

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen

An Affirmation That Is Entirely Other

The refusal to be governed, *period*.
—The Invisible Committee, *Now*

At a certain moment, when faced with public events, we know that we must refuse. Refusal is absolute, categorical. It does not discuss or voice its reasons. This is how it remains silent and solitary, even when it affirms itself, as it should, in broad daylight.” So says Maurice Blanchot (2010c: 7) in his one-page tract aptly titled “Refusal.” In this piece, Blanchot is protesting against Charles de Gaulle and the political maneuvers that made him president of the French Republic in the midst of the Algerian Civil War. On May 29, 1958, de Gaulle was sworn in as president and granted extraordinary powers. There had been no election, but with French paratroopers from Algeria threatening to invade Paris, President René Coty urged parliament to approve de Gaulle in order to prevent civil war. Blanchot refused. He said no—as he put it, a “sure, unshakable, rigorous No.” But the refusal was not just a rejection of de Gaulle; it was a refusal of politics in general. It was a radical refusal, “a total critique” aimed at shaking the technopolitical order of politics and the state.² “At a certain moment,

The South Atlantic Quarterly 122:1, January 2023

DOI 10.1215/00382876-10242616 © 2023 Duke University Press

when faced with public events, we know that we must refuse. Refusal is absolute, categorical” (7).

Blanchot’s refusal was “absolute.” He was not interested in negotiation. “The time of common affirmation is precisely what has been taken away” (Blanchot 2010c: 7). Blanchot proposed nothing and left no room for compromise—after all, it was compromise that had brought de Gaulle back to power. The threat of a military coup had compelled the government to hand over power to the old general, who had cunningly presented himself as a solution. De Gaulle used the threat of a military coup to make it appear as if power came to him “naturally” and not by his own hand. To gain support from the people and the political elites, de Gaulle could not appear to be party to the military coup. However, he also made sure not to distance himself from it. De Gaulle was obviously playing both sides, remaining in the background, positioning himself as the obvious solution—once a savior of the Republic, always a savior.³ Blanchot was refusing the “offer of agreement and compromise”—that is, the game of politics. It was necessary to refuse, full stop: to refuse the political shenanigans, the detours, the ruses and delays, to refuse de Gaulle instead of the military, and to “not discuss or voice [the] reasons” for this refusal (7).

It was a blank, empty refusal. Of course, Blanchot was contesting de Gaulle, rejecting the impossible choice of civil war or de Gaulle, but he refrained from making explicit political demands, proposing a way forward, or presenting a possible political solution. The refusal was “silent,” he wrote, “solitary,” even as it affirmed itself in broad daylight, as a text in a journal. In the midst of an extremely agitated situation—the war in Algeria, a military coup, the return of de Gaulle—Blanchot’s refusal was empty, silent. It did not partake in the loud political skirmishes. It was a break, a voice from elsewhere, an attempt to distance oneself from the political order altogether, to abandon it.

Contrary to other contemporary interventions—by *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the situationists, Roland Barthes, and so on—Blanchot’s refusal was less a political analysis of the war, colonialism, and the Republic than a gesture against politics. It was, of course, a political intervention of sorts, or at least an intervention into politics. Blanchot had previously explicitly refrained from engaging with political affairs (after bringing to an abrupt end his period in the 1930s as editor of the conservative daily *Journal des débats* and as contributor to several radical nationalist magazines, including *Combat*). Throughout the 1950s, he had insisted that literature could not be made complicit with any kind of straightforward political commitment, as it was a different kind of experience—a nothing. But now he was back, coediting an

eminently political journal at a time of intense political pressure. Or, rather, he was *not* back—this was not a straightforward return to politics but a break with politics, a refusal of “public events.” He was not proposing a different politics. There was no program, no solution. It was an end to complicity.

