Reality has never taken the imagination hostage to such an extent as it has in these last days. Our desires and our wildest dreams are dominated by an invisible catastrophe that threatens and confines us, tying our hands and feet to the shackles of fear. Something critical is being played out right now around the unfolding catastrophe. Ignoring the few Cassandras who have been issuing warnings for decades, we have now moved from abstract ideas to concrete facts. As the current emergency with all its prohibitions demonstrates, what is at stake is not only the possibility of survival, but something much more important: the possibility of living. This means that the catastrophe that afflicts us today is not so much imminent human extinction – to be avoided, we are reassured from above and below, thanks to an absolute obedience to the experts of social reproduction – but rather the invasive artificiality of an existence whose omnipresence prevents us from imagining the end of the present.

Since antiquity, this term has retained among its meanings that of a violent event that carries with it the power to change the course of things, an event that constitutes at the same time a rupture and a change of direction, and that consequently can be both a beginning and an end. A decisive event, in short, which by breaking the continuity of the world order, allows the birth of anything else. The simple and immediate image of the plough breaking and turning over a dry and exhausted clod of earth, reviving and preparing the ground for a new sowing and a new harvest, clearly captures the fertile element present in a term generally associated with the dramatic epilogue. Hence the ambivalence of the human feelings aroused in the distant past by the catastrophe, going from panicked fear to
AUGUST 2021

3/8, Berlin (Germany). In the districts of Mitte and Lichtenberg, several vehicles of the real estate developer Vonovia are set on fire in the night, as a “fiery invitation to do more property damage against the city of the rich and to fight for a society without hierarchies and authorities.”

6/8, Berlin (Germany). In the Lichtenberg district, two rental vans containing propaganda material for the far-right AfD party go up in smoke overnight.

13/8, Zelo Buon Persico (Italy). In Lombardy in the province of Lodi, a cell phone antenna is set on fire around 5am. A tag “No to 5G, No to Green Pass” is found in the area by the carabinieri.

17/8, Mellilla (Morocco/Spain). Following the biggest assault of the summer on the border on July 22, when 238 migrants succeeded in penetrating it around 5 am during an assault launched by 150 people.

17/8, Nostang (France). In Morbihan, a cell phone antenna was set on fire during the night near the Lorient–Vannes highway.

18/8, Chania (Greece). In Crete, anarchists break the windows of the office of the far right party Elliniki Lisi in the morning. “Always against the state and the fascists. To break the veneer of normality.”

8/9, Cherbourg (France). In Manche, two night outings leave the windows of the town hall, the CAF and a yuppy store hit by tens of sledgehammer blows.

9/9, Varces (France). In Isère, in the parking lot of the prison, two cars belonging to prison guards were set on fire during the night, while a prison van was damaged by the flames and out of order. The arsonists entered the parking lot by cutting the fence that separated it from an adjacent business.

10/9, Turin (Italy). During a revolt in the detention center (CPR), undocumented migrants destroyed their entire module with burned mattresses, reducing 35 cells of confinement to ashes.

10/9, The Hague (Netherlands). Two ticket machines of the Dutch railways (Nederlandse Spoorwegen, NS) are set on fire at the station in the Moerwijk district. These machines managed and operated on behalf of the railway company by the company Thales are only part of the business of the latter, specializing including at borders. “Thales profits from Fortress Europe, war and militarism. Thales is our enemy. Wherever the company is, it must be attacked,” concludes the communiqué.

In the same way, although many women who wanted to fight were rejected outright (as was also the case in Spain in 1936), this did not prevent hundreds of them from imposing their fighting presence by force or deed. Whether by taking over immediately from men who had fallen at the front or on the barricades by abandoning any gendered role (nurse/canteen worker) in order to recover their rifle and use it; whether by obtaining weapons without asking anyone for anything (several women carried revolvers on their belts during debates in the clubs), or by self-organizing collectively to do so: on May 14, 1871, a hundred women marched in procession to the Hôtel de Ville (where the Committee of Public Safety was sitting) to demand weapons, which they obtained on the spot.

