

## APHORISTIC LINES OF FLIGHT

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### APHORISTIC LINES OF FLIGHT IN *THE COMING INSURRECTION*: IRONIES OF FORGETTING YET FORGING THE PAST— AN ANAMNESIS FOR GEORGE JACKSON<sup>1</sup>

The characteristic of truth is that it escapes, barely enunciated,  
from those who formulate it.

—Julien Coupat, *Le Monde* 25 May 2009

Comrade Depestre  
It is undoubtedly a very serious problem  
the elation between poetry and Revolution  
the content determines the form

and what about keeping in mind as well the dialectical  
backlash by which the form taking its revenge  
chokes the poem like an accursed fig tree.

—Aimé Césaire, *The Verb "Maronner"/for René Depestre, Haitian poet*

#### I. STICKS, GUNS, AND WEAPONS: TEXTUAL STRATEGIES OF *THE COMING INSURRECTION*

This essay is an *anamnesis* for George Jackson. *Anamnesis* derives from the ancient Greek word signifying a recollection, to call back, to actively remember; it is also related to the Roman evocation used to call out to protecting Gods imploring them to abandon enemy cities. In the Platonic dialogue *Meno*, Socrates is confronted with the paradox of one who tries to know something: in this dialogue, virtue. How does one recognize an unknown when it is finally found is the question at hand. Menon only provides Socrates with examples of types of virtues, i.e., he cannot break out of the logic loop of descriptive examples in order to posit a general definition of virtue. Socrates poses a synthesis: Menon already knew what he was seeking

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank: *The Situations Study Group*, Michael Pelias, Richard Dienst, Sampada Aranke for their feedback on this essay, John Clark and all the participants of *The Left Forum* panel where this essay originated, Bill Difazio for providing a forum on WBAI, Seth Adler for his work on The Left Forum, Brent Edwards and his graduate research assistant for making available Columbia University library's copy of *Milles Plateaux* and Edwards's help with matters of French translation. All errors are my own.

so he has to re-remember— Philosophical remembrance here is a re-remembering, a learning what one has already forgotten, hence what one always already knows. This essay constitutes an exercise of active remembrance of Black liberation theorist George Jackson and reads Jackson's writings against prevailing logics of a text, *The Coming Insurrection*, hell bent on severing ties to revolutionary pasts.

George Jackson is evoked here as a hedge against the current conjecture's (both in its revolutionary and hegemonic variants) propensity to forget. I rememorate a past through an exploration of Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of "lines of flight" (in which the authors cite amongst their many examples, the writing of George Jackson)<sup>2</sup> against a kinetic, exciting but flawed French radical manifesto, *The Coming Insurrection*, that consists of aphoristic insights operating as what I call insights that flee. As a consequence of its avant-garde form that privileges newness and scorns what is old, *The Coming Insurrection* confuses its radical formal hostility to prior models with a political program. There is a dual function to my usage of Jackson here. Juxtaposing Deleuze's and Guattari's "lines of flight" with "insights that flee" supplements the French text with a much needed density. As well, Jackson's writings contribute a corrective dialectical savvy, a philosophical rejoinder, and an exercise in force theory (to conjure some of the writings of Frederick Engels) to Deleuze's and Guattari's corpus of collaborative work.<sup>3</sup>

There is a terminological slippage between sticks, guns and weapons in the interstices of *The Coming Insurrection*. Such slippage often occurs as consequences of translation and such variations house politics, political resonances brought to the fore via an act of reading. In this essay, the political consequences of one's theoretical frames—the history housed in such choices, as well as the insistent preoccupation of *The Coming Insurrection* with denying revolutionary pasts constitute my primary interest. What is prescient here in Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's conceptualization of "lines of flight" is the force of one of their examples, the Black liberation movement theorist George Jackson).<sup>4</sup> I will engage Jackson's work to posit

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Fred Moten— Upon completion of this essay, he alerted me to an essay on Deleuze and Jackson: Koerner, Michelle. "Line of Escape: Gilles Deleuze's Encounter with George Jackson." *Genre*. 44.2 Summer 2011. It is encouraging to share (evoking Deleuze's notion) *resonances* with Koerner's brilliant essay.

<sup>3</sup> For an extended discussion of George Jackson's influence on Deleuze see Thoburn, Nicholas. *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Wald, Karen. "Remembering the Red Dragon—An Interview with George Jackson May 16 and June 29, 1971." (<http://historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/jacksoninterview.html>) Accessed May 9, 2011.

a reading strategy to examine the political strategies of The Invisible Committee's manifesto, *The Coming Insurrection*.<sup>5</sup> Its insights on the art of insurrection read as a kind of aphoristic flight pattern—the text's piercing diagnosis of the contemporary condition, and its impressively forceful rhetorical execution in favor of the necessity to defy the existing world order constitute a series of escaped truths. It is aphoristic in so far that its greatest moments textually condense and distill. In their condensed precision such insights formally disengage from the stifling (to use one of the manifesto's keywords) *milieu* that is the manifesto itself. It (the text) flies away, in that its words provide poetic impetus for anti-systemic action in locales other than the Greece and France it immediately evokes.<sup>6</sup> It consists of what cofounder of the radical philosophy journal *Tiqqun* and alleged author, Julian Coupat designates as “enunciations that escape.” Yet, the blanket hostility to past revolutionary models performed over and over again in *The Coming Insurrection* signals a watering down of the philosophical and studied rigor of both Jackson's work and Deleuze's and Guattari's evocation of it. Insights that flee and Jacksonian lines of flight share intensity of elocution (force), but the first lacks the kind of density imperative to the sustainability of revolutionary projects.

Deleuze and Guattari's evocation of Black Panther Party Field Marshal and imprisoned radical intellectual<sup>7</sup> George Jackson provides a counterpoint to the political vision and methodology that one finds in *The Coming Insurrection*;<sup>8</sup> how aphoristic insight flees one context and resurfaces in another. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and the essay “Politics” by Deleuze and Claire Parnet in the volume *On the Line* (1983) and the original source, Jackson's letter to activist attorney Fay Stender from his epistolary work *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (1970) constitute three “lines of flight”:

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<sup>5</sup> Originally published in Paris, 2007 as *L'insurrection qui vient*.

<sup>6</sup> For a useful survey of the Greek context see: *We Are An Image From the Future: The Greek Revolt of December 2008*. Eds. A.G. Schwarz, Tasos Sagris, and Void Network. Oakland, Edinburgh, Baltimore: AK Press, 2010. Note that the designation of past events as an image from the future coincides with what this essay will emphasize as *The Coming Insurrection's* concern with temporality and not restricting the options available in constructing revolutionary futures.

<sup>7</sup> “Imprisoned radical intellectuals” is Dylan Rodriguez's term. Rodriguez, Dylan. *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Surely this is an example of what Said theorizes as “traveling theory.” For an explanation of “traveling theory” see: Said, Edward W. *The World, The Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983. 226-247.

Lines of flight, for their part, never consist in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a hole in a pipe; there is no social system that does not leak from all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight. There is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic, about a line of flight. There is nothing more active than a line of flight, among animals or humans. Even History is forced to take that route rather than proceeding by “signifying breaks.” What is escaping in a society at a given moment? It is on lines of flight that new weapons are invented, to be turned against the heavy arms of the State. “I may be running, but I’m looking for a gun as I go” (George Jackson).<sup>9</sup>

History’s greatest geographic adventures are lines of flight: the long marches by foot, horse, or boat; the Hebrews in the desert, Genseric the Vandal crossing the Mediterranean, the nomads across the steppes, the Great March of the Chinese—it’s always along a line of flight that we create because there we are tracing the real and composing a plane of consistency, not simply imagining or dreaming. *Flee, but while fleeing, pick up a weapon.*<sup>10</sup>

In the inclusive sense, my politics, you’ll find all of the atypical features of my character. *I may run, but all the time that I am, I’ll be looking for a stick! A defensible position!* It’s never occurred to me to lie down and be kicked! It’s silly! When I do that I’m depending on the kicker to grow tired. The better tactic is to twist his leg a little or pull it off if you can. An intellectual argument to an attacker against the logic of his violence—or one to myself concerning the wisdom of natural counterviolence—borders on, no, it overleaps the absurd!<sup>11</sup>

I will return to the critical importance of these three variations in my conclusion; for now, it will suffice to explain why “lines of flight” help clarify the work of *The Coming Insurrection* and indicate the main questions this essay raises.

