social order—policing as an end—and then there is its real order, or rather its real disorder. The function of policing as a means is to make sure that the desired external order *appears* to reign. It ensures the order of things by using the weapons of disorder and reigns over the visible through its elusive

activity. Its daily practices—kidnapping, beating, spying, stealing, forcing, deceiving, lying, killing, being armed—cover the whole register of illegality, so that its very existence never ceases being basically unavowable. Being proof that what is legal is not what is real, that order does not reign, that society doesn't cohere since *it's not held together by its own powers*, policing is constantly pushed into the shadows, where it occupies one of the world's blind spots as far as thinking is concerned. For the ruling order, it's like a birthmark in the middle of the face. It is the persistent and constant expression of the state of exception—that which every sovereignty wishes it could hide, but which it is regularly forced to exhibit in order to make itself feared. If the state of exception is that momentary suspension of the law that makes it possible to reestablish the *conditions* for the rule of law, through the most arbitrary and bloody measures, the police in their daily operation are what remains of the state of exception when those conditions have been restored. The police in their daily operation are what persists of the state of exception in the normal situation. This is why their sovereign operation is itself so concealed. When the policeman faced with a recalcitrant arrestee lets loose with "The law, I am the law!" it's always out of earshot. Or when on a day of demonstration the riot cop dragging a comrade away for no valid reason waxes ironic: "I do as I like. You see,

for me too it's anarchy today!" For political economy and cybernetics alike, the police remain like a shameful and unthinkable relic, a *memento mori* that reminds them that their order, which wants to think of itself as natural, is still not that and doubtless never will be. Thus the police oversee an apparent order that internally is only disorder. They are the truth of a world of lies, and hence a continuing lie themselves. They testify to the fact that the ruling order is artificial and will sooner or later be destroyed.

So it's no small matter that we live in a time when this obscene, opaque recourse which the police constitute is coming into the full light of day. That armed, hooded police officers calmly march as an unauthorized cortège on the Élysée, as they did last autumn, to the cry of "corrupt unions" and "Freemasons to prison," without anyone daring to talk about a seditious activity... that an American president finds himself facing a large portion of the "intelligence community" and that the latter, after forcing the resignation of his national security adviser, clearly aim to bring him down... that the death penalty, abolished by the law, has manifestly been re-instituted by the police in the case of interventions against "terrorists"... that the police have succeeded in asserting a near-total judicial impunity for their most indefensible sprees... that certain bodies within the police



structure more and more openly declare their alignment with the National Front... that what was treated as newsworthy about May 18, 2016 was not that certain police unions had privatized the Place de la République—where Nuit debout was still meeting—for the duration of their get-together in the presence of Gilbert Collard and Éric Ciotti or Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, but a police car in flames along the Saint Martin Canal—taken together, these items outline the contours of a substantial shift. This is what the media's promotion of a minor fracas to the status of a big deal was meant to hide. It was necessary, moreover, to prevent this police parade that ended at a little sign placed a few meters in front of the burning vehicle: "grilled chicken, pay as you like," from setting off, in reaction to such a nose-thumbing, a big ripple of laughter infecting the whole population. So the Interior Minister felt obliged to hastily announce possible charges of "attempted homicide." In this way, he could replace an irresistible comical urge traversing the population by feelings of fear and gravity, culminating in a call for revenge. Policing operations are also operations aimed at the affects. And it's because of this particular operation that the justice system has been obsessing over its indictees for the Quai Valmy attack. After Théo's rape, a police officer made this matter-of-fact confession to the *Parisien*:

“We belong to a gang. Whatever happens, we’re in it together.”

The slogan “Everybody hates the police” doesn’t express an observation, which would be false, but an affect, which is vital. Contrary to the cowardly worries of governing authorities and editorialists, there is no “gulf that deepens year by year between the police and the population,” there is a deepening gulf between those—and they are countless—who have excellent reasons for hating the police and the fear-ridden mass of those who embrace the cause of the cops, when they are not hugging the cops themselves. In reality, what we’re witnessing is a major turnaround in the relation between the government and the police. For a long time, the forces of order were those ignorant puppets, despised but brutal, that were brandished against the restive populations. Somewhere between a parachutist, a lighting rod, and a punching ball. The governing authorities have now reached such depths of discredit that the contempt they elicit has surpassed that of the police, and the police know it. The police understood, albeit slowly, that it had become the *precondition* of government, its survival kit, its mobile respirator. So that their relationship has reversed itself. Henceforth the governing authorities are rattles in the hands of the police. They no longer have any other choice but to rush to the bedside of the lowest-grade cop with a pain and to yield to all the whims of the

force. After the license to kill, anonymity, impunity, the latest weaponry, what can they still want to obtain? Even so, there is no lack of factions in the police force who imagine themselves growing wings and turning into an autonomous force with its own political agenda. In this regard, Russia looks like a paradise, where the secret services, the police, and the army have already taken power and govern the country to their benefit. While the police are certainly not in a position to go autonomous materially, that doesn't prevent them from waving the *threat* of their political autonomy to the sound of all their wailing sirens.

The police are thus torn between two contradictory tendencies. One of them, conservative, bureaucratic, "republican," would definitely prefer to remain just a means in the service of an order that is less and less respected, to be sure. The other is spoiling for a throwdown, wanting to "clear out the rabble" and no longer answer to anyone—to be their own end. Basically, only the coming to power of a party determined to "clear out the rabble" and to support the police apparatus one hundred percent could reconcile these two tendencies. But such a government would be in its turn a government of civil war.

