

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Our New Names For Alienation

Tiqqun's Bloom & Young-Girl

Austin Anarchist Study Group

Austin Anarchist Study Group
Our New Names For Alienation
Tiqqun's Bloom & Young-Girl
2012

theanarchistlibrary.org

2012

Contents

RADICAL THEORY AND THE IDEA OF ALIENATION .	5
TIQQUN'S NEW NAMES: THE FIGURES OF BLOOM AND YOUNG-GIRL	12
EXHORTATION	20

ing out other commodities, but an economy beyond commodities, or maybe even exchange beyond an economy; not the fair distribution of money, but no money; not self-managed work, but the abolition of work. And so on. Tiqqun, one last time: *“Bloom is the man of complete nihilism; his lot is to open the way out or perish.”* Seen from a certain angle, Bloom is that which is in us that has no choice but to revolt. Devoid of a tradition, or of values, we set out from that resistance in ourselves. Against the still quite social suggestion that those who feel the implosion of values and tradition ought to engage in the creation of new ones, we will respond that such reconstructions of society comprise the old path of politics and revolution...*finding we have deviated from the old path, we would rather wander farther off, cleaving to what in us refuses absolutely, than create for the sake of social solutions, for the sake of the society we are and always were, seeking a way out of. A final disorientation: even if at first we must act as spiritual automata.*

clear that the Young-Girl lifestyle exists to undermine Bloom – to *undermine the undermining that is Bloom*.

EXHORTATION

Our anti-politics: to undermine the undermining of the undermining that is Bloom: counter-attack, antagonism.² We become antagonists setting out from Bloom, cleaving to the Bloom side. To do this we must understand our terrain. It is the difference between another tired reference to alienation and its political solution, and the deep, disturbing sense that a new theory may leave us with far fewer certainties. It will certainly leave us with less of a program (or no program at all). The radical Left could always point to society and dream of a better form of it (something they share with their supposed sworn enemies, the far Right, and everybody in between); we have nothing to point to. Setting out from Bloom means refusing identification or definition. Setting out from Bloom means refusing identification or definition. Keeping to the example essayed to explicate the figure of the Young-Girl: we do not seek to liberate sexuality, to explore new categories or identities in sexuality (and as a corollary, we have just as little interest in defending or protecting existing ones). What in us is Bloom *recedes* from sexuality, from sexualization even, *absolutely*. Bloom senses the hollowness in roles, in sexual divisions of every sort. Bloom refuses all this with no positive response or alternative. Bloom's attitude is indifference, which always leaves open the potential for exit and refusal. I said at the outset that Tiqqun does not offer a political program in *Bloom* or *Young-Girl*. But they do provide a series of criteria that tells us just how far we will need to go. *Bloom bears the potential for bringing down commodity society*. This means we are not seek-

² In a language developed in other texts by Tiqqun, this means to identify the apparatuses through which power is exercised, which separate us from what we can do, and to undermine them in whatever ways we can.

RADICAL THEORY AND THE IDEA OF ALIENATION

...*An initial disorientation*: there is something wrong in our lives, a recurrent feeling that things are deeply off balance; so off balance, it seems, that the ability to return to balance, or even to say what balance was or will be, is compromised. What is wrong in our lives overruns the easy synonyms we have for wrong, words like *oppression, domination, and exploitation*. We turn to radical theory (and not science, philosophy, or religion, whatever the overlaps or similarities) with a certain urgency, sometimes even with desperation. That feeling always inflects the search for a new perspective. Theory, as we found it, begins not in wonder or even curiosity but in a kind of widespread and diffuse malaise. There's more: we have become aware that when we draw on this trajectory, when we consciously explore it or unconsciously depend on it, we are repeating well-worn gestures and reproducing age-old, though hardly timeless, sentiments. Like science, philosophy, and religion, radical theory begins in a need to understand, to discuss what goes beyond the obvious. The difference is the urgency with which we experience these needs. The urgency and the repetition are the reasons why we remain dissatisfied with what we have found. I said: we can draw on the trajectory consciously or depend on it unconsciously. In the former case, I mean a critical engagement. In the latter case, I can gesture to the familiar phenomenon of would-be radicals who would like to do without theory; as a paltry alternative they insist on an unexamined common sense about which there can be no discussion. Soon enough it becomes clear that they are not so much without theory as they are in the grips of an older theory that makes up the unstated backbone of their common sense. The theory's ideas and figures appear to them as ordinary words; critical examination of those ideas and figures, or new ideas and new figures, is threatening to their common sense, their inherited the-

