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## From any angle...

Whatever angle you look at it from, there's no escape from the present. That's not the least of its virtues. For those who want absolutely to have hope, it knocks down every support. Those who claim to have solutions are proven wrong almost immediately. It's understood that now everything can only go from bad to worse. "There's no future for the future" is the wisdom behind an era that for all its appearances of extreme normalcy has come to have about the consciousness level of the first punks.

The sphere of political representation is closed. From left to right, it's the same nothingness acting by turns either as the big shots or the virgins, the same sales shelf heads, changing up their discourse according to the latest dispatches from the information service. Those who still vote give one the impression that their only intention is to knock out the polling booths by voting as a pure act of protest. And we've started to understand that in fact it's only *against the vote itself* that people go on voting. Nothing we've seen can come up to the heights of the present situation; not by far. By its very silence, the populace seems infinitely more 'grown up' than all those squabbling amongst themselves to govern it do. Any Belleville *chibani*<sup>1</sup> is wiser in his chats than in all of those puppets' grand declarations put together. The lid of the social kettle is triple-tight, and the pressure inside won't stop building. The ghost of Argentina's *Que Se Vayan Todos*<sup>2</sup> is seriously starting to haunt the ruling heads.

The fires of November 2005 will never cease to cast their shadow on all consciences. Those first joyous fires were the baptism of a whole decade full of promises. The media's "suburbs vs. the Republic" myth, if it's not inefficient, is certainly not true. The fatherland was ablaze all the way to downtown everywhere, with fires that were methodically snuffed out. Whole streets went up in flames of solidarity in Barcelona and no one but the people who lived there even found out about it. And the country hasn't stopped burning since. Among the accused we find diverse profiles, without much in common besides a hatred for existing society; not united by class, race, or even by neighborhood. What was new wasn't the "suburban revolt," since that was already happening in the 80s, but the rupture with its established forms. The assailants weren't listening to anybody at all anymore, not their big brothers, not the local associations assigned to help return things to normal. No "SOS Racism"<sup>3</sup> could sink its cancerous roots into that event, one to

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<sup>1</sup> "Chibani" is Arabic for old man; a cafe with that name in Paris' Belleville neighborhood, populated by old immigrants, is the first place just for them in Paris.

<sup>2</sup> "Send them all packing." Popular chant in the 2001 rebellion.

<sup>3</sup> A European Anti-Racist NGO, basically a Socialist Party front group.

which only fatigue, falsification, and media *omertà*<sup>4</sup> could feign putting an end. The whole series of nocturnal strikes, anonymous attacks, wordless destruction, had the merit of busting wide open the split between *politics* and *the political*. No one can honestly deny the obvious weight of this assault which made no demands, and had no message other than a threat which had nothing to do with *politics*. But you'd have to be blind not to see what is purely political about this resolute negation of politics, and you'd certainly have to know absolutely nothing about the autonomous youth movements of the last 30 years. Like abandoned children we burned the first baby toys of a society that deserves no more respect than the monuments of Paris did at the end of Bloody Week<sup>5</sup> -- and knows it.

There's no *social* solution to the present situation. First off because the vague aggregate of social groupings, institutions, and individual bubbles that we designate by the anti-phrase "society" has no substance, because there's no language left to express common experiences with. It took a half-century of fighting by the Lumières to thaw out the possibility of a French Revolution, and a century of fighting by work to give birth to the fearful "Welfare State." Struggles creating the language in which the new order expresses itself. Nothing like today. Europe is now a de-monied continent that sneaks off to make a run to the Lidl<sup>6</sup> and has to fly with the low-cost airlines to be able to keep on flying. None of the "problems" formulated in the social language are resolvable. The "retirement pensions issue," the issues of "precariousness," the "youth" and their "violence" can only be kept in suspense as long as the ever more surprising "acting out" they thinly cover gets managed away police-like. No one's going to be happy to see old people being wiped out at a knockdown price, abandoned by their own and with nothing to say. And those who've found less humiliation and more benefit in a life of crime than in sweeping floors will not give up their weapons, and prison won't make them love society. The rage to enjoy of the hordes of the retired will not take the somber cuts to their monthly income on an empty stomach, and will get only too excited about the refusal to work among a large sector of the youth. And to conclude, no guaranteed income granted the day after a quasi-uprising will lay the foundations for a new New Deal, a new pact, and a new peace. The social sentiment is rather too evaporated for all that. As their solution, they'll just never stop putting on the pressure, to make sure nothing happens, and with it we'll have more and more police chases all over the neighborhood. The drone that even according to the police indeed did fly over

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<sup>4</sup> The mafia "code of silence:" No cooperation with state authorities or reliance on its services, even when the victim of a crime.

<sup>5</sup> The week-long massacre that crushed the Paris Commune.

<sup>6</sup> A German discount supermarket chain.

Seine-Saint-Denis<sup>7</sup> last July 14<sup>th</sup> is a picture of the future in much more straight-forward colors than all the hazy images we get from the humanists. That they took the time to clarify that it was not armed shows pretty clearly the kind of road we're headed down. The country is going to be cut up into ever more air-tight zones. Highways built along the border of the "sensitive neighborhoods" already form walls that are invisible and yet able to cut them off from the private subdivisions. Whatever good patriotic souls may think about it, the management of neighborhoods "by community" is most effective just by its notoriety. The purely metropolitan portions of the country, the main downtowns, lead their luxurious lives in an ever more calculating, ever more sophisticated, ever more shimmering deconstruction. They light up the whole planet with their whorehouse red lights, while the BAC<sup>8</sup> and the private security companies' -- read: militias' -- patrols multiply infinitely, all the while benefiting from being able to hide behind an ever more disrespectful judicial front.

The catch-22 of the present, though perceptible everywhere, is denied everywhere. Never have so many psychologists, sociologists, and literary people devoted themselves to it, each with their own special jargon, and each with their own specially missing solution. It's enough just to listen to the songs that come out these days, the trifling "new French music," where the petty-bourgeoisie dissects the states of its soul and the K'1Fry mafia<sup>9</sup> makes its declarations of war, to know that this coexistence will come to an end soon and that a decision is about to be made.

This book is signed in the name of an imaginary collective. Its editors are not its authors. They are merely content to do a little clean-up of what's scattered around the era's common areas, around the murmurings at bar-tables, behind closed bedroom doors. They've only determined a few necessary truths, whose universal repression fills up the psychiatric hospitals and the painful gazes. They've made themselves scribes of the situation. It's the privilege of radical circumstances that justice leads them quite logically to revolution. It's enough just to say what we can see and not avoid the conclusions to be drawn from it.

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<sup>7</sup> A historically left-leaning department to the north-east of Paris with the highest share of immigrants, where two youths died electrocuted in a Clichy-sous-Bois (one of the department's communes) power substation in 2005, contributing to spark the riots of November.

<sup>8</sup> Brigade Anti-Criminalite – undercover cops.

<sup>9</sup> French rap super-group.

## First Circle – “I AM WHAT I AM”

“I AM WHAT I AM.” That’s marketing’s final offering to the world, the final stage of advertising’s evolution, beyond, far beyond, all the exhortations to be different, to be yourself, and drink Pepsi. It took decades of concepts to get there, to that pure tautology, to “I = I.” He’s running on a treadmill in front of the mirror in his gym... she’s coming back from work, flying down the road in her Smart car. Will they meet?

“I AM WHAT I AM.” My body belongs to me. I am me, you are you, and *it’s not going too well*. Mass personalization. Individualization of all conditions – of life, work, misery. Diffuse schizophrenia. Rampant depression. Atomization into fine paranoid particles. Hysterics upon contact. The more I want to be Me, the more I feel an emptiness. The more I express myself the more I dry up. The more I run after it, the more tired out I get. I hang onto it, you hang onto it; we cling to our “I” like a tedious bureaucratic window-job. We’ve become our own representatives in a strange commerce, guarantors of a personalization that in the end looks a lot like an amputation. We insure ourselves all the way to bankruptcy, with a more or less disguised clumsiness.

While I wait, *I manage*. The quest for a self; my blog, my apartment, the latest fashionable idiocy, couples’ stories, getting ass... all kinds of prosthetic limbs to hang onto an “I” with! And if “society” hadn’t become such a definitive abstraction, then it would just be all these existential crutches offered me to let me drag myself along a little more, the ensemble of dependencies that I’ve contracted, for the price of my identity. *The handicapped person is the model citizen of tomorrow*. It’s not without foresight that the associations that exploit them today demand a “subsistence income” for them.

The injunction everywhere to “be someone” maintains the pathological state that makes this society necessary. The injunction to be strong produces the very weakness it maintains itself on, to such a point that *everything seems to take on a therapeutic aspect*, even working or love. All the times we ask “how’s it going?” all day long – like a society full of patients, taking each other’s temperature. Sociability is now made up of a thousand little niches, a thousand little refuges where you can come in to keep warm. And it’s always better there than in the bitter cold outside. Where everything’s false, since it’s all just a pretext for getting heated up. Where nothing can happen since we’re all too busy deafly shivering together. This society will soon only be held together by the mere tension of all the social atoms straining towards an illusory healing. It’s a power station that drives its turbines on a gigantic reservoir of dammed up tears that is always about to spill over.

“I AM WHAT I AM.” Never has domination found a more above-suspicion slogan. The maintenance of an “I” that’s in a permanent state of semi-disrepair, in a chronic state of semi-failure, is the best kept secret of the present order of things. The

weak, depressed, self-critical, virtual “I” is essentially the indefinitely adaptable subject that requires a production based on innovation, the accelerated obsolescence of technologies, the constant upheaval of social norms, and generalized flexibility. At the same time the most voracious consumer, and, paradoxically, the *most productive “I,”* it will throw itself with the most energy and avidity into the slightest *project*, only to come back later to the embryonic state it started from.

“WHAT AM I,” then? Washed since childhood in the waves: milk, smells, stories, sounds, emotions, nursery rhymes, substances, gestures, ideas, impressions, looks, songs, and foods. What am I? I’m totally tied to places, sufferings, ancestors, friends, loves, events, languages, memories, all kinds of things that obviously *are not me*. Everything that attaches me to the world, all the links that comprise me, all the forces that populate me – they don’t weave an identity, though I am encouraged to wield one, but an *existence*: singular, common, living, and from which emerges - in places, at certain moments - that being that says “I.” Our feeling of inconsistency is only the effect of this foolish belief in the permanence of the “I,” and the very slight concern we give to what makes us.

It’s dizzying to see Reebok’s “I AM WHAT I AM” enthroned atop a Shanghai skyscraper. The West is advancing everywhere, with its favorite Trojan horse: the murderous antimony between the “I” and the world, the individual and the group, between attachment and freedom. Freedom isn’t the gesture of liberation from attachments, but the *practical* capacity to operate upon them, to move around in them, to establish or cut them off. The family only exists as a family, that is, as hell, for those who have renounced the project of altering its debilitating mechanisms, or don’t know how. The freedom to *tear oneself out* has always been the mere phantom of liberty. We won’t get free of what’s holding us back without losing at the same time that which our strength could be exercised on.

“I AM WHAT I AM,” then, is not just a simple lie, a simple advertising campaign, but a *military* campaign, a war-cry directed against everything there is *between* people, against everything that circulates indistinctly, everything that ties them invisibly together, everything that puts an obstacle in the way of perfect desolation, against everything that makes it so *we exist* and the world doesn’t just look like one big highway everywhere, an amusement park or one of the new cities: pure boredom; passionless, but well-ordered; empty, frozen space where nothing moves besides the duly registered bodies, the automobile molecules and the ideal commodities.

France couldn’t be the fatherland of anxiety-pills, the anti-depressant paradise, the Mecca of neurosis that it is if it weren’t for its simultaneously being the European champion of hourly productivity. Sickness, fatigue, depression, can be seen as the *individual* symptoms of a bigger disease that needs to be cured. They contribute to the maintenance of the existing order, to my docile adjustment to idiotic conventions and norms, my adjustment to my modernized crutches. They are the thin veil on my

selection of opportune, compliant, productive penchants, and on those penchants that they'll soon be amicably mourning. "You've got to be able to change, you know." But taken as *facts*, my failures can also lead to the dismantlement of the hypothesis of the "I." They then become acts of resistance in the war that's going on. They become a rebellion and an energetic core holding out against everything that conspires to normalize us, to amputate us. *It's not our "I" that's in a state of crisis, but the form in which we seek to impress ourselves upon the world.* They want to make us into various manifestations of a well-delimited, well separated, classable "I," able to have its various qualities checked off; – controllable – when in fact we are but creatures among the creatures, singularities among similar peers, living flesh weaving the flesh of the world. Contrary to what we have repeated to us since childhood, intelligence doesn't mean knowing how to adapt... or if it is a kind of intelligence, it's the intelligence of slaves. Our non-adaptation, our fatigue, are only *problems* from the point of view of what's trying to subjugate us. They indicate, rather, a departure point, a junction point for unusual complicities. They let us see an otherwise more dilapidated but infinitely more shared landscape than all the hallucinatory landscapes that this society maintains for itself. We aren't depressed; we're on strike. For those who refuse to manage themselves, "depression" is not a state, but a passage, a good bye, a step to the side towards a *political* disaffiliation. And from then on there's no possible reconciliation besides medications and the police. Indeed, that's why this society has no fear of imposing Ritalin so much on its too-lively children or of fixing people into life-long dependency on pharmaceuticals, and claims to be able to detect "behavioral troubles" at three years of age: because the hypothesis of the "I" is cracking everywhere.



## Second Circle – “Fun is a vital need”

A government that declares a state of emergency against fifteen year old kids. A country that puts its health in the hands of a soccer team. A cop in a hospital bed that complains that he was the victim of “violence.” A mayor that passes decrees against tree-house builders. Two ten year old children, arrested in Chelles for burning down a game library. This era excels in doing caricatures of situations that seem to escape it whenever they really do happen. It must be said that the media haven’t been very thorough in their efforts to smother, in reports of complaints and indignation, the bursts of laughter that should greet news like the above.

An explosive burst of laughter would be the proper response to all the serious “issues” that the present era likes to bring up so much. To start with the most brutally suppressed of them: there is no “immigration issue.” Who still grows up where s/he was born? Who lives where s/he grew up anymore? Who works where s/he lives? Who lives where his or her ancestors lived? And whose kids are these, the kids of our era; the children of their parents, or of television? The truth is that we’ve been torn wholesale from all belonging, that we aren’t from anywhere anymore, and that as a result we have at the same time an unusual penchant for tourism, an undeniable suffering. Our history is one of colonization, migration, wars, exile, the destruction of all roots. It is the history of everything that’s made us foreign to this world, guests in our own families. We’ve had our language expropriated by teaching, our songs by variety, our flesh by mass pornography, our cities by the police, our friends by wage labor. Add to that, in France, the ferocious and secular work of individualization done by a State power structure that notes, compares, disciplines, and separates its subjects from the youngest age, that instinctively sniffs out any solidarity it might have missed so that there’s nothing left but citizenship, the pure, fantasy state of belonging to the Republic. A Frenchman is more than anything a dispossessed, miserable man. His hatred for foreigners melts together with his hatred for himself *as a foreigner*. The jealousy mixed with dread he has towards the “cities” only proves his resentment for everything he’s lost. He can’t stop envying the so-called “ghetto” neighborhoods where there’s at least a little community life left, a few links between people, a bit of non-state solidarity, an informal economy, an organization that’s still not totally detached from those who organize it. We have come to such a deprived point that the only way we can go on feeling like Frenchmen is to curse the immigrants, and those who are in a more visible way *foreigners like me*. The immigrants are in a strange position of sovereignty in this country; *if they weren’t there, the French would perhaps not exist either*.

