



# Rolling Thunder

ISSUE NUMBER EIGHT / FALL TWO-THOUSAND NINE / A SORTIE FROM THE CRIMETHINC, EX-WORKERS' COLLECTIVE

an anarchist journal of dangerous living

Capitalism presents us with two paths to defeat:  
Either to accommodate ourselves to every injustice,  
Taking each imposition lying down  
As if we could sleep on its bed of nails,  
Or else to throw ourselves away  
In useless gestures of isolated defiance—  
To take arms, as they say, against a sea of troubles,  
Not so much to end them  
As to be done with our miserable existence.

Hardest of all  
Is to fight where we stand, for ourselves and together  
As if we might even triumph:  
Not to die fighting, but to live that way—  
Courageously, graciously, joyously.

“One of the advantages of being disorderly is that  
one is constantly making exciting discoveries.”

—A.A. Milne

**LOVE  
LIKE  
YOU'VE  
NEVER  
LOST  
FIGHT  
LIKE  
WE'VE  
NEVER  
WON**

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Let every wasted seed of desire  
Become a beautiful flower  
Watch it unfold hour by hour  
And rise higher and higher  
We pay for our lives with our deaths  
Everything in between should be free

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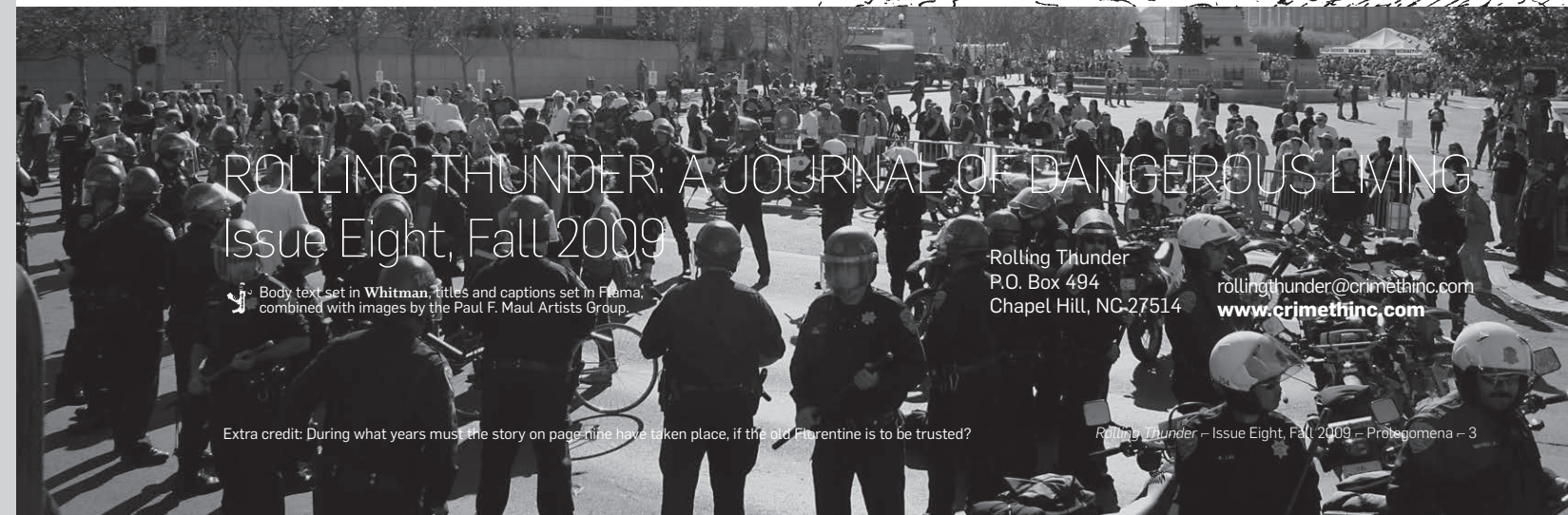
# Cautionary Tales

ANARCHISTS have a reputation for running the red lights of history—a practice that can get you where you're going faster, but can also get you killed. We're not sure we believe in history, let alone in red lights, but there's something to be said for looking both ways before you take the street.

Much of the material in this issue deals with the risks and pitfalls of violent confrontation with the state. This is not because we want to talk anyone out of confronting the state—on the contrary, the reason to talk about it is to make sure that it goes as well as possible. We address ourselves to the few who risk throwing their lives away gratuitously not because they are fools, but because in many respects they are the best of us. In a world even our oppressors admit is unjust, unsustainable, and headed for catastrophe, it makes sense to seek out the others who have already made up their minds to act regardless of the consequences—who have made their peace with the possibility of prison time as well as the inevitability of death, for whom the only remaining question is how to get the most out of their lives. If only there were more of them—if only our most pressing task were simply to restrain each other!

This is a magazine for those who have made up their minds to act, for whom all that remains is to work out the question of how. Revolutionary action can take many forms, from street fighting and sabotage to long-term infrastructural projects and accountability processes; there are as many forms of struggle as there are hierarchies to oppose. We hope to cover a wide range of options in these pages, to equip readers at different places in their lives and also to emphasize that no one approach can succeed in a vacuum.

This is also a magazine for people who haven't finished making up their minds, who are still trying to work out where they stand. Chances are you're getting one side of the story loud and clear from the ones who own practically everything. Perhaps you can find the other side of the story here.



ROLLING THUNDER: A JOURNAL OF DANGEROUS LIVING  
 Issue Eight, Fall 2009

Body text set in Whitman, titles and captions set in Flama, combined with images by the Paul F. Maul Artists Group.

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As Abraham Lincoln famously declared, “The sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon a definition of liberty.” That is to say—the lexicographer presides over a field of struggle no less significant than the workplace or the street. In that spirit, we are pleased to present the eighth installment in our glossary of terms.

# Glossary of Terms

## part the eighth

### Apparatchik ›

Professional revolutionaries are to revolution as professional wrestlers are to actual wrestling. To take the analogy further, episodes such as the Spanish Civil War show that, as in professional wrestling, the outcomes of struggles involving professional revolutionaries are typically fixed in advance.

### Applause ›

A time-honored means of politely silencing a person who has made sufficient demands upon the attention of the public; a white noise for dispelling an experience and cleansing the mental palate; a ritual offering an audience a sense of closure so they can forget what has been said and get on with their lives (see figure i.)

### Class ›

Class is not a static identity, but a relationship; it obscures the issue to say a person is of one class or another without reference to her immediate economic and social relations. A person—or, for that matter, a profession—may occupy one position in the class system, only to shift to

another. Class interests are not fixed or predictable, either; counting on one class of people, let alone one demographic, to lead the struggle against hierarchy is bound to disappoint (see *Revolutionary Subject*). Other factors, such as ethnicity, culture, and privilege, also determine a person’s standing in hierarchical society, and consequently how likely he is to associate his interests with the interests of those in power.

Ninety years after his betrayal and murder at the end of the Mexican Revolution, Emiliano Zapata returns to life somewhere north of the Rio Grande. Immediately, he sets out to raise another army and resume the struggle for agrarian reform. He accosts the first mestizo he sees, an affable grad student at the nearby university: “Discúlpeme, señor. ¿Dónde se encuentran los campesinos del pueblo?”

“Campesinos? I’m not sure we have any campesinos, exactly. Actually, come to think of it, you’re in luck this afternoon! It’s just a couple blocks away—here, I’ll show you.”

“Muchas gracias,” answers the revolutionary general, taking in the general import of the offer and touching the brim of his sombrero. The two stroll along the sidewalk, passing cell phone shops and haute cafés, to an open area where a vinyl banner proclaims FARMER’S MARKET.

Zapata surveys the scene. “No estoy seguro, amigo,” he whispers, fingering his trademark handlebar mustache, “Este mercado está lleno de puros gringos.” The student just shrugs, so Zapata strides around the closest table, past a hand-lettered sign reading “Heirloom Tomatoes—\$4.99/pound,” and addresses the proprietor.

“¡Compañero! ¿Estás cansado de vivir de rodillas? ¿Estás listo para luchar por tu tierra y tu libertad? ¡Juntémonos!”

“No, no, *not here!*” hisses the mortified farmer. “I told you, I’ll pick you up at the gas station on Monday morning!”

### Colonialism ›

In Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the innocent young protagonist, presented with a lovely painting of himself, wishes that it could be the painting that ages, rather than he. His wish is granted, and as he descends into debauchery, the visage in the painting grows more and more dreadful, while he continues to appear unblemished, above reproach.

Today, comparing Brussels to Kinshasa, one might discern a similar phenomenon, even though Belgian rule (see figure ii.) ended long ago—in 1960.

### Coke ›

A solid fuel made by heating coal in the absence of air; an illegal stimulant derived from coca leaves; a corporate beverage including coca ingredients.\* Comparably addictive and deleterious in all three instances.

### Couple ›

A safe, non-reactive romantic configuration. Chlorine is a poison gas and sodium an explosive metal, but together they make table salt. In monogamous circles, singles are seen as unpredictable elements: lacking something, they may take dangerous steps to get it. Even the government appears to regard singles as a potential liability—there are financial incentives for getting married. Couples, on the other hand, can be trusted to keep each other in check.

### Drapetomania ›

A mental illness causing African slaves to attempt to escape, described in 1851 by physician Samuel Cartwright in his report “Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race.” Not surprisingly, Cartwright prescribed whipping as the most beneficial treatment. One can’t help but wonder what perspective the passing of time may give on the disorders diagnosed in our own era.

### Faction ›

One might speculate that there is an inverse relationship between the momentum of a movement and the number of distinct

\* Provided by Stepan Company, the only corporation authorized to import coca into the US.

factions within it. In times of upheaval, radicals focus on what they are doing, arguing about tactics and strategy; in such periods, sweeping tides often wash people from one camp into another, blurring boundaries and shifting stances. On the other hand, when there is little going on, all the exciting verbs of resistance stabilize into nouns; then, radicals differentiate themselves by adopting static ideological positions. Such positions serve as a sort of compensation: unable to live out the resistance they desire, frustrated revolutionaries satisfy themselves by constructing speculative taxonomies of utopia (see *Hypertrophy*). Yet this tends to put off the general public, who know that the vast possibilities of life cannot be encapsulated in mere isms.

Such factionalism was famously satirized in the March 1913 issue of *The Masses*:

“A Syndicalist, you know, is a Possibilist Anarchist, just as a Socialist is a Possibilist Utopist, but a Syndicalist is an Antistatist, whereas a Socialist is a Statist and a Political Actionist, only an Antimilitarist and Pacifist. I’m a Collectivist Revisionist myself. Now, it’s a funny thing, but my brother claims to be a Hervéist, and says he’s a Possibilist Sabotist, but at the same time an Extremist Communist and a Political Actionist... I don’t think that’s a possible thing, do you?”

“I thought he was a Chiroprapist,” I said.

Indeed, whatever he may have fancied himself, we fear the fellow in question was simply a chiroprapist with a big vocabulary.

### Forgiveness ›

Once one is no longer immediately threatened by one’s enemies,

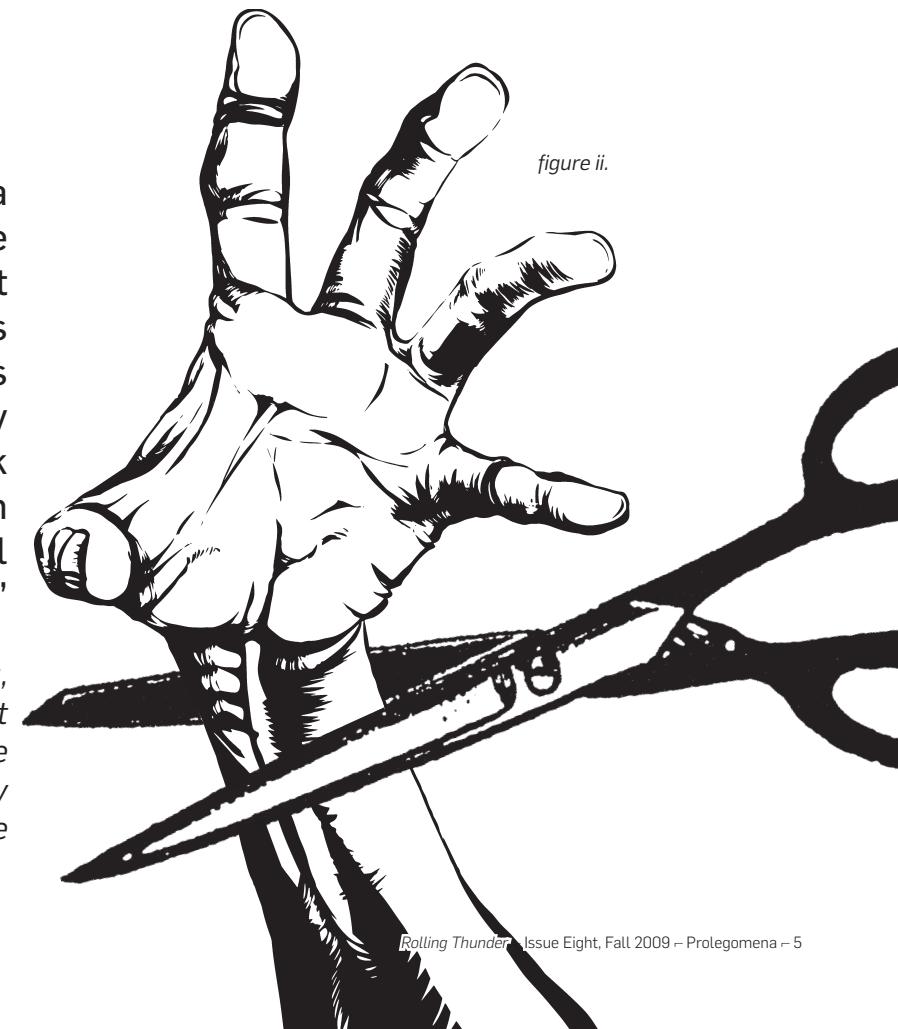
figure i.



figure ii.

“I have just returned from a journey inland to the village of Insongo Mboyo. The abject misery and utter abandon is positively indescribable. I was so moved, Your Excellency, by the people’s stories that I took the liberty of promising them that in future you will only kill them for crimes they commit.”

—Missionary John Harris of Baringa, writing to King Leopold’s chief agent in the Congo, on the business venture that cost the lives of approximately 10 million people



it is unbecoming to hate them, let alone slaughter them after the fashion of Joseph Stalin.

As soon as he was safely in Japan, Bakunin sent a letter to General Korsakov, the governor of Siberia, acknowledging that his escape was bound to be a setback to the governors’ career and emphasizing that he did not mean it as a personal slight. He apologetically explained that there was going to be a revolution, and it would be irresponsible for him to sit it out in exile in Siberia where he could not be of use.

#### **Handout** ›

Individual private property quixotically used to obscure the misfortunes caused by the institution of private property

#### **Home Demo** ›

In activist argot, a demonstration at the home of a corporate executive or otherwise offensive personage. In carpenters’ trade jargon, the act of demolishing everything in preparation for building anew. May the twain meet.

#### **Hypertrophy** ›

When an organ or a capability atrophies, it degenerates from lack of use: for example, those who rarely speak about their desires may lose the ability to frame questions about what they want, just as those who avoid conflict may not be able to defend themselves. When an organ or a capability hypertrophies, it grows out of proportion to other organs or capabilities, often at their expense; for example, those who speak more often than they act may find that their entire lives recede into theory, just as those who focus on confrontation at the expense of building ties may one day look around in desperate need of comrades only to discover that they are alone.

#### **Indian Giver** ›

Talk about adding insult to injury!

#### **Late Fee** ›

The penalty for refusing to pay in advance (see *Landlord, Interest-Free Loan*)

#### **Marketplace of Ideas** ›

Like human beings, ideas must compete on the uneven terrain of capitalism. Some are backed by academies and media moguls, dollars by the billion, entire military-industrial complexes; others are literally born in prison. Of course, despite this, the ones that rise to the top are bound to be the best—just as the human beings who rise to the top of the capitalist economy are superior to the rest.

Hence, in universities, it’s taken for granted that people develop ideas and then live according to them, rather than adopting the ones most convenient to their current lifestyle. If every idea gets a chance, at least in theory, that proves the merits of the ones that proliferate; it also justifies suppressing attempts to put unpopular ideas into practice (see *Freedom of Speech*)—didn’t they get the chance to compete in theory, like all the others? Meanwhile, ideas that are not concretely demonstrated are rejected as utopian naïveté.

#### **Mass Production** ›

A social disorder in which objects crowd their makers out of the world, famously depicted in the Disney remake of Goethe’s poem “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice”

#### **Megadeath** ›

A unit quantifying the casualties of nuclear war, signifying the deaths of one million people. RAND Corporation strategist Herman Kahn coined this term in 1953 and later utilized it in arguing that nuclear war, far from unthinkable, could be a realistic policy decision for the US government. By the 1980s, the idea that human beings might obliterate themselves by the hundred million had become so utterly mundane that “megadeath” came to be better known as the name of a heavy metal band.

#### **Megafauna** ›

Until ten thousand years ago, North and South America were populated by enormous mammals: saber-toothed cats, ankylosaurish glyptodonts, ground sloths twenty feet tall. The Mapinguari, a fearsome beast described in the folklore of various Amazonian indigenous peoples, is presumably one such creature, just as woolly mammoths linger on in a string game played by Inuit children. If even the progeny of the urban middle class tend to be fascinated by stories about dinosaurs and prehistoric mammals, perhaps this indicates that they sense the absence of the animals with whom millions of years of evolution prepared them to share the world.

#### **Microbes** ›

Our only remaining natural predators are the ones too small to exterminate (see *Megafauna*) ; in place of the risk of being eaten by cougars, we have the certainty of dying in hospital beds

#### **Mystic** ›

One who goes on and on about incommunicable experiences

#### **News** ›

Every night the overtaxed employees of news networks scramble to distill stories from the infinity of the day’s events. Such a task would be practically impossible were it not for their biases and the agendas of their masters. One must not look at corporate media reports as “the” events of the day, then, but as strategic maneuvers on the field of public attention (see *Propaganda*). Such broadcasts can still be quite informative, of course, provided one approaches them as machinations to be decoded: efforts to lay the groundwork for repression, attempts to discredit or distract, admissions of fear and confusion.

To name a single example, reports of a Swine Flu epidemic originating in Mexico dominated the media during the composition of this issue. Between 1918 and 1920, a bona fide flu epidemic killed well over 50 million people worldwide, and even today more than 30,000 die of flu-related complications every year in the US alone; Swine Flu, on the other hand, claimed only a couple *hundred* lives worldwide. Fears about looming pandemics notwithstanding, the Swine Flu coverage would be nigh incomprehensible were it not for the implication that immigration from Mexico poses threats that must be

controlled. More people die every year trying to cross from Mexico into the United States than Swine Flu has ever killed; as usual, capitalist treatments are more virulent than the ailments they purport to cure.

#### **Nom de Plume** ›

A nom de guerre for one who gambles on the pen rather than the sword (see *Pseudonym*)

#### **Overpopulation** ›

A crisis thought up by Western scientists and intellectuals, perhaps to distract from the more pressing matter that any one of them consumes more resources than a dozen people in so-called overpopulated nations (see *Mass Production*). One might hypothesize that if there is too many of anyone, it is first and foremost the former.

#### **Private** ›

Pertaining to or characterized by privation

#### **Pseudonym** ›

A prudent acknowledgment that the names signed to works have lives of their own apart from those of the authors. Fernando Pessoa, a Portuguese poet whose alter egotism knew no bounds, wrote as some seventy different personas, each characterized by a distinct personality, style, and relationship to the others—with the effect that when he signed his own name to a text, this too appeared as a persona, a mere artistic convention. This is less obvious in the case of authors who sign only with their own names, but no different. Just as once upon a time, while wizards slept through the witching hour of the night, their staffs would silently slip out to dance in the starlight, so the names and pseudonyms of authors run riot around the world, accruing reputations and associations without regard for the intentions of those who thought they possessed them.

#### **Rational** ›

Pertaining to or characterized by rationalization

#### **Rorschach Test** ›

Although astrology has been scientifically discredited, it persists because it offers a frame, however arbitrary, through which people can interpret the otherwise mute infinity of their lives. In this view, it is not the stars that tell us about ourselves, but our interpretations themselves.

One might say the same thing about other fields, even the “hard” sciences. If Herbert Spencer could see survival of the fittest as the most determinant factor in evolution while Peter Kropotkin interpreted the same raw material in terms of mutual aid, perhaps scientific theories tell as much about the class commitments of their authors as they do about the natural world.

#### **Salary** ›

The wages of sin is death; the wages of the bourgeois are—salaries (see *Wages*)

#### **Semantics** ›

The science of evading the point

#### **Theory and Practice** ›

In theory, they’re the same; in practice, they’re different

#### **Typeface** ›

An alphabet in a straitjacket

#### **Uncertainty** ›

When an equation balances, when an action is free of irony, when decisions and commitments are irreversible, wherever there is mastery, control, certainty, the revolutionary is doomed. In an utterly dominated world, in which causality itself appears to have been pressed into service, all foreseeable conclusions are dead ends; it is necessary above all to create situations that are unpredictable, so as to open up the horizons once again.

#### **Veterinary Medicine** ›

The vet wants to clean and fill my cat’s teeth. “What about a facelift?” Like everything else, cathood involves advantages and disadvantages. If the cat gets fillings, will he want mouthwash next? I worry that he will end up with a myspace profile and a nine-to-five job; his magazine subscriptions will pile up and he’ll have no time to read them. Thanks, doc, but my cat’s teeth are fine.

#### **Victim** ›

There is no more compelling justification for violence and oppression than the need to defend or avenge innocent victims—be they the flower of white womanhood, or the casualties of café bombings. All who see themselves as defenders of the defenseless would do well to interrogate their motivations in this light. This goes double for environmentalists and animal liberationists—the advantage of fighting on behalf of those who do not speak your language is that you can act in their name without ever having to consult them.

#### **Wage** ›

The exploited are paid minute by minute, so not a cent is wasted on them (see *Salary*); of course, the most exploited are rarely paid at all (see *Domestic Labor, Child Rearing, Community Service, Prison-Industrial Complex*)

#### **Wishful Thinking** ›

Better wishful action!

#### **Writer’s Block** ›

# Word of the Issue: Reformism

No one is more passionately invested in the system than those who believe it can be improved. For policemen and reactionaries it is a necessary evil, an awkward means to the desirable end of holding power; the oppressed may nihilistically accept it without approving or disapproving. Only the reformer considers it a good in itself—the essential premises must be beyond question, or else his whole project is a mistake. Thus many who set out to right wrongs end up fighting to impose them upon eternity: the judge who began her career as a conservationist sentences the anti-logging saboteur to years in prison.

Likewise, progressives who are not prepared to rule out the possibility that they too might need to use the apparatus of authority are often loath to push things too far, though they may attempt to seize the reins of resistance movements lest the latter get out of hand. For example, it is said that Gandhi (*see*

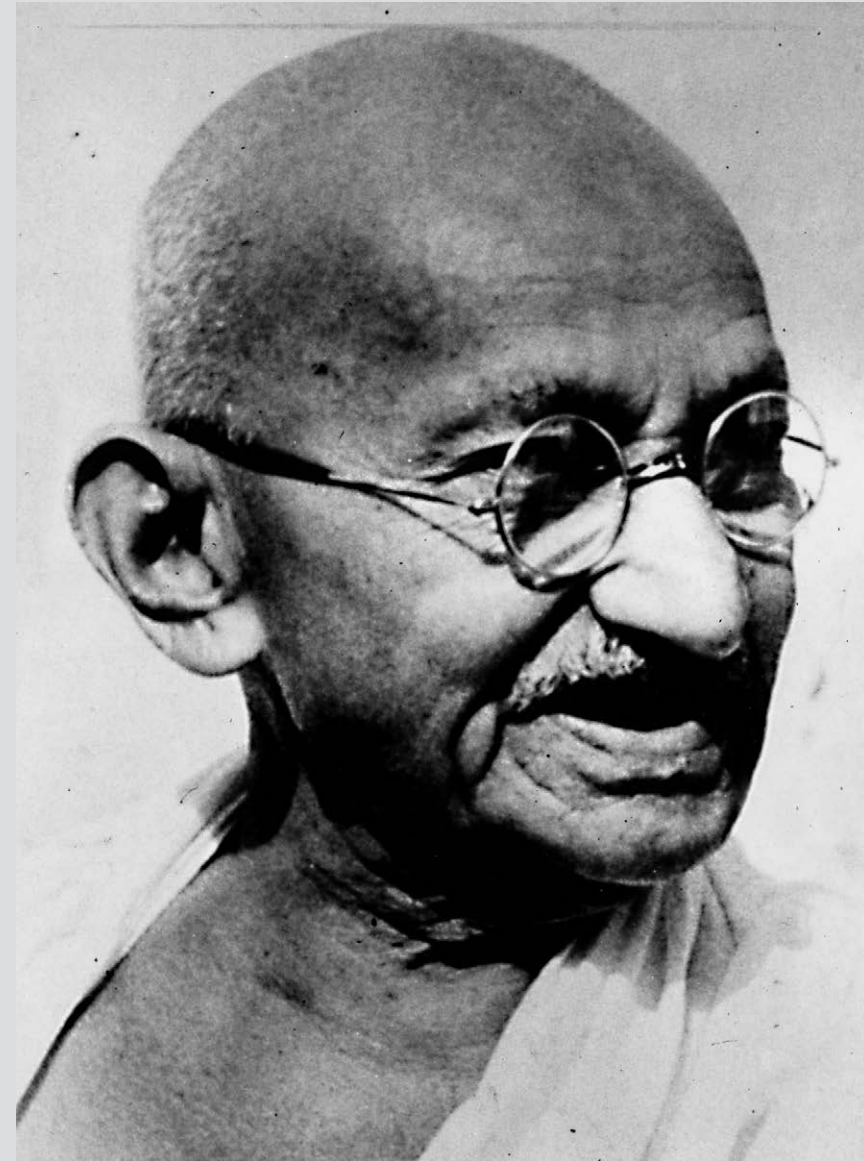
*figure iv.*) was always hesitant to lead the peasants of occupied India in refusing to pay rent or taxes, for once they had utilized this tactic against the British they might employ it against local landlords and governors as well. This may also explain the tameness of recent protests over stolen elections and wars founded on lies. By all means carry signs, *disapprove*—but leave the basic structures intact for when our turn comes around!

Others, the truly incorruptible, may indeed wish to end tyranny and abuse, but feel it to be impossible at the present time; consequently, they hit upon schemes more utopian than any revolutionism. Petroleum is spurring wars around the globe, so they demand car pool lanes; the polar ice caps are melting, and they aspire to cap emissions. All this, in the name of being *realistic!*

Yet it must be said that the reformist always knows what to do, for he has a simple goal in mind, while the radical who wishes to transform everything never knows where to start. Radicals always find themselves serving as foot soldiers in reformists' crusades; countless reforms, from women's suffrage to the eight hour workday, have been won with their blood. But let radicals stand half a chance of upending the whole business, and every *sincere* reformist will fall in with them; perhaps then we'll see some real "hope" and "change."

"A soldier who disobeys an order to fire breaks that oath which he has taken and renders himself guilty of criminal disobedience. I cannot ask officials and soldiers to disobey; for when I am in power I shall in all likelihood make use of the same officials and those same soldiers. If I taught them to disobey I should be afraid that they might do the same when I am in power."

—Mohandas Gandhi, to French journalist Charles Petrasch in *Le Monde*, February 20, 1932, defending his choice not to support the Garhwali soldiers who had refused to fire upon Muslim civilians in Peshawar



In the third ditch of the eighth circle of hell, Pope Boniface VIII was crammed into a burning pit on top of Pope Nicholas III. Both were stuck upside down, so that Boniface's feet protruded from the top of the hole, where flames licked them continuously. Nicholas, smothering at the bottom, kicked against the other's face, who in turn bit at him and kicked his own feet desperately in the blaze.

From time to time a reformer would come by with a representative of the management, decrying the harsh conditions and suggesting various improvements. "Is it really necessary that they be upside down?" he'd inquire, standing just out of range of the fumes. "What about a review board? Do they have any recourse if they feel mistreated?" His companion listened gravely, nodding from time to time but saying little. Occasionally the reformer grew imploring, wringing his hands: "These are *human beings*, man! Surely you can't be utterly heartless?"

One day, after years of this, horned custodians came and removed Nicholas and Boniface with pitchforks, then pushed them back into the hole right side up. The reformer was greatly pleased with this; he came around to congratulate Boniface,

extending his hand gingerly into the smoke. Of course, the mouth of the pit was still engulfed in flame, so the old pope could only choke and wail while Nicholas gnawed his toes. "We can't do anything about the fire," the reformer explained ruefully, "or else all the other simoniacs will want to know why you get special treatment." On later visits, the reformer commented on the hardships associated with the new arrangement, and eventually the two were returned to their original position.

The popes differed as to the reformer's role and influence. "He means well," Boniface opined between blows from Nicholas's feet; "He just can't do anything for us. His hands are tied by all the bureaucracy down here."

"You're wrong there," Nicholas shouted up in a muffled voice. "Think of Martin Luther, another reformer. Everyone will think he's going to bring about the end of Christianity, when in fact he'll buy it another five hundred years!" He howled in agony as Boniface sank his filthy teeth into his ankle. "If you ask me, he has an essential role, perhaps higher up than the demons who guard us. It's even possible *he's* the one supervising our punishment!"



# Naming the Journey

Ona Kalima Mirkinson

LAST DECEMBER, during my annual trip home to San Francisco, my mother and I drove up the coast to visit my godfather Kalima, who has been incarcerated for 40 years in the California prison system.

“This is good for you,” my mother said.

I heard something else. “Move through this. Face yourself. Remember who you are.” I heard, “It’s about time.”

I spent my childhood visiting many of my parents’ friends—underground radicals who had been captured by the FBI during the Reagan-era dragnets of the 1980s. They were Black Panthers, Puerto Rican Independentistas, and white anti-imperialists from the ’60s and ’70s. They faced long sentences for crossing real lines in an attempt to build revolutionary change in the United States. My parents refused to allow them to be forgotten, buried alive though they were in America’s vast network of high-security prisons. They wanted me to know them and them to know me.

Visiting these prisons was neither normal nor abnormal; it just was. People we loved were locked up, and they were constantly being moved from New York City to Kentucky to Florida to Connecticut to California. My sister and I watched our parents fill out paperwork. We took off our shoes, sometimes got interrogated, learned to be still. We felt our mother or father tense up and clench their jaw. We saw our godmothers in khaki jumpsuits, saw their eyes, flat at first then open. We saw their fight to be human under those lights, against those walls, in front of those guards.

Sometimes my sister and I spent the visits piecing together dance moves to perform for Silvia, for Marilyn, for Susan. Other times we let our parents talk and curled up at the adults’ feet, fed dollar bills into the change machines, or built stacks and structures—the great wall of China with coins. My father says he regrets taking me to the control unit in Lexington, where three women political prisoners were being held and tortured. I remember the place. I remember the lights and the white walls and the surveillance. I remember my Silvia holding me in her lap, smoking.

Under the guise of some analysis of child psychology, these visits starting early in my

life would likely be viewed as irresponsible, rippling out toward some inevitably negative developmental effect. I brazen out these would-be-theories with my own experience. These visits and these relationships enriched my life; they continue to deepen my understanding of what it means to oppose imperialism and of the definitions of solidarity, forgiveness, courage, and principle. These visits remind me what side I’m on and why. In a society that encourages us to look constantly inward—at our faults, our bodies, our individuality—these visits pull me out and re-root me, focusing on something bigger and more real.

Today these people are labeled criminals, terrorists. Their names and clemencies are exploited, becoming decontextualized missiles launched during presidential debates, public grist for the campaign mill. Or, they are at once romanticized and vilified. We called them Freedom Fighters. I call them family.

On the drive up to visit Kalima I tried to pinpoint the exact moment that I had begun to resist my identity as a daughter within a revolutionary community. How had I moved from being a politically radical kid to a prototypical white, entitled, druggie college student? I hadn’t told anyone at Sarah Lawrence about my family. Rebelling against my parents, I wanted to tune out. I wanted to get high and pretend I was rich too. I scoffed at white students searching to identify their own privilege. I refused to engage in political discourse.

I thought about what Kalima would say to me after ten years. “*Where the hell have you been?*” might be a good start. How could I tell him anything about myself, my life? My struggles regarding identity had shriveled into a dried, trivial knot. I was 28 years old, and I couldn’t see what was left.

Kalima rolled through the door in a wheelchair and shuffled closer with his feet; his head was covered in a white Kufi. His eyes, two beautiful discs, were dilated and shining. He let out a laugh from his chest and it came toward me, into my ears, through the curled condensed matter of my brain, to the receptors that controlled fear and heart and letting go.

“Ona Kalima,” he said, “My namesake, my goddaughter.”

I walked to him and didn’t have to stoop. Sitting in that chair, Kalima’s face came right to mine. I squeezed his fingers and looked to his thick, curled nails, then back up to his eyes. Glaucoma had clouded them blue.

“The last time I saw you, you were a little girl,” he said. “Well, here you are. Now tell me everything.”

I told Kalima about college, the rejection of political responsibilities, my family, and my former self. I told him about the horrible boyfriend I’d had, the resignation to a mainstream life. I told him how my mother had finally dragged me to the Philippines where she had been involved with Gabriela, the women’s movement there, for over 20 years.

Then I told Kalima about teaching in the public schools in New York City—about how young children of color were counted out from the first day of kindergarten. “Teaching forced me to develop my own political ideas. They became *my* convictions,” I told him. I enrolled as a full time student at one of the country’s reknowned progressive teacher training programs just as the United States officially attacked Iraq. I watched the bombs explode on television from Brooklyn and I lay down in the streets and got arrested for the first time in my life. I discovered my politics.

In graduate school, mostly upper to middle class white students and teachers touted a theory of progressive education that—from the very beginning, in *their* hands—seemed to apply to other upper and middle class white children. My first experience as a student teacher revealed the reality of what progressive education without a deep anti-racist foundation meant for students of color in the New York City public school system—it wasn’t for them. My master teacher told me about how she hated teaching up in Harlem, because the students had the attention span of gnats. I watched her humiliate a six-year-old African-American student over the course of the week, because she deemed her “resistant to learning, just like her older sister.” I watched that family pull their children out of the school and I heard my professor and cooperating teacher justify this decision with what would become a familiar adage, “it just wasn’t a good fit.”

I began to understand why my parents had enrolled us all in public schools and why they had been so adamant about our anti-racist education. I did not want to become another missionary-minded white girl looking to save the world through the classroom. I was forced to confront and assess my own conceptions of intelligence and education. My entire upbringing prepared me for the task of struggling to create a meaningful, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic educational theory. And I spoke up. I fought my way through that program and found myself.

My mother and father had been leaders in Prairie Fire, an anti-imperialist organization that developed from the formation of study groups around the Weather Underground’s famous communiqué of the same name. Part of their work had consisted of political prisoner solidarity, including with the Panthers in San Quentin. Through this work, my mother had met Kalima.

“I met your mother in San Quentin,” Kalima said. “You remember, Mirk?”

“Of course,” she said. “I was pregnant with Ona,” she nodded at me, “and living in Los Angeles. You were editing *Arm the Spirit* and organizing with the Panthers. After that visit, I decided that I would name my child for you.”

When it was time to go, I held my hand out to Kalima and he took it up. My entire fist fit in his palm. Goddamn this, I thought. He is 72 years old. Kalima held on to my fist and nodded.

My mother and I turned our backs and moved toward the gate we had come through. I didn’t want to leave Kalima there. I wanted him with us, back down the coast, free. I started to sob. I hadn’t felt it coming on. My mother, who had visited her friends in jail for nearly thirty years, put her arm over me and said, “I know.”

“I named you Ona for a little girl I met in Okinawa,” my mother said, breaking the silence on our drive home. “Her name was On, which meant light. I added an A to the end to make it mean woman, anticipating what you would become, and all of my hopes and desires for what that becoming would mean.”

But what about my middle name, given to me in honor of a man who had been locked up for most of his adult life? What had my mother wanted to give me along with it?

It was dark when we got back to my mother’s house. I walked down the plant-flanked hall to my brother’s room where I had been staying. In the bottommost corner of a corkboard, my brother had tacked an old Polaroid. My mother, in batiked blue cotton pants, smiled through thick glasses. I was right next to her, ten years old. Then there was Kalima towering over both of us, smiling. I thought about how in Arabic our shared name meant, “Witness and Speaker, Messenger of the Word.” I thought about him in his cell.

I could not imagine what Kalima’s life was like inside that prison. No amount of shifting my own experiences into some conjured idea of imprisonment held any weight. I thought back to my mother eyeing me in the visitor’s room and realized that it wasn’t the kind of look I had taken it for. She had been taking it all in—the daughter she had named, Kalima, herself, the world we all inhabited together, and how our individual lives differed. She had been considering what this meant.

I realized that this consideration was what my mother had wanted for all of her children: to come as close to understanding as we possibly could, what it meant to be white in a country driven by a violently racist history—and present.

So I considered, there on my brother’s bed, in the house on Fulton Street in San Francisco, what my mother and Kalima had given me: something deep, digging and dug, not bars or brick or wood, not any kind of structure over the bone, not sponge or sinew, but something *under* all of that, inside, near the lungs and heart, the home.





say you want an

# INSURRECTION

So do we—a total break with domination and hierarchy in all their forms, involving an armed uprising if need be. Until that's possible, we'll settle for recurring clashes in which to develop our skills, find comrades, and emphasize the gulf between ourselves and our oppressors.

But how do we bring about these confrontations? How do we ensure that they strengthen us more than our enemies? What pitfalls await us on this road? And what *else* do we have to do to make our efforts effective?

Over the past few years, a small current has gained visibility in US anarchist circles prioritizing the themes of insurrection and social conflict.

Like any ideological milieu, it's a lot more diverse than it appears from a distance. Some strains emphasize confrontation for its own sake, rather than as a means of achieving reforms; others frame revolt as a means of building the power of the oppressed outside static organizations. The common thread is that all are critical of formal institutions and focus on *attack* as their central theme.

How effective are these strategies at achieving their professed goals? To answer this question, we can't simply study insurrectionist theory in a vacuum; we have to look at the activities associated with it in the US context. In practice, it's not always easy to tell where strategic considerations leave off and matters of emotional and psychological temperament begin; in this case, both are relevant. Much of what we will discuss below is not so much a matter of what insurrectionists say but of what they do.

This subject is of particular interest to us because we are insurrectionists of a sort, whether or not we use that adjective. For well over a decade, we've focused on confrontational struggle based in individual initiative, informal networks, and ad hoc organization. Starting with shoplifting and vandalism and working up to streetfighting and clandestine direct action, we've learned the advantages and disadvantages of this approach on our own skin. One is always most critical of what is closest to one's heart: most eager to see it succeed, and most concerned about potential errors.

In some ways, this is a very old line of thinking—perhaps older than some of its adherents realize. One genealogy traces its origins to the dispute between Marx and Bakunin over the organizational forms of the Paris Commune. Some insurrectionists see precedents in the propaganda of the deed carried out by Nineteenth-century assassins and the illegalism associated with Jules Bonnot and his fellow bank robbers. We can trace the lineage of current insurrectionist theory from Errico Malatesta and Luigi Galleani through the works of Alfredo Bonanno, Jean Weir, and others who attempted to distill lessons from the social struggles of the 1960s and '70s.

At the same time, the latest wave of insurrectionist ideas is something of a new phenomenon in the US, where the high turnover rate in most anarchist communities often dooms them to relearn the same lessons over and over. One can hardly blame the new generations for this—if anything, the older generations are to blame for dropping out or refusing to communicate. Seasoned anarchists have to be especially cautious not to be dismissive and hostile about the enthusiasms of their young comrades. Ten years ago, we were the upstarts whose new energy and muddled ideas provoked all the testy veterans; we were able to learn from some of their criticisms, no thanks to them, but their disdain contributed to our defensiveness and their marginalization. If we accept roles on the opposite side of this dynamic now, we may doom those who come after us to repeat the same pattern.

In that spirit, let's start with the advantages of insurrection as a point of departure.



## STARTING FROM REVOLT . . .

“Attack is the refusal of mediation, pacification, sacrifice, accommodation, and compromise in struggle. It is through acting and learning to act, not propaganda, that we will open the path to insurrection, although analysis and discussion have a role in clarifying how to act. Waiting only teaches waiting; in acting one learns to act.”

—“Insurrectionary Anarchy: Organizing for Attack,” in *Do or Die* #10

Many organizations and movements, including some that are explicitly anarchist, promise to challenge the powers that be as soon as the groundwork has been prepared; but the world is always changing, and one may lay a foundation only to discover that the terrain has shifted. Once one gets used to waiting, even if it is only a matter of needing to prepare a little more, it is always easier to go on waiting. Revolution, like parenthood and everything else momentous in life, is something one can never be adequately prepared for.

Often, this preparation is framed in terms of the need to do more outreach and education. But

*The answer is always no.*



until there is a clash, until the lines are drawn, there is nothing to talk about. Most people tend to remain aloof from theoretical discussions, but when something is *happening*, when the stakes are high and they can see concrete differences between opposing sides, they will take a stand. In forcing such ruptures, one can compel those who hide authoritarian and capitalist allegiances to show their true colors, while offering everyone else the opportunity to form *other* allegiances.

Sometimes one has to aim beyond the target in order to strike it. Perhaps in the pacified US, some have to decry all compromise and deliberation to resist co-optation and paralysis. By interrupting the apparent consensus and social peace, confrontations make injustice visible and legitimize the rage others feel as well. When the fog of apparently universal submission is dispelled, those who wish to fight can finally find each other—and readiness to fight is a better basis for allegiance than merely *ideological* agreement.

The form of one's immediate actions should match one's long-term goals. Theoretical elaborations give rise to more of the same. Focusing on winning reforms tends to contribute to the development of reformist logic. If you want to destroy all forms of domination, it's best to confront them all from the outset.

## . . . AND SPREADING TO RESISTANCE

“Insurrectionary anarchism, therefore, places particular importance on the circulation and spread of action, not managed revolt, for no army or police force is able to control the generalised circulation of such autonomous activity... What the system is afraid of is not just these acts of sabotage themselves, but also them spreading socially.”  
—*ibid.*

Almost all strains of insurrectionist thought emphasize the importance of revolt spreading. This is one of the best standards, then, by which to evaluate insurrectionist efforts.

If both postponement and action tend to give rise to more of the same, then in acting oneself, one extends an invitation to others. This is an argument for carrying out actions that others can easily emulate, in hopes that they will catch on.

That's the idea, anyway. Sometimes, of course, anarchists carry out an action others could easily emulate, but no one does. What *other* factors enable an action to inspire more actions?

