



Zapatista **A**utonomy **P**roject

Manifesto of the



Malgré Tout Collective

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According to one of the collective's founders, the philosopher and psychoanalyst Miguel Benasayag, Malgré Tout ("in spite of everything") was formed in 1988 with the purpose of creating a decentralised space for the expression and exchange of political ideas and practices. While acknowledging the need to discuss the crisis of modernity, the collective has sought to distance itself on the one hand from the immobilizing sophistry of so many postmodern thinkers, and, on the other, from the deceptive thinking and action of the pragmatist left, which Malgré Tout sees as corroded by a complete devotion to influencing government policy. Some of the collective's practices over the years include work with undocumented migrants in France, with social movements in Argentina, and with social centres in Italy. At the moment of writing the manifesto, the Malgré Tout collective was composed, among others, by Alain Badiou, Etienne Balibar, Michael Löwy, and Miguel Benasayag (facilitator).

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have seen, that power is what founds a situation, and that it must be located in the State. Under the pretext of unifying the multiplicity of minority struggles into a global strategy whether it is at the national or the world scale the party is an organization that separates minorities from their situations in order to transform them into an “alternative” majority.

Therefore, together with messianic time, what must be questioned is the party, the master liberator par excellence. As any militant has encountered as part of his or her everyday practice, all the work and the concrete experience gathered by the grassroots organizations, themselves built equally out of failures and mistakes, are crossed out by the “abstract” slogans of the party. And this is simply because, for the party, the global strategy and the occupation of power become priorities over concrete and restricted actions, always with the illusion that, once power is taken over, things will, in their totality, change. However, there cannot be a solution of continuity between (minority) politics i.e., power-to-do and (majority) management i.e., power-over. Even if these are structurally condemned to exist side by side, we must break with the illusion that it’s necessary to reach majority status in order to conduct a politics of the minority. A multiplicity of libertarian groups and collectives linked in each case to a concrete universal is the image of a multiple radical political power [puissance]. However, the non-totalisation or non-submission of this multiplicity to the “impotent” power of the Party does not imply that the exchange of experiences between these groups is not desirable or even indispensable. The moment is difficult, the challenge is large, but fidelity to two centuries of revolutionary struggles allows us to preserve the same impulse, the same desire on which these were inspired. Instead of crying over the ruins of the old revolutionary edifice, one must consider that this fragmentation, this dispersion and this non-totality are precisely the necessary conditions for a new revolutionary power to free itself from the totalitarian myth of messianic progressivism.

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1. The End of History

The times of revolutionary politics are over, we are told, because messianic time is dead. But in fact, it’s just the opposite: today, a libertarian politics can only exist precisely if it is able to rid itself of messianic time. One no longer struggles for the advent of the end of history or the transparent reign of freedom, simply because freedom is not a state that can be reached, but rather an act that it is necessary to incarnate. Thus, struggle is truly political when freedom acts. This is why free acts are so rare and the promises of freedom so frequent. Along with messianic time, a politics of non-domination should rid itself of the master liberators who promise freedom in the future in exchange for subservience today. Modernity conceived messianic time under the mythical figure of progressivism, which implied that thanks to progress in all the different forms of life the technical, economical, social and political man would become increasingly free. And this was so because, according to the teachings of Marxism, it was the material life of a community that determined the consciousness of its inhabitants. And indeed, it’s true that consciousness is over determined, except that it does not identify itself with freedom. In his situation, Spartacus did not act less freely than Ché.

It’s not by instituting new ways of living that we will become increasingly free, but the opposite: it’s by acting freely that we can invent new modes of life. The same can be said about reason and justice. The point is not to reach, at the end of history, a more just and rational world. Reason and justice are not the goals of rebellion but its causes. If we are right to rebel, it’s because there is a reason, a truth, a justice in our rebelliousness.

