

THEY ALREADY PASSED.

PROTO-FASCIST SUBJECTIVITY AND THE POLITICS OF THE END¹

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*“Thus no global response is possible,
no ‘broad antifascist front’ to block the way of this new threat:
fascism has already taken place/passed!
It oozes from the pores of capitalist societies.”*

FÉLIX GUATTARI – *Lines Of Fight*

In the context prior to the second round of the French legislative elections of 2024, a classic anti-fascist slogan from the Spanish Civil War has been echoing in the country: “¡No pasarán!” [“They shall not pass!”] Various personalities and groups have raised the phrase in response to the possibility of the extreme right being institutionally consolidated in the French government. The truth, however, is that they have already passed. And they did a long time ago.

Regardless of the results of these elections (this text is written between the day and just hours before knowing the final results), and even if the RN does not obtain the absolute majority, the neoreactionaries and neofascists (or, let’s say, the extreme right as a whole) have already passed.

The fact that, just to avoid the circumstances, the entire rest of the political-party spectrum has had to form a mutant coalition, without much in common and with great signs of having an ungovernable situation accounts for the same. The fact that a party like the RN is no longer marginal, but perhaps drags the largest population group behind a single political proposal (something that none of the parties in the left-wing coalition achieve independently) accounts for the same. The fact that the whole purpose of this (sudden and risky) election has been to provoke an act of trust “in the ability of the French people to make the most fair decision for themselves and for future generations” (dixit Macron) and that, later, the French people themselves, against the ropes, have to “block” fascism, because clearly the most unified force behind a single party is effectively that one, accounts for the same.

Hence, to outline an appraisal, from a perspective that approaches the issue not as something particular to France or Europe, it may be necessary to go a little further: Latin America, 1970s.

1. FROM DICTATORSHIP TO VOTING

Neoliberalism was instated with blood and military rifles, through dictatorship, in Chile (1973) and Argentina (1976). On the other hand, this neo-reactionary wave (“neo-fascist”/“post-fascist”/“extreme right 2.0”: taxonomies are unnecessary), has been instated by way of cellphone screens, votes, and democratic means. What makes such electoral results possible today is that the population accounts for a proto-fascist subjectivity, produced by the living conditions of neoliberal logic and the drifts of its

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technology. The current situation is only conceivable if we consider the fact that 40 years of production of said subjectivity have accumulated, marked by dynamics that make feasible –that feed and that favor– what the (anti)politics of the neoreactionary seek to appeal to in their potential voters.

If indeed all the governmentality of capitalism in its neoliberal version actually has as its origin in the violent and bloody extermination of a revolutionary subjectivity (and of those who embodied it), as occurred in Latin America in the 1970s at the hands of dictatorships, we must understand that the democratic arrival of the neo-reactionary extreme right that occurs today (in France and throughout the world, especially legitimized after the Brexit-Trump-Bolsonaro triad) is neither the opposite of nor something to put before that situation. On the contrary, it is the announced extension of said process.

For the *Chicago Boys* to experiment with the implementation of the neoliberal way of life (that is, the material conditions for the production of a proto-fascist subjectivity), the dictatorships that gave them material support had to get rid of a revolutionary subjectivity that characterized the continent in the decade after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. It is on this basis that such a form of Capitalism operated in what has already been detected for decades as that which is central to capitalistic logic: the production of subjectivity. Thus, all the logic and rationalities of neoliberalism, its living conditions, the logic of its technical and technological drifts, over almost four decades, have produced a type of subjectivity that is what makes viable this shift towards neofascism and towards the extreme right through “democratic means”. In other words, the subjectivities that would be massively appealed to by the discourses of the neoreactionary extreme right are those that have generally been produced under the shelter of this logic in recent decades.

With that battle already won, the neo-fascist acceleration of neoliberalism (which is none other than its continuation) no longer requires armies to impose itself, but rather voters and accelerated digital screens. The economic-political order does not only account for factual violence, authoritarianism and forms of war against the population (socially, politically, economically). The axis has –always– been the production of that subjectivity. Hence, it can be stated that, in recent decades, the neoliberal capitalist order not only managed to consolidate itself at an institutional (macro) level, but also managed to achieve macro-micro articulation, with the production of subjectivity.

