

WAR IN THE STREETS

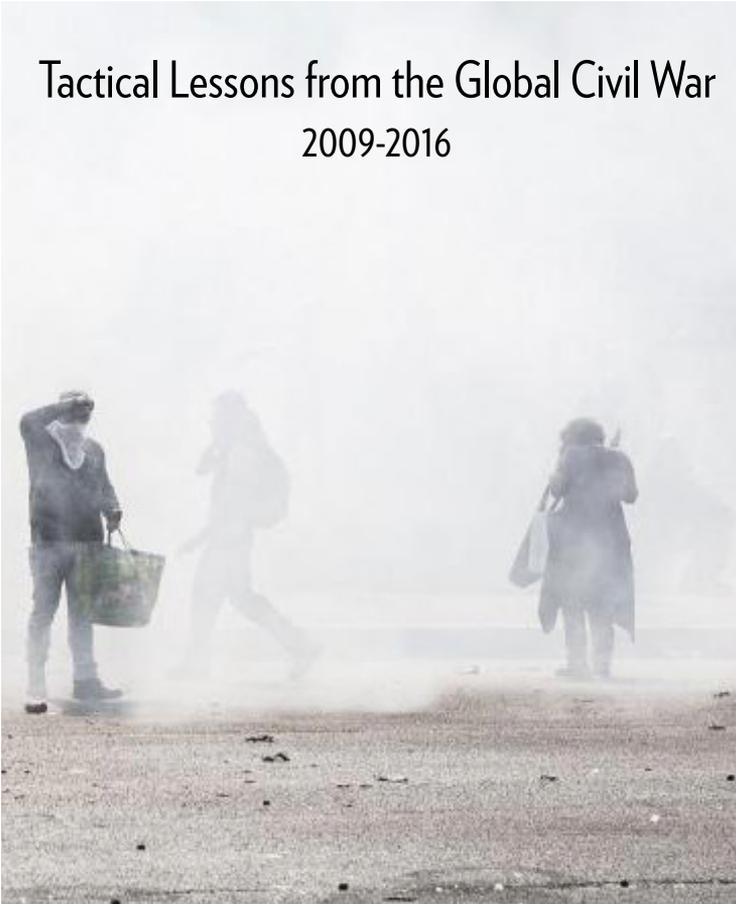
Tactical Lessons from the Global Civil War
2009-2016



ill-will-editions.tumblr.com
illwill@riseup.net

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PREFACE

The idea for this zine was to collect a series of situated and intelligent reflections on black blocs, street clashes and related tactics of confrontation. Each of the texts collected here tries to spell out in concrete ways what seems like it has worked and what hasn't, while trying to be clear about how each tactic relates to the larger insurrectional process.

Given the current US climate of increasingly open social hostility and the more 'mass' nature of some of the rage already foreseeable in the coming years, the time seemed right to assemble a few strategic pathmarks to help us orient and operate effectively on shifting sands.

While the texts emerge from very different moments and places, what links them is the effort to examine the limits and potentials of street combat in their specific context (which was, broadly speaking: the waning alter globalization malaise of the late 2000's; Occupy & the global "squares-movement" sequence of 2011-12; and the 2016 *Loi Travail* revolts in France).

As one of our authors puts it, "the practice of conspiracy, of strategic thought, of breathing together, must be a commons of skills and new forms that we all draw from." We hope this zine can serve that purpose, in however small a way.

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**PLAN B:
OUR EXIT STRATEGY
FROM ACTIVISM AND THE
NEXT EXPRESSION OF AN
AUTONOMOUS SOCIAL
FORCE**

Liam Sionnach



We have known, we still know, the temptation of activism. The counter-summits, the No-Border camps, the occupations, and the campaigns against evictions, new security laws, the building of new prisons; the succession of all of this. The ever-increasing dispersion of collectives responding to the same dispersion of activity. [...] Activists mobilize themselves against the catastrophe. But only prolong it. Their haste consumes the little world that is left. The answer of the activist to urgency remains itself within the regime of urgency, with no hope of getting out of it or interrupting it. The activist wants to be everywhere. She goes everywhere the rhythm of the breakdown of the machine leads her. Everywhere she brings her pragmatic inventiveness, the festive energy of her opposition to the catastrophe. Without fail, the activist mobilizes. But she never gives herself the means to understand how it is to be done. How to hinder in concrete terms the progress of the desert, in order to establish inhabitable worlds here and now. We desert activism. Without forgetting what gives it strength: a certain presence to the situation. An ease of movement within it. A way to apprehend the struggle, not from a moral or ideological angle, but from a technical and tactical one.

-The Call

We intend to contain within our recomposed and constituted rebel communities the capacity and power to attack...¹ The objective of any expression or gesture of revolt must be to produce social conflict and strengthen our worlds. The Activist who responds to the contradictions of capitalism with morality or ethics either misunderstands this or does not seek revolt. The current methods for organizing the transformation of a protest into social conflict invite such activists into the conversation. On the contrary, we seek an avenue for communication that has a foundation in something more than perceived political ties. Likewise, we wish for a network of communication [to produce knowledge] that maintains itself for the next attack. To answer these questions, insurrectional anarchists have proposed the structure and reproduction of small groups (3-7) making attacks on objects of their misery.² This argument has best been put into practice in the US by groups of ecological and animal liberationists. However, these groups are very diffuse and the nature of their cellular structure and somewhat misanthropic perspectives removes them from the arena of human social relationships. Additionally, most who espouse the theory of insurrectional anarchism in the US refuse the protest as a site of attack, and also end up replacing any question of strategy with one of morality: a choice that ultimately reproduces the wrong power. *What Would Peter Young Do? What Would David Gilbert Do?*

1 The editors have taken the liberty of parring down what we deemed to be an unhelpful use of conceptual jargon. Removals are indicated by ellipses. May its authors forgive us. -IWE

2 “Let us take the hypothesis of a ‘minoritarian’ subversive practice that refuses the Leninist model. In a libertarian perspective one either abandons all insurrectional discourse (in favor of a declaredly solitary revolt), the theses we support are already in the heads of the exploited, or that one’s rebellion is already part of a wider condition) one fact remains: we are isolated, which is not the same as saying we are few...Anyone who is incapable of imagining a community of unique individuals has nothing to put in the place of political mediation. On the contrary, the idea of free experimentation in a coming together of like-minded people, with affinity as the basis for new relations, makes complete social upheaval possible.” Anonymous, *At Daggars Drawn*. Available here: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-at-daggars-drawn-with-the-existent-its-defenders-and-its-false-critics>

The point is not to produce a new order and expand its influence but to become attentive to the rifts and also the dirt roads between the existing multiplicity of worlds—to be...intentional and thoughtful... There is a difference between abstract thought and abstractions.

We recognize the social nature of revolt just as we recognize the affects of our rioting. There is nothing in the world of capital that compares to the feelings of comradeship and power in the moments when it is only possible to speak of *I* as a *We*—something that is felt precisely when one is linked to five thousand others destroying everything that prevents us from inhabiting the world. We must remain social, and reproduce gestures and actions that can affirm that.

The model we are most experienced with in the US is the Black Bloc, the process of which looks like this: an affinity group or cluster of affinity groups confirm their interest in producing social conflict at a protest. They chose a date, a few possible targets and have a proposal for a march route. They then produce the most intoxicating rhetoric they can muster as a “call for action” and within the time between then and the protest, and hope for the best. Before the day of the protest there is a secret “vouched-for” meeting where the questions of “how” are sussed-out. Usually however, no one besides the organizing group has made it their task to provide resources, and people can be expected to be prepared only with a few reinforced banners and perhaps some flags—somehow “and anything else one may need to show their resistance to capitalism” does not translate well to weapons in English.

Black Blocs have failed on numerous occasions to produce quality attacks that transform the demonstration into a riot, and moreover, their exclusive nature often provokes a fetishism and thus a parody of autonomous force by those excluded from the knowledge and wisdom of its form. This is less a failure on the part of the form and more on our abilities to share knowledge and be self-critical.

A critical engagement with the Black Bloc form does however, prove there is something that provokes its continual reproduction more so than mere identity fetishism. There have been times when an autonomous material force, expressing its self through a Black

Bloc, has been powerful and intriguing enough to be appropriated by others outside of its political sphere. Take the case of students in upstate New York utilizing the tactic to get their friends and coeds to attack police on Halloween. Likewise, when the Cincinnati riots occurred a few months after small-scale trashing against the Trans Atlantic Business Dialogue, it was no small coincidence that the rioters, who observed anarchists marching against police brutality, were wearing similar colors and masks. The Black Bloc technique, severed from its political implications, has a few simple qualities: it is a way to organize the passage from protest to riot; it is way of creating anonymity so one can riot or do an action with less fear of later consequences; and it is an expression of power. In addition, the organization of a Black Bloc provides a framework to elaborate and experiment with. This is key. Without such a structure, the few victories would likely be nothing more the relationship of praying—hope turned into reality. With our self-organization of attack, we become conscious of our agency...

We can strike anywhere, but it might be best to test out a few things first. We will attempt, and others interested shall attempt to experiment with how we can get organized in an interesting way with one-to-two hundred people. More interesting questions will emerge. Shall we continue to wear all black? What or who might we attack? Where are the real flows of capital? How could we really interrupt them? Where are the most vulnerable sites of resources for us to expropriate? Are there other meetings of the most-wealthy on earth that aren't surrounded by armies of riot police?

1. OUR GOALS WILL ALWAYS INCLUDE THE PRODUCTION OR AMPLIFICATION OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

We wish to get organized with a certain attention to detail, contested space and vulnerabilities of capital within our own lives and within the other worlds we can traverse.

