

It is only in  
contact that  
the friend and  
the enemy are  
discovered.

A political  
situation does  
not proceed  
from a decision,  
but from the  
shock or the  
encounter of  
many decisions.



# READING **NOW**

This is an exercise in the sharing of ideas, of visions; a partial translation, summary, and a commentary and exemplification, or simply a montage, of some of the ideas found in the Invisible Committee's *Now*.

*autonomies.org*



## Reading Our Times With Now

called spiritual things both sensible and intellectual. *To the point of being able to read in the book of our own body everything that men did and were under the sovereignty of time; and to interpret in it the traces of the passage of the human species over an earth on which it will leave no trace.*”

Franco Fortini, “Che cos’è il comunismo”

*Beginning by abandoning the old idea of revolution and reinventing it ... Not as a new ideology but as a true praxis of an ethics of freedom to redefine the desirable and the undesirable and to create a new subjectivity that makes possible the impossible.*

Octavio Alberola, *Revolución o colapso*

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Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to the essay *Maintenant* [Now], published by La Fabrique, 2017. Forthcoming in english, translated by Robert Hurley, November 2017.

THE APPARENTLY SEAMLESS ORDER OF THE OUR WORLD belies its tattered fragments. The promised unity of a global order is sustained only in the realm of illusion by the flickering of screens bleating forth a continuous flow of images. The content of the latter is meaningless, it is the flow that matters, that there be images, the spectacle of our own ongoing passivity. But all about us are the shards of “society”, “science”, “labor”, “states”. The seeming homogeneity of desires is fractured by unmanageable spaces, proliferating knowledges, precarious, uncertain ways of survival and sovereign authorities that exist only through open or less than hidden states of exception. Fragmentation devours all that is solid in its path, like the touch of a King Midas of instability.

“Wage labor explodes in all sorts of niches, of exception, in conditions of anomaly. The idea of the “precariat” opportunely conceals that there is simply no longer any common experience of work, even precarious. So that as well there can no longer be any common experience of its cessation, and the old myth of the general strike can be placed on the shelf of useless accessories. Western medicine is reduced to tinkering with techniques that explode its doctrinal unity, such as acupuncture, hypnosis or magnetism. Beyond the usual parliamentary fiddling, there is no longer, politically, any majority for anything. The wisest political commentary, during the conflict generated by the Labour Law of the spring of 2016 [France], noted that two minorities, a government minority and a demonstrating minority, clashed with each other before a theatre of spectators.” (the Invisible Committee, *Now*, 19–20)

Even our own *selves* dissolve in a confusing stream of disconnected feelings, experiences, thoughts, held together again in the delusion that meaning is to be found in the blind collecting of *consumed experiences*.

“The contemporary experience of life in a world comprised of circulation, telecommunications, networks, a chaos of information in real time and of images aiming to capture our attention is fundamentally discontinuous.” (20)

The presumed *general interest* dissolves and states can do no more than call upon their militarized police and their policing military to see through even the most modest of plans (e.g., Val de Suse, Gezi Park, the airport at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, Standing Rock, and the like); each “public” investment, each infrastructure project, is seen for what it is, criminal theft.

The unities of the past, the person, the nation, the state, the society and economy, and so on, were always fictions, but they were effective fictions. “What is for sure is that the illusion of unity no longer succeeds in *making illusory*, in reigning in, in disciplining. In everything, hegemony is dead and the singularities become savage: they carry with them their own meaning, and await no general order. The little overlooking point of view that allowed anyone with a little authority to act as ventriloquist for everyone else, to judge, to classify, to hierarchise, to moralize, to notify each person what they must do and how

realizations, thereby creating spaces and times for potential collective creativity beyond capital, within the multiple fluxes that exist between ever changing subjectivities.

What capitalism cannot tolerate is the freedom of feeling, seeing, understanding, none of which are politically indifferent, nor equitably shared among us. We are obliged to remain at the surface of experience, of life, in contemporary social relations; even led to fear the risks of engagement, commitment, “loss of control” (when we already control very little). “If the whole social circus continues still, it is because each wears themselves out keeping their head above water, when instead, what would be necessary is to embrace the fall until we touch something solid”. (146)

In struggle, in true collective life where we open ourselves up to create together, our feelings and thoughts change profoundly. However banal this may sound—and it only sounds as such because language has itself become so banal, so empty—we are no longer the same subjects, we become other than what we were before we lived such experiences of shared creativity. We come back to Fortini’s vision, and we can begin to speak of communism as a way of seeing that carries with it a way of being in the world that breaks with the power of economy.

“There is no sense in sharing things if one does not begin by communizing the aptitude to see. Without that, to live communism is similar to a wild dance in absolute darkness: we crash, we injure, we drape the soul and body in blues, without even wanting to and without even knowing precisely whom we should hold something against. To add the capacity to see to everyone in all domains, to compose new perceptions and to refine them to infinity, that is the central object of all communist development, the growth of immediate potential that it determines. Those who wish to see nothing cannot but produce collective disasters. One has to make oneself see [clairvoyant, a visionary], for oneself as much as for others.” (148)

...

“Because it is a matter ... of life itself, the true communist question is not ‘how to produce?’; but ‘how to live?’. Communism is the centrality of the old ethical question, that which historical socialism held to be ‘metaphysical’, ‘premature’ or ‘petite-bourgeois’, and not that of labor. It is general de-totalization, and not the socialization of everything.” (150)

“For us, communism is not a goal. There is no ‘transition’ towards it. It is entirely transition: *it is on the way*. The different ways of inhabiting the world will never cease to cross each other, to crash into each other and, at times, to combat each other. Everything will always have to be taken up again.” (151)

By way of conclusion, with the words of the poet Franco Fortini ...

“Communism is the material process that aims to make the materiality of so-

potential. Equally, the happiness proper to every Commune refers to a plenitude of singularities, to a certain quality of ties, to the radiance at its heart of each fragment of the world—the end of entities, of their weight, the end of individual and collective confinements, the end of the reign of narcissism. ‘The only and unique progress, wrote the poet Franco Fortini, consists and will consist of reaching a higher place, visible, seeing, where it will be possible to promote the potentialities and the qualities of each singular existence.’ What is to be deserted is not ‘society’ nor ‘individual life’, but the couple that they form together. We must learn how to move on *another plane*.” (139–40)

GLOSS: Let us imagine human existence in its four dimensions of space and time. What any State endeavors to do is to render its subjects transparent. For this, it must *map* them. The cartographer’s question is then what “geographical” projection to employ. The human must be, so to speak, flattened out. But as with any such projection, the mapping is eminently political, with those territories that are deemed fundamental for control being given prominence. What contemporary capitalism accomplishes, to a degree unheard of, by means of technological apparatuses of surveillance, control and seduction, is to fragment the subject into a multiplicity of measurable domains, each the object of political and economic investment. Without by any means exhausting the map, we are biochemical measures of cholesterol, sugar, heartbeat; corporal measures of size and shape, volume and weight; emotional and cognitive measures of stability and intelligence; psychological, social and cultural measures of functionality, productivity, ethnicity; political measures of identification and participation, and so on. In each instance, each field is observed, studied, recorded, and always restrained and seduced. The micro-administration of capital is totalitarian in its ambition and it is this potentially inexhaustible reality that capitalism as a system of social relations is able to mold and exploit.

What opposition there can be to capitalism must begin here. And paradoxically, in so fragmenting the human subject, what capitalism accomplishes is the simultaneous revelation of the illusion of a sovereign subjectivity. As fragmentation is intensified for ever greater control, cracks appear, we leak through the fissures, and subjectivities encounter other subjective singularities, generating experiences that defy control.

Communism in some sense can be said to be the ethical acknowledgment and shaping of life within the flux of movements of capital. That is, it shows up a truth, the truth that we are always “between” realities, in the thresholds of corporal, affective and cognitive shifts. Capitalism’s capacity to exploit these movements depends upon self-interested, temporary territorializations, on perpetuating therefore the illusion that all is stable, and that it is in stability where prosperous well-being is to be found. What radical anti-capitalism must strive towards is challenging capitalist territo-

they should do it, has become inaudible. All of the things that “must” be done have been laid low.” (21)

History, progress, the roots of tradition and the hopes of the future fall away. The fragments that remain reduce our temporality to the present, to a *now*. The authority of states and all that they command must thus force the illusions of History evermore, but in so doing, only further reveal the emptiness of what is supposed to seduce. History is nothing before the latest, new and improved, consumer object/relation/experience that is condemned to obsolescence in the very moment of its consumption. If the State’s ambition is to *manage*, and to manage the *totality* of the social life that it gives form to/creates, then it is an ambition that is increasingly strained, depending on ever greater violence and police rule; the more it tightens its hold, the more “society” implodes at its base.

