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Know the Enemy

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KNOW THE ENEMY

Andrew Lopez and
Phillip Mahoney

Introduction to Civil War

by Tiqqun. Los Angeles:
Semiotext(e), 2010. Pp 231. \$12.95
paper.

Glenn Beck's rant on Fox News sent *The Coming Insurrection* (2009)¹ flying off American bookshelves,² a rare occurrence for a small press like Semiotext(e), which mainly trucks in the margins of French theory. In fact, the book had good publicity all around. While Beck's call to "know the enemy" no doubt inspired conservatives to purchase—if not read—*The Coming Insurrection*, radical leftists and intellectuals may have been tempted by the timely arrest of its supposed authors, the Tarnac 9, and the petition signed by a number of big-name theorists for their release (e.g., Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Judith Butler, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, Slavoj Žižek).³ Indeed, it sold even though free translations of the book have been circulating online since its publication. All of this doubtless added to the aura of the book, which was being typecast as a dangerous, anarchist manifesto.

Lacking the no-press-is-bad-press endorsements of *The Coming Insurrection*, *Introduction to Civil War* (2010)⁴ is a more anomalous text, setting out, in aphoristic and impressionistic snippets, what appears to be the conceptual and theoretical foundation of the former. In fact, originally appearing in 2001 in the French journal *Tiqqun*, *Introduction to Civil War* was published first. The reverse order of the English translations thus potentially obscures an important development—namely, that the

more practically oriented call for insurrection grew out of a committed reflection on thinkers as diverse as Hegel, Hobbes, Carl Schmitt, Foucault, Pierre Clastres, Carl Von Clausewitz, Emile Benveniste, Kant, Nietzsche, Marx, Deleuze, and Guattari.

Introduction to Civil War is divided into two sections. The first, titled “Introduction to Civil War,” consists of eighty-five aphorisms, similar in style to Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* or *Human, All Too Human*. These aphorisms are often accompanied by “glosses,” which are nonetheless only slightly more didactic than the allusive aphorisms they seem intended to explain. The particular order of this section feels like a late and rather arbitrary innovation, and there is little reason to suppose that reading it back to front would create a more challenging experience for the reader. One of the virtues of this format, however, is that important concepts like “forms-of-life” gain consistency, not through explicit definition, but through repetition and reworking. Structured like a long, free-verse poem, the second section, “How Is It to Be Done?” makes up only about one eighth of the book and reads much more like *The Coming Insurrection*.

Not surprisingly, given its title, *Introduction to Civil War* institutes and sustains an irresolvable antagonism—that between Empire, Biopower, and hostility, on the one

hand, and civil war, forms-of-life, and friendship, on the other. The title is appropriate, as the latter, positive terms are merely introduced here, the better part of the text being taken up by the negative, archaeological work of dissecting Empire and its various incarnations. This negative dimension represents a true advance not only with respect to the wide range of contemporary theoretical sources the authors synthesize, but also because it chips away at some of the “permanent confusion” they claim is vital to Empire’s maintenance (153).

Following and extending Foucault’s work on biopolitics, which they quote repeatedly, the authors provide a thorough ontology of Empire—a difficult feat, if, as they argue, Empire is “possible everywhere” precisely because it is present nowhere (117). According to them, the “two super-institutional poles” of Empire, “Spectacle” and “Biopower” (118), represent completely immanent forms of authority in which the normal distinctions between observer and observed, citizen and cop, are turned “inside out” (116). This process of “omnivorous immanentization” (132) is fundamental to their account of the transition from the order of States to Empire, where the latter describes a situation in which there is, quite simply, no more outside (41, 126, 130).

Echoing a host of contemporary theorists, such as Žižek, Badiou,

and Agamben, but distinguishing themselves from “deconstruction” (145–47) and what they call “Negriism” (159–62), the authors assert that, precisely because nothing is foreign to it, Empire is the democratic form par excellence (120). In Empire, where local norms and apparatuses have superseded universal laws and institutions (132, 134, 137), they argue that “we are dealing not so much with individualities and subjectivities, but with individuations and subjectivations” (140), with “molecular calibrations of subjectivities and bodies” (141). Thus, “the enemy of Empire is within” (153) and “[e]ach person is a risk” (155). The stakes of Empire’s offensive, therefore, are not “to win a certain confrontation, but rather to make sure that the confrontation *does not take place*” (170).

Hence, the call for civil war or insurrection is based on the need to reclaim everything and anything that has been incorporated into Empire’s nexus, right down to the workings of the soul. For the authors, this is a necessarily localized practice: anyone anywhere can trigger the “process of ethical polarization” that is the essence of civil war (180). What remains then, in the words of *The Coming Insurrection*, is nothing more, nor less, than the creation of a “certain outlook” (19), the recovery of a “perception of the real” (95).

Here, the two books resonate well with each other and together

sketch the beginnings of what might pass for a program (though the title of Tiqqun’s most recent book, *This Is Not a Program*,⁵ suggests otherwise). While *Introduction to Civil War* challenges readers to “become attentive to the taking place of things” (211), *The Coming Insurrection* astutely observes, “the impasse of the present, everywhere in evidence, is everywhere denied” (28). But a privileged feature of this extreme situation of denial, the authors say, is that merely to state the obvious and not “shrink from the conclusions” constitutes a revolutionary act (28). Of course, they warn, “Nothing appears less likely [or] more necessary” (96).

In this sense, *Introduction to Civil War* may be considered a revolutionary text, as it provides a platform where just such a confrontation can take place. Maybe Sylvère Lotringer, general editor of Semiotext(e), is right when he says Glenn Beck “never read” *The Coming Insurrection*, that he is actually “incapable of reading it.”⁶ Nevertheless, Beck’s desperate plea to “know the enemy” causes one to wonder whether, perhaps, he read *Introduction to Civil War*, instead.

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NOTES

1. The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2009); originally published as *L'insurrection qui vient* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2007).
2. Judith Rosen, "Glenn Beck Helps Turn Anarchist Book into Bestseller," *Publishers Weekly*, 18 February 2010, www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/42133-glenn-beck-helps-turn-anarchist-book-into-bestseller.html (accessed 8 June 2010).
3. Alberto Toscano, "The Story of the Tarnac 9," 11 January 2009 (Finland, MN: Organic Consumers Association), www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_19366.cfm (accessed 8 June 2010).
4. Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War*, trans. Alexander R. Galloway and Jason E. Smith (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2010). Originally published in September 2001 as two separate pieces, *Introduction à la guerre civile* and *Comment faire?* in issue 2 of the journal *Tiqqun*.
5. Tiqqun, *This Is Not a Program*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2011).
6. Noam Cohen, "A Book Attacking Capitalism Gets Sales Help from a Fox Host," *New York Times*, 14 March 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/03/15/business/media/15tract.html (accessed 8 June 2010).