



# The Insurrection and Its Double

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In distinguishing true romanticism from sham, Victor Hugo observed how all authentic thought had a disquieting double on the watch for it, always lying in wait, always quick to interpose itself for the original. A character of astounding plasticity that plays on similarities in order to gather some applause on the stage, this double has the specific ability to transform sulfur into holy water and to make the most reluctant public accept it. Modern insurrection, the one that is glad to do without Central Committees and the Sun of the Future, also finds itself reckoning with its shadow, with its parasite, with its classic that imitates it, that wears its colors and clothes, that sweeps up its crumbs.

On the wave of the media clamor that made it a best-seller in France, *The Coming Insurrection* is now also available in an Italian version.

Published in March 2007, under the signature of the Invisible Committee, this text has risen into the limelight of transalpine news thanks to a judiciary investigation that led to the arrest on Novem-

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ber 11, 2008 in the little village of Tarnac, of nine subversives, accused of involvement in an act of sabotage against the high speed railroad line. As often happens in these cases, the investigating judge sought to strengthen his theorem from a “theoretical” point of view as well, by attributing the authorship of the book in question to one of those arrested. Printed by a small commercial leftist publishing house and distributed throughout the national territory, already well received by the establishment<sup>1</sup> at the time of its publication — *The Coming Insurrection* has become by a decision of the Prosecutor’s Office a dangerous and frightening “manual of sabotage”<sup>2</sup>. From this comes its success, fed by the fact that a few priests of the intelligentsia (French as well as others) came out in its favor, concerned with the undue police intrusion into the sphere of political philosophy. If one can imagine the bewilderment of those who have suddenly discovered that the Party can be Imaginary, but the police much less so, it is even easier to imagine the satisfaction of the editor of this little book, who had never thought of finding such an efficient advertising agent in the Ministry of the Interior. In any case, all those arrested were out of prison after a few months and it is hoped that they avoid it for a long time. Here we can end all references to this event, which has taken on ridiculous connotations, since the mixing of *The Coming Insurrection* with those arrested in Tarnac, in the end, is the work of the French magistrature. There is thus no reason to concern ourselves with it for now.

Deserving of warning instead is the brief introductory note in the Italian edition, in which the “Invisible Translators” (talk about the franchising<sup>3</sup> of politics...) don’t hesitate to use the judiciary investigation referred to above as a practical demonstration of the value of this text. After having given word to its alleged author, according to whom “The scandal of this book is that all that appears there

<sup>1</sup> In English in the original — translator.

<sup>2</sup> In the material I have read in English, the French Minister of the Interior went so far as to call it a “manual of terrorism” — translator.

<sup>3</sup> In English in the original — translator.

by the FNAC<sup>13</sup>, but on the other hand, it admonishes us that “In France, literature is the prescribed space for the amusement of the castrated. It is the formal freedom conceded to those who cannot accommodate themselves to the nothingness of their real freedom” [*TCI*, p.87]. But as has already been noted, a revolutionary movement animated by a desire to achieve a rupture with the existent has no need of confirmation from the social order that it criticizes. Let’s leave to the opportunists of every stripe the hypocrisy of passing off as a daring incursion into enemy territory what is, in reality, collaborationism. It is a strange idea of secession and autonomy from the institutions that advises setting it up and participating in it without hesitation.

Let’s keep in mind that the fans of this book have good reason to be happy: after the American edition published by Semiotext(e), which specializes in post-structuralist French theory, is distributed by M.I.T. Press (at only \$12.95), its planetary success is pre-announced. And to what is this success due? Despite the assonance that can be found there, *The Coming Insurrection* — coming into all bookstore windows, that is — is that it is the caricature and the commodification of the insurrection that might break them all.

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<sup>13</sup> *Fédération nationale d’achats des cadres*, or National Purchasing Federation for Cadres (literally “managers”, but in this case apparently a reference to “cadres” in the leftist political sense), an “international entertainment retail chain”, centered in France, offering “cultural and electronic products”, started by two members of France’s Young Socialists movement in 1954, one of whom was Trotsky’s bodyguard for a while.

