

MERRY CRISIS
AND A HAPPY NEW FEAR

Invisible Committee

To Our Friends

Chapter One

1. *Crisis Is a Mode of Government.*
2. *The Real Catastrophe is Existential and Metaphysical.*
3. *The Apocalypse Disappoints*

there is now only a historical battlefield, and the forces that move upon it. Our range of action is boundless. Historical life extends her arms to us. There are countless reasons to refuse her, but they all spring from neurosis. Confronted with the apocalypse in a recent zombie film, a former United Nations official comes to this clearheaded conclusion: “It’s not the end, not even close. If you can fight, fight. Help each other. The war has just begun.”

1

We other revolutionaries are the great cuckolds of modern history. And one is always complicit in some way with one’s own betrayal. The fact is painful, so it’s generally denied. We’ve had a blind faith in *crisis*, a faith so blind and so enduring that we didn’t see how the liberal order had made it the centerpiece of its arsenal. Marx wrote in the aftermath of 1848: “A new revolution is possible only as a result of a new crisis; but it will come, just as surely as the crisis itself.” And indeed he spent the rest of his days prophetizing, with every spasm of the world economy, the great final crisis of capital which he would wait for in vain. There are still Marxists who try to sell us the current crisis as “The Big One” and would have us wait a bit longer for their curious version of the Last Judgement.

“If you want to force a change,” Milton Friedman advised his Chicago Boys, “set off a crisis.” Far from fearing crises, capital now tries its hand at producing them intentionally. The way avalanches are triggered in order to control their timing and size. The way plains are set ablaze so that a menacing fire will extinguish itself there for lack of fuel. “Where and when” is a question of opportuneness or tactical necessity. It’s public knowledge that shortly after being appointed, in 2010, the director of the Greek Statistical Authority, ELSTAT, set about falsifying that country’s debt accounts, making them look worse as a way of justifying the Troika’s intervention. So it’s a fact that the “sovereign debt crisis” was launched by a man still on the official payroll of the IMF, an institution charged with “helping” countries get out of debt. Here it was a matter of testing out, in a European country under real conditions, the neoliberal project of a complete revamping of a society, to measure the effects of a proper policy of structural adjustment.

With its medical connotation, throughout the whole modern period crisis was that natural thing which arose in an unexpected or cyclical way, calling for a decision to be made, a decision that would put an end to the general insecurity of the critical situation. The conclusion would be fortunate or unfortunate depending on the effectiveness of the applied medication. The critical moment was also the moment of *critique*—the brief interval in which discussion concerning the symptoms and the medication was opened. That’s no longer there to put

an end to the crisis. On the contrary, the crisis is set off with a view to introducing the remedy. They speak now of a “crisis” in regard to what they intend to restructure, just as they label “terrorists” those they are preparing to strike down. The “crisis of the banlieues” in France in 2005 thus served to announce the biggest urban-planning offensive of the last thirty years against the so-called “banlieues,” orchestrated directly by the Ministry of the Interior.

The crisis discourse of the neoliberals is a variety of doublespeak. Among themselves they prefer to speak of a “double truth.” One the one hand, crisis is the invigorating moment of “creative destruction,” creating opportunities, innovation, and entrepreneurs of whom only the best, most highly motivated, and most competitive will survive. “Deep down that is probably the message of capitalism: ‘creative destruction’—the scrapping of old technologies and old ways of doing things for the new is the only way to raise average living standards [...] Capitalism creates a tug-of-war within each of us. We are alternately the aggressive entrepreneur and the couch potato, who subliminally prefers the lessened competitive stress of an economy where all participants have equal incomes,” writes Alan Greenspan, chairman of the American Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006. On the other hand, the discourse of the crisis intervenes as a political method for managing populations. The continuous restructuring of everything—social welfare and organigrams, companies and urban districts—is the only way to ensure the non-existence of the opposing party, through a constant disruption of the conditions of its existence. The rhetoric of change is used to dismantle every custom, to break all ties, to unsettle every certainty, to discourage every solidarity, to maintain a chronic existential insecurity. It corresponds to a strategy that can be formulated in these terms: “Use a continuous crisis to avert any actual crisis.” On the everyday level, this is akin to the well-known counter-insurgency practice of “destabilizing in order to stabilize,” which, for the authorities, consists in deliberately producing chaos so as to make order more desirable than revolution. From micromanagement to the management of whole countries, the population is kept in a kind of constant trauma. The resulting stupefaction and dereliction mean that the managers can do more or less what they want with each and everyone. The mass depression currently afflicting the Greeks is the *deliberate* product of the

a street party, but everyone out at once—it was a happy feeling to see everybody even though we didn’t know each other.” The same was with those miniature communities formed spontaneously in New Orleans in the days after Katrina, faced with the contempt of the public authorities and the paranoia of the security agencies, communities that organized daily to feed and clothe themselves and attend to each other’s needs, even if this required looting a store or two.

