Resistance is the motor of history. Again and again we revolt against everything that exploits, oppresses, outrages, and depresses us; again and again our revolts are re-absorbed, becoming new conventions, new confines, new systems of control. Buried in the sedimentary layers of our ancestors’ defeat it’s easy to forget what produced these structures, and can tear them down again: our great unruliness.

“If I find in myself a desire which nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

–C.S. Lewis
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“Today civilization is indeed in a critical stage ... all traditions are used up, all beliefs abolished. Everything contributes to sadden people of good will. We shall struggle in the night, and we must do our best to endure this life without too much sadness. Let us stand by one another, call out to each other in the dark, and do justice as often as opportunity is given.”

—P.J. Proudhon
one of the consistent themes of this magazine is the way the history of capitalism is shaped by our resistance. We shut down a city hosting a meeting of capitalist bigwigs; they move the next meeting to an island. We steal, vandalize, and riot; they set up surveillance cameras throughout entire cities. We win concessions in the workplace; they ship the jobs themselves overseas. We’ve used to thinking of the ruling class as the protagonists of history, inflicting their innovations upon us, but one could as easily frame the rest of us as the motor of history, and their supposed innovations as a desperate scramble to keep up.

The upshot of this is that every time we take on the capitalistic system and lose, all our efforts are turned against us. The hand that invented a new musical paradigm to match its radical message becomes the model for the next wave of corporate clones. Innovations in shopping technology and computer hacking return as the backbones of new security systems. The unions our ancestors fought to set up have become yet another shackle on today’s workers. Ninety years ago the Ukraine came close to anarchist revolution, and the anarchist movement there today has yet to finish paying off the tremendous effort of our forebears. Anarchists there now have the right to live with the aftermath of that defeat.

For what it’s worth, we still think that the anarchist project will return to the forefront of history in our lifetime. We’re not eager to set anyone up for disappointment, but we still believe that there are tremendous opportunities ahead—we even think we can win, whatever that means. But in case some readers don’t find this narrative convincing or compelling, let’s try and simplify the entire story of the impending Final Battle. In this alternate version, things are getting worse and worse, but they won’t hot for centuries to come. If you think industrial capitalism is bad now, wait until it’s had another hundred years to devastate the biosphere and program human- ity. A long night is descending, and who knows when or if it will end. According to this narrative, our resistance move- ments are in a steady decline punctuated by brief flashes of defiance. If this is the case, we’ll be better off now while we still can, so there can be some memory of freedom, some rumor of resistance in the darkness ahead. It might be just you and a friend—every stolen moment and thrown brick is a beacon of hope in the gathering gloom, all the more precious for being so isolated and unlikely.

Imagine the following: all resistance to the fringe, those who carried on fighting were bound to be marginal. All the accomplishments of those movements, their grassroots street battles and private grudge matches with the authorities, could never compare to the brush with collective liberation so many experienced in 1968. But the squatters and punks succeeded in keep- ing alive an ember of resistance until it could ignite a new explosion—as the black bloc did in Seattle 1999, and the defense of Ungdomshuset did last year in Denmark.

When the renegades of Paris 1968 coined their famous slogan about the paving stones, they were implying that the world of their dreams lay buried beneath the generations of defeat that comprise capitalist history—but that all it took to uncover that world was to resist. Now those paving stones are covered over with asphalt. At the high points of our efforts today, we can barely tear up the asphalt to reveal the paving stones beneath—but that’s not so bad when you remember what those paving stones were used to do forty years ago. Perhaps we’ve lost ground, but the paving stones are still down there, and perhaps below them the beach as well. We can fight, we can create and live out moments that compare with the resistance of our forebears—the stories in this issue of Rolling Thunder prove this. It’s incredible how difficult it has been to kill our spirits, even with cameras everywhere, grand juries subpoenaing everyone, and police on every corner.

Some anarchists still believe—somebody’s bound to —this victory is right around the corner: or, if not victory, then peak oil, industrial collapse, the end of the world, whatever it takes to excuse us from the daunting task of changing things ourselves. For our part, we’re not con- vinced of this, but that doesn’t diminish our appetite for the struggle one bit. If we’re not going to see the other side of capitalism and hierarchy for a thousand years, we think it’s all the more important to fucking go for it right now. One anarchist, one revolution.

The Overseas, Riots Issue:

Legend has it that an episode of a popular British television show called “Quincy” once featured a fictional character dressed as punk rockers. Afterwards, the story goes, media-generated “punk rockers” appeared who were not connected to any social continuum, who had become punks under the influence of the mainstream media. Other punks dubbed them Quincy Punks. The episode launched a generation of Quincy Insurrectionists. Quincy Punks have beenLots breaking up pavements to fling at police.
Glossary

of Terms, part the fifth

Autonomist Marxist—Perhaps the most telling difference between anarchists and Marxists is that the latter tend to associate themselves with one thinker’s program—Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Mao, Marx himself—while the former regard thinking as a collective process, taking for granted that a good line of inquiry doesn’t need a big-name theorist to validate it. This focus on intellectual property and leadership is doubtless interconnected with the notorious authoritarianism of most self-proclaimed Marxists; all the same, there are some who maintain that Marxism is compatible with autonomy and horizontalism. But it’s not enough for them simply to champion autonomy, horizontalism, and the revolutionary seizure of the means of production; they still have to drop the name of the foremost authority on communism, like Christians citing the Good Book for legitimacy.

Bad Neighborhood—From a class perspective, a neighborhood without a gate; from an economic perspective, an area where people gather without spending money; from the vantage point of the white suburbs, anywhere you can see people of color smiling.

Beat Cops—Please.

Beat Poets—Hell, beat them too.

Border—One way to create the illusion of a community when people share no real connection or common interest is to establish a boundary and accuse outsiders of violating it. This accusation implies that before the violation, the rightfully included lived together in purity, tranquility, and belonging. There was no such thing as America before immigrants, for example, but you’d never know it listening to racists and nationalists. It is common sense that boundaries create transgressors—but one might as easily say that the invention of transgressors creates boundaries, which would be impossible without them.

Community—The sum of all the individuals and relationships in a social milieu—that is to say, none of them in particular; therefore, at worst, the abstraction for which any of them may be sacrificed.

Death Penalty—The fact that the state occasionally takes life wholesale can’t help but discourage people from complaining about the economy taking their lives piecemeal. This practice is regarded as barbaric (see figure i.), of course, so it is generally inflicted upon those who have been demonized as more barbaric: “Sure it’s scary we have so much power we can kill you if we want—but wouldn’t it be worse for monsters such as this one to have that power over you?” The average politician owes a lot to rapists and murderers—without them, he might have to answer for the subtler forms of rape and murder he countenances.

Democracy—Three wolves and six goats are discussing what to have for dinner. One courageous goat makes an impassioned case: “We should put it to a vote!” The other goats fear for his life, but surprisingly, the wolves acquiesce. But when everyone is preparing to vote, the wolves take three of the goats aside. “Vote with us to...”

Cover art courtesy of Packard Jennings (www.centennialsociety.com).

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rollingthunder@crimethinc.com
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make the other three goats dinner,” they threaten. “Otherwise, vote or no vote, we’ll eat you.”

The other three goats are shocked by the outcome of the election: a majority, including their comrades, has voted for them to be killed and eaten. They protest in outrage and terror, but the goat who first suggested the vote renews them: “Be thankful you live in a democracy! At least we got to have a say in this!”

Fifth—In the words of anthropologist Mary Douglas, dirt is “matter out of place”: that is to say, filth is a moral category rather than a physical condition (see figure ii.). Small wonder it is associated with immigrants, poor people, manual laborers, hoboes, dissidents, and the insane. One might as easily consider deformity, perfume, aftershave, hair gel, and other chemical additives out of place, not to mention concrete and asphalt.

Gildal Village—Pro football fans who visit certain parts of Africa will notice a surprising number of people wearing shirts advertising teams that have lost the Super Bowl. This is because every year, in preparation for the big game, corporations print tremendous quantities of shirts for both teams; at the conclusion of the game, the winning team’s shirts immediately go on the market while the other shirts are shipped overseas to the losers, globally speaking, presumably as a tax write-off. This is what it means to globalize the capitalist village without redressing its imbalances: the wrong side of the tracks now encompasses entire continents.

Identity—A construct for emphasizing the differences between one designated group and others (see Border) while suppressing and obscuring the differences between individuals within those groups (see We).

Ignorance—In Delhi, the poor must walk everywhere, pushing through the crowds that throng—and in some cases dwelt on—the sidewalks. There, one sees poverty close up—fostered injuries, untreated illnesses, chronic malnourishment, despair and desperation. Those with a little money in their pockets can ride in a rickshaw or taxi, rendering the streets a less troubling blur. The truly wealthy move in limousines and private airplanes from one city to another starboard to starboard. The truly wealthy move in limousines and private airplanes from one city to another. The truly wealthy move in limousines and private airplanes from one city to another.

Privilege means insulation from the effects of one’s own actions as well as other inconveniences; often, of those who contribute the most to suffering and devastation are the least aware of it. Who knows more about waste disposal plants—the people who discuss them in boardrooms, or the ones who work in them and live next to them?

Immorality—Stories have the greatest impact on those who tell them, magazines on those who publish them, records on those who record them, pictures on those who paint them. To argue for participatory decision-making, the decentralization of power, and the abolition of the division of labor is simply to acknowledge this.

Injustice—Some allege that polyamory is simply a way for men to have sex with a lot of women without being accountable to any of them. This is unusual, considering that overt polyamory seems to be most prevalent in contexts in which women are comparatively empowered and accountability is valued at a premium. In fact, traditional patriarchal social forms (see Monogamy) already offer sexists men a model for having sex with different women without being accountable, which has worked well enough for them since the days of the Old Testament.

Mediation—Mediated experience is characterized by alienation from the surrounding world and one’s own sensory and emotional responses. It can result from use of an external intermediary such as a television or the internet, or one might also describe it as an orientation one develops to the world when one is used to experiencing everything through intermediaries.

Picture the first human beings to land upon the Galápagos islands—the unfamiliar plants and animals, the untouched wilderness, the hot sun and salty breeze. Compare his or her new experiences to those of the wealthy tourists that visit the islands today. The latter are used to experiencing everything through intermediaries. Picture the first human beings to land upon the Galápagos islands—the unfamiliar plants and animals, the untouched wilderness, the hot sun and salty breeze. Compare his or her new experiences to those of the wealthy tourists that visit the islands today. The latter are used to experiencing everything through intermediaries.

Contrary to bourgeois mythology, the greater a person’s wealth and privilege, the less likely it is that he or she will be well-informed about reality.

Obligation—On Christmas Eve, 1974, an informal truce broke out between German and British troops stationed across from each other in Belgium. The Germans began by decorating the trees across their trenches with candles, then started singing Christmas carols, notably Silent Night. The British troops responded with English carols, and both sides shouted Christmas greetings across the decimated wasteland that lay between them. A few brave soldiers stuck their heads above the fortifications and, not being fired upon, tentatively made their way forward to meet in the middle of No Man’s Land. More followed, and soon the enemy combatants were exchanging gifts—whiskey, jam, cigars, chocolate—and warm embraces.

The surprise truce enabled both sides to recover the bodies of their slaughtered comrades, who had been left rotting where they had fallen in No Man’s Land. Soldiers of both armies joined in funerals and mourned the dead together. The following day everyone gathered for a football match in the open field; it was a close game, and there was much good cheer and camaraderie.

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Not to say we want bourgeois tourists to be free to run wild across the Galápagos the same way they have rampaged across the rest of the world—or the contrary, we want the entire world to be free to run wild, so no one has to go nowhere across the planet to see a vibrant and unique ecosystem—and that’s bound to involve some inconveniences for the bourgeois. For more outrages, see the Papillon review near the end of this issue.
We

Mark Twain famously opined that the only people who should use the word “we” are editors and people with tapeworms, but to our knowledge no one has yet undertaken a serious analysis of the power dynamics hidden within this single syllable. “We” sounds so egalitarian, so communal and participatory, when more often than not it refers to unapologetically hierarchical and constraining social configurations. Fascism, let us remember, is also a form of collectivity.

In our preliminary research, we have already discovered several variants of “we,” though this is hardly an exhaustive list:

The leader’s We: “. . . and we will give . . .

The executive’s We: “We’ve got produc . . .

The boss’s We: “We need to mop this . . .

The babysitter’s We: “Are we a little . . .

The writer’s We: “I have slipped out my bedroom window. Off the roof. I . . .

The activist’s We: “Whose streets? Our streets? Whose, precisely?

The party faithful We: “Now that the factories are in the hands of the workers, we can commence building the paradise on earth Mankind deserves!” [shortly before a one-way trip to Siberia]

Zamyatin’s We: An undated novel that offered much of the inspiration for George Orwell’s 1984.

Some forms of We refer to entirely mythical social bodies: the patriot’s We, for example, thoughtlessly includes everyone who happens to have citizenship in the nation, even if some of them consider themselves enemies of the state. Other forms, such as the We of identity politics, seek to create self-conscious social bodies by premising a mythical commonality on the basis of circumstantial evidence.

Many different forms of collective process are hidden within “We.” In the field of the arts, these range from plagiarism—in which two or more parties are involved, but a single one makes the decisions without any regard for the others’ desires—to corporate journalism, which is practically no different! In the world of politics, these include the democratic We—“We voted to kick out 40% of our membership”—and the consensus-based We: “We took four weeks to compose a paragraph I could have written in three minutes!”

No anarchist discussion of the word We could be complete without an examination of the propagandist’s We. This is a distant relative of the “royal” We, in that it’s not a We at all. The propagandist’s We is most popular among radicals who lack the social skills to collaborate with anyone, yet wish to sound as if they single-handedly constitute a coherent popular movement. A diligent genealogist might trace its history from the mission statements of Bakunin’s imaginary secret societies through the “FC” of the Unabomber Manifesto right up to the worst of current radical yellow journalism. At best, this We is wishful thinking; at worst, it is the We of the would-be despot, who fantasizes about fielding an army of automatons because he cannot imagine any other kind of relationship.