“Of unity, only nostalgia remains, but it speaks louder and louder. Everywhere candidates present themselves to restore national grander, to “Make America great again” or “bring order back to France”. At the same time, when one is nostalgic for French Algeria, what can one be nostalgic for? Everywhere, one promises then to remake by force the lost unity. Only that the more one “cleaves” by discoursing on the “sentiment of belonging”, the greater the certainty that one does not belong to any of this spreads. To mobilize the panic to restore order, is to miss what is essentially dispersive in panic. The process of general fragmentation is so unstoppable that all of the brutalities which will be used to remake the lost unity will only accelerate it, rendering it more profound and more irreversible. When there is no longer any common experience, except that found in front of screens, one may well create brief moments of national communion after “terrorist” attacks by deploying an array of drooling sentimentality, false and empty, one can decree all manner of “wars on terrorism”, one can promise to retake control of all “no-go areas” that one wants, all this remains a newsflash on BFM-TV, at the back end of a kebab shop, and whose sound can’t be heard. This kind of nonsense is like medication: for it to remain effective, the dosage has to be continuously increased, until the final neurasthenia. Those who look favorably on the perspective of ending their existence in a cramped and over-militarized citadel, even one as large as France, while all around, the water rises, carrying the bodies of the unlucky, may very well call “National traitors” all of those who displease them. In their barking, nothing but their powerlessness is heard.” (27)

And for those who would contest, struggle against, this established order, to appeal to the same false unties that underlie capitalism would be to contribute to those same illusions, restraining what is possible within the frame of those illusions and a future order, or said differently, making possible the capture of struggles by the State.

Everything becomes plural, local, situated; paradoxically sharing the common

trait of flight. “It is not only that the people are wanting ... they have already made their suitcases, in a thousand unsuspected directions. They are not only abstentionist, in retreat, nowhere to be found: they are in flight, even if their flight would be nothing but interior or immobile. They are already *elsewhere*.” (28) And it will not be the new populists of the *left*, a Mélenchon or Iglesias, who will bring them back. “What is called ‘populism’ is not only the glaring symptom of the disappearance of the people, it is a desperate attempt to hold on to what remains of the haggard and disoriented.” (29)

In the tired marches and demonstrations of labor unions and left-wing political parties, those who parade are like marionette ghosts, repeating gestures and slogans mechanically, lifelessly. The *Internationale* falls like a corpse from their lips, to be swept up by the municipal street cleaners who follow. What life erupts from these pacified processions of the living dead does so, as it did in France during the 2016 Spring, when the *head* of the marches were “taken” by those desirous to break with the imposed sleep, by the *casseurs*, the “violent rioters” quickly labeled “anarchists” and “black blocks.” But the names hide more than they reveal, for what happened on these occasions, and again the French example is helpful, “is that a certain number of deserters created a political space where to compose their heterogeneity, an ephemeral space certainly, insufficiently organized undoubtedly, but attainable and, for the duration of a Spring, *really existing*.” (*Now*, 30) Our fragmented world is acephalous, mirrored and multiplied in endless forms, including in the futile and paralyzed left. But those who took the “head” of the protests in Paris, for example, did not do so to provide them with a new leadership, but rather to unleash the autonomous multiple gestures that they harbored and rendered possible.

GLOSS: The “global” occupy movement of 2011, beginning with the Arab Spring and seemingly replicating itself in numerous other countries and cities, is the most significant “social-political movement” of our time. To speak in the singular here though is to suggest a unity of intention and/or ideology across these movements which does not exist. And yet their shared occupation of city squares intimates some commonality, to be sought at other levels of lived reality. Tomás Ibáñez, writing of the Spanish movement 15M of 2011, states that it “marked in a clear way a before and an after in the scenario of protests and collective conflict.” (*Anarquismos a contratiempo*, 263) Ibáñez’s judgment may not be extendable to other countries for various reasons, but in the Spanish context, it echoes true. However, the intensity and resonances of the movement are not due to any unified organization, ideology or aim born with 15M. The “movement” was and remains as fragmented as the politics that it emerged to challenge. Its force, its radicalness, must therefore be found elsewhere. And for Ibáñez, everything changes the moment we focus on 15M’s *organizational forms and practices of struggle*, conceived and put into effect without any

suddenly traversed by a special plane of reality, where they find themselves walking together in the world. To love is never to be together, but to *become* together. If to love did not unmake the fictitious unity of being, the “other” would be incapable of making us suffer so. If in love a part of the other was not to be found as a part of us, we would not have to mourn when the hour of separation comes. If there were nothing but *relations* between beings, no one would understand themselves. Everything would move along with misunderstanding. There is neither subject nor object of love, there is an *experience* of love.” (138)

“The fragments which constitute us, the forces that inhabit us, the assemblages where we enter have no reason to compose a harmonious whole, a fluid ensemble, a mobile articulation. The banal experience of life, of our days, is rather that of a succession of encounters which gradually unmake us, fragment us, progressively steal away from us all certain foundations. If communism has to do with the fact of organizing ourselves collectively, materially, politically, it is to the exact degree that it signifies also organizing ourselves singularly, existentially, sensibly. Or, one must accept falling back into politics or the economy. If communism has an end, it is the great well-being of forms of life. The great well-being is gained, in contact with life, through the patient articulation of the disjointed members of our being. One can very well live one’s entire life without experiencing anything, by being careful not to feel or think. Existence is thus brought to a slow movement of degradation. It uses and damages, instead of giving form. Relations, past the miracle of the encounter, cannot but go from injury to injury towards their consummation. Conversely, s/he who refuses to live next to oneself, who accepts to experience, life gives them progressively form. S/he becomes in the full sense of the term a *form of life*.” (138–9)

“Poles apart from this are the inherited methods of activist construction, so fatiguing, so destructive, when they wanted to build so much. Communism is played out not in the renunciation of self, but in attention to the simplest gesture. It is a question of the plane of perception and thus in the way things are done. It is a practical question. What the perception of entities—individual or collective—bars our access to, is the plane where things really happen, the plane where collective potentialities are made and unmade, reinforce or unravel themselves. It is on this plane and only there that the real, including the politically real, becomes readable and makes sense. To live communism, is not to work to make exist the entity to which one adheres, but to deploy and deepen an ensemble of ties, which is to say to sometimes cut them. What is essential takes place at the level of the very small. For the communist, the world of important facts extends beyond sight. It is the whole alternative between the individual and the collective that perception in terms of ties revokes *positively*. An ‘I’ that, in a given situation, rings true can be a “we” of exceptional

tentially. And even those opposed to it, for example, anarchists and marxists, often do little more than play ping-pong around this couple, “without worrying themselves that this false antinomy was fashioned by economic thought.” (131)

“To rebel against society in the name of the individual or against individualism in the name of socialism, is to condemn oneself in advance. The individual and society have not ceased, for a good three centuries, to affirm themselves at the expense of the other, and it is this well established and oscillating apparatus that, from year to year, keeps the lovely spools called “the economy” turning. Contrary to what the economy wants us to see, what there is in life are not individuals endowed with all kinds of properties that they may use or separate themselves from. What there is in life are *attachments*, assemblages, of situated beings who move in a whole ensemble of ties. In making its own the liberal fiction of the individual, modern “communism” could not but confound property and attachment, and carry with itself the devastation even to where it thought it was struggling against private property and constructing socialism. ... It was only on the basis of such a confusion that one could imagine that “Humanity” could exist, that is all women and men similarly torn away from what weaves their specific existence, and phantasmagorically reunited in an great untraceable machine. In massacring all of the attachments that make up the very texture of worlds, under the pretext of abolishing the private ownership of the means of production, modern “communism” effectively made a clean slate – of everything. This is then what occurs to those who practice economics, even in criticizing it. ‘One had not to criticize the economy, one had to get out of it!’; Lyotard would have said. Communism is not a ‘superior economic organization of society’, but the *destitution of the economy*.” (131–3)

What appears under the spectacle economy from the outside as an “individual” is in truth a complex of heterogeneous forces, an aggregate of fragments capable and susceptible to agencies. We are each, many lives, many faces, and what ties we create and are created are not between separate entities, but between and within the confluence of fragmentary flows.