It was a difficult situation. De Gaulle enjoyed immense prestige. He was the savior, the one who fought the Nazis during World War II, who would again take the reins of power to steer the nation during a time of extreme danger. Nonetheless, Blanchot (2010c: 7) coolly rejected de Gaulle’s staging:

In 1940 refusal had to be asserted not against the invading force (not accepting it was self-evident) but against the chance that Marshal Pétain claimed, no doubt in good faith, to represent and against all the justifications he was able to invoke. Today, the exigency of refusal has not arisen in relation to the events of May 13 (which are refused by themselves), but in the face of this power that claimed to reconcile us with them honorably, by the mere authority of a name.

Blanchot’s protest was therefore not primarily against the military coup in Algeria (“the events of May 13”), in which right-wing elements in the military seized power, but against de Gaulle’s return to power. De Gaulle, like Philippe Pétain in 1940, represented the “reasonable” solution, the “political” attempt to control or manage events. But Blanchot refused the reasonable solution; he refused the compromise. He did not doubt Pétain’s sincerity, or de Gaulle’s, for that matter, as both probably did what they thought best under the circumstances. Rather, Blanchot rejected this whole way of thinking—what we might call politicking, state-thinking, or simply politics, with all its compromises and negotiations. What he refused was precisely the adaptation to a difficult reality: “There is an offer of agreement and compromise that we will not hear” (7).

Blanchot’s refusal was radical—or to use his term, silent—because it did not rest on anything. It was by no means clear from where Blanchot’s refusal came, or what authorized it. The text did not mention any mandate for the refusal. It did not seek to confirm a preexisting political framework. There were no overarching principles or values on which it rested, nor did it gesture toward any founding myth or original image. It made no mention of the nation, the republic, or any kind of imagined community that had to be saved. The belief on which the refusal rested was as blank as the refusal itself.

The wording of Blanchot’s refusal drew on neither nationalist nor Marxist discourse. There was no mention of the working class or any kind of dialectics, nor was his refusal framed in the language of class struggle, at least not in any ordinary sense. The notion of “a very poor beginning that belongs . . . to those who cannot speak” (Blanchot 2010c: 7) obviously contained a reference

to the proletariat in the most basic sense, as those deprived of everything.⁴ But it is an idiosyncratic, quasi-mystical Marxism, one completely removed from any kind of economism or the Stalinism of the French Communist Party at the time. The freedom it invoked was “an-archic,” in Reiner Schürmann’s (2019: 28–29) sense of the term: freedom as a nothing, as a mode of abandonment. It was a self-positioning that didn’t advance a universally valid moral imperative. In its rejection of the law of social totalization, it announced a kind of nonsubjective refusal, one that could not be traced back to an act or decision on the part of a preexisting subject, least of all a political subject. Rather, it was a self-constitutive act, an aesthetic gesture. The refusal produced a defiant subject that was not really a subject but more a subject-effect.⁵

We can call Blanchot’s refusal *political* insofar as he was refusing ordinary politics, breaking with what was going on at that moment. He was saying no to the entire technopolitical system, refusing the very order in which the bad (a military coup) and the not so bad (de Gaulle as president) made sense. The refusal opened up the possibility of a different kind of politics. Blanchot was taking back politics from the politicians, rescuing it from de Gaulle’s opportunism. But it is probably better to understand it as an antipolitical gesture, in the sense that it sought to end politics: abandonment of politics and political discourse, of the “realism” of politics, even of political analysis itself. Blanchot did not write “about” or “on” the political situation; he appeared simply to reject the situation, where we had ended up, the course of events, de Gaulle back in power. It was rejection not as a nihilistic gesture but as an affirmation of a different future—what Blanchot called “a beginning.” The refusal was thus also an affirmation, one “that is entirely other.” It was both a withdrawal from de Gaulle’s idealist political chatter about saving the Republic, as he had done during World War II, and an opening up, a bursting forth. It was both a retreat and a beginning. It was the beginning of a revolution not as a teleological political project but, rather, as one that did not ground a new political order or present a political program to be realized but instead broke with state power and the illegitimacy of what was going on, of the appropriation of politics by the state and the general.

