

# Everything Starts Here and Now<sup>1</sup>

Until now, capitalism has only tottered due to the crises of its internal development, its fluxes of growth and decline. It has progressed from one bankruptcy to another. We have never succeeded at bringing it down, except on those very brief occasions when people have taken their destinies into their own hands.

To state the following isn't to pretend to be a prophet: we have entered an era in which the historical circumstances are favorable for the rise of a human future, to the rebirth of a life that is intoxicated by freedom.

Enough wailing walls! Too many funeral hymns are drowning out anti-capitalist discourse and giving it a defeatist background.

I don't deny the interest of observations about the ongoing disaster. Cataloguing the various struggles is part of the will to break financial globalization and establish an international of the human race.<sup>2</sup> My only wish is for the involvement of the experimental advances, the life projects and the scientific contributions whose territories are too discreetly defined by individual and collective poetry.

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<sup>1</sup> “*Tout commence ici et maintenant,*” unsigned, dated 12 December 2019, and circulated in manuscript form (a PDF). Translated from the French by NOT BORED! 26 January 2020. All footnotes by the translator. The author of this text – who has been identified as Raoul Vaneigem by the blogs that have published it – attached the following unsigned note to it.

FYI, this is my contribution to the discussions currently going on in Commercy.

To the people of Commercy,

Motivated by the desire to provide my personal contribution to the crucial discussion about the Commune and communalism, I take the liberty of communicating to you several reflections on the subject. Use them as you please. My name is of little importance; only the efflorescence of ideas is indispensable to the awareness of an insurrectionary movement that, little by little, is winning over the entire world.

All that I ask of you is to not alter the meaning of my remarks (but this goes without saying) and to send me a simple acknowledgement of their arrival.

Thank you. Have a good discussion.

*Viva la revolucion!*

The reference is to Commercy, France, where a national meeting of the representatives of various free Communes and municipal initiatives was held on 18-19 January 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Raoul Vaneigem, *Pour une internationale du genre humain* (Gallimard, 2001).

Claiming the rights of subjectivity is a solitary and interconnected act.<sup>3</sup> Nothing is more exciting than seeing individuals freeing themselves from their individualism, as *being* liberates itself from *having*. Won't that take time? No doubt, but learning to live is learning to break the timeline and banish from the present the return of the past, where the chasms of the future are widening.

A future that has been kept in the fetal stage for 10 thousand years and is now reappearing in the way an object from the past emerges from the depths of the earth.

This future is a wisp of straw in the hay wagon of universal obscurantism. A tiny spark sets it on fire. The whole world is burning.<sup>4</sup>

It is enough to make me jubilant to see a radicalism – the awareness of which I've never stopped refining – assert itself in this plebian insurrection. I stake my own life on adding a few drops of water to the ocean of festive solidarity that surges beneath my windows. Because “the people” is no longer a blind mob; it is an ensemble of individuals who are resolved to escape individualist mindlessness; it is a number of anonymous folks whose status as legal subjects guards against reification. They have revoked their status as objects; they have deserted the herd that can be quantitatively manipulated by the tribunes of both the Right and the Left.

I once wrote: “Life is a wave, its ebb isn't death, but the reprise of its impetus, the breath of its rise.”<sup>5</sup> Thus did I show my refusal of the deadly grip<sup>6</sup> to which we so servilely acquiesce. Here I invite reflection on the implications that this remark has for the self-defense practices that put to work the increasing poetic power of the global insurrections now in progress.

This earth is our territory. This territory has the dimensions of our personal existence. It is both local and global because a single moment doesn't go by without us trying to untangle – in ourselves and in the world at large – the good fortune that finds us and the misfortunes that overwhelm us. We are constantly maneuvering between that which makes us live and that which kills us.

It is only with the individualist, who is a cretin converted from a subject into an object, that preoccupation with self becomes self-absorption, that egotistical calculations prevail over generous solidarity, and that a fictional freedom enlists in the cohorts of voluntary servitude and bitter resignation.