As a means of justifying itself, the state was left with the plebiscitary legitimacy of the grand

democratic elections, but that last fount of legitimacy has gone dry. Whatever the outcome of a presidential election, even if the option of a “strong power” wins out, such an election is bound to produce a weak power, considering how things stand. It will be *as if the election had never taken place*. The minority that mobilized to carry its favorite to victory will put them in command of a foundering ship. As we see with Donald Trump in the U.S., the pledge to brutally restore the national unity delivers its opposite: once in power, the return-to-order candidate finds themselves at odds not only with whole swaths of society but also entire sections of the state apparatus itself. The promise to reestablish order only adds to the chaos.

In a country like France, that is, in a country that may very well be a police state on condition that it not declare it publicly, it would be foolish to seek a *military* victory over the police. Taking aim at a uniform with a paving stone is not the same thing as entering into close-quarters combat with an armed force. The police are a target and not an objective, an obstacle and not an opponent. Whoever takes the cops for an opponent prevents themselves from breaking through the obstacle the police constitute. To successfully sweep them aside, we must aim *beyond* them. Against the police, the only victory is political. Disorganizing their ranks,

stripping them of all legitimacy, reducing them to powerlessness, keeping them at a good distance, giving oneself more room for maneuver at the right moment and at the places one chooses: this is how we destitute the police. “In the absence of a revolutionary party, the true revolutionaries are those who fight the police.” One needs to hear all the melancholy that’s expressed in this observation by Pierre Peuchmard in 1968.

While, compared to the police, revolutionaries may currently present themselves as weak, unarmed, unorganized, and watch-listed, they have the strategic advantage, however, of being nobody’s instrument, of having no order to maintain, and of not being a *corps*. We revolutionaries are not bound by any obedience, we are connected to all sorts of comrades, friends, forces, milieus, accomplices, and allies. This enables us to bring to bear on certain police interventions the threat that an operation to enforce order might trigger an *unmanageable* disorder in return. If since the failure of Operation Caesar, no government has dared to try and expel the ZAD, it’s not out of a fear of losing the battle militarily, but because the reaction of tens of thousands of sympathizers could prove to be unmanageable. That a “blunder” in a banlieue sets off weeks of widespread riots is too high a price to pay for the Specialized Brigade’s

license to humiliate. When an intervention by the police causes more disorder than what it reestablishes in the way of order, it's their very reason for being that's in question. So, either they insist and end up emerging as a *party* with its own interests, or they go back into their kennel. Either way, they cease being a useful means. They are destituted.

There is a basic asymmetry between the police and revolutionaries. Whereas they take us as the target of their operations, our aims reach far beyond them—it's the general policing of society, its very organization, that we have in our line of sight. The outrageousness of police prerogatives and the incredible expansion of the technological means of control delineate a new tactical perspective. A purely public existence places revolutionaries before the alternative of a practical impotence or an immediate repression. A purely conspiratorial existence does allow a greater freedom of action, but makes one politically inoffensive and vulnerable to repression. So it's a matter of combining a capacity for mass dissemination and a necessary conspiratorial level. Organizing revolutionarily entails a subtle interplay between the visible and the invisible, the public and the clandestine, the legal and the illegal. We have to accept that our struggle is *essentially criminal*, since in this world everything has become criminalizable. Even the

militants who go in aid of the migrants have to use clever tricks to evade the surveillance of which they are the object, before they can act freely. A revolutionary force can be constructed only as a network, a step at a time, by relying on sure friendships, by furtively establishing unanticipated ties even within the enemy apparatus. This is how the “tanzikiyat” were formed in Syria, as a web of little autonomous pockets of revolutionaries that would later become the backbone of popular self-organization. In their day, the first Frech Resistance networks didn’t do things differently. In the case of Syria as in the old *maquis*, by successfully reclaiming urban districts and areas of the countryside, by establishing relatively secure zones, it became possible to go beyond the stage of discrete, anonymous activity on the part of little groups. “Life is in the use, not in the time,” as Manouchian put it.





## FOR THE ONES TO COME

What within us is anxious to protect the inner chains that bind us,

What there is within us so sick that it clings to our conditions of existence, precarious though they are,

What's so exhausted from troubles, jolts, needs, that on a given day tomorrow seems farther away than the moon,

What finds it pleasant to pass the time in hip cafés sipping lattes with jungle in the background while surfing on one's MacBook—the Sunday of life alloyed with the end of history,

Is expecting *solutions*.

Cities in transition, social and solidarity economy, Sixth Republic, alternative municipalism, universal basic income, the film *Tomorrow*, migration into space, a thousand new prisons, expulsion of all foreigners from the planet, man-machine fusion.

Whether they're engineers, managers, activists, politicians, ecologists, actors, or simple hucksters, all those who claim to offer solutions to the present disaster are really doing just one thing: imposing *their* definition of the problem on us, hoping to make us forget that *they themselves are plainly part of the problem*. As a friend said, "The solution to the problem you see in life is a way of living that makes the problem disappear."

We don't have any program, any solutions to sell. To *destitute*, in Latin, also means to *disappoint*. All *expectations* will be disappointed. From our singular experience, our encounters, our successes, our failures, we draw a clearly partisan perception of the world, which conversation among friends refines. Anyone who finds a perception to be correct is adult enough to draw the consequences from it, or at least a kind of method.

