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Insurrectionary Foucault: Tiqqun, The Coming Insurrection, and Beyond

The notoriety of *The Coming Insurrection* has risen to almost epic proportions since the arrest of its alleged authors in November, 2008 for acts of terrorism in the sabotage of the French TGV high-speed trains lines as part of an anti-nuke direct action. The government repression of the authors has only stoked a burgeoning resentment, and, as the support committees for the arrested so eloquently put it: “Understanding the logic at work doesn’t appease us. It only makes us angrier. Public meetings will be held so that the question of knowing how to react to the situation that is made for us can be posed everywhere. There aren’t nine people to save, but an order to bring down.” In North America, the excessive reaction of the French State piqued early interest in anarchists and academics, then the book garnered mass appeal after the conservative talking head Glenn Beck gave an emotional review.

Some might want to dismiss *The Coming Insurrection* as a vulgar or extreme interpretation of Foucault, warped for highly politicized purposes. This paper challenges that position. In particular, through clarifying the theoretical influences of *The Coming Insurrection,* I challenge the current reception of Foucault’s recently published College de France lectures. It is my contention that Foucault has been tamed by many academics, especially by governmentality scholarship’s uncritical rehearsal of state histories that intentionally omit insurrection. Texts like *The Coming Insurrection* are therefore, not only the extension of a hidden side of Foucault’s own work, but also provide a productive challenge to the all-too-safe reading of Foucault found in the academy.

Resurrecting Foucault's Forgotten Social War

The prologue to the argument I put forth in this paper begins with the untimely death of Foucault. His unfortunate passing left a lot of questions, especially given the uncertain trajectory of his later work. One site of increased interest has been the concept of biopower, despite only taking up a few scant pages in the *History of Sexuality Volume 1*. When it became clear that the lectures Foucault gave at the College de France were an exception to his injunction against posthumous publications, since public and bootleg copies have been floating around for years, scholars excitedly took up the material from the long eight years between the first and second volumes of the history of sexuality.

The first of the lecture publications to have a major impact was the series from 1975-76 entitled *Society Must Be Defended,* for there had already been considerable scholarship using two lectures from *SMBD* that had been translated and released in the 1980 anthology *Power/Knowledge*. *SMBD* marks a shift away from modern subjects of power, deviants, and psychiatric patients, to a focus on the power relations found more generally throughout society. Scholars were most excited by two aspects of the lectures: first, the expanded demonstration of the genealogy that *Power/Knowledge* had only provided a glimpse of more than 20 years before; and second, an increased level of detail describing the rise and function of biopower, specifically in relation to disciplinary power. Both of these points are mere asides to the explicit focus of this lectures, however, which was to test the proposition 'does war provide a useful grid of intelligibility for understanding social analysis and power relations?' The general silence on the radical implications of war as a grid of intelligibility serves as a foundation for the argument of this paper.

One way to describe *SMBD*'s contribution to genealogical study is that it demonstrates a specific example of genealogy in use: the re-mobilization of previously marginalized knowledges in order to disrupt the present. Genealogy dredges up knowledges, picking up discarded weapons and uses them for attack on the power-effects of institutions and scientific discourse. Rather than trying to dispel authority with a counter-power, they use already delegitimized knowledges to bring the established order 'down to the same level.' As Foucault notes:

> Genealogies are therefore not positivistic returns to a form of science that is more attentive or more accurate. Genealogies are, quite specifically, antisciences. It is not that they demand the lyrical right to be ignorant, and not that they reject knowledge, or invoke or celebrate some immediate experience that has yet to be captured by knowledge. They are about the insurrection of knowledges.

Most practitioners of genealogy focus on the *SMBD* lectures because they provide added detail to what Foucault would consider subjugated knowledge (buried and disqualified knowledges). What gets ignored is the limited and literal sense in which he is describing the genealogy of *SMBD* as *insurrectionary genealogy*. And while the phrase "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" has proliferated since its initial appearance in the 1980 translation of the first two lectures, it has lost its relation to social war because it was originally read out of context.

Now that the whole *SMBD* lecture series has been translated, Foucault's use of 'insurrectionary genealogy' is clear. He does not mean a metaphorization of insurrection (as in simply resisting hegemony or domination) or even insurrection as a general heuristic, but insurrection as a specific set of material practices for

which social war is the best available model. The context specific to this set of lectures retains this exclusive focus – insurrectionary genealogies of knowledges that produced upheavals that resulted in bloody wars, violent counter-revolutions, and the brutal machinations of the Nazi state.