To start with, therefore, rethinking an idea of revolution capable of interrupting the disastrous course of things is to purge it of every apocalyptic element it has contained up to now. It is to see that Marxist eschatology differs *only in that regard* from the imperial founding aspiration of the United States—the one still printed on every dollar bill: “*Annuit coeptis. Novus ordo seclorum.*” Socialists, liberals, Saint-Simoni-ans, and Cold War Russians and Americans have always expressed the same neurasthenic yearning for the establishment of an era of peace and sterile abundance where there would no longer be anything to fear, where the contradictions would finally be resolved and the negative would be tamed. The dream of a prosperous society, established through science and industry, one that was totally automated and finally pacified. Something like an earthly paradise organized on the model of a psychiatric hospital or a sanitarium. An ideal that can only come from seriously ill beings who no longer even hope for a remission. “Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens,” the song says.

The whole originality and the whole scandal of Marxism was to claim that to reach the millennium it was necessary to pass through the economic apocalypse, whereas the others judged the latter to be superfluous. We won’t wait for the millennium or the apocalypse. There will never be peace on earth. Abandoning the idea of peace is the only real peace. Faced with the Western catastrophe, the left generally adopts the position of lamentation, denunciation, and thus helplessness, which makes it loathsome in the eyes of the very ones it claims to be defending. The state of exception in which we are living shouldn’t be denounced, it should be turned back against power itself. We will then be relieved in our turn of any consideration for the law—in proportion to the impunity that we claim, and depending on the relative force that we create. We have an absolutely clear field for any decision, any initiative, as long as they’re linked to a careful reading of the situation. For us

already here, it's evident that most actual disasters offer an escape from our daily disaster. Many examples attest to the relief from existential apocalypse that real disaster brings, from the earthquake that struck San Francisco in 1906 to Hurricane Sandy that devastated New York in 2012. One generally assumes that the relations between people in an emergency situation reveal their deep and eternal bestiality. With every destructive earthquake, every economic crash, and every "terrorist attack," one *desires* to see a confirmation of the old chimera of the state of nature and its train of uncontrollable, violent acts. When the tin dikes of civilization give way, one would like for the "vile core of man" that obsessed Pascal to show itself, that "human nature" with its evil passions—envious, brutal, blind and despicable—which has served the holders of power as an argument at least since Thucydides. Unfortunately the fantasy has been disconfirmed by most of the historically known disasters.

The disappearance of a civilization generally doesn't take the form of a chaotic war of all against all. In a situation of extreme catastrophe, that hostile discourse only serves to justify the priority given to the defense of property against looting, by the police, the army, or, for lack of anything better, by *vigilante* militias former for the occasion. It can also serve to cover misappropriations by the authorities themselves, like those of the Italian Civil Protection Department after the Aquila earthquake. On the contrary, the decomposition of this world, taken on as such, creates openings for other ways of living, including in the middle of an "emergency situation." Consider the inhabitants of Mexico City in 1985, who, among the ruins of their neighborhoods struck by a deadly quake, reinvented the revolutionary carnival and the figure of the superhero serving the people—in the form of a legendary wrestler, Super Barrio. In the euphoria of regaining control of their urban existence, they conflated the collapse of buildings with a breakdown of the political system, releasing the life of the city from the grip of government as much as possible and starting to rebuild their destroyed dwellings. An enthusiastic resident of Halifax said something similar when he declared after the hurricane of 2003: "Everybody woke up the next morning and everything was different. There was no electricity, all the stores were closed, no one had access to media. The consequence was that everyone poured out into the street to bear witness. Not quite

Troika's policy, and not its collateral effect.