However repressed it may be, the question of communism remains the heart of our epoch. If only because the rule of its contrary—economy—has never been so complete. The delegations from the Chinese state who go every year to place flowers on Marx's tomb in London don't fool anybody. One can avoid the communist question, of course. One can get used to stepping over the bodies of the homeless or migrants on one's way to the office

every morning. One can follow the melting of the polar ice in real time, or the rise of the oceans and the panicked pell-mell migrations of animals and humans alike. One can go on preparing one's cancer with every forkful of mashed potatoes that one swallows. One can tell oneself that the recovery, or a dose of authority, or ecofeminism will eventually fix all this. Continuing in such a manner is possible, at the cost of suppressing our feeling that the society we live in is intrinsically criminal, and one that doesn't miss a chance to remind us that we belong to its little association of miscreants. Every time we come in contact with it—by using any of its devices, consuming the least of its commodities, or doing whatever job we do for it—we make ourselves its accomplices, we contract a little of the vice on which it is based: that of exploiting, wrecking, undermining the very conditions of every earthly existence. There's no longer any place for innocence in this world. We only have the choice between two crimes: taking part in it or deserting it in order to bring it down. If the stalking of criminals and the orgy of judgment and punishment are so popular nowadays, it's because they provide a momentary ersatz innocence to the spectators. But since the relief doesn't last, it's necessary to blame, punish, and accuse over and over again—to maintain the illusion. Kafka explained the success of the detective story in this way:

Detective stories are always concerned with the solution of mysteries that are hidden behind extraordinary occurrences. But in real life it's absolutely the opposite. The mystery isn't hidden in the background. On the contrary! It stares one in the face. It's what is obvious. So we do not see it. Everyday life is the greatest detective story ever written. Every second, without noticing we pass by thousands of corpses and crimes. That's the routine of our lives. But if, in spite of habit, something does succeed in surprising us, we have a marvelous sedative in the detective story, which presents every mystery of life as a legally punishable exception. It is a pillar of society, a starched shirt covering the heartless immorality which nevertheless claims to be bourgeois civilization.

So it's a matter of jumping outside the circle of killers.

Few questions have been as poorly formulated as the question of communism. And that's not yesterday's failure; it goes far back to ancient times. Open the *Book of Psalms* and you'll see. The class struggle dates back at least to the prophets of Jewish Antiquity. What is utopian in communism is already found in the apocrypha of that age:

And equal land for all, divided not/By walls or  
fences, [...] and the course/Of life be common  
and wealth unapportioned./

For there no longer will be poor nor rich,/Tyrant nor slave, nor any great nor small,/Nor  
kings nor leaders; all alike in common/

The communist question was badly formulated because, to start with, it was framed as a social question, that is, as a *strictly human* question. Despite that, it has never ceased to trouble the world. If it continues to haunt it, that's because it doesn't stem from an ideological fixation but from a basic, immemorial, lived experience: that of *community*—which nullifies all the axioms of economy and all the fine constructions of civilization. There is never community as an entity, but always as an experience of *continuity* between beings and with the world. In love, in friendship, we have the experience of that continuity. In my calm presence, here, now, in this familiar town, in front of this old sequoia sempervirens whose branches are stirred by the wind, I experience that continuity. In this riot where we all stick to the plan we've decided on, where the chants of the comrades give us courage, where a street medic delivers aid and comfort to an unknown person with a head injury, I experience this continuity. In this print shop dominated by an antique

Heidelberg 4 Color which a friend ministers to while I prepare the pages, another friend glues, and a third one trims, to put together this little samizdat that we've all conceived, in this fervor and enthusiasm, I experience that continuity. There is no myself and the world, myself and the others, there is me and my kindred, directly in touch with this little piece of the world that I love, irreducibly. There is ample beauty in the fact of being here and nowhere else. It's not the least sign of the times that a German forester, and not a hippy, scores a best-seller by revealing that trees "talk to each other," "love one another," "look after each other," and are able to "remember" what they've gone through. He calls that *The Hidden Life of Trees*. Which is to say, there's even an anthropologist who sincerely wonders *how forests think*. An anthropologist, not a botanist. By considering the human subject in isolation from its world, by detaching living beings from all that lives around them, modernity could not help but engender a communism destined to eradicate a *socialism*. And that socialism could only encounter peasants, nomads, and "savages" as an obstacle to be shoved aside, as an unpleasant residue at the bottom of the national scale of importance. It couldn't even see the communism of which they were the bearers. If modern "communism" was able to imagine itself as a universal brotherhood, as a realized equality, this was only

through a cavalier extrapolation from the lived experience of fraternity in combat, of friendship. For what is friendship if not equality between friends?

Without at least the occasional experience of community, we die inside, we dry out, become cynical, harsh, desert-like. Life becomes that ghost city peopled by smiling mannequins, which functions. Our need for community is so pressing that after having ravaged all the existing bonds, capitalism is running on nothing but the promise of “community.” What are the social networks, the dating apps, if not that promise perpetually disappointed? What are all the modes, all the technologies of communication, all the love songs, if not a way to maintain the dream of a continuity between beings where in the end every contact melts away? Opportunely, this frustrated promise intensifies the need, making it hysterical even, and accelerates the great cash machine of those who exploit it. Maintaining misery while dangling the possibility of escape is capitalism’s great stratagem. In 2015, a single website of pornographic videos called Pornhub was visited for 4,392,486,580 hours, which amounts to two and a half times the hours spent on Earth by *Homo sapiens*. Even this epoch’s obsession with sexuality and its hyper-indulgence in pornography attests to the need for community, in the very extremeness of the latter’s deprivation.

