

○ VOLUME 10 NUMBER 3, 2011

FORUM PIECE

## **What if we refuse to be citizens?**

A Manifesto for Vacating Civic Order

**Santiago López Petit**

University of Barcelona

Translated by Sebastian Touza

### **We are Interpellated as Citizens**

Today's citizen is no longer a free person. Citizens are no longer free people who want to live in a free community. A political consciousness that is not taught, but rather conquered, has gradually disappeared. It could not have happened another way. Public space has become a street full of shops that never close, an ongoing television show in which an idiot tells us in detail why he separated from his wife. School, in turn, is not asked to promote a critical consciousness but to merely impart learning of 'correct' civic behaviors, variations of a pretense 'education for citizenship'. Political struggles seem likewise to have disappeared from a world in which there are only diverse types of catastrophes (economic, environmental, natural, etc.). However, when politicians address us, when they pay lip service to calls of participation, they keep calling us *citizens*. Why? Why is this word, which little by little has been emptied of all political force, still in use?

Above all, because, as an identity, 'citizenship' ties us up to what we are. It makes us prisoners of ourselves. We are citizens each time we behave as such, that is, each time we do what we are expected to do: work, consume, have fun... Voting every four years is not really too important. It is through our behavior, day to day, that we really breathe life into the moribund figure of the citizen. Thus, we are granted a life. Citizens are those whose lives function as property, more exactly, those who know how to manage their lives and make them profitable. In the last instance, a loser is not a good citizen, but rather a second-class citizen. I am not even talking of an illegal immigrant, who can

only be a stigmatized shade that works for us. To be a citizen is to believe. Citizens do not think, they believe. They believe what power tells them. For example, that terrorism is our main enemy. Or that the purpose of life is working. In the end, citizens believe that reality is reality, and that they have to adapt to it. But it is difficult to believe in a reality that dissolves at certain moments: we have to be workers, but there are no jobs; we have to be consumers, but commodities are empty gadgets; we have to be citizens, but there is no public space. That is why the citizen has perfectly understood that, to be successful, he or she must follow the old advertising slogan: 'look, compare, and if you find something better... buy it'. Citizens are not cynical; they are sad figures that have no fire inside. To be a good citizen it is necessary, above all, to exercise restraint, to detest excess, to condemn all kinds of violence. Hence when our political representatives speak about the citizen they always highlight his/her maturity; it is not a surprise that all of them agree on this point. The citizen is, in the end, the keystone of 'the democratic', and 'the democratic' is currently the most important form of control and domination.

### **From Democracy to 'the Democratic'**

To understand the key role of the figure of the citizen we have to go beyond the framework of what has always been called democracy. As democracy became a form of state and ceased to be 'the least bad form of government', we have been told many times, it necessarily underwent a complete transformation. To show this mutation I propose a displacement from 'democracy' to 'the democratic'. Just as Carl Schmitt once proposed to go from politics to 'the political', thus opening a new way of approaching the question of politics, I believe that today it is possible to do something similar in relation to democracy. If the defenders of 'true' democracy have themselves to add adjectives in order to characterize it (participative, inclusive, absolute, etc.), it is because the situation is ripe to criticize the term.

Democracy, as I suggested above, is no longer a form of government in the traditional sense, but the formalism that makes *global mobilization* possible. Global mobilization is the project inscribed in neoliberal globalization. As such it consists in the mobilization of our lives in order to (re)produce—by just living—this fully capitalist reality that is imposed on us as plural and unique, as both open and closed, and, above all, as irrefutably obvious. This reality comes close to crushing us, because the same event takes place (almost) everywhere and (almost) all the time: runaway capitalism. Then, the function of 'the democratic' is to guarantee that global mobilization successfully merges with our own life. Successfully means that 'the democratic' helps to effectively manage conflicts generated by runaway capitalism, channeling expressions of social unease, because 'the democratic' severs the political dimension of our own reality and neutralizes any attempt at social transformation.

