AGAINST THE MACHINE

SELECTED WRITINGS FROM PLAIN WORDS

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shootings are also on the rise.[11] These seemingly arbitrary acts are hard to understand, but the absence of empathy points to a lack of connection with people, and the suicidal intentions behind them demonstrates a feeling of hopelessness.

Conclusion

It would be stupid, insensitive, and unhelpful to suggest that people "stop coping," as if that were possible or even desirable. Instead, I seek to uncover a trend in the hope of allowing us to better understand this oft-changing and complex society we have been forced into. If you know what your enemy has been up to, wouldn't that help you plot against them?

11: https://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/24/justice/fbi-shooting-incidents-study/index.html

that gap."[7] But at the end of 2016, after both Brexit and Trump's election, the mood of holiday advertising quickly changed. An article published by a website for Association Executives:

"Last year's tear jerking sentimental ads have been replaced with trampolining animals, courtesy of John Lewis, and a shift from sentimental wallowing – 'sadvertising' – to a healthy injection of light relief and laughter. Maybe the prospect of Brexit and Trump was simply more than most of us could deal with! When it comes to communications it's definitely crucial to have an accurate appreciation of the predominant mood of the audience."[8]

A trend that exploits people's unfulfilled desires to have meaningful connections was replaced by a trend that tip toes lightheartedly around people's fears of a disastrous future. While the cope-baiting is most obvious in the latter, in both cases the target of the advertisements is someone trying to deal with the miserable life they're stuck in.

Failure to cope

To cope implies a degree of successfully persevering through the situation. What about when you cannot, when you lack the ability to both change a situation and deal with it in your life? Hopelessness is "significantly related to eventual suicide" by psychiatrists,[9] and suicide rates have been on the rise across demographics of age and gender. It is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States.[10] If suicide is related to coping, is it linked to a failure to cope, or is it actually a rejection of coping as a way of living? Random mass

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7: https://www.fastcompany.com/3029767/the-rise-of-sadvertising-why-brands-are-determined-to-make-you-cry
8: https://associationexecutives.org/news/322045/What-sadvertising-tells-us-about-communication-in-2017.htm
9: https://focus.psychiatryonline.org/doi/abs/10.1176/foc.4.2.291
10: https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml

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Radical Self-care

The idea of "radical self-care" has become popular through Tumblr and online social justice circles in recent years. Rejecting notions of mandatory productivity and its related shame, radical self-care rhetoric preaches that people should do whatever they need to do to get through the day. The examples given usually seem to be indulgent forms of consumption: eat a whole pizza, binge-watch a mindless series, stay in bed all day if you need to. That radical self-care often translates into indulging in consuming commodities is a stellar example of capitalism preying on people's vulnerabilities.

The rhetoric around radical self-care goes something like: "whatever you need to do to cope, do it. Don't ever let anyone make you feel bad for how you cope with the world." What's striking about this is how identical it is to a popular sentiment in prison: Whatever you have to do to do your time, do it. A thoughtful and multifaceted analysis of radical self-care has already been made[6], but what's apparent here is that it is a synonym for coping.

Sadvertising & Sentimentality in advertising and culture

Marketing and PR executives are tasked with creating propaganda content for their brands, products, and organizations, which requires them to study social trends and know the pulse of the public. In the last few years there was a trend in advertising dubbed "sadvertising," where ads consisted of sentimental and emotionally moving stories, often unrelated to the products being marketed. William Gelner, former chief creative officer of the marketing agency 180LA, attributes this trend to the fact that: "…we live such digitally switched-on, always-plugged-in lives, and yet we still also somehow feel disconnected from people. As human beings, we're looking for human connection, and I think that emotional storytelling can help bridge

6: Crimethinc's "Self As Other" – https://crimethinc.com/2013/09/06/new-zine-about-self-care-self-as-other

them admit to misusing them.[2] When the prescription runs out, or when a tolerance is built-up to the drug's effects, many begin using heroin or other illegal opioids. Chronic means "continuing or occurring again and again for a long time," implying that it probably won't going away permanently. Taking painkillers then is a way of coping, of constantly battling a condition that isn't being fixed for whatever reason.

The most common reported type of chronic pain is low back pain,[3] which has a number of different causes. But it's likely that the prevalence of this kind of pain has actually increased over time. A study done in North Carolina shows that the proportion of people suffering from long-term, low back pain has more than doubled between the early '90s and 2009.[4] Clearly something about this society and form of life is causing people to feel more chronic pain, which they then cope with by taking painkillers.

Habitual use of any drug can be read as a coping mechanism. 55 million people in the US used weed within the last year, and 35 million do on a monthly basis. 52% who used marijuana come from millennial generation.[5] Weed lowers your standards, it makes boring things fun. A stupid show on Netflix becomes entertaining, the toxic parts of a relationship are de-emphasized over the presence of a warm body to cuddle with, and emotions are dulled to the point of being manageable or ignorable. While drug use can provide interesting experiences, habitual use is clearly a way of coping with a boring and stressful world as well as putting off dealing with ongoing problems in life. Since under late capitalism the world cannot be acclimated to the needs of the body, with weed the body adjusts itself to acclimate to the world: a boring, despair-inducing, and stressful one at best.

Plain Words is a website and publication that focuses on spreading news and developing analyses of struggles in and around Bloomington, Indiana. As anarchists, we approach these struggles from an anti-state, anti-capitalist perspective. However, we aren't interested in developing a specific party line - even an anarchist one - and instead value the diverse forms resistance can take. Our anarchism is vibrant, undogmatic, and finds common cause with all others who fight for a world without the state, capital, and all structures of domination.

Much of the theoretical writing submitted to Plain Words has been about information technology. This zine is a collection of those writings.

Rather than shame people for using their smartphones in public, these writings are meant to demonstrate what we have to gain by fighting against the techno-nightmare. Specifically, they describe how these technologies impoverish our relationships, and dull our capacity for combative social struggle.

Any comments, questions, and feedback can be sent to:
plainwordsbloomington@riseup.net

2: https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-overdose-crisis
3: http://www.painmed.org/patientcenter/facts_on_pain.aspx#chronic
4: https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/02/090209163146.htm
5: http://recointensive.com/marijuana-statistics-2017-55-million-americans-admit-use/

Anti-Oppression and the Internet

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Information technology is ubiquitous in present day, it is now considered odd and suspicious to not have a smartphone or any social media accounts. Many people who were not using these technologies heavily in the past are now suckered in by them, partially because they are the new normal that everyone else is doing.

