Becoming Alive, Autonomous, and Explosive

comité invisible

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Whether it's a coincidence or a sign of the times, it is in the midst of a youth revolt and on the eve of a possible "return of the Yellow Vests" that the Invisible Committee is releasing its new book, *Survival Manual*, on October 16.

For twenty years now, through its many textual interventions (*The Coming Insurrection, To Our Friends, Now…*), it has both inspired, and produced the critical balance sheets of, successive waves of revolt and the situations that followed. With its "survival manual," the group offers a stringent, unflinching, self-critical perspective — one free of flattery, yet also capable of being generous and honest.

Many of the questions the book raises are also, at times, our own, just as they are, ultimately, those of many people frustrated by defeat and a feeling of powerlessness: How should we make sense of repeated defeats, even despite the persistence of conflictual forms of action? What conclusions are we to draw from this? How are we to "survive" the present moment? How do our enemies continue to prosper? How can we confront capital with seriousness and strategy and truly reinvigorate revolutionary ethics and perspectives? In line with their explicit critique of the public sphere, their public statements remain rare. However, two contributors to the Invisible Committee's *Survival Manual* answered our questions about the book, while offering their own analysis of the current moment.

Survival Manual ***argues that the Yellow Vests carried out a form of insurrection long awaited by autonomists, yet they did so without them: a movement born out of the encounter between singular, previously-isolated experiences, rather than from any preexisting forms of organization. Are there any similarities with the current youth revolt, or is this just yet another left-wing mobilization destined to be channeled, co-opted, or even sabotaged by unions and political parties?***

What is shaking the country right now is not a social movement, it is a vital movement. The world of the "adults" in charge is hurtling headlong toward a wall — it's even accelerating. It doesn't care about anything; it wants to keep enjoying itself until the very last drop of oil. Claiming to be "responsible," "reasonable," and the custodians of "authority" is the height of their ferocious infantilism. A society of geriatrics can only be youth-obsessed, if not actually young. It wants all the trappings of youth, but detests its vitality. High school students have no reason to feel solidarity with such a civilization of suicidal people. They've seen their parents and teachers submit to all the humiliating aberrations of COVID management, then spout vague justifications

to lock them down and subject them to the same treatment in turn. So much so that, when they speak up, it's as if we were hearing the parents of their own parents. "Just because you accept being treated like worthless dogs, getting paid peanuts, unable to afford a full month of groceries doesn't mean everyone else has to suffer because you didn't have the guts to speak up — I'm sorry," a student explodes. The reverse is also true. That infamous Nazi, Henry Ford, used to say, ""It is well enough that people of the nation do not understand our banking and monetary system, for if they did, I believe there would be a revolution before tomorrow morning." If students knew what — with very few exceptions, and all the more precious for it — their teachers say about them in the teachers' lounge, there'd be few high schools left standing in France. Governing a world with no promise other than that of its own collapse is shaping up to be more complicated than expected. It's not clear that parental geolocation will suffice.

In an administered society, what we call "youth" is simply the free element, those who are not yet bound by a career, a boss, a loan, or a social circle, and who can therefore afford to say aloud what the rest see but prefer to keep quiet about. We generationalize the revolt in order to prevent it from generalizing. The current revolt of "young people" is primarily over our common condition. What is the point of pursuing a career in a world where temperatures reach 45℃ — and therefore of pursuing an education in it? How dare this society treat its untenable contradictions as a "psychological problem," like it's our responsibility, and thus call on us to be "resilient" in the face of our "eco-anxiety"? How long will we tolerate the sifting process occurring at every level of the population — and thus systems like Parcoursup and MonMaster? Does life consist in caring for oneself as "human capital" — and thus as an aggregate of skills? When will we stop working toward our own replacement by AI — a fate already promised to teachers by the ministry's startups? And above all, how can we bring about a revolution in a world entirely designed to prevent us from doing so? All these questions—and a few others — were our starting point in writing *Survival Manual*. For two years, we sought to answer them, to draw up a strategic balance sheet of the failure of the movements in which we had participated, and to clear the ground for the beginning of a new revolutionary process. We knew this task was necessary, but no one was talking about revolution anymore. We wondered if we were even writing for anyone at all. Now we know who we wrote for. We didn't do all this for nothing.

