

*To our friends* **invisible committee**

## chapter 5



### LET'S DISAPPEAR

1. *A strange defeat.*
2. *Pacifists and radicals—an infernal couple.*
3. *Government as counter-insurgency.*
4. *Ontological asymmetry and happiness.*

(Excerpt from "To our friends":  
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1. Anyone who lived through the days of December, 2008 in Athens knows what the word "insurrection" signifies in a Western metropolis. The banks were in pieces, the police stations under siege, the city in the hands of the assailants. In the luxury shops, they were no longer repairing the windows, which would need to be done every morning. Nothing that embodied the police reign of normality was untouched by this wave of fire and stones whose bearers were everywhere and representatives nowhere—even the Syntagma Christmas tree was torched. At a certain point the forces of order withdrew, after running out of tear-gas grenades. Impossible to say who took over the streets then. They say it was the "600 euros generation," the "high schoolers," the "anarchists," the "riffraff" from the Albanian immigration, they'll say anything. As usual, the press blamed the "koukoulofori," the "hooded ones." The truth is that the anarchists were overrun by this faceless outpouring of rage. Their monopoly on wild, masked action, inspired tags, and even Molotov cocktails had been taken from them unceremoniously. The general uprising they no longer dared to imagine was there, but it didn't resemble the idea of it they had in their minds. An unknown entity, an *egregore*, had been born, a spirit that wouldn't be appeased till everything was reduced to cinders that deserved to be. Time was on fire. The present was fractured as payment for all the future that had been stolen from us.

The years that followed in Greece taught us the meaning of the word "counter-insurgency" in a Western country. Once the wave had passed, the hundreds of groups that had formed in the country, down to the smallest villages, tried to stay faithful to the breach which the month of December had opened. At one spot, people might empty the cash registers of a supermarket, then film themselves burning the loot. At another, an embassy might be attacked in broad daylight in solidarity with some friend hounded by the police in his or her country. Some resolved, as in Italy of the 1970's, to carry the attack to a higher level and target, using bombs or firearms, the Athens stock exchange, cops, ministries or perhaps the Microsoft headquarters. As in the 1970's, the left passed new "antiterrorist" laws. The raids, arrests, and trials multiplied. For a time, one was reduced to militating against "repression." The European Union, the World Bank, the IMF, in agreement with the Socialist government, undertook to *make Greece pay* for the unpardonable revolt. One should never underestimate the resentment of the wealthy towards the insolence of the poor. They decided to bring the whole country to heel through a string of "economic measures" more or less as violent, although spread over time, as the revolt.

This was met by dozens of general strikes called by the unions. Workers occupied ministries; inhabitants took possession of city halls; university departments and hospitals that had been "sacrificed" decided to self-organize. There was the "movement of the squares." May 10, 2010, five hundred thousand of us flooded into the center of Athens. There were several attempts to burn the Parliament. February 12, 2012, an umpteenth general strike was staged in desperate opposition to the umpteen-

th austerity plan. That Sunday, all of Greece, its retirees, its anarchists, its civil servants, its workers and its homeless demonstrated in a state of near-insurrection. With downtown Athens again in flames, that evening was a paroxysm of jubilation and weariness: the movement perceived all its power, but also realized it didn't know what to do with it. Over the years, in spite of thousands of direct actions, hundreds of occupations, millions of Greeks in the streets, the euphoria of rebellion was dampened in the drop-box of "crisis." The embers stayed active under the ashes, certainly. The movement found other forms, providing itself with cooperatives, social centers, "networks of exchange without middlemen," and even self-managed factories and health clinics. It became more "constructive" in a sense. The fact remains that we were defeated, that one the biggest offensives of our party during the past few decades was repulsed through debt impositions, exaggerated prison sentences, and generalized bankruptcy. The free used clothing won't make Greeks forget the counter-insurgency's determination to plunge them up to their necks in privation. Power may have tottered and given the momentary impression of disappearing, but it was able to shift the terrain of confrontation and catch the movement off balance. The Greeks were blackmailed by this alternative: "government or chaos." What they got was government *and* chaos—plus immiseration as a bonus.

With its anarchist movement stronger than anywhere else, with its people largely uneasy with the very fact of being governed, with its always-already failed state, Greece stands as a textbook case of our defeated insurrections. Jacking the police, smashing the banks and temporarily routing a government is still not destituting it all. What the Greek case shows us is that without a concrete idea of what a victory would be, we can't help but be defeated. Insurrectionary determination is not enough; our confusion is still too thick. Hopefully, studying our defeats will serve at least to dissipate it somewhat.

2. Forty years of triumphant counterrevolution in the West have inflicted two matching weaknesses on us: pacifism and radicalism. They're both harmful, but in combination they form a pitiless apparatus.

