



**They Want to Oblige Us to Govern.
We Won't Yield to That Pressure.**

**To Our Friends
Chapter Two**

Invisible Committee

1. Characteristic Features of Contemporary Insurrections.

2. There's No Such Thing as a Democratic Insurrection.

3. Democracy Is Just Government in Its Pure State.

4. Theory of Destitution.

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I

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

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

The uprising lasts a few days or a few months, and brings about the fall of the regime or the exposing of every illusion of social peace. It is itself anonymous: no leader, no organization, no demands, no program. The slogans, when there are any, seem to reach no farther than the negation of the existing order, and they are abrupt: "Clear out!" "The people want the system to fall!" "We don't care about your shit." "Tayyip, winter is coming." On TV, on the airwaves, the authorities pound out their same old rhetoric; "they're gangs of *capulcu* [looters], smashers, terrorists out of nowhere, most likely in the pay of foreign interests." Those who've risen up have no one to put on the throne as a replacement, perhaps just a question mark instead. It's not the bottom dogs,

ed space between being large enough, so that it becomes a question of organizing all these disparate elements that nothing connects any more, of reassembling the separate elements as separate. Power creates emptiness. Emptiness attracts power.

Leaving the paradigm of government means starting politically from the opposite hypothesis. There is no empty space, everything is inhabited, each one of us is the gathering and crossing point of quantities of affects, lineages, histories, and significations, of material flow that exceed us. The world doesn't environ us, it passes through us. What we inhabit inhabits us. What surrounds us constitutes us. We don't belong to ourselves. We are always-already spread through whatever we attach ourselves to. It's not a question of forming a void from which we could finally manage to catch hold of all that escapes us, but of learning to better inhabit what is there, which implies perceiving it—and there's nothing certain about that for the myopic children of democracy. Perceiving a world peopled not with things but with forces, not with subjects but with powers, not with bodies but with bonds.

It's by virtue of their plenitude that forms of life will complete the destitution.

Here, subtraction is affirmation and affirmation is an element of attack.

have the task of representing. One doesn't bring power back down to earth in order to raise oneself above the heavens.

Destituting this epoch's specific form of power requires, for a start, that one challenge the notion that men need to be governed, either democratically by themselves or hierarchically by others, returning it to its status as a hypothesis, not a "self-evident" truth. The assumption goes back at least to the birth of politics in Greece—its power is such that even the Zapatistas have gathered their "autonomous communes" under the umbrella of "good-government councils." A definite anthropology is at work here, which is found in the anarchist individualist aspiring to the full satisfaction of their personal passions and needs and in seemingly more pessimistic conceptions, seeing man as a voracious beast who can only be kept from devouring his neighbor by a coercive power. Machiavelli, for whom men are "ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain," is in agreement on this point with the founders of American democracy: "In contriving a system of government, man ought to be supposed a knave," asserted Hamilton. In every case, one starts from the idea that the political order is designed to contain a more or less bestial human nature, where the Self faces the others and the world, where there are only separate bodies that must be bound together through some artifice. As Marshall Sahlins has shown, this idea of a human nature that "culture" must contain is a *Western illusion*. It expresses *our* misery; and not that of all earth dwellers. "For the greater part of humanity, self-interest as we know it is unnatural in the normative sense: it is considered madness, witchcraft or some such grounds for ostracism, execution or at least therapy. Rather than expressing a pre-social human nature, such avarice is generally taken for a loss of humanity."

But in order to destitute government, it's not enough to criticize this anthropology and its presumed "realism." One must find a way to grasp it *from the outside*, to affirm a different plane of perception. For we do move *on a different plane*. From the relative outside of what we're experiencing, of what we're trying to construct, we've arrived at this conviction: the question of government only arises from a void—more often than not, from a void it was obliged to *create*. Power must have sufficiently detached itself from the world, it must have created a sufficient void around the individual, or within him, created a desert-

or the working class, or the petty bourgeoisie, or the multitudes who are rebelling. They don't form anything homogenous enough to have a representative. There's no new revolutionary subject whose emergence had eluded observers. So if it's said that the "people" are in the streets it's not a people that existed previously, but rather the people that previously were lacking. It's not the people that produce an uprising, it's the uprising that produces its people, by re-engendering the shared experience and understanding, the human fabric and the real-life language that had disappeared. Revolutions of the past promised a new life. Contemporary insurrections deliver the keys to it. The shifts made by the Cairo ultras were not those of groups who were revolutionary before the "revolution." Before, they were only gangs capable of organizing against the police. It's from having played such an important role during the "revolution" that they were forced by the situation to raise questions usually reserved for "revolutionaries." There is where the event resides; not in the media phenomenon fabricated to exploit the rebellion through external celebration of it, but in the encounters actually produced within it. This is something much less spectacular than "the movement" or "the revolution," but more decisive. No one can say what an encounter is capable of generating.

