

## To Our Friends

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To those for whom the end of a civilization is not the end of the world;

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To those who see insurrection first of all as a breach in the organized reign of stupidity, lies, and confusion;

To those who discern, behind the thick fog of “crisis,” a theater of operations, maneuvers, strategies—and hence the possibility of a counterattack;

To those who strike blows;

To those watching for the right moment;

To those looking for accomplices;

To those who are deserting;

To those who keep going;

To those getting organized;

To those wanting to build a revolutionary force, revolutionary because it’s sensitive;

This modest contribution to an understanding of our time.

## The Insurrections Have Come, Finally

1. Merry Crisis and Happy New Fear
2. They Want to Oblige Us to Govern. We Won't Yield to That Pressure.
3. Power Is Logistic. Block Everything!
4. Fuck Off, Google
5. Let's Disappear
6. Our Only Homeland: Childhood
7. Omnia Sunt Communia
8. Today Libya, Tomorrow Wall Street



“There is no other world

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There’s just another way to live

—Jacques Mesrine



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The insurrections have come, finally. At such a pace and in so many countries, since 2008, that the whole structure of this world seems to be disintegrating, piece by piece. Ten years ago, predicting an uprising would have exposed you to the snickers of the seated ones; now it's those who announce a return to order who make themselves look foolish. Nothing more solid, more self-assured, we were told, than the Tunisia of Ben Ali, the busy Turkey of Erdogan, social-democratic Sweden, Ba'athist Syria, Quebec on tranquilizers, or the Brazil of beaches, the *Bolsa Familia*, and peace-keeping police units. We've seen what followed. Stability is finished. In politics, too, they've learned to think twice before awarding a triple A.

An insurrection can erupt at any time, for any reason, and lead anywhere. The ruling politicians were among the abysses. Their own shadows appear to threaten them. *¡Que se vayan todos!* was a slogan that has become a common conviction, the *basso continuo* of the epoch, a rumble passing from voice to voice, then lifting up like an ax when it's least expected. The *cleverest* of the politicians have made it into a campaign promise. They don't have any choice. Incurable disgust, pure negativity, and absolute refusal are the only discernable political forces of the moment.

The insurrections have come, but not the revolution. Rarely has one seen, as we have these past few years, in such a densely-packed timespan, so many seats of power taken by storm, from Greece to Iceland. Occupying plazas in the very heart of cities, pitching tents there, erecting barricades, kitchens, or makeshift shelters, and holding assemblies will soon be part of the political reflex, like the strike used to be. It seems that the epoch has even begun to secrete its own platitudes, like that *ACops Are Bastards (ACAB)* which is a strange internationale emblazoned on the rough walls of cities, from Cairo to Istanbul, and Rome to Paris or Rio, with every thrust of revolt.

But however great the disorders in this world may be, the revolution always seems to choke off at the riot stage. At best, a regime change satisfies for an instant the need to change the world, only to renew the same dissatisfaction. At worst, revolution serves as a stepping stone for those who speak in its name but only think of liquidating it. In places, France for example, the nonexistence of revolutionary forces with enough confidence in themselves clears the way for those whose profession is precisely feign self-confidence, and offer it up as a spectacle: the fascists. Helplessness is embittering.

At this point it must be admitted that we revolutionaries have been defeated. Not because since 2008 we haven't achieved revolution as an objective, but because, under a steady barrage of obscurantism, we've lost sight of revolution *as a process*. When we fail, we can blame the whole world, making up all sorts of explanations, even scientific ones, based on a thousand resentments, or we can question ourselves about the footholds which the enemy may have within us that determine the non-accidental repeated character of our failures. We might inquire, for example, as to what remains of *leftism* among revolutionaries and whether it disposes them not only to defeat but also to a nearly general hostility. A certain way of asserting a moral superiority which they haven't earned is doubtless a quirk inherited from the left. As is the presumed ability to decree the right way to live—the way that is true, progressive, enlightened, modern, correct, deconstructed, and undefiled. A claim to which anyone

coming under its summary banishment among the reactionaries-conservatives-obscurantist narrowminds-bumpkins-fogies will respond with thoughts of murder. Far from creating a distance, the heated rivalry of revolutionaries with the left only keeps us moored to its ground. We should cast off

Since *The Coming Insurrection*, we've gone to the places where the epoch was inflamed. We've read, we've fought, we've discussed with comrades of every country and every tendency. Together with them, we've come up against the invisible obstacles of the times. Some of us have died, others have seen prison. We've kept going. We haven't given up on constructing worlds or attacking this one. We've returned from our stays abroad with the certainty that we weren't living through erratic separate revolts that were isolated from each other and would still need to be connected. This is why "news-reporting" constructs and dramatizes in its calculated management of perceptions, being the work of counter-insurrection, which begins at that minute scale. We are not contemporaneous with scattered revolts, but with an unparalleled global wave of uprisings that intercommunicate imperceptibly. Moved by a universal desire to be together that only a universal separation can explain. By a general hatred of the police that expresses a lucid refusal of the general atomization which the police oversees. The same anxiety is visible everywhere, the same deep panic, provoking the same upwellings of dignity, and not indignation. What is happening in the world since 2008 isn't a incoherent series of crazy outbursts occurring suddenly in hermetically sealed countries. It's a single historical sequence unfolding in a strict unity of place and time, from Greece to Chile. And only a *distinctly global* perspective can capture its significance. We can't leave it to the think tanks of capitalism to spell out the practical implications of this sequence.

However localized it may be, every insurrection gestures beyond itself; it contains something global from the outset. It raises us together to the level of the epoch. But the epoch is also what we find deep within us, that is, when we're willing to descend that far, when we immerse ourselves in what we're experiencing, seeing, feeling, perceiving. There's a way of knowledge in this, and a code of action; there's also what explains the underground connection between the pure intensity of street combat and the unalloyed self-presence of the loner. The epoch must be sought deep within each situation and deep within each person. That is where "we" meet up, where real friends are found, scattered over the globe, but walking the road together.