ory. The problem is that such common sense has not gotten us anywhere we still have questions, and we still ask them in all urgency. What is it about power that goes beyond brute force? What is it about ideology that goes beyond mere lies and cover-ups? What is it about society that goes beyond dull platitudes about our common interests? It is to understand and discuss these matters that we turn to radical theory. *The idea of alienation is an inheritance from older radical theory.* It surfaces as one name for the feeling of malaise with which we began. The idea of alienation gained its current consistency precisely as radical theory first emerged as such, in the 18th and 19th centuries, in psychology, philosophy, and eventually the political idea-space emergent from and influencing subversive events in Europe and the Americas. For the most part, the immediate source is Marx and his interpreters¹; but the trajectory runs deeper, deriving from a much longer tradition of western thought that was critically transmuted, through study and events, into theory. Many of us have come to see not only the inheritance of radical theory but also the longer western tradition as exhausted. (*I write “us” with the ready sense that I am reporting on something broader than the affinities that bring radicals together in political projects, or the identifications that draw those inclined into subcultures.*) Yes, today some of us set out from the sense that large parts, if not the entirety, of the trajectory we know as radical (call it the political left) are exhausted. Our feeling of disaster is primarily about its politics, but its theory feels exhausted as well. That is, we turned to radical theory out of malaise, but the theory brings its own kind of malaise. Exhaustion, disaster; as though a tremendous unbalancing event had unfolded and we lived in its aftermath. Signs of the unbalancing event for us include the collapse of the myth of progress,

¹ By and large the term, as the radical left inherited it, came from Marx's youthful writings, unpublished in his lifetime. These writings became important for Marxists in finding another interpretation of Marx (of communism, so they thought) as it became clear that the orthodox interpretation of the USSR and the communist parties in the west was a disaster.

a movement) to grant it rights (liberal) or liberate it (leftist, radical) or get it recognition (all three). This is pluralism, as tolerance and openness to new identities, develops in tandem, and it develops in tandem with a plurality of qualities that can be and eventually are used to designate commodities. This is why we need to critique both sexuality as identity-machine and identity itself as machine. The political and movement-oriented approach assumes a disalienating historical process, still echoing the old ideal of progress (e.g. “look how far we’ve come from [intolerant, or supposedly intolerant, era]”); we counter that what is under way is the expansion of a terrain. The potential to generate subjectivities with their predicates, in this case sexualities, is always eventually severed from what it can do, that is, generate another. The runaway from society is halted. Exhausted, the radical or deviant settles for politics. Tiqqun again: *“Sexuality is an apparatus of separation. In it, THEY have made socially acceptable the fiction of a sphere of truth of all relations and beings, in which the distance between self and self, as with the distance between self and other, can finally be abolished, where pure coincidence can be found. The fiction of sexuality presents the truth/appearance, sincerity/falsehood alternative in such a way that all that is not sexuality is rejected as falsehood. It preemptively undermines any possibility of developing relations between beings. The art of distances, through which one can experiment with leaving separation, is constructed against the apparatus of ‘sexuality’ and its binary extortion.”* The Young-Girl senses sexualization and sexuality can be oppressive, so they try to live a liberated form of it. The Young-Girl lifestyle has many options: to save sexuality by being sexy, and/or by distinguishing good and bad sexuality and opting for good, and/or by distinguishing the normal and the different and opting excessively for the safety of the normal or the showy excess of the different. In every case we can detect the typical operation of the market, where “choice” masquerades as freedom. In every case, it is clear that the complicity of self and power is intact. This is the spectacular path of identification *and* consumption. It should be