“We are not beautiful, complete egos, well unified Selves; we are composed of fragments, we swarm with minor lives. ... Every tie between beings goes from a fragment of being to a fragment of being, from a fragment of world to a fragment of world. It establishes itself below and beyond the level of the individual. It immediately effects [“agence”] between them portions of beings that suddenly discover themselves on an equal footing, experience themselves as continuous. This continuity between fragments is what is felt as “community”, an assemblage. It is what we experience in every true encounter. Every encounter cuts a part of us away, where are indistinctly mixed elements of the world, of the other and of ourselves. Love does not put individuals into relationship with each other; it rather cuts away a part in each, as if they were

conscious appeals to past ways of doing politics (15M is a movement of the radical present, for good or ill).

“The originality of 15M consisted in the fact that it was an event, in the full sense of the word, that introduced new things into the political scenario charged with an unquestionable political radicalness, that curiously contrasted with the absence of any radicalness in its explicit demands.” (266) Instead of merely expressing opposition and through protest seeking change, typically at the level of State policy, 15M was much more. “Even though in the beginning, it was the usual popular concentration to express a protest and make a demand, this very quickly transformed itself into a different phenomenon. The thousands of people who invaded the streets and squares did not do so only to demonstrate against this or in favor of that, but they did so also to institute themselves or, more precisely, to *self-institute themselves* as subjects in a political process.” (267)

...

“This process of *self-institution* required that the people organize themselves, debate, elaborate collectively their own political discourse, and construct in common the necessary elements to make possible the maintenance of the mobilization and the development of political action.”

“The importance that the rejection of representation acquired in the heart of the movement—the famous ‘they don’t represent us’, of course, but also accompanied by the refusal to be represented by any permanent entities: ‘no one can claim the right to represent us’—indicates what the novelty was that the movement introduced into the conventional political game. In effect, a radical rupture was produced with practices that consisted of responding to agendas elaborated externally, that is by others who basically were not among the mobilized. In the public squares, diverted from its conventional and authorized uses, the imagination set to work to create spaces, construct conditions and elaborate procedures that would permit people to elaborate by themselves and collectively their own agenda, at the margin of pre-established and imported ideologies.”

“From the moment that the rejection of representation constituted itself as the active principle of the action of 15M, the only discourses, the only compromises, that were recognized and that were assumed as legitimate, were those that came from the very interior of the movement, those generated from within. Only what the movement produced through and by itself was accepted, autonomously, following the rules of free debate in a non-hierarchical frame.” (268)

The extraordinary significance of 15M thus lies not in what it promised for the future, nor in any rehabilitation of some glorious revolutionary past, ideological or practical, but in what it realized in the present. “If anything

profoundly characterized 15M, it was its unyielding will for autonomy, a generalized demand for autonomy and self-determination that imposed the fixing of its own objectives and the determination of its own ways of being, as well as the rejection of domination, not allowing itself to be led by any external entity, and to decide to act for itself.” (268)

As a political movement, an essentially plural movement, 15M sought not to weld the fragments of social life into a new, false unity, but to create a space of passage, a threshold, through and from which different agencies could enter, gain sustenance, and depart, to possibly return again. If 15M resonated and resonates still in the country, it is because its political children are many. And at its most intense, it not only shared ideas, but bodies. That is, for very, very many who came to the occupied squares of Spain’s cities, what they found was not a politics segregated from all other spheres of life, “politics” as usual, but a politics embedded in life and the care that makes possible the reproduction of forms of life in radical opposition to capitalism, if any such opposition is to be true. 15M was not ideology, organization, fixed practices, leadership, representatives, but the sharing, to speak metaphorically, of wine and bread in a life giving meal that could be re-enacted and edified into a form of life.

Podemos is Judas at this supper, but the murder that it desires and with which it is complicitous has so far failed.

The Invisible Committee is critical of *Nuit Debout*, France’s incarnation of the “occupy movement”, precisely for its fetishism of form, democratic form, voting upon matters that could have no possible execution and which in the end only served to domesticate the occupation. If it too was lacking in any homogeneity, if unplanned gatherings and demonstrations also gestated in its midst, if it also contributed to making the movement against the proposed labor law reform of 2016 in France much more than simply another protest movement, it came to grief on the separation of politics from life and the presumed and desired sovereignty of the former; the belief that life can be *governed*, mirrored in the image of government of the *self*. (*Now*, 52–6)

The Invisible Committee’s argument here takes us further than most of the *political* readings of the occupy movements. For what emerges from their considerations is a re-thinking of the very concept of *autonomy*. So often imagined in terms of self-possession, it finds expression in the State and in the person in the concept of sovereignty. Neither of the two, State or person, are conceivable without it. But then neither are imaginable without violence, the violence that represses and/or destroys that which escapes rule. The task then is to think and live autonomy beyond sovereignty; a sovereignty which in any case has been irretrievably lost in the debris of capitalism’s disaster. The anonymous many who have filled streets and city

If to speak of communism sounds grossly anachronistic in our times, it is because it was, in the 20th century, misconceived as a *social* doctrine, which is to say, as a response to a *strictly human* concern. (127)

“Despite that, it has never ceased to inform the world. If it continues to haunt it, it is because it does not proceed from any ideological fixation, but from a fundamental, immemorial, lived experience: that of *community*, which revokes so many economic axioms, as well as beautiful constructions of civilization. There is never community as an entity, but only as an experience. It is that of the *continuity* with beings and with the world. In love, friendship, we have the experience of this continuity.” (127)

There is a *lived experience* of communism in moments of giving, sharing, friendship; a singular experience of creative interaction with others and the world. It is only by divorcing the human being from this experience that communism could come to be imagined as an emaciated, abstract fraternalism, an empty internationalism, to be appropriated and corrupted by political movements, parties and States. But what is communism if not friendship, equality among friends?

“In taking the human subject in isolation from her/his world, in detaching mortals from all that lives around them, modernity could not but give birth to a communism exterminator of a *socialism*. And this socialism could not encounter peasants, nomads and “savages” except as obstacles to be swept away, like an annoying residue at the bottom of national accounting. They could not even see what communism they were the bearers of. If modern “communism” was able to imagine itself as universal fraternity, as realized equality, it was by cavalierly extrapolating the *lived* fact of fraternity in struggle from friendship. For what is friendship if not the equality between friends?” (128–9)

...

“Without the experience, even occasional, of communism, we die, we shrivel up, we become cynics, hard, barren. Life is this phantom-city peopled by smiling mannequins, and that works. Our need for community is so pressing that after having ravaged all existing ties, capitalism can only run on the promise of “community”. What are the social networks, dating applications, if not this promise perpetually disappointed? What are all of the fashions, the technologies of communication, all the *love songs*, except a way of maintaining the dream of a continuity between beings where, in the end, all contact is stolen away? This promise of frustrated community opportunely redoubles the need for it. It is rendered even hysterical, and turns ever faster the great cash machine of those who exploit it. To maintain the poverty and have it show itself in one possible outcome, this is the great strength of capitalism.” (129)

The capitalist economy rests upon two complicit fictions, that of “society” and of the “individual”, and all that they carry with them, politically, morally, exis-



EVERYWHERE, WE ARE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS...

“Cities in transition, social and solidarity economies, a 6th Republic, alternative municipalism, basic universal income, the film *Tomorrow*, migrations into space, a thousand new prisons, expelling all foreigners from the planet, man-machine fusions—whether they be engineers, managers, activists, politicians, ecologists, actors or simple hucksters, all of those who pretend to offer solutions to the present disaster do but one thing: they impose upon us *their* definition of the problem, in the hope of having us forget that *they* are themselves clearly *part of the problem*. As one friend stated: “The solution to the problem that you see in life is a way of living that makes the problem disappear.” (123–4)

The Invisible Committee offers us no political program, no solution for sale. They speak from their singular experience, their encounters, their successes and failures. From this, they “draw an evidently partisan perception of the world, which conversation between friends refines”. (124) It is then for each one of us, as readers of *Maintenant/Now*, to draw the consequences. And it is with this in the background that one may speak of a defense of *communism*.

The question of communism remains at the heart of our epoch, if for no other reason than that the reign of its opposite, the economy, has never been so complete. (124)

“One can of course elude the question of communism. One can accustom oneself to stepping over the homeless or the migrants on the street each morning on the way to the office. One can follow in real time the melting of the polar icecaps, the rise of the oceans or frantic migrations, in all directions, of animals and human beings. One can continue to prepare one’s cancer each time one swallows a fork of mashed food. One can say that the recovery, a little authority or eco-feminism will resolve all that. To continue in this way is at the price of repressing in ourselves the sentiment of living in an intrinsically *criminal* society, and who does not miss the opportunity to remind us that we are a part of this little criminal association. Each time that we enter into contact with it—by the use of anyone of its devices, the consumption of the least of its commodities or the job that we slave on for it—we make ourselves its accomplices, we contract a little of the vice that grounds it: that of exploiting, pillaging, exhausting the very conditions of all terrestrial existence. We have the choice but between two crimes: that of participating or that of deserting with the aim of killing it. The hunt for the criminal, the thirst for punishment and judgment is frenzied in our time only to the extent of procuring for the spectator, for an instant, a surrogate of innocence. But as the relief is of short duration, it is necessary to continually begin anew to blame, to punish, to accuse—so as to clear oneself of responsibility.” (124–5)

squares are the uprooted and disoriented offspring of the disaster, who gather not as the “people united”, but as a community of the nameless.

