

Invisible Politics

An Introduction to Contemporary Communitisation

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In the wake of the organised left and the demise of working class self-identity, communitisation offers a paradoxical means of superseding capitalism in the here and now whilst abandoning orthodox theories of revolution. John Cunningham reports from the picket line of the ‘human strike’

As we apprehend it, the process of instituting communism can only take the form of a collection of acts of communitisation, of making common such-and-such space, such-and-such-machine, such-and-such-knowledge.

– The Invisible Committee, *Call*, 2004¹

The critique of capital, and speculation around the form and content of communism, always seems to oscillate between a historical materialist science on the one hand and the elaboration of new forms of subjectivity and affectivity on the other. Even Marx, while infinitely more familiar as a close analyst of capital, had early moments of Fourier-style abandon when he attempted to elaborate the more mutable subjective content of a communist society. The dissolution of wage labour would make

it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner [...].²

This suggests a society wherein circuits of affectivity are established that are no longer based upon the exigencies of value production — even if I personally prefer communist utopia as idleness to Marx’s endless activity. Of course, this is one of the rare instances where Marx speaks in the future tense, leaving aside the messiness of the transition from capitalism. Recently, a series of texts from the milieu around the French journal *Tiqqun* — primarily *Call*, *How is to be Done?*,

¹ Anonymous, *Call*, 2004, UK, no imprint, p.66. PDF available here: <http://zinelibrary.info/call>

² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996, p.54.

The Coming Insurrection — have reintroduced this question of the subjective content of communism in a way that might restore a speculative aspect to the critique of capital.³ These are not theoretical texts per se, more inspirational ‘How To’ manuals for the elaboration of communisation as subjective and conceptual secession from both capital and the left. As *Call* states, ‘Nothing can happen that does not begin with a secession from everything that makes this desert grow.’⁴ This discursive distance from the more traditional ultra-left positions on communisation is also reflected in dense, poetic prose that establishes an affinity with possible precursors in revolt such as Dada, Surrealism and Bataille. The development of the thesis of communisation within the ultra-left was always part of an attempt to shift away from the traditional programmatic forms of the party and the union towards an engagement with forms of resistance rising immanently from the social relation of capital, such as wildcat strikes. What might be at stake in a restating of the question of communisation as radical subjectivist secession against the often discredited ideological formulas of anti-capitalist milieus?

It’s best to consider this question alongside the series of texts presented by *Endnotes* that ably document the continued elaboration of communisation within the French ultra-left by presenting a series of texts by Gilles Dauvé and *Theorie Communiste*.⁵ Both are rooted in the diverse groupuscles of the French far left in the 1970s that shared a fidelity to 1968 of whom Debord and the Situationists remain the most renowned.⁶ Dauvé and *Theorie Communiste* retain a commitment to communisation but diverge sharply around questions of agency and history. What remains under-theorised in both Dauvé’s humanist Marxism and *Theorie Communiste*’s more recently formulated Marxist structuralism is any real problematisation of the production of subjectivity within capital. An insertion of this question might illuminate the impasse faced by these more hermetic theoretical critiques of capital. In sketching out the contours of contemporary theories of communisation, a constellation composed of questions around subjectivity, negation, history and utopia emerges. Does a reconsideration of communisation open up new perspectives and different possibilities, given the gap between the cramped space revolutionary milieus find themselves in and any genuine expectations of radical change? Or is even discussing communisation at this time akin to scraping a toothache with a fingernail, pointless utopianism in the face of the constantly mutating social relation of capital?

Before answering this question, though, what is *communisation*? The term immediately evokes various social experiments and revolutionary endeavours from the Paris Commune and utopian socialist communities in the 19th century through to various counter-cultural attempts to reconstitute social relations on a more communitarian basis such as the squatting scene in the 1970s

³ *Tiqqun* was a French journal published between 1999 and 2001. The term is the French transliteration of a Hebrew/Kabbalistic word for redemption, an obvious reference towards the Benjamin and Agamben influenced model of messianic politics to which this strand of communisation subscribes. There were two issues and associated books such as *Theorie du Bloom*, *Theorie de la Jeune Fille* and later texts such as *The Coming Insurrection*. More *Tiqqun* and related material is available at the following: <http://www.tiqqun.info/> ; <http://www.bloom0101.org/tiqqun.html> ; <http://www.bloom0101.org/translations.html> . A good article on the Tarnac 9 case and the controversy around *The Coming Insurrection* is Alberto Toscano’s ‘The War Against Pre-Terrorism’ available at <http://slash.interactivist.net/node/11805>

⁴ *Call*, op. cit., p.33.