A key stake for Deleuze and Guattari is the utility for revolutionary practice and theory of the Hegelian dialectic. A first ‘line’ of attack: For Deleuze and Guattari, the Hegelian dialectic is one of piety because in its all its

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<sup>9</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1987. 204.

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *On the Line*. Trans. John Johnston. NY: Semiotext(e), 1983. 91-2. Jackson is also mentioned in Deleuze, Gilles. “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature.” Deleuze, Gilles, and Claire Parnet 1977. *Dialogues II*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. London: Continuum, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, George. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. NY: Bantam Books, Inc., 1970. 246.

negative energy, in all its propulsion via negation it still, in the last instance, conserves what it negates. Their alternative, what they call “schizoanalysis” disturbs this pious conservation that total hinders total destruction:

“Destroy, destroy. The task of schizoanalysis goes by way of destruction—a whole scouring of the unconscious, a complete curettage. Destroy Oedipus, the illusion of the ego, the puppet of the superego, guilt, the law, castration. It is not a matter of pious destructions, such as those performed by psychoanalysis under the benevolent neutral eye of the analyst. For these are Hegel-style destructions, ways of conserving.”<sup>12</sup>

The authors employ “lines of flight” and their related concept of the *rhizome* as countermeasures against what they perceive as the limiting moment of synthesis in the Marxian (via Hegel) dialectic, one that allegedly houses the false pretense of totality, teleology and truth. I qualify this understanding of the Marxian dialectic to acknowledge both the facts that both their *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* are grounded in research, clinical practice, and polemic and that both volumes’ polemical component might eclipse a nuanced understanding of the Marxian dialectic that can account for their concerns. In Deleuze and Guattari’s paradoxically anti-dialectical dialectical interplay of theory and practice (they were both, in dialogue as and with practicing clinicians), their emphasis on flight patterns to resist various enclosures (in revolutionary politics, in aesthetic endeavors, in the psychoanalytic clinical framework) is motivated by their praxis within a psychoanalytic register.<sup>13</sup> What they call schizo-analysis works as a countermeasure exploding the reliance on and centrality of contradiction in Marxist models. Flight is victorious here:

“Basically, a Marxist is recognized by his assertion that a society contradicts itself, that it is defined by its contradictions. We say rather that in a society everything flees, and that a society is defined by its lines of flight, which affect masses of every kind (once again, “mass” is a molecular notion” (*On the Line*, 91).

Put another way: “One becomes two: each time we encounter this formula, whether expressed strategically by Mao, or understood the most “dialectically,” we find ourselves dealing with the most classical and often

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<sup>12</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. Guattari, & Félix. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. University of Minnesota Press; Minneapolis, 1996. 311.

<sup>13</sup> Dosse, François. *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. Intersecting Lives*. Trans. Deborah Glassman. New York: Columbia U Press, 2010; Guattari, Félix. *The Anti-Oedipus Papers*. Trans. Stéphane Nadaud. NY: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 2006.

considered, the oldest and most worn out thought. Nature does not work this way, but forms ever more ramifying taproot systems (*les raciness... pivotantes*), which are lateral and circular but not dichotomous" (6). Rhizomatic structure (borrowed from botany) is opposed here to dialectical "unity"—or, synthesis:

"Unity always works within an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered (over-coding). But a rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded, never disposes of a dimension supplementary to the number of its lines, that is, to the multiplicity of numbers attached to these lines"(16).

It is this resistance to overcoding that resonates with the political concerns and formal attributes of *The Coming Insurrection*. I evoke it as a frame to think the strategies of the text because it indeed, resonates. Neither my orientation of Deleuze and Guattari nor Jackson is for the purpose of setting up an arbitrary juxtaposition to read all texts anew; rather, Deleuze and Guattari help to offer a strategy of engagement to both highlight and unpack the telling formal construction of *The Coming Insurrection* and the theoretical work of Jackson unsettles a great deal of its assumptions. Such formal and thematic attributes in the manifesto<sup>14</sup> are in service of a revolutionary strategy that refuses overcoding via the inheritance of past models. Its collective authorship refuses to constitute itself via reliance on a particular political strategy from days past prior to actual engagement. In Rhizome analysis the providence of music trumps dialectical thought. "Music has never ceased to set off these lines of flight, as so many 'multiplicities of transformation,' even by altering the codes that structure it or render it arborescent. That is why musical form, even in its ruptures and proliferations, is comparable to a weed, a rhizome" (*On the Line*, 24). This sheds light on *The Coming Insurrection's* affinity for "resonance." Resonance (related to the rhythmic) is a crucial term here that a great deal of the left seems to have forgotten:

"Revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination but by resonance...An insurrection is not like a plague or a forest fire—a linear process that spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the shape of a music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythm of their own vibrations, ways taking on more density.

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<sup>14</sup> Such attributes include: 1. The tendency to reject all models from the past. 2. The hostility to the family and other "milieus" 3. The unwillingness to cite its sources. 4. The conflation of material with aesthetic destruction

To the point that any return to normal is no longer desirable or even imaginable.”<sup>15</sup>

The imperative to impose the rhythm of one's own vibration clarifies the rhetorical strategies of *The Coming Insurrection* and is one of the ways to account for its refusal to cite and name antecedents in revolutionary theory and practice and its hostility to revolutionary pasts.

The anonymous authors of the text make bold claims about the power of observation resulting from an application of rigorous logic: “It's the privileged feature of radical circumstances that a rigorous application of logic leads to revolution. It's enough just to say what is before our eyes and not to shrink from its conclusions” (28). How do the authors present enunciations “before our eyes?” A careful reading of this manifesto's formal/rhetorical leaps and bounds help clarify the content's political vision. By placing Jackson, Deleuze, and Guattari in conversation with *The Coming Insurrection*, a reading strategy can be constructed to theorize the challenges posed in the coupling of form/content, manifesto/political program, and spontaneity/organization in this hybrid political text. This juxtaposition gently pushes against the intent of *The Invisible Committee*. *The Coming Insurrection* considered as avant-garde manifesto refuses to be bound by prior intellectual and theoretical formulations and its status as manifesto refuses to cite its theoretical antecedents. This is the prerogative of the political resonances of its formal choices. In his book, *The Century*, Alain Badiou theorizes the temporality of the avant-garde:

The avant-gardes only think of art in the present and want to force the recognition of the present. This is their way of assuming the newly acquired passion for the real. Invention is intrinsically valuable, novelty as such delectable. Repetition and the old are despicable, so that absolute rupture, which restricts one to the consequence of the present alone, is salutary. This is one dominant representation of Rimbaud's statement: ‘One must be absolutely modern.’ Art is no longer essentially a production of eternity, the creation of a work to be judged by the future. The avant-gardes want there to be a pure present for art. There is no time to wait. There is no posterity, only an artistic struggle against sclerosis

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<sup>15</sup> *The Invisible Committee. The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009. 12-13. The prefatory note of the texts includes the following background: “The book you hold in your hand has become the principle piece of evidence in an anti-terrorism case in France directed against nine individuals who were arrested on November 11, 2008, mostly in the village of Tarnac. They have been accused of “criminal association for the purposes of criminal activity” on the grounds that they were to have participated in the sabotage of overhead electrical lines on France's national railways.”(5)

and death; victory must be achieved, here and now. And since the present is constantly threatened by the past, since it is fragile, it's necessary to impose the provocative intervention of the group, which alone ensures the salvation of the instant, and the ephemeral against the established and the instituted.<sup>16</sup>

How much does this formal immanent avant-garde logic resonate in *The Coming Insurrection*? How does the insistent privileging of the present contribute to a macro-retrograde Thermidorian trend of forgetting—the revolutionary forgetting of revolutionary pasts? Why does The Invisible Committee frame their *cri de guerre* as part avant-garde manifesto, part call to arms? Is there a useful contradiction or overlap between the temporal logic of the text as manifesto (a work of radical aesthetics) versus the text as a political announcement that eschews political programs?

