



**THERE ARE NO  
METROPOLITAN REVOLTS,  
ONLY REVOLTS AGAINST  
THE METROPOLIS**

**ILL WILL**

CONSEJO NOCTURNO

# THERE ARE NO METROPOLITAN REVOLTS, ONLY REVOLTS AGAINST THE METROPOLIS

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When the infrastructures of power are overwhelmed, the aversion of the metropolis to *contingency*—coagulated in metal and concrete buildings that aspire to last forever—is weakened. Unplanned disruptions, natural disasters, or demonstrations that ‘get out of control,’ all equally serve to depose the uneasy continuity of a spectrum of endless agony that draws its vitality exclusively from those who surrender themselves to its simulations. Once vertically arrested, a line of flight is drawn for a life that would organize itself, a life that recognizes the *already*-dead character of an architecture that gathers millions to passively participate in its Great Dream. In such moments, it becomes evident that architectural landscapes have no superior existence, that, on the contrary, they are transient, materially contingent; *that what was historically constructed can be politically demolished*:

“The destruction of representational images is the destruction of a hierarchy which is no longer recognized. It is the violation of generally established and universally visible and valid distances. The solidity of the images was the expression of their permanence. They seem to have existed forever, upright and immovable; never before had it been possible to approach them with hostile intent. Now they are hauled down and broken to pieces.”<sup>1</sup>

To direct every catastrophe that occurs towards the outcome most ruinous for the metropolis, to confer consistency on the ungovernable before the government spectacularizes the event and proclaims itself a “defender of humanity”: this is the task of our Party, of which the popular organization after Hurricane Katrina offered a beautiful example.

What took place in Mexico City in the wake of the earthquake of September 19, 1985 was nothing less than a popular crash of governmental apparatuses, the same sort that happened during the more recent earthquake exactly 32 years later. The infamy and disrepute of the government was evident to all, and not merely in negative terms, i.e., in the non-appearance of its relief services. What in fact occurred was that, the moment they encountered one another, thousands of people ceased waiting for crumbs from their rulers and instead set about removing debris, tending to the injured, transporting food and supplies, and rebuilding houses. All of this was not the result of some illusory citizenly “solidarity” but of an immediate praxis without government.

This experience of 1985 was still sufficiently present in the historical imagination of Mexicans that when the 2017 earthquake arrived its possibilities were quickly assimilated by everyone there. In Mexico City, as in Oaxaca, Morelos, Puebla and other affected areas, thousands took to the streets in under an hour to gauge the ravages of the earthquake. They organized themselves into brigades and rescued trapped people. No one needed the government to ‘call’ for them to do this. From these practices, we quickly saw new languages emerge, new approaches that suspended the generalized metropolitan distrust that prevents us from communicating beyond the trite “hey, do know what time it is?” Here again, the governmental apparatus was superseded by thousands of anonymous people without any institutional allegiances, or who had in any case set them aside for a few days in favor of a collective conspiracy without bureaucratic mediation. As the “Einstürzende Neubauten effect” gradually became visible—that is, as the various post-1985 cardboard construction projects collapsed like a house of cards, revealing state, political, and financial corruption—the same state declared it a ‘crime against the government’ for people to continue organizing independently. The military began its counter-insurrectional enclosure of the collapsed buildings, the media circus began its chatter, stockpiled resources were regulated by in-

stitutional powers, and flow of autonomous donations that was already underway was intercepted and confiscated by the government and other groups. Only the course of events, still not yet concluded, will allow one or the other of the parties to be victorious.

When our Party snatches a space from imperial management, it is not enough to leave it as it was before—it must be made positively and irreversibly *autonomous*. We must seek to destroy any possibility for the police forces to recover it, which can only be achieved by inhabiting it, anchoring it durably and without gaps. All different sorts of folks must form themselves into an *ungovernable anonymous force*: “Each space conquered from Empire, from its hostile environment, must correspond to our capacity to fill it, to configure it, to inhabit it. Nothing is worse than a victory one doesn’t know what to do with.”<sup>2</sup> When the Mexican government crushed the Oaxaca Commune in 2006 it was not only by means of its police occupation. Urban beautification programs filled in for what the police could not accomplish directly, programs that barely hid what was really meant by the so-called “recovery of public space,” i.e., the re-colonization and neutralization of spaces that had been placed in common, their reassignment as commercial spaces separated from any use. Faced with a potentially ungovernable situation, in which reappropriated plazas encouraged encounters within the neighborhood, spawning new modes of collective care, the government, concerned that the revolt had brought “losses in the millions” for the tourist industry in Oaxaca, launched a complete remodeling of the city. In addition to the renovations that were to be expected for the more central and tourist areas, all the peripheral neighborhoods were also reconfigured. Meeting places were neutralized by new urban furnishings whose layouts rendered any form of gathering difficult, temporary structures were razed, and even the tiniest of squares were fenced or covered with concrete. The overarching aim was that another insurrection like that of 2006 would never take place again in such a lovely “Cultural Capital of the World.”

