

# INSURGENT THOUGHT IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD

A review of The Invisible Committee's new book, *Now*  
Nicolas Truong | *Le Monde* | 20.04.2017



Back when globalization was still an ideal, we heard witty minds announce the end of history, perpetual peace, and the reign of liberal democracy. Today the planet is everywhere disintegrating into internecine wars and electoral insurrections. This is the new world insanity [*déraison*]. This is the world whose fall the rioters of the "Invisible Committee" aim to precipitate, by means of clashes with the police and theoretical offensives. Following on *The Coming Insurrection* (2007) and *To Our Friends* (2014), this group of revolutionaries - some of whose presumptive members, such as Julien Coupat and Mathieu Burnel - remain suspects in the so-called "Tarnac Affair" investigations - have just released a new work. Its title, *Now*, nicely sums up both their sense of urgency and their need for immanence. The urgency of a revolution in the face of the rising forces of reaction; immanence of the bodies and capacities [*puissance*] of the moment—impatience and violence. For the Invisible Committee, critique must submerge itself in action: "All the criticism of financial capitalism

forms a pale figure when one looks upon a bank window that's been smashed out and tagged, "Here's your agio!"<sup>1</sup>

To reach the heart of this philosophy of the riot, some may need to get over the revulsion they experience at its aestheticization of violence, its heroic portrayal of bashed-out bus shelters, or the annoyance that its staging of photos of hooded youth can provoke. As theoretical manual for « *guérilla des bocages* » [guerrillas of the grove], such those at the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, and for « *cortèges de tête* » ["heads of the march"], such as those from the demonstrations against the labor law, this work allows us to access the state of mind of today's insurgent youth.

It being election season right now, their will to have done with politics is evident. France is described as the "land of power" [*pay du pouvoir*], a veritable "court society," where a myriad of "Sun Kings" reign, from high and low and in every institution and party, each with its processions of flatterers and coteries. This religion of power is a "cultural disease," they insist, which affects parliament no less than it does the ultra-left: "Each little group scrambles after scraps on the radical marketplace by inveighing as brutally as possible against its closest rivals".

## A "Destituent Insurrection"

Nuit Debout? The movement at the Place de la Republique undoubtedly offered the occasion for some "beautiful encounters", but it was certainly not a new Paris Commune. Above all, the rule laid down by the "Nuit deBoutistes", which enforced a serialization of speeches followed by no effective decisions, and led to a sort of "legislative organ deprived of executive power", ended up crushing the movement under a "disjointed string<sup>2</sup> of Leftist monologues" and a "microphone bureaucracy". Hence our insurgents' refusal to "do politics differently", as is so often said, and their desire to do "something other than politics". But what exactly? A revolution, of course. But, more precisely, a veritable "destituent insurrection", which, like May 1968, seeks to free itself from the constituted institutions—state, school, university—whose model remains the Church.

But if "all the reasons to make a revolution are there," they assure us, why doesn't this generalized insurrection ever come? Because of the permanence of the "society of the spectacle" of which Guy Debord spoke, i.e. a world of commodities in which the individual contemplates his own life as a spectator behind an accumulation of images: "it's not reasons that make revolutions, but bodies. And their bodies are in front of the screens", lament the authors. The insurrection doesn't arrive because money corrodes life, gangrenes both body and mind. Accounting has seeped into the very heart of our intimacies: "Before Airbnb, an unoccupied room at

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<sup>1</sup> Agio: a term used in commerce for exchange rate, discount or premium. Agios (ἄγιος) is also a Greek word meaning "Sacred" or "Saint".

<sup>2</sup> "*Chapelet decousu*": the term *chapelet* can also refer to saying the Rosary. -IWE

home was a guest room (...), whereas now it's lost income. Before Blablacar, to travel alone in your car was an opportunity to daydream (...), now it's an opportunity to make a little cash." These youth refuse politics no less than they do an economy that reduces the existence of the "exhausted ones" [*crevard*] of today to the sort of despair that Edward Munch once painted in *The Scream*.

This is why, they assert, the opposition to the labor law of the spring of 2016 was not a social movement, but rather a "political conflict, as May 68 was". The comparison of slogans (from 1968's "*power to the imagination*" to today's "*in ashes, everything becomes possible*") will perhaps make one smile, and certainly allows one to glimpse the passage from the joy of the 1960s to the darkness of our times. The apologies for "looting", "destruction" and "smashing", never mind the discussions of "bricking cops," will chill even the most hardened of readers. Yet it is when our insurgents are the least predictable that they are the most powerful. When they describe their revolt as a lyrical and enraged quest for the "meaning of life", when they remind the initiated that communism was germinated in the *Book of Psalms* and in apocryphal texts, or that "the class struggle dates back at least to the Prophets of Jewish antiquity". Or when they venture, in the wake of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, to describe what new "forms-of-life" could be. In spite of, and even against, their apologies for violent acts, if we wish to understand the chaos of our time, it is important to read these impatient young people attempting to "force open the door of the present".

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