2. OUR OBJECTIVES, TECHNIQUES AND ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS SHOULD PRODUCE POWER

We wish to get organized in such a way that intentionally de-hierarchicalizes space and affirms the rituals, customs and gestures we make together.

3. WE SAY: “WE NEED THIS, DO YOU?”

We wave to others from the tops of overturned police cars.

4. “100-TO-200 = 1000”; THIS IS A CAPACITY FOR A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF PROPERTY DAMAGE.

With 1000 we can do most things we wish to do in a city. 100-200 solid, self-organized and materially prepared folks can become 1000 far better than 25 and can provide more resources.

5. WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO? HOW CAN WE TAKE WHAT WE NEED? WHERE CAN WE ATTACK?

A lil’ proposal for experimentation:

We would submit that a ‘host’ group chooses an objective(s) and then has face-to-face communication with those they trust about the idea to gauge interest. This will likely have to be done by touring different regions. A more intimate relationship between groups can flourish and a more healthy understanding of needs and differences between groups can become illuminated. The host group will create some mode of communication between themselves and the other trusted groups in order to receive affirmations of interest. The trusted groups, who may not know all of each other, are networked through a series of vouching; facilitated in part by the ‘host’ group and can then begin to find secure modes for their own inter-communication about “how” the objective(s) is achieved. With so much attention to detail and intention, our imaginations are free to experiment with conditions. We can ask questions of our resources, our own intelligence gathering—perhaps, there will be a place where many wealthy people’s cars are kept? Perhaps there can be a way for us to destabilize communication networks of the security forces? Once the host group receives the affirmation for capacity they communicate with the trusted groups who can then choose to make the action public or build their own post-capacity with other trusted people or other modes of communicating to people who may wish to rebel in a similar style. In the case of the summit protest, we can assume this. Our structure is then something that can appropriate that desire or be appropriated as well. If we provide hundreds of rock-hammers to make projectiles out of

concrete, then our one hundred or so can be of use to a thousand more people who wish to riot. Likewise, if we have access to a sound system that can be lost then we have the ability to make a street party emerge. Our structure, by its nature, becomes both robust and diffuse. We have the freedom of imagination to call it off if we must and also the power and capacity to do more tomorrow if we wish. It is through an intimate knowledge of our power that we can refuse to simply “do something” and instead do what will benefit us.

Plan B will not simply be the materialization of Black Blocs again or of their qualities outside the protest arena, but an attempt to produce a more rhizomatic form for our autonomous social force—one that can be easily appropriated by others but also one that, when appropriated, will benefit us too. Which is to say, we become more powerful when our nuclei are elaborated by others’ experiments and when there can be communication between worlds. We intend to produce and share knowledge through our expressions of force. Recognizing what is interesting and to our advantage about the technique, we seek not merely another option for activists to put into their toolbox, but an expression that dissolves the impasse of activism. Plan B is an option for those who wish to rebel, produce social conflict and become more powerful. The feedback-loops that can manifest this relationship with power and rebellion are to be produced and are currently impossible. This becoming-powerful is a situation that requires our exit from political and ethical techniques for social movement. Like Santa Claus or Jesus, they cease to exist when we cease to believe. We should be happy to oblige.

After this model is put into a practice on a number of occasions, it will become necessary that it transitions from the arena of a protest to other contested sites. It is our hypothesis this will be required not because of mere predictability—the war in Iraq could be predicted—but rather in the interest of expanding the temporal expressions of our worlds. Without this intent we will return to the problem of the Black Bloc, a specific tactic for anarchists. Plan B is merely a notion currently but it will best benefit us if we are intentional in expanding its knowledge and creating situations where it can be appropriated and where even we can be appropriated by other expressions of autonomous social force. Plan B and Black

Blocs are not simply tools in the toolbox of anarchists but rather expressions of a certain attention to sociality and force—it is no coincidence that we get organized comparably to the anarchists of Spain: based on our needs and affinities. We intend to elaborate this tradition and likewise use our forms of organization to expropriate everything and destroy anything that prevents us from utopia.

SIGNALS OF DISORDER: SOWING ANARCHY IN THE METROPOLIS

A. G. Schwarz



In an article in the recent book, *We Are an Image from the Future: the Greek Revolt of December 2008*, I briefly made a point that a friend convinced me needs to be elaborated. The idea is that of “signals of disorder,” and their importance in spreading rebellion.

As far as Greece is concerned, the argument is that by carrying out attacks — primarily smashings and Molotov attacks against banks and police stations, which constitute the most obvious symbols of capitalist exploitation and State violence for Greek society — insurrectionary anarchists created signals of disorder that acted as subversive seeds. Even though most people did not agree with these attacks at the time, they lodged in their consciousness, and at a moment of social rupture, people adopted these forms as their own tools, to express their rage when all the traditionally valid forms of political activity were inadequate.

An interesting feature of these signals is that they will be met with fear and disapproval by the same people who may later participate in creating them. This is no surprise. In the news polls of democracy, the majority always cast their vote against the mob. In the day to day of normality, people have to betray themselves to survive. They have to follow those they disbelieve, and support what they cannot abide. From the safety of their couch they cheer for Bonny and Clyde, and on the roadside they say “Thank you, officer” to the policeman who writes them a speeding ticket. This well managed schizophrenia is the rational response to life under capitalism. The fact that our means of survival make living impossible necessitates a permanent cognitive dissonance.

Thus, the sensible behavior is not to reason with the masses, to share the facts that will disprove the foundations of capitalism, facts they already have at their fingertips, and it is not to act appropriately, to put on a smiley face, and expect our popularity to increase incrementally. The sensible thing to do is to attack Authority whenever we can.

Attacking is not distinct from communicating the reasons for our attacks, or building the means to survive, because we survive in order to attack, and we attack in order to live, and we communicate because communicating attacks the isolation, and isolation makes living impossible.

Why do signals of disorder constitute attacks on capitalism and the State? After all, the police are basically the punching bag, the shock absorbers, for the State, and one of the limitations of the insurrection in Greece was that anarchists focused too much on police, rather than on the State in all its manifestations. And what about smashing insured bank windows? Creating a signal of disorder could even involve mere spray-painting, or hanging out on street corners. Isn't this just the ritualization of aimless and impotent rebellion, as the naysayers are so quick to say?

Turns out, the devil is in the details. In a way, the idea of signals of disorder is an inversion of the Broken Windows Theory of policing. Wilson and Kelling's article, "Broken Windows," first advanced the policing theory of the same name in 1982, but it wasn't until Kelling was hired by the NYC Transit Authority later in the decade that this flagship of minute social control was launched. When Rudolph Giuliani was elected mayor of New York in 1993, Broken Windows policing took on city-wide dimensions, and it soon spread to the rest of the country. By the early '00s, Broken Windows was being adapted for the social democracies of Europe.

Among the technocrats, Broken Windows is controversial, because it easily blurs causation with correlation: just because broken windows and other signals of disorder often accompany higher crime rates does not mean they are the cause of crime. Occasionally, you'll hear a whimper that without proper sensitivity training, Broken Windows policing encourages harassment of minorities.

All this misses the point: the State is not interested in reducing crime, the State is interested in increasing social control, and Broken Windows policing is a critical expansion of its arsenal. Giuliani's reign of "zero tolerance" didn't just go after fare-dodgers, graffiti writers, and the squeegee men. Under his stewardship, the NYPD became the first ever police department in the history of the world to log more arrests than reported crimes. Entire neighborhoods became depopulated of certain demographics as young black men were shipped to the prisons upstate. A policing that targets the petty details of everyday life, that criminalizes our minor strategies to cope with the impossibilities of life under capitalism, is part and parcel of an expansion of police power as a whole.

Why does the city government in San Francisco want to criminalize sitting or lying in the streets? Why did the city government in Barcelona ban playing music in the streets without a license? Why did the government of the UK prohibit a detailed list of “anti-social behaviors”?

Because the goal of the State is total social control. Because the trajectory of capitalism is towards the total commercialization of public space. Every time we identify another invasion of State and capitalism into the minutiae of daily life, every time we confront that invasion, we are potentially fighting for revolution. As Authority increasingly manages us at the nano-level, the can of spray paint, the rock, the Molotov, deserve the same significance as the AK-47.

Spreading signals of disorder accomplishes a number of things. It increases our tactical strength, as we hone a practice of vandalism, property destruction, public occupation, and rowdiness.

It interrupts the narrative of social peace, and creates the indisputable fact of people opposed to the present system and fighting against it. It means the reason for this fight, the anarchist critiques, have to be taken more seriously because they already exist in the streets. In this way, the attacks create the struggle as a fact in a way that would otherwise only be possible in times of greater social upheaval and movement. To have this effect, the signals of disorder need to explicitly link themselves to a recognizable social practice, one that would otherwise be ignored or chopped up into disconnected eccentricities of lifestyle. People in the neighborhood must know that the graffiti and broken windows are the doing of “the anarchists” or some other group that has a public existence, because signals of disorder that can be isolated as phenomena of urban white noise can be legitimately and popularly policed with techniques reserved for inanimate objects and aesthetic aberrations; they would rub us off the streets with the same chemical rigor as they clean graffiti off the walls.

Signals of disorder are contagious. They attract people who also want to be able to touch and alter their world rather than just passing through it. They are easy to replicate and at times, generally beyond our control or prediction, they spread far beyond our cir-

cles. They allow us, and anyone else, to reassert ourselves in public space, to reverse commercialization, to make neighborhoods that belong to us, to create the ground on which society will be reborn.

