

Hello – a greeting from nowhere

Proposition 1

It is impossible to be everything we are supposed to be and to do everything we are ordered to, and when we try the failure we are doomed to is neither interesting nor enjoyable. To take the path of breaking with everything is the only worthwhile end, even if it is hopeless.

Everything is what is ordinary. It is hard to find a glimmer of anything else in life, anything that would suggest an Outside. Everything is the way that things are organized, but it is also a command. An order to do and to be. Everything is ordinary in the sense that everything is ordered. And Everything is ordinary in the sense that everything tends to act as an order.

The order is that you must be Everything. So you fail at everything. You endlessly work towards the monstrous goal of accomplishing everything.

You will never get there.

We will never get there, and yet we are still here, still doing and being. Still ordered: organized and ordered around; organizing and ordering others around. That is all that Everything seems to be.

Everything is the way we talk. Everything is the way we sleep and eat. It is the way we stand in line, but also the way we confess our love. It is in our intimacies that we fail most desperately, but we also fail (easily enough, brushing past each other every day and mumbling "hello") in our attempts at the most basic forms of communication. Many have given up on greeting others; many others have gone for a speech so ritualized and regulated, so well ordered, that it says nothing at all (and so, in some way, says everything to those who know how to hear it).

Everything is waiting and being waited on. Everything is apparent. Everything is visible, set in bright relief against everything else. Everything is saturated with light, cameras, directed activity, and sight without seeing. In Everything we learn confusion – we learn to be afraid of the dark.

In Everything, most of us experience ourselves in a kind of darkness. Wandering alone, reaching out for others who are just out of reach, just out of sight. This cinematic blur of countless frames per second, light and dark, confuses us. It casts a gloom onto our deep perception, our ability to see shade and nuance. It deceives our sense of sight and muddies our other senses.

One night you might find yourself speaking out loud. You might hang out of a window or peer down a shadowy alley, saying "hello?" to no one in particular. This is an odd gesture. It is not the "hello" you mumbled as you brushed past a stranger with everything there is to do on our mind; it is not a bored "hello" to your bored friend... it is a kind of cry. A question-call. A question-greeting-call.

Without knowing it, you might be using the utterance "hello?" in an archaic sense. As if speaking from an old place, an ordinary place that is no longer visible, its sound no longer audible. In the past, in a past we are removed from by much more than the passage of time, when one would meet another person on the street, the proper greeting in English was "Good day" or "Good evening". Our now familiar greeting "hello" was something else, a kind of question-call one might cast into the woods, or a question-greeting-call uttered in the direction of a noise in one's home: "Hello? Is there anybody there?" The invention of the telephone, its invasion and reconstitution of everyday life, changed affairs. It was so unnatural to speak into the machine that people were more inclined to say "Hello?" than "Good day". Since the presence of another could no longer be assumed, it seemed appropriate to call a question into the void. And that question-call is what we have unknowingly inherited.

The call into the void has since grown to inhabit all of social life. One index of its spread is the fact that the question-call "Hello" is now the most ordinary of greetings. It even has a cute form: "Hi!" "Hello" is the call into the void, the greeting of an era of telepresence, of ghostly pseudopresence. Ordinary greetings for an ordered life of loneliness shared with other people.

We said that everything is apparent, and that in everything most of us experience ourselves in darkness. It is really a question of the interplay between darkness and a terrible visibility. Better to say the most of us experience ourselves in a void. Most of us wander and reach, and most of us call out almost involuntarily, and not only at night. Usually nothing happens. Usually you just hear your own voice and it is terrifying, or boring, or terrifyingly boring.

Obviously we no longer *just* talking about the telephone – but we *are* talking about a world in which people talk at length *about* their telephones.

Usually you just hear your own voice. But sometimes another answers. We are those who have called "hello" and found others who answered. We still are not sure entirely what this means, but it feels very important. The uncanny cries that have come in response to our initial question-greeting-call are the only hints we have ever known that suggested an Outside. We called back and forth, we shouted for real, and as we did so we drew closer to each other. Close enough to sense depth and nuance.

That is the condition of our saying "we".

We reject everything together and call into the void.

We would like to know who else is out there.