The first thing the Yellow Vests and the current high school revolt have in common is that they come from sectors most removed from militant socialization, with its codes, its endless ruminations, its gloom, and its scowling radicalism. These are revolts that still know how to say "I." Honestly, until last week, we hadn't felt such joy in being out on the streets — joking, dancing, singing, tagging, and rioting — since the Yellow Vests. Another common trait is the way they challenge the humiliation that serves as the norm for social integration, which forms the very foundation of French culture. In other words, they defy *judgment*. Problems with toilets aren't just "shit" problems, but a clear sign of contempt. They must therefore stop. "Gen Z, because we'll be the last generation to be treated like shit," a sign read last Tuesday. Needs are no laughing matter — whether it's the need for sleep, cash, respect, meaning, or love. Everything in French culture seeks to make us ashamed of our needs, to the point that "meeting one's needs" is synonymous with "shitting." High school students, like the Yellow Vests, brazenly defy this taboo. Needs, in their materiality, in their singularity, are ungovernable: as soon as they're brought up, governments no longer know what pretext to use to change the subject. A third common trait between these two uprisings is their refusal of governmental *double binds*, a refusal to let those in power drive us mad with paradoxical injunctions; it is, therefore, the same way of taking them *at their word*.

"You told us to come holler at you; well, here we are, Macron: we're down on the Champs-Élysées, we'll be at the Élysée Palace soon!" "You drone on year round about how we need to work, pass our exams, and sacrifice ourselves for our 'future' — so, give us the conditions to do so, you sons of bitches!" All of a sudden, the powers that be are rendered naked, and begin to stutter. Then they shows their true colors and blurt it all out. They treat a blockaded high school as "urban violence" and explain, on public radio, that there are too many high school students, that many of them don't belong in high school, and that, anyway, even if they pursue an education, it will never be enough for them to compete with AI in the job market. Now everything becomes clear.

The activists' guilty conscience over having "missed out on the Yellow Vests" — a movement they took three weeks to join after initially labeling it "fascist" — is so strong that they have since been constantly trying to "recreate the Yellow Vests" at every opportunity. And in fact, as *Survival Manual* points out, this purely proletarian, anti-union, anti-political, and anti-representative insurrection took place without them. This did not prevent the Yellow Vests, after their first clashes with the CRS, from adopting the "black bloc" as a *technique* — a technique for rioting that had its origins in the German autonomist movement of the 1980s, but was not popularized in France until much later, in 2016. They adopted the technique, not the identity. But it was less through this particular feature, striking though it was, that the Yellow Vests acted autonomously than through their constant refusal of any representative, any spokesperson, any outside organization, or any form of institutional mediation. "Power for no one!" was the rallying cry of German autonomists in 1981. The Yellow Vests embodied that "autonomy beyond the autonomists" of which the Metropolitan Indians had dreamed in 1977. If the Yellow Vests wounded the pride of the autonomists, they were a *nightmare* for the trade unions: workers rising up, taking to the streets and speaking out *directly*, without going through their designated, salaried representatives. We need only recall Laurent Berger's speeches in 2023, at the beginning of the movement against pension reform. All he talked about was his contempt for the Yellow Vests. Indeed, taking revenge on them was the sole motivation of the union leadership in that movement — not winning the fight through a series of stop-start protest days in the face of government provocations, but simply getting back in the saddle after such an affront. It was, in other words, a *restoration* movement. For all sorts of reasons, the current high school and student movement is less well equipped to defend itself against union and political maneuvering. Last Tuesday, a march on Matignon — the prime minister's residence — from City Hall, a march decided upon by thousands of high school and university students, was quietly sabotaged by the trade union organizations and transformed into a march that ended with protesters being kettled in Place Vauban, without anyone making a scandal of it. Trade unions, the media, left-wing organizations — false friends are far more dangerous than genuine enemies. If they manage to fuck us over, it is precisely because, for a time, they pretended to be on our side. As for the Mélenchon supporters, with their strategy of bringing everything that moves under their hegemonic control and their PANG! tactic ("Nobody to Our Left!"), they are merely cynically preparing the biggest political hangover since Mitterrand. They feed on other people's hopes as ticks feed on blood. Is this an excuse not to join the high school students? Certainly not. "Joining the high school students" means less following them and lending them support than extending their refusals and the forms of becoming that their gestures make possible: refusing to let ourselves be crushed. Refusing to become victims of the system. Becoming alive, autonomous, explosive. We are confident: in any case, there is no electoral solution to this civilizational impasse.

