

SITUATING *THE COMING INSURRECTION*

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In the early spring of 2010 at the Left Forum in New York City, the Situations collective hosted a presentation and discussion of a text reputedly authored by Julien Coupat and a group known as the Invisible Committee. This text, *The Coming Insurrection*, was originally published in France in 2007, but the English edition (January 2009) contained an introduction which took into account the Greek uprisings in December 2008 and in advance posed a serious question for the Occupy movement gaining momentum again in the spring of 2012: how does a generalized series of demonstrations and marches, sit-ins, occupations of parks lead to an insurrectionary situation? Written in a poetic fever reminiscent of the 19th century symbolist poets that speaks in an unmediated style which speaks directly to generation debt and the ‘jobless future’, this genre of manifesto has the force of what we could call creative nihilism, an attempt at a Nietzschean forgetting of the past. The insurrection to come demands of us the possibility of finding each other amidst the ruins and extinction of the past, a past that no longer serves the interests of the question of revolutionary upheaval and transformation. In the eyes of the Invisible Committee, the lessons of the past cannot serve insurrectionary change in the immediate here and now. Paraphrasing and citing the Marx of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, the social revolution of the present can only create its poetry from the future, not from the past and in order to arrive at its own content the revolution of the here and now must let the dead bury the dead.

But doesn’t this outright dismissal and negation of the past perplex us? Are we to deny the great lessons of the past, the Paris commune of 1871, October 1917, 1949, the Cuban revolution of 1959 as well as May of 1968, the hot autumn of 1969 in Italy not to mention what we can learn from strategies of the Global Labor struggles, Black Liberation movements, and National Liberation struggles. The Invisible Committee calls for “All Power to the Communes” modeling local upsurges on a nineteenth century taking of the streets and one could easily substitute metro stations, military barracks, prisons, and parks for today’s moment of insurrection. Herein lies the substantive contradiction of this manifesto: have they really negated models of the past, have they overcome the radical imagination of the surrealists,

the situationists, the early soviets, the imaginative and organized anarchist tradition? Does the Invisible Committee produce new forms of thinking and acting in its call for the extinction of an earlier civilization? It calls critique a vain effort to salvage the remnants of extinction even though most of the text is rooted in diagnostic critique. This is certainly a long way from Walter Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*, with one glance firmly fixed on the frozen past.

It is within this context that the following two presentations engage *The Coming Insurrection*. Jeremy M. Glick demands that revolutionary temporality be addressed and that historical memory in the form of strong Platonic **anamnesis** is a revolutionary act that the Invisible Committee disavows. He creates a parallax reading of the black revolutionary, George Jackson's praxis with that of the Deleuzian notion of lines of flight. Ironically, Glick uses a similar rhetorical strategy to that of the Invisible Committee, that of the aphorism to dismantle the futural horizon that denies the revolutionary past as inert and outmoded. Recollection serves us well because it still has lessons to impart, strategies to revisit and critique. For example, the concept of the post-racial is completely dismantled through a re-reading of the past. The radical imagination is better served by a notion of futures past than that of obsolescence and generational impasses. Glick's confrontation with the Invisible Committee is a positive step in terms of working through the aporia in which we find ourselves confined in so far that it demonstrates the power of the past in its capacity to reinvigorate the future with new heuristics and new meaning given to the older categories of revolutionary praxis.

Richard Dienst's tack is to engage keywords in the manifesto for all power to the communes. Appropriately, he confronts the Invisible Committee on its terms with descriptive precision and analytical force. He playfully points to the Fort-Da game involved in insurrection. From withdrawal to engagement, away from the consensus, return to the streets becomes a *modus operandi* for the insurrectionists. And in a very substantial fashion, Dienst points out the crucial moment in the text: that of getting organized, forming the community that binds becomes the basis for the most contradictory moments of the programme, the call for an unconditional affective vanguardism. This seems to echo the occupy movement's claim of a movement without leaders and demands. And in an all —too-serious vein, Dienst asks who will grow the carrots effectively reducing without reductionism the insurrection to the organic bonds of elementary agriculture. The revolution will be radical indeed, as in re-rooting the plants against the corporate mechanized and genetically modified agricultural practice dominant today. Food for thought, indeed.

So as a point of departure, the task is not so much to erase the past but to use and learn from it. Despite the hyperspace that dominates everyday life in its non-thinking and psychic automatism, the encounter these authors have had with the provocations of the Invisible Committee lead us to careful reflection and mindful praxis embedded in the revolutionary tradition seeking what is alive within the internal movement of the cunning of Reason and serves the purposes of the radical imagination.

In this latter vein, the Invisible Committee has given us an incendiary text, one which often brilliantly demonstrates the symptoms of late capitalism and provides a sharp diagnoses of new forms of alienation; its problem, however, does not lie in its inspiration but in its declared disavowal of the past traditions which may lead us into a site of resistance and praxis that may repeat the mistakes of the past rather than learning from them.