It is well presented, has style and ends up being liked by everyone because it gives a bit of reason to all, without disaffecting anyone in the end. From this standpoint, it is a decidedly political book.

We'll end with a couple of words on the context from which this book comes. France is notoriously the fatherland of revolution and of love, but also of cultural avant-gardes. That is where the Futurist Manifesto, considered the father of the avant-garde, was published<sup>11</sup>, that is where the Situationist International, considered its final expression, was active. The Invisible Committee is the necromancer of this rotting tradition that would like to combine revolutionary tensions and grocery<sup>12</sup> sales (generally putting the former in the service of the latter). Like its predecessors, it does nothing more than publicize problems that have always been faced as individuals and groups struggle, sheltered from the cultural and political stage. After drawing from the most varied sources of the revolutionary heritage, after having thoroughly mixed single, pre-selected elements, it arrogantly presents this brisk subversive mix to a public of consumers of radical thrills, boasting about its originality. Even though instructed about the contradiction into which its fathers/godfathers had fallen, the Invisible Committee follows them in deeds as well as words. The result is a text that gets published by a commercial publishing house, but that, at the same time, warns against "cultural circles" whose task is "to spot nascent intensities and to explain away the sense of whatever it is you're doing" [TCI, p.100]. On the one hand, it is chosen as book of the month

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<sup>11</sup> Though the Futurist Movement was founded by Italians, the manifesto was first published, in French, in *Le Figaro* (a French newspaper) on February 20, 1909. — translator.

<sup>12</sup> A reference to the fact that one of the Tarnac 9 bought (with those subversive parental "subsidies") and runs the local grocery store. In an interview he is reported to have said: "I'm just a shopkeeper with a historical passion for revolutionary movements."

is rigorously and catastrophically true, and it doesn't stop coming true more every day." (quotation drawn from an interview released in the well-known subversive newspaper *Le Monde*), the Invisible Translators reach the bizarre conclusion that he was arrested only because he was suspected of having written "the book that you hold in your hands". Seized with excitement, they write of having translated it "because what it says is true, and, above all, it says so". The reason why "we would almost have to thank the sorry puppet theater of anti-terrorism laws for having allowed this book to be read on such a vast scale, in a collective manner, and often from a practical point of view. If it hadn't been for them, probably the joy propagated by this book would not have reached so many people." What do you say in the presence of such considerations that compete in devotion with other salvations of prositu memory? Perhaps it would be enough to recall that this certainly isn't the first time that a subversive writing was used as supporting piece in a judicial inquiry, without for this reason becoming Gospel. It would be like claiming that the arrest of certain stalinists proves the truth of marxist-leninist publications, or that of certain anarchists proves the truth of anti-authoritarian books. That those in power in France don't feel a jolt at the riots that inflame the *banlieu*, at the periodic social movements, at direct actions spreading across the territory, nor so much the less at a possible encounter between these events — of course not! — so much as at a commentary on them that can be acquired for 7 euros in any bookstore... it is a question of a consolation typical of certain armchair revolutionaries. The fact the Translators, Invisible, but above all Self-Interested, transform repression into an advertising spot says nothing about this book. But it says a lot about them.

This dreariness banished, *The Coming Insurrection* doesn't wait.

But what is the coming insurrection that we need to examine? The original one that departed from France, or the one that landed elsewhere preceded by trumpet blasts? Let's not get fooled by ap-

pearances, since it is not, in fact, a question of the same one. The first is the expression of a milieu that, in a world of zombies, points directly toward the success at reviving the corpse of the vanguard, and to do this, it leans on the culture industry. The second, which has the bad luck of being shown off in a country where for now the revolution isn't for sale, is forced to cover the glitter of the merchandise with the cloak of conspiracy. The Italic readers that will avidly read this text, drunk on the subversive perfume sprayed on it by the pigs; would they have done the same if they had found it on a bookshelf at Feltrinelli's with the sole recommendation of some authorized personnel? Permit us to doubt it. But however it may be, it's useless to go into it too much. So let's start by taking this text literally, outside of its specific context to which we will return briefly at the end. It goes without saying that disagreements, more than agreements, are what attracted our attention.