## II. DIAGNOSTICS AND AGENCY: A PROVISIONAL *WHAT IS TO BE DONE*

Firstly, let us look at how the authors of *The Coming Insurrection* view the present conjuncture and what kind of action does their vision call forth and require. For The Invisible Committee the present is not fragile, it is hopeless. The future does not fare any better—it is total negation:

From whatever angle you approach it, the present offers no way out. This is not the least of its virtues. From those who seek hope above all, it tears away every firm ground. Those who claim to have solutions are contradicted almost immediately. 'The future has no future' is the wisdom of the age that, for all its appearance of perfect normalcy, has reached the level of the first punks. (23)

This untenable temporality is the formal analog, a formal precaution and hedge against the authors' unwillingness to limit their strategic options to prescriptive models. The text is divided into two basic components: an initial diagnostic assessment of the world order in which we inhabit and a prescriptive, yet much textually shorter, almost aphoristic assertion of how to proceed onward. They are unwilling to be stifled and neutralized by what they refer to as social milieus:

Literary circles exist to smother the clarity of writing. Anarchist milieus to blunt the directness of direct action. Scientific milieus

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<sup>16</sup> Badiou, Alain. *The Century*. Trans. Alberto Toscano. Cambridge: Polity Press, 134.

to withhold the implications of their research from the majority of people today. Sports milieus to contain in their gyms the various forms of life they should create. Particularly to be avoided are the cultural and activist circles. They are the old people's homes where all revolutionary desires traditionally go to die. The task of cultural circles is to spot nascent intensities and explain away the sense of whatever you are doing, while the task of activist circles is to sap your energy for doing it. (100-101)

This assessment is immediately followed by the suggestion to form communes. The commune is the form of societal organization that ensures that we are not rendered impotent by milieu exhaustion, incapable of seizing the possibilities of the present; a present initially denied in the text. Why this consistent rhetorical strategy of denial and evocation? They caution to “expect nothing from organizations. Beware of all existing social milieus, and above all, don't become one” (99) while, paradoxically, the same text encourages partisans to “GET ORGANIZED” (103). *The Coming Insurrection's* temporal organization and rhetorical structure provide a formal analog to their insistence on not having action prescribed to a point of inaction. As soon as the reader is convinced that no form of political organization will contain the desired intensities, one is offered up one as an ideal— All Power to the Communes! Yet, contrary to the desire of the repressive functionaries of the French state that saw in the text evidence of acts of sabotage and terrorism yet to come, the key moment of destructive violence signaled by the authors enacted by their ideal organizational form—The Commune—is lauded for its pyrotechnic aesthetic beauty:

What to do with all the office towers at the La Defense in Paris, the apartment blocks of Lyon's La Part Dieu, or the shopping complexes of EuraLille? The expression “flambant neuf” (literally flaming new) perfectly captures their destiny. A Scottish traveler testifies to the unique attraction of fire, speaking after rebels had burned the Hotel de Ville in Paris in May, 1871: “Never could I have imagined anything so beautiful. It's superb. I won't deny that the people of the Commune are frightful rogues. But what artists! And they were not even aware of their own masterpiece” (55)

This is a peculiar example of one of the few places in the text where actual acts of destruction are elaborated; yet, it is commensurate with the overall strategies of this volume. As soon as the reader (or the pundit or police agent) can set her sights on this concrete exhibit-A of incendiary violence, the point of focus turns to questions of aesthetic value. The importance of this late-nineteenth century recollection is not that the actors were overcoming alienation, havoc as a build and destroy dialectic, or seeking redress through lashing out at the immediate urban infrastructure; it is

rather the creation of something beautiful— “*Flambant neuf*” as moniker for a new avant-garde movement. This point is not to explain away or stifle the revolutionary desires of this manifesto by reducing it all to an exercise in aesthetics. It is rather that by evoking the violence of the Paris Commune days while simultaneously signaling their ultimate value as aesthetic worth, it renders the text’s most lauded form of political organization inescapable from its frenzied energy of negation. The aesthetic merit is strategically emphasized in the excerpted recollection to complicate even this ideal type organizational form. Desire for any particular organizational form or revolutionary strategic predisposition is thwarted by the text’s productive negativity and avant-garde penchant for the new, the as yet discovered. This strategy is consistent in the text as a whole. *The Coming Insurrection* never explicitly enunciates their revolutionary program (for example in the conventional revolutionary programmatic format of minimum and maximum demands) and neither do they specify their understanding of the revolutionary dialectic. They instead demonstrate it by stringing together a series of bare enunciations that like Césaire’s maroons (evoked in this essay’s second epigram) in verb-form (*maronner*) constantly escapes.<sup>17</sup> The words of the text as lines of flight constantly escape what I call (after Foucault and Dylan Rodriguez) the carceral properties of authorship<sup>18</sup> that *The Invisible Committee* subverts via their invisibility. In this regard, the text functions less like a manifesto as book and more like Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of books as a series of “lines and measurable speeds,” an arrangement (*agencement*):

“In a book, as in everything else, there are lines of articulation or segmentation, strata, territorialities; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and of destratification. The comparative rates of flow along these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or alternatively precipitation and rupture” (*On the Line*, 2).

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<sup>17</sup> On *marronage* see: Mackey, Nathaniel. *Discrepant Engagment: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993. 270-272.

<sup>18</sup> The term Carceral properties of authorship evokes Dylan Rodriguez’s scholarship with Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and his meditation on authorship. “What is an Author?” Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. 1977. NY: Vintage Books, 1995. Foucault, Michel. “What is an Author?” *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. NY: Vintage Books, 2010. 101-120.

### III. A. SEVEN CIRCLES OF ALIENATION

The text begins with a preamble followed by seven circles of alienation (Dante minus two—perhaps two for the future hells not yet anticipated in the present conjuncture). These circles function as diagnostics of the contemporary existential and political condition. Their assessment of the contemporary dangers is as urgent as it is persuasive. The circles consist of the following: “First Circle: I Am What I Am”, which explores the maintenance of the self as the main apparatus of hegemonic reproduction; “Second Circle: Entertainment is a Vital Need”, which questions the legitimacy of common sense narratives surrounding “The Immigration Question” (always already xenophobic and scarred by colonial violence) and the impulse towards intimate coupling (the privileging of the romantic dyad as the salvo for all that ails under global capital); “Third Circle: Life, Health and Love are Precarious—Why Should Work Be an Exception”, a spirited examination of the globally shared contradiction that “We hate bosses, but we want to be employed at any cost”(43) and battle cry “to organize beyond and against work”(51), work that has become redundant: “Producing oneself is becoming the dominant occupation of a society where production no longer has an object: like a carpenter who’s been evicted from his shop and in desperation sets about hammering and sawing himself”(49);<sup>19</sup> “Fourth Circle: More Simple, More Fun, More Mobile, More Secure “, an examination of the fetishization of a city-space that has already disappeared and has become untenable due to capital flows and escalating living costs as well, as a polemical unsettling of the revolutionary and critical theoretical opposition between Country and City (possibly a veiled critique of Raymond Williams<sup>20</sup>); “Fifth Circle: “Fewer Possessions, More Connections”, privileging the bonds of connection over the destructive bonds of political economy—a political economy that is not *in* crisis but rather crisis itself(63) as well as positing a variation of the State Capitalism thesis whereas the breakdown of the Soviet Union is not a victory for capitalism rather a deconstruction of the various forms that capitalism assumes (66); “Sixth Circle: “The Environment is an Industrial Challenge”, which argues “There is no ‘environmental catastrophe.’ The catastrophe is the *environment itself*”(74); and “Seventh Circle: “We Are Building A

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<sup>19</sup> More *resonances*: The text’s carpenter image recalls a distant friend who wrote of an attempt to apply a cosmetic sponge to an abrasion on her face. The act of scrubbing away a blemish reaches manic proportions, resulting in a not so veiled attempt to scrub away the face itself. “I’m kinda digging the uglification,” she writes.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, Raymond. *The Country and The City*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Civilized Space Here”, which anticipates a revolutionary improvement and a parallel framing of the rationale for the barbarism of the first World War (in the name of freedom) with the current “War on Terror.”