This is why 'the democratic' is not easy to define. The central nucleus of formalism is constituted by the articulation between the *war-state* and *postmodern fascism*: between heteronomy and autonomy, between control and self-control. Let's look at this closely. 'The democratic' is built upon a double premise: 1) Dialogue and tolerance refer to a purported horizontality, because they channel all differences to a question of mere personal opinion and cultural option; 2) The conception of politics as war presupposes declaring an internal or external enemy, invoking a vertical dimension. 'The democratic' would produce the—apparent—miracle of bringing opposites side by side in a continuum: war and peace, pluralism and repression, freedom and prison. In this sense, 'the democratic' is beyond this articulation and disperses itself, constituting an authentic formalism of subjection and abandonment. As a formalism that enables global mobilization, 'the democratic' does not let itself be organized around the always too simple dualism of repression/no repression. The civic norms enacted in so many cities, the laws regarding foreigners, community policing that invites betrayal—all of them fit within 'the democratic'. So does the new Spanish penal code, Europe's most repressive, based on pure and simple prison. The efficacy of 'the democratic' lies in the way it shapes public space—and in the end our relation to reality—as a space of possibilities, that is, of personal elections. More freedom means the multiplication of choices, but the option of refusing all other options is never possible. This option, which would raise questions about the space of possibilities, is forbidden. 'The democratic' is the air we breathe. It can be improved, cleaned, regenerated, and these words are by no means accidental. But that's it. At this point I can jump ahead to an essential aspect. 'The democratic' acts, above all, as the mode of subjection—of subjection to our reality—which establishes the partition between the thinkable and the unthinkable. 'The democratic' directly defines the framework of what can be thought, of what can be done, of what can be lived... More precisely, it defines what men and women who call themselves *free must* think, do, and live.

#### **THE CRISIS HAS ARRIVED...**

THIS MESH OF CONCEPTS, VALUES AND GOALS THAT WE, AS CITIZENS, APPROPRIATE—TO BE CITIZENS IS TO THINK AND ACT FOLLOWING THE GUIDELINES OF THE PACT WITH REALITY—IS THE ONE WE APPLY TO CRISIS. THE ONGOING CRISIS, WHICH SYMBOLICALLY BEGAN ON OCTOBER 23, 2008 WITH THE FALL OF LEHMAN BROTHERS, APPEARS TO BE THE SECOND BIGGEST CRISIS, AS A SORT OF APOCALYPTIC TEST THAT EITHER WE MANAGE TO GO THROUGH OR SINK COLLECTIVELY IN MISERY. WE ARE CONSTANTLY TOLD THAT THOSE COUNTRIES THAT DO THE NECESSARY REFORMS WILL GET OVER THE CURRENT STAKES, AND THAT THOSE THAT DON'T WILL BE LEFT AT THE MARGINS OF HISTORY, IN A SORT OF BLIND ALLEY. IN TURN, BUSINESS REPORTS ARE CONFUSING AND, BEHIND THEIR APPARENT COMPLEXITY, SEEK TO POSITION CITIZENS AS SPECTATORS WHO DO NOT UNDERSTAND VERY WELL WHAT IS GOING ON, EVEN THOUGH THEY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO COLLABORATE. YET, WHAT IS CURIOUS ABOUT THE CRISIS IS THE ANALYTICAL SIMPLICITY THAT APPEARS WHEN

