

# **To the Customers**

**Insurrection and Doublethink**

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*His mind slid away into the labyrinthine world of doublethink. To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy, to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all to apply the same process to the process itself. That was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word 'doublethink' involved the use of doublethink.*

George Orwell, 1984

## I

*And Masters themselves allow, that if a Servant comes when he is called, it is sufficient.*

Jonathan Swift, *Directions to Servants*

On the night between October 25 and 26, 2014, in Sivens, the police use a grenade to kill Remy Fraisse, a 21-year old activist who is demonstrating against the construction of a dam. In the days that follow, rage flares up in the streets of many French cities, and almost daily conflicts between the forces of order and demonstrators are reported. But Remy Fraisse died a few weeks too late. If he had been blown up a bit earlier, he would surely have been included in the dedications of the new book by the Invisible Committee, already the authors, in 2007, of the best-seller, *The Coming Insurrection*. Just four days before his death, in fact, the new and awaited title, *To Our Friends*, was beautifully displayed in all the book stores. It opens with a dedication to three dead people and a prisoner, from various countries. And so, an international dedication; and so, aiming to provoke an international commotion; and so, aiming to draw international acclaim.

And, not being able to exploit the emotions aroused by the tragic death of Remy Fraisse on paper, some vulture has thought well of doing it on television. The night of October 31, on the national channel France 2, a debate was held on "Ecology, the new battlefield?" during the program *Ce soir ou Jamais* (This Evening or Never). One participant was Mathieu Burnel – one of the *grocers* of Tarnac investigated by the magistrature at the end of 2008 for a sabotage attack on a railroad line – , suspected of being part of the Invisible Committee (whose members are unknown) because of the deep similarity of language and content between *The Coming Insurrection* and the magazine *Tiqqun* (whose editors instead were known), whose final legacy before disappearing in 2003 was the pamphlet *Appel* (*Call*) patently recycled in the first work of the I.C. Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean that the old animators of the magazine are now members of the I.C. But we can state without fear of denial that the members of the I.C. have read and appreciated the writings of *Tiqqun*, and that the editors of *Tiqqun* have read and appreciated those of the I.C. – now published, not by chance, by the same editor – as the theses supported by both follow upon each other, interweave, and are based in the same harmonic *milieu*. And since the "commune" of Tarnac was also founded by the main animator of *Tiqqun*, Julien Coupat, this explains why many think that the headquarters of the Invisible Committee is in the backshop of the grocery store of the French village. Be that as it may, Burnel is a fanatical supporter of the I.C.

Let's return to the night of October 31, when the death of Remy, the thought of his body mangled by the cops, caused the blood to boil in veins. If there were those who did back down before the police, Burnel was so daring that he did not back down before the television cameras of the journalists, because he wanted to publicly compare his opinions with those of the excellent people invited to share the same bed<sup>1</sup>: Corrine Lepage (former environmental minister, former candidate for the French presidency and member of the current European parliament), Christian de Perthuis (economy professor, member of the Economic Council for Sustainable Development, as well as the author of *Green Capital: a New Perspective on Growth*), Fabrice Flipo (engineer and philosopher, lecturer on sustainable development at the *Télécom Ecole de Management*), Christian Gerondeau (engineer, expert in transportation and road system safety, lobbyist for the automobile industry, current mission chief for the Brussels Commission and the World Bank), Juliette Méadel (spokesperson for the Socialist Party), Philippe Raynaud (professor of political science) and Pascal Bruckner (philosopher who passed from the exegesis of Fourier's utopia to support for NATO's wars).

As to Mathieu Burnel, he was invited as a member of the "Tarnac group ... that supports struggles like that in which Remy Fraisse met death". This, at least, was how the program's host introduced him. The host recalled how the Tarnac group was often thought to be the "famous Invisible Committee" who in 2007 published *The Coming Insurrection* and "who last week published a new book entitled *To Our Friends*" (as the covers of the two books stood out on the screen). Interrupted frequently by his opinionist colleagues invited to attract an audience, Burnel didn't miss opportunity to evoke the emotion aroused years earlier by the appearance of *The Coming Insurrection* by later decreeing that "the insurrection has arrived!". Therefore he openly abandoned the broadcast, declaring that he was bored with the other people's interventions.

But who did he think he would be facing? Did he believe he would hear impassioned arguments about the battle front opening up for carrying out the war against civilization? Obviously not. It is a genuine banality to discover how it is impossible to discuss in freedom inside a television studio, in the midst of reactionaries of every stripe. Representatives of the party of order and the party of insurrection, sitting side by side, to discuss in a more or less calm manner the needs of the state and the desires of revolt before a public television audience in a post-dinner digestive condition; what else could such a staged set-up be, if not buffoonery of the spectacle? If Burnel accepted it, it is clearly because he had his priorities: as the infamous scumbag Timothy Leary would have said, "it is necessary to sell the new thing to the kids". Completely calculated. Once the advertisement spot for the Invisible Committee's new merchandise had ended, it would no longer make sense to remain in those television studios.

Accepting dialogue with those in power under the spotlights of its limelight is a strategic choice of pure marketing. It appears that in these miserable times publicity is not only the spirit of commerce, but also of subversion; or rather of the commerce of subversion. Besides, it's a choice that has a logic of its own in Burnel's environment: weren't his grocer comrades who were also charged in Tarnac, Benjamin Rosoux and Manon Glibert, elected municipal councilors of the small French hamlet in March 2014, after being candidates on a local ballot? And recently hasn't Julien Coupat himself granted interviews to official information media like the weekly *L'Obs* or France Inter radio?

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<sup>1</sup> As in "strange bedfellows".

It's a dirty job, *representing* the insurrection, acting as its spokesperson with institutions, mass media and the market – holding discussions, granting interviews, getting photographed, signing contracts, clasp hands – but someone has to do it! And it is fortunate that there are revolutionaries with noble and generous hearts who are willing to submit to such a sacrifice.

## II

*By spreading his tail this bird so fair,  
Whose plumage drags the forest floor,  
Appears more lovely than before,  
But thus unveils his derrière.*

Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Peacock*

The Invisible Committee's second book, like the first, was published in France by the same publishing house, La Fabrique, whose name is a homage to workerist ideology. Its animator is Eric Hazan, a real character of an editor, as well as a historian and philosopher. Beyond being, of course, a bitter enemy of the constituted order, although his *First Revolutionary Measures* (the title of one of his books written together with the zombie of Kamo, who, some whisper, was also dug up on the plateau of Millevaches near Tarnac) has not completely managed to make people forget his latest counter-revolutionary measures (his electoral propaganda in favor of the socialist François Hollande, now president of France). Like the preceding work, *To Our Friends* is also part of the battle series of La Fabrique editions, the same series that includes works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, Blanqui, Gramsci, Robespierre, as well as three titles from *Tiqun ...* But Hazan doesn't only have eyes for the grandpas and grandsons of authoritarian revolutionary thought: his 2010 catalog can also brag of *Les Mauvais Jours Finiront: 40 ans de combats pour la justice et les libertés* (The Bad Days Will End: 40 Years of Fighting for Justice and Liberty), the title that, with the piquant communard-situ flavor, serves to spice up a hot dish from an author as insipid as the Judiciary Union. Well? What's strange about this? Nothing, considering that in 2003, Hazan had already distinguished himself for the publication of the diary of the founder of the National Police union, who spent twenty years doing this "good job in which one helps people and protects society", while in 2005 he published the book of an auxiliary doctor of the police who desired to let the public know what it takes to care for the health of the arrested in the police station.

In short, as you've understood, Eric Hazan is a revolutionary, well-read and lacking prejudice.

The back cover of the Invisible Committee's new book, along with listing to whom it is addressed, concludes with the by now inevitable affectation of humility, a genuine trademark of certain movement areas. This new editorial effort is simperingly presented by its authors as a "modest contribution to an understanding of our time". Now, it is already annoying to hear a scholar complimenting himself for his erudition, or a muse bragging about her beauty, or a strong man asserting his strength. But modesty? To flaunt one's modesty is to fall into the most flagrant hypocrisy, it is bellowing out one's conceit. But, as we will see, the Invisible Committee is the supreme master of contradiction.

Starting with an ostentatious humility, the I.C. is announced with great fanfare. In the original promotional press release for the book in France, we actually read: "In 2007, we published *The Coming Insurrection ...* A book that has now ended up being associated with the 'Tarnac case',

forgetting that it was already a success in bookstores ... Because it isn't enough that a book be included in its totality in a file of an anti-terrorist investigation for it to sell, it is also necessary that the truths it articulates touch that readers due to a certain correctness. It must be acknowledged that a number of assertions by the Invisible Committee have since been confirmed, starting with the first and most essential: the sensational return of the insurrectionary phenomenon. Starting in 2008, a half-year has not passed without a mass revolt or an uprising taking place to the removal of the powers in charge ... If it has been the sequence of events that has conferred its subversive character to *The Coming Insurrection*, it is the intensity of the present that makes *To Our Friends* an eminently more scandalous text. We cannot content ourselves with celebrating the insurrectional wave that currently passes through the world, also congratulating ourselves on having noticed its birth before others ... *To Our Friends* is thus written at the peak of this general movement, at the peak of the experience. Its words come from the heart of disorders and are addressed to all those who still believe sufficiently in life to fight. *To Our Friends* wants to be a report on the condition of the world and of the movement, an essentially strategic and openly partisan writing. Its political ambition is boundless: to produce a shared understanding of the times, at the expense of the extreme confusion of the present.”

Advertising language knows only the absolute superlative. The words of this presentation sound so lacking in modesty as to be inappropriate if addressed to potential *friends*, usually not so inclined to welcome such arrogance. But perfect if one intends to address potential *customers* luring them with the promise of strong emotions. Isn't it true that every new product that gets put on the market is presented as if it were a “masterpiece”, an “experience you don't want to miss”, a “unique sensation”? In 2006, an essay on the propaganda of daily life that appeared in France, published by *Raisons d'agir* editions, also pointed this out, declaring that “Another symptom of the influence of advertising is the inflation of hyperbole, particularly in ... book and film reviews (...) Journalists make the jobs of the *copywriters* of the advertising agencies easier, littering their articles with enthusiastic formulas, rich with adjectives ... The incestuous relationship with advertising contributes to making [of language] a tool of programmed emotion, an impulsive language, just as one describes ‘an impulsive purchase.’” Curious – but we are not at all surprised – that the author of this essay, entitled LQR, is precisely Mr. Eric Hazan, who in the costume of the essayist lashes out against this invasion of advertising into the language that in the costume of editor he welcomes with the aim of programming readers to the impulsive purchase of his products.

Putting aside the poverty of self-promotional gimmicks, such a conceit brings to our minds some considerations of an old and well-known Italian anarchist, who mocked the “sweet mania of all idolaters. Thus, marxists attribute everything to Marx, and one passes for a marxist even if one says that bosses rob the workers (*ah! so you admit the theory of surplus value*, they shout at you in a triumphant tone) or if one affirms the millennia-old truth that to assert reason force is required. If you say that the sun shines, the mazzinians will say that Mazzini said it, and the marxists will answer that Marx said it. Idolaters are made this way.” The Invisible Committee is also made this way, it is an idolater of itself. It only remembers the disorders that broke out *after* its book was blessed by FNAC or Amazon – not even the insurrections and rebellions that exploded starting from 2007 were due to it, not even the rebels who rose up throughout the planet, did so because they were aroused by reading its text. And what about what happened, for example, in Oaxaca or Kurdistan in 2006, in France or Iran in 2005, in Manipur (in India) or Syria in 2004, in Iraq and Bolivia in 2003, in Argentina in 2002, in Algeria in 2001, in Ecuador in 2000,

in Iran in 1999, in Indonesia in 1998, in Albania in 1997 ... not to mention the ongoing revolts that break out in countries impenetrable to western information like China?

Let the low-down scoundrels of the Invisible Committee resign themselves. They have predicted nothing, they have not discovered and announced anything new. Storms don't break out to confirm the words of the meteorologist. There have been insurrections throughout history, and they have no need of *anyone* to theorize them in order to explode. Neither revolutionaries who discuss them in their autonomous publications, nor intellectuals who transform them into logos of success on the publishing market. So if the I.C. brag about being aware of the insurrectional phenomenon before others, then one has to ask who these *others* are: their competitors in the climb in sales ratings for titles of political critique? Toni Negri who obsesses them so much in the competition for theoretical hegemony of the extreme left, or Stéphane Hessel who incites to the civic insurrection of consciences, or Naomi Klein, icon of the anti-globalization movement, whose books have all sold many more than them, clearly because ... they have articulated even more correct truths?

However it may be, we admit it, the Invisible Committee has achieved a first. Before others, it has commodified insurrection.

But in case advertising hyperbole isn't successful, emotional participation intervenes. In the book's preface, the rugged members of the Invisible Committee enthrall their readers with their personal confidences, making the readers participants in their adventurous life: "Since *The Coming Insurrection*, we've gone to the places where the epoch was inflamed. We've read, we've fought, we've discussed with comrades of every country and every tendency. Together with them, we've come up against the invisible obstacles of the times. Some of us have died, others have seen prison. We've kept going. We haven't given up on constructing worlds or attacking this one."

It is here that that sensation of deep embarrassment, almost shame, for someone else comes out.

The strength of anonymity is in its ability to unburden the meaning of an idea or an action from the identity of the one who formulates it or carries it out, returning it in this way to a full availability in its universal essence. But what is there to say when it gets used only to take the license of claiming or boasting about who knows what undertakings? Who is the Invisible Committee out to impress when – certain that no one could refute it – it evokes its omnipresence in disorders, death and prison suffered by its members, along with its irreducible tenacity? Such boastfulness might impress its customers, but it provokes everyone else to savage sarcasm. We also take for granted that the collection of author's rights has allowed it to make insurrectional tourism, or rather to compete with pacifists and leftists, the police and journalists in rushing headlong to wherever there were outbreaks of revolt. But we still doubt that the I.C. has discussed with comrades of every tendency (okay, let's not be too persnickety: "and every tendency" except for those who don't adore them). Finally, who among its initiates is dead and how? It doesn't say, this way making fantasy fly. Is the Committee speaking of those fallen on the field during insurrections? Or more simply of the dedicatees of this new book? Maybe Billy and Guccio and Alexis were all part of the Committee? And which of its members ended up in prison? The hacker Jeremy Hammond?

We strongly doubt it, but it is completely useless to dwell on such questions. After having been the self-proclaimed spokespeople of the "historical party" of insurrection, nothing remains to the Invisible Committee but to inspect its properties, coopting the revolt of others through the

use of the royal “we” that makes it reflect on “global action by our party”, or to recall that on “May 10, 2010, five hundred thousand of us flooded into the center of Athens.” Just as in the past the intellectuals of the Situationist International bragged of expressing the revolutionary theory, maintaining in defiance of ridicule that their ideas were “in everyone’s heads – it is well-known”, in the same way the intellectuals of the Invisible Committee brag in the present of expressing the insurrectional event, maintaining – in equal defiance of ridicule and feeding off of the slogan of Anonymous – that they are legion and are everywhere on the barricades erected over the planet. It is well-known!