When Milton Friedman says that the market is the magic mechanism enabling “millions of individuals to come together on a daily basis without any need to love one another or even to speak to one another,” he’s describing the end result while carefully redacting the process that has brought so many people into the market, the thing that keeps them there, which is not just hunger, threat, or the lure of profit. He also spares himself from having to admit the devastations *of all sorts* which make it possible to establish something like “a market,” and to present it as natural. The same is true when a Marxist pontificates that “disease, death, love’s sorrow, and assholes will continue to take their toll after capitalism, but there will be no longer any massive paradoxical poverty, resulting from an abstract production of wealth. One will no longer see an autonomous fetishistic system or a dogmatic social form.” (Robert Kurz) In reality, the question of communism is also raised in each of our tiny and unique existences in response to what is making us sick. In response to what is slowly killing us, to our failures in love, to what makes us such strangers to each other that by way of an explanation for all the world’s ills, we’re satisfied with the foolish idea that “People are assholes.” Refusing to see this amounts to wearing one’s insensitivity like a tattoo. It’s well suited to the kind of pale, myopic virility that’s required for becoming an economist.



To this the Marxists, or many of them at least, add a certain cowardice in the face of life's smallest problems, which was also the mark of the Bearded One. There are even those who organize symposia around the "idea of communism" which seem expressly designed to make sure that communism remains an idea, and doesn't meddle too much in the business of living. Not to mention the conventicles where one presumes to decree what is and what isn't communism.

With the breakdown of European social democracy faced with World War One, Lenin decides to restyle the façade of the crumbling old socialism by painting the pretty word "communism" on it. Rather comically, he borrows it from anarchists who have already made it their banner. This convenient confusion between socialism and communism contributed a good deal, in the last century, to making this word synonymous with catastrophe, massacre, dictatorship, and genocide. Since then, anarchists and Marxists have been playing ping pong around the couple individual/society, without being concerned that this false antinomy was shaped by economic thought. Rebelling against society on behalf of the individual or against individualism on behalf of socialism is to head down a dead end street. Society is always a society *of individuals*. Individual and society have not ceased

being affirmed, each at the other's expense, for three centuries, and this is the reliable oscillating mechanism which keeps the charming wheel called "economy" turning round, year after year. Against what economy wants us to imagine, what there is in life are not individuals endowed with all kinds of properties which they can make use of or part with. What there is in life are *attachments*, assemblages [agencements], situated beings that move within a whole ensemble of ties. By adopting the liberal fiction of the individual, modern "communism" was bound to conflate property and attachment, and carry the confusion to the very arena where it believed it was attacking private property. It was helped in that by a grammar in which property and attachment have become indistinguishable. What grammatical difference is there when I speak of "my brother" or "my part of town," and when Warren Buffet says "my holding" or "my shares"? None. And yet one is speaking of an attachment in the first instance and of an ownership in the second, of something that constitutes me in the one case and of an object I own in the other. Only by means of this type of confusion did it become possible to imagine that a subject like "Humanity" could exist. Humanity—that is, all human beings, stripped of what weaves together their concrete situated existence, and gathered up phantasmally into one great something-

or-other, nowhere to be found. By wiping out all the attachments that make up the specific texture of worlds, on the pretext of abolishing private ownership of the means of production, modern “communism” has effectively made a *tabula rasa*—of everything. That’s what happens to those who practice economy, even by criticizing it. As Lyotard reportedly said: “Economy—a thing we needed to *find a way out of*, not criticize!” Communism is not a “superior economic organization of society” but the *destitution of economy*.

Economy rests on a pair of fictions, therefore, that of society and that of the individual. Destituting it involves *situating* this false antinomy and bringing to light that which it means to cover up. What these fictions have in common is making us see *entities*, closed units and their relations, whereas what there is in fact are ties. Society presents itself as the superior entity that aggregates all the individual entities. Since Hobbes and the frontispiece of *Leviathan*, it’s always the same image: the great body of the sovereign, composed of all the minuscule, homogenized, serialized bodies of his subjects. The operation which the social fiction depends on consists in trampling on everything that forms the situated existence of each singular human being, in wiping out the ties that constitute us, in denying the assemblages we enter into, and then forcing the

depleted atoms thus obtained into a completely fictitious, spectral association known as the “social bond.” So that to think of oneself as a social being is always to apprehend oneself *from the exterior*, to relate to oneself *as an abstraction*. It’s the peculiar mark of the economic perception of the world to grasp nothing except externally. That Jansenist scumbag, Pierre Nicole, who exerted such a large influence on the founders of political economy, provided the recipe already in 1671: “However corrupt any society might be *within*, and in the eyes of God, there would be nothing *on the outside* that would be better regulated, more civil, more just, more peaceful, more decent, more generous. And the most admirable thing would be that, being animated and moved only by self-love, self-love would not appear there, and being a thing completely devoid of charity, one would only see the form and signs of charity everywhere.” No logical question can be raised, let alone resolved, on this basis. Everything becomes a question of management. It’s not surprising that *société* is synonymous with *entreprise* in France. This was already the case, moreover, in ancient Rome. If one started a business, under Tiberius, one started a *societas*. A *societas*, a society, is always an alliance, a voluntary association that one joins or withdraws from according to one’s interests. So all in all it’s a *relationship*, an external “bond,” a “bond” that doesn’t touch anything inside us and that one can

walk away from without prejudice, a “bond” with no contact—and hence not a bond at all.