It is in this final part of the diagnostic section where the authors provide their own rumination on the relationship between form and content:

The West as a civilization that has survived all the prophecies of its collapse with a singular stratagem. Just as the bourgeoisie had to deny itself *as a class* in order to permit the bourgeoisification of society as a whole, from the worker to the baron; just as capital had to sacrifice itself *as a wage relation* in order to impose itself as social relation—becoming cultural capital and health capital in addition to finance capital; just as Christianity had to sacrifice itself as a religion in order to survive as an affective structure—as a vague injunction to humility, compassion, and weakness; *so the West has sacrificed itself as a particular civilization in order to impose itself as a universal culture.* The operation can be summarized like this: an entity in its death throes sacrifices itself as content in order to survive as form.

The grammatical singularity of the construction—the use of the indefinite article (a) is striking. Here is a general pronouncement on the maneuvering of an “entity on its death throes”; as well as a particular singularity—the West as a *content* (sacrificed) reproducing itself as a *form* (in all its banality). The use of the “a” specifies and humbles the abstraction the West, bringing it down a notch so as to be finally subsumed. It neuters the abstraction, piercing the pernicious usages by the likes of Empire’s scribes Samuel Huntington and Thomas Friedman as well as their slightly more sophisticated liberal counterparts, for example, Benjamin R. Barber. It is a diagnosis of the world system in which we find ourselves that formally, on the level of its word choice plays a trick on us that demands we pay attention to formal moves. The echoing of the sentence’s key word by the buffoonish Glen Beck—“They are calling for the end of Western civilization”—characteristically misses the point. To repeat an earlier claim, this part of the text is diagnostic. The authors of the text are not calling for anything—in their formulation; the death throes are already in effect. More importantly, the text performs in its interpenetration of form and content resistance to the separation of form and content characteristic of a crisis laden as essence, predatory “West.”

The passage recalls various theoretical benchmarks of a studied left—Samir Amin in the coupling of the geopolitical place marker/construct the West with an insidious universalism, Jean Baudrillard’s theories on the changing (mirrored) nature of production and value, Marx’s discourse on representation

and consolidating class interest in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) and Pierre Bourdieu's and John Guillory's conceptualization of cultural capital. It is not just that the dictates of the form of *The Coming Insurrection* do not require the authors to cite these antecedents; rather, its avant-garde insistence on newness and its revolutionary strategic insistence on openness make such citation practices undesirable. Clearly its authors are informed by more than two centuries of theoretical writing and the careful analysis of radical politics; yet, the impulse to newness cannot openly concede to the actuality of such influences (even though they are certainly implied). Such a formal tactic is admirable in its desire to leave ample room for liberatory combinations not yet constituted but lacking in generosity and potentially problematic for its audience's adherents. It misses the mark in modeling a committed revolutionary praxis that insists upon a regimen of study (one that its authors clearly have committed to, the proof constituting the text under discussion). Such a regimen, a radical discipline of study is apparent in both the form and content of Jackson's two books. Revolutionary insight comes from confronting the old in order to produce the new. This does not happen by rigid disavowal or an anti-citation logic.<sup>21</sup> The unwillingness to signal past debts combined with a contemptuous indictment of the revolutionary past potentially contributes to the ubiquitous forgetting, symptomatic of our Thermidorean present.<sup>22</sup>

### III. B. THE FORMAL CALL TOWARDS *WHAT IS TO BE DONE*: *OPEN-ENDED SUGGESTIONS & STRIKING OUT AT THE PAST*:

The second part of the volume presents its prescriptions as open-ended suggestions and cautionary advice presented with the aphoristic concision readers have been already primed to expect. It ends with a coda, a *mise-en-scène*, prefigured by the rallying call "All power to the communes!" (133). It imagines a revolutionary future where "there's no longer any trace of the screen of embarrassment" (on the subway) in which "the prime minister

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<sup>21</sup> Citational & explanatory notes were added by translators to two key Tiqqun texts available in English: *Introduction to Civil War*. 2010 Tiqqun. Translated by Alexander R. Galloway & Jason E. Smith. *Semiotext(e) Intervention Series 4*: Cambridge, 2010. *This Is Not a Program*. 2009 Tiqqun. Translated by Joshua David Jordan. *Semiotext(e) Intervention Series 7*: Cambridge, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> "'Thermidorean' is the name for that which, whenever a truth procedure terminates, renders that procedure unthinkable. We have just seen how this constitution of the unthinkable can have a long-lasting power. It provides the historical matrix for a destruction of thought." Badiou, Alain. *Metapolitics*. Trans. by Jason Barker. London: Verso, 2006. 138.

seems very alone in his appeals for calm" (135). The chapter headings in sequence, some of which include italicized subheadings are as follows:

1. "Get Going!"(95)
2. "Find Each Other"
3. "Attach yourself to what you feel to be true. Begin there."(97)
4. "Don't back away from what is political in friendship" (98)
5. "Expect nothing from organizations. Beware of all social milieus, and above all, don't become one."(99)
6. "Form communes" (101)
7. "Get Organized", "Get organized in order to no longer have to work" (103)
8. "Plunder, cultivate, fabricate" (104)
9. "Training and learning" (106)
10. "Create territories. Multiply zones of opacity" (107)
11. "Travel. Open our own lines of communication."(109)
12. "Remove all obstacles, one by one" (110)
13. "Flee invisibility. Turn anonymity into an offensive position" (112)
14. "Organize self-defense" (114)
15. "Insurrection", "Make the most of every crisis" (119)
16. "Sabotage every representative authority. Spread the talk. Abolish general assemblies" (121)
17. "Block the economy, but measure our blocking power by our level of self-organization" (124)
18. "Liberate territory from police occupation. Avoid direct confrontation, if possible."(126)
19. "Take up arms. Do everything possible to make their use unnecessary. Against the army, the only victory is political" (128)
20. And finally, "Depose authorities at a local level" (130).

Such condensed forms render them infinitely quotable and highly conducive to being appropriated in different contexts. From the chapter, "Insurrection", the combined density and quotable nature lend the sort of aphoristic line of flight this essay is attempting to enumerate.

Contrast the generality of the prescription to form communes with the concision and dialectical savvy pertaining to the relationship between armed struggle and pacifism.

The commune is the basic unit of partisan reality. An insurrectional surge may be nothing more than a multiplication of communes, their coming into contact and forming of ties. As events unfold, communes will either merge into larger entities or fragment. The difference between a band of brothers and sisters bound “for life” and the gatherings of many groups, committees and gangs organizing for the supply and self-defense of a neighborhood or even a region in revolt, is only a difference of scale, they are all communes. (117)

There is no such thing as a peaceful insurrection. Weapons are necessary; it’s a question of doing everything possible to make using them unnecessary. An insurrection is more about taking up arms and maintaining an “armed presence” than it is about armed struggle. We need to distinguish clearly between being armed and the use of arms. Weapons are a constant in revolutionary situations. But their use is infrequent and rarely decisive at key turning points: August 10th 1792, March 18th 1871, and October 1917. When power is in the gutter, it’s enough to walk over it.

Because of the distance that separates us from them, weapons have taken on a kind of double character of fascination and disgust that can be overcome only by handling them. An authentic pacifism cannot mean refusing weapons, but only refusing to use them. Pacifism without being able to fire a shot is nothing but the theoretical formulation of impotence. Such a priori pacifism is a kind of preventive disarmament, a pure police operation. In reality, the question of pacifism is serious only for those who have the ability to open fire. In this case, pacifism is a sign of power, since it’s only in the extreme position of strength that we are freed from the need to fire. (128-129).

