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Untimely Meditations for Silencing the Drum Circles

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When the excesses of domination generate protests whose reality is certified by the media, an illusion of consciousness is produced, an apparent awakening that seems to herald the reappearance of the social question and the return of the subject destined to play the leading role in a new historical transformation. By noting, however, the trivial and frivolous nature of the main demands of the protests, and by listening to the insipid refrains of progressive ideologies, all our doubts are dispelled with respect to what has really returned by way of this permitted protest, which is nothing but the corpse of the subject. The social question has not yet been profoundly addressed, while all the dead who stand guard over the ideologies stashed away in the cupboard come out for a walk. Despite any truthful content that it may possess, a protest that floats in stagnant waters together with the putrid remnants of other pseudo-revolts from the past is not the most likely place for a reformulation of a project for real change. Even if it should provide itself with horizontal mechanisms for decision-making, even if it takes the form of an assembly, those who speak in these protests

are for the most part impostors or the apprentices of impostors. Reason senses its impotence in the face of the avalanche of platitudes extracted from the garbage dump of history, and confirms that capitalist domination—the system—has not yielded an inch, and that instead, by manipulating its victims, it has created a false civil opposition with which it can douse the fires of the rebellion. It could not have been otherwise. The working class was irremediably defeated thirty years ago and in its place all we have are the leftovers that minoritarian trade unionism cannot and never will be able to revive, coexisting with a juvenile ghetto of militants and inveterate resisters, reduced in numbers and partially immobilized. Not the kind of material with which one could reinstate what Hegel called “the hard work of the intelligence” that could enlighten the new generations, who, when they have to take hold of the concept, will fall flat on their faces.

In all the spectacular new protests, two shared features are always present: first, a large number of suspect allies who, from the mainstream media, ponder, reexamine and justify the protest that has been so properly diluted, from which its radical offshoots have been safely trimmed. Second, an obsessive desire to not look for enemies, not in the forces of order, not in the parties, not in the state, and not in the economy itself, since all their proposals, whether maximum or minimum, however strange they may sound, fit within the system (in addition, it is the system that decides to incorporate them). Hence the sickly pacifism, and its obverse, the ludic-festive side, the ambiguous attitude toward elections and the preference for measures that give more power to the state or enhance economic development (more capitalism), traits that define a specific ideology, the civil society ideology, the precise reflection of a way of thinking in a vacuum that easily sets down roots in the fertile soil of inconsequential dissent. At least one thing must be made clear: the protest of the civil society movement does not question the system, it does not pursue the subversion of the established order, nor does it seek to replace it. What it wants

a crisis of the political system, a political moment in the prescriptions of civil society.

The ideology of the civil society movement is the ideology that is best adapted to the conurbation, since public space is not really necessary for reproducing the kind of formal and symbolic space in which a semblance of debate is represented, just something that looks like a public space. For a real debate to take place, a real public space must exist, a community of struggle, but a community of this type—a collective subject—is completely contrary to a citizens’ assembly, a mercurial aggregation of crippled individualities that imitates the gestures of direct discussion without finally moving in the required direction, since it cautiously avoids all risks by refusing to engage in combat. Its battles are just a lot of noise and its heroism is nothing more than a pose. A community of struggle—a historical social force—can only be formed on the basis of a conscious will for separation, an effort of desertion that is the offspring of a total opposition to the capitalist system or, which amounts to the same thing, the profound questioning of the industrial way of life, that is, a rupture with urban society. Youth unemployment or budget cuts; the starting point does not matter since, if tempers are hot enough, it all leads to the same place; the essential point is the achievement of enough autonomy to shift the flow of debate out of the established channels and towards the fundamental question—freedom—without “responsible” mediators or vigilant tutors. And this can only be achieved by moving away from the party of domination and initiating a long and arduous struggle against it.

The protests take place in an environment that is considered to be almost natural by those who participate in them: the urban environment. The latter, however, is a space that was created and organized by capital, in such a way as to foster the molding and development of its world. The metropolises and the conurbations are the basic elements of the space of the commodity, a neutralized and monitored stage scenery that functions as a factory, where direct communication, and therefore consciousness and revolt, are almost impossible. Any real revolt must fight to free this space from the signs of power and open it up to a process of discovery that favors the decolonization of everyday life; it must be a revolt against urban society. The social question is essentially an urban question, which is why the rejection of capitalism also implies the rejection of the conurbation, its ideal vessel. The turning point in the consumerist and political training program could take place in those monitored dormitories called neighborhoods, if the assemblies that are formed during the crisis become counter-institutions from which the metropolitan urban model can be criticized and an alternative can be designed that is in harmony with the land. In the assemblies of neighborhood representatives an autonomous subject can emerge, a new class that will resist the civil society problematic that comes from the squares and parks by proposing and implementing plans concerning the urban question (neighborhood autonomy, logistical problems, real contact with the countryside, the occupation of public spaces, recovery of artisanal knowledge, anti-consumerism, the struggle against urban planning and infrastructure projects, etc.). Nothing of this kind has arisen from the protests, which seem to be pleased to breathe the polluted air of the urban environment, a portion of which has become the citizens' agora, a place where civil society vacuities have carte blanche. This happens because the mentality of the middle class is in charge in these mobilizations and its representatives hold the initiative. This is why the social crisis has only been manifested as a political crisis,