In a neighborhood where the walls are covered with anarchist posters, beautiful radical graffiti stands alongside all the usual tags, advertisements never stay up for long, the windows of luxury cars, banks, and gentrifying apartments or restaurants are never safe, and people hang out drinking and talking on the street corners and in the parks, our ideas will be seriously discussed outside our own narrow circles, and the state would need a major counterinsurgency operation to have just the hope of uprooting us.

Whenever we can break their little laws with impunity, we show that the State is weak. When advertising is defaced and public space is liberated, we show that capitalism is not absolute.

But at the same time, we cannot make the mistake of exaggerating the importance of the attack, of signals of disorder. At times it may be necessary to be a gang, but if we are ever only a gang, if at any point only our antisocial side is visible, we are vulnerable to total repression. There is a lot of rage circulating, without an adequate outlet, which we resonate with through our attacks. But there is equally a lot of love that is even more lacking in possibilities for true expression. People desire the community and solidarity that capitalism deprives them of, and our way out of this labyrinth of isolation is to go looking for the others and meet them where they're at. To encounter people, in our search for accomplices.

Except in the magical space of the riot, we cannot safely find spontaneous accomplices for the attack. But in the stultifying oppression of everyday, we can find accomplices to share in the little gestures of defiance, the small tastes of the commune we are building — a random conversation, a flyer someone is actually interested to read, the passing around of a stolen meal, collaboration in a community garden, the giving of gifts.

The anarchists must simultaneously be those who are blamed for acts of startling indecency, of inappropriate extremism in all the right causes (“they burned four police cars at our peaceful march!”) and those who are around town cooking and sharing free commu-

nal meals, holding street parties, projecting pirated movies on the sides of buildings, running libraries and bicycle repair shops, and appearing at protests (“oh look, it’s those lovely anarchists again!”).

We will be safest from the right hand of repression and the left hand of recuperation when everyone is thoroughly confused as to whether we are frightening or loveable.



THE RIOT OR THE ATTACK? SOLIDARITY AND QUESTIONS FOR US ANARCHISTS AFTER MAY DAY

AG Schwarz



Since the disruptions in Pittsburgh during the G20, the Portland riots, and the coast to coast May Day smashings of 2010, anarchists in the US have proven they are a force. My beloved Glenn Beck even has to protect his wayward libertarians from us by insisting that we are communists, and that, laugh of laughs, we're working for the trade unions. The rightwing in the United States plays the curious role of recuperating a very popular anti-state sentiment, and as relatively weak as American anarchists are, they are starting to threaten this monopoly. That's the thing about non-vanguardist anarchists: when we speak and act honestly, we tend to have an influence far beyond our numbers.

Because we now have proven to ourselves that we can start shit almost whenever and wherever we want, anarchists in the US no longer need to be so desperate for a riot that they are willing to throw everything away just to get their game on. Less combative anarchists have intuited a weakness in this new direction, a potential for isolation and repression, but unfortunately for everyone they couched it in the tired old terms of a fetishization of violence. Articles like "Are we addicted to rioting" were correct in sensing a danger, but because their authors were not conscious of their own position nor empowered by the confidence that comes with rioting, they sounded the call to retreat.

A much better critique, written after the Strasbourg riots by honest to goodness Black Bloc'ers, is "After We've Burnt Everything." The Invisible Committee as well were on to something when they wrote, "the question of pacifism is serious only for those who have the ability to open fire. In this case, pacifism becomes a sign of power, since it's only in an extreme position of strength that we are freed from the need to fire."

Let there be no mistake. We had to come to this point. And if we back off now rather than charge across this line, we will deflate, putter around a labyrinth of invective and disconnected bicycle repair workshops for a few more years, and then once we regain lost steam only have to face this challenge again. Rather than spreading recriminations as 11 comrades in Asheville³ and possibly some in

3 [For background, see Denver ABC's article "Five Myths about the Asheville 11: Why They're Being Demonized and Why It Matters" -IWE]

Santa Cruz face heavy charges, let's spread lessons, or we'll only retreat and have to come this way again.

THE RIOT

What happened in Asheville on May Day was not a riot, and not because of its size or any matter of scale. A riot expands. It is spontaneous, or it takes hold amidst a backdrop of social struggle. Counter-summits provide the unique opportunity of a planned riot, because there is a larger crowd of people assembled there among whom the riot can spread, and the mass protest situation already creates such a logistical nightmare for the police that the risk, normally idiotic, of trying to start a riot right where the cops are expecting it is often neutralized. Generally, however, riots occur as a spontaneous response to the violence of the state or the humiliations of capitalism, as in Portland, March 2010, and Oakland, January 2009. Riots can be and often are provoked by a couple of people with more confidence in their ability to fight back, but their necessary characteristic is their expansion.

The riot is good because it is a catalyst, a magical spark that allows high social tensions to turn into open social conflict. It is a step towards social war. If, in a certain neighborhood, on a certain day, there is no simmering social tension, there will be no riot. On the other hand, if the people are well trained in obedience, the tensions can be boiling over but the lid will not fly off. The threshold for the transformation to a riot is lowered if people have confidence, if they have practice in fighting back. They can win these things through the attack.

THE ATTACK

An attack should never mistake itself for a riot. Normally it never would because attacks traditionally take place at night or in swift, unobserved moments. A riot is a moving commune. It can dismantle the temples of the commodities with leisure, it can turn the smoke filled streets into zones of play. An attack does not have this luxury, and when it makes the mistake of thinking it does, it transforms quickly into a mass arrest.

The principal purpose of this type of action is to demonstrate that it is easy to attack capitalism, despite all the flaunted power of the state. An attack that does not get away is, at this principal level, a failure. A demoralization.

I don't presume that whoever carried out the May Day smashings in Asheville were trying to adopt a certain tactic that has been perfected by the comrades in Greece, or that they were trying to do anything other than what they ended up doing. But I will say that certain folks have been doing it much better, and it can be useful to understand how.

Certain anarchists in Greece and elsewhere have been perfecting the public attack. This deviates characteristically from traditional attacks in that it happens in the public eye: in the middle of the day, 20–40 trusted comrades gather punctually on a street where there are no surveillance cameras, mask up, run around the corner to their objective, smash it, and disappear, knowing in advance good escape routes and places where they can unmask and blend in. At least one person keeps time, down to the second, and lets everyone know when it is time to move on. Staying at the objective for more than, say, 30 seconds, is suicide.

The Greek anarchists are courageous, but they would not attempt a public attack when police were expecting it (e.g. May Day, in a city where something was also attempted the previous year). Additionally, and this point cannot be stressed enough, they were developing this tactic for years before they got to the point where they would attempt to smash 6 or more objectives, or objectives on entirely different city blocks, at the same time. I have no idea who shook things up in Asheville and how much experience they have, but one thing that is true for all of us is that if we act out of impatience, we are inviting imprisonment. We won't destroy capitalism through the amount or value of damage we cause, but by the significance of that damage and how it communicates itself. If there's one thing we can learn from the heavy blows we suffered with the repression and failure of the ELF, let it be that.

Many other types of public attacks have been developed that don't focus repetitively on broken windows. There is the supermarket expropriation, where 20 masketeers run into a supermarket, fill up

baskets full of food, get out of there in under a minute (some of them make sure the doors remain open and unobstructed), and drop the food off in a park or other public place within a couple blocks where folks are gathered, and disappear. A similar group of people could open up a metro station to temporarily provide everyone who passes through with free public transportation. Another group publicly dismantles a surveillance camera. These and many other forms of public attack communicate themselves much better, and are more likely to win sympathy for illegality and anarchy.

This is not at all a denunciation of the broken windows. Without negation, we are nothing. But it is much easier to understand how healthy it is to make total destroy if it is connected to a more embracing practice rather than an almost ritualized, self-caricaturizing repetition.

The attack is good because it gives us strength and confidence, it helps us manifest as a material force in the social conflicts, it illuminates the rage and dissension brewing in the ranks of capital, it disrupts the illusion of democratic peace even at times of lower social tension, and it communicates that we have an enemy, and this enemy is easy to attack.

NEXT TIME SMASH THE TEMPLATE

A peculiar problem of US society is how televised it is, and I think this has a negative impact on the anarchists as well. The errant irony and generic behavior are pervasive. Just like a high school movie, the anarchist space also has its cool kids. They are certainly the vanguard in the changing sense of theory and strategy, but it seems that US anarchists in general participate in a general substitution of fads for tactics. It's no surprise. The spectacle has trained us to live in templates, and this extends to our struggles. Smashing windows can become and is becoming the signifier of belonging to yet another clique, little different from organizing Food Not Bombs or riding bicycles or holding mycology workshops. Make no mistake, the temples of the commodities must be smashed, but the templates for how we go about that must be smashed as well.

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY

Does a disdain for populist mass movements mean that we want to be alone in our struggle? That would certainly be a caricature of the insurrectionary. If the strongest motion of capitalism is the movement towards alienation, than the strongest attack would be the one that communicates, the one that connects us, the one that mixes us, the one that overcomes isolation. Burn everything but our bridges!

Where was the communication on May Day? Shattering glass has a voice, but only sometimes is it the one that speaks most eloquently. Where are the other voices to help add meaning to its words?

From a distance it seems that the provocations shouted by May Day's falling shards caused many people to take the side of property. There is something valuable in making people's alliances clear, but there is nothing valuable in refusing to challenge the alliances of capital, to instead defiantly occupy a lonely moral high ground as the only enemy of the system.

