

The Tarnac Verdicts: Unraveling the Logic of Anti-Terrorism

After Ten Years, the “Tarnac Affair” Concludes in France

CrimethInc.

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In 2008, the state of France accused the Tarnac Ten of terrorism, charging that they had formed “a group of the ultraleft, of the autonomous type, maintaining links with international extremist movements.”¹ After a decade-long ordeal, the remaining defendants received their final verdict on April 12, 2018.

All of the defendants were found not guilty of the charges of sabotage, rioting, and conspiracy; the terrorism charges had been dropped much earlier. Christophe Becker was sentenced to six months of probation for possession of fake IDs and a fine of 500 euros for refusal to give a DNA sample to the authorities. Julien Coupat and Yildune Lévy were also found guilty of refusing to give DNA, but face no sentence on account of the amount of time that has passed. Considering how many resources the French state had invested in this court case, this represented a massive victory for the defendants.

What can we learn from this passage of a few people through a rather long trial for terrorism? Let’s review the background of this story, the details of the case, and its implications for the future.

All the Unsettled Debts of History

As popular movements around Europe collapsed in the 1970s, anti-imperialist armed struggle groups formed—including *Action Directe* in France and the infamous Red Army Faction in Germany. Taking on the state in symmetrical warfare proved a doomed venture; by the early 1990s, all that remained of these groups was the repressive apparatus that the state had generated in the course of destroying them. Capitalism appeared to have permanently triumphed, with few signs of revolt visible within the core countries. Nonetheless, in the United States and in France, a few strange young people began reading the Situationists and plotting their escape from the 20th century.

In the United States, the mid-1990s saw the emergence of the CrimethInc ex-Workers Collective, a decentralized network of aspiring revolutionary dropouts, whose publication of *Days of War, Nights of Love* upturned traditional revolutionary dogma. Across the ocean, a mysterious review of “critical metaphysics” called *Tiqqun* appeared, advocating for the formation of a Society for the Advancement of Criminal Science, repurposing the concepts of thinkers like Deleuze and Foucault who had long been neutralized by academia.

Shortly thereafter, to everyone’s surprise, the so-called anti-globalization movement precipitated the fiercest clashes Europe had seen in decades. In France, in the wake of the protests against the G8 summit in 2001, a mysterious anonymous text entitled *The Call* appeared, demanding “a new kind of international that will not make the same mistakes as the old.”

In fall 2005, ahead of the global wave of uprisings that were to begin with the Greek insurrection, France experienced an outbreak of riots in the banlieues followed by a powerful student movement against the *Contrat première embauche* (CPE). In 2007, the Invisible Committee’s *L’insurrection qui vient* took the French radical milieu by storm much as *Days of War, Nights of Love* had taken the North American milieu. In the seven years that separated these two books,

¹ The quotation is from the intelligence files gathered on the defendants. Roughly translated, the report is entitled “From the CPE Movement to the constitution of a European pre-terrorist network”—suggesting a link with the student movement three years before the arrests.

rebellion had acquired a sharper edge: to go into exodus no longer meant simply withdrawing from the feedback loops that reproduce industrial capitalism, but entering into open battle.

When revolutionary ideas spread rapidly throughout society, those whose task it is to preserve the prevailing order get nervous. It appears that the French state decided to employ the same strategy of repression that had been so effective against armed struggle groups in the 1970s against these new anarchist-inspired movements. The more fluid structure of anarchistic networks made it more difficult for the state to determine the precise membership and leadership of these groups, but nothing is impossible for the authorities if they are prepared to be dishonest enough. In 2008, police and intelligence services carried out one of the largest anti-terrorism operations ever coordinated on French soil. The French anti-terrorist police (SDAT) arrested nine young people, then added another for good measure. Interior Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie declared victory, proclaiming that the “inner circle” of the Invisible Committee was now arrested and their head, Julien Coupat (a former associate of *Tiqqun*), had been cut off the body. If only it were so easy to suppress revolt!

Ten years later, what seemed impossible has already come to pass. It is widely agreed that capitalism is in a state of terminal collapse; propositions that seemed outrageous in the late 1990s are now regarded as self-evident. On April 12, 2018, the no-longer-quite-so-young people accused of forming a conspiracy to overthrow capitalism heard their final verdict for being, literally, “an association of wrongdoers.”²

The British Undercover Inside the Anti-Globalization Movement

When we organize demonstrations, discuss anarchist theory, and commit ourselves to direct action, it can be easy to feel that our individual efforts have little effect. But the Tarnac case confirms that the headmasters of global capitalism take very seriously the possibility that our actions—and even our words—can change the world.

