

Footnotes on the State of Exception

1. War happens. We know nothing of war, as they constantly remind us. War – always one and multiple – has been on our plates, since childhood, in what mustn't go to waste. They resented us for our presumed ignorance of war, as if we were ignoring pain or an illness, or simply as if this forever absent war was now over for good, and it had to be remembered as one remembers a dead family member. Through grief.

2. Well-being. All those born far from war, or after it, know quite well that it isn't over. They know it as possibility, as a nightmare that might come true. And this knowledge turns disquieting when war explodes in the distance, laying the childhoods, the kitchen smells, the bed sheets of others to waste. The past has dug a grave in the present and is again burying the living there – so they say — but it's a lie. Because war is really one of the names for our present, and not a tale of days-gone-by. It lives in bodies; it flows through institutions, traverses relationships between strangers and acquaintances, even here, in this moment, for a long while now. And the more we pretend to be innocent and alien to events, the guiltier we know we are. Guilty of not being present where blood is shed, and yet somehow we are there... They used to tell us, “you kids have it all” as if to say “you sons of bitches,” yet who has raised and built this affluence, this inexhaustible source of war? Sometimes we have even suspected that if war is elsewhere, then life must be too.

3. Rest in peace... We know everything about war just like we know everything about prison, without having been there, since they are at the heart of “peace” and “free life,” already implied in them. Just as we know that nobody in our system is innocent, that only power relations exist, and that the losers and not the guilty are the ones being punished. That is why war has become someone else's dirty job, which we are *obliged* to ignore. On every street corner they ask us to forget its possibility and its reality, to be surprised by it though never complicit in it. We are thanked in advance for our vigilance. Our choice is between collaborating in the social peace or with the partisans of terror. War is no longer concerned with us, we look at it and it doesn't look back, it is too close. Its distance from us is not the same as that between a spectator and a football match, where we can still desire victory for one team and defeat for another. It resides in the limbo of things we would like to *abolish*. So we never have to take sides or believe that words have a weight that can be felt in the body, or that life has a meaning and that this meaning can also lead to its sudden end.

4. ...*and live in war*. If we don't know what it means to live in war it's because we don't know what it means to live in peace. The more we are governed, the more we live in fear and the more we need other people to arm themselves in our place, and that's how war continues. We do not know past struggles for rights and freedoms of expression as experience (of conflict and victory), but only as a *result*. We are nothing but the dazed heirs to a fortune that is impossible to spend: an archaeological inheritance that crumbles a bit more day by day, of no use-value. Those old victories are not even established, but already lost, because we do not know how to fight to defend them whenever they are threatened. Revolutionary becoming is a process that seems to exclude our participation now. It is by forgetting the oppression of control in exchange for the guarantee of protection that we have expelled ourselves from our own history. And so we mistake the struggle for the war, and we allow it to be simultaneously criminalized and delegated to professionals. While the struggle is what looms up from the discrepancy between what governments demand and what the governed can give them. In struggles we seek those who will accompany and support us, whereas we go to war alone and come back alone (since it's always the others that die).

5. *The game of war*. Historical avant-gardes and war: a love story and not even a tormented one, an almost smooth-sailing romance, apart from a few expatriations. One could still – before the state of exception – play the exceptional singularity, play the game of war with one's friends and rivals. But this is no longer the case for us. The war paradigm of rivalries between small groups, the war-matrix of the guerrilla's imaginative, paramilitary strategies, the surrealists, the situationists, the Mao-dadaists (and the list goes on) lived in a world where words and experience carried on a passionate conversation that could be turned to the extreme, erupt into a scandal or even be interrupted for good. These were toy-wars, wars for snobs. Nowadays we can frame and exhibit these lovely gesticulations and return to the curfew of our already-filmed everyday lives, to surfaces saturated with advertising images, to our socio-economically integrated solitudes. And understand for once and for all that the battleground has changed, that we need to invent much more ambitious *derives* if only in order to escape the amplified normalcy of our perceptions.