⁵ *Endnotes*, Brighton, UK, 2008. For texts and ordering details see the following: <http://endnotes.org.uk/> . The introduction is a great account of the genealogy of communisation in the French ultra-left though it doesn’t engage with *Tiqqun*.

⁶ For further details on the milieu out of which communisation arose, this interview with Giles Dauvé is useful: http://www.riff-raff.se/en/7/gd_corr.php

and '80s. The *Tiqqun* strand — henceforth to be known as The Invisible Committee after the eponymous signatories of *The Coming Insurrection* — draws upon this long history of secessionist antagonism. They posit communisation as essentially being the production, through the formation of 'communes', of collective forms of radical subjectivity. This destabilises the production of subjectivity and value within both capital and more traditional forms of political organisation, eventually leading to an insurrectionary break. 'Commune' in this instance is not necessarily a bunch of hippies aspiring to a carbon free life style. In *The Coming Insurrection* a commune is almost anything that 'seeks to break all economic dependency and all political subjugation', ranging from wildcat strikes to Radio Alice in Bologna in 1977, and innumerable other forms of collective experimentation.⁷

While not completely missing the point, there is a danger of this understanding obscuring the specificity of 'communisation' as a concept and form of praxis that, as *Endnotes* trace out, emerged within the post-'68 ultra-left milieu and then later within insurrectionist anarchism through Alfredo Bonnano. A minimal definition of communisation would be, as Dauvé and Francois Martin wrote in 1972 in an early formulation, the following:

Communism is not a set of measures to be put into practice after the seizure of power [...]. All past movements were able to bring society to a standstill and waited for something to come out of this universal stoppage. Communisation, on the contrary, will circulate goods without money [...] it will tend to break all separations.⁸

This simultaneous destruction of value production alongside the thoroughgoing transformation of social relations as an immanent revolutionary process presupposes the negation of wage labour. The proletariat rather than being embodied in work and its valorisation, whether through wage labour or workers' organisations, becomes the agency of self-abolition. Communisation would mean no more proletariat immediately, not after some interminable period of proletarian state or workers' council management.

For Dauvé, here writing with Karl Nestic, communisation is the potential result of the dialectical opposition between living labour and the inhuman agency of capital. As he states:

'Subject' and 'object' don't exist separate from one another. A crisis is not something exterior to us that happens and forces us to react. Historical situations (and opportunities) are also made of [...] our actions or inactions.⁹

Dauvé rejects theoretical determinism in favour of a more realistically indeterminate historical trajectory, where the only invariants within capital are humanity, alienation, exploitation and resistance. For Dauvé, communisation has been a possibility since 1848, as against the strict periodisation of *Theorie Communiste*.

Theorie Communiste's position is that due to the shift in production to a second phase of real subsumption, post 1960s, capital and labour power are imbricated in a reproductive circuit.¹⁰

⁷ The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009. Recently published by Semiotext(e) the book has been circulating on the internet for some time and is also available here: <http://tarnac9.wordpress.com/texts/the-coming-insurrection/>. Page references refer to the published version (p.102).

⁸ Gilles Dauvé and Francois Martin, *The Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement*, London: Antagonism, 1997, p.36. Originally published in 1974 by Black and Red, Detroit, USA.

⁹ Dauvé and Nestic, 'Love of Labour, Love of Labour Lost...' in *Endnotes*, op. cit., p.152.

¹⁰ See 'Much Ado About Nothing' in *Endnotes*, *ibid*, p.155 and the afterword in *Endnotes* for details of the position that *Theorie Communiste* take towards Dauvé and their elaboration of communisation from conditions of contempo-

Communisation as the self-abolition of the proletariat is only now a possible horizon due to the dissolution of the organised, programmatic parties and unions of the traditional left. Their unveiling in the 20th century, as the necessary managers of the production of value has subsequently led to the inability of the proletariat to constitute an opposition to capital through their self-identification as workers. Stripped bare of any sense of voluntarist agency and subjectivity, what is left is the fact of structural exploitation and increasing proletarianisation that possibly leads to communisation. This dialectical synthesis without any reconciliation was impossible in previous phases of capital where revolution was inexorably tied to labour and the production of value.