At the G8 counter-summit in 2001, the confrontations in the streets of Genoa reached such a pitch that the Italian police openly murdered a participant in the black bloc, Carlo Giuliani. In order to prevent such revolts from occurring again, European governments established new agreements about sharing intelligence and deployed long-term undercover agents into the anarchist movement with the goal of disabling international anti-capitalist protests.

The British intelligence service had been infiltrating radical circles since at least the 1960s, but the influx of people newly curious about resistance gave them a new opportunity. A longhaired and tattooed radical calling himself “Mark Stone” showed up at the 2003 EU Summit protests in Dublin, taking the front lines against the police. His real name was Mark Kennedy; he was an undercover police officer from the National Public Order Intelligence Unit sent to infiltrate the anarchist wing of the anti-globalization and ecological movements.

A comparative anthropological study of the police of different nations would be revealing. Police infiltrators in the United States set out to get immediate results by entrapping protesters and charging protest organizers such as the RNC 8 of “Conspiracy to Riot in Furtherance of Terrorism.” By contrast, British intelligence, drawing on their experiences with the Irish Republican

² The so-called *Loi Scélérates* (“Scoundrel Laws”) of 1893 and 1894, which were passed specifically for the purpose of repressing anarchists, introduced this charge as a way of targeting those who did not themselves engage in illegal activity, but associated with those who might.

Army (IRA), used undercover police officers over a long period of time to map the social networks that mobilized the anti-globalization and ecological protests around Earth First! in the UK.

All the undercover cops in the world cannot stop a protest whose time has come: Mark Kennedy and his handlers failed to prevent the G8 protests in Great Britain, as we described in “Can’t Stop the Chaos.” While Mark Kennedy focused the attention of the London Metropolitan Police on arresting the WOMBLES at a pub in Glasgow, he completely missed the primarily German black bloc that emerged to wreck havoc from a seemingly eco-hippie camp outside Stirling. To prevent this from recurring in the future, he was ordered to infiltrate the infamous “German Autonomen” that were to be key in the 2007 G8 in Heiligdamm, Germany. After gaining the trust of the notoriously security-conscious German anarchists by burning a car, his attention turned to a group of French revolutionaries, including Julien Coupat, a participant in *Tiqqun*.

In January 2008, Mark Kennedy showed up in New York City at an international discussion on the future of social movements. His targets were Julien Coupat and Yildune Lévy. These discussions focused primarily on how to go about occupying social space, an obvious necessity in New York City that prefigured #occupy. At the same time, Japanese intellectuals arrived in New York City who were interested in organizing an anti-globalization protest at the G8 in Japan. Mark Kennedy enrolled the FBI to help him keep tabs on Julien and Yildune.

Based on a televised statement from the New York City Chief of Police, it appears that police thought that Julien and Yildune might have been connected to the “Times Square Bicycle Bombing,” but as it turned out, neither of them were in the US at the time of the attack. The following year, raids on a house belonging to New York City anarchists turned up no useful evidence. Even the FBI eventually lost interest.

Meanwhile, the French police, too, were descending into a state of paranoia, as the 2011 G8 was slated for Deauville, France and the authorities were terrified of a massive black bloc taking the streets. The French police set their sights on a group of young people who had established a commune in the remote village of Tarnac³ as the locus of a subversive virus that had the potential to spread throughout all of France.

The Anti-Terrorist Police Strike

Like an old king in a Shakespeare play, the state was terrified of its own doom. Alain Bauer, foremost theoretician of the security apparatus, discovered *The Coming Insurrection* and mailed 40 copies of it to police forces, claiming that the book represented the re-emergence of the left-wing armed struggle groups that the police thought they had defeated in 1970s. President Sarkozy had combined the foreign-facing anti-terrorist group, the DST (*Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire*), and the internal *Renseignements généraux* together into a single new intelligence agency, DCRI (*Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur*). Inside this new word salad, the two agencies detested each other and began jockeying for power. In order for *Renseignements généraux* to be taken seriously, they had to prove that there was indeed a serious threat to the internal stability of France.

³ To give a sense of the remoteness of Tarnac, we need only note that the nearest town of any note is Limoges, the name of which has entered the French lexicon as a verb meaning *to be fired* or *to be sent into exile*. Of a judge who was demoted from a position in Paris to serve in one of the outer colonies, for example, it could be said that he was “*Limoged*.” The expression derives from the First World War, when Limoges was so far from the action that General Joffre sent senior staff there that he considered useless.

The French state decided that the debut party of the new French FBI, the DCRI, would be to eliminate their new “anarcho-autonomous” terror cell. The DCRI prepared for the SDAT (*Sous-direction anti-terroriste*) to carry out arrests throughout France on November 11, 2008.