Apart from a prologue, the book is composed of seven circles and four chapters. In the first part, the Invisible Committee, in Dantesque guise, take us through the hell of the current society, illustrating it with numerous examples. In the second part, we are introduced into the paradise of insurrection, to be attained through a multiplication of communes. If the first part has an easy time winning a certain approval, with a panoramic view of the world that offers us a glimpse of the continuous devastation, the second part limps, and not just a little. Still, they both share a common characteristic: a certain vagueness, well concealed by the dry and peremptory style. But are we sure that this is a defect and not, rather, a basic ingredient for the success of the book?

As writers of an essay of political philosophy, the Invisible Committee affects a strong contempt for speculation and a marked penchant for practice. And this is good, above all because it allows them to rake in the applause both of the erudite in withdrawal from vitamins and of the activists thirsty for knowledge. Distinguishing themselves from the many marxist sects, the Invisible Committee has no love for the great analyses that subsume and explain, explain

dressed up with the fabric of style: "As for deciding on actions, the principle could be as follows: each person should do their own reconnaissance, the information would then be put together, and the decision will occur to us rather than being made by us" [*TCI*, p.124].<sup>10</sup> It's useless, therefore, to lose time in tedious debates on what method to adopt and on the aim to pursue, which mostly have the disgraceful consequence of producing misunderstandings: let's all go on a stroll and the decisions will come by themselves. Beautiful, brilliant and valid for all. If you then have need of some precision, take a look at their historical references and strain your imagination a bit. Although in words "The fires of November 2005 offer a model for this" [*TCI*, p.113], the action that the scribes have in mind seems to more closely resemble that of a Black Panther Party led by Blanqui. If you think that it resembles an authoritarian hodgepodge of a vanguardist type, then it is necessary to see that you are irreversibly old and surpassed. Unable to satisfy yourself with the elusive gifts of relational "density" or the communitarian "spirit", perhaps you are still able to find the literary description of what might happen in an insurrection, with which this book concludes, sickening! We have already mentioned the lack of precision with which this text is put together, which is not at all its greatest defect, its weak side, as some have maintained in reviewing it. On the contrary, it seems to be its strong point. *The Coming Insurrection* is in step with the times, perfectly in fashion. It possesses the characteristics most required at the moment, it is flexible and elastic, it adapts itself to all circumstances (in the subversive sphere).

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could find nothing to indicate that this is a legitimate translation for the phrase "*fronts à l'échelle mondiale*". But it is more exciting than "common front" or "global front". — (translator's note)

<sup>10</sup> The last clause in both the French and the Italian is a word play of some significance (French: "et la décision viendra d'elle-même, elle nous prendra plus que nous ne la prendrons": "and the decision comes by itself, it takes us rather than we taking it", the point being our relative passivity in the face of the force of circumstance. — translator.

Haven't you noticed it there? More than an observation that spreads joy, it seems to us to be a consolation that spreads complacency. In rhetorical jargon one might perhaps describe it, excusing us for the triviality, as a metonymy. Speaking plainly, an exchange of terms of the sort in which the name of the cause is used for that of the effect, the name of the container is used for what is contained, the name of the material is used for the object... It is a question of a tendency towards confusion that is useful to the Invisible Committee, which allows them to pander to both those who aim for the satisfaction of daily needs and those who point toward the realization of utopian desires (besides, "rage and politics should never have been separated" [TCI, p. 111]), to entertain both those who are dedicated to understanding "plankton biology" [TCI, p. 107] and those who pose questions such as "How can a TGV line or an electrical network be rendered useless? How does one find the weak points in computer networks or scramble radio waves and fill screens with white noise?" [TCI, p. 112]. Through the show of its being practical — a noble intent that no one would dare to oppose — the Invisible Committee skirts over every question that might stir up discord, rubbing their hands for the "political richness" [TCI, p. 120] achieved in this way. It roars loudly against this civilization and doesn't say a word about what it is fighting for. The practical result of this attitude? "We have our hostility to this civilization for drawing lines of solidarity and of battle on a global scale" [TCI, p.99] In fact, if hostility to this civilization is accompanied by a passion for an existence without any form of domination, all these common fronts<sup>9</sup> would not be possible: who would form an alliance with a contender for power?