France is a product of its schooling, and not the other way around. We live in an excessively schooled society, where one remembers passing the college entrance exams as being a defining moment in one’s life. Where retirees still talk about how

they failed some exam forty years ago, and how it messed up their whole career, their whole life. The Republic's schools have been forming a kind of state subjectivity, recognizable among everybody, for the past century and a half. People that accept selection and competition so long as they get an equal chance. Who only want everyone to be fairly compensated for their lives like in some competition, according to their merits. Who mutely respect culture, regulations, and the best students in class. Even their attachment to their grand intellectual critiques and their rejection of capitalism are stamped with their love of schooling. It's that state construction of subjectivities that's collapsing a little more each day along with the decadence of the institution of schooling. The reappearance of the street school and of street culture after 20 years, to compete with the National School system and its cardboard culture is the most profound trauma that French universalism is undergoing at the moment. On this point, the most extreme right winger is in agreement beforehand with the most virulent leftist. Just the name of Jules Ferry<sup>10</sup>, Thiers' minister, theoretician of colonization, should make this institution suspect. As for us, when we see professors issued from some "neighborhood watch committee" or another, come to snivel on "20-Heures"<sup>11</sup> that they've had *their* school burned, we think back to how many times we dreamed of doing it as kids. When we hear a leftist intellectual burping about the barbarity of gangs of youths heckling passers-by in the streets, shoplifting, burning cars and playing cat and mouse with the riot cops, we remember what was said about the "rockers" in the 60s, or even better, what was said about the Apaches in the "belle époque:" A judge in the Seine court wrote in 1907, "It has been in fashion for the past few years to refer with the generic name *apaches* to all dangerous individuals, gangs of recurring offenders, enemies of society, without fatherland or family, deserters of all their duties, prepared to make the most audacious surprise attacks, and any and all attacks against persons or property." These gangs that flee work, take the names of their neighborhoods, and confront the police are the nightmare of every good citizen individualized in the best French style: the former incarnate everything that the latter have renounced, all the possible joy that they will never have. There is a certain disrespect about *existing* in a country where a kid that sings his own songs gets snubbed by someone telling him "cut it out, you're going to make it rain!" a country where academic castration pours out generations of well-policed employees. The persistent mystique of Mesrine<sup>12</sup> has less to do with his honesty and audacity than with the fact that he took revenge for what we should all avenge ourselves for. Or rather, what we should avenge ourselves for *directly*, whereas instead we go on

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<sup>10</sup> Ferry, who resigned as prefect of the Seine (administrator in Paris during the Commune) after the Commune was crushed, eventually became minister of education and passed the "Jules Ferry Laws," a set of French laws which first established free education (1881) and then made it mandatory and laic (1882).

<sup>11</sup> A half-hour news broadcast on French TV at 8 pm.

<sup>12</sup> A famous French robber, killer, and kidnapper, murdered by the police in 1979.

hedging and deferring it. Since there's no doubt that the French constantly avenge themselves, permanently and against everything, for the annihilation that they are resigned to, with a thousand subtle, low acts: all sorts of malicious gossip; a mean, icy little jab here; some venomous politeness there. It was about time that *fuck the police* came to replace *yes, Mr. Officer, sir!* In this sense the nuance-less hostility of certain gangs merely expresses in a slightly less muffled manner the ambiance of meanness, the basically mean mindset, and the desire for redemptive destruction that this country is consuming itself in.

It's such a usurpation to call this mass of foreigners we live among a "society" that even the sociologists have lately been thinking of giving up the concept, one that for a century has been their big bread-winner. Now they're starting to prefer using the metaphor "*network*" to describe the manner in which these cybernetic requests connect to each other, the way that the weak interactions known by the names "workmate," "contact," "buddy," "relations," or "adventure" are knotted together. Just the same, it happens that these networks get distilled into a *milieu*<sup>13</sup>, where nothing is shared but codes, and nothing is at stake besides the incessant reconstruction of an identity.

It'd be a waste of time to detail all that's dying in existing social relations. It's said that the family is back in, that couples are returning to the scene. But the family that's returned is not the same family that went away. Its return is nothing but a deepening of the reigning separation; it just serves to fool people and it becomes itself through that deception. Everyone can bear witness to the doses of sadness that the family reunions ladle out from one year to the next: the forced smiles, that embarrassment at seeing everyone fake it in vain, the feeling that there's a corpse lying there on the table, and that everyone's acting like it's nothing. From flirting to divorce, from living together to getting back together, everyone feels the inanity of the sad family nucleus, but the majority seem to feel that it would be even sadder to give it up. The family is no longer so much the asphyxiation of the maternal stranglehold or the patriarchy of cookies in your face, but the infantile abandonment to a fleecy dependency where everything is known, to a moment of carelessness in a world that no one can deny is crumbling, a world where "becoming independent" is a euphemism for "finding a boss to work for." They'd like to use biological familiarity as an excuse to corrode any slightly destructive determination we might have about us, on the pretext that they watched us grow up; to make us resign ourselves to growing out of everything, like we grew out of our childlike seriousness. We must save ourselves from this corrosion.

The couple is like the final echelon in the great social debacle. It's the oasis in the middle of the human desert. In it we seek all the divine tokens of the "intimate," everything that's so obviously gone from contemporary social relations: warmth, simplicity, truth, a life without theatrics or spectators. But once the euphoria of love

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<sup>13</sup> Social circle.

passes, "intimacy" loses its priestly office: it too is a social invention, it speaks the language of women's magazines and of psychology, and it is just as nauseatingly armored with strategies as all the rest. There's no more truth there than there is anywhere else; there too lies and the laws of foreignness dominate. And when luckily some truth is found there, it brings up a division that deranges the very form of the couple itself. What makes people love each other is also what makes them friendly and ruins the utopia of autism for two.

In reality, the decomposition of all social forms is a blessing. It is for us the ideal condition for a savage mass experimentation, for new arrangements, for new loyalties. The famous "parent flight" has imposed a confrontation with the world on us which has forced us to become precociously lucid and foreshadowed a few beautiful revolts. In the death of the couple, we see the birth of disturbing forms of collective emotionality, now that sex is worn down to a string, now that manliness and femininity are dressed in such moth-eaten costumes, now that three decades of continuous innovation in pornography have exhausted all the attractions of transgression and liberation. We're counting on what is unconditional about blood connections to make the framework for a political solidarity as impenetrable to state interference as a gypsy encampment. Even the most endless stream of handouts that many parents feel forced to give to their proletarianized offspring can become patronage for social subversion. "To become independent," to become autonomous, can also mean to learn how to fight in the streets, to take over empty buildings, to never work, to love ourselves and each other like crazy and steal from shops.

### Third Circle – “Life, health, and love are precarious; why should work be any exception to that law?”

There’s no more confused issue in France than that of Work. And no people has a more twisted relationship with Work than the French do. Go to Andalusia, to Algeria, to Naples. There people scorn work, fundamentally. Go to Germany, the USA, to Japan. There people revere work. Things change, it’s true. There are indeed *otakus*<sup>14</sup> in Japan, *frohe Arbeitslose*<sup>15</sup> in Germany, and there are workaholics in Andalusia. But for the time being these are just curiosities. In France we get down on our hands and knees to climb the hierarchies, but we flatter ourselves in private that we don’t really give a damn about any of them. When we’re swamped we’ll stay at work until 10 pm, but we never have misgivings about stealing some office materials here and there, or snatching a few loose items out of the company stocks that could be sold second-hand. We hate bosses, but we want at all costs to be employed. To have a job is an honor, and to work is a mark of servility. It’s the perfect clinical picture of hysteria. We love by detesting, and detest by loving. And everyone knows the kind of stupor and disarray strikes the hysterical person when he loses his victim, the master. Most often he never recovers.

In the fundamentally *political* country we call France, industrial power has always been subject to state power. Economic activity has never ceased being suspiciously flanked by a nit-picking administration. The big bosses that aren’t the products of State nobility in the style of the ENA-Polytechnique<sup>16</sup> are the pariahs of the business world, where behind the scenes everyone admits a little pity for them. Bernard Tapie<sup>17</sup> is their tragic hero: adored one day, imprisoned the next, but *always untouchable*. It’s no surprise what’s been happening with him lately. Contemplating him as one contemplates a monster, the French public holds him at a distance, and by the spectacle of such fascinating infamy, preserves itself from direct contact with him. In spite of the great bluff of the 80s, the *cult of private enterprise has never really taken hold in France*. Whoever writes a book lambasting Tapie is guaranteeing himself a bestseller. In spite of the managers, their morals, and their literature appearing in public, there’s still a kind of safety ribbon of derisive sniggering around them, an ocean of scorn, a sea of sarcasm. The businessman isn’t really part of the family. All in all, in the hierarchy of detestation, even a cop is preferable to him. To be a bureaucrat is still the commonly understood definition of

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<sup>14</sup> Meaning “someone else’s house,” or in modern usage, a “hobbyist, fan or specialist,” applied to people with obsessive interests like anime, manga, and gaming.

<sup>15</sup> The “merry unemployed.”

<sup>16</sup> The premier Business Educational institution in France, graduates of which have a near monopoly over access to the most prestigious job positions.

<sup>17</sup> A French businessman, soccer team president, politician and occasional actor, singer, and TV host, who was indicted on charges of tax fraud, corruption, and bribing of witnesses.

good work, in spite of wind and flood, in spite of *golden boys*<sup>18</sup> and privatizations. Though those who aren't may envy their wealth, they certainly don't envy them their jobs.

On the basis of this neurosis, the successive governments can still declare war on unemployment, and pretend to wage "the employment battle," while ex-executives camp with their portable phones in Medecins du Monde's<sup>19</sup> tents on the banks of the Seine. While in spite of all statistical special effects the ANPE's<sup>20</sup> massive radiation fails to make the number of the unemployed drop below two million. While the RMI<sup>21</sup> and the *biz* are the only real guarantee, even in the opinion of the Renseignements Generaux<sup>22</sup>, against a social explosion, possible at any moment. It's the psychic economy of the French as much as the political stability of the country that's at stake in the maintenance of the workerist fictions.

May we be permitted not to give a fuck.

We belong to a generation that is living *quite well* without all that fiction. A generation that never expected to get anything out of our rights according to workplace law, and even less out of the right to work. A generation that's not even "precarious" as the most advanced fractions of leftist militancy like to theorize, because to be precarious is still to define yourself according to the sphere of work, in sum: *according to its decomposition*. We admit the necessity of getting money, regardless of the means, because it's impossible right now to do without it, but we don't admit the necessity of working. Anyway, we don't work anymore, we just go *jobbing*. A particular business enterprise isn't a place one exists in, but a place one passes through. We aren't cynical, we are just hesitant to be taken advantage of. All the discourses on motivation<sup>23</sup>, quality, and personal investment, just slide off our backs, to the great dismay of all the human resources managers. They say that we're disappointed with the business world, thwarted in our efforts; they say that it hasn't done honor to our parents' loyalty, that they were fired too unhesitatingly. Lies. To be disappointed you'd have to have hoped that the day would come. And we never hoped for anything from it: we see it for what it is and has always been: a dupes' game, with adjustable comfort levels. As for our parents we just regret that they fell for it, at least those among them who believed in it.

The confusion of emotions around the issue of work can be explained – the notion of work has always contained two contradictory dimensions: a dimension of *exploitation* and one of *participation*. Exploitation of individual and collective labor

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<sup>18</sup> French President Sarkozy's blonde sons.

<sup>19</sup> A reference to Médecins du Monde's "tent city" campaign - in which 300 homeless people were given tents to sleep in on the streets of Paris.

<sup>20</sup> National Employment Agency

<sup>21</sup> Minimum Income

<sup>22</sup> A state informers' organization: like a combination of the FBI and the Secret Service, but unable to arrest anyone.

<sup>23</sup> Or "mobilization."

force by the private or social appropriation of surplus-value; participation in a common project through the links woven between those cooperating in the heart of the universe of production. These two dimensions are viciously mixed up in the idea of work, which is what explains the indifference of the workers, in the end, to Marxist rhetoric, which denies the participatory dimension, and to the managerial rhetoric, which denies the exploitative dimension. It's also the source of the ambivalence of their relationship to work, which is honored at the same time as it makes us foreign to what we're doing, and adored at the same time as it is a piece of ourselves that we stake on it. The prerequisite here is a great disaster: that of the destruction of everything that's had to be destroyed; that of the uprooting of everyone that's had to be uprooted, so that working could end up appearing as the *only way of existing*. The horror of work is less a part of work itself than of the methodical devastation, over centuries, of everything that is not it: familiarities in neighborhoods, professions, villages, struggles, blood relations; attachment to places, beings, seasons, ways of speaking and of doing things.

Therein lies the present paradox: work has triumphed over all the other ways of existing, at the same time as workers have become superfluous. The gains made in productivity, relocation, mechanization, automation, and the digitization of production have gone so far that they have reduced the amount of living labor necessary for the creation of each commodity to almost nothing. We're living out the paradox of a society full of workers with no work, where distractions, consumption, and leisure are only ever just a further indictment of the insufficiency that they must distract us from. The Carmaux mine, which made itself famous with a whole century of violent strikes, has now been made into Cap Decouverte leisure center. It's a "multi-leisure complex" you can skateboard or bike through which stands out for its "Mine Museum," where they simulate firedamp explosions for the vacationers.

In business, work is divided ever more visibly into highly qualified research, design, administration, coordination, and communication jobs, tied to putting in play the knowledge required for the new cybernetic production processes, and the unqualified maintenance and surveillance jobs for those processes. The first are few, highly paid, and thus so coveted that the minority that can get one would never think of letting even the slightest crumb slip away. Their work and their selves are one, locked together in a death grip. Managers, scientists, lobbyists, researchers, programmers, developers, consultants, or engineers literally *never* stop working. Even their one-night stands increase their productivity. "The most creative enterprises are also those wherein intimate relations are the most numerous," theorizes one Human Resources department philosopher. "The enterprise's collaborators," confirms the one from Daimler-Benz, "are part of its capital... Their motivation, their manner, their capacity for innovation and their concern for the clients' desires, constitute the raw material of innovative service... Their behavior,

their social and emotional competence, have a growing weight in their work evaluation. They will no longer be evaluated by the number of hours they have been present, but on the basis of the goals they have attained and the quality of their results. They are businessmen.”

All the tasks that haven't been able to be delegated to automation form a cloud of jobs that can't be done by machines, but could be done by any human at all – warehousemen, storekeepers, assembly line workers, seasonal workers, etc. This flexible, undifferentiated labor force, going from one task to the next and never stopping too long at any one company, can no longer gather itself into a force, since it is never at the center of the production process, but instead pulverized into a multitude of cracks, where they patch up the holes in whatever hasn't been mechanized. The temp is the perfect picture of a worker that's not a worker anymore, that has no more profession but competencies saleable as jobs come along, and for whom having to remain available is another job still.