The excuse the state put forward was that co-ordinated sabotage had taken place along four lines of the French national SNCF train system on the evening of November 7, utilizing a technique from the German autonomous movement in which the saboteur places an iron claw on the electrical lines of the railway so that the claw “unplugs” the electricity of the train. The purported sabotage occurred on the day that the infamous Castor nuclear trains carried nuclear waste from France to be dumped in Western Germany. Local farmers and various German movements have protested these nuclear waste transports for decades. The same evening that the train lines in France were shut down, a communiqué in German was sent to newspapers claiming the anti-nuclear action.

The French police claim that they had 18 police officers following Julien Coupat and Yildune Lévy on November 7, starting at 10 am. The surveillance was heavy-handed; frustrated at the oppressive atmosphere created by their police escorts, the two left Paris in hopes of getting some time to themselves. There followed a cat and mouse game as the young couple tried to lose the police who were tailing them. They stopped to eat a pizza, then tried to find a hotel room, but all the hotels were full. They decided to sleep in their car for a little while, then drove back to Paris.

In Rouen, in the region of Normandy, the police were monitoring well-known collective houses and noticed that Matthieu Burnel, Aria Thomas, Bertrand Deveaux, and Elsa Hauck had mysteriously left their house on the evening of November 7 as well. Benjamin Rosoux, Manon Glibert, and Gabrielle Hallez were also hassled by the police while sleeping in their car on November 7.

Three days later, on November 11, anti-terrorist police stormed Tarnac in an operation involving helicopters and hundreds of police. They arrested Julien, Manon, Gabrielle, and Benjamin; a similar operation seized Matthieu, Aria, Elsa, and Bertrand in their collective houses in Rouen. Yildune was arrested in Paris. Minister of the Interior Michèle Alliot-Marie took the stage to declare victory to the media, announcing that the police had stopped a terrorist cell that was preparing to violently overthrow the state.

The Tarnac Nine were accused of being part of an association of wrongdoers in relationship with a terrorist enterprise (*association de malfaiteurs en relationship avec un enterprise terroriste*). The equivalent in American or British law would be a conspiracy charge with terrorist enhancements. The number of defendants was expanded to ten after the arrest of Christophe Becker in Tarnac for creating documents found on Manon Glibert’s computer, which had been seized in a house raid.

The state thought it was finally safe, and yet no amount of undercover police and preemptive arrests can uphold a dying order for long.

The Insurrection Arrives

“Everybody knows it’s about to explode!” chanted occupiers at an impromptu release party in Barnes and Noble for the English translation of *The Coming Insurrection* in New York City.⁴ And explode it did. As the anti-terrorist operation was rounding up the supposed masterminds of a

⁴ To illustrate the common soil from which early CrimethInc. and Invisible Committee grew, we need only point out that this model was borrowed from a similar unpermitted release party at an unsuspecting corporate bookstore

new terrorist network throughout France, the financial crisis of 2008 pitched the world into global crisis, underscoring that the greatest risk to humanity is not those who threaten the system, but the system itself. As hatred of the banking system increased, riots spread throughout Europe like flames from a Molotov cocktail. Although there was no international barbarian horde to tear down the gates of the G8 at Deauville, it was because no one besides the police even cared: the G8 was clearly impotent in the face of generalized financial meltdown and increasingly decentralized unrest.

Meanwhile, the Tarnac defendants were imprisoned as political criminals and terrorists. Some arrestees were released quickly, while others were jailed for months. The accused “chief of the terrorist enterprise,” Julien Coupat, was held the longest, spending over six months in jail before public outcry over the emerging weakness of the case finally forced the authorities to release him. This reflected the challenges of bringing terrorism charges against young white people: it is likely that a Muslim charged with terrorism in those days would have remained in jail for much longer.

Unexpected friendships blossomed during the defendants’ imprisonment; Benjamin Rosoux befriended Maka Kantè from the banlieue of Villiers-le-Bel, who was accused of shooting at the police during the clashes of November 25–26, 2007. Villiers-le-Bel had erupted into open insurrection against the police after officers murdered two young locals. Despite their differences, the “anarcho-autonomous” arrestee from a middle-class family in Brittany and the second-generation African immigrant found common cause: “*Nous savons que nous sommes toujours plus nombreux, de tous horizons, déterminés à ne pas les laisser marcher sur nos têtes.*”⁵

Across the world, solidarity groups were launched from Russia to the United States. In Greece, beside an official French administrative building that had been attacked with Molotovs, graffiti appeared reading “From Tarnac to Athens, the insurrection has arrived.” Sales of *The Coming Insurrection* skyrocketed to 80,000, with the English translation prompting right-wing radio-host Glenn Beck to state that it was an “evil book” but “it’s important you read this.”