Here it is: the last peacock of the zoo of the extreme left, utterly intent on opening its tail with phosphorescent feathers to put itself on display before its public.

### III

*One of the common traits of LQR, the idiom of advertising and the language of the Third Reich – a parallel that obviously does not imply any equating of neoliberalism to nazism – is the pursuit of effectiveness even at the expense of plausibility ...*

*Of nazi language, Jean-Pierre Faye writes, ‘the most surprising thing is that its inconsequentialities are practical for it: since they also play in the field that produced them, one would say that they tend to recharge it.’ Even LQR does not fear inconsequentiality.*

Eric Hazan, “LQR. La propagande du quotidien” (LQR: The Propaganda of Everyday Life)

The language of the Invisible Committee fears it that much less. The aspect that most leaps out before its writings is precisely the lack of a consequential logic underlying its affirmations. It seems to be a characteristic of this entire milieu, since already in 2003 the last editors of *Tiqun* announced in their (announcement for enlistment and so called) *Appel* (Call): “The question is not to demonstrate, to argue, to convince. We will go straight to the evident. The evident is not primarily an affair of logic or reasoning. It attaches to the sensible, to worlds.”<sup>2</sup> One already starts to smile over the curious and self-interested mixture of terms. In general, the *sensible* is as far as can be from an *evident*. The sensible is subjective, individual, obscure as a riddle that is interpreted by *each one individually*. The evident, instead, is objective, common, clear as a certainty clarified *for all collectively*. The sensible is controversial, the evident, no, it is verified. If both are not “affairs of logic”, it is for diametrically opposed reasons. Reason doesn’t have the capacity of making an affair of what lies beyond its range (like the elusive sensible), while it has no need to do it with what is right here (like the evident already taken for granted at a discount). But what interests the authors of *Appel*, what makes them drool before the evocation of the sensible as evident, is that both are recognized, accepted in any case, *and, above all, are not debated*. Each one has her own inaccessible sensibility, all yield before the undeniable evident.

It’s the same worry that afflicts the Invisible Committee: not to be called into question. So in order not to incur the risk that its words are examined, pondered, maybe refuted, indeed, in order to make it that they are also immediately conceded and accepted as they are, it feigns a superior indifference for the substance of the contents – a tedious waste of time – preferring to

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<sup>2</sup> There are at least two English translations of *Appel*. Here I followed the one that is closer to what the writers of this critique used, but also changed “matter” to “affair”, because the French word here is “*affaire*” which can be translated as “affair”, “business”, “deal”, “bargain”, etc. This critique plays on these multiple meanings, and so my choice here brings out the significance and sarcasm in the critique more clearly.



make the readers quiver with thrilling sensations, like silk: intensity, consistency, finesse. In its debut of 2007, it was quick to present itself in the guise not of the responsible author, but rather of the “scribe” who bears no blame, which limits itself to reporting “commonplaces”, “truths” and “observations” of the times. In this way, *The Coming Insurrection* did not become a book on which to *reflect* and *debate*, but rather a book to *acknowledge*. In short, a sacred text.

Along the same line, *To Our Friends* is presented as a commentary on some slogans drawn on walls during the revolts that broke out around the world. Every chapter, in fact, takes a bit of graffiti, the image of which is recopied on its opening page, as the title. Through this pathetic expedient the customers are directed to observe the same inferred evidence – it isn’t the Invisible Committee speaking, it is the global insurrection; hey, have you seen? the global insurrections say exactly what the Invisible Committee says! Well, of course, after all, the walls of this planet agree with everyone from democrats to fascists, from religious fanatics to sports fans, even sex maniacs. You just have to choose the right photograph.

It’s not hard to grasp that for common mortals intent on making themselves pass for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there is only one sure method for making their words infallible: *saying everything and its contrary*. Flip through the pages of the Invisible Committee and you remain certain that every one of its statements, peremptory as befits a piece of evidence, will know a few pages later an equally peremptory denial. In this way, what it maintains will always be true and those who criticize it will support, by force of circumstance the false. Its intention to untangle the “greatest confusion”, to “untangle the skein of the present, and in places to settle accounts with ancient falsehoods”, through a hurricane of contradictions, sophisms and absurdities, is curious, but we fear that such confusions and such falsehoods can only increase after the reading of its books in which every least bit of logic and consequentiality are literally demolished.

The examples that one might make on the matter risk being endless. We have already seen how the Invisible Committee shows off its modesty to satisfy its vanity. It doesn’t miss any opportunity to insult the left, by which however it gets published and with whom it theorizes having relationships. It denounces the recuperation and impotence of radical ideas when put in the service of the commerce of publishing, but they don’t hesitate to practice it. It thunders about wanting to desert this world, but doesn’t tolerate those who abandon it (unlike these latter, to secede from the world, it seizes it in order to grasp its position!). It complains of the human being alienated by the technological trinkets, then exhorts people to use them after having revealed the ethic of the technique. With regards to ethics, it considers them adorable but only in the service of politics. It admits that insurrection depends on qualitative criteria, while it explains why one cannot do without the quantitative. It cites outlaws who deny the existence of another world, then announces that it creates worlds. It sees war everywhere and wants to make it in such a devastating way that it does not designate the enemy, but rather seeks to makes friends with it. It is interested in any demand-based struggle, originating with any pretext, but then blames those who raise the question of austerity. It critiques time and again the myth of assemblyism and the anxiety over legitimacy present in many struggles, while it exalts the great merit of those that are most infected with them. It throws the self-organizational capacities people put into action when they are suddenly deprived of state services in the face of realists, and then becomes realistic in its turn and prescribes courses that prevent/preempt self-organization for all. It invites the forgetful to remember the ancient insurrectional origin of the term “popular” (populor = devastate) but deliberately omit explaining that the devastation was that carried out by soldiers in war (populus = army). It wants life to put roots into the earth, but it doesn’t tolerate ideas putting roots

into life. While it sets forth its critique of the areas of the movement if accuses those subversives who criticize the areas of the movement of “auto-phagy”. It reproaches revolutionaries for not understanding that power is found in the infrastructures, that it is therefore necessary to strike there, but then warn against taking action. Since everything organizing *itself* requires attention and everything *being* organized requires management, it invites becoming-revolutionaries to *be* organized. It proclaims the end of civilization, by warning that its technical complexity makes it immortal. It mocks the divisions that weaken the movement, but acknowledges that fragmentation could make it indomitable. It goes into ecstasy over the impulse of spontaneism, but it’s best if it is not completely spontaneist. Along with “comrade Deleuze”, it supports the need to be the most centralist of the centralists, but then, along with an Egyptian comrade, supports not wanting leaders, so that the centrality, in order not to be too oppressive, must be transversal. These are just a few examples to explain the nausea that assails us after a few ups and downs on the theoretical roller-coaster of those who in 2007 announced *The Coming Insurrection* and in 2014 revealed that the aim of every prophecy is to “impose here and now waiting, passivity, submission”.

Now when one runs into someone who can habitually stoop to contradictory claims, a doubt spontaneously and immediately arises: is she aware of the absurdities she maintains? If he doesn’t notice them, perhaps his intelligence is quite limited. If, on the other hand, she is aware of it, why does she do it? There would be some not very clear motivation behind it, which escapes us. In short, the conclusion which one reaches in these cases is that there are only two alternatives. Either one is dealing with an aware person, who is then an opportunist. Or, otherwise, one is dealing with an imbecile.

But the Invisible Committee, as one can easily see, is certainly not imbecilic. The other, much more reliable theory remains. This explains the reason for the deep disgust that pervades us in reading its texts (the same that we felt on reading that *Appel (Call)* which, in whatever way and whoever its authors were, anticipated them inside the movement). Could it be that we are victims of that revolutionary romanticism that loves to see in every enemy of the constituted order a Warrior for the Idea; could it be that, like Winston Smith, we also have not managed very well to detach ourselves from the conventions of oldspeak: but could we not feel disgusted before those who would like to make revolutions through the contortions of doublethink? This may all be commercially and politically convenient – as the editorial success of the invisible Committee and the electoral success of its first Fan Club indicate – but it remains ethically appalling.

## IV

*In the tremors of the uprisings,  
I held, as anchors for every storm,  
ten to twelve party badges in my pocket.*  
Giuseppe Giusti, *A Toast to Turncoats*

In Latin, it seems it had origins in a dig at the master of rhetoric, Cicero, who was accustomed “*duabus sellis sedere*” (to sit on two thrones). In French today they say “*jouer sur les deux tableaux*” (to play on two gameboards). In German, it becomes “*zwischen Baum und Borke leben*” (to live between the tree and the bark). In Spanish it sounds like “*nadar entre dos aguas*” (to swim in two

waters). In Italian it is “*tenere i piedi in più scarpe*” (to have one’s feet in many shoes). While in English it is “to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds”.

Every language has a colorful expression of its own to point out the attitude of one who doesn’t hesitate to change opinion and behavior according to the moment and the situation, to describe the oscillations of turncoats, of chameleons, of double-crossers. Opportunism is an old defect that afflicts politics, whether reformist or revolutionary. Like the Calls, it becomes manifest above all in periods of manifest crisis. When events go along at a more or less regular rhythm, it is easy to keep theory and practice, means and ends, together. But when that rhythm gets disrupted, when urgency takes over the mind, that is when people are transformed into acrobats of Tactics. From the search for what one considers right (an ethical question), one turns to the search for what one considers functional and convenient (techno-political questions), closing one’s eyes to possible incongruities. Some of those Spanish anarchists who would become government ministers knew about this, for example, Garcia Oliver who – going in the course of a few months from robbing banks to drawing up decreed laws – began to demand “using the same methods as the enemy, and especially discipline and unity”.

The characteristic of the Invisible Committee is not that of putting into action a practice that contradicts any of its theory, since from the start it maintains opposing theories, flinging open the door to any practice whatsoever. It is so full of contradictions as to no longer even appears contradictory. On the contrary. In fact, *if one can say everything and its opposite, then one can also do everything and its opposite*. This is the secret of its success: giving a semblance of coherence to incoherence. This is what has affected its editor Hazan, theoretical critic of advertising, which he utilizes in practice, as well as a revolutionary editor of judges and cops and supporter of presidential candidates. And this also seems to excite its admirers in Tarnac, who, after having learned yesterday that “visibility must be avoided” and that it is necessary “get organized” coherently, and before repeating today that “disgust, pure negativity, and absolute refusal are the only discernable [*sic*] political forces of the moment”, have thought it good to come into the political and media limelight. But don’t suppose that the editor and Fan Club are not in agreement with the observation that “for two whole centuries elections have been the most widely used instrument after the army for suppressing insurrections”, they had simply already learned in 2007 that “Those who still vote seem to have no other intention than to desecrate the ballot box 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.” A wasted effort since it is well-known, except in Tarnac, that capital ever since “the revolutionaries of the years 1960-1970 were quite clear that they wanted nothing to do with it ... selects its people ... territory by territory”. Everything clear, true?

Naturally this absolute lack of coherence is also and above all what attracts the Committee’s customers, the thing for which they are doubly grateful. First of all for producing goods at an essentially affordable price that allow them to enter into the virtual reality of insurrection, of living a thousand adventures “as if they were true” without taking the risk of getting scratched. To the readers it is enough to leaf through its books to see oneself seated at the table of the Strategic Committee for Global Insurrection, the words of the insurgents of Tharir square in one’s ears, the streets of Exarchia before one’s eyes, Edward Snowden on the run from the CIA sitting on the right and sub-comandante Marcos on the left. Because, ultimately, according to the Invisible Committee itself, everything is reduced to being a mere question of *perception* and *sensibility*. A hit of adrenaline that is extended even after the reading of the book, since at that point the readers feel stirred up and gratified and free to do anything whatever, even if he was a

nuclear technician in the service of the army. Police and fascists excluded (in anticipation of the firing squad, or of some future tactical utilization?), everyone else now knows that they can one day unite with the revolutionaries, the true revolutionaries, those who look neither at intentions nor at individual responsibilities, but only at technical competence.

Such a practical eclecticism is not just the implicit consequence of the contemporary formulation of more opposing thoughts, or of the lack of a coherent and consistent theory, since it is explicitly theorized by the Committee itself. After and as Tiqqun, it repeats like a mantra the need of an action based on a *situational ethic*. Or rather on the relaxed availability, capacity, ability to adapt oneself to circumstances, to merge into the environment, to be – to say it in the I.C.’s way – “at the height of the situation”. Here one might refer to the ancient sophist relativism of Gorgia, but it better to leave it in the vulgar oldspeak of the ends that justify the means. If already in *Call* one could read that “To get organised means: to start from the situation and not dismiss it. To take sides within it. Weaving the necessary material, affective and political solidarities ... The position within a situation determines the need to forge alliances, and for that purpose to establish some lines of communication, some wider circulation. In turn those new links reconfigure the situation”, in *To Our Friends*, the I.C. maintains that, “Conflict is the very stuff of what exists. So the thing to do is to acquire an art of conducting it, which is an art of living on a situational footing, and which requires a finesse and an existential mobility instead of a readiness to crush whatever is not us” managing in this way “in the complexity of the movements, to discern the shared friends, the possible alliances, the necessary conflicts. According to a logic of strategy, and not of dialectics”.

Even though the Invisible Committee sometimes opportunistically invoked it, the refusal of the world – what incites to desertion, to secession – is not at all considered a basis for sedition, but rather for renunciation. The I.C. sees deserting this world, staying outside of it, as the first step toward the rancorous impotence of the hermitage. This is why the I.C. doesn’t at all exhort to breaking ranks, but to taking one’s side inside, or rather reconfiguring them. In fact, the true crisis gets defined as “that of presence” and to come out of it, it is necessary to heed the admonition of a member of Telecomix: “What is certain is that the territory you’re living in is defended by persons you would do well to meet. Because they’re changing the world and they won’t wait for you.” If it is the state defending the territory, if it is the state changing the world, if it is the state not waiting for subversives ... well, let the latter hurry to catch up with the state, to go meet with it. They might give it some good advice.

But this is not desertion at all: deserters are those who no longer obey orders, who abandon the spaces in which they are restricted, throw off the uniforms, and go into hiding. What the I.C. propose instead in *To Our Friends* is an infiltration starting from the bottom. A nearly impossible tactic to put into practice (except in films dear to the Committee like *Fight Club*), but very easy to theorize about on paper (as the early situationists well knew). A tactic that requires a predisposition to falsehood, an inclination to hypocrisy, complicity in abjection, tolerance for infamy, and that has always accompanied the worst betrayals. But when it’s a question of tightening necessary political solidarities, there are those who don’t get lost in operative doubts or in ethical scruples.