TECHNICAL VOCABULARY IS LEFT ASIDE. THE CRISIS TURNS REALITY INTO A SORT OF VIDEOGAME IN WHICH WE ALL SEEM TO BE PARTICIPATING. IT IS NOT BY CHANCE THAT PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE CASINO ECONOMY. IN A VIDEOGAME THERE IS A SCRIPT, WITH GOOD AND BAD GUYS... AND WE ALL KNOW THAT THERE WILL BE WINNERS AND LOSERS. WHEN, FOR EXAMPLE, THE GERMAN CHANCELLOR MERKEL ASSURES US THAT 'POLITICIANS ARE WAGING A WAR AGAINST MARKETS' AIMED AT RESTORING THE PRIMACY OF POLITICS OVER THE ECONOMY, SHE IS CLEARLY DEPICTING SOME OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS: POLITICIANS AND THE STATE (THE GOOD GUYS) ARE FORCED BY MARKETS AND SPECULATORS (THE BAD GUYS) TO INTRODUCE INDISPENSABLE REFORMS INTO THE GAME. AT BOTTOM—AND THIS IS A MAIN STORY OF THE PLOT—THERE IS A SORT OF GENERALIZED GUILT: 'WE HAVE LIVED ABOVE OUR POSSIBILITIES'. WE ARE ALL BAD GUYS IN A CERTAIN SENSE...

ONE CANNOT HELP FIND IT AMAZING THAT CRISIS, UNDERSTOOD AS A SORT OF DISEASE THAT WE CAN LEAVE BEHIND ONLY BY EITHER MOVING FORWARD OR PERISHING, IS THE MAIN EXPLANATORY METAPHOR. IT IS AN OLD METAPHOR, WHICH, AS IS WELL KNOWN, CAN BE TRACED TO ANCIENT GREECE AND WAS LATER ADOPTED BY OTHER FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE, TO BE FINALLY ADOPTED BY ECONOMICS. HOW COULD IT BE APPLIED TO GLOBAL CAPITALISM, WHOSE FOUNDATION CANNOT BE SICK, PRECISELY BECAUSE IT LACKS FOUNDATION? THAT GLOBAL CAPITALISM DOES NOT HAVE A FOUNDATION MEANS THAT IT WORKS AS RUNAWAY CAPITAL, AS AN ESCAPE FORWARD MADE POSSIBLE BECAUSE CAPITAL AND POWER PUSH EACH OTHER BEYOND THEIR LIMITS. THEREFORE, IT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE TO KEEP BLAMING SPECULATORS FOR THE DISEASE. A PROFESSOR OF FUTURE SPECULATORS, MORE SPECIFICALLY AN ETHICS PROFESSOR AT IESE,<sup>1</sup> SAID IT CLEARLY: 'SPECULATION IS FUNDAMENTAL TO CAPITALISM. SPECULATORS ARE BLACK VULTURES WHOSE JOB IS TO CARRY ON THE HEALTHY TASK OF ELIMINATING DYING ANIMALS' (*EL PAÍS*, 23 MAY 2010). NOR DOES IT MAKE A LOT OF SENSE TO TRY TO SAVE THE STATE. THE STATE IS NOT SEPARATE; IT DOES NOT ENJOY A SORT OF ANGELIC RELATIVE AUTONOMY, BUT RATHER IT IS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION. IT DOES NOT WITHDRAW, BUT RATHER IS FULLY IMPLICATED. THE CO-BELONGING OF CAPITAL AND POWER GOES MUCH FURTHER THAN THE BILLIONS IN SUBSIDIES TO BANKRUPT FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

### **Crisis as Political Operation**

We could try different explanations which, taking into account what I argued above, would cast some elements of truth. Financial capital has believed that global time-space engendered money just by moving capital from one place to another. Things don't work that way. There is not a world financial market that could expand in an integrated and flexible manner based on the growth of public expenditure and financial innovations. The final result is always the same: fictitious capital catches fire, the bubble bursts. More specifically, the financial crisis is this time situated at the State level. Greece was the first country attacked by it. The way it works is simple.