The great triumph of Capitalism in its neoliberal version has been the incessant production of this proto-fascist subjectivity, neoliberal-digital subjectivity. And what is happening with this increasingly important consolidation of the forms of the neoreactionary right is only possible when the logic of neoliberalism and the dynamics of the current informational regime have been folded into the subject. Thus, in the spirit of opening some paths for exploration, it would be worth considering what the features or dimensions of this subjectivity are and how it is produced.

2. PROTO-FASCIST SUBJECTIVITY (OR ABOUT THE NEOLIBERAL-DIGITAL)

The central axes of this proto-fascist subjectivity, embodied by those large sectors that increasingly elect reactionary governments, could be given by three dimensions. Firstly, a *counter-empathic dimension*, marked by competition as a way of life and by a kind of “selfishness of survival”. That is, by that *meritocratic economic Darwinism* that erodes all forms of *the common* and empathy (especially in the political sense, that is, that radical empathy that constitutes a power to articulate political emergences). This logic of “self-survival” applied to the social sense, as well as the fact of focusing on an economic-success culture as a consolidation or interface of relationships between subjects, is key when it comes to understanding the

favorable outcomes of the discourses of these neo-reactionary rights (post, neo or simply fascist), which vindicate the same sense of the term “social”.

Secondly, there is an “*ecstasied*” *dimension*, referring to the dynamics of the informational regime of the digital. And this situation, in which an anti-politics of the immediacy and in which the basic affect/effect prevails, appealing to emotions, as well as manipulation through misinformation, is only possible when subjects live disconnected due to hyper-connection. That is, immersed in a context the central feature of which is a hyper-saturated short circuit of information, reasoning is extinguished by the ecstasy of flow, which implies depoliticization, by the thoughtless primacy of speed and saturation. This same flow is what sets the norm for an effective virality (precisely that which feeds and sustains, for example, the logic of *fake news* and which fits so well in the strategies of the extreme right).

Finally, the other feature of this subjectivity is that the effects of the above are constantly and systematically neutralized, quieted, dormant in their possibility of generating political emergences, through the entire commodification of well-being and happiness as an industry and as a strategy. This refers to a dimension that is, at the same time, *productive and “happy”*. And far from the vitalistic and even playful desire that can be seen in the various political emergences, movements and social outbreaks of recent years, in this case it is related to what is operated by the happiness and well-being industry as a placebo effect and neutralization. Its central axis is to focus the tensions of these living conditions on a matter of “individuals” and “inner problems”, for which the spectrum of *dispositifs* is broad.

This includes: from the proliferation of coaching, self-help, the discourse of merit and successism, to the overlap that various religious cults, sects, new-age secularism groups, etc. have delivered in their messages, combining a defence of “values” with that of the economic order. Likewise, it includes pharmacology dedicated to alleviating the effects of this general crisis and making the world more “bearable”.

In short, over the last almost four decades not only have the general conditions and rationalities of neoliberalism been imposed, but these features have been raised as pillars of production of subjectivity².

This idea, presented here in a somewhat schematic way, could give clues as to why a result like the one that occurred in the first round of the elections in France (the election of Milei in Argentina, or the fact that Trump will probably return to the White House) should not come as a surprise or a kind of unexpected chaos. There’s really nothing surprising about it. A lot of bleakness, yes. But no surprise.

If there is a spectre that haunts Europe (and the world today) it is not really that of the extreme right. This is almost more of a symptom, another phase of the logic that has been consolidating for decades. What haunts the world is the subjective form that produces resonances that might seem senseless. Hence the echoes in the political elections: those sectors –both the poor and the wealthy– of Latin America that put Milei in power, that sank the constituent reform in Chile, that previously voted for Bolsonaro or that today support a “hybrid” authoritarian regime in Peru; likewise, the French voter from rural areas, who made it clear with the results of June 30, 2024 that the RN is no longer a marginal force, but a central feature, not only in the French political landscape, but also in the subjectivity of its voters. This also resonates with the worker of the “*deep south*” who is getting ready to “Make America Great Again”, mobilized by the fatigue of the failure of the “traditional” policies of the Democrats, as well as by the fear regarding those migrants who steal, rape, kill and –even worse– “take American jobs” (to quote Trump).

² The ongoing doctoral research by the author of this text precisely develops these three dimensions of production of neoliberal-digital subjectivity.