In this regard, *To Our Friends* contains intoxicating passages. According to the Committee, “insurrections no longer base themselves on political ideologies, but on *ethical truths*. Here we have two words that, to a modern sensibility, sound like an oxymoron when they’re brought together. Establishing what is true is the role of science, is it not? – science having nothing to

do with moral norms and other contingent values.” When it has to approach the words *truth* and *ethics*, the Committee excuses itself with embarrassment as if it had belched in public. To such hyper-modern eyes, such an approach can only seem like an oxymoron. Ultimately, it’s understandable. Ethics dies on contact with politics, politics weakens on contact with ethics. This is why anyone who is obsessed with the search for what is convenient can do nothing less than recall how their values are “contingent” (or rather accidental, random, incidental, conditional). For every outdated spirit, the ethical truths wielded by the Invisible Committee make them roll on the floor laughing as these truths are fickle, synonymous with *convenient opinions*. An ethical truth takes hold of an entire life, 24 hours out of 24, not the time of a situation with the sole aim of tightening a strategic alliance.

But the moment the ethical ballast is jettisoned, according to the I.C. it goes without saying that “We have an absolutely clear field for any decision, any initiative, as long as they’re linked to a careful reading of the situation ... Our range of action is boundless.” Boundless, clear? However little the situation requires it, it is possible to do *anything*. It’s what Nechaev thought in the past, or Bin Laden in the present. So one understands the reason why the I.C. regrets that “Since the catastrophic defeat of the 1970s, the *moral* question of radicality has gradually replaced the *strategic* question of revolution.” To be strategic, the revolutionary has to be as subtle and mobile as a rubber band, she must be able to easily go from the balaclava to the suit and tie, from conflicts with the police in the streets to handshakes with colleagues in the government buildings. One must be capable of spitting on those in power and kissing subversives today, and tomorrow kissing those in power and spitting on subversives. To achieve this result it is necessary to have done with those individuals and those groups so stupid and presumptuous as to get impeded by values that they believe to be their own and autonomous, which they follow like the dog follows its master. It is necessary instead to make way for the “historical party”, phantasm invested with a higher mission – leading to the revolution – in a position to justify every base act carried out by its human militants in flesh and blood in the course of their intelligent and modest slalom between the sensible weathercocks of situations.

But where do all these considerations come to? To Tarnac, for example. It was hard for Invisible Committee to swallow that in 2008-2009 its most enthusiastic fans (or members, according to some points of view) were mocked, taunted, sometimes even pushed out of movement situations, after having clearly shown *what their conflict is made of*, when, to these admirers of Blanqui who spent more than thirty years behind bars, a few weeks in prison seemed to be enough to send them running under the skirts of the disparaged Left in search of protection. Which is why, after years of meditation weighing things up, here is the tactical defense of such behavior: “When repression strikes us, let’s begin by *not taking ourselves for ourselves*. Let’s dissolve the fantastical terrorist subject ...”. It isn’t the claim of innocence, no. It isn’t panic, no. It isn’t the absence of the least bit of dignity, no. It is a winning strategic move. In effect, in this life of the daily repression of desires, it seems to us precisely that the whole lesson of the I.C. is reduced to this: *no longer take yourself for yourself*.

In the same way, it is always in defense of its Tarnac fans – since March 2014 neo-municipal-council-members, then mass media opinion-makers, and more recently even admonishers of police investigators to whom they suggest which investigative trails to follow – that the Committee emphasizes the imperious tactical necessity of establishing contacts with the other side, with all those who might prove useful tomorrow: “We need to go look in every sector, in all the territories we inhabit, for those who possess strategic technical knowledge ... This process of knowledge

accumulation, of establishing collusions in every domain, is a prerequisite for a serious and massive return of the revolutionary question.” This is why recently the most revolutionary grocers in France have gone to knock on the doors of a pair of embassies in London to pay homage to two of the great victims of persecution for telematic Free Information. One is an Australian hacker who aided the police of his country in the hunt for “pedophiles” (those monsters who, behind the closed doors of their habitation, collect and look at obscene photographs of children and who therefore, not being 19th century celebrities like Lewis Carroll or Pierre Louÿs, deserve only prison), the other is an American information technician in the service of the CIA since 2006, after an accident that happened to him during his training shattered his dream of fighting with the Special Forces in Iraq. Here absolutely are two people to know, because they defend the territory, change the world and possess necessary knowledge. And so, two precious allies of revolutionaries, as the condition of both objectively shows since they find themselves targeted by the United States government. After all, as the I.C. puts it: “A gesture is revolutionary not by its own content but by the sequence of effects it engenders. The situation is what determines the meaning of the act, not the intention of its authors.” Which means that individual intentions don’t count for anything, only the results count and it is up to the future to establish who is or isn’t revolutionary. A Marinus Van der Lubbe, to give a name, you can forget him. What did he do that was revolutionary? Nothing, the loser. Considering it well, indeed, now there is no more doubt: *there is hope even for cops and fascists*. A hope of redemption, of atonement, in short, of “*tiqqun*”.

In case it isn’t sufficiently clear, after the passage of the Invisible Committee nothing is left intact but a political idea; and that is, for example, that one can be a state functionary and a revolutionary at the same time.

## V

*A system of terror reached its peak when the victim is no longer aware of the chasm that exists between himself and his butchers. In the inhuman atmosphere of totalitarianism, and as a consequence of the collapse of the personality, the archaic mechanism of imitation gains the forestage without any inhibition ... For any system of power, there is no greater success in acceptance, by its powerless victims, of the values and modes of behavior it postulates.*

Leo Löwenthal, *Individual and Terror*

The one who poses as a free spirit without ethical obligations is not afraid to have recourse to continuous contradictions, which she considers only a series of easy solutions. Setting aside every ethical concern, the practical problem is that in this way one does nothing more than consent and contribute to the decomposition of reality in course. The confusion is not disentangled by any clarity; it is only replaced by a kind of *opacity* – a term favored by the Invisible Committee – useful to the ruling order. To understand this, it is enough to reflect on the abyss that divides the effects caused by the use of contradiction, on the one hand in poetic language that abandons itself to the wild frenzy of the imagination, on the other hand in discursive language aiming to describe the contours of reality.

Constituting itself precisely as the refusal of the functional language of logic, poetry wants to be a form of expression free from utilitarian and projectual intentions. As someone maintained, it is a perversion of words capable of destroying the things that it names. The invention of surpris-

ing images through the mixing of words that don't fit together implies the immediate exclusion of the acquired knowledge and rules connected to words. In this way poetry subverts the order of discourse and throws open the entrance to the unknown. As journalist in Moscow wrote about the avant-garde *zaum* poetry of Kručenyč, who in 1912 announce the *World-Backwards* that would be seen throughout the Russian streets a few years later, "whoever undermines language, undermines social structures, that are based precisely on linguistic communication". It is due to this conviction that in the past – before everything was overwhelmed by the indistinct mud of commerce – there was no lack of subversives convinced that poetry could even materially undermine the order of things. Between a Nicolas Boileau (protected by King Louis XIV) who decreed, "I cannot name anything except by its name. I call a cat a cat" and Jean-Paul Sartre (enlightened by Stalin) who repeated, "The function of a writer is to call a cat a cat," Benjamin Péret, furious in revolt, burst in to launch his challenge – "I call tobacco the thing which is ear" – and take up arms in the Spanish revolution.

But what happens if contradiction, abandoning the language of the unknown, invades that of reality, or rather discursive, philosophical, rational language itself? The perception of reality is not subverted or threatened, but gets neutralized by becoming undifferentiated. In this way, reality itself is sheltered from critique, form being called into question, since all possible points of reference are lacking. This is exactly the goal for which the spread of oxymorons in common, everyday language aims. When Rimbaud evoked the "drunken boat" it was an invitation to the derangement of the senses, whereas the "clean atom" dear to scientists justifies nuclear technology, "humanitarian war" in mouth of generals legitimizes slaughter, the "ethical bank" instituted by entrepreneurs polishes up speculation. In discursive language, the mixing of words that don't fit together does not evoke the unknown, it perpetuates the known. Unlike what happens in poetry, it does not incite to the overcoming of the existent, it does not open extraordinary horizons; it does exactly the opposite. It makes what now exists safe, undermining critical thought. That even the enemies of this social order have set out along this path, the ones who take part in *Critical Mass* dates and the ones who sign the *associative pact* of an *Informal Federation*, doesn't arouse astonishment. It is yet another demonstration of the widespread incapacity to avoid the symmetrically critiqued curse – but hey, not so serious! – on *To Our Friends*.

While contemplating the Angel of History in the company of Walter Benjamin, the man who pushed his absence from the world to the point of not even being able to make himself a cup of coffee, it's a shame that the Invisible Committee hasn't even noted that "criticism is a matter of the right distance", the reason why it finds itself "at home in a world where perspectives and prospects counted". An excessive nearness can make one see otherwise imperceptible details that are often useful and important, but it doesn't allow one to grasp the horizon in one's gaze, and at the same time takes away meaning and movement. The particular becomes significant when it enriches and perfects the picture of the whole, when it allows one to grasp its aspects in depth, otherwise it is reduced to a mere quirk. In the same way, excessive distance leads to catching sight of a much too hazy and incomprehensible panorama. If one loses the right distance, impossible to calculate with precision but sufficiently clear to approach it in order to explore, critique becomes civic reproach or ideological condemnation.

The same can be said of hatred. This feeling of peremptory hostility is made possible by the distance from its object. The enemy is considered other than oneself, an indispensable condition for going to war against him. If he were considered one's like, if he breathed the same air, if she spoke the same language, if she had the same desires, if one shared the same existence with the

enemy (perhaps sitting at the same table in a popular diner or in a television studio or in a municipal council to discuss the same problems), he would cease to be perceived as such, becoming if need be an interlocutor and possible ally. The aversion in her presence, granting that it still exists, would assume the traits of mere annoyance. *The best way to stop hating an enemy is to start to spend time with him.* From day to day, he would become at most an acquaintance with whom to disagree, or a rival with whom to compete. The closeness would banish the hatred, but not the suffering, the uneasiness, the anxiety of living. And then the only war that could break out, after having long brooded in secret grumbling, is another: civil war, in the worst sense of the term, blind and undifferentiated rancor.

Now, this may be the worst aspect of the Invisible Committee's storytelling. With its defense of the situation as the sole criterion of behavior, it does away with perspective by eradicating distances. But in this way it annihilates all hostility. Immersed in the whirlpool of doublethink, tied to a moment without past or future, the I.C. no longer knows who it needs to fight against, whether Eurasia, Eastasia or Oceania. Who are they? Who are we? They, are they always they? We, are we always we? But then, is it necessary to fight? One only has to consider what it writes when it is out to identify power: it isn't in the state, it is in the government; but government is no long in the government, it is in the infrastructure; but it is necessary not to strike the infrastructure if first one hasn't formed a competent technical force! What's left? Nothing, it's like a game of three card monte. If a totality no longer exists but only distinct fragments separated from each other, that are ceaselessly interweave in a whirling spiral, it is clear that before us there are only flashes, situations, *reconfigurations* of the present elements. Yesterdays enemy can calmly become today's political friend, and vice versa. And this is an awareness that leads to developing a particular "sensibility", that of avoiding points of rupture with no return.

In short, all the refrains about the "situation", about "sharing" or about "necessary alliances", aim to spread the need of putting an end to absolute differences. But the end of differences leads to the end of hostilities. And this is why today, within the revolutionary movement itself, people are no longer able to hate even the snitches whose presence is tolerated no only in magazines (as happens in the United States with the well-known theorist of the abolition of work), but also as the head of movements of struggle (as happened in Italy with the No Tav struggle). Why not, at bottom what did they do that was so bad? If they situation required it, they could do anything whatever. And the subversive in England who taught the police how to control the crowd during demonstration, or the other one in Greece who became a government functionary? Why not, they have gone to meet those who defend the territory. It is not surprising that the figure of the *recuperator*, for whose head many subversives would call up until not so many years ago, has disappeared completely from every revolutionary critique; not because there is any lack of those who would like to act as mediators between the Institutions and the Movement, whose numbers, on the contrary increase as far as the eye can see, but because such a role is now recognized and appreciated by (almost) everyone.

"The 'removal of opposites' constituted of western metaphysics," Cesarano wrote. Heir of *Tiqqun*, a publication literally infested with metaphysics, the Invisible Committee becomes the champion of a single idea: the idea that truth is the play of many small, *reconcilable* truths, an idea that is based on the cancellation of the possibility that an irreducible deviation exists. The end of otherness, the end of critique, the end of hatred. It is about an aspiration that, besides being indicative, is nothing new.



## VI

*In noting these contradictions, we can also mark how unseemly, if not old-fashioned it appears to recall the accusation of incompatibility, which was formerly an inescapable aspect of the term contradiction before this term became a synonym for juxtaposition. But it seems essential to draw attention to the inevitable reduction of meaning that has led gradually to a change of meaning – which has led to today’s world that, far from being threatened by this new form of contradiction, seeks only its proliferation, as much for the purpose of avoiding any confrontations as for installing the most alarming kind of uniformity under the appearance of pluralism.*

Annie Le Brun, *Reality Overload*

In 1999, Gallimard Editions in France published the work of Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. This tome of more than 800 pages examines the historical relationship that exists between capitalism and the critique of capitalism (which the two sociologists clumsily divide into “social critique” – born and raised in the revolutionary left and nourished by the reading of party lecture notes – and “artistic critique” – given birth to by bohemia and brought into the limelight only with May 68, desirous of “liberation” and of a “truly authentic live”), observing how the progress of the first has happened by integrating elements of the second. Rich in illusory promises but poor in ethical contents, to impose itself, capitalism needs a *spirit*, in the sense of an ideology that justifies it. It is not enough for the human being to enrich himself because it is useful and comfortable, she must also think that it is just and beautiful. Only in this way can capitalism become invincible. Nowadays, to a critique that maintained values such as autonomy and freedom, capitalism has responded by introducing mobility in the labor market understood as “emancipation” that allows one to become what one wants when one wants (change of activity, a break with every link and affiliation seen as a source of rigidity). In the same way, to a critique that noted how industrial production led to a massification of human beings and thought capitalism has responded with an unbridled commodification characterized by a diversification of offers and products. How can one maintain that the market homogenizes human beings, when one is free to choose between McDonald’s and Burger King, or between a pay-tv that specializes in historical documentaries and one that is concerned with sports?