If any semblance of unity continues to structure State authority, it is only through fear, surveillance and the physical presence of police. The law, the armor of declared and legislated rights that is supposed to protect each citizen’s moral and physical integrity, and thus the guarantor of social unity, is an edifice of ruins. Indeed, as far as the Invisible Committee is concerned, *the Law* no longer exists. (33)

“As long as the security of our fellow citizens justifies it, as long as administrative search warrants [passed without a judicial decision] that only the state of emergency allow are indispensable, it is advisable to maintain the state of emergency.” The words were proffered by Emmanuel Macron during the French presidential election campaign and they are now confirmed by his desired extension of the legal exception until the 1st of November, bringing the state of emergency in France up to two years. Whatever hesitations he may have had in the past have vanished (“We cannot live permanently in a regime of exception. It is necessary to return to ordinary law ... and to act with the right instruments. We have the legislative apparatus permitting us to respond, over time, to our situation”). And in parallel, there is a proposal for a new and additional anti-terrorist law. (*Liberation* 24/05/2017) As such laws multiply, both in France and elsewhere, states of emergency in fact cease to be exceptional; such laws create distinct legal subjects with different rights and duties. And as they do so, the diminished rights of *suspected* criminals and terrorists seep into the fabric of general law, rendering everyone a potential suspect.

The German legal theorist Günther Jakobs elaborated a distinction between two criminal laws: one for “citizens” and another for “enemies”. For Jakobs, the latter includes the rabble, radical opponents, thugs and rogues, “terrorists”, “anarchists”, in sum, all of those who fail to sufficiently respect the reigning democratic order and thereby represent a “danger” to the “normative structure of society”. Should not then such “dangerous individuals” be treated as enemies of society? Do they not exclude themselves from ordinary criminal law, justifying the elaboration of a criminal law for enemies? (33) But to elaborate a law for enemies, is to erase the Schmittian distinction of friend-enemy, which places the enemy outside a constituted sovereignty. That is, it makes all of us potential enemies, it renders the exception normal, thus destroying “normal” criminal law altogether. (The example of the increasing criminalization of dissent in Spain in the wake of 15M, with the law of Citizen Security of 2013 and the recent police operations, *pandora* and *piñata*, against anarchists, is but one example among many today).

“However paradoxical this affirmation may appear, *we live in the time of the abolition of the Law*. The metastatic proliferation of laws is nothing but one aspect of this abolition. If each law had not become insignificant in the roccoco

## An Apology For Communism: The Invisible Committee's Now

of contemporary law, would it be necessary to produce so many? Would it be necessary to communicate, with each event, by means of the enactment of new legislation? The aim of the great legal reforms over the last years in France amount almost all to the abolition of current laws, to the progressive dismantling of all judicial guarantees. So much so that the Law, which professed to protect men/women and things before the hazards of the world, has instead become what adds to their precariousness." The state of exception today reigns "*under the form of the law.*" (34–5)

**GLOSS:** "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "emergency situation" in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency; and our position in the struggle against Fascism will thereby improve." Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

There are two ways to respond to the state of emergency, we are told by the Invisible Committee. The first is to denounce it and call for the return of a state of law; an illusory exercise that calls for what never really existed, because the law depends upon the exception, on the constitution of those who are outside the law. There is no law without the violence of separation and that violence is always potentially and in fact directed at the body constituted by the State. The second response is to assume the exception of the law. If the State frees itself from its laws under the exception, then it is for those who contest the State to do the same. "There are those who protest against a phantom, the state of emergency, and there are those who take action and deploy from *their own state of exception.*" (38)

Before the permanent state of exception, "the maintenance of order is the principle activity of an already failed order". (109) And the greater the fragmentation of social order, the greater is the presence of an increasingly militarized police.

The loss of all hope among the increasingly superfluous many is also the condition for pure revolt, a "revolt that no longer seeks support in what it denies and which is its own self-authorization". (110) Before such disobedience, potential or active, politics is reduced to a vast, daily police operation. (110) And thus rebellion can only direct itself at the body of the State, namely, the police. In Paris, the slogan was, "Everyone hates the police".

That this statement should appear shocking to some is testimony to the successful imposition of sovereignty by modern State power. At the beginning of the 17th century, for the first thinkers on sovereignty, the police were held to be the very constitution of the State, its very form, rather than a mere instrument of State authority. The police was thus "all that can give ornament, form and splendor to the city" (Turquet de Mayerne), "the ensemble of means that serve the splendor of the whole State and the happiness of all of its citizens"

*I am large, I contain multitudes.*

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

*The real problem is not that of restoring a Marxist or Leninist or Maoist truth, nor that of remaking an organization with the same methods and therefore the same errors as the one that failed in too many parts of the world. The half century that has passed since the death of Lenin obliges us, on pain of death, to rethink reality, not texts; society, not formulae; to produce truth, not to contend over hereditary protocols. It is a difficult task that for a number of years has demanded fierce study and pitiless rigour. Nor is it just a task of consciousness. It is a vital task, in which to invent a different relationship between our present, the site of our pain and our joy, and the exalted or terrifying images of the future and the past.*

Franco Fortini



(Hohenthal). Its role is to “lead man to the most perfect felicity that he may enjoy in this life” (Delmare). (111–2) The police then are the government of all of the conditions that render this felicity possible, from the cleanliness of streets to the imprisonment of vagabonds. (112) It is the police as identical with to be *policed*, that is, ordered, administered, governed by *policy*, belonging to the city, the *polis*, the realm of the civilized, in contrast to the savage, those outside the city, inhabitants of *unpoliced* forests. The police in this instance are the very end of sovereignty: the ideal, legal and ultimately fictional order of the world. The police however must also assure that the order is real, or as real as possible. And here it appears as a *means* to its own ideal end. Yet without the former, the latter reveals itself as a fiction, and thus “the function of the police as a means is to ensure that from the outside the order desired *appears* to reign”. Failure however haunts its double role. To act from the “outside” with “necessary” violence is to act from outside the law, to act illegally, to preserve the law. The police is the very *embodiment* of the paradox of sovereignty, the paradox that the sovereign who defines the legal order does so in an initial act that is *a-legal*; that the sovereign who defends the constituted order does so through *illegal* acts. The police “are the proof that the legal is not the real, that order does not reign, that society does not hold because *it does not hold by itself*”; that all are the work and consequence of their force, a permanent agency of *exception* in the heart of constituted and “constitutional” political authority. “If the state of exception is this temporary suspension of the law that permits re-establishing, by the most arbitrary and bloody measures, the condition for the rule of law, the police is what remains of the state of exception when these *conditions* have been restored. The police, in their daily functioning, is what persists of the state of exception in normal circumstances. It is why its sovereign functioning is itself so hidden.” (113)

A French CRS police officer, after arresting someone for no reason during the Paris Spring protests states: “I do what I want. You see, it’s anarchy for me also!” (113)

“The police thus ensure an apparent order that is from within only disorder. It is the truth of a world of lies, and by continuous lies. It confirms that the reigning order is artificial, and that it will sooner or later be destroyed.” (114)

The police is unmasked. It is not that everyone in fact hates the police. They do not. But for those who cry out loudly that they do, they have excellent reasons for doing so. The fragmentation of State power and authority however changes the relation between government and police. Once the mere instruments of politicians, the generalized discredit of the latter renders the police the very condition of government. It is the politicians who now turn to them before any crisis, and cede to them on every demand. Few police bodies would be able, or even willing, to assume openly political autonomy; and for such a body to do so would be to engender a government at war with all or a part of

its population. (115–8)

And in response: “It would be senseless to seek a *military* victory over the police. ... The police is a target and not an objective, an obstacle and not an adversary. Whoever takes the cops for an adversary prohibits themselves from breaking through the obstacle that they are. To be able to sweep them aside, one has to aim *beyond*. Against the police, there is only political victory. Disorganize their ranks, strip them of all legitimacy, reduce them to impotence, hold them at a good distance, grant oneself a larger margin of maneuverer at the desired moment, as in the chosen places: thus is the police destituted.” (118)