Out from the margins of this core of effective workers, necessary for the proper operation of the machine, spreads a vast, supernumerary majority, which is useful for the proper flow of production but hardly any more, and which presses upon the machine the risk that in all their idleness they might begin to sabotage it. The threat of a general demobilization is the specter haunting the present system of production. To the question, “then why work?” not everyone responds like the one-time welfare recipient at *Liberation* magazine who wrote “For my well-being. I've got to look out for myself.” *There's a serious risk that we will end up finding a use for our idleness.* This floating population needs to be either occupied, or held in place. And to this day no better disciplinary method than the wage system has been found. So they'll have to work to dismantle the various “social gains,” so that they can bring the most rebellious ones back to the wage system's teat; the ones who don't surrender in the face of having to choose between dying of hunger and rotting in jail. The explosion of the “personal services” slave sector must go on; cleaning ladies, waitresses, massage girls, house maids, prostitutes, personal nurses, tutors, therapeutic leisure, psychological aides, etc. And all of it accompanied by a continual increase in norms, for safety, hygiene, good behavior and culture, accelerating at the speed of fashions -- which are the basis for the necessity of such services. In Rouen, “human parking meters” have replaced ticket machines; some guy stands there bored in the street and gives you a ticket so you can park, and sometimes, if needs be, he might lend you a raincoat in bad weather.

The order of work made the order of our whole world. Its collapse is so obvious that just thinking about everything that's to come gives everyone lockjaw. To work today is less about the *economic* need of producing commodities than about the *political* need to produce producers and consumers, to save the order of work by any means necessary. Producing *oneself* is about to become the dominant occupation in a society where production has become aimless: like a carpenter who's been kicked



out of his workshop and who out of desperation starts to plane himself down. That's where we get the spectacle of all these young people training themselves to smile for their employment interviews, who whiten their teeth to make a better impression, who go out to nightclubs to stimulate their team spirit, who learn English to boost their careers, who get divorced or married to bounce back again, who go take theater classes to become leaders or "personal development" classes to "manage conflicts" better – the most intimate "personal development," claims some guru or another, "will lead you to better emotional stability, a more well directed intellectual acuity, and so to better economic performance." The croaking of all these little people waiting impatiently to be selected by training themselves to be 'natural' is part of an attempt to save the order of work by a ethic of *motivation*. To be 'motivated' means to report for work not as if it were an activity, but as if it were a whole realm of *possibility*. If the unemployed take out their piercings, get haircuts and start making 'plans,' work hard on their 'employability' as they say, they're proving how motivated they are. Motivation means that kind of a slight detachment from yourself, that minimal tearing ourselves away from what constitutes us, that condition of foreignness, with which it becomes possible for you to *sell yourself*, not just your labor power, and to be paid not for what you do, but for what you are. It's the new norm for socialization. Motivation is what fuses together the two opposing poles of Work: here you participate in your own exploitation, and all participation is exploited. Ideally, every one person gets to be a little business enterprise, your own boss and your own product. And whether you're working or not, you have to accumulate contacts, skills, and a "network:" what one might call "human capital." The planet-wide injunction to get mobilized and motivated on the slightest pretext – about cancer, "terrorism," an earthquake, the homeless – sums up the determination of the ruling powers to maintain the reign of work even beyond its physical disappearance.

The present machinery of production is therefore on the one hand a gigantic mental and physical mobilization-machine, sucking up the energy of those who have become "excess" humans, and on the other it is a *sorting* machine that allows conformed subjectivities to survive and lets drop any and all "risk individuals," those who incarnate a different use of life, and in that sense resist it. On the one hand they give life to ghosts, and on the other they let the living die. Such is the specifically political function of the present machinery of production.

To organize beyond and against work, to collectively desert the regime of motivation, and manifest the existence of a vitality and discipline in *demobilization itself*, is a crime that a civilization in desperate straits will never forgive us; it's in fact the only way to survive it.

#### Fourth Circle – “Easier, more fun, more mobile, safer!”

It would be nice if they'd stop talking to us about “the city” and the “countryside,” and even nicer if they'd stop bringing up their ancient opposition. What surrounds us isn't like that at all: it's a single urban sprawl, without form and without order, a desolate, undefined, and unlimited zone, a global continuum of museum-ized mega-downtowns and natural parks, huge complexes and immense agricultural operations, industrial zones and land parcels, rural inns and networks of bars: the metropolis. There certainly was the ancient city, the medieval city, or the modern city; but there is no such thing as a metropolitan city. The metropolis is the synthesis of the whole territory. Everything lives there together, not so much geographically as by the meshing of its networks.

It is precisely because it is about to totally disappear that the city is being fetishized these days, as History. The huge factories in Lille are now concert halls; the concrete downtown of Le Havre is a Unesco heritage site. In Beijing the *hutongs*<sup>24</sup> that once surrounded the Forbidden City have been destroyed, and replicas reconstructed a ways away for anyone who's curious. In Troyes, half-timber façades are stuck onto cinder-block buildings, in a artsy pastiche reminiscent of the Victorian style boutiques in Disneyland Paris. The historical downtowns, which had long been hotbeds of sedition, are integrated wisely into the metropolis' organizational structure, as ostentatious tourism and consumption centers. They are the commodity fairy islands, upheld with fun-fairs and esthetic attraction... and by force. The asphyxiating vapidness of Christmas marketplaces has to be paid for with ever more security guards and police patrols. Control integrates marvelously into the commodity landscape, showing its authoritarian face to whoever wants to see. It's a blended era; a blend of bland music, telescoping billy-clubs, and cotton candy. All the police surveillance our total enchantment needs!

And it's a taste for the quote-on-quote “authentic,” and the taste for control over it, that accompanies the petty-bourgeoisie in its colonization of the poor neighborhoods. Pushed out of the mega downtowns, seeking a “neighborhood life” that they'd never find in “Phénix” brand tract-homes. And, chasing off the poor, the cars and the immigrants, and making a *clean* place out of it, expelling all the microbes, they pulverize everything they came there looking for. And on a municipal billboard, a janitorial employee is pictured shaking hands with a security guard; the slogan reads: “Montauban: A Clean City.”

The decency that has obliged the urbanists to stop talking about the “city” they've destroyed, and to start talking about “the urban area,” should also lead them to stop talking about “the countryside,” which doesn't exist anymore either. What there is in its place is a landscape that gets exhibited to the stressed-out, uprooted masses, a

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<sup>24</sup> Narrow alleyways formed by courtyard entrances, now being demolished to make way for new roads and buildings.

past that can easily be shown off now that there are so few peasants around anymore. It's a marketing device deployed over a "territory" where everything must be either priced or marked off as a heritage site. It's always the same freezing emptiness that wins out, all the way to the most far-off of bell towers.

The metropolis comprises this simultaneous death of city and countryside, at the intersection where all the middle classes converge, in the middle of this middle class crowd, which extends indefinitely, from rural exodus to "peri-urbanization." The glassing-in of the global territory suits the cynicism of contemporary architecture. A school, a hospital, a multimedia library; just so many variations on the same theme: transparency, neutrality, and uniformity. Massive, fluid buildings, designed without any need to know what will go on in them, and that *could be here* just as much as they could be anywhere. What is to be done with the La Defense<sup>25</sup> buildings, the Part-Dieu<sup>26</sup> towers, the Euralille<sup>27</sup>? The phrase "fire-new" (brand new) contains their whole fate within it. A Scottish traveler, after the insurgents burnt down the Paris City Hotel in May 1871, bore witness to the singular splendor of power in flames: "I had never imagined a more beautiful sight: It is superb. The people of the Commune are dreadful rascals, I won't deny that; but what artists they are! And they weren't even conscious of their work! ... I have seen the ruins of Amalfi, bathed by the blue waves of the Mediterranean, the ruins of the Tung-hoor temples in Punjab; I've seen Rome and many other things: but nothing can compare to what was before my eyes tonight."

Certainly within the metropolitan web there are a few fragments of city and a few residues of countryside left. But all the real liveliness has gone and taken up residence in the ghetto areas. The paradox is that those places that look the least inhabitable are the only ones to still be truly lived in. An old squatted shack will always feel more populated than these "social standing" apartment blocks where all you can really do is insert your furniture and perfect the decoration while waiting to pick up and move to the next place. In many mega-cities, the shantytowns are indeed the last truly living, livable, and unsurprisingly the most mortal, places to live. They're the other side of the electronic decor of the global metropolis. The dormitory towns of the Northern suburbs of Paris, abandoned by a petty bourgeoisie that'd gone pheasant-hunting out at their villas, but brought back to life by mass unemployment, now shine even more intensely than the Latin Quarter -- with language as much as with fire.

The firestorm of November 2005 was not the result of extreme dispossession, as so much rambling on has been done about; rather it was the result of the full possession of a particular territory. Sure, you can burn cars because you're pissed

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<sup>25</sup> A modern office building in Paris.

<sup>26</sup> A high-rise complex in Lyon.

<sup>27</sup> A large shopping center in Lille.

off, but to propagate the riot over a whole month and keep the police in long-standing check, you have to know how to get organized, make alliances, know the terrain to perfection, and share a common language and enemy. Kilometers and weeks couldn't stop the spread of the fire. Other fires burst up in response to the first blazes, and in places they were least expected. Whispers don't try to be heard. The metropolis is a terrain of constant low intensity conflict, of which the occupation of Basra, Mogadishu, or Nablus are the culmination points. The city, for soldiers, was for a long time a place to be avoided, or perhaps to besiege; the metropolis on the other hand is perfectly compatible with war. Armed conflict is merely another episode in its constant self-reconfiguration. The battles waged by the great powers are like incessantly repeated policing tasks in the black holes of the metropolis – "whether in Burkina Faso, the south Bronx, Kamagasaki, Chiapas or the northeastern suburbs of Paris." These "interventions" aren't really so much aiming for any victory or to restore order or peace, but rather they are performed in the maintenance of the great enterprise of forced "security" that's always/already at work. War can no longer be isolated within time, but is diffracted in a series of military and police micro-operations to ensure security.

The police and the army adapt to it in parallel fashion, and step by step. A criminologist asks the CRS<sup>28</sup> to organize itself in small, highly trained mobile units. The military academy, cradle of their disciplinary methods, questions its hierarchical organization. In his grenadiers' battalion, a NATO officer applies a "participatory method involving everyone in the analysis, preparation, execution, and evaluation of an action. Plans are discussed and re-discussed for days, throughout all drills, and depending on the latest information received... There's nothing like a plan elaborated in common to increase adhesion and motivation."

The armed forces don't just adapt themselves to the metropolis; they give it its form. And so, after the battle of Nablus, the soldiers became interior designers. Forced by the Palestinian guerillas to abandon the streets, which were too hazardous, they learned to advance vertically and horizontally, through the urban constructions, smashing walls and ceilings to move about. An officer of the Israeli Defense Forces, a philosophy grad, explained: "The enemy interprets space in the classical, traditional manner, and I refuse to follow its interpretation and fall into its traps... I want to surprise him! That's the essence of war. I must win... and so that's how I decided on the method that ended up with me going through walls... Like a worm crawling forth and eating whatever's in its way." The urban realm is more than just the theater of conflict; it's the means. It recalls Blanqui's councils, where, this time on the side of insurrection, future Paris insurgents were advised to take over the houses on the barricaded streets to protect their positions, break down walls to bring rooms in contact with each other, smash the first floor staircases, knock out holes in

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<sup>28</sup> French riot police.

the ceilings to defend against any potential attackers, rip down the doors to barricade the windows with, and station gunmen on every floor of the building.

The metropolis is not just this urbanized heap, this final collision between city and countryside; it's just as much a flow of beings and things. A *current* that passes through a whole network of fiber optics, high-speed train lines, satellites, video surveillance cameras, so everyone runs to keep up until they're lost. A current that tries to pull everything into its hopeless, constant movement, which *mobilizes* everybody. Where everyone's assailed by news as if it were some hostile force. Where there's nothing left but to run. Where it becomes hard to wait, even for the umpteenth commuter-train ride.

The proliferation of displacement and communications resources everywhere tears us constantly from the *here and now*, with the temptation of being somewhere else all the time. Grab a TGV<sup>29</sup> train, take an RER<sup>30</sup>, pick up a phone, and *you'll already be there*. This mobility only implies a kind of constant being pulled away, isolation, and exile. And it would be intolerable for people were not to always be a mobility of *private space*, of a kind of portable "indoors." The private bubble doesn't burst; it just floats. This isn't the end of the *cocooning*, it's just that it's starting to get moving. From a train station, an office park, a business bank, from one hotel to the next, there's always that foreignness, so commonplace, so well known that it feels like the least familiar thing. The luxuriance of the metropolis is a random brew of defined, infinitely permutable environments. Its downtowns offer themselves up not as identical places but as original offerings of ambiances, among which we evolve, choosing one and passing up another, like a kind of existential shopping among the different styles of bars, people, designs, or iPod playlists. Advertising tagline: "With my mp3 player I'm the master of my world." To survive the surrounding uniformity, the only option is to reconstitute your own inner world constantly, like children building little Wendy houses<sup>31</sup> just the same anywhere. Like Robinson, reproducing his grocer's universe on the deserted island, it's almost like our deserted island is civilization itself, and we are thousands of people constantly being washed up there. Because of the fluid nature of its architecture, the metropolis is one of the most vulnerable human formations that have ever existed. Supple, subtle, but vulnerable. A sudden, total closure of the borders because of a rampant epidemic, any kind of shortage of vital supplies, an organized blockade of communications points, and the whole scenery changes, and no longer hides the scenes of carnage that haunt it at all times. This world wouldn't be on the move so fast if it weren't for the fact that its collapse is so hot on its trail.

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<sup>29</sup> France's high-speed rail service.

<sup>30</sup> The French integrated city subway and pre-existing regional railway network.

<sup>31</sup> A back-yard children's play-house, named after the house Peter Pan builds around Wendy Darling after she falls upon her arrival in Never-Never Land.

Its network structure, its whole technological infrastructure of nodes and connections, and its decentralized architecture attempt to keep the metropolis safe from its own inevitable malfunctions. The Internet is supposed to be able to withstand nuclear attack. The permanent control of the flow of information, people, and commodities has to secure metropolitan mobility and track it, and ensure that there's never a missing pallet from the merchandise stockroom, that there's never a single buck stolen from a shop or a terrorist on a plane. Thanks to a RFID<sup>32</sup> chip, a biometric passport, and a DNA index.

But the metropolis also produces the means of its own destruction. An American security expert explains their defeat in Iraq by the guerilla's ability to profit from the new means of communication. When they invaded Iraq, the USA didn't care so much about democracy as they did about cybernetic networks. They brought with them one of the weapons now defeating them. The proliferation of cell phones and internet access points gave the guerillas unheard-of means of organizing and making themselves hard to attack.

Every network has its weak points, the nodes that have to be taken out to stop circulation, to implode the latticework. The last big European power outage proved it: a single incident involving a high-tension power line and the lights go out over a good chunk of the continent. To get something happening in the metropolis, to open other possibilities, the first step would have to be stopping its *perpetuum mobile*<sup>33</sup>. The Thai rebels that knocked out the electrical relays understood that, the anti-CPE<sup>34</sup> protesters that blocked the universities to then try to block the economy understood it, and the American dockworkers that struck in October 2002 to save 300 jobs, and blocked the main west coast ports for 10 days understood it too. The American economy is so dependent on influx from Asian countries that the cost of that blockage was calculated at around a million euros a day. Ten thousand people can shake the world's greatest global economic power. For certain "experts," if the movement had lasted one more month, it would have been the cause for the "return to a recession in the United States, and an economic nightmare for Southeast Asia."