Anyway, we should not ask ourselves what do we have to do so that humanity is free one day, but instead, what do we have to do in order to be free here and now. This is why we prefer to talk about “restricted action.” Restricted action seeks to part with that dialectical view according to which today’s revolt is validated or justified by a becoming of the world in its globality. What is broken is not libertarian politics, but rather the epic narrative in which the progressive forces defeat the reactionary ones and once and for all eradicate scarcity, exploitation, barbarism, and suffering. History has not ended, simply because it never ends. But if it must be a matter of ends, what has ended is precisely messianic time, or history with an end.

2. Restricted Action

Restricted action is political practice without messianic promise. It is, in situation, a wager without guarantees on the rupture of the status quo. This absence of guarantees is what separates it from any type of vanguardism.

Always dependent on the progressivist model, the military role of the vanguard was to show the points where a situation had to be attacked in order to attain, through its destruction, the political objective of a new status quo, completely different from the preceding one and supposedly better. Thus, the vanguard was imprisoned in a deterministic ideology according to which, once the correlation of forces of the moment was known, the future would become analytically foreseeable. Hence, the vanguard was capable of jumping outside the situation in order to look at history as the progressive unfolding of a plan: the future appeared to be as necessary as the past, and the revolution a mere acceleration of historical time. In turn, this had as a consequence the reduction of freedom here and now: the reduction of the revolutionary decision, its invention, and its novelty, to ineluctable necessity, something as foreseeable as Judas' treason was for God. The idea that a state of affairs subsequent to the current situation is foreseeable presupposes that the laws of historical progress are knowable. Two possibilities follow: either every new event is reduced to a "fact" that can be explained and represented according to the parameters of a model; or, if the event is not anticipated by the model, then it does not exist.

Sartre had observed this in relation to the analysis that Marxists made of the Hungarian revolt of 1956: before having done any research, before starting to think about what had happened there, the event already fit within the framework of possibilities envisaged by the official model. For some, it was a counterrevolutionary reaction that in the context of the Cold War could only have been supported by Western capitalism; for others, the Trotskyites, it was a working class rebellion against the Stalinist bureaucracy. In either case, however, nothing new had happened: it was a foreseeable fact because it left the respective models of analysis intact. Today, something similar happens with explanations of the Zapatista revolt in Chiapas.

The wager without guarantees on the rupture of the situation is at the same time a wager on chance, on the non-determinate or the unforeseeable. It's an opacity in our models: only the powerful can aspire to dominate, foresee, and determine everything that is. And us,

brought to the highest level of barbarism: the medicalization of subjectivity, media alienation, normalization, racial discrimination and worker despoliation. It sufficed to add the adjective "revolutionary" to this barbarism for the victims to accept it in the name of the future good. Even when many of these old revolutionaries speak today of their projects for a society of the future, we can clearly see to what extent they continue to be prisoners of the assumptions that underlie present situations. In their projects, there is also a state-based, managerial conception of politics (they want to be ready in case they attain power). It goes back to good order, rational society, just distribution, and truly free relations between human beings. It goes back to good barbarism against the bad one, the paradoxical idea of a liberating master and the imperative of a world "the way it should be."

We could say that restricted political action and the philosophy of the situation make an appeal to a liberating humility: we can only speak, and this is already quite difficult, of the situation in which we live. Yet it's not only a matter of humility, it's also a critical position: any knowledge regarding an ulterior situation that it would be necessary to attain cannot be but a vain speculation, given that there is no knowledge capable of shedding the assumptions of the situation in which it is born. Which is why the philosophy of revolt does not aspire to any knowledge at all. Rather, it aspires to a truth, a relation with the being of the situation, this hole, this opacity hidden within established knowledge, because the situation, far from rendering action provincial, leads us to the thought of a concrete universal.