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<sup>3</sup> The French here (*un acte solitaire et solidaire*) contains an untranslatable pun.

<sup>4</sup> In the words of Greta Thunberg, “Our house is burning.”

<sup>5</sup> A search for this phrase only brings up the present essay.

<sup>6</sup> The French phrase employed here (*l'emprise mortifère*) can also mean deadly expropriation.

To occupy the territory of our existence is to learn how to live, not just survive. This gives rise to the question: how to live without breaking the yoke of the multinationals of death?

*Enjoy the leisure time of the permanent insurrection.* The time of life is not the time of the economy. Capitalism is ensnared in short-term profitability. Our vital determination is in for the long haul.

Holding steady, striking finance with repeated blows, increasing the number of free zones – this is all part of a guerilla campaign of harassment that requires more ingenuity than violence (for example: the removal of highway tollbooths, free passage through supermarket check-out lines, the blockade of the economy).

*The State beyond the law.* Capitalism and its governmental gendarme won't make any concessions. They will fight the emergence of zones that banish governmental oppression and market reification. They know that we know and they think that they can make us grovel weakly due to the threat of their huge battalions.

But their jabbering blinds them. What they give us is in fact a gift. They leave us nothing less than a reason that annuls the reason of the State. In order to reform or remodel democracy with truncheon blows and lies, the government becomes a dictatorship. From that moment, the inalienable right to human dignity works against it. It justifies civil disobedience as a recourse against inhumanity.

Yes, our right to live will henceforth guarantee the legitimacy of the insurgent people.

This right outlaws the State that flouts it.

*Self-defense is part of self-organization.* We face a choice: to leave self-organization without weapons is suicidal; to militarize it would kill it. Our only resource is innovation, the surpassing of the duality of contraries, the opposition between pacifism and guerrilla war. The experiment is ongoing; it has only just begun.

Like any army, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) possesses a vertical structure. And yet its goal is to guarantee the freedom and horizontality of the assemblies in which individuals working collectively make the decisions that are judged to be best for everyone. Through a democratic vote, the women have obtained a guarantee that the EZLN will only intervene in a defensive manner and never offensively. The sole presence of an armed force has been enough to dissuade the government from using the army and paramilitary forces to crush the Zapatistas. Nothing has been settled, everything is permanently in play.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The French employed here (*Rien n'est joué, tout se joue en permanence*) is very playful.

The situation in Rojava is different.<sup>8</sup> The war conducted by the international of profit condemned the popular resistance there to respond on the terrain of the enemy and use its traditional weapons. There was a state of emergency. And yet, the preponderance of women, the will to found communes freed from communitarianism, the rejection of wheeler-dealer politics and the primacy accorded to the human aspect of things augured a radical renewal of the methods of struggle.

Obviously these examples aren't models for us, but we can draw lessons from their experimental character.

*Federate the struggles.* What is most cruelly lacking for the insurrections that little by little take back our earth, which is threatened on all sides, is international coordination. If the Zapatista movement wasn't suffocated right after its birth, this is because there was an immediate mobilization of awareness. A shock wave shook up the general apathy.

Although the movement of the Yellow Vests<sup>9</sup> has stirred popular intelligence from its long lethargy, spineless media and the hammering doublespeak and Newspeak that invert the meaning of words have gotten the upper hand and have considerably increased the efficiency of the moron-making machine. One might have thought that a wave of indignation and global protests – a universal “*J'accuse!*”<sup>10</sup> – would have liberated Julien Assange<sup>11</sup> and protected whistleblowers. The density of the silence showed that the era of the assassins arrives with catlike stealth. The cemetery is the model social program. Will we tolerate it?

*Neither triumphalism nor defeatism!* Life has uttered a cry that will not die out. It is enough for us to propagate awareness of it to the four corners of the world. We possess an inexhaustible creative power. It has the power to supplant the boring *danse macbre* in which the living rots with the rhythms of life rediscovered.