Since they don't say anything about Why and What, obviously, they don't say anything about How. Here as well avoidance is

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<sup>9</sup> In the quote from TCI above, in the Italian version, the phrase "*fronti comuni*" (common fronts) was used to translate the original French phrase "*fronts à l'échelle mondiale*", which would basically mean "global fronts". In the Semiotext(e)/MIT Press English translation, the phrase "battle" is used, even though I

and subsume everything. Intelligent analyses if you will, for goodness sake, but that after a century and a half they have been a bit of a pain in the ass. They are uncertain, disputable, at times even pathetic. The critique of the existent, taken in its totality, doesn't interest the Committee. Nonetheless, precisely like the various marxist sects, the I.C. has the lust to impose its vision. But since today a discourse that demands to be taken seriously because it is based on "scientific" presuppositions would provoke a certain hilarity, better to bet on something else, better to peddle it as true insofar as it is based on observation. There's been enough analysis, enough critique, enough research, make way for the evidence and its rock-hard objectivity that hits you suddenly right in the eye. Thus, with contrived humility, the Invisible Committee states from the start that they are content to "introduce a little order into the commonplaces of our time, collecting some of the murmurings around bar-room tables and behind closed bedroom doors", in other words, "to lay down a few necessary truths" [*The Coming Insurrection* — hereafter TCI — , p. 28, Semiotext(e)/MIT Press, 2009]. Its members don't even consider themselves the authors of this book; simply, "They've made themselves scribes of the situation. It's the privileged feature of radical circumstances that a rigorous application of logic leads to revolution. It is enough just to say what is before our eyes and not to shrink from the conclusions" [TCI, p. 28].<sup>4</sup> We bet that you had never thought of this: commonplaces are the necessary truths to transcribe in order to awaken the sense of rigor that leads logically to revolution. It's obvious, isn't it?

Dive into the seven circles that subdivide the contemporary social hell and you will find very few ideas on which to reflect, but many states of mind to share. As we've said already, the authors/

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<sup>4</sup> The original in the French actually reads: "*c'est le privilege des circonstances radicales que la justesse y mène en bonne logique à la revolution*". In the English, the word "*justesse*" (accuracy or correctness) disappears within the "rigorous application of good logic". I have therefore taken some liberties with the

writers of this text avoid basing their discourse on any theory. In order not to incur the risk of seeming old-fashioned, the scribes prefer to register the lived in its ordinariness, where everything becomes familiar, precisely as a common-place. In this clear and well-articulated flow of everyday banalities — made of anecdotes, witticisms, advertising slogans, surveys and pining away — each one finds something of himself there and recognizes it. In taking note, in apocalyptic tones, of the impending end of the world, in reviewing the various social spheres in which it is consuming, the Invisible Committee lingers over the most immediately perceivable effects, saying nothing about the possible causes. Indeed, it informs us, “the general misery becomes intolerable the moment it is shown for what it is, a thing without cause or reason” [TCI, p. 65]. Without cause or reason? Don’t expect radical critiques of the existent, even if it means mixing the communist ones of capitalism and the anarchist ones of the state: these are out-dated things to be avoided, if one wants to appear original. From this civilization, political powerlessness, economic bankruptcy, social decline get confirmed, but always seen from the inside. Without illusions about what is, but also without an impulse for what could be. This is because *The Coming Insurrection*, after being born in the form of editorial merchandise, is thought and written to reach the “great public”. And the “great public” is composed of spectators greedy for emotions to consume in the moment, in the course of situations, and is insensitive to ideas that might give meaning to a whole life. To the “great public”, if one wants to seduce it, it is necessary to palm off easy images in which one knows how to reflect oneself without too much effort (as the Italian translators smugly declare, “with no promise of understandings to be achieved in terms of who knows what interpretations”).