10. Conclusion

The challenge of our time is to think of and invent a new liberating praxis. A praxis that implies the formation of a myriad of concrete minority organizations and experiences, not as a means of achieving majority status at some point in the future, but as a way to invent and create a life and a politics based on freedom. To renounce majority status is not the standard of failure or impotence. By representing dominant images and structures, the majority is the most impotent from the point of view of freedom. It's necessary to understand that power-over [pouvoir] and power-to-do [puissance] are two mutually exclusive realities: nobody is more impotent than a master filled with the power to change life. Conceived and structured in terms of taking State power either through violence or by means of elections the party ends up being, today, the very image of this impotence. Notably, this is due to the assumption that sustains the party, which is, as we

9. A non-state politics

When we speak of the subject, one must not confound this concept with the idea of a “subjectivity” understood as the nucleus of individual or collective experiences, even though an individual or a collective may constitute itself, eventually, as a political subject (and also an artistic, scientific, or loving subject, as conceived by the philosopher Alain Badiou). Indeed, an individual or a collective constitutes itself as subject when it enters into a relation, through thought or practice, with a truth of the situation, the point of nonconsistency upon which it is founded, that point of being that is the condition of its possibility.

Let us repeat it: it’s because this subject’s action cannot be anticipated by the situation, or it cannot be “negotiated” in conformity with its legality, that he or she incarnates a free act. In this way, with the idea of restricted action, we are attempting to define a politics that cannot be confounded simply with State management. Indeed, the classic definition of politics the one we find in any dictionary identifies the concept with the “art of governing the republic”, meaning the ability, the knowledge or the technique to manage public affairs or problems. For this reason, the idea of politics remained inescapably linked to the idea of the State. However, one must not confound the State with a simple institution or organization. In a larger definition, we should think of “state” as the normal state of any situation. From this perspective, any “negotiable” action, any corporate or partial social claim that proves to be manageable or solvable within an established legality, is part of this static definition of politics, even if the action involves the use of illegal measures to obtain what is demanded. This is why the great challenge today is to think politics in a way that removes the issue of power from the central position it currently occupies.

Today, the State as a site of effective power which should, by force or vote, be occupied by a politically revolutionary party becomes a formidable illusion, simply because the point upon which a situation is founded and given legitimacy is not something that depends on the State. The latter only over-codifies a reality for which it is more an effect than the cause. To some extent, this is something that was known to Marxists, yet they thought that a change in legislation and in the ideological apparatus of the State would favor the revolutionary transformation of society. (Towards the end of his life, however, Lenin became aware of the error: “We have painted the tsarist State in red”.) Thus, in soviet Russia and in other States, a series of deployments of bourgeois State power were not only painted in red but were also

we can only wish for that event which detotalizes the knowledge and the model of the powerful.

But the point is not to have an irrationalist vocation; rather, it’s a matter of undoing the old alliance between rationality and determinism. As a matter of fact, there is no reason to identify the historical rebels with vanguards or with powerful progressivists. When the revolutionaries engaged in action and thought, they asked themselves what could they do in history that was free and radical. But immediately a master liberator would appear and declare: “We are making history, we are leading humanity toward its salvation.” And as a result of having one eye in the present and the other one in the future, the Left has become squint-eyed... For this reason, we cannot but appreciate the words of Zapatista subcommander Marcos when he compares his revolt with the writing of a poem: far from banal scepticism, his comparison separates him from the logic of means and ends. Mallarmé certainly revolutionized poetic language, but he, however, only sought to do something absolutely revolutionary in poetry. The promise of a better world can no longer legitimate political action. Or, to put it differently, the end does not justify the means. We cannot continue to eat the cannibals in order to put an end to cannibalism. From the moment that a restricted action becomes a global action, it cannot help but think in terms of an army of the good and, consequently, in terms of a good barbarism.

Thus, during the years of the Cold War, many believed it was necessary to support the Soviet Union, “the universal homeland of socialism,” in spite of Stalin’s crimes. Who cared if millions died, if the world would finally be happy! But this does not mean that it’s necessary to confront the old revolutionary foundations with the bourgeois democratic legality of human rights and the reactionary slogan of “saving the body,” as humanists propose in order to de-politicize situations, so that there is no longer a subject but only body-objects to be saved. (In fact, restricted action does not exclude violence, but rather armed power or domination.) Indeed, today we are presented with a model that is content with being a caricatured inversion of the previous one: the messiah has been replaced by the apocalypse. It’s as if the future gave us nothing but barbaric and threatening messages. And this is an excuse for leaving things as they are and limit any political action to a bourgeois-democratic defense of human rights, of constituted legality, and majoritarian consensus. In the postmodern vision of the end of history, this is the best of the possible worlds, because any other can only offer us prodigious barbarism. In this way, political action is no

longer justified by a future good but by an evil always ready to come back. As such, it does not even have its own initiative: political action has become pure reaction in the face of the worse. This is the trap in which unfortunately many “anti” groups fall.