This is how insurrections continue, in a molecular fashion, imperceptibly, in the life of neighborhoods, collectives, squats, "social centers," and singular beings, in Brazil as in Spain, in Chile as in Greece. Not because they implement a political program but because they trigger revolutionary becomings. Because what was lived through shines with such a glow that those who had the experience have to be faithful to it, not separating off but constructing what *was missing from their lives before*. If the Spanish movement of plaza occupations, once it had disappeared from the media radar screen, had not been continued in the neighborhoods of Barcelona and elsewhere via a process of communalization and self-organization, the attempt to destroy the Can Vies squat in June of 2014 would not have been placed in check by three days of rioting by the whole Sants district and we would not have seen a whole city participating in rebuilding the site that was attacked. There would have been just a few squatters protesting against another eviction in a climate of indifference. The construction in question here is not that of a "new society" at its embryonic stage, nor an organization that will

eventually overthrow an authority so as to constitute a new one, it's the collective power which, with its consistency and its intelligence, consigns the ruling power to powerlessness, foiling each of its maneuvers in turn.

Very often the revolutionaries are those whom the revolutions take by surprise. But in contemporary insurrections there is something that especially unsettles the revolutionaries: the insurrections no longer base themselves on political ideologies, but on *ethical truths*. Here we have two words that, to a modern sensibility, sound like an oxymoron when they're brought together. Establishing what is true is the role of science, is it not?—science having nothing to do with moral norms and other contingent values. For moderns, there is the World on one side, themselves on the other, and language to bridge the gulf: A truth, we were taught, is a solid point above the abyss—a statement that adequately *describes* the World. We've conveniently forgotten the slow apprenticeship during which we acquired, together with language, a relationship with the world. Far from serving to describe the world, language helps us rather to *construct* a world. Ethical truths are thus not truths *about* the world, but truths on the basis of which we dwell therein. These are truths, affirmations, stated or not, that are felt but not proved. The silent gaze, fists closed, into the eyes of the little boss, staring him down for a long minute, is one such truth, and worth as much as the loud phrase, “one is always right to rebel.” Truths are what *bind* us, to ourselves, to the world around us, and to each other. They give us entry into an immediately shared life, an unclenched existence, regardless of the illusory walls of our Selves. If earthlings are prepared to risk their lives to prevent a square from being transformed into a parking lot as at Gamonal in Spain, a park from becoming a shopping center as at Gezi in Turkey, woods from becoming an airport as at Notre-Dames-Landes, it's clearly because what we love, what we are attached to—beings, places, or ideas—is also part of us, because we are not reducible to a Self lodging for a lifetime in a physical body bounded by its skin, the whole entity being graced with a set of *properties* which this Self believes it possesses. When the world is fucked with, it's we ourselves who are being attacked.

Paradoxically, even where an ethical truth is uttered as a refusal, the fact of saying “No!” places us squarely in existence. Just as paradoxically,

having its basis in reason; that has no enemies, since to oppose it is to be a criminal; that can do anything, being without honor.

So to destitute power it's not enough to defeat it in the street, to dismantle its apparatuses, to set its symbols ablaze. To destitute power is to deprive it of its foundation. That is precisely what insurrections do. There the constituted appears as it is, with its thousand maneuvers—clumsy or effective, crude or sophisticated. “The king has no clothes,” one says then, because the constituent veil is in tatters and everyone sees through it. To destitute power is to take away its legitimacy, compel it to recognize its arbitrariness, reveal its contingent dimension. It's to show that it holds together only in situation, through what it deploys in the way of stratagems, methods, tricks—to turn it into a temporary configuration of things which, like so many others, have to fight and scheme in order to survive. It's to make the government lower itself to the level of the insurgents, who can no longer be “monsters,” “criminals,” or “terrorists” but simply enemies. To force the police to be nothing more henceforth than a gang, and the justice system a criminal association. In insurrection, the power in place is just one force among others from the perspective of common struggle, and no longer that meta-force which regiments, commands, or condemns all potentialities. All motherfuckers have addresses. To destitute power is to bring it back down to earth.