Comparing the changes that have happened in the administrative field over the course of the years, the authors observe that, while a half century ago a *rigid structure* capable of giving some security for the future was maintained, today it is preferred to gamble on risk and flexibility, or rather on an *elastic network*. The new spirit of capitalism, taking leave from the hard boss, is embodied today in a new figure: “the connexionist<sup>3</sup> man”, “the streamlined human being” capable of passing with agility from one project to another, weaving his network of relations. The manager doesn’t give orders like the boss; he imposes through his charisma, motivates his collaborators without barking at them, spurring them to be creative and not repetitive like on an assembly line. Boltanski-Chiapello linger over the idea according to which “The image of the chameleon is a tempting one for describing the pro, who knows how to conduct his relationships in order to reach other people more easily” insofar as “adaptability is the key to the network spirit”, reaching the inevitable conclusion: “In a network world, it is thus realistic to be ambivalent ..., because the situations people have to confront are themselves complex and uncertain.” This malleability

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<sup>3</sup> This odd spelling is the one chosen by Gregory Elliott, the person who translated Boltanski and Chiapello’s book into English. The word is more commonly spelled “connectionist”.

require the “sacrifice ... of personality in the sense of a manner of being that expresses itself in similar attitudes and conduct whatever the circumstance.”

Facing this new spirit of a capitalism that pursues profit by flaunting the values of creativity, autonomy, adventure, freedom, its critics find themselves mute and disarmed, deprived of the old points of reference. They can only surrender before the “morphological homology between the new protest movements and the forms of capitalism that have been established over the last twenty years”. The two professors reach a very self-interested and interesting conclusion: critique possesses an “inherent ambiguity” that always causes it to share “‘something’ with what it seeks to criticize”. But since the “artistic critique” is what flowed from May ‘68, the responsibility for having taught capitalism to live without dead time and to enjoy without constraints belongs most of all to it. Therefore, capitalism’s adversaries would do better to return to fighting for a “responsible public policy” and the “constitution of new rights”.

Among the acknowledgements in the notes of the book is found the name of one of Boltanski’s young students at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in the world, frequented by the future elite of knowledge: Julien Coupat. Unknown at the time, he would give life that same year to the experiment of the magazine *Tiqqun* that ended with the writing of *Appel (Call)*, later ending up in the grocery store in Tarnac and in the sights of the police (then very young, Mathieu Burnel would draw profit from his residence in the same exclusive cultural institution by awakening the public of France 2). The least that one can say is that the characteristics with which the Boltanski-Chiapello pair described the *new spirit of capitalism* – flexibility, ambivalence, adaptability to changing situations, renunciation of personality – are exactly the same ones that are now preached by the known and unknown supporters of the “historical party” to express the *new spirit of revolution*. Assimilation, integration, recuperation change sides and an “artistic” radical critique that is by now squeezed dry gets thrown away in order to bring back a reformist “social” critique inspired by the overwhelming successes of the market.

In her book against the tyranny of reality and its “*system of cretinization* from which our era draws its consensual strength”, that appeared just one year later, in 2000, Annie Le Brun cites the work of Boltanski-Chiapello, recalling how the recuperation of social critique by the ruling order had already been describes in its characteristics in way back 1964. In fact, in that year a work was published that was destined to become a classic of protest, a book that some – consider the millions of copies sold throughout the world – wouldn’t hesitate to describe as Divine, an Incarnation of History, the Mouth of Truth. We’re referring to *One-Dimensional Man* by Herbert Marcuse. It is quite instructive to read it again today, especially the chapter on the “closing of the universe of discourse”, where the author denounces how this society – “if it assimilates everything it touches, if it absorbs the opposition, if it plays with the contradiction” – manages to impose its cultural superiority, its power over man. The advent of technological rationality has promoted and spread a Happy Conscience that has no need for conflict. Its “publicity agents” create a language that testifies to “identification and unification, to the systematic promotion of positive thinking and doing, to the concerted attack on transcendent, critical notions”, a language in which “the elements of autonomy, discovery, demonstration, and critique recede before designation, assertion, and imitation”. The language of one-dimensional thought is functionalized, abbreviated, unified.

Marcuse observes how the principle characteristic of this language is the neutralization of contradiction, the prerequisite for smoothing out every conflict, to implement with a profusion of

oxymorons. He notes that in the language used by the one-dimensional man “the contradictions [of society] ... are reproduced without exploding the social system. And it is the outspoken, blatant contradiction which is made into a device of speech and publicity”. He recalls that “once considered the principle offense against logic, the contradiction now appears as a principle of the logic of manipulation – realistic caricature of dialectics”. And in doing so, he shows us the logical somersaults of the Invisible Committee.

Marcuse affirms that “This language no longer lends itself to ”discourse” at all. It pronounces and, by virtue of the power of the apparatus, establishes facts – it is self-validating enunciation. The closed language does not demonstrate and explain-it communicates decision, dictum, command.” In doing so he merely forecasts the “obvious” and the observations reported by the Invisible Committee.

Marcuse maintains that “such language is at one and the same time ‘intimidation and glorification.’ Propositions assume the form of suggestive commands – they are evocative rather than demonstrative. Predication becomes prescription; the whole communication has a hypnotic character. At the same time it is tinged with a false familiarity-the result of constant repetition, and of the skillfully managed popular directness of the communication.” In doing so, he describes the I.C.’s method of storytelling capable of winding around with that spiral of short phrases made for effect.

Marcuse notes how the language of operational rationality suppresses history, “political” issues, because “It is suppression of the society’s own past-and of its future, inasmuch as this future invokes the qualitative change, the negation of the present”. He warns about those who oppose “concepts which comprehended a historical situation”. Here, he is again tracing out the I.C. and its emphasis on announcing the disintegration of old concepts. (Society? “a definitive abstraction”. The city? “has finally disappeared”. Government? “Is no longer in government”. Technique? “Untruth”. Nature? “There is no ‘nature’”).

Marcuse write that “The new touch of the magic-ritual language rather is that people don’t believe it, or don’t care, and yet act accordingly. One does not ‘believe’ the statement of an operational concept but it justifies itself in action – in getting the job done, in selling and buying, in refusal to listen to others, etc.” And here he illustrates the glamor to which the Invisible Committee’s admirers are subjected, much more willing to learn the common techniques reputed to be necessary (for example, how to build a barricade) so as not to be forced to exhaust themselves in a single reflection (for example, on the meaning and on the perspective of a struggle).

It is the same ominous effect described by Victor Klemperer in his diaries compiled under the nazi regime (and utilized by Eric Hazan for his hypocritical reflections on propaganda), according to which “the invasion of technical language” wanted by Hitler and Goebbels pushed the Germans to pay *attention* only to *organization*, transforming human beings into functional and efficient automatons ready for everything.

“How quick the mediocre natures are to adapt themselves to the environment!” Klemperer observed, and no one could say that he was a “radical” in need of “ideological coherence”.

The alienation produced by capitalism can count on fifty years of progress since Marcuse wrote: “The unification of opposites which characterizes the commercial and political style is one of the many ways in which discourse and communication make themselves immune against the expression of protest and refusal ... In exhibiting its contradictions as the token of its truth, this universe of discourse closes itself against any other discourse which is not on its own terms. And, by its capacity to assimilate all other terms to its own, it offers the prospect of combining

the greatest possible tolerance with the greatest possible unity.” As the most advanced industry and the most functional technology teaches, it’s therefore a matter of marketing a reduced and simplified product starting from complex and diverse elements, put together through a process – if not of *synthesis*, of *juxtaposition* – and rendered digestible to the great public. It is what the I.C. does by looting both the authoritarian and the anti-authoritarian arsenals, to give life to a transversal potential that is able to make all agree.

“This style is of an overwhelming *concreteness*,” Marcuse continues. “The ‘thing identified with its function’ is more real than the thing distinguished from its function, and the linguistic expression of this identification ... creates a basic vocabulary and syntax which stand in the way of differentiation, separation, and distinction. This language, which constantly imposes *images*, militates against the development and expression of *concepts*. In its immediacy and directness, it impedes conceptual thinking; thus, it impedes thinking.” So in the midst of thousands of images of streets in revolt and armed communes, the Invisible Committee evokes the transformation of a factory in Saloniki whose activity has been reconverted by the workers into the production of disinfectant gels made available to the movement: “the resumption of factory production was conceived from the beginning as a political offensive”. It is one of the few commonplaces of the time that the I.C. forgets to correct: it is not work that ennobles the man, it is revolution that ennobles work. Even Vittorio Vidali – infamous stalinist killer who during a speech in revolutionary Spain lashed out against the anarcho-sindicalists because they wanted to lower the hours of work, whereas he promised the workers that with the revolution they would have more work – thought this. Needless to say material needs have to be satisfied, no doubt about it. But speaking of productive reappropriation means introducing a language *that impedes thinking*, for example, about the destruction of the factories and the end of production.

Acrobat of “consensual contradiction”, the I.C. is only a product of the historical process that aims to garble every difference between freedom and slavery. When it proposes to its “friends” on four continents the “sharing” of situations, that is of fragments of experience, furthermore accompanied by an appropriate iconography, it only fills the lungs with the air already pumped by Facebook (that social network that “is not so much the model of a new form of government, as its reality already in operation”). When it churns out its concise phrases for effect, it only obeys the rule of 140 characters demanded by Twitter (whose subversive origin it likes to recall), monument to that reduction of language that goes hand-in-hand with the reduction of thought. When it announced its intention of contributing to the shared intelligence of the times, it does no more than rehash the dismal joke already told by Wikipedia, supposed source of universal knowledge that as it continually reconfigures itself makes all of us stupider.

What sense can there be in speaking of “shared intelligence”? Intelligence is not a cake that one can divide into slices to distribute more or less equally among all. It is not an accumulation of cold facts made available, from which everyone can draw through consultation. Intelligence is the ability to *read* these facts, gather their meaning, put them in relation to each other, divide causes from effects, understand their origins, uses, and destination. As such, it is an individual capacity and quality that is not inherited and is not gotten with a click. But it isn’t at all a gift of nature reserved for the fortunate few; it is a conquest. Intelligence is within anyone’s reach through reading, reflection, study, curiosity, discussion, even sensitivity. Intelligence can stimulate and can be stimulated, but it cannot be shared. Because it is unique, and differs from individual to individual.

Those who speak of “shared intelligence” are speaking of power. When everyone starts to go to Wikipedia to know who, what, where and when – and no one any longer makes the effort to read dictionaries, encyclopedias, books, to confront the various versions and try to understand – that day (and it doesn’t seem distant) Wikipedia will be dictating Law, *univocal and equal for all*. Its successive reconfigurations will not be able to change in any way this totalitarian effect, but rather will consolidate it. Shared intelligence can only be an enormous project of standardization and control. Aspiring to a shared intelligence means hoping for the advent of a single modern thought. So when the Invisible Committee offers its “modest contribution” in this regard, what do you think it is doing? From the height of its commercial success it is offering *its* thought as the basis on which to standardize everyone’s thoughts in relation to insurrection. As its beloved Gramsci affirmed, cultural hegemony precedes and establishes political hegemony.

All things considered, it is risky to write a book of more than 240 pages. By speaking too much, one incurs the risk of no longer being able to remain in an unstable balance. One incurs the risk of having to, here and there, be explicit. One incurs the risk that the more libertarian mask will drop, putting the authoritarian snout on full display. This is what the I.C. runs up against, for example when in dealing with the reasons why the revolution gets systematically betrayed ends up writing: “perhaps it’s a sign that some hidden flaws in our idea of revolution condemn it to such an inevitability. One of those flaws is in the fact that we still tend to conceive of revolution as a dialectic between the constituent and the constituted.” Considering that the fairy tale of the dialectic between constituent power and constituted power is Toni Negri’s strong suit, considering that immediately after this the I.C. addresses its critique precisely at the Paduan professor, it seems clear who it is referring to when it says “we”: to the extreme left, the I.C.’s true and only comrades. And if there was any doubt about this, the I.C. itself thinks to clear it up: “Obsessed as we are with a political idea of the revolution, we have neglected its technical dimension. *A revolutionary perspective no longer focuses on an institutional reorganization of society, but on the technical configuration of worlds.*” The emphasis is not ours, it is the work of the I.C. itself who keeps it here to emphasize which is its party. The one for which revolution has always been a political obsession; the one for which institutions get reorganized; but above all the one that must no longer neglect the fact that now the revolution is a mere technical problem, being a question of giving a hand in a configuration of worlds.

These three points make us go backwards in time. Who maintained a century ago: “communism is the power of the soviets plus electrification throughout the country”? It is the same one evoked indirectly by the I.C. when it salutes *the quality of the connection and the manner of being in the world* obtained “from the movement of soviet communes– which was the forgotten spearhead of the Bolshevik revolution”.

*State and Revolution or State or Revolution?*

## VII

*On the one hand, we want to live communism; on the other, to spread anarchy*

*Call*

*It is instead probable ... that as in other revolutionary epochs anarchism and communism, in new forms, are moving closer and closer together again in the struggles that pass through our century.*

Antonio Negri, *The Sacred Dilemma of the Idle*

Aside from customers on the hunt for novelty in bookstores, good only for raising its bank account and its fame, who is the Invisible Committee addressing in its new text? Among the enemies of this world, who are the ones it is interacting with? Since historically the subversive movement is divided into authoritarians who need the Party and anti-authoritarians who desire insurrection, the I.C. thought it good to unite these two spirits, to carry out at their interior a strategic surpassing taking back and partially realizing both demands. With the intention of appearing to be the millimetric *milieu* of the movement – or rather, literally, what is equidistant from the extremes, what is always in the middle – it has decided to draw inspiration more from the authoritarians for the theoretical side, and more from the anarchist for the practical side. This is why Blanqui is its hero, because he is the historical banner of the Party of Insurrection.

The intention of acting as a valuable bridge inside the revolutionary movement has led the I.C. to avoid in the most absolute way dealing with the classic points of friction and contrast – written off as ideological and identitarian disputes – feigning having overcome them thanks to an effluvium of banalities of the kind “it is necessary to organize ourselves” with which it tries to butter up both sides, holding together militant sacrifice and extremist thrills. As to the rest, the Committee has cheerfully drawn from all sources, with an acrobatics that allows it to be appreciated by many palates. But it’s all water under the bridge since 2007. The initial circumspection has given space today to a greater ambition, as well as to the desire to settle accounts with those who insist on blocking its path. On the one hand, this means starting to directly confront the main competitor in the conquest for theoretical hegemony in the extreme left. On the other hand, it must bring to its conclusion the transition in course inside the anarchist movement has revealed itself to be a good reservoir of unskilled labor, clasping the most accommodating to itself with a caress and definitively getting rid of everyone else. Snatching the rudder of the extreme left, on the one hand. Digesting the most soluble anarchism and spitting out the harshest anarchism, on the other hand.

As we have seen, the I.C. has its bogeyman, the rival that obsesses its thoughts: Toni Negri. He is like an umbilical chord that links the young French intellectuals to the old Italian intellectual, and their animosity toward him almost has the connotation of generational conflict. This is because Toni Negri has been and has done everything that the I.C. would like to be and do.