Bracketing off the question of political agency and subjectivity in favour of historical structuralism, waving goodbye to the multitude and other spectral forms, is a welcome dose of anti-humanism. However, *Theorie Communiste* seem too eager to remove any subjective agency from oppositional politics. There's a pessimism underlying their evacuation of any possibility in history that is an inversion of the classic 20th century social democratic Marxist paradigm of an inexorable movement towards communism. Too much value is fixed on the movement of history towards real subsumption of capital rather than evaluating history as composed of discontinuous breaks, fractures and events. One such might be the Paris Commune.

In its brief existence, the Commune prefigures many of the themes in contemporary discourse around communisation as both an immanent process of attempting to construct a non-state public sphere and an insurrectionist outburst that broke with the slow advance of 19th century commodity capitalism. Marx grasped that the 'whole sham of State mysteries and State pretensions was done (away) by a Commune, mostly consisting of simple working people' and that the aim of the commune was the 'expropriation of the expropriators', the dissolution of class and property.¹¹ While the commune was primarily political it indicated for Marx the intertwined nature of revolutionary change, abolishing the separation between the economic and political and at certain conjunctures being wedded to insurrectionist force. For Marx the 'great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence', but he believed it gestured towards social emancipation in the limited measures, (such as the appropriation of disused workshops), it was able to undertake in its brief existence.¹² He wrote that '... the present rising in Paris — even if it be crushed by the wolves, swine and vile curs of the old society — is the most glorious deed of our Party...'¹³

Benjamin's 'dialectical image', the juxtaposition of past and present in order to break the frozen reified image of both, provides a way of asking what resources an event such as the Paris Commune might offer the present.¹⁴ This does not pose the existence of an invariant human subject as much as (re)examines the past in light of the present and restores an actuality and potentiality to history. For instance, Badiou has read the Paris Commune as 'what, for the first and to this day only time, broke with the parliamentary destiny of popular and workers' political movements'

rary 'real subsumption'. Also *Riff-Raff* 8 has a good series of texts around TC 11. See, <http://www.riff-raff.se/en/8/> at

¹¹ Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977, p.176; for the phrase 'expropriation of the expropriators', p.75.

¹² Marx, *ibid*, p.81.

¹³ Marx to Dr Kugelmann [London] April 12, 1871, text available here: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71_04_17.htm

¹⁴ See Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, London: Harper Collins, 1992, p.245.

establishing a template for ‘a declaration to break with the left.’¹⁵ Badiou sees this as a model for both a subjective intervention against capital and a communism subtracted from the state. The Invisible Committee constantly refers to the Paris Commune in a similar fashion making suggestive juxtapositions throughout *The Coming Insurrection*. The Paris Commune is present in the text as a constant reminder of the barbarism that the French republic is founded upon, the ‘tradition of the oppressed’ that’s all too easily effaced by the empty continuum of history as the onward march of capital.¹⁶

A theory and practice formed in the still tempestuous wake of May ’68 wildcat strikes — the refusal of work, the proliferation of left groupuscles — and conditioned by this event, communisation posits an escalation of the destruction of commodity production as a millennial break. Concepts such as this, formed at a particular conjunction of forces and material conditions, can easily decline into ideology or, at best, a regulative idea that has little to do with actual social struggle in the present once that moment has passed. All of these different theories of communisation emerge from a sense of a cramped discursive and political space. Post 1968, this cramped space might be viewed as the all too obvious limitations of the traditional workers’ movement, specifically the Communist Party and its affiliated trade unions, in abetting the state suppression of the events alongside, of course, commodified social relations. In terms of the continued elaboration of communisation in the present, such a cramped space, given the weakness of the institutional left, might be composed of the post-Seattle ‘anti-capitalist’ movement itself, or at least its remnants. This movement has given rise to what The Invisible Committee describes, in *How is it to be Done?*, as the ‘desire killing demonstrations’ that ‘no longer demonstrate anything but a collective absence.’¹⁷