We are not Christians who take joy from the mouths of Roman lions. People who rallied around broken windows and damaged cars, in their own minds, were rallying around the false constructs they've been given of community, respect, safety, and so forth. Additional communication is needed to show what these things actually mean in the world we inhabit, to clarify what side they've actually chosen.

Social war means society against the state. Homo sacer is the most honest and honorable member of capitalist society, but also the weakest. For now, we will be the unpopular ones. To have the hope of seeing something different, there will need to be ten flyers for every flying brick, and many more of each.

SOLIDARITY

In "Against the Corpse Machine," Ashen Ruins wrote how in the 1880s, US anarchists could stand fully in support of the Haymarket martyrs, but forget to show similar solidarity for all the

sharecroppers and lynching victims in the South. It worries me immensely that within about a week, a half dozen comrades get killed or disappeared in Oaxaca, including anarchists, and a dozen comrades in the States get arrested on felony charges, and all the attention and solidarity goes to the latter.

This does not at all mean that solidarity with the arrested or the May Day smashings themselves come at the expense of solidarity with Oaxaca. Only a liberal would counterpoise international solidarity with attacking the bars of our own prisons. But if this new direction in the anarchist struggle here could ignore the Oaxaca massacre even at a moment of growing power, it is empty and doomed to pathos and narcissism. How we respond in similar situations in the future will answer the question: are we strengthening ourselves as part of a global struggle that truly believes in total destroy, or are we just pursuing the new fad?

Those arrested on May Day deserve our fullest support, regardless of things like guilt or innocence. The smashings should also be celebrated, because they mark an important expansion of the struggle in the US, showing that anyone in this country is powerful enough to attack this system. Only by taking this realization and moving forward can we come to occupy a terrain where we are not desperate or impatient to attack because we know we can do it at any time, and therefore choose the best moments.

YOUR COOPERATIVE WILL SELL YOUR SOUL, YOUR NEMESIS WILL SAVE IT

Anarchist bookstores, cafés, and social centers, squatted or rented, are a commonplace in our struggles worldwide, so it seems peculiar that in the States so many would be subjected to criticisms of being businesses, of selling out, of not deserving our solidarity. It seems even more peculiar that in the wake of riots or instances of repression, so many members of these spaces should in fact join the business owners in denouncing illegality and distancing themselves from the disturbances, from the bad protestors, from the masked ones.

The anarchist spaces, even if they are rented, even if they have to sell things to pay their rent, are our spaces, and they face the

same compromises we do when we decide whether to get a job, whether to make use of state welfare, state infrastructure. And these spaces are meaningless without a connection to the anarchist struggle. Without the struggle, without the masked ones, without the smashings, they become just another business, and a poorly managed one at that. Running a cooperative threatens nothing. It does not provide an image of the future unless it exists to support a struggle capable of destroying the power structures that stand in the way of that future. Our spaces sustain us in the struggle and prevent our isolation, and our attacks give those spaces their true meaning, but only if they refuse to be separated.

After a bout of smashing, the local media will demonize the visible anarchists, the public anarchist projects, precisely to get them to denounce the invisible and illegal manifestations of the anarchist struggle, to divide us and weaken us all. The plan is for the public ones to scramble to portray themselves as upstanding citizens, which is to say, to defeat themselves; and for the invisible ones to lose and in fact deny themselves access to those few spaces where they can show they are only a threat to those who are the enemies of all of us. In short, the purpose is to isolate those who attack. More often than not, the public ones and the invisible ones cooperate quite well in fulfilling this purpose.

ENOUGH WORDS

Let's not come this way again. There's so much to be done well, why do anything poorly? All power to the communes! Freedom for the Asheville 11! Freedom for everyone!

YES, AND:
**RESULTS FROM THE NORTH
AMERICAN CONTAGIOUS
ANTAGONISMS INQUIRY
2007-2012**

North American Society for the Advancement of
Criminal Science



INQUIRY FIGURE 1: THE BLACK BLOC

Thesis: The black bloc is limited by obsolete aesthetic forms and reduced strategic imagination.

Hypothesis 1: The black bloc will spread antagonism more effectively if it can overcome these limits

Hypothesis 2: The black bloc should:

Abandon identity

Abandon predicates

Develop collective intelligence

Develop tactics

I

The black bloc is a method to prepare and hasten the clash. It is an anonymous way of being together, outmaneuvering police, and making attacks that radically alter the way we think about ourselves, power and our environments. Contrary to the critiques by those who fail to understand our contemporary situation, the black bloc is a long-term project engaged in a monastic work to develop undocile contagious practices.

II

The black bloc is a tension between insurgent identity and event. On the one hand, because the black bloc is a *dynamic* set of practices, it produces an *unstable* subject position: the black blocer. On the other hand, because the black bloc is also an *event*, rather than a fixed identity, it radically interrupts our functional roles as workers, citizens, students, etc. In this way the black bloc is always negotiating a tension between naming—and thus stabilizing—its subject position and becoming indistinguishable from the riot as a few antagonistic yet predictable gestures. While the latter claims an ethics of openness, it also limits how the black bloc can continue to stay unstable and tactically unpredictable.

III

At the heart of our self-analysis and critique is the question of the black bloc's meaning. What does it connote, describe, and do? For us the black bloc means: strategic antagonism.

The black bloc has the potential to connote "we who rebel intelligently." However, it more often connotes "anarchism" because it is employed instrumentally to essentially advertise for that particular political identity. In most cases the narrative might go like this: there is a struggle, it has a dominant reformist discourse, anarchists feel marginalized and call for a black bloc in order to bring more radical ideas to the surface. In this way, the anarchists vote as bloc—the same way as other political groups—in order to be better *represented* in the struggle. However, the tactics deployed and the images produced create a heroic specter, whose glorious figure of revolutionary purity doesn't correspond to the need for anonymity as a practical necessity of contemporary revolt. The use of the black bloc as such locates the figure of the anarchist, the criminal, and the militant all in one place. The black bloc's objectives: *contagiously* reversing the operation of power on our bodies, taking back force, and elaborating practices of offensive opacity—are accomplished by *diffusing these practices* throughout the space and time of a struggle, not by consolidating them in single revolutionary subject. In this way, the very aesthetic that our anonymity rests upon currently works against us. The employment of *all black everything* separates us and functions to produce us as anarchist subjects with predictable motions and roles we fulfill. Even if a black bloc is composed solely of self-described anarchists, it must resist the ideological temptation to claim it as a terrain exclusive to anarchists. The black bloc should spread anarchy as a practice—not an idea or identity.

IV

The challenge of resonance and contagion is exacerbated by the black bloc's ahistorical ethical and aesthetic positions. The anarchist figure appears as a body detached from history, clinging instead to antiquated forms. Whereas each struggle to which we are bearing witness appears to itself as something *new*, the anarchist black bloc remains trapped by the image of Seattle '99. This is not

a problem of the techniques we use to destroy property—we've seen a lot of beneficial advancements in that—nor is this a problem in the techniques employed to confront the police. Here we have seen useful developments as well. The use of barricades, rocks and bottles, burning cars; the use of laser pointers to disorient the police; the use of Information Technologies to gather and disperse with greater speed and agility all amplify our tactical senses. The challenge we must overcome is the same challenge at the core of every struggle. How do we lose our predicates? How do we dissolve ourselves into a common?

V

Imagine the event of an insurrection as either a complex experimental symphony or a drawn out improvisational drama, with a touch of comedic elements and heroism. In either situation, all the participants will first begin with almost no plan or shared sense outside of their environment or their knowledge of their instruments—most times no one will have any intent on playing together. Something happens, someone begins to play, and when the rhythm touches others they join in. Or in the latter case someone speaks, asks a question, and others respond and build on the narrative. In each case the primary operation must be endowed with a force of seduction. This is not to say erotic or pleasurable even, but *decisive* in how it approaches its environment. The operation must pose a question that is irresistible to answer. An experimental composer once said “the hidden secret that makes this thing function is that the audience wants to be a part of the [...] plot” This ordinary operation, the gesture that repeats itself even as it grows in complexity, must solicit the response “Yes, and.” This is how we can measure the success of the black bloc. In the experimental symphony, this is how each musician adds their own layers of emotion and aesthetics to the structure, even by altering the initial rhythm. In the improvisation drama, this is how the narrative grows essentially from nothing, then departs and returns to different plot elements. “Yes, and” must be the answer to rhythmic question “We need this, do you?” *How* this question is posed defines the particular meaning of the black bloc.

VI

As the crisis deepens, revolt spreads. 1+1. simple math. However, instability is a familiar sensation for an economy based on the assumption of scarcity and constant expansion. Capital is well calibrated to crisis, and the arguments that “it will get better, when it gets worse” don’t fare well historically. As the economy is thrown into crisis, control and repression also deepen. In order to integrate antagonisms into a manageable framework, the fields of social sciences, anthropology, and psychology are enlisted to research the finest details of life. Meanwhile others specializing in police science dutifully work to calculate and predict the movements of antagonism in general. Once these antagonisms can be reduced to qualities and data, governments can begin to regulate, distribute and circulate these antagonisms in a way that produces value or guards against any further disruptions. One thinks of both the subtle integration and circulation of identities, the brute force of imprisonment, elimination through police bullets, and reduction through war. This governmental technique, sometimes called “risk reduction”, in practice functions as preemptive counter-insurgency. Here we see that counter-terrorism—as a set of policing measures and juridical transformations—was a maneuver that foreshadowed this epoch of crisis, developing its science over the course of several decades to be perfected just in time to stop the next revolutionary surge. We can’t count on the simple math.