I grew up spending hours on the internet and playing video games every day, back before it was socially normal to do so. Most of my leisure time during my adolescence was spent staring into a screen. I have since realized how much damage it was doing to me, and the extent to which it ruined my concentration, helped stunt my emotional maturity, and generally made me an anxious person. Now I am hesitant to subject myself to the alienation of passively consuming spectacles like television and video games, and carry a deep mistrust of the control inherent in information technology. That these technologies are being cast in a liberatory light seems like a serious error to me, and this essay is a theory I've developed over time while participating and noticing others participate in life over social media.

Isolation and atomization are at the core of capitalist society. The internet is increasing this separation and is subsuming more and more of daily life. Nevertheless, there's a popular narrative which casts this technology in an anti-oppression light, it goes something like this:

"Before the internet, marginalized people (people with oppressed identities and neuro-atypical people) would not have much of an opportunity to see and discuss their experiences with each other. With social networks, marginalized people can connect with each other

Coping with our minds

Mindfulness is a Buddhist practice that has recently become popular within the field of psychology. It involves adopting a quasi-meditative mindset throughout daily life to non-judgmentally notice toxic thoughts. Seeing these thoughts for what they are supposedly lessens their ability to exacerbate neurosis and anxiety. This practice contrasts with psychoanalysis and other schools of psychology in discarding the role of the therapist as an expert of the mind, who tries to "fix" the patient by uncovering latent secrets buried within their psyche. Mindfulness never aims to "cure", but rather offers an ongoing strategy for dealing with anxiety and toxic thoughts. In other words, it is a coping strategy that's become popular due to an increasingly anxiety-producing world. It's not the only one.

Psychiatry, a sister discipline to psychology that includes its practitioners prescribing anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications, adopts the same approach. It never tries to cure someone of depression or anxiety, but instead aims to assist the patient in getting through daily life. Like mindfulness, it is a coping mechanism that can be useful to people. Both are in prominence right now because they level people out enough to enable them to be productive members of society. Someone who cannot get out of bed in the morning won't be able to produce value at work or through whatever role they are assigned in capitalist society.

Coping through drugs

The number of people addicted to opioids have increased drastically in the last decade, including over double the amount of heroin users in the US from 2002 to 2016.[1] The Opioid Crisis is largely a result of over-prescription of painkillers for severe and chronic pain. These painkillers are addictive, and 21 to 29 percent of patients prescribed

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1: https://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/08/health/heroin-deaths-samhsa-report/index.html

Coping with the End of the World

The day after Trump was elected President, news reports circulated images of young people at college campuses gathering to cry and mourn together. At these "cry-ins" or "self-care events," students reportedly colored in coloring books, played with play-doh, met with therapy dogs, drank hot chocolate, and of course, cried together. These stories were met with ridicule, supposedly showcasing the oversensitive millennial generation as a bunch of snowflakes who can't handle the world. But just like how, to Baudrillard, the existence of the uber-commercialized and artificial Disneyland gives cover to the rest of society pretending not to be both already, these spectacular stories of human coping hide the fact that society is already coping all the time.

To cope means to deal with something with some degree of success. When faced with a situation that is unalterable, it is a workaround or sidestep. Since you cannot change it, you try to figure out a way to handle it. In the 20th century, revolutionaries faced the miserable world with hope to transform it into something better, which guided their actions and ways of living. But in present day, a revolution seems less possible, and hopelessness is spreading. Every day is a new disaster: environmental catastrophe, war and the threat of nuclear winter, daily random mass shootings, Nazis killing people and trying to gain power, and the arrival of an Orwellian techno-future. These horrors compound ongoing miseries of daily life under capitalism: hunger, boredom, humiliation, exploitation, isolation, violence, oppression, alienation, etc. Since it seems like we can't change these realities, we try to cope with them.

and realize that they share overlapping experiences of oppression. The internet has fostered a mass 'wokeness' (gaining of political consciousness) of young people not seen in decades. People with mental health disabilities can now share coping strategies and feel assured that others suffer from their ailments, and that they are not alone in the world. It offers a method of finding & creating community that bypasses face-to-face interactions that are stressful or debilitating. Without the internet, they would have just been hidden under the normative culture, and felt alone and frustrated, or simply unaware."

This line of thought is flawed, but it makes some sense. Life in the west since World War II has been very isolating and atomizing, in that people are kept to their homes, codependent relationships, and toxic nuclear family mores, while spending their leisure time passively consuming entertainment media. The conformity of the 50s seems like a stark example of this, but as the decades went on this phenomenon actually increased. Participation in social clubs and adult team sports declined, public space was enclosed and privatized, and average hours of television viewing increased. In this basic context, yes, the internet fosters a connection between people that is appealing due to any other connection being absent in the recent past.

That said, while there probably has been a relatively large-scale "wokeness," it has not created a situation where politically conscious people rise up against systems of domination and oppression. As of yet, it has primarily produced non-revolutionary identity politics that, through groupthink, aim to discipline an ideal set of personal behaviors onto isolated individuals. Revolutionary impulses against capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy crumble into scolding an individuals' language and behavior based on privilege resulting from generalizations about static identities. This tendency has been used to extinguish revolts by separating those in struggle via a relation of "allyship" and ultimately strengthening reformist non-profits. How is it that non-profit groups in Minneapolis using Black Panther imagery and rhetoric were so successful in weakening the forces of

rebellion last year? The answer is in the medium, and specifically not the message.

Bonds produced through internet social connections are weak and generally don't yield feelings of power and the capacity to have an impact on the world. Likely this is because working together to end those oppressions is not even an option, since capitalism's separation between people isn't actually broken. Where to turn then with ones' ideas and critiques? The focus becomes insular: on one's own individual behaviors, language, and projected image.

Often relationships over the internet are maintained via text, or the occasional image and short video. These communications can be drafted and redrafted, while phone calls and interacting face-to-face in real time are increasingly being seen as too "awkward." What causes this and then follows from it even stronger is neurotic introspection. That which marginalizes becomes a fixation, as opposed to basis of a bond between people that has the potential to make one another stronger through resistance to it. Anxiety and awkwardness result from a heightened fixation on oneself as a result of any ability to develop solid bonds between becoming stunted.

When isolated people find each other in life, they potentially become more powerful together. This is quantitative, in that more people means more possibilities, but more importantly it's qualitative. Relationships can deepen through experiences that are shared together. And stronger relationships make stronger people. Think about the courage that people seemingly spontaneously acquire when someone they love is in danger. Bonds between people aren't always that dramatic, but they are ubiquitous in daily life. When my friend thinks of a funny joke and smiles as they begin to tell it, I smile back even before I've heard the punchline. What's happening in this moment of affectation is not located inside them, nor inside me, but instead in the invisible bond between us. Emotions are contagious, and that makes them political.

stant combat with a society always trying to stifle both? That sounds, and would feel, pretty beautiful to me. Nonetheless, I still like works of beauty, like paintings and music. Critiques aren't always meant to be demolishing, they are often meant to be expansive, to rip open the walls of definition.