3. The World of the Spectacle

Thus, people occupy the position of jurors-spectators or public opinion condemning or approving the behavior of others, the true public actors. They are not men and women who freely build a different life; rather, they are the public, represented by an opinion poll, a graph, figures. The goal is not to divide consciences but to gain support or consensus, not to incite thought but to excite common sense and opinion. This is why this spectator-individual no longer conceives himself as immersed in a situation; he is neither worker, nor woman, nor immigrant, nor disabled person, but rather an illusory transhistorical and trans-situational consciousness. Although his judgment of what happens is indelibly linked to the common sense or the consensual norm of a particular epoch, it is nonetheless lived as simply “human.”

The spectator-individual is a particularly effective invention of the era of mass media. Indeed, a media or communicational mechanism is characterized by the construction of three places: the addresser, the addressee, and the referent or “reality” that is communicated. In the mass media, the addresser is generally anonymous. Who writes the wire or the news? Who is the “objective” of the camera? The addressee, in turn, is the majority viewpoint. Thus the worker, the woman, the immigrant, the disabled person are transformed into spectator-individuals when they occupy the place of the message’s addressee. To occupy this place means to accept all the discursive presuppositions without which the message could not be decoded: in other words, the acceptance of an entire common sense. To become addressee, it’s necessary to abandon the being in situation to become a “common person,” a “person from the street,” not more and not less than a dominant or majority gaze. Finally, the referent or “reality” constructed by the media is not the concrete situation of the worker, the woman, the immigrant, or the disabled person, but “the world.” The “world” is an ensemble of facts: wars, genocide, famines, petty crimes, the dollar crisis, ecological disasters, meteorological bulletins, football matches or film releases, presented without an idea of continuity and without historical or situational contextualization. The “world” is everything that constitutes an opinion topic and is part of everyday communication and sociability.

his voice emits discourses written elsewhere; if his eyes can see, it’s always someone else’s sight; if he acts, it’s because he is interpreting a role that has been assigned to him. The individual constitutes himself as such, on the basis of his identification with a dominant model. Therefore, in contrast to what many authors have thought, there is no such thing as a non-alienated, authentic individual, free beyond the social masquerade. There is no critical nucleus in the individual. On the contrary: by seeing himself as an autonomous and indivisible unity, he negates the fact that he is a being in situation, that he is constituted of languages, values, beliefs or myths that he has neither created nor does he dominate.

If we can think of the situation as a theatre play, the individual in it always plays a role. Hence the illusion of invisibility, of continuity in time emerges: he is always the same because in the same situation he repeats the same role. But in fact, being always in situation, he is someone else every time there is a change in the situation: a discontinuity in time. When the ideologues of postmodernity privilege individuality, they do so based on a right to mobility, a right to the conservation of religious or political beliefs, a right to read and write what we like, to live as we will, etc. In this way they think they are responding to all kinds of fundamentalisms, when in fact they are only recuperating the old liberal rights. But these are only formal rights: they do not contemplate the essential integration of the individual, his destiny, since in order to constitute himself as individuality, he must interpret a pre-established role. The individual does not exist outside the situation that constitutes him, and he cannot claim any freedom if he does not transform, if he does not question, this situation. Hence, there is no freedom of thought that is not linked to a practice of transformation of the status quo, and there is no radical action that does not return to the point of inconsistency of the situation. To privilege the struggle for free thought by itself, as if human freedom were located there, is an individualist illusion of the ‘beautiful souls’.

Far from endangering the rights acquired through historical struggles, this critique of the individual allows us to think in terms of civic rights. If individuals can act and think without restrictions, it’s thanks to the conquest of these civic rights. These were the invention of a revolutionary project that responded to a historically determined conception of man; it was not, however, the unveiling of the ‘free’ nature of the individual.

black, or part of a minority-- they force a situation not only at a point which cannot be grasped and is absurd from the perspective of the logic of that same situation, but also at the level of the foundation that explains both discrimination ('they're not like us', say certain Whites) and assimilation ('we are like them', reply certain Blacks).