The characteristic texture of any society results from the way humans are pulled into it, *by the very thing that separates them*: self-interest. Given that they participate as individuals, as closed entities, and thus always provisionally, they come together *as separate*. Schopenhauer offered an arresting image of the consistency peculiar to *social* relations, of their inimitable pleasures and of the “unsociable human sociability”: “On a cold winter’s day, a group of porcupines huddled together to stay warm and keep from freezing. But soon they felt one another’s quills and moved apart. When the need for warmth brought them together again, their quills again forced them apart. They were driven back and forth at the mercy of their discomforts until they found the distance from one another that provided both a maximum of warmth and a minimum of pain. In human beings, the emptiness and monotony of the isolated self produces a need for society. This brings people together, but their many offensive qualities and intolerable faults drive them apart again. The optimal distance that they finally find that permits them to coexist is embodied in politeness and good manners.”

The genius of the economic operation is to conceal the plane on which it commits its misdeeds, the

one on which it conducts its veritable war: the plane of bonds. In this way it confounds its potential adversaries, and is able to present itself as totally positive whereas it is quite evidently motivated by a fierce appetite for destruction. It has to be said that the bonds readily lend themselves to this. What is more immaterial, subtle, intangible than a bond? What's less visible, less opposable but more sensitive than a bond that's been destroyed? The contemporary numbing of sensibilities, their systematic fragmentation, is not just the result of survival within capitalism, it's the precondition for survival. We don't suffer from being individuals, we suffer from trying to be that. Since the individual entity exists, fictitiously, only *from the outside*, "being an individual" requires remaining outside oneself, strangers to ourselves, forgoing any contact with oneself as well as with the world and others. Obviously everyone is free to take everything from the outside. One only has to keep from feeling, hence from being present, hence from living. We prefer the opposite mode—the communist mode. It consists in apprehending things and beings *from the inside*, grasping them *by the middle*. What comes of grasping the individual by the middle or from the inside? Nowadays it yields a chaos. An unorganized chaos of forces, bits of experience, scraps of childhood, fragments of meaning, and more often than not, without any communication

between them. Saying that this epoch has produced a human material in very poor condition is to say little. It is in great need of repair. We're all aware of this. The fragmentation of the world finds a faithful reflection in the shattered mirror of subjectivities.

That what appears externally as a person is really only a complex of heterogeneous forces is not a new idea. The Tzeltal Maya of Chiapas have a theory of the person in which everyone's sentiments, emotions, dreams, health, and temperament are governed by the adventures and misadventures of a whole host of spirits who reside and move about at the same time in our hearts and inside the mountains. We are not a fine collection of egoic completenesses, of perfectly unified Selves. We are composed of fragments, we teem with minor lives. The word "life" in Hebrew is a plural and so is the word "face." Because in a life there are many lives and in a face there are many faces. The ties between beings are not formed from entity to entity. Every tie goes from fragment of being to fragment of being, from fragment of being to fragment of world, and from fragment of world to fragment of world. It is established below and beyond the individual scale. It brings into immediate play parts of beings that discover themselves to be on the same level, that are felt as continuous. This continuity between fragments is what is experienced as "community." An *assemblage* is produced. It's what we

experience in every real encounter. Every encounter carves out a specific domain within us where elements of the world, the other, and oneself are mingled indistinctly. Love does not bring individuals into relation, it cuts through them as if they were suddenly on a special plane where they were making their way together amid a certain foliation of the world. To love is never to be together but to become together. If loving did not undo the fictitious unity of being, the “other” would not be capable of making us suffer to such a degree. If, in love, a piece of the other did not end up being a part of us, we wouldn’t have to mourn it when separation time rolled around. If there were nothing but *relations*, nobody would understand one another. Everything would be awash with misunderstanding. So there is no subject or object of love, there is an *experience* of love.

The fragments that constitute us, the forces inhabiting us, the assemblages we enter into don’t have any reason to compose a harmonious whole, a fluid set, a movable articulation. The banal experience of life in our time is characterized rather by a succession of encounters that undo us little by little, dismember us, gradually deprive us of any sure bearings. If communism has to do with the fact of organizing ourselves—collectively, materially, politically—this is insofar as it also means



organizing ourselves singularly, existentially, and in terms of our sensibility. Or else we must consent to falling back into politics or into economy. If communism has a goal, it is the great health of forms of life. This great health is obtained through a patient re-articulation of the disjoined members of our being, in touch with life. One can live a whole life without experiencing anything, by being very careful not to think and feel. Existence is then reduced to a slow process of degradation. It wears down and ruins, instead of giving form. After the miracle of the encounter, relations can only go from wound to wound towards their consumption. Life, on the contrary, gradually gives form to whoever refuses to live beside themselves, to whoever allows themselves to experience. They become a *form of life* in the full sense of the term.

In sharp contrast to that, there are the inherited methods of activist construction, so grossly defective, so exhausting, so destructive, when they are so focused on building. Communism does not hinge on self-renunciation but on the attention given to the smallest action. It's a question of our plane of perception and hence of our way of doing things. A practical matter. What the perception of entities—individual or collective—bars our access to is the plane where things really happen, where the collective potentials form and

fall apart, gain strength or dissipate. It's on that plane and only there that the real, including the political real, becomes legible and makes sense. To live communism is not to work to ensure the existence of the entity we belong to, but to deploy and deepen an ensemble of ties, which sometimes means cutting certain ones. What is essential occurs at the level of the smallest things. For the communist, the world of important facts extends as far as the eye can see. Perception in terms of bonds dismisses the whole alternative between individual and collective, and does so *positively*. In a real situation, an "I" that says what needs to be said can be a "we" of extraordinary power. And so, the particular happiness of any "commune" reflects the plenitude of its singularities, a certain quality of ties, the radiant energy of each fragment of world that it harbors—good-bye to entities, to their protrusiveness, good-bye to individual and collective confinement, adios to the reign of narcissism. "The one and only progress," wrote the poet Franco Fortini, "consists and will consist in reaching a higher level, one that is visible and visionary, where the powers and qualities of every singular existence can be promoted." What is to be deserted is not "society," or "individual life," but the dyad they compose. We must learn to move *on a different plane*.