Someone said that all friendship is political, but in Everything friendship is impossible. You do not have five hundred friends, almost certainly do not have a dozen, and chances are you don't even have one. If you have a lover, yours is probably the kind of passion that is always sure to keep the door closed. Friendship isn't having experiences together or having things in common. The rare moments are just that and not proof of anything.

To be skeptical about everything, even friendship, is to invite a kind of hopelessness. We do not turn away from such hopelessness.

Indeed, our project is difficult to the point of hopelessness. This doesn't mean it is without focus or intensity – quite the opposite. It means we will be agile. Agility is in the stops as well as the starts: we claim as our own the ability to experience failure without illusion and then to have the capacity to move on or to remain motionless. As long as our next step is hopeless... To the extent to which ends can be achieved they are likely to be disregarded or rejected if they reflect the security of Everything.

Our hopelessness is at once fleeting and urgent; ever present, it calls for *great patience*.

Proposition 2

Everything is hopeless, and yet Everything is always telling its story in a way that sounds desperately hopeful. Many do the same with their stories of how we might change everything. To shake off these stories and look hopelessness in the face, one comes to a real choice, maybe even the only choice that really matters: wallow in despair or dare the leap for a vastly different life.

Let's begin again. All we have are some stories; we don't know if we have friends, if we are succeeding in being friends when we think ourselves sober or enthusiastic enough to do it. We said that in Everything friendship is impossible; and if there is an Outside, the way there remains shrouded in confusion. Things are a mess. And in this mess, this ongoing crisis, sometimes we end up in a circle of people and someone tries to situate all of this, all of our diurnal and nocturnal conversations. Someone starts to tell a story...

Now and then someone invokes history. It is always an instructive moment, when someone addresses the circle and reminds the circle that it is a circle and asks the individuals at its edges to cede, to concede... To finally belong. For us this is a kind of theater. Our first encounter with history was pure nationalist indoctrination. Later, we witnessed someone further from the center of the circle turning towards the center and beginning to speak of something less monumental: the history of people like us, whoever they think we are. It is a smaller history in a smaller circle and perhaps with more audience participation. In the indoctrinating as well as the supposedly radical sense, history is Everything telling its story, telling itself, but in this it is a deceit.

Let's admit it: for us these historical feel-good (or feel-bad) tales do not have the great importance they claim. We live in the now, today. Today is like yesterday and probably like tomorrow. Time goes on, history is said to go on.

This is the story of everything: Everything repeats. This is the history of Everything: Everything reproduces itself. Nothing happens.

We live in the now. We cannot get rid of the nagging sense that history is a deceit, and that the stories we tell ourselves about what we are doing are just little tales vying for the status of historical truth. Whatever else this condition may be, it is disheartening. It has driven many of us to despair. Hopelessness shapes power and resistance – laziness, lashing out, and looking for love as acts of hopelessness...

In fact, it seems at first as though there are only two paths open to us. One is despair as madness: not inaction so much as helplessly random or automatic actions. The other is a false overcoming of despair, a return to hope, a reaffirmation of our small stories: not so much bold new actions as ritualized repetitions of something we believe worked once upon a time. The first leads to solitude, sometimes to a frenzied publicity; the second is public as well, but within the contours of spectacular activism. This is why we don't think we are doing something exotic by having no hope. We believe many have no hope and don't admit it to themselves, let alone to each other.

But hope and fear are just different aspects of the same submission to history. Sitting and listening to the same story, one can hope for a happy ending while another fears a tragedy. Neither is free.

We choose another way. We act on our lack of hope fearlessly – though sometimes this means refusing to do anything. Admitting you have lost everything means that you have the possibility of something truly awesome in each new moment. Aware that you have something to obtain or to do, you maneuver every situation towards your particular end, your project.

This allows us an insight: there are two senses to hopelessness. One tends to point towards solving the problem of hopelessness through security solutions, PR campaigns and self-help programs. This is the terrorizing cynicism of power; and its flipside, the terrorized motivation of the political subject. Both despair and its false overcoming (hope) belong to this approach. The other approach to hopelessness, which is ours, is the relentlessness of finding the limitations of what we are capable of and pushing past them. We do this with our pleasures, with our bodies, and, if we are lucky, with our friendships.