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<sup>8</sup> The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES), often referred to as Rojava, has been a de facto autonomous region since 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Raoul Vaneigem, “Concerning the Yellow Vests: Everything is possible, even self-managing assemblies in the middle of street intersections, villages and neighborhoods” (December 2018): <http://www.notbored.org/yellow-vests.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> “I accuse”: A reference to the famous open letter written by Emile Zola in 1898 concerning the so-called Dreyfus Affair.

<sup>11</sup> Especially since his arrest and forcible removal from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, England, in April 2019, Julien Assange – the former founder of Wikileaks – has been left to the tender mercies of the State.

By depriving us of the means of existence, the State no longer protects us against crime – it is crime. Our legitimacy requires that we shoot it down. The defense of life, nature and human meaning implies that.

Shoot it down? No. Conceived that way, the project would tarnish itself with a swaggering military connotation that – given past examples – should make us feel wary. Wouldn't it be better to empty the State out from the inside, and then gather up and take charge of the public good that the State was supposed to guarantee and that it in fact sold off to private interests? That would truly be the Commune. Right?

Everyone is free to dissect from the top down the State and the mafia system that is its oppressive arm. Thanks to the scalpel of analytical precision, there have appeared many discoveries and denunciations that denude the King down to the very carcass of his transhumanist inhumanity.

They pointed out the despicable plans hatched in the golden backstage area of the *théâtre élyséen*.<sup>12</sup> They showed how the reality created by the exploiters, thanks to the enormity of their lies, tends to substitute itself for the reality lived by the exploited. They showed how we are forcibly enlisted into an upside-down world in which we are merely pawns manipulated by idiots.

These are inescapable indictments of the State, but it will kick them away for as long as we haven't chopped its feet off.

The government legislates with scorn for the suffering of the people in the same way that aficionados of bullfighting block out the animal's pain. For my part, when I see innocence oppressed, I must revolt. I have always chosen to eradicate the misery of lived experience – starting with my own – in order to abolish, starting from the bottom, the system at the top that is its cause.

*Let's come back down to our earth!* The scandal isn't up there, where the distressed sociologists and economists examine the piles of rubbish, it is down here, at the base of the pyramid; it is in the fact that we have abandoned to incompetent and corrupt people the domains that are the closest to us: education, health, the climate, the environment, security, finance, transportation, [relieving] the distress of the disadvantaged and migrants.

Our pauperization is the price to be paid for their oil wars, predatory raids on copper, tungsten and rare-earth metals, and pharmaceutical patents on plants. Will we continue to let our taxes finance the snatching away of our resources and prohibitions upon using them?

Revenue managers laugh at schools and hospitals that need beds and medicines. We are there, dumbstruck by the rulers' corrupt inhumanity, which they cover with the quilted hair-shirts of their arrogance. What can we do with their

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Théâtre des Champs-Élysées*, a famous theater in Paris, France.

speeches against violence, rape and pedophilia, when predation – the very basis of the economy – is extolled everywhere and beaten into children with the stick of rivalry and competition?

To what ignoble depth of consensual slavery must people descend in order for them to accept the fact that the wealthy managers of their miserable poverty deprive them of the lives, families and environments that they are perfectly capable of managing for themselves? The collapse of the State is the Pyrrhic victory of the multinationals of the “profit of pure loss.”<sup>13</sup> It’s our move and [the key to] playing in favor of life is letting it win.

What can we do with their government ministers and bureaucrats whose mission is to show that the enrichment of the already rich improves the conditions of the poor, that social progress consists in reducing pensions, unemployment benefits, allocations for train stations, trains, schools and hospitals, and the quality of food?

When will we take back that which belongs to humanity and is within our reach? Because this “public good” is what most closely touches us, it is in fact a part of our existences, our families and our environments.