Situated in the larger arc of Foucault's career, the turn to social warfare as a model for power isn't replaced, but is supplemented by governmentality. It is first in *Discipline and Punish* that Foucault suggests studying power as the micro-physics of a "perpetual battle" between enclosure institutions and the people they hold captive, a perspective that looks to "points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risk of conflict, of struggles, of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations". To demonstrate this point, he inverts Clausewitz's popular maxim "war is the continuation of politics by other means" by arguing that the order of society and politics owe more to military institutions and military science than to the social contract or rights. Next, in *History of Sexuality Volume 1* Foucault notes that using war as a model is not the only way to look at power but rather should be chosen for its ability to produce a certain type of strategic intervention:

> Should we turn the expression around, then, and say that politics is war pursued by other means? If we still wish to maintain a separation between war and politics, perhaps we should postulate that this multiplicity of force relations can be coded — in part but never totally — either in the form of 'war', or in the form of 'politics'; this would imply two different strategies (but the one always liable to switch into the other) for integrating these unbalanced, heterogeneous, unstable, and tense force relations.

In other words, coding as war is the model of social war from *SMBD* and coding as politics is the study of governmentality. Note that Foucault is explicit that these two codings are complementary, not mutually exclusive.

Foucault's following year of lectures, *Security, Territory, Population*, is an exposition on governmentality. Rather than following the model of social war, Foucault replaces it completely with the model of governmentality. Taking 'the point of view of power' as the starting point of analysis, Foucault describes the production of the dispositif of governmentality through its winding path from the 'conduct of conduct', art of governing, through the police state, all the way to the 'frugal form of government' that establishes the four characteristics of the modern *raison d'etat*: naturalness, an internal logic, population as its aim, and the concept of freedom.

Placing the analysis of social warfare side by side with governmentality, we see that Foucault's analysis of each side of the war-politics couplet produces completely different effects. In addition, each grid of intelligibility has its own form of genealogy. The model of social warfare makes visible a set of politico-historical tools that could be remobilized as weapons to upset power-effects. And according to Foucault in *SMBD*, it provides at least four different sets of techniques for fighting domination: one, it challenges the link between truth and peace/neutrality; two, it values explaining from the perspective of the defeated below, not the victor above; three, it is a radically historical project driven to "rediscover the blood that has dried in the codes"; and four, it is the first discourse in which truth functions exclusively as a weapon. Alternatively, genealogies of governmentality reveal the fragile, temporary, and contingent nature of governance, but is less clear about a positive project. And while this genealogy provides the basis for understanding the historical transformations

and shifts in logic necessary for the emergence of modern liberalism and governmentality, it does not provide any insurrectionary tools. If anything, it suggests how governmental politics as a model of power papers over and buries the history of struggles made visible by the model of social warfare. Given that current scholarship has focused so heavily on governmentality, it seems evident that social warfare deserves greater consideration.

Enter, *The Coming Insurrection*

So; what is one example of insurrectionist genealogy inspired by Foucault's work? *The Coming Insurrection*. The first part of the text critiques disparate centers of power characteristic of contemporary society. Two of the problematics addressed in this section are strongly Foucauldian in inflection, subjectivization and the disciplinary effects of work. The last sections provide explicit instructions for a coming insurrection; clearly taking the model of social warfare as its base of analysis.

It's unfair to let *The Coming Insurrection* take all the credit, however. *TCI* is one among a number of texts penned by the Invisible Committee, a splinter group from a French journal *Tiqqun. Tiqqun* was a project that grew out of autonomist-inspired political activism in France in the Winter 1997-8 movement of the unemployed [*le mouvement des chômeurs*] and was initiated to produce theoretical works for an imaginary formation they call the Invisible Party. One of the central problematics of *Tiqqun* is the crisis of singularities, illustrated by, among other things, their Agamben-inspired focus on 'whatever singularities' as a crucial component of the contemporary condition. The *Tiqqun* experiment led to a number of texts and two full-length issues of the journal that were published in 1999 and 2001. By the end of 2001 *Tiqqun* exploded under the pressure of conflict and its parts flew off in different directions. The thought of *Tiqqun* spread: it found homes

in the rural community of Tarnac and the cold heart of the metropolis; it appeared in the Bernadette Corporations movie “Get Rid of Yourself” and the works of the ready-made artist Claire Fontaine; and it become imperceptible in zones of opacity.

The Coming Insurrection is meant to be more a provocation and less a densely theoretical contribution to the study of insurrection. It may be best understood as a specific articulation of the concept of *civil war* developed in *Tiqqun* 2. There is substantial overlap between *Tiqqun*’s ‘civil war’ and Foucault’s ‘social warfare.’ Both are tied up with mythical-religious impulses, *Tiqqun* connects to *SMBD*’s genealogy of biblical insurrection with a Benjaminian messianism. Both historicize their disputes, challenging the modern State as a contingent form. Both explain war from below, with peace as the perpetuation of pacification. And both challenge the truth of peace, posing speaking subjects as locked into a winner-take-all war over mutually exclusive visions of the social.

