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Has the insurrection come yet? My arm is getting tired...

A Cartography of The Coming Insurrection,
Tiqqun, and their Party

Alex Gorrion

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“I didn’t come to praise Caesar, but to bury him.”

The Emperor is missing some clothes

I want to critique *The Coming Insurrection* and some of the writings of Tiqqun not because I dislike these texts but on the contrary because I like them, because I find them interesting, and because they have become so popular. I focus on the weaknesses because I find their strengths to be self-evident and through this review I hope to encourage more people to read them, but in a critical way. The aura of fashion that has surrounded them encourages one to swallow these texts wholesale and uncritically, so that they become digested as a style rather than as an analysis.

The “Chicago Branch” of the Imaginary Party, for example, put out a translation of “Theses on the Imaginary Party” which is dotted with sentences so botched that the translators themselves probably did not understand them, as they are absolutely

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ungrammatical. (For example, in thesis 3: “It follows identically for the social war of which the combats can remain at their paroxysm perfectly silent and, so to speak, colorless.” And in thesis 17: “One does not insult a mode of unveiling like a fortress, even if one can usefully lead to the other.”) Despite this incomprehension, the Party members in Chicago found something so exciting in it that they “chose to reformat this text to give momentum to its North American circulation, and give it the aesthetic backing it deserves. And because we really like Tiqqun.”

How is it to be said?

While “Theses on the Imaginary Party” could probably be burnt to ashes without any great loss, the other translations I worked with were all poetic, and the texts thought-provoking. *Theory of Bloom* and *The Coming Insurrection* deserve to join the great works of philosophy of their respective centuries. But then, as they might agree, philosophy has often been nothing more than the justification of a certain ordering of things.

While the Invisible Committee’s writings are a sincere strike against a certain arrangement of lies, there are a number of operations they perform in *how* they communicate that exacerbate other of their weaknesses, and lead to a certain problematic ordering of revolution.

First of all, they communicate through resonance, rather than through argument. This is to say, they present a description of reality as self-evident, confident that some readers will immediately identify with their words, seeing in them possibilities they find attractive, or an apt description of their own experience they might not have been able to formulate for themselves.

“In our time of utter decadence, the only thing imposing about temples is the dismal truth that *they are already in ruins*.” [TCI, p.112]

This “truth” will ring true to some readers, thus any concrete proposition logically based on this truth will seem valid, but to other people, with other experiences, the temples—the institutions that manufacture power and meaning—may justifiably seem robust. This latter group are not presented with any convincing arguments, any evidence, to change their perception or question their experience. If the text does not resonate with them, it simply moves on without them.

The advantage of resonance is that it communicates, more than an idea, a certainty, an inspired strength, that reasoned argument cannot; and it bypasses the discourses of the Spectacle, the distracting alibis that don’t deserve to be taken seriously and argued with. Presenting reasoned arguments against the flows of Capital could be like sitting down to a debate with a Creationist or global warming denier; it gives them legitimacy.

The disadvantage is its high potential for demagoguery. It creates an in-group and an out-group, based on who is predisposed to receive those words. Rightwing radio jockeys also use resonance, although with the crucial difference that they can rely on a mass fabrication of experiences to ensure a greater amount of resonance. The TV news is full of crime stories, so when they talk about fear of crime, their message will resonate with many in the audience who have a virtual experience of crime. Because the Invisible Committee cannot rely on the discourses of the Spectacle, the fact that their words resonate with so many people means they’re on to something.

However, on top of resonance they add a second problematic method of communication: the frequent use of untrue truisms. For example: “this same lack of discipline figures so prominently among the recognized military virtues of resistance fighters.” [TCI, p.111]. Actually, one finds in the biographies of many if not most resistance fighters a strict personal and group discipline, which only some do not share. But the Invisible Committee simply does not engage with *facts*

on this factual level. And the resonance-blinded reader will be predisposed to breeze through these errors.

Another example: “Nothing can explain the systematic lack of remorse among criminals, if not the mute sentiment of participating in a grandiose work of devastation.” [Theses, thesis 20]. Actually, a great many criminals *are* remorseful, even when they distinctly should not be, and this reality tells us as much if not more about the functioning of power than the putative silence of the remorseless ones, into whose closed mouths the Invisible Committee is comfortable inserting entire soliloquies.

Thirdly is the element of totalization. Like their Situationist predecessors, the Invisible Committee is proposing a theory by which to understand the totality of domination, struggle, identity, and existence. Their theory is a very sound one, an interesting one, and an inspiring one, but it would be reductionist to understand it as the *only* one with any validity. Yet this, it seems, is what they do, confusing the finger with the moon like the fool in the old zen parable.

We can read, for example, statements like:

“That’s the reason for the well planned and public constitution of a *lumpen-proletariat* in all the nations where late capitalism reigns: the lumpens are there to dissuade Bloom from abandoning his essential detachment by the abrupt but frightening threat of hunger.” [Bloom, p.100].

Really? The existence of an entire class can be reduced to their utility in frightening others? And when were the lumpen-proletariat ever not publicly constituted, and what were the reasons for their constitution before the advent of Bloom, and why did these reasons fully disappear with Bloom? At what point did society change so thoroughly that one theory could disappear and another appear, having fully subsumed all the mechanisms of the former?

A fourth hallmark of the manifestos of the Imaginary Party is non-falsifiability. They go beyond offering poetic,

we are alienated. It is the Party of our class. And it is a Party that has its partisans and conscious fractions, who will say we are the enemy if we disagree with them, or even, perhaps, use different words. The Imaginary Party: take it or leave it.