## EVEN IF THE TIME IS NOT RIPE

“We are insurrectionist anarchists . . . because rather than wait, we have decided to proceed to action, even if the time is not ripe.”

—Alfredo Bonanno,  
*The Insurrectional Project*

It is an article of faith among most insurrectionists that one should not wait for the appropriate material conditions, but should attack immediately. As a defense against the sort of postponement described above, this makes perfect sense; as a moral obligation or an axiom to govern every decision, it can be dangerously counterproductive.

Insurrectionist theory allows for this, but in practice insurrectionists do not always make the wisest choices. This is one of the cases in which it can be difficult to differentiate between insurrectionism as a program with concrete goals and insurrectionism as a matter of disposition. To react immediately against oppression without thought for the consequences is beautiful, and perhaps a way to recover one's humanity in a desensitizing world—but it is not always strategic.

This does not stop some from posing it as strategic. People who grew up in a society founded on Christian notions of moral law often argue for their own preferences as universally valid prescriptions. It's surprising how judgmental people who claim to reject morality can be!

So is insurrectionism a religion, or a strategy? If it is a religion, its precepts are timeless and unconditional: categorical imperatives. If, on the other hand, it is a strategy, developed under specific conditions, we should think hard about how those conditions might be different from ours, and how we should adjust it accordingly.

When Bonanno originally formulated his analysis in the 1970s, Italy was in the midst of an upheaval that threatened the entire social order; authoritarian and anti-authoritarian currents intermingled and contended in the course of struggling against the government. He was not making an argument for precipitating clashes where there were none so much as proposing an organizational strategy to ensure that ongoing clashes would promote liberty and autonomy. Contemporary US anarchists reading texts such as *Armed Joy* do not always understand this, interpreting them instead as a challenge to escalate tactics on a personal basis.

Of course, in a society based on competition and exploitation, there are always clashes, however subtle. One doesn't have to precipitate new ones; it is enough to fight where one stands. Unfortunately, the insurrectionist imagination is often limited by the most well-known models for attack. Imagine an insurrectionist who goes to work or school during the week but smashes bank windows on the weekends—hesitating to create a rupture in the fabric of her own daily life while willingly risking felonies to destroy things outside it. If such a lifestyle could make sense, it is an admission that one must still choose carefully when and how to “proceed to action.” We're not convinced it *does* make sense, but that doesn't mean the insurrectionist in

question would be better off immediately smashing the windows in her own workplace.

If “proceeding to action even if the time is not ripe” doesn't mean picking up the closest heavy object and attacking the nearest person in a uniform, what does it mean? How do we decide what *kinds* of action are most worthwhile?

ON MAYDAY, several dozen masked hoodlums rampage through an upscale shopping district in downtown San Francisco, smashing windows and setting off fireworks. Afterwards an anonymous statement on Indymedia reads, in part:

“De Beers, Prada, Coach, Tumi, Wells Fargo, Longchamp, Macy's, Armani, Crate and Barrel, Montblanc, Urban Outfitters and Guess were all targeted for all kinds of boring ass political shit, but primarily because fuck them. Exploitation is the norm of economic activity, not the exception. We see no need to reveal our laundry list of grievances and solidarity.”

Much has changed since the communiqué from the ACME collective following the black bloc at the WTO protests in Seattle. In 1999, the ACME statement was widely read and debated, influencing the politics of a new generation that saw more sense in opposing corporate power with crowbars than with signs or lockboxes. A decade later, black-clad anarchists are miraculously still finding ways to smash windows, despite ever-increasing surveillance and repression—but the communiqué, if not the action itself, seems to be directed only to those who understand and approve of the tactic.

Elsewhere in the US, local media outlets report that a smaller number of “suspected anarchists” have smashed the windows of four downtown businesses. Over the preceding years, such actions have occurred repeatedly in this city, causing much meriment among radicals and resulting in no serious convictions. But immediately afterwards, police arrest a young man, alleging that his car was seen leaving the scene of the vandalism. He is released without charges, but rumors circulate of investigations, grand juries, trouble on the horizon. Local anarchists are already facing felony charges from actions in other cities, and the strain is starting to take its toll.

## AGAINST SUBCULTURE

“Particularly to be avoided are the cultural and activist circles... All milieus are counter-revolutionary because they are only concerned with the preservation of their sad comfort.”

—*The Coming Insurrection*

Historically, insurrectionist anarchism has centered around a rejection of static organizational structures. In the US, where long-standing anarchist organizations are not particularly common or powerful, it has recently come to be framed more as a reaction against *cultural* factors. Some insurrectionists conceptualize their position as a break with what they consider to be hopelessly passive and assimilated anarchist subcultures—bicycling as an end in itself, potlucks that never end in streetfighting, and so on. Some take this further, dismissing

the very idea that subculture could have any radical potential.

What does it mean to dismiss subculture? Culture is as ubiquitous among human beings as language; you can challenge it, you can even destroy it, but you generate new culture in the process. In general, this dismissal does not seem to proceed from some mystical doctrine that we could escape culture per se, the way that John Zerzan preached a primitivist utopia without language, but rather from a reaction to the subcultural identifications of the preceding generation of anarchists. As explored in the previous issue of this magazine, by the

points of reference in the course of attempting to put the idea into practice. Culture is simply a matter of points of reference, and the more obscure they are, the more “subcultural”—in this regard, ideological insurrectionism is a significantly *more* subcultural current than, say, the vegan straightedge scene.

Actual insurrections can transcend subcultural boundaries in ways that theories do not, of course; likewise, cross-cultural spaces can sometimes create fertile ground for uprisings. There’s a lot to be said for forging bonds between different communities in struggle, demonstrating that resistance is not the sole province of any one demographic.\* Were it not for the homogeneity of most insurrectionist circles, it would be possible to read this criticism of subculture as an argument for cross-cultural spaces, rather than as an underhanded way to promote yet another new subculture. There is no such thing as a zone free of cultural identifiers—efforts to stay free of cultural limitations must begin by integrating multiple cultural contexts rather than pretending to be outside all of them.

Perhaps, like the authors of the aforementioned *Days of War*, some people have to espouse a grandiose opposition to culture itself just to feel entitled to get something new off the ground. But eventually, when that new something has gotten going and become subculturally identified, they will need a critique that acknowledges

this—otherwise, they are bound to be quarantined and neutralized like their predecessors. Those who think they can discount culture entirely are trying to throw out the baby with the bathwater—an especially difficult project when *you’re* the baby.

This dispute about culture parallels the much older dispute between insurrectionists and anarchists who believe in building long-term institutions. The latter argue that insurrectionist criticism of institutions is founded on the notion that formal structures are inescapably hierarchical, but counter that this analysis provides insurrectionists with no tools to challenge the subtle hierarchies that develop in informal networks. Decrying authoritarian tendencies and cultural

\* See “Dropping Out” in *Rolling Thunder* #2 for more on this.

complacency in competing ideological milieus is no proof against falling prey to them oneself.

So, are all subcultures “only concerned with the preservation of their sad comfort”? Perhaps this is simply a matter of semantics, of calling social circles that are only concerned with preserving their comfort “milieus.” Is there a positive role that subculture could play in fomenting insurrections?

Let’s return to the question of how action proliferates. As pointed out above, simply doing things that “anyone else can do” is not itself enough to spread resistance. The premise of this approach is that others who share similar frustrations will see the actions and understand the strategy embodied in them, and that this alone will move them to action. But this takes for granted that the actions will be visible and the strategy comprehensible across cultural lines; it also disregards the ways that desire is determined by culture as well as class.

Many of the assassins who killed presidents and tsars over a century ago passionately believed that these actions would inspire the oppressed to rise up. Clandestine “armed struggle” groups have sometimes used the same logic. One common insurrectionist critique of these groups is that their actions are too specialized; but this does not explain why more easily reproducible tactics often fail to catch on. Another critique of armed groups is that they separate themselves from others so energy and ideas cease to flow; this seems more to the point. One could argue that the circulation of insurgent desires and values—essentially a cultural phenomenon—is as indispensable for the proliferation of revolt as gasoline is to a Molotov cocktail.

For example, over the past few years, North American anarchists have carried out clandestine attacks on ATMs, bank windows, and other targets; this is currently one of the best-known templates for insurrectionist activity. Such nighttime attacks don’t seem to have spread widely outside the anarchist subculture in most of the cities in which they have occurred, but they *have* given rise to copycat actions in other *anarchist* communities. This indicates the importance of a common cultural context—shared values, points of reference, and venues for communication. Acting sincerely can be contagious, but our actions are always modeled on the examples we know and driven by the values fostered by our communities.

People seem to be most likely to join revolts when doing so can help them meet their needs. But needs themselves are socially produced: nobody needed cell phones to maintain contact with their friends until a decade ago, for example, and countless indigenous communities chose resistance over all sorts of amenities until their lifeways were destroyed. The existing power structure is generally at least as capable as radicals are of offering opportunities to meet the needs it produces, whether through individual competition or institutional reforms. A real counterculture fosters needs that capitalism and democracy can never accommodate, such as the desire for human dignity.

Efforts to spread resistance must take this into account. Over the past half century, insurrectionists overseas have frequently been subculturally identified—for example, the Italian insurrectionist milieu of the 1980s and ’90s was based in a

network of autonomous social centers. In criticizing long-term infrastructural projects and countercultural milieus, some US insurrectionists reveal that they are unaware of the context behind the overseas rioting that inspires them.

In response to the extravagant notion that we should jettison culture as a site for mobilizing resistance, we counterpose the project of building a *culture of resistance*, a space in which people of multiple cultural backgrounds can develop common reference points in order to attack hierarchy in all its forms.

## AGAINST ANARCHIST IDENTITY

A variant on the rejection of subculture is the rejection of anarchism as an identity. This calls to mind another old question: should we organize specifically as anarchists, or are other approaches more likely to produce anarchy?

There is a lot to be said for resisting quarantine in closed circuits of the converted. Picture a molecule that bonds with other molecules by sharing electrons with them. If it has loose electrons, it is prone to creating new connections or disruptions; on the other hand, if all of its electrons are in stable bonds, it is unlikely to introduce new dynamics to the molecules around it. Similarly, anarchists who seclude themselves in the company of committed ideologues tend to become static and predictable, while those who limit their participation in explicitly anarchist circles to stay open to other relationships can sometimes catalyze waves of transformation.

At the same time, organizing on the basis of a social rather than ideological position—for example, as queer youth, as a neighborhood, or as working class people who like to break things—can be extremely challenging. Anyone who has worked in coalitions knows how hard it can be to accomplish anything in the face of massive internal differences in goals and values. This is true even without centralized decision-making—think of the instances when presumed comrades have pulled newspaper boxes back onto the sidewalk during street confrontations. Perhaps the best approach is to organize at some intersection of social position and ideology: for example, a gang who grew up together discovers anticapitalist resistance, and sets out to introduce the possibility to other gangs.

Often the ones at the forefront of clashes with the authorities are not self-identifying anarchists at all, while anarchists with carefully articulated political positions avoid conflict or even sabotage resistance. People adopt political stances for all sorts of reasons, and these stances frequently have nothing to do with how they actually conduct themselves. This phenomenon corroborates insurrectionist skepticism about the importance of ideological positions, but it also means that those who identify as insurrectionists are no more likely to practice what they preach than anyone else.

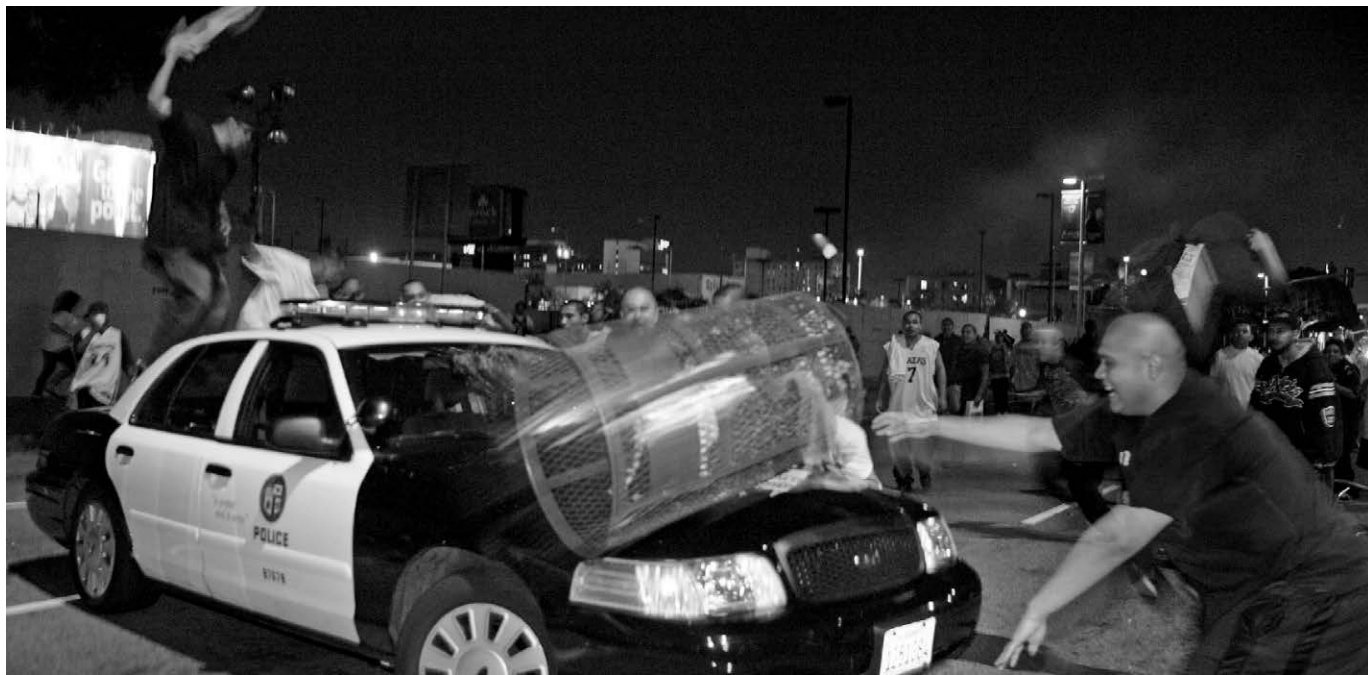
Despite the fact that avowed anarchism does not always correlate with active resistance, there’s no reason to believe struggles that are not identified as anarchist are any *more* likely to produce anarchic situations or relationships. If you’re opposed to all forms of oppression, you may as well say so from the outset, lest you leave an opening for authoritarians to hijack your efforts.



Every action that dispels the illusions of order and resignation is a spell cast for more of the same.

time today’s young anarchists came of age, the punk scene that sired so many of their predecessors had come to be dominated by reactionary elements. Faced with this, rejecting *one* subculture was not enough—why not reject subculture *itself*?

Young insurrectionists are not the first to attempt this: one can find similar rhetoric in books like *Days of War*, *Nights of Love*. Before an idea wins many proponents, it’s easy to declare that it transcends subculture, as it is not incarnated in any particular social context. Once it gains adherents, however, things get more complicated. In all likelihood, the proponents will share subcultural reference points—how else would they have encountered the idea?—and failing this, they are bound to create common



Fans of the LA Lakers celebrate a sports victory.

## NOT JUST INSURRECTION, BUT ANARCHIST INSURRECTION

“‘Armed struggle’ is a strategy that could be put at the service of any project.”

-At *Daggers Drawn*

In the US, where militant political conflict is rare, it’s tempting to assume that clashes with authority are inherently antiauthoritarian. Insurrectionist websites and magazines appropriate images from a wide variety of contexts; some hail all sorts of antisocial crime as manifestations of social war, without knowing the motivations of the protagonists.\*

But rebellion and street violence are not necessarily anarchist. Resistance to oppressors is praiseworthy in itself, but much resistance takes place in support of other authoritarian powers. This is all too familiar in other parts of the world, where illegal violence on the part of fascists, paramilitaries, gangs, drug cartels, mafias, and authoritarian revolutionary movements is an essential aspect of domination. Aspiring authoritarians often take the lead in attacking reigning authorities precisely in order to absorb and co-opt popular unrest. Rioting

\* Assuming common cause with others of unknown political commitments on the basis of their apparently subversive actions is risky on multiple levels. The Situationists used the Watts riots to argue that their ideas were “already in everyone’s heads”; at best, that was a stretch, and at worst a way to claim the right to speak for those who could only speak on their own behalf through action. We can celebrate rebellious actions from outside our communities, but meaningful alliances demand actual relationships.

per se is not always liberating—Kristallnacht was a riot too. Even if some participants have the purest intentions, insurrections can go any number of directions: remember what happened to the Russians following the insurrection of 1917, or the Iranians following the insurrection of 1978-79.

So anarchists must not only provoke confrontations, but also ensure that they contribute to a more horizontal and decentralized distribution of power. In this regard, glorifications of the superficial details of militant confrontation—black masks, Molotov cocktails, and so on—are largely beside the point, if not actively distracting. The flow of initiative among the rebels, the ways decisions are made and skills are shared, the bonds that develop between comrades: these are much more important. Likewise, one must strategize as to how social uprisings will contribute to long-term revolutionary momentum rather than simply enabling reactionary forces to consolidate power.

## AGAINST ACTIVISM

A great deal has been said against activism: it is a specialized role that frames social change as the domain of experts; it is predicated on dialogue with the powers that be; it promotes inauthenticity and limits the scope of change. A lot of this is mere semantics—many people who do not deserve such accusations see themselves as activists. Some of it is projected class resentment: those who have time to mess around in everyone else’s business, “changing the world” rather than solving the problems of

# UNLESS IT PROVIDES FOR THE PRACTICAL NEEDS OF THE PARTICIPANTS, INSURRECTIONISM IS JUST AN EXPENSIVE HOBBY: ACTIVISM WITH FELONY CHARGES AND A SMALLER BASE OF SUPPORT.

individualized survival, must have privileged access to resources, as the right wing has always alleged.

It’s not easy to distill the kernel of truth in this flood of vitriol, but one thing is certain: activism that does not explicitly challenge hierarchy fortifies it. Reformist struggles can win adjustments in the details of oppression, but they ultimately help the state maintain its legitimacy in the public eye—not only by giving it the chance to redress grievances, but by reinforcing the notion that the power to effect meaningful change lies in the hands of the authorities. It is better to struggle in such a way that people develop an awareness of their own capabilities outside all petitioning and bureaucracy. Reformist activism also tends to build up internal hierarchies: as if by chance, the best negotiators and media liaisons often turn out to be college-educated white people with good skin and conciliatory tones. Of course, certain insurrectionist practices may simply build up hierarchies according to different criteria.

## SUSTAINING CONFRONTATIONS

The other lesson we can derive from a close study of activism is the importance of not overextending. Some activities produce more energy and resources than they consume; others cost more than they produce. Many activist projects ultimately founder because they fail to recoup the resources invested in them: one cannot carry on an exhausting undertaking indefinitely without deriving the wherewithal for it from somewhere. Of course, these resources can take a wide variety of forms: a Books to Prisoners group may consume a great deal of labor hours, but persist so long as the social connections it provides are rewarding; traveling around the country to participate in riots may be expensive in terms of gas and bail money, but if it is exciting and empowering enough, the participants will come up with the cash somehow. On the other hand, if a million dollars must be raised for court costs following every demonstration, this may prove prohibitive, unless each demonstration wins new allies with deep pockets.

Activities that cost more resources than they produce are not necessarily bad, but you have to strategize accordingly if you wish to participate in them. Ironically, despite insurrectionist hostility to activism, strategies that focus on confrontation are often at least as costly in this regard as traditional activist organizing. In dismissing goal-oriented struggles in favor of confrontation for its own sake, some US insurrectionists set themselves up for burnout. Symbolic clashes can help develop the capacity to fight for more concrete objectives, but not if they are so costly that they drain their social base out of existence.

Breaking windows is a dead end unless it helps to generate a widespread social movement†—or at least provides access to enough of the commodities behind the windows to fund the vandals’ eventual court cases.

The most sustainable forms of confrontation seize resources which can then be employed in further struggle. The classic example of this is the European squatting movement of thirty years ago, in which the occupied buildings were used as staging areas for further social struggles. This approach supersedes both self-defeating reformist activism and self-destructive insurrectionist dogma. Unless it provides for the practical needs of the participants, insurrectionism is just an expensive hobby: activism with felony charges and a smaller base of support. Insurrectionists of other eras have recognized this and robbed banks rather than simply smashing their windows.

Revenge is itself a need, but it is hardly the *only* need. People who face enough challenges just getting by will not be much more attracted to gratuitous vandalism than they are to activism that has nothing to do with their daily lives; on the other hand, tactics that enable them to sustain themselves may be more appealing. Insurrectionists who are frustrated with the lifestyle-oriented anarchism of those they perceive as “subcultural” actually stand to learn a lot from them. The latter remain involved in their version of anarchist community not because of moral or ideological imperatives, but because it sustains them. For insurrection to spread, it must do the same.

## MAKING A VIRTUE OF REPRESSION

In the US, militant struggle means taking on the most powerful state in the history of the world. It demands a strategy that takes into account the repression, legal support, and prison sentences that will inevitably result, and somehow turns them to our advantage. The absence of such a strategy is perhaps the most significant structural flaw in insurrectionist projects today. We have to engage with the issue of repression beyond the usual security culture, limited prisoner support, occasional solidarity actions, and wishful thinking. “Don’t get caught” isn’t a plan, it’s a prayer.

It’s embarrassing to acknowledge, but the activists who practiced non-violent civil disobedience in the US during the 1980s and ’90s were miles ahead in this regard, integrating

† “It is better to loot than to shoplift, to ambush than to snipe, to walk out than to phone in a bomb threat, to strike than to call in sick, to riot than to vandalize... Increasingly collective and coordinated acts against this world of coercion and isolation aren’t solely a matter of effectivity, but equally a matter of sociality—of community and fun.” -*War on Misery* #3

their arrests, court cases, and prison sentences into their campaigns as strategic moves. Their approach was predicated on privilege and glorified victimhood in the most noxious ways, but perhaps we can still learn something from them in order to make the most of repression and ongoing prisoner support in our own struggle.

The current case of the RNC 8, in which anarchists have been targeted with conspiracy charges for organizing actions against the 2008 Republican National Convention, may offer one starting point. The defendants have used their case to delegitimize the government and win allies in other communities; as of this writing, they seem to have the prosecutors on the defensive, as the terrorism charges against them have just been dropped and the case is widely acknowledged to be an embarrassment. If they had simply been anonymous vandals, rather than highly visible organizers, this might not have been possible.

### IS IT SAFER IN THE SHADOWS, OR IN THE SPOTLIGHT?

“No leaders to round up, no hierarchical organisation to wield power over us in our name, no membership lists to investigate, no manifestos to denounce, no mediators to meet (and then join) the power-holding elite. No public claims are made, no symbolic lines are drawn, no press statements to be deliberately misconstrued and trivialised by journalists. No platforms or programmes which the intellectuals can hijack as their exclusive property, no flag or banner to which to pledge a crass and sectarian allegiance.”

—“Insurrectionary Anarchy: Organizing for Attack”

No membership, no statements, no public face. This might make it harder for the state to single out enemies, but it also sounds a little like the invisibility and isolation that make it so hard for comrades to find each other and get started.

In the current atmosphere of repression, the insurrectionist approach is often framed as a question of security: with infiltrators everywhere and the legal repercussions of resistance intensifying, it is simply too dangerous to engage in visible organizing. However, it's far from certain that less visibility is any more likely to make anarchists safer or more effective.

It often happens that in attempting to correct old errors, people commit new ones; forsaking problematic strategies, they learn the hard way what advantages led their predecessors to adopt them in the first place. So it is that anarchists, who only came into the public eye a decade ago, are now fantasizing about returning to the shadows.

The government would like nothing better than for anarchists to retreat to private scenes and cliques, leaving few opportunities for unconnected individuals to get involved. It is to the authorities' advantage for small numbers of radicals to escalate to more militant tactics while losing connection to a broader social base; this makes direct action less likely to spread, while rendering it easier to justify repression. It might be harder to track down clandestine groups at first, but recent

FBI investigations, such as Operation Backfire,\* show that closed, high-security structures are not impenetrable. One can also look at the case of the Tarnac Nine, French radicals who are currently being charged with terrorist conspiracy; they are also alleged to be involved in authoring the book *The Coming Insurrection*, which champions “zones of opacity” impenetrable to the authorities. In fact, such zones do not result only from proper control of information, but also from the appearance of so many insurgent groups that the authorities cannot keep up with all of them at once.

If this is true, the most pressing task for anarchists is not to carry out secretive military strikes but to spread skills and practices. There is no substitute for participatory activities that offer points of entry for new people and opportunities for existing groups to connect. Likewise, refusing to interact with the public effectively means leaving it to the corporate media to tell one's story—or else suppress it. Just as insurrectionists must tie the escalation of conflict to the pace at which it spreads so as not to overextend themselves, they must also balance the practical advantages of secrecy against the necessity of circulating new formats and rebellious energy.

This also has a bearing on whether it is safer and more strategic for anarchists to act alone with the element of surprise, outside any conventional “political” framework, or to participate in broader campaigns and mobilizations. In the latter context, the state is often more prepared and vigilant, rendering successful attacks more difficult from a purely military point of view; on the other hand, arrestees are more likely to receive support from outside the immediate anarchist community, and their actions may be more visible and comprehensible to others.

All this is not to say that anarchist organizing should be visible in the same way conventional political campaigns are. The point is to ensure that anarchist *models* of resistance are accessible to everyone, not to promote the popularity of a platform or spokesperson or party. The chief dangers of visibility are not posed by the police, after all, but by the possibility of being absorbed into the spectacle, performing for the cameras until one comes to mistake representations for reality.

THE ECONOMY has just crashed, and the anarchists who have spent the preceding half decade building up various anticapitalist infrastructures are eager to assert themselves and their alternative in the public eye. Some friends have been tossing around the idea of a street party, and two dozen people meet to discuss it. The street party becomes A Funeral for Capitalism, intended to initiate a public dialogue on how to mobilize a grass-roots response to the crisis. Handbills and stickers appear everywhere; in planning meetings, the organizers picture themselves at the helm of a crowd of hundreds, tying together public merriment and resource distribution in a two-pronged assault.

But the night of the street party is unseasonably cold, and only fifty diehards show up, finding themselves nearly the only

\* See “Green Scared?” in *Rolling Thunder* #5. It's also worth noting that the only Operation Backfire defendants who conducted themselves honorably were the ones who were still involved in activist organizing or subcultural communities.



pedestrians on the street. They barely make it one block before a lone police officer pulls over and charges into the crowd, seizing someone at random in hopes of setting an example to scare the others onto the sidewalk. To his surprise, he meets a rain of blows. These are not the hesitant activists of the previous generation, but a fiercer new breed.

His intended victim escapes; he snatches another, but the same struggle ensues. Backup has arrived by now, and eventually the police manage to capture a single partygoer.

The rest regroup at a nearby café. Almost everyone who was in the street is present; there is a new sense of common cause. Within a couple hours, they have raised enough money to bond the arrestee out of jail; a couple weeks later, a benefit show featuring a puppet show and a bake sale draws more participants than the street party did and raises all the funds necessary for legal fees.

Eventually the defendant negotiates a favorable plea bargain. Just as the bond money comes back, a comrade in another community is arrested on conspiracy charges, and the idea arises to donate the money to his support fund: so in

coming into conflict with the authorities, the community has actually become more capable of extending solidarity to other communities.

Yet amidst all the hubbub, everyone has forgotten about engaging with the public at large, as the issue shifted imperceptibly from the economic crisis to the injustice of police repression. Bonds are tighter among the radicals, thanks to puppetry and baking no less than street bravado, but no tighter with the rest of the city.

### THE FORCE OF INSURRECTION

“The force of an insurrection is social, not military. Generalised rebellion is not measured by the armed clash but by the extent to which the economy is paralysed, the places of production and distribution taken over, the free giving that burns all calculation...”

—*At Daggers Drawn*

The force of an insurrection is social, not military. The power of *anarchist* insurrection is determined not by military confrontations, but by how pervasive resistance is, how widely

*No less dangerous than the police is the tendency to internalize the logic of spectacle, performing for the cameras until one comes to mistake representations for reality.*

# THE AUTHORITIES UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES TO BE ENGAGED IN SOCIAL WAR, PERHAPS MORE CLEARLY THAN MOST INSURRECTIONISTS DO. THEY DO NOT SIMPLY ATTACK OUR BODIES WITH BATONS, PEPPER SPRAY, AND IMPRISONMENT; THEY ALSO SET OUT TO ATTACK OUR RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS.

distributed tactics and resources are, how durable and extensive and genuinely liberating the relationships are that underpin the whole endeavor. If our goal is not simply to persuade others—or, let's be honest, *ourselves*—of our defiance, then we have to prioritize forms of resistance that are either highly contagious or at least sustainable. Who is the social body that is to rise up? Whence is it to come?

The force of insurrection is social, not military. This has long been an established tenet of insurrectionists, but in practice it is one of the most frequently forgotten. In focusing on attack, it is difficult not to end up unconsciously adopting the military logic of one's enemies, gauging effectiveness by the numbers of targets struck or the number of dollars' worth of damage. Perhaps this is an inevitable risk of conceptualizing attack not as a means but an end—if *attack* is valuable in itself, then isn't a "bigger" attack better? This tendency is particularly dangerous for those who didn't grow up with an example in their communities of what it looks like to wage "social war," who must invent their models for it from scratch.

The force of insurrection is social, not military. That means it depends on the strength, solidarity, and relationships of an entire social body—not just an affinity group or crew. Those who bake cupcakes for fundraisers are at least as important as the arrested rioters; the effectiveness of the fundraisers determines how much force insurgents can continue to wield in the streets. One can break a window with a single brick and the muscles of one's arm, but one can only participate in a long-running *social* conflict as part of a community. Social force is absolutely a matter of culture, values, allegiances, priorities; social war takes place on this terrain, which is influenced by but distinct from the physical terrain of actual confrontations. How many people will support you in a conflict? How many will join in themselves? If you go to prison, will your grandmother support you? Will her community?

The state often isolates rebels by means of a classic martial arts move: it pushes them in the direction they were already headed, provoking them into a showdown before they have built up the social force they need to survive it. It is essential to set the pace of escalation oneself, avoiding unfavorable engagements

and resisting the temptation to focus on revenge. The ultimate target of insurrectionist attack is not just the state, but also the passivity of one's peers.

To return to our starting point, none of this is a reason *not* to act, or to wait for the proper moment to assume hostilities. Social war, like class war, is always taking place: like it or not, we are born into it, and decide at every moment how we fight. The point is to act strategically, so as not to fight alone.

This is especially complicated in today's context of surveillance and repression. One must engage in a certain degree of clandestinity to be capable of meaningful resistance at all. But if the most important aspect of resistance is the relationships that result, it is a mistake to choose forms of struggle that tend to produce smaller and smaller social bodies. Historically, except when resistance is spreading like wildfire, resistance movements tend to break down into smaller and smaller elements once they come into open conflict with the state: think of the transition from Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960s to the Weather Underground in the 1970s, or the trajectory of the Dutch squatting movement over the course of the 1980s. If our social forms may become smaller as conflict intensifies, it might be more sensible to maintain low-intensity warfare that does not provoke the full wrath of the state, or else to start with the crowd as the unit of resistance rather than the crew or affinity group. This is not to say that we should not be organized in affinity groups, but that affinity group action should be a means of catalyzing crowd activity rather than an end in itself.

The authorities understand themselves to be engaged in social war, perhaps more clearly than most insurrectionists do. They do not simply attack our bodies with batons, pepper spray, and imprisonment; they also set out to attack our relationships and social connections. It is significantly more cost-effective for them to intimidate, isolate, or discredit radicals than to imprison or kill them. In confrontations, we should recognize this intimidation and isolation as their top priority, and defend our relationships and our connections to others accordingly. They can beat or jail us as individuals without winning the social conflict—the question is whether our values and tactics take hold.

## SOCIAL WAR REQUIRES SOCIAL SKILLS

"Property destruction is not merely macho rabble-rousing or testosterone-laden angst release. Nor is it displaced and reactionary anger. It is strategically and specifically targeted direct action."

-ACME Collective, *N30 Black Bloc Communiqué*

Considering that insurrection depends on relationships, one would think that insurrectionists would be the most personable anarchists, the most eager to make friends and resolve conflicts. Ideally, insurrectionists would offer a welcome contrast to strident pacifists and domineering reformists. It should always be clear that militant action is not a macho performance but a well-reasoned strategic decision, or at least an honest emotional expression.

It requires tremendous patience and social skills to lay the preconditions for insurrection. Unfortunately, some who gravitate to insurrectionist ideas have a predisposition for impatience and hostility. "Starting from attack" can be attractive to those who don't want to have to talk through disagreements or be accountable. In glorifying their preferred tactics over those of their potential allies, such hotheads spread false dichotomies that cut them off from the resources and support they need to make their attacks effective, sustainable, and contagious.

One could view this tendency as an overreaction to the ponderous coalitions of the antiwar movement. There is nothing good about enforced unity that paralyzes the participants and discourages autonomous action. But a knee-jerk rejection of everything that has made resistance movements possible in the past has little to recommend it, either.

### SOCIAL SKILLS FOR SOCIAL WAR

- decision-making structures and cultural conventions that encourage horizontal power dynamics
- accountability processes to address internal domination
- conflict resolution, both internally and with potential allies
- the ability to provide for material, social, and emotional needs
- the capability to reproduce the social forms of resistance faster than they are destroyed
- the means to communicate beyond a single subculture
- the flexibility to adjust according to context, rather than remaining caught in ritual

IT IS APRIL 21, 2001, and a black bloc is methodically knocking out all the windows of a multinational bank in downtown Quebec City during the Free Trade Area of the Americas summit. Street confrontations have been going on for 24 hours straight; much of the city is awash in tear gas, and increasing numbers of protesters are responding with Molotov cocktails and other projectiles.

A crowd of local toughs watches the black bloc from a distance. They have looked on sympathetically as the foreigners scuffled with riot police; the locals have no great love for the police, and as Québécois they resent that much of the occupying army has been brought in from English-speaking provinces halfway across the continent. On the other hand, the activists are invaders too, and now they're smashing up the city.

As the bloc sets out in search of another bank, the locals follow them, picking up blunt objects and threatening them in limited English: "Fookers!" A bearded older liberal sees this unfolding and falls in stride with the toughs for a moment, pedantically explaining, "No, they're not fuckers, it's just a *bad tactic*." Appropriating what they understand to be a term of biting abuse, the locals continue following the bloc, shouting "Bad tak-teek! Bad tak-teek!"

One idealistic young anarchist falls back to reason with the pursuers. "We're not against you—we're here to fight the same institutions that dominate you, the multinational corporations and the neoliberal governments that—" He is answered with a punch in the face that drops him to the ground.

This is the critical moment, in which the meaning of the whole mobilization is at stake. If the locals and the black bloc come to blows, the narrative of the weekend will shift from a showdown between People and Authority to pointless fighting between Marginalized Radicals and Everybody Else. The black bloc has a reputation for machismo; many other activists doubt their maturity, if not their sincerity. Having grown up bullied and baited, having become a militant anarchist in hopes of getting revenge, the young man must feel the temptation to fight back. If he does, his comrades will leap to his assistance. But he simply stands up and walks back to them, unsteady but deliberate.

Two blocks further, the police loom into view: row after row of armored storm troopers firing concussion grenades and rubber bullets at the narrow lines of human beings before them. Both groups hesitate. The context has shifted.

The locals eye the anarchists warily. "You are here to thrash our cité?" ones calls out.

"No!" shouts back a man in a ski mask. "To FIGHT THE POLICE!"

"To fight the police?"

"To fight them, not you!"

"Fook the police!" shouts back another local, auspiciously.

Representatives of the two groups approach each other with guarded gaits. Flash-bang grenades explode in the background as they hammer out a hasty truce and shake hands. As the sun sets over Quebec City, locals with shirts across their faces crouch alongside slingshot-wielding radicals in goggles and bandannas, peppering the police with chunks of broken concrete.



Insurrectionists coming from positions of comparative privilege cannot shrug these off simply by donning a mask.

## CONFRONTING ALL FORMS OF OPPRESSION

Resistance movements have collapsed again and again amidst conflict over accountability, privilege, and internal oppression—for example, in the US at the beginning of the 1970s, and in Italy at the end of that decade. This occurred on a smaller scale during the disintegration of the US anti-globalization movement after the turn of the century; the consequences of this in Eugene, Oregon were explored in *Rolling Thunder* #5.

In some circles, insurrectionists have a reputation for failing to focus on these issues. This is extremely problematic—the point of anarchist activity is to attack *all* forms of hierarchy, not just the targets that make for exciting riot porn. Accountability and awareness of privilege strengthen the relationships that make meaningful struggle possible; without these, an affinity group can fall apart in the same way a movement can. Nurturing healthy relationships is not an additional task anarchists must take on alongside the project of resisting domination—it is the *basis* of that project, and a way to safeguard it.

Even if the aforementioned bad reputation were only slander based on circumstantial evidence, it would still pose challenges to

insurrectionists, for it enables their adversaries to paint them as irresponsible hypocrites.\* Whenever anarchists fail to take the initiative to address patriarchy, white supremacy, and other manifestations of hierarchy, they leave themselves vulnerable to the machinations of liberals and others eager to discredit militant resistance. Insurrectionists should take the lead to develop tools for understanding and undermining privilege, so it is clear to everyone that there is no dichotomy between confronting the powers that be and addressing more subtle forms of hierarchical power.

Confrontational approaches are bound to encounter opposition at some point, but if the opposition is coming from potential comrades, it's a warning sign that one is on the wrong path. Unfortunately, defensive insurrectionists sometimes react to this by isolating themselves further from constructive criticism, wrongheadedly telling themselves that they don't need allies on the path they have chosen.

\* Some critics challenge the right of a predominantly white or male demographic to initiate confrontations in the first place; but people of all walks of life are entitled to fight for liberation on their own behalf, so long as they don't do so in a way that compromises others. The details of initiating confrontations without compromising others are complicated enough that it would demand an analysis even longer than this one to explore them.

## LANGUAGES OF EXCLUSION

By all means, explode with rage. Refuse to reduce your raw anger to demands or suspend your emotional responses to the tragedies around you. Turn your years of pent-up anguish into a fearsome instrument of revenge. Don't translate your grievances into the language of your oppressors—let them remain burning embers to be hurled from catapults. Attack, negate, destroy.

But if it's *rage* you're feeling, why quote philosophy professors?

If some strands of contemporary US insurrectionism seem to have given up in advance on the possibility of connecting with comrades outside their immediate cliques, this is especially apparent in their esoteric language and points of reference. Talk about “zones of opacity”—and the dangers of becoming trapped in a milieu!

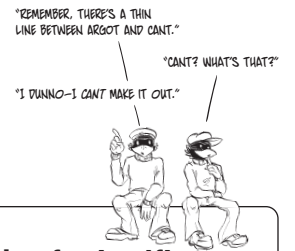
Perhaps this is because so much insurrectionist theory has arrived from overseas in poor translation. Domestic insurrectionists emulate the obtuse style of their favorite texts, and the resulting gibberish highlights the absurdity of attempting to transpose an approach from its original context without reconsidering it. We're not qualified to critique insurrectionist writing from France or Italy, where presumably every dishwasher enjoys Foucault and Negri—but in the US, words like “projectuality” make a lot of people stop listening.

Another source of this tendency can be found in the influence of academia. In the ivory tower, which is predicated on exclusion, academics are rewarded for developing abstruse language and theory. For some insurrectionists, appropriating such language must seem the same as appropriating other status symbols, such as the hip American Apparel® outfits ubiquitous in certain scenes. But “every tool has a world connected to it at the handle,” and the exclusivity of academia comes with the terminology.

Of course, some people are attracted to exclusive language—especially people who desire to see themselves as part of an elect in-group. A milieu that attracts a lot of this kind of energy is not likely to make a welcoming space for a broad range of participants; it also might not have a lot of staying power. Capitalist consumerism depends on new trends every season, and that goes for ideas as well as fashion: what is hip one year is guaranteed to be passé the next.

The alternative to this, amply demonstrated by other US insurrectionists, is not

to communicate in dumbed-down prose like some communist splinter group, nor to affect the slang of imagined class allies, but simply to express oneself in a straightforward manner and not take common context for granted. Recovering obscurantists could try writing in the language they use when they talk with their neighbors or relatives. You can't expect others to step outside their comfort zones unless you are willing to do the same yourself.



### Match the jargon to the Publication-for-Itself!

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. “A process of omnivorous immanentization deploys itself on a planetary scale. The goal: make the world a continuous biopolitical tissue.” | ___ <i>Politics Is Not a Banana</i> #1   |
| b. “We seek to manifest our selves as the species-for-its-self [sic], the species-being.”  | ___ “Re: Committee to Investigate the April 10th Occupation of the New School” |
| c. “Facts: The concatenation of descriptors, tied together around a monad, linked to a chain on a continuum of linear time.”                 | ___ “Footnotes on the Philosophy of History in Asheville, NC”                  |
| d. “Language is increasingly incommensurable. To speak is only to make intelligible the taking place of language.” No fucking kidding!       | ___ <i>Introduction to Civil War</i>   |

## STRIKING POSES VS. DECOLONIZING VIOLENCE

“We can become our own riot porn production machine, but this is less important than ‘creating the conditions where an offensive can sustain itself without fading, of establishing the material solidarities that allow us to *hold on*.’”

—*Total Destroy* #3

By and large, people in the US—particularly white people†—have an especially mediated relationship to violence. This is not to say that we are never exposed to violence, but that proportionately, we witness representations of it more often than we experience it directly. The land beneath our feet was bought with the extermination of its former inhabitants, the commodities that sustain our lifestyles flow in on a sea of blood, but when we think of violence we generally picture stylized images on television and movie screens. Small wonder if radicals who attempt to integrate violence

† Not all insurrectionists fit this demographic, of course—but there might be a few who do.



By and large, radicals in the US have an especially mediated relationship to violence; small wonder if they find themselves acting out programmed roles when they attempt to integrate violence into their resistance.

into their resistance find themselves acting out programmed roles.

“Riot porn,” the depictions of anti-authoritarian violence that abound in insurrectionist media, is only a subset of the representations of sex and violence surrounding us in this society. Pornography doesn’t just cater to desire—it also shapes and directs it; in the case of riot porn, it glorifies the moment of physical conflict, while removing the social context that gives it meaning. Pornography can promote roles that have little to do with the actual needs of the participants; those who have been influenced by corporate pornography sometimes make disappointing sexual partners. Likewise, a cynical observer might caricature some current manifestations of insurrectionism as a misguided attempt to distill a strategy from the aesthetic of riot porn: no difficult negotiations with allies, no intermediate or long-term goals, only the moment of attack, isolated in a vacuum.

