Nikita Shepard
Becoming Ungovernable
A Reassessment
October 29, 2018

Retrieved on 16 April 2025 from
<blogs.law.columbia.edu/praxis1313/nikita-shepard-becoming-ungovernable-a-reassessment>

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

Becoming Ungovernable

A Reassessment

Nikita Shepard

October 29, 2018

ful tools for rethinking and intervening in the world. With respect to the passionate cry from the streets to *become ungovernable*, we have some catching up to do. The teenage rebels, black bloc anarchists, and Invisible Committee polemicists appear to have their finger more squarely on the pulse of contemporary rebellion than the academics and theorists.

Contents

being governed risk reinforcing neoliberal and therapeutic capitalist approaches to social change?

Ungovernability also marks a noteworthy counterpoint to the increasingly widespread metanarrative of "corruption" in oppositional political discourse, from Brazil to Armenia to Moldova. While outrage against the illegal or exploitative behavior by politicians and bureaucrats can focus popular outrage against state regimes in power, it does not necessarily provoke broader critique of the state itself; indeed, anti-corruption discourse has been mobilized effectively by right-wing populisms, most dramatically in Brazil. Solutions advanced to corruption generally involve strengthening various mechanisms of state control or subjecting them to oversight by other state or parastate entities, leaving intact the unquestioned legitimacy of governance as the proper paradigm for the organization of contemporary life. By contrast, ungovernability proposes not more ethical and effective operation of state mechanisms, but their refusal and subversion. It approaches similar problems—appropriation of collective resources, unequal distributions of power, alienation from the processes that control daily life—through a radically different logic of destitution rather than reform.

We can and should critically engage this framework of *becoming ungovernable*—unpacking its racial and gendered implications, thinking through how it indexes individualism or collectivity, noting how its use converges or diverges from Foucauldian notions of governmentality and power, and complicating and extending its tactical expressions. Yet the Praxis 13/13 discussions largely either dismissed it out of hand on the basis of an abstract Aristotelian critique (or worse, academic elitism), or else consigned it to childlike, intuitive, or aesthetic rebellion. These responses both misunderstand its potential force and the social conditions that gave rise to its appeal. Political theory should strive to engage the raw material of struggles, rebellions, reactions, discourses, and existing conditions, and from these disparate and inchoate elements forge use-

have a responsibility to think with it as an emerging concept in our lexicon and a promising framework for praxis. Like it or not, it has arrived on the landscape of our political discourse. And as I have tried to argue above, it brings with it a fascinating and tangled history of divergent uses, thick with implications around race, age, and differing conceptions of governance.

As we drill deeper into this term and its use, we will need to explore the gendered implications of its manifestations. In particular, I want to amplify Jackie Wang's speculation that certain formulations of becoming ungovernable may reinscribe gendered hierarchies, with ungovernability serving as a code word for a "governmentality of the masculine." As feminist critics of insurrectionary anarchism have articulated, a valorization of certain tactics and modes of radical embodiment can promote patriarchal conceptions of militancy, reinforce gendered public/private distinctions, and obscure the critical importance of care, affect, culture, and relationality in subverting regimes of control. Bringing these critiques into dialogue with gendered frameworks for discussing contemporary state policies and modes of governmentality—from the "nanny state" to the gender of welfare to masculinist neoliberalism—may help us to better understand the gendered stakes of how we both conceptualize and critique twenty-first century governance.

Ungovernability also poses intriguing questions when analyzed in individual and collective registers. As we have seen, popular usage of *ungovernable* originally described individual forces and entities but shifted towards cities, nations, and other collectivities. In conceiving of becoming ungovernable as a mode of resistance to power, do we imagine this as a personal gesture of defiance? Or a collective process of subversion? How do these registers intersect? To what extent do we emphasize affective and psychological dimensions of refusing personal constraints versus destituting or undermining the functioning of institutions through collectively delegitimizing, avoiding, or withdrawing from them? Might an individualizing paradigm rooted in personally refusing the constraints of

Introduction: Rethinking Ungovernability

At the Praxis 13/13 Seminar event on October 3 discussing the Invisible Committee's *Now*, discussion among panel participants seemed to run aground on the term *ungovernable*, which marked for some panelists a space beyond coherent praxis. Yet despite the frustration of academic critics, the insistence upon *becoming ungovernable* as a trajectory for resistance in our current political moment has gained increasing traction among youth and student radicals, anarchists, Black autonomists, and various other groups in revolt.