In response, the state did everything possible to isolate the Tarnac Ten from each other even after they were released from prison, instituting strict rules of non-association. This *contrôle judiciaire* restricted their movements to a small geographical area. In some ways, it is more humiliating and boring to be kept under house arrest at your parents’ isolated residence than to be kept in jail where you can fraternize with other victims of the state. Somehow, however, the idea of Tarnac as a collective political project survived, as comrades from places as distant as Switzerland and Italy moved to the tiny town to keep the *Magasin General* open.⁶

In December 2009, the Tarnac Ten decided to wilfully break their non-association rules, announcing in *Le Monde* that they would no longer abide by them. A lawyer representing them had officially asked the Court of Appeals to drop the charges restrictions, but they boldly posted their statement two days in advance.

“But what we desert first is the role of public enemy, that is to say, basically, of victim, that they wanted to make us play. And, if we desert it, it is to be able to

in the year 2000, at which a CrimethInc. cell in Connecticut celebrated the publication of *Days of War, Nights of Love*. The difference was that at the earlier event, the participants did not invite a reporter from the *New York Times*.

⁵ “We know that we are always more numerous, from all walks of life, determined not to let them step on our heads.” Maka Kantè and Benjamin Rousoux.

⁶ The village’s “general store.”

resume the fight. 'For the feeling of hunted game, we must substitute the initiative of the combatant,' said Georges Guingouin, in quite similar circumstances."

-The Tarnac defendants, writing in *Le Monde*

While Julien, Benjamin, Manon, and Gabrielle returned to Tarnac, the forces that had set the operation in motion were beginning to fall apart. In England, Mark Kennedy's identity as an undercover police officer was revealed in 2011 when his activist partner discovered his real passport and later found a birth certificate with the father's profession listed as "police officer." Confronted by his old friends, Mark Kennedy claimed to repent and even offered to help roll back the charges for previous court cases he had been involved in. There followed a uniquely English sex scandal that engulfed the London Metropolitan police and disrupted an undercover operation to infiltrate social movements that dated back to 1968. However, Mark Kennedy was no friend of the Tarnac Ten. He insinuated that stopping them justified his other less glorious undercover activities, such as sleeping with activists under his false identity.

As the Arab Spring kicked off in the former French colony of Tunisia, Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie proposed that the same anti-insurgency expertise responsible for the Tarnac arrests could be exported to Tunisia—along with a little tear gas—to help quell the unrest. When public sympathy turned in favor of Arab Spring, she was forced to resign; Sarkozy lost the French election in 2012 to the Socialist François Hollande, a deputy from Corrèze, the administrative division of France that includes Tarnac. In a statement entitled "Paris, Texas," the Tarnac Ten wrote that Sarkozy should return to his paymasters in the United States in the same manner Mubarak did when he fled for Saudi Arabia during the Arab Spring: "Mr. President, there are ranches for sale in Texas, and your plane is waiting for you at the Villacoublay airport."

Police officers worked themselves into a state of complete paranoia. Christian Bichet, one of the officers who had been surveilling the Tarnac Ten since at least 2007, opened no less than seven different blogs personally attacking them. The attacks of this particular disappointed intellectual-turned-police officer were so venomous that they appeared to come from disappointed ex-comrades from the anarchist milieu. This police officer formed fake support groups in order to obtain the names of supporters, wrote letters of support to the real support committees, and started leaking evidence of a global conspiracy to newspapers. When he was revealed, Bichet was removed from his position and demoted to tend the police archives.

One of the chief witnesses for the prosecution, a local farmer who had accused the defendants of burning down unemployment buildings and training for armed struggle, not only admitted to having signed the deposition that included these allegations under police pressure without reading it, but he also appeared to have lost his sanity. In an unrelated case, he was charged with fabricating death threats against himself, among other things. So much for that evidence! However deranged the authorities may make rebels out to be, you can count on ordinary people to be stranger.

The "investigating magistrate"⁷ Thierry Fragnoli behaved like a jilted lover. After announcing to a journalist that he wanted to be played by Brad Pitt in a movie about Tarnac, he ordered more house raids and arrests in Rouen in hopes of turning up actual evidence of terrorism. Fragnoli imagined that Charles Torres, a blacksmith and the grandson of a Spanish anarchist veteran,

⁷ An investigating magistrate is a judge, supposed to be neutral, who is charged with assembling a dossier representing the "truth" of the court case—a rather Enlightenment tradition.

had manufactured the iron claw used to shut down the train lines. However, during a house raid, the blundering French police accidentally left a dossier containing files on everyone they were surveilling in Rouen on the table—along with one of their police phones, which they had to meekly return to pick up! When the dossier and personal emails expressing his virulent hatred of the defendants were leaked to the French press, Fragnoli sent a paranoid letter claiming that a conspiracy existed between the French media and Julien’s Jewish lawyer, Jérémie Assous. This letter was duly published in the media. In response to subsequent pressure, Fragnoli quit the case and was effectively *Limoged3* to a French colony in the Pacific, Petite-Île.

