



E V E R Y

B O D Y

H A T E S

T H E

P O L I C E

“ There is a basic asymmetry between the police and revolutionaries. Whereas they take us as the target of their operations, our aims reach far beyond them—it’s the general policing of society, it’s very organization, that we have in our line of sight.

A revolutionary force can be constructed only as a network, a step at a time, by relying on sure friendships, by furtively establishing unanticipated ties even within the enemy apparatus. This is how the *tanzikiyat* were formed in Syria, as a web of little autonomous pockets of revolutionaries that would later become the backbone of popular self-organization. In their day, the first French Resistance networks didn't do things differently. In the case of Syria as in the old *maquis*, by successfully reclaiming urban districts and areas of the countryside, by establishing relatively secure zones, it became possible to go beyond the stage of discrete, anonymous activity on the part of little groups. "Life is in the use, not in the time," as Manouchian put it.

Printed in 2018 by some friends, forming a revolutionary force step by step.

Cover photo: Police during the G20 summit (Hamburg, 2017)

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Introduction

The following text is a chapter excerpted from *Now*, published in France, 2017 by the Invisible Committee. Due to its origin, the piece contains a slew of references to various laws, institutions, events, people, and histories that most likely mean very little to the average reading in the English-speaking world. For example the ZAD, a squatted forest obstructing government plans to build an airport near Notre-Dame-des-Landes. The text also leaves out much of the racialized aspects of policing—something not foreign to France either. Despite this, the text still has much to offer. Whether we're talking about the French CRS or the local police department's riot squad, the Invisible Committee provide a basis for understanding the operation of police and how we struggle for liberation.

Laws mean nothing without people to enforce them—this is policing. Police are the ones who evict the homeless from wherever they've found shelter, the ones who carry out the violence implicit in a 'no trespassing' sign. Immigration agents are those who make borders a reality and carry out deportations, not Trump signing a bill about a wall. Not only is it the human officers themselves, but all the tools they have at their disposal to maximize their effectiveness, to cover all the terrain they can't physically occupy.

As the Invisible Committee point out, "The police are a target and not an objective, an obstacle and not an opponent." The goal isn't to crush the police entirely, but to render them inoperable. To out-manuever all of their attempts to enforce order. As they write, "it would be foolish to seek a *military* victory over the police" given their clear superiority in brute force. But by "[d]isorganizing their ranks, stripping them of all legitimacy, reducing them to powerlessness, keeping them at a good distance, giving oneself more room for maneuver at the right moment and at the places one chooses: this is how we destitute the police."

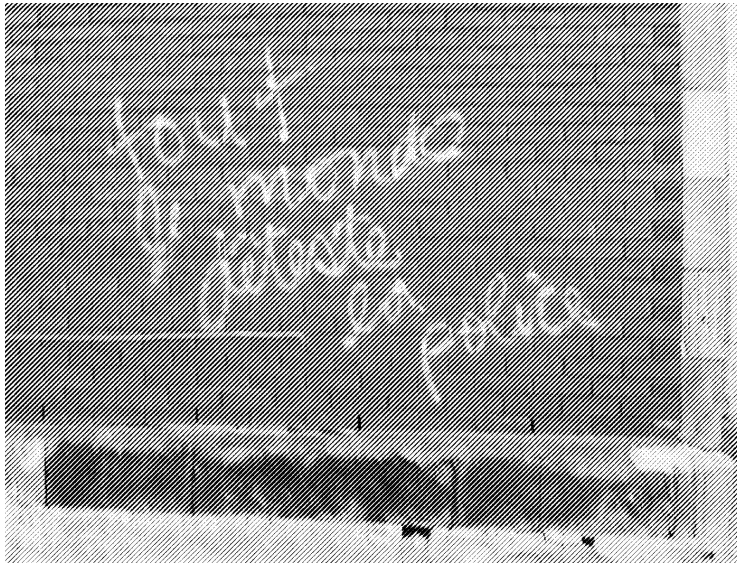
This asymmetry is our strength. "Organizing revolutionarily entails a subtle interplay between the visible and the invisible, the public and the clandestine, the legal and the illegal." It is necessary then to build this revolutionary force "a step at a time, by relying on sure friendships." From this framework we can begin to sketch out the possibilities for liberation.

