

“The Day After is Already Far Behind Us” By Joël Gayraud¹

I

Everyone is talking about “the day after.”² In today’s confined³ imagination, it has taken the long-vacant place of the Big Night⁴ or the singing tomorrows.⁵ But the day after is already far behind us. The day after is the day that, in one country as in another, followed the announcement of the confinement. It was an extra day, one that should never have come.

II

On that day, the historical horizon, which a year of social crises had begun to reopen, wasn’t simply closed. It was brutally locked shut, without a single shot being fired or a *coup d’État* being proclaimed. Never before has such a large number of people – more than half of the world’s population – been placed into custody in such a brief period of time.

III

Over the course of several hours, we went from “Everything is fine” to “Nothing is right anymore.” The principle of casualness that has so nicely served the market economy, to the point of transforming the entire planet into a huge manure pit, was effaced, as if by magic, by the principle of responsibility. But the truth is that each person has given in to the blackmail of survival. And, because of that, each person has become irresponsible for him- or herself. From now on, no more future, no more possible escapes. In the autistic world of the spectacle, the apparent victory of the principle of responsibility signifies the real ruination of the principle of hope.

IV

Democracy, which only survived in the rotten ritual of elections, has been dealt its final blow, without (almost) anyone finding anything to complain about. And with democracy has departed two of the freedoms that were formerly held to be fundamental: coming and going without

¹ Joël Gayraud, “DERRIÈRE NOUS, LE JOUR D’APRÈS,” published in *Lundi Matin* #241, 4 May 2020: <https://lundi.am/Derriere-nous-le-jour-d-apres>. Translated from the French by NOT BORED! on 5 May 2020. All footnotes by the translator.

² Cf. the title of a famous American TV movie about nuclear war directed by Nicholas Meyer (1983). Today the phrase means the day after the battle against the coronavirus has been won.

³ The French word used here, *confiné*, can also mean “stuffy” or “stale.”

⁴ In the 1880s, and for several decades afterwards, *le Grand Soir* meant the outbreak of social revolution.

⁵ Cf. Pete Seeger, “Quite Early Morning” (1969): “Through all this world of joy and sorrow / We still can have singing tomorrows.”

restrictions or conditions and getting together with whomever we want. What is being played out today is our irreversible transformation from illusory political subjects to authentic bio-political livestock. Henceforth, those who believe themselves to be people, if not individuals, as well, are nothing but bodies. They will be numbered, registered, surveilled, tracked and traced for a long time. And, at the same time, the old [form of] politics has disappeared, replaced by the management of survival. We will not regret it.

V

Let us be clearly understood. No one denies the reality of the danger, nor the necessity of bringing the epidemic to an end and saving the greatest possible number of lives. But the human community could very well have acted on its own, without having to place its health in the hands of the State. This is what the Zapatistas immediately did in Chiapas⁶ when they were confronted with the denials issued by the Mexican State and its obvious carelessness.

VI

It is only the movement of market exchanges, not the movements of bats or pangolins,⁷ that has transmitted the virus [around the world]. Though they are its breeding ground [*le réservoir*], these brave animals are only the material cause of the epidemic, not its efficient cause. We know the reasons for the virus' quite rapid propagation: countless flights of people by airplane, almost always undertaken under such futile pretexts as work or tourism (that lugubrious inversion of the journey). And then the epidemic found fertile fields [*joyeux cours*] for growth in various air-conditioned purgatories: battle ships, cruise ships, office towers, retirement homes, and even hospitals. And now, at the end of the chain, it affects the poor, who haven't flown on any airplanes, or gone on any cruise ships, but who stagnate in prisons or vegetate in the outer boroughs, subjected to all kinds of shit,⁸ and who of course bear the brunt of the crisis. The pandemic is not at all a natural calamity: it is the fruit of a social arrangement – the market economy – which was condemned a long time ago and which must be abolished, more so now than ever before.

⁶ “EZLN closes Caracoles Due to Coronavirus and Calls on People Not to Abandon Current Struggles,” *Enlace Zapatista*, 17 March 2020: <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2020/03/17/ezln-closes-caracoles-due-to-coronavirus-and-calls-on-people-not-to-abandon-current-struggles/>.

⁷ Mammals that are native to Asia and Africa, pangolins are poached for their meat and their scales, which are believed to have various medicinal properties. It is thought that the coronavirus jumped from such animals to human beings due to their proximity to other wild creatures sold in the “wet markets” found in places like Wuhan, China.