8. The ethics of the individual

From this perspective, in a situation, there is no sounding of alarms that call on the citizenry to revolt against it: every individual is a being in situation, and despite himself, is possessed by its presuppositions. In this respect, he plays as a destiny the roles presented to him by the situation. The spectator-individual thus remains impotent in front of the 'world', since he can only ask himself the questions that can be answered by the common sense of his situation. The indignation or horror that he may feel when confronted with a fact that of poverty, for example, or discrimination do not generate political action. The individual is always faced with 'serious' circumstances that lead him to appeal to the knowledge of the administration or the intervention of the judge. The individual asks himself how something could have happened, but never why. The question of why leads to the point of being of the situation, to its foundation or its condition of existence, to the blind spot or the nucleus that is obscured and inaccessible to him. It's not a coincidence, then, that post-modern ideology, in defending the consensus and the existent legality as the framework of all politics, privileges the figure of the individual. In the face of the old mass politics, the individual is seen as a nucleus of rationality and lucidity.

From Le Bon to Freud and beyond, the man of the masses was conceived as someone who, like a hypnotized person or a zombie, nullifies his reflexive individuality in order to obey the orders of the Party, the Führer or the church, and thus finds himself capable of committing the worst types of barbarism. But why should it be assumed that individuals cease to be individuals when they come together? Why should it be assumed that man thinks when he is alone but not when he is in a group? It's believed that if a multitude acts together in a uniform way, it's because each individual has abandoned 'his' will, 'his' own choice, in order to submit himself to the decision of an Other. Often this Other is characterized by an impersonal 'One' to which the individual delegates his reflection and volition. But in fact it's the other way around: the individual as an autonomous entity, meaning someone who determines his own rules of behavior, is an illusion. There is nothing left but a 'one says', 'one sees', 'one does': when the individual talks,

Thus, many progressive people ask themselves: what can we do about what is happening in the world? What can we do in the face of events such as the Rwanda massacre, the hole in the ozone layer, or American interventionism? The answer may seem disappointing: nothing. Because this ensemble of facts that is called "the world" is a construction aimed at the spectator-individual and not to the person in situation. In other words, such a world does not exist outside the discursive presuppositions that constitute it. Hence, we cannot accept such a world without accepting at the same time its presuppositions, without occupying the place of the receiver or spectator-individual. It's necessary to choose: either world or situation, because they are two mutually exclusive realities, in the same way that the individual and the political subject exclude each other. Is this an acknowledgement of the impotence of restricted, situational action in front of the world? Just the opposite: it's the "world" what reduces any political action to impotence, because it removes it from concrete action. Which means that the mass media's concern with the world not only puts us in a position of impotence in the face of its spectacle, but it also anesthetizes us and prevents us from acting right where we can do it: namely, in our situation.

Thus, restricted action is opposed to any vain desire for power, to any omnipotent messianism which, from a quasi-delirious position, looks at the world as it is and dictates how it should be. If restricted action is a praxis in and for the situation, it's because its delimitation and its terms are not equivalent to information provided by the mass media. What comes to be presented as the situation must be simultaneously the fruit of an investigation, of a thought, and of a praxis which allows us to say: if this is the structure of the situation in question, then this will be our wager. When that is the case, even mistakes will be part of a moment in the reconstruction of a praxis of freedom. In this sense, it's necessary to be categorical: the "world" as a totality of facts is a media illusion. There is only a multiplicity of situations, each of which relates to a problem, to a concrete universal that radically distinguishes itself from the "world" as arbitrary totality.