I agree with you that dissatisfaction, isolation, anxiety, cruelty, despair, and misery were not created by capitalism, but I suspect that many of these feelings/inflictions have been exacerbated by it. Or, at least, some people at certain contexts within the past 300 years of capitalism experience those feelings more than others in different contexts. For example, precarity in late-stage capitalism contributes to anxiety, as does debt. Again, neither created by capitalism, but both heightened for certain people at specific eras. I agree with your sentiment that we shouldn't expect a hypothetical future anarchist society to solve every human existential crisis, as Christians view heaven. But capitalism, especially with assistance with information technology, has deeply infiltrated minute aspects of our daily lives. That these intrusive systems of control and mediations, which serve the purposes of varied inhuman institutions and abstract forces like capital, wouldn't contribute to our dissatisfaction, isolation, anxiety, despair, and misery seems unlikely to me. Either that, or us humans are incredibly flexible in what we desire and will tolerate. Given how unhappy everyone is, how terrible of a shape the world is in, and how neurotic and awful we are to ourselves and each other, I doubt this is true.

I want for us to contribute something to the rich tradition of finding our place in the universe. But I think people come to insight by learning from and through each other, hence artist/literary scenes, scientific journals, etc. If TV is keeping us isolated, then it's a direct obstacle to us coming to any of those ideas.

I like what you say about "a rich tradition stretching back tens of thousands of years of humans struggling with our place in the universe." If we're going to talk about ideas like "our humanity," I think it fits there, as a thing to aspire to contribute to. So I disagree when you say that TV is "full of archetypes that speak to core elements of our humanity." I just don't know how anyone can know about "core elements of our humanity," and I tend to read these kind of claims as ideology, which always camouflages human-constructed ideas as nature.

The closest I've seen a TV show speaking to any kind of deep meaning, situated in the time and place it came from, is The Sopranos, but only because at every turn the characters failed to grasp any understanding of themselves, each other, and the world around them. A striking example of the 20th/21st century first-world condition if you ask me!

Does great art and literature really make you go out of control? I'm jealous if so. When reading most literature, my mind quickly wanders after reading a few pages, and I end up flipping to the end of the chapter to see how much I have left before I can put the book down. I blame this attention deficiency on the hours I spent every day as a kid playing video games and watching TV. When I think of great art, I remember viewing Tumblr or Instagram on my phone. No matter how beautiful some image was, I'd scroll down to the next one within a second. If anything, I'd say that if you really value great art and literature then you should be especially hostile to all these tech toys, which reduce beauty in preference to amusement.

That all said, I do have a critique of art, one shared by many artists such as the surrealists, Dadaists, Situationists, and others throughout the last century. Creativity can and should exist in all aspects of life, not just frozen in a product, or "work of art." Should only a painting or a sculpture, but not a relationship between caring friends who come to deep understandings of each other, be considered art? What about a life lived with dignity and through one's own desires, in con-

Another reason why this post-Occupy wokeness hasn't produced gains for revolution and anarchy is the lack of power that comes from it. The immense focus on victimization and shameful self-flagellation is directly opposite from the anarchist idea that one should try to gain control of ones' life. To be clear, I'm not posing anarchy as a bootstraps mentality, but rather to posit that anarchists see themselves as protagonists in their own lives. The bonds between us aren't based on our victimhood, but on our resistance to what hurts us. "Destroy what destroys you." I am constantly trying to think of ways to project myself onto this world, and to attack those things which I see as sabotaging the possibility of me living a free life through healthy relationships with other people and the planet.

When one isn't able to wage war against the world around them, they do battle in the world inside themselves. And judging by how neurotic, anxious, and paralyzed the population has become, it's a losing one.

In "We Are All Very Anxious" by Plan C, a valuable essay that can be easily found online, it's suggested that anxiety is a defining characteristic of our era. Social media and the internet are surely related to this. Everything that one says on the internet has the potential to stay archived and accessible for people to see and judge you, possibly for decades. Additionally, social media promotes bite-sized thought, ideas, and communications, where complex ideas are shrunk and ethical conundrums are flattened into oversimplified dichotomies promoting moralistic reaction and denunciation. Face-to-face interaction provides at least the possibility for empathy, in that you see the person whose feelings you are about to hurt; but the style of communication through the internet promotes cruelty. It also enforces a social life based on the mini-rewards of notifications and likes.

What all these recent cultural developments have brought is an expansion of performance in everyday life, where one is constantly trying to impress those around them, or if not that, at least worried about the things they say. As every psychologist and self-help book

will tell you, this is the exact opposite of a healthy way to approach life.

Progress is destroying the earth and putting another layer of colonization over our social relationships, including one to ourselves. It was briefly de-enchanted after the 60s but now, at the worst time possible, it's looking seductive again. Let's put a hostility towards progress back alongside the social struggles and projects we've been a part of. Or, at the very least, let's realize that technology is not neutral, and that it carries the culture and social relationships of the systems that created it.

"We Are All Very Anxious" by Plan C can be found at:
www.weareplanc.org/blog/we-are-all-very-anxious/

mourning Game of Thrones because of a racist scene at the end of its second season. The content of TV was a constant source of comment, but never the medium itself.

In college, I was in a class where we were discussing advertising to children in commercials. I explained how disgusting it is the way advertisers exploit children, and it seemed like most of the class agreed. But then one student spoke up, and said if there were no children's advertisements, they wouldn't have commercials during children's shows, and therefore we need advertisements for children. I was shocked, but the class seemed to totally agree with his sentiment. They couldn't imagine TV itself being something bad, or something that could be judged in its own right.

I'm not going to deny that there are TV shows that are "feats of human creativity and artistic expression." I agree with you there. But I don't think that's why people watch TV. TV watching is a habit, formed because it is the easiest alternative to basically every otheractivity available to us. I wrote more about that in the original essay, so I won't re-explain it here. I think people watch TV, and occasionally one of the shows they watch contains some kind of special meaning or beauty. That's been my experience at least. Sure I watched The Wire, but when it was over I queued up the newest season of Archer. Like phones and computers, it occupies the time in between work and other necessary social roles.

I'm having a hard time understanding your use of the ideas "our humanity" and "the human condition." I did a little research into the latter, and it seems to be an idea produced in the 20th century in the first-world. I am skeptical that someone in this society could have anything close to a meaningful and conclusive understanding of what it would mean to be human. Knowledge about abstract things should always been read as being situated in the time and place they come from. So instead of "the human condition," I read it as "the 20th/21st century first-world condition!"

we'd all be smashing out Starbucks windows and killing our bosses if it weren't for TV." Fair enough, I regret the choice of words I used, it wasn't an accurate description of what I was thinking when writing the piece.