Suffered, the processes of fragmentation may push us towards misery, isolation, schizophrenia. Life may be lived as a pure waste. Nostalgia then possesses us; nostalgia for family, nation, or so many other fictions of wholeness. For is not belonging the only thing that remains to those who no longer have anything? Yet this same fragmentation can also be a starting point, it may also give rise to an intensification and pluralization of the “*relations that make us*.” (41) Perhaps then we may see finally that it was our “integration in society” that was “a slow loss of being, a continuous separation, a slipping towards ever greater vulnerability, and an ever more disguised vulnerability.” (41)

“There is in the fragmentation something that points towards what we call ‘communism’: it is the return to earth, the ruin of everything made equivalent, the restitution of all singularities to themselves, the failure of subsumption, abstraction, the fact that moments, places, things, beings and animals all acquire their own name—their own name. Every creation is born of a rupture with the whole. ... If the Earth is so rich in natural milieus, it is in virtue of its complete absence of uniformity. To realize the promise of communism held within the fragmentation of the world calls for a gesture, a gesture to be repeated interminably, a gesture that is life itself: that of to *provide passages* between the fragments, to put them into *contact*, to organize their encounter, to open the paths that lead from one friendly bit of the world to another without passing through hostile territory, that of establishing the good *art of distances* between the worlds.” (43)

What these connected fragments are remains open, changing. But they are held together in moving affinities of plural forms of life, archipelagos of life beyond the politics of institutionalized and enforced spectacular commodification.

And thus the need to imagine radical politics differently, perhaps in the guise of a *destituent* power.

Fernando Pessoa, in the poem *The Keeper of Flocks*, composed under the pseudonym of Alberto Caeiro, wrote:

I don't believe in God because I never saw him.  
If he wanted me to believe in him,  
Without a doubt he would come to talk with me  
And come in my door  
Telling me, Here I am!

(Maybe this is ridiculous to the ears  
Of someone who, because they don't know what it is to look at things,  
Doesn't understand someone who talks about them  
With the way of speaking looking at them teaches.)

But if God is the flowers and the trees  
And the hills and the sun and the moonlight,  
Then I believe in him,  
Then I believe in him all the time,  
And my whole life is an oration and a mass,  
And a communion with my eyes and through my ears.

But if God is the trees and the flowers  
And the hills and the moonlight and the sun,  
Why should I call him God?

And if money, our God, is all of those things which can be consumed, if it is the measure of reality, then what would occur should we strip it away? We might perhaps then discover the illusions of this false God, of a universality that portrays everything as quantifiable and thus the same; the same in its utter meaninglessness. The nihilism of capitalism, we suggest, cannot be broken by a new herculean *will* (*individualist* anarchism aside, in whom could such a force even be found, imagined?), but rather by a gesture of suspension, of retreat, first from money, and with it, from all of its prophets and prophecies. Pessoa, in the same poem cited above, spoke of “thinking” through gestures—“If I stretch out my arm, I get exactly where my arm gets”—of “thinking” from the place of the body—“what's really funny is that we're always thinking something else./And we live truant from our reality./And we're always outside it because we're here.” To think in the present, to rediscover the weight of our singularities without the re-affirmation of closed identities, to understand that freedom lies not in the sovereign subject or State, but in the permanent possibility of creating and recreating unmediated forms of life with others, was perhaps Alberto Caeiro's pagan teaching; a teaching that perhaps points beyond capitalism.

ticed with strangers, people with whom one is not attached, who are distant enough for a dodgy dealing to become a general conflagration. To pay, in Latin, comes from *pacare*, “to satisfy, to calm”, notably by distributing money to soldiers so that they can buy salt, a salary therefore. One pays *to have peace*. All the vocabulary of economics is in the end a vocabulary of avoided war”. (103)

GLOSS: The religion of capitalist money may be said to suspend the *principle of sufficient reason*, revealing capitalism to be, as is the case with all forms of government, an exercise in constructing an *ontology*. In the court of miracles governed by the circulation of money, the reality that is generated is one where “the true world transforms itself into a world of fable, where the will of men takes the place of reason for what comes to be. ... One has a desire for a cherry, and lo and behold that at our command a cherry tree appears charged with ripe fruit. Another command, and the fruit flies towards our mouth and, if we wish, divides itself in half in the air, such as to let fall the pit and the spoiled bits, so that we do not have to spit them out in turn. Pigeons on spits fly in the sky and fall spontaneously into the mouths of those who are hungry”. (Quoted from: Giorgio Agamben, *Bartleby ou la création*, 52–3) The words are those of the 18th century German philosopher Christian Wolff; where he speaks of *will*, we may speak of *money*. And if Wolff thought that the suspension of causality to be logically impossible, for it would translate into the death of reason and the will, and thus of a rational Christian God, capitalism has generalized a Calvinism without God, or a form of government where it is the irrational (because setting aside all local or immediate causality) and global movement of money capital, the new God, that determines the reality of events.

Under such a religion all social life is equally rendered friendless (friendship depends upon trust, trust in the consistency of others and things, something impossible under capitalism). War, the permanent possibility of war, accordingly structures *all* social relations, such that “peaceful” ways of interacting are but war by other means.

The implications of all of this for thinking through and practicing anti-capitalist politics are far reaching. Any politics cannot ignore where and who we are today. And thus in our time, any “radical” political subject is first and foremost the anonymous many, the indifferent, the subjects that capitalism sculpts through the universal power of money. A politics that claims to begin with something more than this (with a specific *people*, of one *kind* or another), risks reproducing the very logic of war that capital is so easily able to absorb as well as appealing to something which may in fact no longer exist (the sociologically “natural” revolutionary subject). Even more fundamentally perhaps is that such a revolutionary politics seeks to anchor itself in an ontology (of the subject, the world, of time and space) that is either being rapidly refashioned or that has simply ceased to be.

## Now & The Anarchy Of Destituent Power: Reading Politics With The Invisible Committee

*... they wanted to reinvent everything, each day; to make themselves masters and possessors of their own lives.*

Guy Debord

*If to constituent power corresponds revolutions, uprisings and new constitutions, that is, a violence that lays down and constitutes new law, for destituent power, it is fitting to think of completely different strategies, of which the definition is the task of the coming politics.*

Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*

*To destitute the government, is to make ourselves ungovernable.*

Comité Invisible, *Maintenant*

THE ENEMY HAS ALREADY TRIUMPHED. We live after the disaster, disoriented amidst the rubble of fragmentation. What *peoples* remain, what social identities persist, are vestigial or function as instruments of control: “everything which for centuries constituted the splendor and misery of the generations who succeeded each other on earth have today lost all meaning.” In the expanding and accelerating flow of capital, in the sweeping away of use value by exchange value become spectacle, a parody of the Marxist project of a classless society is realized in the planetary petite-bourgeoisie. The “the state of the spectacle ... empties and nullifies every real identity, and substitutes the *public* and *public opinion* for the *people* and the *general will*”, thereby producing “massively from within itself singularities that are no longer characterized either by any social identity or by any real condition of belonging: singularities that are truly *whatever* singularities.” (Giorgio Agamben, *Marginal Notes on Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*)

If the unifying fictions of nations, peoples, societies, cultures, classes and the like formerly functioned as instruments of State rule and reproduction, these same instruments weaken considerably in the tides of consumer desire and the semiotic (non-conscious, non-ideological) control of population movements and habits. The *public* is unstable and its *opinions* are ephemeral. The older disciplinary technologies (e.g. schools, factories, armies, etc.) that produced the former binding identities prove insufficient; in the acceleration of movement, they must give way to apparatuses of generalized surveillance and control, measures and registries of passage, techniques of seduction and financial subservience, politics of precariousness, marginalization, of rendering superfluous, of death. The State, never a master of all that it unleashes, appears increasingly a sorcerer’s apprentice, or as a marionette with its strings pulled in different, opposing directions.

The societies of control, of spectacle, are at best relatively successful in the administration of populations. And yet, cracks appear everywhere. Parts of populations rise up unrestrained or feel themselves to be unrelated to the “public” to which they supposedly belong, opinion loosens its hold. And the old fictions, today more fragile than ever, fracture.