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<sup>32</sup> Radio Frequency Identification

<sup>33</sup> Perpetual motion.

<sup>34</sup> First Employment Contract. A 2006 proposal applying to employees under 26 that would have removed their bosses' need to give a reason for firing them over a 2 year trial-period. It was so unpopular that massive protests were held by young students, and the government rescinded the amendment.

## **Fifth Circle – “Less possessions, more connections!”**

Thirty years of mass unemployment, “crisis,” sluggish growth, and still they want to make us believe in the economy. Thirty years punctuated, it is true, by a few interludes of illusion; from 1981-83, France had the illusion that a left wing government that could make people happy; then we had the cash-in years (1986-89), where we all became rich businessmen and speculators; the Internet interlude (1998-2001), where we all found virtual employments by dint of plugging ourselves in and staying there, where France, many colored but one, multicultural and cultivated, brought all the world cups home. But at that point we spent all our reserves of illusion, touched bottom; we’re flat broke – even if we don’t look it.

From all that we had to understand that it isn’t the economy that’s in crisis; the economy *is* the crisis; it’s not that we can’t get any work, it’s that *there’s too much of it*; all weighed in, it’s not crisis but growth that’s depressing us. We must admit that for us the litany of the stock market rates has just about as much meaning as a Latin mass. Lucky for us, we who have come to this conclusion are many. We aren’t talking about all those people living off little thefts, trafficking of all kinds, or who have been on welfare for 6 years. Or all those who just can’t manage to identify with their jobs any more and instead put more into leisure. We aren’t talking about all those who are locked up, underground, the ones who do the minimum and live to the max. Or about all those who are stricken by that strange *mass detachment* that makes the example of the pensioners and the cynical super-exploitation of adjustable labor forces stand out even more. We aren’t talking about them, though indeed they will probably be coming to similar conclusions one way or another.

What we’re talking about is all these countries, all these whole continents that have lost their economic faith, having seen the IMF’s Boeing jet depart amid crashes and losses, or having felt the World Bank’s heat a bit. They’re not talking too much over there about this crisis of purpose that the economy is trudging through all over the West. In Guinea, Russia, Argentina, Bolivia, there’s a violent and durable discrediting of this religion and its clergies going on. “What do you call a thousand IMF economists lying at the bottom of the sea?” ... “A good start!” so goes the joke at the World Bank. Russian saying: “Two economists meet. The one asks the other, ‘do you know what’s happening?’ The other replies, ‘well, hold on and I’ll explain it to you.’ ‘No, no, says the first, explaining it isn’t hard -- I’m an economist too, you know. No, what I’m asking is: do you understand it?’” Sections of the priesthood itself feign dissidence and criticize the dogma. That slightly alive current of supposed “economic science” – a current that humorlessly calls itself “non-autistic economy” – now makes a living out of dismantling a few usurpations, doing a few sleight of hand tricks, adulterating the indexes by a science whose only tangible role is to bounce the monstrosity around the crack-pot ideas of the dominant ones, and give a slight aura of ceremony to their calls to submission, and, at last, as all

religions have always done, to *supply explanations*. Because the overall sickness becomes immediately intolerable when it appears for what it is: ungrounded and unreasonable.

Money isn't respected anywhere anymore, neither by those who have it nor by those who don't. The answer given by twenty percent of German youths, when asked what they wanted to do later in life, was "artist." Work is no longer sustainable as a given of the human condition. Corporate accountancy admits that it doesn't know where value comes from. The market's bad reputation would have done away with it a good decade ago, without the rage and vast resources of its apologists. Progress has everywhere become a synonym for disaster, in common parlance. Everything flees in the economy's world, as everything fled the USSR in Andropov's<sup>35</sup> time. Anyone who's looked a little into the last years of the USSR will easily recognize in all the appeals to volunteerism by our rulers, in all their pretense of soaring towards a future that they've lost all trace of, all these professions of faith in "reform," of anything and everything, the first cracks in the Wall's structure. The collapse of the socialist bloc didn't seal the victory of capitalism, but merely attested to the failure of one of its forms. Anyway, the USSR being put to death wasn't the act of a people in revolt; the *nomenklatura* just got changed around. By proclaiming the end of socialism, a fraction of the ruling class right away freed itself of all the anachronistic duties that once tied it to the people. It took *private* control over what it already controlled in the name of all. "Because they pretend to pay us, let's pretend to work," we said in the factories. And the oligarchy answered: "No problem, we'll stop pretending, then!" Some get the raw materials, the industrial infrastructure, the military-industrial complex, the banks, the nightclubs, and others misery or emigration. No one believed in it anymore in the USSR under Andropov, and no one believes it anymore in France in the meeting halls, workshops, and offices. "No Problem!" answer the bosses and governors, who don't even take the time anymore to soften up "the hard laws of the economy," relocating a factory in the middle of the night and telling all the personnel that it's been shut down early the next morning, and never hesitate anymore to send in the GIGN<sup>36</sup> to break a strike – like they do over at SNCM<sup>37</sup> or during the occupation of a sorting office in Rennes last year. All the murderous activity of the present power structure comes down to managing these ruins on the one hand, and on the other setting up the basis for a "new economy."

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<sup>35</sup> Andropov was the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party from 12 November 1982 until his death fifteen months later. Ex-ambassador to Hungary, he watched in terror in 1956 as officers of the Hungarian security service were hanged from lampposts. He urged armed force to maintain Soviet control in Prague in 1968, Kabul in 1979, and in Warsaw in 1981.

<sup>36</sup> The National Military Intervention Group, an elite anti-terrorist and hostage rescue force.

<sup>37</sup> National Corsican Mediterranean Maritime Corporation. The company faced uproar and a hard trade-union strike upon Prime Minister Villepin's first attempt privatize it and give it to a old schoolmate.



But indeed, we were made for the economy. For generations we've been disciplined, pacified, we've been made into naturally productive *subjects*, just content to consume. And that reveals everything we had to force ourselves to forget: *that the economy is political*. And that this politics is today a politics of selection operating at the heart of a humanity that has become massively superfluous. From Colbert<sup>38</sup> to De Gaulle<sup>39</sup> by way of Napoleon III,<sup>40</sup> the State has always seen economy as politics, no less than the bourgeoisie that drew profits from it and the proletarians that confronted it did. And that strange intermediary stratum of the population, that curious, powerless aggregate of *those who don't take part*, the petty bourgeoisie, is the only group pretending to believe in the economy as if it were a reality – because that way it can preserve its neutrality. In France, small businessmen, small bosses, little bureaucrats, execs, professors, journalists, and middlemen of all sorts make up this non-class, this social gelatin composed of the masses of those who simply want to live their little private lives far from History and its tumult. This marshy mass tends to be the champion of false consciousness, ready at any time in its half-sleep to keep its eyes shut to the war raging all around. Every time they almost wake up a new fad is invented and sold to them. For the last ten years, ATTAC<sup>41</sup> and its improbable Tobin tax – the enforcement of which would have required no less than the creation of a global government – its apology for the “real economy” against the financial markets and its touching nostalgia for the State. The comedy can go on as long as they want; it's still in the end just a lifeless farce. One fad replaces another; now it's *degrowth*. While ATTAC and its popular education courses tried to save the economy *as a science*, degrowth is an attempt to save it *as a morality*. Just one alternative to stop the coming apocalypse: degrow. Consume and produce less. Become joyously frugal. Eat organic, ride a bike, stop smoking, closely examine the ingredients in the products you buy. Be content with strictly what's necessary. Voluntary simplicity. “Rediscover the true wealth in the blooming of convivial social relations in a healthy world.” “Stop extracting our natural capital.” Move towards a “healthy economy.” “Prevent regulation by chaos.” “Don't generate social crises that would question democracy and humanism.” Basically: *become thrifty*. Go back to daddy's economy, to the golden age of the middle class: the 1950s. “When the individual is thrifty, his property fills its office perfectly, which is to let him enjoy his own life, sheltered from public existence or just in his own private enclosure.”

A graffiti writer in a handmade hoodie drinks a fruit cocktail among friends on the terrace of an ethnic cafe. Eloquent, cordial, speaking softly, not making too much

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Baptiste Colbert, French minister of finance 1665-1683 under King Louis XIV.

<sup>39</sup> WWII General, founded the Fifth Republic and was its first President, 1959-1969.

<sup>40</sup> 1808-1873. Both the first president and the last monarch of France.

<sup>41</sup> Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens, ATTAC) an organization pushing for a tax on foreign exchange transactions.

noise or being too silent, they look at each other with smiles, and are a bit beatific, even: ever so civilized. Later some of them go off to do some hoeing in the community garden, and others go make pottery, zen, or an animated film. Communing with the just sentiment for the formation of a new humanity, a wiser, more refined one, the final one. And they're right. Apple and de-growth understand each other in a strange way on the subject of the civilization of the future. The idea to return to the economy of yesteryear that some have is the opportune smoke screen behind which hides the idea of the great technological leap forward that others have. Because there's no going back, no returns in History. The injunction to go back to the past only expresses one of the forms of consciousness of one's time, and rarely is it the least modern form. De-growth is not just coincidentally the banner of the dissident ad-men of *adbusters* magazine. The inventors of 'zero growth' – the 1972 club in Rome – were themselves a bunch of industrialists and bureaucrats that had the support of the MIT cyberneticians.

This convergence is not fortuitous. It's part of the forced march to find a way to relieve the economy. Capitalism has made profit out of destroying everything that lived off social connections, and is now reconstructing them *on its own basis*. The metropolitan sociability of today is its incubator. In the same way as it raped the natural world, it's today throwing itself into the crazy idea of reconstituting that world as controlled environments with all the proper surveillance sensors installed. There's a new economy for this new humanity, an economy that doesn't just want to be a separate sphere of existence but its very fabric, that wants to be the substance of human relationships; a new definition of work, as working on yourself; Capital as human capital; a new idea of production as the production of *relational goods*, and consumption as the consumption of situations; and above all a new concept of value that embraces all the qualities of human beings. This "bioeconomy" that's being born now sees the world as a closed system to be managed, and claims to be setting up the basis for a science that will integrate all the parameters of life. Such a science that might one day make us look back fondly to the good old days of rigged indexes where they said they were measuring the people's happiness by the growth of the GNP, but where no one believed a lick of it.

"Revalorize the non-economic aspects of life" is a watchword of de-growth and at the same time Capital's reform program. Eco-villages, video surveillance cameras, spirituality, biotech, conviviality, all belong to the same "civilization paradigm" that's forming now, a paradigm of total economy built from the bottom up. Its intellectual template is cybernetics, the science of systems, that is, *of controlling them*. To definitively impose the economy, its ethics of work and stinginess, they needed to intern and eliminate, over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, all the idlers, beggars, witches, loonies, merry revelers, and other poor people without any profession; a whole humanity, which by its very existence gave the lie to the order of interest and self-restraint. The new economy won't be imposed without a similar selection of the

subjects and zones most suitable for the transformation. The ever-announced coming chaos will be either the occasion for that sorting-out process, or that of our victory over this whole detestable project.

## Sixth Circle – “The environment is an industrial challenge.”

Ecology is the new big discovery of the year. It's been for the last thirty years that we've just been leaving that stuff to the Greens, laughing about it on Sunday and acting concerned about it on Monday. And now it's caught up to us, and is invading the airwaves like a hit song in summertime, since it's 68 degrees in December now. A quarter of the fish species have disappeared from the ocean and the rest don't have much time left either.

Bird flu alert: hundreds of thousands of migrating birds are to be shot in flight.

The mercury levels in human breast milk are ten times higher than the rates allowable for cows. Lips swell up on biting an apple; it came from the market... The simplest gestures have become toxic. We die at the age of 35 from “a long illness” that's managed like everything else is managed... We should've drawn the right conclusions before things got this bad, where we're all patients at pavilion B in the palliative care center at the hospital.

It must be said that this whole “catastrophe” we're so noisily kept up on, doesn't really effect us. At least not before it hits us with one of its perfectly normal and expected consequences. Maybe It doesn't concern us because it doesn't *touch* us. And that's the catastrophe right there.

There's no “environmental catastrophe.” The *environment itself is the catastrophe*. The environment is what's left to man after he's lost everything. Those who live in a neighborhood, a street, a valley, a war zone, a workshop – they don't have an “environment;” they're living in a *world*, peopled by presences, dangers, friends, enemies, living and dying areas, all kinds of beings. This world has its own substance, which varies according to the intensity and quality of the connections that attach us to all these beings, all these places. There's no one but us, we children of the final dispossession, the exiles of the end times – who come into the world in concrete cubes, harvest our fruits at the supermarket, and catch the echo of the world through television – only we get to have an *environment*. And there's no one but us watching our own annihilation as if it were just a simple change of atmosphere. Getting indignant about the latest advancements of the disaster, and patiently putting together encyclopedia entries about them.

What is frozen in an environment is a relationship with the world based on *management*, that is, on foreignness. A relationship with the world where we're not made *as well* as the rustling of trees, the smell of frying oil in the building, the bubbling of water, the uproar of school classrooms, the mugginess of summer evenings, a relationship with the world where there is me and then there is my environment, surrounding me but never really constituting me. We have become neighbors in a planetary co-owners' meeting. It's hard to imagine a more complete hell.

No material surroundings have ever deserved the name “environment,” except perhaps for today’s metropolis. Digital voices making announcements, tramways with such a 21<sup>st</sup> century whistle, bluish streetlamps looking like giant matchsticks, pedestrians made up like failed fashion models, the silent rotation of a video surveillance camera, the lucid crackling of the metro electricity terminals, supermarket checkout counters, office time-clocks, electronic ambiances at the cybercafé, the profusion of plasma screens, fast lanes and latex. Never has a decor been so able to do without the souls traversing it. Never have surroundings been more *automatic*. Never has a context been so indifferent, and demanded in return such equal indifference in order to survive in it. The *environment* is in the end merely that: the relationship with the world that is proper to the metropolis, which projects itself onto everything that escapes it.

Here’s the situation: our parents were employed to destroy this world, and now they’d like to make us all work to rebuild it so that, adding insult to injury, it becomes profitable. The morbid excitement that drives the journalists and ad-men these days in reporting each new piece of evidence for global warming unveils the steely smile of the new green capitalism, in the making since the 70s, which we waited for at the turn of the century but never came. Well, here it is! Ecology, that’s green capitalism for you! Alternative solutions, that’s it too! The health of the planet demands it! No doubt about it anymore, it’s a green scene; the environment is to be the pivot point for the political economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A volley of “industrial solutions” are introduced for each new catastrophic possibility.

The inventor of the H bomb, Edward Teller, suggests spraying millions of tons of metallic dust into the atmosphere to stop global warming. NASA, frustrated at having had to put its grand idea of an anti-missile shield away in the museum of cold war horrors, suggests putting a gigantic mirror beyond the moon to protect us from the sun’s now-fatal rays. Another vision of the future: a motorized humanity, driving along fueled by bio-ethanol from Sao Paulo to Stockholm; the dream of a cereal grower from the Beauce<sup>42</sup>, which after all only implies the conversion of *all* the arable land in the planet for soy beans and sugar beets. Ecological cars, clean energy, environmental consulting co-existing smoothly with the latest Chanel ad, throughout the glossy pages of the opinion magazines.