I thank the Invisible Committee for their writings, and I wish them the best of luck. If my words sting too sharp, I want them to know I consider them comrades, and I have participated in solidarity events for the Tarnac 9 (though the money went to others of the French *anarcho-autonome* who were arrested for bombing police cars and have gotten far less attention than the 9). When there are barricades in the streets or people in prison, we will always be on the same side. But I think it should be clear: when it comes to the Imaginary Party, I hope to be the first to be purged.

Works Cited

TCI = *The Coming Insurrection*, Semiotext edition

Bloom = *Theory of Bloom*, anonymous 2010 edition

Theses = “Theses on the Imaginary Party”, Chicago Branch edition

How? = “How is it to be done?” Inoperative Committee 2008 edition

Metaphysics = “A Critical Metaphysics Could Come About as a Science of Apparatuses”, online version from the tiqqunista site.

YoungGirl = Raw Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl, online version from the tiqqunista site.

forced assimilation, and at other times it is a conscious group employing a singular strategy. “The Imaginary Party is the particular form that contradiction assumes in the historic period where Domination imposes itself as dictatorship of visibility and of dictatorship as visibility, in a word as Spectacle.” [Theses, thesis 1]; “In this sense, the Imaginary Party is the political party, or more exactly the party of the political, because it is the sole one which can designate in this society the metaphysical labor of an absolute hostility” [Theses, thesis 7]; “Therefore the Imaginary Party is known in the Spectacle as the party of chaos, crisis, and disaster.” [Theses, thesis 14]; “every Bloom, as a Bloom, is an agent of the Imaginary Party” [Bloom, p.114].

And now see how quickly this undifferentiated mass signs on to a common wisdom or a shared program, or becomes a Party with “conscious fractions” [Theses, thesis 27]. “[T]hose of the Imaginary Party work to hasten the advent of this by any means[...] They are besides freer to choose what will be the theatre of their operations and act at the point where the smallest forces can cause the greatest losses.” [Theses, thesis 15]; “The Imaginary Party can count upon this constant: that a handful of partisans suffices to immobilize all the “Party of Order”.” [Theses, thesis 21]; “the assumption of Bloom mean[s] [...] to enter into contact with other agents of the Invisible Committee – through Tiqqun for example – and silently coordinate a truly elegant act of sabotage.” [Bloom, p.134]; “we can only desert the situation inwardly, by reclaiming our fundamental non-belonging to the biopolitical fabric with a participation on a more intimate and thus unattributable level, in the strategic community of the Invisible Committee” [Bloom, pp.135-136]. “Tiqqun is the only possible outlook for revolution.” [Bloom, p.102].

There are moments when one needs to argue against an idea, and moments when one need only present it clearly. Here it is: the Imaginary Party. We are told we all belong to it, insofar as

inspiring, or useful descriptions of reality to argue scientific causality and propose (semi)concrete actions. It often happens something like this:

“Organizations are obstacles to organizing ourselves.

“In truth, there is no gap between what we are, what we do, and what we are becoming. “Organizations—political or labor, fascist or anarchist—always begin by separating, practically, these aspects of existence.” [TCI, p.15]

The first two sentences contain interesting points. They do not need to be absolutely true in order to be useful. However, the writers go on to assert a causal connection between those two points; in other words by always enforcing this existential gap, organizations make themselves obstacles. Now they have moved from a poetic or suggestive logic to a scientific one, at the same time as they make a non-falsifiable statement about the origin of organizations. This assertion cannot be true in any empirical sense, it can only be true if you accept the insistence of its truth. You must accept their specific redefinition of a common word and the writers need not take any risks by clarifying which actual groups constitute organizations, by this new definition, and which do not.

“Organization” is now reserved as an ideological weapon to be used against those whose organizing one does not like.

Generally, and again like the Situationists, the Invisible Committee are careful not to make any falsifiable statements while offering up their total theory, even while they use a scientific or causal logic. And the few times they do let slip an assertion that can be factually checked, it falls flat on its face. For example:

“It is a rarely disputed fact: we know from experience that the violence of explosions grows in proportion to excessive confinement.” [Bloom, p.113].

This is another fact that is not a fact. Confinement often leads to greater passivity, to depression and unresponsiveness. This can be factually confirmed in a prison, at the

zoo, in densely populated cities, during the Holocaust. Violent explosions are sometimes related to confinement, but the relationship is hardly so simple to justify such a facile correlation.

The Second Coming Insurrection

From its very title, the millenarian character of *The Coming Insurrection* becomes apparent.

“Everyone agrees. It’s about to explode. [TCI p.9]

“Whether [the collapse] comes sooner or later, the point is to prepare for it.” [TCI p.9]

“Everyone agrees that things can only get worse. “The future has no future.” [TCI p.23]

The same imminence can be found in other texts of theirs. “We know at present that the denouement is close.” [Theses, No. 15]

“commodity society” has reached “its final age.” [Bloom, p.97].

The insurrection is coming. One can almost hear it panting out those very words in the exuberance of these writings. As we’ve seen, there is no need to argue this certainty. In the style of *Appel* (the earlier book by this crew), it is presented simply as “an evident.”

What is accomplished by this operation? Those with whom these texts resonate, which is to say, those who are predisposed to agree with them, will be inspired by the poetic language, the beautiful descriptions of their own isolated experiences, and empowered by the projection of strength, certainty, and confidence. For everyone else, the text will have no effect. Thus, the Invisible Committee’s chosen form of communication creates a strong divide between believer and gentile which is at its core thoroughly unstrategic, not because there is anything wrong with resonance over argument, but because the specific message the IC is spreading speaks of an impending civil war in which we will have to choose sides, yet the way they spread

part because Lenin’s populist rhetoric was largely borrowed from the anarchists. They thought he was one of them.