This refusal did not create a political community—at least, not in the traditional sense of a present, visible community united around an idea or an identity. As Blanchot (2010c: 7) put it, there was no “common affirmation.” The refusal was anonymous, and it was silent. It was not something one could present and make into a project. It was not something one could join or avow. There was no mandate (“I am the community,” “I speak on behalf of this or that group”). “The power of refusal is accomplished neither by us

or in our name, but from a very poor beginning that belongs first of all to those who cannot speak” (7). The refusal was a speechless utterance. It was an act of solidarity with the ones who could not speak. It was from this lack that the refusal emerged—a “poor beginning,” as Blanchot called it. It was power without power.

The New Sensibility

A few years after Blanchot refused, the notion of refusal was picked up by Herbert Marcuse in his 1964 book, *One-Dimensional Man*. This was Marcuse at his most pessimistic: advanced industrial society was the culmination of a historical dynamic in which the oppression of humankind increased concurrently with technological developments that could potentially liberate them but did not. The atomic bomb, which presented a threat of total annihilation, was an emblematic expression of this situation. The new society exerted an almost complete ideological control over human subjectivity and, as such, effectively integrated the proletariat.

Marcuse was confronted with a society that appeared to transcend the contradictions of the capitalist economy. The one-dimensional society was an industrially advanced society with soaring productivity and staggering growth rate, which enabled a material improvement of the lives of most people (in the West, at least). It was a “metamorphosis” of capitalism, in which the standard of living continuously improved for the middle and working classes, who had no reason to oppose the system. An ever-increasing tide of goods enabled the smooth integration into a classless class society.

However, Marcuse argued that this new society was still a capitalist society, characterized by unsolvable contradictions. It was merely a quantitative change, in which human beings had exchanged the possibility of a free, self-determined future for high living standards and access to cheap commodities. But it was not possible to identify an actual moment that transcended capitalist society, as the working class was no longer the obvious, or even plausible, spearhead of a socialist revolution. Marcuse could no longer muster belief in the proletariat. As Marcuse (2006: 257) put it, “Dialectical theory is not refuted, but it cannot offer the remedy.”

Marcuse’s analysis in *One-Dimensional Man* was pretty bleak, but at the end of the book he gestures toward the possibility of radical critique, quoting Blanchot’s refusal from 1958.⁶ Marcuse (2006: xliv) argued that, insofar as people could refuse, “denying the positive,” they could emancipate themselves and break free from existing society. Because the nature of people had

been absorbed into the system of capitalist commodity production, the only alternative was whole-scale refusal. One-dimensional society was a materialization of ideology, and therefore its negation would have to be “the pure form of negation” (259). The only possible opposition, therefore, would be an abstract refusal, similar to the one described by Blanchot a few years earlier:

All content seems reduced to the one abstract demand for the end of domination—the only truly revolutionary exigency, and the event that would validate the achievements of industrial civilization. In the face of its efficient denial by the established system, this negation appears in the politically impotent form of ‘the absolute refusal’—a refusal which seems the more unreasonable the more the established system develops its productivity and alleviates the burden of life. (259)

The dialectic movement of history had broken down. The gravediggers of capitalism, the proletariat, had been transformed into consumers. But it was still possible to refuse.

The deck was stacked against Marcuse. The more the worker was integrated into class society, the more unreasonable the radical critique appeared. Why contest affluent society if it was ameliorating everybody’s lives (in the West), if workers had access to jobs, housing, education, and culture—in other words, if they shared in the affluence of industrially advanced societies? Part of the challenge concerned the integration of the superstructure in the productive sphere, given the increasing entanglement of culture and economy. The consumer economy created “a second nature of man,” Marcuse (1969: 10) wrote, libidinally tying humans to the commodity form. One-dimensional man voluntarily subjected himself to the demands of the consumer economy. Therefore, the revolution would have to entail developing new desires “which could precondition man for freedom” (10). The struggle for a new society would be the struggle for new passions, Marcuse argued.