Actual sex and violence can be reclaimed from patriarchal society, but in some ways it is more challenging to reclaim representa-

tions of sex and violence.\* Anybody can shoot a motherfucker, but in this society the image of the gun is almost inextricably associated with notions of male power and domination. Anti-authoritarians who think spectacular representations of violence can be turned against their masters are playing with fire in more ways than they think.

On the other hand, in a society in which so much privilege rests on violence that occurs outside our immediate experience, it is commendable that insurrectionists set out to establish a firsthand relationship to it. Perhaps insurrectionist activity should be evaluated according to how effectively it serves this project of deprogramming, no less than how much it costs the enemy or inspires potential comrades. To what extent does a given action enable the participants to achieve an unmediated and

\* Speaking of representation, white anarchists must be careful not to exoticize and eroticize violence in poor communities of color. This already occurs in hip hop consumerism, where racist capitalists kill two birds with one stone by profiting off representations of black people as violent and oversexed. Suburban insurrectionists pinning for comrades may unconsciously picture stereotypical characters from hip hop videos as their class allies in the social war.

intentional relationship to violence? To what extent is it simply a reprise of all-too-familiar scripts? Just as we might judge erotic play or material by the extent to which it “queers” sex rather than reinforcing conventional roles and power dynamics, we might assess insurrectionist practice according to the extent to which it *queers violence*. This could mean anything from empowering demographics who do not normally have the opportunity to wield violence against their oppressors, to dispelling the influence of media representations of violence by replacing them with a familiarity based in lived experience, to making violence serve forbidden roles no one has yet imagined.

THE AFTERNOON of the action, one older anarchist who hasn’t participated in the organizing expresses his usual irritation: “So the idea is to get the fucking cops called, wait till they show up, and then try to march around? These idiots have finally come up with a way to lose the element of surprise, which is practically the only advantage of the tactic!”

But surprisingly or not, everything goes exactly according to plan. People gather in the park for food and games, then at the appointed time depart in small groups for the secret location. It turns out to be a spacious abandoned building in the heart of downtown, with a great banner hanging from the roof: “Reclaiming space to reclaim our lives: OCCUPY EVERYTHING.” Party favors are distributed at the door—condoms, masks, a precious little manifesto: “You see, here’s the deal. We’ve recently started to realize that we exist...” Inside, a dance party is in progress; the derelict post-industrial decor has been beautified with streamers and another banner, this one reading “PARTY LIKE IT’S 1886.” A couple gender dissidents have taken off all their clothes. Others are exploring the margins of the reclaimed building in ones and twos. Unlike the Reclaim the Streets actions that swept the state a decade earlier, this is a private party, but it has the same atmosphere of wonder.

After longer than expected, the news spreads from ear to ear: the police are inside! The sound system cuts out and someone pulls it out the back door just as an officer comes into sight, probing the crowd with his flashlight. Everyone trickles out the front door in a single-file line; this feels somewhat demoralizing, and the older anarchist grumbles that if they really want to have a march they should be exiting in one determined block. Instead, a hesitant crowd congeals on the sidewalk, dawdling as the outnumbered police struggle to figure out what’s going on.

The sound system reappears and people rally around it. Just as the crowd begins to move down the street, a policeman rushes over and seizes it. Everyone else continues; turning the corner, they miraculously find themselves occupying the street in a world seemingly empty of authorities. There is no precise cause or rallying cry for the evening, so the participants—unable to dispense with activist traditions, despite some rhetoric to the contrary—find themselves chanting the first catchphrases that come to mind: “Swine flu!” “Wu Tang Clan ain’t nothin’ ta fuck with!” Two young men out on the town join in, clearly not interpreting this as an anarchist street party.

A block later hoods go up, masks come down, and the sound of grating metal rings out as newspaper boxes are dragged into the street. Everyone else around the country is abandoning corporate print media, but anarchists are still passionately invested in their conviction that the boxes prevent pursuit by police vehicles. The café district is around the next turn, and chairs are sent flying against plate glass windows, only to bounce off and fall to earth. There is an element of playacting in the demeanor of even the wildest participants: they are striking poses, acting out their favorite scenes without the grim determination to *do damage* that characterized the famous black blocs of the anti-globalization era.

The legal risks, of course, are still very real—but the police are mercifully far behind, and the crowd disperses before they can catch up. Some participants are pleased with themselves; others are nonplussed. A young hippy tries to initiate a conversation with a stern-faced fellow tucking a sweatshirt under his arm: “Did you see those people throwing chairs at windows? That’s fucked, huh?” The one with the sweatshirt picks up his pace and does not answer.

Afterwards, all the discussions from five years earlier begin again. Was it irresponsible for some people to escalate to property destruction when others didn’t know it was coming? On the other hand, how are people supposed to initiate participatory vandalism? You can’t exactly put up fliers announcing it. Did anyone aside from the participants understand the point—and does that even matter? Is it pathetic that the would-be rioters couldn’t break the café windows? Or is it fortunate, as that might have provoked a more serious follow-up inquiry without achieving any meaningful objective? Few recognize these old questions—five years earlier, most people were living elsewhere or involved in totally different things.

The grumpy older anarchist reminisces about the days when surprise marches like this used to take place in his own community. The first one involved hundreds of people, the majority of whom had never imagined themselves parading without a permit; to his mortification, they chanted “What do we want? PEACE!” when he would have preferred to raze the whole city to the ground. Over the following years, each march became a little more aggressive than the last; a small nucleus of committed clandestine organizers emerged, while conflicts deepened within the broader social base that made the format possible. The final action ended up on the national news, with tens of thousands of dollars of damage done to a high-profile target and several people standing trial for felonies. After that, everything dissolved in a mix of angry recriminations, exhausting legal support, and prohibitive security culture.

His friend asks if it was worth it. “Maybe,” he allows. “Like, everyone blames the Spanish anarchists for losing the Spanish Civil War, as if a few kids in their twenties today could know the context better than they did—but perhaps they *knew* they were doomed from the start, and were holding it together as best they could in hopes of going out with a bang so they could inspire people like us. If the movement we were part of wasn’t going to last forever, maybe it’s for the best it ended the way it did, too. But should you cut right to smashing shit when you’re trying to get something started? I don’t know.”



*Clashes do not occur between groups so much as within societies. Every society is made up of conflicting currents, which compete not only within society as a whole but also within the individuals who constitute it.*

## PRETENSIONS OF DESTROYING EVERYTHING

Some contemporary insurrectionism affects a nihilist posture, proposing in an offhand manner that everything that exists must be destroyed. To indigenous or environmentalist ears, this project of universal destruction sounds suspiciously like the program industrial capitalism is already carrying out.

As with the disavowal of subculture, it may make pretty rhetoric to say one is against “everything,” but it doesn’t make a lot of sense. Even opposing everything is still a position adopted in this world, shaped by and proceeding from the existing context. If we are against *everything*, how do we navigate? Where do we start, and how can we be sure that the results of our efforts won’t be even worse? Can we make any stipulations about which direction to set out in at all?

It makes more sense, and is more honest, to say that we side with some existing beings and currents against others, and hope by doing so to effect a total transformation of the world. Not only does this approach offer concrete starting points, it also lends itself better to studying the intricate ways hierarchical and horizontal

dynamics intermingle in both the enemy’s camp and our own.\* If you can’t see any good in your adversary, you probably won’t be able to recognize anything bad in yourself. By the same token, the idea that everything has to be destroyed anyway can make it easy to excuse oneself from criticism.

## DYNAMITING THE FAULT LINES

Let’s return once more to the context surrounding large-scale insurrections such as the one that took place in Greece in December 2008. Militant resistance is sustainable in such situations not only because of the initiative of the immediate participants, but also because of the efforts of non-anarchists who oppose military intervention, organize against legal repression, and otherwise limit the options of the state. Many of these people may also oppose the insurrection, even while playing essential roles in making it possible. If social war were simply a matter of force meeting force, the Greek government could have bombed all the squats and occupied universities from which the

\* Contrast this with the facile opposition to “civilization,” case closed, adopted by hard-line primitivists.

**IT IS NEITHER PERSUASION TO ABSTRACT IDEAS NOR CLASS POSITION ALONE THAT MAKES PEOPLE INVEST THEMSELVES IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST HIERARCHY. IT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF ANARCHIST SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS OF LIFE, THE DEVELOPMENT AND FULFILLMENT OF ANARCHIC DESIRES. THE NEED TO REVOLT, TO DESTROY, TO GET REVENGE IS ONLY ONE OF MANY SUCH DESIRES.**

revolt was organized; it could not do so because its hands were tied by liberals, and for fear of turning liberals into radicals.

This is not to diminish the courage of those who meet the state in open conflict, but to emphasize that clashes do not occur *between groups* so much as *within societies*. Every society is made up of conflicting currents, which compete not only within society as a whole but also within the individuals who constitute it; the moments of rupture that take place within individuals are no less important than those that take place between classes. The most effective insurrectionist actions not only open up the fault lines that run through society, they also compel the undecided to take sides—and to do so according to their own interests, rather than those of their masters.

The outcome of revolutionary struggle is not decided by revolutionaries or autocrats so much as by those who sit on the fence between them. The balance of power is determined according to which side of the fence they come down on when they are forced to choose. Revolutionaries ignore this at their peril.

## INFRASTRUCTURE ~~VERSUS~~ EQUALS CONFRONTATION

Liberals and others who oppose revolutionary struggle often pose a false dichotomy between connecting with the community and engaging in militant confrontation. Some insurrectionists have accepted this dichotomy at face value, arguing for the latter in place of—perhaps in despair of—the former. Ten years ago, militant anarchists argued against the conceptual framework of violence “versus” non-violence; now the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme, and it is insurrectionists who insist that *attack* is distinct from community organizing.

On the contrary, “community organizing” and taking the offensive are at their most effective when they are identical. Permanent conflict, decentralized organization, and all the other insurrectionist precepts can serve quite well in local,

community-based struggles.† Combining infrastructural and confrontational approaches does not mean volunteering at an infoshop during the day and smashing bank windows at night, but rather synthesizing the two into a single project. This is not complicated—as the whole world has been taken from us, we need only seize back any one of the things that should be ours and we enter into conflict with the state. If anarchists do not undertake this more often, perhaps it is because it is always most frightening to attempt what one wants most, what one knows one should have been doing all along.

Is there an empty lot that should be a community garden? Turn it into one, and mobilize enough social force that the owner finds it most convenient to leave you be. Is a coworker being harassed or laid off? Bring the full power of your community to bear against her employer. Are there resources at the grocery store or the university that would be better off in your neighborhood? Figure out whom you can trust and how to distribute them, and *take them*. To win these engagements, you’ll have to spend a lot more time building up relationships and credibility than running around with masks on—but there are no shortcuts in social war.

This is nothing less than the project of *beginning our lives*, eternally deferred with all manner of half-hearted excuses and tortuous theoretical justifications. In our *real* lives, we are warriors who fight for ourselves and each other, who seize back the territory of our day-to-day existence or else die trying. Nothing less is worthy of us.

It is neither persuasion to abstract ideas nor class position alone that makes people invest themselves in the struggle against hierarchy. It is the *experience* of anarchist solutions to the problems of life, the development and fulfillment of anarchic desires.

† For example, one of the classic cases of insurrectionist practice referenced by Alfredo Bonanno was a campaign to prevent the construction of a US missile base in Comiso, Italy. Anarchists helped form autonomous groups in the community, which were not ideologically identified but functioned according to insurrectionist principles, on the basis of a commitment to stop the construction by any means necessary.





## FIND EACH OTHER



The need to revolt, to destroy, to get revenge is one such need; if insurrectionist approaches can fulfill it, so much the better. But we deserve a resistance that fulfills *all* our needs, and all our dreams besides.

### ANARCHISM WITHOUT ADJECTIVES

“There are no such things as superior forms of struggle. Revolt needs everything: papers and books, arms and explosives . . . The only interesting question is *how to combine them.*”

-At Daggers Drawn

RETURNING FROM the riots in Gothenburg during the 2001 summit of the European Union, activists in Stockholm begin casting around for ways to initiate struggles closer to home. At first, the prospect is overwhelming: when you're trying to confront the system in its entirety, where do you start?

Meanwhile, the rates in the Stockholm subway increase from 450 kronor to 500. One day, perhaps en route to a meeting, a young activist narrowly escapes being ticketed for fare evasion. Like most of her friends, she simply can't afford the new rates, and has to risk her luck leaping the turnstile every time she goes out. Most of the time she gets away with it—but if they catch her next time, it will cost 1200 kronor.

She reflects on how many others must share her plight, each waging an individual guerrilla war against the transportation authorities. There's a union for everything in Sweden, it seems—but when it comes to the day-to-day tactics by which people actually survive, they still have to go it alone.

There's an idea. A fare-dodgers union.

Hundreds of people join up. The dues are 100 kronor a month, a savings of 80% on the government rate for transportation, and if you get busted the union pays your fine. More importantly, fare dodging is no longer an isolated activity, but a collective revolt. Fare-dodgers see themselves as a social force, taking pride in their actions and inviting others to join in; the union also warns commuters of the movements of ticket enforcers, giving them added incentives to skip the fares even if they don't become dues-paying members. Rather than trying to persuade others to join in their activism, the founders of the union have found a way to bring people together on the basis of the resistance they were already engaged in: now every fare-dodger is a potential revolutionary, and *sees herself as one.*

After a few months have passed and a few members have been busted for evasion, it turns out that the union is operating at a profit. With the extra funds, the organizers produce glossy propaganda urging the public to join them in an all-out war on public transportation fees, and begin brainstorming about their next step. What other fault lines run through Swedish society? How can other individual revolts be transformed into collective power—not in order to bargain with the authorities, but to defy them?

For more on the fare-dodgers' union, see [www.planka.nu](http://www.planka.nu).

If we have never called ourselves insurrectionists, it is not because we do not wish for insurrection, but because our own temperament predisposes us to an *anarchism without adjectives*. The important thing is to fight for freedom and against hierarchy; we imagine that this will demand different approaches in different situations, and that these approaches may need one another to succeed. We are anarcho-syndicalists on the shop floor, green anarchists in the woods, social anarchists in our communities, individualists when you catch us alone, anarcho-communists when there's something to share, insurrectionists when we strike a blow.

Anarchism without adjectives not only refuses to prioritize one approach over the others, but emphasizes the importance of each aspect of anarchism to its supposed opposites. The riot needs the bake sale to be repeatable; the arson needs the public campaign to be intelligible; the supermarket heist needs the neighborhood grocery distribution to pass on the goods.

All dichotomies are false dichotomies to some extent, masking not only the common threads between the terms but also the *other* dichotomies one might experiment with instead. On close inspection, successful insurrectionism seems to depend so much on “community building” and even “lifestyle anarchism” as to be virtually indistinguishable in practice. If we retired this particular distinction, what other distinctions might arise in its place? What other questions might we ask?

All this is not to say that individual anarchists can't focus on their particular skills and preferred strategies—simply that it is an error to frame anyone's personal preferences as universals. In the end, as always, it comes down to a question of which problems you want to wrestle with, which shortcomings you feel most equipped to overcome. Do you prefer to struggle against invisible hierarchies in informal networks, or brave the stultifying inertia of formal organizations? Would you rather risk acting rashly, or not acting at all? Which is more important to you, security or visibility—and which do you think will keep you safer in the long run?

We can't tell anyone which problems to choose. We can only do our best to outline them. Best of luck in your insurrections—may they intersect with ours.



**FIGHT  
WHERE**

**YOU  
STAND**

## Appendix: BROADENING THE TEMPLATE FOR REVOLT

*If contemporary US insurrectionism needs anything, it is to get beyond the fixation on window-smashing and vandalism as the chief form of practice. Much of the theory is sound, but might be more effective if it were applied with a wider range of tactics. Towards that end, we asked a couple of our correspondents to send in stories of rupture that have nothing to do with the anarchist vendetta against plate glass.*



### Gobsmacked!

—Enric Duran Segundo

While we all know that spit is the ideal sexual lubricant, always free and readily at hand, when it comes to expressing rage, we are more reluctant to let the spittle fly. Yet don't love and hate both stir up our bodily fluids and call for discharge? Sadly, in the case of the latter, polite society disparagingly considers the well-placed smack of gob to be the crudest and most self-indulgent of protests. In spite of these prohibitions on expressive expectoration, sometimes an uncontrollable anger at injustice wells up and demands a phlegmatic release. This story is about the immediate satisfaction afforded by that most personal of revolts, and the unexpected social consequences.

Once upon a time in the 1970s, after routinely cashing a check at a local bank where I had an account, I remained parked in their lot in order to spend an hour volunteering at a nearby free school at which I was facilitating a seminar about music and resistance. Afterwards, following a particularly passionate discussion, I returned to my parking space only to find that my car had been towed away. I walked into the bank and confronted the manager about this petty harassment, but he just laughed in my face. No doubt he had selectively enforced the parking lot rules because he knew I had been involved in the recent publication of an exposé documenting the racist “redlining” policies and lending practices of local banks. As a result of the redlining study, I was already abstractly contemptuous of all banks. When I encountered the haughtiness of this one banker firsthand, I spontaneously sent him an airmail message of contempt, spitting squarely in his face.

Caught off guard by my mucous missile, he instantly lost his smirk. As I turned and walked toward the tellers, I could sense a certain giddy sense of complicity on the part of his subordinates. Looking in their eyes, I saw that the balance of power at the workplace had at least temporarily shifted because my liquid expellation had publicly humiliated their boss. Maybe they themselves had secretly fantasized about the same act of defiance. As the furious banker threatened to call the cops, spit still dripping down his red face, I calmly closed out my account amidst a palpable atmosphere of silent solidarity.

As for me, the directness of the spitting incident offered a satisfaction the formal publishing of the collective research that I had participated in for the redlining report could only hint at.

By acting as a “bad apple,” I had not only embarrassed a particularly obnoxious banker, I had created a ripple effect that upset the appercart of the authoritarian workplace. With just simple saliva, I had overturned the pile of apples he had so carefully stacked. As the now wayward apples chaotically rolled around everywhere, he desperately tried to retrieve them, to no avail. The genie could not be put back in the bottle. As I made my exit, one of the tellers furtively gave me a conspiratorial wink that I'll never forget. Take heart comrades, social rebellion is within spitting distance!

*Editor's note: For more on the revolutionary potential of spitting, see Bukaka Spat Here, reviewed in Rolling Thunder #5.*

### Conversation on a Plane

—Typo Negative

I am eighteen, en route to see my mother in Dallas. I have been walled up in a friend's home for a little over a week, tending to my wounded hand. I stare down at our pathetic bandaging attempt. The flight is cold. Boredom is counter-revolutionary.

I have been written on by the text; its caring hands massaged me, its condescension shamed me. Hakim Bey's *Temporary Autonomous Zone* was placed in my hand by A----: she wanted to do poetic terrorism to my body. I bought my very own copy of *Days of War Nights of Love* and, as its anonymous authors acted on me, the wreckage of history was washed away by terrible myths—giving way to an image, of me, interrupting the miserable normal conditions of my existence; making war at home in my Carharts; in sweaty basement shows; in the stupid songs we all could sing.

Airports are quite possibly the most miserable places on earth. Airplane flight itself is not a place, so its misery must be understood as a void between one miserable airport and the next one. Thus, the airplane can become the suspension of misery—at least, it could back before there were armed federal agents on every flight.

Seated at the my left is an older black gentleman. At eighteen, I haven't begun developing a critical understanding of race; I have the idea that when encountering an older black gentleman in Denver, it is proper manners to say “Alright now,” whereas in New Orleans, “Aight.” To my right is a misplaced character from the sitcom *Friends*, a white women in her mid-thirties whom I read as a business lady. As I flip through the pretty pictures of *Days of War, Nights of Love*, I notice the gentleman to my left subtly looking over my shoulder. Motivated by my desire to spread the good news, and my desperation to talk to anyone about this shit, I ask if he'd like to read my copy: “I mean, I'll be able to look at this anytime, you should read it if you want to.” After he takes the book from me, feeling the subtle break with our vacant time, I turn my attention to the business lady: “Would you like to have cool conversation?”

“Uh, yeah, sure,” she responds with slight hesitation.

I gesture with my bandaged-ass-hand and arrogantly challenge her: “Ask me how I did this to my hand.”

“OK, how did you do that to you hand? Was it a skateboard accident?” I am a stupid white teenager. Good guess!

“No!”

“Well, how?”

“Well, I was breaking the windows of this bank the other night, and you wouldn't believe how fucking difficult it is break those windows! I mean the first one, I had to hit it with my hammer at least twice before it busted out, and then the second window... I knew it was going to be hard, so I really went at it. I hit it once, nothing. I hit it twice, nothing, and then, of course, third time's the charm. But immediately, I began to feel a sort of burning sensation in my right hand, and I look down and see that my hand is full of glass. We freaked out a little bit—the friends I was with—and drove away. Everyone kept saying I should go to the hospital, but I was convinced that the police would soon have my DNA scanned from the shards of glass around the Bank and I would be fucked. So we went back to my friend's house and I ran to the bathroom. It looked like someone had died—so much blood can come out of your hand! Anyway, we removed the glass, someone went to the drugstore and got some gauze and medical tape, and we bandaged me up. I've just sort of been letting it heal, like this.”

“What? Uh... Why? Why were you breaking the windows of a bank?”

In my infantile understanding of the commodity form and of capital, I explain exactly why. I tell her that I want to destroy capitalism. I tell her that to me, banks are the most obvious manifestation of capitalism, and thus the most reasonable target for such attacks. We talk for the rest of the flight. It is indeed a pretty cool conversation. She has seen images from the wild demonstrations against global capitalism in Seattle and in Washington, DC.

I have no idea if she dropped everything when she got home, stole a pair of Carharts, and hopped the next freight train, as was the style at the time; she probably didn't. What was achieved, for me, was that I initiated the conversation I wanted to have. Perhaps more importantly, she and I shared a strange communion which located me as an image—the black clad rioter—but also simply as some stupid eighteen-year-old white boy on an airplane, like any other stupid-eighteen-year old white boy on an airplane she might have sat next to.

Yes, what a stupid risk. Blabbing about one's most hilarious arson attempt might not be the best thing to do on a plane today, when there could be armed federal agents sitting next you. However, the neutralization of any potential relationship that could transgress its prescribed role or survive past its scripted end is one of the primary means by which our miserable society is perpetuated. Counter-insurgency and repression begin on the territories of bodies and social life.

I am twenty-seven now. I am not a charismatic teenage white boy. I am an adult who works in design and service-industry jobs. I go to parties—there are no longer hardcore shows for me. But I still take stupid risks, because this society makes us powerless and I hate it. When my boss leaves, I steal food. When I meet new co-workers I show them how we get ours. When I have the chance to subtly make anarchist practices a pretty cool thing, I take it. Power begins with the vulnerability of communicating about power.

# Thinking Through Perpetrator Accountability

*"They" is used as a singular pronoun throughout this text to refer to survivors and perpetrators without reference to their gender identity. Although the majority of intimate violence is perpetrated by people who were socialized as male against children and people who were socialized as female, abuse occurs in relationships between people of all genders. People of all genders are survivors and perpetrators.*



SLOWLY BUT STEADILY, dialogue is opening up around abuse and recovery in intimate relationships. These days, most temporary anarchist gatherings foreground some kind of consent policy, and almost every radical conference features a standard workshop on a community response to sexual assault. It is amazing how much this has been prioritized in radical movements in the US. It has not always been this way, and still these important issues seem largely overlooked in many other anarchist movements.\*

In my early punk days, if you were sexually assaulted, you just wrote a zine about it detailing what an asshole the person was and telling everyone to stop being friends with them and push them out of the community. Usually one or two people in every town took it seriously, a few people in your hometown viciously took sides without making any space for real conversation, and everyone else ignored you.†

By the time I came to anarchist organizing, I was doing weekend shifts on the rape crisis line and overnight stays at the domestic violence shelter. While the connection between the injustice of the state judicial system and the misogyny of everyday life was inescapable for me, I struggled to understand how friends that could theorize so extensively about anarchist politics could be so oblivious to the power and abuse in their relationships and the relationships around them.

Anarchist communities have clearly come a long way in prioritizing conversations about abuse, but still the dialogue seems formulaic, distanced, as if seen from the outside—like we don't really know how to approach it or we're simply afraid to take it on. As much as some things have changed over the years, time after time I have seen anarchists around me fail to grasp the gravity of abuse in intimate relationships and fail to see how necessary outside support and intervention is. I have seen individuals dedicated to combating abuse burn out from a lack of appropriate support and attempt after thwarted attempt at accountability processes that never get anywhere.

\* Just a few years ago while traveling in Europe, my partner and I facilitated consent workshops on stops across many countries; she and I were constantly astounded by how challenging these basic conversations were to people's assumptions about the gender binary and its relationship to sex and equality.

† Thank you to all of the brave people who pushed these issues to the forefront before my days, whose zines I read aching with every sentence, filling my whole being with fury and possibility. Your words did not fall empty; they still burn inside of me today.

Accountability is about making a commitment to the people in our lives to work through destructive behaviors, toward healthier, more egalitarian relationships. Accountability is about the willingness to receive input from and be responsive to the people around us, prioritizing their needs, safety, and emotional health in our actions.

In most of our communities, we have no established structures for this, no resources or guidelines for conflict resolution; as individuals, we don't have the skills to communicate openly, directly, supportively with one another. We don't know where autonomy and community intersect. As anarchists, we seem confused about when it is okay to get involved in others' lives, but our lives cannot be made distinct, separate. We are more interrelated than many would like to act, and it is only this interdependence that makes us strong.

## Getting It Together

Lately, I've been hearing complaints about the lack of skill and guidance in dealing with accountability processes for perpetrators of sexual assault, intimate violence, and abuse. I've seen a desire to craft "the anarchist model" for dealing with situations "like these." It's great that people are talking about this, but it's not useful to fall into a rote "this is what consent always looks like" or "this is the community response to sexual assault" model. Some people have done a great job of taking the ideas of consent and shaping them in ways that work for them—maybe it's easier to feel how consent is a daily practice, how it's widely applicable, or maybe it's just more fun to talk about it and compare notes. But we also need to develop nuanced approaches to perpetrator accountability processes that really work in our individual lives.

We seem to be developing a new standard response for what to do when someone is identified as a perpetrator of intimate violence or sexual assault. The survivor seeks support and—ideally with the help of friends—issues a list of demands for the perpetrator and requests regarding how they want others to interact with that person. Although I am not asking for survivors or their supporters to do anything more than what they want to, when this is the full extent of the response, it can feel insufficient. We need more comprehensive, long-term responses, in which other friends or family create support structures for the perpetrator, as well, for more thorough accountability and rehabilitation.

It is an extremely complicated process to heal from all of the heartbreak and trauma associated with abuse—for the survivor,

the perpetrator, friends, and family‡—and it requires a serious commitment and structures of support for all involved that rarely exist in our transient cultures. Every situation is unique; every survivor and perpetrator are unique—what they want and need will be different. There is no formula, but hopefully this framework can contribute to a dialogue about how to craft an appropriate model for each situation.

When focusing on perpetrators—both in this article and in assembling an accountability process—it must be clear that the survivor(s) and their needs should be central to the extent that they desire. Other people in supporting roles should take the lead from them—that could mean receiving direct instructions, checking in with them regularly, or avoiding communication about the process, specifically as dictated by the survivor(s). However, that does not mean that a survivor must be involved for a group of friends or family to create a process of accountability for an individual. The hurt that comes from abusive behaviors extends beyond the intimate relationship in which it is focused. The perpetrator must be accountable to the survivor, to their communities, and to themselves, and anyone from the effected groups can offer valuable input on how a perpetrator can recover from their abusive patterns.

### Accountability

- a perpetrator is accountable to the survivor(s)
- a perpetrator is accountable to their communities
- a perpetrator is accountable to themselves

## Meeting Basic Needs

An effective accountability process cannot be established until the situation has leveled out enough for all involved to listen and communicate honestly. When a survivor first identifies that

‡ When describing that both the survivor and perpetrator need emotional space to heal, it is important to be clear that this is not to suggest that they will need the same kind of support or that what they are going through is similar. For a perpetrator, healing is merely one piece of the transformative process of being accountable to one's community. Also, it is important for the perpetrator's supporters not to use this kind of language to minimize the perpetrator's responsibility, as if the perpetrator is just sick and needs healing, and can't be held fully accountable for their actions.

they have been in or are in an abusive relationship, the initial priority is to assess the situation and take steps to assure the safety of everyone involved. Listen to what the survivor wants. Ask questions that can lead to concrete solutions. Offer to help in any way you can—but only in ways the survivor wants.

If the survivor and the perpetrator live together, find emergency housing options for one or both of them. If the survivor and the perpetrator work on projects together, find people to take on their responsibilities without immediately ousting either of them. If the survivor and the perpetrator live in a small town or neighborhood, or if they see each other regularly, help make a plan for accomplishing daily life tasks without running into one another and putting undue stress on the situation. Whatever the challenge, figure out how to create the space necessary for both the physical and emotional safety of the survivor.

## When a Perpetrator is Unwilling

It is never easy to be presented with the fact that you have hurt someone, but it can be especially hard to get this through to many perpetrators. When a perpetrator is first confronted about their abusive behavior, they may respond with surprise and repudiation before the initial shock passes. Some may try to continue utilizing the manipulative logic and defense mechanisms honed through their pattern of abusive behaviors, as if pushing back the obvious reality. They may deny, dismiss, or minimize the situation, the survivors' concerns, or the survivors themselves. They may try to put the blame onto the survivor; they may frame themselves as the victim. They may use their social status or charisma to put on a good public face. They may pay convincing lip service to the process, using the language of consent and accountability, while continuing to refuse to acknowledge their actual role in the abuse with the survivor.

People often get tricked by the subtle machinations of a perpetrator who is unwilling to approach this process honestly—because the smooth-talking calm of the perpetrator on the defense is more palatable than the emotional intensity of many survivors or because people simply don't have a clear understanding of what abuse is\*. People don't want to get wrapped up in messy drama; they only want to interact with a situation where everything is clear and simple. However, abuse is never simple.

If a perpetrator in the midst of rationalization says a survivor was abusive to them too, don't get confused. When someone is being abused, they often must respond with some kind of defense. Especially in situations where the abuse is long-running, it can eventually become difficult to disentangle abusive behaviors from survival responses. For instance, toward the end of my time living with my abusive ex-housemate, he was screaming at me so consistently that I was afraid to ever approach him

\* People have some pretty fucked up ideas about what does and doesn't constitute abuse. After months of living with an aggressive alcoholic who consistently used threats and physical intimidation against me, a different housemate told me, "If only he had hit you, then I would know how to make sense of this." Check out the article "Cycles of Abuse and Survival" in the second issue of *Rolling Thunder* for a more in-depth look at what abuse is, or look for the Power and Control Wheel developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.

to talk. While he was at work, I moved a piano into our house without asking for his consent. While it is my responsibility to check in with my housemates whenever I want to do something to our house, by creating an atmosphere of fear, he made that impossible. During our attempt at an accountability process later, he listed this and similar examples, as if what he called my "inconsiderate, abusive behavior" was justification for his aggression toward me.

This is not to discount the situations in which two people both bring major patterns of abuse to a relationship. When the instigation of abuse is coming equally from two people, both individuals can be involved in some kind of accountability process to remediate their destructive behaviors, and both individuals can give input and perspective into the process for the other person.

However, when one person is calling another out for abuse, and the person being called out puts the onus of abuse solely on the other, this should send up a red flag immediately. Any time a person reacts defensively, seeking to protect themselves and their reputation rather than being concerned that they might have hurt someone, that behavior alone warrants serious scrutiny and suggests the need to reconstruct priorities.

Sometimes, a perpetrator will be awesomely ready for or will even request help to begin their accountability process. More often, it will take a lot of patient and firm explaining for a perpetrator to see the importance of such a process. In all too many situations, a perpetrator will deny the abuse and refuse their responsibility to the bitter end, and an accountability process will not be possible. In that context, should they so desire, I hope the survivor finds great support in bringing down all the vengeance of the world on them. For the former two situations, read on.

## Approaching the Accountability Process

The most foundational structure for beginning an accountability process involves the survivor and their support group, the perpetrator and their support group, and an agreed upon method for communication between the groups. It is essential to define concrete networks of support for both the survivor and the perpetrator. We are only able to change the destructive behaviors we have inherited from this culture when we have healthy opportunities to process our feelings and supportive spaces in which to learn from our mistakes. Please don't underestimate how much a perpetrator needs support.

A support network for a perpetrator can be made up of people with varying levels of commitment or roles within the group. As a whole, the group should function to create safe spaces to explore the feelings resulting from the abuse—including defensiveness and guilt that can obscure deeper feelings—and to help the perpetrator identify their behavioral problems and make concrete plans for how to change them. They should advocate for the perpetrator's needs and help find appropriate resources and people to fill necessary roles. Perhaps most importantly of all, supporters should check in with the perpetrator regularly, making sure that everything is on track and

# Remember that in supporting perpetrators of abuse, it is the person you are supporting, not their behaviors.

nothing falls through the cracks. Particularly with emotionally difficult work, it is easy to avoid doing what is agreed upon or what one knows is needed, simply because it is hard. A support network should be the encouraging, yet unyielding voice that doesn't let that happen.

Once support groups for both people solidify, establish the healthiest way to communicate between the groups. The survivor could decide to be in direct communication with the perpetrator, either privately or with one or more people from each support group present at each conversation. They could decide to communicate through some kind of mediator: either through a "neutral" person or through one or more people from each support group. Or the survivor could decide to have no communication at all with the perpetrator, in which case some combination of people from either the perpetrator's group or the survivor's group must facilitate the accountability process themselves.

Of course, it is possible for there to be overlap between these support groups, particularly in small circles of friends where some people may be close with both the survivor and the perpetrator. However, everyone involved in the accountability process must be up front with themselves about their own difficult feelings and motivations. Supporters should know that it is legitimate to have their own feelings of hurt and anger about the abuse and should be aware of the ways their own trauma around abuse may be triggered, but supporters of the survivor or the perpetrator must not take advantage of their roles to exact their own rage or vengeance on the perpetrator—nor their own masculine guilt about their past abusive behaviors. People involved in supporting roles in the accountability process are bound to bring different skills, as well as different emotional investments; the challenge is in balancing the various perspectives to put something together that is really forward moving and healthy for all involved.

It is important, also, to recognize that not everyone wants to take on the role of supporting a perpetrator of abuse. In radical communities, often the people who are most committed to doing work around abuse and accountability are people who are themselves survivors of abuse, and it can be particularly emotionally

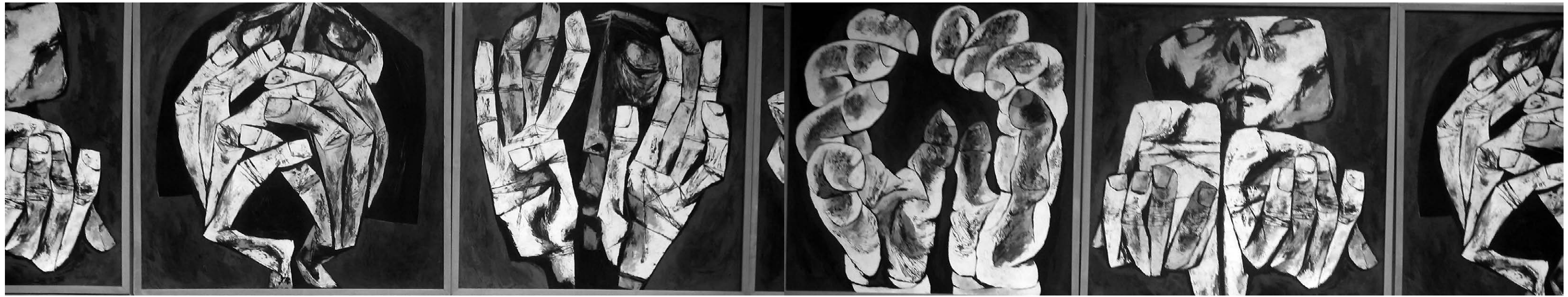
taxing and complicated for past survivors to support perpetrators. It is only going to be good for a perpetrator if their supporters have the emotional capacity to be fully present for them. Accordingly, there must be space for people to decline doing this kind of work. This may mean others with more privilege in terms of gender, sexuality, or abuse history stepping up to take on these roles.

In crafting the general framework for the accountability process, it is essential to focus on the necessity for rehabilitation, not punishment. If we don't want to recreate the flaws of the judicial system, we should not unquestioningly adopt its focus on forcing people to atone for past infractions. As anarchists, we should be cautious not to recreate cycles where punishment for abuse creates more abuse, creating a miniature prison-industrial complex within our own movement. We already know that doesn't work.

That said, it is completely valid for the survivor to have any range of emotions in response to the trauma they have experienced. They can

## (Mis)Understanding Abuse

- I have heard people say they didn't get involved because the survivor never asked them for help.
- I have heard people say that they don't need or want to know what is going on in their friends' romantic relationships.
- I have heard people say that they don't understand how a survivor could have let it happen, or how such a strong feminist could have allowed such abuse.
- I have heard people say that the abuse must not have been that bad because the survivor went back to the relationship with the perpetrator one or more times. (However, statistics show that on average in this country, it takes a survivor seven attempts before leaving a domestic violence situation for good.)
- I have heard people say that the perpetrator has been around so long and is such a valuable part of anarchist organizing that no one wants to kick them out of the scene or sever their long-standing friendships.
- I have heard people say that they didn't really know what to do, so they figured someone better equipped would sort it out.
- I have heard people say that the survivor and their supporters should stop being so divisive, stop trying to spread such hate against the perpetrator. I have even heard people argue that there could be no other explanation than that the survivor *must* be working for the Feds.
- I have heard people say that they never really liked either the survivor or the perpetrator that much anyway.



dictate everything that happens for them, for the spaces around them, for their own healing process. The survivor should be fully supported in whatever they need for themselves, but it is still possible for them to ask for unacceptable things from the perpetrator. They shouldn't be the only ones to dictate what the perpetrator should do or how it will be best for them to achieve the collectively desired goals. There has to be room for negotiating what is reasonable and non-coercive to ask for and what can be challenging in a productive way for the perpetrator. Accountability processes are not the place for exacting revenge. Again, it is completely valid if that is what the survivor wants—particularly if the perpetrator is unwilling to participate in an accountability process—but that type of retaliation must happen outside of this process.

### Setting Boundaries for (Not) Interacting

Along with establishing how the survivor and perpetrator will or will not communicate with one another, it may be important to create other ground rules for negotiating the physical spaces and working relationships in which the survivor and perpetrator could potentially interact. The survivor and their support group should communicate as clearly as possible about how much separation from the perpetrator will create a positive healing environment for the survivor. Because these boundaries can be revisited and changed at any point in the process, survivors should feel entitled to try out various approaches until they find a system that works.

As the support groups develop the details of the boundaries, they should take the context

into consideration. First, they should evaluate how much community the survivor and the perpetrator share:

- How interconnected are the communities of the survivor and the perpetrator? Where do they overlap and diverge?
- What is their capacity for support?
- How can the perpetrator continue to have positive social interactions without infringing on the space of the survivor?
- How can the perpetrator use the distinct communities they come from as a way to get outside support without sidestepping their accountability?

The support groups should also establish what social spaces the survivor and the perpetrator share; this may include their houses, friends' houses, organizing spaces, community venues, or public places they have no influence over:

- How often are the survivor and the perpetrator in those spaces?
- How important are they to the healing and support needed by both people?
- How does access to those spaces contribute to accruing informal social or political capital?

Finally, support groups should consider what projects the survivor and the perpetrator share:

- Does the survivor want to continue work-related communication in person, through email, or via listservs, or is some more mediated approach desired?
- How does this affect the survivor and the perpetrator's participation in different groups that communicate and work together?

- For groups that both the survivor and the perpetrator are a part of, is this work that contributes to or distracts from the accountability and healing processes?

It can be incredibly complicated to create safe spaces for the survivor and their friends while maintaining the perpetrator's connection to and participation in radical communities. Clear communication can help facilitate dealing with these challenges in the small, interconnected social circles the survivor and perpetrator often share. In addition to making specific requests for access to social space without the perpetrator, the survivor or their support group may ask the perpetrator to decrease their general visibility—minimizing the ways they are around, even when they are not around. That might mean asking the perpetrator to take significant steps back from public organizing, to make an effort to avoid receiving public recognition, or to spend less time in high-profile social settings.

### Setting Goals for "Progress"

Once the structure for the accountability process is in place—networks of support for the survivor and perpetrator, modes of communication, and some basic boundaries around their interactions—it is possible to begin to develop a curriculum. Everyone who can offer perspective should, as various people's combined experiences with the perpetrator's abusive behaviors will provide the most comprehensive picture of the problem. Again, people should be especially cautious never to contradict the survivor's, or anyone else's, direct experience of the abuse.

Often, the first steps involve establishing a shared understanding of what happened. This is essentially an agreement of terms—the development of specific, appropriate language. This can include describing some or all of the distinct examples of abuse, and more generally ascertaining what the recurring patterns of abuse are. To explain individual experiences, we can look to classifying words like abuse, assault, unconsensual interaction, or boundary violation. Describing the overarching patterns of the abuse may be much more difficult, but figuring out the connections between the individual instances of abuse means the difference between a symptomatic and a holistic approach to recovery.

As in every aspect of the accountability process, the way these details are decided will vary from one situation to another. In one case, the survivor may want to identify a list of examples of the abuse without input from anyone else, and leave the task of describing the behavioral patterns up to the perpetrator's support network; in another, the survivor may want to discuss everything to agreement with the perpetrator and/or the perpetrator's support group. Regardless of how involved or removed from the process the survivor chooses to be, the perpetrator's support group must function with due respect for the survivor and be equipped to take the lead wherever the survivor doesn't want to.

Much of the actual emotional and theoretical processing will probably be up to the perpetrator's support group, although the survivor may want to give input about what to prioritize or how to approach certain topics. It is important for the perpetrator's support network to help the perpetrator work out what their abusive

patterns are and where they come from and to create space for the perpetrator to process through their own abuse history to understand how it is interlinked with their abusive behavior. It is also important for the perpetrator to develop a theoretical framework for understanding abuse through a critical analysis of binary gender, patriarchy, and violence in our culture.