In this context, it is no wonder that determined women (as well as men) took hold of an idea that was circulating cameras are destroyed in the night with a hammer.
machinations ever invented in a civilized country. ... everything that has been burned has been burned by men”, Karl Marx, interview in the New York Herald, August 3, 1871).

Of course, and let’s say it right away, since we are not talking about the plot of the latest popular televised fiction, but about the very real subversive activity of thousands of women in an insurrectionary moment: Edith Thomas does not reach any definitive conclusion from her judicial sources, while taking great care to distinguish the Versailles myth of the fifth column setting fire to Paris once it was recaptured, from their probable participation as fighters in the great burning of the capital to prevent the troops from entering it. More precisely, with a few exceptions, it is clear from the court reports that the convicted women were sentenced to years of imprisonment or life imprisonment for having been communards, rather than for the so-called “objective” elements of their incendiary activity. And for good reason, since a court of law, and this is still true today, never has the objective of establishing any justice or truth, but only consecrates a balance of power between two opposing parties.

Many of the condemned women had either directly carried arms (not all of them were canteen workers or nurses), or had incited the combatants not to retreat, or had insulted the Versailles soldiers, or had simply defended that everything had to burn in front of witnesses (“He can become a King now, he will find his castle in flames!”). As for the few who were caught with oil under their skirts, they generally pleaded to looting for heat... which means nothing, since many arsonists were simply not arrested. Notably for the simple reason, besides the fact that they were not all snatched on (the basis of these trials at the time), that a part of them participated in the fighting until the end, dying directly on the barricades or being executed on the spot without any other form of trial (“hundreds of women”, according to E. Thomas). So, alongside an Aurore Machu, who admirably handled the cannon at the Place de la Concorde (headquarters of the occupied Ministry of the Navy), both to point and to shoot; for an Elisa Rousseau, guilty of having fired at least fifteen cannon shots; for a Marie Schmitt, a former sex worker of having fired the shot in the defense of the Butte-aux-Cailles and proudly declaring to her judges “I regret not having done all that I am accused of”; or for others possibilities. After the materialization of the unhinkable, human beings can no longer remain the same, for they have not only seen the houses, monuments, churches or parliaments crumble with their own eyes, but also faiths, theories, laws – all in the form of ruins. The ancient fascination for the catastrophe starts from here, from this chaotic horizon that is irreducible to any calculation, from the moment when an unprecedented upheaval suddenly breaks all stable reference points, brutally asking the question of the meaning of life whose infinite repercussions require, in answer, an excess of imagination. The catastrophe is offered to the individual, in the dramatic discovery of something that goes beyond their identity, to merge again with nature, the primordial earth or the source of creation.

But after the end of the Second World War, marked by the first atomic explosion, what happened? The revolutionary perspective gradually faded away, erased from hearts and minds. And so, within them, only one possible form of material upheaval remained unchallenged, and it had formidable technical means to manifest itself. But the present catastrophe has very little in common with that of the old days. It is no longer a thunderbolt of nature or the work of a God, bringing the human being face to face with itself – it is a simple product of scientific, technological, political and economic assurance that the catastrophes of the past could incite looking the impossible in the face, overturning the established order; modern catastrophes limit themselves to digging deeper into the possible. Instead of opening up the horizon and leading far away, they lock it up and nail it to the nearest thing. Wild imagination gives way to calculated risk, where one no longer desires to live another life, but aims to survive by managing the damage.

One after the other, the disasters of the last decades pass before our eyes as if they were simply consequences of techno-scientific myopia and bad governance, to be overcome by more attentive and far-sighted technicians and politicians. The disasters of the present and those of the future become avoidable, or at least reducible, only with an ever greater control of human activities, placed in conditions of permanent emergency. The effect of this logic is that “natural” disasters are immediately forgotten and put into a distant context, as if they were minor events, while only “human” disasters take center stage in a narrative that in turn allows us to accept the unacceptable. If they terrorize us, it is only because it is our physical survival as a species that is threatened. And it is this that we should fear more than...
In the district of Vyronas, a camera is out of order. Surveillance mast downtown is.