The spectacle, by obliterating the past in fetishistic consumption and official memorialization, and enslaving the future to a present of repetition, destroys time and thereby the spaces in which histories are made. *Peoples* become *populations* of *individual* spectators, with one population distinguished from another only on the grounds of the apparatuses of control that restrain-create them. What *human universality* prevails is not that of a *subject* bearer of rights common to all (the illusion of the subject has vanished beneath the endless stream of images, representations), but that of a *spectator*. “Humanity as subject no longer has a face.” (the Invisible Committee, *Now*, 39) And what “faces” do appear are either the children of ancient, though increasingly

“This movement is that by which capital appropriates to itself all human attributes and by which humans make themselves the neutral basis for capitalist valorization. Capital no longer just determines the form of cities, the content of work and leisure, the imaginary of crowds, the language of real and intimate life, the ways of being in fashion, needs and their satisfaction. It also produces *its own people*. It engenders its own *optimizing* humanity”. (96)

...

“The logic of value now coincides with organized life. The economy as a relationship to the world long ago exceeded the economy as a sphere. The madness of evaluation obviously dominates each aspect of contemporary work, but it is also as master that it reigns over everything that escapes it. ... Measure has become the way of being obliged to everything that aims to exist socially”. (97)

If the commodity economy of abstract exchange value already implied the command of measure in trade, what contemporary capitalism expresses is the full colonization of “use-value” (that is, the uses that things can be put to, how they are used and the “nature” of those who use them) by abstract “exchange-value”. Current technologies for the surveillance and measure, in real time, of all of the aspects of life, make the nightmare of a generalized valuation our truth.

In this new golden cage, money, the universal mediator of all activity, becomes the new divinity. Present, yet absent (because never enough), it is money that miraculously makes possible the socially sayable, readable, visible; it is the measure of life and reality. (100) But this god, like all absolute deities, gives and takes; the world seemingly condensed to measure masks, obliterates, the local, the particular, the here and now of irreducible singularities. (102)

The god of miracles renders every thing and every event inexplicable; each is replaced or follows on another without reason. The proliferation of monetarily mediated social relations thus equally divorces us from *comprehension*. Events come and go without apparent cause, except for the presence or absence of money. And each relation mediated by this universal standard, thereby being made equivalent and substitutable, becomes in fact incomprehensible. If I can buy all that is associated with love, then I may buy anyone who meets the criteria of lover. The singularity of the lover, and our understanding of her or him, becomes completely irrelevant and impossible. The only danger is that I fall upon an enemy. But then it is the role of money also to pacify. Friendship and love bind singularities. Where strangers appear, perhaps threatening, money buys relative concord between the anonymous.

“To come out from under the economy is to have stand out the reality which it covers over. The exchange of goods and all that it implies of fierce negotiation, defiance, deception, *wabu wabu*, as the Melanesians say, is not specifically western. Where one knows how to live, these kinds of relations are only prac-

where, *money must also be lacking everywhere*. Everything, from now on, must be the occasion to generate a little money, a little value, “a small banknote”. The ongoing technological offensive should also be understood as a way of occupying and valorizing those who can no longer be exploited through salaried work.” (92)

The consequence is a sort of global “uberisation”, where all that was formerly given, shared, must now be paid for. Friendship, trust, even acquaintance, the foundations of giving and sharing, thus become suspect. To give what can be sold (an object, a “service”, a space and so on) is symptomatic of stupidity; something that is rendered equally almost impossible given the omnipresent need for cash.

“It is constantly and from whatever perspective necessary that we be *counting*; that the fear of ‘losing an opportunity’ be the spur of life. ... Everything must from now on enter the domain of the profitable. Everything in life becomes of value, even the waste. And we ourselves become *crewards*, waste”. (93)

As the marketing of ways of life, in all of their many dimensions, proceeds apace, capitalism reveals itself not so much an economy of production and sales, but of transforming relations and realities into countable, measurable values. Herein lies its oceanic reserve of accumulation. “Capitalism is the universal extension of *measure*”. (94)

In economic language, this finds expression at one level in the concept of “human capital”. The idea that human beings own themselves, their labor and what they produce through it can be traced back to classical political economy and to Marx. And in both instances, “man” (for it was invariably *male* labor that was conceptualized) was the owner of something which he could supposedly alienate while still remaining himself. The labor was given over, as dictated by need, but the laborer continued to be, in the process, whom he was essentially, the *owner* and therefore *master* of his labor power.

“With the theory of human capital, man is less the holder of an indefinite aggregate of capital—cultural, relational, professional, financial, symbolic, sexual, health—than s/he is her/himself that aggregation. S/he is capital. S/he arbitrates permanently between the growth of what s/he is as capital, and the fact of selling to this or that market. S/he is inseparably the producer, the product and the seller of the product. Successful footballers, actors, stars, youtubers are logically the heroes of the epoch of human capital, they whose value coincides completely with who they are. The micro-economy thus becomes the general science of behavior, whether it be in the company, the church or in love. Which is to say that each becomes a company guided by the constant concern of self-valorization, by a vital imperative of self-promotion. Man becomes essentially the *optimizing creature* – the *Crevard*”. (95)

...

fragile, forms of life rooted in the earth of local spaces (e.g., the indigenous), or the rebellious faces that affirm momentary, seemingly ungovernable, identities before the oblivion of the spectacle (e.g., “undocumented” migrants and refugees), or of those “identities” expressed in the circular dialectics of dissidence and control (e.g., “women” under “liberal” governments, ethnic “minorities” in regimes of “multiculturalism”, homosexual and lesbian “minorities” harnessed in patriarchal paradigms of “home economy”, etc.). All of these identities, and others, serve or have served to ground politics of resistance, revolution *as well as* institutionalized politics. And States have relatively little difficulty in managing or absorbing them when circumstances and/or needs dictate. That is, their rebellious potential is invariably limited and their rise to power is inevitably reproductive of new oppressions and exclusions. The problem then lies deeper and radical thought and practice must move beyond concerns with sovereign identities, the liberation of peoples and State power.

The Invisible Committee’s most recent essay *Now*, argues that the problem abides in the separation of politics from other spheres of life. Politics is thus *reified*, made a *thing*, something that can be referred to by the use of a *noun*. If however it is denoted by the use of an *adjective*, then it reveals itself not as something substantive, fixed, but rather as *a way of being—one is politically*—way of being in the world in opposition to, in conflict with, other ways of being.

“There are conflicts, there are encounters, there are actions, there is the expression of views which are ‘political’, because they stand decisively in a given situation against something, because they carry an affirmation regarding the world that they desire. Politics erupts, is an event, breaches the regulated course of disaster. It generates polarization, sharing, taking sides. There is however no such thing as “politics”. There is no specific domain that gathers together all of these events, all of these occurrences independently of the place and the moment where they happen. There is not a particular sphere where the affairs of all would be addressed. There is not a separate sphere for what is general. ... Everything which is of the nature of an encounter, the friction or conflict between forms of life, between regimes of perception, between sensibilities, between worlds *from the moment that this contact attains a certain threshold of intensity* is political. The crossing of this threshold is signaled immediately by its effects: battle lines are traced, friendships and enmities are affirmed, the uniform surface of the social cracks, what was falsely united shatters and subterranean communications between the different fragments are born.” (59–60)

The French Spring of 2016 was thus not a *social movement*, but a *political conflict*. Social movements have a frame, a liturgy, a ceremonial, with everything that falls outside of this being defined as excessive. However, what characterized the events of 2016 was that they continually overflowed this framework,

whether it was set by political parties, labor unions or the police. In sum, the French Spring was an uninterrupted series of excesses, moments of political transgression; and this was the greatest virtue of Nuit Debout (against all of those who sought, and finally succeeded in, domesticating it). “The only ‘demand of the movement’—the abrogation of the El Khomri labor law—was not one, insofar as it left no room for any arrangement, any ‘dialogue’. In its entirely negative nature, it meant only the refusal to continue to be so governed, and for some, the refusal to *simply* be governed. ... It was a frontal collision between two forces—government against demonstrators—between two worlds and two *ideas* of the world: one of craving beggars led by a few kings of beggars, and a world comprised of many worlds, where one breaths, where one dances and where one lives.” (61–2)

What comes to light in every eruption of politics is the irreducible plurality of human ways of being and doing, resistant to any totalization. The unity of capitalist spectacle is thus radically anti-political and any opposition to State-Capital is, in its affirmation of the possibility and reality of *ways* of life, essentially political. “We have to abandon the idea that there is politics only where there is a vision, program, project and perspective, where there is a goal, decisions to be made and problems to be resolved. The only true politics is that which arises from life and which makes of it a determined, directed reality. And that is born from those who are near us, and not from what is projected on those distant from us. The near does not mean the restricted, the limited, the narrow, the local. It means rather the agreed upon, the vibrant, the adequate, the present, the sensible, the luminous and the familiar—the graspable and comprehensible. It is not a spatial concept, but ethical.” (63)

“It is only in contact that the friend and the enemy are discovered. A political situation does not proceed from a decision, but from the shock or the encounter of many decisions.” (63)

The plurality of conflicting forms of life that engenders politics echoes Carl Schmitt’s definition of politics as grounded in the opposition of friend and foe. But for Schmitt, this opposition must find expression in a sovereign-constitutional form; that is, in a State (child in turn of the *decision* on the exception). Otherwise, the tensions, conflicts, will only engender chaos. For the Invisible Committee, the constituted State of the friend-enemy distinction is the expression of alienated politics and the suppression of *ethoses*, forms of life, under the weight of *institutional* structures.