Whatever the outcome of the street confrontations, insurrection has always-already torn holes in the tight fabric of beliefs that enable government to be exercised. That is why those in a hurry to bury the insurrection don't waste their time trying to mend the broken foundation of an already invalidated legitimacy. They attempt instead to infuse the movement itself with a new claim to legitimacy, that is, a new claim to be founded on reason, to preside over the strategic plane where the different forces clash. The legitimacy of “the people,” “the oppressed,” “the 99%” is the Trojan horse by which the constituent is smuggled back into insurrectionary destitution. This is the surest method for undoing an insurrection—one that doesn't even require defeating it in the streets. To make the destitution irreversible, therefore, we must begin by abandoning *our own legitimacy*. We have to give up the idea that one makes the revolution in the name of something, that there's a fundamentally just and innocent entity which the revolutionary forces would

normally, but capable at certain moments of flashing into presence. We like to think that “the people” only have to assemble, ideally in front of the parliament, and shout “You don’t represent us!” for the constituent power to magically depose the constituted powers through its simple epiphany. This fiction of the constituent power actually only serves to mask the strictly political, fortuitous origin, the *raw coup* by which power is instituted. Those who’ve taken power project the source of their authority back onto the social totality which they henceforth control, and in this way legitimately silence it *in its own name*. So it happens that the feat of getting the people fired upon in the name of the people is regularly accomplished. Constituent power is the matador’s costume which the squalid origin of power always sports, the veil that hypnotizes everyone and makes them believe that the constituted power is much more than it is.

Those who propose, like Antonio Negri, to “govern the revolution” only see “constituent struggles” everywhere, from the banlieue riots to the uprisings in the Arab world. A Madrid-based Negriist who supports a hypothetical “constituent process” coming out the movement of the squares, even calls for the creation of “the party of democracy,” “the party of the 99%,” for the purpose of “articulating a new democratic constitution just as ‘ordinary,’ as non-representative as 15M was.” Misdirections of this kind encourage us to re-conceive the idea of revolution as *pure destitution* instead.

To institute or constitute a power is to give it a basis, a foundation, a legitimacy. For an economic, judicial, or police apparatus, it is to ground its fragile existence in a dimension that is beyond it, in a transcendence designed to place it out of reach. Through this operation, what is never anything but a localized, specific, partial entity is elevated to an elsewhere from which it can then claim to encompass the whole. As a constituted thing, a power becomes an order with no outside, an uncontested existence with no counterpart, which can only subject or annihilate. The dialectic of the constituent and the constituted comes to confer a higher meaning on what is never anything but a contingent political form. This is how the Republic becomes the universal banner of an indisputable and eternal human nature, or the caliphate the single locus of community. Constituent power names that monstrous piece of magic that turns the state into that entity that’s never wrong,

the individual is discovered to be so unindividual that sometimes the suicide of a single one can collapse the whole edifice of social untruth. Mohamed Bouazizi’s gesture involving self-immolation in front of the Sidi Bouzid prefecture is sufficient evidence of this. Its explosive power is due to the potent affirmation it contains. It says, “The life laid out for us is not worth living,” “We weren’t born to let ourselves be humiliated like that by the police,” “You can reduce us to nothing, but you’ll never take away the share of sovereignty that belongs to living beings,” or “Look at us little people, barely existing, humiliated, see how we’re beyond the miserable means by which you cling to your sick man’s power.” That is what was distinctly heard in the gesture. If the televised interview, in Egypt, of Wael Ghonim after his secret incarceration by the “services” had the effect of reversing the situation, it’s because a truth broke through his tears and also exploded in the hearts of everyone. In the same vein, during the first weeks of Occupy Wall Street, before the usual movement managers instituted their little “working groups” responsible for preparing the decisions which the assembly would only need to approve, the model for the speeches made to the 1500 persons present was the guy who stepped forward one day and said, “Yo! What up? My name is Mike. I’m just a gangster from Harlem. I hate my life. Fuck my boss! Fuck my girlfriend! Fuck the cops! Just wanted to say, I’m happy to be here, with you all.” And his words were repeated seven times by the chorus of “human megaphones” that had replaced the microphones prohibited by the police.