Banks and international financial groups lend money to broken States again—as they did before with the banking sector and private companies—they are sure that they will get the money back by imposing austerity measures under the supervision of international organizations. They can allow themselves to give rise to another profit bubble by speculating with bonds that States are forced to issue in the international market to manage their bankruptcy. In its different stages—to simplify it, (mortgage bubble, financial bubble...)—crisis adopts the form of a true looting, managed by real ‘white collar’ criminals. This crisis we are going through is not so much a synonym of restructuring as it is of looting. In the first place, looting of the people who can neither afford to pay the mortgage nor sell their house, and can only run away from it, as is becoming usual in the USA. Next, looting of wages, of pension funds... and even looting of the entire economy of a country. The conclusion we arrive at could not be clearer: paradoxically, crisis is not the moment of capitalism’s failure, but the moment of its greatest success. As soon as we are ready to abandon the figure of the citizen and stop believing in the crisis discourse, crisis itself begins to appear as a process of pure and simple expropriation of collective wealth.

### **The New Personal Deal and the War**

The crisis is, therefore, an unfavorable situation for the politically constructed majority as long as the latter is naturalized. To describe crisis as a form of capital’s primitive accumulation is true for the most part, yet it is insufficient. If crisis, or better, this global crisis is important it is because it launches a new social deal. This new social deal gives people the right to participate in the global mobilization that produces the world; more precisely, in this fully capitalist reality without an outside that is our world. The social contract that the official labor movement accepted, in effect until the end of the seventies, was very clear: ‘social peace in exchange for money’. The social contract in force after the defeat of the working class at the end of the seventies is completely individualized, because it is now aimed at each one of us. The social contract becomes a *personal contract*. It is also clearly formulated: ‘life in exchange for the most absolute employability’. Precariousness has become existential. In the last instance, the new personal contract recognizes you by what you are and you must be: (a piece of) human capital. The suppression of collective agreements and the reformation of the job market towards flexicurity and a single labor contract are aimed in that direction. But this is something that goes beyond the old sphere of work. The new personal contract reaffirms the fact that life is the battlefield, because the market has gone beyond the market itself. However, absolute employability is not an end in itself, but the medium to reach the maximization of competitiveness. And competitiveness is certainly between all of us, but also in relation to oneself. Competitiveness, then, means quantitative self-evaluation to manage our own effort and thus maximize profit. Capitalism and reality have never been so close to each other, and life constitutes the realm where they merge. It is so partial and reassuring to keep talking only about commodification and

privatization in relation to a phenomenon that changes both subjectivity and reality themselves!

The project of modernity implied, above all, conceptualizing the self-institution of a society for which transcendental instances that can legitimate order are no longer available. This self-institution was theorized from political (Hobbes and his social contract) and economical (Adam Smith and the market) perspectives. These were the only realms from which—because of the crisis of absolutist models—it seemed possible to defend order. Hobbes' social contract certainly forced submission and confined moral consciousness to the private sphere, but spared life, because the State—which we make possible by refusing self-determination—exorcized war. Fear of dying and reason were the forces which propelled the acceptance of the pact. In turn, the market was, according to Smith, not only the true representation of society, but also the organizing principle of a pacified society that no longer needed politics. Based upon individual selfishness, the free market was capable of generating general well-being. The new personal contract instituted in the global era would combine both models in an original way. 'The democratic' and the market, politics and apoliticism would combine in the new figure of this citizen who *is* his or her propertied life, who is thus enrolled in global mobilization. However, the new personal contract apparently denies the goal, shared by both Hobbes and Smith: to institute a *foundation* for order. Absolute employability as a way of life, life understood as a maximization of profitability, the self conceived as brand-Self—all imply a permanent humiliation behind which there is the pure arbitrariness of violence. But, let's be careful, we have not returned to the state of nature nor are we immersed in a war of all against all. Now it is easier to make the status of the new contract clearer. The new personal contract has established arbitrariness in its fullest sense. What else, if not this, is absolute employability turned into an existential condition? This shows that arbitrariness exerted under the form of (monetary, military, etc.) violence, power in its pure arbitrariness, still has, paradoxically, a clearly defined foundation. In other words: the foundation or principle of (global) order is war. Global mobilization is the war against all and this war organizes the world.