There's a flagrant disintegration of "society," certainly, but there's also a move aimed at recomposing it. As often happens, to see what lies in store for us we must turn our gaze to the other side of the Channel. What the conservative governments of Great Britain have already been implementing since 2010 is the so-called "Big Society." As its name doesn't indicate, the "Great Society" of which it is a question here consists in a final dismantling of the last institutions vaguely recalling the "welfare state." What's curious is the list of priorities that this purely neoliberal reform sets out: "give more power to 'communities' (localism and decentralization), encourage individuals to engage actively in their 'community' (volunteer work), transfer responsibilities from the central government to local authorities, support cooperatives, mutual societies, charitable associations and 'social enterprises,' publish public data (open government)." Liberal society's maneuver, at the moment when it can no longer hide its implosion, is to try and save the particular and particularly unappealing nature of the relations that constitute it by replicating itself in a proliferation of little societies or *collectives*. Work-based, neighborhood-based collectives, collectives of citizens, of activists, of associations, of artists, etc., collectives of every sort are the future of the social. There again, one joins as an individual, on an egalitarian basis, around an

interest, and one is free to leave when one chooses. So they share society's loose and ectoplasmic texture. They appear to be simply a blurry reality, but that vagueness *is their distinguishing trait*. On the other hand, the theater troupe, the seminar, the rock group, the rugby team, are collective *forms*. They are assemblages composed of multiple heterogeneous elements. They contain humans allotted different positions, different tasks, who make up a particular configuration, with its distances, its spacings, its *rhythm*. And they also contain all kinds of non-humans—places, equipment and materials, rituals, cries, and refrains. This is what makes them forms, *specific* forms. But what characterizes “the collective” as such is precisely that it *is formless*. Even in its very formalism. The formalism, which claims to be a remedy for its absence of form, is only a mask for it or a ruse, and generally temporary. It's enough to apply for membership and be accepted in order to belong just like anyone else. The postulated equality and horizontality basically make any asserted singularity scandalous or meaningless, and enable a diffuse jealousy to set its prevailing mood. The average members find an opium there which allows them to forget their feelings of inadequacy. The tyranny peculiar to collectives is that of an absence of structure. That is why they have a tendency to spread everywhere. Thus nowadays when one is really cool, one

doesn't just form a "music group," one establishes a "musicians collective." Ditto for contemporary artists and their "artist collectives." And since the sphere of art so often anticipates what will be generalized as the economic condition of everyone, one won't be surprised to hear a management researcher and "specialist in collective activity" note this development: "Before, one considered the team as a static entity in which everybody had their role and their objective. One spoke then about a production team, an intervention team, a decision-making team. Now however, the team is an entity in motion because the individuals composing it change roles to adapt to their environment, which also is changing. Today the team is regarded as a dynamic process." What salaried employee in one of the "innovative professions" still doesn't know what the "tyranny of the absence of structure" means? In this way the perfect fusion of exploitation and self-exploitation is brought about. While every business is not yet a collective, collectives are now already businesses—businesses that for the most part don't produce anything, anything other than themselves. Just as a batch of collectives could very well take over from the old society, it is to be feared that socialism will survive only as a socialism of collectives, of little groups of people who force themselves to "live together," that is, to *be social*. Nowhere is "living together" talked

about more than where everyone basically hates everyone else. A journalist recently titled his piece, “Against the Uberization of Life, the Collectives.” Self-entrepreneurs also need an oasis against the neoliberal desert. But the oases are annihilated in their turn: those seeking refuge there bring the desert sands in with them.

The more “society” falls apart the more the attraction of collectives will grow. They will project a false escape. This scam works all the better as the atomized individual becomes painfully aware of the freakishness and misery of their existence. Collectives are designed to reintegrate those whom this world rejects, and who reject it. They may even promise a parody of “communism,” which inevitably yields disappointment and swells the mass of those disgusted with everything. The false antinomy formed by individual and collective together is not hard to unmask, however. All the defects which the collective is in the habit of lending so generously to the individual—selfishness, narcissism, mythomania, pride, jealousy, possessiveness, calculation, the fantasy of omnipotence, self-interest, mendacity—are found in worse measure, more caricatured and unassailable, in collectives. No individual will ever be as possessive, narcissistic, self-centered, full of bad faith, and determined to believe in their own nonsense as a collective can be.