We are told that the environmental issue has the incomparable merit of being the first truly *global problem* that humanity has had to deal with. A *global problem*, that is, a problem that only those who are organized on a global level will be able to solve. And we know who that is: the very same groups that for almost the past century have been the vanguard of disaster, and certainly intend to remain as such, but with a minor logo change; cheap! That the EDF<sup>43</sup> has the impudence to serve

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<sup>42</sup> A region in northern France, between the Seine and Loire rivers

<sup>43</sup> Electricity of France

us up its nuclear program again as the *new solution* to the global energy crisis says plenty about how much the new solutions seem to perfectly resemble the old problems.

Secretaries of State in the back rooms of alternative cafés, their concerns are always expressed in the same words, which are after all the same words as ever. People have to *get mobilized*. Not for to rebuild the country, like in the post-war era; not for the Ethiopians like in the 1980s, not for employment like in the 1990s. No, this time it's about the environment. It will thank you for it. Al Gore, Hulot<sup>44</sup> style ecology, and de-growth stand side by side with the eternal great souls of the Republic to play their role in re-exciting the little left wing people and the well known idealism of youth. Voluntary austerity writ large on their flag, they work benevolently to make us compliant with the "ecological state of emergency to come." The sticky round mass of their guilt lands on our tired shoulders, intending to push us on to cultivate our garden, sort out our garbage, and compost the rest of the macabre feast in which and for which we are patronized condescendingly.

Manage the phasing out of nuclear power, the excess CO2 in the atmosphere, the melting glaciers, the hurricanes, the epidemics, global over-population, the erosion of the soil, the mass disappearance of living species... such is our burden. "It's everyone's duty to change their behaviors," they say, if we want to save our fine civilization-model. We must consume little, in order *to be able to go on consuming*. We must produce organically *in order to be able to go on producing*. We must control ourselves *in order to still have control*. Such is the logic of a world trying to survive while giving itself an air of historical rupture. Thus they would like to convince us to participate in the great industrial challenges of the present century. And stupid as we are, we're ready to leap into the arms of the very same people that presided over causing the devastation, expecting them to get us out of it.

Ecology isn't just the logic of total economy, it's also the new morality of Capital. The system's state of internal crisis and the rigorous selection going on are such that we will need a new criteria to operate such sorting with. From one era to the next, the idea of virtue was never more than an invention of vice. Without ecology, how could we have today the existence of two different food channels, one "healthy and organic" for the rich and their children, and the other notoriously toxic for the plebes and their offspring, damned to obesity. The planetary hyper-bourgeoisie couldn't make their ordinary lifestyle look respectable if its latest caprices weren't so scrupulously "respectful of the environment." Without ecology, no one would have enough authority anymore to shut up any and all objections to the exorbitant progress of control.

Tracking, transparency, certification, eco-taxes, environmental excellence, water police, all give us an idea of the coming state of ecological emergency. Everything

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<sup>44</sup> Mr Hulot, bumbling French movie character in films by Jacques Tati.

is permitted to a power structure that authorizes itself to act as the representative of Nature, health, and well-being.

“Once the new economic and behavioral culture has passed into common morality, coercive measures will *doubtless* fall into disuse of their own accord.” You’d have to have all the ridiculous aplomb of a television adventure show host to have such a frozen perspective and at the same time to call upon us to feel “sorry for the planet” enough to get mobilized about it and yet remain sufficiently anesthetized to watch the whole thing with restraint and civility. The new eco-asceticism is precisely that *self-control* that is required of us all to negotiate the rescue operation for what the system itself has taken hostage. In the name of ecology, we must all now tighten our belts, as yesterday we did so in the name of the economy. The roads could certainly be transformed into bicycle paths, we ourselves could perhaps within a certain scope be one day gratified with a guaranteed income, but only at the price of an entirely therapeutic existence. Those who claim that generalized self-control will spare us from an environmental dictatorship are lying: the one will make the other’s bed, and we’ll have both.

As long as there is Man and Environment, there between them will be the police.

Everything about the ecologists’ discourse has to be turned upside down. Wherever they call the blunders of the present management system for beings and things “catastrophes,” we should really only see the catastrophe of its oh-so perfect operation. The greatest wave of famine known in the tropical belt to this day (1876-1879) coincided with a global drought, but above all it coincided with the apogee of colonization. The destruction of the provincial world and of its food-production practices had made the means of dealing with scarcity disappear. Beyond a mere lack of water, it was the effect of the colonial economy in full swing of expansion that covered the whole tropical strip with thin corpses. What presents itself everywhere as an ecological catastrophe has always been above all the manifestation of our disastrous relationship with the world. The way we don’t really inhabit it at all makes us vulnerable to the slightest jolt in the system, to the slightest climactic risk. As the latest tsunami approaches, and the tourists continue to frolic in the waves, the islands’ hunter-gatherers make haste to flee the coasts, following the birds. The present paradox of ecology is that on the pretext of saving the Earth, it is merely saving the foundations of what’s desolated it.

The regular functioning of the world normally serves to hide our state of truly catastrophic dispossession. What is called “catastrophe” is no more than the forced suspension of this state, one of those rare moments when we regain some sort of presence in the world. Let the petroleum reserves run out earlier than expected; let the international flows that maintain the metropolis’ tempo get interrupted, let us suffer some great social disruption and some great “return to savagery of the population,” a “planetary menace,” or the “end of civilization!” Either way, any loss

of control would be preferable to all the crisis management scenarios they envision. The specialists in sustainable development aren't the ones with the best advice. The logical elements for a response to this problem, which could easily cease to be one, come out in times of malfunction, when the system short-circuits. Among the signatory nations to the Kyoto Protocol, the only countries that have fulfilled their commitments, indeed in spite of themselves, are the Ukraine and Romania. Guess why. The most advanced experimentation with "organic" agriculture on a global level has taken place since 1989 on the island of Cuba. Guess why. And it's along the African highways, and not elsewhere, that automobile mechanics work has come to be a form of popular art. Guess how.

What makes the crisis desirable is that in the crisis the environment ceases to be the environment. We are forced to reestablish contact, albeit a fatal one, with what's there, to rediscover the rhythms of reality. What surrounds us is no longer a landscape, a panorama, a theater, but rather it is what we have to inhabit, something we should be made of, something we can learn from. We won't let ourselves be robbed by those who've caused the possible content of the "catastrophe." Where the managers platonically discuss among themselves how they might reverse emissions "without breaking the bank," the only realistic option we can see is to "break the bank" as soon as possible, and make good use of the each collapse of the system until then to increase our strength.

New Orleans, a few days after hurricane Katrina. In this apocalyptic atmosphere, life is reorganizing itself. In the face of the inaction of the public authorities, who were too busy cleaning up the "French quarter" tourist area and protecting the shops to come to the aid of the poorer city dwellers, forgotten forms are reborn. In spite of the sometimes forcible attempts to evacuate the area, in spite of the "negro hunting" parties that the supremacist militias went out on, a lot of people refused to leave the terrain. For the latter, who refused to be deported like "environmental refugees" to the four corners of the country, and for those who from nearly everywhere decided to join them in solidarity, responding to a call from a former Black Panther, self-organization came back to the fore. In a few weeks time, the Common Ground Clinic was set up. This true country hospital provided, from the very first days, free and ever more effective care to those who needed it thanks to the constant influx of volunteers. Years later, the clinic is still the base for an everyday resistance to the clean-sweep operation of the government's bulldozers, which are trying to turn that part of the city into a pasture for property developers. Popular kitchens, supplies, street medicine, illegal takeovers, the construction of emergency housing: a whole practical knowledge accumulated by people here and there over the course of their lives has a place to be put to use in there. Far from the uniforms and sirens. Whoever knew the penniless joy of these New Orleans neighborhoods before the catastrophe, the defiance of the State that already characterized them and the mass



“coping” that was already happening there, wouldn’t be surprised that all that has come to pass was possible. On the other hand, someone who’s trapped in the anemic and atomized everyday routine of our residential deserts might doubt that any such determination could be found anywhere anymore. Yet to reconnect with such gestures, buried under years of normalized life, is the only practicable means of not sinking to the bottom along with this world. May there come a time when we again become impassioned by those gestures.

## **Seventh Circle – “We’re building a civilized space here”**

The first global slaughter, the one that from 1914 to 1918 got rid of a large sector of the urban and rural proletariat, was waged in the name of freedom, democracy, and civilization. It is outwardly in the name of the same values that for the past 6 years we’ve been seeing the famous “war on terror” be waged, from targeted assassinations to special operations. And the parallel stops there: on the level of appearances. Civilization is no longer just something to be brought to the natives without further ado. Freedom is no longer that name you write on the wall, since it’s always followed by “security,” which is now like its shadow. And democracy has a general notoriety about it now, easily soluble in any piece of emergency legislation – for instance in the official reestablishment of torture in the United States, or the Perben II<sup>45</sup> law in France.

In one century, freedom, democracy and civilization have been made into mere theories again. All the work of the rulers now consists in arranging for the material and moral, symbolic and social conditions in which these theories can be validated, and configuring the spaces where they are to appear to function. All means to these ends are acceptable, even the least democratic, the least civilized, and the most security-obsessed. In one century, democracy presided over the birth of the fascist regimes, civilization constantly rhymed – to the tune of Wagner or Iron Maiden – with extermination, and freedom has had both the face of a banker throwing himself from a window, and that of a family of workers dying of hunger, as in 1929. It was agreed since then – or rather, since 1945 – that the manipulation of the masses, the activities of the secret services, the restriction of public liberties, and the total, full sovereignty of the various police forces were part and parcel of the proper way to ensure democracy, freedom and civilization. At the final stage of this evolution, we see the first socialist mayor of Paris putting the final touches on urban pacification, with the highly policed city settlement of a poor neighborhood, and explaining it with carefully chosen words: “We’re building a civilized space here.” There’s nothing to find fault with there; it’s just all got to be destroyed.

Beneath its abstract appearance, this question of civilization is in no way a philosophical one. A civilization is not an abstraction hanging over life. It is what rules, besieges, and colonizes existence in the most everyday, personal way. It’s what holds together its most intimate and most general dimensions. In France, civilization is inseparable from the State. The more a State is powerful and old, the less it is a superstructure and the exoskeleton of a society and the more it is in fact the very form of the subjectivities that people it. The French State is the framework of French subjectivities, the aspect taken on by the centuries-old castration of its

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<sup>45</sup> A French law, similar to the USA-PATRIOT act, which though it excuses financial crime and corruption, is “aimed at fighting delinquency and organized crime.”

subjects. Considering that, no one should be surprised that so many people so often go from being political figures to ending up raving mad in psychiatric hospitals; that people see our leaders as the root of all our ills, that we like to grumble about them and that we grumble them all the way into power as our masters. Because here, we don't think of politics as a reality outside of us but as a part of ourselves. The life we invest these figures with is the life we've had stolen from us.

If there is a French exception, that's the cause of it. Everything, even the global influence of French literature, is the fruit of this amputation. Literature in France is the space sovereignly granted for the amusement of the castrated. It is the formal freedom conceded to those who can't get used to the nothingness of their real freedom. That's what gives rise to all the obscene winks that the Statesmen and men of letters in this country have never stopped giving each other, as they easily borrow each other's costumes. That's also why the intellectuals here tend to talk so loud when they're so soft, and always fail at the decisive moment, the only moment that would've given meaning to their existence but which also would've gotten them ostracized by their profession.

It's a forbidden and justifiable thesis that modern literature was born with Baudelaire, Heine, and Flaubert, as the blow-back from the State massacre of June 1848. In the blood of Parisian insurgents, and against the silence surrounding the slaughter, the modern literary forms were born – spleen, ambivalence, fetishism of form, and morbid detachment. The neurotic affection that the French have for their Republic – in the name of which all blunders regain their dignity, and even the worst dishonesty gets its high-level approval – extends the repression of the founding sacrifices through every instant. The June days of 1848 – after one thousand five hundred dead in battle, but many thousands of summary executions among prisoners, the Assembly welcomed the surrender of the last barricade with cries of “Long Live the Republic!” – and the Bloody Week are birthmarks that no surgery can ever erase.

Kojeve wrote in 1945: “The “official” political ideal of France and of the French is today still that of the nation-State, the ‘one and indivisible Republic.’ On the other hand, in the depths of its soul, the country understands how inadequate this ideal is, the political anachronism of the strictly “national” idea. This feeling has admittedly not yet reached the level of a clear and distinct idea: The country cannot, and still does not want to express it openly. Besides, for the very reason of the unparalleled brilliance of its national past, it is particularly difficult for France to recognize clearly and to accept frankly the end of the ‘national’ period of History and understand all of its consequences. It's hard for a country which created the ideological framework of nationalism out of nothing and exported it to the whole world to recognize that all that remains of it now is a document to be filed in the historical archives.”

The issue of the Nation-State and of mourning it forms the heart of what has had to be called, for the past half-century, the *French malaise*. We politely give the name

of “alternation” to this twitchy indecision, this pendulum-like swinging from the left to the right, and then from the right to the left; like a manic phase after a depressive phase that only prepares another one; or like the way that in France we have, coexisting, such an oratorical critique of individualism and such a ferocious cynicism; such grandiose generosity and such petty obsessions among the masses. Since 1945, this foggy malaise, which only appears to have slightly dissipated in the light of the insurrectionary fervor of May 68, has never really stopped thickening. The era of States, nations, and republics is coming to an end; and a country like ours that has sacrificed everything that was lively about it to them can only remain totally stunned. The explosion that was caused by Jospin’s<sup>46</sup> simple phrase, “the State can’t do everything,” shows the kind of reaction that we’ll be seeing sooner or later when it becomes obvious to everyone that it can’t do anything at all anymore. The feeling we’ve been cheated is like a wound that just keeps growing and getting more infected. It’s the basis for all the latent rage mounting in people towards just about everything. That we’re not mourning the era of nations is the key to the French anachronism, and to the revolutionary possibilities France still has.

Whatever their outcome may be, the role of the next presidential elections will signal the end of our illusions, and the bursting of the historical bubble we’re living in that makes *events* like the anti-CPE movement (scrutinized by other countries as if it were some bad dream that escaped the 1970s) possible - that’s why no one really wants anything to do with the elections. France is indeed the *red* lantern of the western zone.

The West today is a GI speeding into Falluja on an Abraham M1 tank while listening to hard rock full blast. It’s a tourist lost on the Mongolian plains, mocked by everyone and clinging to his debit card as to his only lifeline. It’s a manager that swears by the game of Go. It’s a young girl that seeks her happiness in clothes, guys, and moisturizing creams. It’s a Swiss human rights militant that travels to the four corners of the earth to show solidarity with all the world’s rebels – as long as they’ve been defeated. It’s a Spaniard who doesn’t give a shit about political freedom as long as he’s got sexual freedom. It’s a art enthusiast exhibiting a century of artists as the final expression of modern genius; artists from surrealism to Viennese actionism competing to see who could spit in civilization’s face with the best aim, to the dumbfounded admiration of the viewer. It’s a cybernetician who’s found a realistic theory of consciousness in Buddhism and a particle physicist gone to seek out inspiration for his latest discoveries in Hindu metaphysics.