The conspiracy theorists are counterrevolutionary in one respect at least; they reserve the privilege of conspiracy exclusively for the power elite. While it's obvious that those in power scheme to preserve and extend their positions, it's no less certain that *there's conspiracy everywhere*—in building hallways, at the coffee machine, in the back of kebab houses, at parties, in love affairs, in prison. Through capillary channels and on a global scale, all these connections, all these conversations, and these friendships are forming a historical party in operation—"our party," as Marx said. Confronting the objective conspiracy of the order of things, there is a diffuse conspiracy of which we are de facto members. But the greatest confusion obtains within it. Everywhere it turns, our party stumbles over its own ideological inheritance. It gets caught up in a whole tangle of defeated and defunct revolutionary traditions, which demand respect nonetheless. But strategic intelligence comes from the heart and not the brain, and the problem with ideology is precisely that it forms a screen between thinking and the heart. To put this differently: we're obliged to force open a door to a space we already occupy. The only party to be built is the one that's already there. We must rid ourselves of all the mental clutter



that gets in the way of a clear grasp of our shared situation, our “common terrestri-ty,” to use Gramsci’s expression. Our inheritance is not preceded by any will or testament.

Like any advertising slogan, the catchphrase “We are the 99%” owes its effectiveness not to what it says but to what it doesn’t say. What it doesn’t say is the identity of the *powerful* 1%. What characterizes the 1% is not their wealth—in the United States the wealthy are far more than 1%—it is not their celebrity—they tend to be discreet, and nowadays who doesn’t have a right to their fifteen minutes of fame? What characterizes the 1% is that they are *organized*. They even organize in order to organize the lives of others. The truth of this slogan is quite cruel, and it’s that the number doesn’t matter: one can be 99% and still be completely dominated. Conversely, the collective lootings of Tottenham are a sufficient demonstration that one ceases to be poor as soon as one begins to get organized. There is a considerable difference between a mass of poor people and a mass of poor people determined to act together.

Organizing has never meant affiliation with the same organization. Organizing is acting in accordance with a common perception, at whatever level that may be. Now, what is missing from the situation is not “people’s anger” or economic shortage, it’s not the good will of militants or the spread of critical consciousness, or even the proliferation of anarchist gestures. What we lack is a shared perception of the situation. Without this binding agent, gestures dissolve without a trace into nothingness, lives have the texture of dreams, and uprisings end up in schoolbooks.

The daily profusion of news, whether alarming or merely scandalous, shapes our conception of a generally unintelligible world. Its chaotic look is the fog of war behind which it is rendered unassailable. Its ungovernable appearance helps to make it governable *in reality*. There is the ruse. By adopting crisis management as a technique of government, capital has not simply replaced the cult of progress with the blackmail of threatened catastrophe; it has arrogated the strategic intelligence of the present, the general assessment of the operations that are under way. This move must be countered. As far as strategy is concerned, it’s a matter of getting two steps ahead of global governance. There’s no crisis that we would need to get out of, there’s a war that we have to win.

A shared understanding of the situation cannot emerge from one text alone, but requires an international discussion. And for a discussion to take place, statements need to be offered, this being the first one. We have subjected the revolutionary tradition and positions to the touchstone of the historic situation and sought to cut the thousand ideal threads that keep the Gulliver of revolution attached to the ground. We have groped for the passageways, the gestures, and the thoughts that might allow us to extract ourselves from the impasse of the present. There’s no revolutionary movement without a language that can capture the state we find ourselves in as well as the fissure of possibility running through it. What follows is a contribution to its elaboration. To that end, our text is appearing in eight languages and on four continents at once. If we are everywhere, if we are legion, then we must not organize ourselves, worldwide.



Athens, December 2008.

## MERRY CRISIS AND HAPPY NEW FEAR

1. *Crisis Is a Mode of Government.* 2. *The Real Catastrophe Is Existential and Metaphysical.* 3. *The Apocalypse Disappoints.*

1. We other revolutionaries are the great cuckolds of modern history. And one is always complicit in some way with one's own betrayal. The fact is painful, so it's generally denied. We've had a blind faith in *crisis*, a faith so blind and so enduring that we didn't see how the liberal order had made it the centerpiece of its arsenal. Marx wrote in the aftermath of 1848: "A new revolution is possible only as a result of a new crisis; but it will come, just as surely as the crisis itself." And indeed he spent the rest of his days prophesying, with every spasm of the world economy, the great final crisis of capitalism which he would wait for in vain. There are still Marxists who try to sell us the current crisis as "The Big One," and would have us wait a bit longer for their curious version of the Last Judgement.

"If you want to force a change," Milton Friedman advised his Chicago Boys, "set off a crisis." Free from fearing crises, capital now tries its hand at producing them experimentally. The way avalanches are intentionally triggered in order to control their timing and size. The way plains are set ablaze so that a menacing fire will extinguish itself there for lack of fuel. "Where and when" is a question of opportuneness or tactical necessity. It's public knowledge that shortly after being appointed, in 2010, the director of the Greek Statistical Authority, ELSTAT, set about falsifying that country's debt accounts, making them look worse as a way of justifying the Troika's intervention. So it's a fact that the "sovereign debt crisis" was launched by a man still on the official payroll of the IMF, an institution charged with "helping" countries get out of debt. Here it was a matter of testing out, in a European country under real conditions, the neoliberal project of a complete revamping of a society, to measure the effects of a proper policy of "structural adjustment."

With its medical connotation, throughout the whole modern period crisis was that natural thing which arose in an unexpected or cyclical way, calling for a decision to be made, a decision that would put an end to the general insecurity of the critical situation. The conclusion would be fortunate or unfortunate depending on the effectiveness of the applied medication. The critical moment was also the moment of critique—the brief interval in which discussion concerning the symptoms and the medication was opened. That's no longer the case at present. The remedy is no longer there to put an end to the crisis. On the contrary, the crisis is set off with a view to introducing the remedy. They speak now of "crisis" in regard to what they intend to restructure, just as they label "terrorists" those they are preparing to strike down. The "crisis of the banlieues" in France in 2005 thus served to announce the biggest urban planning offensive of the last thirty years against the so-called "banlieues," orchestrated directly by

