

A black and white halftone image of a globe. A protest sign is draped across the globe, featuring the text 'DESTITUTIONS LE MONDE' in a hand-drawn, blocky font. The globe shows continents and oceans, with a grid of latitude and longitude lines. The overall image has a grainy, dotted texture characteristic of halftone printing.

LET'S DESTITUTE THE WORLD

DESTITUTIONS
LE MONDE

**COMMUNISM IS THE REAL
MOVEMENT THAT DESTITUTES
THE EXISTING STATE OF THINGS.**

The Invisible Committee

ent way to begin it than this, so prone it is to close back down as soon as it is opened in a peaceful manner. Everyone will have noted, moreover, how the conflict of the spring of 2016 served as a divine lull in the deterioration of public debate.

Only an affirmation has the potential for accomplishing the work of destruction. The destituent gesture is thus desertion and attack, creation and wrecking, and all at once, *in the same gesture*. It defies the accepted logics of alternativism and activism at the same time. It forms a linkage between the extended time of construction and the spasmodic time of intervention, between the disposition to enjoy our piece of the world and the disposition to place it at stake. Along with the taste for risk-taking, the reasons for living disappear. Comfort—which clouds perceptions, takes pleasure in repeating words that it empties of any meaning, and prefers not to know anything—is the real enemy, the enemy *within*. Here it is not a question of a new social contract, but of a new strategic composition of worlds.

Communism is the real movement that destitutes the existing state of things.

lent appropriation of this world; it divides into two. On the one hand, there are worlds to be made, forms of life made to grow apart from what reigns, including by salvaging what can be salvaged from the present state of things, and on the other, there is the imperative to attack, to simply destroy the world of capital. A two-pronged gesture that divides again: it's clear that the worlds one constructs can maintain their apartness from capital only together with the fact of attacking it and conspiring against it. It's clear that attacks not inspired by a different heartfelt idea of the world would have no real reach, would exhaust themselves in a sterile activism. In destruction the complicity is constructed on the basis of which the sense of destroying is constructed. And vice versa. It's only from the destitute standpoint that one can grasp all that is incredibly constructive in the breakage. Without that, one would not understand how a whole segment of a union demonstration can applaud and chant when the window of a car dealership finally gives way and falls to the ground or when a piece of urban furniture is smashed to pieces. Nor that it seems so natural for a cortege de tete of 10,000 persons to break everything deserving to be broken, and even a bit more, along the whole route of a demonstration such as that of June 14, 2016 in Paris. Nor that all the anti-smashers rhetoric of the government apparatus, so well-established and normally so effective, lost its traction and was no longer convincing to anyone. Breaking is understandable, among other things, as an open debate in public on the question of property. The bad-faith reproach "they always break what is not theirs" needs to be turned back around. How can you break something unless, at the moment of breaking it, the thing is in your hands, is in a sense yours? Recall the Civil Code: "As regards furniture, possession can be taken as ownership." In effect, someone who breaks doesn't engage in an act of negation, but in a paradoxical, counterintuitive affirmation. They affirm, against all appearances: "This is ours!" Breaking, therefore, is affirmation, is appropriation. It discloses the problematic character of the property regime that now governs all things. Or at least it opens the debate on this thorny point. And there is scarcely a differ-

Even though 80% of French people declared that they no longer expect anything from the politicians, the same 80% have confidence in the state and its institutions. No scandal, no evidence, no personal experience manages to make a dent in the respect owed to the institutional framework in this country. It's always the men who embody it who are to blame. There have been blunders, abuses, extraordinary breakdowns. The institutions, similar to ideology in this respect, are sheltered from the contradiction of facts, however recurrent. It was enough for the National Front to promise to restore the institutions to become reassuring instead of troubling. There's nothing surprising in that. The real has something intrinsically chaotic about it that humans need to stabilize by imposing a legibility, and thereby a foreseeability, on it. And what every institution provides is precisely a *stationary* legibility of the real, an ultimate stabilization of phenomena. If the institution suits us so well, it's because the sort of legibility it guarantees saves us above all, each one of us, from *affirming* anything whatsoever, from risking our singular reading of life and of things, from producing together an intelligibility of the world that is properly ours and shared in common. The problem is that choosing not to do that is the same as *choosing not to exist*. It's to resign from life. In reality, what we need are not institutions but *forms*. It so happens, in fact, that life, whether biological, singular or collective, is precisely a continual creation of forms. It suffices to perceive them, to accept allowing them to arise, to make a place for them and accompany their metamorphosis. A habit is a form. A thought is a form. A friendship is a form. A work is a form. A profession is a form. Everything that lives is only forms and interactions of forms.