What I think TV and similar commercial passive entertainment stymies isn't revolt, but rather creativity and the urge to experiment. I was more on point when I wrote earlier in the essay that "capitalism and the technology developed through it have created conditions that hinder the creation of long-term life habits outside those of passivity and consumption." Because these technologies are so seductive for reasons explained in my essay, people are more likely to spend their free time isolated, entertaining themselves with an endless stream of shows and content. When that option is always present, people are less likely to go out, interact with others, and in their boredom, come up with something interesting. It seems like the institutions and value systems of this society are dying, but I don't see experiments in communalism or new ideas or interesting social phenomenon popping up. While I don't mean to blame tech toys for ALL the world's issues, I can't help but see them as contributing to these specific problems.

You say, "of course TV pacifies us and of course it isolates us," but I don't think that should be taken for granted. When I was younger, I heard the phrase "idiot box," but I never hear sentiments like that now. I have no way of knowing this, but I'm going to guess that most people nowadays don't think of TV as an object which they can have an opinion about, let alone come to conclusions that it is isolating or pacifying. I have two experiences that come to mind.

I used to spend time on Tumblr, and it seemed like the general opinion in the "radical" and social justice circles there was that some TV shows were a socially positive force, aka "woke," while others that didn't portray race, gender, and sexuality in the ways fashionable to their circles at the time were "problematic." They would spend time "debating" whether Buffy the Vampire Slayer was feminist, or-

Express Yourself: Liberal Democracy's Trap

It was the night after Darren Wilson was acquitted for the murder of Michael Brown, hundreds of people were gathered in the heart of downtown in a medium-sized Midwestern city. After arriving with some comrades, I decided I needed to do something to counter the cold. Walking through the edge of the crowd, I saw not only the usual friends and activists, but faces I didn't recognize. Some appeared angry and militant, others deeply sad, but the crowd generally seemed confident, and there was a charge in the air that I hadn't felt at a demonstration in the many years I'd lived there. Years of apathy and tame liberalism had taken their toll on my sense of optimism, but this night I sensed that things were about to change. Finally, the organizers of the burgeoning Black Lives Matter group in town called for the crowd to gather around. After a few chants, they asked us to walk to a spot in a public square to listen to speakers. Someone in the crowd yelled "Let's march!" but the organizer replied: "Yes, let's march to this spot here and listen to the speakers."

The crowd obliged, walked briefly to the space, and began listening to speeches by the organizers. At first people seemed excited and energized if the speaker was especially moving, but that momentum began trickling away as the speeches kept coming. A Democratic Party politician was unfortunately given the megaphone, and then the floor was left open for whomever to come and say what they wanted to say. I felt restless and cold, it had been half an hour since we walked over, and I noticed that the crowd began to trickle away. Mothers, teenagers, preachers, and other folks gave impromptu speeches, talking about their experiences, and calling for more or less vague forms of change relating to policing and racism. By the time this was finished, an hour and a half passed, the crowd had

halved, and there was no more energy in the air. Some people tried to force a march, but it was pathetic, consisted of only a dozen people, and quickly ended.

It seemed like in most cities resistance to policing and white supremacy was galvanized by the mass actions, highway takeovers, and riots that took place that night, but over the course of the next year, nothing like that materialized in this particular city. The chance was missed.

At rallies, demonstrations, and even illegal occupations of government buildings in the last few years, I've witnessed or heard stories where a large number of people are mobilized and angry, potentially ready to take action in a way that could make some kind of impact. But at the moment when energy is the highest, the offensive potential of the crowd is halted to make way for speakers to give speeches. The crowd, originally ready for action, adopts a posture of passivity, receiving the information being conveyed to them by the speakers. The speaker, sometimes a vile politician but more often just an angry person, tries to convey their frustrations, anger, and sadness. The posture towards action irreversibly settles into one of speaking and listening. What's happening here?

Speaking truth…at each other?

From the Civil Rights Movement all the way on to the Second Iraq War protests there was a frustratingly dominant tendency in activism called "speaking truth to power." What this entailed was someone not in a position of power, an "average joe," saying what they believe to politicians or businesspeople. What did they think would come out of this? It's difficult to understand, but it was ubiquitous in social movements for half a century.

Maybe it stuck around because people thought they could change policy by changing politicians' minds, or perhaps they enjoyed the feeling of moral superiority they got from being so right against peo-

parts of ourselves and exponentially increase their impact are apt and inserting them is strategic, but it's naïve the way we anarchists seem to often be saying that dissatisfaction, isolation, anxiety, cruelty and anti-social violence, despair and misery are created by capitalism. Try telling that to someone living a few hundred years ago, before the enclosure of our precious commons. We've got some good ideas about how things could be better and how we could build a world that promotes the best parts of ourselves and discourages our yuckiest parts, but let's be more honest about which problems we can and can't solve. It isn't the TV that's making us miserable. While aspects of capitalism and the state are definitely making our lives worse, the various forms of human misery listed above are part of the human condition.

When we embrace this reality, we place ourselves on the receiving end of a rich tradition stretching back tens of thousands of years of humans struggling with our place in the universe. I bet we'd have some cool things to contribute to that conversation. And when we ground ourselves there, we build a solid foundation on which to express and attempt to realize our visions of a better world.

Thanks for creating and curating this forum and for putting your ideas out there. Can't wait to see what comes next.

A response by the author

Thanks for your thoughtful and non-dogmatic response to the article I wrote. I appreciate the critical thought apparent throughout the letter, it is unfortunately a rare commodity these days, even among anarchists. I found some of the critiques you made useful, and disagreed with others.

First, I want to clarify what I was getting at with the "Good TV" essay. As you point out, I wrote, "TV is both bad in its own right, and in how it stymies revolt and keeps people from taking action against the nightmare world around them," to which you responded, "like

shows because they are beautiful. Because, in the best cases, they are feats of human creativity and artistic expression that deserve attention. The studies of light and color, of film and of storytelling, of beauty and sensual ity, of power and aggression and suffering. You write that when watching TV "we are set in receiving mode while being flooded with images, archetypes, and stories." But setting yourself in "receiving mode" to watch intricately-crafted images, full of archetypes that speak to core elements of our humanity is a tradition with roots far deeper than late capitalism. If you're gonna "raze" that "to the ground" it makes me worry what other core elements of human culture you've got on the chopping block.

The images Michelangelo painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel were commissioned by Pope Julius II. From one perspective, these are images depicting a creation myth of the most oppressive religion humans have ever created, funded by an authoritarian colonial leader of that religion as a monument to its hegemony. Perhaps it, too, should be razed to the ground?