Marcuse highlighted the abstract and total character of Blanchot’s refusal but interpreted it slightly differently. He situated it in a Marxist framework—the refusal was abstract because it was a rejection of reification *per se*. If Blanchot’s refusal was an evacuation or a refusal of politics, then Marcuse’s refusal was a historically specific refusal of the consumer economy, of the integrated society of advanced capitalism. This was the challenge facing Marcuse—one-dimensional society was a society without opposition. There were still classes, of course—the bourgeoisie and the working class—but they were no longer agents of historical transformation. Both materially and ideologically, the working class had been integrated into the capitalist

system, effectively debunking the Marxian concept of revolution. Capitalism seemed to have found a way to escape the perils of class structure, and the proletariat was nowhere to be seen. The historical subject that would end capitalist exploitation and end prehistory was absent. In such a situation, Blanchot's blank refusal provided Marcuse with a much-needed internal/external opposition to the "affluent" one-dimensional society.

Whereas previous historical forms of critique could count on forces within capitalist society to bring down society from within, this was no longer the case. As Marcuse (2006: 260) put it: "The struggle for the solution has outgrown the traditional forms [of revolution]. The totalitarian tendencies of the one-dimensional society render the traditional ways and means of protest ineffective." Marcuse therefore had to look beyond the forms of established working-class opposition and Marxist theory. The only revolutionary forces were those excluded from affluence—the nonintegrated "outsiders." "Underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcast and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable" (260). In other words, the beginning of the end lay in the hands of the most exploited, whose "opposition hits the system from without" (260–61). The proletariat, the conscious agents of historical change, had been replaced by those who had been cast aside, the most persecuted outsiders. These groups were not class conscious, but they nonetheless refused one-dimensional society. Their opposition was "revolutionary even if their consciousness [was] not" (261).

In a situation of almost unprecedented affluence, the revolutionary perspective manifested in a radical refusal of the new life of consumer society. For Marcuse, emerging subcultures, such as the hippies, were an example of people "refusing to play the game" (260–61). These were small groups who had broken with the familiar. They were rejecting the routine ways of doing things, experimenting with new ways of living, creating new forms of political affect.

Refusal as Destitution

Interestingly the notion of a radical refusal that does not take the form of a program but undoes political arrangements has reemerged in the new cycles of protests that have swept the globe since 2011. Already in its analysis of the Argentinian uprisings of 2001, *Colectivo Situaciones* positively highlighted the absence of a political program in the protests. It was "a new type of insurrection" that rejected representation as well as the institutional terrain of politics

more broadly (Colectivo Situaciones 2011: 43). The uprising itself was important. It was less a question of entering into a political process of constituting a movement, project, or party, not to say a state, than it was a question of a “subjectless” experience closer to ethics than to politics in the traditional sense.

The attempt to analyze the subjectless refusal has been further advanced by Giorgio Agamben and Marcello Tari, among others.⁷ But it is primarily the anonymous collective the Invisible Committee that, in a series of three books, *The Coming Insurrection*, *To Our Friends*, and *Now*, has sought to analyze and advance the new protest cycle by proposing to understand them as the emergence of a destituent revolutionary project where political subjectivity in the modern sense, a conscious agent with a vision of future society, is refused.

The Invisible Committee’s books are characterized by a sense of crisis, almost doom. It is as if the world had already broken down without us noticing, as if the staggering preponderance of canned happiness, boredom, separation, and police injustices are in themselves a symptom of the hollowness of our civilization. This is a latter-day situationist analysis of the commodity society, in which powerful content-generating machines carpet-bomb us with images, brands, slogans, Tweets, and memes in order to reproduce the semblance of a society when, in reality, society has already imploded, leaving only political democracy as a simulacrum of wholeness.