All of this is a tall order. Even the best of us can spend our whole lives trying to unlearn our defense mechanisms, poor communication skills, and the fucked up ways we relate to other people. It is a serious commitment, regardless of one's history with abuse. For the purposes of the accountability process, it's necessary to break down this complicated and massive endeavor into more manageable pieces. Some approaches to these tasks can include:

- Getting together regularly with a group of friends or one peer mentor to read books, talk through discussion questions, practice consent role plays, and develop concrete skills for improved communication. Topics to consider include: gender, sexism, patriarchy, abuse, violence, nonviolent communication, rape culture, consent, and deconstructing masculinity. This could also function as a men's—or other gender-based—support group to talk more generally about past and present experiences bound up in gender.

- Getting together regularly with a counselor to get to the emotional centers of gravity of the abuse and develop an honest understanding of how to make concrete changes. This could be a professional, licensed counselor\*, a friend who has well-developed counseling and communication skills, or a trained co-counselor. Meeting with any type of counselor should provide space solely to focus on the emotional challenges facing the perpetrator.

- Using something like an accountability circle model, in which both the survivor and the perpetrator are present with one or two supporters and a facilitator. This can be a good way to clarify what happened and get a good foundational base to move from. This can be particularly useful if the perpetrator resists accepting the survivor's definitions of their experience of the abuse; sometimes hearing the concerns from more neutral parties can help the perpetrator really take in the gravity of the situation.

Also, don't be afraid to explore outside resources when your communities don't have the capability to meet all of your needs. Look to existing men's group, batterers' programs, or abuser recovery programs. Find a local peace and justice group that does mediation† and de-escalation trainings. Go to the local

\* It may be possible to find radical or radical-friendly counselors in your area. However, avoid going to a counselor who doesn't have any grounding in a radical or feminist analysis of relationships. It may just fuck things up more.

† Despite the suggestion to take advantage of mediation trainings to further a perpetrator's communication skill set, mediation should not be used as a substitution for an accountability process. Mediation is for two people having a conflict that needs to be resolved; abuse is not mutual. Abuse is not simply about two people needing to come to the table to work things out. Mediators may certainly be useful for helping to facilitate some of the concrete negotiations within an accountability process, but please do not suggest a session with a mediator as an option instead of a long-term commitment to an accountability process.

rape crisis center to get domestic violence and sexual assault survivor advocacy trainings. Find networks of co-counselors in the area and go through their trainings. If drug or alcohol problems are a factor, consider Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or other rehabilitation options.

With so much to be done, figuring out how to mark a perpetrator's progress is complicated. Some perpetrators who are familiar with the radical argot around consent and accountability may appear to be making swift progress in the way they talk about the issues, while internally refusing to explore the origins of the abuse in a way that leads to them accepting responsibility and making changes. It's important to go beyond such a superficial reading of the perpetrator's emotional development.

One option is for the support networks to make a timeline of various subjects to tackle or approaches to graduate through. For example:

rape culture ► deconstructing masculinity ►  
gender binary ► consent

or

accountability circle ► men's discussion group  
► batterer's recovery program ► co-counseling  
► rape crisis line volunteering

The support networks could make a list of new, concrete skills to be developed, or they could create a system for regular progress reports. Ideally, the support networks will find a process that feels both thorough and sustainable.

## Disclosure

Once terms have been agreed upon to talk about the abuse and there is some semblance of a plan in place, figure out how to talk to others about the abuse and the accountability process. Remember that a person's patterns of abusive behavior affect more than just those within the relationships where the abuse is the most focused. It's important for the perpetrator to communicate about their accountability process with their future partners, friends, housemates, comrades, and anyone they organize with.

It may be that disclosure of the perpetrator's abuse history is one part of the accountability process. The survivor may request specific ways or time frames in which the perpetrator should talk about the abuse to other people in their life, or the survivor may request that the perpetrator publicly disclose information about their accountability process through an open letter, zine, or other means. Public disclosure from the perpetrator may be important for communication across multiple communities or for a perpetrator who is widely known. At its best, disclosure can be an important way to open up dialogue in a wide array of spaces.

If the perpetrator is unwilling to participate in an accountability process or is otherwise resistant to the survivor's requests, public disclosure about the abuse from the survivor or their

support networks may be necessary to give people the pertinent information about a perpetrator's history. Disclosure about the abuse may also be used as a pressure tactic; the humiliation and widespread attention of publicly disclosing the perpetrator's failure to participate in an accountability process may push the perpetrator to take it more seriously. Also, when other people from the perpetrator's life begin to ask them about the situation or participate even peripherally in the accountability process, this can emphasize the importance of engaging with it.

However, disclosure is a complicated thing. It is increasingly acceptable in anarchist circles for perpetrators to disclose information about their histories of abuse and their accountability processes. Although it is important to create an environment in which it is possible to communicate openly even about difficult, emotional things, it is also necessary to develop a culture of awareness about how that disclosure will affect the people addressed—especially if they are acquaintances or simply friends. At the forefront of this concern is sensitivity to survivors who may not want to be forced to think about abuse simply because a perpetrator needs to address it. It is crucial to check in first before bringing up such a charged issue, but it may be more complicated than that to create the space for someone who may already have difficulties asserting their boundaries to navigate out of such a request.

Over the last year and a half, six different people in my life—some of whom I am not especially close with—have chosen to disclose this kind of information to me. Two came looking for my help; of the others, some might say they told me about it because they wanted me to know, another might simply say he was told to do so. All of them, though, approached me in ways that made me feel trapped; even when they asked if it was OK, the subtext was always, “I'm asking you because I need your help. I *need* you to hear this. And eventually I need your approval.” I know that I am not the only female-bodied person, not the only survivor, who is beginning to move beyond feeling overwhelmed into feeling overburdened by the non-stop crisis created by this kind of disclosure. And I know I am not the only one who feels the subtle perpetuation of the abusive dynamic in the asking that is not really asking, particularly when so many men are consistently seeking support solely from the women in their lives. I'm not here just to fix it for you; I'm not ready at your disposal.

For every perpetrator who crosses the threshold from uncertainty into ease about their accountability process, and for every well-intentioned support network that pushes a perpetrator to disclose their abuse history to *everyone* in their life, I would like to ask them to consider their motivations carefully and think through the consequences each time before approaching this kind of disclosure with new people. What do you want to achieve by telling this person? Is it for you, or is it for them? How can you make it clear that it's OK for you not to broach the subject right now? If this person doesn't want to hear about your history, how should you conduct yourself?

Lately, radical conferences and gatherings have been experimenting with policies around perpetrator disclosure about abuse history. At the winter 2008 Earth First! Organizer's Conference, some people in the hosting collective put together a perpetrator

accountability circle for the rural gathering. Two people had abuse histories that they felt were important to share with everyone, and they opened up a space for other perpetrators to disclose information about their histories at the morning circle attended by the whole camp. I think the idea was to encourage—or maybe even destigmatize—disclosure around these critically important issues. They made sure to explain the accountability circle and left space for people to leave if they wanted to. I don't know if anyone left before the accountability circle, but I know that some people ended up feeling cornered, tricked into a painfully unpleasant lecture that felt impossible to leave. Rather than individuals clearly and directly owning up to past mistakes and providing examples of early indicators about potential abuse patterns, tips for checking in about triggers, or insight that could have been concretely useful, the circle quickly devolved into a bunch of men ranting endlessly and thoughtlessly about what abuse is.

Rather than opening up space for dialogue, the accountability circle felt silencing. The space was designed for perpetrators to talk and survivors to listen. It became a perpetuation of the very thing it was intended to counteract. I left the circle feeling like it would have been a more productive use of time to get all of those people to sit down and listen to survivors tell their stories about abuse, to hear women and trans folks talk about their daily experiences with systemic sexism, for the people who are used to dominating social spaces to experience what it means to listen. Perhaps it can still be possible to balance disclosure with awareness.

## Long-Term Support

Perpetrator accountability is not an easy or short process, even after everything is set in motion. It takes a lifelong commitment to change behaviors that are so deeply ingrained; it requires consistent effort and support. When talking about follow-up, we should be making schedules for weeks, but also talking about checking in after months and years. It takes that kind of long-lasting support to make real transformation possible.

Another part of follow-up is getting our stories of recovery out there. People often say that there's not a lot of success with grass-roots perpetrator accountability processes—that fundamentally, perpetrators don't change their abusive behaviors. But people also aren't used to talking about the tough stuff they've been through, nor chronicling the trajectories of their emotional and personal growth. If you're a perpetrator who has begun to make substantial progress in your accountability process, if enough time has passed that you're feeling settled in this new plateau, check in with your support network and write a zine or essay about it. Become a mentor to another perpetrator involved in an accountability process. Do what you can to share your experiences and help others through this daunting process.

# From Popular Power to Social War

# CHILE



IN THE EARLY HOURS OF MAY 22, 2009, 27-year-old anarchist Mauricio Morales Duarte died in a bomb explosion outside the School of Prison Guards in downtown Santiago, Chile. Capitalist media alleged that he was transporting an explosive device to the school and may have been involved in a series of similar bombings that had occurred throughout the capital in the preceding months. Since 2006, there have been nearly 100 low-intensity, non-lethal bombings across the capital. These actions have

occurred without arrests directly linked to the attacks, despite heightened attention from police and intelligence agencies.\*

Anarchist and libertarian† activity in Chile takes place in a significantly different context than in the United States, and consequently takes on different forms. As in Greece, examined in the previous issue of *Rolling Thunder*, the contemporary Chilean anarchist movement has its roots in a long struggle against a US-backed dictatorship. Current revolutionary movements and state repression are descended in a direct line from resistance and repression under the Pinochet regime. This affords anarchists a broader base of support and a wider understanding of their efforts, but also intensifies clashes with the authorities. Mauricio was not the first anarchist to die in conflict with the state in recent years. Over the past decade,

\* A month later, Cristian Cancino was arrested for allegedly providing black powder for explosive devices from his workplace in the mining industry. Cancino's case is the first instance under the democratic regime in which the dictatorship-era anti-terrorism law is being used in Santiago; the law is usually reserved to repress indigenous Mapuche revolutionaries in southern Chile.

† Some anti-authoritarian comrades in Chile do not call themselves anarchists, instead referring to themselves as libertarians. The term has a decidedly different meaning than it does in the United States.

Claudia López Benaiges, Daniel Menco Prieto, Jhonny Cariqueo Yañez, and others have lost their lives—all killed by police.

What are the roots of current social conflict in Chile, and of anarchist involvement? Has the transition from dictatorship to democracy shifted the terrain? Can US anarchists learn from the movement in Chile, or is the context utterly different?

## The First Phase of US Intervention

“The key is psych war within Chile.”  
-CIA secret cable, September 27, 1970

Political discourse in Chile—from politicians and capitalist media to revolutionary circles—is largely dominated by the legacy of the military dictatorship. For seventeen years, Chileans lived under the rule of Augusto Pinochet. The coup d'état that brought him to power was backed by the US government. Upon seizing power, the military murdered thousands, tortured tens of thousands, and forced countless more into political exile. This continued until the dictatorship was slowly phased out between 1988 and 1990. The role of the US in establishing military rule in Chile is part of a larger program of supporting dictatorships throughout Latin America, including Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia.

*The touch of empire has been felt in so many places. The United States is not the empire; it is only its most famous spokesperson.*

The democratic system in Chile was historically divided into three key blocs: the electoral left, the center, and the right. Throughout the twentieth century, the center bloc was critical in deciding ruling coalitions and the presidency. This mechanism allowed a presidential candidate to secure a majority of votes even though the electoral tradition was not a bipartisan system as in the United States. There were exceptions to this tradition, such as the election of the right wing president Jorge Alessandri Rodríguez. The 1958 election of Alessandri foreshadowed complications in the three electoral blocs, which would one day be used as a justification for the military coup of 1973. As a candidate for the National Party (PN), Alessandri barely won a plurality in the election by 32.2%. His closest competitor, Salvador Allende Gossens from the Front for Popular Action (FRAP), received 28.5% of the vote, while the centrist candidate from the Christian Democrat Party (PDC) gained 20.5% of the vote. Without a clear majority, the decision to select the president fell upon congress, which supported the plurality in favor of Alessandri.

This election was not the last attempt by Allende to bring a coalition of left parties to power. Though influenced by anarchism during his youth, Allende co-founded the Socialist Party in 1933, and ran unsuccessfully for president so many times that he joked that his epitaph would read “here lies the next president of Chile.” The 1958 election was Allende's second attempt, and he failed again in 1964, losing this time to the Christian Democrat candidate. It was the height of the Cold War; fearing that a Marxist electoral victory would destabilize their control of Latin America, the US had crafted a program

called the Alliance for Progress to empower centrist parties across Latin America. Chile was a key target of this new program. Though many documents from this period remain classified, it is known that the US covertly financed \$4 million to the Christian Democrats' campaign during the 1964 election. This would only be exceeded in the next election.

In 1970, Allende ran for the presidency on the ticket of a new coalition of left parties, the Popular Unity (UP), a tenuous alliance including Allende's Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Radical Party, the Movement of Unitary Popular Action (MAPU), and the Social Democracy Party (PSD). Allende was once again in tight competition with right-wing candidate Alessandri, and the US government was following the contest closely. This time, in a situation similar to the Alessandri election of 1958, Allende gained a plurality with 36.6% of the vote, while Alessandri followed with nearly 35.3%.

In a secret CIA document from September 16, 1970, officials discussed “Project FUBELT,” a plan to prevent Allende from successfully assuming power. The memorandum clearly states,

The Director told the group that President Nixon had decided that an Allende regime in Chile was not acceptable to the United States. The president asked the Agency to prevent Allende from coming to power or to unseat him. The president authorized ten million dollars for this purpose, if needed. Further, The Agency [sic] is to carry out this mission without coordination from the Departments of State or Defense.

This document has only been public since the early 2000s, and it substantiates what many have suspected ever since the 1973 coup.

The US government developed two plans to prevent Allende from assuming the presidency. The first plan, Track I, was to dissuade the Chilean congress from accepting Allende's victory, and the second, Track II, was to create the conditions for direct military intervention. Track I focused on creating fears of a possible communist totalitarian state in order to persuade the current president to dissolve his cabinet, create a new cabinet with military officers, refuse to accept the presidency of Allende, and finally leave the country. According to reports, the presiding president felt uneasy with this plan, being a staunch constitutionalist and centrist. Track I failed when congress approved Allende in a last-minute decision after he signed a document affirming his support for the Chilean constitution.

Subsequent CIA documents—all with pages of blacked out text—illustrate detailed intelligence techniques for psychological warfare intended to destabilize the confirmation of Allende. On September 17, the CIA delivered a report stating that they were preparing a group that would “conduct special recruitment and other direct approaches—they all have ‘false flag’‡ experience.” Later CIA reports included plans to create a situation that could induce a military coup, including *economic warfare* to be instigated by Chileans with anti-Allende sympathies.

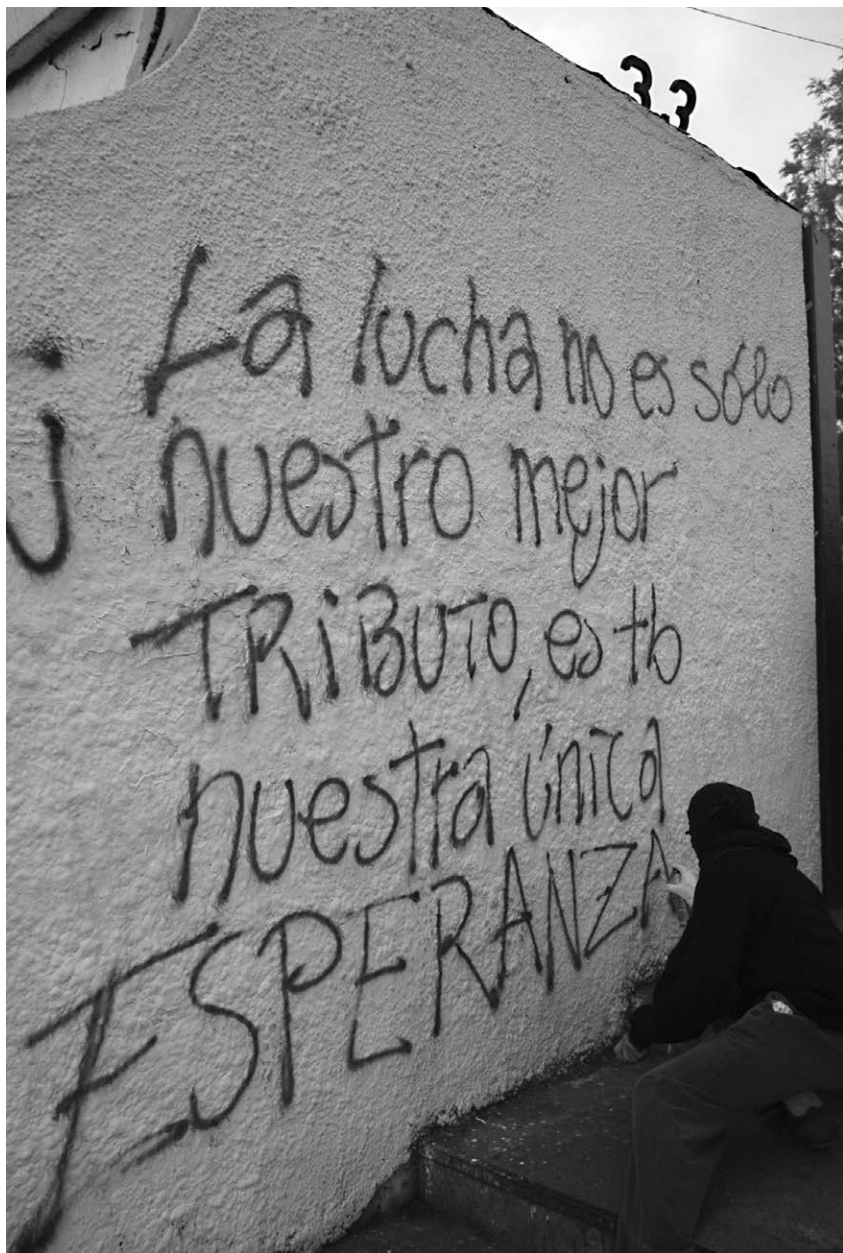
*We must prepare ourselves for psychological warfare today. We overhear their voices on our poorly tapped phones. We feel the weight of their eyes reading our email. They take our photographs before*

‡ “False flag” operations are covert operations designed to appear as though they are being carried out by entities other than those actually behind them.

Jhonny Cariqueo was killed by Chilean police in 2008, two days after the anniversary of the Day of the Youth Combatant. In this photograph, encapuchados gather around the casket during the funeral.







"The struggle is not only our best tribute, it is our only hope." A masked demonstrator writes on a wall outside the USACH.

meetings and social events. We hear rumors about friends and comrades being infiltrators; sometimes these are lies circulated by agents of the state. We are not afraid. We are prepared for all of these complications. We have a strong sense of security culture. We study our enemy.

### The Rise of the Popular Unity Coalition

"Workers of my country, I have faith in Chile and its destiny. Other men will overcome this dark and bitter moment when treason seeks to prevail. Keep in mind that, much sooner than later, the great avenues will again be opened through which free men will pass to construct a better society."  
-Allende's final radio address

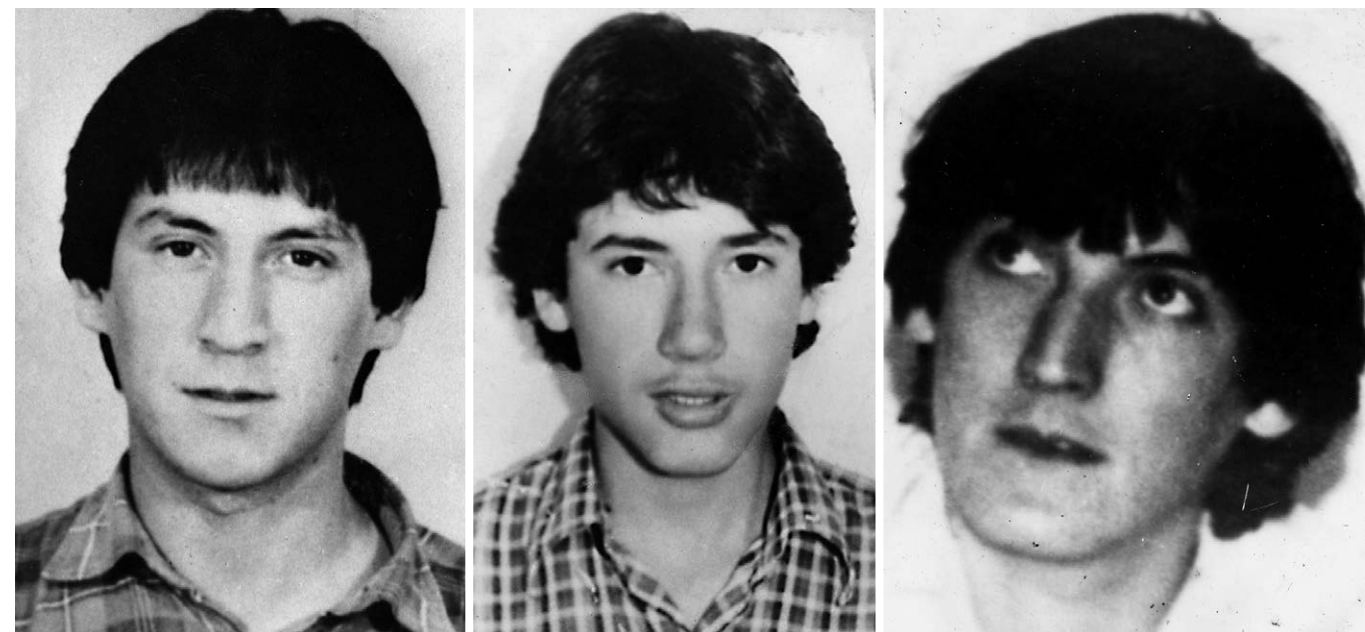
Allende's electoral victory heralded a period of social tensions in Chile. The new government undertook a series of reforms, eventually nationalizing the vast copper mines in the northern part of the country. Meanwhile, segments of the Chilean bourgeoisie began a campaign to undermine the Popular Unity coalition. Many of their tactics were in line with the CIA's Track II plan: for example, shop owners falsely claimed food shortages to spread fear of economic collapse and hyperinflation. The Chilean right also employed more direct approaches; a right wing organization, *Patria y Libertad*, formed to combat revolutionaries during street demonstrations.

Although the new president was a constitutionalist and reformist, more militant groups used this moment to mobilize their forces. One key group, the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), was an armed organization formed in 1965 by radical students with revolutionary tendencies, including some anarchists; the MIR later declared itself Marxist-Leninist, in 1967. While the statist Allendista movement promoted the idea of the *vía pacífica*, the peaceful way, it was the revolutionary elements that pushed direct conflict with the bourgeoisie. The MIR declared, "The MIR rejects the theory of the 'peaceful way,' because it politically disarms the proletariat and is useless, because the bourgeoisie will choose totalitarian dictatorship and civil war before peacefully giving up power."\*

*The dictatorship of capital does not know peace. It is an empire built upon massacres and fear. The dictatorship only promotes peaceful dissent to keep us incapable of destroying it.*

After a failed coup attempt by a faction of the military on June 29, 1973, an even tenser atmosphere reigned in Santiago. Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, head of the Chilean army, did not support the effort. He was generally considered a constitutionalist opposed to military intervention—at least until he helped lead the successful coup d'état on September 11. There is evidence of US support for the coup in secret documents that were recently made public, but it is noteworthy that there was domestic support

\* The period of the Popular Unity was a complicated time of conflicting revolutionary tendencies and right wing conspiracies. Workers took over factories and students occupied their schools against the will of the Allende government; there were massive demonstrations in the streets. Readers interested in the history of this period should check out the three part documentary, *La Batalla de Chile*, filmed just before and during the military coup. Part three, "El Poder Popular," contains an especially interesting look into these competing tendencies.



[Left, Center] Eduardo and Rafael Vergara, young militants of the MIR, were gunned down by police in Villa Francia on March 29, 1985. The date is now known as the Day the Youth Combatant.

[Right] Pablo Vergara, militant of the MIR, was blown up in the southern city of Temuco on November 5, 1988, three years after the murder of his brothers, Eduardo and Rafael.

for the coup among the Chilean bourgeoisie, political right, and centrist parties. Members of the centrist electoral bloc believed that the military would take power only temporarily before returning it to the political structures from before Popular Unity rule.

*Allende also believed this to be true, and preferred temporary military rule to armed conflict. This demonstrates the reformist intentions of his entire project.*

In Allende's final radio address, he requested that leftists, students, and workers not raise an armed resistance to the military, a plea that was ignored by the MIR and others. These organizations assisted in the armed defense of the *poblaciones*, the poor neighborhoods on the outskirts of Santiago, such as la Legua, that were raided by the military during the coup d'état.

The military regime did not immediately hand power over to the center and right-wing electoral blocs, but held it for seventeen years.

### Militant Activity during the Dictatorship

"In Chile, a leaf does not move without me knowing about it."  
-Augusto Pinochet

The armed forces quickly organized a ruling junta including all branches of the military and the police. Pinochet was selected head of the regime; initially this was to be a temporary position rotated between various members of the junta. The military government justified the coup as a preemptive measure against *Plan*

Z, an alleged Popular Unity coalition plot for armed communist revolution, which has never been substantiated. As time passed, Pinochet secured control of the military regime, which he retained until its end.

The new regime created a list of suspected communists and subversives in the country. Many of these were detained and executed or tortured. Some, such as Miguel Enríquez Espinosa of the MIR, went underground to combat the new regime; others went into exile. Enríquez was eventually shot to death in a standoff in 1974 with officials from the National Intelligence Directorate (DINA), the new secret police force. After the repression of the early 1970s, many Chileans were afraid to participate in illegal street demonstrations. The 1980s, however, brought a resurgence of political activity against the military regime, and the MIR reemerged as a political force.

*As revolutionary anarchists, we critique the organizations of the past that failed to reject state power, but we do not forget their practice in combat. We are at war.*

Political actions during this period included clandestine activity. In addition to the historic MIR, two more armed organizations formed in the 1980s: a wing of the Community Party designated the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front (FPMR) and a militant faction of the MAPU from the Popular Unity era, called MAPU-Lautaro. In one of the most famous cases, on September 7, 1986, a cell of the FPMR unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Pinochet. All three organizations engaged in armed actions during the dictatorship, including expropriations.



An encapuchado walks away after throwing handbills in the air during confrontational protests at the University of Chile. The leaflets explain the motives for the protest. Under the dictatorship, protesters would throw pamphlets in the air by the hundreds to break the censorship of dissent.

It is impossible to steal what is ours. Our comrades a generation ago raided trucks that transported groceries to be sold in the poblaciones. The bourgeoisie made its riches off the poverty in those communities until one day the neighborhood took what it needed.

This period saw a new phase of open conflict with the dictatorship, and it also produced emblematic stories of repression. In one case, Carmen Gloria Quintana Arancibia was set on fire by soldiers while participating in a small street demonstration. She survived the incident, though others did not. Gloria was badly burned, and the images of her injuries deeply impacted public opinion of repression during the dictatorship.

On March 29, 1985, two young brothers, Rafael and Eduardo Vergara Toledo, both

militants of the MIR, were gunned down by police as they walked through the población Villa Francia, a neighborhood known to be a center of resistance to the dictatorship. The Vergara brothers' funeral was a politically charged event in Villa Francia. Families, friends, and comrades of youth murdered by the state often took their funerals as occasions for protest; this still occurs today. The anniversary of the murder of the Vergara brothers was marked for years to come, both privately and publicly, and the date eventually became known as Día del Joven Combatiente, the Day of the Youth Combatant.

On November 5, 1988, their older brother and comrade, Pablo, was blown up in southern Chile along with a fellow MIR militant, Aracely Romo Álvarez. While these cases are still discussed today, there were many other examples of repression. The Day of the Youth Combatant has become known across Chile and now around the world as a result of the political militancy and dedication of the victims' surviving relatives. Their sister, Ana Vergara, had spent years in exile with Pablo, and she continues to organize memorial activities for the brothers to this day. Their parents, Luisa Toledo and Manuel Vergara, also continue to give passionate speeches in support of revolutionary movements, including anarchist efforts.

## Trading One Dictatorship for Another

The 1980s witnessed a division among the opponents of the military regime. Many reformist groups proposed an unarmed transition to bourgeois democracy, while more revolutionary elements proposed an armed insurrection against the capitalist state. The assassination attempt by the FPMR in 1986 forced this debate to the foreground. The political constitution of 1980—a document approved in a rigged plebiscite—required the dictatorship to hold a referendum on the regime in 1988. The reformist elements of the opposition seized this opportunity to wage a successful campaign for the *no vote* against the ruling dictatorship. The ruling classes in Chile embraced the return to a democratic state rather than face the possibility of an insurrection.

*The insurrection has only begun. Many claim that the state is advancing upon us, but we respond that we have only made the cracks in its structure clearer.*

The transition to a democratic state took place between 1988 and 1990; under the new system, the Socialist Party and other political parties began open negotiations with members of the former dictatorship. The Communist Party was written out of the process, but supported it anyway, hoping to gain more access to the political system further down the road—a goal they still have not achieved. In one attempt to pursue this objective, they called for the FPMR to disarm; some factions of the organization turned in their guns, while others did not.

With the reintroduction of democracy to Chile, the bourgeoisie found a new solution to the challenge of having three traditional electoral blocs. *La Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia*, originally formed as a coalition of centrist and center-left parties for the *no vote*, became the new dominant regime; it continues to rule to this day. The political right formed a coalition called *Alianza por Chile*, which includes numerous figures from the former military dictatorship. This created a system that no longer involved a split between three electoral blocs, thus preventing electoral left parties from gaining power via the political system.

The new political strategy of the bourgeoisie was one of social control and domination. The Socialist Party of the deceased Allende embraced the neoliberal policies introduced by the Pinochet dictatorship. The Concertación, including the Socialist Party and the Christian Democrat Party, began an international campaign to change Chile's image from a military dictatorship to a successful neoliberal democracy. Under the guidance of the neoliberal politician Sebastián Piñera Echenique,\* credit cards were introduced.

*The press worked hard to create a middle-class identity. They bombarded pobladores, students, and workers with propaganda encouraging them to support the same dictatorship, changed only by a new face and empty promises of human rights and peace. The supposed revolutionary parties of yesteryear showed their true colors.*

Between the 1970s and 1990s, the state discourse shifted from criminalizing revolutionaries as communists to defaming them as terrorists. This took place around the world; in Chile, it was a strategic move to frame the new democracy as a stable alternative to insurrection or war. During this period, newspapers were filled with articles about armed actions and suspected terrorist activity, and the Concertación took on the role of the former dictatorship in condemning these groups as small extremist organizations. Cells of the FPMR,† the MIR, and MAPU-Lautaro continued armed activity against the new democratic regime, which responded with the same tactics the dictatorship had utilized. Comrades were killed in combat, tortured, and murdered. The new state intelligence organization, sometimes called *the office*, focused much of its attention on MAPU-Lautaro.

\* Piñera is a brother of one of the Chicago Boys—a group of economists trained in the US under Milton Friedman. They were instrumental in designing the economy under Pinochet, and their legacy continues to this day.

† One cell of the FPMR that did not disarm despite the request of the Communist Party assassinated a dictatorship-era figure, Jaime Guzmán Errázuriz, in 1991.

MAPU-Lautaro faced severe infiltration, and many of its militants were jailed over the course of the early 1990s. The organization was comprised of three structures: the Lautaro Youth Movement (MJL), the Rebellious and Popular Lautaro Forces (FRPL), and MAPU-Lautaro itself. With a significant part of the organization in jail, MAPU-Lautaro focused much of its energy inside the prison. In 1996, numerous members of the youth faction of the group, the MJL, organized themselves in a collective of prisoners called *Kamina Libre*. In the late 1990s, groups of young anarchists outside of prison began doing support work for political prisoners, including *Kamina Libre*. Consequently, many ex-militants of the MJL later left prison as libertarians and critics of authoritarian politics, a pivotal development in the Chilean anarchist movement.

*We defend the prisoners of war from both dictatorship and democracy. Despite differences in tactics and organization, our enemy is the same. We engaged in passionate debate during visiting hours. We spent hours seeking food and needed items for our jailed friends. We continue to this day.*

Anti-authoritarian ideas gained prominence in the revolutionary movements in Chile as the anti-globalization movement became influential around the globe. The anti-globalization movement reached a height in Chile during the APEC conference in late 2004. While there have been anarchists present throughout the history of political struggle in Chile, Marxist and reformist organizations dominated during the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s.

At the end of the 1990s, the Congreso de Unificación Anarco-Comunista (CUAC) formed, and over the course of the early 2000s other organizations such as the Organización Comunista Libertaria (OCL) emerged from the platformist tradition. Since then, the development of anarchist practice in Chile has included both platformist and insurrectionary perspectives. Many anarchists in Chile look positively upon Latin American insurrectionary figures such as the Argentine Severino Di Giovanni, active during the 1920s. Underground communiqués written after recent bombings and attacks on capital in Santiago are often signed by affinity groups that use the names of these individuals.

*We remember the revolutionary groups of the recent past. Actions against capital are immediately necessary, but their authoritarian structures failed us. Our older comrades joined these organizations because these groups were all that existed at the time. They thrived in the universities, liceos, and poblaciones. These revolutionaries watched their organizations suffer infiltration by intelligence agents in the early 1990s. The hierarchy only aided this process, as the leaders made decisions from jail.*

*Today, we attack the idea of authoritarian practice. Even some revolutionaries of yesterday have joined our ranks. Our actions reproduce themselves based on affinity. An anti-authoritarian structure does not mean inaction against capital; it means more effective action. There is no command to infiltrate. We are the invisible.*



"Social war." A city bus bears the evidence of protests in downtown Santiago.

## Remembering September 11: 2006

Since the time of Pinochet, people have engaged in protests and riots on various anniversaries. September 11, the date of the military coup, continues to be one of these days of combat. In a tradition originating from the era of the dictatorship, thousands march every year from downtown Santiago to the General Cemetery, where there is a memorial for the victims of the military regime. Police still utilize militarized machinery to repress protestors the same way they did before democracy. The Fuerzas Especiales of the Carabineros, which are basically highly-equipped riot police, can be seen downtown on a daily basis.

*As soon as we turned the corner, we were met by water cannons.\* Police attempted to corner the marchers, chasing us down with their horrible*

\* The Fuerzas Especiales have three main classes of vehicles. One of them, the guanaco, is a reinforced truck armed with water cannons. Another, the zorrillo, is similar to a military jeep and is capable of launching streams of tear gas. The third is the micro, used to transport riot police. It is also used as a storing pen for recent arrestees. Carabineros sometimes use a fourth vehicle, the tanqueta, a small tank, in the most intense conflicts, such as during the September 11 protests in the poblaciones. The police still use tear gas without hesitation; the strength of the tear gas depends on the occasion and location. More rebellious places outside of downtown are often attacked with heavier mixes of gas.

*machines. After a tactical retreat, we regrouped to plan how we would meet our friends. I noticed that the bank, which had been protected by riot police just moments ago, had been dramatically assaulted. Its windows were destroyed and its walls had been painted: "The struggle continues." Then the zorrillo, utilized by the Special Forces, made its round of attacks. From a short distance, I saw a large flash of fire: someone threw a Molotov. The pigs were lined up outside of the cemetery.*

The police employ militarized formations that have not changed since the dictatorship. Riot police generally keep a distance from protestors, instead relying on their armored vehicles to direct the crowd. Police on foot will only approach crowds in large teams; individual police are at risk of being attacked by protestors.

Anarchists regularly participate in protests in downtown Santiago, often engaging in combat with police. Some years, the September 11 protest involves intense riots in which militants attack banks and businesses with Molotov cocktails. In 2006, a masked protestor threw a Molotov cocktail at la Moneda, the presidential palace. Although the attempt did not cause any structural damage, it created a wave of sensationalist reports in the capitalist press.

*I landed near a news van and happened to catch some amazing news. A Molotov had hit la Moneda! The press would later repeat the usual slurs about anarchists along with images of the attack.*

*The march had turned another corner. We only had to enter straight ahead through a small alley. Seconds later I found myself in the thick of a crowd thousands strong, with countless encapuchados, people who mask their faces in protest, moving through downtown. I could hear the constant sound of shattering glass. We were not under attack; we were attacking them! I was surrounded by an array of black flags and combatants armed with makeshift weapons. Not a single capitalist target was left untouched.*

In a wave of repression following the incident, the Carabineros raided a squatted social center and a politically active university before a protest concerning the educational system. Police claimed that the squat, la Mansión, was a factory for manufacturing Molotov cocktails. Carabineros even presented machetes and chemicals from the school, the Universidad de Santiago de Chile, to the press as probable weapons for combating riot police. The director of the university was

forced to appear on the news to negate these accusations, as the machetes were from an African dance class and the chemicals from the chemistry lab.

Carabineros, politicians, and the press were not the only groups to criminalize anarchists during the September 11 march. The youth faction of the Communist Party spoke out against the attack on la Moneda. The Communist Party was among the official organizers of the protest, and they claimed that they would forcibly prevent anarchists from disrupting future marches. However, the protests have continued every September 11 since, and the Communist Youth will never play the role of protest police in Chile.

*The march continued toward the General Cemetery. I heard a series of whistles from comrades, signaling trouble. Guanacos were approaching from all sides! We ran for cover. I quickly found myself separated from my partners as the street combat continued. Out of the corner of my eye, I glimpsed someone I recognized. We managed to reach each other; holding hands to make sure we would not get separated, we continued toward our destination. We were now exiting downtown and*

A group of encapuchados fight police on the other side of the gates that surround a campus of the University of Chile.



getting close to the General Cemetery. My partner and I recognized another friend. We regrouped.

By a lucky break, we saw a large group entering the parking lot of a nearby apartment complex. A guard attempted to close the gate to the lot, but upon seeing our desperation, he allowed us to enter. We hid behind cars. A zorrillo raced by, leaving a trail of tear gas. While one of my partners was recovering from the effects of the gas, I walked to the gate to see if it might be a good moment to exit. I happened to look up towards the apartments over us, and something caught my attention—people were throwing things at us! No, people were not throwing things at us; residents of the apartment complex were throwing lemons to us. When you're suffering from the effects of tear gas, lemons are a beautiful sight; chewing on their peels can help you recover your breath.

Finally, we were able to enter the cemetery. Riot police routinely raid the General Cemetery, so a series of barricades were mounted to slow them from entering the grounds, and protestors defended themselves with rocks and the occasional Molotov cocktail. The police eventually fought their way in, but their advance was not easy. Even for some time after things died down, I could see an occasional masked demonstrator running between the networks of narrow roads that make up the cemetery.

## The Student Rebellion

In Santiago, some of the public universities have a strong tradition of protest culture; these include the Universidad de Chile, the Universidad de Santiago de Chile (USACH), Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencia de la Educación (UMCE), and the Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana (UTEM). Ex-Pedagógico, as many students still call the UMCE, is a historic site of student protest under both the dictatorship and today's democracy. Eduardo Vergara, one of the brothers killed on the Day of the Youth Combatant, was an active student at this campus and was eventually expelled for his political activities. Outside of Santiago, there are other politically active universities, including the Universidad de Valparaíso, the Universidad de Tarapacá, the Universidad de la Frontera (UFRO), and the Universidad de Concepción. There are also certain private institutions that are politically active, such as the Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano—commonly called la Academia—and the Universidad de Artes y Ciencias Sociales (ARCIS).

Students regularly engage in strikes and occupations of their departments, and sometimes in occupations of entire universities. These phases of activity are generally decided through student spokescouncils. Under the democratic regime, the protests focus on reformist demands regarding the educational system, both on a national level and in specific universities. Some factions of the student body, such as the formal student government, limit themselves to advancing these demands, while other elements use these protests as opportunities for agitation. Some revolutionary student organizations come from a traditional leftist background; but over recent years, anarchists have become increasingly influential in student protests. Currently, there is participation from groups with diverse traditions in anarchist practice; there are formal organizations, such as the

Student Libertarian Front (FEL), and insurrectionary anarchists who reject formal organization.

The tradition of political activity in universities in Chile extends back before the Popular Unity period. The massive traditional universities—the Universidad de Chile and the USACH—were broken up by the dictatorship into smaller schools in an attempt to maintain control over the rebellious student population. The dictatorship regularly attacked students at the universities from outside the gates; the democratic state continues to do this today. In response to student protests, Carabineros will indiscriminately fire tear gas onto the campus and charge the school gates with guanacos and zorrillos. Riot police also regularly fire gas canisters at the bodies of demonstrators, a tactic that took the life of the young anarchist Daniel Menco at a university demonstration in northern Chile in 1999. Despite this, the schools remain territories of rebellion.

*We engage in territorial work to maintain space for confrontation, localities where the tradition of social conflict is kept alive. Our actions are propaganda of the deed for everyone who passes through the territory. We reproduce ourselves. We are the product of our actions.*

During moments of social conflict, the rebellious universities are centers of upheaval. Militant protestors regularly erect burning barricades outside the university gates and engage in long skirmishes with police. At the intersection of three rebellious campuses in Santiago, the street corner Macul and Grecia, riot police wait in their machines all day long in the parking lots of McDonald's and Shell. Over the past few years, *encapuchados* have set fire to the McDonald's with Molotov cocktails repeatedly.

Confrontational protests occur on political campuses year round, but they transpire with more regularity during traditional dates of protest such as September 11 and the Day of the Youth Combatant. Administrators often close the campuses down on these dates, and revolutionary students now protest throughout the month. September 11 is giving way to *black September*.

*The monotony of the school day was like any other. Students walked to their classes with an air of casual defeat, but some had a glint of optimism in their eyes. Anything could happen. It was late March, near the anniversary of the Day of the Youth Combatant. Over recent years, the director had been closing the school on March 29, the actual anniversary. Would the encapuchados materialize on this day? Would the director close the school as a precaution against the protests? People speculated about the prospects. When everyone had given up hope, our comrades appeared from the quiet school yards, taking up a spirited chant sounding the names of fallen combatants.*

*“Compañera Claudia López. ¡Presente! Compañero Jhonny Cariqueo. ¡Presente! Ahora. ¡Y siempre!”*

*Unmasked students gathered to watch the confrontation. They cheered when a Molotov engulfed the detachment of Carabineros outside the gate. Some of the encapuchados painted messages on university buildings, while others read statements to the student body:*

*“We have come here to manifest our revolutionary subversion. We are in a direct war with the state and its machinery of repression. We are here to display our hostilities to the system and to remember all the combatants who fell before us.”*

## The Penguin Revolution

The universities are not the only part of the school system to engage in militant protest. The *escolares* are high-school-aged students who study at *liceos*. Students at these schools have a long history of protest extending back past dictatorship, and many played a key role in the movements against the Pinochet regime, including some *escolares* who were members of armed organizations like the MIR.\*

The *escolares* continue to be a powerful social force; in 2006, they initiated one of the most significant waves of protest since the transition to democracy. Over 700,000 students went on strike against the Organic Law on Teaching (LOCE), which further privatized the education system. It was the last law Pinochet put into place before handing power over to the democracy in 1990. The massive protests against the LOCE were the culmination of many years of organizing. Students had gradually built a campaign based on marches, strikes, and school occupations; in 2006, this exploded into the streets. Students went on strike and *liceos* were occupied across the country. The movement was dubbed the Penguin Revolution by the press because of the colors of the student uniform.