VII

As the environment of struggle shifts, so should our strategy. The contemporary sites of struggle are no longer demarcated spaces of confrontation—summits of the elite where our discourse congeals around a critique of financial capital and around a moral rejection of state violence. Revolt is now found in a delimited environment, more closely aligned with nightmarish war theory, where everything and everywhere is a potential terrain of conflict. There is an increasing need to develop common techniques that are easily appropriated. No one would have predicted that by 2010 a specter of university occupations would hang over the US, much less that a movement of occupations would erupt across the globe by 2011. But given the circumstances we believe this will spread, mutate and deepen. For our own safety locally and to contribute to the

historical struggles emerging at a global level, black blocs must be able to pose the question: “We need anonymity, do you?” And as the lulzy hacker group Anonymous proves, the response “Yes, and” may not take the form we expect.

VIII

At the moment when struggles were cohering as a convergence of the antagonistic remnants of culture—the cycle of struggles that included environmentalism, third-wave feminism, anti-death penalty, anti-war, and anti-globalization—all *black everything* attacking the symbols of financial capital was clearly contemporary. The black represented a conscious sense of the way these ethical practices were excluded from capital, and financial capital was the example of shameless entrepreneurship *par excellence*. However, today our anti-social media darlings no longer conjure a meaning exterior to capital—mostly because these forms (culture) could be, and were, integrated into the general circulation of commodities. The black bloc and corresponding meaning that was linked to a set of subcultural identities is empty. There may remain a caricature in some newspaper making reference to one of our more loud participants—the anarchist punk—Bbut as we all know, there is no longer a world for such a creature. Some may feel a sense of depressing nostalgia for how capitalism has drained our subcultures of what was living, but the emptiness of the black bloc—its abyss of potential chaos—is precisely what makes it more relevant than ever. The black bloc drained of identity has the potential to become open in ways impossible when it was only the practice of a limited set of subcultures. Strategic antagonism in a world increasingly composed solely of hostility now has the potential to shed its veneer and experiment.

* * *

What follows is a set of experiments to be immediately put into practice. The results should be examined, and analyses should be shared through our internal circuits of communication.

This text, although in public forums, is an example of how our communication works. We can say there is something, but there is no need to speak of its content. Thus, a cypher put into public

spheres. The cypher codes that a black bloc is called. The call speaks to those who hear it. It happens. If it happens well, it would appear that there was never a black bloc at all, only the event. However, *the real* of the event is not pure spontaneity, but the ease with which antagonistic techniques are able to spread and mutate.

* * *

Experiment 1. *Street clothes is the new black. Plain colors on the first layer, prints, stripes or plaids for the second layer. Jeans for bottoms.*

In some occasions, when the entire struggle is already located as criminal or revolutionary, all black makes sense—that is, it generates a certain meaning, a certain attention to our surroundings. “Black” for us should connote *speed* and *intensity of attack*, not ideology. Anonymity can be gained collectively through means other than the color of our clothing. Hats and scarves alone work quite well to make a surveillance camera less effective. An outer layer can be disposed. Shoes can be changed. A large crowd on its own also helps. If a few people in black are throwing rocks, they are easily isolated; if what appears to be “anyone” is throwing rocks, they are concealed by the contagion of the practice. A slow riot, drawn out street fights, the spread of uncivil practices. These can be achieved when it is increasingly difficult to distinguish the law-abiding citizen from the annotated figures of protest and revolt.

Experiment 2. *Slogans and signs are a thin barrier between us and the police—use them accordingly.*

Banners, yes; black flags, sometimes.

Black bloc has meant a different way of engaging in struggle. It has meant the advancement of tactical anti-police and property damage sciences. When shedding our facade, we need not lose the tactical intelligence of banners and flags. Banners call attention. Contemporary struggles do not cohere over “ideas,” and we first came to this realization through the black bloc. Like the myth of “free speech” under the reign of democracy, banners provide a thin barrier between us and police. Use them accordingly.

Here the movement of occupations has been very clever and instructive. The first wave of student occupations against austerity measures saw the use of shields painted as books—a tactic appropriated across an ocean and a few continents. In New York instead of the demand “Never work!” or slogans that cohere over ideas such as “against capitalism” banners, we see the intelligent use of an ambiguous narrative “I will never get a job in this economy.” While our creativity remains captive until we are emancipated from the regime of value, our use of slogans and text should be charged with the same meaning as our defensive technologies.

Flags on the other hand have a history which links them to identity, to nations, to a People. Being that there is no longer any People outside the global citizen-producing project of Empire, even those flags waved by the citizens of anarchism and communism are but an empty threat. Just as the Red and the Black flew next to the Serbian flag during the strike to oust *Milošević*, just as the Black Flag flew next to the Mexican Flag during the Immigrant general strike of '06, these symbols no longer carry meaning.

Flags also have a different history, a technical history in both combat, and festival. Flags can be used to signal just about anything—a charge, a way of moving together, a certain time in which its good to disperse; they need not be black. And of course, flags are sticks with piece a of cloth attached. Here we would do best to not care if the image is a masked youth waving a black flag in front of a cloud of teargas or a surly old man swinging the stars and stripes at some cops, bellowing about taxation.

Experiment 3. *Spread the disease.*

Conspiracy means strategize together. The sense of a different way of being together, of getting organized, is one of the paramount achievements of the black bloc. We need to find ways to spread this sense across new fields of struggle. With confidence in our experience, we need to humbly experiment with applying our tactical knowledge to different conflicts, with people otherthan just seasoned riot-tourists.

The first wave of occupations in the US, from the Newschool in NYC to the University of California, saw quite a bit of this experimentation. A line of power grew from a house discussion, a classroom, a bar, a rooftop, and multiplied.

In the western territories, one saw the insulation of cliques formed through these struggles grow with experiment, not without the accompanying pangs and mistakes. The intensity leading up to the March 4th UC-wide student strike proved to be a misplaced nostalgia for summit demonstrations of yore. However, events which followed the fizzled climax generated a certain intelligence about how to engage with Marx's maxim "Men make history but not in conditions of their choosing."

The summer of '11 saw an interventionary strategy, composed of "anti-cut" events revolving around a discourse of anti-austerity by a group called Bay of Rage. While the actions—mostly smaller street parties-cum-confrontations with the police—never generated the results that the initial Bay of Rage participants wanted, they did consolidate a shared sense between them, and recreate their environment as a laboratory of subversion. Moreover, the shared space to *practice* developed a certain endurance, sense memory, and refining of muscular and mental energy, that, when *something happened*, was tuned to the rhythm of struggle. Here the normal situation of someone murdered by police quickly took on new meaning as Bay of Rage went from a few hyped actions of die-hards to becoming host to riotous demonstrations of a few hundred. The shift against the Bart police also added to this chorus. The anti-policing sense gave birth to new rhythms and these resonated with others beyond those closest to the Bay of Rage. Anonymous, street youth, and an array of many other worlds joined this choir. The situation continued to build on itself, as more people responded with "yes, and." We might see the impressive developments with Occupy Oakland in this light.

A small song booklet theorized how this taste for strategic thought might spread outside of our milieu. "When a couple of angry bus drivers, or grocery store workers encounter some of us in this or that place, and we say: 'there are fifty of us, we have these means, and we want to fight.' The rest is silence."

Through practice we develop the means, consistent numerical capacity, and qualitative knowledge and techniques. When our practice effectively re-inscribes the meaning of an environment's signs, architecture and geography, our presence is undeniable. In such a situation, the ease with which practices can cross-germinate and

mutate also establishes the necessary condition of communication—translation, and audibility.

Nearing the end of March 2012 a wild fare strike subtly assaults the subway fare apparatus in New York. A proper action, smoothing the line between our well known clandestine figures and that of an *everyman* mass worker. The attack targets some 20 stations during the morning's busiest hours and is claimed by the Rank and File Initiative, a collection of #occupiers and Transport Workers Union Local 100 and the Amalgamated Transit Union. Of course the union's leadership denies involvement in any such thing. In the an anonymous interview posted on the Village Voice website, the Rank and File Initiative says there were around 3-4 people in each station all disguising their identities, and that union members were paramount to the logistical elements. While the action doesn't immediately give birth to mourning shop owners, it does function to create rupture in the normal flow of metropolis precisely because those who didn't pay were all complicit. Here we see the practical mutation and intelligent application of complicity, resonance, and opacity.

The anonymity we need isn't limited to the streets. Zones of opacity must be established. We need intimate meetings where we can discuss, make plans, and sort out the real material solidarities and resources to achieve our objectives, without the threat of the police. We need to elaborate a system of deciding what levels of trust are required, and how to practically implement this. Perhaps we need a different culture than that of security. Perhaps we need a multiplicity of possible forms of trust. We may not need to know each other for a million years to engage in a collective criminal attack against capital—such as the Port of Oakland blockade—but we need to spread a fluency in this illicit dialect.

The practice of conspiracy, of strategic thought, of breathing together, must be a commons of skills and new forms that we all draw from. Here it is important to reflect on the NYC fare strike interview that followed the release of the communique because it highlights *how* they did it. Instead of just privileging propaganda to explain our actions through the matrix of social critique, we should explain how to participate—as if it were a game with simple rules. This, above all else, must be developed in the coming years.