The difference between these formulations is striking. The formalist avant-garde hostility to the old that is characteristic of the text at large is suspended in this meditation on pacifism. Historical precedent, evoked by date (and in subsequent passages, geographical proper name) contributes a poignant specificity here, frequently absent in the larger text. Such specificity directly informs the sophistication of its assertions, the dialectical mediation on how the condition of possibility for an authentic pacifism, one that is worth its name, is the ability to employ the force of arms. Contrast that with the commune, the partisan reality par excellence, as framed above. Here the refusal to evoke historical precedent— The Paris Commune, The Russian Soviets, the Haitian *coumbite* just to name a few risks lending it a lame generality. Both insights are set to travel; some soar high yet light. In an effort to navigate a flight pattern, let us shift emphasis from the diagnostic and prescriptive to Jackson as a corrective.

#### IV. BOOKS AS “MURDEROUS ACTS”: GEORGE JACKSON’S PRAXIS-IMPERATIVE TO STUDY

George Jackson’s book is a murderous act, beyond all measure, but never demented, even if Jackson’s sufferings and fevers drove him the door of madness, a door he never entered; it is a radical murder, undertaken in the solitude of a cell and the certainty of belonging to a people still living under slavery, and this murder, which is ongoing, is perpetrated not only against white America, against the American will to power, against what is called the entrepreneurial spirit; it is the systematic and concerted murder of the whole white world greedy to drape itself in the hides of nonwhite peoples; it is the—hopefully definitive—murder of stupidity in action.<sup>23</sup>

“How is that, even more than ten years ago, he is our contemporary?”<sup>24</sup> writes Alain Badiou about his colleague Gilles Deleuze. We can ask the same about George Jackson, one of the twentieth century’s most profound revolutionary theoreticians and astute formalists. Jean Genet’s sense of Jackson’s epistolary work as a “murderous act” is interesting to think alongside how the French state utilized *The Coming Insurrection* as a *a priori* proof that the Tarnac 9 planned to commit acts of infrastructural sabotage—what Alberto Toscano called “The War Against Pre-Terrorism.”<sup>25</sup> In his introduction to *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, Genet credits Jackson for revising the epistolary form utilized in such (implied by Genet) works as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* (1748), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753). “Many people would be amazed to hear that the epistolary narrative was still capable of affording us a resolutely modern mode of expression; yet if we merely juxtapose (one after another) a certain number of George Jackson’s letters, we obtain a striking poem of love and of combat.”<sup>26</sup>

There is a strange temporal dynamic constitutive of Genet’s politics of solidarity. Nostalgia as a structuring paradigm, a desiring machine if you

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<sup>23</sup> Genet, Jean. “After the Assassination.” August 1971; *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*. Ed by Albert Dichy and Trans by Jeff Fort. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. 171. See also: Laroche, Hadrien. *The Last Genet: A Writer in Revolt*. Trans. by David Hormel. Originally published in France as *Le dernier Genet*, 1987. Éditions du Seuil. Vancouver: Arsenal Pup Press, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Badiou, Alain. *Pocket Pantheon*. London, New York: Verso, 2009, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Toscano, Alberto. “The War Against Pre-Terrorism. The Tarnac 9 and *The Coming Insurrection*”, *Radical Philosophy* 154 [Online] Accessed May 9, 2011 ([http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel\\_id=2187&editorial\\_id=27700](http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel_id=2187&editorial_id=27700))

<sup>26</sup> Introduction by Jean Genet in George Jackson, *Soledad Brother The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, NY: Coward-McCann, Inc, 1970, i.

will, functions for Genet as dialectic of present and past. Genet's reflections on Palestinian combatants offer up a model of transmitting a past that resists quantification; a model of transmission that resists perceiving inheritance through the hegemonic apparatus of the financial quant or the bean counter. It provides an alternative to *The Coming Insurrection's* impulse to burn the past:

The present is always grim, and the future is supposed to be worse. The past and that which is absent are wonderful. But we live in the present, and into the world lived in the present the Palestinian revolution brought a sweetness that seemed to belong to the past, to that which is far and perhaps also to that which is absent. For the adjectives that describe it are these: quixotic, fragile, brave, heroic, romantic, serious, wily, and smart. In Europe people talk only in figures. In *Le Monde* on 31 October 1985 there are three pages of financial news. The *fedayeen* didn't even count their dead.<sup>27</sup>

In light of this essay's concern with reading the formal moves in *The Coming Insurrection* through some of Deleuze's and Guattari's categories, I want to suggest a few examples in Jackson's work that might serve as a corrective to what I see as some of its limitations. These signaling of resonances will be limited primarily to Jackson's overlapping discussion of: 1. The centrality of method, 2. The imperative to maintain a studied engagement with revolutionary pasts, and finally, 3. Improvisation and defining revolutionary subjects and his willingness to concede the milieu of the family as a site of radical contestation.

The main narrative arc of *Soledad Brother* not only marks the politicization and revolutionary transformation of its author; but, it also traces a willingness to engage his primary milieu, his immediate family members (Mother, Father, Brother), as a site of pedagogic and dialogic engagement. This is not Andre Gide's "Families, I hate you!" but rather, "Families I hate you some of the time but I will engage in struggle with you always and unrelenting!" Akin to Paulo Freire's work on radical pedagogy in opposition to liberalism's emphasis on plurality and consensus, Jackson's understanding of dialogic is a conversation space amongst potential and actual partisans. It is certainly marking a line in the sand. Yet, prior to demarcation, you engage in discussion. Both of Jackson's books resonate with the same urgency of *The Coming Insurrection*, but one is struck by the fact that in Jackson proper names of revolutionary leaders past, references to particular theoretical texts and

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<sup>27</sup> Citational & explanatory notes were added by translators to two key Tiqqun texts available in English: Genet, Jean. *Prisoner of Love*. Translated by Barbara Bray. Originally published by Editions Gallimard as *Un Captif Amoureux*. 1986. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992, 204-5.

parrying in the realm of ideas mark the main currency of communication with his family. Writing to his attorney, Fay Stender, Jackson affirms:

"I had decided to reach for my father, to force him with my revolutionary dialectic to question some of the mental barricades he'd throw up to protect his body from what to him was an omnipresent enemy...I felt that if I could superimpose the explosive doctrine of self-determination through people's government and revolutionary culture upon what remained of his mind, draw him out into the real world, isolate and identify his real enemies, if I could hurl him through Fanon's revolutionary catharsis, I would be serving him, the people, the historical obligation." (180-1)

Historical obligation here implies history. Even though Jackson writes with similar aphoristic verve as *The Invisible Committee*, he makes for an interesting counterpoint due to his willingness to struggle with what Gide, Freud, Deleuze, and Guattari might identify as the main confining milieu, the family. Such a family for Jackson is inseparable from not only studied engagement, but an appropriate site for the circulation of revolutionary texts, benchmark events and proper names. In one of many letters to his father, Robert pertaining to the education of his brother Jonathan, he signals the importance of method:

February 19, 1968<sup>28</sup>

Dear Robert,

Too bad about Jon; I suggested upon your last visit that he may be getting too much TV. Anyway, you are absolutely correct in that these are his crisis years. You had better give him something good in the way of *purpose, identity, and method*. It should be taken for granted that he is getting nothing along this line in school; if anything, these things are being trained out...so that he will be a good Negro, an individual, a nonperson, an intellectual dependent. If you do not know the definition of "purpose," "identity," and "method," it is already too late for Jon.

I do not want to be addressed as George any longer. You will please respect my wishes enough to use my middle name from this day on. I won't respond to any other.

My work goes well here I am in health. I hope you are well.

Take care of yourself,

Lester

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<sup>28</sup> *Soledad Brother*, 126.