The true content of Occupy Wall Street was not the demand, tacked onto the movement a posteriori like a post-it stuck on a hippopotamus, for better wages, decent housing, or a more generous social security, but *disgust with the life we’re forced to live*. Disgust with a life in which we’re all alone, alone facing the necessity for each one to make a living, house oneself, feed oneself, realize one’s potential, and attend to one’s health, *by oneself*. Disgust with the miserable form of life of the metropolitan individual—scrupulous distrust/refined, *smart* skepticism/shallow, ephemeral loves/resulting extreme sexualization of every encounter/then the periodic return to a comfortable and desperate separation/constant distraction, hence ignorance of oneself, hence fear of oneself, hence fear of the other. The life in common that was attempted in Zuccotti Park, in tents, in the cold, in the rain, surrounded by police in

the dreariest of Manhattan's squares, was definitely not a full rollout of the *vita nova*—it was just the point where the sadness of metropolitan existence began to be flagrant. At last it was possible to grasp our shared condition *together*, our equal reduction to the status of entrepreneurs of the self. That existential epiphany was the pulsing heart of Occupy Wall Street, for as long as it was fresh and lively.

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

In Slovenia in 2012, in the calm city of Maribor, a street revolt erupted which inflamed a good part of the country in the days that followed. Such a thing was unexpected in a country with Swiss-like features. But what is more surprising is that its starring point was the revelation that road-radar flashes were proliferating in the city because a private company was pocketing nearly all the fines. Could anything be less "political" as the starting point of an insurrection than radar flashes? But could anything be more ethical than the refusal to let oneself be fleeced like sheep? It's like a 21st century Michael Kohlhaas. The importance of the theme of prevailing corruption in almost all the contemporary revolts shows that they are ethical before being political, or that they are political precisely to the degree that they're contemptuous of politics, including radical politics. As long as being of the left will mean denying the existence of ethical truths and correcting for that impairment with a morality that's as feeble as it is expedient, the fascists will

4

Coming out of Argentina, the slogan "¡Que se vayan todos!" jarred the ruling heads all over the world. There's no counting the number of languages in which we've shouted our desire, during the past few years, to *destitute* the power in place. And the most surprising thing still is that in several cases we managed to do that. But however fragile the regimes succeeding such "revolutions," the second part of the slogan, "¡Y que no quede ni uno!" ("And let not a single one remain!"), has gone unheeded: new puppets have taken the places left vacant. The most exemplary case has to be Egypt. Tahrir had Mubarak's head and the Tamarod movement that of Morsi. Each time, the street demanded a destitution that it didn't have the strength to organize, so that it was the already organized forces, the Muslim Brotherhood then the army, that usurped that destitution and carried it through to their benefit. A movement that demands is always at a disadvantage opposite a force that *acts*. We can marvel in passing at how the role of the sovereign and that of the "terrorist" are basically interchangeable, seeing how quickly one transitions from the palaces of power to the basements of its prisons, and vice versa. So the complaint that is commonly heard among yesterday's insurgents says: "The revolution was betrayed. We didn't die to make it possible for a provisional government to organize elections, then a constituent assembly to draw up a new constitution that would lay out the modalities of new elections from which a new regime would emerge, which would be almost identical to the previous one. We wanted life to change, and nothing has changed, or very little." On this point, radicals always give the same explanation: it's that the people have to govern themselves instead of electing representatives. If revolutions are consistently betrayed this may be the result of fate, but perhaps it's a sign that some hidden flaws in our idea of revolution condemn it to such an inevitability. One of those flaws is in the fact that we still tend to conceive of revolution as a dialectic between the constituent and the constituted. We still believe in the fable that tells us all constituted power is rooted in a constituent power, that the state emanates from the nation, as the absolute monarch does from God, that beneath the constitution in force there always exists another constitution, an order that's underlying and transcendent at once, silent

more democratic than the mafia-run neighborhood.

Those who thought that the forms of Law were a definitive acquisition of democracy, and not a transitory form in the process of being outstripped, must be feeling disappointed. Those forms are now a formal hindrance to the elimination of democracy's "enemy combatants" and to the continual reorganization of the economy. From Italy of the 1970s to Obama's dirty wars, antiterrorism is not a regrettable violation of our fine democratic principles, a marginal exception to the latter; it is rather the uninterrupted *constitutive action* by which contemporary democracies are held together. The United States maintains a list of "terrorists" of the entire world containing 680,000 names, and feeds a corps of 25,000 men, the Joint Special Operations Command, secretly charged with going to kill just about anyone at any time anywhere on the surface of the globe. With their fleet of drones that are not so attentive to the exact identity of those they blow to smithereens, extrajudicial executions have supplanted the Guantanamo-type of extrajudicial procedures. Those who raise objections to this don't understand what it means to *govern democratically*. They are stuck in the preceding phase, where the modern state still spoke the language of Law.