One thinks of those who say “France,” “the proletariat,” “society” or “the collective” without blinking an eye. Anyone with a good ear can’t help but hear them saying “Me! Me! Me!” underneath those other words. In order to construct something collectively powerful, we should abandon the idea of “collective” and all the disastrous exteriority to oneself and to others that it conveys. Heiner Müller went further:

“What capitalism offers is aimed at collective groupings but it’s formulated in such a manner that it makes them break apart. What communism offers, by contrast, is utter solitude. Capitalism never offers solitude but always just a placing in common. McDonald’s is the absolute offer of collectivity. One is seated in the same space everywhere in the world; one eats the same shit and everybody’s content. Because at McDonald’s they are a collective. Even the faces in McDonald’s restaurants resemble each other more and more. [...] There’s the cliché about communism as collectivization. Not at all. Capitalism is collectivization [...] Communism is the abandonment of man to his solitude. In front of your mirror communism gives you nothing. That is its superiority. The individual is reduced to his own existence. Capitalism can always give you

something, insofar as it distances people from themselves.” (*Fautes d'impression*)

Feeling, hearing, thinking are not politically neutral faculties, nor are they fairly distributed among contemporaries. And the spectrum of what the latter perceive is variable. Besides, in contemporary social relations one is one's own troubled introspection. If the whole social circus endures it's because everyone is straining to keep their head above water when they should rather assent to going deeply enough into themselves to finally touch something solid. During the conflict against the loi Travail, the emergence of what became the “cortège de tête,” the lead contingent in marches, was the result of a *vision*. A few hundred “young people” *saw*, as early as the first demonstrations, that the union groups were marching like zombies, that they didn't believe a word of the slogans they were mouthing, that their security marshals were clubbing the high-school students, that there was no way to follow that big cadaver, and so it was necessary to claim the front of the demonstration at all costs. Which is what was done. And done again. And again. Until a limit was reached where, with the “cortège de tête” repeating itself, it was no longer a gesture in a situation, but a subject mirrored back in the media, the alternative media in particular. So it was time to desert that desertion,



which was congealing and becoming a parody of itself. And to keep moving. That being said, for the whole time it was vibrant, the “cortège de tête” was the locus from which things became clear, the site of a contagion in the ability to see what was going down. From the simple fact that there was struggle, that different determinations were clashing, that forces were joining, allying, separating, that strategies were called into play, and that all this was manifesting in the streets and not just on television, there was a *situation*. The real was returning, something was taking place. One could disagree about what was happening, one could read it in contradictory ways, but at least there was a legibility of the present. As for knowing which readings were correct and which mistaken, the course of events would sooner or later decide; and then it would no longer be a matter of interpretation. If our perceptions were not adjusted, that would be paid for in baton blows. Our errors would no longer be a question of “point of view”; they would be measured in suture points or swollen body parts.

Deleuze said in 1968 that it was a “phenomenon of clairvoyance: a society suddenly saw what it contained that was intolerable and also saw the possibility of something else.” To which Benjamin adds: “Clairvoyance is the vision of that which is taking form. [...] Perceiving exactly what is taking

place is more decisive than knowing the distant future in advance.” In ordinary circumstances most people do end up seeing, but when it is *much too late*—when it’s become impossible not to see and, quite often, seeing no longer serves any purpose. This aptitude owes nothing to any great body of knowledge, which often serves for overlooking what’s essential. Conversely, ignorance can crown the most banal insistence on not seeing. Let’s say that social life demands of everyone that they not see, or at least act *as if* they didn’t see anything.

It makes no sense to share things if one doesn’t begin by communizing the ability to see. Without that, living the communist way is like a wild dance in utter darkness; one crashes against the others, one gets hurt, one inflicts bruises on the body and the soul without meaning to and without even knowing exactly who to be angry with. Compounding everyone’s capacity for seeing in every domain, composing new perceptions and endlessly refining them, resulting in an immediate increase of potential, must be the central object of any communist development. Those who don’t want to see anything cannot help but produce collective disasters. We must become seers, for ourselves as much as for others.

Seeing means being able *to apprehend forms*. Contrary to what a bad philosophical legacy has

taught us, form does not pertain to visible appearance but to dynamic principle. The real individuation is not that of bodies, but of forms. One only has to reflect on the process of ideation to be convinced of this: nothing better illustrates the illusion of the stable and individual Self than the belief that “I” have ideas, since it is abundantly clear that ideas *come to me*, even without my knowing from where, from neuronal, muscular, and symbolic processes so opaque that they pour in naturally while I’m walking, or when I’m falling asleep and the boundaries of the Self are giving way. An occurring idea is a good example of form: there enters into its realization, in a language environment, something that’s infra-individual—an intuition, a splinter of experience, a bit of affect—in a constellation with something that’s supra-individual. A form is a mobile configuration that holds together, in a tense and dynamic unity, heterogeneous elements of the Self and the world. “The essence of form,” said the young Lukács in his idealist jargon, “has always resided in the process by which two principles that absolutely exclude each other become form without mutually abolishing each other. Form is the paradox that has materialized, the reality of lived experience, the true life of the impossible. For form is not reconciliation but the war of conflicting principles, transposed into eternity.” Form is born of the encounter

between a situation and a necessity. Once born, it affects things far beyond itself. In the conflict of the spring of 2016, one could have seen the birth of a form from a perfectly singular, perfectly identifiable point. On the Austerlitz Bridge, a courageous little group forced the riot police to pull back. There was a first line of masked people sporting gas masks and holding a reinforced banner, other masked ones backing them in case of attempted arrests and making up a bloc behind the first line, and behind that bunch and on the sides, baton-wielding masked folk who whacked on the cops. Once this little form had appeared, the video of its exploit circulated on the social media. And kept making babies in the weeks that followed, up to the acme of June 14, 2016 when its offspring could no longer be counted. Because that's how it is with every form, with life even, the real communist question is not "how to produce," but "how to live." Communism is the centrality of the old ethical question, the very one that historical socialism had always judged to be "metaphysical," "premature," or "petty-bourgeois"—and not the question of labor. Communism is a general detotalization, and not the socialization of everything.