Something runs through the profile of all those voters and it is neither a surprise nor a consequence of some merely strategic move or operation. It is a subjectivity that has been produced transversally. Hence the name *neoliberal* (marked by the living conditions of that system) and also *digital* (subject to the logic of that informational regime). That is, produced outside the social contexts and of each country. It is not something that is necessarily easy for the tools of social or political science to grasp. But there is something that resonates with those voters and in this consolidation that, more than a cause, is a symptom. And so, strategic issues (disinformation, *fake news*, hate speech, etc.) function in a similar way, beyond the particularities (always relevant, of course) of each context or reality.

3. WHAT MOBILIZES THESE VOTES? (OR WHAT THE LEFT DOES NOT MOBILIZE)

Now, if there is something that can be identified as a kind of common denominator in this “neo-reactionary mainstreaming” and that serves to mobilize a large number of people to vote, it is the fact that they propose that there is no possible future or alternative. The extreme right – in the most diverse latitudes and contexts – has been skilful in weaponizing the fact that we are riding the end.

This is what appeals and resonates with that proto-fascist subjectivity: the idea that “every man for himself” is the only viable option and its natural implication is to only consider those of the same *class*, the same *values* or even the same *nation* (in general, the same *civilization*, something that also marks current wars). That logic is actually consistent with counter-empathy, it is blurred in the logic of affect/effect of the screens and is appeased by the machinery of capitalist domestication of anguish. In other words, that logic is at the heart of the dimensions that constitute the proto-fascist subjectivity produced by the system itself. Likewise, the rationality of protecting “what is mine” or “my people” is what has made it possible for these far-right impulses to always succeed in mobilizing such basic motions as fear or anger, which they also know how to translate well into rejection and hatred towards the usual scapegoats. This is what is extremely useful and efficient for them, of course. It functions as a political potency based on its logic, which becomes directly a partisan or electoral formula.

But this neo-reactionary common denominator of the extreme right does not imply the constitution (or the search) for a leading *political subject* to incarnate such a project. It is rather a way of appealing to a population that is marked by the proto-fascist subjectivity already described, but it does not really constitute the enunciation or consolidation of a political subject. For forty years, the hegemony of the neoliberal order has produced a subjectivity that can be appealed to –in its general disconnection, in its depoliticization, in its appeased numbness– precisely from the most basic (and “low”) emotions. But this is not a political subject that seeks to articulate or organize itself beyond that.

Thus, while on the Left we continue to pursue forms of internationalism that manage to make the intersectionality of our struggles resonate, the sinister geniality of the neoreactionary Right has been to be able to resound, organize, emerge and achieve –in diverse contexts and with dynamics that give little importance to “the international issue”– both good electoral results and relevant articulations (the RN of France included). Ironically, it is precisely from there that these rights do operate concretely in a transversal way and in various contexts, as proven by the “Reactionary International” that met in Spain at the *Viva 24 event* of VOX (where, among others, were present Milei, Le Pen, Meloni, Orbán and Abascal, the host). In that sense, although it could seem hurtful, at times it seems that the right has more political potency these days.

On the other hand, the left continues to look for one (or several) *political subjects* and despises a politics of the most basic emotions, perceived as a strategic issue. As if programmatic and less “ignoble” ideas had taken us somewhere.

It is not about saying that we “forget the class struggle” or that we belittle “to resist”: of course, these tensions continue to develop at the heart of the economic logic of society (with its decibels of frank violence and necropolitics). Nor is it about insisting that “we must reconfigure the concept of class” as if that could solve the above, as long as we include in it all the intersectional struggles and tensions. The truth in this regard is that we have been arguing in terms of “multitudes”, “unforeseen subjects”, “cognitariats”, “precariats” for several decades and we continue to lose. It is, perhaps, about recovering something that ignites, that spurs a response from those proto-fascist subjectivities. Again, the possible hinge is discontent and anger. Assuming that there is no ideology beyond boredom or anger and, if there is any doubt about the usefulness of this, we should remember the great success that the extreme right has known regarding how to monopolize the idea of *the end* and such issues.