It's anarchy for us too, every day.

police, the only victory is political. Disorganizing their ranks, stripping them of all legitimacy, reducing them to powerlessness, keeping them at a good distance, giving oneself more room for maneuver at the right moment and at the places one chooses: this is how we destitute the police. "In the absence of a revolutionary party, the true revolutionaries are those who fight the police." One needs to hear all the melancholy that's expressed in this observation by Pierre Peuchmard in 1968.

While, compared to the police, revolutionaries may currently present themselves as weak, unarmed, unorganized, and watch-listed, they have the strategic advantage, however, of being nobody's instrument, of having no order to maintain, and of not being a *corps*. We revolutionaries are not bound by any obedience, we are connected to all sorts of comrades, friends, forces, milieus, accomplices, and allies. This enables us to bring to bear on certain police interventions the threat that an operation to enforce order might trigger an *unmanageable* disorder in return. If since the failure of Operation Caesar, no government has dared to try and expel the ZAD, it's not out of a fear of losing the battle militarily, but because the reaction of tens of thousands of sympathizers could prove to be unmanageable. That a "blunder" in a *banlieue* sets off weeks of widespread riots is too high a price to pay for the Specialized Brigade's license to humiliate. When an intervention by the police causes more disorder than what it reestablishes in the way of order, it's their very reason for being that's in question. So, either they insist and end up emerging as a party with its own interests, or they go back into their kennel. Either way, they cease being a useful means. They are destituted.

There is a basic asymmetry between the police and revolutionaries. Whereas they take us as the target of their operations, our aims reach far beyond them—it's the general policing of society, its very organization, that we have in our line of sight. The outrageousness of police prerogatives and the incredible expansion of the technological means of control delineate a new tactical perspective. A purely public existence places revolutionaries before the alternative of a practical impotence or an immediate repression. A purely conspiratorial existence does allow a greater freedom of action, but makes one politically inoffensive and vulnerable to repression. So it's a matter of combining a capacity for mass dissemination and a necessary conspiratorial level. Organizing revolutionarily entails a subtle interplay between the visible and the invisible, the public and the clandestine, the legal and the illegal. We have to accept that our struggle is *essentially criminal*, since in this world everything has become criminalizable. Even the militants who go in aid of the migrants have to use clever tricks to evade the surveillance of which they are the object, before they can act freely.



governing authorities are rattles in the hands of the police. They no longer have any other choice but to rush to the bedside of the lowest-grade cop with a pain and to yield to all the whims of the force. After the license to kill, anonymity, impunity, the latest weaponry, what can they still want to obtain? Even so, there is no lack of factions in the police force who imagine themselves growing wings and turning into an autonomous force with its own political agenda. In this regard, Russia looks like a paradise, where the secret services, the police, and the army have already taken power and govern the country to their benefit. While the police are certainly not in a position to go autonomous materially, that doesn't prevent them from waving the *threat* of their political autonomy to the sound of all their wailing sirens.

The police are thus torn between two contradictory tendencies. One of them, conservative, bureaucratic, "republican," would definitely prefer to remain just a means in the service of an order that is less and less respected, to be sure. The other is spoiling for a throwdown, wanting to "clear out the rabble" and no longer answer to anyone—to be their own end. Basically, only the coming to power of a party determined to "clear out the rabble" and to support the police apparatus one hundred percent could reconcile these two tendencies. But such a government would be in its turn a government of civil war.

As a means of justifying itself, the state was left with the plebiscitary legitimacy of the grand democratic elections, but that last fount of legitimacy has gone dry. Whatever the outcome of a presidential election, even if the option of a "strong power" wins out, such an election is bound to produce a weak power, considering how things stand. It will be *as if the election had never taken place*. The minority that mobilized to carry its favorite to victory will put them in command of a foundering ship. As we see with Donald Trump in the U.S., the pledge to brutally restore the national unity delivers its opposite: once in power, the return-to-order candidate finds themselves at odds not only with whole swaths of society but also entire sections of the state apparatus itself. The promise to reestablish order only adds to the chaos.