While politicians, police officers, witnesses, and judges struggled with incompetence and delusions, the villagers of Tarnac were at first divided on how to respond to the arrests. On one hand, their quiet rural lives had been disrupted by the terrorist raids; on the other hand, the young people that the state was targeting were clearly bringing life back to the little village. The terrorism trial revived the historical memory of the old communist mountain farmers of Tarnac, who had resisted the Nazi occupation and bore more than a passing resemblance to Julien Coupat. At the local general store, the conversation turned to the topic of “collaboration” as the villagers recognized the latent fascism hiding under “anti-terrorism.” The very evening of the arrests, a solidarity committee formed in Tarnac, echoed shortly thereafter by dozens more solidarity groups across France. Together, they began raising funds and publicly speaking on behalf of the arrestees.

By and large, anarchists and—more surprisingly—the broader Left united around Tarnac. By 2011, this solidarity had given the defendants such courage that many of them publicly participated in a massive public direct action to stop the very same Castor nuclear-waste carrying trains that they had been accused of sabotaging in 2008. Such public support for an action that had been labeled as terrorism only a few years earlier highlighted how the context in France had changed since the arrests. When the Hollande government attempted to push through the construction of an airport near Nantes, eco-anarchists set up the autonomous ZAD (*Zone À Défendre*) occupying the proposed site. When the French state sent over two thousand police to evict them in the hilariously misnamed “Operation Caesar,” more than forty thousand people showed up from all walks of life in support of the new barbarians.

The Tarnac Ten continued their process of collective theorization, repairing their raided farm at Goutailloux in order to host seminars on everything from feminism to cybernetics. This helped to reinvigorate the French autonomous movement, eventually resulting in the first new book from the Invisible Committee since the arrests, *To Our Friends*, which hazarded an analysis of the insurrectionary process after 2011. It was published in 2014, not a moment too late; #occupy finally hit France in the form of the *Nuit Debout* protests, followed by massive black blocs at the anti-austerity protests against the *Loi de Travail* in 2016. These protests undermined whatever remaining credibility President Hollande possessed, leading to the historic collapse of both the French Socialist Party and the right-wing *Les Républicains*. In the wake of this final wave of protests that shook France to its very foundations, the Invisible Committee published a new book in 2017, *Maintenant*. Finally entering the internet era, associates began producing an online newspaper, *lundi.am*.

As the French state continued to face one popular uprising after another, the charges of “terrorism” seemed increasingly quaint. Scandal after scandal had sapped the police of legitimacy; the illegal involvement of the British undercover Mark Kennedy could not be denied when notes detailing his surveillance of Julien in his handwriting were revealed, by accident, via court dis-

closures in the United Kingdom. At the same time, France was rocked by attacks carried out by fundamentalists affiliated with the Islamic State. This made the tremendous amount of resources the state had poured into trying to make a “terrorist” menace out of the ultra-left appear ridiculous. The new investigating magistrate, noting the fate of her predecessor Fragnoli and the popularity of the Tarnac Ten, decided that the terrorist charges were to be dropped.

The original charge was essentially terrorist conspiracy—seeking “to severely disturb public order through intimidation or terror.” The alleged crime consisted of taking part in international meetings in Germany, the US, and Greece, inciting violence against police officers and destruction of property, and destroying train power lines. The anti-terrorist prosecutor was determined not to let the narrative of terrorism collapse, and presented appeal after appeal against the dropping of the terror charges. Eventually, the prosecution took the accusation of “terrorism” to the highest court of France, the *court de cassation*. In 2015, the court ruled that the charge of a “terrorist enterprise” was to be dropped, but that a criminal trial without the charge of “terrorist enhancement” would continue.

The accused of Tarnac were downgraded from terrorism defendants to an *association de malfaiteurs*, a charge introduced in 1894 for the express purpose of sending anarchists to jail in France for supporting direct action in newspapers such as *l’Anarchie* even if no other charges could be brought against them. Without the terrorism charge, the case was held together by the barest of threads. Gabrielle Hallez and Aria Thomas saw their charges completely dropped, reducing the Tarnac Ten to the Tarnac Eight.

Matthieu Burnel and Benjamin Rosoux were charged with refusing to give their DNA to the police. Manon Glibert and Christophe Becker faced charges for faking documents. Bertrand Deveaux and Elsa Hauck remained charged with *association de malfaiteurs*, but not on account of the sabotage, which everyone maintained they had nothing to do with. Rather, they were accused of participating in an anti-fascist demonstration against an EU summit on blocking immigration that was organized in Vichy—ironically, during the occupation, the seat of the collaborationist government that deported Jews and communists to Nazi death camps. Only Yildune Lévy and Julien Coupat retained the sabotage charges and the charges of being part of an *association de malfaiteurs*. Julien had been demoted from being the chief of a terrorist conspiracy to a mere *animateur*, dovetailing with his current job as part of a theater group.