Given all this ambiguity, what proper use remains for the word “We”? We? (There it is, “we!”) I would like to direct the reader to the famous joke in which Tonto and the Lone Ranger are set upon by a bloodthirsty horde of so-called Indians:

“Looks like we’re in trouble, old pal,” the Lone Ranger observes.

to which Tonto replies: “What do you mean, ‘we’, white man?”

Mother told me we had to stay inside for a few days. I thought it was because of another sandstorm. The sand blows everywhere here, and blinds you. It prickles the windowpanes as I am trying to sleep.

I want to go outside because the neighbor has peacocks that stand on his roof and watch me play and I can show them things, like my cartwheels. They pay a great deal more attention to me than my brother does. And I want to go visit Fatima. She lives inside the huge walls across the street. She wears my favorite dress that I make Fatima look like embered coal in the middle of fire. Father explains that this means one man, and all the men who like him, are making another man, and all the men who like him, move out of his house. Father says that the new men will become the new government and everyone one must wait in their homes until they are done.

I ask Father, What do they do once they move into the house? Do they things for the country? Like what? Like build roads and make laws. I think about Niger. I think about the sand-swept Sahara and the camels and nomadic people. It strikes me that roads disappear, like everything else, under sand and that laws mean as much to nomadic peoples as they do to a four-year-old. And I become an anarchist.

Outside Bluemont, Virginia, mid-1980s

I breathe in the mud below me, the moss. I note to myself that licities grow where there is good water and good air. Mr. Jenkins taught me that I unfold my handana and eat my rations—a small sandwich cut into triangles by my mother. I eat it, confident that if need be, I can survive off mushrooms, though I really don’t like them. I could always eat the berries near the bus stop, too. I will find a hollowed out tree to live in, and befriend a crow, and if I can’t find a crow, one of those brownish birds will do. I can start fires rubbing together sticks and, failing that, I can find my brother, who has a lighter, even though he is not supposed to. I am wild. I am heathen. I am imagination. I am an anarchist.

Washington, DC, 2001

I have been pushed down from behind—the backs of my legs are screaming obscenities as they buckle under the blows of a baton. My face is on the pavement and there is a hand that must belong to a giant holding the back of my skull. I can only see black boots tethered with tight laces. These are also enormous, and it feels like there are dozens of them. I can feel pieces of asphalt lifting from the road and implanting into my cheek. Suddenly Jon’s face is in front of mine. One eye is pressed shut against the ground, but the other is focused on me. He is all I can see now. He is two inches from my face. He is grinning wildly.

There is spit coming out the side of his mouth, and the rest is teeth. Jon has enormous teeth. I realize I feel small, between the gargantuan hand on the back of my head, the big boots, and Jon’s teeth. He starts counting down. Five, four, three . . . What are we counting to? I find myself counting, also. That’s what you do when someone is staring at you unblinking and counting. Two . . . one! We are now running and there are hands on us, but proportionate hands, hands without gloves, and we are spraying. I didn’t know my legs could do this. And there is yelling behind us. And sirens, and shit, as far as I know, there are tanks and guns and fucking bombs. So I keep running. We all do. I feel safe among anarchists.
Dear Rolling Thunder readers,

Sometimes I think I am a hopeless romantic. I’m pretty sure my friends are certain I am. One of those talking stories that pleases situations and evokes action. I often say that you make my words with a broad stroke of irony. I love the Steve Miller Band for their song, “Space Cowboy,” I love my mom’s Brylcreem, and I love and you making love to me.” You tearing apart the house and then “making love to me.” No one to turn to. No one to tell. Fuck you. But this isn’t happening anymore. From now on I’m going to fight like a girl just like you trained me to.

You made me everything that I am today and you will be sorry.

New Orleans, LA, 1998

I watch from the armchair as the fireman comes in from work and puts his coat on a chair. He stands in the doorway to the dining room and watches my mother as she bends to set the table. He does this each night, with a half-crocked smile on his face—he watches her move for a moment and his eyes soften, his cheeks turn to felt, his lips curl. Today, he did not fight with me. He did not take a stand. Today there were no fiery words flung, no marches, no protests. Today perhaps nothing happened that didn’t also happen yesterday. But at 4:45 every morning my father falls in love again, like he has for thirty-five years. There is nothing you can make a family out of the food from the garden. I sink back into the valley I have dug between the rows of beans and let gravity have its way with me. I have become . . .

Chapel Hill, NC, 2001

That motherfucker. That motherfucker. I pull myself up.

That motherfucker.

I call Cito. I don’t even tell Cito. I don’t even cry and I don’t know where I am so I cannot tell him where to find me. All I can say is don’t beat him up don’t beat him up and I am pleading with Cito who has never said he will do this and hasn’t actually said anything except “Where are you?” and I say don’t beat him up.

Because I’m going to beat him up this time. Because I’m not even hurt anymore. You hovered over me with your back arched and your pants around your ankles saying “just if you would feel it like you used to . . . hold still and feel how you love me.” But this is all I remember from you. This is all I remember— you slapping me so my cheeks burned and you “making love to me.” You tearing apart the house and then “making love to me.” No one to turn to. No one to tell. Fuck you. But this isn’t happening anymore. From now on I’m going to fight like a girl just like you trained me to.

I am twelve and aware that my dirty mouth is no big deal but I am twelve and aware that my dirty mouth is no big deal compared to this shit. My father opens his mouth to tell me not to cuss, and I give him a look, and he knows not to say anything . . . because we are aware of what I am.

Letters

Andy Stepanian is serving a three year sentence for alleged conspiracy to violate the International Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, as a result of efforts to shut down the-animal-testing-corporation Huntington Life Sciences.

Andrew Stepanian #26950-009 FCI Butner Medium II Federal Correctional Institution P.O. BOX 1300 Butner, NC 27509

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If they can redirect control of oil out of Iran through shipping hands and into the hands of US affiliates, thereby stunting the growth of China, the feared future “big dog” in the Middle East, they can “do it big,” providing and Middle Eastern springboard for the big plan to “democratize” the Arab world. This situation companies don’t “do it big” overseas, they “do it big” at home well. Big houses, big cars, big things with neon signs to advertise them. Big institutions, big police forces, big county courts, big state courts, big federal courts, and big prisons. In fact, recent research shows that the American “prison industrial complex” is the next largest growing industry in this country, second only to courier services like UPS, DHL, and Logistics. Both private and government run prisons have four times the labor at what is legally considered slave wages. This has led to the increased priva-
profit when work that would otherwise cost upwards of $18-30 per hour per employee can be obtained for 12 cents an hour per inmate. Major corporate conglomerates are getting involved directly with prison policy, building facilities within the walls of prison compounds and creating profits for the prison, the state and federal government, and even more for the company and its client contracts.

Often the company will operate under a fake name and use a “holding company” name for a ticker symbol so that the public may invest. Such is the case in my cage, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, where a “private” company (whose name I cannot include in this article, grrr…) operates many facilities that take on specific tasks (which I can’t specifically name, grrr…). This produces a variety of products (under different brand names, grrr…), at times caters to government or private contracts, and all the while trades on the open market under the “public holding company” name (whose I cannot include unless it earns more). Nevertheless, these companies “do big” business. I just think of how “big” your profits can be if you don’t have to pay workers. What happens when it is illegal to unionize and illegal to refuse work, illegal to be late? You get to keep your shop open around the clock, your workers keep coming in, and even when you give them bonuses like a pack of Nutty Bars from the prison store you’re still saving $12-$29 an hour. That’s BIG savings! Size-wise these facilities are always big, like 10-acre concrete boxes filled with bustling people.

A friend of mine recently wrote me recounting her experience in accompanying my mutual friend as he voluntarily surrendered himself to the Bureau of Prisons. She said that these places are solid examples of “everything we hate.” She recalled saying to herself, “what the fuck are we doing? What the fuck are we doing?” I remember feeling the same way when I walked myself in about a year ago. Her words were a poetically echo of the feelings that rang through me for over a week when I surrendered myself. My heart wept along with hers, and with our friend who surrendered himself. Those times evoked a feeling in me that I used to shudder at as it would leave the mouths of pessimistic folks. A feeling that there was too much evil out there, a feeling of being consumed, a feeling like drowning. I felt a tremendous weight on my shoulders and a fear that my efforts were noble but not more than a blemish on the face of evil. I want so much more for this life. I want more for others, not just me, not just humans, everything… Our lives are fucking remarkable and there is evidence of such everyday.

Every day has its ups and downs. This is true everywhere, but in prison it seems to be even more exaggerated. The July 4th meal helped me paint a picture of the “do it” consumption that embodies everything that is wrong with our culture, right inside the theater of the prison chow hall. As a spectator, I can drown in my disgust and smile more pessimistic and jaded, or I can relish the good points on this rollercoaster ride. I remember one point so nice that as I write this I know it will just provide more evidence for my friends’ position that I am in fact a hopeless romantic.

My job in the prison has me doing a bunch of silly tasks: mostly I sweep the sidewalks on the compound, sometimes I clean the tables and set up chairs in the visiting room, other times I move boxes into the prison industrial facility. Because this prison has only been open a year, it’s not yet fully operational. One day my co-workers and I moved boxes into an industrial space the size of a shopping mall. It was empty and quiet. We had a cart to wheel the boxes in, a dolly flatbed bottom with hard plastic wheels and a handle to guide it. After we unloaded the boxes, the other inmates and I got eerily quiet and a smile came over my face. You see, this industrial facility is what makes the prison profitable, and here it sits, idle. When it was built it was supposed to serve as a “411 call center” for people who want to buy products from the distribution service provided by the private company that uses prison labor, but something happened on the way. There was a previous failed attempt at a similar call center at another prison, and it appeared that I am not the only “hopeless romantic.” Some inmates with lengthy sentences who enjoy the company of ladies had trouble getting off the phone with female customers. This apparently never made it into the BOP’s calculations when building these prison call centers, and even today if you listen carefully in this empty box you can hear an echo from yesteryear saying “oops.”

We all laughed as we unloaded the boxes. We were convinced big brother BOP was trying to make the space seem useful by filling it with cardboard cubes of great importance. We were black, white, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern—men with all of the racial tensions of the prison complex—and we laughed together and smiled together. The cart was now empty and one of my co-workers, a white man with swastikas on his arm, climbed aboard the cart and stood like Michael J. Fox atop the van in “Teen Wolf.” A young African-American kid began to push the cart across this empty sea of concrete floor. He too jumped on board. The hard plastic wheels clicked as they rolled over the cracks that divided one section of concrete from another. Click-click, click-click. We all smiled, we all laughed, and in this moment we were free. Above us were the large plate glass windows where the corporate guys would have been supervising the hundreds of phone receptionists, below us and to all sides was a vast empty space now echoing with clicks and laughter.

I felt like I did when my mom took me to my first fireworks show. I was seeing “everything we hate” collect dust and become the space for box cart races and laughter—and a space to destroy a once-tense racial dynamic. I stood there and took it all in: the echoes, the laughter, the dust bunnies on the floor. Because of the prior failed attempt to create a prison call center, the private company offering this service could not find another client. They haphazardly went ahead and built the space in hopes that another client would come along, but to no avail. I wondered what this famed Paul Bunyan did when his spaceship crashed out of space. He stood there with swastikas on his arm, climbed aboard the cart and stood like Michael J. Fox atop the van in “Teen Wolf.”

“Victory” is a word that we are often taught to fear. No one is feeling they contributed much to it. I want to suggest an alternative interpretation. Let me lay out three initial propositions here:

1) Oddly though it may seem, the ruling classes live in fear of us. They appear to still be haunted by the possibility that, if average-Americans really get wind of what they’re up to, they might end up hanging from trees. I know it seems implausible, but it’s hard to come up with any other explanation for the way they go into panic mode the moment there is any sign of mass mobilization, and especially mass direct action, and usually try to start some kind of war to distract attention.

2) In a way, though, this panic is justifiable. Mass direct action is the biggest problem facing direct action movements is that we don’t know how to handle victory.

This might seem an odd thing to say because a lot of us haven’t been feeling particularly victorious of late. Most anarchists today feel the global justice movement was kind of a blip: inspiring, certainly, while it lasted, but not a movement that succeeded either in putting down lasting organizational roots or transforming the contours of power in the world. The anti-war movement was even more frustrating, since anarchists and anarchist tactics were largely marginalized. The war will end, of course, but that’s just because wars always do. No one is feeling they contributed much to it.

I want to suggest an alternative interpretation. Let me lay out three initial propositions here:

1) Oddly though it may seem, the ruling classes live in fear of us. They appear to still be haunted by the possibility that, if average-Americans really get wind of what they’re up to, they might end up hanging from trees. I know it seems implausible, but it’s hard to come up with any other explanation for the way they go into panic mode the moment there is any sign of mass mobilization, and especially mass direct action, and usually try to start some kind of war to distract attention.

2) In a way, though, this panic is justifiable. Mass direct action—especially when organized on democratic lines—is incredibly
anarchist tactics and forms of organization: America of what we now consider standard nuclear
power. If so, the results are clear. Short-term
goals were almost never reached. Despite
numerous tactical victories (delays, utility
company strikes, legal injunctions), the plants
that became the focus of mass action
all ultimately went on line. Government
actions simply cannot allow themselves to be
seen to lose such a battle. Long-term
goals were also obviously not obtained.
But one reason they weren't is that the me-
ans were all already in place, immediately.
The actions did delegitimize the very
idea of nuclear power—raising public
awareness to the point that when Three
Mile Island melted down in 1979, it
doomed the industry forever. While plans for
Seabrook and Diablo Canyon might have
been cancelled, just about any other
then-pending plan to build a nuclear reactor
was, and no new ones have been
proposed for a quarter century.* There
was indeed a move towards conservation,
non-violence and feminist-inspired
direct democracy. All
movements dissolved almost immediately, but very
quickly and dramatically that even the me-
tal was not kept together. After all, states
are usually more than willing to take—if only because
protest-proof.) There is also always a small
risk some miscalculation will accidentally
trigger a nuclear Armageddon and destroy the
planet. But these are risks politicians
can never completely rule out. The whole thing can blow up in one's
face, as it did in Vietnam (hence the ob-
struction of all new nuclear plants, delegit-
mize the very idea of nuclear power and
nuclear weapons; and foible new forms
of non-violent resistance and feminist-
inspired direct democracy.