In a country like France, that is, in a country that may very well be a police state on condition that it not declare it publicly, it would be foolish to seek a *military* victory over the police. Taking aim at a uniform with a paving stone is not the same thing as entering into close-quarters combat with an armed force. The police are a target and not an objective, an obstacle and not an opponent. Whoever takes the cops for an opponent prevents themselves from breaking through the obstacle the police constitute. To successfully sweep them aside, we must aim beyond them. Against the

forcing the resignation of his national security adviser, clearly aim to bring him down... that the death penalty, abolished by the law, has manifestly been re-instituted by the police in the case of interventions against “terrorists”... that the police have succeeded in asserting a near-total judicial impunity for their most indefensible sprees... that certain bodies within the police structure more and more openly declare their alignment with the National Front... that what was treated as newsworthy about May 18, 2016 was not that certain police unions had privatized the Place de la République—where *Nuit debout* was still meeting—for the duration of their get-together in the presence of Gilbert Collard and Eric Ciotti or Marion Marechal-Le Pen, but a police car in flames along the Saint Martin Canal—taken together, these items outline the contours of a substantial shift. This is what the media’s promotion of a minor fracas to the status of a big deal was meant to hide. It was necessary, moreover, to prevent this police parade that ended at a little sign placed a few meters in front of the burning vehicle: “grilled chicken, pay as you like,” from setting off, in reaction to such a nose-thumbing, a big ripple of laughter infecting the whole population. So the Interior Minister felt obliged to hastily announce possible charges of “attempted homicide.” In this way, he could replace an irresistible comical urge traversing the population by feelings of fear and gravity, culminating in a call for revenge. Policing operations are also operations aimed at the affects. And it’s because of this particular operation that the justice system has been obsessing over its inditees for the Quai Valmy attack. After Theo’s rape, a police officer made this matter-of-fact confession to the *Parisien*: “We belong to a gang. Whatever happens, we’re in it together.”

The slogan “Everybody hates the police” doesn’t express an observation, which would be false, but an affect, which is vital. Contrary to the cowardly worries of governing authorities and editorialists, there is no “gulf that deepens year by year between the police and the population,” there is a deepening gulf between those—and they are countless—who have excellent reasons for hating the police and the fear-ridden mass of those who embrace the cause of the cops, when they are not hugging the cops themselves. In reality, what we’re witnessing is a major turnaround in the relation between the government and the police. For a long time, the forces of order were those ignorant puppets, despised but brutal, that were brandished against the restive populations. Somewhere between a parachutist, a lightning rod, and a punching ball. The governing authorities have now reached such depths of discredit that the contempt they elicit has surpassed that of the police, and the police know it. The police understood, albeit slowly, that it had become the *precondition* of government, its survival kit, its mobile respirator. So that their relationship has reversed itself. Henceforth the

IT RESEMBLES A PHYSICAL LAW. The more the social order loses credit, the more it arms its police. The more the institutions withdraw, the more they advance in terms of surveillance. The less respect the authorities inspire, the more they seek to keep us respectful through force. And it’s a vicious circle, because force never has anything respectable about it. So that to the growing debauchery of force there is an ever diminishing effectiveness of the latter in response. Maintaining order is the main activity of an order that has already failed. One only has to go to the CAF, the family assistance fund, to take stock of things that cannot last. When an agency as benign as that must surround itself with guards, ploys, and threats to defend itself from its clients, one realizes that a certain rationality has come to an end. When the orderliness of demonstrations can no longer be assured except by means of sting-ball grenades and kettlings, and the demonstrators are forced to flee the green lasers of the Anti-Crime Brigade’s LBD 40s, targeting its future victims, this is an indication that “society” has already reached the stage of palliative treatment. When the calm of the *banlieues* comes at the cost of arming the CRS with automatic rifles, we know that a certain figure of the world has faded. It’s never a good sign when a democratic regime takes up the habit of having its population fired upon. Since the time when politics started to be reduced, in every domain, to a vast police operation conducted day after day, it was inevitable that policing would become a political question.