The crisis discourse of the neoliberals is a variety of doublespeak. Among themselves they prefer to speak of a “double truth.” On one hand, crisis is the invigorating moment of “creative destruction” creating opportunities, innovation, and entrepreneurs of whom only the best, most highly motivated and most competitive will survive. “Deep down that is probably the message of capitalism: ‘creative destruction’—the scrapping of old technologies and old ways of doing things for the new is the only way to raise average living standards [...] Capitalism creates a tug-of-war within each of us. We are alternately the aggressive entrepreneur and the couch potato, who subliminally prefers the lessened competitive stress of an economy where all participants have equal incomes,” writes Alan Greenspan, chairman of the American Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006. On the other hand, the discourse of crisis intervenes as a political method for managing populations. The continuous restructuring of everything—social welfare and organizations, companies and urban districts—is the only way to ensure the non-existence of the opposing party, through a constant disruption of the conditions of existence. The rhetoric of change is used to dismantle every custom, to break all ties, to unsettle every certainty, to discourage every solidarity, to maintain a chronic existential insecurity. It corresponds to a strategy that can be formulated in these terms: “Use a continuous crisis to avert any actual crisis.” On the everyday level, this is akin to the well-known counter-insurgency practice of “destabilizing order to stabilize,” which, for the authorities, consists in deliberately producing chaos so as to make order more desirable than revolution. From micromanagement to the management of whole countries the population is kept in a kind of constant trauma. The resulting stupefaction and dereliction mean that the managers can do more or less what they want with each and everyone. The mass depression currently afflicting the Greeks is the deliberate product of the Troika’s policy, and not its collateral effect.

If some commentators made fools of themselves by hastily proclaiming the “death of neoliberalism” with the explosion of the subprime swindle, it’s because they failed to understand that the “crisis” was not an economic phenomenon but a political technique of government. We’re not experiencing a crisis of capitalism but rather the triumph of crisis capitalism. “Crisis” means: government is growing. Crisis has become the *ultima ratio* of the powers that be. Modernity measured everything in relation to the past backwardness it claimed to be rescuing us from; now everything is measured in relation to an impending collapse. When the salaries of Greek civil servants are reduced by half, it’s while pointing out that one could just as well no longer pay them at all. Every time the period of pension contributions of French wage earners is lengthened, the rationale has to do with “saving the retirement system.” The present crisis, permanent and unilateral, is no longer the classic crisis, the decisive moment. On the contrary, it’s an endless end, a lasting apocalypse, an indefinite suspension, an effective postponement of the actual collapse, and for that reason a permanent state of exception. The current crisis no longer promises anything; on the contrary, it tends to free whoever governs from every constraint as to the means deployed.

2. Epochs are proud. Each one claims to be unique. Our own prides itself on bringing about the historical collision of a planetary ecological crisis, a generalized crisis of democracies, and an inexorable energy crisis, the whole being crowned by a creeping global economic crisis, b

“unmatched for the last hundred years.” And this affirms and heightens our pleasure at living through an epoch like no other. But one only has to open the newspapers from the 1970s, or read the Club of Rome report on the *Limits to Growth* from 1972, the article by the cybernetician Gregory Bateson on “The Roots of Ecological Crisis” from March 1970, or *The Crisis of Democracy* published in 1975 by the Trilateral Commission, to see that we’ve been living under the dark star of integral crisis at least since the beginning of the 1970s. A text from 1972 such as Giorgio Cesarono’s *Apocalypse and Revolution* already analyzes it lucidly. So if the seventh seal was opened at a precise moment, it certainly wasn’t yesterday.

At the end of 2012, the highly official American Centers for Disease Control circulated a graphic novel for a change. Its title: *Preparedness 101: Zombie Apocalypse*. The idea is simple: the population must be prepared for any eventuality, a nuclear or natural catastrophe, a general breakdown of the system or an insurrection. The document concludes by saying: “If you’re ready for a zombie apocalypse then you’re ready for any emergency.” The zombie figure comes from Haitian voodoo culture. In American films, masses of rebellious zombies chronically function as an allegory of the threat of a generalized insurrection by the black proletariat. So *that* is clearly what people must be prepared for. Now that there’s no longer any Soviet threat to wield as a way to ensure the psychological cohesion of the citizens, anything will do to make sure the population is ready to defend itself—this is, *defend the system*. Maintaining an endless fear to forestall a frightful end.

All of Western false consciousness is compressed into this official comic strip. It’s plain to see that the real living dead are the petty bourgeois of the American suburbs. Obvious that the dull concern with survival, the economic worry about not having enough, the feeling of having an unsustainable form of life, is not something that will come after the catastrophe, but what already drives the desperate struggle for life of each individual in a neoliberal regime. Defeated life is not what threatens but what is already there, day after day. Everyone sees it, everyone knows it and feels it. The Walking Dead are the *salary men*. If this epoch is crazy about apocalyptic dramatizations, which make up a large share of film production, there’s more involved than the aesthetic enjoyment which the distraction authorizes. Besides, John’s *Revelation* already has a whole Hollywood-style phantasmagoria with its air attacks by furious angels, its horrendous floods, its spectacular scourges. Only universal destruction, the death of everything, comes close to giving the suburban employee the feeling he’s alive, since he’s the *least alive* of all the creatures. “To hell with it all” and “let’s pray that it lasts” are the two sighs heaved alternately by the same civilized distress. An old Calvinist taste for mortification has a part in this: life is a reprieve, never a plenitude. The discussions of “European nihilism” were not vain talk. Indeed, nihilism is an article that’s been exported so successfully that the world is now saturated with it. As regards “neoliberal globalization,” one could say that what we now have above all is the globalization of nihilism.

In 2007 we wrote that “what we are faced with is not the crisis of a society but the extinction of civilization.” At the time, this kind of statement got you taken for an Illuminatus. But “the crisis” has gone down that path. And even ATTAC acknowledges a “crisis of civilization”—which goes to show. More dramatically, an American veteran of the Iraq war turned “strategy” consultant, wrote in the autumn of 2013 in the *New York Times*: “Now, when I look into our future, I see water rising up to wash out lower Manhattan. I see food riots, hurricanes, and climate refugees. I see 82nd Airborne

soldiers shooting looters. I see grid failure, wrecked harbors, Fukushima waste, and plagues. I see Baghdad. I see the Rockaways underwater. I see a strange, precarious world [...] The biggest problem climate change poses isn't how the Department of Defense should plan for resource wars, or how we should put up sea walls to protect Alphabet City, or when we should evacuate Hoboken. It won't be addressed by buying a Prius, signing a treaty, or turning off the air-conditioning. The biggest problem we face is a philosophical one: understanding that this civilization is *already dead*." In the days after the First World War it still only called itself "mortal," which it certainly was, in every sense of the word.