The attempt to introduce the logic of anti-terrorism had failed. The French state had tried to use a massive media operation to convince the public that the “anarcho-autonomous” movement was a “pre-terrorist organization” in 2011, but they were defeated on their own territory. The Tarnac Ten withstood the pressure and managed to convince the vast majority of the French population that autonomy was not synonymous with terrorism.

At the same time, in the end, the prosecution was able to avail themselves of all the special resources reserved for pursuing terrorism cases to target what turned out to be a handful of perfectly ordinary activists. All the evidence gathered under the auspices of “fighting terrorism” was still admissible in the trial. The lead anti-terrorist prosecutor was still prosecuting the case, despite the merely criminal nature of the trial. Above all, the tremendous, debilitating repression reserved for terrorism cases was directed at paralyzing the defendants and their communities. This gives us a foretaste of what we can expect from the security apparatus in the future. We can see this process somewhat further along in Russia and Brazil.

The “Tarnac Process”

“Before the judges of the bourgeois class, the revolutionary does not have to account for his acts nor does he have to respect any so-called truth of theirs.”

-Victor Serge

In every court case, there are certain roles: the solemn judges, the defendants pleading guilty or innocent (but above all, pleading), and a well-paid supporting cast of parasites, from lawyers to journalists, who stand to profit from the case. The entire procedure requires everyone to play by the rules. Even denouncing the entire juridical procedure, as popularized by Algerian revolutionaries and illegalist anarchists,⁸ has become a formalized part of the procedure. But when the court case opened on March 13, 2018, it became clear that the defendants were not playing the game.

How might the accused avoid playing the game of the state? Perhaps, first, by treating all the members of the trial, including the prosecutor and the judge, as everyday people: laughing when they say something stupid, chiding them when they forget a key point, refusing to put them on a pedestal. The judge, irritated, demanded that the defendants either denounce the court or continue in a respectful manner: “You are free to adopt a defense of rupture,” she railed, “it’s your right. But if you don’t want this, you need to respect the court.” The Tarnac defendants refused either approach, discussing the facts of the case in detail but according the pomp and circumstance of the judicial sphere no respect. The proceedings resembled a decidedly more philosophical version of the Chicago Seven trial, with the defendants constantly interrupting the judge, the police, the lawyers, and each other.

Another way the defendants subverted the justice system was by neither denying the charges nor validating them. While the act of sabotage itself was clearly defensible as an anti-nuclear ecological measure and the French court attempted to suppress the fact that police had received a communiqué from German groups claiming responsibility for it, the defendants never denounced the action. Likewise, the prosecutor showed picture after picture of the accused at a demonstration in Vichy against the opponents of immigration, at which they were alleged to have brought ropes to pull down the fencing around the meeting. Finally, Christophe emerged and noted that it was ridiculous to question the defendants about a demonstration that had taken place ten years earlier, but asserted that he was proud to have participated in a demonstration for immigration. The entire court broke into applause. The defendants never recanted any of their actions but, one by one, gave reasons for them. Julien, for example, justified his illegal border crossing into the United States from Canada as a refusal of a fascist biometric system.

More importantly, the defendants never refused their cause. While the defendants proclaimed their support of the autonomous project of Tarnac in public, the police and intelligence officers hid their identities behind masks, referred to by numbers rather than names.

The judge attempted to go through the file in chronological order. She hastily pushed through the files on Mark Kennedy and the infamous trip of Julien and Yildune Lévy to New York City

⁸ In France in the 1960s, during the Algerian war, a lawyer who later became famous “invented” what he called the “defense of rupture,” in which the accused did not recognize the legitimacy of the trial. In the context of fighting colonization, it meant that FLN members did not recognize the right of French courts to judge them on Algerian soil. Afterwards, some extreme-left groups used this approach up to the 1980s to denounce “bourgeois justice,” as opposed to some sort of imagined “proletarian” justice.

after Julien openly mocked FBI reports about a Network of Worldwide Anarchists (NWA). Even in France, NWA sounds like an acronym for a hip-hop band or wrestling federation; the defendants took the opportunity to hold forth on the history of hip hop in the USA. Still, the judge refused to acknowledge the crucial role played by the intelligence of Mark Kennedy, seeking to avoid blaming the English spy for the initial frame of anti-terrorism.

As the trial continued, the question of the authorship of *The Coming Insurrection* came up again and again. The book states that,

“To sabotage the social machine with some consequence today means reconquering and reinventing the means of interrupting its networks. How could a TGV [high speed train] line or an electrical network be rendered useless?”