There can be no living *in* the metropolis, the uninhabitable *par excellence*, but only ever *against* the metropolis. When two or more people ally themselves and begin to conspire together, when others begin to love each other on the fringes of the capitalist axiom, when a space acquires an intensity and a form-of-life, *the metropolis no longer takes place* [*no tiene*

*lugar*], since it no longer superimposes itself over our existences and our territorialities. If the metropolis functions as the consummate negation of inhabitation, the latter begins the moment we free ourselves from it. In this sense, *all living is always on the outside*. If ‘to inhabit’ means to come into contact with the full range and details of our existence, it is also to become autonomous in the broadest sense of the term.

As some friends wrote: “A revolutionary perspective no longer focuses on an institutional reorganization of society, but on the technical configuration of worlds.”<sup>3</sup> At the same time, if we seek “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.”<sup>4</sup> It is in this sense that the phrase *insurrectionary inhabitation* assumes its full meaning, for it is only by inhabiting fully that the principle of government is deprived of any hold over us. To put it in a single formula: *deposing the powers that govern us coincides, or tends to coincide, with doing without them, and vice versa*. Some friends from the ZAD at Notre-Dame-des-Landes put it like this:

“We live here, and that’s not a small thing to say. To live somewhere is not to be a lodger. A lodging is a box in which one is ‘lodged,’ willingly or not, after his workday ends and as he awaits the next one. It is to be caged within walls that remain strange to us. It is something else to inhabit: to weave connections and attachments, to belong to places as much as they belong to us. It means refusing to remain indifferent to the things that surround us, to root ourselves in them: to the people, the ambiances, the fields, the hedges, the woods, the houses, the plant that sprouts again and again in the same spot, the animal that shows up in the same area. It is both to anchor ourselves in the places we are, while at the same time to open up new and powerful possibilities therein. It’s the opposite of the sort of metropolitan nightmare that one merely ‘passes through,’ and of which we must rid ourselves.”<sup>5</sup>

That inhabitants can be stronger than the metropolis is a fact attested to by every attempt to expel inhabitants from their lands, from the Viet-Cong to the Zadists. In such moments, habitual use and territorial tact can easily overwhelm the coarseness and ineptitude of police and military

who know of no other way to traverse a territory other than to dominate, crush and desolate it. To inhabit entails a territorial experiment completely heterogeneous to those about which urban planners and metropolitan managers fantasize: to inhabit a territory is first of all to experience ourselves *territorially*, that is, within a process of depersonalization that, like the wind, overflows any designation of boundaries and opens up a thousand possibilities. To inhabit cancels, in a certain sense, all cartography, any separate and bureaucratic conception of reality that opposes the sovereign Self and the set of entities over which it operates. There is no *management* of the real, only of its caricature. The map catalogs and arranges the apparatuses to be projected over a territory to be governed. It is an economic language, one incompatible with that of the revolt, which is always a rupture in the state of things, not only a new distribution of the cards, but another use of the rules of the game. How could one map a revolt? As a political act, it is unrepresentable, it is *the* unrepresentable. A map can perhaps serve us to *plan* a blockade or sabotage, but the blockade and sabotage themselves, occurring here and now, concern less a projected surface than an *experienced interface*. Let us think in this sense of the nomadic experience of spaces—for example, that of the Warlpiri people in northern Australia: various anthropologists have meticulously represented their routes, but hundreds of traces will never suffice to translate the situated experience the Warlpiri have of their territories, which is narrated in songs and rhythms, not a list of things. These songs and rhythms amplify the daily relations that are established with the territories, linking each place with an anecdote, with an adventure, with a myth, with an essence. Thus, for example, their vocabulary is composed of terms such as *ngapa* (rain), *waitya-warnu* (seeds), *ngarrka* (initiated man), *ngatijim* (green parrot), translations that are at best approximate, given that other languages simply lack the affections expressed here. To inhabit the real rather than to govern it is already a form of subversion of the metropolis, it is the generation of a plane of ungovernability, it is to reject the all-too-human desire that *everything* be channeled, reducible to a form of government. The construction of a new geography in which forms-of-life enter into intimacy with the most sensitive part of a territory, extending, multiplying, gaining in presence and not in representation, is elaborated only through a process of inhabitation.