society into a project or activity (work, consumption) wherein that outsidership, nonbelonging, becomes a novel perspective that may be capitalized upon. There are many directions for us to use these figures to explore our terrain. One is a *critique of identity politics* – as identity and as politics. I would like to emphasize that identity, the term and the associated idea of identity politics, is largely limited to the Left in the US. We rarely have an opportunity to realize how provincial we are in thinking through the relation between power, separation, and consciousness. By and large, identity politics is a pluralistic retelling of the old humanist story of alienation. Identity is the last avatar of alienable essence, and to claim one's identity is the illusory liberation at the end of a long tradition of politics centered on consciousness. Now, let us first grant this modern phenomenon its due. It is possible to realize some of our potentiality in identifying in a momentary, situational fashion. This event temporarily shatters Bloomitude, rendering some other kind of subjectivity visible. As this other kind of subjectivity is actualized, however, the creative potential is exhausted. What is left is clinging to a product no longer capable of tapping into potential. The product eventually congeals into an array of categories and qualities; sooner or later, these become part of marketing and branding. Even when they do not immediately exist in the space of consumption, they seem to prefigure their inclusion therein by automatically taking on the form of predicates, the future qualities of commodities that the Young-Girl will sort through, expressing the freedom in selecting among them. From the point of view of those developing their new identities, this is a vital, sometimes even life-or-death struggle; from the point of view of marketers, it is also important, because it is free labor. Take, for example, sexuality, we have many sexual identities and some consensus about their predicates. For example, there is some consensus about which ones are more marginalized. There are also many people hard at work developing and defining new identities. Every time a new one is developed and defined, we have seen a movement (or a gesture towards

a common skepticism about revolutions (coupled with an increasingly fanatical insistence on revolution set against that skepticism); they also include the sense of a limit to humanist, more or less religious or moral descriptions of the radical project; and the implosion of politics when its shaky foundations on those very ideals of progress and faith in humanity are revealed. Here I will not argue about these matters, but rather restrict myself to stating the preceding as the summary of shared sentiments: *we sense that the old ideas have failed us*, leaving the feeling of malaise that drove others like us to search them out. From now on our theory must include this feeling as a genetic component. It's not as if any of us spend too much time in the conceptual world of the Old or New Left, though. We usually do not feel *that* exhaustion until someone attached to the radical tradition as we knew it forces us onto their terrain. Usually we just feel a sense of absence, which for some of us translates into an insistent need for new terms, new analysis; for some of us, even more than that; for some of us, a new language. If we are to become antagonists against this world, we need a new way of encountering each other, of speaking to each other in and through such encounters. I am attracted to Tiqqun's writing because it seems to emerge from an attempt to come to terms with the deepest roots of the left-wing trajectory in the western tradition, recognizing that we are bound up in it without feeling a psychic or political debt to it. They do not offer (at least not in the pieces I will discuss here) proposals of a practical nature; but they do suggest the path that a new analysis might take by hazarding a few new terms and ideas; the beginning, so I like to think, of a new anti-political language. I turn to Tiqqun's writings on the figures of Bloom and the Young-Girl in search of new ways of addressing the matter of alienation, both because it is a key example of the old radical vocabulary, and because it is perhaps central to radical theory as we knew it, if I am right that it is also the name for the drive to theory as a form of knowing, thinking, and feeling what it is like to be off balance. The idea of *alienation* was, maybe still is,