In reality, the end of civilization has been clinically established for a century, and countersigned by events. Expatiating on the matter is now nothing but a means of distraction. But it's a distraction from the catastrophe *there in front of us*, and that has been there for a long time, from the catastrophe that *we are*, the catastrophe that *the West is*. That catastrophe is existential, affective, and metaphysical first of all. It resides in Western man's incredible estrangement from the world, an estrangement that demands, for example, that he become the master and possessor of nature—one only seeks to possess what one fears. It's not for nothing that he has placed so many *screens* between himself and the world. By cutting himself off from what exists, Western man has made it into this desolate expanse, this dreary, hostile, mechanical, absurd nothingness which he must ceaselessly devastate, through his *labor*, his cancerous activism, his shallow hysterical agitation. Relentlessly driven from euphoria to stupor and from stupor to euphoria, he tries to remedy his absence from the world through a whole accumulation of expertise, prostheses, and relations, a whole technological hardware store that is ultimately disappointing. He's more and more visibly that *overequipped existentialist* who can't stop engineering everything, recreating everything, unable as he is to bear a reality that is completely beyond him. As that moron, Camus, blandly admitted, "For a man, understanding the world means reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal." He tries humbly to re-enchante his divorce from existence, from himself, from "other people"—that hell!—by calling it his "freedom," when it's not by resorting to dismal parties, stupid entertainments, or heavy drug use. Life is effectively affectively absent for him, because life repels him. Deep down, it *nausetes* him. He's managed to protect himself from everything reality contains that is unstable, irreducible, palpable, corporeal, weighty, hot, or fatiguing by projecting it onto the ideal, visual, distant, and digitized plane of the Internet, where there's no friction or tears, no death or odors.

The falsity of the entire Western apocalyptic consists in projecting onto the world the mourning we're not able to do in regard to it. It's not the world that is lost, it's we who have lost the world and go on losing it. It's not the world that is going to end *soon*, it's *we who are finished*, amputated, cut-off, who refuse vital contact with the real in a hallucinatory way. The crisis is not economic, ecological, or political, *the crisis is above all that of presence*. To such a point that the *must* of commodities—the iPhone and the Hummer being exemplary cases—consists in a sophisticated absence outfit. On the one hand, the iPhone concentrates all the possible accesses to the world and to others in a single object. It is the lamp and the camera, the mason's level and the musician's recording device, the TV and the compass, the tourist guide and the means of communication; on the other, it is the prosthesis that bars any openness to what is there and places me in a regime of constant, convenient semi-presence, retaining a part of my being-there in its grip. They've even launched a smartphone app designed

remedy the fact that “our 24/7 connection to the digital world disconnects us from the real world around us.” It is brightly called the *GPS for the Soul*. As for the Hummer, it’s the possibility of transporting my autistic bubble, my impermeability to everything, into the most inaccessible recesses of “nature” and coming back *intact*. That Google has declared the “fight against death” to be a new industrial horizon shows how one can be mistaken *about what life is*.

At the apex of his insanity, Man has even proclaimed himself a “geological force,” going so far as to give the name of his species to a phase of the life of the planet: he’s taken to speaking of an “anthropocene.” For the last time, he assigns himself the main role, even if it’s to accuse himself of having trashed everything—the seas and the skies, the ground and what’s underground—even if it’s to confess his guilt for the unprecedented extinction of plant and animal species. But what’s remarkable is that he continues relating in the same disastrous manner to the disaster produced by his own disastrous relationship with the world. He *calculates* the rate at which the ice pack is disappearing. He *measures* the extermination of the non-human forms of life. As to climate change, he doesn’t talk about it based on his sensible experience—a bird that doesn’t return in the same period of the year, an insect whose sounds aren’t heard anymore, a plant that no longer flowers at the same time as some other one. He talks about it scientifically with numbers and averages. He thinks he’s saying something when he establishes that the temperature will rise so many degrees and the precipitation will decrease by so many inches or millimeters. He even speaks of “biodiversity.” He observes the rarefaction of life on earth *from space*. He has the hubris to claim, paternally, to be “protecting the environment” which certainly never asked for anything of the sort. All this has the look of a last bold move in a game that can’t be won.

The objective disaster serves mainly to mask another disaster, this one more obvious still and more massive. The exhaustion of natural resources is probably less advanced than the exhaustion of subjective resources, of vital resources, that is afflicting our contemporaries. If so much satisfaction is derived from surveying the devastation of the environment it’s largely because this veils the shocking destruction of interiorities. Every oil spill, every sterile plain, every species extinction is an image of our souls in shreds, a reflection of our absence from the world, of our personal inability to inhabit it. Fukushima offers the spectacle of this complete failure of man and his mastery, which only produces ruins—and those Japanese plains, intact in appearance but where no one can live for decades. A never-ending decomposition that is finishing the job of making the world uninhabitable: the West will have ended up borrowing its mode of existence from what it fears the most—radioactive waste.

When one asks the left of the left what the revolution would consist in, it is quick to answer: “placing the human at the center.” What that left doesn’t realize is how tired of the human the world is, how tired of humanity we are—of that species that thought it was the jewel of creation, that believed it was entitled to ravage everything since everything belonged to it. “Placing the human at the center” was the Western project. We know how that turned out. The time has come to jump ship, to betray the species. There’s no great human family that would exist separately from each of its worlds, from each of its familiar universes, each of the forms of life that are strewn across the earth. There is no humanity, there are only earthlings and their enemies, the Occidentals, of whatever skin color they happen to be. We other revolutionaries, with our atavistic humanism, would do well to inform ourselves about the uninterrupted uprisings by the indigenous peoples of Central and South America.

over the past twenty years. Their watchword could be “Place the earth at the center.” It’s a declaration of war *against Man*. Declaring war on him could be the best way to bring him back down to earth, only he didn’t play deaf, as always.