This essay aims to contextualize the discussion of ungovernability as a discourse and as a horizon of praxis through a broad examination of its historical usage in US popular media and a more fine-grained genealogy and explication of its deployment in contemporary struggles. I hope that this analysis can sharpen our understanding of this provocative framework and enable us to engage, as intellectuals and activists, in critical solidarity with those individuals and movements whose rebellion against authority rejects all frameworks of government—including the paradigms of democratic "self-government" that both liberal and many radical critics have adopted as their ideal.

From Forces, Children, and Slaves to Cities and Nations: The Evolution of Ungovernability in Popular Discourse

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the popular press in the United States used the adjective *ungovernable* primarily to describe forces and states of being: tempers, appetites, impulses, addictions, passions and emotions, especially anger. When describing material things as *ungovernable*, newspaper and magazine articles tended to focus on nature, fires and storms, or unruly

machines or beasts, such as damaged ships or skittish horses. The only humans thus described were those considered, on the basis of age or race, to lack reason and thus be particularly subject to unruly passions: specifically, disobedient children and enslaved Black men and women. For example, historian Thavolia Glymph's exploration of Black women's experiences in the plantation household in the mid-nineteenth century notes how white mistresses during the Civil War complained of the enslaved women who worked in their homes as becoming particularly ungovernable as news of the contingency of the Confederacy's fortunes rippled outward.[1] Only on rare occasions did writers described rebellious or unstable nations as ungovernable—usually in conjunction with racial or ethnic typologies, as in condemnations of Haiti or Ireland.[2]

This general pattern of usage continued more or less consistently through World War II, although the gradual decline of paternalism as an overarching paradigm for social relations in the twentieth century United States may account for its decline in frequency. Beginning in the 1950s and peaking in the 1960s, however, "ungovernable" came to signify something markedly different. While still occasionally describing disobedient children or uncontrollable passions as ungovernable, journalists and writers in the 1960s increasingly began to use the term to characterize unruly cities, territories, and nations. Regions of Northern Ireland torn by sectarian violence, the Chinese countryside convulsed by the Cultural Revolution, and sprawling American cities rife with crime, traffic, pol-

[1] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (2008).

[2] See, for example, a US Navy officer's 1890 article on "Hayti and its People," which attributes the lamentable state of the "ungovernable isle" to "the Negro's lack of capacity for self-government." "HAYTI AND ITS PEOPLE: A Naval Officer's Impressions of the Ungovernable Isle. *Baltimore Sun,* Apr 5, 1890, 4.

from counseling to incarceration in a youth detention center. According to Louisiana sheriff Bobby Guidroz, "The term 'ungovernable' refers to a juvenile who is impossible to control. All children at some point rebel and feel they do not need to listen to their parents. When this behavior escalates to the point where a parent feels the need to enlist the assistance of law enforcement, a juvenile can be charged as ungovernable."[23] Thus ungovernability can also describe the absolute limit of normative rebellion, an index of uncontrollability by systems of authority, and the membrane between private and public regimes of control.

So when we analyze ungovernability as praxis, we should not misconstrue its "child-like" dimensions as an indication of immaturity, or a pure, pre-linguistic affective expressiveness, or an unthinking intuitive revolt. These conceptions frame ungovernability as a counterpoint to a mature, reasoned, properly political rebellion to be executed and administered by responsible adults (which, as we have seen, has profoundly racial and colonial implications). Indeed, in an era in which the state form has had such supreme success at recuperating nearly all revolts undertaken under the banner of democracy, to become ungovernable may reflect a more profound rationale, a *strategy*, with the potential to push beyond the limits of most contemporary radical discourse still mired in the swamp of democratic political theory.