a central part of the radical theories when it comes to explaining what is wrong with us, and what to do about it. What was the idea of alienation? First of all, a secular rewriting of a religious idea. The religious idea goes something like this: *“humans are creatures out of harmony with themselves and with God.”* According to the Christian and some other versions of the story, this is related to freedom and is therefore our fault. And it is also to be resolved through freedom. *“We made the wrong choice and we should make the right choice. We return to what we are when we return to God. This is the right use of freedom, to be in truth, or rectitude.”* Something like that is the murky background of the idea of alienation as it appears in its more familiar humanistic mode, the mode that was adopted in the Left. In the mode, alienation is an estrangement of our essence, in labor or in forced normalcy, for example. This is understood as the effect of power, which separates us from our essence, not allowing us to exist as we should. Separation is also understood as mediation, which places layers of signs or representations between us and reality. The result is malaise and false consciousness about the sources of that malaise. Accordingly, to undo alienation is to regain our essence. In terms of power, this would mean that we are no longer separated from our essence. In terms of mediation, this would mean that immediacy is regained. (this could mean either that the signs and representations are properly understood or that they are just done without.) In either case, true consciousness wins out: we are what we should be and know it. We return to what we are when we return to ourselves, individually and as a society. This return is again associated with freedom, as collective liberation. Here is an example of the underlying thought pattern – what could be said to be the shared morality of the Christian prehistory and the more recent trajectory of the idea: *“our essence is good. With our essence, our goodness, estranged, we are not ourselves. To be ourselves again is to be autonomous, which is to have regained our goodness.”* What did this thought pattern, this story – we might say, this *myth* – do for people like us? It made it possible to address three prob-

unpaid manual labor that maintains waged labor, as well as affective labor, maintaining social networks, kin work, and so on. This is even more obviously a form of anticipated, expected, enforced care. Again, everything pushes in this direction, but women are identified with it most strongly, or feel the push most strongly. Here is what is difficult, what the hyphen in the figure of Young-Girl allows us to bring into focus: young people’s relation to consumption and women or girls’ relation to reproduction seem like phenomena that can be oppressive of liberating. We know of political projects that describe a good form of consumption as opposed to a bad one (boycotts, green consumerism, localism, sustainability, etc.) and parallel political projects that describe a good form of reproduction, or at least reproductive labor, as opposed to a bad one (liberal feminism and identity politics). Young-Girl is the critical figure to help us name and critically think through how these two forms of intensified consumption and reproduction come together (mind the dash) in the form of a benevolent Biopower that manages care. This care is a form of rebinding to society, a maintenance of primary separation (there is room here to consider the endless invocation of the family, and sometimes its values, across the entire US political spectrum as an aspect of the Young-Girl operation. Allegiance to family is one of the principal ways in which those who do not identify as female may still be understood through the figure of the Young-Girl.) This is the terrible conclusion for all those who fought or fight for a sense of self in a society like this one: there is no good form of either consumption or reproduction. What we are offered as a path to liberation through being or “supporting” (as political allies) Young-Girls is ultimately a re-insertion into precisely the society we were (as Blooms) capable of being indifferent (or antagonistic) to. Young-Girl names every path that is laid out for us to contain our dissent and our revolt, to channel it back into capitalist social relations: commodities, work, money, and the selves that define themselves according to these metrics. It is the encouragement to focus our disavowal of, our indifference (or hostility) to,

is possible, beyond measure. Bloom is the psychic, emotional space of that dissatisfaction, before it is channeled into whatever project, institution, or organization, or set aside by some distraction or possibility. To take the analysis of the terrain further, let us now turn to the Young-Girl. I claimed Bloom corresponded to a sense of being unreal without trusting the path offered back to the real. A first approach to the Young-Girl is to grasp that it is the figure of someone who abandons that sense of unreality in favor of what THEY offer as the path back to the real. Overall, this is to be understood as an effect of power, a re-binding to the social real. It was the danger always present in the language of alienation. With the figure of Young-Girl we name the two principal contemporary forms of reintegration: identity and consumption as a lifestyle. In their closely connected functioning, as identification with the Spectacle, the fundamental ambiguity of Bloom is betrayed, and the plans for exit are botched. The Young-Girl, Tiqqun say, is the model citizen; here citizenship is redefined as an explicit response to the threat of Bloom's indifference to society. Its two aspects, *Young-* and *-Girl*, refer to roles that are pushed onto us. These roles are two ways of expressing the same kind of relation of *care*. As a demographic, *young people* define themselves, as they are defined, through consumption. They care, or are made to care, about what's new, hot, cool, etc. They do the bulk of the work, or are made to do the bulk of the work, of sorting through commodities, tangible and virtual. Like all labor, this is a channeling of energy; like all work in a society like ours, channeling is separation. Everything about our society pushes in this direction, but young people are identified with it most forcibly, and thus feel the push most strongly. To exist as young is to be forced to care about consumption (conversely, anyone heavily involved in sorting through commodities gains the appearance – and not just or necessarily physical appearance – of youthfulness). As a demographic, *women* are pushed to define themselves through reproduction. This is not just the bulk of the work of making babies but what is called reproductive labor, which entails all of the