Except that, voila, we are in France, the country where even the Revolution has become an institution, and which has exported that ambivalence to the four corners of the world. There is a *specifically French* love of the institution that must be dealt with if we wish to talk again about revolution one day, if not make one. Here the most libertarian of the psychotherapies has seen fit to label itself “institutional,” the most critical of the sociologies has given itself the name “institutional analysis.” If the principle comes to us from ancient Rome, the *affect* that accompanies it is clearly Christian in origin. The French passion for the institution is a flagrant symptom of the lasting Christian impregnation of a country that believes itself to be delivered from that. All the more lasting, moreover, as it believes itself to be delivered. We should never forget that the first modern thinker of the institution was that *lunatic* Calvin, that model of all the despisers of life, and that he was born in Picardy. The French passion for the institution comes from a properly Christian distrust towards life. The great malice of the institution idea is in its claiming to free us from the rule of the passions, from the uncontrollable hazards of existence, that it would be a transcendence of the passions when it is actually just one of them, and assuredly one of the most morbid. The institution claims to be a *remedy against men*, none of whom can be trusted, whether the people or the leader, the neighbor or the brother or the stranger. What governs it is always the same idiocy of sinful humanity, subject to desire, selfishness, and lust, and who must keep from loving anything whatsoever in this world and from giving in to their inclinations, which are all uniformly vicious. It's not his fault if an economist like Frederic Lordon can't picture a revolution that is not a new institution. Because all economic science, and not just its “institutional” current, has its basis finally in the lessons of Saint Augustine. Through its name and its language, what the institution promises is that a single thing, in this lower world, will have transcended time, will have withdrawn itself from the unpredictable flux of becoming, will have established a bit of tangible eternity, an unequivocal meaning, free of human ties and situations—a definitive

reappropriate. Who would wish to reappropriate nuclear power plants, Amazons warehouses, the expressways, ad agencies, high-speed trains, Dassault, La Defense business complex, auditing firms, nanotechnologies, supermarkets and their poisonous merchandise? Who imagines a people's takeover of industrial farming operations where a single man plows 400 hectares of eroded ground at the wheel of his megatractor piloted via satellite? No one with any sense. What complicates the task for revolutionaries is that the old constituent gesture no longer works there either. With the result that the most desperate, the most determined to save it, have finally found the winning formula: in order to have done with capitalism, all we have to do is reappropriate money itself! A Negriist deduces this from the spring of 2016 conflict: “Our goal is the following: transformation of the rivers of command money that flow from the faucets of the European Central Bank into money as money, into unconditional social income! Bring the fiscal paradises back down to Earth, attack the citadels of offshore finance, confiscate the deposits of liquid returns, secure everyone's access to the world of commodities—the world in which we really live, whether that pleases us or not. The only universalism that people love is that of money! Let anyone wishing to take power begin by taking the money! Let anyone wishing to institute the commons of counter-power begin by securing the material conditions on the basis of which those counter-powers can actually be constructed! Let anyone preferring the destituent exodus consider the objective possibilities of a withdrawal from the production of the dominant social relations that are inherent in the possession of money! Let anyone in favor of a general and renewable strike reflect at the margins of the wage autonomy granted by a socialization of income worthy of that name! Let anyone wishing for an insurrection of the subalterns not forget the powerful promise of liberation contained in the slogan “Let's take the money!” A revolutionary who cares about their mental health will want to leave constituent logic and its rivers of imaginary money behind them.

So the revolutionary gesture no longer consists in a simple vio-

policies of the European Union. As for Podemos, everyone no doubt can appreciate the radical novelty of the quarrels for its control, which pitted its number 1 against its number 2. And how could one forget the touching speech of Pablo Iglesias during the legislative campaign of June 2016: “We are the political force of law and order [...] We are proud of saying our country. [...] Because our country has institutions that enable children to go to the theater and to school. That is why we are defenders of the institutions, defenders of the law, because the poor only have the law and their rights.” Or this instructive tirade of March 2015, in Andalusia: “I’d like to pay a tribute: long live our democratic servicemen! Long live the Guardia Civil, those policemen who put handcuffs on the corrupt.” The latest deplorable political intrigues that now make up the life of Podemos moved certain of its members to make this bitter observation: “They wanted to take power, and it is power that has taken them.” As for the “citizens’ movements” that decided to “squat power” by taking possession of the Barcelona mayor’s office, they’ve confided to their former friends of the squats something they still can’t declare in public: by gaining access to the institutions, they were indeed able to “take power,” but *there was nothing they could do with it* from there, apart from scuttling a few hotel projects, legalizing one or two occupations and receiving with great ceremony Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris.