3) Long-Term Goals: (at least for the
more radical elements) smash the state
and destroy capitalism.

If so, then the movement was really
doomed to failure. It does not make sense to
keep trying to achieve what it can never
 Cushions. Clamshell’s immediate goal was
to block construction of a proposed nuclear power plant in Seabrook, New Hampshire.
While the alliance never ended up man-
aging an occupation so much as a series
d of dramatic mass-arrests, combined with jail
solidarity actions—invoking, at peak,
thousands of people around the world
in direct democratic lines—succeeded in
throwing the very idea of nuclear power
into question in a way it had never been
before. Similar coalitions began spring-
ing up across the country: the Palmetto
Alliance in South Carolina, Oystershell in
Maryland, Sunflower in Kansas, and most
famous of all, the Abalone Alliance in Cali-
foria, reacting originally to a completely
innocuous plan to build a nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon, almost directly on top of a major geographic fault line.

Clamshell’s first three mass actions, in
1976 and 1977, were wildly successful. But
it soon fell into crisis over questions
of democratic process. In May 1978, a
newly created Coordinating Committee
issued a statement that mobilized a last-minute
office to accept a three-month
nuclear freeze move;

In conclusion, the anti-nuclear
movement is not an end in itself, but
a means to a greater end. The ultimate
goal, in my opinion, is to create a society
where non-violent direct action is
accepted as a legitimate form of political
expression. To achieve this, we need
a movement that is not afraid of
direct action, that is not intimidated
by repressive forces, and that is not
afraid to challenge the status quo.

* Editors’ note: Unfortunately, federal and corporate
interests are taking advantage of long-overdue
nuclear waste cleanup to push through new
projects, despite the demonstrated failures
of the past. We must resist all efforts to
restart the nuclear industry and demand
the immediate dismantling of all existing
nuclear plants. The time to act is now!
We’re not living in utopia—we knew that much already.

The question is why we never notice our victories.
every thousand dollars owed four years ago, Latin America now owes fourteen bucks. Asia followed. China and India now both have no outstanding debt to the IMF and refuse to take out new loans. The boycott now includes Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and pretty much every other significant regional economy. Also Russia. The Fund is reduced to lording it over the economies of Africa, and maybe some parts of the Middle East and former Soviet sphere (basically those without oil).

It isn't clear that anyone particularly wants the tatters, the IMF no longer serves any obvious purpose for the Bonos and rich countries of the world, much hypocritical posturing on the part of their governments, European social protections are empty. Another important, perhaps, is our reluctance to even say the word “we.” The Argentine default, wasn’t that really engineered by Nestor Kirchner? What does he have to do with the globalization movement? I mean, it’s not as if his hands were forced by thousands of citizens rising up, smashing banks, and replacing the government with popular assemblies coordinated by the IMC. Or, well, okay, maybe it was. Well, in that case, those citizens were People of Color in the Global South. How can “we” take responsibility for their actions? I’m not immediately sure. Strategic debates ensued, but they were carried out, as always, indirectly, as arguments about race, privilege, tactics, as abstractions, not tactical victories. Strategic debates. Here, too, everything was made infinitely more difficult by the state’s recourse to war. It’s hard to talk about capitalism.

Myself, I think it’s reasonable for a movement to consider its accomplishments in global terms. These are not inconceivable. Yet just as with the anti-nuclear movement, they were almost all focused on the middle term. Let me map out a similar hierarchy of goals:

1) Short-Term Goals: blockades and shut down particular summit meetings (IMF, WTO, G8, etc.).
2) Medium-Term Goals: destroy the “Washington Consensus” around neo-liberalism, block all new trade pacts, democratize and ultimately shut down institutions like the WTO, IMF, and World Bank; disseminate new models of direct democracy.
3) Long-Term Goals: (at least for the more radical elements) smash the state and destroy capitalism.

Here again, we find the same pattern. After the miracle of Seattle, short-term—tactical—goals were rarely achieved. But this was mainly because faced with such a movement, governments tend to dig in their heels and make it a matter of principle that they shouldn’t be visibly defeated. This was usually considered much more important, in fact, than the success of the summit in question. Most activists do not seem to be aware that in a lot of cases—the 2001 and 2002 IMF and World Bank meetings for example—police ended the demonstrations so elaborately that they came very close to shutting down the meetings themselves, ensuring that many events were cancelled, the ceremonies were ruined, and nobody really had a chance to talk to each other. But the point was not whether trade officials got to meet or not. The point was whether the protesters could not be seen to win. Here, too, the medium-term goals were achieved to quickly that it actually made the longer-term goals more difficult. NGOs, labor unions, authoritarian Marxists, and much of the anti-globalization movement fell silent immediately after the protests. The IMF was reduced to lording over the economies of Africa, and maybe some parts of the Middle East and former Soviet sphere (basically those without oil).

No doubt the IMF was bankrupt if it can’t find someone willing to bail them out, but its clear that anyone particularly wants to. With its reputation as fiscal in tatters, the IMF no longer serves any obvious purpose for the Bonos and rich countries of the world, much hypocritical posturing on the part of their governments, European social protections are empty. Another important, perhaps, is our reluctance to even say the word “we.” The Argentine default, wasn’t that really engineered by Nestor Kirchner? What does he have to do with the globalization movement? I mean, it’s not as if his hands were forced by thousands of citizens rising up, smashing banks, and replacing the government with popular assemblies coordinated by the IMC. Or, well, okay, maybe it was. Well, in that case, those citizens were People of Color in the Global South. How can “we” take responsibility for their actions? I’m not immediately sure. Strategic debates ensued, but they were carried out, as always, indirectly, as arguments about race, privilege, tactics, as abstractions, not tactical victories. Strategic debates. Here, too, everything was made infinitely more difficult by the state’s recourse to war. It’s hard to talk about capitalism.

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Anarchists are best known for their failures. They lost the Spanish Civil War, the Soviets prevailed in Hungary ‘56, the Paris communards were shot to death, the status quo continued after May ‘68. And yet, far from trying to suppress these histories, these are the stories that anarchists recount. Even anarchist holidays tend to commemorate moments of dazzling defeat: Haymarket, Sacco and Vanzetti, Berkman’s botched assassination.

This is unusual. American patriots do not speak, with a gleam in their eyes, of the incredible number of battles that George Washington lost (and he lost almost as much as anarchists do). Instead he’s there at the bow of that boat, guiding the way through the expansive darkness as he crosses the Delaware river to victory. The prevailing holidays of the various nation-states, religions, and authoritarian movements we’ve grown up with do not generally harp on their failures. Instead, they celebrate Independence Days, Resurrections, and the Wars They Won.

This difference between the ways nationalists and anarchists talk about their histories seems fundamental. Of course, it’s possible that anarchists talk about defeat simply because they have no other histories to choose from.

Not only have we never had any notion or desire to win but not even any notion that there was anything to be won anywhere and then you know if I really think about it now to me the word winning seems exactly the same as dying.

—Nanni Balestrini, The Uncon
But I like to think that it’s because anarchists see past the tendency towards quantifiability—that they know there are moments in time, even preceding defeat, when people learn more about themselves, and feel a greater sense of inspiration from what they’re experiencing, than all the George Washingtons victoriously sailing across all the Delawares of the world.

Here’s a story about defeat.

I live in a city some would call a “high pressure zone”—a place with a thriving service sector and a centrality to the workings of the global economy. Real estate values here have been exploding for decades now, and I’m almost constantly dealing with the difficulty this presents.

The ways we choose to respond to difficulty are interesting. Cultures of all types are constantly institutionalizing certain responses, and to some extent the responses we choose often reflect cultural rules as much as anything else. Anarchists are not immune to this. If you’re hungry, the anarchist answer is dumpster diving. If you need space, the anarchist answer is squatting. Maybe it shouldn’t be this simple. We live complex lives in complex situations, which to some degree will always defy recipes and generalizations. Besides, trying the same things over and over again eventually causes them to lose their charm. Shouldn’t the anarchist response embody inspiration, dynamism, and experimentation in an unpredictable way?

At some point I started to think critically about my strategies for dealing with the high rents and impossible space constraints in the city where I live. The anarchist recipe of trying to squat the few empty buildings I could find didn’t really work in a town where the pressure is so high. I started to wonder instead about the possibilities of the ocean, where the harsh lines of property end and an appar.

It couldn’t continue, though. The weather was about to change, and there were things I wanted to do that required more space and consistency than my rooftop provided. Instead, as a result of all I’d discovered off shore in my sailing experiments, I resolved to try building a floating house along the downtown waterfront. The ocean would provide a lot of room and remain moor-or-less stationary, but which I could dock more mobile boats to. The home base for an emerging armada, with room for friends to build their own adjacent floating islands. Something that would provide a lot of room and remain moor-or-less stationary, but which I could dock more mobile boats to. The home base for an emerging armada, with room for friends to build their own adjacent floating islands.

I talked with some friends who were excited to try the same thing. We didn’t know anything about building float-

And so, with only a sense of inspiration under our belts, and the shape of my change completely.

Suddenly I was fiberglassing, caulkng, and epoxying. I was sanding, priming, and scraping. I was carrying dry-cot as my sworn enemy, and finding a fungus-hunting epic. I was going to sleep with sunburn on my face and waking up with sawdust in my hair. I felt strong at the end of the day with engine grease on my hands and root on my neck.

We both barely fit through the hole, but it opened up a rough sketch that was essentially a series of twelve- by eight-foot platforms, each floating on six sealed fifty-five-gallon drums. The idea was that the platforms could be built and floated one at a time. Then they would be joined together once they were in the water. From there, we could build structures on top of them.

And so, I went out to gather inspiration from what they’re experiencing, than from all the George Washingtons victoriously sailing across all the Delawares of the world.
project was disturbing him, and he assured me that he was interested in seeing me carry the thing through.

So a few nights later, some friends and I floated the first section—all alone on the derelict shore with only the moonlight glinting off the water to help us. It took five of us to flip it over and get it poised above the rising tide. It went in with a splash, and rode high. Seeing it actually float was amazing, and we all looked at each other with huge grins. We jumped on it, danced on it, and eventually just sat on it together as we talked and looked out over the bay. When it got late, we rowed it a little ways off shore and anchored it, where it would wait for other platforms to join it.

And so I spent the next week, gradually getting to know some of the other strange characters who had made this wreckage their home. The platforms slowly came together as we managed to find more and more barrels.

One day I came down to the shore, ready to put the finishing touches on another platform. But when I looked up, I noticed that the entire floating apparatus was gone. All that remained was an empty patch of water. With a shock, I searched up and down the shore, but saw no sign of it anywhere. Eventually I found some people fishing who said they’d seen a boat full of people with orange vests arrive, unmoor it, and tow it away.

I called the police and the coast guard before eventually determining that it had been done at the behest of a man named Hadley Prince, from the Port Authority.

Hadley Prince.

The name alone conjured images of some robber baron industrialist, twirling his handle-bar mustache with menace and condescendingly adjusting his top-hat. In reality, he was your average-looking bureaucrat with a demeanor that embodied the typical lack of sympathy. He admitted to having been the one who ordered the hit on my floating house, and when I showed him the relevant sections of the state code, (which prohibited him from taking such an action), he was very clear about his ability to do whatever he wanted—regardless of the law. When I pressed the matter further, he looked down at my highlighted stack of paper, paused, then stood up abruptly and shouted “Get the fuck out of my office!”

I wasn’t entirely surprised, but it felt terrible.

Objectively, this was defeat. In one swift move, my whole project had been destroyed by the Port Authority. And they had laughed in my face as they did it. It made me incredibly angry, and I did my best to express that contempt.

But in a way, I was prepared for it. Just like with the task of destroying capitalism, there were dizzying odds against it. It made me incredibly angry, and I did my best to express that contempt.

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We jumped on it, danced on it, and eventually just sat on it as we talked and looked out over the bay. When it got late, we rowed it a little ways off shore and anchored it, where it would wait for other platforms to join it.
You could go to prison for something you do, or something you did long ago. You could be framed and go in for something you had nothing to do with. Even if you’ve never broken a law, you could still go to prison—just reading these words makes you a suspect. The more people spend their lives in slavish obedience, the easier it is for the government to make an example of whomever they choose.

Look at the historical figures you respect—or maybe even your friends. If you follow the same path, chances are you’re going to prison too. Come to terms with this. Imagine your time in prison, what you will do, how you will handle it. You can go with dignity or you can go spinelessly, assisting your enemies and selling out your friends. You can go to prison for something you believe in, or you can go for no reason at all, never having stood up for yourself or anyone else.

You’re going to prison. Now that you realize this, you’re free. You can go to prison for whatever you want, you can do whatever you believe is right. Hell, if you’re careful, you may not go to prison for a long time.

If enough people figure this out, one day there will be no more prisons. As someone who is going to prison, you understand that day can’t come soon enough.
Green Scared?

For Those Who Came in Late... (for more information, try www.greenscare.org)

At the end of 2005, the FBI opened a new phase of its assault on earth and animal liberation activists. It was a campaign that involved deaths, arrests and indictments of several current and former activists. This offensive, dubbed Operation Backfire, was intended to obtain confessions for many of the unsolved Earth Liberation Front arsons of the preceding ten years. Of those subpoenaed and charged, eight might eventually cooperate with the government and inform on others in hopes of reduced sentences: Stanislas Meyerhoff, Kevin Tubbs, Chelsea Dawn Gerlach, Suzanne Savoie, Kendall Tankersley, Jennifer Kolar, Lacey Philippaum, and Darren Thurston (see sidebar). Four out of the twenty-person jury, during which it seemed certain they would end up serving decades in prison, until they were able to broker plea deals in which they had no active role in their actions for their apologies without providing information about others: Daniel McGowan, Jonathan Paul, Eike (aka Nathan Block), and Sadie (aka Josephine Overaker).