4. The World of Capital

The other temptation that has dominated the modern theory and praxis of political action is the idea that there is a situation that subsumes all the others. From this perspective, sexual repression, racial discrimination, the phallogocentric submission of women, the institutionalization of the insane, the normalization of marginals, and all other social conflicts

were subordinated to one big foundational struggle: class struggle. Or, to put it in a different way, all the situations were superstructural in relation to a basic structural situation: capitalism and its globalization. Of course, the point is not to negate capitalist exploitation, the tyranny of capital, or the worship of the commodity. In our opinion, the mistake is to believe that the medicalization of subjectivity, racial discrimination, the codification of the family, the “technologization” of life and other realities of our times are the consequence of a mode of production. What numerous historical investigations allow us to corroborate today is that these modes of being, acting, knowing, and even loving, arose from historical ruptures that preceded the appearance and institution of capitalism as mode of production and exchange of commodities. Thus, it would not be a mistake to speak today of a “capitalistic” era, in which multiple situations come together and connect with each other. The working class situation is therefore a concrete universal that a certain Left has turned into an abstract one, to the detriment of workers’ struggles and other struggles. For the same reason, one cannot oppose to capitalism a global alternative situation called “socialism.” As Marx himself taught us, it was capitalism itself that, by universalizing market exchange, created what we nowadays call the “world.”

The world as globality does not exist without the flattening of every concrete situation something that is qualitatively different from the quantitative violence of the commodity. The argument about the “complexity” of today’s world, which regards any attempt to transform it as vain, is a consequence of the failure derived from acting at the level of a globality or of a world-system. It is the illusion produced by the reduction of the situational multiplicity to a single explanatory principle. Among the main figures of current common sense provoking the anguish of people while ensuring and structuring their impotence are clichés such as: “the world is becoming increasingly smaller” or “in this fin-de-siècle everything is accelerated” or even “time flies.” These are all themes that characterize the painful experience structuring the subjectivity of our contemporaries. If the world is increasingly smaller, if we cannot go anywhere because everything is always “in the same place,” then the trappings of the structure that hinders every free act become visible. But when we add to this a dizzying pace of time, the trap is finally closed. These phrases, proper to the society of the spectacle, fit perfectly within the logic of the commodity: they are statements from a world founded on the quest for profit and efficiency. Indeed, the world is small, minuscule even, when we think of it through the problem of overproduction of commodities that are impossible to sell. The joke about “selling refrigerators to the Eskimos” is a reality of

because it cannot be taken into consideration by the statements that give any situation its apparent veracity and meaning. In this way, inconsistency is absurd; it is a non-meaning necessarily foreclosed by the consistency of the situation.

For this reason, from the perspective of a common sense or consensus, this truth is unintelligible: it is not a fact that can be demonstrated but a reality that must be forced through. Thus in Europe of the nineteenth century, for example, the fact that industrial capitalism generated terrible social inequalities was an observation that anybody could corroborate. It was a ‘serious matter’, a preoccupation detectable in all studies of that society as well as in the novels of Dickens and Zola. But viewed in such terms, it could only invoke a humanist principle of private or state assistance. This assistance, not surprisingly, corresponded exactly to the logic of the system: the state or the charitable organizations took care of maintaining alive and in good health, during the months of low production, an enormous amount of labor power that could then be used whenever it was once again desirable. Within the logic of the system, this misery could be inhuman but it was not essentially unjust. The buying and selling of labor power took place according to the laws of the free market. That is what Marx says in response to Proudhon: capitalist exploitation is not theft because it fits perfectly within the canons of the established legality of bourgeois democracy. The capitalist and the worker ‘freely’ exchange money for labour. However, it’s precisely here that Marx introduces the idea of ‘forcing’ [forçage]: work cannot be bought or sold as a commodity because it is what produces all commodities. For this reason, this structural injustice does not reflect a failure or a partial dysfunction of capitalism: on the one hand it is perfectly consistent and it leaves no room for reproach; on the other hand, this injustice is what establishes or makes capitalism possible, it is its point of inconsistency, necessarily invisible to capitalism itself.