Conclusion: Questions, Limits, and Horizons

I do not intend to argue for ungovernability as the most promising paradigm for conceptualizing resistance to regimes of state, capital, and social oppression in our contemporary political landscape. I do, however, think that activists and radical intellectuals

[23] Guidroz, Bobby. "Defining an 'ungovernable' child." *Daily World*, June 1, 2017. https://www.dailyworld.com/story/news/local/2017/06/01/defining-ungovernable-child/361935001/

to be governed and to be enslaved are fundamentally linked, and for Black Americans, governance is always already racial.

This rapid expansion of the vocabulary of *ungovernability* in the aftermath of Trump's election, not only among anarchists fundamentally opposed to all governmental rule but among a range of radical critics, begs explanation. For some, the election of Donald Trump produced a profound disillusionment with representative democracy, an affective surge that exceeded the limits of previous ideological frameworks. Whereas progressives and radicals certainly had plenty to condemn in the aftermath of the elections of Nixon, Reagan, and the Bushes, rarely since the 1970s had non-anarchists responded to these circumstances by questioning the legitimacy of the entire political apparatus. While some contemporary uses correlate more closely to that of the national liberation movements of the 1970s and 1980s—ungovernability as a temporary and tactical approach to undermining and replacing a particular regime—most cleave more closely to the anarchist sense towards which the Invisible Committee gestures, in which the destitution of the state combines with autonomous self-organization to subvert the ambitions of various hierarchical powers to maintain control over our lives.

The connection between ungovernability and youth revolt articulated by the Invisible Committee is not accidental. Foucault's discussion of the emergence of governmentality examines how the relations of governance telescoped from the macro to the micro, from the relationship of the prince to the state down through the estate, the household, and the family. On the most elemental level, the control and guidance of children by parents serves as the foundational relation of governmentality, the relation through which all young people are socialized into hierarchy and control and the raw material upon which larger social institutions of governance are constructed. Indeed, "ungovernable" is now even a semi-technical term within juvenile criminology, through which parents can subject their unruly adolescent children to juridical interventions ranging

lution, and conflict earned this designation during the early years of this semantic shift.[3]

In the American popular imagination, anxieties over global instability inflamed by Cold War tensions and decolonization movements intersected with the deflation of 1950s cultural confidence and the rise of domestic anti-war and countercultural movements. The breakdown of government control abroad seemed to ominously portend instability at home. In a dramatic LA Times column that appeared just weeks before the clashes at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, conservative pundit William F. Buckley asked, "Has the United States Become 'Ungovernable'?", arguing that Hubert Humphrey's Democratic Party was essentially blackmailing the nation by drawing on the threat of unruly student rebels to advance their agenda.[4]

As domestic rebelliousness waned in the 1970s, *ungovernable* remained primarily a descriptor of unstable national politics in foreign countries and municipal politics within the United States. Internationally, combatants in national liberation struggles began to use the discourse of ungovernability in an attempt to leverage power to influence, join, or replace existing governments, by threatening the spectre of instability in their demands were not met. In the midst of the Northern Irish "Troubles," Sinn Fein leader Ruairi O Braidaigh announced in 1971 a strategy to force British rule out of the North by rendering the region ungovernable. The organization's goal was to establish a unified "32 country Democratic Socialist Republic" in Ireland; ungovernability served as a strategic and rhetorical device aimed at delegitimizing and functionally undermining British rule, but not as an attack on the legitimacy of government itself. Ten years later, Unionist leader Ian Paisley

[3] See, for example, "The Ungovernable City." New York Times, Oct 24, 1965; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times with Index. pg. E10

[4] William F. Buckley, Jr. "Has the United States Become 'Ungovernable?'" *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1968, A5.

would make the same threat, directed towards diametrically opposite political aims.[5]