The West is a civilization that has survived all the prophecies of its collapse with a singular stratagem: The bourgeoisie had to deny itself as a *class* in order to permit the bourgeoisification of society as a whole, from worker to baron; Capital had to sacrifice itself as a *wage relationship* in order to impose itself as a social

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<sup>46</sup> Socialist Prime Minister of France under Jacques Chirac, 1997-2002.

relationship, thus becoming cultural capital and holy capital as well as financial capital; Christianity had to sacrifice itself as a religion in order to survive as an emotional structure-- as a diffuse injunction to humanity to be compassionate and powerless, *the West has sacrificed itself as a particular civilization to impose itself as a universal culture*. The operation comes down to this: a dying entity sacrifices itself as content in order to survive as form.

The individual, reduced to a few crumbs, survives as form thanks to counseling in "spiritual" technologies. The patriarchy, by attributing to women all the worst attributes of men: will, self-control, insensitivity. A disintegrated society, by propagating an epidemic of sociability and entertainment. These are all the great, stale fictions of the West, maintained by artifices that themselves even contradict them point by point.

There's no "clash of civilizations." What we have here is a clinically dead civilization that a whole plethora of artificial survival apparatuses are deployed on, to keep it spreading its characteristic pestilence throughout the planet's atmosphere. At this point no one believes in a single one of that civilization's "values;" in fact, anyone who affirms them is considered insubordinate, and their affirmation a provocation it feels it must cut to pieces, *deconstruct*, and return to a state of doubt. Western imperialism today is the imperialism of relativism, of "that's your point of view"; it's the little sideways glance, the wounded protestation, at anyone who's stupid, primitive, or presumptuous enough to still believe in something, to affirm anything at all. You can see the dogmatism of constant questioning give its complicit wink of the eye everywhere in the universities and among the literary intelligentsias. No critique is too radical among postmodernist thinkers, as long as it contains a little nothingness of certitude. Scandal for the past century has come from any too noisy negation; today scandal bursts from any affirmation that does not tremble.

No social order can be durably founded on the principle that nothing is true. So we must *make it stick*. The application of the concept of "security" to every single thing these days is the expression of a project to securely fasten the ideal order onto places, behaviors, and even people themselves; an ideal order that they aren't ready to submit to. The saying "nothing is true" says nothing about the world, but it says everything about the western concept of truth. Truth, here, is not seen as an attribute of beings or things, but of their representation. A representation that conforms to experience is considered true. Science is the last resort of this empire of universal verification. All human behaviors, from the most ordinary to the most learned, rest on a foundation of unequally formulated pieces of evidence: but in practice things and representations are only indistinctly linked, and so into every life is introduced a dose of truth that isn't included in the western concept. They talk about "real people," but it's only to mock the "poor in spirit." That's why Westerners

are universally considered liars and hypocrites by people in the countries they've colonized. That's why they're envied for what they *have*, for their technological advancement, and never for what they *are*, indeed they're rather justly scorned for it. One couldn't teach de Sade, Nietzsche, and Artaud in the high schools if their whole idea of truth hadn't been discredited in advance. To endlessly contain all affirmation; to deactivate all those certitudes that can't help but come out: such is the long labor of the western intellect. Philosophy and the police are two of its convergent but formally distinct means for doing so.

The imperialism of the relative, in the end, finds a suitable enemy in any and every empty dogmatism: any marxist-leninism, any salafism, any neo-nazism; anything that confuses affirmation and provocation as much as Westerners do.

At this juncture, any strictly social contestation that refuses to see that what we're faced with is not the crisis of a society but the *extinction of a civilization* becomes complicit in perpetuating it. And the modern strategy, indeed, is now to critique this society in the vain hope of saving this civilization.

Well then; we've got a corpse on our backs, but we won't be able to shake it off easily. Nothing is to be expected from the end of civilization, from its brain-death: it will only be of interest to historians. But it's a *fact*, and we have to make a *decision* about it. The facts can be covered up, but the decision is political. Only when we decide to put this civilization out of its misery and figure out *how* it will happen will we get free of its cadaver.

## GET GOING!

We can't even see where an insurrection would begin anymore. Sixty years of pacification, of suspended historical upheavals; sixty years of democratic anesthesia, of managed events have weakened our ability to abruptly perceive what's real, to understand the meaning of the resistance going on in the current war... We've got to rediscover that ability of perception first.

There's no reason to get *indignant* about the fact that a law as notoriously unconstitutional as the Everyday Security Law<sup>47</sup> has been in force for the past five years, or to protest against the total implosion of the whole legal framework. Organize accordingly instead.

There's no reason to *engage* in one citizens' collective or another, in one extreme-left impasse or another, in the latest communitarian imposture. All the organizations that claim to contest the present order themselves have all the puppetry of the form, morals and language of miniature States about them. None of the old lies about "doing politics differently" have ever contributed to anything but the indefinite extension of Statist pseudopodia<sup>48</sup>.

There's no reason to *react* to the news of the day, but to understand each information given as an operation carried out on a hostile battlefield full of strategies to decode, an operation aiming precisely to stir up some certain reaction or another among some group of people or another, and to see that operation itself as the real news contained within the apparent news.

There's no more reason to *expect* or *wait for* anything – to expect that it will all blow over, that the revolution will come, a nuclear apocalypse or a social movement. To wait anymore is madness. The catastrophe isn't coming; it's here. We're already situated *within* a civilization's movement of collapse. And we have to take part in it.

To stop waiting means to enter into insurrectionary logic in one way or another. It means to begin to hear, once again, in the voices of our rulers, that trembling of terror that's never really left them. Because to govern has never meant anything but to hold back, by a thousand subterfuges, the moment when the crowd will string you up – and every act of government is nothing but another way to keep from losing control over the population.

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<sup>47</sup> An ensemble of anti-terrorist legislation passed a few months after September 11<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> A temporary protrusion of the surface of an amoeba for movement and feeding.

The starting point for us is one of extreme isolation and extreme powerlessness. Everything about the insurrectionary process still remains to be built. It may be that nothing seems more unlikely than an insurrection; but nothing is more necessary.



## FIND YOURSELF

*Hold on to what you feel to be true.  
Start from there.*

An encounter, a discovery, a huge strike movement, an earthquake: every event produces truth by changing our way of being in the world. Conversely, an official report that is indifferent to us, that leaves us unchanged, that engages nothing, doesn't even deserve to be called a truth anymore. There's a truth underlying every gesture, every practice, every relationship, and every situation. Our habit is to elude it, to *manage* it, which produces the characteristic distractedness of the majority of people these days. In fact, everything is linked. The feeling that you're living in a great lie is also a truth. But you have to not let that go, and start from there, even. A truth isn't a view on the world; a truth is something that keeps us tied to it in an irreducible way. A truth isn't something you hold but something that holds you. It makes and unmakes me, it's my constitution and destitution as an individual; it distances me from a lot, but brings me closer to those who feel it too. An isolated being attached to it will unavoidably meet a few fellow creatures. In fact, every insurrectional process starts from a truth that refuses to be given up. In Hamburg, in 1980, a handful of the occupants of a squatted house decided that they would only be expelled over their dead bodies. The whole neighborhood was besieged by tanks and helicopters; days were filled with street battles, monster demonstrations – and the mayor at last gave in. Georges Guingouin, the “first French resistance fighter” in 1940 had nothing but the certitude that he refused the Nazi occupation. At the time, the Communist Party called him “just some madman living in the woods”; and they kept on thinking that way until 20,000 of those madmen living in the woods liberated Limoges.

*Don't shrink from the political aspect involved in all friendships.*

We have come up with a neutral idea of friendship, as pure affection without consequence. But all affinities are affinities *within* a common truth. All encounters are encounters *within* a common affirmation, even one of destruction. We don't have innocent connections in an era where to hold on to something and not let go regularly puts people out of work, since you have to lie in order to work a job, and you have to work to maintain the means of lying. People who swear that they could apply quantum physics to everything and draw the appropriate conclusions from it are no less politically connected to each other than comrades fighting against an agri-business multinational are. They'll all be sooner or later led to defection and combat.

The founders of the workers' movement had the workshop and then the factory to find themselves in. They had strikes, where they could stand up and be counted, and unmask the cowards among themselves. They had the wage relationship, which pitted the party of Capital and the party of Labor against one another, to trace out solidarity and set up battle fronts on a global level. We have the whole of social space to find ourselves in. We have the everyday behaviors of non-submission to stand up and be counted, to unmask the cowards. We have hostility to civilization with which to trace out solidarity and set up battle fronts on a global level.

*Expect nothing from organizations.  
Defy all the existing milieus,  
and above all, refuse to become one.*

It's not a rare event, in the course of a consequent disaffiliation, to cross paths with organizations – political, union, humanitarian, community organizations, etc. It even happens that one meets with sincere but desperate beings, or enthusiastic but cunning beings in them. The attraction of organizations is their apparent substance – they have a history, a head office, a name, resources, a leader, a strategy and a discourse. They are nonetheless empty architectures, taking pains to populate the respect they believe is due their heroic origins. In everything as in each of their levels, they are concerned only with their survival as an organization, and nothing else. Their repeated betrayals have thus more often than not alienated their rank-and-file membership's attachment to them. And that's why one can occasionally meet a few respectable beings among them. But the promise contained in such encounters will only ever be able to be realized outside of the organization, and, necessarily, against it.

Far more fearful are *milieus*, with their supple texture, their malicious gossip, and their informal hierarchies. Flee from all milieus. Every one of the people that make them up is like a truth-neutralization agent. Literary milieus are there to suppress the obviousness of writings. Anarchist milieus are there to suppress the obviousness of direct action. Scientific milieus to hold back what their research might imply starting today for the majority of people. Sport milieus to contain different ways of life among their members that might lead them to different kinds of sport. Particularly to be avoided are cultural and militant milieus. They are the classic old people's home to where all revolutionary desires have traditionally gone off to die. The task of cultural milieus is to locate nascent intensities and subtract you from the meaning of whatever you're doing by explaining it away – and the task of militant milieus is to take away your energy for doing it. Militant milieus spin their diffuse web all throughout the French territory, and everyone encounters them on the path of becoming a revolutionary. They are the bearers only of their defeats and

the bitterness they get from them. Their usury and the excesses of their powerlessness have made them unsuited for grasping the possibilities of the present. They talk way too much, anyway, in all their attempts to decorate their unhappy passivity; that makes them unsafe to be around in terms of the police. Since it's vain to expect anything from them, it'd be stupid to be disappointed by how fossilized they are. It's enough to just leave them to die.

All milieus are counter-revolutionary, because their only business is the preservation of their own paltry comfort.

### *Organize into communes*

Communes come into being when people find themselves, understand each other, and decide to go forth together. The commune itself makes the decision as to when it would perhaps be useful to break it up. It's the joy of encounters, surviving its obligatory asphyxiation. It's what makes us say "we," and what makes that an event. What's strange isn't that people who agree with each other form communes, but that they remain separated. Why shouldn't communes proliferate everywhere? In every factory, every street, every village, every school. At last the true reign of the committees of the base! We need communes that accept being what they are, where they are; a multitude of communes, replacing society's institutions: family, school, union, sports club, etc. We need communes that, outside of their specifically political activity, aren't afraid to organize themselves for the material and moral survival of all their members and all the lost ones that surround them. Communes that don't define themselves – as collectives tend to do – by what's within them and what's outside of them, but by the density of the connections at their core. Communes not defined by the persons that make them up, but by the spirit that animates them.

A commune is formed every time a few people, freed of their individual straitjackets, decide to rely only on themselves and pit their strength against the reality. Every wildcat strike is a commune; every house occupied collectively on a clean-cut foundation is a commune; the action committees of 1968 were communes, as were the runaway slave villages in the United States, or even Radio Alice in Bologna in 1977. Every commune needs to be based on itself. It needs to bring the question of needs to an end. It needs to smash all political subjection and all economic dependency, and degenerates in milieus whenever it loses contact with the truths that founded it. There are all kinds of communes now that aren't waiting to have the numbers, or the resources, or much less the "right moment" – which never comes – to get organized.

## ORGANIZE

### *Organize for the end of work*

Good hideouts are getting rare, and to tell the truth it rather often means losing too much time to still go on being bored in them. Anyway they generally tend to be pretty mediocre conditions for resting and reading.

It's well known that the individual exists so little that he has to *earn his living*, that he has to trade in his time for a little bit of social existence. Personal time for social existence: such is work; such is the market. The time of the commune escapes work straightaway; it doesn't play along with the big scheme; it prefers other ones. Groups of Argentine picketers collectively maintain a kind of local welfare system, accessible by doing a few hours of work. They don't record working hours; they hold their gains in common; they establish clothing workshops and a bakery, and set up gardens as needed.

For the commune, money can be had just by seeking it out, not by having to make a living. All the communes have slush funds. Schemes abound. Aside from welfare/unemployment income, there are allocations, sick leave monies, accumulated school scholarships, subsidies drawn off fictitious childbirths, all kinds of trafficking, and a lot of other resources that appear with every change in the control system. It's not for us to forbid the use of them, or to install ourselves in makeshift shelters or to protect them like an insider's privilege. What's important to cultivate and spread is the necessary disposition to fraud, and to share innovations. For the communes, the question of work is only asked in light of other existing income. What useful knowledge might be gotten by passing through certain professions, training, or well-placed job posts should not be neglected.

The commune's demand is to free up the most time possible for everyone. And we're not just talking about the *number of hours* free of any wage-labor exploitation. Liberated time doesn't mean a vacation. Vacant time, dead time, the time of emptiness and the fear of emptiness – this is labor time. There's now no longer any time to *fill*, but a liberation of energy that no "time" contains; lines that sketch themselves out, that emphasize each other, that we can follow at our leisure to their ends, or until we see them cross over others.

### *Pillage, cultivate, fabricate*

A couple old MetalEurop employees become thieves instead of prison guards. A few EDF employees pass along to their friends a way to rig the electricity meters. Hardware that "fell off the truck" sells like hotcakes. A world that so openly proclaims its cynicism can't expect much loyalty from proletarians.

On the one hand, a commune can't bank on the eternal existence of the "welfare state," and on the other it can't bank on living for all too long off of shoplifting, dumpster diving at supermarkets and at night in the warehouses of the industrial zones, misdirecting government subsidies, ripping off insurance companies and other frauds-- in brief: pillage. It must thus concern itself with permanently increasing the level and extent of its self-organization. It's certainly most logical that the lathes, milling machines, and photocopiers sold at a discount after the closure of a factory should serve in turn to support some kind of a conspiracy or other against commodity society.

The feeling that the collapse is imminent is so vivid everywhere these days that we'd have a hard time enumerating all the experimentations going on right now in construction, energy, materials, illegality or agriculture. There's a whole plethora of knowledge and techniques just sitting there waiting to be pillaged and torn from its moralist, street thug, or ecologist packaging. But this plethora is no more than a part of all the institutions, of all the different forms of social behavior, of that genius that characterizes the shantytowns, which we will have to make use of if we want to repopulate the metropolitan desert and ensure viability halfway through an insurrection.

How will we communicate and move about in a context where the flows have been totally interrupted? How will we restore food crop production in the rural areas until they can once again support the population density that they were still able to support sixty years ago? How will we transform concrete spaces into urban kitchen-gardens, as Cuba has done in order to withstand both the American embargo and the liquidation of the USSR?