The exception tests the rule.

This means brushing aside what is impossible, hopeless in the first sense, and grasping, even enjoying, hopelessness in the second sense. *This is our power.*

Our hopelessness has this one great virtue: it is a marvelous purgative. It will cleanse you of layer upon layer of everything piled upon you, everything you are coated with, all of these clumsy masks stuck to your face as history and stories. Politics, first of all: political solutions to crises and breakdowns too intimate to ever be addressed in a mass way. And as for that specialized politics crystallized around the intimate, the politics of identity, hopelessness has nothing but a shrug and a laugh: good luck with your history of defeats... But perhaps the strongest, the most needed purgative is the one that will forever cleanse you of the sense that it is possible to express who you are without deceit.

We could keep going, but let's be clear: if we are against everything, we should say so. We are the only ones who say so, the ones who greet you in the nighttime, who cast you a wink in broad daylight. We are staking our lives on this open confession of faithlessness... that we do it anonymously and from behind a very different sort of mask is just evidence that we are not stupid, but seductive.

Proposition 3

Because everything is order and organization, it is foolish to look to the order and organization of politics for ways out of our condition, out of Everything.

Recently there has been a moment of occupation. It has inhabited our minds, the media, and a few town squares. This political moment has been surprising because it has alluded to a question rather than assuming a set of answers.

Until it was decided what this moment's real intentions were in Everything, be it endless meetings, street fighting, or a kind of negotiation with banks, it was the freshest breath of air in a lost decade.

But once Everything's web-spinning began, the protagonists of the moment became trapped. Trapped in old patterns of protest politics, in negotiations that had been avoided heretofore, they drifted further and further into Everything. The web-makers, as necessary evils who enabled visibility into certain recruiting moments, used the logic of recruiting as a frame, then shrank the frame and proceeded to eat the host.

We are familiar with this digestive strategy. This is the operation of politics, the *lack of conversation* necessary to manage bodies and stultify minds – which amounts to pretty much everything we know. To escape politics isn't possible, but it would be fantastic. As fantastic as a trip to the moon or a carnival ride. Recent activities against politics as usual have lacked enough of a fantastic orientation to escape gravity. They have crashed back to reality as more-of-the-same, reflecting less truth about Everything than about their own fuel, which was far less corrosive than necessary.

Let's return to the question of politics. We would like to have dismissed politics as rapidly as we did above, but we know better. It is a malady of the soul, an addiction. It is our little problem. You quit one day and start again the next. You abandon it one week and reinvent it the following. You do it in denial of doing it. To return to politics and thoroughly cast it off is another way of saying "hello", of letting the greeting from nowhere find its way. Because when we reach out, when we go for the gesture of friendship, we end up entangled in cliques, groups, scenes, milieus, subcultures... so many so-called communities populated by the usual suspects.

There is terror in discovering that we, too, are the usual suspects for others. Friendship is impossible.

We begin by setting aside any sort of participation in representative, parliamentary, democratic politics. We are all familiar enough with those meetings where we talk about Everything. We are concerned rather with the way in which everything tends to reflect that sort of politics, especially when Everything claims to oppose itself. the eternal return of representation, the thousand and one names for what always amounts to speaking for the others.

We wrote: when Everything claims to oppose itself. There is a limited range to any discussion of extra-parliamentary power: from desire to participate in near-parliamentary formations like committees or collectives to the rejection of anything short of temporary ad hoc groups. On this spectrum, to do-the-good means to make a better and more sincere effort towards more democracy and more participation by a broader and broader section of the population. This oath is guided by a belief in who we want to be as a people. It replaces the utter lack of transparency and accountability in normative politics with a watered down clear slurry of toxicity. Everything is made transparently and responsibly mediocre.

The desire to create our own societies is perfectly comprehensible. We create something that fills the role that ife used to fill. History never ceases to remind us that community was once possible, and politics never ceases to produce increasingly artificial recreations of community. For most of us this means consuming an ideal that we believe we can be part of, enlarging the sense of belonging that we get from history and stories into a semblance of life. Telepresence, ghostly presence. We participate in the creation of exactly the experiences that we desire and the ideal sort of people who conform to our desires and expectations. We choose the style, color, quantity, and definitional characteristics of our category; then we click BUY.