Again, I believe that the danger this time around is minuscule, and the IC-as-thought have helped rejuvenate theorizing as a collective activity among US anarchists to an extent that far outweighs their disastrous effect, -as-style, on the plethora of hyperbolic communiques that announced various broken windows and occupied buildings with a mood of poetic rapture.

And on the other hand, the IC shouldn’t be taken too seriously. After all, let’s cut the crap: they’re basically CrimethInc. with a better vocabulary. Replace “deserting” with “dropping out” and there’s no denying it. They blatantly lack the humility that at times has allowed CrimethInc. to be such a positive thing; furthermore, they carry out a couple operations that would make me hesitate before starting a commune with them, much less a milieu or a Party. As I mentioned earlier, this Party is not just an ironic linguistic device but a group that has its inner circle and its mechanisms for exclusion.

It works like this: if you disagree with them, you’re out. “One would have to be a militant element of the planetary-petty-bourgeoisie, a *citizen* really, not to see that society no longer exists.” [How?, p.3]. They never define society, mind you, though I would guess they know, they’re so well read after all, that it is a central element of the praxis of other anti-capitalists that society in fact does exist, beneath all the chains and IV tubes of Biopower, and that this is a good thing. But I guess their ideological competitors are nothing but representatives of the petty bourgeoisie (say, haven’t we heard *that* one before?).

I predict the Party leaders might chide me for missing the irony of their words, but with such ideological absolutism, though they may not hand out membership cards they have still fallen for their own joke.

Curious thing: sometimes the Imaginary Party is an unconscious umbrella that includes everyone who chafes at their

tacular actions were understood to be the most important. That way, a minuscule group, whether the Weather Underground or the Red Brigades, could form guerrilla cells to carry out the heavy actions that would ensure that everyone else in the struggle would give them their due attention and read their lengthy communiques. The mass movement is replaced by the media, and the vanguard constitutes itself as such not through organizational relationships but through attention that places it symbolically at the cutting edge of what had been a diverse and multi-directional movement.

As the Spectacle degenerates from a reality based on news to one based on fashion, I wonder if nowadays, a postmodern vanguard could form itself only by being fashionable, by turning their Party into a fad and their analysis into a style. It's interesting that the IC give us such a perfect explanation of hipsters [Bloom, p.55] when, at least in the US, many of their most avid partisans have come from the hipster wing of the anarchist movement. And what are hipsters but an elite in an age when integration is produced above all through consumption? And for the anti-capitalist palette, consumption need not require a large budget for shopping. In this economy of trivia, sophistication is enough.

I don't want to be alarmist, and certainly a vanguard based on *la mode* could never be as dangerous as one based on the *cheka*, but either way, turning a text like *The Coming Insurrection* that has good parts and bad parts into a cult classic, and tolerating for a moment a resurrection of the idea of the Party is nothing other than a good way to defeat ourselves, which I suppose is the role that communists have played in anti-capitalist struggles for over a century, so it should be no surprise that they're coming back now.

The putsch that ushered in the October Revolution was led by anarchist sailors from Kronstadt and left SRs. It was largely orchestrated by the Leninists, whom the anarchists trusted in

it forgoes the necessity of intervention, of influencing how others perceive that choice and what choice they make.

Our attention is directed towards the certainty of this insurrection's arrival and away from what we might do to aid it. If we are predisposed, we will "break ranks." If not, we won't. And that's not even worrisome, because we are presented (again) with a revolution that unfolds from an internal "dialectic". If Blooms and the negative acts of desertion they are capable of are simply produced by the contradictions within the Spectacle, within the "empire of positivity", then we are once again saddled with a mechanistic view of struggle.

The contradiction between dialectics and human agency is especially pronounced in *Theory of Bloom*. Tiqqun "is not the revolution that *must be waited for*, much less the revolution that *we can prepare*: but the revolution that is taking place according to its own invisible pulsations, in a temporality operating internally within history." [Bloom, p.102]. Here we are presented with a revolution wholly unaffected by our choices, plans, preparations, and strategies. A revolution we need not even be conscious of, and that is, in fact, largely inscrutable, according to the assurances of the Invisible Committee. This absence of strategy undergoes a curious shift towards an exaltation of agency, with such passages acting as intermediary: "Because [Bloom's] strategy is to produce disaster, and around himself to produce *silence*." [Bloom, p.115]. Since Bloom is a phenomenon and a condition produced by the Spectacle, the emptiness on the other side of alienated individuality, any strategy that is ascribed to him is a function of his characteristics rather than a choice of his desires. He is just another machine, but one that "produces" disaster.

Only at the rousing end of the text does Bloom gain his agency, and we suddenly hear about the "duty to make decisions" [Bloom, p.122].

This is neither incoherence nor creative paradox. An attentive reading of Tiqqun reveals that there is a run-of-the-mill

Bloom and a becoming-conscious Bloom who is more equal than the others, just as, in a few paragraphs, we will infer the existence of an Inner Party and an Outer Party.

For now, Bloom is overwhelmingly an object, and his “fate is either to make his escape from nihilism or perish.” [Bloom, p.104]. Those who learn from history probably hear a little warning bell go off with this phrase. Didn’t some prophet of the past promise us a similar insurmountable contradiction that arose from the imperatives of the system itself? Hasn’t there already been an argument between those who saw revolution as something for us to make now and those who saw it as an inexorable product of history?