### **THE CITIZEN AS UNIT OF MOBILIZATION**

IT COULD BE ARGUED THAT *CLASS STRUGGLE*—WORKING CLASS ANTAGONISM MANAGED BY UNIONS RUN BY THE CLASS—WAS BOTH THE MOTOR AND THE COHESIVE ELEMENT OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY. TODAY, WAR, MANAGED FROM 'THE DEMOCRATIC', SERVES THE SAME FUNCTIONS. IT IS A NEVER-DECLARED WAR THAT NEVER APPEARS AS SUCH. SOCIAL WAR APPEARS AS A SERIES OF ECONOMIC MEASURES, POLITICAL REFORMS, AND EVEN HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS, ALWAYS NECESSARY AND ALWAYS AIMED AT OUR OWN GOOD. INDEED, WAR IS THE NAME OF THAT GLOBAL MOBILIZATION OF OUR LIVES THAT SLOWLY DESTROYS US. IN REALITY, THERE ARE NEITHER ECONOMICS NOR POLITICS ANY MORE; THIS IS WHY IT IS WRONG TO PRETEND THAT BY

SAVING POLITICS THE ECONOMY WILL FALL UNDER CONTROL. GLOBAL MOBILIZATION, LIKE THE REALITY IT PRODUCES, IS A TOTAL PHENOMENON THAT DOES NOT LET ITSELF BE.

Yet, as it wages war against us—which means turning us intimately into capitalism—capital necessarily rebuilds an ‘us’; an ‘us’ that it cannot count on to rebuild order. Because the ‘us’ that is born from unease escapes a logic of visualization. It suddenly irrupts and, at the same time, it hides. If, since 9-11, 2001, violence has essentially come in the form of terrorism, it is acquiring an increasingly social character day by day. Until now, global violence was filtered, above all, by a war-state that had pointed to terrorists as the enemy to fight against. In the current crisis, as I already argued, capitalism succeeds at the same time as it builds its internal enemy. The conflict whose function was to establish order becomes, despite itself, background noise. Background noise, anonymous people and their uneasiness, are the new big dangers. Thus, enemies are all those who cannot tolerate having their lives squashed by global mobilization. In the last instance, we are all enemies. Appropriately, some time ago the oracle of Davos, while meeting in its Swiss hideout, alerted: ‘this severe economic crisis might trigger violent social reactions’. These are their big fears: the silencing of the musical tune by the rumor in the background; desperation turned into anger; this ‘us’, in silence and at night, finally undermining the daytime figure of the citizen. The day belongs to them, the night belongs to us. The citizen interpellated by politicians, the one who must tighten his or her belt because of the crisis, no longer exists as such. It is just an entelechy, a rhetorical device to channel a discourse of submission aimed at extending the life of runaway capital. The citizen has been redimensioned as the essential piece of global mobilization. We are interpellated as citizens when, in fact, they would like us to be real mobilizing units. It is time to vacate that empty shell, that rhetorical figure through whose mouth only the voice of power can speak. Insofar as we are citizens, who act like citizens, we have already lost the war. What, then, if we refuse to be citizens?

### **THE POINTLESSNESS OF ARGUING**

ONCE WE REACH THIS POINT, THE ABYSS OPENS BENEATH OUR FEET AND A DEVIL WHISPERS IN OUR EARS: ‘WOULD YOU DARE TO ABANDON YOUR OWN JAIL?’ SOMEONE MIGHT SAY THAT TO REFUSE TO BE CITIZENS IS A CRAZY IDEA BECAUSE, IF CARRIED OUT, SOCIETY WOULD COLLAPSE. IT IS ABSURD, EVEN REACTIONARY, ONE CAN HEAR IN THE DISTANCE. YOU CAN SAY THAT BECAUSE YOU DON’T RISK ANYTHING. THERE ARE PLENTY OF PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD WHO WOULD LIKE TO BE CITIZENS, BUT THEY CAN’T. TO DEFEND THE CITIZEN IS TO DEFEND THE WELFARE STATE. BLAH, BLAH, BLAH...