It is almost banal to observe how Guy Debord’s ghost haunts this text that sometimes recalls *The Fight Club*. Yes, precisely the famous

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next sentence, replacing the Italian word “*giusto*” (rightness, correctness, accuracy) with “rigor” in order to parallel the English translation.

resolve every annoyance with the speed with which one signs a check (or gets it sign by mamma and papa, patrons of subversion), commune participants are almost always forced to dedicate all their time and energies to internal “functioning”. In short, sticking with the metaphor, on the one hand, the daytime activity with its needs tends to absorb all strength at the expense of the nighttime activity; on the other hand, the nighttime activity with its consequences tends to endanger the daytime activity. In the end, these two tensions clash. Fortuné Henry, at the time when he started an intense propaganda activity that led him to go away from Aiglemont, saw his social experiment overturning in a very short time (and no one missed it). The French illegalist anarchists at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had lived together in the community at Romanville, but it was only after the collapse of this communitarian endeavor and their return to Paris that they became the “automobile bandits”.

Let’s be clear. This doesn’t mean to deny the importance and value of such experiments. It only means not overburdening them with a meaning and an importance that they cannot have. As Malatesta said in 1913, “We have no objection to the fact that some comrades seek to organized their life in the way the intend it and draw the best solution that they can from the circumstances in which they find themselves. But we protest when they want to present ways of life, which are and can only be adaptations to the current system, as anarchist things, or worse still, as means for transforming society without having recourse to revolution”. A limited and circumscribed in vitro experiment is certainly able to furnish good indications and become more than useful in specific circumstances, but it isn’t, by itself, liberation.

Extending the concept of the commune to all rebellious manifestation and equating their sum to an Insurrection, as the Invisible Committee does, is an instrumental gimmick for evading the question and causing one’s advertising slogan to be welcomed everywhere. If the totality of subversive practices is the insurrection, then this is not at all arriving: it is already here, it always has been.

metropolis and open up other possibilities the first act must be to interrupt its *perpetuum mobile*" [TCI, p. 61]). Driven by enthusiasm for this brilliant combination that had never poked its head up in the mind of any revolutionary, after having prescribed that "The expansive movement of commune formation should surreptitiously overtake the movement of the metropolis" [TCI, p. 109], the scribes ask themselves: "Why shouldn't communes proliferate everywhere? In every factory, every street, every village, every school. At long last, the reign of the base committees!" [TCI, p. 101]. The answer to this question is something obvious, observable in Tarnac on November 11, 2008: the coming police. Without any originality, the Invisible Committee broods over the old illusion active in the 1970s of an "Armed Commune", of a commune that is that doesn't retreat in defense of its liberated space but goes to attack other spaces that remain in the hands of power. It's just that this cannot be realized for two types of reasons.

The first is that, outside of an insurrectional context, a commune exists in one of the gaps left empty by the ruling order. Its survival is linked to its innocuousness. As long as it is a matter of cultivating zucchini in organic gardens, of churning out food in people's dining halls, of healing sick people in self-managed clinics, it all goes well. At times, someone is needed to remedy the lack of social services. At bottom it provides a convenient place to park the marginalized far from the glittering showcases of the city centers. But as soon as one goes out in search of the enemy, things change. Sooner or later, the police come knocking on the door and the commune is finished, or at least trimmed down. Something other than "surreptitiously overtaking" the metropolis. Every commune that has attacked the existent has had a short life.