Experiment 4. *Determine our own terrain of struggle; become unpredictable.*

Our enemies deeply examine the geography, duration, and intensity of struggles, and develop their techniques of policing from this. Recognizing that we cannot count on pure numerical superiority and spontaneity means we must elaborate a practice of unpredictable movements and gestures. A central contribution of the black bloc to the summit riots was its refusal to have its movements bared by conventional limits—police, fences, architecture, and protest marshals. A certain fluidity gave it decisive agency. We need to reorient ourselves to this intelligence. Our environments can change based on how we act within them. We don't have to stay together as a unit, linking arms and marching as a bloc. This is true for a demonstration and the entire space and time of a struggle. We can move through a smooth field. The same techniques employed for communicating where to gather to march and where to regather can be used *within* the entire terrain of a social struggle and a gathering point doesn't have to lead in a linear path to an objective. A flashmob could converge within a march at a precise moment, and a precise location (for example: behind the Teachers against Budget Cuts banner) and then disperse and reemerge once we reach *this* building, *this* line of cops, or some other sign which we endow with meaning through our self-organization. This could be extended based on our capacity and levels of organization. Using a higher level of technology to achieve a circuit of communication is not the only way to accomplish this, but today's struggles from the Banlieue riots to the Flashmobs across the US to the Arab Spring prove that contemporary revolt has a penchant for collective intelligence. Spreading and refining these techniques may not be as troublesome as some might think. There may be ways that don't require everyone involved having a trashphone, or smartphone with a secure text app; its up to us to experiment.

Experiment 5: *Or if we really want to experiment with being unpredictable:*

Imagine a game spread through the same message and image boards that generate the phantom, Anonymous, except it elaborates the "doing it for the lulz" project in real time. Simple rules: you have to be invited to play, and if invited, you have to play.

Through the spread of #occupy, one can't help but notice those "live feeds." With UStream, one can watch and hear the events unfold, and even communicate through IRC in real time with others watching and the person who's broadcasting the live stream. Imagine some players on the ground, in a demonstration or something else, as avatars, while their friends literally direct their movement. The on-the-ground player might always decide to do different than what she is told, but it might also be more fun to be *whatever*, and lose oneself. Such a game would generate complicities capable of producing a far more terrible practice of offensive opacity by bringing the logic of spectacle to its hyperreal threshold. While certain questions of how to establish the necessary trusting environment, or completely anonymous environment, for such a game are yet to be answered, the technological and social conditions are quite ripe. We see now the spread of YouTube videos highlighting both social struggles and absurd criminal acts of youth for pornographic consumption. Such a game might catch on with far more seduction and malleability than our old game of dignified militant struggle.

Beginning Again.

For almost a decade, for three rounds of struggles, an assemblage of anti-control sciences has been tinkering with techniques, environments, and dispositions of struggle. While its clear that the black bloc is not the single methodology of contemporary struggle, we privilege it as a site of development because of its easy entry-points, relative flexibility and by the way our conditions continue to summon it. Some have theorized a mythical Plan B in order to supersede the limits of the black bloc at demonstrations. Occasionally, this has been practiced as the black bloc's ferocity and intelligence, deployed outside of the large demonstration arena. Plan B has also been "attacking your enemy where he is not" within demonstrations, and as smaller gatherings that make dramatic public attacks—using speed and anonymity to escape capture, rather than the cover of a large crowd. While these experiments are conjured by the same spirit, we believe the current situation—a growth of strange and impressive struggles—is not the time to focus on how to intensify struggle, but how to alter our environments in ways that expand the territory of struggle. To us, the musical question is more one of duration and frequency than intensity. Intensity will follow, provided that initial question is posed in a way to solicit "Yes, and."

We will more than likely be forced to continue this work for another decade. This monastic work of building a long term project of street confrontation and undocile practices is not in order to prepare for an event in the future. It is monastic precisely because the time in which this project takes place is a time contingent on but external to the time of the work-day. Our victory will come not by messenger, nor by the final orgasm of history. Rather, revolution will be the complex unfolding of billions of relations of domination, accented and accelerated by insurrection. From the time we entered this project to the present, the general geography of everyday struggle has condensed and multiplied, continuously paving the urban and suburban human environment in revolt against this society. There is increasingly less time between capitalist normality and moments of rupture. We expect our victory will be the slow, painful saturation of this world in such ruptures. The task set before us is how we will develop the necessary endurance, means, and vitality to be able to make these ruptures inhabitable.



REFLECTIONS ON VIOLENCE

Lundimatin



PREFACE

Since the events of April 9th and the wild week that followed, the Nuit Debout (Rise Up At Night) general assembly has placed the question of violence at the center of its debate. While citizens persist in their rigorous pacifism, stances in favor of the “diversity of tactics” are also multiplying. The National Student Coordination has explicitly refused to dissociate rioters and demonstrators.

Amidst this proliferation of discussions, the Nuit à Bout Action Committee has gathered a few positions that seem useful for the strengthening of the movement as well as pertinent as regards the question of its repression. The more serious our presence in Place de la République [the square where Nuit Debout held its assemblies, and from which the wild marches departed -IWE] becomes, the more frequently situations leading to confrontation will present themselves. We must prepare for them. It is not a matter of convincing everyone that violence is a viable option or necessary route. It is simply a matter of finding those forms of action, perhaps frightening, that will rid us of our fear.

I

What must be explained is not why things sometimes get out of hand around the *Nuit Debout* gatherings in Paris, but why it doesn't happen more often. In the end, it's clearly understood why people who have been gathering every night for two weeks to envision the end of capitalism might end up wrecking the windows of the Société Générale bank (#PanamaPapers). It is obviously correct, it makes total sense. The problem lies elsewhere. Which is why neither the moral apologies for violence nor the theoretical or ideological justifications for smashing things will succeed in bringing more people to fight against the police or break bank windows.

We shouldn't forget that if many people are staying quiet in demos, it's not because pacifism is in their blood, but simply because they're afraid. To overcome this fear is a collective task, one that is nowhere better accomplished than in the streets. This begins with taking care of everyone, and not only one's friends—with us all taking care of each other, even in the worst situations.

II

“Diversity of tactics” is an expression which, like its cousin, “convergence of struggles”, tells us nothing about what must be done when people are brought together who don’t have the same way of struggling, or don’t have *any* way of struggling at all. The expression conceals what is actually a pretty liberal idea: everyone struggling next to each other, in their own way, without bothering or talking to one another. Diversity of tactics is nothing but a subtler form of dissociation. When will we get a “*diversity of corteges*”?⁴ In fact, the FIDL [*Fédération indépendante et démocratique lycéenne*] already asks for it at every high school demo.

III

The question is not whether to be violent or not, but of being offensive or inoffensive. Three gangs of five friends determined to smash ATM’s but incapable of organizing on a larger scale than their own affinity group are just as inoffensive as 10,000 unionized citizens slowly marching behind the CGT’s sound-system-french-fries-van. Conversely, 3,000 people holding their ground in a cloud of tear-gas while a small group throws rocks from behind a banner almost succeeded in having a nightcap at Prime Minister Valls’ house.

All the most powerful moments experienced in the streets since March 9th have demanded, at one point or another, that those who were ready to fight and those who were not took care of each other, decided to stand together, and not just side-by-side in polite and diplomatic indifference. On April 9th at Place de la Nation, there weren’t enough tear gas grenades in all the capital to tear apart the hundred or so people who were bombarding the CRS lines from the hundreds of people who booed and filmed the cops, while cheering or nursing the rioters [*émeutiers*].

IV

Little by little, the “question of violence” appears for what it is: a distraction. As long as we continue to talk about it, and moreover

4 A *cortège* is a procession, but here means something more like a bloc within a march. —Trans.

to speak about it in moral and ideological terms, we won't confront the true strategical problems posed by the demonstrations. To write one more apologia for violence will accomplish nothing. There are plenty of people ready to defend themselves from the police. What's missing is precisely a *cortège* to defend.

V

A demonstration is not a symbolic ritual. It is a test of strength, wherein those who have reasons to revolt physically encounter those paid to maintain the world in the deplorable state we find ourselves in. Every demo is the actualization of a *rapport de force* between those who are ready to take risks to change the situation, and those whom we pay to preserve it. The problem of official union demonstrations is that they deny the very existence of such a force relation. The image of life and of struggle they offer us is disgusting. Sponsored balloons, sausage-slogans and security squads; if "struggling" means to march like the CGT, then to struggle means to remain passive, to repeat the same gestures again and again, to never take risks. That, in addition to being deceptive, is intolerable. We only begin to fight from the moment we cease to be inoffensive: this may sound tautological, but the entirety of the union forces spend their time affirming the contrary. Their gestures in the streets express nothing but submission.

VI

The police maintain order.⁵ Because it is a protest against the order of things, a demonstration is, in its essence, a confrontation with police, no matter what form it takes. Therefore, when night comes, there is a winner and a loser. Either the police win (April 5th), or the demo wins (March 31st). The police win when everything goes as planned by the higher-ups. Demonstrators win when everything doesn't go as they planned. What freedom we win consists in what we manage to collectively pull off under the noses of the police. *Winning matters*. As much for the construction of the *rapport de force* as for our ties to each other, for our courage. Too many peo-

5 In French, the job of the police is typically described as "le maintien de l'ordre public", which translates literally as 'the maintenance of public order'. —Trans.

ple come to rallies like tourists, unconscious of the importance of successfully breaking the mold. They might be sympathetic clowns dancing in front of the CRS, or rioters who are indifferent to the behavior of the rest of the march. It doesn't matter, as both are inoffensive.



VII

To ensure that everything happens as expected, the cops set up their apparatuses: kettles, closed streets, hordes of plainclothes officers, and so on. In the demonstration, our challenge is to combat the police apparatus: we must prevent it from working, we must break it down. Not only are there thousands of different apparatuses, but there are thousands of different ways to break them down [*déborder*]⁶.