3. On December 21, 2012, no fewer than 300 journalists from 18 countries invaded the little village Bugarach in the Aude *département* of France. No end of time was ever announced for that date on any Mayan calendar deciphered so far. The rumor that this village had some slight connection with the non-existent prophecy was an obvious practical joke. The television broadcasters dispatched a swarm of reporters to the place nonetheless. One was curious to see if there *really are* people who believe in the end of the world, since we can’t even manage to believe in that any more, and have the hardest time believing in our own loves. At Bugarach on that day, there was no one, no one apart from the numerous celebrants of the spectacle. The reporters were reduced to talking about themselves, about their pointless wait, their boredom and the fact that nothing was happening. Caught in their own trap, they revealed the true face of the end-of-the-world: journalists, waiting, and events that refuse to happen.

One shouldn’t underestimate the craving for apocalypse, the lust for Armageddon that permeates the epoch. Its particular existential pornography involves ogling prefigurative documentaries showing clouds of computer-animated grasshoppers descending on the Bordeaux vineyards in 2075, juxtaposed with “climate migrants” storming the southern shores of Europe—the same migrants that Frontex is already making a point of decimating. Nothing is older than the end of the world. The apocalyptic passion has always been favored by the powerless since earliest antiquity. What is new in our epoch is that the apocalyptic has been totally absorbed by capital, and placed in its service. The horizon catastrophe is what we are currently being governed by. Now, if there is one thing destined to remain unfulfilled, it’s the apocalyptic prophecy, be it economic, climatic, terrorist, or nuclear. It is pronounced only in order to summon the means of averting it, which is to say, most often, the necessity of government. No organization, whether political or religious, has ever declared itself defeated because the facts contradicted its prophecies. Because the purpose of prophecy is never to be right about the future, but to *act upon the present*: to impose a waiting mode, passivity, submission here and now.

Not only is there no catastrophe to come other than the one that’s already here, it’s evident that most actual disasters offer an escape from our daily disaster. Many examples attest to the relief from the existential apocalypse that real disaster brings, from the earthquake that struck San Francisco in 1906 to Hurricane Sandy that devastated New York in 2012. One generally assumes that the relations between people in an emergency situation reveal their deep and eternal bestiality. With every destructive earthquake, every economic crash and every “terrorist attack,” one *desires* to see the confirmation of the old chimera of the state of nature and its train of uncontrollable violent acts. When the thin dikes of civilization give way, one would like for the “vile core of man” that obsessed Pascal to show itself, that “human nature” with its evil passions—envious, brutal, blind and despicable—which has served the holders of power as an argument at least since Thucydides. Unfortunately the fantasy has been disconfirmed by most of the historically known disasters.