We could answer with many different arguments. Aren’t these words hiding the impasse we are in as well as the ineffectiveness of the very idea of political intervention in a sense of social transformation?

Perhaps our point of departure should be to acknowledge that left-wing discourse has lost credibility and that, for this reason, impotence dwells deep inside these kind of phrases. It is not a coincidence that, when the left has little to contribute—above all because it does not know how to go beyond the categories of modern politics, today seriously in crisis—it feels the need to wrap itself in a blanket of moralization: from a certain ethical re-establishment of capitalism to the ideology of disbelief. And I could go on... But the question is still raised. Actually, all the arguments we could argue would be of little help. Because, how is it possible to refute a position that is within the limits of what can/must be thought? To discuss it is also to remain confined in the prisons of the possible, to remain stuck like a dead fly on the glass of reality. There is only one possibility: to get out. We must get out completely. We must get out from the grip of mediocre securities, from simple truths, from doubts. We must get out from self-deception and the propagation of deception. We must get out of this world. I don't know if I will be able to get out.

But I do know who gets out. I know there are people who get out. 'We have nothing to lose, why does it matter what we want?' was the answer a Greek demonstrator who had just thrown a rock at the police gave to the journalist interviewing him. The answer reminds us of the famous phrase from Marx's *Communist Manifesto*: 'proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains'. Change is, without a doubt, essential. Now there is no emancipatory horizon, there is only the will to sink this reality that has become one with capitalism. Struggle is already directly liberating. Also emerge from this reality those who, by desiring to turn their desire to live into a challenge, tear up their lives and find themselves seized by insomnia. Out of this reality do emerge those comrades who live with just enough in order to support a press that is like a dagger driven into the heart of this stupid reality. As do come out also those who try to collectively reduce their consumption. Or those who come together, day after day, to collectively face the same abyss of ignorance. Those who do not want to be deceived and find themselves burned little by little by truth do also get out.

### **Two Ways of Emptying the Figure of the Citizen**

And yet, is there a real way out? Is it possible to play against the big game of the machine? If, in order to dismantle the machine's power I have to play against it while accepting its rules and the space designed by it, can I really win and keep my victory from serving the goals of the mobilization machine itself? In May 1968 the Situationists spread the idea that power recuperates everything. Subsequently we learned, specially thanks to Foucault, that not only does power recuperate in the sense of using, but it is also capable of producing things as odd as truths. Under these conditions, which history only confirms, is it still possible to defend the idea of an exit? Or perhaps that idea would be a sort of regulative ideal that allows us to subsist with at least a bit of dignity. None of the previous examples, nor many more we could bring up, exactly constitute a way out because there is



not an outside. They are all different ways of confronting this reality. I have said that we do not want to deceive ourselves. However, my rejection of the idea of an exit in its more abstract and general form—because it forces us to take the impotent road of alternative proposals—by no means denies their viability as concrete exits.

We don't know if a global alternative to this society will be feasible one day, what we do know is that we reject this society as a whole. We also know that this rejection has to be concrete, because a force that does not materialize necessarily extinguishes itself. To struggle is to invent concrete—and, if possible, collective—exits. Certainly, in our invention we cannot get lost, although such danger is inherent both to the approach to the concrete and to the very self-organization of 'the social'. But getting lost does not have to mean losing; rather, the opposite is the case. Impotence can only be left behind if we are willing to get lost. To get lost means to abandon the security offered by being a citizen, that is, by being someone protected by the system of beliefs and values that construct reality as a tautology. To get lost is, therefore, to get away from the figure of the citizen. But getting lost amounts also to knowing that, in this exit of the unit of mobilization—if we desire to avoid death, madness, or being imprisoned—there has to be a certain degree of negotiation with reality itself. To get lost implies subtracting oneself, although many times it also implies to get oneself dirty by plunging oneself into this disgusting reality. We must handle in our favor the same rules that keep reality functioning. If there is not an outside, there can be no purity or coherence. Only power can be pure power at maximum coherence.