Destitution makes it possible to rethink what we mean by revolution. The traditional revolutionary program involved a reclaiming of the world, an expropriation of the expropriators, a violent appropriation of that which is ours, but which we have been deprived of. But here’s the problem: capital has taken hold of every detail and every dimension of existence. It has created a world in its image. From being an exploitation of the existing forms of life, it has transformed itself into a total universe. It has configured, equipped, and made desirable the ways of speaking, thinking, eating, working and vacationing, of obeying and rebelling, that suit its purpose. In doing so, it has reduced to very little the share of things in this world that one might want to

stabilization of the real, like death.

This whole mirage dissolves when a revolution breaks out. Suddenly what seemed eternal collapses into time as though into a bottomless pit. What seemed to plunge its roots into the human heart turns out to have been nothing but a fable for dupes. The palaces are vacated and one discovers in the prince’s abandoned jumble of papers that he no longer believed in it all, if he ever had. For behind the façade of the institution, what goes on is always something other than it claims to be, its precisely what the institution claimed to have delivered the world from: the very human comedy of the coexistence of networks, of loyalties, of clans, interests, lineages, dynasties even, a logic of fierce struggles for territories, resources, miserable titles, influence—stories of sexual conquest and pure folly, of old friendships and rekindled hatreds. Every institution is, in its very regularity, the result of an intense bricolage and, as an institution, of a *denial of that bricolage*. It’s supposed fixity masks a gluttonous appetite for absorbing, controlling, institutionalizing everything that’s on its margins and harbors a bit of life. The real model of every institution is universally the Church. Just as the Church clearly does not have as its goal leading the human flock to its divine salvation, but rather achieving *its own salvation* in time, the alleged function of an institution is only a pretext for its existence. In every institution the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* is re-enacted year after year. Its true purpose is to persist. No need to specify how many souls and bodies must be ground down in order to secure this result, and even within its own hierarchy. One doesn’t become a leader without being basically the most ground down—the king of the ground-down. Reducing delinquency and “defending society” are only the pretext of the carceral institution. If, during the centuries it has existed, it has never succeeded at these things—on the contrary—this is because its purpose is different; it is to go on existing and growing if possible, which means tending to the breeding ground of delinquency and managing the illegalities. The purpose of the medical institution is not to care for people’s health, but to produce the patients that justify

its existence and a corresponding definition of health. Nothing new on this subject since Ivan Illich and his *Medical Nemesis*. It's not the failure of the health institutions that we are now living in a world that is toxic through and through and that makes everyone sick. On the contrary, we've seen their triumph. Quite often, the apparent failure of the institutions is their real function. If school discourages children from learning, this is not fortuitously: it's because children with a desire to learn would make school next to useless. The same goes for the unions, whose purpose is manifestly not the emancipation of workers, but rather the perpetuation of their condition. What could the bureaucrats of the labor unions do with their life, in fact, if the workers had the bad idea of actually freeing themselves? Of course in every institution there are sincere people who really think they are there to accomplish their mission. But it's no accident if those people see themselves systematically obstructed, are systematically kept out of the loop, punished, bullied, eventually ostracized, with the complicity of all the "realists" who keep their mouths shut. These choice victims of the institution have a hard time understanding its double talk, and what is really being asked of them. Their fate is to always be treated there as killjoys, as rebels, and to be endlessly surprised by that.

