

Paris, May 8th, 2007

Dear R.,

It's been too long since we've spoken of anything besides the daily grind. Since we last saw each other, the weight of things has slightly shifted and I don't know why I can no longer really look at people I pass on the street with goodwill. I also have the impression I am the only one in this predicament. It's as if grace has permanently deserted the moments strangers' eyes meet in this city. The bodies of passersby lack beauty and no silent dialogue of desire unites them.

Yes, it's burning again, there are shards of glass on the sidewalk and taxi drivers often refuse to take the shortest route between two places. But those things don't figure into what's behind this change in the gravity of the real I am referring to—they are only its symptoms. The relationship between cause and effect has been afflicted by a dire illness for some time now, and nothing ever winds up as the direct consequence of something else. So, as soon as there is an urgent need to put an end to injustice or to resolve a problem, we cannot find the responsible ones, there are no doors to knock on, or to be kicked or to throw stones at. All that's left is our solitude and our questions without addressees.

None of this is new, you'll tell me, and I grant you that, however not so long ago I saw power tremble like a match flame with my own eyes, and then the hand of order came to protect it from the wind of the revolts.

This morning we, the passersby, all looked like the guilty liberated, and the cars and shop windows and the entire public space showed their teeth as only houses of detention with their pensioners do. We were part of a vicious circle we had not even contributed to forming.

The police populated our fields of vision in an incongruous way, like a profusion of trash covering a vacant lot. And if the streets are in such bad need of defending—we were saying—then our deep and confused impression must be *fair*.

If our footsteps are now hollowed of pleasure, it's because the fabric binding things and images has become unraveled; something constantly disrupts our happiness to be alive and to be walking about one morning, our feet on the pavement amongst strangers. I keep feeling tempted to name this something and I stop myself because the words of philosophers interfere with my conjectures and they are not the appropriate words.

The words themselves have also changed place and shifted their weight and that's surely why children have an increasingly harder time reading and writing. But that's another story.

There is also the difficulty of taming the idea that the pleasure of a few is the suffering of everyone else.

We've had class struggle, racial unrest, generational conflict and sexual battles, but what's coming now is a war without a name. Whatever they call it—terrorism, insecurity—they speak of this war without being able to discern it. At present, whatever burns and whatever breaks does so as an object participating in a world contaminated by non-sense, relieved of all signification. Innocence and impunity are now so intimate that it's impossible to distinguish between them where things and where people are concerned. Fear reigns sovereign under these conditions and the sirens that cleave through the traffic waste their energies fueling it. The world and its inhabitants have begun to embody the plausible targets of a violence so logical that it has become universally shareable.

But we still call certain acts of destruction violence and there are no words for the harm we have done to our capacity to love each other, to give to each other, to struggle and to share. No words for the cruelty of the smiling faces pasted to all the walls, inviting us to shut up and forget, without saying as much.

Money divides us, of course, but it is also—as you say—what keeps us alive. And it's precisely this idea of "life" that I can no longer bring myself to share. Beyond the fossils of contestation from another cycle of capitalism and another cycle of anger and unhappiness, we are too completely destitute in gestures and speech to proclaim our need for joy and freedom, our need to crush everything that degrades the basic force of bodies moving together without guide and without constraint. This new poverty is also a nascent force we aren't yet sure how to use, even though power keeps an apprehensive eye on it.

I sometimes stop writing to you because I wonder if you really want these words of doubt, if they might not ring like words of defeat but, I can reassure you, they aren't. It's not my strength and the strength of our friendship that has unraveled and been emptied—they remain intact and have even been reinforced—it is the fabric of the world. Wherever there is mass transportation, and shops, offices, neighborhoods, schools, there used to be networks of solidarity, of affects, of complicities, poised to stop at any moment, to close up on themselves for protection whenever necessary. And when we passed through these places, these fluxes, we felt different intensities, odors, tastes, which gave meaning to the simple fact of being there at a given moment. Passing through life meant passing through these unicities because we weren't loving, we weren't sleeping, we weren't eating the same way in the different magnetic fields of the present. We were our strength of sharing at each instant, in each encounter, we were a possibility that called to others.

Now we co-exist in a present of the colonized, we are subjected to the time and space of an Other that wears different guises: reassuring, artificial, ignorant of pleasure, of affection and of illness. Monstrous faces that we often think we see in people's traits and expressions.

Truce, you'll say, respite from these considerations, which are true, but which bring us nothing, which are fair, but which do not help us to live more simple lives. Truce. That's what everyone is asking for and yet it's this truce that has produced the new war. The war in which one mustn't choose one's camp by going toward others, one must descend into the depths of the self and recommence the interrupted conversation with the most unsettling host. This situation will not resolve itself without violence, no matter what we wish, because at this stage our desires are worthless. Yet the result

we will know is not going to be corporatist, it will no longer speak the language of work and it's procession of social identifications. The change that is coming, that is already here, will be a change within ourselves, a strike at the level of the most rooted and persistent habits, beginning with nostalgia for the past and for what hasn't happened, which the past carried away with it. This will be what I am calling a human strike.

Dear R., you know we could turn into regretless beings and put fear out of our minds, if only we understood the extent to which we are already deprived of destiny. But this letter is already much too long and I know how much work you have at the moment, so I'll finish here and we'll see each other soon.

Best,

Claire