Between late May and early June, students built barricades across the main avenue in downtown Santiago, while the capitalist press generated the usual sensationalist reports decrying them as delinquents. Then a journalist was hit in the face by a riot policeman's shield, and this single act apparently caused the capitalist press to change its entire discourse, criticizing the Carabineros as overly violent. Sympathy from the capitalist press was short-lived, though. The Carabineros eventually raided the occupied schools throughout Santiago; in some cases, they used the Grupo de Operaciones Policiales Especiales (GOPE), equivalent to US SWAT teams. Some students defended their spaces with projectiles.

*Escolares slowly gathered at the plaza. They jumped up and down as they chanted the names of their liceos. It was clear that they had a set plan of action: they took the streets before the riot police had time to finish gathering their forces. The president, Michelle Bachelet, was forced to address the public, pleading with the students to leave the school occupations.*

There was an unsuccessful attempt to revive the movement the following October. Some schools were occupied, but were quickly raided by riot police. In 2007, the *escolares* once again raised an offensive, and experienced more raids and criminalization. The state proposed a plan to end the LOCE and create the General Education Law (LGE) in an attempt to stall students. The new law retained the majority of the elements of the LOCE, only modifying minor sections.

In March 2007, the *escolares* tried an unprecedented action.

\* Readers interested in learning more about this topic should seek out the documentary *Actores Secundarios*.

They took the streets in downtown Santiago on March 29, the Day of the Youth Combatant. This occurred without the assistance of the reformist part of the student movement;† on this day, the *escolares* shut down Alameda, the main avenue in downtown Santiago.

*There was a lone policeman walking along the sidewalk. Escolares had gathered along the shopping district, waiting for the crowd to take the streets once again. The Carabinero stared at the young students with a grimacing countenance. Eventually he looked satisfied, and moved on. Out of nowhere, a young encapuchado leaped forward and kicked the pig in the back. He stumbled a few steps and appeared startled. Everyone whistled at the cop, threatening him. With nowhere to go, he hid under a partially closed storefront.*

The *escolares* launched another successful round of protests in 2008 against the newly-passed LGE. Students marched and occupied schools, receiving support from teachers. Despite the wave of protests, the government ignored the demonstrations. The reformist movement against the educational law has not achieved a solution, and it is likely that there will be more protests and occupations in the years to come. While the protests against these laws are reformist, they are a point of entry for many students who later become anarchists.

## The Tradition of Combat in the Poblaciones

Since the time of Pinochet's rule, *pobladores* have engaged in armed defense of their neighborhoods against the military and police. The *poblaciones* were originally land occupations; they have now been officially incorporated into the city after decades of struggle. The occupations were a highly politicized process, as can be seen in the culture of these spaces. In one dramatic example, the streets of the población la Victoria are named after revolutionary figures and moments in history, including the date of the land occupation, the Haymarket martyrs, and May Day. The *poblaciones* were the site of the most intense urban conflict during the dictatorship, and all three armed organizations were highly active in the more political neighborhoods. In some of the *poblaciones*, the armed groups occasionally maintained territorial control. When democratic rule returned, the ungovernable neighborhoods presented a threat to the new system.

*The new democracy flooded the neighborhoods with pasta base, a version of crack cocaine. The engineers of social control converted territories of social rebellion into spaces of criminal activity. Pasta base is a tool of the state, and it is directly linked to the arrival of the democratic regime. The drugs have made dynamics in the territory more complicated, but the memory of social revolt is alive.*

There are still clashes in some of the more political *poblaciones*. On September 11, combative *poblaciones* go into

† A reformist faction of the *escolares* is based in formal student governments. As in the movement in the universities, revolutionary students also represent a significant part of the student movement, and anarchist collectives and organizations have become increasingly important in the more confrontational currents.



*Encapuchados throw Molotov cocktails at a tanqueta, a vehicle used by police during the most intense demonstrations; an encapuchado waits for police during nighttime protests around the Day of the Youth Combatant in the población la Victoria.*

revolt across Santiago and the entrances are secured with burning barricades. The police are generally afraid to enter the hearts of these neighborhoods, but they will engage in conflict on the outskirts. These actions bring together revolutionaries, including anarchists, with disenfranchised youth who are not otherwise politically active. The actual situation varies between neighborhoods, but certain neighborhoods, such as Villa Francia, maintain a strong political tradition.

It is common to see a wide scope of militant tactics on September 11. Sometimes demonstrators cause power outages in order to gain the advantage over police, who are less familiar with

the terrain and hesitant to navigate it in the dark. These tactics originated during protests against the Pinochet regime.

*Security culture is critical. We must live by it. I will share only one memory with you from that night. An older woman on the street corner told me, “Take care of yourselves, comrades.”*

Police utilize more violent tactics in the poblaciones than they do against protests downtown or outside the universities; they even fire live ammunition. In some neighborhoods, demonstrators respond with guns, as well.

There have been numerous protest fatalities under democracy, including the young anarchist dancer and student at la Academia, Claudia López. During the protests in 1998, she was fatally shot while spray painting messages on a wall. Carabineros are also known to beat demonstrators that they arrest during the night.

Confrontations in poblaciones are not limited to September 11; they occur during most periods of protest, including the Day of the Youth Combatant. Although these protests started in the Villa Francia where the Vergara brothers were killed, they now occur throughout the poblaciones, and in recent years, these protests have spread to other Chilean cities. There are also conflicts in Villa Francia on November 5 to commemorate the death of Pablo Vergara, the elder brother of Eduardo and Rafael.

*The Day of the Youth Combatant is not only about the Vergara brothers. We remember the deaths of all the combatants under the dictatorship and democracy.*

The September 11 protests in 2007 produced a larger scale of conflict than had been seen in the preceding years. There were confrontations in neighborhoods that had not been active in recent memory. In another traditionally active neighborhood, Pudahuel, a Carabiniero was shot dead. This story figured in the capitalist press for weeks. Tragically, a young anarchist named Jhonny Cariqueo was beaten to death in the same neighborhood close to the following anniversary of the Day of the Youth Combatant. He was participating in a daytime march with others from the población when the police arrested a large number of demonstrators. Carabineros physically attacked Cariqueo and other demonstrators after forcing them into the micros. Cariqueo died of heart complications upon arriving at the police

station. This was widely considered an act of revenge for the death of the Carabiniero in 2007.

The capitalist media often produce sensationalist new reports during these times of confrontational protest, attempting to delegitimize militants as delinquents or terrorists. This has been going on since the time of the military coup, when Pinochet declared the military government a war against communism. As anarchist practice has become increasingly influential in revolutionary movements, the press now focuses on anarchists and encapuchados. These reports may influence the perceptions of some who do not occupy the territories of struggle, but many who inhabit the political poblaciones and other such territories recognize these stories as media distortions.

*Our actions speak for themselves. We engage in propaganda of the deed, and we share our practice with people in these spaces. We read comunicués that explain our actions. We create the atmosphere for insurrection.*

## The Legacy of a Dictator

*On December 10, 2006, I had just returned home from a short trip. I was sitting in my bedroom reading an engaging novel. My mind wandered as I pictured the story before me. Suddenly a voice screamed, “He is dead! He is really dead!” Alarmed, I ran into the other room to find my friend in an elated state. Augusto Pinochet was dead. We called all our friends to share the news, and the phone system soon collapsed. We did not need to ask anyone where to go. We traveled downtown to Plaza Italia, a traditional site for protests. Other comrades marched in the poblaciones. There were so many of us on Alameda that we took up both directions on the road. As soon as one march left towards la Moneda, the plaza filled up enough for another march. We celebrated and chanted. It was a carnival. Pinochet was finally dead.*

*People jumped up and down chanting, “Ya, cayó!” The environment was festive. When we neared la Moneda, the riot police reacted with their machines. But there were thousands of us, and the Carabineros were few—they had no way of planning for the day that Pinochet died. We raised barricades all the way down to la Moneda. Encapuchados wandered the streets, attacking a department store and other manifestations of capital. We were unstoppable.*

*As night fell, we constructed more barricades. A lone zorrillo tried to break them down one by one, but it was of little use. The vehicle passed over one barrier at full speed and its tire blew out. Sparks flew everywhere. Without hesitation, the crowd erected the barricade again. This was our night.*

## The Mapuche Conflict and Anarchist Solidarity

A detailed analysis of the Mapuche conflict is beyond the scope of this article. The situation is far too important and complicated to be presented in such a small space, but it is also impossible to discuss the situation in southern Chile without at least mentioning it.

The Mapuche people successfully resisted Spanish occupation during the colonization of South America. Early maps of Chile show *Wallmapu* as an autonomous territory. *Wallmapu*

remained relatively independent of the Chilean state until the army engaged in a campaign called the “pacification” in the late nineteenth century. The military intervention resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Mapuche people, and large tracts of land were handed over to people of European descent.

The contemporary conflict in *Wallmapu* is not a reemergence of indigenous resistance, but a continuation of a war that never ended. Today, Mapuche communities clash with national and multinational corporations that hold land that is traditionally part of *Wallmapu*. Some communities have successfully regained large amounts of land after decades of struggle. *Weichafes* (Mapuche warriors) defend their communities against violent police raids. Carabineros routinely fly over rebellious communities in helicopters, and watch all movement in and out of the area closely.

*This is an entirely militarized zone. When the weichafes raise barricades outside their communities, police immediately fire upon them with live ammunition. The level of brutality and racism is intense; one can only describe the feeling as claustrophobic. The communities in conflict are surrounded.*

The conflict focuses on forestry plantations, mines, farming plantations, and dams. In numerous cases, forestry plantations have been set on fire by encapuchados. Under the Lagos administration of the Concertación, the democratic government began utilizing a dictatorship-era anti-terrorism law to target Mapuche communities and organizations. The law allows the use of unidentified witnesses who can have their voices scrambled and their faces obscured while testifying. As a result of this campaign of government repression, there are numerous Mapuche political prisoners.

*The Chilean state considers this conflict its greatest national threat. The cities are full of people of Mapuche descent. If the communities in conflict become strong enough, they may find sympathy in the Mapuche people in urban areas who were taught by the racist system to forget their culture. This is already starting to happen.*

Two Mapuche youth and *weichafes* from a militant organization, the Coordinadora Arauco-Malleco (CAM), have been shot and killed by police over recent years. Alex Lemún was killed by a gunshot wound to the head in 2002, and Matías Catrileo was murdered with an uzi in 2008. Several documentaries explore this topic, including *El Despojo* and *Wallmapu*.

Anarchists continually engage in solidarity actions concerning the conflict, including regular marches for Mapuche political prisoners. Comrades also participated in confrontational demonstrations after the deaths of Alex Lemún and Matías Catrileo.

## The Banco Security Case and Repression of Ex-Lautaristas

“During these days of confinement, we have received the love, care, and dedication of many people without regard to borders. Our history of struggle speaks for itself: repression

during dictatorship, our families tortured and jailed, political prison in democracy, and fallen brothers, sisters, and comrades. We are persecuted to this day...”

—Open letter from Marcelo Villarroel and Freddy Fuentesvilla

On October 8, 2007, an armed robbery occurred at a branch of Banco Security in Santiago. Five people disguised in everyday dress participated in the heist, then attempted to leave the area on two motorcycles. The robbers were confronted by a Carabinero on a motorcycle and an exchange of gunfire ensued. In the aftermath, the Carabinero, Luis Moyano Fariás, lay dead, and the individuals made their getaway. The capitalist news speculated about the identities of the robbers for weeks. The press and the state expressed suspicion of the robbers’ capabilities with firearms, even declaring that the robbers must have been former Carabineros. In early November, the state changed its position, announcing that they suspected ex-members of MAPU-Lautaro.

The five new suspects included four former members of the organization: Marcelo Villarroel Sepúlveda, Freddy Fuentesvilla Saa, Juan Aliste Vega, and Carlos Gutiérrez Quiduleo. Villarroel, singer for the punk band Dlinkr, was an active libertarian and former participant in the political prisoner collective Kamina Libre. As a young subversive, he had spent fifteen years in jail under the new democratic government of the 1990s—nearly half his life. The ex-Lautaristas went into hiding, and the government soon arrested another former member of the same organization, Áxel Osorio Rivera. Osorio, another militant libertarian, was accused of providing a network of assistance for the underground ex-Lautaristas.

*Remember, our comrades lived through a time where false confrontations—killings made to look like standoffs with police—were common.*

Osorio was arrested outside of the metro; after his detention, he shouted words of support for Mapuche political prisoners to the press: “Freedom to the political prisoners, marrichiweu! This is a setup.” Reports in the press revealed that he had been subjected to weeks of close surveillance by intelligence officers. Osorio was ultimately sentenced to three years and one day in jail for transporting a firearm. It was later revealed that Osorio, along with Cristián Godoy Ávila, another person charged with assisting the suspects, was framed by an individual turned state’s witness, Carlos Sepúlveda Begries.

Two of the the suspects in hiding, Freddy Fuentesvilla and Marcelo Villarroel, were captured in Argentina on March 15, 2008. As of this writing, Villarroel and Fuentesvilla are still facing charges for transporting arms in Argentina as well as an extradition request from Chile.

Over the following weeks, the capitalist press criminalized comrades with a history in MAPU-Lautaro. On the Day of the Youth Combatant in 2008, Carabineros arrested Marcelo Dote López, an ex-member of the Lautaro Youth Movement. They accused Dote of attempting to attack police with a Molotov

\* A Mapuche saying: “Ten times over we will be victorious.”

cocktail during a nighttime demonstration for the anniversary in Pudahuel. The police raided Dote’s home; in the process, they arrested a former Lautarista, Esteban Huiniquir Reyes. The police invented scandalous stories for the press about a possible reappearance of MAPU-Lautaro, and even released a document intended to show that ex-members of the organization planned to infiltrate various movements, including the escolares and the Mapuche conflict.

A young Chilean woman, Andrea Urzúa Cid, was arrested on September 20, 2008 in Argentina upon visiting Marcelo Villarroel and Freddy Fuentesvilla. She was accused by the Argentine authorities of delivering explosive materials on her person to help break the two out of prison. Urzúa responded by denouncing the charge as a further attempt to incriminate Villarroel and Fuentesvilla. The Chilean press responded with exaggerated headlines, even calling Urzúa the “woman bomb.”

*The state seeks to criminalize ex-militants from the subversive organizations of the past in order to delegitimize the political dissent of today.*

## The Current Climate of Repression and the Death of Mauricio Morales

“Key Information in Investigation of Bombings Identifies Anarchist Groups.”  
—Headline on January 29, 2009 from the capitalist newspaper *El Mercurio*

Maucio Morales, a young anarchist and history student at the Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencia de la Educación, died in a bomb explosion during the early morning of May 22, 2009. Carabineros and capitalist media allege that Morales and another unidentified individual intended to target the School of Prison Guards. According to reports, this second person was injured during the explosion, but has not been apprehended to date.

*The Day of the Youth Combatant is a day to remember all the people who have fallen under the dictatorship and democracy. Mauricio Morales is the most recent addition to a long list of fallen combatants.*

“He died a warrior, fighting without fear and without hesitation against all forms of power.”  
—Open letter from the occupied social center and library, Sacco y Vanzetti

Morales was politically active in Santiago, participating in various occupied social centers in Santiago. After the death of Morales, Carabineros raided two social centers, Cueto con Andes and La Idea. Police also attempted to enter a third space, a squatted social center named after the Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. The operation proved unsuccessful after occupants and supporters of the center defended it.





"Fire to the state and its jails."  
Anti-state graffiti following  
a protest in downtown  
Santiago.

[Opposite]  
"Against cops and their  
repression . . . student subver-  
sion." An encapuchado fights  
riot police outside the Univer-  
sidad de Santiago de Chile;  
Manuel Vergara and Luisa  
Toledo, parents of the Vergara  
brothers, speak at a Day of the  
Youth Combatant memorial in  
the población Villa Francia.

[Previous Page]  
Masked demonstrators  
throw Molotov cocktails  
at riot police outside the  
Universidad Metropolitana  
de Ciencia de la Educación;  
Mapuches and supporters  
march during the "Day of the  
Race," the official name of  
Columbus Day in Chile.

"We stand in solidarity with the family and friends of Mauricio Morales. The ideas of freedom are with us just as so many others are with us everywhere—people who act in diverse ways. [...] We call for more acts of assistance, resistance, and solidarity against this repressive situation. We are here defending our home and space."  
—International call for solidarity after police raided the squat La Idea in downtown Santiago

Mauricio loved his community, and he expressed it in all of his actions. Mauricio's moments of combat are not only apparent in how he died, but also in how lived. Mauricio supported activities in squatted social centers and libraries. Mauricio was a combatant in every sense of the word.

"When one embraces the social war, one must also accept the tragedy that accompanies it. Death is inevitable, and war creates death in its urgency. For us, the death of the enemy is a part of this urgency: the death of the state, capital, and all of its relations, money, and property. Without a doubt, we must be capable of understanding the inexplicable deaths, the indescribable, unnecessary, and terrible ones..."

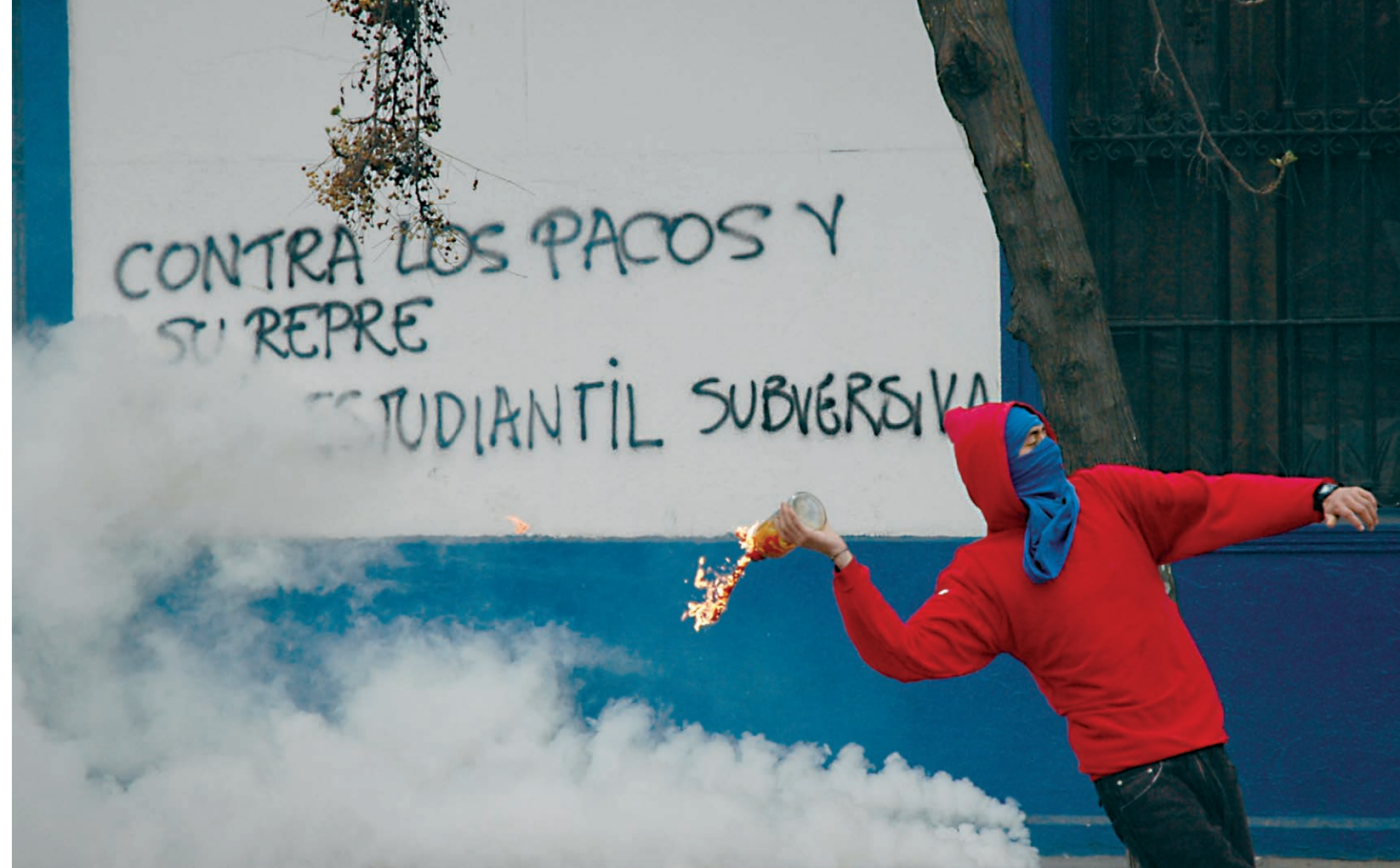
—Open letter from Áxel Osorio, revolutionary anarchist and ex-militant from MAPU-Lautaro, currently confined to maximum-security prison

"Compañero Mauricio Morales.  
¡Presente! Compañero Mauricio  
Morales. ¡Presente!  
Ahora. ¡Y siempre!"

On June 24, the mother of a young anarchist, Diego Ríos González, alerted police to a bag that she found suspicious in her home. Betrayed by his mother, Ríos went into hiding, and police raided a social center nearby in the población Pudahuel, the Centro Social Autónomo and Biblioteca Libertaria Jhonny Cariqueo. On the right-wing news channel, Meganoticias, a neighbor stated, "I do not know why they have so much against these young people who bring culture to the población, since there are so many drug dealers just a few blocks away."

*The repression is nothing new. It is only the extension of decades of tyranny.*

As of writing this piece, the raids, persecution, and constant police surveillance have not succeeded in breaking up the movements in Chile. Revolutionaries in the country are part of a culture that has sustained generations of repression since the establishment of the military dictatorship. The anti-authoritarian structure of





*Protestors burn the Chilean flag and mount barricades outside a campus of the University of Chile.*

anarchist affinity groups and collectives is more difficult to infiltrate than the organizations of a generation ago.

In 2004, anarchists were blamed for violent demonstrations during the APEC conference. Two years later anarchists were attacked in the

media for violent May Day demonstrations. Encapuchados were also accused of infiltrating student demonstrations. In 2006, anarchists were criminalized by the media for the Molotov attack on the presidential palace, La Moneda.

*State repression occurs in many forms: sensationalist media campaigns, infiltration, “false flag” operations, and militarized police tactics. All of these methods are directly inherited from the military regime.*

Despite repression, the anarchist movement continues.

## Reflections on Chile and the International Context

*“It is once again the time for dedication. It is the moment to act on our convictions.”*

*–Comunicado upon the death of Mauricio Morales, signed by the Fuerzas Autónomas y Destructivas León Czolgosz, Columnas Armadas y Desalmadas Jean Marc Rouillan, and Banda Antipatriota Severino Di Giovanni*

*The dictatorship never ended; democracy is only its latest image. The dictatorship is the violence of the economy, the rule of the bourgeoisie, and the brutal repression of a militarized police force.*

The Concertación and the Alianza have created a more stable electoral system, reforming the traditional three blocs. This new structure has aided in the promotion of social control and the neoliberal project. The new Socialist Party has a stronger sense of clarity than it ever had under the Allende government. The party no longer maintains the pretensions of the “peaceful way.” It utilizes the doctrines developed under the dictatorship, the LOCE and the anti-terrorism law being only two obvious examples.

*It is a dictatorship that does not recognize national boundaries. It is empire.*

On a larger scale, the Concertación and Alianza continue the neoliberal project of the Pinochet dictatorship. This is an international program, carried out across the globe.

*The enemy has no borders and neither should our response. Our combat is alive in the streets of Greece and France. It is alive in Wallmapu. It is even alive in the heart of empire, the United States.*

Political repression against anarchists around the globe continues to intensify. Carlo Giuliani was killed in Genoa, Italy during the G8 demonstrations in 2001. Nicolas Neira was beaten to death by police at a May Day demonstration in Bogotá, Colombia in 2005. Brad Will, an indymedia journalist from the United States, was killed in Oaxaca while documenting the conflict in 2006. Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a fifteen-year-old anarchist, was killed in Greece on December 6, 2008, inspiring a wave of riots across the country and other parts of Europe.

*We are all youth combatants. Let every day be a day of combat! We materialize our conflict through direct confrontation with the state, but this combat is not limited to skirmishes with police. Our enemies are the people that control the police, and the social system that controls them. We learn through our friends, building affinity. We trust each other with our lives. We take the risk to say comrade and really mean it. We provide unwavering support to our communities. We celebrate with our neighbors. Our actions speak for themselves. We are at war.*

*“We affirm a diversity of tactics.”*

*We work in the communities that we touch, and we are touched by them. These are our territories. We listen to the stories of those who have fought before us, and we create our own.*





# Scene Report: San Francisco Bay Area

This article was written and peer-reviewed by one small group in the Bay Area; the viewpoints expressed are the authors' alone. We are fortunate to have a multitude of analyses in the Bay Area anarchist community; it is not our intention to posit ours as more valid than others. We apologize in advance for all errors of fact, analysis, and omission which are undoubtedly present, and ask the reader—especially readers from our community—to understand that our main goal in writing this is to further strategic dialogue between communities and within our own, not to incite divisiveness.



The Bay Area anti-war movement included people from many different communities, many of whom were willing to engage in direct action.

One poster that appeared throughout the Bay Area in the months leading up to the invasion.



When the bombs drop, America stops. In the first months of 2003, this was the mantra of anarchists and other direct-action-oriented participants in the anti-war movement. Many currently active in the anarchist community cut our teeth in this milieu. The buildup to the Iraq war had been slow; a generation of anarchists had come of age at breakaway marches and similar militant demonstrations. These efforts came to a head when the invasion began on March 19, 2003.

Huge protests took place across the country, and while America as a whole didn't stop, several large cities did—especially San Francisco. Tens of thousands of people poured into the streets on Day X, crippling the financial district. In the Bay Area, it remains one of the most tactically successful protests in living memory. But within months of that powerful action, the group that organized it—Direct Action to Stop the War (DASW)—was essentially defunct.

The narrative arc of DASW is not unique in the Bay Area. Activists in the Bay inherit a rich heritage of resistance; one might attempt to tease out the genealogy of any given movement, only to realize it all goes back decades, if

not centuries. But momentum has never built steadily; instead, there have always been peaks and valleys. Just as a group or movement begins to look really promising, even inspirational, somehow the bottom falls out and people have to start over again.

What causes this? We set out to study the history of recent anarchist groups in the Bay Area, including our own, in hopes of coming to a better understanding of the boom/bust cycle.

### Recent Radical History

The protests of March 19, 2003 didn't just materialize out of the ether. They were the result of a heroic effort by DASW organizers. DASW themselves drew on twenty years of organizing efforts, including struggles against nuclear power and the 1991 Gulf War. The group formed in October 2002 following a blockade of the San Francisco Federal Building in response to Congress authorizing the use of force in Iraq. In the following months, DASW organized direct action skill shares at which many activists met other like-minded people and formed affinity groups. They also developed a strategy to shut

down the city. This included a menu of key intersections and other targets throughout the city. Affinity groups chose locations from the menu and planned blockades. In addition, a strategy of congesting the financial district was publicly disseminated. On the day the war started, affinity groups deployed themselves throughout the city, snarling traffic in the downtown corridor. The organized blockades were reinforced by tens of thousands of other activists and passersby who poured into the streets. The large turnout was undoubtedly caused in part by the outreach work of DASW. Together, participants in the action seemed to constitute a nearly insurmountable force. Police spent much of the next few days forcing protesters from one intersection to another. Though they arrested over 2000 people, it took them days to regain control of downtown.

Following this protest, DASW had to formulate a strategy for opposing the ongoing war. Some wanted to continue doing confrontational shutdowns, while others wanted to focus on undermining the war profiteers that kept the war machine rolling. A compromise was reached: the next demonstration would shut down the Port of Oakland. The Oakland police—perhaps having seen the success of the San Francisco demonstration, or perhaps directed by “counter-terrorism” experts on high—reacted barbarically, indiscriminately firing round after round of wooden dowels and similar ordnance into the crowd of non-violent demonstrators. While this shook some organizers, it also assured many that they were using the right tactics. The state wouldn't react so harshly to actions it deemed ineffectual. One week after the port demonstration, DASW organized a well-attended protest at Chevron's corporate headquarters in the East Bay suburbs. The group also successfully blockaded major entrances to the corporate campus. Nine days later, DASW carried out a similarly large and successful lockdown at Lockheed Martin's Palo Alto campus.

Of course, these actions didn't stop the war. After a year of Herculean efforts to prevent it and months of similarly heroic efforts to end it, many activists were burned out. Perhaps some wrote the cause off as unwinnable; others may have concluded that Iraqi insurgents were doing a better job fighting the occupation than we were. There are differing accounts of what brought about the demise of DASW, and a full analysis is beyond the scope of this report. Whatever the cause, coalitions fell apart across the country, actions became less and less frequent, and in a few short years the anti-war



movement had crumbled. DASW died a slow painful death as part of this trajectory.

Anarchist organizing in the Bay Area picked up in 2005 with the formation of Anarchist Action. As the name implies, this was an explicitly anarchist group; it evolved into a forum for local anarchists to propose actions and find others willing to help carry them out. Early on, a demonstration was organized under the aegis of Anarchist Action in the wealthy peninsula town of Palo Alto. The event got rowdy and was characterized by some local papers as a riot. Anarchist Action quickly became notorious for sponsoring similarly militant actions. They continued their work by organizing around immigrant rights, confronting the newly-formed racist anti-immigration Minutemen group.

Their efforts culminated in a July 2005 solidarity demonstration supporting the mobilization against the G8 summit in Scotland. Anarchist Action had sponsored several outreach events and a spokescouncil in advance of

In 2005 Anarchist Action sponsored a number of exciting demonstrations, culminating in the July G8 solidarity demo.



Over the years, Bay Area anarchists have organized and participated in a number of street parties, such as this Reclaim the Streets action.

the demonstration in San Francisco's Mission district. On the evening of July 9, over 200 anti-authoritarians left the BART station at 16<sup>th</sup> and Mission. The crowd began targeting symbols of corporate capitalism, smashing windows at Wells Fargo and Kentucky Fried Chicken. They also dragged newspaper boxes and other objects into the street as makeshift blockades. At one point, a police cruiser drove into the crowd and got stuck on a foam sign.\* The police exited their car and charged protesters; at least one officer began beating them. At this point another demonstrator allegedly came to the aid of his comrade and hit officer Peter Shields in the head with some object, fracturing his skull.

The assault on Shields provoked a powerful backlash in the local media and courts. Anarchist organizers received visits from police investigating the action. A federal grand jury was convened, ostensibly to look into allegations that anarchists attempted to set fire to the police car by firing bottle rockets at it. Indymedia journalist Josh Wolf was subpoenaed and ordered to turn over video footage of the protest; Wolf refused to comply and was jailed by the federal district court for 226 days, more time than any journalist in American history

\* This incident was reported variously in the media as anarchists throwing a mattress under the car, causing smoke or fire.

had previously served to protect source material.† In the midst of this repression, Anarchist Action dissolved.

After this, the Bay Area experienced a lull in explicitly anarchist organizing. Local anarchists remained busy with long-term infrastructural, single-issue, or identity-specific projects. There were anarchist book fairs, Reclaim the Streets actions, May Day demonstrations, Really Really Free Markets, Food Not Bombs servings, and so on, but when it came to general anarchist organizing space, there was a void.

Some anarchist organizers were seeking to fill this void when, in 2008, they helped reform Direct Action to Stop the War. The immediate impetus for the revival was the five-year anniversary of the Iraq invasion. The newly-resurrected DASW held several spokescouncils at which many groups helped develop a strategy for the anniversary. Affinity groups formed and a strategy of blockading war profiteers was adopted. On the day of action, affinity groups successfully deployed lockdowns and other forms of civil disobedience against Bechtel, Chevron, the Carlyle Group, and URS Corp, as well as Nancy Pelosi's office. However, these actions did not shut down San Francisco the way the protests five years earlier had; the masses that

† When Wolf's footage was finally released, it did not depict the assault on Shields, but did depict Shields' partner choking a demonstrator half to death.

had spontaneously come into the streets to aid the blockades in 2003 were nowhere to be seen. In this iteration of DASW, a broad group of activists holding a diversity of political perspectives were temporarily able to organize together, but ultimately dissolved on account of the absence of a shared vision.

### Unconventional Action in the Bay: Genesis

Many of the anarchists leaving the second iteration of DASW began working with Unconventional Action (UA) in the Bay. UA in the Bay had been formed in summer 2007 by a group of friends interested in organizing toward the 2008 political conventions. The impetus for this came largely out of discussions with other Unconventional Action clusters throughout the country. Many of our comrades were putting a concerted effort into the conventions; it seemed possible that we could plug in and make something special happen. We also hoped in doing so to revive local anarchist organizing efforts.

One thing we saw in the national UA milieu that resonated with us was a desire to combine direct action organizing with infrastructure. The UA experiment was as much about creating a national direct action network as it was about organizing toward the conventions in particular. Many of us had participated in mass mobilizations before and were frustrated by having to construct a new network all over again for each mass action. There hadn't been much national coordination between anarchist communities in a long time. We felt that all our communities would benefit from a greater degree of interconnection, and it seemed that organizing for the political conventions was a good way to build these connections.

Much of the discussions going on nationwide applied to our situation in the Bay. Confrontational street actions were in a lull. Worse, in an area with dozens of active radical projects, hardly anyone was working together. It was as if the whole Bay Area had been divided up into tiny islands of radical activity, with nary a boat in sight. Many of us wished for a more expansive organizing space in which we could coordinate long-term strategies and develop relationships between people working on diverse projects.

In March, the RNC Welcoming Committee presented several discussions in the Bay area. These were widely attended and offered a great opportunity to meet new friends. As the conventions started to attract attention, more people started working with us. Things really took off in July when we hosted a regional consulta. The excitement was palpable as people got to know one another and hatch schemes for that summer. Most people didn't feel able to attend both conventions, so the majority of the organizing began to center on the RNC. Over the next several weeks, several additional consultas took place. Each was better attended and more energetic than the last. Our group agreed to adopt the area of St. Paul designated "sector four" by the RNC Welcoming Committee; we organized benefit shows, designed outreach material, and even thought up a catchy theme for our sector: "Bay Area'cades."

Just before leaving town, the group planned one last benefit concert at a squatted former landfill site in Albany, just north of Berkeley. When we arrived, we found the parking lot fenced up and police out in force. Apparently, the Albany City Council had passed a last minute ordinance closing access to the park

for the time period directly corresponding with our event. In retrospect, this was a sign of things to come, but at the time it only served to increase our camaraderie.

### In St. Paul

When our cluster arrived in St. Paul, we quickly realized that the situation on the ground was much different than we had imagined. First of all, the sector we had adopted was more geographically isolated from the others sectors than we had anticipated. It was bordered on the north by a freeway and a steep hill, and to the east by the hard security zone which divided the city. Sector three was immediately to the south, but beyond that was the river. It would be extremely challenging to move between sectors three and four and the rest of the city: that meant limited options and little hope for reinforcements.

As detailed in the previous issue of *Rolling Thunder*, preemptive repression created challenging conditions in the days before the RNC. Even more troubling, we all had to scramble at the last minute as changes were made to the time and structure of the convention due to a hurricane expected to hit New Orleans. These factors forced us to adjust our strategy under intense police repression and time pressure. As UA in the Bay scrambled to reorganize, communication between groups disintegrated. Reliability, accountability, and personal relationships wavered and our coordination fell apart. In the final days, as groups arrived from the DNC, conflict and disorganization caused many to abandon the sector strategy, while others moved forward without the numbers they would need to succeed in their plans.

Consequently, the blockading strategy for our sector failed to produce the desired results. Sparse groupings in our sector were among the first arrested that day, and blockades were quickly routed or prevented by police. Some UA in the Bay participants spent the entire RNC in jail, though others roamed the streets throughout the convention. After the early failure of our strategy, though, UA in the Bay did not coordinate further actions in the Twin Cities.

On one hand, the St. Paul experience was disheartening. We'd been raided, jailed, tear-gassed, and beaten up, and our friends were facing conspiracy charges. On the other hand, we had taken the initiative and organized on our own terms. Anarchists around the country had come out of the closet, as it were, and mobilized militant collective action. This had effects locally as well. At the beginning of the summer, many of us in the Bay felt disconnected; after the RNC, we at least had a space in which to work toward broader campaigns and long-term strategies. The recognition of our combined potential helped us through the legal aftermath following the RNC. Although some left our group, the ones who stayed were determined to cash in the potential we had glimpsed in St. Paul.

### Organizing for the Long Haul

Upon returning, we undertook the daunting task of figuring out what we were going to do locally. One of the challenges we had faced in St. Paul was a lack of strong interpersonal relationships and good communication. We hypothesized that these

problems were caused at least in part by our community's lack of accessible organizing space. On one hand, this feeling of disconnection made us long for an anarchist organizing body broadly inclusive of local anti-authoritarians; on the other hand, we had seen that anarchists organizing publicly can be easy targets for repression as soon as they begin to achieve success. Similarly, while our experience had shown that we needed to improve our skills in the streets, the Anarchist Action episode suggested that a group engaged in escalating direct action may collapse when targeted by the state. In addition, we still faced the classic questions that have plagued anarchists for ages. What strategies and tactics are most effective for us? How can we gain broader support? How can we avoid burnout?

We haven't arrived at definitive answers to these questions, but starting in fall 2008 we held a series of exhausting organizational meetings to flesh out some points of departure. Through these meetings we developed a set of goals to help guide our activities, and an organizing model under which we could operate.

## Hitting the Ground Running

### ICE Demonstration

Shortly after these grueling organizational meetings, we were approached by comrades organizing for immigrants' rights. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had recently carried out several raids and detentions in San Francisco, despite its status as a "Sanctuary City." In response, several groups were planning a demonstration at the ICE detention center in the city. This is an important issue locally, and presented us with an opportunity to begin building bridges with other activist groups in our area. We agreed to provide trained medics, and also to construct banners that would serve as a physical barrier between the police and the protesters. Many youth groups in the Bay Area helped plan this demonstration; some young people were participating on behalf of family members who were unable to on account of their immigration status, or because they had already been deported.

Many of these young activists were located in the East Bay. This posed a logistical challenge, since the detention center is

in San Francisco and public transit between the two is notoriously expensive. Consequently, they organized school walkouts for the morning of the action, with the intention of marching to the nearest Bay Area Rapid Transit station, hopping the turnstiles, and riding to San Francisco. Unfortunately, BART heard that students were marching toward the stations, and in some cases ordered the trains to continue through the targeted stations without stopping to pick up passengers. Some students were thus prevented from getting to the action in the first place.

Eventually, however, many students did make it to the rally point; the action began an hour or two behind schedule. In the spirit of Dia De Los Muertos, and to conceal our identities, we painted our faces to resemble skeletons and began marching to the ICE building. Some groups had brought drums, which helped create a loud and boisterous presence in the street. We arrived at the detention facility with perhaps a thousand protesters and held a rally in front of it before circling the building several times. On the third pass, a group of young Latinas emerged from the crowd. Using cleverly disguised barrels, they locked themselves down at the exit of the alley in which ICE stores its vehicles. A second group was simultaneously doing the same thing at the other end of the alley.

The lockdown continued throughout the afternoon. The SFPD seemed reluctant to use excessive force against the two groups of young women; the fact that ICE is wildly unpopular in the Bay Area probably contributed to this. To our knowledge, ICE was not able to use any of their vehicles to raid or detain immigrants all day. The lockdown culminated late in the afternoon when ICE had to reroute their detainee transport bus to the front of the building. Apparently, they would normally transport detainees for court or deportation through the alley we were blocking. Since that was impossible, they brought the bus around to the front of the building and began to transfer detainees through the front door. Word spread, and disorganized groups hastily made their way to the bus. Protesters began to block the bus, and for a moment it seemed they might have to abandon their transfer that day. In the end, the police got the upper hand and contained the crowd. We were made to chant from the sidewalk as detainees were loaded on the bus. This was disheartening, but we did take some solace in knowing that those being loaded



onto the bus got to see us and know that we were demonstrating in solidarity with them. Indeed, their morale seemed to improve, and several even cheered *us* on.

### Dia de los Muertos

While organizing for the ICE demonstration, we learned of the murder of fellow San Francisco activist Kirsten Brydum in New Orleans. This followed immediately on the heels of the murder of Indymedia journalist Marcella "Sali" Grace in Oaxaca. We felt strongly that we should do something in their memory and speak out against what we saw as an ongoing war on women. We learned that some of our comrades in San Francisco were building a memorial for Sali and Kirsten at the Dia de los Muertos celebration in the Mission district, a major event in a mostly Latino neighborhood. It was an especially appropriate venue in that many San Francisco anarchists reside there and it was the site of the Really Really Free Markets Kirsten helped organize. We organized a contingent in the procession; the march was solemn and non-confrontational, but there was a sizable turnout and many appreciated that there was an explicitly anarchist presence to celebrate

our fallen comrades. We passed through the Mission and ended at Garfield Square, where friends of Sali and Kirsten had constructed a powerful monument of the two ghost-riding a tandem bike with wings.