6. *Visions of the world*. Our consciousness now disarmed, we've been comfortably tucked into the nightmare of an illegible, deaf-mute present, in a territory marbled with anxieties. The cells in which the presumed guilty have been locked up and forgotten, the bare rooms with chairs and a desk where tortures result in confessions, these continue to exist, and even

though we can't see them, we perceive them. Their smell, their silence, their white lights populate the invisible, administrative levels of everyday life. They have not disappeared. The eternal night of the television news brings us this intuition along with images of the actual theaters of war. From the police stations, hospitals, motorways, schools, prisons, high-security zones and barracks, to the trucks, trains and planes exporting hatred in the name of war, or what we agree to call war – all these things fill us with fear. Because they contain us and we contain them.

7. *Coherences*. Sometimes, in the insecure rhythms of our lives, we recognize a line of coherence. It's the same line that transmits the knowledge of a war we haven't experienced but whose effects and affects circulate within our bodies. The line that connects the most common gestures of our everyday life here with the disasters that happen elsewhere – an electric line, a paratactic line conveying this link made of a lack of links. Eichmann lined up numbers upon numbers without ever being bothered by the idea that they represented human beings sent to the slaughterhouse. Contemporary art has even made this habit of participating in the disaster without being able to question it into its basic, structural principle. It builds surfaces of coexistence between incompatible elements, it questions what we can't understand, and nevertheless it contributes – as much as these lines do – to the functioning of the machine. The means to either halt our becoming or to transform our subjectivity don't seem accessible to us any longer. Somebody else has designed the form of our lives: now we are only free to choose the form of our products and to hope that our private property will protect us from war. Meanwhile, private property is itself the first stage of war.

8. *The night where all singularities are whatever*. The simple soldier or the armed partisan of a cause are always represented as anonymous, as cannon fodder. Doomed to be pulverized for a nation or an ideal, they are abstract bodies, clockwork lives. The simple citizen, or the free civilian, on the other hand, is the unique individual, different from any other, involved in the specificity of his social relationships, which are supposed to isolate him from his neighbor, to magnify him in his irreducible identity. Nevertheless, we can look all over for this truly human individual without meeting him or her in any region of the working world: over the counter, in the supermarkets and in the offices, we interact with interchangeable and insignificant singularities, all reproducing the same task so as not to be expelled from the productive process.

9. *Exceptions*. On the other hand. Experience, as impoverished as it is, teaches us that love is not an attachment to a pre-defined subject, that what we love or what links us to the other is

their singularity as such, their whatever-singularity. Because love does not have a specific cause or a reason that can be communicated. The more we are governed or integrated into a discipline, the more controlled and isolated we are in our performances and our behaviors. Government sees the masses, but only looks at individuals. A loved singularity is whatever and non-interchangeable, whereas a productive singularity is isolated and individuated, and yet replaceable at a moment's notice. The productive rules of universal substitution cause our certainty to vacillate. The knowledge that the organs of control possess of our lives makes us all exceptions in the eyes of power. And when we meet the arm of the law, what it does with us will not depend on established conventions, but on the contingency of this particular friction. Our present has become unpredictable, each instant a potentially exceptional moment. This is precisely the new configuration of war, that of Identifying Power versus whatever singularities, which leads some to guerrilla suicide, and others to an anonymous solitude surrounded by objects.

10. Rules of the Game. Living in society has become a new and terrifying experience.

Traditional humanism assured us that progress consists in the improved administration of our lives. But now we know that the discipline governing us can just as well produce merchandise as corpses. Our perception of this new state of things does not translate into words; it is made up of images and gestures. This new solitude has turned us into extraordinarily contemplative beings. Thousands of devices provide us with an intermittent and hypnotic visualization of the monopoly of violence that governs us. Our contact with geopolitical information increases but is less and less intimate, and vocabulary, summoned to define all these exteriorities, begins to fray. The bodies on the receiving end of this flood of frontline news have become misaligned. Gazes rest on screens. Memory-screens, image-screens: a fragmented reality gives rise to the need for new distractions. Our perceptions are aligned only sporadically: this is the most devastating effect of the new war. This is also the reason we cannot counter it on the terrain of images or of iconoclasm (the dark screen is not the same as a monochrome, since the painter never pretended to inform us directly about the state of the world). And yet, spectators have never had so much influence, because their conditions were never so shared. It is the ethical use-value of our perceptions that remains to be negotiated and established, but it already exists as potential, just waiting for the gesture that will put it into circulation. Because, in times of war, it is not only monetary exchanges, but also the entire economy of desire, that is touched by inflation.

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