We simply have to ask ourselves: what if the insurrection doesn’t come? What if we’re just getting jerked around, and capitalism finds a way out, secures itself a future existence, as it has every time so far? Will our participation in this civil war, the morale we need to be insurgents, be staked on the “fact” that the catastrophe is here? The communists drowned themselves in a hundred year defeat by gambling that capitalism contained a contradiction it could not overcome. Is the grand carousel of history, well past the point of tragedy, looking to serve up a little farce?

Didn’t you hear? The event got defeated

A major problem with *The Coming Insurrection* is that it basically dresses up a tried and defeated strategy in new clothes, the strategy of a good part of the European autonomous struggles of past decades. Perhaps this is why it was way more popular in the US than in France: because its suggestions aren’t all that groundbreaking, except here, where there never was an autonomous movement. Knowledge is often created by struggle. Could it be that some academics (Agamben) were inspired by the new theoretical directions implicit in the ongoing social struggles of the ’70s and ’80s, gradually worked that inspiration into their theoretical production over the years, and then

them in accordance with continuing colonization, or choose some third option that I have never seen elaborated.

Through their Bloom theory, the Invisible Committee make another of the same mistakes as Marx. Dialectical reasoning and their implicit assumption of a unilineal history make them look to the populations most advanced in capitalist development as the site of future revolutions. Scientific Marx predicted Britain and Germany, unscientific Bakunin predicted Russia, Italy, and Spain. Enough said. The IC, in their turn, predict that the Bloom figure, the total death of subjectivity, contains within it the necessary annihilation of the Spectacle. But it seems true that—generally, not totally—where Bloom is least present, rebellions and social ruptures are most common. They refrain from admitting it, but the most bloomified figure is the middle class white, who has no history and no identity left but an array of false privileges, which is to say an absence of certain blackmails that are, for everyone else, universal.

I spit on the politics of anyone who says middle class whites cannot be revolutionary, are not exploited and abused, and do not have their own truckload of reasons to hate and destroy the system, but someone who says they have the same experiences as everyone else, just as someone saying that everyone within one of these identity categories (“all women know that...”) have the same experience, is speaking not from their body but from the narrative of the Spectacle.

The Dictatorship of the Fashionable

In the days of “the dictatorship of the proletariat,” the Communists could play at vanguard by organizing a Party that would manipulate and dominate general assemblies, communes, soviets, and any other gathering point of what was a largely aboveground and solidaristic movement.

In the ’60s and ’70s, an aboveground Party could only be reformist, so one could only be a vanguardist by encouraging a hierarchy of tactics, whereby the most illegal, risky, and spec-

of the antisocial violence in public space, violence which is romanticized in several Tiqqun texts, is not so much a rebellion as an autonomous attempt to impose hierarchies in miniature. It may well be that the majority of casualties in this global civil war are the bodies that have fallen in the civil war being fought within the ranks of the Imaginary Party.

Another example: “The thread of historical transmission has been broken. Even the revolutionary tradition.” [How?, p.11]. This has not been my experience. Although I grew up ahistorically, Bloomlike, another lost child of the ’burbs, I have since lived in places with historical continuities of struggle. I have been a recipient of historical transmission and it has been something qualitatively different, unlike anything I knew growing up, and it made me infinitely stronger. One can also see that places with history, with revolutionary tradition (e.g. Greece, Kabylia, Oaxaca) are generally stronger in their struggles.

On a specific point, this thesis about the end of history directly contradicts many indigenous struggles for freedom. A major element of some of these struggles is that the genocide has not been completed, that there is an unbroken 500 year history of resistance, which at times has been stamped out to the point of darkness, but never fully extinguished. The argument that historical transmission has been broken and recognition is counterrevolutionary means that these indigenous struggles are wrong in asserting that they are *still* fighting colonialism, that there is something liberating in recognizing themselves as members of this or that nation (not nation-state, eurocentric readers), that through centuries of genocide they have survived (though no one is saying they survived *unaltered*, which is the strawman the academics usually opt for).

In considering these struggles, one cannot simply dismiss them or sweep them without direct comment into the ranks of the Imaginary Party. One must either give them solidarity, or agree with the post-modernist academics who are reclassifying

twenty years later some intellectuals, disenchanted with the failings of present struggles and cut off from stories of past struggles, read the new theory, which was just a digestion of the old struggles, and thought they had discovered something original (beef jerky)?

I wouldn’t even call that a hypothesis, but still one wonders how else European radicals could repackage the strategy of revolution through the networking of autonomous spaces as though it were a new idea.

Their analysis of the world is brilliant and moving. Their suggestions for what to do generally fall flat. They have replaced the term “autonomous space” with the old favorite, “commune” (neologism: it’s a great way to lose the same fight twice); they keep the emphasis on learning skills of self-sufficiency; they throw in a nice take on pacifism; they resolve the question around the General Assembly by calling for its abolition and clarifying the assembly as a place for talk rather than decision, which is a great point but hardly constitutes a correction to the autonomous strategy, since there were already strong segments of this practice who felt the same way. They’ve beefed up the importance of sabotage and the economic blockade, and they’ve thrown in a partially original call for invisibility.

They fail to answer or even ask what in my mind is the most important question regarding the defeat of this strategy: how to build the communes and the material basis for self-sufficiency—thus creating *something to lose*—while continuing to act like you have nothing to lose, which is to say, without falling into a defensive posture that facilitates recuperation or at the very least stagnation, seeking some uneasy truce with the dominant order. What they offer instead is a confidence that they will never sell out, which mirrors the confidence of the autonomen in the ’70s, although the IC has found more poetic language for it.