There are important points of differentiation between *Tiqqun*’s civil war and Foucault’s social war. No doubt some of *Tiqqun*’s formulations are Foucauldian, but it also includes a wider network of references that they share with Giorgio Agamben. Most importantly, *Tiqqun*’s concept of civil war is deeply ontological in character, drawing from Spinoza, Lucretius and Wittgenstein, which is altogether different than Foucault’s epistemology-driven system that maintains a bare-bones ontology. A key reference for *Tiqqun* that isn’t shared with Foucault is Debord’s virtual civil war, developed in his “Comments on the Society of the Spectacle”. In this essay Debord considers both standard examples of revolutionary civil wars: Spain, the French Revolution, Soviet Russia, and May 68; and also less noted ones: the unactualized revolution in Italy and the state of terror and economic domination that accompanies the war economy. Another reference is Schmitt’s political theology, which provides the composition and

strategy that results from bodies in encounter in terms of friend, enemy, and partisan.

A number of tendencies share the model of civil war to diagnose the current moment. Capitalism is crisis, governance is the management of crises, the social is a desert, and politics is founded on a mall-like universalism. But there is a disagreement over the proper response – a problem that influenced the *Tiqqun* split in 2001. The risk is that it only actualizes new forms of being together through a siege mentality. So the ultimate question may be: what is the form of conflict that should arise from the condition of civil war? Claire Fontaine turned to art as a form of human strike that de-familiarizes the everyday. The Invisible Committee moved to the French countryside in a return to the land and self-sufficient autonomy against the metropolis. And at a greater remove, so-called Insurrectionist Anarchists and Left-Communists advocate the working out of social war, an intensification of a growing sense of ungovernability through petty crime and attack.

Tiqqun produced a short text that succinctly explored their strategy of ontological re-articulation by taking on Lenin's "what is to be done?", leaving behind what they considered to be a voluntaristic nihilism. For them, the real question is the ethical and subjectivist "how is it to be done?" What follows are two co-productive lines of attack: compositional process of communization and the de-subjectivizing human strike. The *Tiqqun* text "Living and Struggling" defines the empirical basis for this problematic, warning against the dangers of giving up and forming a ghetto or submitting to the suicidal impulse of becoming an army like the RAF or the Red Brigades. But nowhere is it captured so eloquently as in the Invisible Committee text, *The Call*: "On the one hand, we want to live communism; and on the other, to spread anarchy".

Communization as a form of lived communism is founded on the imperative “communism now or never”. Instead of being a social form that has to be prepared for, communism is thought of a contingent possibility at every moment. On one side there is communism, a being-together of bodies; and on the other, there is the social, a desert of alienated proletarianized subjectivities that through de-socialization have lost the ability to connect to each other. Communization formed as a post-68 rethinking of the classical Marxian categories of the subject and revolution reflected in the texts of Gilles Dauvé and Theorie Communiste. The Invisible Committee wants to make an explicit break from the Marxism or other theories of communization, however. In *The Call*, they argue that “Communism is not a political or economic system. Communism has no need of Marx. Communism does not give a damn about the USSR”. Rather, communization works to build affinities and construct shared worlds through attack. One such form of attack is the human strike.

Human strike is the turning away that jams subjectivization machines. It is similar in formulation to the autonomist *refusal to work*. The refusal to work is not meant as a literal refusal to work, but the refusal of the work relationship and the values it implies. In its refusal, it rejects both aspects of the work relations: first, how the body and time of the worker are abstracted in the form of labour-power; and secondly, the theft of the body and power of the worker in terms of surplus value. The human strike is similar to refusal to work but is a refusal of the subjectivizing process of the social. In addition to the category of the human strike being more capacious than the workerist refusal to work, it also implies a third move, the mobilization of affect. A recent presentation by Claire Fontaine resurrected Michelle Perrot’s research on the 19th century strike. Perrot commented on the birth of ‘sentimental strike’ in the year 1890 that follows the trajectory of the refusal to work, “the strikers didn’t give any reason for their interruption of

the work, just that they want to do the same thing as the others". What Claire Fontaine wants to emphasize is the circulation of affect that emerges from this form of strike, something uniquely captured by the concept human strike. Perrot describes the transformation of Amandine Vernet, "she never made herself noticeable before May the 14th when she started to read a written speech in a meeting of 5000 people in the Robiac wood. The day after she had started to speak, and the following days, made more self-confident by her success, she pronounced violent and moving speeches. She had the talent of making part of her audience cry." So while they pose a negative anthropology, whereby the human is slowly removed from the clutches of subjectivization, what is left is the collective form of power: affect.

In summary, insurrection is not a dead end but the way forward. The challenge today is to pose fruitful avenues of inquiry that ward off the state through insurrection rather than cultivating expertise in the daily affairs of statecraft.