Against the slightest revolutionary possibility in France, one will always find the institution of the Self and the Self of the institution. Inasmuch as "being someone" always comes down finally to the recognition of, the allegiance to, some institution, inasmuch as succeeding involves conforming to the reflection that you're shown in the hall of mirrors of the social game, the institution has a grip on everyone through the Self. All this couldn't last, would be too rigid, not dynamic enough, if the institution wasn't determined to compensate for its rigidity by a constant attention to the movements that jostle it. There's a perverse dialectic between institution and movements, which testifies to the former's relentless survival instinct. A reality as ancient, massive, and hieratic as that, inscribed in the bodies and minds of its subjects for the hundreds of years the French state has existed, could not have lasted

then steps to the side and watches it expire. It reduces it down to the incoherent ensemble of its practices and makes decisions about them. A good example of this is the way in which the party then in power, the Socialist Party, was led in the summer of 2016 to cancel its *université annuelle*, the party's summer school in Nantes. What was constituted in June within the assembly called "Attack" [*A l'abordage*] did something the *cortege de tete* couldn't do during the whole spring conflict: it got the heterogeneous components of the struggle to meet and organize together beyond a movement time frame. Unionists, Nuit-deboutists, university students, Zadists, high school students, retirees, community volunteers, and other artists began to put together a well-deserved welcoming committee for the Socialist Party. For the government, the risks were great that the little destituent potential that had spoiled life for it throughout the spring would be reborn at a higher degree of organization. The convergent efforts of the confederations, the police, and the vacations to bury the conflict would have all been for nothing. So the Socialist Party withdrew and abandoned the idea of doing battle faced with the threat posed by the very positivity of the bonds formed in the "Attack!" assembly and the determination emanating from them. In exactly the same way, it's the potential of the connections that are formed around the ZAD that protects it, and not its military strength. The finest destituent victories are often those where the battle simply never takes place.

Fernand Deligny said: "In order to fight *against* language and the institution, the right phrase is perhaps not to fight against, but to take the most distance possible, even if this means signaling one's position. Why would we go and press ourselves against the wall? Our project is not to take and hold the square." Deligny was clearly being what Toni Negri cannot abide, "a destituent." But observing what happens when a constituent logic of combining social movements with a party aiming to take power, it does look like destitution is the way to go. Thus we saw, in the last few years, Syriza, that political party "issuing from the movement of the squares," becoming the best relay for the austerity

tion. It means that the impact potential of an action doesn't reside in its effects, but in what is immediately expressed in it. What is constructed on the basis of effort always ends up collapsing from exhaustion. Typically, the operation that the *cortège de tête* causes the processional setup of union demonstrations to undergo is an operation of destitution. With the vital joy it expressed, the rightness of its gesture, its determination, with its affirmative as well as offensive character, the *cortège de tête* drew in all that was still lively in the militant ranks and it destituted demonstrations as an institution. Not with a critique of the rest of the march but something other than a symbolic use of capturing the street. Withdrawing from the institutions is anything but leaving a void, it's suppressing them *in a positive way*.

To destitute is not primarily to attack the institution, but to attack the need we have of it. It's not to criticize it—the first critics of the state are the civil servants themselves; as to the militant, the more they criticize power the more they desire it and the more they refuse to acknowledge their desire—but to take to heart what the institution is meant to do, from outside it. To destitute the university is to establish, at a distance, the places of research, of education and thought, that are more vibrant and more demanding than it is—which would not be hard—and to greet the arrival of the last vigorous minds who are tired of frequenting the academic zombies, and only then to administer its death blow. To destitute the judicial system is to learn to settle our disputes ourselves, applying some method to this, paralyzing its faculty of judgment and driving its henchmen from our lives. To destitute medicine is to know what is good for us and what makes us sick, to rescue from the institution the passionate knowledges that survive there out of view, and never again to find oneself alone at the hospital, with one's body handed over to the artistic sovereignty of a disdainful surgeon. To destitute the government is to make ourselves ungovernable. Who said anything about winning? Overcoming is everything.

The destituent gesture does not oppose the institution. It doesn't even mount a frontal fight, it neutralizes it, empties it of its substance,

so long if it had not been able to tolerate, monitor, and recuperate critics and revolutionaries as they presented themselves. The carnivalesque ritual of social movements function within it as a safety valve, as a tool for managing the social as well as for renewing the institution. They bring it the flexibility, the young flesh, the new blood that it so cruelly lacks. Generation after generation, in its great wisdom, the state has been able to coopt those who showed themselves amenable to being bought off, and crush those who acted intransigent. It's not for nothing that so many leaders of student movements have so naturally advanced to ministerial posts, being people who are sure to have a feel for the state, that is, an appreciation of the institution as mask.