If some commentators made fools of themselves by hastily proclaiming the "death of neoliberalism" with the explosion of the subprime swindle, it's because they failed to understand that the "crisis" was not an economic phenomenon but a political technique of government. We're not experiencing a crisis of capitalism but rather the triumph of crisis capitalism. "Crisis" means: government is growing. Crisis has become the *ultima ratio* of the powers that be. Modernity measured everything in relation to the past backwardness it claimed to be rescuing us from; now everything is measured in relation to its impending collapse. When the salaries of Greek civil servants are reduced by half, it's while pointing out that one could just as well no longer pay them at all. Every time the period of pension contribution of French wage earners is lengthened, the rationale has to do with "saving the retirement system." The present crisis, permanent and omni-lateral, is no longer the classic crisis, the decisive moment. On the contrary, it's an endless end, a lasting apocalypse, an indefinite suspension, an effective postponement of the actual collapse, and for that reason a permanent state of exception. The current crisis no longer promises anything; on the contrary, it tends to free whoever governs from every constraint as to the means deployed.

2

Epochs are proud. Each one claims to be unique. Our own prides itself on bringing about the historical collision of a planetary ecological crisis, a generalized crisis of democracies, and an inexorable energy crisis, the whole being crowned by a creeping global economic crisis, but “unmatched for the last hundred years.” And this affirms and heightens our pleasure at living through an epoch like no other. But one only has to open up a newspaper from the 1970’s, or read the Club of Rome report on the *Limits to Growth* from 1972, the article by the cybernetician Gregory Bateson on “The Roots of Ecological Crisis” from March 1970, or *The Crisis of Democracy* published in 1975 by the Trilateral Commission, to see that we’ve been living under the dark star of integral crisis at least since the beginning of the 1970s. A text from 1972 such as Giogio Cesarono’s *Apocalypse and Revolution* already analyzes it lucidly. So if the seventh seal was opened at a precise moment, it certainly wasn’t yesterday.

At the end of 2012, the highly official American Centers for Disease Control circulated a graphic novel for a change. Its title: *Preparedness 101: Zombie Apocalypse*. The idea is simple: the population must be prepared for any eventuality, a nuclear or natural catastrophe, a general breakdown of the system or an insurrection. The document concludes by saying: “If you’re ready for a zombie apocalypse you’re ready for any emergency.” The zombie figure comes from Haitian voodoo culture. In American films, masses of rebellious zombies chronically function as an allegory for the threat of a generalized insurrection by the black proletariat. So *that* is clearly what people must be *prepared* for. Now that there’s no longer any Soviet threat to wield as a way to ensure the psychotic cohesion of the citizens, anything will do to make sure the population is ready to defend itself—that is, *defend the system*. Maintaining an endless fear to forestall a frightful end.

All of Western false consciousness is compressed into this official comic strip. It’s plain to see that the real living dead are the petty bourgeois of the American suburbs. Obvious that the dull concern with survival, the economic worry about not having enough, the feeling of having an unsustainable form of life, is not something that will come after the catastrophe, but what already drives the desperate struggle for life

3

On December 21, 2012, no fewer than 300 journalists from 18 countries invaded the little village of Bugarach in the Aude *departement* of France. No end of time was ever announced for that date on any Mayan calendar deciphered so far. The rumor that this village had some slight connection with that non-existent prophecy was an obvious practical joke. The television broadcasters dispatched a swarm of reporters to the place nonetheless. One was curious to see if there *really are* people who believe in the end of the world, since we can’t even manage to believe in that any more, and have the hardest time believing in our own loves. At Bugarach on that day, there was no one, no one apart from the numerous celebrants of the spectacle. The reporters were reduced to talking about themselves, about their pointless wait, their boredom and the fact that nothing was happening. Caught in their own trap, they revealed the true face of the end-of-the-world: journalists, waiting, and events that refuse to happen.