Thanks to the Tarnac 9 arrests, the most famous part of the book, though it only receives a few pages, is where they cosmet-

ically alter the old autonomous strategy by adding emphasis to the idea of sabotaging the commodity flows. “The interruption of the flow of commodities [...] liberate potentialities for self-organization unthinkable in other circumstances.” [TCI, p.119]. Elsewhere: “In order for something to rise up in the midst of the metropolis and open up other possibilities, the first act must be to interrupt its *perpetuum mobile*.” [TCI, p.61]. Yet the examples they mention, in Thailand or in France, seem to indicate that this interruption is in fact a *result* of self-organization rather than a prerequisite. Strong movements with real popular support already existed, and were able to knock out infrastructure with a large part of society sympathizing with the inconvenience rather than becoming hostile towards the trouble-makers. On the other hand, the countrywide train sabotage for which the Tarnac 9 were arrested did not seem to liberate any potentialities, and the massive blackout in Barcelona of 2007 was experienced more as a wasted potential than a liberated potential.

Of course I can’t abide any Marxist-Leninist “accumulation of forces” argument and I won’t suggest that these tactics are only appropriate or worthwhile once a mass movement has gained full popular approval and the petitions to prove it. The experience of the Argentine piqueteros shows that the increasing use of sabotage can be a useful tool in building up the potentials of self-organization and social presence over time. The point is simply that *The Coming Insurrection* exaggerates the effect of the blockade. Its greatest potential, evidently, comes not as an event but as a process. The authors also fail to make a useful point culled from the Greek experience: once a struggle becomes strong enough to precipitate a rupture, perhaps the principal infrastructural network to be sabotaged is the television.

The Invisible Committee does an equally good job of missing out on important lessons to be learned from the major social rebellions in Oaxaca (2006) and Kabylia (2001), though they

themselves that the IC does not acknowledge, and seems to dismiss (I’m talking now about, among other things, race, gender, sexuality, as particularities). We can read an astute analysis of apparatuses that control us by mobilizing comfort [Metaphysics], but there is a subtextual hostility towards the discussion of the discomfort that is mobilized *only against certain people*. In fact, this sort of differentiation seems to contradict the poetic simplicity of Bloom theory and the idea of the Imaginary Party. They will take the effort to construct a theory of the Young Girl as a “model citizen” for consumer society but insist that this “is obviously not a gendered concept” [YoungGirl, iii] despite how odd it is to look at models of citizenship and commodity consumption without looking at gender.

Cat calls, degrading looks, insulting comments, men who follow you, every time you go out the door alone: the fact that certain people who are not cis male presenting as heterosexual will never be allowed to be comfortable in public space, when walking down the street, reveals a number of critical dynamics that any theory would be short-sighted to ignore. First of all, while the private sphere may indeed be socialized, because it holds a measure of security (though for some this may be a contractual security, such as that won through marriage) that the public sphere never will, we have to assert a continuing difference between the public and private spheres, one that necessarily precedes the Spectacle and links today’s apparatuses to classical Patriarchy. This is a link I have never seen the Invisible Committee acknowledge. Rather everything is new, freshly discovered and named (by them). Their favorite phrase is, “From now on...”

Secondly, through this gendered mobilization of discomfort in public space, or the racial segregation of neighborhoods, we see how people who are generally alienated exercise power over the bodies that pass through the space around them, the actual structure of which they are powerless to change. Much

The Invisible Committee presents us with a totalizing theory. In the very introduction of *The Coming Insurrection*, they tell us, “Everyone agrees.” In *Theory of Bloom* they assert that, “it’s *how* every being is the way they are [...] it is precisely what gives *consistency* and *possibility* to each being. Bloom is the *Stimmung* in which and by which we understand each other at the present time” [Bloom, pp.22-24]. Bloom “experiences an ontological finiteness and separation common to all men.” [Bloom, p.105].

In fact, the affirmation of these truths is the necessary signifier for the creation of a new identity, a new milieu. It’s also the recreation of a working class, a universal identity that has room for everyone. But it’s a poor fit. There simply is no clean, unproblematic answer to the question of identity. Its very nature is as a question that will never be solved. True becoming can have no end point.

The totality is not a collection of identities (which could then be opposed by singularities) but a set of rules, often contradictory but arranged by mostly shared loyalties and similar visions of a common project, generated and imposed by numerous institutions, to define identities and regulate people’s movement between them.

So two people who call themselves “activists” (or mothers or militants) may have entirely distinct relations to the totality. One may indeed be a *becoming*, a *whatever*, as she asks herself questions about how to strike out from where she stands and lets herself feel doubts about both the ground she stands on and the weapons she has picked up; while the other may indeed be a recuperator, satisfied with activism as a reproducible practice, eager for the paths of promotion laid out within it.

The Invisible Committee presents us with an Imaginary Party that is homogeneous not in any implied sameness but in its characteristic rejection of any internal differentiation. But I wonder how well this totalization encompasses all those who do not see themselves in Bloom, or who see aspects of

make a really good point about how the communes can arise from the social movements, when talking about the French students’ struggle on page 121 of *The Coming Insurrection*.

Where did the rebellions in Oaxaca and Kabylia come from, and why did they fail? Important questions. The IC passes the buck. They include a critique of organizations, but it’s not nearly nuanced enough. The Oaxaca rebellion was largely co-opted by elements within the APPO—not the general assembly itself but its steering committee—but it was provoked largely by the teachers’ unions. In their brief mention of Kabylia, the writers diss the “interminable” assemblies, but fail to mention that some of these assemblies were a continuation of indigenous forms of self-organization and an important vehicle for the rebellion itself. Some of these forms of organization recuperated themselves, while others are still resisting the recuperation. *The Coming Insurrection* is trying to dissect a fly with a butter knife, and justifying it with a witchhunt logic: if it gets smashed, it was no good.

