

A NECESSARY RESPONSE

TO A NEW PREDICAMENT



At a time in which catastrophe dominates our collective political imagination, Alameda identifies the eclipse of modern utopias as a strategic problem, rather than the consequence of a conclusive historical resolution.

The increasingly frequent recurrence of crisis has transformed politics from a dispute for the future into an exercise in management of the present. The urgent demand to act in response to crisis – to stabilise, to restore order – obscures its structural causes. And yet, the apparent ubiquity of crisis produces a sense that there loom ever larger catastrophes more devastating, more totalising, with potentially irreversible effects.

Today, ecological collapse, nuclear war, and world-economic disintegration appear as abstract, but insurmountable, threats on the horizon, even as their concrete effects already proliferate in the present. They contribute to generalised anxiety, as well as melancholia for past ideals. And if these affective conditions can mobilise political action, they can also nonetheless become instrumental to the naturalisation of a voracious – indeed, autophagic – regime of accumulation that now expedites the realisation of catastrophic threats.

These threats are not new, of course. But a decade-and-a-half of disorganised rebellion against the normal order of things, following the financial crisis of 2007-2008, has put paid to illusions of a sustainable social pact that might yet rescue progress from the civilisational collapse augured by disenchanted intellectuals more than a century ago. Through the turbulence, the gig economy was expanded, further undermining the modern formalities of work. In turn, the accelerated destruction of living labour – the source of value – has compelled an even more frenzied and perilous push for profits.

A new common sense now prevails, according to which there is not enough capitalism to go around. A politics of spoliation, enabled by the state's capture by racketeers, is complemented by the widespread assumption of a duty to hustle – an entrepreneurialism of the self, whose most brutish manifestations can be seen along frontiers of accumulation, such as the Amazon, where, still, the natural world and its designated guardians resist.

It is this moment – in which a large portion of the human population has not only given up on the future, but has become set on rushing to the end – that confirms entry into a time of catastrophe. But this moment also reluctantly offers signs of hope, not so much in the bastions of civility and order, but amidst the debris of social institutions hard-won through struggle from below: public health and education, rights and democracy.

Here, organised defiance is still suggestive of an alternative world waiting to be born with the eruption of crisis. Its political limitations, however, are symptomatic of a predicament configured by this new time: already serving as an impasse, catastrophe defines strategy as redundant, even though strategy is now imperative to survival in this world. If catastrophe does indeed turn out to be a definitive impasse, the postponement of its consummation will depend on preparations for a new world.

Alameda is a response to this predicament.

Through research rooted in contemporary social struggles, we seek to contribute to strategy that can provide pathways of transition – alamedas – to a new world.