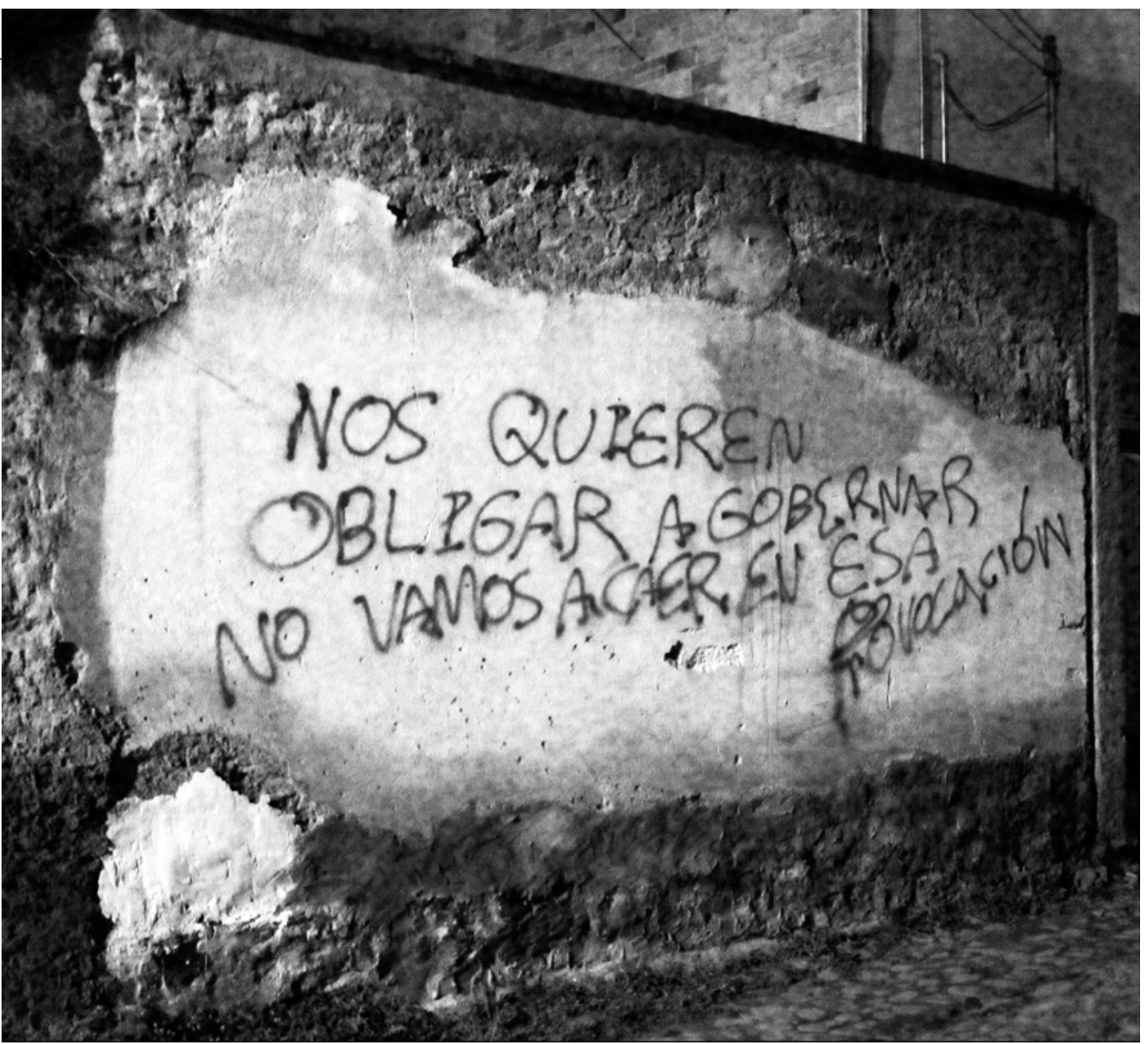


The disappearance of a civilization generally doesn't take the form of a chaotic war of all against all. In a situation of extreme catastrophe, that hostile discourse only serves to justify the priority given to the defense of property against looting, by the police, the army or, for lack of anything better, by *vigilante* militias formed for the occasion. It can also serve to cover misappropriations by the authorities themselves, like those of the Italian Civil Protection Department after the Aquila earthquake. On the contrary, the decomposition of this world, taken on as such, creates openings for other ways of living, including in the middle of an "emergency situation." Consider the inhabitants of Mexico City in 1985, who, among the ruins of their neighborhoods struck by a deadly quake, reinvented the revolutionary carnival and the figure of the superhero serving the people—in the form of a legendary wrestler, Super Barrio. In the euphoria of regaining control of their urban existence, they conflated the collapse of buildings with a breakdown of the political system, releasing the life of the city from the grip of government as much as possible and starting to rebuild their destroyed dwellings. An enthusiastic resident of Halifax said something similar when he declared after the hurricane of 2003: "Everybody woke up the next morning and everything was different. There was no electricity, all the stores were closed, no one had access to media. The consequence was that everyone poured out into the street to bear witness. Not quite a street party, but everyone out at once—it was a happy feeling to see everybody even though we didn't know each other." The same as with those miniature communities formed spontaneously in New Orleans in the days after Katrina, faced with the contempt of the public authorities and the paranoia of the security agencies, communities that organized daily to feed and clothe themselves and attend to each other's needs, even if this required looting a store or two.

To start with, therefore, rethinking an idea of revolution capable of interrupting the disastrous course of things is to purge it of every apocalyptic element it has contained up to now. It is to see that Marxist eschatology differs *only in that regard* from the imperial founding aspiration of the United States—the one still printed on every dollar bill: "*Annuity coeptis. Novus ordo seclorum.*" Socialists, liberals, Saint-Simonians, and Cold War Russians and Americans have always expressed the same neurasthenic yearning for the establishment of an era of peace and sterile abundance where there would no longer be anything to fear, where the contradictions would finally be resolved and the negative would be tamed. The dream of a prosperous society, established through science and industry, one that was totally automated and finally pacified. Something like an earthly paradise organized on the model of a psychiatric hospital or a sanatorium. An ideal that can only come from seriously ill beings who no longer even hope for a remission. "Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens," the song says.

The whole originality and the whole scandal of Marxism was to claim that to reach the millennium was necessary to pass through the economic apocalypse, whereas the others judged the latter to be superfluous. We won't wait for the millennium or the apocalypse. There will never be peace on earth. Abandoning the idea of peace is the only real peace. Faced with the Western catastrophe, the left generally adopts the position of lamentation, denunciation, and thus helplessness, which makes it loathsome in the eyes of the very ones it claims to be defending. The state of exception in which we are living shouldn't be denounced, it should be turned back against power itself. We will then be relieved in our turn of any consideration for the law—in proportion to the impunity that we claim, and

depending on the relative force that we create. We have an absolutely clear field for any decision, and any initiative, as long as they're linked to a careful reading of the situation. For us there is now only one historical battlefield, and the forces that move upon it. Our range of action is boundless. Historical life extends her arms to us. There are countless reasons to refuse her, but they all spring from neurosis. Confronted with the apocalypse in a recent zombie film, a former United Nations official comes to this clearheaded conclusion: "It's not the end, not even close. If you can fight, fight. Help each other. The war has just begun."



Oaxaca, 2006.

## **THEY WANT TO OBLIGE US TO GOVERN. WE WON'T YIELD TO THAT PRESSURE.**

**1. *Characteristic Features of Contemporary Insurrections.* 2. *There's No Such Thing as a Democratic Insurrection.* 3. *Democracy Is Just Government in Its Pure State.* 4. *Theory of Destitution.***

1. A man dies. He was killed by the police, directly, indirectly. He's anyone, an unemployed person, "dealer" of something or other, a high school student, in London, Sidi Bouzid, Athens, or Clichy-sous-Bois. He's said to be a "young person," whether he's 16 or 30. He's called a "young person" because he's socially nil, and because, back when one became someone on reaching adulthood, the young people were precisely those who were still nobodies.

A man dies, a country rises up. The one is not the cause of the other, just the detonator. Alexandros Grigoropoulos, Mark Duggan, Mohamed Bouazizi, Massinissa Guesma—the name of a dead person became, during those days, those weeks, the proper name of the general anonymity, of the shared dispossession. And at its beginning, insurrection is the doing of those who are nothing, of those who hang out in the cafés, in the streets, in life, at the university, on the Internet. It coalesces the who floating element, plebeian and petty bourgeois, that is secreted in excess by the continuous disintegration of the social. Everything regarded as marginal, obsolete, or without prospects returns to the center. At Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine, Thala, it was the "crazies," the "lost souls," the "good-for-nothings," the "freaks" who first spread the news of the death of their companion in misery. They climbed onto chairs, tables, monuments, in all the public places all over town. Their tirades stirred everyone willing to listen. Right behind them, there were the high school students who swung into action, those without any remaining hope of a career.