Let's go back a few months. After the declaration of the state of emergency, the Forfeiture-of-Nationality Bill, the Intelligence Act, the Macron Law, the killing of Remi Fraisse, the Competitiveness and Employment Tax Credit and its millions offered to the bosses, the loi Travail was meant to complete the ultimate demoralization of a "left-leaning people" supposedly brought to the edge of the abyss. What the powers-that-be could not understand is that the loss of every hope also forms the precondition for pure revolt—the revolt that no longer seeks support in the thing it is negating and gets its warrant only from itself. What crystallized in the conflict against the loi Travail was not the partial refusal of a disastrous reform, but the massive discrediting of the government apparatuses, including the union ones. It's not surprising that the banner of the French spring, "Soyons ingouvernable," rendered as "We are ungovernable," re-emerged in Washington in the protests against Donald Trump's inauguration. Since within the governmental apparatus the police have the function of ensuring individual submission in the last instance, of producing the population as a population, as a powerless, and hence governable, depoliticized mass, it was logical that a conflict expressing the refusal to be governed would begin by laying into the police and would adopt the most popular slogan: "Everybody hates the police." Escaping its shepherd, the flock could not have found a better rallying cry. What is more unexpected is that this slogan, appearing in the demonstrations following the killing of Remi Fraisse at Sivens eventually reached all the way to Bobigny after the police rape of Theo, as a slogan of "young people" there, thrown in the face of the uniformed brutes who were eyeing them from a raised metal passageway turned into a mirador.

"*Tout le monde deteste la police*" expresses more than a simple animosity towards cops. Because for the first thinkers of sovereignty, at the beginning of the 17th century, policing was nothing other than the constitution of the state, its very form in fact. At the time, it was not yet an instrument in the hands of the latter, and there was not yet a police lieutenancy in Paris. So that during the 17th and 18th centuries, "police" still had a very broad meaning: thus *la police* was "everything that can give an adornment, a form, and a splendor to the city" (Turquet de Mayerne), "all the means that are useful to the splendor of the whole State and to the happiness of all the citizens" (Hohenthal). Its role was said to be that of "leading man to the most perfect felicity he can enjoy in this life" (Delamare). Policing had to do with the cleanliness of the streets and the provisioning of markets, with public lighting and the confinement of vagabonds, with the fair price of grains and the clearing of canals, the healthiness of the urban environment and the arresting of bandits. Fouché and Vidocq had not yet given it its modern, popular face.

If one wishes to understand what is at stake in this eminently political question of policing, its necessary to grasp the conjuring trick operating between policing as a means and policing as an end. On the one hand, there is the ideal, legal, fictitious social order—policing as an end—and then there is its real order, or rather its real disorder. The function of policing as a means is to make sure that the desired external order *appears* to reign. It ensures the order of things by using the weapons of disorder and reigns over the visible through its elusive activity. Its daily practices—kidnapping, beating, spying, stealing, forcing, deceiving, lying, killing, being armed—cover the whole register of illegality, so that its very existence never ceases being basically unavowable. Being proof that what is legal is not what is real, that order does not reign, that society doesn't cohere since *it's not held together by its own powers*, policing is constantly pushed into the shadows, where it occupies one of the world's blind spots as far as thinking is concerned. For the ruling order, it's like a birthmark in the middle of the face. It is the persistent and constant expression of the state of exception—that which every sovereignty wishes it could hide, but which it is regularly forced to exhibit in order to make itself feared. If the state of exception is that momentary suspension of the law that makes it possible to reestablish the *conditions* for the rule of law, through the most arbitrary and bloody measures, the police in their daily operation are what remains of the state of exception when those conditions have been restored. The police in their daily operation are what persists of the state of exception in the normal situation. This is why their sovereign operation is itself so concealed. When the policeman faced with a recalcitrant arrestee lets loose with "The law, I am the law!" it's always out of earshot. Or when on a day of demonstration, the riot cop dragging a comrade away for no valid reason waxes ironic: "I do as I like. You see, for me too it's anarchy today!" For political economy and cybernetics alike, the police remain like a shameful and unthinkable relic, a *memento mori* that reminds them that their order, which wants to think of itself as natural, is still not that and doubtless never will be. Thus the police oversee an apparent order that internally is only disorder. They are the truth of a world of lies, and hence a continuing lie themselves. They testify to the fact that the ruling order is artificial and will sooner or later be destroyed.

So it's no small matter that we live in a time when this obscene, opaque recourse which the police constitute is coming into the full light of day. That armed, hooded police officers calmly march as an unauthorized demonstration on the Elysee, as they did last autumn, to the cry of "corrupt unions" and "Freemasons to prison," without anyone daring to talk about a seditious activity... that an American president finds himself facing a large portion of the "intelligence community" and that the latter, after