This ‘collective absence’ is not so much a lack of organisation for The Invisible Committee as a plenitude of organisational forms that serve to divert antagonism into reformist or activist dead ends, constructing milieus that are concerned with their own self-perpetuation as fetishised organisational structures. At best, these attempt symmetrical conflict with capital rather than more asymmetrical tactics of withdrawal, diffusion and sabotage. For me, this ‘collective absence’ in contemporary forms of activism and militancy is all too apparent in those constrained ideologies, such as the identity politics that dominate much of contemporary ‘radical’ politics. Hence, contemporary anti-capitalism is riddled with a ridiculous anarchist, ecological and socialist moralism that masks itself as a politics. This critique of militancy is prefigured in Dauvé and Martin’s early 1970s observation that the ‘communist movement is anti-political, not a-political.’ Dauvé and Martin grasp communism as inherently social and immanent to capital while rejecting the traditional role of the militant who ‘interferes in these struggles to bring the communist gospel’.¹⁸ It’s this anti-political strand, the negation of contemporary political forms or what Jacques Camatte termed ‘rackets’ that I find most constructive, in a destructive way, within theories of communisation.¹⁹ Nick Thoburn, in his book *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*, argues that cramped political

¹⁵ Alain Badiou, *Polemics*, London: Verso, 2006, pp.272–273.

¹⁶ *The Coming Insurrection*, op. cit., p.88 and p.130. A further suggestive connection is in the text ‘To a Friend’ wherein the 19th century revolutionary Auguste Blanqui is presented as an inspirational ‘conceptual persona’ containing the unfulfilled potentiality of the past. The text is available here: <http://libcom.org/history/auguste-blanqui>

¹⁷ Tiqqun, *How is it to be Done?*, 2008, <http://www.bloom0101.org/translations.html>

¹⁸ Dauvé and Martin, op. cit., p.39.

¹⁹ Jacques Camatte, ‘On Organization’, in *This World We Must Leave*, New York: Autonomedia, 1995, p.19. Camatte is an important precursor to much of the Invisible Committee’s anti-politics both in his rejection of orthodox radicalism and the tendency towards secession that he expressed by moving towards primitivism. Given that he

and discursive spaces, composed of both traditional organisational forms and capital as a social relation, are productive of innovative attempts to reassemble lines of flight from available resources. These clear a space and allow the articulation of previously ignored demands and the formation of oppositional subjectivities.²⁰ Or more succinctly, all the strands of communisation are attempting to dissolve the worker as worker into a more diffuse antagonistic subject.

The Invisible Committee's complex assemblage of ultra-leftism and situationist theory has operative within it just such an attempt to produce new forms of political subjectivity, Agamben and Foucault playing a theoretically pivotal role. To inspire secessionist communisation seems an odd fate for Agamben, a philosopher who is most famed for the melancholic framing of contemporary subjectivity within the parameters of 'bare life', the passive residue of the human subject under biopolitical sovereignty.²¹ The reduction of humanity, through political sovereignty, to classes, identities and subjects such as citizen, worker or migrant is essentially based upon the exception that is 'bare life'. Opposing this, Agamben's concept of 'form-of-life' or 'whatever singularity' is utilised by The Invisible Committee to suggest a political subjectivity that isn't contained within the parameters of 'bare life' and an identifiable subject.²² As they note, 'I become a whatever singularity. My presence starts overflowing the whole apparatus of qualities that are usually associated with me.'²³ Sounds esoteric, but it's worth emphasising the explicit relation to labour power that 'whatever singularity' retains in its element of the refusal of the role of worker. Agamben writes that 'form-of-life' is

a life [...] in which the single ways, acts and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power.²⁴

And in this case it's the power, or *Potenza*, to refuse wage labour and hence challenge the extraction of value from living labour. This 'irrevocable exodus from any sovereignty' is an emancipation from producing value towards the potentialities of an inseparability between activity and subject.²⁵

This inoperative collective political subject takes the form of the 'Human Strike' within The Invisible Committee's radical subjectivism. In *How is it to be Done?* 'Human Strike' is the point where the human subject as constituted within capital breaks down and refuses or simply ceases to function, a 'Luddism of the human machinery that feeds capital'.²⁶ This is a Bartleby style refusal that responds to the (re)production of subjectivity within contemporary capitalism throughout the entire social field by valorising negativity and dysfunction. *The Coming Insurrection* highlights an advertising slogan, 'I AM WHAT I AM', and sarcastically but accurately notes, 'Never has domination found such an innocent sounding slogan.'²⁷ An individualism that is the sub-

started as an ultra-left follower of Bordiga, Camatte might be the missing link between the different strands of communisation.