About as invisible as that elephant sitting over there in the corner

The Invisible Committee’s most characteristic modification of the autonomous strategy is the call for invisibility, to avoid recognition. “Flee visibility [...] to be visible is to be exposed, that is to say above all, vulnerable” [TCI, pp.112-113]. “[W]e see appearing among Blooms not only a certain taste for anonymity, but at the same time a certain defiance towards visibility” [Bloom, p.111]. “From now on, to be perceived means to be defeated” [How?, p.11].

I’ll get the awkwardness out of the way, do the brutish, inappropriate thing, and say right off the bat that this is an odd argument, seeing as how the presumed authors of the text, once the state’s spotlight was turned on them, fled directly into the media spotlight, which has always been recognized as an at least partially effective way for people to save themselves from

the executioners of the justice system. In the terrain of democracy, unlike the terrain of guerrilla warfare, people tend to be safest in plain view. As much as the Spectacle needs to be abolished, media attention that protagonizes rebels, though it is a poisoned apple, can build sympathy and provide protection from repression, and this is no more a contradiction than the fact that, while fighting to destroy capitalism, we often have to get jobs and buy commodities; while fighting to destroy the state, we use state infrastructure. After all, we're not vegans or anything, and we understand that the total boycott isn't even possible. I also argue, and I'm not sure whether the Invisible Committee understands this, that although our theories may be unified and streamlined, the system we're fighting against never is. There are contradictions among institutions of power that we can exploit.

One could counter that the arrestees only utilized a media campaign, with big protests, dignified academics writing in to the major newspapers and all that, only after they were already in the spotlight. The obvious answer is that going to the hills, dressing normal, and trying to avoid recognition didn't work very well then, because it was relatively easy for the state to find them and slap on whatever ill-fitting label was in its own political interests at the moment, in that case, *anarcho-autonome* or terrorist.

The War on Terrorism succeeds as a repressive operation precisely when its victims cannot be recognized. Because recognition is not only to accept someone's predicate assigned on the basis of an assemblage of social constructs, in this case, "terrorist." It can also mean to assign someone a predicate based on a conflicting assemblage of social constructs ("good citizen," "neighbor," "human being," "social activist," "freedom fighter," "conscientious objector,"), an approach which creates a strategic conflict that can neutralize the initial operation (exposing certain individuals and groups to greater repression by not allowing them to be recognized outside of the category imposed

most sleek movements towards insurrection. Everything that is not judged to be perfect on the plane of ideas is denounced as recuperation.

"RULE No. 2: You can never free yourself from an apparatus by getting engaged within its minor part." [Metaphysics]. There is a logic to this. The identities, the subjectivities, they refer to can certainly be viewed as a "minor part" of the apparatus, and certainly creating counter-subjectivities cannot in and of itself destroy that apparatus and may often bind you to it more tightly, but the idea that only the most economic of motions in a struggle should be preserved ignores the messy reality of how people begin to desert and to fight, and it misses the opportunity for strength that is presented by an attitude of picking fights with the apparatus everywhere, in its most minor and major parts. Engaging with gender by redefining what it means to be a woman or a trans person or a man in this world is just moving around the prison bars. Attacking advertising that defines these roles for us (and realistically, such an attack would come out of a process in which we are also reading and writing and talking about gender identities) can be a step towards the insurrectionary, towards the war against domination in all its forms.

I, for one, do not see insurrection in the efforts of a Party that is increasingly warlike, precise, and correct, but in the messy, inefficient, contradictory ecology of resistance that already exists. A thousand forms of collaboration are contrary to the spirit of insurrection, true, but no person embodies this spirit wholly. On some key levels what's important is to sympathize with it. We may and must critique and challenge the many compromises with existing reality, absolutely, but abandon them, never. Let the others fight the revolution from temple to temple. I'll stay here in the swamp.

The Incompleteness of the Totality

ity? And if this is true, one might not be so brash in predicting that in the Arabic or Imazigh translation of *The Coming Insurrection* or *Tiqqun* texts, the translators would embarrassingly note that Kabylia isn't such a good example because that struggle was full of recuperators, but the authors could hardly have known that because of the distances involved; in the Spanish translation of these texts the translators would embarrassingly note that experimental Cuban agriculture isn't such a good example because so much of it was funded or at least permitted by the state, and Oaxaca isn't such a good example either because the initial strikes were actually organized by the teachers' unions.

Once you penetrate their opacity, it seems, all the little chapters of the Imaginary Party blow away in a puff of smoke.

Could it be that the Imaginary Party is, after all, imaginary? There can be little doubt, when one reads their assertion about "Japanese children, whom one might justly consider the most intense avant-garde of the Imaginary Party" [Theses, thesis 18].

Most whatevers aren't good enough for them. Only what is farthest away is valued. They sling denunciations of activists, of leftists, of anarchists, of other ways of doing things, and their only suggestions are exotic. The analysis in the first parts of *The Coming Insurrection* brilliantly show how the civil war is all around us, but when talking about how it is to be fought, all they can do is make struggle even more distant, by creating a pressure, a higher standard, to fight effectively by being unrecognizable, by being anonymous, by being spontaneous, higher standards that only exotic examples can meet because they are unknown to the authors.

The whatever is just an ignorance of details.