This discourse picked up steam in national liberation movements in Africa and the Americas in the 1980s. Its high point arrived with the African National Congress's Executive Committee's dramatic 1985 statement, originally delivered as a speech by Oliver Reginald Kaizana Tambo and subsequently circulated internationally as a pamphlet, titled "Render South Africa Ungovernable!" The statement outlined the group's strategy for overthrowing the apartheid regime through a combination of economic disruption, political subversion, and international solidarity. In a section titled "We Reject Illegitimate Rule," Tambo describes how the destruction of the apartheid government's community councils and struggles around education made "impressive strides towards rendering the country ungovernable" by pitting "our democratic power against the power of the forces of oppression, racism and counter-revolution, for the defeat of the latter and its replacement with popular power." In this paradigm, ungovernability indexed a coordinated strategy of delegitimizing and disrupting the functioning of organs of the state in conjunction with reasserting power from below through armed struggle, alternative institutions, and revolutionary culture.[6] Other left-wing movements mirrored this rhetorical and tactical approach, though with less success, such as after the 1989 inauguration of a new right-wing president in El Salvador, when Marxist guerrillas promised to make the country ungovernable.[7]

[5] David McKittrick, "Paisley aims to make North 'ungovernable.'" *The Irish Times*, Nov 17, 1981, 1.

[6] This conception of ungovernability influenced some post-Occupy radicals in the United States; see Arun Gupta, "Make NYC Ungovernable: Lessons From the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in the Age of Bill de Blasio." *TruthOut,* December 31, 2013. [https://truthout.org/articles/make-new-york-city-ungovernable-lessons-from-the-anti-apartheid-struggle-in-the-age-of-bill-de-blasio/]

[7] "Cristiani Assumes Presidency; Salvador Rebels Step Up Drive." *Los Angeles Times*, Jun 1, 1989, K2.

to cooperate. Now is the time to shut down the systems of power. Now is the time to resist."[20]

An emerging movement of Black autonomists have also engaged the language of ungovernability to articulate a path forward for resistance to white supremacy and the Trump regime. In the aftermath of the 2016 election, a coalition of Black radical activists and organizations including Cooperation Jackson and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement came together to establish "Ungovernable," described by participants as "a radical organizing platform rooted in anti-state Black and POC autonomy." Echoing the tradition cited above of ANC radicals who worked to subvert the apartheid regime's legitimacy and capacity to function, organizer Kali Akuno argued that in response to a US government headed by a neo-fascist, "We shouldn't legitimize that rule in any form or fashion. We need to build a program of being ungovernable." A February 2017 Alternet article on Ungovernable 2017 emphasized the movement's message that "the right-wing populism of the Trump administration will not be defeated by civil discourse and liberal democracy," and that instead, as Akuno put it, "we can create a clear and comprehensive message around being ungovernable."[21] The Become Ungovernable platform called both for resistance on Inauguration Day and for a broad range of programs to build collective infrastructure, defend targeted communities, and fight back against state violence.[22] An epigraph preceding the platform by Toni Cade Bambara— "Make yourself unavailable for servitude"—reflects an important connection that stretches back to the original nineteenth century use of the term:

[20] https://www.commondreams.org/views/2017/02/06/make-america-ungovernable

[21] Sarah Lazare, "Here's How We Prepare to be Ungovernable in 2017." *Alternet*, January 1, 2017. <https://www.alternet.org/activism/heres-how-we-prepare-be-ungovernable-2017>

[22] https://popularresistance.org/become-ungovernable/

and "radical" varieties—appear so limited, so recuperable and recuperated, so reterritorialized within the striated space of universal cybernetic governmentality, that imagining a livable future requires a rupture not just with existing conditions but with the very categories of political thought that have defined Greco-Roman and Euro-American philosophy since Aristotle. The language of ungovernability reflects an intuition that modes of living together beyond government, pursued through collective acts of refusal and negation, could, just perhaps, provide lines of flight out of the hopelessly striated spaces of our contemporary social, political, and economic existence.

