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Destruction or Political Ritual?

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“Instead of large snail-paced processions, insurrection prefers scattering, drifting, and moving fast. Looking not to take hold of power, but to disband it by negating all authority, all privilege of caste, it chooses its targets by their psycho-geographical proximity: scores to settle, rich residences to loot, symbols of slavery to demolish. It doesn’t look to engage in battle nor to militarise the confrontation; by its omnipresence and vibrancy, it aims for the annihilation of all separations.”

The passion for destruction is also a creative passion, said an anarchist revolutionary – an unrestrained promoter of tumult and insurrection, enemy of all authority irrespective of the colour or ideology that legitimized it. He wasn’t talking of the destruction caused by armies – bombarding, pillaging and raping on their way – but of destruction as an act that makes *tabula rasa* of the values and symbols of power, breaking up the social bonds of submission and dependence, upending the roles assigned by society. He wasn’t talking of the attempt – from the side of power – to destroy every form of life, every rebellious or non-conforming existence, but of destruction as

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an individual act of awareness in a world where we get used to passivity and delegation from childhood on, to paternalism and the omnipresent eye of the state. Not of the destruction of one's own - provoked by the infernal spiral of social cannibalism, alienation, maladjustment, exclusion, depression and addiction. On the contrary, of destruction as an act of will and of individual resistance – a necessary action that implies to bring down on its path every thing that allows the perpetuation and reproduction of domination, exploitation, misery, alienation of a subdued life and not a lived one, the representations that forge our most intimate and profound being and that tear up our repressed existence. Destruction, finally, as the only act not to be recuperated by the progressive and humanist tentacles of a power that is capable of changing face a thousand times while preserving its essence. As a passion, a liberatory drive; it foils strategies, it doesn't make calculations, it is far removed from politics. However, it is not synonymous with blind irrationality if it is moved by a liberatory fervour.

Since some time, in several demonstrations in France, a certain destructive joy seems to have shaken up the political forms of consented dissent, ritualised and inoffensive, that – today as well as yesterday – serves to legitimize and reinforce the democratic robes of domination. A joy that dresses in black, appears suddenly in demonstrations to shatter windows and burn some cars, that seems to want to do away with democratic representation. Yet, in the sequence of masked moments and those with faces uncovered, in the heterogeneous ensemble that is called *cortège de tête*, it transpires clearly now that there are forces that want to control, channel, represent and steer the dancing.

For example, the force of a party – increasingly less imaginary – that issues bombastic communiqués to celebrate its potency and galvanize its troops. A group that performs excellent acrobatic pirouettes to maintain an insurrectionary face – to seduce the rebellious youth – while keeping a political credibility towards the friends and allies of the institutional left, towards

the intellectuals, the syndicalists, towards the associations and towards the journalists. Besides, beyond this “party”, it seems that behind the masks are hidden several small groups and individuals that are sincerely democratic, always concerned about maintaining a *legitimacy* for the public opinion. A whole range of texts explaining that the *black block* is nothing more than a spatial strategy, that its aim is only to “attack symbols of domination”. They define limits, normalise these moments of collective revolt. And we sometimes saw some of these vandals physically blocking other demonstrators from attacking an office from Emmaüs – a humanitarian association that collaborates with the state in the managing of migrants – or from snatching the cameras of journalists, auto-media or spectators producing images useful for repression and contributing to transforming the riot in a spectacle. Or, more, intervening when it is not a bank or a McDonalds that loses its windows, but a big bar for the bourgeois in the 5th district. Of course, because “the people” will not understand and they will not agree with us!

So, lets go for the passion of destruction, but within certain limits, limits set by the *strategy*. But who gets to decide the strategy? After all, we arrive again to this place. The cancer of politics reappears, the thirst for freedom and revolt has to give way to the quest for consensus. No looking for complicity between exploited, marginal, pissed-off, potentially rebellious individuals. But rather the will to appear credible towards fantasized revolutionary subjects; “the workers”, “the popular neighbourhoods”, “racialised persons” etc. etc. Brands most of the time identified with different components of the reformist left: labour unions, citizen organisations, associations... We also arrive at serious authoritarian excesses: on several occasions we have seen political groups organizing real steward teams (*services d'ordre*) inside the *cortège de tête* or physically assaulting individuals or other groups that didn't respect their *instructions*. These authoritarian excesses don't seem surprising to me, they're part of the will of these groups to channel the desires

for revolt in a view on struggle that makes its central axes from *composition* and strategy. More disturbing on the other hand, is the almost total absence of critique, passivity that allows these groups to establish their strategies.

These moments of revolt end up losing their subversive character to re-enter in the ranks of the political ritual and the spectacle. This with all the elements specific to them, even if they are camouflaged by informality and masks; leaders and followers, beginnings of steward teams and media representation. We could ask ourselves if, in fact, these dynamics are not intrinsic to a tendency towards centralization, to wanting at all costs take part in the “social movements” in the hope of radicalising them. For being more visible, for gathering a greater quantity of forces, we end up sacrificing the most important part of ourselves and to serve, sometimes in spite of ourselves, as a radical workforce for political forces with which we share neither perspectives nor methods. Incapable of tracing an autonomous revolutionary path, we go from one demonstration to another, on terrains chosen and negotiated by the labour unions and the prefecture. So the voice of anti-authoritarian individualities disperses in this collective euphoria, engulfed by the ultra-consensual hymn “Siamo tutti antifascisti!” (sic!), implicitly or passively accepting the role of the new little leaders of the radical movement.

And if we would decide to undermine the normalising and ritualising of revolt? If we would try to be really uncontrollable, outside the ranks and the appointments of the parties? What would happen if hundreds of persons would organize in small groups, everywhere, during the night, without troops or leaders, to attack domination in its multiple structures? If anti-authoritarian groups and individuals would decide at times to coordinate to act together, for example to sabotage the flux of economy? But that has to necessarily go through a critique and surpassing of the political rituals, including the most radical ones. The point is not to oppose collective action to that from

small groups, but to oppose the centralizing logic that tends to steer, channel and often recuperate revolt. It’s about deepening the creative potential of destructive action, by freeing these actions from the limited horizons in which some want to enclose them.