We said that we found each other, but we still have no idea as to the way Outside; we are in the breakdown, in the crisis. But we know that to turn against everything, to think ourselves against Everything and live accordingly, we must embody the most corrosive skepticism towards any political formation, and perhaps the most where it is most likely we outcasts are being managed in our discontent (or worse, managing it ourselves): the sphere of so-called radical politics.

Politics always opaquely drags us back to compromises with everything. Hopelessness is transparently antipolitical.

Proposition 4

If we try to get out of the grips of what we are ordered to do a be, we are defeated before we begin unless we do away with everything we believe about good and evil. To push beyond history, politics, and the oralism that subtends Everything, we will commit to commitment itself.

Everything is coated in moral colorations, usually with very little fine shading. The order to do is the order to do it right; the order to be is the order to be good. When we say "hello" we are greeting those who have begun to step away from the cruel moralism that characterizes everything about our culture and its subcultures.

Our rigor, our guilt, our fear all have their origins in the great monotheistic religions. Yes, let's cast the net wide on this one. If living in North America means anything these days, it means living in spaces defined by a Christianity more cultural than faith-based. Maybe, as Christianity fades, Christendom is strengthened – in any case, we call its pervasiv influence *moralism*. This moralism is the very fabric of Everything, believe it or not. Think of it as an emotional form of surveillance, a camera in your head.

There never was an angel or devil on your shoulder, a voice of conscience telling you what's right and wrong, or a serpent of temptation hissing in your ear. But there was a reason someone would have you believe they were real.

we have good reason to feel undermined by our leader-priests. At least priests have the minimal good taste of being transparent about what they think they are doing.

If you want to grasp moralism in politics, when you see a leader speaking imagine him wearing priestly robes, and when you see one of the leaders who say they are not leaders, imagine her as the preacher on the street corner or bus. And conversely, if you want to grasp the politics in moralism, observe as those who would set up themselves up as moral and religious leaders, advisors of every sort, cynically make it their business to cut corners and conceal their infinite hypocracies.

Liars in everything.

This motley array of characters each has their own way of draining our vitality. They weaken our flesh by managing our pleasures, so we are lost in our own bodies. They train our souls as well, but believing in salvation or redemption does not lead to either.

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In Everything community means that our behavior is not our own. But neither are our actions and beliefs merely prescribed by figureheads. They are ordered by anonymous agents of a secular culture that grows intertwined with them all. Everything is not a religion, but it can wear religion as its mask, and most relate to everything religiously. This is what we mean by moralism. Most of us carve it into our own bodies. We pride ourselves on the scars that show how much we have suffered – how good we are.

It is at this personal and intimate scale that one can grasp the cruelty at work in moralism. It is the guilt-before-guilt of being ordered to be everything, and always failing. Moralism is the monstrous guarantee that we each lay our life bare before some god in all of our activity. In exchange, we are offered a story according to which we are redeemed through pain. Most people's self-understanding begins here. And most so-called communities are ordered around the repetition of some minor variant of this story which they call their history, radical or otherwise.

Beyond these stories of redemption through pain, no other kind of salvation is possible. No one else can save you, and you can't save yourself.

In Everything, our pathetic desires to do good for others, be saved from our mistakes, and achieve our ends are ordered into monstrous rituals. With enough repetition of these rituals, ordered desires secrete stories and beliefs. History is built on these stories when they graduate and become myths, spoken in epic, important tones.

But belief is more about who we are than about what we do.

Everything binds us to it through our belief in the way everything works. So, in Everything, our belief comes to shape what we are able to do. This is belief as the realistic, simple faith in god, in the World, in Everything. For us, on the other hand, belief is a test, a matter of going beyond the hope-and-fear matrix. Going Outside everything.

That is why we no longer believe in anything – in everything, that is. This is how we discovered that we never really believed in god, in the World, in Everything. We know all of the exits are blocked by our age-old fallibility and by the crises of our time. The result: our endlessly repeated confusion about the connection between means and ends.