We had our second general meeting the weekend after the procession. Our attendance had swelled due to outreach at the ICE protest and the Dia de los Muertos procession; over fifty people showed up. Folks were excited to see anarchists organizing openly again. Unfortunately, much of this energy was squandered as a result of our inexperience organizing together. We hadn't yet worked out a really good meeting place in San Francisco; we gathered in an unfinished basement below a record store. There was very little light, and in the early November evening it was icy cold. This atmosphere lent itself to jokes about clandestine organizing, but did little to put newcomers at ease. The attitude of suspicion some expressed toward new attendees exacerbated the situation. The repression in St. Paul was still fresh in our minds, contributing to fears of infiltration. On top of this, the meeting included a lengthy and fruitless discussion of organizational issues. Unfortunately, many first-time attendees never returned. After this fiasco, we stepped back to consider what it means to

*By participating in protests against ICE and for immigrants' rights in general, we have begun to build strong alliances in those communities.*

#### Organizational Goals

- Build and support parallel structures outside of capitalism in the Bay Area, and engage in mutual aid and empowerment within the anti-authoritarian movement
- Build capacity for action in the streets
- Proliferate anarchist and anti-authoritarian ideas
- Build and connect the anti-authoritarian/anarchist community in the Bay Area
- Stand in solidarity with movements of oppressed and disempowered people in the Bay Area

#### Things that Have Worked

- A food co-op distributes food before meetings, offering an additional incentive to meet regularly
- General meetings occur at regular intervals; always on the same day at the same time; this eliminates the stress of constantly negotiating when to meet
- Regular meeting locations that are comfortable, and close to public transit
- Sliding-scale dues-paying membership model has managed to meet our limited financial needs
- Open organizing model has encouraged cross-pollination with other anti-authoritarian groups

#### Things that Haven't Worked

- Creating a working group for each activity causes too many meetings and diffuses group efforts
- Our infrastructure work has stalled; while we have a larger vision of what could be accomplished with infrastructure, it has been difficult for us to answer the strategic questions necessary to get started
- Over time, attendance has dropped, especially as we started organizing fewer street protests
- Developing long term strategy has proven difficult; this is exacerbated by differing ideas of what a revolutionary group should do to incite revolutionary change



*The murders of Kirsten Brydum and Sali Grace came as a shock to the Bay Area anarchist community and sent waves of grief rippling through our social circles.*

be a public organization, in hopes of learning from our mistakes. We've also discussed how to interact with newcomers in a way that makes them feel welcome and gives everyone a shared feeling of ownership of the group. We're more friendly now, to say the least.

### *Black Friday*

Not long after the ICE demonstration, friends from Iraq Veterans Against the War invited us to participate in an action planned for Black Friday. IVAW chapters throughout the country have carried out a street theater program entitled Operation First Casualty, in which IVAW members in full combat uniforms conduct operations in busy urban corridors of American cities in much the same way that they would in Iraq. The IVAW squad patrols an area, and eventually goes into the crowd and arrests "suspected insurgents." It can be powerfully affecting for a person who has not witnessed a military occupation to see a squad of highly-trained soldiers maneuver into a crowd to detain people. The IVAW organizers were hoping we could join several other activist groups in providing actors to play the suspected insurgents. We agreed.

The Black Friday action went off without any major problems. It was surreal and spectacular to see vets maneuvering through crowds of

Christmas shoppers in Union Square, detaining people apparently at random. Afterwards, we moved to another tourist hot spot, the cable-car turnaround on California, and recreated another Iraqi street scene in which the vets were ostensibly staffing a checkpoint. The squad came under fire from an unknown location, and subsequently returned fire on a group of protesting Iraqis—us—who all "died" in a grotesque orgy of blood.

There were large audiences for the street theater, and everyone seemed to get the point; it was also a pretty good time. The action was easy enough for us, as it did not require much organizing and was relatively non-confrontational. It may not have been the most militant thing we've done, but it helped us to strengthen our relationship with friends in the IVAW, and building bridges between groups in the Bay Area is an important aspect of our project. We've collaborated with them on several more anti-war actions since.

### *Greek Solidarity Action*

In December 2008, fifteen-year-old anarchist Alexandros Grigoropoulos was murdered by police in Athens, Greece. Anarchists responded by engaging police in weeks of pitched battles that threatened to topple the Greek government.

Early on in the uprising, the assembly of the occupied Athens Polytechnic University publicized a request for anarchists abroad to carry out solidarity actions. In response, an ad-hoc coalition of anarchists and activists from across the spectrum set about planning a successful solidarity action. UA in the Bay did not—and still doesn't—have a process for reaching consensus outside our biweekly meeting structure, so we were unable to participate in the organizing process as a group. Nevertheless, anarchists throughout the Bay reached out through their social networks and prepared for the action.

A recurring topic during these planning discussions was the desire to reclaim and hold space. The Greeks were striking from a neighborhood in which they had held space for years, and had used the opportunity to turn the area into liberated space. In Britain, protesters had seized the Greek consulate and continued to hold it. Meanwhile New College, a local radical-leaning liberal arts college in the Mission District, had recently been foreclosed upon and was sitting vacant, slated for gentrification. New College seemed particularly apropos as the economy was imploding and eviction rates were skyrocketing. In the middle of this discussion someone received a text message declaring that New York's New School had been occupied in solidarity with the Greek anarchists and general assemblies were being held to determine a further course of action. We took this as a challenge and immediately set about determining the best method for occupying New College.

Over the following days, anarchists around the Bay painted banners, designed and distributed fliers, and completed the other necessary preparations. The haste with which this was accomplished was inspiring. At the designated time, we gathered at the 24<sup>th</sup> and Mission BART station. We were several hundred strong stepping off the curb on our way to New College, and our numbers grew as we continued. The crowd was vocal and boisterous; clearly, many participants had been inspired by their Greek comrades and were ready for conflict. Unfortunately, however, when we reached New College, it was completely locked down by cops. Word of our plan had evidently reached them in advance. The crowd gathered outside of New College as we tried to decide what to do, and our numbers continued to increase. Somehow, in spite of the overwhelming police presence, some brave souls managed to drop banners from the roofs of neighboring buildings declaring our support of the Greek insurrection and our opposition to gentrification. Others took advantage of the sound system to make impassioned speeches.

The deliberation about what to do continued. The original plan had been to host general assemblies inside of New College especially to discuss space; how to take more, and how to defend what we had. Some participants still wanted to take advantage of our numbers to begin having these discussions. An attempt was made, briefly, to have an assembly right there in the street. The atmosphere made this almost impossible, though, and there was still a huge amount of energy in the crowd. Most people were not content to let that energy peter out; eventually the group opted to continue marching, ostensibly in search of another target to occupy.

Apparently, years ago, the police would violently repress unpermitted marches as they left the sidewalk and arrest the

participants. However, radical lawyers began vigorously defending such arrestees. The headache this caused for the police seems to have caused a shift in policy; today they will usually allow unpermitted marches to continue as long as property damage is kept to a minimum. This is particularly true if such marches remain in certain neighborhoods, such as the Mission, where capital is less concentrated, the population is less wealthy, and political protests are more common.

Whether or not the police could have stopped us at this point, they declined to, and we continued our march. We marched down Valencia and eventually found ourselves at the Mission District police precinct. The connection to the murder of Alexandros was obvious; many participants must have reflected that at that very moment our Greek counterparts were probably hurling petrol bombs at police stations. At any rate, we stopped. It didn't appear that the police had anticipated an attack on their own infrastructure, and few were present to defend the station. For a moment, it seemed that the absurdity and romance of occupying the police station—or at least attacking it—titillated the crowd. But it seemed to occur to everyone at once that such things are impossible in the US... right? Alternately, perhaps a moment of rationality dissuaded us from a suicidal path. Anyway, we hesitated, and police hurried to reinforce the defenses of their building. Another rally occurred, with speakers using the opportunity to denounce the police and police state locally and abroad. Once again, an assembly was attempted, and again the energetic crowd opted to continue marching.

The crowd continued down 16<sup>th</sup> street, where we came upon a Wells Fargo branch office. Surely, there must be a link between Wells Fargo and the murder of Grigoropoulos; at the very least, Wells Fargo is a cornerstone in the capitalist system which requires the protection of police and the murder of anarchists. At the time, any connection was nebulous, but, as mentioned, the economy was imploding and the bank's culpability in *that*, at least, was glaringly obvious. In one suspenseful moment, several people lunged for the front door, through which we could have entered and occupied the building—but just as they grasped the handle, security guards bolted it shut, and subsequently put the building on lock down.

At this point everyone was getting frustrated. There was still a lot of energy, but we needed a target, and we had squandered the few opportunities that had presented themselves. There were brief arguments about where to go next. Our message of Greek solidarity was getting watered down, and the general assembly had failed to materialize. Finally, we opted to continue marching—to leave the Mission and head downtown.

This was a bold move. While the SFPD has allowed marches to continue in the Mission District until they lose energy and peter out, they have been extremely hesitant to permit them to continue into the financial district. Seasoned activists advised that they would "surely arrest us once we hit Market." Accordingly, as we turned from Valencia onto Market, we picked up speed. In an effort to outmaneuver police, we coordinated sprints, counting down from three and then sprinting for several blocks. After leaving the bank, our numbers had dropped somewhat, but the energy was building as we ran down Market Street. Somewhere along the way a dedicated Food Not Bombs

activist caught up and began serving soup from a bike trailer as the crowd ran along. After several cycles of sprinting, we had made it farther down Market than most had expected. We were only a few blocks from downtown proper. We counted down once more and sprinted once again past a disorganized and confused police force—and found ourselves at the Westfield Shopping Mall.

It was the last weekend before Christmas, and without even planning it, we had run right into the middle of San Francisco's elite shopping district. There were people everywhere, thousands of them, shopping bags in hand—and to our right, the Westfield mall. This is no ordinary mall—it's a monster, a high-status monument to excess and capitalism. It is a cathedral at which the consumer prays to the god of demand, sacrificing children to the god of supply. Without hesitation or reflection, the crowd charged in.

What happened next is not entirely clear. The march entered, and police and security guards rushed after it in hot pursuit. Shoppers on the first floor, including some families with children, fled in horror, and hundreds of heads peered over the banisters of the floors above. The cops and guards began attacking us, and some began throwing objects back at police in self-defense. In the course of the tussle a moderate amount of property was destroyed, including a mall kiosk. Police managed to arrest six people, and several more were beaten up, but everyone else managed to escape through various exits or into the crowd of people.

We regrouped outside the entrance to the mall. At this point so many curious shoppers had gathered that it was impossible for the police to enter the crowd and arrest anyone else. Several of our comrades were dragged past us by squads of police and into a paddy wagon on the street. Some demonstrators got back on the sound system and began to denounce the police. Unexpectedly, the message resonated with a number of the shoppers, many of whom were people of color who may have had their own beef with the law. Boisterous chants of "Fuck the Police" began to echo off the buildings.\* The support of the gathering crowd re-energized us, and we began to surround the vehicle that held our friends. Unfortunately, it was locked, and the police quickly sent in additional officers to secure it until they could drive it away.

Having reassembled, the crowd rushed back into the streets. A few street-savvy moves later, we were marching north through streets lined with stores offering luxury goods. At this point, there were only about sixty militant protesters left. The police had had enough† and were beginning to conduct maneuvers to

\* At this point, some proselytizers from the Revolutionary Communist Party materialized seemingly out of nowhere. In an uncharacteristic move, they began giving their newspapers away for free to those gathered outside of the mall. At this point we had been marching for over two hours and had no literature left, so the RCP's message was the only one that was delivered. This attempt at cooptation by the RCP further embittered many of us toward them, a sentiment that subsequent experiences only deepened. We also learned that we should always prepare much more literature for an event than we imagine is necessary.

† Editors' note to whatever SFPD intelligence officer is tasked with reading this: obviously, you should have just let them occupy the New College. The moral of the story is that overzealous policing can lead to riots, shopping stoppages, and volatile situations.

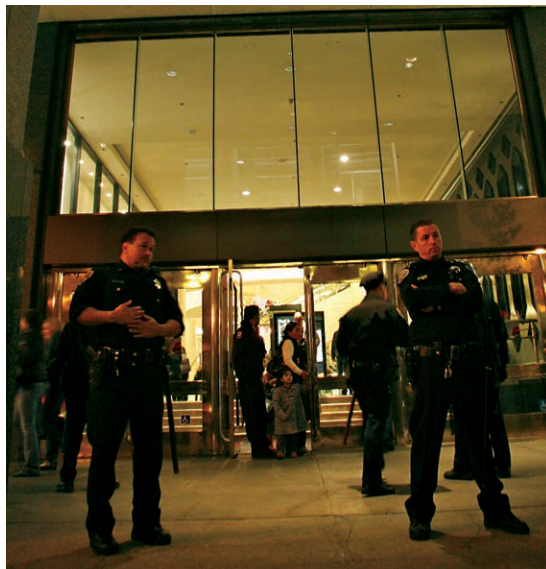
disperse or arrest us. The remaining participants began dragging objects into the street in order to slow the police pursuit. The march became less cohesive, and police were able to make several arrests. At this point we knew it was time to find a place to safely disperse. A few blocks later, we came upon Union Square, where hundreds of families had gathered to sip lattes, ice-skate, or take a break from shopping in nearby department stores. They were shocked, to say the least, when a ragtag band of hooligan street fighters came storming up the street. We stopped in front of the park's enormous Christmas tree. Images of the monumental Christmas tree set afire by the anarchists of Athens flashed through our heads. Having been in the streets for over three hours, however, we were tired. And we were already pressing our luck: the police would surely show us no quarter if we continued on, and there would be no dispersal spot as advantageous as this one. Additionally, it would have been ethically questionable to risk bringing severe police violence upon an area full of families and children. So we called it a night.

Although we weren't able to take a major organizing role in the Greek Solidarity action, UA in the Bay had some good discussions about it. The decision to enter the mall was wildly controversial. Some felt that it needlessly endangered and alienated shoppers in the mall, some of whom reportedly fled the building with their children in tow. Others felt that entering the mall was entirely appropriate, that those inside were culpable for patronizing such a despicable institution. Yet others felt that, while the mall may not have been a perfect or even strategically significant target, it would have done more harm to Bay Area organizing efforts to have let that energy peter out; they reasoned that doing so would have been demoralizing and might have discouraged anarchists from engaging in similar organizing efforts in the future.

One lesson that some of us learned, or relearned, from this experience was how lucky we are to live in the Bay Area. Many of us were nervous after the Greek Solidarity action: a good number of our comrades had been arrested, and some faced relatively serious charges. It appeared that we were going to have to put a lot of energy into fundraising and legal support for our comrades. But the local National Lawyers' Guild chapter swept in almost immediately and began representing the arrestees. Within a few days, everyone was out of jail, and as of this writing arrestees have faced relatively minor consequences. The SF NLG chapter is incredibly active, and along with other legal collectives such as the Midnight Special collective they have provided invaluable support to anarchists. Getting our friends out of jail and confronting the state in court is at least as important as confronting the state in the street. These legal collectives, along with other groups focusing on radical space, healthcare, and resource acquisition, provide crucial infrastructure‡. Admittedly, our infrastructure is nowhere near where it needs to be for us to be able to foment the kind of change we want to see, but we are fortunate to be the inheritors of the infrastructure amassed over decades of struggle in the Bay Area. Our movement, after all, can move only as far as there is infrastructure to support it.

‡ A few other such groups include Bound Together Books, the Long Haul Infoshop, Station 40, and AK Press.





*Decades of struggle in the local courts have tempered the police reaction to street protests, but as soon as property is threatened they show their true colors.*

### Gaza Solidarity

Shortly after the Greek solidarity action, Israel invaded Gaza in what was called in the Arab press the “Gaza Massacre.” Political groups of all stripes began calling for individual actions, including one called for by DASW that ended in a militant breakaway march led by Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim youth. In the last week of December actions escalated to a dramatic demonstration that brought thousands to the Israeli consulate and again saw militant youth lead breakaway marches that obstructed traffic and confronted police.

At the behest of the Arab Resource Organizing Center and members of SF ANSWER, a call circulated to organize a coalition to coordinate demonstrations. To this end, the Gaza Action Coalition was formed and agreed on a strategy of targeted civil disobedience. In the first week of January, attempts were made to shut down the federal building and the Israeli consulate, as well as maintain nightly street demonstrations.

On Saturday, January 10, ANSWER organized a rally and march. Our group put together a call

for anarchist participation in this action, which we used as an opportunity to practice blocking up and coordinating movements in a mass demonstration environment: linking arms, counting down to sprint, and other such maneuvers.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes in the Gaza Action Coalition, sectarian divisions and jealousies, as well as duplicitous and undemocratic practices, undermined the organizing capability of the group. Actions began to peter out after dozens of arrests and grueling nightly demonstrations had exhausted organizers.

### Oakland Uprising

It was only a matter of days before Bay Area anarchists found themselves fighting in the streets again. As is now widely known, on New Year’s Eve 2008, BART officer Johannes Merserle cold-bloodedly murdered Oscar Grant, a young local man of color, as he was on his way home from a party in San Francisco. Sadly, police executions of this kind have not been uncommon over the years. What was unique about this one was that scores of people riding

the train that night video-recorded the incident on their cell phones. In the days following the murder, videos of the incident spread virally across the internet, so by the time the authorities began the process of fabricating excuses and cover-ups the word was already out. On January 7, the day of Grant’s funeral, an ad hoc group, the Coalition Against Police Execution, organized a rally at the Fruitvale BART station where the murder occurred.

The rally was huge, with perhaps a thousand people attending. Right away protesters blocked the toll gates, which prevented trains from stopping.\* The organizers set up a sound system and began presenting speakers and offering open mic time. The organizers insisted on a “non-violent” response to the murder, arguing in favor of keeping a merely rhetorical fire under the bureaucrats’ feet to ensure “justice.” Most of the individuals who spoke extemporaneously disagreed, however. The crowd was furious, and many voiced a need for retribution, suggesting that justice was a prize to be won in the streets.

\* This may have actually prevented even *more* people from showing up, as it became nearly impossible to reach the rally via BART.

A pattern emerged. A member of the crowd would get on the mic and demand action, invigorating the protesters and calling for the crowd to march. Immediately after, the organizers would take back the mic, call for calm, and restate their belief that we should channel our energy into “legitimate” channels. They would promise to march “in 10 minutes” or “after this amazing next speaker.” This went on for a number of hours, and the crowd grew restless. The crowd continued to swell as this continued. A group of anarchists began to gather toward the back of the rally. After a while it became apparent that the organizers had no intention of marching, and that a good many protesters did. So the anarchist bloc, not being ones to wait for permission, began beating improvised drums, and left, accompanied by the vast majority of the crowd, including the rally organizers.

The march proceeded through the predominantly Hispanic Fruitvale district and toward downtown Oakland. As we marched down International Blvd., we received cheers of support from bystanders and our numbers seemed to grow. The crowd was teeming with energy, but mostly satisfied itself with chanting

*Among other things, protesters were accused of destroying the potted plant pictured here.*

*[Next Page] By organizing anarchist contingents in large liberal marches, we’ve created points of entry for disconnected activists and opportunities to practice our skills; Oakland police have a tradition of being more aggressive with protesters than SFPD, but they kept their distance during much of the Oakland rebellions.*



and marching through Fruitvale. As we came out of Fruitvale, though, the anger became more and more palpable. Some youths began jumping on a parked car. A little later, some protesters rushed into a liquor store as others demanded that they not loot it. As we turned off International toward the BART precinct office, piles of flaming newspapers appeared in our path. Things were escalating, but up to this point it seemed the police were standing back. They must have believed—correctly—that a large visible presence would incite the crowd.

Everything escalated after we turned toward the police station. Several blocks on, the march met a solitary police car with two officers inside. The crowd quickly approached the surprised officers; being boxed in, they abandoned their car and fled on foot. People started jumping on the hood and roof while others smashed out the windows. A flaming dumpster appeared out of nowhere and careened toward the car. Just as it smashed into the car we looked to our left and saw a phalanx of cops in full riot gear approaching us. They began unloading pepper bombs and other less-lethal ammunition. The crowd fled into the surrounding streets, and the riot was on. Dumpsters and newspaper boxes filled the streets. Police pushed protesters into downtown Oakland, splitting them up by means of troop movements and vehicle sweeps. One group ended in a standoff with police on Broadway. Other groups began to reconvene around this standoff. In spite of everything, the police were still being relatively restrained. It appeared that some higher-up didn't want the story of the night to be police violently repressing hordes of people demonstrating against police violence.

Bands of people slipped away from Broadway and headed south. Property destruction began in earnest: windows were smashed out all over the place and cars were set ablaze. There are many locally-owned businesses in downtown Oakland, more than in most urban business centers. These had their windows smashed along with the banks and fast food chains. Humorously, anarchists were seen suggesting corporate storefronts within striking distance that might make more appropriate targets than local minority-owned businesses. Despite this, people smashed what was there, including mom-n-pop shops.

The police began to escalate their tactics, conducting maneuvers to restrict access to certain areas of town and force insurgents out of them. They also began isolating individuals for arrest. Suddenly, an enormous OPD-flagged tank appeared with forty or fifty riot cops on top. This monstrosity began racing through the city terrorizing people. Gunshots were heard around Lake Merritt\*. Protesters were scattered across the southern part of downtown Oakland, and becoming less and less cohesive.

Just then, however, Oakland mayor Ron Dellums came out of City Hall to speak to the protesters. The disjointed masses rallied around Dellums' speech. Dellums appealed for calm, and asked that demonstrators wait for "justice" to run its course. For the first time, and probably because of the "riot," Dellums promised that Mehserle would be prosecuted. He also voiced concerns that others might lose their lives, implying that you never could tell who the police might kill in a riot. The crowd

\* It's unclear where these came from; it has been suggested that someone in an apartment building fired at people who were smashing his car.

was not impressed; re-united, they continued smashing windows along 17<sup>th</sup> street. Police finally corralled and arrested the largest remaining body of protesters. In all, they made 105 arrests that night.

In the days following the riot, public outrage seemed to focus on anarchists participating in the uprising. News outlets published articles in which they blamed anarchist provocateurs for the "violence." This was frustrating, but not entirely unexpected. One commentator said, "if they're blaming us, at least they're not blaming other [less privileged] participants." Unfortunately, though, some anarchists eagerly joined those denouncing us; one North Bay anti-authoritarian group posted a lengthy diatribe on the internet and spread it throughout activist communities, characterizing the riot as undignified and inappropriate.

This characterization does a disservice to the non-anarchist participants that night—which is to say, the vast majority. It robs African-American youth of agency, implying that they would not have had the initiative to act in that fashion without anarchist influence. For the record, anarchists were present for all aspects of the uprising, and acted in unity with other rioters, despite others' subsequent attempts to drive a wedge between anarchists and other participants. There were times when anarchists shared skills garnered through years of street demonstrations, such as how to conceal one's identity or evade police. But it's disingenuous to characterize anarchists as playing a leadership role. Anarchists worked side by side with a diverse crowd that night†, but the rage that fueled the fire came from those who face brutal police repression every day of their lives.

Unfortunately, some groups in the African-American community did not see it this way. At first many of these groups bought into the narrative presented by corporate media. It seemed that, having been betrayed by political activists and other predominantly white evangelists in the past, these groups suspected that anarchists had dropped in to have their fun and wouldn't be sticking around the clean up the mess. This animosity was displayed a week later at another rally organized by CAPE, when organizers formed a human wall to prevent anarchists from participating in the event.‡

Despite expectations, anarchists continued to work on the issue. Some helped form the Oakland 100 Support Committee to do jail support alongside Critical Resistance and other community groups. The NLG and the Midnight Special Law Collective provided legal support to arrestees. Anarchists attended forums in the African-American community about the issue, and outed themselves when talk turned against anarchists; this included some of the lawyers working on the cases. Eventually, the anti-anarchist outcry quieted down. As time passed, fewer people attended these community meetings, but anarchists continued to work on the issue, and gained some credibility. Even CAPE toned down their rhetoric. In the end, most arrestees had no charges filed, while others had their charges drastically

† See "Oakland on Fire: Anarchists, Solidarity, and New Possibilities in the Oakland Rebellion," available on the internet, for a more in-depth discussion of anarchist participation in the Oakland uprising.

‡ All the same, this rally led to a breakaway demonstration in which participants continued the property destruction of the previous week, although to a lesser extent, and there were several more arrests.





Tristan Anderson has been organizing as an anarchist in the Bay Area for longer than almost any of us. The hundreds who poured into the streets to protest his assault attested to the good will he has earned here.

reduced. As of this writing, a handful of felony cases remain pending, and anarchists continue to organize around the issue, especially with the No Justice, No BART campaign.

The backlash from the Oakland uprising stimulated a lot of reflection in UA in the Bay. The local political situation had blown up since we'd formed the group. We'd organized a number of actions; this had given people a chance to work with each other in the street and helped build radical momentum. The Greek demonstration and Oakland uprising were hastily-planned reactions which we were unable to organize for as a group, but they seemed to carry on this momentum. As we reflected further, it occurred to us that as an anarchist group openly organizing protests in the Bay we represented an opportune target for repression. We realized that

we had spent the preceding months pushing an action-based agenda while neglecting the rest of our goals. If we continued on that path, we might push things to the tipping point and bear the wrath of the state—which we might not be able to withstand, having not yet created an infrastructure that could help us do so. We thought back to the trajectory of Anarchist Action. Additionally, we were exhausted: working on action after action for several months had taken a toll, and burnout loomed on the horizon. So we shifted our focus a bit, and began to look at ways to build the infrastructure we needed.

## Infrastructure

A major concern of ours from the outset was how to extend the “life span” of anarchists. Many of us had watched over the years as old comrades left our communities, often dropping out of activism altogether. Undoubtedly, this phenomenon is complex and has many causes, but burnout has certainly been one of them. Anarchists put a lot of time and effort into our activities, but our projects often end in abject failure; other times, we achieve qualified successes that we conclude didn't warrant the effort. When this happens over and over, it's easy to see how one could become burned out. In our case, we had seen a moderate degree of success, but we had taken on an insane workload, and the stress was becoming palpable.

We discussed the issue of burnout at length and reached out to friends around the country for perspective on how to deal with it. One theme we heard over and over was that your group must constantly be giving back to its members instead of just consuming their resources. This seems like a no-brainer, but it's easy to lose track of this in the urgency of struggle.

Infrastructural projects were one way we thought the group could give back to the individual. Think how many more people would stay involved in anarchist organizing if doing so provided them access to housing and health care. This sort of synergistic relationship is the basis of mutual aid: the more the group helps its members meet their needs, the more time and energy they will have to put back into the group.

We've also emphasized infrastructure because in the long run we believe it can build broader support. Infrastructure can be a form of propaganda by the deed: a way to show that our forms of social organization can provide for people's needs. This type of work has been common in almost all social movements that have achieved some degree of success. The Black Panthers,

for example, gained credibility in their communities by providing social services such as their breakfast program. Anarchist participation in the Spanish Civil War was preceded by a decades-long campaign of infrastructure-building, including an extensive system of rural free schools. More recently, participants in the uprisings in Greece have suggested that the insurrection was made possible in part by the extensive network of social centers that had emerged over the preceding decade.

Building infrastructure has proven more difficult than we expected, however. While we can plan an action and be done with the whole thing in a matter of weeks, a lot of infrastructure work takes considerably longer and requires more commitment and resources. There has been a lot of discussion within UA in the Bay about acquiring space and reclaiming our time,\* but we've made little concrete progress.

A few specific issues have prevented our efforts to build infrastructure from getting off the ground. First, we have failed to consent upon an infrastructural strategy. To whom is our fledgling infrastructure meant to be useful? On one hand, we stand to build more community goodwill by creating infrastructure that addresses the needs of underserved people in the communities we live. On the other hand, by addressing the needs of fellow activists, we could increase our ability to work on projects, and hopefully create long-term inter-generational anarchist communities. The two are probably not mutually exclusive; but given a perceived lack of human and financial resources, it has been hard determining where to start.

We have had some small-scale successes, though. For example, we've run a food cooperative since almost the beginning of our existence. For a small fee, members can receive a box of produce before each general meeting. We've also attempted to supplement the food co-op by contributing to a few gardening projects. Meanwhile, we've built our street capacity by training street medics and setting up a tactical communications system.

We continued this type of work in February 2009 at the anarchist book fair. The book fair has been a staple of radical organizing in San Francisco for fourteen years now. It is generally the only time each year when you can see all your radical comrades together in the same place. The event also draws a lot of out-of-town activists. As part of our ongoing work, we agreed

\* These are critical issues in our community, as space is expensive and the high cost of living forces many of us to work most of the time.



to coordinate a housing cooperative and offer childcare services over the book fair weekend.

Tragically, amidst the jubilation of the book fair, we learned that our friend and comrade Tristan Anderson had been shot in the head with a tear-gas canister in Israel and was critically injured. Tristan has had a long and storied career in radical activism in the Bay Area and around the world. He was among those who helped organize the participation of UA in the Bay at the RNC. A demonstration was organized for the day after the book fair. UA in the Bay threw its weight behind the event, spreading the word throughout the weekend.

That Monday, several hundred angry activists showed up at the Israeli consulate to express support for Tristan and solidarity with Palestinians. After an emotional rally, including Tristan's partner giving a report live from Israel about his condition†, the crowd set out on an unpermitted

† As of this writing Tristan Anderson continues to undergo surgery and rehabilitation at Tel Hashomer hospital in Tel Aviv. Those wishing to learn more or donate toward Tristan's medical expenses may do so at [justicefortristan.org](http://justicefortristan.org).

Here patches declaring solidarity with Tristan are screened in the middle of Market Street, interrupting a busy weekday commute.

## **If we spend six hours every week at meetings about projects that will fail or be repressed, no one will want to participate in our group for long. On the other hand, if those who work on these projects thereby gain access to child care or health care, people will have an immediate incentive to stay involved.**

ted march through downtown San Francisco. The procession stopped after perhaps an hour to hold another impromptu rally in the middle of Market Street. Friends and acquaintances of Tristan shared thoughts on the sound system, and others silkscreened patches voicing their support of him. This went on for almost an hour, until one organizer declared the march over and stated that the sound system would be leaving. This seemed odd to some of us—especially those who had brought the sound system in the first place.

Many disagreed that the protest was over and attempted to make their way back to the consulate. This breakaway contingent was small, but fierce and angry. We followed with the sound system. A problem soon became apparent: no one had brought any decent music. There were a few abortive attempts to solicit ipods from the crowd that all ended in disaster. Finally, we settled on a Sonic Youth album. Police tried to control the march, but the participants turned up the street of the Israeli consulate and sprinted ahead against one-way traffic. At this point, things became chaotic; objects were thrown into the street while police rushed to protect the consulate. The police were bearing down on us from all directions with sirens blaring. A few blocks away from the consulate, some of us realized it was time to get the sound system out. We ran down some back alleys and attempted to put some distance between ourselves and the action. Unfortunately, we looked back to find that a number of protesters had followed us. Awkwardly, we implored folks to let us go our separate way, then pointed the sound cart up a steep hill and sprinted, finally ducking into a parking garage. At the bottom of the hill, the police had outmaneuvered protesters; lines of riot police were closing in to protect the consulate. Their patience gone, they came out swinging batons at those in the street. Several were injured and four were arrested.

The sixth anniversary of the Iraq war occurred three days later. For this reason, we had decided far in advance of the book fair to dedicate March to anti-war organizing. On the anniversary, we teamed up with some allies for a rally highlighting military recruitment of undocumented people and other immigrants' rights issues. A number of speakers came to talk about their experiences as immigrants, soldiers, or both. In addition, we put together some street theater, various musicians performed, Food not Bombs served, and we wrapped up with a film. This was decidedly a change of pace for us, but it was a nice break from the high-stress events of the preceding winter.

The following week we organized a forum to discuss strategies for fighting militarism. We were nervous in the days leading up to it, as we hadn't had much experience planning that sort of event. It turned out to be a great success. We'd attracted amazing speakers and facilitators, thanks to the social networks resulting from our work earlier in the year. The turnout was better than anticipated, and the conversations lively and stimulating. We gathered afterwards in a nearby park for a barbeque that received rave reviews. This kind of organizing may seem less glamorous than other forms of struggle, but it can enable our community to build valuable cohesion and solidarity.

Since March, we haven't organized many large-scale events. We've put together some small actions, such as an anarchist contingent in the San Francisco May Day procession. We've also worked on a number of skill shares and workshops, including more medic trainings. We have a new sub-group called the "super fun adventure club," which is basically our version of the Boy Scouts. In this group, we do physical training, learn valuable skills such as climbing, conduct urban exploration missions, and enjoy other "super fun" stuff. As of this writing, we're also busy planning an "anarchist Olympics" which will offer entertaining games and skill shares which we hope to help prepare anarchists for upcoming events such as the G20 summit in Pittsburgh, the Vancouver anti-Olympics protests, and the Oscar Grant murder trial which will take place locally. It seems fair to say, however, that we've slowed down a bit since our busy winter.

Perhaps one reason for this is that we've been trying to figure out some big conceptual issues. We've put a lot of energy into trying to develop cohesive strategies for several months now, and haven't gotten very far. From the beginning, we've tried to be as inclusive as possible of anarchists with varied perspectives, and this has allowed us to avoid many of the sectarian arguments that bog down other anarchist organizing groups. But not subscribing to any particular trend of anarchist thought forces us to develop unique strategies for fighting capitalism. Simply dealing with the enormity of that issue is perhaps more difficult than any of the ideological conflicts we have experienced. We have a long way to go before we overthrow capitalism, and envisioning the way forward is a daunting task. But one thing the group is almost unanimous about is that we don't want to just keep doing one-off actions, which don't seem to create lasting results even when they are successful.

## **Conclusions/Beginnings**

The struggle for liberation is not a skirmish; it is a campaign. In order to win it, we must position ourselves for prolonged struggle. Having seen movements in the Bay wax and wane over the years, we believe that we must develop strategies to improve our staying power. If we cannot accomplish this, all of our efforts will likely be lost in the boom/bust cycle we've seen so many times. It is in breaking this cycle that we stand to do our best work. This is also our most daunting task.

It would be dishonest to say that we've made great gains in this regard. In reality, we've made little progress toward meeting our infrastructural goals. Social centers, food production networks, free schools, day cares, and the like could help build momentum over many years, if not generations. But such projects are huge in scope and require an effort that would dwarf all we've attempted to date.

In spite of our shortcomings, the last year has been pretty extraordinary for us. We've come a long way from those first meetings about the RNC. Since we learned in St. Paul that we needed to develop closer relationships and gain experience working together, we've orchestrated an impressive list of actions; at the same time, some of the most noteworthy ones took place outside our organizing structure. On May Day 2009, an autonomous group of masked demonstrators held a "flash mob" protest in San Francisco's luxury shopping district, in which dozens of high-end retailers were attacked. The mob vanished before police could respond. The regularity with which such events have occurred indicates that momentum has been building in the Bay over the past year. No single group of people is

responsible for this—certainly not us—but we'd like to think that our work has contributed to it.

It's unclear what the future holds for us. Perhaps by the time you read this we will be just another defunct organization, a footnote to the pages written by the next wave of anarchist activists in the Bay Area. But with a little luck and a lot of work and determination, we could build something truly powerful. Anarchists have struggled in the Bay Area for decades now. Movements have come and gone, but all have left something behind for us. Sometimes it's an infoshop, a legal precedent, or something else that makes things a bit easier the next time around. Often, it is just a cautionary tale, a warning of what to watch out for next time. Even if we fail utterly, even if our efforts only add up to another example of what not to do, we have shared this struggle together, and it's been a hell of a time.

*Let them burn us, hang us, shoot us,  
Joe Hill,*

*For at the last we had what it takes  
to make songs with.*

—“Before the Brave,” *Joe Hill Listens to the Praying*  
Kenneth Patchen, Anarchist, Poet, War Resister, Bay Area resident

## **Appendix: UA in the Bay and the Unconventional Action Network**

After the 2008 Republican National Convention, various proposals circulated regarding what the Unconventional Action network should do next; some regional networks that had held gatherings in advance of the DNC and RNC organized subsequent consults aimed at maintaining coordination and momentum. The final nationally coordinated action associated with the network appears to have occurred on the morning following the election of Barack Obama, when people around the US woke up to find corporate newspapers wrapped in a false front page proclaiming "Capitalism Wins at the Polls; Anarchy Brewing in the Streets." But by early 2009, UA had evaporated as a national phenomenon\*. When it was announced that the G20 summit would occur in Pittsburgh the following September, only one UA group besides UA in the Bay endorsed the call for an anarchist mobilization.

Like individual organizing groups, networks can only persist when they offer concrete resources or opportunities to the participants. Were there an anarchist federation that could provide its members with free health care, this country would not lack for anarchists. The networks that developed in the buildup to the convention protests flourished because they promised the opportunity to participate in something exciting and historic; they failed to endure because no equally compelling purpose emerged after the RNC. The point of networks is to save organizers the trouble of

\* This is hardly inevitable; Bash Back!, the radical queer and trans group that came out of RNC organizing, held a nationwide conference in May 2009 that drew hundreds of people.

duplicating groundwork, and to increase the scope of what can be achieved with the same tactics so it is possible to escalate conflict without increasing individual risk. This presupposes at least a few groups with the energy, initiative, and longevity to make the most of these possibilities.

Why did UA in the Bay survive while so many other UA groups dissolved? This is especially interesting considering that there were many anarchist groups in the Bay Area already, while elsewhere UA was thought to fill a void in communities where there was little ongoing anarchist organizing. Unconventional Denver, which had been the local body coordinating anarchist demonstrations against the DNC in 2008, also outlasted most UA nodes. In both cases, the key seems to have been a focus on local rather than national organizing.

Anarchists in North America are notoriously incapable of sustaining national networks; perhaps the US is simply too vast, both spatially and culturally. In any case, a durable national network is impossible without long-lived local groups. Perhaps the Bay Area's rich anarchist heritage made it fertile ground for an Unconventional Action group, rather than rendering the latter redundant; when other UA groups began to dissolve, this did not compromise the mission or momentum of UA in the Bay, because the latter was focused around local activity. Ironically, the lesson seems to be that a lasting nationwide network can only be formed out of local groups that don't need one.



"When they describe a work as unintelligible, they mean that the artist has said something new; when they describe a work as immoral, they mean that the artist has said something true."  
—Oscar Wilde

## La Commune (de Paris, 1871)

Peter Watkins

1999; 5 hours 45 minutes

The feature article in the second issue of *Rolling Thunder* asked whether anarchists should frame liberation as the consummation of current values and desires, or a total rejection of them. One might pose a parallel question about radical cinema: is it better to appropriate popular aesthetics and turn them against the powers that be, or to violate them in the course of rejecting the system that produced them? Would a full-length Hollywood epic complete with star actors and computer animation seduce viewers to the other side of the barricades more effectively than Guy Debord's famous blank screen, or would it simply utilize rebellious desires to rivet more spectators to their seats?

In 1871, at the end of a disastrous war with Germany, Paris experienced a popular uprising. The rebels drove government forces from the city, convened a council of immediately-recallable delegates, and attempted a variety of ambitious social experiments in women's liberation, workers' self-management, and public education. After two months, a reactionary counteroffensive supported by the Germans recaptured the city, though the communards fought street by street and block by block; the invaders murdered tens of thousands outright and later executed or deported tens of thousands more. Anarchists and communists hailed the Commune as the first proletarian revolution; on the other hand, as Edmond de Goncourt wrote, "A bleeding like that, by killing the rebellious part of a population, postpones the next revolution... The old society has twenty years of peace before it."

In 1999, dissident television and film director Peter Watkins set out to depict the uprising in a film intended to be as horizontal and experimental as the Commune itself. Hundreds of actors were recruited according to the class and politics of the characters they were to portray, ranging from rough-and-ready radicals to bourgeois conservatives; the majority had no prior acting experience. They formed study groups to learn about the lives of the constituents and opponents of the Commune, and discussed the relationship between the Paris of 1871 and modern-day Europe. A set representing the working-class 11<sup>th</sup> district of Paris, one of the last to fall at the end of the uprising, was built inside a disused factory on the site of the studio

of film pioneer Georges Méliès. In this setting, the cast acted out the story of the Paris Commune from beginning to end, while the camera crew dashed around filming as if they were documenting a current upheaval.

In 2009, *La Commune* still makes a jarring viewing experience, though not necessarily an unpleasant one. While the costumes and interiors are convincing, Watkins never hides the edge of the set, undermining the "authority" of film as representation the way Bertolt Brecht might have. Similarly, Watkins anachronistically depicts the uprising through reports from opposing television channels, the reactionary Versailles TV and the radical Commune TV, emphasizing that any portrayal of the Commune necessarily takes place through the lens of our own time. By explicitly requesting that viewers suspend their disbelief—"We ask you to imagine that it is now March 17, 1871"—the filmmakers achieve the opposite effect, denying the audience the illusion that the reenactment takes place in a world other than their own. *La Commune* thus avoids the catharsis Aristotle described as the purpose of tragic drama, in which people experience an emotional discharge in a controlled environment only to return to their ordinary lives: "Wasn't that a sad story!"

Rather than focusing on the Brad Pitts and Audrey Tautous of history, Commune TV wanders the crowd in long cuts, giving equal time to scores of people the way a haphazard Indymedia video might. The apparent improvisation of the cast and film crew succeeds in evoking the tremendous chaotic energy of an insurrection: the urgency and disorder, the alternation of exultation and terror, the multiplicity of voices, desires, and activities.

As the reactionary forces of the government begin bombarding Paris from outside, power struggles develop within the Commune, opening the fault lines that divided anarchists from communists and other socialists shortly after its fall. The cast weigh the purported necessity of centralizing power to coordinate the defense of the city against the ideal of the Commune as a pure, if doomed, gesture towards liberation; as the arguments intensify, some actors depart from character to debate the Bolshevik revolution and the slaughter of anarchists at Kronstadt.

The journalists of Commune TV undergo a parallel schism. One—perhaps intended to represent Peter Watkins, and in any case acted by his son—is outraged at the other's pretense of objectivity in the face of the consolidation of power by the dictatorial Committee of Public Safety: "We'll give our opinion from now on and

that's it, or I'm going home!" Like the real-life Watkins, who made *La Commune* for French television only to see it suppressed, his scruples result in his departure from the television crew.

Today, as television is superseded by internet media, it's hard to picture the different uses to which it could have been put—one can hardly separate the shortcomings of the technology from the ways it has taken shape in this society. In robbing us of our imaginations and historical sense, capitalism renders it impossible to imagine or remember how any of the inventions of our civilization could be applied outside its logic. Primitivist generalizations aside, could it be possible to produce anything along the lines of "motion pictures" without dooming millions to spectatorship, and melting the polar ice caps in the bargain? We may never find out. But it's poignant that only a decade ago a renegade director, doomed to obscurity by corporate stonewalling, was still struggling to build signposts to the roads not taken.

The risk, of course, is that in earnestly attacking corporate media and its aesthetics, the film legitimizes itself as a medium—buying more time for a format perhaps better buried entirely. Even Guy Debord's blank screen was still a spectacle to contemplate, as its afterlife in European museums attests. Yet one can also look at *La Commune* as an effort to discover a way of recounting history that brings its unsettled debts back into play. Whether or not it accomplishes this for viewers, it seems to have served this purpose for members of the cast, some of whom went on to form a collective that continued organizing around the issues brought up by the film long after its release. One can imagine that, in attempting to incarnate revolutionaries without ceasing to be themselves, the actors were forced to engage with the injustices and possibilities of their own times as well as those of 1871.

This personal engagement is the film's greatest strength, from a viewing standpoint as well. Though some of the earlier stretches can drag, the film builds to a stirring and unusual climax. Because the artifice of cinema has long been revealed by the final sequences, they can only derive their power from the extent to which the passions displayed in them are genuine. This underlines the essential message of the film: not only does history repeat itself, but its unresolved conflicts continue to seethe just beneath the skin of the present day. As one comunard proclaims near the conclusion, with a sincerity that provokes gooseflesh: "If there are any barricades in Paris in the year 2000, I'll be there fighting!"