⁸ The French word used here, *nuisances*, is usually translated as “harmful substances,” “pollutants” or socio-economic “problems.” In colloquial English, *shit* seems to include all three meanings.

VII

“The day after” has inaugurated the first global dystopia in history. Until now, the various dystopias, which had aimed for universal domination (see Nazi Germany), always saw their expansion limited, first in space, then in time. The one that is currently setting itself up is designed⁹ to last: its first action consisted in brutally modifying the conditions of sensibility: [enforced] physical distance atrophies the most sensual of our senses, the sense of touch, and the quasi-total primacy accorded to screens mutilates our perception of space’s three dimensions. One might fear that, once this epidemic has been vanquished, we will find that human behavior has been radically altered and for a quite long time.

VIII

Capitalism changed its paradigm after the Second World War: it became cybernetic. That is to say, it retained several feedback loops that have allowed it to soften¹⁰ economic and social crises. It alternates between phases in which the economy is administered and phases in which it is “liberal,” but always within the same regulating apparatus. If we focus our critique too much on neo-liberalism, we will soon miss the target, which is capitalism in its two inseparable aspects: “liberal” in economic initiatives, governmental in its support of the economy. To set back into motion the machine that has temporarily seized up, they’ve been able to instantly come up with the billions that are necessary. Those nostalgic for Keynesianism or the Thirty Glorious Years¹¹ can’t return to them. They’ve forgotten that the State is the system’s best guarantor. With the triumph of the cybernetic dystopia, they now serve it.

IX

The house arrest that confinement imposes is only the first stage of a new Total Mobilization. They immobilize us in order to better mobilize us. The mobilization has already begun with working from home, which allows companies to save on fixed capital, such as offices and communicating machines, and soon on variable capital, too, with the transformation of salaried workers into self-entrepreneurs, with each one compensated according to his or her profitability. The mobilization will continue by way of or despite [*à travers*] major planetary, ecological conditions, which are a vast playground for green neo-capitalism, and with the alibi of seeking greater and greater efficiency, that is to say, larger and larger profits for the optimal management of shortages and disasters.

X

Those who call for a return to normality have understood that it will never happen and they worry as much as they scrub their hands. It must be said that, for them, normal in recent times was hardly gratifying: there were Yellow Vests occupying traffic circles and filling the streets [in

⁹ The French word used here, *vocation*, can also mean “called upon” or “destined.”

¹⁰ The French word used here, *amortir*, can also mean “amortize.”

¹¹ *Trente Glorieuses*: the thirty years’ of economic prosperity between the end of World War II and the “oil crisis” of the early 1970s.

France], barricades in Chile and insurgents in Lebanon. Some imagine that, now that the situation has turned in their favor, they will be able to master it in the long term. And yet they have governed blindly until now, thus showing the degree to which they were unable to foresee anything. They saw nothing coming, neither the anger of men and women, nor the fatal whims of the economy. They never foresee anything, moreover, as they are deprived of any historical vision. The horizon is closed for them, too.

XI

As for those who, in their naïve reformist minds, believe that, after the return to normal conditions, they will “no longer go on as before,” they are greatly mistaken. Because there will be no restored normality. It will disappear in the pleasant haze of lost illusions. We will obviously do as we did “before,” only things will be worse.

XII

These considerations only sketch out a picture of the current moment, grasped in its general tendencies, and they do not decipher a concerted plan on the part of the leaders. The dystopia that is currently installing itself is not the product of a conspiracy that has been hatched by some secret government,¹² but derives from a contingent moment in the rationalization of capitalism, which, for all that, cannot suppress its constituent irrationality. The many different methods employed by the various States to respond to the epidemic, which have been improvised and matched to the means at hand, furnish the glaring truth of this. On the contrary, their differences, lies, incoherencies and obvious errors show the fragile foundations upon which the cybernetic dystopia – which claims to rule over the use of our lives in every aspect – is built. Perhaps it is at the very moment that this dystopia believes itself to be all-powerful that it is the most vulnerable. But even so, our desires for freedom, equality and justice must be vast enough and sufficiently grounded order for us to federate our forces.¹³ If we do not open up the utopian breach, we will live in the day after perpetually.

¹² Contrast this with comments about “global government,” Gianfranco Sanguinetti, “Western Despotism” (2020): <http://www.notbored.org/western-despotism.pdf>.

¹³ There a step missing here, one which Raoul Vaneigem has dwelled upon in his recent essays, namely, “self-managing assemblies” at the neighborhood level. Cf. “For the Commune” (2020): <http://www.notbored.org/for-the-commune.pdf>.