In the Rhône, a video the school year.

smoke in a depot in the Grand Bois district at around 6 pm, just forcing the metal screen before making away with a part of its goods.

Carrefour cables, entered the charging dock by night workers who, in addition to cutting these cables, entered the Carrefour Market by the loading dock by forcing the metal screen before making away with a part of its goods.

In Eure, 15,000 homes and 500 businesses in 24 communes are deprived of any internet access following the willful sabotage of two fiber optic cables supplying the telephone exchanges and a dozen Orange mobile antennas in the area, at around 4am.

This sabotage would have been committed as a preventive measure by night workers who, in addition to cutting these cables, entered the Carrefour Market by the loading dock by forcing the metal screen before making away with a part of its goods.


“As for the burning of Paris, yes, I participated. I wanted to oppose the invaders of Versailles with a barrier of flames. I have no accomplices in this fact.”

Louise Michel, before the Council of War

If this long-out-of-print study by Edith Thomas on the mythical pétroleuses of the Paris Commune was republished earlier this year, it is of course to feed the editorial market of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of this insurrection. A bit like the previous monograph on Louise Michel, portrayed as a prophetess of anarchy, which was published posthumously in 1971 on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary.

When I saw this book lying around on the shelves of the book merchants, it was something else that immediately came to mind, which didn't leave me all day. You know, that cheerful little song about a machine-gun having bloodied some partying Stalinists in Spain, before unfurling the verses: “Must say that we will put our hearts into it / The pétroleuses were our sisters / Come the storm...”. Very far, then, from the obscurities of the moment – where we saw, for example, a historian of the State priding himself with radicalism by exhibiting a cardboard reproduction of Louise Michel in front of the Sacré Coeur, under the good offices of the mayor of Paris. In short, it is in any case this catchy tune that made Les Pétroleuses pass from the stall to my pocket.

There is much to say about the author, but this is neither the goal nor the place of this little review. Let’s just say that she trained at the Ecole des Chartes at the turn of the 1930s to work as an archivist, she took advantage of this time between two novels and reports to write biographies on socialist or revolutionary women of the 19th century (Pauline Roland, George Sand, Flora Tristan, or Louise Michel), while having a thwarted love affair with the Communist Party. She was only a member of one of its satellite organizations (the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists) for a year before resigning publicly at the end of 1934, reproaching it for “orthodoxy”, then joining it a second time in 1942 to actively participate in the Resistance before resigning in 1949, following the Yugoslavian conflict between Stalin and Tito. She remained resigned until her death in 1970.

In substance, if we had only been dealing with the umpteenth work of a left-wing intellectual critic, even a forgotten one, this work would obviously have no place here. But the interest of Edith Thomas’s Pétroleuses is that it is not only one of the rare systematic studies on the question (notably through an analysis of the trial against the communards, but also through the activities of women’s clubs or various individuals), but above all that the author is not hostile to the great burning of Paris, and does not try to pass off the incendiary activity of the communards as a simple invention of the Versailles administration... it is in any case this catchy tune that made Les Pétroleuses pass from the stall to my pocket.

SEPTEMBER 2021

1/9, Toulouse (France). In Haute-Garonne, a boom truck of the telecommunication network installer Scopelec is targeted, in particular to “attack boredom for real”.

2/9, Leipzig (Germany). In Saxony, the large windows of the Savings Bank are smashed in the night, in solidarity with occupied places and in revenge for others that are already evicted.

3/9, Petite-Île (France). In the colony of La Réunion, an SFR relay antenna goes up in smoke in the night with the help of flaming tires. Also connecting the neighborhood to the fiber optic network, the impact to the telephone and the internet is estimated to last less than a week by the authorities.

6/9, Rennes (France). In Ille-et-Vilaine, a modular building of 400 m2 of the town hall is burned at about 1:30 with garbage cans ignited against its structure. It housed the South Sports Department, the census department of the Department of Administrative Services for the Population, the Regional Chamber of Social Economy, as well as a storage space assigned to the IT Department or a space dedicated to the CGT trade union... of which only soot and ashes remain.

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