In the context of the work as a whole, method is the component of this triad that maintains some sort of coherency. Within the context of this particular letter, proper names shift based on preferences of self-definition. A footnote early on in the text indicates: “The author’s father’s name is Robert Lester Jackson. The author addresses him either as Robert or Lester depending on mood or circumstances.” (58) Identity is a process marking an ongoing politicization for author, brother, mother, and father—what Deleuze and Guattari might refer to as “becoming Black Panther.” Or, perhaps, “becoming George Jackson.” Even the proper name of one of the primary political formations to claim Jackson, the Black Panther Party of Self-Defense is a site and organizational milieu of contestation. Jackson’s masterful *Blood in My Eye*, finished just days prior to his murder by San Quentin guards presents a rich example. “All of this, of course means that we are moving, and on a mass level: Not all in our separate directions—but firmly under the disciplined and principled leadership of the Vanguard Black Panther Communist Party.”<sup>29</sup> The Black Panther Party (like Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association) claimed membership from various, often overlapping ideological tendencies—Marxist, Pan-Africanist, Revolutionary Black Nationalist and the cacophony of nuanced interpretations housed under such umbrellas. By literally changing the name of the BPP, Jackson signals a methodological commitment to engage in the milieu and imprint it with his own understanding—I’ll call it what I want it to be and you catch up. Positing what constitutes the revolutionary vanguard in these texts is also a space of negotiation, rather than a foregone conclusion.

For Jackson, “People’s War is improvisation and more improvisation” (*Blood* 61). This improvisatory spirit of negotiation also happens in *Soledad Brother’s* struggle to define the revolutionary vanguard. Speaking of his Grandfather, Jackson writes: “He was an extremely aggressive man, and since aggression on the part of the slave means crime, he was in jail now and then. I loved him.”(14). In the same autobiographical sketch:

I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels, and Mao when I entered prison and they redeemed me. For the first four years I studied nothing but economics and military ideas. I met black guerillas, George “Big Jake” Lewis, and James Carr, W.L. Nolen, Bill Christmas, Tony Gibson, and many, many others. We attempted to transform the black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality (26).

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<sup>29</sup> Jackson, George. *Blood in My Eye*. London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd. 1972, 130.

The contrary nature of these two assertions requires dialectical mediation. “Aggression on the part of the slave means crime” signifies a position of radical inclusivity. Here, crime is not a neutral occurrence, rather it is an oppressive social relation defined by the oppressors to curtail the rebellion of the oppressed (in this instance the enslaved). At the same time, engagement with social milieus, proper names, and revolutionary place-markers of old ignites a process that desires the transformation of criminal mentalities into revolutionary ones. The first statement pierces the oppressors’ ideological designation of crime; while the latter names that designation as something to be surpassed. Presenting this contradiction early on in the text has the effect of formally priming the reader of *Soledad Brother* to be attuned to the nuances of the books dialectical leaps in both form and content. Like *The Coming Insurrection*, its writerly logic has a great deal to say to its ideological content. For George Jackson, praxis of regimented study reveals, instead of stifles future developments. It is an example, if you will, of Montreal bard Leonard Cohen’s “*Le Partisan*” dialectic—in which the chorus refrains *J’ai repris mon arme*: I have retaken my weapon. Retaken implies a prior taking and such revolutionary priors do not stifle present action but rather enriches the clarity of their execution. The Invisible Committee’s imperative to “Find Oneself” for Jackson requires a template. Radical purpose is derived methodologically from recognition and deep studied engagement not by the avant-garde impetus to dismiss. Purpose is consistently radical but the author’s understanding of the lineaments of such purpose shifts with further study, experiential development, and acute (often heart wrenching)<sup>30</sup> engagement with his family milieu, a milieu one might fear that the formal demands of *The Coming Insurrection* might shove off with great haste.

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<sup>30</sup> “I’ve given you the best and you have rejected me for my enemies. With the last act you have betrayed my bosom interest, even though I warned you not to say anything at all. I will never forgive you this. Should we live forever I’ll never trust you again. Your mind has failed you completely. To take sides against your son! You did it in ‘58 and now again. There will not be a third time. The cost to me is too great. Father against son, and brother against brother. Disgusting! You are a sick man.” (64). It is interesting to note; Jackson did indeed both forgive and trust his father again.

V. UN-INTELLIGIBLE BARBARIANS, RAMBLING BELLEVILLE *CHIBANIS*,  
AND *BRICOLAGE* FIGHTING FORMATIONS<sup>31</sup>

Let us conclude with two characterological examples of subjects who have difficulty getting their words out. In the opening of *The Coming Insurrection*, readers are presented with one of these inarticulate offenders: “The ramblings of any Belleville *chibani* contain more wisdom than all the declarations of our so-called leaders.”(2)<sup>32</sup> The second incoherent offender, from the Greek Alexandrian poet Constantine Cavafy’s 1904 poem ‘Waiting for the Barbarians:’

Why don’t our distinguished orators come forward as usual  
to make their speeches, say what they have to say?  
Because the barbarians are coming today  
and they’re bored by rhetoric and public speaking.<sup>33</sup>

Relevant to the Invisible Committee’s surprise at the clarity of the old man’s insight (recall, he rambles) and our current world geopolitical seasonal climate change—The 2011 Arab Spring—Edward Said’s analysis on Cavafy’s unawareness of the Arab world in the bulk of his work is instructive:

Cavafy’s poetry has a persistently urban setting, which brings together the mythical and—with its ironic, understated tone of melancholic disenchantment—the prosaic. But to locate Cavafy in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Egypt is to be struck by how utterly his work fails to take note of the modern Arab world. Alexandria is either the anonymous site of episodes from the poet’s life (bars, rented rooms, cafés, apartments where he meets

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<sup>31</sup> The concept of “Bricolage Fighting Formations” is an attempt to signal Claude Lévi-Strauss’s concept of bricolage in *The Savage Mind* and Fredrick Engels’s discussion of Robinson Crusoe in *Anti-Duhring* alongside Black Panther Party veteran and political prisoner Russell Shoats’s essay “Black Fighting Formations: Their Strengths, Weakness, and Potentialities.” Shoats, Russell. “Black Fighting Formations: Their Strengths, Weakness, and Potentialities.” *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, E.ditors. NY, London: Routledge, 2001. 128-138. Signal, because the urgent work of extending Shoats’s analytic to contemporary Pan African fighting formations is of utmost importance and has yet to be done.

<sup>32</sup> A footnote in the text provides the following translation: “*Chibani* is Arabic for old man, here referring to the old men who play backgammon in the cafes of Belleville, a largely immigrant neighborhood in Paris.”

<sup>33</sup> Cavafy, C.P. “Waiting for the Barbarians.” *C.P. Cavafy Collected Poems*. Translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrad. Edited by George Savidis. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009, 33.

Barbarian derives from PIE *base* barbar-- echoic of unintelligible speech of foreigners, from the Greek *barbarous*—foreign, strange, ignorant. And par Aristotle, those who do not speak Greek. Consult Susan Nakley’s important contribution in applying the political consequence of such etymologies in the field of Chaucer Studies. Nakley, Susan. “Sovereignty Matters: Anachronism, Chaucer’s Britian, and England’s Future’s Past”, *The Chaucer Review*, 44.4, 2010, 368-396.

his lovers); or it is portrayed as it once was, a city in the Hellenic world under successive and overlapping imperiums: Rome, Greece, pre- and post- Alexandrian Byzantium, Ptolemaic Egypt, and the Arab empire. Partly invented, partly real, the characters in the poems are seen at passing—though sometimes crucial—moments in their lives: the poem reveals and consecrates the moment before history closes around it and it is lost to us forever. The time of the poem, which is never sustained for more than a few instants is always outside and alongside the real present, which Cavafy treats only as a subjective passage in the past. The language, a learned Greek idiom of which Cavafy was self-consciously the last modern representative, adds to the parsimony, the essentialized and rarefied quality of the poetry. His poems enact a form of minimal survival between the past and the present, and his aesthetic of nonproduction, expressed in a nonmetaphorical, almost prosaic unrhymed verse, enforces the sense of enduring exile that is at the core of his work.<sup>34</sup>