For us, therefore, communism is not a finality. There is no "transition" towards it. It *is* transition entirely: it is *en chemin*, in transit. The different

ways of living will never cease to chafe and move against each other, to clash with and occasionally combat each other. Everything will always have to be rethought. There are bound to be the usual Leninists who will reject an immanent conception of communism such as this, by citing the necessity of a vertical, strategic articulation of the struggle, and an instant later we're sure to hear the lumbering "question of organization." The "question of organization" is still and always the Leviathan. In a time when the apparent unity of the Self can no longer mask the chaos of forces, attachments, and participations that we are, how could we still believe in the fable of organic unity? The myth of "organization" owes everything to the depictions of the hierarchy of natural faculties that were handed down to us by ancient psychology and Christian theology. We are no longer nihilistic enough to think that inside us there is something like a stable psychic organ—a will, let's say—that directs our other faculties. This neat invention of the theologians, much more political than it appears, had a dual purpose: first, to make man, newly provided with a "free will," into a moral subject and to deliver him over in this way to the Last Judgment and the century's punishments; second, based on the theological idea of a God having "freely" created the world and essentially standing apart from his action, to institute a formal separation between

being and acting. For centuries, this separation, which was to mark Western political ideas in a durable way, made ethical realities illegible—the plane of forms-of-life being precisely that of a non-differentiation between what one is and what one does. So “the question of organization” exists since those Bolsheviks of Late Antiquity, the Church Fathers. It was the instrument of legitimation of the Church just as it would later be that of the legitimation of the Party. Against this opportunistic question, against the postulated existence of the “will,” it’s necessary to emphasize that what “wants” within us, what inclines us, is *never the same thing*. That it is a simple *outcome*, crucial at certain moments, of the combat waged within and outside us by a tangled network of forces, affects, and inclinations, resulting in a temporary assemblage in which some force has just as temporarily subdued other forces. That the sequence of these assemblages produces a kind of coherence that may culminate in a form is a fact. But to always label *with the same noun* something that in a contingent way finds itself in a position to dominate or give the decisive impetus, to convince oneself that it’s always a matter of *the same authority*, to convince oneself finally that every form and every decision are dependent on a decision organ, is to perform quite a trick, but one that’s been repeated all too long. By believing in such an organ for such a long

time, by stimulating that imaginary muscle over and over again, one ends up in a fatal aboulia that seems nowadays to be afflicting the late offspring of the Christian Empire that we happen to be. In opposition to that, we propose paying careful attention to situations and to the forces that inhabit and traverse beings, in conjunction with an art of *decisive* assemblages.

Faced with capitalist organization, a destituent potential cannot confine itself to its own immanence, to all that grows under the ice in the absence of sunshine, to all the attempts at local construction, to a series of punctual attacks, even if this whole little world were to regularly find itself caught up in great turbulent demonstrations. And the insurrection will definitely not wait for everyone to become insurrectionary. The mistake of the Leninists, Trotskyists, Negriists, and other sub-politicians, a telling one fortunately, is to believe that a period that sees all the hegemonies lying broken on the ground could still tolerate a political hegemony, even a partisan one of the sort that Pablo Iglesias or Chantal Mouffe fantasize. What they don't see is that in a time of general horizontality, *horizontality itself is the verticality*. No one can expect to organize the autonomy of others any longer. The only verticality still possible *is that of the situation*, which commands all of its components

because it exceeds them, because the sum of forces in presence is greater than each one of them. The only thing capable of transversally uniting all the elements deserting this society into a historical party is an *intelligence of the situation*. It is everything that makes the situation gradually understandable, everything that tracks the movements of the adversary, everything that identifies the usable paths and the obstacles—the systematic character of the obstacles. Based on that intelligence, an occasional vertical expedient needed to tilt certain situations in the desired direction can well be improvised.

A strategic verticality of this kind can only emerge from a constant, generous discussion, undertaken in good faith. In this epoch, the means of communication are the forms of organization. It's our weakness, for the means aren't in our hands, and those who control them are not our friends. So there's no other choice but to deploy an art of conversation between worlds that is cruelly deficient, but from which, in contact with the situation, the right decision must emanate. Such a discussion can gain the center, from the periphery where it is currently contained, only through an offensive from the domain of sensibility, on the plane of perceptions, and not of discourse. We're talking about addressing bodies and not just the head.



“Communism is the material process that aims to render sensible and intelligible the materiality of the things that are said to be spiritual. To the point that we’re able to read in the book of our own body all that humans did and were, under the sovereignty of time—and to decipher the traces of humanity’s passage upon an Earth that will preserve no trace.” (Franco Fortini)





*Now* is the phantom chapter to the Invisible Committee's previous book, *To Our Friends*: a new critique from the anonymous collective that establishes their opposition to the world of capital and its law of labor, addresses current antiterrorist rhetoric and the ferocious repression that comes with it, and clarifies the end of social democracy and the growing rumors of the need for a coming "civil war." *Now* emerges at a time when the Invisible Committee's contestation has found resonance throughout the West, with a collapse of trust in the police, an inept weariness on the part of the political system, a growing urgency for opposition, a return of the theme of the Commune, a vanishing distinction between radicals and citizens, and a widespread refusal on the part of the citizen to be governed. *Now* proposes a "destituent process" that charts out a different path to be taken, a path of outright refusal that simply ignores elections altogether. It is a path that calls for taking over the world and not taking power, for exploring new forms of life and not a new constitution, and for desertion and silence as alternatives to proclamations and crashes. It is also a call for an unprecedented communism—a communism stronger than nation and country.

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