“The real has something of the intrinsically chaotic which humans have a need to stabilize by imposing on it a readability and, in this way, a predictability. And what every institution provides is precisely an *arrested* readability of the real, an *eventual* stabilization of phenomena. If the institution so works out for us, it is because the kind of readability that it guarantees above all saves us, us, each one of us, from *affirming* anything, of risking our singular reading

In selling her/his time, in making her/himself the subject of that for which s/he is employed, the salaried worker places the meaning of their existence in the hands of those for whom it is indifferent, or even whose vocation is to tread on it. Salaried labor permitted generations of men and women to live eluding the question of the meaning of life, in ‘making themselves useful’, in ‘making a career’, in ‘serving’. The worker was always free to leave this question for later—let us say, until retirement—while leading an honorable social life. And as it is ‘too late’, it appears, once retired to ask it, nothing remains but to patiently await death. One will have thus succeeded in spending a whole life without ever having really lived. Salaried labor therefore relieved us of the cumbersome burden of meaning and human freedom. Munch’s *The Scream* does not draw for nothing, today still, the true face of contemporary humanity. What this despairing figure does not find on his jetty is the answer to the question ‘how to live?’” (89–90)

The fragmentation of the society of labor offers opportunities for reorganization, as well as risk. “The risk is that humans will make an unpredictable use of their time and their life, even taking to heart the question of its meaning”. (90–1) To avoid then such “existential” freedom, the new “free” time is colonized, invested by demands for consumption. Objects and patterns of consumption become socially obligatory, deemed the source of pleasure and joy. To not consume, or to not wish to do so, is eccentric, even a sign of psychological malaise. And should the temples and fantasies of consumption fail to seduce, technologies and professions of control fill the gap. And when these fail, the police intervenes.

“Instead of seeing the current headlong rush towards security and the orgy of control as a response to the September 11th attacks, it would not be foolish to see them rather as a response to the established economic fact that it was precisely from the year 2000 that, for the first time, technological innovation lead to a reduction in the volume of employment. It is now necessary to be able to survey en masse each of our activities, each of our communications, each of our gestures, place cameras and sensors everywhere, *because salary discipline is no longer sufficient to control the population*. One can only dream of offering a universal basic income to a perfectly controlled population”. (91)

But what is fundamental in the new economy lies elsewhere. To preserve the political reign of the economy beyond the salary, money is made to pervade ever larger spaces and times of social relations. Money is made to become the universal mediator of activities. “In the absence of labor, the necessity to earn money must be maintained”. (92)

“We are witness to a handover of reign in the heart of the economy. The majestic figure of the Worker is succeeded by that, rachtic, of the *Crevard* [in french, the word suggests someone who is dying of hunger, who is dying, but who is also greedy] – for however much money and control may infiltrate every-



IF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE THE WORLD OVER CONTINUE TO LABOR for salaries in centers of industrial production and service provision, and to be conscripted into such labor, millions of others are made superfluous by the same economy.

Even those employed work under increasingly violent forms of precariousness; their usefulness is at best measured.

The former eulogy of labor and social integration through labor of industrial capitalism (and its mirrored reflection in *institutionalized* socialisms and communisms) dies in an economy whose only aim is the expanding reproduction of itself, that is, of calculable benefits. The needs of workers and consumers are but the means to this end, needs which can and must be dominated and exploited, and in parallel, also ignored and forgotten, depending on their value. And the ever more rapid and expanded use of technology in production reduces increasingly large numbers to being valueless. If capitalism could reproduce itself without humans, then our fate would be finally decided.

The “commodity form”, with its domination of “use value” by “exchange value” in capitalism, or the sway of “spectacle”, under which all representations are in turn commodified, as analyzed respectively by Karl Marx and Guy Debord, only take us so far in the understanding of the contemporary economy.

The “crisis” or death of labor, revealed in the growing superfluousness of the many, is testimony to the *totalitarian* nature of an “economy” that is essentially a form of *government*. The economy of labor however was equally so. And thus the political absurdity, in the present, of a promised return to “full-employment” (under current conditions, it is not possible, as it was not in the past for different reasons and on a different scale), and the blindness, in the past, of the celebration of work, among political actors from the Right to the Left.

Salaried labor was a transformation of older relations of servitude. It also sought to and does create “slaves”, that is, subjectivities susceptible to and accepting of particular forms of administration and extraction of human energy. “To make of a man the ‘the holder of his labor power’ and be disposed to ‘sell it’, that is, to make habitual the figure of the Worker, that is something which calls for a great deal of spoliation, expulsion, pillage and devastation, along with ample terror, disciplinary measures and death. The political character of the economy cannot be grasped if attention is given only to the returns on work; the latter has less to do with producing merchandise than with producing workers—in other words, a certain relation to the self, the world and others. Salaried labor was the way of maintaining a certain order. The fundamental violence that it contains, that which has us forget the broken body of the assembly line worker, the miner killed by a methane explosion or the burn out of employees under extreme managerial pressure, shapes the meaning of life.

of life and things, of producing together an intelligibility of the world that is ours and common to us. The problem is that in renouncing to do that, we simply renounce to exist.” (67–8)

“In reality, what we need are not institutions, but *forms*. Now it turns out that life, whether it is biological, singular or collective, is precisely the continuous creation of forms. ... Everything that lives is nothing but forms and interactions of forms.” (68)

While forms are plural and passionate, institutions are contemptuous of life. “The great malice of the idea of institution is to pretend that it would free us from the reign of passions, the uncontrollable hazards of existence, that it is beyond passions when it is one among them, and certainly one of the most morbid.” (69) To some degree, institutions, even if only temporarily, establish a fragile release from the uncertainties of human life, becoming, time, establishing a “little palpable eternity”, a simulation of death. (69–70)

The whole illusion however dissolves before the eruption of rebellion and revolution. Events strip away the facade of the institution, revealing so many sordid interests, passions, malevolence, miserable competition, that animate those who assure the institution’s functioning. “Every institution is, even in its very regularity, the result of intense makeshift interventions [“bricolage”] and, as an institution, the denial of this. Its alleged fixity masks a glutenous appetite to absorb, control, institutionalize everything that is marginal to it and which harbors a bit of life.” (70) Appearing as a means to the end of the *rational* ordering of life, the institution quickly becomes an end in itself. Its failure to fully control, its internal dysfunctions, are part of how it operates; paradoxically, the institution exists between the need to control life, while nourishing itself on its indomitable resistance. (71)

Plural forms of life are the fresh daily flesh upon which institutions feed. And each historical revolution, in its aspiration to conquer power, has only re-enacted the circle of rebellion-constitution-rebellion. It is this circle that must be broken; something that the Invisible Committee envisages through the notion of revolution as a *destituent* power, in opposition to *constituent* power and exemplified in the French May of 1968, the long Italian May and the so many insurrectionary communes. And if the many “occupy” movements failed in this regard, it is because they quickly put into play the old revolutionary dialectic that aims to oppose to “constituted powers”, the “constituting power” of a people invading public space. (74)

In the logic of *constituent* and *constituted* power, politics revolves around the appropriation and organization of political, sovereign authority. It is this, however, at least on one level, that condemns all “revolution” (and one can add supposed “radical” reform) to failure. Destituent power seeks rather to escape sovereignty. “The gesture specific to it is *to exit*, while the constituent gesture is to take by assault. In a destituent logic, the struggle against the

## Government By The Economy: The Invisible Committee's Now

State and capital is first exiting from the lived capitalist normality, deserting the shitty relations experienced to oneself, to others and to the world.” (76) It obeys the vital necessity of pulling away. It does not regulate itself by the movements of the adversary, “but by the expansion of what its own power requires.” (76–7). It does not exhaust itself in criticism—to do so is to remain in the space of the adversary. Instead, it flees, to employ the language of Gilles Deleuze; without forgetting to pick up a weapon. (Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*)

This last remark may suggest an analogy that takes us back to a conflict between powers for sovereignty. But the “weapons” in question are of a different nature, because to flee is not to escape. It is rather to create what Deleuze calls runoffs through the cracks of a social system. That is, the creation of forms of life beyond the State and Capital are already weapons, the only weapons worthy of a revolution. (Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*)

“The true fecundity of an action resides in its very interior. This does not mean that there is no question for us regarding the verifiable efficacy of an action. What it does mean is that the power of the impact of an action resides not in its effects, but in what it itself expresses immediately. What is built on the exclusive basis of effort always ends up collapsing due to exhaustion.” (77)

At the heart of a radical politics of destitution, the aim is not to criticize or attack the institution (symptoms of a desire for it), but our need for it. In the words of Nietzsche, “Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster; for if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes back into you.” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*) It is to do what the institution is perhaps sought for, and to do whatever it is (fundamentally satisfying perceived basic needs) outside of the institution, or to step beyond it altogether. “The destituent gesture does not *oppose* the institution, it does not lead a frontal attack against it; the gesture neutralizes it, empties it of its substance, it takes a step aside and watches the institution expire.” (79)

What is at stake here is the very notion of “revolution”: can it be rethought in such a way that it continues to render comprehensible and desirable a certain “political” project, or must it be jettisoned as terminally corrupt or moribund? For the Invisible Committee, the idea remains defensible, but only after a profound re-conceptualization.