Anarchist analysis must expand. If we can't find ways of speaking and relating to the way the eroticism and sensuality of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel catch your breath and, like all great art and literature "make us go out of control" as Leslie Fiedler[1] put it, then we are going to continue to speak only to ourselves. Anyone not already thoroughly indoctrinated by our ideology can see that we're missing something big here.

On a different note, there seems to be an assumption floating around in the background of this article (and in much anarchist discourse) that TV and the system that created it are the source of all of our problems. We are presented with an image (literally and figuratively) of a solitary person, miserable and alone in front of the television.

Our analysis of the ways capitalism and the state encourage theworst

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1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDoGLBBC0BQ

ple who were obviously so wrong. More realistically it stuck around because it was ineffective and actually aided systems of control. Any situation where people air their grievances and anger to power is just giving the latter a new vocabulary to co-opt. Local politicians and bureaucrats learn how to tailor their messages to people. Police and media learn useful rhetoric to more effectively divide people during rebellious moments. On the nation-wide level, political parties and corporations have think-tanks and public relations professionals that do research and specialize in formulating the exact right thing for their clients to say. Luckily for us, speaking truth to power seems to be dead.

It has been replaced by speaking truth at each other. This tendency rightfully reacts to the reality that there are wide gulfs in experience between people, often related to race, gender, sexuality, ability, and social class. So far, so good. But in the absence of an effort to physically undermine the structural existence of the economic, political, and social system in power through action, the act of communicating becomes fetishized itself. There seems to be an informally understood idea that if those who occupy the more privileged identities hear about the hardships of those most oppressed, then the former will change their behavior, and oppression will end this way. Just like speaking truth to power, things become murky and vague when deciphering how it actually get the goods. What both forms share is that they dangerously give their users a cathartic release at vocalizing their experiences and oppressions to a crowd of people, undermining the potential for that frustration to be released through revolt and subversion.

Liberal democracy functions this way. The world we inhabit has been set in motion long before we were born, and at best we are meant to move passively through it. Our relationship to our surroundings, our daily lives, those around us, our bodies, and our futures is that of distance and alienation at best. Those in the grasp of democracy may be oppressed, controlled, dominated, and exploited in the most degrading ways possible through work, the justice system, toxic in-

terpersonal relationships, and a constant existential alienation, but "freedom of speech" and other civil liberties exist to appease this feeling and give the appearance of freedom. All of the anger and stress that could go into action is diverted into talk that often makes one feel slightly better after doing it. It's a pressure-release valve that lets off steam.

In order to exist globally, capitalism in its current form needs liberal democracy. In Chile, Greece, Spain, and many other formerly totalitarian countries throughout the world, this fact has been realized and they've transition away from dictatorship. Fascism and totalitarianism, while useful in certain situations and towards specific populations, largely breeds resentment and pressure that will eventually boil over, possibly disrupting the system. It's no wonder that these countries, where the state has been so intensely crushing, currently have vibrant social movements and strong anarchist and autonomist milieus.

Status updating at the void

The tendency to communicate in this way seems eerily similar to the phenomenon of posting updates to social media. Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, and other social media platforms have created a new social tendency, that of "talking at the void." These status updates, tweets, and Tumblr posts are written for everyone and no one in particular. They mirror a politician's speech in both being performative and creating a speaker/listener dichotomy instead of fueling mutual communication. In other words, it is done as a performance meant to appeal to those passively listening, as opposed to building an ongoing conversation. If there is any back and forth, it is in "replies" consisting of very short text messages and/or emojis, sacrificing the nuance of body language and longer arguments, which are often needed to flesh out unfamiliar ideas.

In contrast, the back and forth of conversation can build understanding between people, whose idiosyncrasies, body language, an-

Art and Anarchy

The following is a critique we received of the article "Good TV as a Roadblock to Becoming Ungovernable, or Anything Else Really" in the Winter 2018 edition of Plain Words. It is followed by a response from the author of the original article.

Dear Plain Words,

Nice magazine. These photographs are beautiful and the layout is excellent. The articles are insightful. In Issue #4, I liked the kaleidoscope one and the "good TV" one. I read them and talked about them with friends. I'm not into the indiscriminate violence of your namesake, but I appreciate their tenacity.

I've got a couple things to say about the "good TV" article. I liked how it talked about the trap of seeing your sub culture or identity represented in the media. Having your interests sold back to you like that. And it was a good reminder to get off the couch and go talk to people.

But there's a couple important things I think it's missing about what it means to be human.

With some exceptions, anarchists these days don't do a very good job of dealing with art and beauty. These are huge and important parts of human life, but we don't have much to say about them. What we do have to say is usually about how these things are enslaving us and alienating us and "stymying revolt." Like we'd all be smashing out Starbucks windows and killing our bosses if it weren't for TV.

Of course it's true. Of course TV pacifies us and of course it isolates us. It fits conveniently into a life of alienation under late capitalism. For sure. I'm not arguing for or against "good TV."

But it could be that people are watching some of these "good TV"

nized the world to prevent us from discovering and creating almost any other. But the characters in shows and movies have somewhat similar daily lives as us, and their relationships look like ours. If things deviate, it is in specific genres like fantasy or science fiction where the deviation is part of the appeal. When viewing these spectacles on an ongoing basis, the rhythms and forms of daily life under capitalism are cemented in our minds, so that it doesn't seem like life could be any different.

To be clear, television does not "defend" this conceptualization of life, it in fact specifically does not do this. Rather, it presents images caricaturing our daily lives, our relationships, and the way we conceptualize everything as normal. Like all ideology, it camouflages itself as natural. Any benign intentions for producing subversive content using TV, and visions of TV existing in a post-capitalist world, would unknowingly create these same conditions of isolation and ideology.

Conclusion

I want television, and the world that it mirrors, to be totally razed to the ground. The world I dream of surely has stories, roleplaying, and other similar forms of play, but not in such a mind-numbing form as television.

I don't know what I want readers to take from this essay. I don't know what anybody's life is like but my own, and I'm not interested in telling people what to do with their daily lives or how to engage politically. But I do know that this society mystifies what it's doing to people, and I'm interested in pointing these things out when I see them. Since television sucks roughly five hours of life every day from people in the US on average[1], it seems like an important thing to notice and think about. Especially for those of us that want collective revolt and to develop lives of our own subversive desires.

1: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/business/media/nielsen-survey-media-viewing.html

ecdotes, and ways of thinking can be teased out and unravel themselves before each other. What's being communicated can be clarified by reading someone's facial expression or gestures, also making it much easier to detect each other's thoughts and intentions. However, conversation in this culture has primarily not been of a reciprocal dynamic for a long time, instead consisting of people taking turns talking at each other. The depth of our loss goes much deeper than Facebook.