Unlike Mike Davis who sociologically discussed American criminal gangs without having ever been part of one, Toni Negri isn’t a mere armchair intellectual theorizing about the barricades. Founder and animator of some Italian extreme left groups in the 1960s, principle theoretician of the area of Autonomia Operaia in the 1970s, Toni Negri was arrested in April of 1979 with the charge of being the mind behind the Red Brigades, the *evil mastermind* who guided the movement to armed insurrection against the state. Unlike the grocers of Tarnac, the professor of Padua was kept behind bars for more than four years also taking part in a revolt that broke out in the Trani prison during which the prison guard broke one of his legs.

While behind bars, Negri had already put into practice what the I.C. would theorize more than twenty years later: he adapted himself to the situation, he sought and formed the necessary political alliances, reconfiguring it strategically. Ending up in the hands of the repression, he also stopped *taking himself for himself*. He proposed dissociation as the way for closing the conflict between the state and the movement, and he accepted the protest-candidature offered to him by the Radical Party for the elections of 1983. Elected as a member of parliament (no mere municipal councilperson!) and now enjoying parliamentary immunity, he was released from prison and took advantage of it by taking refuge in France. Here he pursued his studies and his activity as

professor of the extreme left, of the left completely devoted to advising the state about how to make the Revolution. In 1997, he finally returned to Italy and made use of the benefits derived from his plea bargaining, serving a reduced sentence. His most successful book, *Empire*, written together with Michael Hardt and published in 2000, got notable global recognition, selling more than half a million copies.

Toni Negri embodies everything that the I.C. aspires to become: the intellectual guiding the real movement, the Machiavelli in the service of the anti-Prince, the dark spirit behind the insurrection, all seasoned with an editorial and social success that never spoils. It is the so-called *Syracuse syndrome*, a defect that afflicts every philosopher who's grown tired of words and thirsty for power, whose conceit pushes him to want to seduce those who hold power with the spell of their knowledge. The metaphor originates with the Plato's comings and goings between Athens and Syracuse; he spent a long time sucking up to the tyrant Denis with the intent of educating him. Uselessly. In France this defect is accompanied by a predilection for military metaphors fed by the cultural avant-garde, a predilection already stigmatized by Baudelaire according to whom recourse to bellicose expression is typical of spirits "made for discipline, i.e., for conformity: minds born as slaves, that can think only in society". The Situationist International was already not immune to such rhetoric; the Invisible Committee then wallows in it completely. As aspiring generals of state insurrection, they are continuously intent on drawing maps, opening fronts, making pacts, erecting barricades, making maneuvers. If the word strategy comes so frequently to their lips it is because their "modest contribution" is to offer themselves in the capacity of strategists of the movement: "A thing is revolutionary that actually causes revolutions. While this can only be determined after the event, a certain sensitivity to the situation plus a dose of historical knowledge helps one intuit the matter." And who possesses this situational sensitivity and this erudition, who therefore deserves to be the strategist of the historical party, capable of "getting two steps ahead of global governance"? Strategists, or rather *military leaders*. Exactly what the Italian judiciary imputed to Toni Negri at the end of the 1970s.

But though it is clear what unites Toni Negri and the I.C., we have some difficulty grasping what divides them. Formal quirks aside. In fact, both share the same theoretical references. And it isn't just a question of the passion for authoritarian thought revised in the light of post-structuralist French Theory (Foucault, Deleuze and yawning away), it is a question of the same deterministic vision of history. For both, the world created by the ruling order does nothing more than reflect and prepare the revolution. For Marx "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." For Engels, "... after its victory the sole organisation which the proletariat finds already in existence is precisely the state." For Lenin, "our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare *no effort* in copying it and not shrink from adopting *dictatorial* methods to hasten the copying of it." In the same way, in the 1970s, Toni Negri was capable of writing "communism is imposed first and foremost by capital as a condition of production ... only the construction of capitalism can give us truly revolutionary conditions ... the most advanced capitalist form, the factory form, must be assumed within the working class organization itself". Where is the difference with an I.C. which makes its own the new winning spirit *on* and *of* the market, strong from the fact that "It's generally when they reach their maximum degree of sophistication that civilizations fall apart.", or that writes: "What distinguishes [the worker] in a positive sense is his embodied technical mastery of a particular world of production"? If already in 2007 on the trail of

the *Communist Manifesto* (“not only has the *bourgeoisie* forged the weapons that bring death to itself”), it maintained that “the metropolis also produces the means of its own destruction”, today it repeats the same concept assuring us that “Eventually however ... the path towards presence paradoxically reopens. By detaching ourselves from everything, we’ll end up detaching ourselves even from our detachment. The technological beat-down will ultimately restore our capacity to be moved by the bare, pixelless existence ... *The poverty of cybernetics is what will bring it down in the end.*”

Even though the I.C. mocks Toni Negri for his conviction that “beneath the constitution in force there always exists another constitution, an order that’s underlying and transcendent at once, silent normally, but capable at certain moments of flashing into presence”, this irony does not prevent them from nourishing an analogous conviction. It’s really no use for the I.C. to clarify that it is necessary instead “to reconceive the idea of revolution as *pure removal*”<sup>4</sup>. What else is concealed behind it’s exhortation to a “removal” or a “technical configuration”, if not the blanquist idea of assigning *a new form to the same thing* through insurrectional lightning? Reconfiguration, a term which is employed above all in computer science, is only a different ordering of elements already given. In the same way, removal is a juridical-institutional term that indicates a dismissal from office, prerequisite for a replacement. In the cycle of renewal of the life of the state, the potential to remove and the power to constitute are like the sunrise followed by the dawn. If the I.C. lingers only on the sunrise, it is not to deny the exercise of power, but to draw in those who want its definitive destruction, inducing them to believe that it is the same thing with the aim of enlisting them. There is no *pure* removal to oppose to a *corrupt* one, it is the looking glass onto which one climbs in order to give oneself an insurrectionary air, the fig-leaf over the shame of one’s hypocrisy. One removes a sovereign when one throws him down from the throne *leaving it empty for a changing of the guard*. In fact that poor asshole Giorgio Agamben (Italian philosopher, Tiqqun’s teacher, admired both by the I.C. that paraphrases his titles and by Toni Negri who writes reviews adulating him), who went to Athens at the end of 2013 to teach democracy to Greeks and to invoke the “potential to remove”, has not failed to express the hope that “the leftist government of Syriza could be the spark of a progressive turn in Europe”. If it is true that “Far from serving to *describe* the world, language helps us rather to *construct* a world”, well there is no doubt about what the world constructed by this language is – the same one that Toni Negri inhabits.

And then it’s no accident if in Italy Tiqqun’s first title has appeared through a publishing house in *Tuta bianca* (Derive e Approdi), and today in the United States the same publishing house, Semiotext(e), publishes both Negri’s works and those of the Invisible Committee (and Tiqqun). Furthermore, the I.C. isn’t even the first collective editorial ectoplasm of international fame, having been preceded by that Wu Ming whose principle animator described himself years ago as “communist, or rather worse, negrian”. Both the Committee and Wu Ming are committed to the plot construction, the mythopoeisis of revolts and insurrections. But while the Italians

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<sup>4</sup> I have chosen to translate this phrase directly from the French myself, because Robert Hurley, perhaps out of laziness, perhaps considering it more important to keep what in French is a wordplay even though it changes the meaning of the text, or maybe intentionally to hide what the Invisible Committee actually says here. The French word “*destitution*” does not translate into English as “destitution” (which, in English, means “impoverishment”, “indigence”), but as “dismissal”, “removal from office”, “deposal (as of a king)” – in other words, the removal of someone in power from their office *through official means*. The correct translation is necessary both to understand the critique of the I.C. the authors of this book are making here and to understand what the I.C. is actually proposing.



reduce them to literary novels (so appreciated as to get debated at M.I.T.), the French transform them into philosophical essays (so appreciated as to be distributed by M.I.T.). “*Omnia Sunt Communia*”, beyond being Thomas Münzer’s last words, is not only the title of the second to the last chapter of *To our Friends*, it is also the title of a feature of Euronomade, the site that more than any other depends on Toni Negri. And, since both abhor the individual above all else, the I.C. drools over the commune and Toni Negri salivates over the commons. What’s so strange if in 2000 Toni Negri wrote that anarchism competes in “powerlessness” with the most reactionary capitalism, while in 2014 the I.C. writes that nihilist anarchists are only among the “powerless”? Aside from discrepancies in linguistic tics, the praises that the I.C. has woven in 2014 around the struggle against the High Speed Train (TAV) in Val Susa do not differ much from those formulated in 2008 by its negrian competitors. If the former note that “Alternating family-style demonstrations with attacks on the TAV construction site, resorting to sabotage at one moment and partnership with the valley’s mayors the next, associating anarchists and Catholic grandmas, this struggle is revolutionary at least insofar as it has been able to deactivate the infernal coupling of pacifism and radicalism” – furthermore following such observations with praise for the politics of those who passed from damned poetry to stalinist propaganda complimenting the purging prefect of Paris<sup>5</sup> – for the latter “it is well-known how the cohesive coexistence of the institutional dimension and that of the movement has been one of the main reasons for the effectiveness of the Valsusan opposition ... This intense sharing of objectives and strategies has contributed to the creation of a virtuous circle between administrative action and participation from the bottom that has marked the highest point of the experience of the reappropriation of decisional power that has taken place in the Susa Valley”. Amen.

And what distinguishes the admirers of the Invisible Committee from Negri’s admirers? The latter have been active for decades in the institutional and media entryism that is only now gets taken up by the former: participation on the ballots, roles as public administrators, newspaper interviews, television appearances. And it’s a good thing that “radicals” would make of the revolution “an opportunity for personal validation”! Benjamin Rosoux and Manon Glibert’s Italian colleague, a Negri-fan municipal councilor in Veneto bragged years ago about being a subversive who makes “incursions” into the institutions – another lovely word camouflage that shouldn’t be missing from the shelves of the Tarnac grocery store. Other readers of the Paduan professor have certainly not waited for the I.C. to discover the revolutionary profit of establishing roots in the neighborhoods and the villages in order to contribute to opening people’s medical clinics and be present throughout Italy in housing struggles, in strikes and whatever else. It is “political work in the territory”, beauty, strong suit of generations of militants coming out of the bosom of the Communist Party that doesn’t prevent the students of the Italian professor from curating a site always rich in *direct correspondences* from barricades all over the world. So they also go where the epoch is inflamed. Therefore, Negri’s most activist admirers theorize the necessity of institutional entryism (above all in order to take advantage of the funds allocated), but then also practice insurrection. On the other hand, the admirers of the I.C. theorize the necessity of insurrection, but then also practice institutional entryism (above all to take advantage of the funds allocated). Inverting the order of the factors does not change the final outcome.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a reference to Roger Vailland, who was involved with *Le Grand Jeu*. He embraced stalinist politics and wrote a defense of the Prefect of Paris, leading the surrealists to break with him.

All this to make readers understand how the cantankerous critiques in *To Our Friends* addressed to the “ideologue” Toni Negri have all the flavor of venom reserved for the main competitor or rival in cultural-political hegemony. I.C almost sounds tender when it writes: “Those who propose, like Antonio Negri, to ‘govern the revolution’ only see ‘constituent struggles’ everywhere, from the banlieue riots to the uprisings in the Arab world”, considering that those who propose to command the insurrection see only “communes” everywhere, from the riots in the suburbs to the uprisings in the Arab world. The only thing that changes is the saddle to put on the tiger to ride. Besides, if the enraged French kids lash out against the Italian parent, the latter seems to bear them with affection. Recently one of his students even gave a borrowed salute to their “strategic intelligence”. Who knows if she will also follow the track of the one who years ago abandoned the court of Negri and, as chance would have it, entered into the catalog of La Fabrique editions, and is today the theorist of that “widespread autonomy” whose zealots in Italy play on the Invisible Committee to win.

And so then, you find the differences. Come on, the apple never falls to far from the tree.

## VIII

*The task of revolutionary critique is certainly not that of leading people to believe that revolution has become impossible*

Guy Debord, letter to Jean-François Martos, December 19, 1986

This is what the famous situationist said in astonishment about his anemic anti-industrial encyclopedist students, according to whom it wasn’t worth the effort to strive much since “it is useless to destroy mercantile society: it is collapsing before our eyes. Let’s leave it to sink”. One of these, the Spaniard Miguel Amorós, is the author of a text again the greatest present-day anarchist insurrectionalist theorist, who he describes as “the first agitator since Blanqui to proclaim the possibility of an offensive against Power during a period when the working class was in full retreat. This evidently involved an attempt to escape from historical determinations by way of the decisive actions of minorities.” Here is the other worry of the Invisible Committee: anarchists. It can’t be concealed that, if in the last few decades of social pacification, the insurrectional idea has remained alive – alive in the movement and in struggles, not in the publishing market – it is due, above all, to the anarchists, or better, to a few of them who have always maintained it, against each and all, facing both state repression and the sarcasm of a movement perpetually waiting for the times to ripen. This is so widely known that in France critics of the *insurrectionalist temptation*, sitting at the peak of radical theory to wait for the course of history to carry away the corpse of capitalism, make no distinction at all between soldiers under the command of revolutionary generals and impassioned evokers of the demons of revolt, uniting them in a single indistinct and execrable mishmash.

It is irritating for the I.C. to have to share *its* logo; it thought it had registered it and possessed the prerogative to it. Much more irritating considering that in the last few years the most insurrectional country in Europe is Greece, where the anarchist presence is strongest. Besides, from where have the fiercest critiques that rained down on them come, if not from anti-authoritarians? But the I.C. finds itself facing a rather delicate situation, since many of those who have translated, published and spread its works are anarchists. It is one of the consequences of its commercial success. Thanks to the FNAC and to Amazon, to quote a contemporary of Dante, “for this reason his

reputation rose so much that some become his partners; hence in a few months he made a great fortune. Having multiplied peoples and possessions, he started to go from country to country” (in the United States, Italy and Germany, above all). So, on the one hand it would like to be done with these silly enemies of the state, so politically naïve, on the other hand, it is not convenient to go so far as to do it with all of them. And, needless to say, it finds them more lovable when “partners”.

It is a problem that it has confronted *strategically*. How? By strewing a bit of everything in its book – just for a change – both critiques anarchists can share and critiques of what anarchists maintain. In the attempt to avoid any possible explicit reference so as not to offend those who are wooing it (having finally understood that to become winners it is necessary to stop being anarchists), the I.C. prefer to thrash hackers or “radicals”. What a ridiculous term! Useful for not musing up the remnants of pride of its libertarian suitors, as well as for avoiding dealing with the substance of anarchism, its critique of all authoritarianism.