Likewise, there isn't much to say about a demo where the police apparatus hasn't been challenged. Which is perhaps why, when the media talks about demonstrations, they speak exclusively of the moments that break away [*les débordements*], for these alone mean anything. To say that "the confrontations occurred on the fringes

6 This term appears frequently in writings from this cycle of struggle in France, as seen the opening paragraphs of "Build the Hacienda, Burn Down the Palaces" (collected below). It can also mean to breakaway, outflank, overflow, jam, or to flee-beyond. —Trans.

of the demo,” makes about as much sense as saying “the goals were scored on the sidelines of the football field”.

VIII

Smashing things [*La casse*] is the easiest and most obvious way to break a police apparatus. It is also one of the least interesting, and most boring. What most narratives about rioters miss is that the latter would usually prefer to do something else: to free the demo by breaking the police lines, to occupy a building, to start a breakaway march, to hold down barricades, paint inspired tags, etc. Smashing is often a last ditch, stopgap option. It is the degree-zero of the demonstration. As for the classical union rally, family-friendly and good-natured, it isn't even a demonstration: it is a police operation.

It's worth noting that there's rarely been as few windows broken in a social movement as that of the month that just passed. When you're confronting the police, you aren't worrying about smashing shit. You've got better things to do.

IX

Whether or not *Nuit Debout's* general assembly can at times be entertaining, touching or ridiculous, it remains a useless tool for organizing ourselves in a revolutionary perspective. It's a practical problem: you just can't discuss such matters in the same way one takes a ticket and gets in line at the butcher shop. The infinite succession of stopwatched, disconnected speeches effectively abolishes the conditions of a constructed conversation.

Nobody can say anything intelligent in two minutes. Everybody sees it, but everybody goes along with it. Whatever the “democratic” will of certain organizers or “facilitators”, the decision and voting procedures are generally nothing but a farce. What they parody from “formal democracy” is the powerlessness related to the fact that the decisions, in the end, touch nothing and reach no one [*n'engage rien ni personne*]. And yet, sustaining confrontation *does* require that we make certain decisions – decisions which the general assembly makes *de facto* impossible. We attend them in the same way we consume *The Voice*. To elaborate a revolutionary

perspective requires that other modes of speaking, sharing and of collective intelligence be deployed in a parallel fashion on site.

X

Our marches will begin to add up to something when everyone shares not a principled tolerance towards the actions of others, but a common strategic perception of the situation. That is to say, once we perceive all demonstrations as battles we must win by any means necessary; once we are all inclined, not to violence, but to speed, surprise, and being offensive. It is by our attentiveness to the movements and affects that agitate our demonstrations that we will succeed in finding a common ground allowing a true convergence of struggles—at one central point, Place de la République.

There are thousands of non-violent gestures that then come to mind that would help to increase our efficiency in the streets:

- Marches should extend onto the sidewalks in order to prevent the lateral movements of the CRS from catching the demo in its pincers.
- Think carefully about the routes taken by wild marches. Those leading the march, in the heat of the action and improvisation, don't always choose the best routes. Help them.
- Get in the habit of hiding your face at the right moment: as much to sabotage the identification and surveillance work systematically and massively conducted by the police as to render demonstrators taking part in confrontation indistinguishable from the others.
- Confrontations tend not to unfold in silence or on mute. Slogans and chanting express the spirit of the movement. Thus, they have their place in all moments of confrontation. When others are fighting, sing and dance.
- Be mobile and do not allow any holes to form in the march when security squads or police attempt to divide it.
- Learn to protect ourselves from tear gas so that it's not just those who came equipped standing in the clouds.
- Systematically throw back tear gas canisters, or at least keep them away from the *cortege*.
- Stay calm during police charges to avoid brawls. Stick together and don't back-up a hundred times farther than where the police line stops, as this only hands them more free space.

Their morals are not ours.

Nuit à bout Action Committee



[The situation is excellent—where shall we toss the ashes of the old world?]

BUILD THE HACIENDA, BURN DOWN THE PALACES

Lundimatin



What we've been living through is new. It is certainly not just another "social movement." "Social movements" have a frame, so that everything escaping it is defined as a boiling-over or a breakaway [débordement]. Yet what we've experienced since March 9th has been an uninterrupted series of such breakaway moments, with the old forms of politics trailing after them from behind. The call to demonstrate on March 9th was a breakaway from the unions by the Youtubers. The demonstrations since then have seen constant breakaway marches led by the "youths", while the traditional image of union marches headed up by the various union bosses has been systematically replaced by groups of hooded youths defying the police. Nuit debout overflows every recognized political frame, while the "wild marches" that leave from its site at Place de la République are themselves a breakaway from Nuit debout. We must continue to begin—or in other words, continue to break-away, to remain on the move, to surprise.

II

Attempts to assimilate the new into the already-known are part of the arsenal of neutralization. Just as the demonstrations against this new labor law have little to do with the struggle against the CPE [i.e. the large national unions - IWE], Nuit Debout bears very little relation to the Indignados of Puerta del Sol [Madrid, Spain]. Whereas the occupation at Puerta del Sol declared itself pacifist, the occupation at Place de la République had hours-long clashes with the police last Friday. "Everyone hates the police" has become a chant hit. Whereas Puerta del Sol called itself "apolitical," we have lost count of the calls by unions and the speeches by unionists at Place de la République. However, Puerta del Sol really was occupied, which is not the case with Place de la République. At Puerta del Sol food was made for thousands, people stayed day and night, the police were not making daily evictions, nor ordered

7 *This text was circulated prior to a national day of action on April 28th, during which comrades in Paris attempted to construct a large fortified structure in Place de la République, the site where the nightly occupation and assembly movement Nuit Debout had been taking place since March 31, 2016. The structure was destroyed by police during an eviction of the square that evening, which led to one of countless pitched battles. -IWE*

to takedown this or that, or to stop folks from cooking. This last difference indicates a path to follow: if we want to make Place de la République more than just an interminable general assembly where curious on-lookers are giving a first-hand look at its powerlessness and the inconsistency of its “decisions,” then we must really occupy it; this means building real spaces and defending them from the police.

III

What Place de la République really constitutes is a public counter-space. Since existing public, political and media space has become an integral lie, we have no choice but to desert it. Not by falling back into silence, but to positively desert it by constructing another. And speech is like freedom: when you first take hold of it you start to say and do some dumb shit, but that’s not what’s important. What matters is to not to dwell on that first fuck-up. We must instead say that we have a long way to go, that these past weeks comprise our first few breaths. It’s been years now that a coalition of forces have made the situation unbreathable, between the “threat of the National Front,” “war on terrorism,” “crises” of all kinds, the emergency laws, climate apocalypse and the permanent campaign for the next presidency. What characterizes the reigning public space is that it offers a space for nothing but contemplation: what we witness, what we hear, what we learn never becomes an act or bears any consequence because we face it all alone. As was made evident in exemplary fashion the evening of the ‘nightcap at Valls’ place’, what is vibrant and powerful about a counter-space is the capacity for acts to follow speech. Consciousness and the capacity to act are not disjointed. This is the way that a counter-space can positively destitute existing public space. Hence the great curiosity and jealousy of the media.

IV

The conflict around the El Khomri law is not just a conflict about “work” law, it’s a conflict around the possibility—or not—of governing, which is to say, a political conflict in the true sense of the term. No one can stand to be governed any more by the puppets in the National Assembly, which is why, from our point of view, the law cannot pass; yet the government itself cannot afford not to pass this law—which means, it has been factually destituted

[destitué de fait], it can no longer govern. This refusal is even seen in a union like the CGT, whose rank-and-file can no longer bear to be governed as it had previously been by its management. If one listens to the speeches people give at place de la République, most fall into either one of two camps regarding this question of destitution: some want the moment of destitution to be followed by a constitutive moment where a new constitution could be written and a new society founded, whereas others think the destitution should be without a conclusion because it is first of all a process of construction, in which the fiction of a single society is replaced by the reality of an existing plurality of worlds, each of which express and incarnate their own idea of life and of happiness. Those of us writing here share the latter position.

V

Let's be pragmatic: no one's going to be able to write a constitution until this regime has been overthrown. And being that you do not overthrow a democratic regime democratically, i.e. that it will defend itself against any fundamental challenge until its very last riot cop, the only path leading to a new constitution is an insurrectional path. However to lead a successful insurrection, like that of Maidan for example, Place de la République must be really occupied, barricaded, guarded, etc.; also, all political and existential sensibilities favorable to insurrection must be able to find each other; to this end, instead of the desperate search for a consensus that will never be found in the middle of Paris (a consensus of a more or less frightened metropolitan petty bourgeoisie), we must substitute the material existence of a plurality of spaces, of "houses," where each of the sensibilities of the insurrection could collect themselves and enter into fusion. Those who are passionate about writing a constitution are welcome to build their own house where they can write up as many drafts as they like. And as for those who want to put the constitution into place, well, we'll discuss this when Valls and Hollande will have already hopped in their jet and taken refuge in the USA, Africa or Algeria.