This quote was used as evidence to demonstrate conclusively that there was a plan to “paralyze” the city. While expressing agreement with the contents of the book, the defendants never admitted to authoring the text. Strangely, the charge of thoughtcrime premised on authorship of *The Coming Insurrection* had been the *raison d’être* for the terrorist charges. In the time since the charges had first been pressed, it had become one of the best-selling political books in France; legions of intellectuals, paranoid police officers, and journalists had agreed that the book was of high quality. The terrorism charges created a paradox for those who wished to see themselves as the defenders of society: if the authors were terrorists, was the popularity of the book a sign of popular support for terrorism?

The court embarked on outright Dadaism when it was decided that both the police and the defendants had to re-enact the original sabotage. As if on a school field trip, the judge, the prosecutor, and the defendants rode together to Dhuisy in a bus to re-enact the purported sabotage. Five anti-terrorist police officers who participated in the trial as masked anonymous witnesses rode along in one of the 30 police cars that escorted the bus; a police helicopter flew along overhead the whole day. The police and intelligence agency witnesses had to keep their masks on the entire time. As the court had to verify elements of the police testimony both in daylight and at night, the court and the defendants had to wait in a festival hall surrounded by dozens of *gendarmes*. The defendants ate and drank wine in this surreal situation while the antiterrorist witnesses had to stay outside to maintain their anonymity. When the police reappeared for the last verification of the night, they complained to the judge that they couldn’t eat. The defendants’ lawyers answered that there might be some crumbs left over, hinting that—in a reversal of the ordinary relation between rebels and the lackeys of the state—they should eat the defendants’ trash. Of course, the police refused their just desserts.

As the trial closed, the judge struggled to maintain order. Mathieu Burnel, in his final statement, used the court as a platform to indict the state apparatus itself rather than submit to the judgment of the state. Julien took the stand and noted that it was indeed their privileged roles as intellectuals that saved them: “The peculiarity of this trial is that the judicial apparatus has come up against people who are prepared to defend themselves and determined not to let themselves be crushed. We are conscious of having had the chance to defend ourselves, of being able to speak, of having three weeks in which to do so. Since we’ve fought, we have benefited from certain privileges. Having spent a little time in prison, I would like to dedicate this trial to all those who haven’t had the means to defend themselves, who are not listened to and who are convicted in silence.” The court broke into a final applause for the alleged terrorists.

There's No Justice—It's Just Us

So what can we learn from the Tarnac case? First, that with a little luck and perseverance, it can be possible to face down the full force of the state. The Tarnac case could have turned out much worse had the defendants not stood together uncompromisingly. At the beginning, the situation must have looked grim indeed.

After the Tarnac arrests, at previously tame French demonstrations, more and more young masked people attacked the police. The police have also learned from the Tarnac affair, continuing to repress revolutionaries with absurd charges, although somewhat more discreetly. We cannot say that either party has really come out ahead in this conflict. What we have seen over the past ten years is a parallel development of both forces. On one hand, the idea of a few revolutionaries being really dangerous as a small self-contained group has been dispelled, yet everything that the police targeted spread throughout French society: anonymity, riots, the refusal of all institutional politics. At the same time, if the Tarnac prosecutions did not entirely succeed, the police are rapidly learning how to employ their intelligence gathering more effectively. Conspiracy cases are more and more common; surveillance and police violence are intensifying by the day. The end of this story has yet to be written.

Anti-terrorism is a peculiar kind of logic. As the enemy is potentially anyone, all it takes to label someone a terrorist is to frame the actions of the accused in such a way that they potentially undermine the stability of the state. As the state edges closer to dissolution, there are more and more excuses to accuse people of undermining its stability. The security apparatus is on the lookout for anyone who refuses the logic of capitalist individualism—a category that can include anyone from Islamic fundamentalists to anarchists who want to live in a commune. Benjamin Rosoux observed this irony in court when he noted that life in Tarnac was based on openness and sharing, while the police were hiding in the forest taking photos of their houses.

What is terrorism? Terrorism is the panic put into the state apparatus by the fear of its own demise. Terrorism, defined by the state, is not a matter of *human anguish* but of *institutional loss of control*. The Tarnac Ten struck a chord of terror in the state—not because of the force they could muster, but because of the uncontrollable potential they represent. The specter of insurrection that had disappeared in the 1980s returned, as new groups of young people appeared who were prepared to defy the existing order.