Ungovernable 2017 and Beyond in the United States

Of course, this turn towards the ungovernable is not merely a French youth phenomenon. Indeed, within weeks of the election of Donald Trump, the framework of *ungovernability* as a paradigm for contemporary resistance had begun to circulate in American discourse far beyond the anarchist circuits within which it has primarily taken root over the past twenty to thirty years. Protests against Trump's inauguration in January 2017 coalesced around the slogan *Become Ungovernable*, #ungovernable appeared on Twitter associated with the demonstrations, and marches in Detroit and other cities adopted it as their slogan, while banners at the inauguration in Washington trumpeted it.[19] Even Chris Hedges, a left-wing author notorious for his attacks on anarchists and other social rebels, adopted this anarchist and autonomist rhetoric within weeks of Trump's inauguration: "We have the power to make the country ungovernable. But we do not have much time… Now is the time *not*

[19] https://abolitionjournal.org/the-inauguration-of-fascism-thinking-violence-and-resistance-in-the-age-of-trump/

On the home front, anxieties over street crime inflamed by the "law and order" politics of Nixon and his successors located ungovernability as a feature of urban centers, particularly those with concentrations of poor and non-white populations. But in the late 1970s during the Carter administration, the term appeared in national politics in connection with anxieties around inflation and Congressional gridlock.[8] The Reagan Revolution in the 1980s appeared so powerful to many conservatives for its combination of effective execution of a legislative agenda and its law and order rhetoric—in short, pushing back against the dual anxieties of American ungovernability, legislative impotence and street crime—while couching its efforts in a neoliberal discourse that identified government as the problem, rather than the solution.

Over the past 30 years, both Republican and Democratic critics have condemned partisan intransigence by their counterparts using the language of ungovernability, as exemplified by columnist Paul Krugman's condemnations of Republican obstruction of President Obama's legislative agenda in 2010: "Don't blame Mr. Obama. Blame our political culture instead… And blame the filibuster, under which 41 senators can make the country ungovernable."[9] While liberal critics occasionally couched their anxieties about the destructive actions of institutions such as police departments or multinational corporations in the language of ungovernability,[10] the primary use of the term in mainstream political commentary since the mid-1970s has centered around partisan gridlock and the federal legislative process, largely displacing previous uses denoting frustrated paternalism or unruly urbanism.

[8] George F. Will, "Not so 'ungovernable'." *The Washington Post;* Aug 27, 1995, C9.

[9] Paul Krugman, "America Is Not Yet Lost." New York Times, Feb 8, 2010, A21.

[10] See, for example, "L.A.'s Ungovernable Police." *New York Times*, Mar 2, 2000, A26.

Anarchism, Punk, and the Global Justice Movement: The Roots of Ungovernability as Praxis

Yet separately from this semantic trend, another sense of the term surfaced in the 1980s and 1990s in punk, countercultural, and anarchist communities in the United States and United Kingdom. This usage bore some resemblance to its use by the ANC and other national liberation movements, but little connection to other previous or contemporary deployments. In this sense, *ungovernable* represented a thoroughgoing rebellion against political structures and authoritarian control of all kinds. An early example of this usage appears in the 1986 album "The Ungovernable Force" by London-based anarcho-punk band Conflict. The album's title track growls out a furious critique of the police, military, and government forces that defended property and suppressed resistance. Reciting a list of recent riot zones—"Belfast, Brixton, Toxteth, Tottenham, St Paul's, Handsworth / Reclaim the streets, reclaim the towns, reclaim the nation"—the song defiantly insists, "You can batter, beat us, even imprison us, yet still you will never ever never defeat us… The gas, the batons, the water cannon; the more you oppress the more we will resist." This insistence on refusal of state control interlaced with the punk ethos of defiance of social norms and the increasingly confrontational militancy of European direct action movements to present another formulation of ungovernability in the late twentieth century.

By the late 1990s, disparate currents of anarchist, anti-fascist, international solidarity, labor, and environmental struggles were consolidating into what would become known as the global justice or anti-globalization movement. With strong anarchist political and punk cultural influences, its expressions in the United States centered in part on confrontations with institutions of global economic elites, most famously in the 1999 World Trade Demon-

tagma Square activists now administering Eurozone austerity measures in Syriza, the ungovernable cannot be appropriated back into state logics of control.