The months following the launch of Rolling Thunder, Issue Five, Spring 2008

The authors centralize the importance of intelligence and informants for repression and the personal attacks on activists and their supporters. The authors present the myriad ways in which the government has used Operation Backfire as a backdrop of government investigation, and use it as an example of the internal dynamics of the Eugene anarchist community, but we can look at how the authorities went about repressing it.

One useful resource for this inquiry is “Anarchist Direct Actions: A Challenge for Law Enforcement,” an article that appeared in Studies in Conflict & Terrorism in 2005, authored by Randy Burman of the University of South Florida and Chuck Titby of the Eugene Police Department. According to Jeff (“Free”) Luers, Titby was one of the cops who surveilled Free and his co-defendant Critter on the night of their arrest in June 2000. Titby has given press releases and speeches about the “green movement” to law enforcement groups, and was intimately involved in the Operation Backfire cases, even making statements to the media and providing a quote to the FBI press release at the end of the Oregon federal prosecution.

The paper’s article does not explicitly reference Eugene, Oregon at all. Besides Titby’s byline at the beginning, there’s no indication that the paper was written from Eugene. All the same, the article provides several important clues about how the government proceeded against the Oregon defendants and those who were perceived to support them.

The authors centralize the importance of information and informants for repression “criminalizing the criminal” while adding to the difficulty of obtaining them. In the case of grand jury subpoenas, anarchists regularly fail to comply, and support groups are standing by their commitments, regardless of what others do.

We can commend Thurston for the actions he took in defense of animals and the environment, but the most important round of struggle takes place not in the streets but in the courtroom, when the defendants and those who stand up in support of them are charged with criminal activity. The outcome of these cases will determine the future of direct action and not only the outcome for the individuals involved. As Thurston says in his statement, “I believe in the power of nonviolent resistance and have no regrets for the actions I took.” His words echo the sentiments of the entire anarchist and direct action movement.

The authors argue that the government’s use of informants has been a major focus of the Operation Backfire cases, and that it has been a threat to dissent and the maintenance of freedom. In contrast, non-cooperating Operation Backfire defendants have made their pleas public in their entirety; Thurston explains that he has not done the same for fear that this case would not be completely indicative of my cooperation and that he would be easily misunderstood by the majority of those who would hear about him.

As his cooperation is already a matter of intense controversy, it could hardly make matters worse for him to follow the non-cooperating defendants’ example. It’s also worth noting that non-cooperating defendants, who have been allowed to tell their plea but are not allowed to speak about it, are urging people not to support him, presumably for good reason.

At the conclusion of his statement, Thurston offers “his closest comrades” a limited apology for his decision to inform, admitting it “set a bad example” but placing responsibility on his choice for others’ shoulders: others cooperated first and made the case “unwinnable,” the government divided communities by spreading rumors, activists abandoned and vilified the cooperating defendants before they’d even decided whether or not to participate. He also suggests those without suspects accused of terrorism without ever specifying which ones. He does this if not a massive passive-aggressive self justification but of serious concerns about their conduct, he esteems it to the activist community to be more explicit.

In some anarchist circles, the initial onset of the Green Scare was met with a panic that paralyzed the response to the September 11 attacks. This, of course, was exactly what the government wanted: quite apart from bringing individual activists to “justice,” the government threatened to bring further charges against him. It’s been months since a new high profile felony case was brought against an environmental activist, though federal agents have been poking around in the Midwest. It’s time to begin laying down defenses from the past two years of government repression, to equip the next generation that will take the front lines in the struggle to defend life on earth.

Distinguishing between Perceived and Real Threats

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The Case of Darren Thurston, Government Informant

Darren Thurston recently released a lengthy statement presenting the history of Operation Backfire as he sees it and laying out what he apparently considers to be extenuating circumstances. He does not condone his decision to inform. The state can do anything to us—isolate us, threaten us with life-threatening health problems as a consequence of prison for almost a year and is doing so by destroying the atmosphere of any supposed solidarity that does not proceed from this premise. If this is not a matter of passive-aggressive self-justification but of serious concerns about their conduct, he esteems it to the activist community to be more explicit.

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warn that “investigators and law enforce- ment officers should be cautious during questioning not to divulge more to the subject about the case (via questions), than is learned in Portland about alcohol. Indeed, questions asked by grand juries turned up more than once in the pages of the Earth First! Journal, which was edited from Eugene for a time. It is extremely important to support those under investi- gation and keep abreast of investigators’ efforts. Some believe that the Backfire investigation only arrived at a position of real strength once such support started to weaken in Oregon.

Regarding infiltration, “Anarchist Direct Actions” advises that infiltration is made more difficult by the communist nature of the [anarchist] lifestyle (under constant observation and scrutiny) and the extensive knowledge held by many anarchists, which require a considerable amount of study and time to acquire. Other strategies for infiltration have been explored, but so far have not been successful. Discussion of these theo- ries in an open paper is not advisable.

What we know of the early Backfire investigation points to a strategy of gen- eralized monitoring and infiltration. While investigators used increasingly focused tools and strategies as the investigation gained steam—for example, sending “co-operating witnesses” wearing body wires to talk to specific targets—they started out by sifting through a whole demographic of counter-cultural types. Activist and punk houses as well as gathering spots such as bars were placed under surveillance—anarchists who drink should be careful about the way alcohol can loosen lips.

Infiltrators and informers targeted not only the most visibly committed anar- chists, but also bohemians who inhabited similar cultural and social spheres. Police accumulated tremendous amounts of background information even while failing to penetrate the circles in which direct action was organized. The approximately 30,000 pages of discovery in the Oregon cases contain a vast amount of gossip and background information on quite a few from the Eugene community.

A similar profiling methodology ap- pears to have been used in nearby Portland, Oregon. In March 2001, for example, a large-scale police raid was carried out on a house party attended by Portland punk rockers. The attendees were photographed and questioned about the Earth and Animal Liberation Fronts. Some were arrested and charged with kidnapping and assault on an officer—a standard over-charging which eventually led to plea deals. The defendants from the raid were videotaped at their court appearances by officers later identified as Gang Enforcement Unit members. In the aftermath of this raid, cops routinely han- dled punks on the street, demanding to be told whether they were anarchists.

In retrospect, it seems likely that such efforts were not meant simply to intimidate Portland’s punks, but to uncover informa- tion relevant to the anarchist and ALF/ELF cases of the time. This may have been a wrong step in the Backfire investigation, right now there’s no way to know. We do know, however, that “wide net” approaches by the state can be effective at stifling so- cially aware subcultures, even when they uncover no real links to radical action, by sifting through a whole demographic of potential suspects in which those affected by the raid came together in response, aiding each other, limiting the damage done, and taking advantage of the situation to draw attention to police activity.

Another point of speculation is the degree to which authorities fostered divi- sion and infiltration within radical circles in Eugene. This was a common CDNTELPRO tactic, and is probably still in use. Borum and Tilby hint at this in the final section of their paper, “Law Enforcement Strategies / Implications.”

Internal conflicts are another major source of vulnerability within the movement. The Dot (“Diversity of Tactics”) debate has already been addressed, but the movement also is struggling with a perceived lack of power among women, and the lack of institutionalization of ethnic minorities. This kind of conflict occurred three decades ago within the leftist revolutionary movement in the United States.

For those familiar with Eugene radical circles, this brings to mind the heated con- flicts over gender and feminism within that community. There is no concrete evidence that government operatives were involved in organizing such debates, and we should be careful not to jump to conclusions; such speculation can only assist the state by propagating paranoia. However, law enforcement from local to federal levels must have been aware of the vulnerabilities that opened up when real debates turned to goupthink and factionalism in Eugene. Tilby and his cohorts must have had such insights to their advantage as they devised anti-anarchist strategies.

The time Operation Backfire grand juries be- gan following up on real leads in Eugene, many who could have come together to oppose them were no longer on speaking terms. While this does not justify the lack of integrity shown by those who assisted grand juries, it does offer some context for why our grand juries weren’t resisted more effectively.

Borum and Tilby close their paper by urging investigators to display “patience and persistence”—and indeed, patience and persistence ultimately paid off in Op- eration Backfire. This is not to lend credi- bility to the notion that “The FBI always get their man.” The investigation was riddled with errors and missteps; plenty of other actions will never be prosecuted, as the authorities must not be so lucky because of their useful cooperation. But we must under- stand that repression, and resistance to it, are both long-term projects, stretching across years and decades.

According to some accounts, one of the most significant leads in Operation Backfire came from a naive request for police reports at a Eugene police station. According to this version, the police de- rived from this request that they should pay attention to Jacob Ferguson; Ferguson later became the major informant in these cases. It is less frequently mentioned that the police were accusing Ferguson of an arson he did not participate in! With Fer- guson, the unlikely happened and it paid off for the authorities to be wrong. Later on, when agents made their first arrests and presented grand jury subpoenas on December 7, 2005, two of those subpoe- nas were wrongly assumed to have been involved in attacks. Their subpoenas were eventually dropped, as the authorities gained the cooperation of more informants and eventually made moves to arrest Exile and Sadie.

The investigation was not as unstoppa- ble and dynamic as the government would have us to think, although the prosecution was adhered to no more closely. The FBI initially, under constant observation and surveillance, and with considerable weight of evidence, they obtained an arrest warrant for Jacob Ferguson, the unlikely happened and it paid off. In July of 2005, the unlikely happened and it paid off for the authorities to be wrong. Later on, when agents made their first arrests and presented grand jury subpoenas on December 7, 2005, two of those subpoe- 

The Green Scare cases show that cooperating with the government is never in a defendant’s best interest. On average, the non-cooperating defendants in Operation Backfire are actually serving less time in proportion to their original threatened sentences than the informants, despite the government’s efforts to make an example of them. If every arrestee understood the difference between what the state threatens and what it can actually do, far fewer would give up without a fight.
Law enforcement received its most significant breakthrough in the Backfire cases—thanks to an incorrect hypothesis—just before Free’s sentencing, in the period between anarchist jubilation and the shift to the defensive. The same fees that were incorrectly linked to Ferguson were used to justify Free’s stiff sentence, which intimidated some anarchists out of action. There was not enough revaluation, learning, and sharpening of skills, nor enough efforts at concentration; the retreat occurred by default. What would have happened if the Backfire investigation had continued under different circumstances, while radicals maintained their momentum? That would be another story. Its conclusion is unknown.

Putting up a Fight

Repression will exist as long as there are states and people who oppose them. Complete inervolatility is impossible, for governments as well as their oppo-
nents. All the infiltrators and informants of the Trast secret police were powerless to prevent the Russian revolution on 14 July, just as the East German Stasi were unable to prevent the fall of the Berlin Wall even though they had files on six million people. Revolutionary struggles can succeed even in the face of massive repression; for our part, we can minimize the effects of that repression by preparing in advance.

For many years now anarchists have focused on developing security culture, but security consciousness alone is not enough. There are some points one can never em-
phazise too much—don’t gossip about sensitive matters, share delicate information on a need-to-know basis, don’t surrender your rights if detained or arrested, don’t cooperate with grand juries, don’t tell other people out. But one can abide by all these dictums and still make crucial mistakes. If anti-repression strategies center only on what we should not talk about, we lose sight of the necessity of clear communication for communities in struggle.

State disruption of radical movements can be interpreted as a kind of “armed cri-
itique,” in the way that someone throwing a brick through a Starbucks window is a critique in action. That is to say, a successful use of force against us demonstrates that we had pre-existing vulnerabilities. This is not to argue that we should blame the victims in situations of repression, but we need to learn how and why efforts to destabilize our activities succeed. Our response should not start with jail support once someone has been arrested. Of course this is important, along with longer-term support of those serving sentences—but our efforts must begin long before, countering the small vulnerabilities that our enemy can exploit. Open discussion of problems—for example, gender roles being imposed in nominally radical spaces—can protect against un-
healthy resentments and schisms. This is not to say that every split is unproductive— sometimes the best thing is for people to go their separate ways; but that even if that is necessary, they should try to maintain mutual respect or at least a willingness to communicate when it counts.

Risk is relative. In some cases, it may be a good idea to lay low; in other cases, maintaining public visibility is viewed as too risky; when in fact noth-
ing could be more dangerous than with-
drawing from the public eye and letting momentum die. When we think about risk, we often picture security cameras and prison cells, but there are many more mis-
sious threats. The Operation Backfire defendants ended up with much shorter sentences than expected; as it turned out, the most serious risk they faced was not prison time, after all, but recantation and betrayal—a risk that proved all too real.

Likewise, we can imagine Eric McDavid, currently awaiting sentencing on con-
spiracy charges, idly discussing the risk factor of a hypothetical action with his supposed friends—who turned out to be two potential informants and a federal agent provocateur. Unfortunately, the really risky thing was having those discussions with those people in the first place.

Preparing for the Worst

Conventional activist wisdom dictates that one must not mix public and clandes-
tine activity, but Daniel McGowan’s case seems to contradict this. McGowan was not brought to trial as a result of the investigations based on his public organizing, but rather because he had worked with Jacob Ferguson, who turned snitch under police pressure. Though the government was especially eager to connect him on account of his extensive prisoner support work and organizing against the Republican National Convention, McGowan received tremendous public support precisely be-
cause he had been so visible†. Had he simply hidden in obscurity, he might have ended up in the same situation without the support that enabled him to weather it as successfully as he did—and without making as many important contributions to the anarchist movement.