“Waiting for the Barbarians” is often evoked to discuss insights that traverse aesthetics, geopolitics, and contemporary critical theory. Said uses it to develop his theory of “late style” in aesthetics, patterned after Adorno’s writings on Beethoven. The poem can serve as a point of departure to engage topics as broad as Foucault’s understanding of power-discourse circulation, the peripheral status within Europe of Greece and the radical potentialities housed in such positionality, Greece as a bridge between the so-called East and so-called West; and the relationship between language and power, form, and content. Said’s insights above are crucial here because they capture the tension in Cavafy between a measured, supple balance between past and present in the poem and an almost total lack of awareness of the surrounding Modern Arab world. The *chibani*, regardless of the clarity in his elocution does not register for Cavafy. Yet, there is a useful insistence in the text that speaks to a crisis in our current political conjuncture’s reasoning. For the sake of vindicating the rambling *chibani* (a task he can do without my assistance), I’m interested in the poem’s ending: “And now, what’s going to happen to us without barbarians? / They were, those people, a kind of solution.” I’m interested here in a theoretical and radical political analysis that can help gage the pragmatic and radical aesthetic value of these kinds of past solutions as an imperative to assist the present unfolding, open-ended task of finding ourselves. There is a sort of materialist insistence in Cavafy’s final lines, an imperative to think ‘a kind of solution’ in all its specificity and context— To not treat evaluation of a radical conjuncture (or an anti-

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<sup>34</sup> Said, Edward W. *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*. NY: Pantheon Books, 2006, 144-145.

systemic leader, regime or movement) with a check-list approach of political purity. *The Coming Insurrection's* formal impatience with a disciplined studied engagement with the past, exemplified by George Jackson's work potentially encourages such hastiness and its rhetorical force confuses such hastiness as revolutionary fervor. This resonates with our categorical rush to judgment in both positing and denying uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Libya as "Revolutions" in the sense of how we imagine such events in the West. What if we don't have category to think these developments yet? Or more precisely, since the demand for separate categories reifies a stupid, ultimately racist tendency to think what happens East of France (or the United States for that matter) as mystical, pre-modern happenings outside a shared world-system (as well as further reifying the abstraction that is The West); maybe, instead of new categories we just need more time. A poignant, insightful consideration of revolutionary China's premier Zhou En Lai's retort when asked in Geneva in 1953 by a French reporter what he thought about the 18th Century French Revolution: "It is too early to tell."<sup>35</sup> Even if Zhou was referring to France, May 1968, as some sources now believe, the tension between these two political events, these two temporal markers in French revolutionary history is still productive in light of this essay's concerns.

For example, a significant segment of partisans of The Arab Spring conflated a popular uprising and insurrection in Egypt against U.S. backed dictator President Hosni Mubarak with the NATO/US led extra-legal aggression and subsequent murder of Libyan Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. Such a hasty conflation lacks the minimum analytical responsibility necessary for any anti-systemic thought to distinguish between (Cavafy's) "kind[s] of solution[s]." Qaddafi's decades of financial and tactical support for anti-systemic movements, his significance for both Pan-Arab and Pan-African politics, his willingness to acknowledge Arab complicity in the commerce of Black African flesh, the ideological character of the anti-Qaddafi "resistance", his acute errors as well as his idiosyncratic mannerisms, even his cooperation with U.S. and British intelligence in the wake of the September 11th, 2001 attacks, and most importantly for the stakes in this essay— the fact that the murder of Qaddafi hastens an international war against anti-systemic, anti-imperialist memory is almost completely disregarded. Qaddafi's murder was an adrenaline shot to the hegemonic tendency to aggressively forget. The

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<sup>35</sup> There has been recent doubt cast about the accuracy of this quote. See McGregor, Richard. "Zhou Enlai's Caution Lost in Translation" *Financial Times*, June 10, 2011.

Monday morning outrage against the sanguine excesses of NATO and the brutality of his killing by a segment of “revolutionary” partisans of the Libyan resistance cannot soften the crime. In fact, it only demonstrates that despite militant posturing, the consequences of rush-to-insurrectionist rhetorical stances cannot be faced. Apparently, Sartre’s *Les Mains sales* still deserves readership. As my family can painfully bare witness ten years after the death of my father in the World Trade Center— If you murder some kind[s] of solution[s] and continue to escalate systemic premature death, exploitation, resource expropriation, and global bullying you are left with other kind[s] of solution[s]. Somewhere cued between the hum of complacent *Al Jazeera English* feeds and *Twitter* retractions (“We didn’t think they would kill him like that!”) a David Bowie track gets appropriately misheard—“John, I’m only rambling.” Somehow I don’t think the comparative clarity of the rambling *chibani* compared to the functionaries of repressive states would be much of a surprise to George Jackson. The ability to gage certain kinds of solutions demands a reading strategy, so does an analytic that can distinguish the critical importance of sticks, guns, and weapons. An accounting of Jackson’s preference for the stick would help elucidate this importance.

“I may run, but all the time that I am, I’ll be looking for a stick! A defensible position!” *Les Frères de Soledad* translates Jackson’s stick as *une arme*—“*Je cherche une arme!*”<sup>36</sup> The plural— as in— “*Aux armes citoyens! Formez vos bataillons!*” could be translated using the English “arms,” as in “the right to bear arms.” In French the word for “arm” in the sense of an appendage of the body is *bras*. There seems to be an archaic etymological root between the two senses in French, too, since “to arm” (as in to take up weapons or protect oneself) comes from a phrase “to cover the shoulder,” and “arm” in its etymology refers to a bodily joint. By intellectually mapping political resonance one discovers etymological resonance. *Une arme* can be translated as both weapon and gun, accounting for the discrepancies in the varying references to Jackson in the works of Deleuze and Guattari.

*Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* represents a fourth variation:

Good people say that we must not flee, that to escape is not good, that it isn’t effective, and that one must work for reforms. But the revolutionary knows that escape is revolutionary—*withdrawal, freaks*—provided one sweeps away the social cover on leaving, or cause a piece of the system to get lost in the shuffle. What matters

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<sup>36</sup> Jackson, George. *Les Frères de Soledad*. Trans. Catherine Roux. France: Gallimard, 1971, 339.

is to break through the wall, even if one has to become black like John Brown. George Jackson. "I may take flight, but all the while I am fleeing, I will be looking for a weapon!" (*Anti-Oedipus*, 277)

The coupling of militant abolitionist John Brown with Jackson should give one pause. It is yet another opportunity for Deleuze and Guattari to assert the primacy of *becoming* in their revolutionary process—Becoming Woman, Becoming Virginia Woolf, Becoming Animal, and so on. Deleuze and Guattari often do not explicitly cite or introduce quotes—"I may take flight..." is torn from its initial context and such flight acknowledges that what is important for Deleuze and Guattari is not origins, but rather how something can be used, how it works or how it does not work. If this is the case and the proper name plus period that precedes the quote from *Soledad Brother* is not citational in its function, then perhaps George Jackson has to "become black" just like John Brown, the white architect of the anti-slavery raid on Harper's Ferry. A brief digression on force-theory and citation in W.E.B. Du Bois's 1909 *John Brown* will serve us well here.

## VI. BECOMING "BLACK LIKE JOHN BROWN"; BECOMING SOCIALIZED WOOL MARKETS

In the last chapter of the text, Du Bois reproduces Brown's final words: "I, John Brown, am quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood. I had, as I now think vainly, flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done."<sup>37</sup> Such feisty, combative aphoristic insight flees and is taken up as revolutionary impetus and inspiration in different contexts (and rightfully so). It is also evoked by the stewards of Black national oppression and white supremacy's continued maintenance as proof of Brown's out of joint, Christian puritanical fanaticism. Yet compare the more well known evocation of Brown's by all means necessary approach to slavery abolition with the lesser known reportage by Du Bois early on in the text pertaining to Brown's failed efforts to socialize the wool trade in which he was a minor-major player (47-55). Equally forceful in ideational content, the lines from Brown's many letters to his family and business associates might travel and unlike the words that extol the virtues of armed struggle, they could not be so easily evoked by the industry of scholarship dead set on framing Brown's commitments as

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<sup>37</sup> Du Bois, W.E. Burghardt. *John Brown*. 1909,1972. NY: International Publishers, 1996, 274.