The Invisible Committee interprets this destituent turn partially in generational terms: in analyzing the 2016 upheavals and concluding that "a generation could become ungovernable," it links the contemporary crisis to the 1968 youth revolt, particularly in its affective and even ludic dimensions.[17] Disillusionment and ironic detachment, so prevalent in youth culture and its responses to contemporary crises, may not indicate "apathy" or "disengagement" so much as a radical and indeed more effective rejection of the terms of contemporary framings of the political:

It's not through ignorance that "young people" appropriate rappers' punch lines for their political slogans instead of philosophers' maxims. And it's out of decency that they don't take up the shouts of "We won't give an inch!" by militants who are about to relinquish everything. It's because the latter are talking about the world, and the former are talking from within a world.[18]

Through this lens, it is hard not to roll one's eyes at a room of older tenured academics furiously condemning the incoherence of radical youth. Criticisms centered on the very notion of being ungovernable as incoherent or impossible. An oft-repeated radical phrase, attributed either to Che Guevara or to the walls of Paris in May 1968, urges us to "be realistic; demand the impossible." The supposed impossibility of *ungovernability* should not dissuade us from interrogating its meaning, nor from pursuing its horizons of (im)possibility. Why would radicals across the world, especially younger people, increasingly coalesce around this "impossible" demand at this historical moment?

Likely because the horizons of possibility defined within discourses of government and democracy—including its direct

[17] *Now*, 37.
[18] *Now*, 7.

Becoming Ungovernable in The Invisible Committee's *Now*

Only in this broader context can we make sense of the turn towards *becoming ungovernable* as a proposal for radical praxis, and its specific articulation by the Invisible Committee in *Now*. Against the backdrop of a generalized hatred of police (and by extension, intrusive control and authority) and the total delegitimization of conventional electoral and partisan political solutions, today's revolts are not manifesting via the familiar channels and discourses of politics, even the "radical" politics of activist groups or identity-based constituencies. This shift in logic underlies the framework of destituent power, in which conventional notions of the defeat of one force by another (even if warfare is asymmetrical) or the dialectical synthesis of clashing opposites no longer obtain. Instead, the Invisible Committee proposes, an institution can be destituted by a gesture that "neutralizes it, empties it of its substance, then steps to the side and watches it expire." Key to this reframed paradigm is the undermining of political legitimacy as concentrated in constitutions, parties, formal processes, and even logics of direct democracy. Thus if "to destitute the government is to make ourselves ungovernable," this requires a different approach than a democratic logic of self-government.[16] What anarchist critics of democracy have realized is that investing political legitimacy in a formal process (however "directly democratic) rather than a set of relations and lived realities tends in practice both to accentuate our alienation and to reinforce the strength of state forms that claim, with considerably more historical justification, to be the bearers of democracy. While ungovernability as the destitution of the political offers no blueprint for the reconstitution of a more legitimate authority, perhaps this is one of its strengths: unlike popular assemblies in Slovenia roped into participatory budgeting for municipal governments or Syn-

[16] *Now*, 48.

strations in Seattle. At the same time, forces from these interlaced movements also protested United States government elites as key linchpins upholding global economic and environmental exploitation. Anarchists in the United States foisted banners with the term *ungovernable*, possibly for the first time, in 2000 at protests against the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. In the context of the broad anti-authoritarian "movement of movements" that analyzed capitalism and state control within a global context, the imperative to become ungovernable in the United States connected to a broader project of destabilizing the institutions of extraction and impoverishment that transferred wealth from periphery to core nations while consolidating it in elites. Inflected by punk aesthetics of defiance and the disruptive and confrontational black bloc and civil disobedience tactics of the global justice movement, this early assertion of the goal of *becoming ungovernable* spoke to an anarchist vision of promoting decentralized, horizontal power relations through subversion of state and corporate control. This discourse has featured prominently in anarchist protests against political party conventions and presidential inaugurations over the past twenty years.