It's taken for granted that the experiences of the few hundred people who make a movie are less important than those of the thousands or millions who watch it; experiments like *La Commune* are rejected out of hand as disrespectful to the audience and ineffective as vehicles for propaganda. But in a product-oriented society, in which so few reflect on anything they see, perhaps a few hundred people participating in an empowering process could be more significant than any blockbuster viewed by millions. Moreover, if this comes across on the screen as something that *really happened*, perhaps it could challenge the passivity of the audience as well.





## De Stad Was van Ons

A Film about the Amsterdam Squatters' Movement 1975-1988

Joost Seelen

1996; 1 hour 45 minutes

Thirty years ago, squatters in Amsterdam could fight the authorities for control of the physical terrain of the city and win. This documentary, comprised of interviews interspersed with archival footage, chronicles the trajectory of the movement up to that zenith and beyond, into its subsequent nadir. The film makes a useful companion to the excellent book *Cracking the Movement*, which explores the same events through a cleverly analytical lens, though it seems some of the names are given differently in the book.

The director's goal was clearly to dispel the image of the squatting movement as a leaderless, spontaneous phenomenon. Were this a dramatization, it would be hard to gauge its impartiality—but the stories are told by the protagonists themselves, juxtaposing accounts from participants on opposite sides of each issue. Through this format, the film offers an instructive example of how power struggles can play out inside decentralized groups confronting the state.

At the opening of the narrative, in 1975, squatting is framed as a lifestyle choice made of necessity: there is a housing crisis, so people begin occupying buildings. A culture of collective living and radical politics develops around this alternate approach to housing, and when the government attempts to evict squatters, hundreds turn out to resist. At first, the squatters try pacifist tactics; when the police respond with brutal force, they reconsider and shift to a more active defense.

The next squats are reinforced like medieval castles, and real battles ensue when the police come. When the police attempt to evict a building on Vondelstraat, the squatters fight them off and erect tremendous barricades, establishing an autonomous zone that lasts until the Danish government is finally forced to send in helicopters, tanks, and soldiers with live ammunition. At this point, by all accounts, the squatters were supported by a great part of Dutch society, who viewed the housing crisis as a real problem and saw the government as the aggressor.

As they recount the subsequent developments, the narrators' interpretations begin to differ. The first fractures appear around the riots during the coronation of Queen Beatrix in

1980, which were organized under the banner "no housing, no coronation." Some squatters see this as a gratuitous gesture that can only discredit them in the eyes of the public: so long as the confrontations were about physical spaces, they were defensible, but now confrontation is becoming disconnected, an end unto itself. Others, more focused on political struggle than lifestyle, consider the riots a success; one effuses: "There was the incident where a cop was pulled off his horse. I did my best to get that horse. That would have been great—I can ride a horse!"

At this point in the storyline, many anarchists will find themselves identifying with the latter tendency. It's hard not to be inspired by their grim determination: "If you choose confrontation, you have to go to the extreme and not bluff. If you put a refrigerator on the roof, you may have to throw it off." This makes the following developments especially chilling.

The Grootte Keyser, the flagship fortress of the movement, is legalized by the city in a back-room deal involving some of the most militant organizers, following a decision at a squatters' assembly which turns out to have been fixed in advance. Afterwards, some of the lifestyle-oriented squatters who had squatted the building in the first place drunkenly trash the infoshop inside it. The militants react by literally kidnapping and interrogating some of them.

The tension between serious organizers and uncontrollable individualists—between anarchy as order and anarchy as chaos—will be painfully familiar to anyone who has spent time in a space where anarchism overlaps with other manifestations of rebellion, such as punk. One might conclude that this episode was not simply the result of irresponsible destruction, nor of authoritarian overreaction, but a sign that the community desperately needed some kind of healthy accountability process.

No such process occurred, however, and eight years later the same militants were locked in a turf war with other squatters reminiscent of the "co-op wars" that took place in Minneapolis in 1975-6. Once again, other squatters were taken hostage and interrogated, this time threatened with electrodes. Looking back, the interrogator rationalizes his actions: "We were a minority, and if you're fighting a 'majority,' you have to use other tactics." His comrade agrees: "It only counts if you use them."

Thus the radicals who began by using violence to defend autonomous spaces from the authorities end by turning it on each other.



Is this inevitable, or can we identify what went wrong? One cannot help noticing how gendered the schism is: every one of the militants is a man, and every woman interviewed becomes alienated by their conduct in the end. One also cannot help viewing the narrators in light of their subsequent lives, as the interviews take place many years after the events. Like the characters in the German comedy *What to Do in Case of Fire*, some have gone on to middle class success, reminiscing disingenuously from comfortable living rooms, while others remain invested in living against the grain; one is still homeless, and mourns the passing of the squatting movement piteously. Had all the participants depended on the squatting movement for their very lives, they might have had more impetus to work out conflicts. Of course, that equation can be inverted: who will stake her life on a movement that cannot work out conflicts?

Movements that involve massive numbers of people can enable the participants to accomplish things they could not do on their own, but these often arise practically by accident. As the participants sort out what they want from them, the movements splinter, until the miracles of collective action that catalyzed them become impossible. Those who wish to wield that collective power rarely recognize how much they need each other until it is too late. In the Dutch squatting movement of the early 1980s, for example, it was ultimately immaterial whether or not riots like the one at the coronation actually alienated the public; the fear that they would, and the arrogance of those who brushed this off, were enough to divide the movement, rendering confrontations and housing-oriented squatting alike more difficult. In the wake of this collapse, no incentive remained for the survivors to get along.

In the final passages of the documentary, after provoking a series of violent clashes, the militants are forced out of the movement entirely; squatting goes on without them, albeit on a smaller scale than during its peak. In fact, despite the power struggle that built up to it, this outcome attests to the non-hierarchical nature of the squatters' movement: had this conflict played out in a different context, the

authoritarians might have been able to consolidate control for themselves. Although the stories of violent internal conflict are harrowing for anyone who would like to believe that people can coexist without authorities, they don't necessarily prove that this is impossible. Human beings are bound to have conflicts, and sometimes these escalate to violence; the idea that this could be avoided by the imposition of external force is part of the statist mythology that justifies the consolidation of power. Where the institutions of the state are absent, however, power tends to even out, the same way water seeks its own level—even if it takes some sloshing about to get there.

Scenes from the barricades on Vondelstraat.

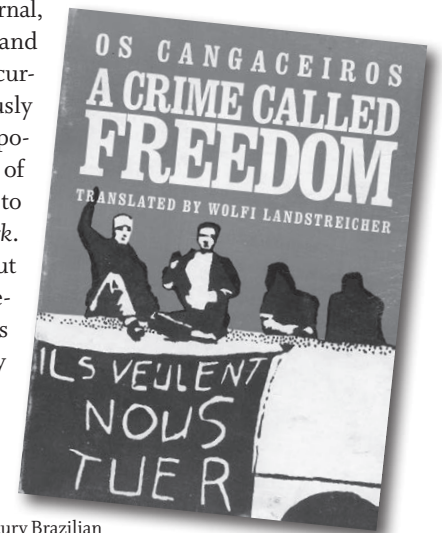
## Os Cangaceiros

A Crime Called Freedom

Eberhardt Press, 2006

This is the first book published in the US about the French group Os Cangaceiros\*, a semi-clandestine circle of anticapitalists active around Europe from the early 1980s to the beginning of the '90s. Though they published a journal, carried on targeted direct action, and sought to support the most radical currents in labor struggles, they famously identified as criminals rather than political activists, extolling all manner of "anti-social" activity and attempting to live out the old challenge: *Never work*.

English-language information about the group has been limited and somewhat mythologized: the Cangaceiros appeared during the revolt of May 1968, as if that storied tempest conjured social deviance incarnate; they traveled the world from Cold War Poland to South African townships,



\* The original Cangaceiros were late 19th Century Brazilian bandits known for robbing wealthy landowners—hence the "Pampas" in the title of Leopold Roc's text, the latter being the extensive, treeless plains of South America.

It may seem strange to you, dear reader, for us to review two obscure foreign films that came out several years ago here. But this is the cybernetic age, and you probably have all the movies, books, and albums of all time at your fingertips. If, however, you are as befuddled by all this newfangled technology as we are, and haven't any idea of how to track down either of these films, we'll be happy to help; contact us via [rollingthunder@crimethinc.com](mailto:rollingthunder@crimethinc.com). We can also supply copies of the original Os Cangaceiros publications in French, in hopes of dispelling some of the fog around them.



wildcat strikes and riots erupting everywhere they set foot; rather than squatting derelict buildings, they forced yuppies out of posh condominiums—"squatting as expropriation"—and regarded the inevitable arrival of the police as part of the party; they distributed their magazines in the manner of the French Resistance, leaving stacks of them in the subway; like the fairies of old who appeared in the witching hour to curdle milk, they mixed sugar into the concrete at the construction sites of future prisons so the walls would crumble easily. Some of this is exaggerated, though doubtless the truth is at least as fabulous; one role of mythology is to convey the wonder of reality where simple facts cannot.

Unfortunately, like children impatient to be disabused of the fancies of youth, we can't help rushing past the mythology to try to get at the facts. The one person we've managed to track down who knew the Cangaceiros personally—an old British fellow who refers to them as the Kangaroos—reports that though they were influenced by the most radical currents from the 1968 uprising, most were too young to remember it\*. The majority were from middle class backgrounds, though they kept company with genuine workers and, true to their rhetoric, funded many of their projects via criminal escapades.

Os Cangaceiros appeared from the ashes of the Gravediggers of the Old World, who published four issues of an eponymous magazine between 1977 and 1983. The first of three issues of the magazine *Os Cangaceiros* debuted in 1985. Members of the group had gone to Britain to participate in the wave of rioting that had peaked in 1981; some spent years living there, in hopes that a revolutionary situation would develop. They befriended a number of British workers and radicals, including participants

\* One, who was a child at the time, recalled helping initiate an occupation of her grade school.

in the Yorkshire miner's strike, which inspired texts like "Brick Keeps Britain Beautiful" in *Os Cangaceiros* #2.

This collection is not entirely free from the aforementioned tendency towards spotty scholarship: translator Wolfi Landstreicher, who rendered the contents of an Italian collection into English rather than working from the original French, repeats the line that "the group came together in Nice in 1968," and there is virtually nothing on the Cangaceiros' activities in England. The texts are all from the Cangaceiros' later phase, when they returned from their British idyll to pursue a vendetta against the French prison system.

This campaign gained public attention in 1985 when they sabotaged train lines in solidarity with a wave of prison uprisings. After repeating this tactic in 1986, they went back to the drawing board, returning a couple years later to take the offensive against a government program intended to build enough new facilities to accommodate an additional 13,000 prisoners. In a series of actions reminiscent of the SHAC campaign described in *Rolling Thunder* #6, they broke into offices to steal and destroy documents, set fire to the vehicles of subcontractors, and even attacked a prison architect in the street. This culminated in a mass mailing in which they circulated classified floor plans and other documents detailing the new prisons, a major embarrassment for the government and a potential boon to flighty captives.†

In the end, most of the Cangaceiros fell out with each other, as radicals are wont to do even

† As Leopold Roc discusses in the following text, the stroke of genius in this action was that, rather than counting on the Cangaceiros group to make the most effective use of the information via clandestine attacks, it equipped the public at large to broaden the terrain of conflict past the scope of any police investigation. In limiting their focus to what they can do alone, militants often unconsciously lose faith in the rest of the population, which not only causes them to miss strategic opportunities but also to give up hope of a genuinely anarchist struggle.

when they deny being "political," and scattered across the world from Ulan Bator to Tanzania. Intense pressure from the police, who conducted raids throughout subversive circles in search of them, could not have helped. They left behind a couple publishers started up on stolen money, and a ghost—a specter, if you will—that continues to haunt Europe.

North Americans will find that this little collection of their writing makes an exciting introduction to their deeds and ideas. It only remains for others to fill it out with additional material, so a more complete picture of the Cangaceiros can emerge: not of an invincible clandestine cell that put the efforts of other prison abolitionists to shame, but rather of ordinary people who experimented with a number of approaches to waging war in times of social peace, with mixed success.

The human being is made from the same material as his dreams. We are revolutionaries. *Os Cangaceiros* means "Everything is possible," "We are at war," "Nothing is true, everything is permitted."



—The Gravediggers of the Old World, Paris, May 1980

# The Blurred Trail of the Cangaceiros in the Social Pampas

Leopold Roc, May 1995; copyedited for this publication

Between 1985 and 1990, the group Os Cangaceiros attained some notoriety through a couple resounding actions in France; now that the Cangaceiros belong to the past, it is probably those actions which are worth remembering, or rather the lessons and criticisms that can be drawn from them. However, the following comments are not an effort to arouse admiration, nor scorn: I just think that they could be of use to others willing to engage in similar practical dissent.\*

The various acts of sabotage we carried out were an assertion that when it comes to expressing discontent or solidarity a few determined people can indulge in something more efficient than habitual pamphlet writing. In 1985, the idea was to relay the demands of rioting prisoners by disrupting railway traffic on a wide scale. Blocking highways and railway lines is a long-established tradition in French workers' struggles†. By using the same means, we wanted to stress that a prisoners' revolt is as legitimate a social struggle as any other: just

\* This text reflects my personal view on the subject; though part of it comes from a collective reflection, some former protagonists probably wouldn't agree with my outlook. -L.R.

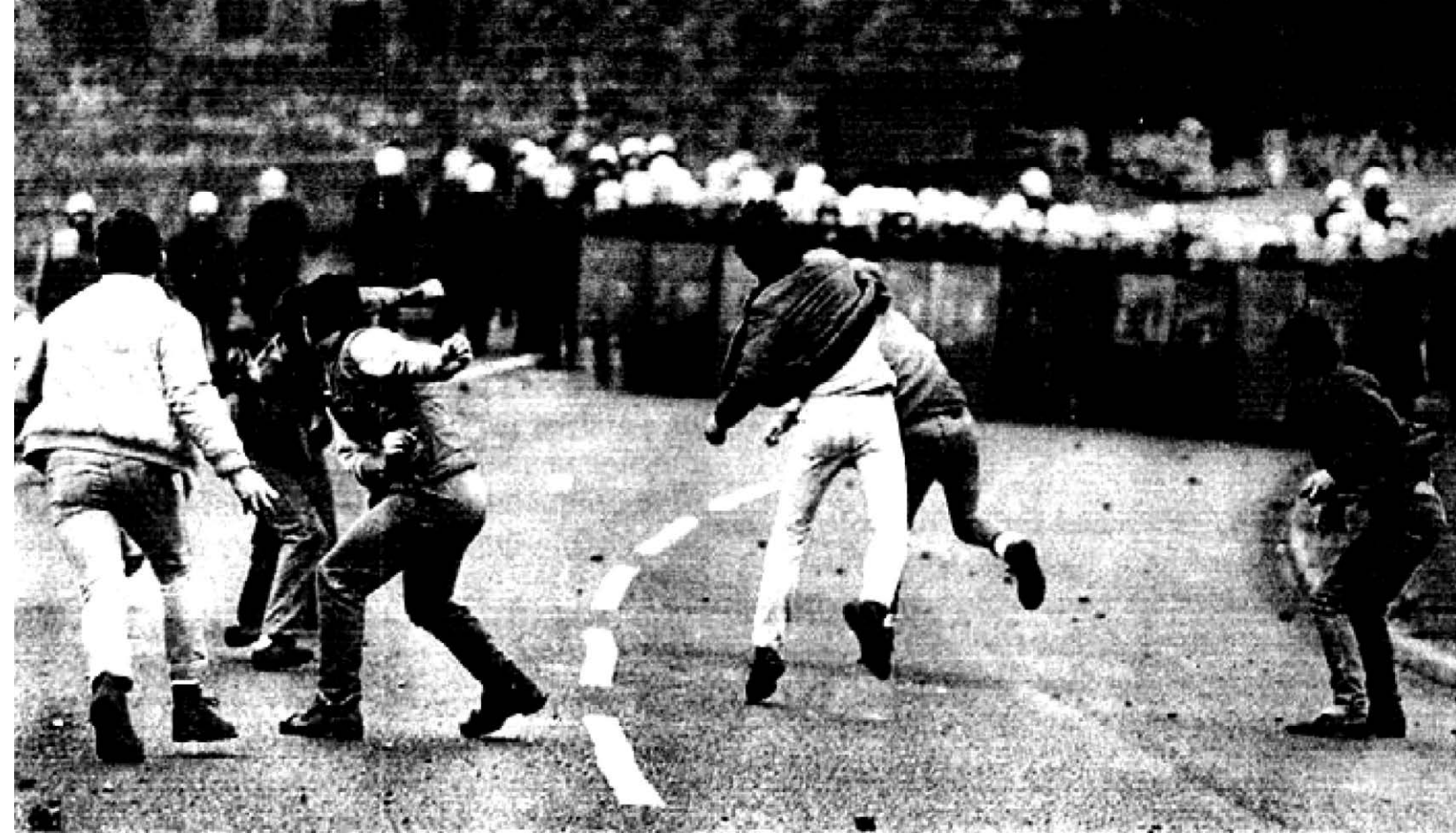
† Editor's note: As of this writing, the so-called Tarnac Nine face terrorist conspiracy charges for allegedly sabotaging train lines in 2008; the Cangaceiros case resulting from the 1985 action offers a precedent for this on a variety of levels.

as workers go on strike for a pay rise, prisoners riot for reduced sentences—and in both cases there is more at stake than the actual demands. Needless to say, the state and the media didn't acknowledge this, and ranted about terrorists supporting criminals (or vice versa). Still, this display of solidarity was well received within the prison walls, and also among many people outside. And while reporting our actions, the press had to mention the prisoners' demands, thus allowing them to become more widely known. It also has to be said that, in spite of the accusations of terrorism, the four people who were charged with these actions eventually got quite mild sentences, thanks to a local defense campaign.

Though we didn't wish to reproduce this particular kind of action endlessly and spend all our time on railway ballast, we resorted to it once more in February 1986. This time we were acting in support of Abdelkarim Khalki, who had shown his noble sense of friendship and humanity by attempting to liberate his mates, Courtois and Thiollet, while they were appearing on trial. The court, jury, and journalists were taken hostage for 36 hours, and though the attempt failed, they'd managed to "judge their judges," the judicial system and society, live on prime-time TV. Now Khalki was on hunger strike, demanding that the minister of interior respect the promise he'd made to let him go in exchange for the surrender of Thiollet and Courtois. So one morning, thousands of Parisians had a good excuse for arriving to work late, as we paralysed virtually the whole Metro network for over an hour just by throwing heavy things on the rails and cutting through the main electrical cables. Posters in and around the stations informed everybody about Khalki's situation and demands; again, this action compelled the press to mention Khalki's hunger strike, which had been blacked out until then. Of course, the government never kept its promise, and Khalki received a heavy sentence. As our poster said, "What can be expected from the state but blows and lies?"

The series of actions we carried out in 1989-90 were based in a different perspective. This time it was not a direct response to a revolt that had just occurred‡, but a decision to oppose

‡ Of course, we still considered it part of the ongoing prison struggles, as well. The situation had changed since 1985, thanks to a number of individuals and groups both inside and outside the walls. Beyond sporadic outbursts, a movement was then beginning to organize itself, involving nationwide prison strikes, committees of struggling prisoners, and public support when inmates appeared in court for rebellion. Brilliant critical texts were also published in prisoners' underground magazines.



Street conflicts during the British miner's strike, from "Brick Keeps Britain Beautiful," in Os Cangaceiros #2

the planned construction of new prisons. This meant we could decide for ourselves the timing and means we thought most appropriate. We were motivated by the obvious reasons for which anyone might feel pissed off at the prospect of 13,000 new cages being built, but we also had personal grounds for resentment: in the preceding year, we'd been subjected to continuous harassment by the police, who had tried to vanquish the Cangaceiros with as little publicity as possible, forcing us to be constantly on the run. It was no exaggeration to assert that those prisons were also being built for us; seeing as "the best defense is to attack," we thought that if we were caught, it would be better if it was for something worth it. However, this feeling of anguished emergency also played a harmful role in the whole thing, as the playful element, necessary to any kind of subversive activity, tended to give way to a neurotic obsession with wanting a successful outcome.

The final report we published about this campaign can give a deceiving impression of ease and facility. In fact, for more than a year, we kept banging our heads against the many walls of well-guarded government offices, private businesses, building sites, and secret data locations, with the impression that our sabotage was a mere pinprick against such a monstrous machine. And confronted by this, our

first reaction was to overstate our goals, which can lead to a dangerous (i.e., uncontrolled) escalation. Moreover, long-term planning relating to hit-squad activity tends to produce its own "military" logic, which prevents you from getting any distance on events for self-critical reflection while means slowly turn into ends§. However non-hierarchical the group might be, everyone still feels that they have somehow lost the initiative; so it took us some time to realize that we had a much simpler and more efficient card to play by circulating the secret plans and documents we'd gotten hold of. This was not just a change of tactics; I would like to stress more general considerations regarding this matter.

The first concerns our relation to the media. The sort of acts of sabotage we carried out in 1985-86 were highly dependant on media coverage. No matter how much you despise the media, you also need their publicity—for what's a solidarity action worth, if it doesn't come to the attention of the ones it's aimed at? And thus you surrender to their power: the power

§ For instance, according to one of the participants, the most militant Yorkshire miners also had this experience during the 1984-85 strike: they were so absorbed in the daily organizing of flying pickets and hit squads that they didn't have any time left to discuss the general perspective at stake. In an army, only the generals are allowed to discuss strategy. However, the miners' wives meeting in the food kitchen did have the time and disposition for more profound reflections.



Prisoners at Fleury-Mérogis, August 20, 1983, from "Prisoner's Talkin' Blues," in Os Cangaceiros #2.

to slander you, to blow you up out of proportion in order to provoke repression, or simply not to report you, leaving you unnoticed. In 1989-90, the press had clearly been given the order to black out our activities: even the local papers, which never failed to report on the occasional run-over dog, didn't write a single line on the security firm we'd virtually burnt to ashes or the prison architect we'd punched up on a Paris street.

With the distribution of the "13,000 Belles" dossier, we turned the problem upside down. Before the media knew anything, tens of thousands of people had already become aware of what was happening—for instance, we'd sent the dossier to all the cafés in the towns where new prisons had been built, and our spies there told us that it fed and nourished discussions in the bars all day long. According to a local paper, a horrified pensioner rushed to her local town hall, asking them if it was true that prisoners could force their way out through walls that had been sabotaged. She handed them the mail she'd received, they copied it ("Xerox machines were busy that day," a journalist wrote), the copies were then transmitted to higher authorities, and so on. The journalists were then forced to rush around to get a copy of the dossier: thus, during the day, the news made its way from the local papers to the agencies of the national

press, until a government official had to call a press conference to "reassure the public" about the potential dangers of these revealing documents. And just because this time we hadn't needed the press as a necessary go-between to reach the general public, their reports were more consistent and accurate than usual—even funny sometimes. *Le Figaro* drew up a full page article called "Jailbreaks—directions for use" in which they reproduced our entire letter, and another paper commented: "These Cangaceiros are as romantic as their predecessors (i.e., the Brazilian social bandits), though better organized"! A TV news announcer concluded: "One could think of it as a bad joke, for weren't these people already known to the police?" There is a moral to this story: the best way to use the media, instead of them using you, is to try to bypass them\*. Make them unnecessary so that they will react as a mere amplifier of events, without us depending on their assistance.

But behind the media problem lies a more substantial question. The more we'd been striving to cause consistent damage to the prison program, the more the uneasy feeling was growing among us that we were fighting a "one to one" match against the state—a challenge

\* A good example of this is the hackers who send out the secret data they've dug up via the internet to millions of potential users, making a blackout impossible.



Prisoner revolt in Scotland, from Os Cangaceiros #3; the banner reads "We are all hostages." After four days on the roof, they set fire to the prison, destroying an entire wing.

which, as such, we were obviously bound to lose. We were The Last of the Mohicans in a desperate assault against the palefaces. In the end, it was of little importance whether the media reported on this fight or not, and whether it would raise sympathy or scorn among the public; in any case, the "public" could do nothing but remain a public of spectators, watching it from afar. We'd never considered ourselves a sacrificial avant-garde, but still we were finding ourselves pushed into a corner in which our "good intentions" were of little use. The option of distributing the prison plans was something of a breakthrough, in that it appealed not to spectators but to potential accomplices who could themselves relay our initiative and carry it further.

And it worked quite well. Though some prisoners definitely had knowledge of the dossier and were enthusiastic about it, we don't know whether it actually helped inmates to find a way out—but every time there's been some disturbance in one of those prisons since then, the press has never failed to remind us of those missing documents on the loose somewhere. Regardless, it's certain that the playful side involved in pilfering forbidden documents and sneakily passing them on to someone else did contribute to a wide distribution. Even people who usually do not like us appreciated for once

this snook we'd cocked at the state. However, this eventual success also was a denial of our former perspective, however glad we were to have carried it out, because in the end the whole thing left us utterly exhausted.

To return to the alienating side of long-term clandestine activity, the police strategy towards us fit that description remarkably. As I said, at one time they had counted on a big clamp-down, probably amounting to a spectacular show trial complete with fabricated evidence; it also seems that they tried to infiltrate us in order to have us plant bombs†. But their main concern throughout the years has been to isolate us by means of a constant harassment of our potential allies. Yet again, in February 1991, the "13,000 Belles" scandal was followed by media-profiled raids in several cities, with 25 people being questioned, their flats searched, and *Mordicus* magazine that reproduced parts of our dossier threatened with legal action.

† This is according to allegations published in *Le Figaro* in November 1990, which we have some grounds to believe are true. As early as 1983, a certain X. Raufer wrote a book "on social violence" where he highlighted us as a group of embittered semi-intellectuals eager to fan the flames wherever a fire was burning! At the time when the police operations started against us, Raufer was a personal adviser on security matters to Pasqua, the minister of the interior who once promised he'd "use subversion against the subversive."

Since they'd gotten rid of Action Directe\* in 1987, the French state was looking for a new official enemy within, and we were definitely at the top of the list for such a role. It is elementary police psychology that the more individuals or groups are cut off from the rest of society, the more they are likely to react with an increased level of violence, which in turn will isolate them further. The media blackout of our actions against the new prisons undoubtedly worked toward that end. And admittedly, we laid ourselves open to this. We thought we'd done away with the critique of terrorism, because we never missed an opportunity to express our contempt for Action Directe, the Red Army Faction, the Red Brigades, and the like, and because we refused to resort to guns and bombs—"our means or action are the ones used by any proletarian: sabotage and vandalism." Yet this missed the essential point: in a context of social regression, a group of people standing out and asserting their violent revolt can easily be highlighted, then isolated and dragged onto the enemy terrain—to the police within your head; unconsciously, you end up molding your own behavior and thoughts on theirs, and this is their first victory.

This contradiction was also present in the less public part of our activity—I mean organized theft, or "la reprise" (retaking), as the illegalist anarchists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century called it. "Never work": we never took this as just a poetic slogan, but as an immediate program. Of course, theft also is, in many respects, some kind of Labour, but a kind of labor for which the division, organization, and results all belong to you. Living in permanent struggle makes you sharpen some valuable skills, and in the end—if you've been successful!—you have the pleasure of having opposed the fate which had been designed for you. Besides, as Woody Allen puts it in *Take the Money and Run*, the working hours are cool, you meet interesting people, and the pay's all right...

Of course, our goal was neither to blow our dosh on sports cars, palaces and champagne (though there's nothing wrong with luxury goods!), nor to accumulate capital for some business investment. Even when we'd collectively managed to get hold of a nice stash, the question remained what collective use of it could fit our social ambitions. Also, because we wanted to part ways with that abstract radical speech, since you never knowing where it's come from, we wished to speak from our own concrete situation in the world as delinquents. In this respect, we could feel how distant we were from the old anarcho-illegalists in Spain and elsewhere who belonged to effective communities, whose thefts were commonly considered part and parcel of the ongoing social struggle. Durruti felt himself insulted when the press called him a villain: he was a worker among other workers, who recognized him as such†. Needless to say, things are totally different now that virtually all struggling communities and social traditions have been destroyed. Of course, the money we grabbed enabled a greater degree of solidarity and

generosity—without which, for instance, our friend Andrea's experience wouldn't have been possible‡. Still, who were we, in that respect, but an isolated group among isolated individuals? We had many conversations about making a Dadaist use of money, about socialization and confronting the necessity of money, which indeed led nowhere. Not that the idea was wrong—I am still convinced that any attempt to oppose social disintegration has to grasp the financial question one way or another—but its application requires a larger basis than a dozen irregulars on the run.

The fact is, we never really came to terms with our subjective aspirations: beside our will to contribute somehow to a new wave of social dissent—i.e., a long-term goal with a careful concern for the appropriate mediations—there was also this raw impulse for immediate revenge itching away at us. The last thing I want is to say anything against taking revenge in acts of spectacular bravado that don't bother about consequences—that's a show of humanity, which doesn't need any further explanation, and never fails to provoke massive underground recognition§. And as far as anti-prison actions were concerned, the sight of those architects carefully designing cages for human beings, petty entrepreneurs rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of the profits they would draw from them, and state lackeys coldly supervising it all, did often tempt us into less symbolic responses. But it seems that, against all odds, we still weren't desperate enough for this.¶

For sure, everyday life in 1980s France (and Europe) left little place for optimism. But we took this situation with an utter fatalism, which in turn encouraged an exacerbated voluntarism as far as our own fight was concerned. Thus, it is significant that, though we never thought of ourselves as anti-prison activists, all our actions were nevertheless focused on prisons, as if any perspective by that point was as obdurate as a prison wall. And I don't think we were the only ones who merely complained about the ebb of the revolutionary tide of the 1960s and 70s without questioning whether the "radical" conceptions and practices we were still carrying on were not also to blame for this situation.

Especially because I'm writing now to English-speaking readers, I know that these comments will easily be taken by some people as a confirmation of their old individualist stance, which a priori dismisses any kind of collective attempt as a "breeding ground of hierarchical power," the "alienation of the individual by the group," and so forth. I still think that this kind of criticism is irrelevant. True enough, as soon as people join forces for some long-term purpose, there are risks that conflicts will erupt over power, that specialized roles will coagulate, or that emotional feelings will be kept hidden behind a veil of "objectivity"—and Os Cangaceiros was not exempt from this at all. But this is no reason to sit back and wait until "the revolution" magically solves those problems: they exist anyway, and are part of the

‡ Editor's note: Andrea was a comrade of the Cangaceiros, whose struggle with terminal cancer is described in the deeply moving *N'Dréa: One Woman's Fight to Die Her Own Way*.

§ The best example of this in France still is Jacques Mesrine.

¶ In October 1994, while reporting on two young anarchists who allegedly shot dead a couple of policemen and a taxi driver in Paris, a French magazine mentioned Os Cangaceiros as another example of "looming anarchist nihilism."



Georges Courtois, Patrick Thiolet, and Abdelkarim Khalki, from Os Cangaceiros #3

experiment enabled by collective activity, from which you can learn valuable lessons. The real question, rather, is how to reach and maintain a sufficient level of fluidity between the group and its social environment; failing this, the group tends to follow a separate logic, and to become its own end—a sort of autism, which in turn exacerbates interpersonal conflicts.

Throughout all those years, we had been obsessed with the idea of creating a big scandal, something in the Dada-Surrealist-Situationist tradition: a spectacular deed expressing the latent negativity undermining society. In some ways, the "13,000 Belles" outcome was one. However, we also experienced the limits of this notion. The primary failure of most of the radical post-1968 agitation has been its inability to create lasting breaches in the coherence of society, the patient construction of social bonds through various mediations and initiatives. The "radical" attitude confined itself too often to a mere denunciation of society in all its particular and finite activities, rather than trying to act in an innovative way within a definite terrain. Instead, there have been the habitual comments made from the outside on struggles taking place, too often with an attitude of "we already know the end of the film," or, in a less passive way, hit-and-run actions which could not have any lasting dynamic impulse.

This might have been relevant practice at a time when a revolutionary situation seemed at hand—no time to lose, May '68 or nothing at all—but now it's no longer the case. And because the Cangaceiros strived towards the limits of such a conception, living it as a total challenge, we felt with a particular sharpness that it had just led us into a radical cul-de-sac: solitary navigators on a sea of troubles.

No bitterness here, though. This has been an adventure, in an epoch when adventures are rather scarce. Fortunately, unlike most illegal groups, it didn't end in a tragic rout—and what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. But because it was just an adventure, it had no particular reason to last beyond the will of its protagonists. Eventually, the only thing the Cangaceiros could agree on was that such an association was no longer desirable, and each one went his own way, trying to put into practice whatever he'd taken from this shared history. So I will leave the question open whether this experience was just a belated occurrence of post-'68 radicalism, or if it carried seeds for something new to come.



# Madge & Pansy

by Carrot Quinn

Madge put on her huge white hat made of lace and beads and said, "We are going on a journey!"

"Where are we going?" asked Pansy. Pansy was sitting next to the woodstove, knitting a scarf of yarn that she had spun from scrap thoughts, gathered from library bookstores and the dumpsters behind great and expensive universities.

"In our country, there are already enough scarves!" said Madge, ignoring the question. "Come! We are going on a journey!"

"But where?" asked Pansy again.

"We are going," said Madge dramatically, "to a fantastical city, built entirely of stone mined from the hills of unreasonable expectations." She then carefully taped shut one side of a tall cardboard box filled with dress-up clothes. "We'll need these dress-up clothes," she said, "for something or other, and this accordion, which we can take turns playing."

The accordion played one single chord always, whether you were pushing in or pulling out, in addition to whatever buttons you might press. Neither of them knew how to play the accordion.

Suddenly Pansy had an idea.

"We can bring my invisible snare drum!" she said. "On a stand! We'll hide it in your tall cardboard box of dress up clothes, and tie the box onto the rack on the back of my bike, balanced on my panniers filled with Things."

"What Things?" asked Madge, changing into her travel shoes—shiny black pointy shoes with kitten heels and ankle straps.

"Things that need to be taken to the fantastical city. Things that need to be moved great distances."

"How do you decide which things need to be moved great distances?" asked Madge.

"I select them," said Pansy, and she began to fill the two black bike panniers with items to take along.

Checking to make sure the big white lace hat for traveling was on her head, Madge picked up the old accordion, and they walked to the highway shoulder. Pansy was pushing the

bicycle loaded with panniers filled with Things, and with a tall cardboard box filled with dress-up clothes strapped to the rack, in which there was hidden an invisible snare drum. After nine steps Madge stopped and shouted, "Wait!"

"What is it?" asked Pansy.

"What if there is a cat?"

"What?"

"What if there is a cat, at the hills of unreasonable expectations?"

"Yes?" said Pansy, who was anxious to be going.

"If there is a cat," said Madge, "It will need a house!" And she turned and ran back, appearing moments later with a cat house made of foam, which she carried to the highway shoulder.

"Now we have everything!" she said.

"Who are we waiting for?" asked Pansy. They were standing on the highway, no traffic anywhere, and the long arms of blackberry brambles shook handfuls of herbicide-coated road berries at them.

"We are waiting," said Madge, "For Dude in a Pickup Truck."

"Who's that?" asked Pansy, gathering a handful of big hot berries, muttering under her breath the magical incantation to make the berries pure and non-toxic. (There's no such thing as herbicide there's no such thing as herbicide.)

"Dude in a Pickup Truck is the person who's coming to pick us up. His truck is big, except for when it's small. He always has room, except for when he doesn't. He got off work and gave his girlfriend a ride home, now he's on his way to his mother's with a load of siding for her house. He works too much and never takes time to enjoy himself. He remembers when he used to hitchhike, back before he got in that motorcycle accident, seven surgeries and the scars to prove it, now he feels lucky to be alive and does five hundred sit-ups a day. But he's bored."

"Why is he bored?"

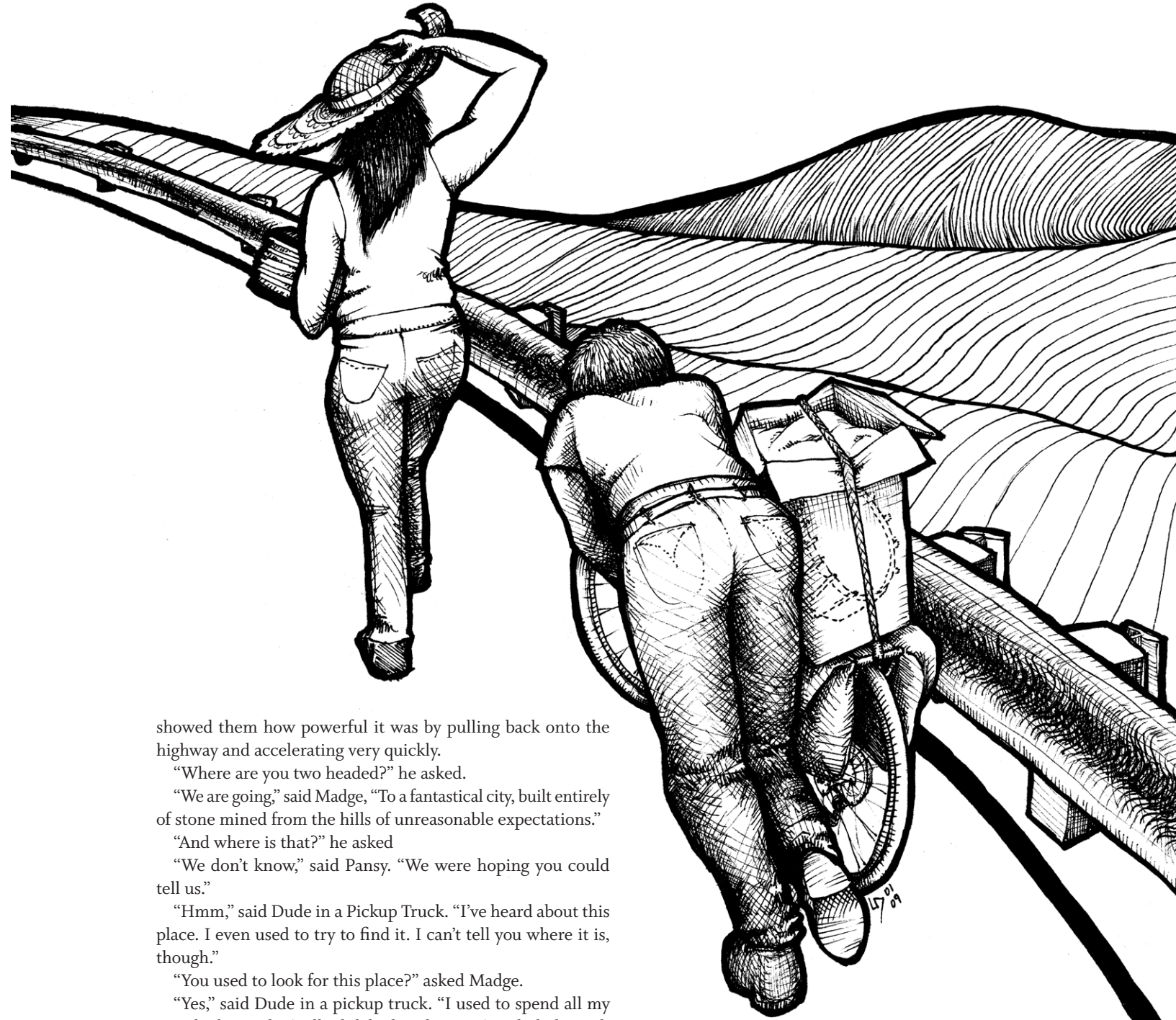
"Because life can be boring," said Madge.

"That's why he picks us up."

"Oh," said Pansy.

"Here he is now!" And sure enough, an enormous yellow pickup truck drove up and stopped for them. They gathered up all of their things, the bike, the cardboard box, the panniers, the accordion and the cat house, and ran after the truck.

The man inside the pickup truck got out and showed how helpful he was by lifting all of the things up and into the bed of the truck, like a great crane. They got inside of his spacious, masculine, and wasteful yellow truck, and he



showed them how powerful it was by pulling back onto the highway and accelerating very quickly.

"Where are you two headed?" he asked.

"We are going," said Madge, "To a fantastical city, built entirely of stone mined from the hills of unreasonable expectations."

"And where is that?" he asked

"We don't know," said Pansy. "We were hoping you could tell us."

"Hmm," said Dude in a Pickup Truck. "I've heard about this place. I even used to try to find it. I can't tell you where it is, though."

"You used to look for this place?" asked Madge.

"Yes," said Dude in a pickup truck. "I used to spend all my time looking. That's all I did, look. When you're a kid, the path is very clear. As you get older, it splits a lot. But you still look. Then, at about twenty-four, it's like bushwhacking in a thick fog. That's when I gave up."

"What do you do now, instead of look?" asked Pansy.

"I Keep Busy," said Dude in a Pickup Truck. "I Keep Busy, and the Busy makes life pass by like a strong bowel movement. I Keep Busy during the day, and afterwards the day is gone."

"I see," said Madge. The three were silent for a moment, and then Madge asked, "If you were to recommend someplace to get pie, in your country, where would it be?"

"A good place to get pie?" repeated the man, stroking his mustache.

"The very best place to get pie. In your country, what is the very best place to get pie."

"That would be in Brinnon," said the man. "At the Halfway House restaurant. I would say that that is the very best place to get pie."

"With ice cream?" asked Madge.

"With ice cream," said the man. And then, "Well, here is my turn. If you want to go to Brinnon, stay on this road." And he pulled onto the shoulder in his big yellow truck, and they stepped down from it's high leather seats and he lifted all of their things from the bed of the truck, one by one, until there was a tall pile of things on the highway shoulder, and they thanked him for his generosity.

“Good luck, you two,” he said, and got back in his truck, still stroking his mustache thoughtfully.

“Why did you ask him about the pie?” asked Pansy, after he had driven away.

“Well,” said Madge, “It’s good to know which place has the best pie. If every single person says that this place in Brinnon has the best pie, with ice cream, then we can assume that the people at the restaurant know a thing or two about unreasonable expectations. We can go talk to them, and maybe they can help us.”

“That’s a very smart idea,” said Pansy. She was beginning to see the logic in all of this.

As they waited for their next ride, a strange figure moved up the hill far below them. It was a person on a bicycle. As the person got closer, you could see that the person was wearing bright yellow spandex clothing, a bright blue helmet, and rode a bright red bicycle. The person crested the top of the hill and stopped, panting a bit, where Madge and Pansy were standing next to their hill of things.