To inhabit—to live without governing—entails a break with all productivist logic, a logic that reflects the compulsive execution of a separated practice that denies what is there, that aspires to never be situated, to not be located, to disregard phenomena. In this sense, Antonio Negri's solidarity with the anarchic nihilism of capital becomes fully apparent when he defines its constituent power as “an absolute process—all-powerful and expansive, unlimited and unfinalized,” or, likewise, as “the absolute of an absence, an infinite void of possibilities.”<sup>6</sup> A practice that starts from nothing, that issues from a dislocated will, is indistinguishable from the capitalist reification of the world. It is highly possible that the autonomy of objects in our world had its roots in a perception of the manufacturing of artifacts as an activity totally distinct from the cultivation and breeding of plants and animals, and, more generally, from the thought that there would be something like a sphere of the artificial totally cut off from the natural. Although it was once merely an aggregate composed of other aggregates—what Spinoza called nature—now that it has become an extension of the relations of industrial production, life is subsumed within a circuit of things that are understood as unnatural and as arising exclusively from the labor, inventiveness, technology, and sweat of humans. This objectification and subordination of animals and other beings by human powers spread and expanded itself over the years until it reached the point of objectifying subjects themselves: human life, having become the main object of government and police sciences, is today the most precious capital to be incentivized and promoted.

Here is where the research of anthropologists such as Tim Ingold proves to be crucial. As Ingold shows, not only did the distinction between “producing” and “harvesting” that lies at the heart of this issue not exist between farmers and shepherds in the past, but even today the Achuar Indians or the inhabitants of Mount Hagen—and in fact most human groups except those in the West—perceive the practice of manufacturing or producing “things”—and in general, everything made—in a manner that is not fundamentally distinct from cultivation, from “making things grow”:

“The orthodox Western account, as we have seen, extends the idea of making from the domain of inanimate things to that of animate be-

ings. I want to suggest, quite to the contrary, that the idea of cultivating might be extended in the reverse direction, from the animate to the inanimate. What we call ‘things’, too, are grown. In practice, there is more to the manufacture of artifacts than the mechanical transcription of a design or plan, devised through an intellectual process of reason, onto an inert substance. [...] Far from ‘impressing the stamp of their will upon the earth,’ to adopt Engels’s imperialistic phrase, those who toil on the land—in clearing fields, turning the soil, sowing, weeding, reaping, pasturing their flocks and herds, or feeding animals in their stalls—are assisting in the reproduction of nature, and derivatively of their own kind.”<sup>7</sup>

That the human pride in “creating” has become hegemonic under the metropolis (no longer only among artists, but also among genetic engineers, marketers, or philosophers) can only be attributed to a consummate lack of connection with a world, to a poverty of situation. One more step toward the hallucinatory delirium of production. By displacing our conception of action from its bureaucratic-humanist conception to one that instead seeks to purely accompany the flowering of forms, we regain our presence, a *situating* [*una situalización*] that entails the constitution of an intimacy of experience between beings and the world. And it is in this being-in-situation that a destituent power can finally take place, which opens a way beyond the figure of this epoch.

## Notes

- 1 Elias Canetti, *Crowds & Power*, Continuum, 1978, p. 19.
- 2 Tiqqun, *This Is Not A Program*, Semiotext(e), 2011, p. 71.
- 3 The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, Semiotext(e), 2015, p. 95.
- 4 Ibid, p. 75.
- 5 Mauvaise Troupe, *The Zad & No-TAV*, Verso, 2018, p. 122.
- 6 Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies*, University of Minnesota, 1999, p. 13.
- 7 Tim Ingold, *The Perception Of The Environment*, Routledge, 2000, pg. 81–88.

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