This trajectory provides valuable context for understanding the deployment of *becoming ungovernable* as a praxis within *Now*. The key thinkers of the Invisible Committee were shaped profoundly by their experiences in the early 2000s in the transnational punk and anarchist milieu, including participation in mass protests in the United States. While their philosophical roots clearly reflect the influence of Heidegger, Agamben, Schmitt, and other elite European intellectuals, their political thought also owes a considerable debt to the particular expressions of anarchism in circulation in these transnational networks. Commenting on the last two years of riots, *Now* states, "It's not surprising that the banner of the French spring, '*Soyons ingouvernable*,' rendered as 'Become ungovernable,' re-emerged in Washington in the protests against Donald Trump's

inauguration."[11] This references merely the latest iteration an ongoing process stretching decades of the reciprocal influence, reflected in everything from banner slogans to tactical experimentations and theoretical developments, of transnational networks of anarchists and protest organizers through which the contemporary sense of the ungovernable has emerged.

Two particularly significant developments in anti-authoritarian praxis over the past decade that have influenced articulations of the ungovernable are critiques of democracy and the proliferation of insurrectionary anarchist ideas. In recent years, anarchist critics have increasingly articulated a trenchant rejection of democracy as a paradigm for revolutionary praxis. This marks a divergence from the years of the global justice movement, in which the chant "This is what democracy looks like!" expressed a popular sentiment, and "small-a anarchists" frequently framed their aspirations using the language of direct democracy.[12] However, the Occupy Movement marked a turning point in which the *tactics* of direct democracy—consensus, popular assemblies, and so forth—revealed their weakness as mechanisms for concerted resistance. Texts such as *Contra La Democracia* in Spain and *From Democracy to Freedom* in the United States picked up long-standing anarchist critiques of democracy and combined them with contemporary analysis of the limitations of the wave of assembly-based movements since 2011.[13] These texts have criticized conceptions of self-determination that

[11] The Invisible Committee, *Now* (2017), 66. [https://illwilleditions.noblogs.org/files/2018/02/Invisible-Committee-NOW-READ.pdf]

[12] See, for example, David Graeber, "The New Anarchists" [https://newleftreview.org/II/13/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists], and Cindy Milstein, "Democracy is Direct" [https://www.revolutionbythebook.akpress.org/ak-tactical-media/pamphlet-no-2/].

[13] Grupos Coordinados Anarquistas, *Contra La Democracia* (2013); English translation: [https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/coordination-of-anarchist-groups-against-democracy]; CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective, *From Democracy to Freedom* (2017) [https://crimethinc.com/books/from-democracy-to-freedom]

take the form of government and attacked the paradigm of government itself, understood both in terms of the state form as well as hierarchical relations of power expressed through various institutions.

This critique of democracy dovetails with an increasing influence in the mid-2000s within European and United States anti-authoritarian movements of insurrectionary anarchist ideas.[14] In particular, works by Italian thinkers such as Alfredo Bonanno, who argues for the primacy of immediate refusal and revolt and informal organizing over bureaucratic self-organization, identity and interest group politics, and programmatic utopianism, were translated and widely circulated in French, British, American, and other contexts.[15] *The Coming Insurrection*, the Invisible Committee's 2007 book, reflects and amplifies this current of thought; its publication in English in 2009 attracted great controversy (including an infamous citation by right-wing talk show host Glenn Beck) and proved highly influential on a generation of radicals that went on to participate in student occupations and anti-police uprisings in the following years. Reflecting on lessons from the Arab Spring, in which disruptive uprisings managed to topple regimes that decades of patient organizing had failed to dislodge, and inspired by anti-police uprisings from Ferguson to Baltimore and across the world, radicals in the past five years have increasingly broken from traditional notions of activism based on formal organizations and demands from the powerful in favor of spontaneous, informal, directly confrontation, even ludic forms of rebellion.

[14] For background on insurrectionary anarchism and its influence during this period, see "Say You Want an Insurrection," [https://crimethinc.com/2010/01/07/say-you-want-an-insurrection]

[15] Alfredo Bonanno, *Armed Joy* (1977), [https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/alfredo-m-bonanno-armed-joy]; Anonymous, "At Daggers Drawn," [https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-at-daggers-drawn-with-the-existent-its-defenders-and-its-false-critics].