In the first book the devastating critique of the reign of commodities and technique ends with a call to arms, albeit a convoluted one. It is a question not of engaging in political activism but of deserting politics entirely. As society has already imploded, it is just a matter of finishing the job, of bringing an end to false capitalist anarchy in favor of true anarchy, an anarchy or life form already omnipresent, albeit in slightly displaced ways, in delinquency and everyday refusal. The book picks up a particular gnostic gesture from the *Tiqqun* journal, which preceded the Invisible Committee. *The Coming Insurrection* posits the idea of an imaginary party of people who refuse capitalist civilization, in a conspiracy against consumer society. What first appear to be isolated acts of vandalism or suicidal violence are in fact signs of a reckoning to come. The transcendence of the crisis, in which an anonymous mass emerges from invisibility and attacks the system through faceless and nocturnal actions, “[creates] an invulnerable position of attack. The fires of November 2005 offer a model for this. No leader, no demands, no organization, but words, gestures, complicities” (Invisible Committee 2009: 113) This is antipolitical politics beyond political organizations and after the implosion of society. No institutions are left to occupy or take over, as they are mere symbols of the idea of society as a whole.

The two following books not only expand the critique of capitalist civilization but also, more important, develop the notion of destitution. This can be defined as the group's reconceptualization of the revolutionary project on the basis of an affirmation of the insurrection. If *The Coming Insurrection* anticipates a new cycle of insurrections, *To Our Friends* and *Now* take stock of the wave of riots and protests that materialized from 2011 onward. *To Our Friends* analyzes the sequence that started in 2011 and concludes with the politicization of the Greek and Spanish square occupation movement. *Now* is inspired by the 2016 *Nuit debout* protests against the so-called labor law. The insurrections came indeed, and the committee aims to present a kind of balance sheet of their ebbs and flows, their successes and failures.

While *The Coming Insurrection* preferred to talk about insurrections, dismissing revolutions as “centralized,” the two subsequent books stressed the necessity of expanding the insurrection with a view to ending capitalism, that is, proceeding from insurrection to revolution. Of course, this is precisely what did *not* happen, even in places like Egypt, where demonstrators succeeded in toppling Hosni Mubarak and briefly seemed to be on the verge of changing a corrupt and repressive system. As is well known, the military at first forged an alliance with the mosque, in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood, but then staged a coup against the Brotherhood. In hindsight, it is evident that the military never really loosened their hold on the reins of power, even when millions were in the streets or when workers occupied factories. The Invisible Committee's (2015: 72) assessment is clear: the insurrections have not been able to finish the destituent process, and “new puppets have taken the place left vacant.” The defeat is partly, of course, a question of physical power: unless soldiers can be persuaded to desert, revolution will always be difficult. But it is also a question of the protesters' idea of revolution, that they still “tend to conceive of revolution as a dialectic between the constituent and the constituted” (73). The protesters came up against an overwhelming state apparatus, but they also fell into the trap of politics. They believed that it was a question of replacing a corrupt order with a new one, a better one. In other words, they sought to institute a different kind of state, to replace false representatives of the people with better ones, or with the people themselves, in some form.

The Invisible Committee (2015: 73) argues that this is a mistake: “We still believe in the fable that tells us all constituted power is rooted in a constituent power, that the state emanates from the nation, as the absolute monarch does from God, that beneath the constitution in force there always exists another constitution.” However, the whole logic of constituted and

constituent power—the idea of a creative energy that gives rise to a new institutional order—is flawed, the committee writes. It is therefore necessary to rethink revolution without referring to democracy or constituent power: “Constituent power is in fact nothing but a ‘matador’s costume’ . . . a veil that hypnotizes everyone and makes them believe that the constituted power is much more than it is” (74).

It is necessary to bid farewell to the constituent fantasy of creating a better system: “The notion of destitution is necessary in order to free the revolutionary imagination of all the old constituent fantasies that weigh it down” (*Invisible Committee* 2017: 76). Revolutionaries should not govern. Lenin should have stayed away from the Winter Palace. As long as protesters remain attached to an idea of democracy or political power, they will remain within politics. The *Invisible Committee* sees this exemplified by the Negrian currents in the square occupation movements, most notably in Spain, which transformed insurrectional movements into movement parties that compete in national elections, trying to gain power in order to re-create society. The contemporary revolutionary project is something completely different, the committee argues: to refuse to enact an order(ing), thereby breaking the progression from deposition to renewed institution. The refusal of politics is the affirmation of the crisis of politics and modernity as civilization.