lems of politics that go beyond a conventional understanding and practice of politics. A *first problem*: it's not just that there are imbalances of power, oppression, exclusion, and the rest of it. it's that people by and large don't notice, or if they do notice, it is only in local and anecdotal ways. The world-views that made it impossible to register what is really going on at the level of a whole society, an entire historical moment, what some call the totality, are ideologies. The theory of ideology is an expanded form of the notion of false consciousness suggested by the alienation of most citizens. A *second problem* of politics is less related to consciousness. Ideology suggests seeing things wrong (upside down); at a deeper level, alienation suggests feeling apart from society: some combination of actually being expelled or feeling that way. The mainstream ideal of political participation makes even less sense in this case, since not only do alienated people participate in wrongheaded ways, but some withdraw from participation altogether. These are the apolitical individuals, the great silent mass of society. A *third problem* is that alienated people are not acting in their own name, or with full consciousness of what they are doing. Thus, any number of antisocial phenomena, including much of what is considered crime by the mainstream and oppressive behavior by radicals, have to be considered as not under the control of individuals. Some form of morality continues to be appealed to in the background of politics, but the idea of alienation allows for it to be more or less temporarily suspended – explaining certain transgressions through appeals to social causes, and correspondingly suggesting social solutions to the prevalence of such transgressions. *The backdrop for political participation is a social orientation, a psychic debt to society*. In sum, these problems of politics that go beyond politics were addressed, within the trajectory of the radical left, as estrangements to be undone so that there could be a return to inclusion and wholeness. This is usually talked about in terms of removing meditations, or recovering alienated products, including our selves. True consciousness, enthusiastic participation, and a strong moral compass would

have been both the preconditions and the result of using freedom properly, which is to say, within political channels of expression. When I write that for some of us large parts, if not the entirety, of the trajectory of the radical left are exhausted, that might be schematically rephrased as follows: the radical left by and large encouraged the undoing of oppression and alienation to return actors to the political field and reinvest them in society. Those of us who come to feel that the trajectory is exhausted have come to suspect that it was the in the very constitution of the political field itself, as a participatory and mass-social space, that produced those alienating effects. We need another way of understanding those effects *and* other names for them. *We need new names for alienation.* To do that, we should first aside the discourse (the *myth*) of mediation, where immediacy is good, desired, and the goal, and mediation is the opposite of all that. As we have inherited it, the idea of mediation is either an awkward way of talking about how our organs of perception work in concert with our mental faculties, or simply a trap. In the first case, it is an old religious-philosophical story about our endless difficulties in coming into contact with the real world. This has nothing to do with the problem at hand, even if it can be treated as one of its symptoms in a language that is compelling to many. Secondly, the immediate is easy to invoke as a goal. Someone said about political organizations that they talk about the immediate because they want to mediate. That is, we are offered a political way out of our malaise by manipulators smart enough to know that they must appeal to us in that way, but deceitful or deluded enough to imagine that any politics, however radical, could put an end to our detachment. This conclusion puts us back on the right track. It is the centrality of politics and the present or future social integration that always accompanies it that makes some of us so critical of the Left. In the briefest terms, it is a question of fixing society or abandoning it. The radical Left, with its faith in progress and common assumption of human goodness, has always opted for the former in a sort of twistedly sycophantic loyal opposi-