In the forms of history, politics, and moralism, the confusion will repeat. But we suspect we have found a way to think more clearly. More importantly, we think we have a way to say of a feeling or a passion that it is our own. In this way the disconnection between means and ends is momentarily unbound. And our game is to chain such unbinding moments together, to destroy the separation between means and ends every time we know how.

We said that Everything repeats, that nothing happens. What would it take for something to happen? That the hints or secret glimpses of an Outside would expand like holes in a deteriorating reel of film, would take on nuance and depth, and grow to become panoramic. That is what it would mean for something to happen beyond history. Outside everything.

Our name for what it would take for something to happen is *commitment*. Commitment has long been out of style; like loyalty, and honor, it is one of those values of the past that lost most of its meaning in its incorporation into Everything. It was, it still might be, a way of selecting those passions and relations that are excluded in Everything. A way of knowing who and what is ours beyond of the prejudices of moralism and politics.

Commitment is what there is to do and what there is to think about. To be realized, it must be torn from Everything. And when we say that our game is to chain unbinding moments, hopeless moments together, what we are calling for is in fact a *commitment to commitment*.

Proposition 5

In a world of motivational posters and self-help books encouraging us to strive, excel, and be ourselves, we still want to speak of a kind of striving for excellence that lies Outside all that. This commitment is what is lacking in Everything and in its opposition. Without it, any supposedly radical rejection of the world we know ends up, whether by compromise, repentance or surrender, arriving back in the huge and welcoming arms of social participation, the suffocating embrace of the all.

A world of half measures and moral relativism haven't proven more sensitive to people's different experiences, values, or beliefs, nor has it transformed us into more than nervous calculators of demographics and feelings. More and more tolerance has pacified our manner of disagreement; but what is even more disastrous is that it has pacified our disposition to friendship and love, rendering them impossible.

In many places everything depends on being nice. Everything is everyone coming together to suffocate each other. No one may escape the group hug.

Many beg for the crushing embrace to cease, but everyone hears this as a plea for a more complete hug. Someone is always willing to listen, listen, nod, and perhaps give you some pills. In the end, most simply succumb. After all, it is said that suffocation is a peaceful and pleasant way to die.

So when we call "hello" – is there anybody out there? - we do in the midst of a crushing mass of bodies. We do so with what little breath has not been squeezed out. If the cry is weak, it is because everything muffles it.

You can't be friends with everyone. To be true to another is to be an enemy of the group. To have space to breathe, to think clearly, to have solitude and silence, one must make space. And to make space one must destroy what takes it up. Only then there is anything worthwhile to occupy by oneself or with a friend.

Grasped beyond moralism, violence, like love and sorrow, is ultimately a passion suffocated by the demand for mediation and pleasantries.

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There are all sorts of commitments that we are uninterested in. Every worthless cause congeals around its committed people. TV shows, idiotic pop stars, obscure musicians, middlebrow intellectuals, all of the social, cultural, and political garbage of Everything finds its adherents. And in their arbitrary commitment the adherents mistake their act of consumption for a self-defining, self-asserting, and perhaps even liberatory act.

(But let us not be so naive as to think that the idea of liberation enters the consciousness of most.)

If it is to be anything but joining in the big hug, commitment itself requires commitment. It requires attention and care on one hand, and corrosive skepticism on the other. We said that our project is difficult to the point of hopelessness. We also said that everything involves an order to do and to be; we should add that Everything separated everything into two orders – the order of thought and the order of life – and the only point at which they are legitimately to meet in a society such as this one is in an expressive act of consumption. *Get yourself something nice.*

To violate this order to do and to be is probably to face misery, poverty or prison time.

And yet that is what we are committed to risking, because we crave the intensification of the link between life and thought. Between what we say we do, and what we do; between what we say we are, and what we are. Commitment is that link; the commitment to commitment is its intensification.

We could go even farther and say that what we are committed to is the annihilation of the separation between thought and life. And this is necessarily to say we are committed to the annihilation of Everything.

Proposition 6

When we invoke commitment to commitment, we are speaking of a form of organization that is far from all the boring clubs and pseudo-military formations. The strength of this form is entirely dependent on the intensity with which one enters into it and how well it shrouds itself. You do not have to believe that you are doing something more serious than playing a game to play it seriously, to win.