²⁰ Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*, London: Taylor and Francis, 2003.

²¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.

²² Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p.3.

²³ *How is it to be Done?*, op. cit., p.5.

²⁴ Giorgio Agamben, 'Form-of-Life', in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt eds., *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p.151.

²⁵ Agamben, 2000, op. cit. p.3. When Agamben speaks of power in this context it has more in common with the Italian term *Potenza*, usually linked to a sense of potentiality than force or violence as sovereignty.

²⁶ *How is it to be Done?*, op. cit., p.16.

²⁷ *The Coming Insurrection*, op. cit., p.31.

sumption of affective qualities within the circuits of capital. The individual is nothing but the residual effects of an incorporation of identities promulgated through the apparatuses of production, consumption and leisure. The real subsumption of the human by capital presented in *The Coming Insurrection* begins to resemble a bad day commuting to work. This production of subjectivity is what Foucault termed ‘governmentality’, wherein power is not only repressive and disciplinary but also creates the conditions for the production of value, encouraging forms of subjectification that channel creativity and affective identification towards the valorisation of capital.²⁸

As *Theorie Communiste* point out, what produces a blockage within the Marxist humanism of Dauvé is a view of subjectivity within capital as something produced purely through the repression of an invariant humanity. Granted, this Marxist humanism still has a radical import around unleashing the potentiality of the human outside of the wage relation but there’s little problematisation of the forms of subjectivity. However, in attempting to embrace a rigorous anti-humanism, *Theorie Communiste* fall prey to simply evacuating any notion of subjective agency as being a soppy romanticism in favour of economic determination. This reinforces the hermetic nature of such critique as relatively divorced from the experiences of everyday life.

None of this is a particularly new problematic, given the proliferation of theories of radical subjectivity since at least György Lukács, but *The Invisible Committee* restate this critique in a way that restores a sensual apprehension of what might be at stake in any form of oppositional politics. The image of a proliferation of communes as ‘a power of production’ that is ‘just incidentally relationships of production’ establishes what is best termed desiring production.²⁹ It arises through assemblages of communised spaces, knowledge, means, bodies and desires that establish a refrain between them, displacing the secessionist collective from capital and those identities such as ‘worker’ or ‘migrant’ that are fixed within it. This could produce a blockage within the flows of value production as information and commodity in what *The Invisible Committee*, again taking their lead from Agamben, theorise as the ‘metropolis’; the undifferentiated, sprawling non-place of contemporary biopolitical capital.³⁰ This process of blockage is expressed in *The Coming Insurrection* thus:

The technical infrastructure of the metropolis is vulnerable [...]. Nowadays sabotaging the social machine with any real effect involves reappropriating and reinventing the ways of interrupting its networks.³¹

Does this simultaneous production of subjectivity and disruption of value production posit ‘whatever being’ as a new form of political agency? As the model of an actualised Fourierist utopia, or even as an allegory of the production of oppositional politics this seems fine, but communes form an insurrectionist phantom organisation, a piloting machine that is more or less organically formed through the act of secession, constituting an avant garde of the disaffected and voluntarily displaced. A residual aristocratism emerges alongside a phantom vanguardism that is revealed in the formulation, ‘Making the paralyzed citizens understand that if they do not join the war they are part of it anyway.’³² These communes that, for *The Invisible Committee*, are

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p.184–85

²⁹ *Call*, op. cit., p.67.

³⁰ See, <http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpagamben4.htm>

³¹ *The Coming Insurrection*, op. cit., p.111.