The status update breeds narcissism. When constantly being presented with a text field that reads "What's on Your Mind?," always interested in what you have to say, it makes sense that people begin thinking that what they have to say is always important, or that it is always appropriate to share. People's habits and tendencies shift towards what the status update conditions them to. Technology is not neutral, and this machine formats the way people talk and think.

Social media gives the appearance of participation, but as cultural tropes suggesting one not "read the comments" show, these technologies are not designed to facilitate communication that is empathetic, ethically nuanced, able to convey complex ideas, or that allows people to fully understand each other. Compared to the lack of public life immediately prior to the internet's rise, these technologies give the appearance of connection, but as stated in "Anti-Oppression and the Internet," this is an illusion. Nonetheless, the damage is done: through constant use of these technologies we become accustomed to communicating in toxic ways, and by default see this form of communication as valuable. Capitalism wins, liberal democracy wins, and everyone else loses.

Conclusion

Communication is clearly valuable politically, for example the September 9, 2016 national prisoner strike would not have been possible if not for letters and phone calls that formed relationships between people inside prisons and out. Understanding other people's experi-

ences, especially those that face oppression, largely comes from listening to them. This should not be underestimated. Neither should we create a fetish around all "action," as some actions strengthen our enemies or simply satisfy our feelings of "doing something."

The specific tendency of "speaking truth at each other" that has developed concurrently with the rise of social media is a dangerous pressure release valve that can halt our ability to attack what destroy us. Liberal democracy lays many traps for us in the realm of struggle and politics; let's keep an eye out for this one.

thing, to embarrass oneself, or to be made upset by something someone says always exists. So TV, being much easier, draws us away from the social and in towards separate private worlds.

Good TV kills creativity, because there is no reason to think or struggle with what to do with your time when screens can connect you to instant entertainment. What to do with ones' time is hardly a question people need to grapple with, because TV fills in the empty slots in ones' daily routine. There is no urgency to deal with a society that is destroying everything via environmental catastrophe, war, and oppression, because the ability to distract or easily entertain ourselves always exists.

People have rapidly been losing the talent towards communicating with each other face-to-face. This tendency, hundreds of years old, gets worse every generation with the increasing mediation of information technology. It's a common cultural trope to notice that people hardly really communicate with each other, they instead talk at each other. In our era, the lure of mediating technology or voluntary isolation via staying home and watching shows is a result and further cause of this phenomenon. The more awkward we are, the more we want to stay inside, and the more we stay inside, the more awkward we become.

In addition to pulling people towards isolation, television and similar media forms like movies present the world unquestioningly as it is. The portrayals of life mimic the structure of the lives we live now, and therefore reinforce the hegemony of this way of life in our minds. This is not an intentional strategy of elites scheming in a smoky corporate boardroom, rather it is built in to the technology itself.

Daily life, social relationships, value systems, technology, and even the geography of infrastructure are specific to capitalism at this stage of its development. The daily experience of waking up, commuting, working, commuting, watching Netflix, and going to sleep is only one of millions of forms of life that could exist. Capitalism has colo-

and stories. TV is both bad in its own right, and in how it stymies revolt and keeps people from taking action against the nightmare world around them.

Isolation & Ideology, Inherent in the Technology

Capitalism breeds isolation. In no other society in history has humanity experienced such separation between themselves and others. This has come to be because divided people are easier to control. Where people regularly encounter others, potential exists for a variety of interactions, behaviors, and relationships to develop over time. In these spaces it becomes possible for people to build trust, share frustrations, and maybe take rebellious action together. Strikes, riots, and the building of subversive bonds need these spaces to unfold. There is a reason why totalitarian societies enact laws forbidding more than a certain number of people from converging in public. TV is liberal democracy's work-around for this problem, in that it draws people towards voluntary isolation.

Capital, which can roughly be defined as "money invested in something to make more money," over time increasingly colonizes the world, transforming it so that investments can be profitable. This process includes the evolution of technologies in directions that support the status quo and the cementing of habits and cultural norms that benefit it. We go home exhausted after work and the most attractive option is to collapse on the couch, a significant other next to us maybe, while amusing spectacles on the screen pass the time until we go to sleep and recharge our bodies enough to trudge back to work. This is not natural. It is the environment that's become dominant over time because it is suitable for capital, this is capitalism.

Sitting back and watching a show is especially seductive because it requires virtually no effort. It is the easiest option to relieve boredom and to distract from anxiety. Contrastingly, socializing with others requires active listening, emotional energy, and a sense of obligation towards performing social niceties. The potential to say the wrong

A Theory of Destitution and Trolling

In the grip of modern capitalism we face destitutions both material and social. Precarious employment, debt, exorbitant rent, and a diminishing welfare safety net are complimented by ubiquitous information technology that hinders the development of real life social skills, perpetuating neurotic anxiety and self-loathing which follows perceived failures to meet expected social roles. Both destitutions can be seen as "falling through the cracks," where people fail to meet society's norms in achieving a middle-class income, and/or fostering relations of affection, friendship, and love. One can imagine that these destitute people see themselves as losers, and hence gravitate towards opportunities to be in power relations where they are the ones on top, or at least higher than they are now.

In revolutionary times, the collective power inherent in massive and combative struggles may be seductive enough to draw these people in to the anti-politics of liberation. But with no horizon of revolution in sight and the limits of current collective struggles, the destitute will take what they can get. The easiest and most accessible opportunity for power, especially seductive for men with lighter color skin, are the sectors of the internet where far-right trolls specialize in tormenting marginalized people through social media. As the popular adage about bullying goes, the weak become the strong by preying on others that are weak. At the moment, and conceivably in the future, the formula is:

Privilege – Power + Humiliation + the Internet = Far-Right Trolling

In the past, those who capitalist society shaped to be losers and nerds would rectify their powerlessness by becoming an authority

on a commodity or spectacle of their choice. Developing encyclopedic knowledge of video games, music genres, and Star Trek episodes while being condescending to those not in the know replicates a feeling of authority, and instills a fleeting sense of confidence about something, regardless how pathetic. This way of asserting power over others is passive and somewhat harmless, adopted only because it's within reach.

Contrast this with the typical images of racial hatred in the post-war period: southern brutes drunkenly assaulting civil rights demonstrators, or a horde of working-class whites in the urban north converging on a house newly moved into by a black family to harass and attack them. The aforementioned losers, having too little confidence in themselves and their strength, would likely not be participants in such blatantly confrontational acts.