Pacifism lies, and lies to itself, by making public discussion and general assembly the be-all and end-all of political practice. That explains why the squares movement, for example, was inca-

pable of becoming anything more than a terminal starting point. To grasp what the political means, there seems to be no choice but to take another detour through Greece, but ancient Greece this time. After all, the political was invented there. Pacifists are reluctant to remember this, but early on the ancient Greeks invented democracy as a continuation of war by other means. The assembly practice on the scale of the city-state came directly from the assembly of warriors. Equality of speech stemmed from equality in the face of death. Athenian democracy was a hoplitic democracy. One was a citizen *because one was a soldier*—hence the exclusion of women and slaves. In a culture as violently agonistic as classical Greek culture, debate itself was understood as a moment of warlike confrontation, between citizens this time, in the sphere of speech, with the arms of persuasion. Moreover, "agon" signifies "assembly" as much as "competition." The complete Greek citizen was one who was victorious both with arms and with discourse.

Above all, the ancient Greeks conceived assembly democracy in combination with *warfare as organized carnage*, and the former as the guarantor of the latter. It's significant that the Greeks are credited with the invention of democracy only on condition that its link with that rather exceptional type of massacre based on the phalanx is glossed over—that is, with the invention of a form of line warfare that replaces skill, bravery, prowess, extraordinary strength, and genius with pure and simple discipline, absolute submission of each to the whole. When the Persians found themselves facing such an *effective* way of waging war, but one that reduced the life of the foot soldier in the phalanx to nothing, they rightly judged it to be perfectly barbaric, as did so many of those enemies whom the Western armies were to crush subsequently. The Athenian farmer getting himself heroically slaughtered in the front rank of the phalanx in view of his friends and relatives was thus the flip side of the active citizen taking part in the *Boule*. The lifeless arms of the corpses strewn over the ancient battlefield were the necessary counterparts of the arms raised to intervene in the deliberations of the assembly. This Greek model of warfare is so firmly entrenched in the Western imaginary it's almost forgotten that at the very time when the hoplites were awarding the victory to that phalanx of the two that would accept the maximum number of deaths in the decisive clash rather than yield ground, the Chinese were inventing an art of war that consisted pre-

cisely in minimizing losses and avoiding battle as much as possible, in trying to “win the battle before the battle”—even if this also meant exterminating the defeated army once the victory was obtained. The equation “war=confrontation army=carnage” extended from ancient Greece down through the 20th century. It’s basically been the aberrant Western definition of warfare for two thousand five hundred years. That “irregular warfare,” “psychological warfare,” “little war” or “guerilla” are the names given to what is elsewhere *the norm of warfare* is only one aspect of that particular aberration.

The sincere pacifist, one who is not simply rationalizing his own cowardice, performs the feat of being doubly mistaken about the nature of the phenomenon he claims to be combating. Not only is war not reducible to armed confrontation or carnage, it is the very matrix of the assembly politics that the pacifist advocates. “A real warrior,” said Sun Tzu, “is not bellicose. A real fighter is not violent. A victor avoids combat.” Two world conflicts and a terrifying planetary fight against “terrorism” have shown us that the bloodiest campaigns of extermination are conducted in the name of peace. At bottom, the rejection of war only expresses an infantile or senile refusal to recognize the existence of otherness. War is not carnage, but the logic that regulates the contact of heterogeneous powers. It is waged everywhere, in countless forms, and more often than not by peaceful means. If there’s multiplicity of worlds, if there’s an irreducible plurality of forms of life, then war is the law of their co-existence on this earth. For nothing allows us to foresee the outcome of their encounter: contraries don’t dwell in separate worlds. If we are not unified individuals endowed with a definitive identity as the social policing of roles would have it, but the locus of a conflictual play of forces whose successive configurations only form temporary equilibriums, we have to recognize that war is in us—holy war, as René Daumal called it. Peace is neither possible nor desirable. Conflict is the very stuff of what exists. So the thing to do is to acquire an art of conducting it, which is an art of living on a situational footing, and which requires a finesse and an existential mobility instead of a readiness to crush whatever is not us.

Pacifism attests therefore either to a deep stupidity or a complete lack of good faith. Even our immune system depends on the distinction between friend and enemy, without which we would die of cancer or some other autoimmune disease. Actually, we do die of cancers and

autoimmune diseases. The tactical refusal of confrontation is itself only a stratagem of warfare. It’s easy to understand, for example, why the Oaxaca Commune immediately declared itself peaceful. It wasn’t a matter of refuting war, but of refusing to be defeated in a confrontation with the Mexican state and its henchmen. As some Cairo comrades explained it, “One mustn’t mistake the tactic we employ when we chant ‘nonviolence’ for a fetishizing of non-violence.” It’s amazing, furthermore, how much historical falsification it takes to find fore-bears who are presentable to pacifism! Think of poor Thoreau who was barely deceased when they made him into a theoretician of *Civil Disobedience*, by amputating the title of his text, *Resistance to Civil Government*. This was the man who wrote in longhand in his *Plea for Captain John Brown*: “I think that for once the Sharpe’s rifles and the revolvers were employed in a righteous cause. The tools were in the hands of one who could use them. The same indignation that is said to have cleared the temple once will clear it again. The question is not about the weapon, but the spirit in which you use it.” But the most farcical case of false genealogy has to be the way Nelson Mandela, the founder of the armed-struggle organization of the ANC, was turned into a global icon of peace. He lays it out himself: “I said that the time for passive resistance had ended, that nonviolence was a useless strategy and could never overturn a white minority regime bent on retaining its power at any cost. At the end of the day, I said, violence was the only weapon that would destroy apartheid and we must be prepared, in the near future, to use that weapon. The crowd was excited; the youth in particular were clapping and cheering. They were ready to act on what I said right then and there. At that point I began to sing a freedom song, the lyrics of which say, ‘There are the enemies, let us take our weapons and attack them.’ I sang this song and the crowd joined in, and when the song was finished, I pointed to the police and said, ‘There, there are our enemies!’”