One shouldn’t underestimate the craving for apocalypse, the lust for Armageddon that permeates the epoch. Its particular existential pornography involves ogling prefigurative documentaries showing clouds of computer-animated grasshoppers descending of the Bordeaux vineyards in 2075, juxtaposed with “climate migrants” storming the southern shores of Europe—the same migrants that Frontex is already making a point of decimating. Nothing is older than the end of the world. The apocalyptic passion has always been favored by the powerless since earliest antiquity. What is new in our epoch is that the apocalypse has been totally absorbed by capital, and placed in its service. The horizon of catastrophe is what we are currently being governed by. Now, if there is one thing destined to remain unfulfilled, it’s the apocalyptic prophecy, be it economic, climatic, terrorist, or nuclear. It is pronounced only in order to summon the means of averting it, which is to say, most often, the necessity of government. No organization, whether political or religious, has ever declared itself defeated because the facts contradicted its prophecies. Because the purpose of prophecy is never to be right about the future, but to *act upon the present*: to impose a waiting mode, a passivity, submission, here and now.

Not only is there no catastrophe to come other than the one that’s

last bold move in a game that can't be won.

The objective disaster serves mainly to mask another disaster, this one more obvious still and more massive. The exhaustion of natural resources is probably less advanced than the exhaustion of subjective resources, of vital resources, that is afflicting our contemporaries. If so much satisfaction is derived from surveying the devastation of the environment it's largely because this veils the shocking destruction of interiorities. Every oil spill, every sterile plain, every species extinction is an image of our souls in shreds, a reflection of our absence from the world, of our personal inability to inhabit it. Fukushima offers the spectacle of this complete failure of man and his mastery, which only produces ruins—and those Japanese plains, intact in appearance but where no one can live for decades. A never-ending decomposition that is finishing the job of making the world uninhabitable: the West will have ended up borrowing its mode of existence from what it fears most—radioactive waste.

When one asks the left of the left what the revolution would consist in, it is quick to answer: “placing the human at the center.” What that left doesn't realize is how tired of the human the world is, how tired of humanity we are—of that species that thought it was the jewel of creation, that believed it was entitled to ravage everything since everything belonged to it. “Placing the human at the center” was the Western project. We know how that turned out. The time has come to jump ship, to betray the species. There's no great human family that would exist separately from each of its worlds, from each of its familiar universes, each of the forms of life that are strewn across the earth. There is no humanity, there are only earthlings and their enemies, the Occidentals, of whatever skin color they happen to be. We other revolutionaries, with our atavistic humanism, would do well to inform ourselves about the uninterrupted uprisings by the indigenous peoples of Central and South America over the past twenty years. Their watchword could be “Place the earth at the center.” It's a declaration of war *against Man*. Declaring war on him could be the best way to bring him back down to earth, if only he didn't play deaf, as always.

of each individual in a neoliberal regime. Defeated life is not what threatens but what is already there, day after day. Everyone sees it, everyone knows it and feels it. The Walking Dead are the *salary men*. If this epoch is crazy about apocalyptic dramatizations, which make up a large share of film production, there's more involved than the aesthetic enjoyment which the distraction authorizes. Besides, John's *Revelation* already has a whole Hollywood-style phantasmagoria with its air attacks by furious angels, its horrendous floods, its spectacular scourges. Only universal destruction, the death of everything, comes close to giving the suburban employee the feeling he's alive, since he's the *least alive* of all the creatures. “To hell with it all” and “let's pray that it lasts” are the two sighs heaved alternately by the same civilized distress. An old Calvinist taste for mortification has a part in this: life is a reprieve, never a plenitude. The discussions of “European nihilism” were not vain talk. Indeed nihilism is an article that's been exported so successfully that the world is now saturated with it. As regards “neoliberal globalization,” one could say that what we now have above all is the globalization of nihilism.

In 2007 we wrote that “what we are faced with is not the crisis of a society but the extinction of a civilization.” At the time, this kind of statement got you taken for an Illuminatus. But “the crisis” has gone down that path. And even ATTAC acknowledges a “crisis of civilization”—which goes to show. More dramatically, an American veteran of the Iraq war turned “strategy” consultant, wrote in the autumn of 2013 in the *New York Times*: “Now, when I look into our future, I see water rising up to wash out lower Manhattan. I see food riots, hurricanes, and climate refugees. I see 82nd Airborne soldiers shooting looters. I see grid failure, wrecked harbors, Fukushima waste, and plagues. I see Baghdad. I see the Rockaways underwater. I see a strange, precarious world [...] The biggest problem climate change poses isn't how the Department of Defense should put up sea walls to protect Alphabet City, or when we should evacuate Hoboken. It won't be addressed by buying a Prius, signing a treaty, or turning off the air-conditioning. The biggest problem we face is a philosophical one: understanding that this civilization is *already dead*.” In the days after the First World War it still only called itself “mortal,” which it certainly was, in every sense of the word.