is to participate, since it does not propose a way of life (and of producing) that is radically opposed to the prevailing system. Its program, when it is set forth, does not go beyond reforms intended to clear the way for institutionalized collaboration and sharing the consequences of the economic crisis with the ruling class in a more equitable manner. It is a simple appeal for civic values addressed to domination. It does not at all propose to change the condition of the voting, car-driving and indebted wage labor force, but rather to preserve it—if possible—with stable jobs, electoral reforms and decent wages. The proletarian condition survives, but dissimulated under the alleged condition of the citizenry. The struggle for its abolition is no longer a bitter clash between classes for control over and management of social space as it was in times past, but the peaceful exercise of a political right within the bounds of an accessible and neutral state.

Does the “citizenry” really exist? Is it a new class? In order to answer these questions we will have to acknowledge an undeniable fact: that neither the remnant industrial proletariat nor its contemporary heirs, the masses of wage workers, are intrinsically revolutionary, objectively or subjectively. The principal productive force is knowledge, not manual labor; furthermore, on the side of the subject, the struggles waged merely for improved conditions and higher wages are not destroying capitalism, but modernizing it thanks to the labor bureaucracy that they have generated. The trade union and political apparatuses dissolve class consciousness and facilitate integration and submission. In addition, the expansion of production is fundamentally destructive, which is why the workers cannot ignore the consequences of their own labor and much less seek to self-manage it. The working class has come to the end of its historical role, which was linked to a stage of capitalist development that is now over, and its current successors can only condemn the function they perform in the system and assert the need to separate from it, but without consciousness and without morality this is not possible. The end of the proletariat as a class

leaves the terrain of the social struggle abandoned, without a subject, at the mercy of the intermediate classes that the system itself is fragmenting, dispersing and excluding just as it is doing to the working classes, in whose ranks the old revolutionary theory of the proletariat is not re-emerging, but instead the modern civil society ideology, brandished as an anti-radical weapon and tool for cooptation by all those little parties, groupuscules, networks and office-seekers who swarm in the protests of postmodernity, infiltrating them, banalizing them and corrupting them. Just as was the case when there was a class struggle, when leftism contributed to the modernization of the trade union and political organizations of capitalism, only then it did so in the name of the proletariat while today it does so in the name of a fantasy, the “citizenry”. This resort to the citizenry, that is, to all the subjects of the state, is purely rhetorical, as was the appeal to the “people” in times gone by. The citizenry does not exist; it is an unreal entity that inhabits the progressive mind and serves as a surrogate subject, one that can apply to everyone. Despite its non-existence, it can be found everywhere: from the discourse of power it has passed to the militant language of the street. It has proven to be most useful to those who, like the leftists, are attempting to make themselves visible and influential with the protests of the new generations by infecting them with populist ideology, manipulative sectarianism and a long-suffering workerism, in order to cause the present-day radicals-in-formation to become like them or to be disgusted and give up. They do not often succeed in the former, which is why the system itself helps them out with its enormous virtual means, issuing obscure appeals and initiating self-contained processes that, by providing the participants with one or two days of tolerated glory in the park, gives them the feeling that they are in charge, as in Tahrir Square or at the Sorbonne in 1968. The operation can get out of control, but what can the system fear from the kinds of behavior tailored to the “education for the citizenry” that are promoted in these protests, and which spread like a new fashion among the middle class youths

who form its ranks. How can a movement be energized by off-the-rack hedonism, fanatical non-violence, spirited gestures, crippling consensus, the playful banging of pots and pans, and communication by means of Twitter? This kind of behavior is presented as the innovative practice of freedom, despite the fact that this kind of freedom is abundant in slave societies and is hardly of any use for assaulting the Winter Palace. But who wants, and worse yet, who is capable of assaulting a center of power today? The only thing these protests are asking for is dialogue and participation.

We are immersed in a harsh process of adaptation to the crisis implemented by the state in accordance with the directives proclaimed by “the markets”, a violent adjustment process that leaves victims everywhere in its wake: workers, retirees, civil servants, immigrants and ... the *déclassé* youth. If the majority is just barely getting by, the youth, at any rate—almost half of whom are unemployed—has a bleak future ahead of it, and this is why they are protesting, but not against the system that has marginalized them, but against those whom they consider responsible, the politicians who govern, the trade unionists who remain quiescent and the bankers who speculate. These protests mark the beginning of a confused era where one-third of civil society is mobilizing in one way or another outside of the institutions, although not against them. They do not feel that they are properly represented in a democracy that “is not a democracy”, since its population does not participate in it, and that is why they want to reform it. They do not want to destroy separate power, but to separate the constituted powers. For the precarious middle class that is claiming as its own the bourgeois concept of democracy, Montesquieu never died, but we should recall that Franco is not dead either, and that the democracy that “cost so much to attain” and that claims that it is derived from the reconversion agreed to by the political-repressive apparatus of the dictatorship, built up its power from the innards and sewers of the state.