Decades of pacification of the masses and masification of fears have made pacifism the spontaneous political consciousness of the *citizen*. With every movement that develops now one has to grapple with this awful state of affairs. One can cite the pacifists delivering black-clad rioters over to the police at the Plaça Catalunya in 2011, or the harassment and verbal lynching of “Black Bloc” protesters by the same in Genoa in 2001. In response to that, the revolutionary milieu secreted, as a kind of antibody, the figure

of the radical— someone who always takes the opposing view to the citizen. To the moral proscription of violence by the one, the other always replies with his purely ideological apology of violence. Where the pacifist always seeks to absolve himself of the state of the world, to remain good by doing no evil, the radical seeks to absolve himself of participation in the “existing state of things” through minor illegalities embellished with hardcore “position statements.” Both aspire to purity, one through violent action, the other by abstaining from it. Each is the other’s nightmare. It’s not certain that these two figures would go on existing for long if each one didn’t have the other deep inside him. As if the radical only lived to make the pacifist shudder inside, and vice versa. It’s fitting that the bible of American citizen struggles since the 1970’s is titled *Rules for Radicals*—by Saul Alinsky. Because pacifists and radicals are joined together in the same refusal of the world. They take pleasure in their disjunction from every situation. It gets them high, makes them feel like they’re in touch with some sort of excellence. They prefer living as extraterrestrials— such is the comfort that is authorized, for a while still, by life in the metropolis, their privileged biotope.

Since the catastrophic defeat of the 1970’s, the *moral* question of radicality has gradually replaced the *strategic* question of revolution. That is, revolution has suffered the same fate as everything else in those decades: it has been privatized. It has become an opportunity for personal validation, with radicality as the standard of evaluation. “Revolutionary” acts are no longer appraised in terms of the situation in which they are embedded, the possibilities they open up or close. What happens instead is that a *form* is extracted from each one of them. A particular sabotage, occurring at a particular moment, for a particular reason, becomes simply *a* sabotage. And the sabotage quietly takes its place among certified revolutionary practices on a scale where throwing a Molotov cocktail ranks higher than throwing rocks, but lower than kneecapping, which itself is not worth as much as a bomb. The problem is that no form of action is revolutionary in itself: sabotage has also been practiced by reformists and by Nazis. A movement’s degree of “violence” is not indicative of its revolutionary determination. The “radicality” of a demonstration isn’t measured by the number of shop windows broken. Or if it is, then the “radicality” criterion should be left to those in the habit of *measuring* political phenomena and ranking

them on their skeletal moral scale. Anyone who begins to frequent radical milieus is immediately struck by the gap between their discourse and their practice, between their ambitions and their isolation. It seems as if they were dedicated to a kind of constant self-incapacitation. One soon understands that they’re not engaged in constructing a real revolutionary force, but in a quest for radicality that is sufficient in itself—and is played out equally well on the terrain of direct action, feminism or ecology. The petty terror that reigns there and makes everyone so *stiff* is not that of the Bolshevik Party. It’s more like that of fashion, that terror which no one exerts in person, but which affects everyone alike. In these milieus, one is afraid of not being radical anymore, just as elsewhere one fears not being fashionable, cool or hip. It doesn’t take much to spoil a reputation. One avoids going to the root of things in favor of a superficial consumption of theories, demos, and relations. The fierce competition between groups and inside them causes them to periodically implode. But there’s always fresh, young, and abused flesh to make up for the departure of the exhausted, the damaged, the disgusted, and the *emptied-out*. An a posteriori bewilderment overtakes the person who’s deserted these circles: how can anyone submit to such a mutilating pressure for such enigmatic stakes? It’s approximately the same kind of bewilderment that must take hold of any overworked ex-manager turned baker when he looks back on his previous life. The isolation of these milieus is structural: between them and the world they’ve interposed radicality as a standard. They don’t perceive phenomena anymore, just their measure. At a certain point in the autophagy, some will compete for most radical *by critiquing the milieu itself*, which won’t make the slightest dent in its structure. “It seems to us that what really reduces our freedom,” wrote Malatesta, “and makes initiative impossible, is disempowering isolation.” This being the case, that a fraction of the anarchists declare themselves “nihilists” is only logical: nihilism is the incapacity to believe in what one does believe in—in our context, revolution. Besides, there are no nihilists, there are only powerless individuals.