Like Blanchot’s refusal, destitution is not only an attack on the state but also an act that attempts to undo the need for institutions. It is a micropolitical intervention or escape, in which institutions are rendered redundant, instead of simply being attacked, which enables them to consolidate and reinvigorate their power. It’s a kind of continual or open-ended withdrawal from the state and the libidinal attachment to institutions: “Breaking the circle that turns our contestation into a fuel for what dominates us, marking a rupture in the fatality that condemns revolutions to reproduce what they have driven out” (*Invisible Committee* 2017: 76). The insurrection is both a transformation of human circumstances and an emotional transformation of human beings. Destitution means not accepting the void that power always creates in order to legitimate itself. Power separates and creates an absence that retrospectively necessitates a sovereign instance—a state. “Power creates emptiness. Emptiness attracts power” (79). In the insurrection, it becomes evident that there is no need for power. There is no void to be managed by an externalized/internalized power. This is the secret of the insurrection.

A Break in the Revolutionary Tradition

If we were to historicize the discussion of the insurrection, something the committee itself rarely explicitly does, then we might say that today's uprisings oppose any kind of power. In May '68, the idea of an alternative power was still present in different ways, from notions of a workers' state and workers' councils to Maoist ideas of purging institutions (the Cultural Revolution). In this way, the state still had a grip on revolutionaries through the 1960s, and as such, the uprising's "autonomy" was only partial. In 1958, and later in May '68, Blanchot sought to empty refusal of political content, and his notion of refusal points toward the committee's notion of destitution. However, large parts of the '68 revolt still sought to connect the uprising to different kinds of state forms and to previous proletarian revolutions of 1917–21. The situation is different now: the new cycle of uprisings, which occur more or less all the time, but not at the same time, has made clear that a revolutionary break can only be a stateless project, that the revolution is destituent—it does not have its end in a new state form but seeks the immediate abolition of money and state power.

After the Subject

As an analysis, but also as a kind of theoretical and practical testimony from inside the uprisings, the Invisible Committee's books are an important displacement of the revolutionary project that tries to envisage a postsovereign politics or antipolitics against socialism as state capitalism, and democracy as counterrevolution. In this way, the committee echoes important insights from Blanchot about the openness and nonidentity of the uprising, its anonymous character, but also the need to abandon the working class as the revolutionary subject, as Marcuse had to acknowledge in the mid-1960s. There is no communist society to realize—not challenging or abolishing the state and the money economy, in a Hegelian *Aufhebung*, but withdrawing from them entirely. This is the new meaning of the gesture of refusal. Blanchot's refusal was precisely not made on behalf of a party or group but was an interruption of mediated relations of politics and violence. The subject of the insurrection is not the working class in the traditional Marxist sense, nor is it a nonmovement (see Endnotes 2020); it's not something you can join or that can become a political project. It is, rather, an unavowable community.

The Invisible Committee's rethinking of the revolutionary question could be called anarchocommunist. The committee presents an idea of

revolution in which opposition to the established system is a radically blank opposition that does not propose a new order but instead tries to undo the need for order itself, thereby enabling a different mode of life now, in the present. It is an antipolitical perspective that does not strive to achieve hegemony within state institutions, and in which “democracy” and representation are traps to be avoided.

Insurrections are particular experiences. When an insurrection takes place, it becomes its own “ground,” thereby connecting substance and subjectivity—what Agamben terms *zoé* and *bios*. In that way, insurrections are laboratories for communist life forms, in which it is impossible to divide biological and political life, in which there are neither subjects nor objects but a different present, in which communism is possible now.

For Blanchot and the Invisible Committee, the question of revolution is thus not a political one. It is not a question of adjusting the procedures involved in how politics unfolds. It’s something much larger—it is a question of a certain mode of life that has run its course and needs to be abandoned. In that way, the revolution has become a question of anthropology, of leaving the city, living the crisis differently, repairing existence beyond society. An uprising is a break with society. It is an event in which bodies are put to use now, with no end in sight, with no new society as a goal.