Different sectors of the Left do not seem to finally accept that by continuing to try to build a possible future, the extreme right managed to steal the idea of *the end of the future* in which there is no possible world and in which the only thing left to do is save oneself by any means possible, even at the expense of the rest. Even those versions of the Left in which they criticize a certain “progressive liberal left” (which they present almost as complicit in the processes of the reactionary advance) have not gotten rid of the idea that there is a possible alternative. They therefore seem surprised when things like the first round of France, the election of Milei or the consolidation of a second term for Trump occur, as if they did not realize that the alternatives on the side of the population had not already been captured (not so much at a macro level, but at a micro level; although the electoral results at a global level are also already accounting for the former).

Fear and anger are clearly mobilized towards the polls (on both sides of the Atlantic and on both sides of the Equator) precisely because fear does not need any internationalism. Fear (and its possibility of turning into hatred) runs through us all: those who are *partisans* or militants and those who are not, those who are interested in developing a *common language for the struggles* and a project/program and those who are not.

While from a critical or progressive platform we try to consolidate that *common language* as well as the ways to translate it into some organization that manages to capture these struggles and movements, to establish new strategies and articulate other political emergencies, while on the left we continue orbiting in it, the extreme right has achieved unprecedented consolidation.

And it is unprecedented because what is actually happening is far from what happened almost 100 years ago, in the context of institutional partisan fascism in very different forms, but among them a key point is precisely that difference with respect to teleological issues and the recapture of *the end*.

Thus, the *Viva 24 coven* with all the neoreactionary “rockstars” gathered together, blurts out in our faces – once again – that there is a generalized emergence of these impulses, which resonate with each other, but without a universalist (or internationalist) reproducible plan. Different from programmatic fascism, of black and brown shirts, in which internationalist echoes were key, when it came to opening factions and subsidiaries, this new “Reactionary International” does not even share the most basic issues regarding its vision of the world. Everyone has sold to their voters their own version of the *end of the world* and of how to save themselves. Even the retro-utopias of the current extreme right are far from the teleological projects of classical fascism. Retro-utopias now are almost like a lifeboat for the end that is impending.

What they agree on, yes, is that the liberal order has effectively exhausted itself, in one way or another and that there are culprits both outside (migrants or “progressive and left-wing” international forces) and inside (the poor who neither produce nor consume, or the usual politicians who caused everything, or the political-economic elites and ruling “castes” of globalization). The latter is something on which they agree with the left, despite the fact that neoliberal technocraticism is nothing other than a different face of the authoritarian neo-fascist advance and has played a key role in the production of the subjectivity that translates into right-wing votes. But, beyond that, there is no more programmatic aspect than surfing the apocalypse, closing in as much as possible to protect what remains. There is no common language, beyond that of affects/effects. The first both in the sense of “what affects” and in the sense of the affective dimension, and the second both in the reactive and consequent sense.

The weight of our intersectionality of struggles, of combining all our tensions, of trying to rebuild internationalism as a correlate of local movements is a necessary and always urgent task, of course. But it is condemned to continue failing (while it *resists* or, better said, while it *endures*). Indeed, the form of politics that we have inherited from Modernity is already watering down, but we continue to insist on it in one way or another. It is as if we continue to prolong the tensions of the 20th century when, even since the consolidation of Capitalism as a global hegemony, the prospect of a large-scale articulation that allows us to think about a concrete possibility of a turn (revolutionary, let’s say) was systematically de-potentiated. Instead of assuming defeat to pay attention to how the hatefully victorious wave has been operating, we continue to occupy the place of *resistance* and *endurance*. We have been developing the language and tools to think and articulate that “non-fascist life” for 50 years, but we continue to lose because precisely the fascism that lives in each of us, the one that makes us love being governed (called micro-fascism, proto-fascism or whatever), is the one that seems to continue sweeping the polls and elections results. The commitment to a large-scale revolution or taking everything to a global civil war, even though it may have the most lucid diagnosis, is still intoxicated with the same enthusiasm and is not something new either.

In that sense, it is not that the extreme right constitutes the *threat* of a possible radical change in society. The radical change has already occurred. That, on a global level and also regardless of what is going to happen with the results of the second round in France. *In extremis*, it could be said that the current wave of extreme right is the harvest of what they have been sowing in their production of subjectivities for 40 years.