The radical defining himself as a producer of actions and discourses has ended up fabricating a purely quantitative idea of revolution—as a kind of crisis of overproduction of acts of individual revolt. “Let’s not lose sight of the fact,” wrote Émile Henry back then already, “that revolution will not be the resultant of all these particular

revolts.” History is there to contradict that thesis: whether it’s the French, Russian, or Tunisian revolution, in every instance revolution results from the shock encounter between a particular act—the storming of a prison, a military defeat, the suicide of a mobile fruit vendor—and the general situation, and not the arithmetical addition of separate acts of revolt. Meanwhile, that absurd definition of revolution is doing its foreseeable damage: one wears oneself out in an activism that leads nowhere, one devotes oneself to a dreadful cult of performance where it’s a matter of actualizing one’s radical identity at every moment, here and now— in a demo, in love, or in discourse. This lasts for a time—the time of a *burnout*, depression, or repression. And one hasn’t changed anything.

A gesture is revolutionary not by its own content but by the sequence of effects it engenders. The situation is what determines the meaning of the act, not the intention of its authors. Sun Tzu said that “victory must be demanded of the situation.” Every situation is composite, traversed by lines of force, tensions, explicit or latent conflicts. Engaging with the war that *is present*, acting strategically, requires that we start from an openness to the situation, that we understand its inner dynamic, the relations of force that configure it, the polarities that give it its dynamism. An action is revolutionary or not depending on the meaning it acquires from contact with the world. Throwing a rock is never just “rock-throwing.” It can freeze a situation or set off an *intifada*. The idea that a struggle can be “radicalized” by injecting a whole passel of allegedly radical practices and discourses into it is the politics of an extra-terrestrial. A movement lives only through a series of shifts that it effects over time. So at every moment there is a certain distance between its present state and its potential. If it stops developing, if it leaves its potential unrealized, it dies. A decisive act is one that is a notch ahead of the movement’s state, and which, breaking with the status quo, gives it access to its own potential. This act can be that of occupying, smashing, attacking, or simply speaking truthfully. The state of the movement is what decides. *A thing is revolutionary that actually causes revolutions*. While this can only be determined after the event, a certain sensitivity to the situation plus a dose of historical knowledge helps one intuit the matter.

Let’s leave the radicality worry to the depressives, the Young-Girls, and the losers, then. The real question for revolutionaries is how to make the lively powers in which one participates increase,

how to nurture the *revolutionizing* developments so as to arrive finally at a revolutionary *situation*. All those who draw satisfaction from dogmatically contrasting “radicals” with “citizens,” “active rebels” with the passive population, place obstacles in the path of such developments. On this point, they anticipate the work of the police. In the current period, *tact* should be considered the cardinal revolutionary virtue, and not abstract radicality—and by “tact” we mean the art of nurturing revolutionizing developments.

Among the miracles of the Susa Valley struggle, one has to include the way it succeeded in tearing a good number of radicals away from their painfully constructed identity. It brought them back down to earth. In contact again with a real situation, they were able to shed most of their ideological spacesuit—not without incurring the inexhaustible resentment of those still confined in their interstellar radicality where breathing is such a problem. Undoubtedly, the happy outcome was due to this struggle’s special art of avoiding capture in the image that power holds out to it— whether it’s that of an ecology movement of legalistic citizens or that of an armed-violence vanguard. Alternating family-style demonstrations with attacks on the TAV construction site, resorting to sabotage at one moment and partnership with the valley’s mayors the next, associating anarchists and Catholic grandmas, this struggle is revolutionary at least insofar as it has been able to deactivate the infernal coupling of pacifism and radicalism. “Living in a political manner,” reflected a Stalinist dandy shortly before dying, “means acting instead of being acted upon, it means doing politics instead of being done by it, remade by it. It’s to engage in combat, a series of combats, to wage war, one’s own war with war objectives, immediate and longterm perspectives, a strategy, a tactic.”

3. “Civil war,” said Foucault, “is the matrix of all the power struggles, of all the power strategies and, consequently, the matrix of all the struggles over and against power.” He added, “Civil war not only brings collective elements into play, but it constitutes them. Far from being the process through which one comes down again from the republic to individuality, from the sovereign to the state of nature, from the collective order to the war of all against all, civil war is the process through and by which a certain number of new collectivities that had not seen the light of day constitute themselves.” It’s on this plane of perception that

basically every political existence deploys. Pacifism that has already lost and radicalism that only intends to lose are two ways of not seeing this. Of not seeing that war is not essentially military in nature. That life is essentially strategic. The irony of our epoch has it that the only ones who situate war where it is conducted, and thus reveal the plane where all government operates, happen to be the counter-revolutionaries themselves. It is striking to note that in the last half-century the non-militaries began rejecting war in all its forms, and at the very time when the militaries were developing a non-military concept, a civil concept of war. A few examples, casually excerpted from contemporary articles:

“The locus of collective armed conflict has gradually expanded the battlefield to include the whole earth. In like manner, its duration may now be indefinite, without there being a declaration of war or any armistice (...) For this reason contemporary strategists emphasize that modern victory results from conquering the hearts of the members of a population rather than their territory. Submission must be gained through adherence and adherence through esteem. Indeed, it’s a matter of imposing one’s purpose on the inner individual, where the social contact between human collectivities is established at present. Stripped bare by world homogenization, contacted by globalisation, and penetrated by telecommunication, henceforth the front will be situated in the inner being of each of the members that make up the collectivities. (...) This sort of fabrication of passive partisans can be summed up by the catchphrase: ‘The front within every person, and no one on any front.’ (...) The whole politico-strategic challenge of a world that is neither at war or at peace, which precludes all settlement of conflict by means of the classic military juridical voices, consists in preventing passive partisans on the verge of action, at the threshold of belligerence, from becoming active partisans.” (Laurent Darnet, “La polémosphère”)

“At present, given that the terrain of warfare has extended beyond the ground, sea, space, and electronic fields into those of society, politics, economics, diplomacy, culture, and even psychology, the interaction among the different factors makes it very difficult to maintain the preponderance of the military domain as the dominant one in every war. The idea that war can unfold in unwarlike domains is foreign to reason and hard to accept,

but events increasingly show this to be the trend. (...) In this sense, there no longer exists any area of life that cannot serve war and there are almost no areas remaining that do not present the offensive aspect of war.” (Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *La guerre hors limite*)

“The probable war is not waged ‘between’ societies, but ‘within’ societies (...) Since the objective is human society, its governance, its social contract, its institutions, and no longer this or that province, river, or border, there is no longer any line or terrain to conquer or protect. The only front that the engaged forces must hold is that of the populations. (...) To win the war is to control the milieu. (...) It’s no longer a question of perceiving a mass of tanks and of pinpointing potential targets, but of understanding social milieus, behaviors, psychologies. It’s a matter of influencing human intentions through a selective and appropriate application of force. (...) Military actions are truly ‘a manner of speaking’: henceforth, every major operation is above all a communication operation whose every act, even a minor act, speaks louder than words. (...) To wage war is first and foremost to manage perceptions, those of the set of actors, whether close by or far away, direct or indirect.” (General Vincent Desportes, *La guerre probable*)

“The developed postmodern societies have become extremely complex and hence very fragile. To prevent their collapse in the event of a ‘breakdown,’ it’s imperative that they decentralize (the salvation will come from the margins and not the institutions) (...) It will be necessary to rely on local forces (self-defense militias, paramilitary groups, private military associations), first from a practical standpoint owing to their knowledge of the milieu and the populations, second, because on the part of the State it will be a mark of confidence that federates the different initiatives and reinforces them, and last and most important, because they are more apt to find appropriate and original (unconventional) solutions to delicate situations. In other words, the response called for by unconventional warfare needs to be citizen-based and paramilitary, rather than having a police and military focus. (...) If Hezbollah has become a first-rate international actor, if the neo-Zapatista movement manages to represent an alternative to neoliberal globalization, then one has admit that the ‘lo-

cal' can interact with the 'global' and that this interaction is truly one of the major strategic characteristics of our time. (...) To put it briefly, a local-global interaction must be answered by a different interaction of the same type, supported not by the state apparatus (diplomacy, army), but by the local element par excellence—the citizen." (Bernard Wicht, *Vers l'ordre oblique : la contre-guérilla à l'âge de l'infoguerre*)

After reading that, one has a slightly different take on the role of the militias of citizen sweepers and the appeals for snitching following the riots of August 1011 in England, or the bringing in— then the opportune elimination when “the pitbull got too big”—of the Golden Dawn fascists as players in the Greek political game. To say nothing of the recent arming of citizen militias by the Mexican federal state in Michoacan. What is happening to us at present can be summed up more or less in this way: *from being a military doctrine, counterinsurgency has become a principle of government*. One of the cables of American diplomacy revealed by Wikileaks confirms this, bluntly: “The program of pacification of the favelas incorporates certain characteristics of the doctrine and strategy of counterinsurgency of the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq.” The era can be reduced ultimately to this struggle, this race, between the possibility of insurrection and the partisans of counter-insurrection. Moreover, this is what the rare outburst of political chattering triggered in the West by the “Arab revolutions” served to mask. To mask, for example, the fact that cutting off all communication in the working-class areas, as Mubarak did at the start of the uprising, was not just the impulsive act of an addled dictator, but a strict application of the NATO report, *Urban Operations in the Year 2020*.

There is no world government; what there is instead is a worldwide network of local apparatuses of government, that is, a global, reticular, counterinsurgency machinery. Snowden's revelations show this amply: secret services, multinationals, and political networks collaborate shamelessly, even beyond a nation-state level that nobody cares about now. In this regard, there is no center and periphery, internal security and foreign operations. What is tried out on faraway peoples will be the fate that is in store for one's own people. The troops that massacred the Parisian proletariat in June of 1848 had honed their skills in the “street war,” with its torchings called *enfumades*, in Algeria during colonization. The Italian mountain infantry battalions, recently returned

from Afghanistan, were redeployed in the Susa Valley. In the West, using the armed forces on national territory in cases of major disorder is longer even a taboo, it's a standard scenario. From health crisis to imminent terrorist attack, their minds have been methodically prepared for it. They train everywhere for urban battles, for “pacification,” for “post-conflict” stabilization. They maintain their readiness for the coming insurrections.