In Brazil, under anti-terrorism provisions some young people were arrested whose crime was to have tried to organize a demonstration against the World Cup. In Italy, four comrades were jailed for "terrorism" on the grounds that an attack on the work site of the TAV, the high-speed train line, seriously damaged the country's "image" by burning a compressor. Useless to multiply the examples, the fact is universal: everything that resists the schemes of governments risks being treated as "terrorist." A liberal mind might fear that governments are detracting from their democratic legitimacy. That is not at all the cases in fact, through such a practice they reestablish it. That is, if the operation works. If they've read the prevailing mood correctly and prepared the public sensibility. Because when Ben Ali or Mubarak denounced the crowds filling the streets as terrorist gangs, and that didn't take, the reestablishment operation turned back against them. Its failure sucked the ground of legitimacy out from under their feet and they found themselves pedaling above the void, in view of everyone—their downfall was imminent. Such an operation appears for what it is only at the moment it fails.

continue to look like the only affirmative political force, being the only ones who don't apologize for living as they do. They'll go from success to success, and will go on deflecting the energy of nascent revolts back against themselves.

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

2

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

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

now through their deterioration, government as a *specific form of power*. If today the rusty old superstructures of nation states can be allowed to crumble without fear, it's precisely because they must give way to that vaunted "governance"—flexible, plastic, informal, Taoist—which is imposed in every domain, whether it be management of oneself; of relationships, of cities, or of corporations. We others, we revolutionaries, can't keep from feeling that we're losing every battle, one by one, because they are all waged at a level we still haven't gained access to, because we mass our forces around positions already lost, because attacks are conducted where we are not defending ourselves. This is largely the result of our still imagining power in the form of the State, the Law, Discipline, and Sovereignty, when it's as government rather than it continues to advance. We look for power in its solid state when it was a long time ago that power passed into a liquid, if not gaseous, state. Frustrated and baffled, we develop a suspicion of anything still having a definite form—habits, loyalties, rootedness, mastery or logic—when power is manifested rather in the ceaseless dissolution of all forms.

Elections don't have anything particularly democratic about them. For a long time, kings were elected and it's a rare autocrat who will say no to a pleasant little plebiscite here and there. Elections are democratic only in that they make it possible to ensure, not people's participation in government, but a certain *adherence* to it, through the illusion that elections create of people having chosen it to some small extent. "Democracy," wrote Marx, "is the truth of all the forms of the state." He was mistaken. Democracy is the truth *of all the forms of government*. The identity of the governing and the governed is the limit where the flock becomes a collective shepherd and the shepherd dissolves into his flock, where freedom coincides with obedience, the population with the sovereign. The collapsing of governing and governed into each other is government *in its pure state*, with no more form or limit. It's not without reason that *liquid* democracy has begun to be theorized, because every fixed form is an obstacle to the exercise of pure government. In the great movement of general fluidification, there are no stop-blocks, there are only stages on an asymptote. The more fluid it is the more governable it is, and the more governable it is the more democratic it is. The metropolitan single is clearly more democratic than the married couple, which is itself more democratic than the family clan, which is

of democracy, is the equivalence between those who govern and those who are governed, whatever the means by which that equivalence is obtained. Whence the epidemic of hypocrisy and hysteria that afflicts our lands. In a democratic regime, one governs *without really appearing to*. The masters clothe themselves in the attributes of the slave and the slaves believe they are the masters, The former, exercising power on behalf of the happiness of the masses, are condemned to a constant hypocrisy, and the latter, imagining they possess a “purchasing power,” “rights,” or “opinions” that are trampled on all year round, become hysterics as a result. And because hypocrisy is the bourgeois virtue *par excellence*, something irreparably bourgeois becomes permanently attached to democracy. The popular feeling on this point is not mistaken.

Whether one is an Obama democrat or a fierce proponent of workers’ councils, and however one imagines “government of the people by the people,” what the question of democracy *overlays* is always the question of government. Its premise, its unthought assumption, is that there must be government. But governing is a quite specific way of exercising power. To govern is not to impose a discipline on a body, it is nor to compel respect for the Law in a territory even if that means torturing the violators as under the Ancien Régime. A king reigns. A general commands. A judge judges. Governing is something different. It is managing the behaviors of a population, a multiplicity that one must watch over like a shepherd his flock in order to maximize its potential and guide its free-dom. So this means taking into account and shaping its desires, its ways of doing and thinking, its habits, its fears, its dispositions, its milieu. It means deploying a whole ensemble of tactics, of discursive, material, and policing tactics, paying close attention to the people’s emotions, with their mysterious oscillations; it is acting to prevent rioting and sedition, based on a constant sensitivity to the affective and political climate. Acting upon the milieu and continually modifying the variables of the latter, acting on some to influence the behavior of the others, to keep control of the flock. In short, it means waging a war that’s never called one and doesn’t look like one, in almost every sphere of human existence. A war of influence—subtle, psychological, indirect.