Considering how many years it took the FBI to put together Operation Backfire and the prominent role of informants in so many Green Scare cases, it seems likely it is possible to get away with a lot, pro-
vided you are careful and make intelligent decisions about who to trust. McGowan’s direct action résumé, as it appears in the government arguments at his sentencing (see appendix), reads like something out of an adventure novel. One can’t help but think—just seven years, for all that! The other side of this coin is that, despite all their precautions, the Green Scare defendants did get caught. No matter how careful and intelligent you are, it doesn’t pay to count on not getting caught; you have to be prepared for the worst. Those who are considering risky direct action should start from the assumption that they will be caught and prosecuted; before doing anything, even before talking about it, they should ask themselves whether they could accept the worst possible consequences. At the same time, as the government may tar-
eget anyone at any time regardless of what they have actually done, it is important for even the most law-abiding activists—not to mention their friends and relatives—to think through how to handle being in-
vestigated, subpoenaed, or charged.

The Green Scare cases show that co-
operating with the government is never in a defendant’s best interest. On average, the non-cooperating defendants in Opera-
tion Backfire are actually serving less time in proportion to their original threatened sentences than the informants (see chart), despite the government engaging the entire repressive apparatus of the United States to make an example of them. Exile and Sade were threatened with over a thousand years in prison apiece, and are serving less than eight; if every arrestee understood the government had every reason to make an example of them, and that they did not have to give up without a fight.

* It does appear that Operation Backfire defendants could have done better at timing the flow of infor-
mation inside their circles. Rather than organizing in closed, consistent cells, the defendants seem to have worked in more fluid arrangements, with an enough crossover that once a few key participants were in closed, consistent cells, the defendants seem to have worked in more fluid arrangements, with an enough crossover that once a few key participants were
A court case is essentially a game of chicken. Defendants should not be intimidated by the initial charges brought against them; the state starts by threatening the worst penalties it possibly can, whether or not it can follow through, in hopes of intimidating the defendant into pleading guilty and informing.

In the United States legal system, a court case is essentially a game of chicken. The state must be able to demonstrate that it has the power to make the worst possible threat, or at least a threat that is impossible to reverse. Otherwise, the defendant could use that threat to negotiate a plea bargain.

The worst possible threat is the death penalty. In most states, the death penalty can only be imposed if there is no hope that the defendant committed the crime. This is known as the death-penalty mandate. If the defendant is unable to show that he committed the crime, then the state must either withdraw the death penalty or allow the defendant to enter a plea bargain. This is why most defendants are willing to enter a plea bargain even if they are innocent.

But the courts had to let them go free. The FBI botched that case so badly, it was essentially a hobby, with its parents begging him not to throw his life away and the system he fought against apparently denying the entirety of his present and future, it takes a powerful sense of right and wrong to resist selling out. In this light, it isn’t surprising that the chief complaint thread that links non-cooperating defendants is that practically all of them were still involved in either their communities or the anti-fascist communities. Daniel McGowan was ceaselessly active in many kinds of organizing right up to his arrest. Exile and Sadie were still committed to life against the state, if not political activity—a witness who attended their sentencing described their supporters as an overwhelmingly white body of black metal fans with branded boards and facial piercings. Here we see again the necessity of forging powerful, long-term communities with a shared culture of resistance; dropouts must do this from scratch, swimming against the tide, but it is not impossible. Human relationships are the backbone of such communities, not to mention secure direct action organizing. Again—unadressed conflicts and resentments, unbalanced power dynamics, and lack of trust have been the Achilles heel of count- less groups. The FBI keeps psychological profiles of targets, with which to weigh their weaknesses and exploit potential interpersonal fissures. The oldest trick in the book is to tell arrestees that their comrades already snitched on them; to weather this intimidation, people must have no doubts about their comrades’ reliability. “The Goldman witchhunts,” posters not-withstanding, anarchists aren’t situated to enforce a no-informing code by violent means. It’s doubtful that we could do such a thing without compromising some principles, anyway—when gangsters involved in illegal capitalist activity refuse to inform, it is they who have compromised their own interests; what exactly are one’s “own interests,” if not to live in a world without slaughterhouses and global warming? Cheaper hamburgers and air conditioning, slaughterhouses and global warming?

Prompt prisoner support is as important as public support for those facing grand juries. As one Green Scare defendant has pointed out, defendants often turn informant and then “find out” that they are not going to be exiled after all. Without reliable support, people will not wish to exile themselves from it by turning informant. For this to work, course, those who do inform on others must be excluded from our communities completely, telling the absolute truth; betraying others for personal advantage, they join the ranks of the police officers, prison guards, and executioners they assist. Those who have always been active in direct ac- tion together should first take time to get to know each other well, including each other’s families and friends, and to talk over their expectations, needs, and goals. You should know someone long enough to know what you like least about him or her before com- mitting to secure activity together; you have to be certain you’ll be able to work through the most difficult conflicts and trust them in the most frightening situations up to a full decade later.

Rolling Thunder, Issue Five, Spring 2008
Peifer began by stating that Daniel McGowan was pleading guilty to one count of conspiracy and arson charges related to actions at Superior Lumber in Glendale, Oregon and Jefferson Poplar Farm in Clatskanie, Oregon, and that his aliases had included Dylan Kay, Jamie Moran, Sorrel, Djenni, Rabid, Agent Tart Classique, and Agent Key Lime. Peifer said he has had lengthy involvement with many underground groups, including the Biotic Baking Brigade (BBB), California Croppers, Cropatistas, Reclaim the Seeds, Washington Tree Improvement Association, and Anarchist Golfers’ Association. Although many co-defendants in this case have said in court that they had never used the name “The Family,” Peifer said McGowan used it often and repeatedly.

Daniel, he said, was two different people; the one his family and friends knew, and his underground persona. He characterized Daniel as having a “Jekyll and Hyde” personality. He said that, like Kevin Tubbs who committed his first arson solo, in 1997 Daniel “acted alone,” breaking windows and spray painting “ALF” at a Macy’s in Brooklyn that sold furs, at Zamir Furs in Brooklyn, and at a business called “Evolution” that sold parts of endangered animals.

In 1998, Daniel moved to San Francisco where he met Suzanne Savoie. In November of that year, he threw a pie in the face of the Sierra Club president. Peifer said this was “more than a symbolic act,” and that by this time, Daniel had given up on mainstream environmentalism. That same month, Daniel pied the CEO of Novartis Seeds and the Dean of Natural Resources at UC Berkeley. The communiqués attributed the acts to the Biotic Baking Brigade. Peifer said that Daniel was associated with the group as late as 2004. The same year, Daniel targeted Fidelity Investments (for their investment in Occidental Petroleum) by throwing glass etching solution on their windows. In December, there was a power outage in San Francisco, and Peifer stated that Daniel took advantage of the opportunity to target the Bank of America with paint-filled balloons, “apparently just because it was a financial institution.”

In July 1999, Daniel performed reconnaissance at a UC-Berkeley plant research facility. He drew a diagram of the genetically engineered corn crop, which was then used by others to tear the crops up. Daniel was not there, Peifer said, because he was busy in Lodi, California with a group calling themselves the Lodi Loppers, destroying GE corn owned by Eureka Seeds. The communiqué for the action was written by Daniel. The same year, Daniel was involved in another action against genetic engineering with a group called Reclaim the Seeds. Near the end of 1999, Daniel moved to Seattle to begin preparing for the WTO ministerial—but, according to Peifer, “his work lived on” in a ‘zine called The Nighttime Gardener, posted on the Bioengineering Action Network’s website. Peifer said it was similar to the how-to guides written by Bill Rodgers, with instructions on how to attack research facilities and “destroy years of researchers’ work.”

While living in Seattle, Daniel and Suzanne Savoie traveled to Pullman, Washington to target a potato research facility, but the action was called off due to a vehicle breakdown. In November, three days before the WTO battle, there were attacks at two GE crop sites, in Puyallup, Washington and at the University of Washington (which Peifer called “prophetic”). Daniel wasn’t there because he was sick and denied writing the communiqué, but said that parts of it appeared to be based on his research. The communiqué references Toby Bradshaw, whose office was later targeted during the “Double Whammy” arson at the University of Washington.

APPENDIX:
Report from Daniel McGowan’s Sentencing Hearing, June 4, 2007
A summary of Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen Peifer’s presentation of the government’s case against Daniel McGowan, by Gumby Cascadia

* According to federal prosecutors, those charged in the Northwest eco-sabotage cases were part of “The Family,” a shadowy association of earth and animal liberation operatives. While some of the defendants may have once referred to each other as “family,” prosecutors used this phrase to suggest that the defendants were as violent and cultish as Charles Manson’s “Family.”

† Stenographer’s note: in the course of describing all these “facilities” and “research,” Peifer never once said the words “genetic engineering.”
From November 30 through December 2, the World Trade Organization met in Seattle. Peifer said Daniel was an “integral part” of the property destruction carried out by the black bloc. Daniel was not involved in the Romania arson, but Meyehoff came to Daniel to approve the communiqué. Daniel was concerned that the communiqué mentioned Free and Critter, but was unable to sway the group to change it.

In 2000, Daniel moved to Eugene, where he was invited to attend his first “book club” meeting, but he didn’t go to that one. “By that time, he was a trusted member of the Family, otherwise he would not have been invited,” said Peifer. Daniel quoted antics of vandalism around Eugene—at Umqua Bank and at a “health food store,” according to Peifer. For a short time, Daniel worked for the Earth First! Journal, which was not “radical or extreme enough” for him, according to Peifer, who quoted a line from a letter to the Journal from “Rabid” that read, “If Earth First! won’t support the ELF, who will?”

In June of 2000 with Savoie, Daniel targeted the Pure Seed Testing Company in Canby, Oregon, destroying their greenhouses and test plots and causing half a million dollars in damage. The communiqué released by the Anarchist Golfers’ Association was “full of McGowan’s well-known humor and ridicule,” according to Peifer. The communiqué blamed the US Forest Service and APHIS for their role in biological destruction, which Peifer said was another example of how Daniel has targeted government agencies and private facilities “over and over again” to intimidate, coerce, and retaliate.

The following month, Daniel traveled to the Midwest to work with an entirely different cell. Peifer said the plea agreement does not require Daniel to name those, but that the Midwest group is an entirely different cell of people and that Daniel is protecting them and threatening to refuse to name them—“not that there haven’t been leads,” he said. While in the Midwest, Daniel researched and carried out an attack on the US Forest Service Biotechnology Laboratory in Rheinlander, Wisconsin, which Peifer said was “looking for alternative ways to create wood pulp to save trees.” Over one million dollars in damage was done, and Daniel wrote the communiqué.

In September, Daniel attended the “book club” meeting in Santa Cruz, where he “lectured” to the others about actions against genetic engineering. That December, Daniel performed a recon mission at Jefferson Poplar, which was a large and challenging target, so the action was put off, and instead, Superior Lumber was targeted. Daniel reconnoitered the site a week before the action, and moved into a nearby house “safely to prepare.” He “lived with the devices and fuel,” and on the night of the action, helped load the vehicle and rode with the crew, changed into dark clothing, checked the radios, and acted as lookout while the others set the devices that caused over a million dollars in damage. After the action, Daniel and Savoie went to Portland and used a public computer to write the communiqué. Peifer said Daniel went into the bathroom at Powell’s Books to assemble the communiqué, “almost by force.” According to Peifer. The communiqué was discussed, as was the possible dissolution of the “Family.” On June 18th of 2001, Daniel damaged logging equipment totaling $22,000, and in July he dug up and damaged culverts at a timber sale in Oregon. Following that action, he moved to Canada, and “tries to make it look innocent,” says Peifer, but grand juries were being convened in Eugene and people subpoenaed, so Daniel left to “avoid getting arrested.” He returned to Eugene briefly before moving back to New York. Peifer made the “tjekyl and Hyde” allusion again, saying that during his time back in New York, Daniel engaged in “legitimate activism while remaining sympathetic to direct action tactics. As for Daniel’s prisoner support committee, he was only willing to support those who had not cooperated with law enforcement and that his current support is filled with “like-minded people.”

On January 20, 2004, Daniel stood by while someone tossed a pie into the face of the EarthFirst! senior founder of eight-wingnut pro-life wackos Opera- tion Rescue [stereogapher’s wording, not Peifer’s—but the following are Peifer’s words] “Appropriately free speech and lawful protest only go so far with Mr. McGowan.” Daniel wrote the communiqué, which was signed Agent Ken Levine. Also in 2004, Daniel was a key organizer for the RNC. Not Welcome website designed “to make conventioneers feel unwelcome in their hometown.” Peifer showed articles from the New York Times and Salon, which showed that “All the respectable news organizations, both large and small, are writing editorials or responses praising the actions against political violence against people, but not property. Peifer said Daniel was “directing his cadre of anarchists, dogging delegates, and trying to make Republicans’ lives as miserable as possible.”

* Judy Bari (1949-1997) was an organizer with Earth First! and The Industrial Workers of the World, known especially for her involvement in campaigns to save redwood forests in Northern California. As part of these campaigns, she brought together lumber workers and environmentalists to challenge the shortsighted and greedy policies of timber companies that valued neither workers’ lives nor the environment. It was partially in relation to this worker/environmental alliance that she called for the abandonment of tree-spiking as an eco-defense tactic; it should also be noted that this tactic had already met with diminishing returns in previous years.

† Craig Rosebraugh served as a public spokesperson for the Earth Liberation Front from 1997 to 2001, and experienced numerous FBI raids, grand jury subpoenas, and other harassment as a result; in one instance, the Portland Police singled Rosebraugh out at a protest, throwing to him the ground and breaking his arm. Rosebraugh’s book Burning Rage of a Dying Planet details his experiences in this spokesperson role.

‡ The NA-ELPSN is the North American affiliate of the International Earth Liberation Prisoner Support Network, founded in Britain in the 1990s to support people who are accused or convicted of actions in defense of the Earth and its inhabitants. More information on the North American branch is available at www.ecoprisoners.org.
Peifer then played excerpts of the recorded conversations Daniel had with the wired (double entendre intended) Jake Ferguson. In the recordings, captured when Ferguson visited Daniel in New York in April of 2005 and again when Daniel visited Eugene in August that year, they discuss whether the actions had any lasting effect. Daniel said he felt the actions had been a powerful symbol, even though most of the targets had been rebuilt. He referred to Vail as a “recruitment drive,” and expressed that he felt the actions had been successful in changing public perception. Daniel also expressed concern about others in the cell turning on each other, and said that if any of them were ever captured, he would find the money to hire the best lawyer available for that person. He said the only reasons he felt anyone would talk were if they “found Jesus,” went insane, or if they wanted money, to which Jake jumped in and said, “Money? What do you mean?” and to which Daniel replied, “That’s some judas shit, man.” Daniel spoke about Free’s case, and talked about hiring a private investigator to reveal a personal friendship between Lyle Velure (the judge from Free’s case) and the Steve Romania family (owners of the SUV lot Free targeted). He also spoke about putting Velure’s address and phone number on a website (although he never did it).