The uprising lasts a few days or a few months, and brings about the fall of the regime or the exposure of every illusion of social peace. It is itself anonymous: no leader, no organization, no demands, no program. The slogans, when there are any, seem to reach no farther than the negation of the existing order, and they are abrupt: "Clear out!," "The people want the system to fall!," "We don't care about your shit." "Tayyip, winter is coming." On TV, on the airwaves, the authorities pound out their same old rhetoric: "they're gangs of *çapulcu* [looters], smashers, terrorists out of nowhere, most likely the pay of foreign interests." Those who've risen up have no one to put on the throne as a replacement, perhaps just a question mark instead. It's not the bottom dogs, or the working class, or the petty bourgeoisie, or the multitudes who are rebelling. They don't form anything homogenous enough to have a representative. There's no new revolutionary subject whose emergence had eluded observers. So if it's said that the "people" are in the streets it's not a people that existed previously, but rather the

people that previously *were lacking*. It's not the people that produce an uprising, it's the uprising that produces its people, by re-engendering the shared experience and understanding, the human fabric and the real-life language that had disappeared. Revolutions of the past promised a new life. Contemporary insurrections deliver the keys to it. The shifts made by the Cairo ultras were not those of groups who were revolutionary before the "revolution." Before, they were only gangs capable of organizing against the police. It's from having played such an important role during the "revolution" that they were forced by the situation to raise questions usually reserved for "revolutionaries." This is where the *event* resides: not in the media phenomenon fabricated to exploit the rebellion through external celebration of it, but in the encounters actually produced within it. This is something much less spectacular than "the movement" or "the revolution," but more decisive. No one can say what an encounter is capable of generating.

This is how insurrections continue, in a molecular fashion, imperceptibly, in the life of neighborhoods, collectives, squats, "social centers," and singular beings, in Brazil as in Spain, in China as in Greece. Not because they implement a political program but because they trigger revolutionary becomings. Because what was lived through shines with such a glow that those who had the experience have to be faithful to it, not separating off but constructing what *was missing from their lives before*. If the Spanish movement of plaza occupations, once it had disappeared from the media radar screen, had not been continued in the neighborhoods of Barcelona and elsewhere via a process of communalization and self-organization, the attempt to destroy the Can Vies squat in June of 2011 would not have been placed in check by three days of rioting by the whole Sants district and we would not have seen a whole city participating in rebuilding the site that was attacked. There would have been just a few squatters protesting against another eviction in a climate of indifference. The construction in question here is not that of a "new society" at its embryonic stage, nor an organization that will eventually overthrow an authority so as to constitute a new one, it's the collective power which, with its consistency and its intelligence, consigns the ruling power to powerlessness, foiling each of its maneuvers in turn.

Very often the revolutionaries are those whom the revolutions take by surprise. But in contemporary insurrections there is something that especially unsettles the revolutionaries: the insurrections no longer base themselves on political ideologies, but on *ethical truths*. Here we have two words that, to modern sensibility, sound like an oxymoron when they're brought together. Establishing what is true is the role of science, is it not?—science having nothing to do with moral norms and other contingent values. For moderns, there is the World on one side, themselves on the other, and language to bridge the gulf. A truth, we were taught, is a solid point above the abyss—a statement that adequately *describes* the World. We've conveniently forgotten the slow apprenticeship during which we acquired together with language, a relationship with the world. Far from serving to describe the world, language helps us rather to *construct* a world. Ethical truths are thus not truths *about* the world, but truths on the basis of which we dwell therein. These are truths, affirmations, stated or not, that are felt but not proved. The silent gaze, fists closed, into the eyes of the little boss, staring him down for a long minute, is one such truth, and worth as much as the loud phrase, "one is always right to rebel." Truths are what *bind* us, to ourselves, to the world around us, and to each other. They give us entry into an immediately shared life, an undetached existence, regardless of the illusory walls of our Selves.

earthlings are prepared to risk their lives to prevent a square from being transformed into a parking lot as at Gamonal in Spain, a park from becoming a shopping center as at Gezi in Turkey, woods from becoming an airport as at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, it's clearly because what we love, what we are attached to—beings, places, or ideas—is also part of us, because we are not reducible to a Self lodging for a lifetime in a physical body bounded by its skin, the whole entity being graced with a set of *properties* which this Self believes it possesses. When the world is fucked with, it's we ourselves who are being attacked.

Paradoxically, even where an ethical truth is uttered as a refusal, the fact of saying “No!” places us squarely in existence. Just as paradoxically, the individual is discovered to be so unindividual that sometimes the suicide of a single one can collapse the whole edifice of social untruth. Mohamed Bouazizi's gesture involving self-immolation in front of the Sidi Bouzid prefecture is sufficient evidence of this. Its explosive power is due to the potent affirmation it contains. It says, “The life laid out for us is not worth living,” “We weren't born to let ourselves be humiliated like that by the police,” “You can reduce us to nothing, but you'll never take away the share of sovereignty that belongs to living beings,” or “Look at us little people, barely existing, humiliated, see how we've gone beyond the miserable means by which you cling to your sick man's power.” That is what was distinctly heard in the gesture. If the televised interview, in Egypt, of Wael Ghonim after his secret incarceration by the “services” had the effect of reversing the situation, it's because a truth broke through his tears and also exploded in the hearts of everyone. In the same vein, during the first week of Occupy Wall Street, before the usual movement managers instituted their little “working groups” responsible for preparing the decisions which the assembly would only need to approve, the model for the speeches made to the 1500 persons present was the guy who stepped forward one day and said, “Yo! What up? My name is Mike. I'm just a gangster from Harlem. I hate my life. Fuck my boss! Fuck my girlfriend! Fuck the cops! Just wanted to say, I'm happy to be here, with you all.” And his words were repeated seven times by the chorus of “human megaphones” that had replaced the microphones prohibited by the police. The true content of Occupy Wall Street was not the demands tacked onto the movement a posteriori like a post-it stuck on a hippopotamus, for better wages, decent housing, or a more generous social security, but *disgust with the life we're forced to live*. Disgust with a life in which we're all *alone*, alone facing the necessity for each one to make a living, house oneself, feed oneself, realize one's potential, and attend to one's health, *by oneself*. Disgust with the miserable form of life of the metropolitan individual—scrupulous distrust / refined, *smart* skepticism / shallow ephemeral loves / resulting extreme sexualization of every encounter / then the periodic return to comfortable and desperate separation / constant distraction, hence ignorance of oneself, hence fear of oneself, hence fear of the other. The life in common that was attempted in Zuccotti Park, in tents, in the cold, in the rain, surrounded by police in the dreariest of Manhattan's squares, was definitely not the full rollout of the *vita nova*—it was just the point where the sadness of metropolitan existence began to be flagrant. At last it was possible to grasp our shared condition *together*, our equal reduction to the status of entrepreneurs of the self. That existential epiphany was the pulsing heart of Occupy Wall Street, for as long as it was fresh and lively.