We have already seen how in *To Our Friends*, the defense of insurrection is interspersed with invitations to a tactical entryism and how the calls for ethics are submerged by a ceaseless exhortation to political opportunism. In fact, how could the I.C. ever accept abstentionism, except to support it in the most adverse situations? As to the consistency between means and ends, it considers it not only an error, but an authentic horror. In this regard, more than with anarchists or surrealists or situationists, the I.C. could find itself in agreement with Bernard-Henri Lévy according to whom ethical invariance is the stuff of “the choppers off of heads”.

But with regard to the more anti-authoritarian side of *To Our Friends*. Beyond the lyrical defense of uprisings, it is manifested in a forceful critique of any governability, of any claim of constitutional legitimacy. A critique we could share if it were not, besides being contradicted by the desire for removal, accompanied by contempt for individual freedom. It is one of the cornerstones of anarchism, but the I.C. prefers to attribute it to the hacker mentality, so that it can go on the attack, aiming however elsewhere: “*Freedom and surveillance, freedom and the panopticon belong to the same paradigm of government*. Historically, the endless expansion of control procedures is the corollary of a form of power that is realized *through* the freedom of individuals”, “Individual freedom is not something that can be brandished against the government, for it is the very mechanism on which government depends, the one it regulates as closely as possible in order to obtain, from the amalgamation of all these freedoms, the anticipated mass effect”, “The cause of individual freedom is what prevents them from forming strong groups capable of laying down a real strategy, beyond a series of attacks; it’s also what explains their inability to form ties beyond themselves, their incapacity for becoming a historical force”. Makes you shudder, doesn’t it? You need to be ungovernable, but not in order to do what you want, but rather to do what ... who? the situation? the commune? the insurrection? the historical party? or its invisible strategists? ... want?

Strategists who also make themselves strong with another argument favored by the friends of the state, the one that is presumed to make this institution materially inevitable. As good adults, they bring the delicate situation generated by the technical complexity reached by the current world, where nuclear technology has reached a point of no return, to weigh upon infantile revolt: “so long as we can’t do without nuclear power plants and dismantling them remains a business for people who want them to last forever, aspiring to abolish the state will continue to draw smiles; so long as the prospect of a popular uprising will signify a guaranteed fall into scarcity, of health care, food, or energy, there will be no strong mass movement”.

Aside from the fact that the abolition of the state will always draw smiles, given that its end gets imposed with force from below since it is impossible that it would be resolved from above (because *abolition* is such a resolution, it is the same misunderstanding present in the concept of *removal*), but then wasn't revolution the emergency brake of a train heading towards the cliff? Before pulling it, is it truly necessary to "assemble all the technical intelligence"<sup>6</sup>, or rather to confide with experts present on board and with conductors with the aim of precisely knowing the control panel, the speed of movement, the friction on the tracks, the inclination of the curves, the force of the wind, the humidity in the air, the composition of the surrounding terrain, the presence of ambulances and hospitals nearby ... and if there is enough food, water and toilet paper for everyone? Perpetually in balance, the I.C. first extols in lyrical tones the immediacy of the deed, and then recommends its studied survey. From the barricades here and now it goes back into Benjamin's waiting room. To emerge, the revolutionary question must balance the accounts, and if it wants to cook the books, it must propose, if not a political program, at least a satisfactory technical program: "For a revolutionary force there is no sense in its knowing how to block the opponent's infrastructure if it can't make such facilities operate for its benefit if there's a need."

But how does the insurrection, that was not able to break out anywhere, at any moment, with any opportunity, being the unforeseen that grabs by the throat, upset normality with its intensity, etc., etc.? Yes, but that is rhetoric for attracting libertarian fools. In reality, without the correct knowledge and competence, that are found only on the top, the insurrection is condemned to fail: "without a concrete idea of what a victory would be, we can't help but be defeated. Insurrectionary determination is not enough; our confusion is still too thick." After having thrown the necessity of favorable historical conditions claimed by marxist dinosaurs out the door, here it is coming back in again through the window.

Blanqui does well as a rag to wave in battle, but Marx is the blanket that warms one up every night. May insurrection be, therefore, but only after the nuclear engineers, computer technicians and other such trash have been seduced by the chatter of the Invisible Committee and help it to *make the adversary's infrastructure* – the place where it says itself "*power now resides*" – *function to its advantage*.

The I.C. targets social war, because the despised anarchists "mouth off" about it. According to the Committee the defect of that social war "is that by lumping the offensives carried out by "the State and Capital" and those of their adversaries under the same rubric, it places subversives in a relation of symmetrical warfare ... The idea of social war is actually just an unsuccessful updating of "class war," maintaining that each one's position in the relations of production no longer has the formal clarity of the Fordist factory". With a certain embarrassment – considering that the symmetry of those who fight power is always less worrisome than the syntony of those who stand by it – we allow ourselves to note that it is flatly impossible that these well-educated

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<sup>6</sup> I have had to again make my own translation from the original French, because in his English translation of *À nos amis (To Our Friends)*, Hurley chose to gloss over this phrase. The sentence in the original is: "*Construire une force révolutionnaire, aujourd'hui, c'est justement cela: articuler tous les mondes et toutes les techniques révolutionnairement nécessaires, agréger toute l'intelligence technique en une force historique et non en un système de gouvernement.*" (emphasis added to show the phrase I translated). Hurley translates this sentence: "This is exactly what it means to construct a revolutionary force today: linking together all the worlds and all the revolutionarily necessary techniques, shaping these into a historical force and not a system of government", leaving out the phrase that has a pretty clear implication that, for the Invisible Committee, the construction of a revolutionary force requires dependence on technical expertise – the 21st century version of the dependence on specialists in marxist theory that leninists upheld 100 years ago.

French revolutionaries truly think that the concept of “social war” is an amalgam linked to the end of fordism. Leaving out antiquity, the first revolutionary to evoke this phrase was probably their fellow-countrywoman, the communard André Léo, who so entitled her speech given in Lausanne in September 1871 during a Peace Conference. Lashing out against pacifist neutrality that remains blind and defenseless before every social massacre, André Léo however seemed to attribute only to those in power the sole agency in the social war. In her words, indeed, it took a heavy toll among the poor and proletarians. The subversives who in Brussels in 1886 used the same term as the masthead of their periodical, “anarchist-communist organ” must have had quite a different opinion. And those who in 1906 in France, or in Italy in 1915, published other papers with the same title, were not at all orphans of workerism: the former brought together revolutionary socialist and anarchist anti-militarists, the latter on the contrary gave voice to anarchist interventionists.

So the concept of *social war*, in its origins and despite the differences existing among its supporters, has never amalgamated anything and has never had an interest in whether factories were opened or closed, central or marginal in capitalist production. Its significance for a long time can be summarized in the simple negation of *social peace*, a phrase commonly used to point to a peaceful coexistence between governors and governed, exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed, or however one wants to say it. In the same way, “social” is meant to exclude the political and institutional dimension of this conflictual situation, which doesn’t at all aim at opening a ministerial crisis by abrupt means. So it’s not surprising that those who don’t want to point out the enemy for reason of political opportunity prefer to use strategy (inflected in its various forms more than 40 times in the text) as their mouthwash. Just as it’s not surprising that those who sneeze at old anarchist concepts then fill their mouths with a term like *party* thinking to save it from the dust mites that cover it by adding the adjective *historical*.

Its critique of the anarchist concept of revolution is then simply pathetic. To make it easier and more convenient, do you know what the Committee does? It draws inferences from a phrase written in 1892 by the twenty-year-old Émile Henry in a polemic with Malatesta: “The radical defining himself as a producer of actions and discourses has ended up fabricating a purely quantitative idea of revolution—as a kind of crisis of overproduction of acts of individual revolt. ‘Let’s not lose sight of the fact,’ wrote Emile Henry back then already, ‘that revolution will simply be the resultant of all these particular revolts.’ History is there to contradict that notion: whether it’s the French, Russian, or Tunisian revolution, in every instance revolution results from the shock encounter between a particular act – the storming of a prison, a military defeat, the suicide of a mobile fruit vendor – and the general situation, and not the arithmetical addition of separate acts of revolt. Meanwhile, that absurd definition of revolution is doing its foreseeable damage ...”

Now, aside from the fact that an act of revolt could very well become one of those particular acts that triggers off an insurrection – and precisely in this sense were carried out by both the anarchist Bresci and the communist Van der Lubbe –, aside from the fact that in this same text Henry recognized both the necessity of communism and the diversity of attitudes that other revolutionaries brought in wanting to organize proletarians, where would this arithmetical idea of revolution be in circulation today? The view of a tree does not announce a forest, just as a photo does not confirm an international truth. The ruling order has already thought to the load the air of the general situation with black powder, forcing everyone to drag along in an existence lacking not only happiness, but now even security in any survival. So it is not strange if anarchists are concerned with going in search of the spark and, not believing that it is manifested by applying

an exact science, take matches in hand and incite to striking them as much as possible. For the I.C., this is not strange, but it is wrong. Perhaps because in this way one falls into the “tyranny of the informal” against which it is necessary give attention to raising the shield of joyous “discipline”.

To crush “radicalism”, in its speech synonymous with anarchism, the Invisible Committee doesn’t hesitate to make use of manipulation. It seems that “the radical only lived to make the pacifist shudder inside, and vice versa. It’s fitting that the bible of American citizen struggles since the 1970s is titled Rules for Radicals –by Saul Alinsky.” In fact, it is fitting. But not because radical and citizen are two sides of the same coin taken out of circulation, but because in English “radical” refers generically to anyone who wants to change society. Communists, socialists, syndicalists, anarchists, fascists, nazis, ..., get called this without distinction. Now, Saul Alinsky was a leftist “radical” and with his last book (with the subtitle “A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals”) intended to leave a useful guide for community organizers so that they would be in a position to unite people who lived in the same territory in a collective action against power. *It is fitting* that this is the same objective pursued by the I.C., who have recourse here to the most shameful of expedients: attributing one’s own bible to others. A bible that, after having inspired mercantile thought itself thanks to the “new spirit of capitalism”, has come back to dictate its commandments among subversives attracted to quotations in the Stock Exchange. In fact, the Committee itself is selling on the market what “an entrepreneur who’s in fashion” explains: “One has to get organized, find other people, get to know each other, work together, recruit other motivated persons, form networks, shake up the status quo...”

The Invisible Committee’s critique doesn’t raise the veil on the misery of anarchists, but rather on its own. Also because the *quantitative* idea of revolution much more shapes those who don’t want to remain isolated from the population, a nagging worry that in the craving to arrive at the arithmetical sum of separated politicians and technicians is producing the predictable damage of a quite cheerful rather than depressive collaborationism.

## IX

*Build bridges, not walls.*

Pope Francis I

But the Invisible Committee doesn’t just stay in the realm of ideas, it also goes down into the field, into the midst of flesh and blood anarchists. It does so with suffering, considering it incomprehensible that there could be individuals who consider freedom incompatible with authority. Doubly incomprehensible, both because it doesn’t acknowledge individuals, and because it is convinced that freedom rhymes with institution. Its inability to even just accept their existence is such that to its eyes anarchists appear as an enigma in bad taste: a social category to list between pensioners and functionaries or a political identity foisted on rebels to separate them from the population (that healthy, normal, balanced population that is therefore convinced that freedom is produced and protected by authority).

Prey to the itch that anti-authoritarianism provokes in it, the I.C. starts to scratch itself by dividing the good-ones-to-cure from the bad-ones-to-extirpate. The good one are the anarchists who, for example in Italy, have learned that “In the current period, *tact* should be considered the cardinal revolutionary virtue, and not abstract radicality – and by ‘tact’ we mean the art of nurturing revolutionary becomings. Among the miracles of the Susa Valley struggle, one has to

include the way it succeeded in tearing a good number of radicals away from their painfully constructed identity. It brought them back down to earth. In contact again with a real situation, they were able to shed most of their ideological spacesuit – not without incurring the inexhaustible resentment of those still confined in their interstellar radicality where breathing is such a problem.” In fact, many old Italian deserters have responded to the Call and have enlisted so they can roam about in the *agora* – half assembly, half market – of an earth-to-earth citizenism with sterilized air, earning in this way the unfailing esteem of mayors, members of parliament, priests, union leaders, journalists, television personalities. What’s more, they have pushed their *tact* to the point of performing the further miracle of not even bothering snitches. Evidently, these are the people that they love, “that *previously were lacking*”.

No one is any longer aware that they are anarchists, not even they themselves. They have gotten a new wardrobe not only in the clothes closet, but also in their heads, in their mouths and in their hearts. Journalists can no longer complain about their autism, their barbarous babbling, since they have finally understood that “The revolutionary task has partly become a task of translation. There is no Esperanto of revolt. It’s not up to the rebels to learn to speak anarchist; it’s up to the anarchists to become polyglot”. Esperanto is the international language constructed by drawing cues from already existing idioms, which contribute everything to its composition. The intentions of its inventors was that it was supposed to allow all human beings to communicate and understand each other, without linguistic hegemony and keeping alive the different original idioms, including those otherwise at risk of extinction, crushed by the more widespread languages. Wouldn’t an Esperanto of revolt be magnificent? Not at all, those who want to organize their leader-becomings demand that the anarchist language disappears and that anarchists finally learn to express themselves in authoritarian politickese.

Tired of always being alone *on the outside* and repressed in their ambition for popularity, not a few anarchists have stopped *taking themselves for themselves*. It has happened in the past, and continues to happen now. There is in fact a long tradition of (ex)anarchists willing to put themselves in the service of others’ authoritarian aspirations. It is only thanks to the misery of these times that in the past the authoritarians had to pull off a revolutionary triumph in the streets in order to be able to enlist their servants among the libertarians (just think of Victor Serge who went from following the path of Albert Libertad to following the orders of Leon Trotsky), whereas today a publishing success in a bookstore is enough.

If, in fact, for the I.C., with regards to anarchists, Val Susa is a blessing, Athens, on the contrary, is a curse. “Anyone who lived through the days of December 2008 in Athens knows what the word ‘insurrection’ signifies in a Western metropolis.” and also knows that over there “its anarchist movement [is] stronger than anywhere else”. But the logical conclusion that one might draw from these two observations is catastrophic for the I.C., which put itself in the midst to disarm it: “The truth is that the anarchists were overrun by this faceless outpouring of rage. Their monopoly on wild, masked action, inspired tags, and even Molotov cocktails had been taken from them unceremoniously. The general uprising they no longer dared to imagine was there, but it didn’t resemble the idea of it they had in their minds.” But anarchists, unlike the authoritarians dear to the Committee, have never aspired to any monopoly of revolt, but rather to its generalization. This why the only thing that overcame them was the joy in seeing that rage spread.