### *Train and Develop*

What's left to us, we who have so completely worn out all the leisure activities authorized by commodity democracy? Whatever could one day make us go jogging on a Sunday morning? What keeps all these karate fanatics, these DIY, fishing, or mycology freaks going? What, if not just the need to fill up some totally idle time, to reconstitute their labor force or their "health capital?" The majority of leisure activities could easily cast aside their absurd character and become something besides leisure activities. Boxing has not always been reserved especially for doing demonstrations on the Telethon or for big, spectacular matches. China, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, torn up by hordes of colonists and starved by too long of droughts, saw hundreds of thousands of its poor peasants organize themselves to set up innumerable open-air boxing clubs, to take back what they had been despoiled of from the colonists and the rich. This was the Boxer Uprising. It's never too early to learn and practice what less pacified, less predictable times might require of us. Our dependency on the metropolis – on its medicine, its agriculture,

and its police – is so total at the present time that we couldn't attack it without putting ourselves in danger. The unformulated consciousness of this vulnerability makes for the spontaneous self-limitation of today's social movements, and causes our fear of crises and desire for "security." It's because of it that the labor strikes have usually traded the horizon of revolution for that of a return to normalcy. To free ourselves from this misfortune would require a long and consistent learning process, and multiple, massive experiments. We'll have to know how to fight, how to pick locks, how to set fractures and deal with throat infections; how to build a pirate radio transmitter; how to set up street cafes; how to aim straight; how to gather together scattered knowledge and set up wartime agronomics; understand plankton biology; soil composition; study the way plants interact and thus rediscover lost intuitions; get to know possible uses for and connections with our immediate surroundings, and the limits we can't go beyond without exhausting them; and we have to start to do all that today, and on the days when we'll need to be able to get more than just a symbolic helping of food and a meager satisfaction of our other needs.

*Create territories. Multiply opaque zones.*

More and more reformists have started talking these days about the "approach of peak oil," and about how in order to "reduce greenhouse gas emissions," we will need to "re-localize the economy," encourage regional supply lines, short distribution circuits, give up having easy access to imports from far away lands, etc. What they forget is that the nature of everything that's done locally in economic matters is that it's done *under the table*, in an "informal" manner; that this simple ecological measure of re-localizing the economy implies either total freedom from state control, or total submission to it.

The present territory is the product of many centuries of police operations. The people have constantly been pushed back -- out of their fields, then out of their streets, then out of their neighborhoods, and finally out of their building lobbies, in the demented hope that all life could be contained within the four sweating walls of a private existence. The territorial question isn't the same for us and for the State. For us it's not about *holding onto it*. Rather it's a matter of creating density in the communes, in our circulation, and in our solidarity, to such a point that the territory becomes incomprehensible and opaque to all authority. It's not a question of occupying, but of *being* the territory.

Every practice brings a territory into existence – the territory of the deal, or of the hunt; the territory of child's play, of lovers, of a riot; the territory of farmers, ornithologists, or gleaners. The rule is simple: the more territories there are superimposed on a given zone, the more circulation there is between them, and the less Power will find footholds. Bistros, print shops, sports arenas, vague terrains, second-hand book stalls, building rooftops, improvised street markets, kebab shops,

garages, could all easily be used for purposes other than their official ones if enough complicities can be found there. Local self-organization, superimposing its own geography over the State's cartography, jams it and annuls it, and produces its own secession.

*Travel. Trace out our own means of communication.*

The principle of the communes is not to oppose the metropolis and its mobility with local roots and slowness. The expansive movement of the constitution of communes must clandestinely overtake that of the metropolis. We don't have to reject the movement and communications possibilities that the commodity infrastructure offers; we just have to know their limits. It's sufficient to be prudent enough, harmless enough. To drop by and pay a visit is anyway more secure, leaves no trace, and forges much more consistent connections than any Internet contact list. The privilege granted to a number of us of being able to "circulate freely" from one end of the continent to the other, and even across the whole world without too much trouble, is not a negligible asset when it comes to communications between pockets of resistance/conspiracy. It's one of the charms of the metropolis that it allows Americans, Greeks, Mexicans, and Germans to meet furtively in Paris for a discussion on strategy.

Permanent movement between allied communes is one of the things that can protect them from emaciation and from the inevitability of renunciation. To welcome comrades, to find out about their initiatives, to ponder their experiences, to make use of new techniques they've mastered, does more for a commune than sterile consciousness-examinations behind closed doors. It would be wrong to underestimate what decisive ideas might be elaborated over the course of evenings spent comparing views on the current war.

*Overturn all obstacles bit by bit*

It's well known that the streets are overflowing with incivility. Between what it really is and what it should be, there's the centripetal force of all the police, doing their best to return order; and on the other side there's us, that is, the inverse movement, a centrifugal force. We can only rejoice upon seeing fits of rage and disorder erupt wherever they may. Nothing surprising in the fact that the national festivals that aren't really celebrating anything at all anymore are now systematically going bad. Whether sparkling or dilapidated, the urban furnishings – but where do they begin? Where do they end? – are but a materialization of our common dispossession. Persistent in their nothingness, all they ask is that we go back to them to stay. Let us contemplate what surrounds us: all this will have its final hour; the metropolis suddenly takes on an air of nostalgia, the kind that only fields full of ruins have.

Let all the incivilities of the streets become methodical, let them become systematic and flow together into a diffuse, efficient guerrilla war to give us back our ungovernableness, our primordial indiscipline. It's disconcerting to some that indiscipline figures in so prominently among the number of military virtues that resistance fighters have. In fact, rage and politics should never be separated. Without the first, the second is lost to discourse; without the second the first exhausts itself yelling. Words like "enragés"<sup>49</sup> and "exaltés"<sup>50</sup> have surfaced again in politics, but not without warning shots being fired.

As for methods, let us remember the following principles for acts of sabotage: minimum risk in taking the action, minimum time, and maximum damage. As for strategy, let us remember that an obstacle that has been overturned but has not been submerged – a liberated, but uninhabited space – is easily replaced by another obstacle, one that is more resistant and less attackable.

It's useless to dwell at length on the three types of workers' sabotage: reduce the speed of work, with the "go-slow," the "gusto strike"<sup>51</sup>; breaking the machines, or hindering their function; and the disclosure of company secrets. Expanded to the much vaster dimensions of the whole social factory, the principles of sabotage are generalized, from production to circulation. The technical infrastructure of the metropolis is vulnerable: its flows are not merely for the transportation of people and commodities; information and energy circulates by way of wire networks, fibers and channels, that could be attacked. To sabotage the social machine with some consequence today means re-conquering and reinventing the means of interrupting its networks. How could a TGV line or an electrical network be rendered useless? How could the weak points in computer networks be found, how could radio waves be blurred and the screens filled with white noise?

As for serious obstacles, it's not correct to consider any and all destruction of them impossible. The promethean part just comes down to the proper use of fire, but without any blind voluntarism. In 356 BC, Erostratus<sup>52</sup> burned the temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the world. In our times of total decadence, the temples have nothing imposing about them besides the funereal truth that *they are already ruins*.

Annihilating this nothingness isn't just some sad, dull task. Those who participate in that annihilation find a new youth in it. Everything suddenly makes sense and comes together; space, time, friendships. All available means are made use of, and

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<sup>49</sup> The "enraged," a group of radicals in the French Revolution; the name was also taken by Situationist student radicals in 1968.

<sup>50</sup> The "fanatics," a less-radical group from the French Revolution, wearers of the Red Cap of Liberty.

<sup>51</sup> "Don't try to do any more than you absolutely have to."

<sup>52</sup> An obscure Ephesian; a decree was soon passed applying the death penalty to anyone who uttered his name, but the decree itself gave wider publicity to his act.



ways of using them are rediscovered; we are but arrows. In the misery of the present, “fucking everything up” will perhaps – not without reason, it must be said – serve as the final collective seduction.

*Stay invisible. Put anonymity on the offense.*

In a demonstration, a unionist pulls the mask off an anonymous protester who had just broken a window: “Assume responsibility for what you’re doing instead of hiding yourself.” To be visible is to be out in the open – that is, above all to be vulnerable. When the leftists of all nations continually make their cause more “visible” – whether that of the homeless, of women, or of immigrants – in the hope that it will get taken care of, they’re doing exactly the opposite of what they ought to. To not be visible, but rather to turn to our advantage the anonymity we’ve been relegated to, and with conspiracies, nocturnal and/or masked actions, to make it into an unassailable attack-position. The fires of November 2005 offer a model. No leader, no demands, no organization, but words, gestures, complicities. To be nothing socially is not a humiliating condition, the source of some tragic lack of recognition (to be recognized: but by who?), but on the contrary is the precondition for maximum freedom of action. Not signing your name to your crimes, but only attaching some imaginary acronym – people still remember the ephemeral BAFT (Tarterets<sup>53</sup> Anti-Cop Brigade) – is a way to preserve that freedom. Obviously, one of the regime’s first defensive maneuvers was to create a “suburban slum” subject to treat as the author of the “riots of November 2005.” Just take a look at the ugly mugs of those who *are someone* in this society if you want help understanding the joy of being no one.

Visibility must be avoided. But a force that gathers in the shadows can’t escape it forever. Our appearance as a force has to be held back until the opportune moment. Because the later we become visible, the stronger we’ll be. And once we’ve entered the realm of visibility, our days are numbered; either we’ll be in a position to pulverize its reign quickly, or it will crush us without delay.

### *Organize Self-Defense*

We live under occupation, under *police* occupation. Illegal immigrant round-ups in the middle of the street; undercover cop cars criss-crossing the boulevards; metropolitan neighborhoods pacified using techniques forged in the colonies; the declarations of the minister of the Interior against the “gangs,” declarations worthy of the Algerian war; these things remind us of that fact every day. There are enough

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<sup>53</sup> A large district in Corbeil-Essonnes, south of Paris, that has become emblematic of the suburban slum issue in France.

reasons to not let ourselves be crushed anymore, and to start to commit to self-defense.

As a commune grows and spreads, it sees power's operations target its very substance. Power's counterattacks take the form of seduction, recuperation, and as the last recourse, brute force. Self-defense must be a collective, obvious fact for the communes, as much practical as theoretical. Preventing an arrest, gathering swiftly and in large numbers against expulsion attempts, sheltering one of our own, will not be superfluous reflexes in coming times. We cannot ceaselessly reconstruct our base. Let us cease denouncing repression and instead prepare to meet it.

It's not a simple affair, since as an increase in police work being done by the population itself is to be expected – from informing to the occasional membership in the citizens' militias – so the police forces melt into the crowd. The catch-all standard police intervention, even in riot situations, is now the cop in civilian clothes. The efficiency of the police during the last anti-CPE demonstrations was due to those civilians that mixed in with the crowd and waited for an incident before showing themselves with gas, billyclubs, flash-balls, arrests; the whole shebang, in coordination with the "order-keeping services" of the unions. The simple possibility of their presence was enough to suggest the thought to the demonstrators: who's who? And to paralyze actions. Though a demonstration is certainly not a way to stand and be counted but rather a space to take action in, we'll certainly have to equip ourselves better with resources to unmask the plainclothesmen, chase them off, and if need be pull the people they're trying to arrest away from them.

The police are not invincible in the streets, they simply have the means to organize, train, and test new weapons endlessly. Our weapons, on the other hand, are always rudimentary, DIY, and often improvised then and there. They certainly don't have a hope of rivaling them in firepower, but are intended to hold them at a distance, redirect their attention, exercise psychological pressure or force passage and gain ground by surprise. All the innovations deployed in the French police's urban guerrilla preparation centers are manifestly insufficient, and will doubtless always be insufficient, for making an adequately rapid response to a moving multiplicity that can strike a number of places at a time and above all tries to always keep the initiative.

The communes are obviously vulnerable to surveillance and police investigations, by undercover cops, feds, or otherwise. The waves of arrests of anarchists in Italy and of eco-warriors in the US were permitted by phone-tapping. All police custody now implies getting your DNA taken to put into an ever more complete index. A squatter from Barcelona was caught up with because he'd left his fingerprints on the tracts he was distributing. Filing methods are ever improving, mostly with biometrics. And if the electronic identity cards are put in place, our task would only be that much more difficult. The Commune of Paris partly solved the filing problem:

by burning the City Hall, they destroyed the civil status records. Ways to destroy forever all the rest of the computerized data remain to be found.

## INSURRECTION

The commune is the elementary unit of resistance reality. An insurrectionary upswing perhaps means no more than a multiplication of communes, their connections to each other, and their articulation. In the course of events, either the communes will melt into entities of a larger scale, or they will break up into fractions. Between a band of brothers and sisters tied together “in life and in death,” and the meeting of a multiplicity of groups, committees, gangs, to organize supplies and self-defense in a neighborhood, or even in a whole region in revolt, there is only a difference of scale; they are all communes.

All the communes can only tend towards self-sufficiency in food and feel that money within them is a derisory thing, out of place there. The power of money is that it forms connections between those who have no connections, connects strangers as *strangers* and thus, by making all things equivalent through it, gets everything into circulation. But the price of money’s capacity to tie everything together is the superficiality of those ties, where lies are the rule. Distrust is the foundation of the credit relationship. Because of this the reign of money must always be the reign of control. The practical abolition of money will only be accomplished by the expansion of the communes. Each commune in its expansion, however, must take care not grow beyond a certain size, after which it would lose contact with itself and almost unavoidably give rise to a dominant class within it. And the communes will prefer to split up, to spread themselves better that way, and simultaneously to prevent such an unfortunate problem.

The uprising of Algerian youth that set all Kabylia aflame in spring 2001 managed to retake almost the whole territory, attacking the armed police, the courthouses, and all the representations of the State, and generalizing the riot until they caused the unilateral retreat of the forces of order, until they physically prevented the elections from being held. The movement’s strength was in the diffuse complementarity of multiple constituents – who were only very partially represented in the endless and hopelessly masculine assemblies of the village committees and other popular committees. The face of the “communes” of the still trembling Algerian insurrection was those “blazing,” helmeted youths, throwing bottles of gasoline at the riot cops from a Tizi Ouzou rooftop; it was the mocking smile of an old resistance fighter draped in his burnoose; it was the energy of the women of a mountain village still growing food and raising animals in the traditional way, in spite of and against everything, without which the blockades of the region’s economy would never have been so repetitive or so systematic.

*Fan the flames of every crisis*

“It must be added, furthermore, that we wouldn’t be able to treat the whole French population. We would thus have to make choices.” That’s how a virology expert, writing in *Le Monde* on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2005, sums up what would happen in the case of a bird-flu epidemic. “Terrorist threats,” “natural disasters,” “virus alerts,” “social movements,” and “urban violence” are for society’s managers so many moments of instability where they reinforce their power by selecting what works for them and destroying what embarrasses them. So, logically, those moments are also an occasion for all other forces to gather or to reinforce themselves, by taking up the opposition. The interruption of commodity flows, the suspension of normalcy – it’s enough just to see the resurgence of social life that takes place in a building that’s suddenly had its electricity cut off to imagine what could become of life in a city deprived of everything – and of police control liberate a potential for self-organization that would be unthinkable in other circumstances. This escapes no one. The revolutionary workers’ movement understood it well, as it made bourgeois capitalism’s crises into the high points of their increase of power. The Islamic groups are never as powerful as they are when they have wisely stepped in to compensate for the weakness of the State, for example in the setup of aid after the Boumerdes earthquake in Algeria, or in their everyday assistance rendered to the population of southern Lebanon, destroyed by the Israeli army.