Then Daniel talked about finding a copy of Bill Rodgers’ “Setting Fires with Electrical Timers,” making “clean” copies, and sending them to some distributors in hopes they would be circulated. While Ferguson drove Daniel to the airport, they passed a Serenca Sawmill (owners of a company Daniel remembered as linked to the Superior Lumber Company but that was actually connected to the (judie sale), laughed and said “Happy fuckin’ New Year,” (i.e. referring to the New Year arrest at Superior Lumber).

Peifer said the comment showed Daniel’s attitude. He said that, if Nathan and Joyanna plead out because they “had to,” that Daniel’s “goose was cooked” by those tapes. In them, he recounts all his major criminal acts and reveals his attitude toward the law. Peifer then quoted Emerson: “Committ a crime, and the earth is made of glass.” Right now, your Honor, Daniel McGowan’s world is made of glass.” He said the government is seeking 92 months’ sentence.

On October 19, 1998, eight fires at two different sites completely destroyed many millions of dollars’ worth of property at the Vail Ski Resort in Colorado, whose expansion threatened sensitive Lynx habitat. The impressive habitat. William Rodgers was allegedly sensitive Lynx habitat. The impressive

† After midnight on June 16, 2000 Jeff Luers and Craig Marshall set fire to three Sports Utility Vehicles at the Joe Romania Chevrolet dealership in Eugene, Oregon; unbeknownst to them, undercover cops had been tailing them for hours. Criter took a plea deal without informing on his co-defendant or anyone else, and was released in January 2005. Free was sentenced to 22 years and eight months following a trial in which he was also convicted January 2005. Free was sentenced to 22 years and eight months following a trial in which he was also convicted

‡ This “Earth Liberation Front Guide,” put together by William Rodgers in May 2001, describes the construction of timing devices for arson. Stanislas Mwenderha, a government informant since his arrest in 2005, apparently helped with some details and device testing. The manual can still be located online.

‡ On October 19, 1998, eight fires at two different sites completely destroyed many millions of dollars’ worth of property at the Vail Ski Resort in Colorado, whose expansion threatened sensitive Lynx habitat. The impressive...
Once this question is asked, another question inexorably follows: what qualifies as a situation that calls for action to be taken outside the established channels of the legal system, if not the current ecological crisis? Species are going extinct all over the planet, climate change is beginning to wreak serious havoc on human beings as well, and scientists are giving us a very short window of time to turn our act around—while the US government and its corporate puppeteers refuse to make even the insufficient changes called for by liberals. If the dystopian nightmare these scientists predict comes to pass, will the refugees of the future look back on this encounter between McGowan and Aiken and judge McGowan the coward? We live in a democracy, Aiken and her kind insist: bypassing the established channels and breaking the law is akin to attacking freedom, community, and dialogue themselves. That’s the same thing they said in 1859.

Those who consider obeying the law more important than abiding by one’s conscience always try to frame themselves as the responsible ones, but the essence of that attitude is the desire to evade responsibility. Society, as represented—however badly—by its entrenched institutions, is responsible for decreeing right and wrong; all one must do is bravely comply, arguing for a change when the results are not to one’s taste but never stepping out of line. That is the creed of cowards, if anything is. At the hearing to determine whether the defendants should be sentenced as terrorists, Aiken acknowledged with frustration that she had no control over what the Bureau of Prisons would do with them regardless of her recommendations—but washed her hands of the matter and gave McGowan and others terrorism enhancements anyway. Doubtless, Aiken feels that whatever shortcomings this system has are not her responsibility, even if she participates in forcing them on others. She’s just doing her job.

That’s the Nuremberg defense. Regardless of what she thinks of McGowan’s actions or the Bureau of Prisons, Aiken is personally responsible for sending him to prison. She is responsible for separating him from his wife, for preventing him from choosing anonymous action, they did not set out to be heroes; they are as normal as any of us—any normal person who takes responsibility for his or her actions is capable of tremendous things.

This is not to say we should all become anarchists. There are countless paths available to those who would take responsibility for their own actions, and each person must choose the one that is most appropriate to his or her situation. Let the courage of the non-cooperating Green Scare defendants, who dared to act on their beliefs and refused to betray their convictions even when threatened with life in prison, serve as reminders of just how much normal people like us can accomplish.

and Heroes

So—if McGowan and the other non-cooperating Green Scare defendants are not cowards, does that mean they are heroes?

We should be cautious not to unthinkingly adopt the inverse of Aiken’s judgment. In presenting the case for the government, Peiffer described the Operation Backfire defendants as “almost like Mission Impossible.” It serves the powers that be to present the defendants as superhuman—the more exceptional their deeds seem to be, the further out of reach such deeds will feel to everyone else.

Similarly, lionizing “heroes” can be a way for the rest of us to let ourselves off the hook: we are obviously not heroes of their caliber, we need not hold ourselves up to the same standards of conduct. It is a disservice to glorify McGowan, Exile, Sadie, Peter Young, and others like them; in choosing anonymous action, they did not set out to be celebrated, but to privately do what they thought was necessary, just as all of us ought to. They are as normal as any of us—any normal person who takes responsibility for his or her actions is capable of tremendous things.

Ungdomshuset (“Youth House”) was a four-story autonomous social center located in the Nørrebro neighborhood of Copenhagen on Jagtvej 69—hence the prevalence of “69” tattoos throughout Denmark. It was evicted and demolished in March 2007, provoking some of the most intense rioting Denmark had seen in generations.

For those who read the article in the second issue of Rolling Thunder describing the Danish squatting movement in the 1970s-80s, this story basically picks up where that one left off. To offer a little context, most European countries have at least one social center left from the heyday of the squatting movement a couple decades ago. Norway has the Blitz, Austria has the EKHi, Germany has Kepi in Berlin and Rote Flora in Hamburg, Slovenia has an entire occupied neighborhood called Metelkova. Over the past few years, European governments have mounted new attacks on these last redoubts; Ungdomshuset is the first in northern Europe to be successfully evicted, and both anarchists and authorities are watching to see whether its eviction does more to crush or reinvigorate resistance.

I was last at Ungdomshuset myself in fall of 2005; it was my fourth time in eight years to perform there with one of the bands I play in. Most of the time, the show would proceed without incident. One time, a punk band performing just before us refused to stop playing and kept the building surrounded; all night we heard them exchanging threats with the punks standing guard on the roof. The show in 2005 was less tense: just a couple hundred old and new friends enjoying delicious food and rowdy music, everyone from veteran squatters to boisterous street kids eating and dancing and talking together. As morning approached several dozen of us bedded down on mats under the high ceiling of the theater room on the second floor; I stayed awake in the dark whispering stories back and forth with the Australian traveler next to me, not wanting to miss a moment.

When our band played at a state-run center in Sweden the following evening, the contrast couldn’t have been more stark. A glass cage was set around the drums to protect the precious hearing of young Swedes; state employees battled about enforcing a host of Kafkaesque regulations, even checking the volume of the bands with a decibel meter. The teenage attendees stood awkwardly between metal barriers, not daring to violate the rules by dancing, and we literally couldn’t turn our amplifiers up without officials offering to cancel the show then and there. Everything was over long before midnight, and the building emptied out; the remaining half-dozen or so thatched left in the shell of a democracy—a dystopia in which liberty trumps liberty. Fortunately, not everyone is willing to follow the rules.
TIMELINE: Squatting and Resistance in Copenhagen

1897 - November 12. The building is completed with the name “Folkets Hus” (“The People’s House”) as a headquarters for Copenhagen’s embattled labor movement. Over the following decades, both Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg speak here.

1910, the Second International holds an international women’s conference at the house, during which Clara Zetkin proposes an International Women’s Day. Several historic demonstrations were organized in Folkets Hus, including the massive demonstration in 1918 when workers stormed the Stock Exchange. As late as the 1950s, it was still used by associations and unions involved in the labor movement, hosting activities including boxing matches and dances.

1971 - September. Fifty activists squat Christiania, an old military compound in the heart of Copenhagen; over the following years, it becomes home to nearly a thousand people.

1982 - March. The former Musical Meistersinger school in a quiet neighborhood is squatted. The empty bread factory “Rutana” and the empty rubber factory “Schinnring & Arvé” are squatted. Police attempt to get a house through legal processes, but they are turned down by the local council.

1986 - September 14. A popular protest march, delivering them to an old firehouse that is owned by the state.

1999 - May 6. A popular protest hosts the building. The battle between Father House and Youth House is on!

2001 - September 28. The extremist Christian and Faderhuset (“House of the Lord”) buys up HUMAN A/S, after their cult leader has a dream in which God commands her to destroy Ungdomshuset by any means necessary. The squatters refuse to recognize the sale or even to permit the self-styled “owners” to enter the building. The battle between Father House and Youth House is on!

2003 - Faderhuset uses the users of Ungdomshuset demanding to take it over.

2004 - The court rules in favor of Faderhuset; the users appeal the case.


2006 - June 22-25. Ungdomshuset hosts the widely attended K-town Festival and “Bike Wars.”


2006 - December 16, evening. An unpermitted demonstration sets out from Ungdomshuset. People from all over the world have come to participate. They only get a few hundred yards from the house when riot police attack, resulting in hours of fighting in the streets and 231 arrests.

2007 - January 13. A house is squatted on Dortheavej, not far from Ungdomshuset. Police evict the place. A new attempt is made to get an appeal.

2007 - February 3. A house on G rundalsvænge is squatted, but evicted the same day.

2007 - February 16. Morning traffic is blocked by protesters with banners for Ungdomshuset.

2007 - March 1, 3 am. A march starts moving towards the building at Jagtvej 69 and the biggest riots in Denmark’s history break out. Activists barricade the streets and set cars on fire to block police vans. The police shoot tear gas, and protesters return fire with molotov cocktails, rocks, and bottles. 217 people are arrested.

2007 - March 2. A group of people squats the headquarters of the mayor’s political party. The police bring in cops from all over the country, and police vans from Sweden and Holland are brought in after protesters smash the local ones. That night about 2000 people once again attempt to get to Ungdomshuset; when the police attack they build barricades and set police vans on fire. The riots spread throughout the city to other parts of Copenhagen. 188 people are arrested.
2007 - March 3. Police illegally raid places around Nørrebro. 13 arrests. 13 foreigners have already been arrested. The members of the Anarchist Black Cross who had been organizing prisoner support are themselves arrested, and their phones shut down. Later that day, the Black Cross announces a new phone number. Despite the violence, the support group Citizens Group for Ungdomshuset is slammed with calls from people who want to join; its membership has grown to almost 300 in the preceding days. 2000 people gather for a march in the afternoon. Solidarity demonstrations are occurring all around Europe; over the following days, Danish consulates are occupied, highways are shut down, and protesters trade projectiles fire with police. That evening riots break out again all over Copenhagen. 76 people are arrested. The cost of the riots is estimated to be $2.7 million.

2007 - March 6. Masked workers start to tear down Ungdomshuset under heavy police guard; many companies have refused to participate, so they support Ungdomshuset then because they can’t guarantee the safety of their workers. Vehicles belonging to the companies that tear down Ungdomshuset have the windows slashed, their windows broken, and acid poured on their seats. One of the companies sends its workers home and bills Faderhuset for the damages. Late that night, two trains are burned in the parking lot of the company that has been transporting material from Jagtvej 69. The company, “3354 Transport,” announces that it is a politically neutral company and “will transport any orders no matter the political, religious, or ethnic ground.” Despite this, they choose to stop working around Ungdomshuset: “3354 Transport will at any time choose to not do work that will pose a threat to the people working in the company, and fail, with this in mind, choose to not take any more orders in connection with the clearing of Ungdomshuset at Nørrebro.”

2007 - March 6. The cult leader of Faderhuset gives a victory speech in which she announces that the young people of Nørrebro set out in support of Ungdomshuset at Nørrebro.”

2007 - March 6. A vanload of police stops by Jagtvej 69 just to piss on the ground where Ungdomshuset used to be. Asked by a bystander if it is not illegal to urinate on private property, the police answer, “We have a very good relationship with Ruth” [the cult leader of Faderhuset]. Meanwhile, the police department admits to having “accidentally” attacked crowds with a potentially lethal form of tear gas.

As soon as the smoke cleared, Faderhuset put the property up for sale for DKK 15 million (they purchased it for DKK 2.6 million). City councilors expressed irritation, since Faderhuset had refused to sell the house when Jagtvej 69 offered to buy it for the squatters, and the riots that followed the eviction cost an estimated DKK 72 million. In all, more than 750 arrests took place during the eviction and resulting conflicts, including 140 foreigners. Solidarity actions occurred throughout Denmark and as far away as South Korea. Thousands of people joined the fight for a new Youth House and people from the 1980s squatting movement came out of retirement, organizing weekly protests as the Grey Bloc.

And the story continues: 2007 - May 14. Police enter Christianshavn to demolish the abandoned Cigarkassen house. The building has been destroyed, but the fight for a new house is gathering steam.

2007 - March 16. A.varial of people start to tear down the building at Jagtvej 69 almost a century earlier, with a march in support of the struggle for Ungdomshuset. The building has been destroyed, but the fight for a new house is gathering steam.

