

“Above the Volcano”¹

By Jacques Philipponneau and René Riesel²

From now on, this assessment will be commonplace: world society is sinking into crisis. Never in history has a society so precisely imagined the calendar of its collapse. Whether it is the magnitude of atmospheric warming, the exhaustion of natural resources, the generalized poisoning of the planet or the certainty of future Fukushima-like disasters, each month brings its share of details concerning the contours and *timing*³ of the unavoidable. Whole populations have become accustomed to it. The States and their green auxiliaries have been reassuring. They have made their case: there will still be beautiful days thanks to a disagreeable but unavoidable period of adaptation. “Decreasers” [“*décroissants*”] have relied on the State to impose the restrictions and reeducation that are useful for the return of happiness. All this has been smashed to pieces in less than a decade.

What hasn’t been calculated is the speed of the expansion of the geopolitical chaos that is linked to the global war for control of natural resources (oil, uranium, rare-earth metals, agricultural land, water), the *Somali-ification* that today is at work from Africa to Afghanistan, and especially the magnitude and rapidity of the social disintegration (briefly glimpsed in the financial crisis of 2008) precipitated by the globalization of the economy. But these are only minor inconveniences for a system that intends to manage the chaos with no other ambition than to preserve its most immediate interests, if, at the same time, on the planetary level, the awareness doesn’t develop that there won’t be any more tomorrows, that the irresistible activity of the economic-industrial complex will only worsen the disaster, and that there is nothing to expect from the States – cancerous growths in which parasitical, corrupted or mafia-controlled technocratic castes are mixed together in different doses – that coldly flaunt their refusal to appear to have any influence over the course to the destruction of one and all, and that are clearly reduced to their primary function: the exercise of the monopoly on violence.

There is no longer time to see in this the extravagant theories of apocalyptic eco-catastrophists, hopeless anti-authoritarian extremists or reactionary intellectuals cloistered in their ivory towers. All of these questions are now publicly posed; the [aforementioned] assessment has become universal and has irremediably insinuated itself into all the strata of a totally decadent society. No one can escape it. And it is this fact, not the slow-moving catastrophe itself, which is feeding the inquietude of the States.

¹ Dated 5 November 2014, this text – the title of which is a détournement of the title of Malcolm Lowry’s novel, *Below the Volcano* (1947) – was published in a slightly abridged version by *Le Monde* on 4 December 2014. Translated by NOT BORED! on 25 December 2014, using the unabridged French original. All footnotes are by the translator.

² A note added to the end of this text identifies its authors as “aligned with the anti-industrial current issued from the *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*.” Jacques Philipponneau is also known for his book, *Relation de l’empoisonnement perpétré en Espagne et camouflé sous le nom de syndrome de l’huile toxique*, which was published by the *Encyclopédie des Nuisances* in 1994. René Riesel is also known for his role during May 1968 as part of the Enragés group and, later, for his membership in the Situationist International.

³ English in original.

Domination, which reaches the purity of its concept in the fusional convergence of the State, the economy and the media, brings up its heavy artillery, hammers home the ideas that there's no alternative, that the dice have been thrown, that one must adapt or perish, that from now on it's only a question of managing the catastrophe, and that those whose job it has been to provoke and maintain the catastrophe are the best qualified to manage it. Like a killer who claims that he's the only one who is authorized to conduct an autopsy on his victim. And this is more than a metaphor in the case of Rémi Fraisse, the 21-year-old killed by a mobile gendarme who is assured of continued employment by a Socialist government that is celebrating a century of betrayals, or the case of the 43 Mexican students whom the police handed over to the torturers of the drug cartels, or the case of independent journalists in Putin's Russia (each reader can pursue this list *ad libitum*).⁴ Politicians doubt their staying power; they know that they reign above a volcano (in China, which is universally admired by the supporters of the maintenance of order, the domestic security budget is larger than the military budget) and that they absolutely must muzzle, render invisible or silence any serious opposition to the established order, that is to say, any that challenges the fiction of the necessity of that order.

That the victims are mostly young people only surprises those who have never been young. This youth – which people say are integrated into the market society and its dematerialized survival, trained to sell itself to the highest bidder, to detach itself from all solidarity and to recognize itself as a solitary monad in the capitalist utopia – is beginning to understand dialectically that it has no place at the feast of artificial abundance and that the food is inedible, as well, which are things that an intransigent or irreducible [*irréductible*] part of the youth have always known and proclaimed. These things became visible (later in France than in its Mediterranean neighbors) with a strength that got them disqualified for “violence,” though it was legitimately defensive and mostly symbolic. Among whose ranks do we imagine that they will return?

Among those of the so-called “anti-industrial” struggles against the too-obviously absurd plans to eradicate that which still hasn't been flattened by the steamroller of artificial life and false needs (natural zones that still remain pre-industrial in parts), because they express a shared feeling of irremediable loss that brings a myriad of opponents together so much faster. If the non-violent and participatory gullibility of these opponents at first makes us smile, we will agree that it was quickly swept away by the scorn of the decision-makers and the violence of the powers [of law and order]. We will leave condescension towards the marbles, hats and hesitations of youth to the Versailles⁵ who these days shout out their appeals for repression. The facts are these: while certainly still very small, a part of the youth has seceded from society. Whether it submits to it or chooses it, it has no future, it doesn't want one and has nothing to lose, except, possibly, its life. The refusal of the State, the primacy of the economy over life, and the primacy of technological artificiality over the intensity of human relationships; the hatred of all hierarchy (even “militant” ones); the refusal of stardom; concrete solidarity between all opponents whatever their practices – none of this is deceptive: it is a question of the birth of a *conception of life* that is radically hostile to the one imposed by domination.

When two antagonistic conceptions of life confront each other, the ineluctability of the forthcoming central conflict is also affirmed: the one between the fanatics of the programmed

⁴ Latin for “at leisure.”

⁵ Those who suppressed the Paris Commune.

apocalypse and those who aren't resigned to the idea that human history will end up in the manure pit.