to try to separate them.” Bloom synthesizes a feeling of disinvestment, of detachment that more or less everyone experiences, and the search for the rare feeling that through that detachment almost anything is possible – any social or antisocial experiment. *“But the more the Spectacle and Biopower are perfected, the more the appearance and the elementary conditions of our existence gain autonomy, the more their world detaches from men and becomes alien to them, the more Bloom withdraws into himself, deepens and recognizes his inner sovereignty in relation to the unbearable weight of the objectivity that crushes him. He detaches himself more and more painlessly from his social determinations, from his “identity,” and toughens, without regard to any effectiveness, into a pure force of negation...The condition of men and of their common world as exiles in the unrepresentable coincides with the situation of existential clandestinity that befalls them in the Spectacle. It manifests the absolute singularity of each social atom as the absolute whatever, and its pure difference as a pure nothingness...Assuredly, Bloom is positively nothing, as the Spectacle tirelessly repeats. The interpretations diverge only as to the meaning of the ‘nothing’.”* Look: Bloom is not a revolutionary subject. It is not a question of opting for one group and not another; nor is it a question of having a special kind of consciousness. As far as that goes Bloom may be anyone whatsoever. Bloom seems at first to be pure alienation, which tempts those who hold on to the radical tradition to try to undo it in the prescribed way, through reformist or revolutionary re-integration. In the old story, alienation is bad and to be overcome, undone. In Tiqqun’s analysis, Bloom is neither good nor bad; Bloom instead reveals a potentiality. That is all. But that is a lot. For an unflinching examination of our lives through the figure has revealed a potential for exit. Bloom names our insistence on experimentally clarifying this potential in ourselves. In that sense the figure of Bloom indicates whatever first brought you to question everything, to feel apart from the square world. It recalls the secret feeling that what is valuable in the world is not *of* the world, or is missing in the world. It reminds you that another kind of relation

evant to would-be antagonists: Bloom and Young-Girl. Bloom first: *Bloom is society*; or rather, the fact that, the way in which, *we are all society to each other*, especially to anyone we do not know, but probably also to those we know best (even ourselves), *is the Bloom-condition*. The power that knows how to vanish portrays Bloom to us as “the last man, the man of the street, of the crowds, of the masses, mass man...as the sad product of

the time of the multitudes, as the disastrous son of the industrial age and the end of every enchantment.” This corresponds to the classic figure of alienated humanity. But Bloom is not that; it is the purveyors of Spectacle, the portrayers, who are. Tiqqun call the purveyors of Spectacle, those with an interest in portraying Bloom to us, “THEY”. The anonymous no-one, that is, what anyone is to anyone else in a society like ours. Or at least threatens to be. *Bloom is society* may thus be restated as: *to you I may be THEY*. The stultifying discussion of motives that follows every mass shooting offers the clearest example here: it conceals what most of us feel and some of us know – that a growing anomie makes such events possible as acts with no real motive other than the cruel anonymity with which we all face off against each other every day. But Tiqqun insists that there is another side to Bloom, which fills out the figure and gives it its tension: “...*this is what Bloom means: that we don’t belong to ourselves, that this world is not our world. That it confronts us not only in its alien totality, but also in its smallest, alien details.*” Bloom is not only the condition of (absolute) separation, but also the potential for undoing separation. The figure of Bloom names not only the separation that characterized alienation in the old sense, but also the ultimate possibility that something other than the terrible couplet “alienation from society/disalienation through reintegration into it” is possible. Bloom is that person without qualities who has become aware of their emptiness, of the potentiality contained within that emptiness. “*Bloom is not alienated man...Bloom is the man who has become so thoroughly conjoined with his alienation that it would be absurd*

tion. But as the panorama broadens, and, beyond radical politics as we have known it, an unknown *anti-politics* appears, the question shifts from radical change in the continuum from reform to revolution to one of *abandonment, exodus, or exit from social institutions*. Is it a question of becoming healthy, sane, normal, employed, better adjusted etc. – in short, *assimilated* – or of changing the game entirely? Our answer echoes Tiqqun’s in *Theory Of Bloom*: “*Without being discreet about it, leave the ranks. NOW.*” A second modification to the old common sense: if we are critical of the philosophical and theoretical presuppositions of the Left, and of moralism in general, then we should set aside the idea that we have an essence that can be estranged. This idea of an essence – bad or good, holy or profane – has served principally as the depository for the prejudices of individuals and epochs. In our disillusion we set out from the terrible, liberatory idea that there is nothing in particular for humans to be or do – no essence, or nothing knowable of that sort. When we critically rename alienation, we will be looking for a less humanistic, perhaps simply antihumanistic refashioning of the idea. That is what I believe I have found in Tiqqun, as the idea of a separation between a force and what it can do. We will set aside the parts of alienation that had to do with mediation and a human essence, natural or moral. We will also set aside the priority of consciousness – at least true or false consciousness and ideology. We might also say that power is what binds, in the sense that it emerges in attempts to secure political participation and social belonging (or their converse, exclusions and disqualification). But separation is primary: for power to bind, it must separate. To understand separation properly here is to understand what we have retained and what we have added to the idea of alienation. We have retained the sense of a split in each of us, a cleavage or caesura that opens up as a result of the continuing application of a certain sort of power. But what is split is no longer our essence and our existence, or labor of being and its social product, but just our *potential to be*. What we *can do* – not just what we *are*. We are no longer appealing to an