The other reason why the attempt to generalize the "Armed Commune" outside of an insurrection is thwarted springs from the material difficulty in which such experiments flounder, since they generally see rising before them a myriad of problems accompanied by a chronic lack of resources. Since only a privileged few are able to

film taken from Chuck Palahniuk's novel, known for the "hard and innovative style, with nihilistic contents". The Invisible Committee brings to mind the dressed-up Edward Norton seated on the john with the Ikea catalog in hand, on the point of exploding and transforming into a wild Brad Pitt. Same "schizophrenia", same phrases for a point-blank effect.

— *"This is your life, and it is ending one minute at a time."*

— *"After fighting, everything else in your life got the volume turned down.. You could deal with anything."*

— *"It was right in every everyone's face. Tyler and I just made it visible. It was on the tip of everyone's tongue. Tyler and I just gave it a name."*

— *"Murder, crime, poverty, these things don't concern me. What concerns me are celebrity magazines, television with 500 channels, some guy's name on my underwear. Rogaine, Viagra, Olestra."*

— *"It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything."*

— *"We're the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our Great War's a spiritual war... our Great Depression is our lives. We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars. But we won't. And we're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off."*

— *"You're not your job. You're not how much money you have in the bank. You're not the car you drive. You're not the contents of your wallet. You're not your fucking khakis. You're the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world."*

— *"Why these buildings? Why credit card companies?" — "If you erase the debt record, we all go back to zero. It'll create total chaos."*<sup>5</sup>

...and so on until the collapse of the metropolises.

In this same nihil-aestheticist air, in *The Coming Insurrection* the end of civil life together is depicted with the distance that sepa-

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<sup>5</sup> All quotes from the movie *The Fight Club*

rates the sentimentalism of pop songs from the warnongering of the most militant rap. The end of the family is inferred from the climate of boredom and embarrassment that looms over the ritual common meal. The end of the economy is readable in the jokes that circulate among the managers themselves. The end of the city materializes in the form of advertising posters. Having reached the end of the seventh circle, the conclusion is predictable: like the Norton/Pitt due, the Invisible Committee deserves applause. That it isn't so difficult to sound convincing when one limits oneself to describing the daily horrors of which we are all victims is of little importance. That later, here and there, this long series of objective observations allows some subjective tic to leak through, who cares? Come on don't be pedantic. Don't growl in the face of the collective We accompanied by the insistent contempt for the individual I. Already sold off as the inspiration of Reebok, the individual later finds itself again passed off as a synonym for "identity", "problem", "straight-jacket". Aspiring shepherds like to wallow in the stench of the flock. All that is needed to make them happy is the evocation of a street gang or a political collective, with their respective followers to fight and make processions for the racketistic control of the "territory". Uniqueness is fought off because it doesn't create a mass to manipulate. Level zero of consciousness is the silence in which slogans echo the strongest, the blank sheet on which the Calls to enlistment are printed.

In the same way don't frown at the sight of the Byzantine distinction between politics and the political<sup>6</sup>, of the frantic attempt to save the savable after having taken note of the shipwreck that is going on. The fire that burns all demands to ashes, like the fury that escapes all civil confrontation, certainly has a political meaning. But for whom? Not for the anonymous insurgents who want to make a blank slate of what surrounds them, to whom it is enough to give free rein to their desires. Every political concern belongs

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<sup>6</sup> See page 25 of *TCI*, among other places.

cussions around the Cecilia Community, while in France it was embodied in the choices of two brothers, Emile and Fortuné Henry (pardon, but everyone has a History of his own to pass on. Unlike the Invisible Committee, for us, anarchists come to mind). The first of the brothers, subscribing to the words of Alexander Herzen according to whom "We do not build, we demolish; we do not announce new revelations, we destroy old lies", went up on the gallows after having carried out some dynamite attacks; the second founded the community of Aiglemont. The terms of the question from that time have remained more or less the same: can a new form of life be revealed only in the course of an insurrectional break, or can it be realized also outside of this? Do the barricades make the impossible possible through the suspension of centuries-old habits, prejudices and prohibitions, or can this impossible be relished and nourished daily at the margins of the ruling alienation?