“pathological.” Yet as careful readers of George Jackson are reminded, this choice is a false one. It is not a question of choosing between the violent revolutionist anti-slavery John Brown or the proto-socialist John Brown who failed in his attempt to socialize wool markets. Both need to be thought together, interpenetrating each other with its force and clarity of ethical vision. Abdication of one renders the other, in the last instance, less relevant. “Becoming black” in Du Bois’s text requires both political prerogatives to be thought alongside each other.

Like the authors of *The Invisible Committee*, Jackson’s force-theory refuses to decouple form from content—propaganda as formal enunciation from militant action: “They must work toward developing the unity of the pamphlet and the silenced pistol” (*Blood*, 133). Jackson’s stick adds another theoretical dimension to the different interpretations of the line from *Soledad Brother* under examination here. His original wording resonates with *The Coming Insurrection’s* radical desires. Jackson’s stick signifies a deep commitment to improvisation—People’s War as Improvisation—or Claude Lévi-Strauss’s notion of *bricolage* as creative spontaneity and critique of the techno-supremacist, Eurocentric tendencies of anthropological discourse. (A do it yourself ethic, fitting for rebels in flight.) Congruent with *The Coming Insurrection’s* unwillingness to over-code future outcomes and limit strategic options, Jackson’s stick, in good urban guerilla fashion gently pushes against Engels’s critique of Duhring’s “Force Theory,” a reading of the dialectic that privileges the most advanced war-technologies as decisive in determining victorious outcomes:

But let us look a little more closely at this omnipotent “force” of Herr Duhring’s. Crusoe enslaved Friday “sword in hand.” Where did he get the sword from? Even on the imaginary islands of Crusoe stores, swords have not, up to now, grown on trees, and Herr Duhring gives us no answer whatever to the question. Just as Crusoe could procure a sword for himself, we are equally entitled to assume that one fine morning Friday might appear with a loaded revolver in his hand, and then the whole “force” relationship is inverted. Friday commands, and it is Crusoe who has to drudge.<sup>38</sup>

Or to paraphrase Malcolm X: “When the lights go out, it’s even-steven!”

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<sup>38</sup> Engels, Frederick. *Anti-Duhring. Herr Eugen Duhring’s Revolution in Science*. 1877. NY: International Publishers, 1970, 184. See also Engels, Frederick. *The Role of Force in History: A Study of Bismarck’s Policy of Blood and Iron*. Translated by Jack Cohen. NY: International Publishers, 1972,

## VII. ON “CRUDE THINKING” AND MARRONAGE

On the relationship between thought and political action, it is helpful to recall Walter Benjamin’s reflections on his friend Bertolt Brecht’s fondness for *plumpes Denken*, i.e. crude thinking:

There are many people to whom a dialectician means a lover of subtleties. In this connection it is particularly useful when Brecht puts his finger on ‘crude thinking’ which produces dialectics as its opposite, contains it within itself, and has need of it. Crude thoughts belong to the household of dialectical thinking precisely because they represent nothing other than the application of theory to practice; its application to practice, not its dependence on practice. Action can, of course, be as subtle as thought. But a thought must be crude in order to come into its own action.

The formal enunciative force of the pamphlet and its desire to act on the world demands a sort of crude concision; an aphoristic compression that announces a series of insights that flee. Yet built into (containing “it within itself”) such citational brevity is clearly in the case of *The Invisible Committee* a highly sophisticated praxis that includes revolutionary study and reflection. A studied praxis that the formal demands of the book must reject (or rather cover up) in a manic denial of the utility of revolutionary pasts. This is a crucial political problem that needs further examination. It runs the risk of substituting the process of *anamnesis* for the circuits of *melancholia*.

This essay’s epigram from Martinican poet-statesman Aimé Césaire is purposely misleading. The utilization of the language of form and content in the poem is parodic. Césaire demands of Haitian poet René Depestre a re-remembrance (an *anamnesis* of The Haitian Revolution) as a corrective to the poet’s rhetorical strategies— strategies congruent with the prescribed poetics of French Communist Party poet-luminaries. As Caribbean literature scholar Christopher Winks explains with learned verve:

Aimé Césaire challenged the young Haitian poet’s apparent rejection of his erstwhile surrealist/Négritude aesthetics in favor of an alignment with the conservative metrically bound poetics prescribed and practiced by leading French Communist *littérateur* and ex-Surrealist Louis Aragon, to whom Césaire virtiologically refers by name: “Whether the poem turns nicely or poorly on the oil of its hinge/ kiss it off Depestre kiss it off let Aragon go on about it.” Exhorting Depestre to break with this party-line colonial-metropole-based aesthetics, which he likens to a new form of slavery by comparing it with the “whip wielding masters” of the

past, Césaire declares that the best thing for black poets to do is “go maroon on them”...<sup>39</sup>

What is needed now, says Césaire, is precisely the intransigent resolve that [Haitian revolution combatant] Dessalines displayed on the day of victory, since nothing was ever won by cozying up to masters old and new. As if to emphasize that point, Césaire launches into a wicked parody of the wooden language of Communist pronouncement, complete with such catchwords as “comrade,” “dialectical,” and “form and content,” again interrupting himself in mid-speech by declaring, “it’s not my job to write the report/ I’d rather look at the spring. Precisely/ it’s the revolution.” Like every maroon, Césaire concentrates on the details and the overall (dialectical) movement of his environment, deciphering its signs and assimilating its meanings...(Winks 73)

There is certainly nothing “wooden” about the language of *The Coming Insurrection*. It is not that Césaire minimizes the importance of interplay between form and content in poetics tasked with performing radical political work. It is rather that the poem expresses Césaire’s concern that Depestre is confined by the *milieu* of French Communist Party poetic norms. For this essay’s purposes, note that the corrective suggested in the poem is not a myopic lauding of the now or worshipping of the deed; it is rather an instructive reminder from one comrade to another to re-remember a revolutionary past as a site of radical knowledge, aesthetic innovation and transformative use.

To conclude, Socrates offers departing words to Menon: ‘By now it is time for me to go; and your part is to persuade your friend Anytos [who will become an accuser of Socrates] to believe just what you believe about it, that he may be more gentle; for if you can persuade him, you will do a service to the people of Athens also.’<sup>40</sup> The philosopher exits the closet drama yet the discipline required of *Anamnesis* still disturbs—the exciting breakout of Occupy Movements throughout the United States demonstrates an actualization of *The Coming Insurrection’s* clarion call to “Find One Another.” A process of Becoming *Anamnesis*, the necessity of the Occupy Movements to work towards organizationally solidifying, which is not synonymous to codifying or regimenting (Let us not forget that Plato’s discussion of *Anamnesis* was amongst others things, in service of advancing his theory of forms) reminds partisans that they will find not what was lost or never known, but rather

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<sup>39</sup> Winks, Christopher. *Symbolic Cities in Caribbean Literature*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 70.

<sup>40</sup> *Great Dialogues of Plato*. “Meno (Menon).” Edited by Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse. Translated by W.H.D. Rouse. NY: Mentor Books, 1962. 68.

what was forgotten. For Jackson, the pain thrust of the dialectic can be meted out by both book and stick. The ongoing process of looking for a defensible position demands the open ended, un-harnessed explosion that *The Coming Insurrection* desires to write into being. The explosion, according to the logic of the text is actually already here. Twisting off the leg of the person who is kicking you demands a thorough accounting of both prior blows and prior defense strategies; transforming societies structured in dominance through radical re-organization requires a great deal more. The same formal strategies that make *The Coming Insurrection* a text of such urgency also contribute to the vogue fetishization of acting in the now, a cult of immediacy that problematically shuns organization as totalizing, a rhetorical posture that risks reducing the importance of study and ignoring the public safety reminder for the revolutionary to look for sticks while she runs, to mine the past for useful tools, before she burns it down.