2007 - August 30-September 6. A week of action occurs on the six-month anniversary of the eviction, including several massive demonstrations, a feminist day focusing on self-defense skills, the usual barricading and street fighting and property damage, and a group of children squatting a house at H.C. Oerstedsgade 65 and defending it from the police with pies and water balloons. After the riots on September 1, the US embassy sends warnings to all American citizens in Denmark to keep out of Nørrebro. At the end of the week, there are 63 simultaneous protests at 59 different locations that have the house number 69. Squatting activists have already announced that an abandoned water pumping station at Grønalsvænge Allé 15 will be occupied the following month, using tactics from the G8 summit protests in Germany.

2007 - October 6. Almost 10,000 people gather in Nørrebro to occupy Grenalsvænge Allé 15, nearly 1000 have trained for months for confrontations with police. After the march sets out, it divides into four different blocks, each with its own themes and preferred level of risk. The chosen building and the entire surrounded area is full of barbed wire, police, and police dogs. The vast majority of the crowd is explicitly nonviolent, but the police still use tear gas, dogs, and batons, even gassing themselves and innocent families at various points. 466 people are arrested, the biggest single mass arrest in the history of Denmark. Despite all this, a few hundred people manage to reach the house and God was the Jolly Roger flag from the roof. In the end, they don’t succeed in holding the house, but the mayor announces that she wants to negotiate.

Anonymous Accounts from the Defense

I wake up to someone screaming, “EVICTION!”

For the past months, people from all over the world have been on watch in shifts. Seven in the morning is the end of the night shift and people are tired from the strain of being on constant alert. We know that the house is going to be evicted at some point and both the police and government have promised, but the waiting game has drained a lot of our energy and in a strange way some of us are actually looking forward to it happening. The barricades separating each floor have been reinforced in every possible way we could think of. Huge plates of metal on wood, packed with wool to fuck up their chainsaws. Every window is boarded up with strong metal netting to prevent the pigs from shooting tear gas through the windows.

I’ve been living here since the international call went out announcing the protest in December on the original date of the eviction. The protest was a show of force, a taste of what was to come if they evicted the house. Thousands of people from all over the world came, and as the black bloc of two thousand people started to march, we only made it three hundred yards before the police blocked the road and all hell broke lose. The riots lasted for hours and several hundred people were arrested.

I sit up in my sleeping bag and almost immediately my eyes start to burn. A bucket of urine that has been freed from the roof. I reach for the gas mask next to me and get up. Some people are running up the stairs and some are running down them. People are yelling everywhere. Someone is fighting off cops on the floor above. I am having problems getting my mask on. I spot my friend coming down the stairs. It’s getting hard to see anything as grenade after grenade of tear gas explodes inside the building, now on every floor it seems. He helps me with my mask. My eyes burn and my lungs hurt. Last night, there was a concert, and a local band missed their train, so they slept in the house. We divide into two groups: a group to sit and wait for the cops, as they are not really there to defend the house, and a group that will see what we can do to hold it as long as possible. To the roof! Not possible. OK. Barricades closed. Where are they? Explosions seem to be going off everywhere.

Further down the back stairs, peep through the door on the second floor. Shit, they’re everywhere. Even further down: a hole in the wall—so we did hear something last weekend! To the basement, board up the door. Nowhere else to go. They’re outside the door. We can hear the group that sat down to wait behind the bar start to scream. Fuck, what are they doing to them? Fucking pigs.

They start to break down the door. We back into a small room in the back of the basement and close the door. They have broken through the outer door. Final showdown. No way out. “Let’s give ‘em hell!” Everyone screams as they start to break through the last door. Total chaos. A huge fire breaks out in a cramped basement full of tear gas. A cop screams. I can’t tell what is happening until I am being beaten to the ground with a blow to the head from what feels like a police baton.

They sit us down in a row and rip off our gas masks. People are starting to throw up, screaming for air, many pass out. A young guy is being lifted up and carried out by four anti-terror police officers. He is no longer conscious; some of the cops beat him unconscious in the fight. They let us sit there in the basement filled with tear gas long enough for a few of us to sustain lung damage; more of us temporarily lose sight. They take us one by one out to their transport police bus, which is parked in the beautiful trashauld backyard behind the building. Police are everywhere. I look back at the house and I can’t even focus on the building. It isn’t until hours later that I regain my eyesight, and several days until I can breathe normally.

I never saw the house again, only on television from my prison cell as they tore it down, my heart filled with anger and sorrow.

Rolling Thunder, Issue Five, Spring 2008
Copenhagen, March 1-4, 2007

Everyone has their story about the day. I’ve heard the most amazing tales of victories and great escapes, and there is no way I can pass on all that happened during the first few days of March. We had two days in freedom, during which the police were fought off and we held the streets, even though we didn’t get to take back the house. I can only tell my own story.

Thursday

I moved to Copenhagen in November to organize for a possible eviction. I’ve hoped all along that the city council would change their minds and find a solution to the situation—but since my faith in the state is really nonexistent, I prepared for eviction. I meet with my friends as soon as I hear about the eviction. I have to get in contact with a lot of people and write some indy news updates, but my friends go as close as they can get to check out the situation. Come back a few hours later to tell me that so far it’s very unorganized, there are massive numbers of police, and they seem to have the upper hand.

So we wait until 5 pm. We meet up with the rest of our group at Blaagards Plads, where the protest is to begin. I can’t believe my own eyes. For the past months, there have been more and more people showing up at the protests to save Ungdomshuset, but this is completely insane. I would say there are more than 5000 people gathered here today. Many masked and in their affinity groups. We have not been the only ones waiting for this. Let’s take back our house! Tonight we will celebrate in Ungdomshuset once again.

We start to move down the small street that leads to the main road. As the protest turns the corner onto the main road, three police vans are parked across the road in an optimistic attempt to block 5000 people. We don’t even get into throwing range before the first stones and bottles fly through the air. The front of the protest starts to run towards the police vans, and they quickly turn around to get away.

What the fuck—are there on the sidewalk about a hundred yards down the street? 2000 people charge the 20 Nazis, who run like they have never run before. The police vans have blocked off the street a little further down. The march speeds up moving towards them. Rocks and bottles smash down upon the front windows and they start to back up slowly down the street. Charge! A few hundred protestors from the front attack the police cars and chase them further down the street. Oh no, it’s a trap—police vans have been waiting in a street off the main road. “PULL BACK!” Everyone starts to run back, but the police capture about 70 people—mostly bystanders, press, and some young kids.

The喇叭 of this as a great success on the evening news, though afterwards they were not able to arrest any of the people caught in this maneuver.

Barricades now! The cops keep driving straight through them, so set them on fire. Block the streets to the main road. Bounce cars out into the road. They are not going to catch any of us in a trap with that tactic again. Check out the graveyard along Jagtvej. Break the locks. Damn, there are a lot of cops in there. Police dogs. No move. Back a little. Stash the bags. Get out the map. OK, two construction sites nearby. Three parks. Remember, in the back of every block of buildings there are trash containers. Let’s get them out. Bottle recycling containers: tilt it, get it open. Who has the screwdriver? Dig out the dirt around the paving stones. Let’s get them out there. Get some crates and shopping carts from that supermarket. OK. We can get through the blocks here and here: This building is locked, but X has a key. Down this street, just ring the doors, people hate the pigs here—they will help us.

Can’t wait until it gets dark.

The protest has been fighting the police back and forth for some hours now. Bouncing cars out onto the road is a great way to block the street—but if tear gas is fired or people leave to go fight somewhere else, the cops just bounce the cars back and regain control of the street. People have started to set the cars on fire to prevent this. They may have 25 police vans, but they only have a couple fire trucks—and those have to be guided by police vans, and they can’t do anything until people are gone.

They want us off the street. They have started shooting tear gas at every crowd of more than 20 people. On our way back to our bags, we are hit by a huge cloud of tear gas. No time for maps. We can’t run since we can’t see. We dive into a courtyard behind a building—the gate is locked. We can hear the cops exiting their vehicles. A door opens a few meters from us: “In here,” a man says. In this part of town you can almost always trust people, as most people living here really hate the police.

We crawl through the doorway into a basement. All around us people are lying on the floor with tears in their eyes and gas in their lungs. Break out the lemon water, pass it around. It helps a bit. We start to breathe again. After ten minutes, the guy leads us through the basement and into the courtyard. “Use these,” he says, pointing to the trash containers. We peek out of the gate at the main street: the cops are further down the street—busy trying to get away from a huge crowd! Into the streets with the containers. People everywhere. The containers are set on fire. From where we are standing now, we can see more than five burning barricades. We need a break. We get back and get our bags, then head for the park. We need to get something to drink, rest for a while, and make plans.

Constant sirens, exploding tear gas grenades, fireworks being shot back. Back onto the streets. Fires everywhere. Flashing lights. It’s getting late. Tomorrow another protest is planned. We start to head back. All the streets connecting to the main street have flaming barricades and burning cars in them. We heard rumors that the fighting has spread to other parts of the city to draw the police away from Nørrebro. At Christiania, about a thousand people have built barricades and are now battling police. We need more information. Back to the house. Phones, internet, television. Constant updates; the news shows the police losing control of the situation. My favorite clip shows the chief of operations telling an interviewer that everything is under control while people are screaming in his face that he should get the fuck out of their neighborhood and explosions are going off in the background.

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The news shows the police losing control of the situation. My favorite clip shows the chief of operations telling an interviewer that everything is under control while people are screaming in his face that he should get the fuck out of their neighborhood and explosions are going off in the background.
we go. Almost every backstreet still has burning cars and barricades; not many police down here. As I lay down with
the TV still on, there is a special bulletin: police have been
fought back outside Christiania. Damn, I can't sleep, I wish
I was there. The activist news ticker is constantly updated
on the computer. I finally fall asleep.

Friday

Get up. We eat and talk about yesterday. We all have things to
do this afternoon before the big protest this evening.

On the television, the police chief of operations tells us
that everything is now under control, hundreds have been
arrested, he thanks people have given up. Oh my, if he only
knew. They show scenes of burnt cars, bourgeois citizens
talking about how horrible it was with big smiles on their
faces. They loved it, you can see it in their eyes. finally
something happened. I have to help out by the info point
this afternoon and help out with the internet update after-
wards. We plan to meet up later. Police are still everywhere.
They look tired. The theme for today's protest is "follow the
green flag." I can't wait.

I take the bus, and I can't help smiling every time the bus
hits a bump in the road from where one of yesterday's
burning barricades left a deep scar in the asphalt. I hear
amazing tales at the info point. Dozens of people were unar-
rested last night, even more made a run for it with their
hands cuffed behind their backs with plastic strips. Three
or four police vans were damaged by upside down benches
with their legs at an angle. In the exhaust pipes of other
police vans. I help Food Not Bombs prepare dinner for
thousands of people from all over the country and the
rest of the world.

I meet up with my group at Sankt Hans Tov, not far
dated on where the cops are, as it is shouted out whenever
something happened. We talk about the events that
took place here in 1993, when the police fired 113 shots at
the protesters from where Ungdomshuset is. We can see it behind the trees of the
cemetery before we reach the main street. We walk towards Ung-
domshuset. We can see it behind the trees of the cemetery
just next to it. It's there, just behind those 500 police
officers with helmets and batons at the corner of the street.
We hear an explosion nearby. Is it gas? No, must have been
fireworks or a car set on fire. More police vans speed in
down at the corner. They know if we get past them, the
house is ours again. The protest stops just in front of the
police line. They are wearing gas masks. BOOM! Gas fills
the streets. So do rocks from the pavement. Smedrider
between the stones of the sidewalk. Dig up the dirt; when
one stone is removed, other stone can be picked up.
Folk science passed down for generations. Masks on. We
know it wasn't going to be easy. Someone spots plain clothes
pipe police inside 7-11. They all guard those fucked up shops.
Rocks shatter the windows. More gas. People start to run.
Cops move in. Let's go!

We run back a bit. Just as we pass a building, a woman
in her forties pops her head out of the gate to the court-
yard. “In here,” she says. Furniture that has been thrown
out and about six garbage containers. Furniture into the
containers—go, go. Out on the street. We smile and thank
the woman for helping. “Give 'em hell boys,” she says before
closing the gate again. A simple lighter won't set this ablaze.
Two people who helped get the stuff out on the street run
to the 7-11 down the street. “Be careful, check for cops!”
we yell after them. The store has boards over every window
but is still open. If someone steals a bottle of flamm-
able liquid tonight no cops are going to come stop them.
There are people everywhere. Mostly protesters, but also
a lot of people using the riots as a night on the town. People
nearby cheer as the flames ignite the living-room-themed
barricade. We need to find a larger and tighter group of
people so we can do what we came here for and take back
Ungdomshuset.

Blagaards Plads, a square in the middle of social project
housing—there we go. More than a thousand people have
gathered here, burning barricades with flames reaching up
three stories in the air. We snatch a few bike chains ear-
er. Time to turn the street lights. After a few attempts,
the bike chain wraps around the wires on the pole. Sparks.
Darkness. Here come the cops. The van stops, the door
opens, and more than twenty rocks hit it. The door closes.
“Don't let them get out to fire gas,” someone yells. People
move forward. Let's get them out of here. More vans arrive.
Same deal. The cops drive a bit down the road and turn
to try to flank us. In this part of town, we have kids with
cellular phones on every corner, so we are constantly up-
dated on where the cops are, as it is shouted out whenever
someone gets a call. We pass on the information in English,
Rolling Thunder, Issue Five, Spring 2008

My heart skips a beat when I take in the view: there are barricades burning everywhere, all over the city.

calling out directions in place of street names. They can’t get through the end of the street we’re on, so we head back as the cops try to get to the other end of the road. As the first van turns the corner up the street, a molotov hits the street right in front of it. It stops just long enough for rocks to start flying. They back off. No gas yet. A lot of the locals have no interest in taking back the house; they want to stay and fight the cops here. Fair enough. By yelling, we gather a few hundred people that want to try to take back Ungdomshuset. Where is everyone else? Some think people have gathered in Folkets Park (“People’s Park”) just on the other side of the buildings next to us. Some think they are out in the streets blocking them off, in smaller groups.