And the ignorance is above all a philosopher's preference for easy answers, an ideologue's refusal to engage with complexity. In the theorizing of the Invisible Committee, there is a certain streamlining of resistance. Beneath the poetry exists an economy of thought that demands the excision of all but the

by the state) but one that also recuperates the recognizant defiance by maintaining it within the assemblages proffered by the system—in other words, a draw, a going back to square one. An honestly, fighting a campaign of repression to a draw is not all bad. But there is a third possibility for recognition: assigning someone predicates that are fluid and non-categorical.

In "How is it to be done?" the Party members talk about predicates in a way that could be optimistically construed as only referring to socially imposed categories: "it takes many assemblages to turn a female being into "a woman", or a black-skinned man into "a Black"." [How?, p.9], although phrases like "Let be the gap between the subject and its predicates" and "A "white horse" is not "a horse"." [How", p.9] suggest that indeed they are attempting to cut much deeper.

Elsewhere, they leave no room for doubt.

"As for the statement "a rose is a flower," it allows me to erase myself opportunely from behind the classification operation that *I* am carrying out. It would thus be more suitable to say "I class the rose as among the flowers," which is a standard formulation in Slavic languages." [Metaphysics]

This structural argument is interesting as a passing, philosophical consideration, but it is theoretically useless and factually flawed. I can say with certainty that their assertion regarding the grammar of the Slavic languages is wholly untrue in Russian and Ukrainian. I'm waiting to hear back from some friends regarding Polish, Bulgarian, and Croat, and I'll announce my error if my prediction proves untrue but the IC's track record with facts leaves me with little doubt that they're imagining things again.

While we're at it, I want to point out that the structuralist hypothesis that language defines possibilities for thought, which is the assumption on which the IC is basing their point about predicates (they say the "to be" verb of Indo-European languages allows for a peculiar confusion between subject and predicate), has been soundly disputed. Research has shown

that there is a weak effect—for example speakers of languages in which all nouns are gendered (“el tiroteo,” “die Tür,”) are more likely to assign feminine or masculine adjectives to inanimate objects based on the noun’s gender, when asked to personify those nouns in a survey, though not necessarily in everyday speech (i.e. the German speakers will personify “the door” with feminine adjectives). There is, however, no strong determination of language on thought. English and Spanish speakers do not have a profounder sense of time than German or Russian speakers because English and Spanish grammars contain far more tenses, just as English and Spanish speakers do not have a more primitive grasp of the interactional relationship between different bodies and objects just because German and Russian grammar contain far more developed cases. The human brain is everywhere the same in its range of differences, and language is something we constantly recreate as needed—given the necessity, children will create a brand new language for themselves in a generation. Faced with a restrictive grammar, we have a whole array of other linguistic cues to communicate all the nuance we need. Anarchy is the fundamental reality of linguistics as with all other spheres; every language has its black market amply provisioned with whatever needed meaning one cannot get through the more structured spaces of the tongue.

The very assemblage of meanings, of cultural assumptions and conversations suppressed or already had, that form the backdrop to every conversation, allow us to surpass the confusions or limitations of grammar at any moment. A society that reifies scientific categories may be confused by the sentence, “a rose is a flower,” just as they may believe when they are told a tomato is a fruit and not a vegetable (dastardly lie). But a society in which people talk about the relationship between language and the world, people with a humbly metaphysical appreciation of the act of naming would not be confused. They will still say “a rose is a flower” rather than “I classify the rose

ing Class. There are no women, there are no blacks, there are only members of the Imaginary Party.

Something curious, of an understated significance, takes place within the pages of the English-language edition of *The Coming Insurrection*. On page 83, just a page after the French authors extol agricultural experimentation in Cuba and the artistry of auto mechanics in Africa as evidence of the fertility of catastrophe, they allow themselves to get excited by the Common Ground Clinic in New Orleans, as a fruit of the catastrophe that was Hurricane Katrina. This is no doubt embarrassing for Party members in the US, as Common Ground is an example of “activism” and thus part of the Spectacle, the Party of Order, and not of the Imaginary Party. So, the translators insert a footnote to explain away the mistake and denounce the Clinic. They say its founder, Malik Rahim, used it for a Congressional campaign (they need not consider what Rahim’s relationship was to the Clinic during his campaign, nor the attitude of those who keep the Clinic running to political campaigns), and they point out that “one of the main spokesmen for the project, Brandon Darby, was an FBI informant” (ignoring that FBI informants have also cropped up in the most insurrectionary of projects in this country—let’s not forget what else Darby himself participated in).

The translators stumble blindly into a great irony that they themselves have dug, abyss-like, in their very path. They try to minimize the IC’s error of praising Common Ground with an easy truth: “A certain distance leads to a certain obscurity.”

I want to repeat that one: “A certain distance leads to a certain obscurity.” This little turn of phrase, like a sewing needle, pops the overinflated balloon of a good part of what the Invisible Committee says, of what the Imaginary Party itself stands for.

First of all, isn’t obscurity exactly what they were going for? Or is there a functional difference between obscurity and opac-

of capitalist relations, in this case by seeing care in instrumental terms, as another form of production. What I want to know is, how can we liberate something we insist on viewing in mechanical terms? After all, care can only be plugged into capitalism in the first place when it ceases to be nurturing and comes to be reproductive.

It's hard to say how the Invisible Committee view care because they're so far removed from care's gritty details. The statement, "We are not depressed; we're on strike" [TCI, p.34], can only be true if this strike comes with its own picket line to hold back those who would cross into the recuperation of pharmaceuticals, its own support committee so that the misery of being out of work, affectively, becomes a joyful poverty. In the movement from absenteeism to the unlimited general strike, what we need is an expansive body of experience and experimentation to mobilize our boredom, reify our resentment, wear our open wounds with pride and heal them with abandon, and help one another make our bodies whole again. The IC call for this experimentation, but hell, so did the feminists of the '70s, and even the activists of the anti-globalization era. All we get that's new is a rhetoric that protects us from seeming like those who failed before us.