What has continued to develop since the 17th century in the West is not state power but, through the construction of national states and

is a fullness of expression—in the chants, on the walls, in the spoken interventions, in the street—and a nullity of deliberation. Perhaps the miracle of insurrection can be summed up in this way: at the same time that it dissolves democracy as a problem, it speaks immediately of a beyond-democracy.

As we know, there’s no shortage of ideologists, such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, who will deduce from the uprisings of the past few years that “the constitution of a democratic society is on the agenda” and propose to make us “capable of democracy” by teaching us the “skills, talents, and knowledges necessary for governing ourselves.” For them, as a Spanish Negriist encapsulates it none too neatly: “From Tahrir to the Puerta del Sol, from Syntagma Square to Plaça Catalunya, a cry is repeated from plaza to plaza: ‘Democracy!’ That is the name of the specter that is moving through the world today.” And in fact everything would be all right if the democratic rhetoric were nothing more than a voice emanating from heaven and applied to every uprising from the exterior, either by those governing or by those wanting to succeed them. People would receive it piously, like a priest’s homily, while trying not to laugh. But one has to admit that this rhetoric has an actual hold on minds, on hearts, on struggles, as the much talked about “indignants” movement attests. We write “indignants” between quotes because in the first week of the Puerta del Sol occupation, reference was made to Tahrir Square, but no mention of the innocuous little volume by the Socialist Stéphane Hessel, which advocates a citizens’ insurrection of “consciences” only as a way of averting the threat of a real insurrection. It was only after a recoding operation conducted in the second week of occupation by the newspaper *El País*, also linked to the Socialist Party, that the movement received its peevish name, which is to say, a good part of its echo and the signifier of its limits. Something related happened in Greece, moreover, where the occupiers of Syntagma Square rejected the label “aganaktismenoi” (“indignants”) which the media had stuck on them, opting en bloc to call themselves the “movement of the squares.” All in all, with its factual neutrality “movement of the squares” accounts for the complexity, indeed the confusion, of those strange assemblies where Marxists cohabited with Buddhists of the Tibetan way, and Syriza adherents with bourgeois patriots. Spectacle’s maneuver is well known, which consists in taking

symbolic control of movements by celebrating them in a first phase *for what they are not*, the better to bury them when the right moment comes. By assigning indignation as their content, one was consigning them to helplessness and untruth. “No one lies more than the indignant man,” Nietzsche observed. He lies about his estrangement from what makes him indignant, pretending he has no part in what upsets him. He postulates his powerlessness so as to wash his hands of any responsibility for the way things are going; then he converts it into a *moral affect*, into an affect of moral *superiority*. He *believes he has rights*, poor thing. While angry crowds have been known to make revolutions, indignant masses have never been known to do anything but protest powerlessly. The bourgeoisie takes offense, then takes revenge; the petty bourgeoisie waxes indignant, then goes back to the doghouse.

The slogan that was associated with the “movement of the squares” was that of “Democracia real ya!” because the occupation of the Puerta del Sol was initiated by about fifteen “hacktivists” at the conclusion of a demonstration called by the platform with that name on the 15th of May, 2011— “15M” as they say there. Here it was not a question of direct democracy as in the workers’ councils, of even true democracy in the style of antiquity, but *real* democracy. It’s not surprising that the “movement of the squares” was established, in Athens, a stone’s throw from the place of formal democracy, the National Assembly. Up to then we had naively thought that real democracy was the kind that was there, as we’d known it forever, with its electoral promises made to be broken, its recording chambers called “parliaments,” and its pragmatic negotiations aimed at fooling the world for the benefit of the different lobbies. But for the “hacktivists” of 15M, democracy’s reality was the betrayal of “real democracy.” That it was cybermilitants who launched the movement is not insignificant. The slogan “real democracy” means this: technologically, your elections that take place once every five years, your pudgy representatives who don’t know how to use a computer, your assemblies that resemble a bad theater play or a free-for-all—all this is obsolete. In today’s world, thanks to the new communication technologies, thanks to the Internet, biometric identification, smartphones, social networks, you are completely outmoded. It is possible to set up a real democracy, that is a continuous polling, in real time, of the opinion of the population, to really submit every deci-