³² *How is it to be Done?*, op. cit., p.17.

immanent in the present but not formalised encompass any number of spaces and collectivities, from proletarian to counter-cultural and illegal. Squats, wildcat strikes, riots, rural collectives, any bunch of the disaffected or excluded (re)appropriating the neighbourhood. At its best this carries within it an involuntary viral diffusion of communal and subjective disaffiliation from capital as a social relation. At its worst they all end up sharing within the insurrectionist thematic voluntary renunciation and conscious refusal. For me this loses something of the negativity of the more primordial 'human strike' hinted at, that refuses as much as an involuntary reaction to unbearable social relations, as through a conscious act of will. There's an import to 'human strike' that restores an actuality to the ways that depression for instance might function as both a sign of vulnerability and site of resistance. As *The Coming Insurrection* notes, 'depression is not a state but a passage, a bowing out, a side-step towards a *political* disaffiliation.'³³ Rather than the insurrection, it's this awareness that most productively marks The Invisible Committee off from more conventional radical milieus. What Camatte termed the real subsumption and domestication of the human by the community of capital here turns to speculative forms of resistance.³⁴

The Coming Insurrection has had the dubious distinction of having reached the exalted heights of Fox News with a text extolling communisation, due to the controversy following the Tarnac 9 case in France. As an ironic confirmation of The Invisible Committee's attachment to Debord's notion of the spectacle, it is also proof that the hysteria of projected insurrectionism is more than met by the hysteria of the spectacle. This commitment to insurrectionism by The Invisible Committee underlines the value of the more sober assessments by Dauvé and Theorie Communiste. In a well balanced engagement with *Call*, Dauvé writes that there is lack of 'an analysis of the present social movement, the fights, the retreats and the resistances to the world of waged labour, the strikes, their appearance, their frequent failure, their absence sometimes [...]'.³⁵ This criticism of secession is well founded and it is this very material awareness of the instauration of capital as a social relation that is lacking in the more voluntarist exhortations towards insurrection. There is a correlation here with the post-Autonomist theory of exodus formulated by Paolo Virno as a strategy of refusal and subjective break with capital. This can give rise to a pre-emptive theoretical negation of any role as worker, suspending the fact that for most people a shit job is a necessity and the only exodus is the weekend.³⁶

Nevertheless, the re-inscription of a political agency as negation is refreshing when compared to the inclusivity of concepts such as Negri's 'multitude'. It's in keeping with a line of active nihilism that permeates the theoretical production of The Invisible Committee. As opposed to Negri, where such an affective turn by capital is replete with immanent possibility, the production of subjectivity within contemporary capital is presented as part of the destruction of experience,

³³ *The Coming Insurrection*, op. cit., p.34.

³⁴ Camatte, op. cit., p.39.

³⁵ Dauvé and Nestic, aka Troploin, issued this in response to the initial publication of *Call*, one of the few instances, to my knowledge, of any overt communication between the post '68 communisation theorists and their later descendants around *Tiqqun*. Thanks to Adeline Mannarini for translation. See, <http://troploin0.free.fr/ii/index.php/textes/19-communisation-un-appel-et-une-invite> . *Tiqqun* have disavowed any connection with other ultra-left currents with Julian Coupat, one of the founders of *Tiqqun*, saying recently that 'the ultra-left is a political current that had its moment of glory in the 1920s and that, subsequently, never produced anything other than inoffensive volumes of Marxology'. This seems like a classic avant-garde tactic of breaking with precursors, though there are undoubted differences. The interview is available here: <http://www.notbored.org/julien-coupat.html>

³⁶ Paolo Virno, 'Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus' in Virno & Hardt, op. cit., pp.189–213.

what *Call* terms ‘the desert’. Almost nothing is exempted from this line of negation that runs from the micro-politics of an ‘existential liberalism’ that produces the individual through to all forms of politics, including anti-capitalism. The ‘desert’ is a form of passive nihilism endlessly replicating exchange-value, the obscure disaster of what both Benjamin and, in his footsteps, Agamben have conceptualised as the evacuation of experience by the shock and vacuity of the commodity.³⁷