In order to get out, therefore, one must empty the figure of the citizen and, as I have pointed out, there are two ways of doing it. The first consists in constructing another world opposed to this one—our press, our free software coop, our disease—against this world. The second way implies destruction. To refuse to be a citizen is, therefore, to undermine the boundaries imposed by a reality upon us. 'The economy is in crisis: let it blow up!' To demand impossible rights. Irresponsibility understood as a way of getting rid of the fear we are demanded to internalize. The irresponsibility contained in every radical gesture that interrupts global mobilization and opens up a space of anonymity. Because the spaces of anonymity are not organized around pronouns (I, you, he, she...), they block any political road aimed at a social contract. The spaces of anonymity are those spaces in which people speak by themselves and lose fear. In them, rhythm has come to replace relations based upon pronouns and yet by no means is there fusion. If those relations are the expression of the desire to live, rhythm organizes space. Rhythm is what most clearly defines life, because living is, precisely, the continuing expansion of the desire to live. The rhythm that interrupts global mobilization is what remains when pronouns are in flames and the night comes on. The spoon that beats the pan, the fires ignited once and again, the scream of anger that never ends—the rhythm that the codes seek to tame. The spaces of anonymity open up in the face of and against a public space reduced to a simple showcase of the city.

### The Force of Anonymity

What if we refuse to be citizens? Actually, there are not two ways of emptying the figure of the citizen. Construction and destruction are not opposite poles. In every attempt to build something there is destruction, and vice versa. Only from the standpoint of power is it possible to distinguish between who is violent and who is nonviolent. To refuse to be citizens is to set in motion the power (*potencia*) of emptying and to operate according to a transversal strategy. It is to refuse to be what reality forces us to be, that is, to refuse to be citizens—there is no need to recall that citizen is today the authentic name for the unit of mobilization—consists in drawing a line between what one wants to live and what one is willing to live. Transversality, on the other hand, means that there is no longer a privileged battlefield of struggle (for example: the sphere of work), but that the combat is aimed against reality itself conceived as a continuum of struggles. When life is a battlefield it is no longer useful to consider partial approaches. The aim should always be the same: to puncture reality in order to breathe. For that to happen, we must begin to open no-man's-lands. The no man's lands that, stuck in the war front, are the place to replenish in order to attack again this damn videogame we are in. As we empty the figure of the citizen, the force of anonymity that lives inside each of us can emerge. That force escapes because nobody knows its real force. That force is irreducible because it is the force of the desire to live. Exit. Exit everything while already building a world between us. Exiting everything but without killing each other. Exit, also, the very idea of emptying defended by this manifesto. What if we refuse to be citizens?

**Santiago López-Petit (Barcelona 1950)** is a professor of philosophy at the University of Barcelona. A long-time activist, he was involved in the workers autonomy movement in Spain in the 1970s and in a workers-run factory, where he worked as a chemist. He has published a number of books exploring the relationship between life, politics and art from a militant and critical perspective, including *Entre el Ser y el Poder: Una Apuesta por el Querer Vivir* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1994), *Horror Vacui: La Travesía de la Noche del Siglo* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1996), and *El Infinito y la Nada: El Querer Vivir Como Desafío* (Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2003). His book *La Movilización Global* is being translated into English by Autonomedia. Also, Santiago has published articles in several journals, including *El Viejo Topo*, *Archipiélago*, *Riff Raff*, *Futur Antérieur*, and *Posse*. He is a member of the Catalan collective Espai en Blanc. Santiago's email address is: [slp@sindominio.net](mailto:slp@sindominio.net).

---

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Instituto de Estudios Superiores de la Empresa ('Institute of Higher Business Studies' or 'International Graduate School of Management').

© borderlands ejournal 2011