It is all too clear what “in truth” leads the Committee to minimize the anarchist presence as it exalts the Greek insurrection, and on the other hand to emphasize it when it evokes the counter-insurrection that followed. The anarchists must disappear. This is why the Committee

doesn't hesitate to shamefully speculate on the death of three bank employees that occurred during a demonstration – struck by a molotov thrown ritually and not strategically? – recalling the devastating effect it had on the Greek anarchist movement. And this is still why first it gets excited about the “groups” that “tried to stay faithful to the breach which the month of December had opened”, for example by carrying “the attack to a higher level”, and then it spits on those it makes out to be “a fraction of the anarchists [that] declare themselves nihilists [*sic*]”, since “nihilism is the incapacity to believe in what one does believe in—in our context, revolution”. Therefore, according to the I.C., the anarchists who identify the enemy and go into action are nothing but powerless individuals. Idiots, even clumsy oafs, who seek to plug “the gap between their discourse and their practice, between their ambitions and their isolation”. If they were shrewd, they wouldn't go to meet the people in power with weapon in hand. They would act like those Italian anarchist who were embarrassed about being so, who know well how to make discourses and practices match without stumbling into a gap: on the one hand, by launching citizenist reproaches, and on the other hand, struggling in the company of bureaucrats and priests and snitches (a service rewarded now and again with the concession of some binge).

When the I.C. criticize the “infernal couple”, radicalism-pacifism, it places under accusation the dichotomy, the separation, preferring to support their *possible coexistence*. Once and for all, revolutionaries have to learn to stand with reformists, reformists have to learn to stand with revolutionaries. Again, its obsession is to emphasize the need of bringing about the end of contrast and incompatibility. In the final pages of the book it repeats this yet again, this time, for vicarious celebrity, speaking in the voice of the philosopher of institutional anti-institutionalism who is a theoretical father-in-law of sorts to Toni Negri. Now, over to Michel Foucault: “Dialectical logic brings contradictory terms into play in a homogeneous context. I suggest replacing this dialectical logic with what I would call strategic logic. A logic of strategy doesn't stress contradictory terms operating within a homogeneity that promises their resolution into a unity. The function of strategic logic is to establish the possible connections between disparate terms that remain disparate. The logic of strategy is the logic of connections between the heterogeneous and not the logic of the homogenization of the contradictory.”

The I.C. doesn't love dialectical logic because it annuls contradictions, conforming them in a unity. It prefers strategic logic that seeks to keep their connections alive. Foucault and Mao, Foucault and the communist party, Foucault and the socialist party, Foucault and Khomeini... were different but were still united – by the willingness of the former to become a supporter of the latter. Linked. Connected. The connection is the intimate union between two or more different elements, the link of close interdependence between facts and ideas. The thing that puts what is separated into contact. A bridge, not a blender or a wall. But this strategic logic doesn't get put into action only with the aim of obtaining “unification” within the revolutionary movement, not from the identification of the enemy but rather “from the effort made to enter one another's geography” – that is, when anti-authoritarians connect with authoritarians to become the dirty black hand in the red kid glove, black-clad unskilled labor in the service of the red flag. It is theorized and applied *even in the face of the enemy*, an enemy that possesses secret techniques about how to make the world function and that we therefore have to go to meet. Not to become all one, but interdependent. In one another's geography?

For the Invisible Committee authority and freedom are indeed heterogeneous elements, but not in absolute opposition. So, here and there, they have to be put in contact. On the other hand,



for us these two elements are not only different, they are also contrasting and incompatible. These bridges have to be undermined.

## X

*Here lies the nightmare of the founders of the modern state: a section of collectivity detaches itself from the whole, thus ruining the idea of social unity. Two things that society cannot bear: that a thought may be incorporated, in other words that it may have an effect on an existence [in terms of conduct of life or way of life]<sup>7</sup>; that this incorporation may be not only transmitted, but also shared, communized. All this is enough to discredit as a 'sect' any collective experience beyond control.*

Anonymous, *Call*

Here lies the nightmare of the strategists of the coup d'état: a section of the movement detaches itself from the whole, ruining the idea of class unity, of community to share. Two things that politics cannot tolerate: that a thought may be incorporated, in other words that it may have an effect on one's own existence in terms of conduct of life or way of life (such is ethics); that this incorporation may be not only experienced privately, but also theorized in an open manner (to be rendered imaginable and therefore generalizable). All this is enough to usually accuse of 'isolation' or disqualify as a 'sect' any individual or collective experience beyond control.

Günther Anders has already noted how this society describes those who want to protect their individuality from a more and more intrusive modernity as introverts and those who, having nothing to protect because they are empty of thoughts and values, accept with good grace the consumption of any merchandise and fetish as extroverts. Today these introverted individuals also appear "dogmatic" and "rancorous" in their refusal to learn *how it is in the world*. The human being in flesh and blood is not supposed to have any individuality anymore, she is not supposed to have her own ideas, tastes, attitudes, desires, values, that distinguish her and make her unique and singular. No, from the figure of the *unique*, one is supposed to go on to that of *being anyone*, which according to the Invisible Committee is only the "locus of a conflictual play of forces whose successive configurations only form temporary equilibriums". After reading such repugnant words – a defense of the human-amoeba, of the multiform Zelig modeled and molded by the external situation – we can do no less than consider what Georges Henein wrote long ago in 1947: "The human being is everything he wants to be, except anyone. One of the sad successes of society is that it has convinced him of being anyone and, in doing so, has persuaded him to become this. The Anyone Man (the novelty found only in the upper case) is not an inheritance from fascism – it is a creation of the French Revolution. All being citizens, and all being equal citizens, an extraordinary bureaucracy becomes necessary to administer this equality, to measure the portions, to rein in the violations. Now, every bureaucracy needs people to resemble each other. Anxious to write: 'Distinguishing marks: none', the bureaucrat persuades his victim not only that there is nothing in himself that distinguishes him, but above all that he must not distinguish himself." It is the same conviction that the bureaucrats of insurrection would like to inculcate in their friends-customers.

If it were not lost in the labyrinth of doublethink, the I.C. would notice the contradictions that make its thought reactionary. That is, that *one can't serve and subvert at the same time*. One can't

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<sup>7</sup> This phrase isn't found in the English translation I have of *Appel (Call)*, though it is there quite clearly in the original: "*en termes de conduite de vie ou de manière de vivre*".

incite to deserting this world, mock the “infantile or senile refusal to recognize the existence of otherness” recalling the “the underground connection between the pure [political]<sup>8</sup> intensity of street combat and the unalloyed self-presence of the loner”, but then, prey to panic over the consequent isolation, lash out against this desertion branding it as the “purely ideological apology”<sup>9</sup> of the “radical” who “absolve[s] himself of participation in the ‘existing state of things’.”

The one thing is the negation of the other. It would have to make a choice and in fact limits itself to supporting desertion or secession only in words. In events, its entire discourse is an endless invitation to enlistment and to the military career. This is why anarchists, at least those who are not repentant about being so, are so unbearable to it. Because, not being moved by political ambition but by an ethical tension, they have no fear of solitude, of being banished. They aren’t at the margins of society in order to lay claim to a radicality on the political market, but because that is where the conflict between the order of this world and the disorder of their passions hurls them. When they express what they think they don’t first weigh it on the scale of expediency in terms of consensus. And not being at all attracted by solitary hermitages, more forced to put up with them than intentionally choosing them, they don’t limit themselves to abandoning this world with its siren songs but also invite others to go *outside* (the alternative being that of remaining trapped inside the institutions). And from here, from this elsewhere with regard to the institutions, they seek to organize themselves to go to the attack. Desertion, not aiming at an alternative bucolic commune, is the first step toward revolt.

As we have already said, desertion is abandonment: no more uniforms, orders marches, training, salutes to the flag. No more barracks, no more snapping to attention. Ranks break and don’t come back together. Where do deserters go? Into the forests, into the spaces where the enemy doesn’t set foot. And they don’t carry anything with them from their previous life, nothing except a few useful tools if necessary. Unlike the past, when there was still the possibility of finding an unknown physical space in which to find refuge and organize not just a different way of living, but also a counter-attack – from the Sherwood Forest of legend to the Brazilian quilombo of history – now the entire planet is under the watchful eye of those in power. There are no longer any impenetrable territories, no longer any *terra incognita* populated by fierce savages, as Theodore Kaczynski well knows. Even in the big cities, there are fewer and fewer neighborhoods where the police don’t dare to enter. So the forest of the deserter is no longer so much within reach physically as within one’s frame of mind. It is an imagination that, in the face of a reality totally produced by the economy and by politics, can react only with a “creative indifference”. It demands nothing of what is, because it wants to give life to what has never been. An imagination that was once widespread, that cultivated a visceral hatred toward every uniform and perceived the ruling values as alien, utterly different from the modern day imagination with its civic tolerance.

From what is it thought that the thing that western idiots call *mal d’Afrique* originates? After traveling for a period of time in a place where the laws, the usages, the costumes, the rhythms to which we are accustomed, by which we are domesticated, doesn’t rule – and having discovered

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<sup>8</sup> Once again Robert Hurley left out a word significant to understanding the actual ideas of the Invisible Committee and their milieu. The original reads: “*la connexion souterraine entre la pure intensité politique du combat de rue et la présence à soi sans fard du solitaire.*” (emphasis added to point out the word left untranslated).

<sup>9</sup> The original French word “*apologie*” refers specifically to the English definition of “apology” that is rarely used outside of philosophical and theological realms, which is not an expression of being sorry for something, but is rather a justification or defense of something.

that one doesn't just live the same, but that one lives much better! – how could one not feel an acute nostalgia for it? Better to walk down a path or sit in a traffic jam on the expressway? Better to play and laugh with people one knows and loves or spend the day in front of a screen?

If the exotic folklore organized by the tourist agencies can already upset those who have a wallet instead of a heart, imagine the nomads and the savage tribes. The beauty and the ferocity and the good health of those “red men” of the Amazon jungle, of those “blue men” of the Sahara desert, born and raised thanks to their isolation from the civilization of the gray men of money. When members of the primitive tribes of the Amazon see a journalist, they don't try to get interviewed, they shoot their arrows at him or turn their back on him. For the Tuaregs life is the struggle against the dogma of death, and their aim is not to overthrow the king (who represents death) in order to take his place, but instead to replace the king with life. If an individualist anarchist poet at the start of the 1900s, proud to live on the margins of society, lashed out against the mediocrity of the demands “of the belly”, a tuareg poet of the 2000s affirms that his rage-filled verses fight “against the unthinkable, against the belly, against the logic of the stomach”, since “I don't give a damn at all about giving people a dose of aestheticism, nor of claiming that others think the same thoughts as me or dream the same dreams as me. I have no need for subjects or slaves. In the Act I supply the tools for understanding my thought, but in a way that everyone can go it alone in building their own thinking.” Not the political ambition of achieving a shared intelligence through consensus, but rather the utopian tension of opening other and endless horizons through revolt – a tension that when it appears in such different contexts cannot be written off as faithfulness to an ideological tradition.

Considering ethics as a tool in the hands of politics, the I.C. holds that the ethical fabric of the Spanish anarchist movement at the beginning of the 20th century (in order to celebrate it, the I.C. describes it hypocritically as “working class”) was given by the bond, by the life that by spreading in all its activities united the participants. But where did this link come from, what pushed these men and women to lead that life if not an idea, a common vision of the world? They didn't fight to feel *intense* or *significant* or *dense* or *fine* feelings, but to build a world that reflected what they had in their heads and hearts. It was the sharing of an idea, in their case the idea of a world without relationships of power, an idea that became throbbing flesh and blood, it was *affinity*. The I.C. would like to recreate that link, *but without the encumbrance of an idea so intrusive as to embarrass the I.C. in its becoming-business*. It has such a horror of this that from the start it takes care to clarify that now a widespread critical awareness is not at all lacking, but rather “a shared perception of the situation”. As if perception had nothing at all to do with awareness but only with what a shared intelligence has established, as if a situation could be unlinked from a perspective.

Here one can grasp the utter difference between an action that is born from the bottom pushed by a vital ethic, and one that has its origin from the top, as a strategic politics. In the first instance, each unique individual, each human being in flesh and blood, is confronting life on the basis of her own ideas, values and desires. And the clearer and more deeply explored these are, the more fruitful his action can be. In the latter case, instead, the maneuvers, the machinations, the intrigues of the enlightened few, for whom the many are only unskilled labor, pawns to move on the chessboard of their strategy. Reflection and critique are avoided because the aim is not to act in a way that everyone becomes responsible for himself. On the contrary, pawns are moved with the most ease when they are deprived of awareness; it's enough that they have a common “perception”, that they learn by heart the refrain of the “shared understanding”.

Of course, for the I.C. all this is just “ideological coherence”, “political identity”, that leads to self-isolation, losing: “Throwing a rock is never just ‘rock-throwing.’ It can freeze a situation or touch off an intifada. The idea that a struggle can be ‘radicalized’ by injecting a whole passel of allegedly radical practices and discourses into it is the politics of an extraterrestrial.” As a good inhabitant of this planet organized and administered by the powerful, the I.C. has only the realpolitik in mind. And being persuaded to carry the revolutions watch on its wrist, it thinks that the stone must be thrown at the right moment, the triggering one. When it says so, in short. But if insurrection doesn’t wait to break out until the times are ripe, stone don’t at all wait to fly until the erudite strategists give the green light. History doesn’t make appointments, the revolution is not a program, everything is always possible. What else should anarchists who take part in a struggle do, if not shoot at clocks and throw gasoline on the fire? It isn’t politics, it never has been and it has never claimed to be: *it is life, the embodiment of a thought.*

“Our life is an insult to the weaklings and the liars who boast of an idea that they never put into practice”, said Albert Libertad and Anna Mahé while they loved each other in the joy of life and fought together in the pleasure of revolt.

Here again, it is necessary to decide. One cannot on the one hand praise the poetry of the voluntarist act and on the other hand prescribe the science of the deterministic process. This world is built, forged, organized *by* and *on* authority, which it reflects in all of its aspects. It is present in the morning alarm clock, in the traffic lights that keep us in line, in the money that we carry over our hearts and our asses, in all the permissions we have to ask and in the obligations to fulfill. Authority is in the cities in which we live, in the food that we eat, in the air that we breathe. It flows in our blood passed down by centuries of voluntary servitude. As Fredy Perlman said, the practical daily activity of the members of a tribe reproduces and perpetuates the tribe, that of slaves reproduces and perpetuates slavery, and that of wage workers reproduces and perpetuates capital. What reproduces and perpetuates this hell on earth if not the daily activity of those condemned to it? This is why, unless one believes that the world in which we live is the natural outcome of human existence – or thinks like Marx that “this ship full of fools driven by the wind” will “still go to meet its destiny”, since its “destiny is the revolution that looms over us” – it is necessary to decide to face the fact that the condition for its reproduction *is the willingness of individuals to continue to alienate their existence.*

## XI

*Destroy, for all creation comes from destruction...*

*Construct nothing in nights past. Set what you build adrift.*

Marcel Schwob, *The Book of Monelle*

To do away with that willingness is to undermine this alienation. This is desertion. What does it mean? That anyone who considers it necessary to get rid of obedience and power would do well to stop obeying and commanding, and to start inciting others to do likewise (“but we can’t, social relations always function this way!”). Anyone who thinks that parties are harmful would do well to stop voting for them and applauding their initiatives (“but we can’t, we have to become their friends or to enter them and participate in order to exploit their influence!”). Anyone who thinks that mass media are tools for dulling the mind would do well not to tread on their stage (“but we can’t, we would lose good opportunities for propaganda!”). Anyone who thinks that

language is not neutral and is modeled on the grammar of power would do well to rub it the wrong way, to drain it of its commonplaces (“but one can’t, the people are not accustomed to it and wouldn’t understand us!”).