The counter-insurgency doctrines should be read, therefore, as theories of the war being waged against us, doctrines that partly define, among so many other things, our common situation in this era. They should be read both as a qualitative leap in the concept of war, short of which we cannot situate ourselves, and as a deceptive mirror. Although the doctrines of counter-insurgency warfare are patterned after the successive revolutionary doctrines, one cannot negatively deduce any theory of insurrection from counter-insurgency theories. That is the logical trap. It no longer suffices for us to wage the “little war,” to attack by surprise, to deprive the adversary of any target. Even that kind of asymmetry has been diminished. As far as war as strategy is concerned, it's not enough to catch up: we have to move into the lead. We need a strategy that's aimed not at the adversary but at his strategy, that turns it back against itself, making it so that the more he thinks he's winning the more surely he's heading towards his defeat.

The fact that counterinsurgency has made society itself its theater of operations doesn't at all indicate that the war to be waged is the “social war” that some anarchists mouth off about. The main defect of this notion is that by lumping the offensives carried out by “the State and Capital” and those of our adversaries under the same rubric, it places subversives in a relation of symmetrical warfare. The smashed window of an Air France office in retaliation for the expulsion of undocumented migrants is declared to be an “act of social war,” on a par with a wave of arrests targeting people fighting against detention centers. While we have to recognize an undeniable determination on the part of many upholders of “social war,” they accept fighting the state head-to-head, on a terrain that has always belonged to it and no one else. Only the forces involved in this case are dysemmetrical. A crushing defeat is inevitable.

The idea of social war is actually just an unsuccessful updating of “class war,” maintaining that

each one's position in the relations of production no longer has the formal clarity of the Fordist factory. It sometimes seems as if revolutionaries are doomed to constitute themselves on the same model as what they're fighting. Thus, as a member of the International Workingmen's Association summarized it in 1871, the bosses being organized worldwide around their interests as a class, the proletariat must likewise organize itself worldwide, as a working class and around its interests. As a member of the young Bolshevik Party explained it, the tsarist regime was organized into a disciplined and hierarchical politico-military machine, so the Party should also organize itself into a disciplined and hierarchical politico-military machine. One can multiply the historical cases, all equally tragic, of this *curse of symmetry*. Take the Algerian FLN, which in its methods came to closely resemble the colonial occupiers well before its victory. Or the Red Brigades, who imagined that by taking out the fifty men who were thought to constitute the "core of the State" they would be able to appropriate the whole machine. Today, the most wrongheaded expression of this tragedy of symmetry comes out of the mouths of the new left. What they say is that set against the diffuse Empire, which is structured into a network, but endowed with command centers all the same, there are the multitudes, just as diffuse, structured into a network, but endowed nonetheless with a bureaucracy capable of occupying the command centers when the day comes.

Marked by this kind of symmetry, revolt is bound to fail—not only because it presents an easy target, a *recognizable* face, but above all because it eventually takes on the features of its adversary. To be convinced of this, open *Counter-insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, by David Galula, for example. One finds therein, methodically laid out in detail, the steps to a definitive victory of a loyalist force over generic insurgents. "The best cause for the insurgent is one that, by definition, can attract the largest number of supporters and repel the minimum of opponents... It is not absolutely necessary that the problem be acute, although the insurgent's work is facilitated if such is the case. If the problem is merely latent, the first task of the insurgent is to make it acute by 'raising the political consciousness of the masses'...The insurgent is not restricted to the choice of a single cause. Unless he has found an overall cause, like anti-colonialism, which is sufficient in itself because it combines all the political, social, economic, racial, religious, and cultu-

ral causes described above, he has much to gain by selecting an assortment of causes especially tailored for the various groups in the society that he is seeking to take over."

Who is Galula's "insurgent"? None other than the distorted reflection of the Western politician, official, or publicist: cynical, external to every situation, devoid of any genuine desire, except for an outsize hunger for control. The insurgent that Galula knows how to combat is a stranger to the world just as he's a stranger to any belief. For that officer, Galula, insurrection never emanates from the population, which only aspires to security, basically, and tends to go with the party that protects it the best or threatens it the least. The population is only a pawn, an inert mass, a *marsh*, in the struggle between several elites. It can seem astonishing that power's notion of the insurgent wavers between the figure of the fanatic and that of the crafty lobbyist—but this is less surprising than the eagerness of so many revolutionaries to put on those unpleasant masks. Always this same symmetrical understanding of warfare, even the "asymmetrical" kind—groupuscules competing for control of the population, and always maintaining an outsider's relation with it. In the end, this is the monumental error of counterinsurgency: despite its success absorbing the asymmetry introduced by guerilla tactics, it still continues to produce the figure of the "terrorist" *based on what it is itself*. And this is to our advantage, then, provided we don't allow ourselves to embody that figure. It's what all effective revolutionary strategy must accept as its point of departure. The failure of the American strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan bears witness. Counterinsurgency did such a good job of turning "the population" around that the Obama administration has to routinely and surgically assassinate, via drone, anything that might resemble an insurgent.