Without causing any major stir, the “world’s greatest democracy” embarked on a global manhunt for one of its agents, Edward Snowden, who had the bad idea of revealing its program of generalized surveillance of communications. In actual fact, most of our precious Western democracies have become unabashed police regimes, whereas most of the police regimes of this period proudly wear the title of “democracy.” No one took much offense that a Prime Minister like Papandreou was dismissed without notice for having had the outrageous idea of submitting the policies of his country, that is, of the Troika, to the voters. Moreover, in Europe it has become customary to suspend elections when an uncontrollable outcome is anticipated, or to require citizens to revote when a first vote doesn’t produce the result that was counted on by the European Commission. The democrats of the “free world” who strutted twenty years ago ought to be tearing out their hair. Isn’t it well known that Google, faced with the scandal of its participation in the espionage program, Prism, was reduced to inviting Henry Kissinger to explain to its workers that they would have to resign themselves, that our “security” came at that price? It’s almost comical to imagine the go-to man of all the fascist coups of the 1970s in South America speechifying about democracy in front of the very cool, very “innocent,” very “apolitical” employees of the Google headquarters in Silicon Valley.

One is reminded of the statement by Rousseau in *The Social Contract*: “If there were a nation of gods, it would govern itself democratically. A government so perfect is not suited to men.” Or the one, more cynical, by Rivarol: “There are two truths that must not be separated in this world: 1. That sovereignty resides in the people. 2. That they must never exercise it.”

Edward Bernays, the founder of public relations, began the first chapter of his book *Propaganda*, titled “Organizing Chaos,” in this way: “The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society. Those who manipulate This unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.” That was in 1928. What one has in mind, basically, when one speaks

the different mechanisms of the assembly—from turn-taking to silent applause—organize a cottony space with no edges other than those of a succession of monologues, disabling the need to fight for what one thinks. If democrats must structure the situation to this degree, it's because they have no trust in it, And if they don't trust the situation, this is because at bottom they *don't trust themselves*. Their fear of allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by the situation makes them want to control democracy at any cost, even if this often means destroying it. Democracy is first of all the set of procedures by which it gives form and structure to this anxiety. It doesn't make much sense to denounce democracy: one doesn't denounce an anxiety.

We can only be freed from our attachment to democratic procedures through a general deploying of attention—attention not only to what is being said, but mostly to what is unspoken, attention to the way things are said, and to what can be read on people's faces and in silences. It's a matter of swamping the emptiness that democracy maintains between the individual atoms by a full attention to one another, a new attention to the world we have in common. What's called for is to replace the mechanical regime of argumentation with a regime of truth, of openness, of sensitivity to what is there. In the 12th century, when Tristan and Iseult found each other again by night and set to conversing, it was a "parlement"; when, through street encounters and the pressure of circumstances, people gather and start discussing things, it's an "assembly" This is what should be contrasted with the "sovereignty" of general assemblies, with the palaver of parliaments: the rediscovery of the affective charge linked with speech, with *true* speech. The opposite of democracy is not dictatorship, it is truth. its precisely because they are moments of *truth*, where power is laid bare, that insurrections are never democratic.

sion to them before making it. An author anticipated this in the 1920s: "One can imagine that one day some subtle inventions will permit everyone to express their opinions about political problems at any time without leaving their homes, thanks to equipment that would record all these opinions on a central device where we could simply read the results." For him this would be "a proof of the absolute privatization of the State and of public life." And, though they were gathered on one plaza, it was this constant polling that the raised and lowered hands of the "indignants" would silently manifest during the successive speeches. Here even the old power to acclaim or jeer had been taken away from the crowd.

On one hand, the movement of the squares was the projection—the crash—of the cybernetic fantasy of universal citizenship onto reality, and on the other an exceptional time of encounters, actions, celebrations, and reappropriations of communal life. This is what eluded the eternal microbureaucracy that tries to pass off its ideological whims for "assembly positions" and seeks to control everything based on the requirement that every action, every gesture, every declaration be "validated by the assembly" to have the right to exist. For all the others, this movement had laid to rest the myth of the general assembly, that is, the myth of its central role. The first evening, May 16, 2011, at the Plaça Catalunya in Barcelona there were 100 persons, the next day 1000, 10,000 the day after, and the first two weekends there were 30,000 persons. So everyone could observe that when so many were present there was no longer any difference between direct democracy and representative democracy. The assembly is where one is forced to listen to bullshit without being able to reply, just like in front of the TV, in addition to being the place of an exhausting theatricality all the more false for its mimicking of sincerity, affliction, or enthusiasm. The extreme bureaucratization of committees got the better of the roughest participants, and apparently it took two weeks for the "content" committee to deliver up an unbearable and calamitous document that, in its opinion, summed up "what we believe in." To a point that, seeing the ridiculousness of the situation, some anarchists put to the vote that the assembly become simply a space for discussion and an information nexus, and not a decision-making body. The thing was comical: voting on not voting anymore. More comical still; the voting was sabotaged