essence but focusing on strengthening a capacity for experimentation. Our anti-politics begins whenever and wherever we learn to fortify and use this capacity.

TIQQUN'S NEW NAMES: THE FIGURES OF BLOOM AND YOUNG-GIRL

Theory of Bloom and *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* were both published in the first issue of the Tiqqun journal in 1999. For all of the reasons stated above, here we would like to explicate and restate, maybe expand on their ideas; but let's be clear that what follows is an intervention made applying *their* tools to *our* situation, insofar as we understand each. There is no intention here of being faithful interpreters. Tiqqun calls their style of theory "critical metaphysics". For us, this means that they share our sense of exhaustion of the western trajectory, and the need for a critical reappraisal of every term and position we've inherited from it. In our case, the metaphysics that is being reappraised critically (though not exactly abandoned) is the set of conceptual scaffolds and religious or moral prejudices at work in the idea of alienation. In *Theory of Bloom* and *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, the critical work proceeds through *figures*. Bloom and Young-Girl are figures. They are not concepts (alienation is a concept, or at least an idea); they are not demographic designators. They *figure* social phenomena that emerged in the twentieth century and are ubiquitous today. These social phenomena have to do with forms of experience and subjectivity (in other words, how we perceive the world, ourselves, and interactions between them). When we talk about these in the U.S. way, we usually use the impoverished lexicon of identity politics – about which more later. The terrain is therefore contemporary; it is also important to note that Tiqqun displays a shift away from thinking radical politics along a strictly historical trajectory (the history of alienation,

with progress as incremental disalienation, and revolution as the idea of absolute disalienation). With them, we are trying to understand the effects of the most recent historical shifts, shifts that may have finally exposed what was so religious and moral about the old theories of ideology and alienation; but, paradoxically, those shifts lead us to reject temporal orientations and instead orient our emergent anti-politics around the subversive exploration of the social wasteland around us, its terrain. Let us begin to listen to Tiqqun, then, with two descriptions of the terrain. From *Theory of Bloom*, an elaboration of the terrain in terms of relations of power: "...the contemporary form of domination is essentially productive. On one hand, it governs all the manifestations of our existence – the Spectacle – and on the other, it manages the conditions of our existence – Biopower. The Spectacle is the power that insists you speak, that insists you BE SOMEONE. Biopower is the benevolent power, full of a shepherd's concern for his sheep, the power that desires the salvation of its subject, the power that WANTS YOU TO LIVE." A form of power that separates, that manages separation and continually binds us to social and institutional structures, constitutes the terrain. From *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*: "Behind the hypnotized grimaces of official pacification, there is a war. We can no longer merely call it economic, or social, or humanitarian. It has become total. By now everyone has felt their existence becoming a battlefield on which neuroses, phobias, somatizations, depression, and anxiety each beat their respective retreats; yet no one has managed to grasp the meaning of their trajectory or what is really at stake. Paradoxically it is the total nature of this war – total in its means no less than in its ends – that has allowed it to remain invisible. A form of power that, as it manages appearance, vanishes as power, leaving behind a war-torn terrain. This power, its war, the terrain they constitute, are the ultimate guarantors of politics as we know it (that politics is possible at all) on the horizon of history as we know it (that history is comprehensible, that progress is real). On this contemporary terrain we discern two figures, two types, two kinds especially rel-