In reality, the end of civilization has been clinically established for a

century, and countersigned by events. Expatiating on the matter is now nothing but a means of distraction. But it's a distraction from the catastrophe *there in front of us*, and that has been there for a long time, from the catastrophe that *we are*, the catastrophe is existential, affective, and metaphysical first of all. It resides in Western man's incredible estrangement from the world, an estrangement that demands, for example, that he become the master and possessor of nature—one only seeks to possess what one fears. It's not for nothing that he has placed so many *screens* between himself and the world. By cutting himself off from what exists, Western man has made it into this desolate expanse, this dreary, hostile, mechanical, absurd nothingness which he must ceaselessly devastate, through his *labor*, his cancerous activism, his shallow hysterical agitation. Relentlessly driven from euphoria to stupor and from stupor to euphoria, he tries to remedy his absence from the world through a whole accumulation of expertise, prostheses, and relations, a whole technological hardware store that is ultimately disappointing. He's more and more visibly that *overequipped existentialist* who can't stop engineering everything, recreating everything, unable as he is to bear a reality that is completely beyond him. As that moron, Camus, blandly admitted, "For a man, understanding the world means reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal." He tries humbly to re-enchant his divorce from existence, from himself, from "other people"—that hell!—by calling it his "freedom," when it's not by resorting to dismal parties, stupid entertainments, or heavy drug use. Life is effectively, affectively, absent for hi, because life repels him. Deep down, it *nauseates* him. He's managed to protect himself from everything reality contains that is unstable, irreducible, palpable, corporal, weighty, hot, or fatiguing by projecting it onto the ideal, visual distant and digitized plane of the Internet, where there's no friction or tears, no death or odors.

The falsity of the entire Western apocalyptic consists in projecting onto the world the mourning we're not able to do in regard to it. It's not the world that is lost, it's we who have lost the world and go on losing it. It's not the world that is going to end *soon*, it's *we* who *are finished*, amputated, cut-off, we who refuse vital contact with the real in a hallucinatory way. The crisis is not economic, ecological, or political, *the crisis is above all that of presence*. To such a point that the *must* of com-

modities—the iPhone and the Hummer being exemplary cases—consists in a sophisticated absence outfit. On the one hand, the iPhone concentrates all the possible abesses to the world and to others in a single object. It is the lamp and the camera, the mason's level and the musician's recording device, the TV and the compass, the tourist guide and the means of communication, on the other, it is the prosthesis that bars any openness to what is there and places me in a regime of constant, convenient semi-presence, retaining a part of my being-there in its grip. They've even launched a smart-phone app designed to remedy the fact that "our 24/7 connection to the digital world disconnects us from the real world around us." It is brightly called the *GPS for the Soul*. As for the Hummer, it's the possibility of transporting my autistic bubble, my impermeability to everything, into the most inaccessible recesses of "nature" and coming back *intact*. That Google has declared the "fight against death" to be a new industrial horizon shows how one can be mistaken *about what life is*.

At the apex of his insanity, Man has even proclaimed himself a "geological force," going so far as to give the name of his species to a phase of the life of the planet: he's taken to speaking of an "anthropocene." For the last time, he assigns himself the main role, even if it's to accuse himself of having trashed everything—the seas and the skies, the ground and what's underground—even if it's to confess his guilt for the unprecedented extinction of plant and animal species. But what's remarkable is that he continues relating in the same disastrous manner to the disaster produced by his own disastrous relationship with the world. He *calculates* the rate at which the ice pack is disappearing. He *measures* the extermination of the non-human forms of life. As to climate change, he doesn't talk about it based on his sensible experience—a bird that doesn't return in the same period of the year, an insect whose sounds aren't heard anymore, a plant that no longer flowers at the same time as some other one. He talks about it scientifically with numbers and averages. He thinks he's saying something when he establishes that the temperature will rise so many degrees and the precipitation will decrease by so many inches or millimeters. He even speaks of "biodiversity." He observes the rarefaction of life on earth *from space*. He has the hubris to claim, paternally, to be "protecting the environment," which certainly never asked for anything of the sort. All this has the look of a