But different opportunities arise with the internet's anonymity and everyone being "within reach" due to social networks. Every powerless person who occupies a position of even marginal privilege now has the easy ability to go to 4chan, participate in a coordinated harassment, perhaps of a black celebrity or any visible Trans people, and feel the deranged psychological benefit of asserting power over another. Similarly, men who have been trained to see women as objects, intimidating ones they are incapable of talking to without being creepy, can use social media to lash out in their impotence by tormenting, doxing, and threatening them.

The internet has created an easy pathway for the powerless-yet-privileged to become monsters in a vain reach for power. Who would have thought that hell would be participatory and decentralized?

ing characters and plot, as well as higher budgets in designing sets and hiring actors. Unlike episodic shows where everything more-or-less returns to normal at the end, these shows are similar to novels where each episode is a chapter. Episodes often end in a cliffhanger or with some dramatic moment taking place, creating buzz and anticipation for the next one. Or they are released a season a time, so they can be "binge-watched." Contrasted with a banal-yet-anxious life under techno-consumer capitalism, these shows with ongoing stories give the viewer an escapist fantasy of a life of adventure and intrigue, but from the safety of the bedroom or couch.

Likely resulting from instant viewer feedback in internet forums and social media, market researchers for these media companies have honed in on both what they did poorly in the past and how to now tailor shows to specific demographics. Additionally, cultural critiques produced by academics in the 90s detailed ways that shows and movies were racist, homophobic, and sexist. This material, including the tumblr-sphere which criticizes shows along these lines practically in real-time, is all easily accessible for marketers to study in order to market their products to the millennial generation that seems to be interested in social justice. This has led to certain shows now having a higher percentage of actors of color and characters that are queer, which can widen their appeal, especially when targeting younger audiences.

For those interested in liberation from oppression, exploitation, and other systems of control, good TV is bad news. Television is a technology of social control, and the world would be a better place if it was destroyed. But it seems like the opposite is happening, and people are increasingly drawn to spending significant amounts of time watching these shows. Whether good TV or cheesy 90s sitcom, these technologies isolate people from each other and thus further the loneliness and anxiety of capitalism. They frame this society and all its ugly mechanisms and social relations as natural. And they kill the imagination by putting us in a position of passivity where we are set in receiving mode while being flooding with images, archetypes,

masses were sucked in by it as they are today, it seemed like people back then knew even as they watched it that it was mindless entertainment, and rolled their eyes at all the laugh tracks, game shows, and sentimentality.

Since TV was a vehicle for commercials, shows were crafted to appeal to the lowest common denominator, and therefore contained the least controversial and most normative portrayals of characters and life. They featured almost exclusively attractive white actors playing static and one-dimensional cliché characters. With "good TV," shows have compelling ongoing stories, comedies have become sharper, and characters have a wider spectrum of emotions and are no longer just straight white people. Additionally, niche audiences are targeted with subcultural anecdotes, political jokes, aesthetic, and tone which prompt viewers to more easily identify with specific shows. In other words: TV's reputation has gone up, and it is not seen as something to avoid or try to disconnect from.

The "good" quality of programming rose out of the success of HBO's "The Sopranos" and "The Wire" in the early 2000's. The dark, moody Sopranos used subtle literary techniques and complex symbolism while telling stories about organized crime as more broad metaphors and critiques of contemporary American life. The Wire, similarly pessimistic, detailed the intrigue and contradictions revolving around the Drug War in urban America to point out how difficult and naïve attempts at reform can be. The Sopranos was a commercial success, The Wire not so much outside of liberal and academic circles, but both demonstrated to the television industry that viewers were interested in shows that had effort and care put in to them, and wanted more than mindless entertainment. Hence shows like True Detective, which boast numerous literary and philosophical sources and references.

While they are not always as deep as The Sopranos or The Wire, there has since been a proliferation of "series" which are ongoing stories, like the soap operas of the past, except with more care put into craft-

Deer Smashes Up Computer Store, Flings Cop with Antlers

Reposted from Earth First! Newswire, 11/11/2017

A disoriented 250-pound deer broke through two glass doors at an east-side computer store, thrashed — bleeding — through the business and flung a police officer over its back with its antlers before being tranquilized.

Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department described the buck as "going berserk" and "terrorizing employees" before Animal Care and Control officers could subdue it.

"You just don't think of this type of thing happening in the city," said Bob Collins, the owner of Key Computer, 9040 E. 30th St. "I've never seen anything like it."
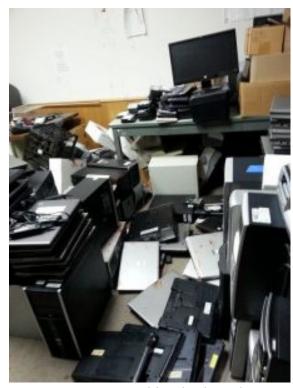
Collins said the surprise customer arrived at 10:30 a.m. Friday by breaking through the plate-glass front door that leads to a reception area. Inside the vestibule, the deer rooted about, frantically trying to escape but instead busted through another glass door leading to the 5,000-square-foot store, where it continued its rampage.

"Maybe he didn't know there was glass there or saw his reflection and was running toward it," Collins said.

There were no customers in the store so Collins and his five employees rushed to a separate office, locked the door and called police. Officers arrived within minutes but were unable to corral the animal. A sergeant wrote in his report that Officer Justin Callahan was injured when the deer ran down the hallway and "was able to gore Officer Callahan, stepped on his right foot and, with its 8-point antlers, threw him over its back."

When two animal control officers arrived later, their tranquilizer darts agitated the deer but didn't knock it out. The deer eventually sprinted out the front door and ran to a wooded area across the street, where it was captured.

Callahan suffered only "bumps and bruises," and was not hospitalized, said IMPD Sgt. Kendale Adams.

No employees at Key Computer were injured but broken glass was everywhere, a desktop computer was destroyed and blood was splattered on the walls, equipment and carpet.

"We had a lot of cleaning up to do," Collins said."It was very scary but it could have been worse if there were customers."

Good TV as a Roadblock to Becoming Ungovernable, or Anything Else Really

Originally published on plainwordsbloomington.com, 9/16/2017

"Become ungovernable" is a slogan anarchists like to use these days. It sounds cool and fits the anarchist aesthetic of revolt and spectacular conflict. It doesn't immediately mean much, but that's the beauty of it, the meaning shifts with each person and the specificities of their lives. With no revolution and lots of environmental catastrophe, state violence, and "active shooter situations" on the horizon, rather than despairing at our no-future future, it instead contains a path forward: to refuse submission to law, duty, and passivity in daily life.