The Invisible Committee is like virtue: it always stays in the middle. Like today's supporters of the "non-state public sphere" (from the flabbiest anarchist militants to the slickest negrian "*disobbedienti*"), it maintains that "Local self-organization superimposes its own geography over the state cartography, scrambling and blurring it: it produces its own secession" [*TCI*, p. 108–9]. But whereas the former see in the progressive spread of experiments in self-organization an alternative to the insurrectional idea, the Invisible Committee proposes a strategic integration of ways judged separate up to now. No longer sabotage or the garden, but rather sabotage and the garden. During the day planting potatoes, during the night knocking down trellises. The daytime activity is justified by the need not to be dependent on the services now provided by the market and the state and to guarantee oneself in this way a certain material autonomy. ("How will we feed ourselves once everything is paralyzed? Looting stores, as in Argentina, has its limits" [*TCI*, p. 125]), the nighttime activity by the need to interrupt the flows of power ("In order for something to rise up in the midst of the



113]. The lack of embarrassment of the scribes-who-make-note-of-the-evidence is embarrassing. It is true that the history of the revolutionary movement is a huge theoretical and practical arsenal to loot. But the ease with which they untie centuries old knots, the fruit of a crude manipulation, leaves us astounded. Let's observe how they transform the concept of the "Commune" into an ideological master key able to fling open all their doors. Still scraping together consent throughout the varied field of the dissatisfied, among the enemies of this world (for whom the Commune is synonymous with the insurgent Paris of 1871) as among the alternatives to this world (for whom the Commune is the happy oasis in the desert of capitalism), they become the bards of a "Commune" that they see everywhere: "Every wildcat strike is a commune; every building occupied collectively and on a clear basis is a commune. The action committees of 1968 were communes, as were the slave maroons in the United States, or Radio Alice in Bologna in 1977" [TCI, p. 102]. And then what else? "The commune is the basic unit of partisan reality. An insurrectional surge may be nothing more than a multiplication of communes, their coming into contact and forming of ties. As events unfold, communes will either merge into larger entities or fragment. The difference between a band of brothers and sisters bound 'for life' and the gathering of many groups, committees and gangs for organizing the supply and self-defense of a neighborhood or even a region in revolt, is only a difference of scale, they are all communes" [TCI, p. 117].<sup>8</sup> Of course, the cows are all herds, without distinctions.

It is incredible to have to recall that the debate over the relationship between the revolutionary rupture and experimentation with ways of life that offer an alternative to the single model imposed by the ruling social relationships goes back at least to the end of the nineteenth century. In Italy it was manifested above all in the dis-

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<sup>8</sup> In the original: "elles sont indistinctement des communes", literally "they are communes without distinction".

only to the "state's tentacles" [TCI, p. 95]. And don't snort at the re-proposition of the dialectical nursery rhymes, inevitable jigsaw puzzles that transform the following of one event after the other into a well-oiled mechanism (if for Marx and Engels "the bourgeoisie has not only manufactured the weapons the bring its death", for the Invisible Committee "the metropolis also produces the means of its own destruction" [TCI, p. 61]). If this all reminds you of something old and dismal, it is only because you are absorbed with old and dismal ideological prejudices.

Dramatically aware that "We can't rid ourselves of what binds us without at the same time losing the very thing to which our forces would be applied" [TCI, p. 32], the Invisible Committee keeps all irreducible otherness at a safe distance. Best not to go too far into "disaffiliation", best that it remains "political". This society has become unlivable, it is said repeatedly, but only after having observed its failure to keep its promises. One comes to ask oneself: if it had not failed? Who knows, maybe if we hadn't "been expropriated from our own language by education, from our songs by reality TV contests, [...] of our city by the police" [TCI, p. 36]... we might even be happy living in our world. In expectation of reappropriating something that we have never possessed, we can get by and struggle by exploiting out parents ("We count making that which is unconditional in relationships the armor of a political solidarity as impenetrable to state interference as a gypsy camp. There is no reason that the interminable subsidies that numerous relatives are compelled to offload onto their proletarianized progeny can't become a form of patronage in favor of social subversion" [TCI, p. 42]<sup>7</sup>) or perhaps by participating in the electoral show ("Those who still vote seem to have no other intention than to desecrate the ballot box

