

Paris, November 2005

Dear R,

I don't know if there have been times in the past when cities were burned, not by barbarians, but by their own inhabitants.

Anyway I can reassure you: there aren't any fires here, no overturned cars, no smashed windows. And even less so barricades,

Nothing new.

Except a very deep and terrible silence.

On the street corners nothing is said and each gesture is saturated with utter silence.

Yet, what remains unsaid is of a different nature than what is wordlessly expressed in the burnt vestiges, whose odor is carried to us by the wind.

What remains unsaid is an infamy.

That age-old infamy coming from those who believe that foreigners always turn up with their pockets lined with unhappiness. And also the shameful idea that rebellion is a matter of immigrants. That it arises, like any other epidemic, because of a poorly controlled border.

People just keep repeating the same thing: what's happening is happening elsewhere.

In a faraway and unattainable place.

Beyond the ring road and the tall buildings whose roofs are topped with illuminated letters.

Beyond the national roads where one forgets everything about the city.

Further than the last imaginable RER station.

In a concrete décor where all buildings are rectangular and you cannot tell the difference between homes, schools, and barracks.

There, where it all resembles a huge hospital for the terminally ill.

It's only over there, they say, that *it* is happening.

But there is indeed something that the window sills of trains and cars guzzle too quickly as we travel along, something that is more than a landscape, more than a mass of objects rubbed out by the rush. It is a question.

A question about the criteria organizing the real and its perception, a question about the factory of elsewhere and the industrial plant of our home. A truncated question, I agree.

Yet, I often have the impression that as soon as this elsewhere, about which we know so little, started to burn, it took hold at our very center. One could say that *it burns* here too, but like an infected wound, that it pulsates, that it almost breathes, feebly.

Since the curfew, the nights are calm but insomnia has settled into them.

Sleep's forsaken are undoubtedly saying that the pain must have attained a new threshold for so many to prefer destruction to the given evidence of a too humiliating reality. That even the police keeping watch cannot protect us from it. That we are in danger of dying from our own fears.

Also a small split has taken place and nothing is quite the same anymore.

If this is because those who have committed these acts are true flesh and blood beings we might encounter at any time, or because the reasons for such hatred, which we must say are unfair or incomprehensible, are actually too familiar, I can't really say.

Everywhere, they repeat that there is no point, that it makes no sense to be violent.

Perhaps this silence did not exist before this violence, but there weren't any words for the bodies of people deprived of a future and piled up on the edges of the city either.

These fires in the night have cleared a new landscape, they took a naked and defenseless reality by surprise, and in an ephemeral glow, they revealed the emergence of a possibility, but which one? And certain languages, you say, came untied too.

Fine, you are right; I read and hear elected officials, teachers, sociologists, and rappers reiterating that things are going badly, that it has to change, it has to stop, it cannot keep going on like this. The leftists are talking about the causes of the revolt, the rightists about the effects. But what I hear in their speeches, and what frightens me, is the silence.

I read somewhere the story of a philosopher who had ended his days in an asylum because he had understood that his books were a series of letters written to communist proletarians who would never read them. The intellectuals were the only ones reading his works and they were simply commenting on them.

He surely must have felt inside a silence similar to this one, like an all powerful objection to what we can say about our present.

His body must have filled up with people that never speak. People that have nothing to say about their lives at the limit of the alphabet, on the margins of the law, that no language shelters, and about which there is nothing to explain.

His books must have suddenly revealed their ties to the words in newspapers, tribunals, magazines, all of which are part of the same conspiracy against the poor and do nothing but distance the world from their hands. He must have said to himself that if thinking cannot encounter life elsewhere than in pages, then the number of deaths and the cost of damages that are counted out after each riot aren't worth a damn. That they are nothing in comparison with the poverty of the years that await us, with the perspective of being escorted daily by the idea that whatever circulates between bodies can always be converted to cash. If something doesn't occur from outside of culture.

I don't know what you call politics, but I believe that it is a level of intensity in the affects when it happens along with the possibility of becoming widespread.

Of course objects participate in it, of course institutions and knowledge are implicated in it; it is not a matter of pure encounters; I don't believe in the spontaneous propagation of elective affinities either.

That's also why I don't believe in armed struggle. Anything that aims to be lyric and grandiose, and sometimes even manages to be so, never emancipates anyone. Even if I am still thinking over that question someone asked me one day: what, then, would an un-armed struggle be? (Probably something impossible, at times).

The fact is that they force us into apartments, into jobs, into clothes, into cars, and into desires that make us very difficult to love. It has already become an exhausting labor to love two, three, or five people—to the extent, as the State never ceases to remind us, that it has been turned into a national obligation called the “family”. As for the obligation to hate, it no longer needs to be instituted, we can manage it even with strangers, and so many of the agents of public order filling our streets today have turned this talent into an issue of professional pride.

And still, despite this, what shocks people most is the hatred of things: hundreds of bodies will very soon be locked away because they've harmed objects. It appears inconceivable to you, but it is not at all. Nowadays, objects are our best friends, our greatest loves, what we endlessly desire. And you, an artist, will not be able to prove otherwise.

You ask me, in short, how we are feeling over here.

We feel just about like elsewhere.

Surrounded by a malevolent attention, obliged to perform useless tasks, wanting to change but not knowing how to.

We feel alone.

Best wishes,