Important sections of* Survival Manual *are devoted to "governance through trauma." This includes, in particular, a scathing critique of the strategic stupidity of the organizers of the Sainte-Soline mobilization, whose actions resulted in deliberate "traumatization." To "begin again" would therefore mean drawing the appropriate lessons and breaking out of traumatic repetition. Here again, we are faced with police repression that is as predictable as it is massive. Are we once again throwing ourselves into a trap?

When you send 7,000 high school students into police custody over the course of three weeks and charge at them on horseback or with grenades with their pins pulled, this is obviously no longer a matter of "maintaining public order" or a problem of "unit deployment." It is a strategy. "The aim of the operation was to frighten students and their parents in order to put an end to the rebellion as quickly as possible," a police commissioner explains matter-of-factly. What this ordinary admission illustrates is the extent to which governments have, in recent years, become accustomed to manipulating trauma — whether its source is a catastrophe, a terrorist attack, a war, or their own police force. In the latter case, the *Survival Manual* speaks of "strategic traumatization." The repression of the high school student movement unfortunately confirms this thesis. In France, the Yellow Vest uprising marked a turning point in this new configuration. During the week of December 8, 2018, the government and the media never stopped stoking the threat of people being killed. It was then that they threw the "Malik Oussekine doctrine" overboard. The strategy of "maiming one to deter a hundred" had already been tested in the context of the ZADs (*Zones à défendre*, or "Zones to Defend"), whether at Sivens, at Bure, or during the eviction of Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Taking advantage of the non-urban terrain, the police and gendarmerie rained down offensive grenades that exploded indiscriminately. This is apparently what happened in Lens. As for the tactic of ramming protesters with vehicles, it has long been tested in the *banlieues*. What is its purpose, from the standpoint of crowd management? None. The point is to traumatize. The shock and terror are amplified by videos — one way, among others, of turning the protesters' own tools against them. Their videos become the means through which trauma spreads and, consequently, through which deterrence is achieved. To blame the fascisization of the police serves only to obscure how profoundly democratic this mode of governance actually is.

Sainte-Soline, in March 2023? The trap was visible from everywhere, from every vantage point and every point of view. Anyone who had taken part in the wildcat demonstrations during the pension protests — with their decapitated effigies of Macron, their threats invoking Louis XVI hurled from Place de la Concorde, or the administrative court attacked in Nantes — knew that something was slipping beyond the deadly grip of union control. For those in power, it was urgent to crush at birth the generation that was emerging there. So they installed their gigantic trap for the militant mice on this conspicuous mound. Anyone standing in front of that hill of earth, surrounded by trucks forming a defensive wall, with the general of the opposing forces parading along the battlements of the keep, could immediately recognize the trap. Anyone who had heard Darmanin's provocations in the preceding days, like the pre-fight taunts before a boxing match, could smell the ambush. A few days after our complete rout, the gendarmes were crowing in the newspapers about the success of their campaign of traumatization. That was the term they used. The movement was abruptly broken. The organizers' political maneuvering and calculations are not enough to explain why such an obvious trap worked. Until we confront this kind of failure head-on, along with the whole web of reasons that led to it, we condemn ourselves to repeating it. We remain prisoners of the cycle of traumatic repetition. At the demonstration in