Notes

- 1 The title of this article is taken from the following quote by Blanchot (2010a: 6): “It is undoubtedly the task of our time to move towards an affirmation that is entirely other.”
- 2 When he was trying to set up an international journal in 1960, in a letter to Sartre Blanchot (2010b: 37) would present the aim of the journal as one of “total critique.”
- 3 For a very detailed but also highly problematic pro-de Gaulle account of the events in May 1958, see Rudelle 1988.
- 4 As Blanchot (2003: 260) wrote in a text on Robert Musil, included in *The Book to Come*, “But the man without particularities—is he not essentially the proletariat, if the proletariat, characterized by not-having, is directed only toward the suppression of any individual mode of being?”
- 5 The notion of refusal runs through Blanchot’s literary writings. Also in 1959 he published a short article titled “The Great Refusal” in *Nouvelle Revue Française* in which he commented on Yves Bonnefoy’s exploration of the sacred as an immediacy that is infinitely distant and that ruptures the Hegelian dialectic, exceeding all labor and conceptualization. Here, refusal was the refusal of identity, which reduces the other to the same, and the refusal of philosophy was the dialectical movement of language, where the singularity of the thing is transformed into a concept. Poetry, on the other hand, “was a relation with the obscure and the unknown” (Blanchot 1993: 48).
- 6 Marcuse had already written about “the great refusal” in *Eros and Civilization* from 1955: “The Great Refusal is the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for

the ultimate form of freedom—“to live without anxiety” (Marcuse 1974: 149–50). Marcuse referred to Alfred North Whitehead and his use in *Science and the Modern World* of the concept of refusal, which describes the determination not to succumb to the facticity of things as they are: “The truth that some proposition respecting an actual occasion is untrue may express the vital truth as to the aesthetic achievement. It expresses the ‘great refusal’ which is its primary characteristic” (qtd. at 149).

- 7 Agamben’s large *Homo sacer* project ends with an analysis of destitution that is in dialogue with the committee’s rethinking of the present insurrectionary wave as destituent. Agamben (2016: 268) envisages this as “a purely destituent potential, which is to say, one completely set free from the sovereign relation of the ban that linked it to constituted power.” Tari 2021 provides an important Benjaminian rereading of the revolutionary project on the basis of the new subjectless cycle of protests.

References

- Agamben, Giorgio. 2016. *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV, 2*. Translated by Adam Kotsko. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 1993. “The Great Refusal,” translated by Susan Hanson. In *The Infinite Conversation*, 33–48. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 2003. *The Book to Come*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 2010a. “An Approach to Communism (Needs, Values),” translated by Zakir Paul. In *Political Writings, 1953–1993*, 3–6. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 2010b. “[Maurice Blanchot to Jean-Paul Sartre],” translated by Zakir Paul. In *Political Writings, 1953–1993*, 36–38. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 2010c. “Refusal,” translated by Zakir Paul. In *Political Writings, 1953–1993*, 7. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Colectivo Situaciones. 2011. *Nineteen and Twenty: Notes for a New Social Protagonism*. Translated by Nate Holdren and Sebastián Touza. New York: Minor Compositions.
- Endnotes. 2020. “Onward Barbarians.” https://endnotes.org.uk/other_texts/en/endnotes-onward-barbarians.
- Invisible Committee. 2009. *The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Invisible Committee. 2015. *To Our Friends*. Translated by Robert Hurley. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Invisible Committee. 2017. *Now*. Translated by Robert Hurley. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Marcuse, Herbert. 1969. *An Essay on Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Marcuse, Herbert. 1974. *Eros and Civilization*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Marcuse, Herbert. 2006. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Rudelle, Odile. 1988. *Mai 58: De Gaulle et la République*. Paris: Plon.
- Schürmann, Reiner. 2019. “On Constituting Oneself an Anarchistic Subject.” In *Tomorrow the Manifold: Essays on Foucault, Anarchy, and the Singularization to Come*, 7–30. Zürich: Diaphanes.
- Tari, Marcello. 2021. *There Is No Unhappy Revolution: The Communism of Destitution*. Translated by Richard Braude. New York: Common Notions.