

“For a destituent process: an invitation to a voyage”

By Eric Hazan and Julien Coupat¹

For several days now, red embers have been visible in the ashes of the Left. There have been hesitations about the decline of the French nationality and a call for a primary in advance of the forthcoming presidential election. Because the chief executive² has aligned himself with Right and even extreme Right positions, the unease has peaked. These intellectuals, these activists, these Leftist representatives are demanding “content, ideas and challenging debates” so that their candidate “embodies the project that France needs to get out of this impasse.” In sum: they still believe in politics. They haven’t caught wind of the big news: *all politics are dead*. As are the words in which politics is expressed: France, the Nation, the Republic, etc. As is the institutional pump that surrounds the governmental emptiness. Politics breathed its last breath last summer in Greece, where it had been born, 2000 years ago. Alexis Tsípras³ was its gravedigger. Engraved on its tomb are these words, spoken like a funeral oration by the German Minister of Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble: “We can’t let elections change anything.”⁴ There you are. Everything in a nutshell. And plainly, too.

To refuse to mourn the death of “politics,” to appeal, on the contrary, to efforts to “give it meaning again,” even to do it “differently” – this is to speculate on the supply of gullibility, when it has in fact run dry; on the provisions for hope, though they have been decimated; and on the target market for illusions, now at very low levels. Who [really] expects a Montebourg administration, with Piketty at [the Ministry of] Finance and Rosanvallon at Culture,⁵ an administration that will nationalize credit, disarm the police, spit upon the multinationals and calm the counter-terrorist frenzy? Everyone knows that it will end up like Tsípras and then Podemos. Because it is taking place completely within the electoral circus and the public sphere. Who listens to journalists, other than days on which there have been attacks? Who gleans the opinions of “intellectuals”? These days, who cares about the declarations of government ministers? Imagine that a Prime Minister had said

¹ “Pour un processus destituant: invitation au voyage,” published in *Libération* on 24 January 2016: http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/01/24/pour-un-processus-destituant-invitation-au-voyage_1428639. Translated by NOT BORED! on 30 January 2016. All footnotes by the translator. Note that the phrase *un processus destituant* is an echo of Giorgio Agamben’s “*théorie de la puissance destituante*.”

² François Hollande, allegedly a “socialist.”

³ A leader of the “left wing” Syriza, Alexis Tsípras is currently the Prime Minister of Greece.

⁴ Referendum concerning Greece’s exit from the Euro, September 2015.

⁵ Arnaud Montebourg, Thomas Piketty and Pierre Rosanvallon are all “socialist” politicians.

this Orwellian phrase, “The state of emergency is the rule of law.”⁶ If anyone paid attention to it, he or she would joke about it in the bar. But no one cared. The votes for the Front National and mass abstention are two symptoms of an electoral system at the point of breakdown. But we must see these symptoms from *outside of this system*, from all that has already escaped it, from the reality of an internal desertion that is diffuse but as vast as a continent. From a ship’s gangway, they claim that this continent doesn’t exist. They can hardly accept the existence of a few floating islands, such as the ZAD⁷ that they want to get rid of so much.

There is no reason for us to endure a year-and-a-half-long electoral campaign whose results, it is already clear, will be the blackmailing of democracy. To end our submission to this countdown, it is enough to invert the meaning: we have, in fact, a year and a half to have done with the sad servitude of aspiring leaders and the comfortable role of spectator into which their races confine us. Denunciations, attacks and attempts to persuade will be of no use. As Kafka says, “In a world of lies, a lie cannot even be eliminated by its opposite; it is only eliminated in a world of truth.”⁸ – more likely by *worlds* of truth. We have a year and a half to form, based upon our existing friendships and bonds and necessary encounters, a human fabric that is rich and confident enough to render the reigning stupidity obscene, to make everything on display in the “public sphere” ridiculous and to laugh at the idea that voting constitutes a *gesture*, a *political* gesture a fortiori.

In opposition to the constituent process that was recently proposed by *Libération*,⁹ we hereby initiate a clear [*pan par pan*] *destitution* of all the aspects of current existence. These last few years have shown us that it has allies everywhere. We must return to earth and take back into our hands everything that has been *suspended* from our lives and that tends to escape us ceaselessly. We aren’t preparing an assault, but a movement of continuous subtraction, the attentive, sly [*douce*] and methodical destruction of all politics that soars over the perceptible world.

But the real travelers are only those who leave
In order to go, light hearts like balloons
From their destiny they will never deviate
And without knowing why, always say: let’s go!¹⁰

⁶ Cf. remarks by the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, December 2015.

⁷ *Zone À Défendre*: a zone to be defended from unnecessary and destructive commercial development.

⁸ Fourth Octavio Notebook, aka Notebook “G,” entry for 4 February 1918.

⁹ “Pour une primaire à gauche,” 10 January 2016.

¹⁰ Charles Baudelaire, “Le Voyage,” 1857, my translation.