

“Warning Lights”

On the Recent Riots in France

The Paris Group of the Surrealist Movement

Excerpted from a longer statement, November 2005

For three weeks, in the ghettos of the poor suburbs, on the outskirts of the outskirts, thousands of cars were burned, public utilities devastated, troops of police deliberately attacked.

This is a movement without explicit demands. This is a movement impossible to reduce to ethnic or racial demands.

This is, moreover, a movement without spirit or class consciousness—a movement typical of those common uprisings that blur conventional distinctions: a movement of “imperative revolt” due to permanent poverty and daily humiliation. But it is also a movement without strategy, a movement more prone to gaze at itself on television screens, drawing its ephemeral strength from the media coverage it produces.

These riots are made by an unidentifiable mob; some are numbed by religion, many alienated by consumerism, or enthusiasts of masculine values, sharing with the masters of society the stupid worship of sport (some riots were suspended during televised football games).

In a society in which all previous forms of belonging, and therefore of associated consciousness, have been wiped out, these events testify to the eruptive and uncontrollable return of the social question, firstly in an immediately negative form, that fire—emblem of all apocalypses—symbolizes. In contrast to May ’68, neither poetry nor brilliant ideas are on the barricades. No wildcat strike is going to spread widely with these troubles. But the rulers have been given a good hotfoot and have been forced to unmask themselves.

In a flash, such warning lights have revealed—during these November nights—the return of a possibility that seemed to be lost: that of throwing power into a panic even when its forces are harassed in a disorganized manner through the whole territory by a handful of forsaken social casualties.



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