4. If the insurgents' war against the government needs to be asymmetrical, it's because there is an *ontological* asymmetry between them, and hence a disagreement about the very definition of war, about its methods as well as its objectives. We other revolutionaries are both the focus and the target of the permanent offensive that government has become. We *are* the "hearts and minds" that must be conquered. We *are* the "crowds" that are to be controlled. We *are* the environment in which the governmental agents evolve and which they mean to subdue, and not a rival entity

in the race for power. We don't fight in the midst of the people "like fish in water"; we're the water itself, in which our enemies flounder—soluble fish. We don't hide in ambush among the plebs of this world, because it's also us that the plebs hide among. The vitality and the plundering, the rage and the craftiness, the truth and the subterfuge all spring from deep within us. There is *no one* to be organized. We are that material which grows from within, which organizes itself and develops itself. The true asymmetry lies there, and our real position of strength is there. Those who make their belief into an article of export, through terror or performance, instead of dealing with what exists where they are, only cut themselves off from themselves and their base. It's not a matter of snatching the "support of the population," nor even its indulgent passivity, from the enemy: we must make it so *there is no longer a population*. The population has never been the *object* of government without first being its *product*. It ceases to exist once it ceases to be governable. This is what's involved in the muffled battle that rages after every uprising: dissolving the power that had formed, focused, and deployed in that event. Governing has never been anything but denying the people all political capacity, that is, preventing insurrection.

Separating those governed from their political power to act is what the police are about whenever they try to "isolate the violent ones" at the end of a righteous demonstration. Nothing is more effective for crushing an insurrection than causing a split within the insurgent mass between an innocent or vaguely consenting population and its vanguard, who are militarized, hence minoritarian, usually clandestine, and soon to be "terrorist." We owe the most complete example of such a tactic to Frank Kitson, the godfather of British counterinsurgency. In the years following the extraordinary conflict that engulfed Northern Ireland in August 1969, the great strength of the IRA was to stand together with the Catholic districts that had declared themselves autonomous and called for its assistance, at Belfast and Derry, during the riots. Free Derry, Short Strand, Ardoyne: three of those no-go areas that one finds so often in apartheid territories, and still encircled today by kilometers of "peace lines." The ghettos had risen up, barricading their entry points and closing them to the cops and the loyalists. Fifteen-year-old kids alternated mornings at school with nights on the barricades. The most respectable members of the community did the shopping for ten and orga-

nized clandestine grocery outlets for those who couldn't safely go out on their own. Although caught unprepared by the summer's events, the Provisional IRA blended into the extremely dense ethical fabric of those enclaves that were in a constant state of insurrection. From that position of irreducible strength, everything seemed possible. 1972 would be the year of victory.

Somewhat taken aback, the counterinsurgency deployed its major means. At the end of a military operation with no equivalent for Great Britain since the Suez crisis, the districts were emptied out, the enclaves were broken, in this way effectively separating the "professional" revolutionaries from the riotous populations that risen up in 1969, tearing them away from the thousand complicities that had been woven. Through this maneuver, the Provisional IRA was constrained to being nothing more than an armed faction, a paramilitary group, impressive and determined to be sure, but headed toward exhaustion, internment without trial, and summary executions. The tactic of repression seems to have consisted in *bringing a radical revolutionary subject into existence*, and separating it from everything that made it a vital force of the Catholic community: a territorial anchorage, an everyday life, a youthfulness. And as if that wasn't enough, false IRA attacks were organized to finish turning a paralyzed population against it. From counter gangs to false flag operations, nothing was ruled out for making the IRA into a clandestine monster, territorially and politically detached from what constituted the strength of the republican movement: the districts, their sense of making-do and of organization, their custom of rioting. Once the "paramilitaries" were isolated, and the thousand exceptional procedures for annihilating them were routinized, it was just a matter of waiting for the "troubles" to dissipate of their own accord.

When the most indiscriminate repression comes down on us, we should be careful, then, not to see it as the conclusive proof of our radicality. We shouldn't think they are out to *destroy* us. We should start rather from the hypothesis that they're out to *produce* us. Produce us as a political subject, as "anarchists," as "Black Bloc," as "anti-system" radicals, to extract us from the generic population by assigning us a political identity. When repression strikes us, let's begin by not taking ourselves for ourselves. Let's dissolve the fantastical terrorist subject which the counterinsurgency theorists take such pains to impersonate, a subject the representation of which serves mainly to produce the "population" as a

foil—the population as an apathetic and apolitical heap, an immature mass just good enough for being governed, for having its hunger pangs and consumer dreams satisfied.