Thus the free, just and rational rules of the market, the laws of supply and demand, have their origin in an injustice, an alienation and an absurdity that are unintelligible to the system, and which are, consequently, perfectly legal and consensual even in the eyes of a large number of workers and trade unionists. This is why the point is not so much that injustice sparks up rebellion, but rather that rebellion forces the inconsistency of the system: it’s in light of the revolutionary political project that the system reveals itself as unjust. When the militants of the black minority come to say that a Black man can be a White man and a White man is not necessarily White --he can become

held image or by the norm of a situation. For this reason, it's not a matter of making partial or sectoral claims that would in any case invoke, at the most, the application of human rights.

The struggle of the minority is universal in that it attacks a dominant common sense, a situational normality that concerns all the inhabitants of the situation. In this respect, the struggle of the minority is not, as we were saying, 'negotiable', it cannot find a solution from the point of view of the management of the situation. Thus, the point is not to be in solidarity with a minority or to intervene wherever it manifests itself, but to have the courage to become a minority or to betray what the majority, as a norm, expects from us. To become a minority is to become unpredictable: to create a political subject who is displaced vis-à-vis all the possibilities that a situation proposes. This free act is the only legitimate one, the only foundation that can be claimed by restricted political action.

7. The serious and the tragic

By founding the struggle upon a future to come, upon a better, more rational and more just world, revolutionary modernity functioned on an 'epic' model in which the progressive forces of liberation would overcome the reactionary armies of oppression and barbarism. The final victory was the establishment of a free, just and rational world. In turn, 'managerial politics' the dominant politics of today function solely upon the concept of 'serious' matters. Serious matters are approached as fixable in the short or long term, from within the normality of the situation, regardless of how illusory such a notion might be. In the face of serious matters, there is no victory but rather a 'cure'. All struggles that claim a 'negotiable' partiality fall from the start into this trap of the administrative, managerial or legal logic of serious matters. This is why it's important not to confuse the spectacular dimension or the violence of an action with its political 'radicality.' Clandestine activity is not enough to transform a group into a political subject and effectively become a minority.

And so we find that restricted action recuperates a 'tragic' dimension of the political subject: it operates upon the only point that is non-negotiable in terms of management; in other words, it operates upon an unpredictable possible or the 'impossible' from the viewpoint of the normality of the status quo. It operates precisely upon the basis of this normality, upon the point of being of the situation, that which makes its existence possible. We say that such point of being is inconsistent

the world of the commodity, which is always becoming narrower. This is why the refrigerator, like any commodity, must be perishable, for even before the Eskimo has paid the second installment, a new model will be coming out of the factories. Thus, time becomes dizzying, time does not give time to time: such is the barbarism of a society structured on the basis of the production of commodities.

This world is reflected in the ideology of the societies of the spectacle: our contemporaries perceive themselves as "productive units" not only in the economic sphere, but also in the affective, bodily, social, etc. Thus they find themselves trapped in this freedom-killing vision which separates them from their concrete situations. The world then appears to be divided into two categories, according to a truly supermarket style Darwinism: on the one hand is the large mass of exhausted people (the acceleration of time and the shrinkage of space constitute, strictly speaking, the experience of depression), and on the other hand are the strong, enterprising, and productive people, who dominate the world but do so in constant anguish of falling into the first group. It's not surprising that the concrete considerations of people in situation do not figure in this spectacular vision, given the fact that what characterizes all consensual dominant ideologies is that they make such considerations disappear. The statement "the world is one and is increasingly smaller" is the totalitarian proposition that tends to conceal that reality is infinite in its dimensions and possibilities.

To say that everything is similar and that everything is small is a reactionary profession of faith whose effects on reality are very serious. That time escapes from our hands, because of its peculiar acceleration at the end of the century, is a socio-historical pseudo-corroboration that seeks to conceal the fact that every day can contain an eternity. The fact is that, in a month of insurrections, in a few years of autonomous experience, or in all those events in which the free subject acts, the long-standing suspicion that eternity takes refuge between the minutes of the clock is confirmed.