Breaking the circle that turns our contestation into a fuel for what dominates us, marking a rupture in the fatality that condemns revolutions to reproduce what they have driven out, shattering the iron cage of counter-revolution—this is the purpose of *destitution*. The notion of *destitution* is necessary in order to free the revolutionary imaginary of all the old constituent fantasies that weigh it down, of the whole deceptive legacy of the French Revolution. It is necessary to intervene in revolutionary logic, in order to establish a division *within* the idea of insurrection. For there are constituent insurrections, those that end like all the revolutions up to now have ended: by turning back into their opposite, those that have been made “in the name of”—in the name of whom or what? the people, the working class, or God, it matters little. And there are destituent insurrections, such as May '68, the Italian creeping May and so many insurrectionary communes. Despite all that it may have manifested that was cool, lively, unexpected, Nuit debout—like the Spanish movement of the squares or Occupy Wall Street previously—was troubled by the old constituent itch. What was staged spontaneously was the old revolutionary dialectic that would oppose the “constituted powers” with the “constituent power” of the people taking over the public space. There's a good reason that in the first three weeks of Nuit debout, Place de la République, no fewer than three committees appeared that gave themselves the mission of re-

writing a Constitution. What was re-enacted there was the old debate that's been performed to a full house in France *since 1792*. And it seems there's no getting enough of it. It's a national sport. There's not even any need to spruce up the decor to please today's taste. It must be said that the idea of constitutional reform presents the advantage of satisfying both the desire to change everything and the desire that everything stay the same—it's just a matter, finally, of changing a few lines, of symbolic modifications. As long as one debates words, as long as revolution is formulated in the language of rights and the law, the ways of neutralizing it are well-known and marked out.

When sincere Marxists proclaim in a union leaflet, "We are the real power!" it's still the same constituent fiction that is operating, and that distances us from strategic thinking. The revolutionary aura of this old logic is such that in its name the worst mystifications manage to pose as self-evident truths. "To speak of constituent power is to speak of democracy." It's with this risible lie that Toni Negri begins his book on the subject, and he's not the only one to trumpet these kinds of inanities that defy good sense. It's enough to have opened the pages of *Constitutional Theory* by Carl Schmitt, who can't exactly be counted among the good friends of democracy, to realize the contrary. The fiction of constituent power suits monarchy as well as it suits dictatorship. Doesn't that pretty presidential slogan, "in the name of the people," say anything to anybody? It's regrettable to have to point out that Abbe Sieyes, inventor of the disastrous distinction between constituent power and constituted power, that brilliant sleight of hand, was never a democrat. This is what he said in his famous speech of September 7, 1789: "The citizens who appoint representatives refrain and must refrain from making the law themselves: they do not have any particular will to impose. If they dictated wills, France would no longer be this representative state; it would be a democratic state. The people, I repeat, in a country that is not a democracy (and France cannot be one), the people cannot speak, cannot act, except through its representatives." If to speak of "constituent power" is not necessarily to speak of

"democracy," both these notions do, however, always lead revolutions into a cul-de-sac.

Destituere in Latin means: to place standing separate, raise up in isolation; to abandon; put aside, let drop, knock down; to let down, deceive. Whereas constituent logic crashes against the power apparatus it means to take control of, a destituent potential is concerned instead with escaping from it, with removing any hold on it which the apparatus might have, as it increases its hold on the world in the separate space that it forms. Its characteristic gesture is *exiting*, just as the typical constituent gesture is taking by storm. In terms of a destituent logic, the struggle against state and capital is valuable first of all for the exit from capitalist normality that is experienced therein, for the desertion from the shitty relations with oneself, others, and the world under capitalism. Thus, where the "constituents" place themselves in a dialectical relation of struggle with the ruling authority in order to take possession of it, destituent logic obeys the vital need to *disengage from it*. It doesn't abandon the struggle; it *fastens on to the struggle's positivity*. It doesn't adjust itself to the movements of the adversary but to what is required for the increase of its own potential. So it has little use for criticizing: "The choice is either to get out without delay, without wasting one's time criticizing, simply because one is placed elsewhere than in the region of the adversary, or else one criticizes, one keeps one foot in it, and has the other one outside. We need to leap outside and dance above it," as Jean-Francois Lyotard explained, by way of recognizing the gesture of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. And Deleuze made this remark: "Roughly speaking, one recognizes a Marxist by their saying that a society contradicts itself, is defined by its contradictions, especially its class contradictions. We say rather is that in a society everything is escaping, that a society is defined by its lines of escape [...] Escape, but while escaping look for a weapon." It's not a question of fighting for communism. What matters is the communism that is lived *in the fight itself*. The true richness of an action lies within itself. This doesn't mean that for us there's no question of the observable effectiveness of an ac-