“Where are you two trying to get to?” asked the person, taking off his dark plastic sunglasses to see them better.

“We are looking,” said Pansy, “for a fantastical city, built entirely of stone mined from the hills of unreasonable expectations. Do you happen to know how we might get there?”

“No,” said the person on the bicycle. “I don’t know how to find that city.” The person paused, and stared out over the tops of the trees that panned in the road. “I used to look for it myself,” they continued, “but—”

“But what?” asked Pansy, but the person only leaned on their handlebars and looked sadly down at the road. They waited for a moment.

“What do you do now, instead of look for the City?” asked Madge.

“I don’t talk about it,” said the bicycle rider. “I don’t talk about it, I talk about other things instead, and the days go by very quickly. Now if you’ll excuse me,” he said, as if remembering something very important, “I must be on my way.”

“But wait!” said Madge, as the rider was fastening his helmet buckle, “If you were to get pie here, what would be the very best place?”

“In Brinnon!” shouted the rider, as he pushed down his peddles and began to roll away. “At the Halfway House restaurant! They have the very best pie!” And then the bicycle rider was gone, with the wind at his back.

When their next ride came, Madge was feeling grumpy. She sat up front, and the driver asked her what was wrong.

“It’s just,” said Madge, “in our country, no one drives. Everyone hitchhikes, so it’s very easy to get a ride, and you never have to wait for very long.”

“Your country sounds like a very friendly place,” said the driver. The driver was a woman, and she had picked them up in a very fine car. They had taken Pansy’s bike apart, and Pansy sat in the back, with the frame from the bike in her lap, and everything else stacked around her.

“It is a very friendly place,” said Madge. But we had to leave it. We are looking, you see, for a fantastical city, built entirely of stone mined from the hills of unreasonable expectations. Have you heard of such a place?”

“I have heard of it, yes,” said the woman. “But I have never found it.”

“So you’ve looked?” said Madge.

“Yes, I’ve looked,” said the woman. “I spent a long time looking. I looked until I was exhausted. I looked until my shoes were worn through, until my clothes were waterproof with grease. Until the cuffs of my pants held dust and sand from all the corners of the world. I looked so hard, I didn’t sleep. I looked so hard, all that I ate was old bagels, dipped in water and reheated on flat rocks in the sun. I looked until I fell down one day and could look no longer.”

“What did you do then?” asked Pansy, from the backseat.

“I decided to get rich,” said the woman. “When you are rich, you may not have found a fantastical city, but other people look at you and think that perhaps you have.”

The woman looked ahead at the road, from inside of her fine car.

Pansy asked, from the back seat, “Where is your favorite place to eat pie?”

“Pie?” said the woman. “Well, I have traveled all over the world, and eaten pie in many places, and now I am very rich, and I can eat whatever kind of pie I want, and I would say that the very best place to get pie would be at the Halfway House restaurant, in Brinnon.”

“You don’t say!” said Madge. “Do they have different kinds?”

“They have many different kinds!” said the woman. “In fact, I can take you right there if you’d like to go. It’s only a few minutes out of my way.”

The woman took them right to the gravel parking lot of the Halfway House restaurant, and to show her gratitude Pansy opened one of her panniers and took out a Thing. It was a card with a picture of a cave on it, and coming out of the cave were bats. She handed the card to the woman, who looked at it curiously.

“Bats fly at night, when perhaps we are sleeping, thinking the day is done. This is to remind you that you can still look for the City, although other people assume you have already found it.”

“Thank you!” she said. “I will hide it away, and show it to no one!” And she got in her fine car and left.

Madge and Pansy stacked their things in a neat pile against the outside of the restaurant, and stood looking at the dull, two-story building.

“I am indeed having some unreasonable expectations,” said Madge. “I think that we have come to the right place.”

“The pie must be incredible,” said Pansy, looking up at the faded green siding.

“The pie must be out of this world,” said Madge, taking in the wooden window boxes planted with geraniums.

They went inside the restaurant, a little bell tingling when the door swung shut behind them. They sat at a table next to the window, in two brown vinyl chairs. A woman with a very smooth ponytail filled their plastic glasses with ice water that tasted like a swimming pool.

“What kind of pie do you have here?” they asked her. She stepped to the side so that they could see a long glass display case showing pies of every sort, with a mirror in back that created the illusion of even more pies. There were berry pies, and apple pies, and cream pies that had candy in them, and chocolate pies, and mysterious pies that were covered in whipped cream. There was such a variety, it made the idea of pie seem even more incredible, as if they could eat every kind of pie. The pies were so tall, and the crusts so golden, and the slices so well shaped, it seemed as if they would be more like pie than any pie had ever been before. Madge felt, at that moment, that this pie would not only satisfy her desire for pie, but that it would stop time entirely, making only this one moment, the moment of pie, into the only moment that could ever exist, and it would become infinite, this moment of pie and eating pie and wanting pie and tasting pie.

“I don’t know which kind I want!” cried Madge, in a moment of wild abandon. “Bring me your very favorite!”

“They’re all good,” said the woman, who was loosely holding a glass pot of thin, acidic coffee. “You have to choose.”

“Which pie is everything?” asked Pansy, who felt as if she had been waiting for this moment her entire life.

“Pardon me?” said the woman.

“I want the pie that is everything. All of these things. The berries and the cream and the chocolate and the candy and, and . . .”

“There is no pie that is everything,” said the woman. “Many pies are very different, and you can only eat one piece at a time. Would you like me to choose one for you?”

“Yes!” said Madge. And then she turned to Pansy: “I think that each one will be everything!! You’ll see! Plus, you and I can get different pieces, and share!!” She turned back to the woman. “Can I have mine warm, with ice cream?”

The woman left, and when she returned she placed a white plate in front of each of them, and on each plate was a piece of pie. Madge’s was strawberry-rhubarb, with ice cream.

“My favorite!” she said.

Pansy’s piece was cool chocolate peanut butter pie.

“Just what I wanted!” she said.

They ate the pie quickly, and when their plates had been scraped clean, they put down their forks and stared at each other. A heavy sadness had been lingering around the bottoms of their chair legs, and now it swept over them like fog. It seeped into the holes in their ears and underneath their eyelids and they took great gulps of it when they inhaled. The fog filled their insides and they felt their eyes swell up with big stinging tears. Pansy hung her head in sorrow. The world became a very heavy place.

The woman with the coffee pot came back and took their plates and asked them if they wanted some coffee. Madge put her head down on the table and sobbed. She poured them two cups and left a little pitcher of cream. Pansy looked up from a place of deep despair and asked her, “We are looking for something. Do you think you could help us?”

“Maybe I could,” said the woman.

“We’re looking for a fantastical city, built entirely of stone mined from the hills of unreasonable expectations. Have you heard of such a place?”

The woman made a great sigh, and her eyes suddenly looked

very sad. She pulled her lips up tight into her face and looked past Madge and Pansy, out the window of the restaurant. Outside, the wind was beginning to whip the apple trees that lined the parking lot.

“I do know this place. I know this place too well.”

“So you’ve been there?” squeaked Madge. She’d lifted her head off the table, and her face was red and blotchy from crying. There were crumbs stuck to her cheeks.

“No,” said the woman, and she shook her sleek tight ponytail. She set the coffee pot down on the table, and a little steam rose from it. “I’ve never been there, and I couldn’t tell you where it is. But my lover, she was from that city.” The woman sighed again and stared out the window at the wind. Madge and Pansy waited for her to continue talking.

“She came into town one day, with only a small backpack, saying that she was from a fantastical city, built entirely of stone mined from the hills of unreasonable expectations. She said she was here for good—that she wanted to stay forever! I thought she was everything. When she left, I had nothing. And then I began making pies—I made all of these pies, to try to recreate everything that she had been for me. She had been the chocolate, and the berries, and the cream, she had been one piece of pie and she had been every piece of pie, she had been hunger for pie and tasting of pie and pie that you are saving for later.” The woman looked down at Madge and Pansy, and they could see the weary circles underneath her eyes.

“I make all of these pies,” she continued. “I use buckets of sugar and barrels of flour and whole glorious summertimes of ripe berries. I use the honey from thousands of bees, great wooden pallets of butter, white and blue and brown eggs from dozens of chickens. I make these pies to try and recreate everything that my lover was to me. And when people are finished eating this pie, and the pie is gone, they cannot help but feel the way I felt when she left me.”

The woman sighed again and picked up her coffee pot. A man wearing bright red suspenders had come into the restaurant and settled on a tall barstool. He opened the small local paper and looked over at her for his cup of coffee.

She looked down at the floor. “I didn’t mean for it to be this way. It could have been so wonderful.”

“Your story is so sad,” said Madge. She pulled a wadded-up hanky from a pocket in her skirt and handed it to the woman. “I’m sorry. Your pies are beautiful.”

The woman looked back up at them, her eyes wet and red.

“Nothing!” she cried fiercely. “Nothing can be everything!” She clenched her hands together and took a few deep breaths, twisting the hanky around as tight as it would go. And then she said, “So you two are looking for this City? You want to find it?”

“Yes!” said Pansy. “And you’ve never been there?”

“No,” she said. “I’ve never been there. I’m not sure I would want to go, now.”

“Wait a minute!” cried Pansy, and she ran out the door. When she came back inside she had one of her black panniers, and she reached into it and dug around for a minute. She pulled out a tiny white Thing, and handed it to the woman, dropping it into the palm of her hand. The woman held it out in front of her, in the light from the window.

"It's a tooth!" she said.

"A tooth!" said Pansy, "To remind you that too much sugar will make your teeth fall out."

The woman was overcome with gratitude. Tears grew again in the corners of her eyes. She wiped them away.

"Thank you!" she said. "In return, I will tell you the one thing that I know about this fantastical City." She paused. "In this City, there are Magical Talking Unicorns."

"Magical Talking Unicorns!" cried Pansy. Madge and Pansy looked at each other excitedly. "It's more than we could have hoped for!"

The woman smiled a sad, tight smile. "Now go," she said, "And good luck." She turned away to serve the man at the counter, but then she looked back and said, "Oh—if you get tired of hitchhiking, there's a bus that will take you where you need to go. To get to the bus stop, you go up the road to the top of the hill, and then left, down to the very bottom."

"Thanks!" cried Madge and Pansy, and they left the small restaurant, shaking the melancholy from their limbs and jumping up and down to clear their lungs of the heavy air.

They had decided to ride the bicycle to this faraway bus stop, so they had piled everything on top of it. Pansy worked the pedals, since it was her bike and it fit her, and the cardboard box of dress-up clothes was balanced on the rack with the panniers, and on top of the cardboard box was Madge, holding the accordion and the foam cat house. (It was a very sturdy cardboard box.) Pansy took a long drink of questionable spring water to wash away the last taste of pie, and they set off down the road, up to the top of a long sloping hill and then to the left, down to the very bottom. While Pansy was pedaling Madge was playing

the accordion, which was broken and played one single chord always, whether you were pushing in or pulling out, in addition to whatever buttons you might press. During the bike ride Madge played the accordion and she discovered, to her surprise, that she could also play several other chords, and even a bit of a melody that she had adapted from a country song they had heard on the radio, when they were riding with Dude in a Pickup Truck.

"I think I'm learning to play the accordion!" she shouted to Pansy above the noise of the wind and the noise of the one chord that the accordion was always playing.

"Of course you are!" cried Pansy, panting a little bit. "You can't play and play the accordion, pushing in and pulling out, without eventually figuring out how to play the accordion!"

Finally they were at the very bottom of the hill, at the bus stop, and at the bus stop were three teenagers. Madge climbed down from the top of the cardboard box, and they leaned the bike against a metal pole, and then they asked the teenagers about the bus.

"You missed the bus," said the teenagers.

"We missed it?"

"You missed it. It was just here, like five minutes ago."

"Well, what will we do now?" asked Pansy, looking at the teenagers. They stared at her awkwardly and then said,

"You can come to a show we're having. It's

just over there, in that building." And they pointed across the street, to an old grey building with big dark holes for windows. "We're going there now. You could come with us."

Madge and Pansy agreed that that seemed like a fine idea, since they had missed the bus, and they followed the teenagers over to the old building and through the front door, which was a big sheet of plywood that had been spray-painted red. Inside the building it was very dim, except for the places that light came in through the window-holes. It was empty and smelled like car tires and grease-soaked rags. As they waited, more teenagers showed up, until the place was almost full, and everyone was smoking cigarettes and laughing and talking or standing awkwardly like they were all waiting for a band to show up.

Pansy walked up to a teenager in a hoodie that was much too big and asked, "Where is the band that's playing a show? And why are you wearing a hoodie that's much too big for you?"

"I'm wearing this hoodie because I have nothing more interesting to wear," said the teenager sadly. "And we don't know where the band is. We don't have a band. Do you?"

Pansy turned to Madge and asked, "Do we have a band?"

Madge thought for a moment and then said, "The Dark Sun! The Dark Sun is the name of our band. We sing songs about coffee. And sea creatures," she added.

"Yeah! The Dark Sun!" said Pansy. "We'll go get our instruments."

They went back out to the bus stop and returned with the accordion, and the giant cardboard box filled with dress-up clothes, in which there was hidden an invisible snare drum. Madge pulled out the accordion and then pushed it in, thinking which chords she would play for their songs. Pansy carefully opened the giant cardboard box, and one by one she pulled out the dress-up clothes, looking for the snare drum that was hidden inside. The teenagers gathered around and stared at what was coming out of the box. There was a red dress with rhinestones on it and a puffy red bow, and a white sequined snake-skin jacket, and a headband with rabbit ears on it, and there were so many shoes! High heels, shiny flats, Mary Janes. There were also aprons—floral, checkered, and striped; there were velvet capes and shimmery capes and hooded and collared capes, there were dresses of satin and tulle, and soft dresses from the 1930s, and a long black wig with bangs, and one tiara. Pansy pulled all of these things out of the box, and then she looked up, and all of the teenagers were staring at her.

"Well," she said, "What are you waiting for? Go ahead!"

And suddenly the pile was buried in a writhing mass of teenagers, reaching their arms in and grabbing at the dress-up clothes, and when they were finished they stepped back and all that was left was one gold button, lying on the dusty floor.

And the teenagers were so happy now! They grinned in their glittering new clothes, they jumped up and down and twirled around and laughed at each other, they swapped hats and traded satin bows and beaded necklaces until everyone was content with the incredible outfit that they had created.

And inside the giant cardboard box, at the very bottom, was the invisible snare drum. Pansy pulled it out gently, and set it up on its stand, and took out two invisible drumsticks from her pocket.

"What are you doing?" asked a teenager wearing a torn pink dress over jeans, and a top hat. The dress had stains on it.

"I'm setting up my snare drum," said Pansy. "It's invisible."

The teenager nodded, understanding completely, and turned to tell the other teenagers about Pansy's invisible snare drum. Soon they were all nodding. An invisible snare drum, of course. An invisible snare drum, how clever.

When Pansy was finished setting up, they pushed the box to the side and Madge joined her, holding up her elbows theatrically and waiting for a cue they had not agreed on to begin playing the songs that they had not rehearsed. After a moment there was a bit of bird song outside the window and they both began playing, Pansy on her invisible snare drum and Madge pulling out and pushing in on the broken accordion, and singing too, high meandering songs about coffee and creatures that live deep in the sea.

It was the most wonderful music that any of the teenagers had ever heard, and they closed their eyes and swayed back and forth in their brightly colored costumes, and in their collective imaginations there grew a fantastical city, a city built entirely of stone, and the stone was mined from the far-away hills of unreasonable expectations. They listened to the music and they swayed with their eyes closed, and they imagined this city, as Madge squeezed chords from the dear accordion and Pansy tapped at her snare drum, and they both sang in high wailing off-key voices about dark cups of coffee and the farthest reaches of the deep, secret ocean.

The Dark Sun played several songs, but then they ran out.

"Well that's it," said Pansy. "I guess we'd have more, but we don't practice." The teenagers would hear none of it, they were shouting and smiling and wanting more, more songs, just play more songs, they shouted, jumping up and down like they had springs inside of their fancy, ill-fitting dresses. Madge and Pansy shrugged and began to put away their things, Pansy folding up the little invisible snare drum stand and putting the invisible drum sticks back in her pockets. One of the teenagers, the teenager that had been wearing such a big hoodie, came up to them and asked shyly, "Where are you going after this? Are you on tour?"

"No," said Madge. "We're looking for a city. A fantastical city, built entirely of stone mined from the hills of unreasonable expectations..."

"I COULD COME!" shouted the teenager. "I could come with you!" The teenager turned excitedly to the rest of the crowd, and told them all about the quest that Madge and Pansy were on.

"We all could come!" they shouted. "We could help! We want to come!" Madge and Pansy looked at each other, excited. How happy these teenagers would be, free! What an interesting journey they would have!

"Yes!" they said, "Come with us! Let's all get on the bus and find this place together!" The teenagers jumped and shouted and grinned at the idea of such an incredible adventure, but then one by one they fell silent, and closed their mouths, and frowned.

"I can't come," said one teenager, in the back. "I have to go to school."

"And I can't come either," said another teenager. "My parents would never let me."



“And I can’t come,” added another, from the side of the room, “because I would miss my home, and because I don’t have any money.” They all chimed in now, one after the other: “And I’m afraid of the dark.” “Because my little brother would think I died.” “And I don’t know how to read a map.” “My mom needs me to sweep the floors.” “I don’t have any good shoes for traveling.” “What about my girlfriend?” “My sister’s birthday is coming up.” “I have to feed the dog.”

And so on. Madge and Pansy listened and nodded and sighed, and then Pansy ducked and darted out the door, too quickly for the teenagers to notice, they were so busy talking and being disappointed. In a minute she was back inside, with a Thing cupped in her two hands. She walked up to the shy teenager and held out the Thing. All of the other teenagers fell silent, watching.

“It’s a feather!” said one of them.

“A chicken feather,” said Pansy.

“It’s the most beautiful feather I’ve ever seen,” said the shy teenager. And it was beautiful. Near the base were the most delicate soft hairs. In the middle the feather was fluffed and spotted, a brown that shimmered with all the colors of the rainbow. And at the tip the feather was sleek and lightly curled.

“This feather is to remind you that the ordinary is the extraordinary,” said Pansy. “For when you cannot go on quests. This reminds you to look at what you already have, because with it, and your imagination, you can make the most extraordinary things happen.”

“But I wish I could go with you!” cried the shy teenager, devastated.

“Wait!” said Pansy, and from her pocket she pulled another Thing. It was a round metal bell, with a ball inside that jingled.

“I didn’t know you had a bell in your pocket!” said Madge. “How did I miss its jingling?”

“I stole it from the Halfway House restaurant. It was hanging on the door.” She paused. “I wanted a souvenir!” And she turned back to the teenager.

“This is mine. And I want it. I’m giving it to you, to promise that I’ll be back. And we’ll bring our band with us, and we’ll have even more songs, because we will have practiced. And if you start to miss us, you can jingle it. It won’t be very satisfying, but I don’t know what else to tell you.”

The teenagers stared down at the bell and the chicken feather.

“Thanks,” they said. Pansy put her invisible snare drum back in the cardboard box, which was now empty, and together they walked to the bus stop, to wait for the next bus. The teenagers milled about and then drifted off, pulling their hoodies back on over their fancy dresses, and grinning to themselves as they walked away down the empty street, filled with secrets and the beginnings of fantastical new plans.

Madge and Pansy waited for the bus for a long, long time, and finally it came in the cold evening and opened its doors and the warm air rushed around them. They put the bicycle on its front bicycle rack and carried their things aboard. The door swished shut behind them and

the bus rocked as it pulled away from the bus stop and into the night. The driver looked merry and his uniform was crisp and square and the fluorescent lights of the front of the bus reflected green off of his pale face. He looked at the two of them, sleepy and hungry, standing in the bus clutching a cat house made of foam and a cardboard box and a broken accordion and two black panniers, and he asked them a question. “Where are you two headed?” Just like everyone else had asked them so far.

“We don’t know,” they said.

“Well,” he said, “have a seat. The seats are soft. I’ll take you as far as I go, which is pretty far. You can fall asleep if you want. I’ll let you know when we get to the end.”

They nodded and stumbled wearily towards the back of the little bus, and sank into two soft seats, piling their things next to them.

Outside it was nighttime, and getting very cold. They looked out the window. Hot, stale air blew at them from vents. Pansy felt hungry and then drifted off, thinking about peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and venison stew with big fava beans in it. Madge felt hungry too but she just stared out the window, too awake to sleep, wondering if they would ever make it to the city, or if they would just look and look and finally give up and go home, defeated. Finally drowsiness overcame her and she fell asleep, slumping over onto Pansy, who was slumped against the damp window. Up at the front of the bus, the driver listened to the radio and whistled merrily, watching his headlights sweep along the dark trees, turning left and then turning right onto this country road and then that country road, no other cars anywhere.

Pansy and Madge woke up. The driver was talking to them.

“Well,” he said, “here we are! End of the road! No more road after this! Gotta turn around! You gotta get off!”

They blinked their eyes and rubbed them and stood up, bones creaking. Madge gathered the accordion and cat house and Pansy carried the panniers and cardboard box. They thanked the driver, and he smiled at them.

“Sun’ll be up soon. You’ll be alright.”

They pulled the bicycle off of the rack and pushed it out of the way. The bus rumbled and left. It was still cold and dark, with a little grey in the very farthest east.

“What do we do now?” asked Pansy.

“Let’s sleep some more,” said Madge wearily. “In that grass—” and she pointed to a dim meadow on the other side of some blackberries. “I bet when the sun comes up it’ll be nice there. And then we can decide what to do, when the sun comes up.”

They found a little animal track through the blackberries, and picked their way across, trying not to catch their things too much. Once in the tall grass they found an old log and curled up next to it, leaning the bicycle against it and wrapping their arms around each other for warmth.

“Do you think we’ll ever find the city?” asked Pansy. She had been thinking the very same thing as Madge.

“I don’t know,” said Madge. “If we get tired of looking, if we get tired of being hungry and lost, we can always just go home. Home will still be there for us, whenever we want it.”

“If we go home,” said Pansy, “I can finish the scarf I was making.”

“If we go home, I could write some songs,” said Madge.

“And every day we could get up, and we would be in the same place.”

They thought that sounded wonderful. But then Pansy thought of something else.

“What if home is not there for us, when we want to go back? What if we’ve been away too long?”

Madge couldn’t think of anything to say.

“And what if we go home and get up every day, and we’re in the same place, and it’s boring?”

Madge couldn’t think of anything to say, so she pretended to be asleep. And soon, Pansy stopped thinking so much and fell asleep too. And as they slept, tiny insects watched them from the blades of long grass.

“They’re so tired,” said the insects, making breakfast cakes from crumbs of humus.

“I hope they find it,” said the insects, washing their faces in drops of dew.

And the yellow sun rose quietly, and gently lit the meadow, one green grass blade at a time.

A magical talking unicorn took a long sniff of Madge’s face. Luckily, her face was hidden under her big white hat for traveling. But Madge felt the stinky magical talking unicorn breath and she woke up, and looked into the magical talking unicorn’s big wet eye.

“AHHH!” she shouted. She thought the magical talking unicorn was a horse, and she was afraid that the horse would step on her, since she was just laying there in the field.

“AHHH!” spoke the magical talking unicorn. It flung its head up and jumped backwards and then pranced around for a moment, as if something had bitten it on the foot.

Madge sat up and the hat fell off her face. She elbowed Pansy to wake her, and Pansy sat up. There were red streaks on pansy’s face that were shaped like the grass.

Pansy looked at the horse and cried out, “It’s a magical talking unicorn!”

And Madge saw that it was! The unicorn looked like a horse but it was glossier, its hair was a lustrous white pearl color, and on its head a delicate horn twisted around and around, shimmering with all sorts of bright colors and shooting beams of bright color through the air. It stopped jumping around as if had been bitten, and looked at them with one big wet eye.

“What are you doing sleeping in the grass?” it asked them, in a horsey sort of voice. “Aren’t you afraid of getting damp? You know, if you sleep outside, in the open air, water will condense all over you.” The magical talking unicorn gave a huff.

“We don’t have a house to sleep in,” said Madge, a little sadly.

“Oh, I understand completely,” said the Unicorn.

“You don’t have a house?” asked Pansy. They had indeed gotten damp, but had slept in late and the sun had dried them again.

“Me? Of course I have a house!” And the unicorn laughed, tossing its long hair, and showing its big white teeth. “It’s my

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cat—” And the unicorn pointed with its long horn to the edge of the field, where a small grey cat lay in the morning sun, watching them. “My cat doesn’t have a house. Every night, she sleeps outside, and the dew condenses all over her. And the wind chills her pink little nose. And her fur shimmers in the moonlight.” And the unicorn tossed its hair again. “If only she had a little house to sleep in, to keep the dew off!”

Madge pulled the foam cat house from the grass. She had used it as a pillow.

“We have a house you can have!” she said. She walked over to the magical talking unicorn and held out the foam house. “We brought it very, very far. We were hoping to go farther—but this is as far as we got. And you can have it.”

“Fantastic!” cried the unicorn. And Madge set the foam house in the grass at its feet. The cat watched, bored.

“What are you doing in this meadow, anyhow?” asked Madge. “Did you travel far?”

“Not very far,” said the unicorn. “I come here to eat the blackberries. They are so sweet, and there are so many of them. In my country, we don’t have invasive species. There’s nothing like this. I come alone, I don’t tell the other unicorns about this meadow. If they came here, they would eat all the berries, and there would be none left for me! I bring my cat, so I don’t get lonely.” The unicorn looked over at the small grey cat. “Cats don’t eat many berries.”

“Oh!” said the unicorn. “I want to go home now! I want to show all the other unicorns the house for my cat!” The unicorn looked down at Madge. “Please, will you place the house on my back so I can carry it?”

Madge reached way up and slid the house onto the unicorn’s back. It immediately fell off the other side. The unicorn stamped its feet.

“Oh no!” it said. “I should have brought my baskets. I have no way to carry this house! The cat, she rides on my back! But how to carry a house, I don’t know!”

“Where are you going home to?” Asked Pansy. She had gotten up and put away all of their things, and was picking at her teeth with a stick she had found.

“I’m going to a fan—” But the unicorn stopped short and looked at them. “Why?”

“Because we could help you,” said Madge. “We could ride on your back, and hold the house. We could leave our bicycle here, next to this log, and we could go with you to your home, wherever it is.”

The unicorn nodded. “Yes, that makes sense. And then I can show all the other unicorns my new cat house, and they’ll be so jealous!”

“Do the other unicorns have cats?” Asked Pansy.

“No. Just me.” And then, “Well, come on! Let’s go!”

Madge and Pansy grinned at each other. They filled their arms with things, tossed some grass over the bike, and used the log as a stool to step up over the magical talking unicorn’s back. Neither of them had ever been on a unicorn before. They felt its warm muscles under their legs, and its hair was slippery like velvet. Its mane was knotted and coarse, and Pansy grabbed fistfuls of it and leaned in close to its neck. She turned and whispered to Madge, “The unicorn’s mane smells like strawberry soap!”

The cat trotted over and hopped easily onto the unicorn’s back, and once aboard climbed delicately inside the cat house that Madge held on her lap, curling into a ball inside. Madge wrapped her arms around Pansy and the cat house, and they waited excitedly. Would the unicorn fly? Did unicorns fly? Was this a magical talking flying unicorn?

The unicorn didn’t fly. But it ran. It ran very, very fast, crying “Hold on tight!” and then pushing its strong legs against the earth and sprinting forward into the bright light of late morning, bouncing at first and jarring with its heavy muscles and then beginning to flow across the grass like a mudslide. Soon they were at the road, and then they were across it, and then they were soaring over the meadows and through the high, straight forest and Madge felt like they were flying, like they were flying six feet above the soil. The open woods and gentle meadows went by faster and faster until it was all just a dizzying blur of green and bright sun and shadow, and Madge couldn’t look at it anymore. She hid her face in Pansy’s back and they held on tight, the warm wind rushing into their nostrils and flinging dust into their hair.

After some length of time the unicorn slowed and they looked up, and what they saw before them made them forget the dust, forget the wind, forget the bus ride and the cold, lonely night, made them forget their hunger and their weariness—what they saw was so brilliant and wonderful that all they could do was open their mouths and take deep breaths of sweet air, and blink their eyes.

They were galloping lightly on the crest of a small hill, and down in the valley close below them lay a series of rambling, curving walls, and set among the walls were fruit trees, and stretches of pasture, and slender streets that wound past small uneven houses and around clear pools of water that reflected the vivid sky, and here and there bright flags flapped in the wind or gleamed like tinsel and tall towers reached up towards the heavens, and the towers were set all around with windows of plum-colored glass and topped with sun-drenched gardens. They galloped closer and soon they could see that the whole city, the walls, roads, and towers, were built of the gentlest rose-colored stone. A gust of wind blew up from the city, bringing with it the warm smell of nutmeg. They trotted to the bottom of the

hill and approached a break in the wall, and slowed. In front of them stretched an olive-colored banner, and on the banner, written in a script of the brightest gold, were the words

### Slow And Steady Wins The Race.

The unicorn trotted to a stop and Madge & Pansy dismounted, open-mouthed in awe. They carried their things in their arms and walked slowly through the break in the wall, and just past it green pasture stretched out before them, thick with wildflowers, all in bloom, and there was a smooth stone road, and on either side of the road were two tall flagpoles, and on each flagpole was a long flag, one milk-colored and the other the color of the sky. Pansy stood for a moment and then she could see that they both had words on them, and that one of them said

### No Thing Can Be Every Thing

and on the other one was written

### The Ordinary Is Extraordinary

all in the most flowery golden script.

“Wow!” cried Madge, who was spinning around, staring at everything around them, clutching the accordion and the cat house to her chest. “What is this place?”

“This is my home,” said the unicorn. The cat had jumped to the ground and now it stretched, and then trotted a bit down the road, pausing to look back at them. “I live here.”

Pansy turned and touched the stone wall. The stone was warm, though it was in the shade, and felt smooth and soft under her fingers. She looked ahead and saw that a party of unicorns was coming to meet them, sharp hooves clacking, candy-colored manes flying in the wind.

“Is it always windy here?” asked Pansy, looking up at their unicorn.

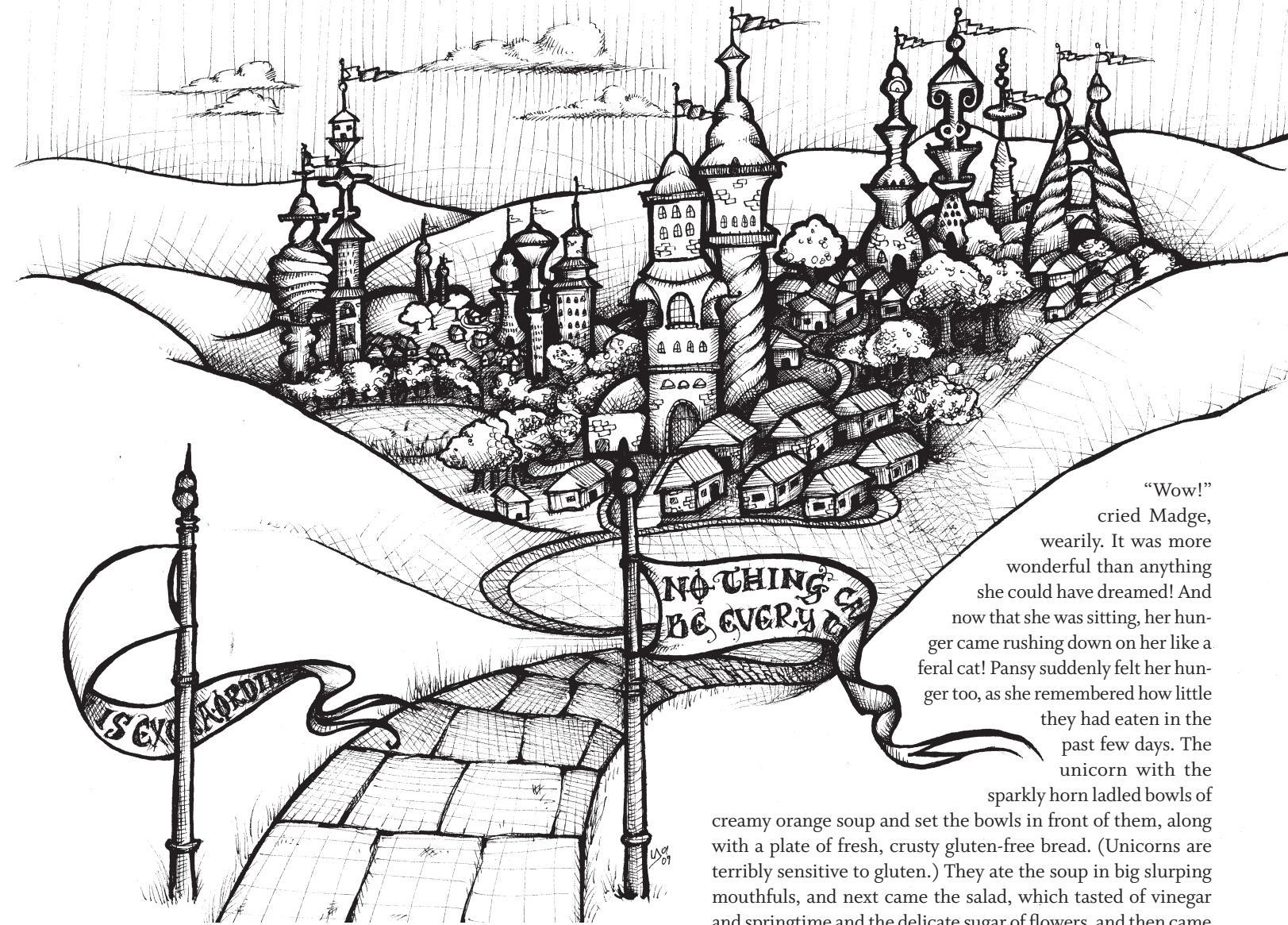
“Always,” said the unicorn. “It is important that our flags constantly flap, and our manes constantly flutter, and the smell of nutmeg always fill the air. It reminds us that we are alive. And it keeps the flies off.”

The group of unicorns neared them and slowed to a halt, and looked down at them with wet, gentle eyes.

“You have traveled far,” said one with a shocking orange mane and a big pink spot over its eye.

“You must be hungry,” said another, this one colored a deep chestnut brown all over, except for its horn, which was magenta, and sparkled. There was a third, this one had a blue neck and a purple trunk and black legs, and a mane that was silver like Christmas tinsel. Madge and Pansy could only nod, so overwhelmed were they with the beauty of the unicorns, and the bright sunlight on the wildflowers, and the great flapping nutmeg wind.

“Come with us,” said the unicorn with the black legs and purple trunk and tinsel mane, and the unicorns turned and walked down the smooth stone road, towards a smooth stone tower, which was set all around with plum-colored glass. Madge



“Wow!” cried Madge, wearily. It was more wonderful than anything she could have dreamed! And now that she was sitting, her hunger came rushing down on her like a feral cat! Pansy suddenly felt her hunger too, as she remembered how little they had eaten in the past few days. The unicorn with the sparkly horn ladled bowls of

creamy orange soup and set the bowls in front of them, along with a plate of fresh, crusty gluten-free bread. (Unicorns are terribly sensitive to gluten.) They ate the soup in big slurping mouthfuls, and next came the salad, which tasted of vinegar and springtime and the delicate sugar of flowers, and then came the meatloaf, which was rich and savory, and the French fries, which were crispy and just right. And last was the pie, and it was just an ordinary piece of pie, and by this time the two were so full that they could hardly appreciate it, much less finish every bite. The unicorn stood watching them with its gentle wet eyes, and when they were finished it cleared the plates away and motioned with its nose to a pile of cushions that lay next to the fire and a stack of thick velour blankets, meaning that they should curl up there on the cushions and maybe nap. Blearily full, they stumbled over to the cushions and collapsed into their deep softness, pulling the blankets up around them and gazing into the softly crackling fire. The unicorn settled down across the hearth, its knees folded neatly on a tasseled pillow, and watched them, curiously, and with a look of heavy contemplation. Pansy turned away to stare at the fire, but she could feel the unicorn’s dark eyes like warm stones resting on her back, and at last she sat up, and turned, and asked the unicorn if it was thinking about anything in particular, and if so, what.

“I was only thinking,” said the unicorn, “that tomorrow, when you two shed your human forms and become great glittering unicorns like us—I was only wondering what colors you might turn out to be. It’s always a surprise, and you never can know in advance. Sometimes we place bets—”

and Pansy rushed after them, carrying their things in their arms, leaving the cat house behind for the first unicorn, who was knee-deep in wildflowers, contentedly munching clover.

They entered the tower and inside it was big and open, with soft purple light spilling in through the windows, and the floor was stone grown all over with moss, and flowering vines climbed up and down the smooth walls. There was a warm, crackling fire in an enormous fireplace that was set back into the wall, and hanging over the fire was a heavy black cauldron from which rose the most delicious steam. The unicorn with the sparkling magenta horn motioned for them to sit on the ancient stumps of enormous fir trees, which were arranged around a small wooden table. They sat gratefully on the enormous chairs, and saw that on the table was a piece of heavy paper, and on the paper was a menu.

“Dinner,” said the unicorn. And this is what the paper said:

- BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP
- SALAD OF LAMB’S-QUARTERS, KALE, EDIBLE FLOWERS
- DELICIOUS MEATLOAF
- FRENCH FRIES
- PIE

“Become a unicorn?” cried Madge with alarm, suddenly sitting very upright in the soft pillows. “Who said anything about becoming a unicorn?”

The unicorn stared at them, surprised.

“Well of course you become a unicorn, silly! How else would you live in this place? This majestic, shimmering land? This fantastic city?”

“Unicorns?” asked Pansy, shocked. “We have to become unicorns? And what if we don’t want to become unicorns? What happens then?”

The unicorn blinked its wet dark eyes, surprised.

“If you don’t become unicorns, you cannot stay here! You can only stay in this fantastical city if you are an equally fantastical creature. You cannot live here in your human, mortal body. If you do not become a unicorn, then you cannot stay!” the unicorn huffed, and tossed its mane a little in the firelight. “What did you expect?”

“What did I expect?” mumbled Madge, mostly to herself. Her eyes were looking down, at the blanket in her lap, and her hand was absentmindedly tugging at her hair. “What did I expect...”

Pansy was quiet, too, and looked at the palms of her hands. They were still with their thoughts, and a new sort of feeling, a feeling that they couldn’t quite describe, something akin to disappointment.

The unicorn saw their sadness, and shifted a leg on the tasseled pillow, uncomfortable.

“There, there,” said the unicorn, “It’s not so bad. You’ll like being a unicorn. I like it! The sun is most always shining, the nutmeg wind is blowing—there’s plenty of clover. The days pass with their own slow current. There’s no sense of urgency here, no great crisis to live through or overcome. Only sweet lovely unicorn-ness, and lots of prancing.”

Pansy still stared at her hands, deep in thought. She *did* like prancing. And the nutmeg wind was nice, the way it kept those inspirational banners flapping in the wind. And the warm, rose-colored stones, and the nice-tasting soup...

Madge was also thinking hard, staring off at nothing, hand pulling at her hair. She was reliving a memory from childhood, standing at the bus stop in the early morning dark, fishing around in her pocket for dimes. The gutters were filled with clumps of grey snow, the sky shot with stars. The air smelled of exhaust and early springtime. The bus came, its doors opened, and she climbed aboard to go to school.

Long moments passed, and the two were still undecided. They’d worked so *hard* to find this place, thought Pansy, they’d traveled so *far*. There had been a moment, in their travels, when they had almost ceased to believe that it even existed. And now what? The unicorn watched them, infinite patience etched on its face. By and by it spoke, nodding at the pillows, and the gentle popping fire.

“You could sleep on it,” said the unicorn. “You could sleep, and maybe the answer will come to you in your dreams. Or maybe you are too tired to come to a decision, and in the morning your thoughts will be clearer.”

“That’s a great idea,” said Pansy, yawning. It was a terrifically hard decision to make, especially feeling as tired as she did! Madge nodded agreement, and the two lay back in the nest of

pillows, pulling the thick velour blankets around them. The unicorn stretched its neck out on the cool stone hearth, and watched the fire. Madge and Pansy slept.

Pansy woke first, as usual, to the deafening racket of birds. The blackberry brambles that surrounded the meadow seemed to be thick with them, and they flipped to and fro, moving sticks and running errands, shouting at each other. The sun had been up, it seemed, for several hours, and the morning was starting to warm. Any haze had lifted, and the dew on the grass had returned to the atmosphere, come and gone in the night like a ghost.

And then Pansy remembered the unicorns. The wall, the tinsel, the plum-colored glass—the city! They had found the city! Pansy sat up with a start, knocking to the grass the sweater she’d used as a blanket. She looked around her frantically. There were only the birds, some yellow grass, and her bicycle, resting on the other side of the stump they’d slept against. There was no unicorn, no nutmeg-wind, no clover.

“Oh no!” she cried, and Madge woke with a start, the meadow rushing into her senses like water through a port-hole.

“What is it?” She asked groggily, alarmed.

“The unicorns!” cried Pansy. “The magical talking unicorns! We’ve lost them!”

Madge gasped. The unicorns! What had happened to the city, and why were they back in this meadow? How had they gotten here? Surely they hadn’t been carried on the back of the unicorn with the cat—all that motion would’ve woken them up.

“I just don’t understand it,” Pansy was saying. “we hadn’t even made our decision. And now we may never get another chance! Oh! Wherever will we find that unicorn that liked to eat the blackberries? However will we find the city again? Where are we, even?”

As Madge sat up in the morning light, listening to Pansy, a dream began to come back to her, like an old Polaroid photograph that takes a few minutes to develop. In the dream she was walking through the forest on a narrow trail, and a rounded fog hung in the trees like cotton batting, and lichens stretched from the branches like cobwebs. She was walking with the unicorn, the one who had sat with them the night before, the one with the deep chestnut body and sparkling magenta horn. They were walking through the forest together, and now and then there was a break in the trees, and through the break Madge could see a great and sprawling city, grey and darkly shadowed, and in the distance, something that loomed on the horizon like thunderclouds. The unicorn was leading her somewhere, somewhere safe, somewhere far away from this city, but she didn’t want to go. At last she stopped and faced the unicorn, in a quiet, mossy clearing, a neutral place, a spot between here and there.

“It’s all I have,” said Madge, in her dream, to the dream-unicorn. The unicorn tilted its great, glittery horn, and pointed down the path, into the quiet woods. Madge shook her head. “It’s all I have,” she said again. The unicorn blinked its wet eyes, saying nothing. Madge turned and looked through the trees, at the sprawling city in the distance. “It’s mine,” she said. And when she turned around, the unicorn was gone.

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THERE  
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