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<sup>7</sup> One has to wonder why the explicit references to *family* relationships and *parents* found in the passage in both the Italian and in the original French are dropped in the English version. The passage is about depending on one's parents for cash as a path to autonomy... The assumption is that one's parents have cash and will give it with no strings attached. — translator.

by voting as a pure act of protest. We're beginning to suspect that it's only *against voting itself* that people continue to vote" [TCI, p. 23]). These radical philosophers, what jokers! So much for maltreating/misusing the most conformist among their readers, frightening them with evocations of the fires of the winter of 2005, threatening them with the defense of the riffraff of the urban outskirts, surprising them with the affirmation of the practical uselessness of the state, reaching the point of accusing them of envying the life of the poor.

All this to get where? For the Invisible Committee, this civilization no longer has anything to offer. Only it's a dusk that doesn't forecast any dawn. As in all forms of nihilism — and it is well-known that nothing excites philosophers more than nihilism — it is the utopian tension that gets lost. Beyond this world, there is only this world. All that is left is a present that is rapidly disintegrating, inside of which to survive as best one can under the circumstances. It is therefore not surprising that for the scribes "Becoming autonomous" means merely "learning to fight in the streets, to occupy empty houses, to love each other madly, and to shoplift" [TCI, p. 42]: surviving as best one can under the circumstances, precisely.

But then, what about the insurrection? What the heck, here we are. After having described a social misery without cause or reason, here we have reached the second part, that in which an insurrection without content is announced. Here as well, from the start, a good approximation for satisfying all palates stands out. "We can no longer even see," the Invisible Committee begins, "how an insurrection might begin". From an uprising — someone has noted with irritation. Naaah, too precise. Best to leave the question unresolved, so as to appeal to as many of the curious as possible, and to jump from subject to subject in order to dodge the points on which minds are usually divided. Do you think relationships between subversives should be based on affinity (i.e., on a firm sharing of general perspectives and ideas) or rather on affectivity (i.e., on

a temporary sharing of particular situations and feelings)? Never fear, to the Invisible Committee an acrobatic leap is enough to nonchalantly overcome the obstacle and swing on a sensational overlap ("We have been given a neutral idea of friendship, understood as a pure fondness without consequence. But all affinity is affinity *within* a common truth" [TCI, p.98]). It's a simple trick. Instead of starting from individual desires, by force of things, multiple and divergent, it is enough to start from social contexts that are easily perceived as common. The Invisible Committee doesn't like ideas that we possess; they prefer truths that possess us: "A truth isn't a view on the world but what binds us to it in an irreducible way. A truth isn't something we hold but something that carries us" [TCI, p.97]. Truth is external and objective, single-voiced, beyond discussion. The imminence of the end of the world that surrounds us, for example (thus ignoring a possible extension of this agony). It is sufficient to share the feeling of this truth in order to find oneself again in cahoots about banalities of the "we need to get organized" type. Don't break the spell. Take this truth, according to which the dead end in which the social order finds itself is transformed into a superhighway toward the insurrection, on trust and don't dare to ask: organize how? for what? with whom? and why?

Are you one of those who holds that the destruction of the old world is an unavoidable and preliminary moment in an authentic social transformation? Or perhaps you are convinced that the immediate birth of new forms will manage to divest the old authoritarian models of their power, rendering all direct conflict with power superfluous? No problem. Once again the Invisible Committee, with a finger in every pie, is able to reconcile tensions that have always been opposed. While it hopes for "a multiplicity of communes that will displace the institutions of society: family, school, union, sports club, etc." [TCI, p. 102], it theorizes about "Not making ourselves visible, but instead turning the invisibility to which we have been relegated to our advantage, and through conspiracy, nocturnal or faceless actions, creating an invulnerable position of attack" [TCI, p.