Paris on October 6 last year, the small riot that erupted just before the march reached Place de la Nation was precisely an attempt to avoid falling victim to the police deployment waiting there to crush the usual end-of-demonstration skirmishes. Every revolt of any real consequence invents its own forms, which are also tactics. It is impossible to imagine everything that can exist beyond the idiotic union-led transhumance! On every occasion, the event never lies on the side of mere "demonstration." Otherwise, we would not have heard LeCornu congratulating himself in the National Assembly on "these demonstrations [which] the government welcomes with great respect […] and with relief, because at last we have a legal, declared, democratic framework within which disagreements can be expressed." At the beginning of this month, high school students showed that they could place their own school under siege, using fire and "delirium" to hold it. Nobody expected them there, least of all their wardens. On October 6 in Lyon, rather than endure confinement within the Trotskyist general assembly, the march spread into the surrounding streets and erected barricades there. There was probably more dancing around these improvised fires than on the benches of the Bourse du travail.

Every eruption finds its own repertoire, one that ultimately always runs counter to what aspiring leaders prescribe. All this bears witness to the persistence of the tactical intelligence that was so sorely lacking at Sainte-Soline. Fortunately, there is no general staff directing high school blockades across France, unlike what happened that day in Deux-Sèvres. The strategy of traumatization has, moreover, failed to produce the intended effect on the high school student movement. Quite the contrary: it has added yet another grievance to a movement that already had no shortage of them. And it has hardened the very determination it was supposed to weaken. Caramba, another failure!

There is a certain amount of anticipation surrounding October 17, which is supposed to mark the return of the Yellow Vests. In Survival Guide, the illusion that social media alone could generate a revolutionary dynamic is severely criticized, including through the example usually cited to support this idea (that of the Arab Spring). The failure of September 10, 2025 — considered a "militant speculative bubble" — illustrates this thesis. Are we still in this kind of bubble, or does this call, combined with the youth revolt, create a more open scenario?

A few weeks before the dissolution of the National Assembly in June 2024, Macron's close advisors gathered at the Élysée Palace to watch the series "La Fièvre" together. The June 9 address announcing the dissolution would, in fact, refer to this same "fever." The series was conceived by a former member of the Socialist Party (PS) aligned with Jean-Luc Mélenchon's movement. In it, opponents, whether pro- or anti-government, compete using the power of communication to quell or stoke revolts across the country. Communications strategists from all sides scrutinize giant control panels, where they monitor tensions emerging in real time on social media. It is a fantasy of cybernetic power, that of the Control Room. Readers of the Polytechnique journal know that the Prime Minister's office, in 2024 to be precise, tested software for a real-time mapping of risks of social fragmentation, a map derived from digital noise. What matters in this mapping are not the ideas circulating or who is spreading them (activists or Russian bots), but the deviations from the norm, how they coalesce, form abscesses, and how to puncture them. It should come as no surprise that governments are turning communication tools into tools of control. What should concern us, however, is that so many revolutionaries have ended up adopting a similar conception of revolt. After weaving a web of real or fake accounts and amassing *followers*, after crafting a highly viral call to action, all they would need to do is press a big ar-

row to launch the insurrection. This communicational conception of the uprising did not emerge just last year. Facebook and Twitter were already applying this narrative to the "Arab Spring." But, as Survival Manual details, there was no Facebook Revolution. Just as May 1968 was not an "RTL Revolution" [*Radio Télé Luxembourg*], nor was Genoa in 2001 a "Wanadoo riot." This is not to deny the role of communication channels in these events, and particularly in their rhythm. The multiplicity of *narratives*, the idea that anyone could show their world to everyone else, is literally an invention of the anti-globalization movement, born from the convergence of the first hackers and the Zapatista movement. We must admit that this idea has been turned against us, like many other weapons from the cycle of insurrections over the last quarter-century. We are only just beginning to take stock of our arsenal.