One should never underestimate the power of small groups. The Paris Commune was not brought about by a great organization or Party, but by myriad small conspiracies: the Vigilance Committees that met in each arrondissement, the networks of friends and neighbors on each street in the faubourgs. When the stars align, little conspiracies like these can spread like wildfire until they are innumerable; that is what creates the conditions for uncontrollable insurrection. This is why the state apparatus always attempts to nip these conspiracies in the bud; it is why they targeted the Tarnac defendants in hopes of forestalling the wave of unrest that surged in December 2008; and it is why no amount of repression can ultimately stem the tide of insurrection, for it can spring anew from any of the countless nodes in the vast web of relations that makes up this society.

It is the intensity of feeling that we can share that the state fears above all, the capacity to generate new dreams and ambitions together. This is the very stuff of life. For those who can find it together, it is worth any ordeal, any degree of repression.

Some have criticized the way the Tarnac Ten engaged with the media and with the public notions of legitimacy represented by the intellectuals who came forward to speak in their favor. We should never make the mistake of believing that media exposure or social legitimacy are tools that can in themselves serve to advance the cause of liberation; but nor can we always afford to do without them entirely when the forces of repression use those tools to set the stage to destroy us. As anarchists, we are always fighting against the terrain itself as well as against our adversaries. This is not a reason not to fight on the terrain of media or perceived legitimacy; it simply means that we must find a way to operate in that territory that enables us to outflank the authorities without absorbing their logic. Every blow they strike against us must cost them double: in this regard, the explosion of interest that the Tarnac arrests produced in *The Coming Insurrection* sets a good example for how revolutionaries can prepare to make the phase of repression just another step in our plans—a phase in which we can *continue to advance*.

At the same time, spectacular fame is dangerous, above all because it enables the spectator to sit back and let another protagonist stand in for his or her own agency. We must not look to any particular cadre of heroes for the next brilliant theory or courageous action. If the promise of the Invisible Committee is that perhaps, in a world of Maoist academics and hipsters spouting empty words, someone somewhere might be putting their thoughts into action, that someone must be *us*.

There are still many battles to be fought, and many thoughts yet unthought, and many acts for which one must try not to get caught. The fear of imprisonment should not prevent us from unifying our thoughts with our actions. Indeed, the possibility that we might do so is the last, best hope of a dying world.

Appendix: Extracts from Mathieu Burnel’s Closing Statement

“You have all claimed that this trial was exceptional. What we’ve seen on the contrary is something extremely banal: different parties disagreeing who debate, argue, and talk. This is what has been happening forever in all human aggregations. It’s banal and normal. What you actually consider exceptional is that we come into this court without looking down and without kowtowing. That we didn’t submit to all this, this little theatrical ritual of submission that makes your daily life...

“We came here out of curiosity, but to be honest, Madame judge, we haven’t discovered much in this court that we didn’t expect. A ritual, some theater, robes, gildings, and all this petty quaint staging. Everyone playing his role, playing his little music, his little indignation, his little seriousness, his little articles of law and even sometimes his ‘great and just authority.’ In reality, what I believe, Madame president, is that what we obliged you to tolerate those three weeks, what you condemned yesterday evening⁹ is that we were the only people in this room to not play a role, to not pretend, to not play the petty game of justice...

“What actually happened during those long days of trial that you call ‘exceptional’? A small displacement, a tiny step aside. You came here with some expectations. You were going to see this

⁹ When she said the defendants were the most ill-mannered people she had ever met.

famous ‘Tarnac group.’ Gurus, a sect, ‘political activists,’ ‘anarcho-autonomous,’ professionals of riots or theoreticians of violent revolution, what else? But in the end, you ended up in front of us: Manon Glibert, Julien Coupat, Benjamin Rosoux, Yildune Lévy, Christophe Becker, Bertrand Deveaud, Mathieu Burnel. And we appeared banal, normal. You even asked us some really curious questions: Manon, what is the musical instrument she’s playing? Benjamin, his political science degree, he received it in Rennes or Paris? And how do you manage to live on 750 euros a month?

“This tiny step aside, we probably provoked it, but it is within yourself that it operated. You’ve gathered in the course of these three weeks of trial that what is the most singular about revolutionaries is that they are made of what is infinitely common.

“We don’t need any empathy, we actually never complained. What we did during those ten years is what we know how to do: fight. This is what people like us do: resist, fight back. It was about holding ourselves to a central and sovereign refusal: not to accept to be crushed. The forces joined against us were massive and powerful. We had to find resources, time, strength, and complicities. We held ourselves to this tiny but irreducible truth: you won’t crush us. The ‘us’ here not being limited to the eight of us, of course, but to all those who were indirectly targeted by this political, media, and juridical operation. We and our friends, who are numerous. Whatever the outcome of this trial will be, we’ll come out of it stronger than we entered it, stronger than ten years ago.”

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The Tarnac Verdicts: Unraveling the Logic of Anti-Terrorism
After Ten Years, the “Tarnac Affair” Concludes in France
April 12, 2018

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