Whatever, dude

For the Invisible Committee, in the insurrection they prophesy, the real one, their insurrection, we are all "whatever singularities," without predicates, an emptiness brimming with possibilities. It's a beautiful dream, and I, for one, believe in fighting for dreams. But there is a certain ownership they exercise over their insurrection, a certain power of exclusion the Invisible Committee have vis a vis the Imaginary Party, that could make this dream nothing more than a maneuver identical to the one by which the communists suppressed difference by demanding adherence to the unified identity of the Work-

as a flower," because the former is more streamlined, and a linguistic rule of thumb is that more frequently used formulations tend to be shortened.

Another example. Two paragraphs back, I hesitated before writing the phrase "feminine or masculine adjectives". I thought about writing "adjectives considered to be feminine or masculine" but decided that was too bulky to put in the middle of an already long sentence. And it was unnecessary. The former phrase and the latter phrase mean the exact same thing, as long as the readers have already engaged with the idea that femininity and masculinity are always social constructs and matters of assigned value.

Suspending language, which does not exist without the assignment of predicates, can be vital in moments of meditation, hallucination, and ecstasy. But as a program or ideological argument the suggestion is the absurd fantasy of a totalitarianism of ideas, a hyper-intellectuality that has gotten so lost in its own cerebral cortex it has not heard that its mother has been calling it down to dinner for the last three days.

To talk of becoming anonymous or existing only in presence, avoiding recognition, on a practical level, means very little if this is not simply a strategy of boycotting the media and not adopting any identity category other than member of the Imaginary Party. The thing about "opaque zones" [How?, p.11] is that they are only opaque to the state, its media, its academy. Within these zones there is a great deal of recognition, of differentiation, and a flourishing of predicates. If the banlieue or Kabylia seem opaque to the Invisible Committee, this is only because they stand outside and above them.

The fact of the matter is, invisibility is only an option for the state agents spying on us, and the guerrilla who is willing to sacrifice her life to an existence of clandestinity. For the rest of us, it's a question of appearance and disappearance: constantly learning to appear in the lives of others, and disappear from the

traps, the enclosures of meaning, the Spectacle creates around us.

Here's another thing about invisibility: the more you hide, the hipper you get. Case in point, *Vice Magazine* seeking out the Invisible Committee in Tarnac.

What is, er, sorry, how is the human strike?

While *The Coming Insurrection* may be excused for the weakness of its practical suggestions, since the greater emphasis goes to their analysis of the present reality, Tiqqun has given us a text specifically intended to address this question: "How is it to be done?" They start by making a haughty distinction between theirs and Lenin's pamphlet of a similar name, provoking some interesting thoughts by outlining the difference between focusing on what to do and how to do it, though in the body of the text the difference proves to be basically meaningless, as their suggestions just as easily constitute a what as a how. The exception is in their discussion of recognition, which, as I already argued, is nothing to write home about.

On page 14 they offer a concrete suggestion that is equal parts what and how and advises, quite like *The Coming Insurrection*, a succinct reemployment of the autonomous strategy, "an expansionary constellation of squats[...] linked by an intense circulation of bodies", without any idea on how to improve this practice. The fact that the autonomous strategy was defeated, though significant, should not in any way obscure all the possibilities it creates and capacities it develops. In fact, throughout France and Spain in particular, many people are still working at this expansionary constellation, tweaking it, maintaining it, giving it consistency, trying to push it in new directions, coming together in periodic *encounters* to share ideas and emotions. Curiously, at least some of the partisans of the Imaginary Party denounce these efforts as not whatever enough. Are they calling shots from the bleachers, or do they have anything to share from their own experiences of taking to the field?

"How is it to be done?" answers its eponymous question primarily through the suggestion of the "human strike," giving the example of the Italian feminists who refused to be mothers, who refused to dedicate their *care* to the reproduction of capitalism. I'm confused by how this suggestion conflicts with the calls for invisibility and against recognition, because it seems that a human strike requires, above all, consistency, as we learn over time how to liberate care and create new relationships, but consistency, which is on some levels the creation of new rituals, would seem to allow for what the IC refer to as visibility, an opportunity for the Spectacle to recuperate these efforts by assigning new labels and dispatching new commodities.

The human strike is a building up of force that will most certainly be noticed as we withdraw our affective energies from the economy, and replace commodity relations with a mutual caring for one another. Even if the police agencies of the state somehow fail to notice all the new communes—not the easy communes of the riot but the persevering ones that build up new capacities through consistency—Revlon will certainly notify them when cosmetics sales start to plummet.

Yet the Invisible Committee admonishes us that: "Our appearance as a force must be reserved for the right moment" [TCI, p.114] Wait for the right moment?? These people seem to be re-ordering all the Marxist fallacies and trying to make them hip again. What gives?

And how are we to remain invisible (for now) while carrying out a human strike, when the Italian feminists got recuperated and the Tarnac 9 couldn't even pull it off? They've let us know what to do, but the Party leaders just can't pinpoint *how* we're actually supposed to do it.

Precarias a la Deriva of Madrid give a more meaningful explanation of the human strike (see "A Very Careful Strike"), but they also seem wedded to the great communist defeats. Their analysis of care and feminine labor is brilliant, but they do just as the Marxists in adopting capitalist logics in their challenges