What is at issue in contemporary insurrections is knowing what a desirable form of life would be, and not the nature of the institutions that would loom over it. But recognizing this would immediately

mean recognizing the ethical inanity of the West. And this would rule out attributing the victory of this or that Islamic party after this or that uprising to a presumed mental backwardness of the populations. It would have to be admitted on the contrary that the strength of the Islamists lies precisely in the fact that their political ideology presents itself as a system of ethical prescriptions, first of all. To put it differently, if they were more successful than the other politicians, it's precisely because they didn't situate themselves mainly on the terrain of politics. And so people here in France can stop whining or crying wolf every time an earnest adolescent chooses to join the ranks of the "jihadists" instead of our suicidal army of wage workers of the service sector. And, adults that we are, it may be possible for us to accept the face we discover in that unflattering mirror.

In Slovenia in 2012, in the calm city of Maribor, a street revolt erupted which inflamed a good part of the country in the days that followed. Such a thing was unexpected in a country with Swisslike features. But what is more surprising is that its starting point was the revelation that road-radar flashers were proliferating in the city because a private company was pocketing nearly all the fines. Could anything be less "political" as the starting point of an insurrection than radar Hashes? But could anything be more ethical than the refusal to let oneself be fleeced like sheep? It's like a 21st century Michael Kohlhaas. The importance of the theme of prevailing corruption in almost all the contemporary revolts shows that they are ethical before being political, or that they are political precisely to the degree that they're contemptuous of politics, including radical politics. As long as being of the left will mean denying the existence of ethical truths and correcting for that impairment with a morality that's as feeble as it is expedient, the fascists will continue to look like the only affirmative political force, being the only ones who don't apologize for living as they do. They'll go from success to success, and will go on deflecting the energy of nascent revolts back against themselves.

This may also be the reason for the failure, incomprehensible otherwise, of all the "anti-austerity movements" which, given current conditions, should take off like wildfire, but instead are sluggish and relaunching in Europe for the tenth time. The problem is that the question of austerity is not being addressed on the ground where it's truly situated: that of a serious disagreement about what it means to live, to live *well*. Put in a summary way, austerity in countries with a Protestant culture tends to be seen as a virtue, whereas in a large part of southern Europe being austere basically means being a pathetic loser. What is happening currently is not just that some are trying to impose an economic austerity on others who don't want to accept it. It's that some consider austerity to be a good thing, the absolute, while others consider it to be, without really daring to say so, an absolute misery. Limiting oneself to fighting against austerity doesn't just add to the misunderstanding, it also ensures that one will lose, by implicitly accepting an idea of life that one doesn't agree with. We don't have to look elsewhere for an explanation of "people's" reluctance to throw themselves into a battle that is already lost. What is required rather is to acknowledge what the conflict is really about: a certain Protestant idea of happiness—being hard-working, thrifty, sober, honest, diligent, temperate, modes reserved—is being pushed everywhere in Europe. What is needed for contesting the austerity plans is a *different idea of life*, which consists for example in sharing rather than economizing, conversing rather than not saying a word, fighting rather than suffering, celebrating our victories rather than disallowing them, engaging rather than keeping one's distance. Something should be said in the

connection about the incalculable strength given to the indigenous movements of the American subcontinent by their embrace of *buen vivir* as a *political* affirmation. On one hand, it brings out the visible contours of what one is fighting for and what against; on the other, it opens one up to a call for the discovery of the thousand other ways the “good life” can be understood, ways that are not enemy ways for being different, at least not necessarily.

2. Western rhetoric is unsurprising. Every time a mass uprising takes down a satrap still honored in all the embassies only yesterday, it’s because the people “aspire to democracy.” The stratagem is as old as Athens. And it works so well that even an Occupy Wall Street assembly saw fit, in November 2011, to allocate 29,000 dollars to twenty or so international observers to go monitor the Egyptian election. Which drew this response from comrades of Tahrir Square, who were intended recipients of the assistance: “In Egypt, we didn’t make the revolution in the street just for the purpose of having a parliament. Our struggle—which we hope to share with you—is broader in scope than the acquisition of a well-oiled parliamentary democracy”

That one is fighting *against* a tyrant doesn’t mean that one is fighting *for* democracy—one may also be fighting for a different tyrant, for the caliphate, or for the simple joy of fighting. But above all, there is one thing that has nothing to do with any arithmetical principle of majority, it is insurrection, the victory of which depends on qualitative criteria—having to do with determination, courage, self-confidence, strategic sense, collective energy. If for two whole centuries elections have been the most widely used instrument after the army for suppressing insurrections, it’s clearly because the insurgents are never a majority. As for the pacifism that is associated so naturally with the idea of democracy, we should hear what the Cairo comrades say about that as well: “Those who say that the Egyptian revolution was peaceful did not see the horrors that the police visited upon us, nor did they see the resistance and even the force that revolutionaries used against the police to defend their tentative occupations and spaces: by the government’s own admission, 99 police stations were put to the torch, thousands of police cars were destroyed and all of the ruling party’s offices around Egypt were burned down.” Insurrection doesn’t respect any of the formalisms, any of the democratic procedures. Like any large-scale demonstration, it imposes its own ways of using public space. Like any specific strike, it is a politics of the accomplished fact. It is the reign of initiative, of practical complicity, of gesture. As to decision, it accomplishes that in the streets, reminding those who’ve forgotten, that “popular” comes from the Latin *populor*, “to ravage, devastate.” It is a fullness of expression—in the chants, on the walls, in the spoken interventions, in the street—and a nullity of deliberation. Perhaps the miracle of insurrection can be summed up in this way: at the same time that it dissolves democracy as a problem, it speaks immediately of a beyond-democracy.

As we know, there’s no shortage of ideologists, such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, who will deduce from the uprisings of the past few years that “the constitution of a democratic society is on the agenda” and propose to make us “capable of democracy” by teaching us the “skills, talents, and knowledges necessary for governing ourselves.” For them, as a Spanish Negriist encapsulates it not too neatly: “From Tahrir to the Puerta del Sol, from Syntagma Square to Placa Catalunya, a cry repeated from plaza to plaza: ‘Democracy!’ That is the name of the specter that is moving through the world today.” And in fact everything would be all right if the democratic rhetoric were nothing more



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