by thirty or so Trotskyists. And since that type of micropoliticians excludes boredom and hunger for power in equal measure, everyone ended up avoiding the tiresome assemblies. No surprise, many Occupy participants had the same experience, and drew the same conclusion from it. In Oakland and Chapel Hill alike, people concluded that the assembly had no business validating what any group could do or intended to do, that it was a place of exchange and not of decision. When an idea voiced in an assembly took, it was simply that there were enough people who thought it was good enough to be implemented, and not owing to a principle of majority. The decisions took, materialized, or didn't; they were never made. In this way Syntagma Square voted "in general assembly," one June day, 2011, with several thousand *individuals* voting, to initiate actions in the subway; on the scheduled day, however, not twenty persons showed up at the rendezvous prepared to act in an effective way. Thus the problem of "decision-making," an obsession of all the flipped-out democrats of the world, is revealed to have been nothing but a false problem from the beginning.

The fact that, with the movement of the squares, the *fetishism* of the general assembly fell into the void doesn't tarnish the assembly *practice* in the least. We just have to keep in mind that nothing different can come out of an assembly than what is there already. If, on the same plaza, thousands of strangers are brought together, who don't share anything apart from the fact of being there, we can't expect that anything more will emerge from it than what their separation authorizes. One shouldn't imagine for example that an assembly will somehow by itself create the mutual trust necessary for risking an illegal action together. That something so repugnant as an assembly of co-proprieters is possible should already put us on our guard against the passion for GAs. What an assembly actualizes is simply the degree of existing commonality. An assembly of students is not a neighborhood assembly, which is not a neighborhood assembly organizing against the neighborhoods "restructuring." An assembly of workers is not the same at the beginning of a strike and at the end of one. And it definitely bears little resemblance to a popular assembly of Oaxacan peoples. The only thing an assembly can produce, with the right effort, is a shared language. Where the only experience in common is separation, one will only hear the amorphous language of separated life. Then indignation

is in fact the maximum political intensity attainable by the atomized individual, who mistakes his screen for the world just as he mistakes his feelings for his thoughts. A plenary assembly of all these atoms, in spite of its touching togetherness, will only expose the paralysis induced by a false understanding of the political, and hence their inability to alter the world's drift in the slightest. It makes one think of a sea of dumbstruck faces pressed against a glass wall and watching the mechanical universe continuing to function without them. The feeling of collective helplessness, after the joy of meeting up and *being counted*, did as much to scatter the owners of those "Quechua" tents as the clubs and the tear gas attacks did.

Yet it's true that there was something going beyond that feeling in these occupations, and it was precisely those things that had no place in the theatrical moment of the assembly, everything having to do with the miraculous ability of living beings to inhabit, to inhabit even the uninhabitable: the heart of the metropolis. In the occupied squares, all that politics since classical Greece has basically held in contempt, and relegated to the sphere of "economy," of domestic management, "survival," "reproduction," "daily routine," and "labor," was affirmed instead as a dimension of collective political potential, escaping in this way from the subordination of the private. The organizational ability that was routinely demonstrated every day and that managed to feed 3,000 persons at every meal, construct a village in a few days, or take care of wounded rioters can be seen as marking the real political victory of the "movement of the squares." To which the occupation of Taksim and Maidan added the art of maintaining barricades and making Molotov cocktails in industrial quantities.

The fact that a form of organization as banal and predictable as the assembly was invested with such an intense veneration says a lot about the nature of democratic *affects*. If insurrection has to do with anger at first, then with joy, direct democracy; with its formalism, is an affair of worriers. We want to be sure that nothing will occur that is not covered by some procedure. That no event will exceed our capacities. That the situation will remain something we can handle. That no one will feel cheated or in open conflict with the majority. That absolutely no one will ever have to count on their own powers to make themselves understood. That no one will impose anything on anyone. To that end,