Deep down, ever since the Yellow Vests movement wore itself out with the repetition of Saturday marches, "Yellow Vests" has become a way of saying "insurrection" without actually saying the word. And in fact, insurrection is the only response commensurate with the suffocation, humiliation, impoverishment, and outright mockery that the government apparatus has in store for us. However, since December 8, 2018, this apparatus has tooled up to defend itself against a new surge of the Yellow Vests, after being caught off guard on November 24 and December 1 of that year. We therefore need a new element of surprise. The vitality of high school students can change the game and complicate the repressive equation for government forces, but an insurrection is not merely a series of demonstrations. Rather than speculating about this date, we prefer to draw strategic lessons from past defeats and build on what remained unaccomplished. In retrospect, the craziest thing about the Yellow Vests' days of insurrection was that we marched past the headquarters of Lazard, the UIMM, and LVMH, or beneath the Publicis offices, without realizing that it was *there* — far more than at the Élysée — that the enemy lay in wait: capital. Things are clearer now. Capital's arrogance has laid it bare. The addresses are circulating. Insurrection is the only way to escape the electoral trap looming on the horizon. Everyone senses that the moral and financial pressures to bring us to heel will only intensify in the coming months. Lockdown through gas prices is no more acceptable than previous lockdowns. Moreover, we cannot let the Macronist regime fade away without making it pay the price for its abuses. They demand vengeance. In any case, we will be in the streets on October 17.

The entire text is a nuanced analysis of contemporary forms of capitalist domination and how they have evolved over the past fifteen years or so. It shows how so-called "revolutionaries" have fallen into every trap set for them and are thereby reinforcing their dependence as well as their powerlessness. It critiques the analytical and strategic weaknesses of these circles. What, then, are the paths of resistance, the lines of flight and subversion, the right strategy for all those — and there are many — who, though likely caught up in their own contradictions, can no longer stand the world as it is, but who, isolated and cornered by the entire machinery of capital described here in such precise detail, can't see where to begin?

When we step out of our shell and finally rise up, we still find in our paths a whole little activist world standing in our way, trying to intimidate us. It claims to have the right practices, the right rhetoric, the necessary organization, and a whole range of ready-made solutions. It even has a sound system and media contacts; can you believe it! What Survival Manual documents is that this entire little scene is rich only in its failures, and its determination to repeat them. If it had even the slightest solution, we wouldn't be where we are today. We're in France, a country where there's always someone claiming to educate you. When it's not the government, it's the

anti-government crowd. Activist circles are a cul-de-sac, not a point of departure. There's no such thing as a bad starting point; the best one is undoubtedly right where we are, with those we love and the things we hold dear — provided we stop telling ourselves stories, stop playing along with social lies and their so-called "values," and provided we stop being *terrified*, deep down. Terrified of being banished. This is what the *Survival Manual* calls the "process of singularization." It has no end. This is what it means to truly live. No one wants to sacrifice themselves anymore. No "collective value" can command sacrifice anymore. Collective realities must be founded on something other than suffering. It is precisely to prevent this that the specter of war is now being held up before us. But the real war is between all these processes of singularization and the crumbling yet still-reigning order that intends to continue vampirizing every form of life on earth. At this point, all legalistic options have been swept aside — on the mega-reservoirs, the A69 highway, the Duplomb Law, labor law, and international law alike. "Burn it all down since everything's already burning," read a sign in the Paris march last Tuesday. "Fuck almost everything!" another one put it more subtly. The echoes currently reverberating between the French, Belgian, Spanish, and Albanian uprisings are no coincidence. A war is underway between us and capital, against the backdrop of the thousand forms of dependence through which it believes it holds us captive. The entire *Survival Manual* is an effort to update our understanding of the theater of operations. We cannot summarize it in a few sentences. Noting, shortly before his death, the fatal course the Soviet regime was taking, Lenin wrote: "Those communists who do not give in to illusions or discouragement, who retain the strength and flexibility to start over from scratch and tackle one of the most difficult tasks, are not lost (and most likely will not perish)." Amidst the apocalypse of capital, this advice remains solid.

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