Revolutionaries have no call to convert the “population” from the bogus exteriority of who knows what “social project.” They should start instead from their own presence, from the places they inhabit, the territories they’re familiar with, the ties that link them to what is going on around them. Identification of the enemy and effective strategies and tactics are things that come from living and not from any prior declaration of belief. *The logic of increasing power is all that can set against that of taking power.* Fully inhabiting is all that can be set against the paradigm of government. One can throw oneself onto the state apparatus, but if the terrain that’s won is not immediately filled with a new life, government will end up taking it back. Raúl Zibechi writes this about the Aymara insurrection in Bolivia in 2003: “Actions of this magnitude cannot be consummated without the existence of a dense network of relationships between persons—relationships that are also forms of organization. The problem is that we are unwilling to consider that in everyday life the relationships between neighbors, between friends, between comrades, or between family, are as important as those of the union, the party, or even the state itself. (...) Established relationships, codified through formal agreements, are often more important in Western culture than those loyalties woven by informal ties” We need to give the same care to the smallest everyday details of our shared life as we give to the revolution. For insurrection is the displacement of this organization that is not one—not being detachable from ordinary life—onto an offensive terrain. It is a qualitative leap in the ethical dimension, not a break with the everyday, finally consummated. Zibechi goes on to say: “The same bodies that sustain everyday life sustain the uprising (the neighborhood assemblies in the local councils of El Alto). The rotation of tasks and the obligatory character ensures everyday community life, just as it guaranteed the task of blocking roads and streets.” In this way the sterile distinction between spontaneity and organization is dissolved. There’s not on one hand a prepolitical, unreflected, “spontaneous” sphere of existence and on the other a political, rational, organized sphere. Those with shitty relationships can only have a shitty politics.

This doesn’t mean that in order to conduct a winning offensive we must ban any inclination to conflict among us—conflict, not double dealing

and scheming. It’s largely because the Palestinian resistance has never prevented differences from existing within it—even at the cost of open confrontations—that it has been able to give the Israeli army a hard time. Here as elsewhere, political fragmentation is just as much the sign of an undeniable ethical vitality as it is the nightmare of the intelligence agencies charged with mapping, then annihilating, resistance. An Israeli architect writes as follows: “The Israeli and Palestinian methods of fighting are fundamentally different.

The fractured Palestinian resistance is composed of a multiplicity of organizations, each having a more or less independent armed wing—Iz Adin al-Qassam for Hamas, Saraya al Quds (the Jerusalem Brigades) for Islamic Jihad, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Force 17 and Tanzim al-Fatah for Fatah. These are supplemented by the independent PRC (Popular Resistance Committees) and imagined or real members of Hizbollah and/or Al-Qaeda. The fact that these organizations shift between cooperation, competition, and violent conflict increases the general complexity of their interactions and with it their collective capacity, efficiency, and resilience. The diffuse nature of Palestinian resistance and the fact that knowledge, skills, and munitions are transferred within and between these organizations—and that they sometimes stage joint attacks and at others compete to outdo each other—substantially reduces the effect that the Israeli occupation forces seek to achieve by attacking them.” Accommodating internal conflict when it presents itself honestly, doesn’t interfere at all with the concrete elaboration of an insurrectionary strategy. On the contrary, it’s the best way for a movement to stay vital, to keep the essential questions open, to make the necessary shifts in a timely manner. But if we accept civil war, *including in our midst*, it’s not only because in itself this constitutes a good strategy for defeating imperial offensives. It’s also and above all because it accords with the idea we have of life. Indeed, if being revolutionary implies an attachment to certain truths, it follows from the irreducible plurality of the latter that our party will never enjoy a peaceful unity. As far as organization is concerned, then, there will be no choosing between fraternal peace and fratricidal war. We will need to choose between the forms of internal confrontations that strengthen revolutions and those that hinder them.

To the question, “Your idea of happiness?” Marx replied, “To fight.” To the question, “Why do you fight?” we reply that our idea of happiness requires it.

*We would have liked to be brief. To forgo genealogies,  
etymologies, quotations.  
That a poem, a song, would suffice.  
We wished it would be enough to write “revolution”  
on a wall for the street to catch fire.  
But it was necessary to untangle the skein of the present,  
and in places to settle accounts with ancient falsehoods.  
It was necessary to try and digest seven years of historical  
convulsions. And decipher a world in which confusion  
has blossomed on a tree of misunderstanding.  
We’ve taken the time to write with the hope that others  
would take the time to read.  
Writing is a vanity, unless it’s for the friend. Including  
the friend one doesn’t know yet.  
In the coming years, we’ll be wherever the fires are lit.  
During the periods of respite, we’re not that hard to find.  
We’ll continue the effort of clarification we’ve begun here.  
There will be dates and places where we can mass our  
forces against logical targets.  
There will be dates and places for meeting up and  
debating.  
We don’t know if the insurrection will have the look  
of a heroic assault, or if it will be a planetary fit of  
crying, a sudden expression of feeling after decades of  
anesthesia, misery, and stupidity.  
Nothing guarantees that the fascist option won’t be  
preferred to revolution.  
We’ll do what there is to be done.  
Thinking, attacking, building—  
such is our fabulous agenda.  
This text is the beginning of a plan.  
See you soon,*

*Invisible Committee,  
October 2014*