5. The Concrete Universal

We are now going to define what we understand by "concrete universal." We say it's restricted political action that, on the base of a concrete situation, proceeds toward a universal rupture at the level of its quality and structure. We say universal because, unlike a global model that ignores the particularity of the elements of the situation, it questions the foundational core of that situation. This is why it would

be a mistake, as we will see in a moment, to confuse restricted action with a partial, limited, or sectoral claim. What is at stake here is not the dialectic of reformism and revolution: the global and totalitarian vision of society belongs not only to the modern conceptions of revolution, but also to reformism. Let's take first a classical example: that of the working class. As its name indicates, this class is a part or subset of a situation: the capitalist system of production. As such, this class can make a partial or self-interested claim. Take for example a claim raised by a union. Such a claim is perfectly "negotiable" within the framework of the situation, and, from the moment the class becomes unionized, it can even obtain a favorable decision from the ordinary justice system. But, as Marxists used to reproach trade unionists, any action in that sense even a violent one can be social, but it's not political if it does not question the structure of the situation. In this case, justice does not reside in the provision of higher or lower wages to workers, but in the destruction of the system that alienates their labor time.

For the same reason, this latter position is not "negotiable," or cannot be answered from the normality of the situation, because it implies its destruction. In this way, political action ceases to be a partial claim, so as to become a singularity: something unforeseeable by the situation because it questions its very foundations. At this point it's no longer a matter of a class, but of an unclassifiable or anomalous political subject. This subject does not exist outside the situation. It's a subject that arises from, but is not linked to, the situation because the situation does not foresee it. At the same time, this singularity is universal from the very moment it introduces a rupture that concerns all the inhabitants of the situation (bourgeois, petit-bourgeois, intellectuals, artists, proletarians, etc.), who now have to decide whether or not to commit to the struggle that questions not only the situation they inhabit, but also what they in themselves are.

This is why the commitment to a struggle is a completely different thing from external or humanist solidarity. Let's take a second example: the black population of the United States. As a subset or part of a situation, black people have struggled for the right to be recognized as equal to white people. Not only as far as the right to vote is concerned, but also with regard to their functions: a black person should not be discriminated as a candidate for a job, since he is "as capable as a white person" to do it. Which means that he fulfils all the conditions required by the system. This is the reason why the first step towards liberation from slavery was to adopt, in the last century, the religion of white people: being a Christian was the equivalent of being

"human" being like white people, of course, from the standpoint of the white vision of the world. In the twentieth century, the equivalent was integration: assimilation into the system and way of life of white people in order to conquer the same rights. Many white people could, in this way, give lessons of tolerance to their racist fellow compatriots: "blacks are not evil by nature, there are some who are good: those who live like us whites, who are good Americans." As a reward, they were even sent to Vietnam to show that between Americans there was no racial distinction.

But at the same time, some radical groups of blacks began to criticize the "world of the whites." Several malicious intellectuals of all skin colors interpreted this as inverted racism: scorn toward the "white man" and celebration of Negritude (black is beautiful). But the "white man" is not this or that member of the "white race." This is not about racist arguments, but about "white man" as a model of behavior or mode of being: an identifying image to which both whites and blacks can be assimilated. Yet the point is that a black minority revealed as feminism did in turn that "white man" is a norm of behavior and a worldview that is imposed to all the inhabitants of a situation. In this way, whoever takes a commitment to the black cause does so not as simple external or humanist solidarity, but as a true commitment that implies questioning a situation in which he or she is also implicated. This struggle is, therefore, concrete and universal for the same reason that it is not negotiable through any available administrative or legal mechanism.

6. The political subject

Hence, we can define the subject of restricted action as a 'minority'. But it's necessary to dispel two possible misunderstandings that can arise from this concept. Firstly, the concept of minority does not refer to the quantitative. Thus, women are a 'minority' that, quantitatively speaking, is the majority. Secondly, the term 'minority' has been used by postmodernists to speak of a 'right to difference', which is nothing but the recognition 'by right' of a reality 'of fact', namely cultural diversity. But of course, the moment they invoke such a right, these ideologists can only recognize but the smallest, amusingly exotic differences. When it comes to differences that are highly accentuated, such as the practice of genital mutilation or the tyrannical assassinations carried out in certain Third World regimes, this right to difference collapses. Can one speak of the Rwandan massacre as a simple cultural phenomenon? As we understand it, 'minority' is a group that is confronted by a majority-