Unlike the institutions that supposedly lead us, we make it an absolute requirement that human freedom revokes the freedoms of profit, that life matters more than the economy, that the manipulated object gives way to the [self-directing] subject, that the worker, who is the product and producer of misfortune, learns to become the creator of the world by creating his or her own destiny.

The polluters and burners of the planet use ecology like a detergent to clean their dirty money. Meanwhile, at the bar of the everyday lie, the consumers make toasts to measures in favor of the climate, while only 10 meters away from their homes the battle rages against pesticides, industries such as Seveso<sup>14</sup> and the [other] harmful effects of profit-making. Can we fail to see that our struggles are in fact both local and international?

Neither the town, the neighborhood, nor the region need a government minister to promulgate prohibitions upon toxic business enterprises when they are

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<sup>13</sup> This unusual phrase (“*profit en pure perte*”) appears in “Lettre ouverte du travail: Cher, Cher Capital,” published in issue #592 (December 2013) of *Capital Travail: Domination/Emancipation*, the monthly publication of the UGICT-CGT. “Let’s put our cards on the table: I finance – yes, yes, you are money, but it is me who finances things – my personal expenses, taxes, which are clearly heavier than yours, expenses for social protection, things that I’m proud of, research, schools and roads . . . And the more I spend, the more you accumulate, the more I waste away, the more you profit: the profit of the pure loss.”  
<https://syndicoop.fr/kiosque/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2017/12/options-592-déc-2013.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Seveso, Italy, where a horrific industrial accident took place on 10 July 1976.

founded upon new practices and experiments, such as permaculture and the reinvention of useful, pleasant and high-quality products.

To promote the provision of free transportation is a plausible response to the privatization of the railroads and highways through governmental fraud.

Building one's own buildings can demolish real estate speculation. Supporting research into non-polluting energy sources (solar power station?) can free us from the use of petroleum, nuclear materials and natural gas. As for the minister of concentration-camp education, he or will won't be able to fight against the life-sustaining schools that individuals and families can set up virtually everywhere.

It isn't our problem if commercialism withdraws from the Euro or not. The real question is foreseeing the disappearance of money and conceiving cooperatives that favor the exchange of goods and services, with or without accruable money. A decisive turning point in the course of the traditional organization of things will be reached when such solutions, practicable by small entities, become federated regionally and internationally.

Until now, quantity has been privileged [over quality]. We only reason in terms of large ensembles. The reign of numbers, figures and statistics imposes a disorder upon sheep-like crowds in which the repressive order can illusorily appear to be a balancing factor.

*Living the Commune.* The self-managed commune is the power of the people [wielded] by the people. Just as the patriarchal family structure was the basis of the State, whether it was sacred or profane, the Commune and its self-managed assemblies will make the heart of individual generosity beat. And just as religion had been the fictitious heart of a heartless world, human life will imprint its rhythms on the new world. It will abandon the old world to the exhausting tachycardia of stock market speculation.

*Peaceful insurrection is demilitarized guerilla war. It must have the self-organization of autonomous communes as its basis and goal.* Our most powerful enemy isn't so much the authority of the master as the resignation of the slaves.

The abolition of the State as an organ of repression occurs during the widening development of civil disobedience. The Yellow Vests' resistance, determination and ingenuity have suggested to me that we call "insurrectionary pacifism" or "peaceful insurrection" the determination to confront the violence of governmental repression and stand firm without sliding into paramilitary Leftism, retro-Bolshevism or other Guévarist recantations.

Avoiding face-to-face confrontations with the repressive power of the enemy implies new angles of approach in the treatment of conflicts. Until now, the simultaneously firm and fluctuating resolution of the Yellow Vests has proven to be of the greatest effectiveness. It is their way of intervening where they are not

expected, of striking, harassing, appearing, moving away and being omnipresent. An unusual and surprising inventiveness has taken the place of the “knife without handle whose blade has disappeared.”<sup>15</sup> As an insurgent once poetically expressed it: “We do not fire with a weapon, we fire with our soul.”<sup>16</sup>

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