As we mentioned above, the devastation of New Orleans by hurricane Katrina gave a whole fringe of the North American anarchist movement the opportunity to take on a previously unknown substance by rallying all those who were resisting the forced relocations then and there. Setting up street cafes presupposes that prior arrangements will have been made for supplies; emergency medical aid requires a prior acquisition of the necessary knowledge and materials, as does the installation of pirate radio stations. What is joyful about them, what goes beyond individual resourcefulness, what is tangibly real and resists the everyday banality of order and work about them, guarantees the political fecundity of such experiences.

In a country like France where the radioactive clouds stop at the border and there’s no fear of building a cancer-center on the old AZF factory site, a Seveso<sup>54</sup> class area, we’ll have to bank on social crises, and not so much on “natural” crises. Social movements are here what interrupts the ongoing normal disaster. Certainly in these last years the various strikes have primarily been occasions for power and corporate administrations to test their capacity to maintain ever more broadly applied “minimum service” until work stoppages are reduced to a purely symbolic aspect – hardly any more damaging than snowfall or a suicide on the highway. But by overturning the established militant practices with their the systematic occupation of establishments and stubborn blockading, the highschoolers’ struggles of 2005 and the anti-CPE struggle recalled the capacity for diffuse offensives and nuisances

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<sup>54</sup> A 1976 industrial accident in northern Italy which resulted in the highest ever civilian exposure to dioxin aside from the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam.

caused by large movements. With all the gangs that emerged in their wake, they gave a glimpse of the kind of movement conditions that can become the birthplace of new communes.

*Sabotage all representation.*

*Generalize arguments.*

*Abolish the general assemblies.*

All social movements' first obstacle, well before the police proper, are the union forces, and all of that whole micro-bureaucracy whose office is to circumscribe struggles. The communes, rank-and-file groups, and gangs spontaneously defy them. That's why the para-bureaucrats have for the past 20 years been inventing front groups that look more innocent because they lack a label, but nonetheless remain the ideal terrain for their maneuvers. If any stray collective decides to have a go at autonomy, they'll immediately and endlessly drain it of all content by resolutely ruling out any good issues or questions. They are ferocious; they get heated up, not in the passion of debating, but by their vocational conjuring of debate. And when their stubborn defense of apathy finally wins the collective over, they'll explain their defeat by a lack of political consciousness. It must be said that in France, thanks to the crazed activity of the different trotskyist cliques, there's no shortage of the art of political manipulation among the militant youth. They could never draw this lesson from the firestorm of November 2005: all front groups are superfluous when there is real organization; organizations always get in the way whenever people start to self-organize.

Another reflex is to make a general assembly and vote whenever there is the slightest movement. The simple issue of a vote, of which decision will win, is enough to change the assembly into a nightmare, to make a theater out of it, where all the various little pretenders to power confront each other. And therein we suffer from the bad example of bourgeois parliaments. The assemblies are not made for decision making but for arguing, for free-speech to be exercised aimlessly.

The need to assemble is as constant a need among humans as the need to make decisions is rare. Gathering together goes hand in hand with the joy of feeling common power. To decide is only vital in emergency situations, where the exercise of democracy is compromised anyway. For the rest of the time, "the democratic character of the decision making process" is only a problem for the procedure fanatics. There's no reason to critique the assemblies or desert them, but to liberate our speech, gestures, and play in them. It's enough just to see that each person doesn't come to the assembly with just one point of view or some one motion, but with desires, attachments, capacities, strengths, sadness, and a certain availability. If the General Assembly fantasy can be gotten rid of and replaced by a kind of *assembly of presences*, if the always renascent temptation of hegemony can be

evaded, if making decisions is no longer fixed as the final goal, then there might be some chance that a kind of *mass solidification* could take place, one of those collective crystallization phenomena where a decision suddenly *takes people*, as a whole or only in part.

It's the same for deciding on actions. To start from the principle that "the action in question should determine the trajectory of an assembly" is to make both debate coming to a boil and efficient action impossible. An assembly made up of numerous people that are foreign to one another is damned to give rise to action specialists, that is, to give the action up to their control. On the one hand, delegates are by definition hindered in their actions; on the other nothing's stopping them from deceiving everybody.

There's no reason to propose an ideal form of action. The essential thing is that action take on a certain form, that it create it and not be made to undergo it. This presupposes that one particular political and geographical position – like in the sections of the Paris Commune in the French Revolution – be shared by all, as well presupposing that a certain knowledge will be going around. As for deciding on actions, the principle might be conceived as follows: let each person do reconnaissance, put information together, and the decision will come by itself, and will take us, rather than us taking it. The circulation of knowledge annuls hierarchy; it equalizes everything from the top down. Horizontal communication, proliferated everywhere, is the best form of coordinating different communes and of putting an end to hegemony.

*Block the economy, but measure our  
blockading power by our level of self-organization*

At the end of June 2006, throughout the whole State of Oaxaca, occupations of city halls multiplied, and insurgents occupied public buildings. In certain communities they expelled the mayors and requisitioned the official vehicles. A month later, the entries to certain hotels and tourist complexes were blocked. The minister of Tourism talked about it like it was a catastrophe "comparable to hurricane Wilma." A few years earlier, blockading had become one of the primary forms of action for the Argentine revolt movement; the different local groups aided each other to blockade one major road after another, and threatening to paralyze the whole country by remaining there in their joint action if their demands weren't met. Such a threat was for many years a powerful tool in the hands of railway workers, electric and gas workers, and truck drivers. The anti-CPE movement didn't hesitate to blockade train stations, ring roads, factories, highways, supermarkets, and even airports. No more than 300 persons were necessary in Rennes to immobilize the beltway for hours and cause a forty kilometer traffic jam.

Blockade everything – from here on out that will be the first reflex of everything that stands against the present order. In a delocalized economy, where companies

function on the basis of continual flows, where value derives from connections to a whole network, where highways are rings in the de-materialized production chain that goes from one subcontractor to the next, and then on to the assembly factory, blockading production also means blocking circulation.

But this blockading can't go so far as to prevent the insurgents from getting their supplies and communicating with each other; it cannot go so far as to hinder the effective self-organization of the different communes. How would we feed ourselves when everything is paralyzed? Pillaging the shops, as was done in Argentina, has its limit; as immense as the temples of consumption are, there aren't infinite food-stores. Acquiring, in the meantime, an aptitude for procuring elementary subsistence thus implies appropriating the means of their production. And on this matter, to wait any longer appears rather useless. To let two percent of the population go on taking care of producing food for everyone else is a historical inanity as much as a strategic one.

*Liberate the territory from police occupation.*

*Avoid direct confrontation as much as possible*

"This whole business brings to light that we aren't dealing with a few youths demanding a bit too much social change, but with individuals who have declared war on the Republic," noted a lucid cop on the subject of the recent surprise attacks. The offensive aiming to liberate the territory from its occupation by the police has already begun, and it's got the inexhaustible reserves of united resentment towards those forces going for it. The "social movements" themselves have been won over by rioting, no less than the Rennes partiers that back in 2005 used to fight the riot cops every Thursday night, or the partiers from Barcelona that recently devastated a main commercial artery of the city during one of their *botellones*<sup>55</sup>. The anti-CPE movement saw the return of regular use of molotov cocktails. But certain suburbs are the molotov champions. Notably when it comes to a technique that is now already rather old: the ambush. Like the one that happened in Epinay on October 13, 2006: some BAC teams rolled out around 11 pm, answering a call about a trailer that had been broken into, and upon their arrival one of the teams was "blocked in by two vehicles that pulled up across the road and by around thirty individuals carrying iron bars and handguns, that threw rocks at the police cars and used tear gas against the police." On a smaller scale, one might consider those police stations that have been attacked after closing hours: windows smashed, cars set on fire.

One of the results of the latest movements is that a real demonstration is from now on a "wildcat" one, one without any permits from the police. Having the *choice of*

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<sup>55</sup> Since it's less expensive than drinking at clubs, Spanish youth often buy drinks at the market and hang around the streets in groups; they call that kind of a gathering a "botellón."



*terrain*, we'll need to do as the Black Bloc did in Genoa in 2001: by-pass the red zones, avoid direct confrontations, and, deciding on a trajectory, run the cops around instead of being run around by the trades-union and pacifist police. A thousand some people there managed to push back whole trucks full of *carabinieri*<sup>56</sup> and eventually set their vehicles on fire. The important thing is not so much to be the most well-armed as it is to have the initiative. Courage alone is nothing, but confidence in one's own courage is everything. And having the initiative contributes to that.

Direct confrontations can be conceived of, however, as fixation points, to stall the enemy and attack elsewhere, even very close by. That direct confrontations can't be kept from happening doesn't mean that it can't be used as a diversion. Beyond just taking actions, their coordination must be taken on. By harassing the police, it can be brought about that although they may be everywhere, they become effective nowhere.

Every act of harassment recalls a truth that was spoken in 1842: "The life of a police agent is tiresome; his position in society is as humiliating and scorned as crime itself... shame and infamy close in upon him from all sides, society chases him from its midst, isolates him as a pariah, spits scorn at him as his payment, without remorse, without regret, and without pity... the policeman's ID card, carried in his wallet, is but the proof of his disgrace and shame." The 21<sup>st</sup> of November, 2006, the striking firemen of Paris attacked the riot cops with hammer blows and wounded fifteen of them. This was a reminder that to want to exercise "the profession of serving and protecting" will never be a valid excuse for joining the police force.

*Be armed. But do everything possible to make the use of weapons superfluous. Against the army, victory is political.*

There's no such thing as a peaceful insurrection. Weapons are necessary: it's a question of doing everything possible to make their use superfluous. An insurrection is more just about taking up arms and maintaining an "armed presence," than it is about entering an armed struggle. Weapons are a constant in revolutionary situations, though their use is infrequent or indecisive, in moments of great reversals: August 10<sup>th</sup> 1792, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1871, October 1917. When power is in the gutter, it's enough just to trample it underfoot.

From the distance that separates us from them, weapons have taken on a kind of double character of fascination and disgust, that only training in their use can overcome. Authentic pacifism can't mean refusing weapons, but only refusing to use them. Pacifism without being able to fire bullets is just theorizing on powerlessness. Such a *priori* pacifism is a kind of preventive disarmament, a pure police operation. In truth the pacifist question is only serious for those who have the

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<sup>56</sup> The national armed policemen of Italy, functioning as both civil and military police.

ability to fire bullets. And in this case pacifism would be on the contrary a indication of real power, since only from an extremely strong position is one liberated from the need to use the gun.

From a strategic point of view, indirect, asymmetrical action seems the most effective, the most adapted to the era: an occupation army can't be attacked frontally. For all that, the perspective of going urban guerrilla Iraqi-style, which would get bogged down without the possibility of going on the offense, would be more to be feared than desired. The *militarization* of civil war is the defeat of insurrection. Though the Reds had their triumph in 1921, the Russian Revolution was already lost.

Two kinds of state reactions must be envisioned. The one of plain hostility, the other more underhanded, democratic. The first being wordless destruction, the second a subtle but implacable hostility: hoping to enlist us. We can be defeated both by dictatorship itself and by being reduced to opposing *only* dictatorship. Defeat consists as much in losing the war as in losing the *choice* of which war to wage. Both are possible, though, as was proven in Spain in 1936: the revolutionaries there were doubly defeated, both by fascism and by the republic.

When things get serious, the army will take over the terrain. The way it will commence taking action is less obvious. It would require that the State be resolutely committed to causing a bloodbath, one that at present is no more than a threat, almost like the threat of using the nuclear bomb was a half-century ago. Though it has been wounded for a long while, the beast of the State is still dangerous. It still remains that to go against the army a massive crowd is necessary, invading its ranks and fraternizing with the soldiers. Another March 18<sup>th</sup> 1871 is necessary. When the army hits the street, that's an insurrectionary situation. When the army's gone into action, it's pushing the issue. Everyone will find himself or herself forced to take a side, and choose between anarchy and the fear of anarchy. An insurrection only triumphs as a political force. Politically it's not impossible to defeat an army.

### *Depose authorities locally*

For an insurrection, the question is how to go beyond the point of no return. Irreversibility is attained when the authorities' need for authority has been defeated, when property's taste for accumulation has been defeated, when the desire of all hegemony for hegemony has been defeated. That's why the insurrectional process contains within itself either the very form of its victory, or that of its defeat. Destruction has never been enough to bring things beyond the point of no return. It's all in how it's done. There are ways of destroying things that unavoidably provoke the return of what has been annihilated. He who kicks the corpse of a social order is guaranteed to awaken its professional avengers. Also, wherever the

economy is blockaded, wherever the police are neutralized, it's important to have the least possible pathos about the overthrow of the authorities. They must be deposed with scrupulous casualness and derision.

In these times, the response to the decentralization of power is the end of revolutionary centralities. There are still many Winter Palaces left, but ones that are designed more for being assaulted by tourists than by insurgents. In our lifetime, we might take Paris, Rome, or Buenos Aires, but still not win the decisive battle. Taking over Rungis<sup>57</sup> would certainly have a greater effect than taking over the Elysee<sup>58</sup>. Power is no longer concentrated in any given place in the world; Power has become this world itself, its flows and its avenues, its men and its conventions, its codes and technologies. Power is the organization of the metropolis itself. It is the impeccable totality of the world of the commodity everywhere. So whoever defeats it locally sends a global shockwave through the networks. The Clichy-sous-Bois assailants delighted more than one American household, and the Oaxaca insurgents found willing accomplices in the very heart of Paris. As for France, the loss of the centrality of Power signifies the end for Paris as a revolutionary center. Every new movement since the strikes of 1995 has confirmed this. It's no longer in Paris that the most daring and consistent actions have been carried out. In sum, it is simply as a target for raids, as a pure terrain of pillage and devastation, that Paris still stands out. Brief and brutal incursions from without attacking the metropolitan flows at their point of maximum density. Streaks of rage criss-crossing the desert of this artificial abundance, and then vanishing. A day will come when this dreadful concretion of Power which is the capital city will be grandly ruined, but it will be at the end of a process which is far more advanced everywhere else besides there.

*ALL POWER TO THE COMMUNES!*

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<sup>57</sup> A community in the southern suburbs of Paris with one of the largest wholesale food markets in the world, serving the Paris metro area.

<sup>58</sup> The French White House: the official residence of the President of the French Republic, both the president's office, and the meeting hall of the Council of Ministers.

*In the metro, there's no longer any trace of the backdrop of poverty that habitually hindered the gestures of the passengers. Strangers talk to each other, and no longer just get up into each other's faces. A gang is having a meeting on a street corner. Bigger gatherings on the boulevards, deep in serious discussions. Attacks flash from one city to another, from one day to the next. A new barracks has been pillaged and burnt to the ground. The inhabitants of a foreclosed-on house have stopped playing tug-of-war with the mayor's office; they live there in his office now. With a flash of lucid discourse, a manager has just sent a chill down the spines of a handful of his colleagues in the middle of a meeting. Files with the personal addresses of all the cops and national guardsmen, and of the employees of the prison administration have just been leaked, and an unprecedented wave of people moving to different addresses has arisen. People bring their excess products in to an old village grocery store/bar and take out everything they need. People get together to discuss the general situation and the hardware they need for the machine workshop. The radio keeps the insurgents informed on the withdrawal of the government forces. A rocket just blew out the wall surrounding Clairvaux prison<sup>59</sup>. It's impossible to say whether it has been months or years since the "events" began... And the prime minister looks very alone, making his appeals for calm.*

March 2007.

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<sup>59</sup> A maximum-security prison.