And in this regard, it sometimes seems that certain sectors of the left have even found it, if not comfortable, at least convenient to continue dabbling in the old dialectics of opposition and, from there, continue in the nostalgic insistence of a political subject (no matter how “multiple”, “unforeseen” and mutant it is). Instead, the far right capitalized the anger, fear, and the realization that there seemed to be no further salvation possible. Its product starts from something: it is *the end* and only “every man for himself” is worth it. And the worst thing is that it is not a lie. It is, indeed, the end.

4. FOR A POLICY OF THE END. REAL ENDINGS, STRATEGIC ENDINGS, ENDLESS ENDINGS

Given all this, perhaps it is not vain to ask what a “politics of the end” would imply and how it could be used (not only) strategically. That is, how to make it a political potency that is not only recaptured by the right of the acceleration towards fascism.

The key, perhaps, would lie with the idea of revenge. The idea that *the end* is indeed the current state, but that it constitutes ignition/indignation for something. Not the possibility of a different future, that is, the impossibility of a future as a project, but rather the possibility of redirecting or recapturing that “every

man for himself” and everything terrible that it mobilizes. And, once again, the end that the extreme right instrumentalizes is not a false one. We are in it or in different versions of it. It is not an ending “à la Fukuyama” as an “end of the story” as a conclusion or unavoidable realization, but it is *the end* with respect to several very specific aspects.

It is *the end* of an economic order that has already reached its limit (and which constitutes the corpse on which the neoreactionaries feed –like worms– but which they in turn denounce as insoluble), it is *the end* of the possibilities of liberal thought, of enlightened and nineteenth-century heritage, of that “holy European trinity” (British economy, French politics and German metaphysics).

It is *the end* of the most recent order that, *mutatis mutandis*, we inherited from the Second World War, in terms of economic hegemonies and the international contractual-legal order. This had already been going through a series of disproportionate accelerations, such as the entry into the dollar standard as currency and the end of the Breton Woods system, such as the end of the Cold War and the establishment of a globalized neoliberalism, such as the consolidation of the digital informational regime and its transformations of all caliber, such as the 2008 crisis with its consequent punishment on the populations, such as the COVID pandemic and such as the current context of war in Ukraine and genocide in Gaza (which constitute the last nail in the coffin of that contractual-international order). However, despite all these preceding accelerations, it is the current shifts that seem to drag with them the very modern way of doing politics and all economic hegemonies. The modern order, then, seems to be standing on the edge of its end.

But it is also about the end on an eco-biological level: this economic-political order is about to destroy our species (not the planet, something that our anthropocentric pride sometimes seems to forget). It’s *the end* in that sense too. Whether it is because of climate change, which will not stop no matter how much the people of the rich countries in the north of the planet strive to recycle or to be as “green” as possible. This, of course, compared to the countries of the south where –literally– much of the garbage produced in the north is imported and where, in addition, extractivism –coupled with lax regulatory frameworks and corruption– continues to kill and poison valleys, rivers and people in order to continue with mining extraction, or where the Amazon continues to be cut down at a rapid pace, or where recycling is not a common or daily practice (or even a concern or option) for populations that survive with what they can.

And finally, it is *the end* also due to the threat of a total war that could erase everything and –although it sounds like a fatalistic delirium–, it is something that has been brandished in media discourses around the world for months as if it were a scenario to contemplate in the current context.

Anyway. It would seem too naive to claim a policy of the future in such a context. Now, regarding what could be the clues to outline a “politics of the end” and its scope, well, it is something that goes beyond this text. As an intuition, perhaps, it requires not only large doses of strategic pragmatism but also a certain amount of cynicism. This, of course, is somewhat distant from the possibility of hope (no longer even teleological or programmatic) that the left still seems to carry. All in order to appeal to the subjects marked by those proto-fascist subjectivities.

In any case, this text is about thinking beyond the institutional and partisan political logic of the Right (technocratic neoliberalism plays in favor, as a counterpart ally of the extreme right), because we must try to appeal to *its* voters, fed up with everything and convinced of *the end*, full of fear, of hatred, of revenge. It is to them that we must appeal, with their subjectivities produced in the shadow of such an order.

It is about understanding that perhaps as an alternative path, as a possible tool, it could be considered neither programmatic, nor resistance, nor the abstraction of possible worlds, but rather embracing *the end*

knowing that there has been a defeat of decades that we haven't got over yet. Because it is not our militants who need to be convinced (they even seem to be the most surprised with results like those of France), but rather those who can swing at the level of votes. Thinking that with those who share our ideas we can build something alternative or better and then "descend" towards the population in terms of majority may not only sound naive, but it is the guarantee for the reactionaries to continue coming, dragging and sweeping everything "from below".