VI

A poster in the Parisian metro a few years ago declared, "Those who organize space, rule over it"; it was decorated with a majestic

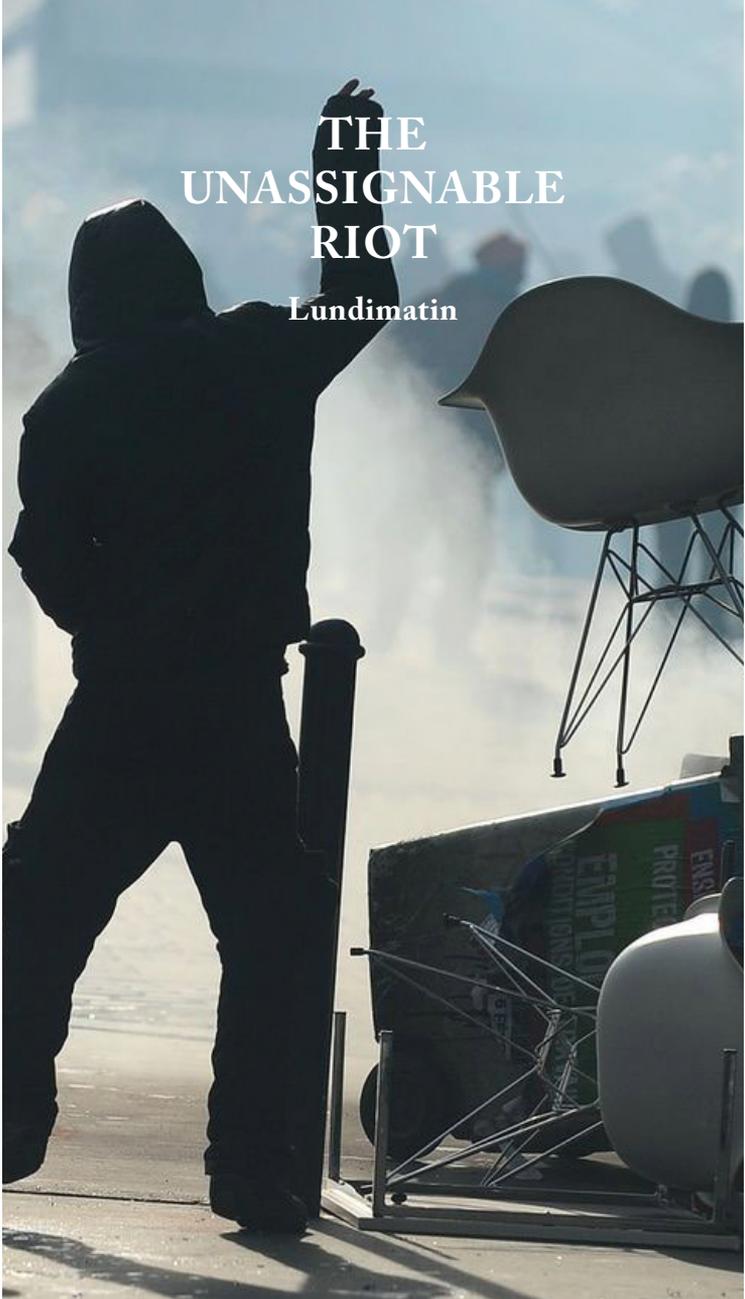
lion supposedly representing the sovereignty of the RATP Group [management of Parisian state-owned transport]. What sort of power is to be found in Place de la République? It lies in the management of the square itself, and the forces of order who impose respect thereby. Power is this grand empty esplanade; the flux of cars and their din; and the anti-police vans posted on all sides. How can an assembly seriously claim to be sovereign which then debases itself by respecting the real sovereignty that dictates its every move? It's impossible to take it seriously. But we would not have gathered together, nor been as numerous and determined as we've been, if we weren't very serious. By serious, here we mean that we have taken it upon ourselves to manage this place, but to express our intention to hold out by constructing the means for doing so, to refuse to be added to the list of mediatic flashes-in-the-pan that let themselves be swept away by the first attack. If we are going to be able to welcome comrades from all over, we must escape the precarity imposed on us by the current forces of management, and to arrange things as we see fit—in other words, we have to be constructive.

VII

We are in the middle of a fford, at the heart of peril: there are too many of us to simply return home and not enough of us to throw ourselves into an insurrectional assault. We must “shift into second gear” as some say. To hold out till the end of April is already not bad. We cannot count on the union bosses, because even if a few strikes that can be re-directed spring up here and there, by nature these strikes will be against their will. However, we know the danger that awaits us if this situation closes up again, a danger we already struggle against even now: that of the electoral system, the democratic blackmail of having to choose between the plague and cholera, between Alain Juppé and Marine Le Pen. Those who are likely to join us are precisely those whom are disgusted by such a reality, those who cannot bear for politics to be reduced to the insignificant process of voting. Politics consists of what we plan, what we build, what we attack and what we destroy. Shifting into second gear means: build the hacienda, burn down the palaces.

-The Construction Committee
Paris / April 2016



A silhouette of a person wearing a hoodie, standing in a public space. The person is facing right, with their right arm raised. In the foreground, there is a white plastic chair and a table with a metal frame. The background is a bright, hazy outdoor setting with other people visible in the distance. The text is overlaid on the image.

THE UNASSIGNABLE RIOT

Lundimatin

“The novelty of coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the state organization.”

Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*

Everyone—including the enemy’s propagandists—generally agrees that the riotous new figure appearing at the head of the recent demonstrations [*le cortège de tête*] is one of the noteworthy inventions of the current uprising. The governmental attempt by the media to reduce this phenomenon to a soundbyte that is both disgustingly depoliticized (the enigmatic “black bloc” or, more commonly, the “smashers” [*casseurs*]) and quantifiable (“dozens”, “several hundred”, “close to a thousand,” depending on the day) clearly aims to conceal a reality that is precisely the inverse: the head of the cortège is growing in numbers, at the same time that its composition is becoming increasingly unassignable.

One can, of course, find experienced political activists, members of this or that organization, some of whom have a long history of social movements and whose presence is expected, predictable, and normal. But the singularity of the head of the cortège lies in its generic character, which evades capture by any identity. In it, people are encountering others who they should never meet under the normal course of things, whose assigned positions appear radically incommensurate. What could be more worrisome for power than to observe (with an impotence proportionate to its brutality) the practical weaving-together of those very bodies it busies itself keeping apart? The CGT activist who clashes with the police instead of strolling along behind his union’s sound truck, the university professor who dons a hoodie and swimming goggles instead of signing a petition and once again separating speech from gesture, the student who leaves her classroom to go join the employees on strike, the retiree who braves the tear gas: so many uncontrollable lines of flight, so many miraculous journeys. If becoming-revolutionary means anything, it is precisely this assumption of the *clinamen*, this self-abandonment, this uncompromising engagement with the possible opened up by the situation.

“What Empire demands is not that each conforms to a common law, but that each conforms to his own particular identity. Imperial power depends on the adherence of bodies to their supposed qualities or predicates in order to leverage control over them.”

Tiqun, *Introduction to Civil War*

That everyone *remains in their place*—this is the injunction of the dominant order. However, the concept of form-of-life, which to our eyes seems helpful for grasping the collective *élan* at work in this ongoing experiment [or: experience]⁸, designates precisely an attraction, an inclination, a taste that exceeds (through the intervention of an eventual contingency) any identifying grasp, any substantial fixation. The form-of-life is a free use of predicates, one that suspends, deactivates, and destitutes them. Every objective determination is hereby rendered inoperative. Trade unionists, students, precarious workers, the unemployed, workers, intellectuals, activists, artists, youth from the *banlieus*: the head of the cortège embodies the neutral and anonymous coalescence, the becoming-anyone of this whole human multiplicity whose specific origins find themselves locally and punctually suspended. As Agamben put it, “a form-of-life is that which ceaselessly deposes the social conditions in which it finds itself living.”⁹

To our eyes, a similar logic occurred in the refusal of work that took place on a mass scale during the labor struggles of the early 1970's in Italy. What was at issue was not defending the identity of the workers, but negating it, materially destroying it. Whereas the union bureaucracies claimed to win better working conditions, thereby maintaining the worker in his alienated function as laborer, in his submission to the hierarchy of the boss, autonomous proletarians struggled against work itself through an entire series of offensive practices, from sabotage to absenteeism, all of which testified to a refusal on the part of the working class to reproduce itself as an available labor force, i.e., as capital. To refuse work, means to be extraneous to the relationship of production, to struggle against one's own class identity, against all that is perceived as a negation and a dispossession of one's existence. In

8 In French *expérience* can mean both experience and experiment.

9 Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, Stanford, 2016, Part IV.

short: “to struggle against production and against the command of the market [*le commandement d'entreprise*], to negate ourselves as working class and hurl ourselves into an attack on state power.”¹⁰ From which we draw the following conclusion: if the enduring operation of power is to impose upon us a fixed set of predicates, from which are derived a series of specific behaviors, then the primordial gesture of liberation is a desubjectifying one that aims to subvert its own social identity.

«To assume a form-of-life means to be more faithful to our penchants than to our predicates.”¹¹ For weeks now, we’ve witnessed the unforeseeable encounter of bodies sharing a single form-of-life, a single penchant for direct emancipation, open antagonism, insurrectional audacity. That this has transpired through the reappropriation of mass violence (the symptom of an increasingly diffuse radicality), i.e. by the destitution of its centralized monopoly by the state, should no longer surprise us.

Obviously, the whole question now is whether this fabric of political friendships will be able to produce its own war machine, and overcome the momentary culmination inevitable at the present stage. If everyone simply returns to their old existence (prior to the event), if the bodies that today are affected by a common power resume their atomic separation, this movement will have been a mere convulsion without consequence. It is up to us to deepen these material and affective bonds, which right now are merely embryonic, and to give them a duration, an organizational consistency. To build and strengthen our Party: that is the task of the coming phase. By which we mean, to follow the line along which forms-of-life grow, to assume the becoming-common these networks of affinity, and to invent, far from all all vertical hierarchies, a new strategic operator.

We can, therefore we must.

-A musician from the head of the *cortège*.

10 Marcello Tari, *Autonomie! Italie, les années 1970*, La Fabrique

11 Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War*, 23.