There are many reasons not to desert, as the Invisible Committee tries to convince us with its suggestions: “The world doesn’t environ us, it passes through us. What we inhabit inhabits us. What surrounds us constitutes us. We don’t belong to ourselves. We are always-already spread through whatever we attach ourselves to. It’s not a question of forming a void from which we could finally manage to catch hold of all that escapes us, but of learning to better inhabit what is there”. We don’t belong to ourselves and it is better to learn to inhabit what is here and forms us? Is this the barracks, with its hierarchy, its discipline, its orders, all its sadness? No, thanks.

We start from precisely the opposite. That we need to give life to *our* world, which, if it is a void it is devoid only of power; that we need to make our world grow, defend it, extend it. When imbeciles hear talk of the *creative nothing*, with a snicker they ignore the first word – “how boring, so you want to go nowhere!” They think that this world just as we know it is all that we have available to us, that it contains all possible worlds, which is why the only problem is how to *reconfigure it*, how to participate in it in a strategic way. The I.C., for example, maintains that the void draws power and should be avoided, without realizing that it is precisely because power has no grip on the void that it rushes to occupy it. In the one-way world in which we live, where different conditions are subjected to a single law, that of power and money, it is not necessary to fear the void, it is necessary to multiply it. If anarchists have always thought of anarchy as a gigantic archipelago of communes, it is precisely because in the midst there is a void, guarantee of freedom. Anyone can change communes, found another one, live by herself. There is no longer the state, continent under the domination of the One, there is the archipelago of the Many, of infinite difference. This is why ruptures with imposed normality, cracks in the homogeneity of this world, are so important, because these are what create the possibility for the *completely other* to emerge. This is the great work of insubordination and sabotage that we need to try to carry out, *starting here and now*.

Dispossession and exploitation go hand in hand, one aspect is the premise and guarantee of the other. The more an individual is deprived of her world, the more he becomes easily maneuverable labor. At the same time, the more he gets exploited, dedicating all her time and energy to solving the problems of others, the more she becomes incapable of thinking and acting to build his own world. To critique only exploitation is as idiotic as it is to deny it. Human unhappiness doesn’t arise from too low a wage, or from the lack of property in the means of production, but it also doesn’t come from a phantasmic boredom or alienation. We live in a world that is not ours, and we get exploited to perpetuate it. Its values impose work on the muscles, just like its efforts order opinions in the brains. Ceasing to make one’s contribution to the reproduction of the existent then means starting to give life to the completely other.

What would have to provoke ruptures capable of undermining passivity, what could rouse a fantasy capable of imagination a life without permissions: politics? The constituent power of those who adore proletarian sweat and accuse one of myopia and naivety if he doesn’t have the far-sightedness and the acumen to begin working for the electoral victory of the left, the same left that, as soon as it begins deliberating, gets accused of having disappointed and betrayed? The removing potential of those who cultivate both the fetishism of violence in the streets and the passion for the negotiation table, and accuse one of impotence and paralysis if she doesn’t have the virility of a municipal councilor and the dynamism of a sales representative?

Pathetic buffoons, one and all. They are always there, with eyes focused on high to probe into an infamous power in order to try to understand *how to make it function*, how to constitute a new one (after having removed the old one from office), how to remove the old one (in order to then constitute a new one), getting excited before every man with the answers who appears on the horizon. But in the meantime, next to them, in this world in decomposition where, in order to survive, human beings devastate the planet and exterminate each other, one who rebels cries that *all of them have to get out!* A war cry that has not at all *become* popular wisdom; it has been there for centuries, but only now explodes in all its thunder. It is true that “The cleverest of the politicians have made it into a campaign promise”, indeed from Africa to Tarnac, passing through Val Susa, there are “new puppets” coming to shout “make way, we are coming!” But *it is the visceral hatred of authority, of any authority, that incites to insurrection*. Certainly not the dialectic or the metaphysics of ambitious philosophers with or without university pedigrees, who invest in that hatred only to make it productive, or rather to exploit it. “Agitate the people well before using it” said Talleyrand, a strategic tactic that led him to serve first the monarchy, then the revolution, and finally the monarchy again.

And this visceral hatred is precisely what the Invisible Committee would like to domesticate. In the past, the intellectuals who would have liked to all be the patient subjects of the Empire, desirous of passing through it in order to better realize it, get defined as its “emissaries”. Today, how would the intellectuals who strive to make disorder meet with order, after having rendered the former inoffensive, be treated? This civilization does not have to be realized, it does not have to be completed. Useless to cheat on the words, it does not have to be concluded in the sense of *being brought to its conclusion*. Because there is no happy ending after its battle fields and its superstores, after its elections and its television shows. The more one takes position inside it, the more one participates in fooling himself that he is correcting it, and the more one prolongs it.

This civilization has to be stopped. It has to be abandoned, thwarted, damaged, blocked, demolished. Starting from desertion (non-participation, non-collaboration on all fronts), continuing with sabotage (meant as theoretical and practical attack against the structures and persons of power), up to seizing the moment and exploding with the insurrection that is, always has been and always will be *the demolition of power*.

## XII

– ‘*And how can these two feelings be reconciled? And what does the Führer say concerning your former boss Walzel, the teacher you admired so much? And how can you reconcile this with the humanitarianism of Lessing and all the others about whom you had essays written? And how ... but it’s pointless asking any more questions.*’

*She had in fact simply shaken her head in response to every sentence I uttered and had tears in her eyes. ‘No, it really does seem to be pointless, because everything you are asking is based on reason and the accompanying feelings stem from bitterness about insignificant details.’*

– ‘*And what are my questions supposed to be based on if not reason? And what is significant?*’

*‘I’ve told you already: that we’ve really come home! It’s something you have to feel, and you must abandon yourself to your feelings, ...’*

Victor Klemperer, *LTI. The Language of the Third Reich*

This is perhaps one of the most horrifying passages in the diaries kept by the Jewish philologist chased from the Dresden university, who from 1933 to 1945 chronicled the modifications of the German language under the nazi regime and the change in mentality and daily behavior that he discovered in the population. The meeting with a university assistant, whose intelligence he admired but who he now found as a teacher and nazi sympathizer, had made him aware that no reasoning, no logical demonstration, no word could affect the *Zeitgeist*, not even its obvious falseness. Those who believed in it were so infatuated by it as to remain deaf to any argumentation.

It is the same awareness that one notices facing the present-day world. Here also, *everywhere, every two minutes, every two lines, one reaches the same conclusion; everything totters, everything reels, wherever one goes, one flounders*. And we aren't referring to *To Our Friends*, which, as we have seen, is only a reflection, a product, and is rightly presented as such under the neon lights of the market. We are referring to the life that they force us to drag ourselves through, to how the merciless mechanisms of the destruction of meaning are able to crush all utopian tension. To how the blackmail of reality, in the form of instructions for use, is able to occupy every dream and desire contrary to the reproduction of the existent. And how everything urges and exhorts to *be there*, to participate in what is, to make it function, and not *to be*. To how the prospect has been canceled by the one-sidedness of the situation and by the contradiction, a thing that indeed allows an increase of experience, but at the same time delimits its potentialities. To how power, once it has dematerialized and become fluid or gaseous, has been able to make itself safe; since one drinks it and breathes it, one can't seize it *by the throat*.

And yet one has to ask if this awareness is truly a distinctive trait of this epoch spent in front of and in the middle of screens. If we want to look behind, at those who came before us in the attempt to float off into the unknown; at those who wanted damned poetry to become true and life to escape from the representations that crucify it (because they had no interest in revolving around its corpse asking themselves how to make the infrastructures of power function); to those who wanted a world in flames whirling into the infinite and for this reason aimed to dynamite electric power stations and railroad lines... – what do we see? Don't we perhaps see the same rage, anguish and desperation before a dawn that announces only a new day of work?

But at nightfall, luckily, the most marvelous dreams return to keep us company. Sarcasm from those who pursue a career, incomprehension from those who aspire to products without logos, exclusion from those who use public funds ... the absence of all these cards to certify, in order to ensure our presence, is of no concern. It leaves us utterly indifferent. Because desertion from the daily toils imposed allows for thousands of conspiracies. We have something else to which to dedicate ourselves as compared to those who want to make themselves a name, those who want to get a place of their own in the world. In its totalitarian arrogance, power has unified and interconnected to such a point as to make itself even more vulnerable. A small accident can be transformed into a catastrophe. A local uprising can flare up into a continental insurrection. Having good ideas is more important than having reputation; with the former we self-organize, with the latter they organize others.

When the Egyptian insurgents found themselves enraged in front of the office of the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo, in the summer of 2013, they found the entrance impregably barricaded. Their assault would have ended immediately there if someone had not sprung out with a ladder in hand. He had thought well to bring it with him, and the integralists hadn't thought to barricade the windows on the higher floor. And the office of the Muslim Brotherhood was devastated from

top to bottom. Never confusing the furious wind of the unforeseen or of insurrection with the gentle breeze of politics.

The desert wind, as you can see, has a force capable of stopping the greatest powers. Cambise II, the Persian king who wanted to conquer Egypt, became aware of it when he lost an army composed of 50,000 selected soldiers marching toward the Siwa Oasis. The *khamsin*, a wind that raises enormous sandstorms and dehydrates the body, offered no escape. Swallowed up into nothing. When one thinks about the subversive ghibli that has blown in the last few years in Egypt, the mind goes immediately to the hot Tahrir square (and to the acquaintances to cite). On the other hand, not being anyone's friends – or rather, perfect in the role of killers in some conspiracy – three men, arrested at the end of March 2013 by the coast guard on the open seas of Alexandria when they were found aboard a small boat, have been forgotten by all. It seems that they were about to cut one of the undersea cables that ensure international and internet communications, sabotage that already happened in those waters damaging the SMW-4 cable.

A suggestion that goes beyond any motivation one might stand behind, good or bad as they may be. Of course, it is easier to applaud those Palestinians who cut down some Israeli pylons near Ramallah in the summer of 2014, or at most that group of armed men who in April 2013 opened fire on the transformers of a Californian electric power station, causing \$15,000,000 in damages. But why insist on reducing the possibilities of *what* to the identity of *who*?

Nothing is ever lost, not as long as a ladder appears in the middle of the streets in turmoil and a small boat on the quiet open sea (or a chainsaw in some lost hill, or a rifle...). Nothing is lost, not so long as all these tools come out from the fantasy of the ethics, and not from the toolbox of politics. There is no more time for sadness. The glow of dawn could still open on a life without masters and godfathers. The emergency brake is next to us. *Instead of sacrificing our life for this world, let's start to sacrifice this world for our lives.*

Let's leave pessimism for when we are dead.

*(All footnotes in this text are the translator's footnotes)*

## **(Appendix)**

Perhaps nothing is able to help us grasp, to make palpable, the negative active in the course of an insurrections like the testimony of two men who experienced the Paris Commune of 1871 from opposite sides of the barricades.

Written with a hand trembling with horror, the words of the man of letters, Théophile Gautier (to whom the flowers of evil of disciple Baudelaire had clearly taught nothing) despite themselves were one of the most moving homages to the Parisian insurgents:

*“Beneath all great cities there are lion's dens, caverns closed with solid bars where wild beasts, smelly beasts, venomous beasts, all the refractory perversities that civilization has not been able to domesticate, crowd together: those who love blood, those who are amused by a fire as if it were a firework, those who get excited by theft, those for whom the attack against modesty is love, all the monsters of the heart, all the deformed of the spirit. Foul population, unknown to the light of the sun, that grimly swarms in the underground shadows. One day it happens that the distracted tamer forgets the keys to the menagerie door, and the fierce beasts spread out through the terrorized city with savage roars. From the opened cages the hyenas of 1793 and the gorillas of the Commune leap out.”*



On the other hand, the profession of ethnologist (empathetic, furthermore, precisely by wild peoples) should not be alien to the calmness with which Élisée Reclus starts the list of his description. But the coldness of the scholar gives way to the voluptuousness of the rebel:

*“Let’s stop a moment and look at the event: it’s worth the effort; it is perhaps unique in history. It is the most serious realization of anarchy that any utopian has ever been able to dream. Legally, we no longer have government, neither police forces nor police officers, neither judges nor trials, neither judiciary officials nor writs, landlords flee in mass abandoning the buildings to the tenants, neither soldiers nor generals, neither letters nor telegrams, neither customs officers, nor excisemen, nor tax collectors. Neither Academies nor Universities, the great professors, doctors and surgeons have left. Emigration in mass of the ‘Party of Order and of Honest Persons’, followed by spies and prostitutes. Paris, vast Paris, is abandoned to the orgies of the low multitude, to the frenzies of the impure mass, to the furies of the rogue, to the appetites of the filthy proletariat.”*

**No legitimacy,**

**no demands,**

**no reconfiguration.**

**Between these incompatible worlds,**

**may there only be relentless hostility.**

**(back cover)**

To those who...

To those who see the end of civilization as a bookstore or grocery business;

To those who consider insurrection as a breach in the monopoly of falsehood, representation, power;

To those who are able to sense that behind the dense fog of the “crisis” there is a theater of operations, maneuvers, strategies and therefore the possibility for self-promotion;

To those who launch “attacks” in order occupy seats in the municipal council;

To those who seize the propitious moment to display themselves in the mass media;

To those who don’t seek accomplices, but political friends;

To those who don’t desert, but who infiltrate;

To those who mock the refusal to participate in this world;

To those who organize others into a party, perhaps – why not – into a historical party;

To those who intend to give life to a revolutionary force, as long as it’s institutional.

A contribution to a debate that has need of a single way of thinking shared by all...

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2016

It's not hard to grasp that for common mortals intent on making themselves pass for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there is only one sure method for making their words infallible: saying everything and its contrary. Flip through the pages of the Invisible Committee and you remain certain that every one of its statements, peremptory as befits a piece of evidence, will know a few pages later an equally peremptory denial. In this way, what it maintains will always be true and those who criticize it will support, by force of circumstance, the false.

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