Despite clear and certain advances in some areas, made from the current forms of struggles (the feminist struggle, that of popular economies and the different indigenous struggles are perhaps the examples always mentioned throughout recent years), the truth is that regression and reaction always threaten to sweep everything away. The examples could go from the setback in laws regarding abortion, to the institutional shipwrecks (such as the Constituent Assembly in Chile or precisely these French elections). In recent years, one would have thought that there was a back-and-forth, that is, that at times there was progress in some direction and then there was a usual tension. It was the case with the "red" and "pink" waves in Latin America, and with the "Socialisms of the 21st century", with Bernie Sanders, with the fall of Trump and Bolsonaro, with the return of Lula. In a very naive way, this "unification" of a progressive front in France a few days ago even looked hopeful. But the right keeps passing.

In this sense, in northern countries, with a consolidated, functional institutionality (to the point that it can effortlessly become authoritarian at the service of the neoliberal-neofascist regime) perhaps the aspiration is none other than precisely to take votes away from that extreme right. This is to begin a transformation from the institutions themselves and without having to live resigned to the need to celebrate that they managed to put together "a new popular front" just to barely hold on –and for how much longer?– and not be swept away by the wave of neofascism.

In realities such as Latin America, on the other hand, where the institutionality of the State can be brutal in its factual violence, but where its little functionality and penetration also grants large territories (physical and not) for the articulation of other avenues, emergences and *agencements*, other strategies could perhaps be tried. There are already experiences of responses to this state laxity, ranging from neo-Zapatism in Mexico, to pseudocurrencies or popular economy movements in Argentina, passing through articulations such as "popular kitchens" in Peru.

There, furthermore, that same political potency of *the end*, that ignition of revenge, that embracing of the angered sentiment that "they took everything", is nothing new in Latin America, where this crisis of Modernity is all we have known since they gave birth to us 500 years ago with colonialist invasion, 200 years ago with a poorly formed republican order and 50 years ago with the brutal implantation of neoliberalism. Perhaps this allows us other forms of articulation. But of course, these are speculative scopes.

And what is sought here is to draw some points regarding the surprise of various critical and progressive sectors ("leftist", that is) regarding the fact that the extreme right continues to win and regarding, also, the fact that insisting on a typical organizational program does not seem to work (a platform of party struggle, or ideology-program-strategy triad, or global civil war, among many others) or –even worse– considering it as "the option" *par excellence*. On the other hand, other alternative forms (multiple and "movementist") of political articulation, which attempt to play with new pieces in the old game, are susceptible to be recaptured because the problem is the political form as a whole as well as the subjectivity of those who vote in such contexts, something that precisely the extreme right has read very well.

Given this, what is outlined here (and without any intention of preaching from the pulpit and pretending that there is a ready-made solution, or a formula), is how to be able to ignite, articulate in another way. How to appeal to those subjectivities of the neoliberal-digital context, precisely by embracing and brandishing what the right has successfully used so well, the idea that there is nothing other than *the end*. That there is nothing left to mobilize for anything other than that vitalist fear of clinging to life because everything announces that it is falling apart.

If every well-wielded tool can be a weapon, perhaps what we are talking about here is whether we cannot also use the weapon of the right that is taking over everything, the idea of the end, as well as what it mobilizes in the subjects. This, not as in a fatal resignation (also depoliticized and anomic or indifferent), nor as in an unrealistic and irresponsible denial of pretending that there is no tomorrow waiting at the end of every day (and that, therefore, one should no longer fight, articulate or, at least, function or do).

It is clear that there is a difference. Nor is it intended to say that every organization is mortgaged to teleological progressivism. But continuing to articulate from the possibility that –now– there is something different from this context of *the end*, an open (or poorly closed) door through which those who are already winning will continue to pass. And the fact is that, on the dawn of these results and, regardless of what they are, they have already passed. If they win, it will be the realization of a tragic issue. If they do not win, it will be the agonizing prolongation of a process that is not irreversible, but that can be if the same formulations continue to be insisted upon.

Rennes, France. July the 7th, 2024