But "become" ungovernable? As in, transform your life into one of ungovernability? This is where things get tricky. Capitalism and the technology developed through it have created conditions that hinder the creation of long-term life habits outside those of passivity and consumption. The toys of information technology are small but contain terabytes of distraction, ever pulling their users' attention towards them, like a tiny black hole's massive gravitational well. Bursts of energy and spectacular moments responding to a crisis generated by capitalism may draw people away from the daily grind for days, weeks, or even months, but the system has tools to pull people back in. That's a lot to dissect here, but this essay is going to stick to one element of it: good TV.

We are living in the era of "good TV" or the "golden era of TV," a relatively new phenomenon where TV series are being praised as intelligent, gripping, and even works of art. Until the last decade, "the idiot box" has had somewhat of a bad reputation. While most of the

arrest anyone it will be sufficient to search the internet to find succulent photographic material for their files, and if unfortunately they later arrest one of these people, it will be enough to check their cell phone (which they usually do when they lock you up in a cell and your telephone and documents remain in their hands) to find evidence of so and so's presence at those demonstrations, which only they and their comrades should have known, evidence that can be used during the trial. On the other hand, the mainstream media also get busy, with activists who serve them up with perfect photographs for sensational items of news on a silver plate.

I don't understand either the necessity or purpose of photographs like these.

What do these people want? A beautiful memento to show to their grandchildren? I don't want to deny the importance of documenting this kind of event also with photographic and audio-visual material; because often, if it wasn't for people passionate about videos, who gather and record all this, or as part of press collectives close to social movements or alone, we wouldn't know many of the things that happen. But it is important to maintain a culture of safety and above all to bear in mind that when you photograph yourself you are not only exposing yourself only but also the people around you or other comrades who at that moment are taking part in the events, and maybe don't want to be part of your irresponsible fetishism.

It's important to reflect on this, and not fall into an ambiguous or passive position of the sort 'everyone does what they like'. Some comrades take their anonymity very seriously, as they are persecuted and controlled, while others play at revolution between flashes and 'selfies'. Everything is heroism and publicity, aesthetics, top-models of the revolt, until the police come to your door and then with all your might you wish you had never taken that damned photo...

For a culture of safety and responsibility. Against the fetishism of images and hoodies.

Fuck Your Selfie: On the Spectacle of Resistance from Bloomington to Hamburg

Published in Plain Words #4, Winter 2017/2018

The following article was written in the wake of the recent riots in Hamburg against the G20. I'm republishing it with additional commentary because I feel it raises questions that transcend its specific context, questions essential to developing a culture of direct action in Bloomington. To open further discussion, I'll discuss two points: anonymity and spectacularization.

It is dangerous to engage in openly confrontational or (potentially) illegal action with your face visible or only partially covered. The state, and non-state enemies like the Alt Right, can and will use any images obtained from demonstrations to doxx, investigate, or prosecute demonstrators after the fact. Even in the case of seemingly "legal" demonstrations (let's not forget that unpermitted marches in the streets of downtown are not exactly legal), there is a high risk of illegal action in self-defense (ex: defending your comrades against cars that attempt to run down protesters, as happens at virtually every march in town). By refusing to hide our identities, we are stating from the outset that: a) every demonstration we engage in plans to refrain from illegal action of any sort; and b) that we are willing to leave ourselves open to both state repression and doxxing by the Alt Right. Putting aside the purely theoretical/moralistic defenses and critiques of mask-wearing or anonymity, this is simply not a strong strategic position from which to struggle, as it sacrifices both offensive possibilities and defensive safety. (For those seeking tips on safely protecting your identity at demonstrations or actions, see "How to Mask Up" in Plain Words #1 or online.)

The second critique – of turning all action into a spectacle for social media – is equally important. We so often find ourselves at demon-

strations surrounded by smartphones, with people taking selfies, sending texts, and livestreaming. Rather than pushing street actions in more creative or interesting directions, many of those who join us in the streets seem more concerned with documenting the image of the moment than actively participating in it. This results in a theater of resistance, in which the same old symbolic protests that make for good photo ops take priority over actions that may materially challenge or disrupt systems of power. Kept within the realm of social media and its corresponding ideology of pacified appearance, these demonstrations lose any possibility of putting us in touch with our collective ability to think, feel, and act. Trapped by the spectacle as in amber, we appear much but are little.

I'd like this to be a catalyst for conversation. What role, if any, should social media serve in our projects and initiatives? What role does documentation play in demonstrations? How do we protect ourselves from the surveillance state and Alt Right doxxing? How do we develop forms of communication that do not rely upon Facebook, Google, Instagram, Twitter, or possibly the internet at all? How do we develop a sense of collective responsibility for our safety, and generalize this knowledge so as to avoid the media-constructed division of "masked anarchists" and "good protesters?"

<div align="right">Margot V.</div>

Much remains to be said on this topic, so please feel free to email Plain Words at plainwordsbloomington[at]riseup[dot]net with your own thoughts.

'About the holidays in Hamburg': selfies, disorders and the tyranny of images

A month ago in Hamburg, Germany, a G20 summit was beginning, and with it mass protests against it, with demands for a more 'human' running of capitalism, up to the total destruction of the system in order to build a more ethical world where there would be a place and respect for all, where there would be no repression or hierarchy, where the earth would be protected and the insatiable thirst for empty benefits on which this society is based would disappear from our values and life goals. You can read about what happened during the 3 days of the summit and the demonstrations in many websites, including this blog [actforfree.nostate.net], if you look in the corresponding posts (starting from the month of July, for those who are curious); and as I couldn't go to Hamburg (and I'm sorry about that) for reasons that are irrelevant here, I won't comment on what happened or go into detail. The comrades who were there have talked about that and continue to do so.

I'd like to talk about a particular aspect of those demonstrations, which I think occurs too often in this kind of context, and which seems a serious problem, at least to me, and one that annoys me. It's what is known as the 'tyranny of the image'.

In today's society the spectacle covers everything. Our lives are being transformed into a compulsive traffic of images, stereotypes and identity markets that nourish profiles, a projection of ourselves, often altered, fictitious, but with which we somehow make up for our deficiencies and the aspects of our real lives that don't satisfy us (instead of trying to change them, we cover them with images), just as happens in most social networks. It doesn't matter who you are, but who you seem to be. People must see a photo on the screen that confirms everything, if it doesn't appear on TV or in the internet it doesn't exist. Just as the modern liberal nouveau riches take photos of their luxuries and share them on the internet so that the world can see their exclusive lifestyles and admire their 'success', in the anti-capitalistic, antiauthoritarian, revolutionary milieus, the same dictatorship of appearance is reproduced. In the midst of disorders many people want their own souvenir, their own photographs, like those who pay a few extra euros to get a picture of their adventure in a leisure park while whooshing on a roller coaster. Images circulate frantically on social networks, blogs, mass platforms of videos and photos, for the joy of the police and the media; and if they didn't