Another way to approach commitment to commitment is to ask ourselves why projects fail, why people sell out or give up, or why movements either go mainstream or implode.

We respond that Everything makes it impossible to keep promises. There is a kind of built-in dishonesty or hypocrisy to everything we do. It seems to us that Everything's order interferes precisely where one might, on one's own terms, keep a promise, swear an oath, or be transparent with a friend. We only understand swearing an oath, for example, in terms of loyalty to an institution: the court, the army, marriage... We only understand keeping promises or being honest in terms of morality.

Our sense of the oath is not so much the moral question of telling the truth, but the question of true joy, the hopeless possibility of achieving an ecstatic bond between thought and life. Or, in another register, true friendship.

A hopeless affair.

We might even invoke that archaic sense of being true to another, where to be true meant to be intertwined. The intensity of a friendship understood as an immanent quality rather than something referred to a command from on high.

We are writing about friendship, again. We are still and perhaps only writing about friendship. We are writing about a rupture, a leap from commitment to commitment-to-commitment. This is not something that happens in private, but neither it is something that happens in public. It does not happen in or as Everything and so it is hidden in plain sight. If you are doing it right, you and yours will be illegible in Everything.

About the rupture as it happened – as it happens – in our lives, we can report two things. It happened once (we cried out "hello?" into the void) and it is endlessly repeated (it began when someone responded in the dark). Every conversation, all our intercourse, is a repetition of this first and originary event.

Every time we see a project fail, hear of another betrayal, think of a movement imploding, we are back in the original void, saying "hello?", wondering who is there. We will never abandon the psychic distance that our first awareness of separation, of everything brought us. We are familiar with impossibility.

The fact of the rupture, our enjoyment of its accident and of its less than accidental repetition affords us this insight: your sense of belonging to a group or a party, to a team or a crew, can drift off into belonging to everything. Nothing is easier, nothing is more available, more possible, than this resuturing to things as all recognize them and know them to be. No one can successfully be something – claim some identity – and not have that identity equal its assigned place in Everything.

The Outside is not the inside's outside. It is another side. The chain links together accidents, non-accidentally; it is a series of moments of attention and passion, and of lessons learned with no confidence that our fallibility has been overcome. Commitment to commitment is the will to make the next link, hopelessly. We are free to participate in countless activities, and withdraw from countless more, insofar as some true response issues forth there.

Proposition 7

Having abandoned history, we have no interest in waiting for the end of the world. We have realized we cannot live our lives except by being the world's undoing. In the end, there is nothing to wait for and nothing to fear. What's more, we have all the time in the world to undo it.

We who would like to not be deluded, who hold a certain *dis-illusion* as a criterion of life, know that everything comes to an end. At least we know it sometimes. Sometimes it is as simple as knowing our friend will die, or that we will die for them.

You know about death because you are surrounded by it. But, even as Everything manages and orders the death that surrounds, it conceals death. It has to do so constantly, and cannot ever do so entirely. And when it fails, you see that you are surrounded by death.

When we spoke of hopelessness, we meant a disregard for everything, but also an attitude toward the certainty of death. When we spoke of fearlessness, it was to distinguish ourselves from everything that lives as though it should not die. So, without fear, without hope, we are playing a game with time and death. Our project, to which we will have been true, will come to an end as well. The game, which comes in several variants, is to know this and remain committed – without illusions.

Commitment to commitment is to know how to communicate the *dis-illusion* and the game. This is what we are doing when we say: "hello."

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The world too will end; this is certainty and not hope. In fact, countless worlds already have ended, are ending as we speak.

We are committed to the annihilation of everything and so to the end of the world.

Someone said that many worlds are possible, as if we could save the ones that are ending, or as if we could resuscitate all of the ones already extinguished, restoring traditions, cultures, and languages back to life. We think not even one of these worlds is inhabitable. Everything is the single, colossal World that orders every subordinate world. There is room in everything for your private world, for your particular culture, and your commitment to it behind closed doors or in the political sphere. There is no room for commitment to commitment, the unbinding of our faith in the World.

The end of the World depends on us.

True friendship is the end of the World, the beginning of our play together.

The secret is to begin at the end.

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