The response of *The Invisible Committee* is to accelerate this nihilism through a series of inversions such as the valorisation of gangs and illegalism – a heightening of the anti-sociality of contemporary capital. As such they are part of a current within French anarchism that runs from the Bonnot gang through to the Situationists and Os Cangaceiros. The latter, a group of post-’68 proletarian illegalists rejected leftist politics and its armed struggle variants in favour of tactics such as sabotaging railways in solidarity with prison revolts. Or, as they stated succinctly ‘of shitting on this world with its prisons.’³⁸ There’s always a risk with such illegalism that it reifies something like gang culture in a simple inversion of spectacular hysteria, but at least *The Coming Insurrection*’s evocation of the November 2005 revolt in the banlieues restores a sense of agency to what were routinely decried as criminal acts within mainstream politics. In the fairly early *Tiqqun* text ‘Theses on the Imaginary Party’, this illegalism extends to random acts of violence produced by the subjective forms of spectacular commodity capitalism and its evacuation through shootings, suicides, etc..³⁹ This aspect is most certainly an avant-garde provocation similar to Breton’s simple surrealist act of firing into the crowd, though it is not necessarily lightly meant; indeed, it generalises the sense of crisis that *The Invisible Committee* wishes to instill. In an oblique comment, Agamben references this active nihilism as ‘the irreparable that allows the coming of the redemption’, a messianic opening into forms of political agency that refuses the exigencies of political sovereignty.⁴⁰ Such an active nihilism posits a joyful destruction as necessary in order to break with contemporary society’s immersion in the commodity form. *The Coming Insurrection* notes that ‘[a]nnihilating this nothingness is hardly a sad task [...]’ and that ‘fucking it all up will serve [...] as the last collective seduction.’⁴¹ In embracing this they connect via some punk rhetoric to the destructive impulses of both the political and artistic 20th century avant gardes.⁴²

What relation might this active nihilism have to the more general economic violence of communisation as the suspension and destruction of production? Communisation in whatever form always seems caught in a tension between an immanent supersession of capital, the gradual proliferation of struggles that breach the limits of party, self management and workplace organisation, and the radical break, the institution of what Benjamin termed ‘the real state of exception’ in opposition to the state of exception imposed by the sovereignty of the state.⁴³ This two-fold rhythm of communisation is paralleled by the tension that’s evident, in any attempt to theorise

³⁷ Benjamin, op. cit., especially ‘The Storyteller’, p.83 and ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’, p.152; and Agamben, *Infancy and History*, London: Verso, 2007, p.13.

³⁸ Os Cangaceiros, *A Crime Called Freedom*, Portland: Eberhardt Press, 2006, p.85.

³⁹ See <http://libcom.org/library/theses-imaginary-party>

⁴⁰ From Agamben’s 2001 postscript to the Italian edition of the *Coming Community*: <http://notesforthecoming-community.blogspot.com/2008/04/tiqqun-de-la-noche.html>

⁴¹ *The Coming Insurrection*, op. cit., p.112.

⁴² See ‘The Problem of the Head’, <http://libcom.org/library/problem-head>, a *Tiqqun* text that illuminates their relation to avant-gardes from Surrealism to the Red Brigades.

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Works*, Volume 1, Cambridge, MA: Belknap/ Harvard, 1996, p.236.

and practise it in the present, between a subjective activity and a more objective analysis of capital. Marx's concept of *Gewalt* might be a good way to grasp the imbrication of different forms of force and power within communisation. Luca Basso reads *Gewalt*, a complex term meaning both violence and power, as being present in Marx's formulation of the originary violence of capital as primitive accumulation, a violence that is repeated politically by the state as the imposition of wage labour. He quotes Étienne Balibar as characterising it as 'violence of economics, the economics of violence', violence being immanent to capital as exploitation.⁴⁴

Attempts to formulate communisation contest this by positing an oppositional *Gewalt* that would break with capital politically and economically. Given the day to day *Gewalt* of contemporary capital it is not surprising that there are attempts to formulate projects of secession which, however doomed to failure, seem necessary as breathing spaces. Overstated as insurrectionary projects, such secession is a little optimistic as to its chances of even escaping capital, never mind overcoming it. Simultaneously, the theoretical analysis of *Theorie Communiste* and Dauvé/Nesic seems lacking in the necessary juncture of events to make anything other than potential interventions. Pessimism in the face of contemporary capital's ability to adapt would probably be the best approach, but pessimism tempered with an awareness of the subjective and theoretical possibilities offered by the various theories of communisation. Benjamin wrote that 'The destructive character sees nothing permanent. But for this very reason he sees ways everywhere.'⁴⁵ Maybe in this complex allegorical figure something like the use value of theories such as communisation resides.

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⁴⁴ Luca Basso, 'The Ambivalence of Gewalt in Marx and Engels: On Balibar's Interpretation' in *Historical Materialism* 17 (2009), p.220.

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Works*, Volume 2, Cambridge, MA: Belknap/ Harvard, 1999, p.541.

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