“The traditional revolutionary program was that of regaining control of the world, of expropriating the expropriators, a violent appropriation of what is ours, but of which we have been deprived. However, capital has taken hold of every detail and of every dimension of existence. It makes a world after its own image. From the exploitation of existing forms of life, it has mutated into a total universe. It has configured, equipped and rendered desirable the ways of speaking, of thinking, of eating, of working and of going on vacation, of obeying and of rebelling that are convenient to it. In doing so, it has reduced

*The astonishing reality of things  
Is my discovery every day.  
Each thing is what it is,  
And it's hard to explain to someone how much this makes me happy,  
How much it's enough for me.  
If I stretch out my arm, I get exactly where my arm gets –  
Not even a centimeter farther.  
I only touch where I touch, not where I think.  
I can only sit down where I am.  
And that's funny like all really true truths,  
But what's really funny is that we're always thinking something else,  
And we live truant from our reality.  
And we're always outside it because we're here.*  
Alberto Caeiro/Fernando Pessoa, *The Keeper of Flocks*



to very little what one might, in this world, want to appropriate.” (81–2)

But then Nietzsche’s monster rears its head, as the Invisible Committee imagines a duality in its politics/anti-politics of destitution. “On the one hand, there are worlds to make, forms of life to make grow apart from that which reigns, including recuperating what can be in the current state of things, and on the other hand, to attack, to destroy the world of capital. A double gesture that doubles itself again: obviously the worlds that we construct only maintain their distance in relation to capital by their complicity with the fact of attacking and conspiring against it.” (83–4) Without this opposition, confrontation, the construction of new worlds would exhaust itself in sterile activism. “In the destruction is constructed the complicity on the basis of which is constructed the meaning of the destruction. And vice versa.” (84) A double movement then, of creation and destruction, each of which is in turn complicit with the other, each bestowing mutual meaning on the other.

“The destituent gesture is thus desertion and attack, elaboration and plunder, and that *from the same gesture*. It defies at the same time the accepted alternatives and the standard activism. ... It is not a question here of a new social contract, but of a new strategic composition of worlds.” (85)

The setting aside of any new constitution would seem to push away the ambitions of recuperation and novel sovereignty. The destituent gesture is one of withdrawal, but withdrawal is not escape; indeed, no escape is possible. Yet if retreat or self-removal is married to attack, then the latter risks colonizing the very gesture of creativity, subjecting it to the vicissitudes of a *politics* of conflict and war for position and invariably enslaving the *creativity* of destitution to the logic (masculinist, vanguardist, and so on) of the struggle for hegemony.

This is not an argument for passivity. It is rather an effort to intensify the implications of *destitution*.

Constituent politics is structured around a conception of political life, distinct from other spheres of life, and even life itself (political *bios* versus *zoe*). Political life is then the *actualization* of what we as human beings carry with us *potentially*; an actualization that thus involves the isolation, suspension from, that which is mere life, something shared with plants and animals. The substance of politics, or political life as a substance, is the realization of what “man” can be fully, in opposition to all of that and to all of those who must inevitably fall outside of the political order.

It is in this sense that constituent politics is a politics of sovereignty, in the most profound sense: it not only is constitutive of a political authority, but of *subjectivities* appropriate to that order. Those not suitable are thus to be excluded, marginalized, banned; they are Carl Schmitt’s *exception*, *enemy*, those against which sovereignty is defined.

By then bringing the enemy into *political life*, as they conceive of the latter, as

a *mode of being* integrated into other spheres of life and *opposed* to other ways of being in the world, the Invisible Committee risks edifying anew the logic of sovereignty precisely when it thought it was freeing politics from it. And the doubly bounded gesture of creativity and destruction only heightens that risk.

Conceptually, we move away from the logic of sovereignty by understanding that the power to be, what one is potentially, is not defined first by what one is or can be *actually*, but by the power *not to be* what one can be. As a pianist, I am able to play the piano, but as a pianist, I am someone who first may or may not play the piano. And thus playing the piano is not something that I am condemned to, but something that I “freely” assume, or desire. In the same manner, and in parallel, a political regime is an actualization of a human community potential, but what defines that political reality is the possibility that the regime can be otherwise or not at all. A sovereign authority is not then *the* actualization of a dimension of human nature that can only be made real under institutionalized political authority, but the expression of one form of human community which need not be.

If all of this sounds excessively abstract, what is at stake conceptually is not. To understand that sovereignty is not the necessary realization of what we are in *potentia*, that it is only so through the exclusionary violence of the exception, that we are never first merely *naked*, to be molded and shaped as *civilized*, *policed*, by political power, that this violence is permanent as long as power is caught in sovereignty and that this violence fails permanently because it is not the expression of what any “people” are by nature, then it is possible to begin to heal the rift separating *political life* from *life*, and understand that all lives are already expressions of *forms of life*. It is then in autonomous, self-managed *forms of life* of growing intensity that lives beyond capital can begin to gain shape.

What thereby gains body however is not to be consumed in the burning flames of a police vehicle or the smashed windows of a bank, or more modestly, in ritualized mass protest. All of these can be recuperated by the spectacle. A far greater power resides in building without banks and police, that is, without the apparatuses of control of capital, to which we so quickly run in times of need.

Stated differently, we must try to imagine a politics of destitution as pulling us away from the concept and practice of politics as war. All war presupposes and creates the divide between friend and enemy, mine and thine; and all sovereignty and property depends on war. To endeavor to live beyond the violent fiction of sovereignty is thus to take us away from property, hierarchical political power and war. To say that such is impossible is to condemn us to the disaster that is our reality. To insist that radical, anti-capitalist politics must battle for the control of power, is to render impotent that politics under the guise of false courage.

Walter Benjamin once wrote that there is nothing more anarchic than the bourgeois order. And Pier Paolo Passolini could put into the mouth of one of the fascists of his film *Salò*, “True anarchy is of that of power”. Anarchism as a political *ideology* and *practice* has always been haunted by the seduction of power and it is by no means historically innocent. It is not then in any oppositional position against that which is, that anarchism will affirm its *an-archy*. Power in fact feeds on anarchy as its hidden food; it is power’s radical other. It is then and instead when nothing appears more anarchic than the established order that anarchy will free itself from its false master, from power; in such a setting, there will no longer be anything to conquer, to appropriate. The task will be rather to assume that all is “anarchic”, that the State decreed state of exception is permanent, that power is empty except for the gun, and to step away. The aim will not be to become a new power, but to occupy consciously that position where all that is, is understood as a possibility that need not be; that we may always *not be* what we are and thus that we remake ourselves, endlessly.

“[W]e must recognize that the principal enemy of freedom is not the authoritarianism of others, but our own and unconfessed authoritarianism, above all when one believes oneself to be the depository, the guardian and the most qualified representative of the ideological orthodoxy. ... I believe then that the hour has arrived to stand for an anti-authoritarian anarchism, for anarchy and not for anarchism as a sect, in its ivory tower or as a pressure group. ... The crucial problem for anarchism today is that of the imposture, of not being an anti-authoritarian, anti-dogmatic, anti-demagogic and anti-bureaucratic anarchism, that of not being open to all anti-authoritarian currents and practices, that of not having freed itself from idols and complexes of persecution. ... We all know now that the dilemma is not between spontaneity and organization, but in finding a form of organization that does not combat, that does not kill spontaneity, that is sustained from it.” (Octavio Alberola, *Revolución o colapso*)