Let’s go. First Folkets Park. Sure enough, a big crowd has taken hold here. Streets are blocked by burning barricades and people are making plans around a big fire in the middle of the dark park. We can’t go through the cemetery—earlier today there were hundreds of cops hiding in there, some with police dogs. All the gates are locked and we need to move a lot of people fast if we are to have a chance. No good.

What’s left? There are the main streets on either side of the cemetery, with a lot of cops in them; their tactic is still to speed up and down the streets and shoot gas at crowds of people. The backstreets then. The lights are off in most of them. There are a lot of places to hide and escape through, and hopefully other people there as well. So far, we have mostly seen people building barricades and defending them when the cops come rather than gathering to try to take back the house.

Off we go. We pass the main street. Six or seven burning barricades have sprung up since we were last here. Down the back streets. We meet smaller groups of people; most are doing their own thing and have no interest in joining us. We lose some people that want to stay behind, hoping for a larger group to show up. We need more people. No cops here. We can hear their sirens out on the main street as we move through the darkness. A trail of bounced cars and hasty barricades appears behind us as we move. We get to the other side of the Runddelen square right near to Ungdomshuset. Still no sign of the several thousand people that were in the protest when it started. Well, there are people everywhere, but not in a large group. Here police are using a different tactic: they drive their vans down the street, and when they get close to a large group they jump out and start to run towards them. Then people start to run—that is, at least the first couple times. We discover that they are not really doing anything but running a bit, then returning to their vans.

No gas so far. We hope that they haven’t run out. Last time that happened, in 1995, they started shooting people instead. Still no signs of the crowd—until we get a call about people gathering back where we just came from. Damn. We hold a meeting in the middle of the street, mostly with people we’ve never met before. We share our information, as we’ve noticed that police are no longer driving up and down the street but instead have positioned themselves at Runddelen near Ungdomshuset. In case some of the people we are meeting with are cops, we are all masked; some help out translating the meeting into English for the many activists from outside the country.

We decide to take the direct route towards the place we just came from, hoping that the people gathered there are starting to move towards us from the other end of the main street. The cops have parked their cars front to front blocking the street; at least they won’t suddenly come speeding through. A few people stay at the corners of the streets we pass on our way to the main street, in case there are other cop cars trying to creep up behind us. We’re getting closer. BOOM! That was the gas. The wind is at our backs, so since they shot it over us it has no effect. I climb a street sign to see if there are people moving in from the other side of the police line. No luck. Now what? The cops outnumber us big time. From where we stand we can see some cops starting to throw something at us. They have been known to throw rocks before. But as their small tear gas hand grenades goes off, we know this is not the case. No escaping this gas.

Hard to breathe, no eyesight. We know they have more than one kind. This kind is really bad. Back up. Stay together. People help the ones that were gassed the worst.

The cops are staying put; guess they just thought we got too close. Time out. Breathe easy. Rinse with lemon water.

We need to find more people. Don’t use phones. Some people want to go back to other rally points. We need a top view of the city. We find a scaffold down a street and climb up to a rooftop. My heart skips a beat when I take in the view: there are barricades burning everywhere, all over the city. The blue flashing lights are now only down at the square near Ungdomshuset. We can see people everywhere, but no larger crowd prepared to follow the original plan of taking back the house. We share a beer and a cigarette here on top of the world. No one says much. We just take in the sight. Never before in my life have I seen something so beautiful as this. We are all tired. We head home for the night.

The TV is on. Tonight people took back the streets all over the city. At the few towns Christiania, the police were beaten back with rocks, paint bombs, and huge burning barricades. As I fall asleep, I think of my friends who were inside the house. I hope they are OK. The TV showed some images of unconscious people being carried out of Ungdomshuset yesterday by anti-terror police as they evicted the house.

Saturday and Sunday

I wake up late. My phone is ringing. The cops have attacked ten places looking for foreign activists. They kicked in the door and tear gassed the legal “Bummen” squat. More than a hundred arrested. The total count is more than 600 now. The cops lost a lot of police vans last night, so now they have brought in extra vans from Sweden and Holland and extra police from the entire country. Last night the police really lost control. There was a chance—if only we had been able to stick together and take back the house. It seems the police are really organizing towards not letting people take back the streets today. All through the morning, we get more and more news. The police are now driving around the streets in masks and arresting anyone they think looks like an activist. We continue following the updates. So many people arrested, so many more cops. It doesn’t look good.

Early in the evening, we head towards Folkets Park. We get a few kilometers up the main street, and by that time we have already seen two people pulled into police vans. There are plain clothes cops everywhere. We decide that we don’t want to take the chance right now. We exit the main street, move across the railroad tracks, and head back home. Unless we know we have a gathering of some kind to go to, we will not go anywhere. The police are pissed about getting their asses kicked last night, so tonight they take it out on everybody they see. Some political parties want to put the army on the streets.

Saturday night brings a few rocks and barricades, more arrests, but nothing like the previous two days. Sunday brings a strange calm in the city. Images of charred cars, smashed windows, and broken police vans are all over the news. I return to help out at the info point. The stories people have to tell really scare me. The leader of Faderhuset went to inspect Ungdomshuset. Cops have already been tearing out windows and things from inside the building. The sect has decided to tear it down, and the demolition begins. The square nearby is filled with people crying, the cemetery wall has “RIVENGE” written all over it.

Six Months Later

When the building lay in ruins, everyone agreed that that was just the beginning. And it has been. Since the eviction, there have been weekly protests demanding a new house, and at the beginning of September, on the six month anniversary of the eviction, the entire city was hit by riots again. The movement has exploded in numbers, and now counts thousands from all over the country and the world.

Nothing is over. It has only just begun.
Interview with a Participant: The Organizing behind the Riots

Describe the organizing that went into the defense of Ungdomshuset. Was it centralized or decentralized? What was the security situation like?

First of all, this is my version. Since the movement around free spaces has exploded in form and numbers, but as far as I can tell, there is not a well-thought-out strategy that got people involved. It was as if people had been waiting for a cause, and the threat of eviction was some kind of a signal to that.

In my opinion a lot of different factors contributed to the resistance reaching the scale it did. Denmark has a long history of social democratic rule. This in itself is not a good thing, but it did provide a sort of political vacuum, a standoff that was ended when the liberals came into power along with the most racist political party this country has ever seen. For years now, they have cracked down on alternative subcultures and spaces, “civil rights,” schools, welfare institutions, and immigrants and asylum seekers. This created a volatile social situation.

Ungdomshuset had been used by thousands of people over its twenty-four-year existence. My older sister helped squat the house, and I have met people who received the keys to the building. I’ve spent many years of my life eating, socializing, and playing music there.

So the building has been important to a great many people—and even though many of them now work high-paying jobs or have moved away, they have not forgotten that part of their lives. This was the majority of protestors: people from around sixteen to their early forties who had a direct connection to the house or a political opposition to the eviction. Another segment of the defenders were there not so much to protect Ungdomshuset but to get back at the racist and intolerant state and police—and they fought tooth and nail, too.

Defendants is a lieu de fictions, so we are not trying to imagine the reality of how to move cars into the road by “bouncing” them. I’m pretty sure it was an American that taught the workshop on tripods; one was used in a squatting action this past weekend, in fact. As for the cars, when people saw that the police just got out of their vans and bounced them, they tried setting them on fire too.

Since the eviction, there is a protest every week. Just this weekend, hundreds of people went to stop the annual Nazi protest for Rudolf Hess, and hundreds more squatted a building two days in a row. It is true that in the past there have been bad days when people went to the police when they were waiting for the cops to show up after some hours and riots broke out. Sometimes the protests in the year leading up to the eviction had resulted in the same thing—so many people had learned, firsthand, a great deal about the slow and heavy arm of the law.

In the months leading up to the eviction, a festival was held that included skillshare sessions on how to build tripods and how to move cars into the road by “bouncing” them. I’m pretty sure it was an American that taught the workshop on tripods; one was used in a squatting action this past weekend, in fact. As for the cars, when people saw that the police just got out of their vans and bounced them, they tried setting them on fire too.

There are conflicts inside the group itself. Everyone pretty much agreed upon the line that was chosen. The disagreements that occurred were handled in the Monday meetings. These sometimes took all night, when there were heavy decisions on the agenda.

What can you say about the defense strategy?

Plans were made for several scenarios of what might follow the eviction. I can’t get into the plans themselves or how people were organized inside or outside the house, as many are still on trial.

What kind of preparation led up to the eviction? Why do you think so many people got involved in the resistance and how long did the movement for Denmark stay?

The movement around free spaces has exploded in form and numbers, but as far as I can tell, there is not a well-thought-out strategy that got people involved. It was as if people had been waiting for a cause, and the threat of eviction was some kind of a signal to that. This is sad in that self-organization is something to be very general. It’s kind of a touchy subject, but here goes.

The organizing grew out of the weekly Monday meetings, where most things are decided in large groups. They used to be mostly about who would handle the sound system and stand at the entrance in concerts, things like that. The situation got worse and worse, they ended up being almost only about the coming eviction and how to deal with it.

Many groups used the Monday meetings to present ideas and ask for help or advice. In the months leading up to the eviction, “safety subjects” were brought up in the meetings by masked people, since the press had sneaked in a few times. The Monday meetings are still going on and need people going on at the meetings unless it’s some urgentings, in that you don’t talk about what is going on here and there. This is sad in that self-organization should be reason enough to form a connection with the place, but it’s better than nothing. The point is, there exists a popular understanding of and momentum for change in Denmark now?

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Seeking leverage on governments doesn’t necessarily legitimize government itself—so long as such leverage is obtained by direct action and would-be leaders are not permitted to hijack it, this is simply a survival strategy in a world in which governments still hold a lot of power. We can halt the destructive effects of hierarchical power only to the extent to which we are able to manifest a horizontal counter-power; the more we do so, the more freedom we win for ourselves and others. If the riots in Copenhagen have not yet resulted in the squatting movement obtaining another building, they certainly provide a deterrent for other European governments considering whether to evict social centers.

In the end, the police announced that they were totally overextended and exhausted—not from any one conflict, but from maintaining a perpetual state of alert—and the mayor offered to open negotiations about turning over another building to the squatting movement. That is to say—even in one of the wealthiest capitalist countries, a direct-action-based social movement that plays its cards right can win a war of attrition against the forces of repression and compel the state to literally cede territory.

Act Locally
The battle for Ungdomshuset offers a localized example of the kind of mass confrontations usually associated with summit protests, yet it lacked many of the shortcomings critics cite in the latter. Summit protests often seem to occur in a vacuum, drawing people from disconnected communities to participate in a spectacle that doesn’t directly contribute to ongoing local efforts; in contrast, most of those who threw rocks and set fires in Copenhagen were building relationships that will continue for years to come, and contributing to an ongoing project that was not over when the smoke cleared. It is impossible to separate events like the G8 protests in Germany from local struggles such as the defense of Ungdomshuset. Individual mass mobilizations are only possible because of the skills and motivations people develop in continuous local struggles, and only make sense in the broader context they offer.

Organize Globally
The organizers astutely used international support for Ungdomshuset to create a situation that radicalized local participants. By inviting anarchists from all around the world for the march on December 16, they succeeded in setting a tone for pitched confrontation that carried over to the eviction the following spring—even though fewer internationals were present then to swell the numbers of avowed anarchists. Just as the role Ungdomshuset itself played in igniting widespread social struggle shows that the cultivation of subculture can sometimes catalyze resistance, this demonstrates that radicals can sometimes create an environment conducive to generalized revolt, despite being quarantined in the “radical ghetto.” This is the most worthwhile role for mass mobilizations that draw anarchists from far and wide: they should demonstrate what is possible in such a way that locals will try out those possibilities on their home turf.

North American anarchists should study how to do this ourselves. Not every engagement with the powers that be will set off a chain reaction like the one in Denmark last year—but each one is a lit match tossed out into the world, and some of them are bound to start fires.

* The strategy of raising expectations with a series of escalating actions has been used effectively in the United States as well—for example, in 2005, in the buildup to the anti-G8 solidarity march in the Bay Area.

The second time I visited Ungdomshuset, back in 1999, we arrived early, long before the show was to begin. My friend and I sat in the candlelit bar, listening uncomprehendingly to the squatters’ weekly meeting. At one point, the grizzled veteran nearest us noticed that the candle beside him had burned down to the mouth of the glass bottle that held it. We watched as he absentmindedly took a new candle and held the base of it over the sputtering flame until the wax was soft. Then he turned it around, lit the wick with the last dim flame of the old candle, and pushed the softened end of the new candle into the mouth of the bottle.

It was a simple, distracted gesture, but the two of us watched in awe. We didn’t speak of it at the time, but years later we discovered that both of us had experienced it as a profound image of renewal.

Ungdomshuset is dust now, a vacant lot. From its ashes can rise equally amazing autonomous spaces and social struggles and adventure stories—even here on the other side of the Atlantic, dear reader, if you so desire.
dinner party at Ungdomshus, 10.25.06

housecleaning, 10.14.06

packed show, 11.2.06

in-house pirate radio, 2.25.07

kitchen, 11.21.06

backyard, K-town festival, 6.22.06

bike war at K-town festival, 6.22.06

Page 58: Brand News - Rolling Thunder, Issue Five, Spring 2008
Once a year, the self-styled rulers of Germany, Italy, France, Britain, Russia, Japan, Canada, and the US meet to strategize and pose for the cameras. In 2007, the summit was in a tiny town on the German coast, surrounded by miles of fortifications, soldiers, and police—all the same, tens of thousands of anarchists and other troublemakers showed up from around the world to shatter the illusion of consensus.

Can’t Stop the Chaos

Autonomous Resistance to the 2007 G8 in Germany

by Alex Trocchi and Ontó,
with accounts from various anonymists
“Autonomen” is the German word for participants in autonomous movements, including Autonomous Maimi (see this issue’s glossary of terms) and anarchists; one can trace the European roots of these movements back to 1968, when the “War on Terror” had cast a deathly pall over the world. The stakes had never been higher: the “War on Terror” had cast a deathly pall over the world, as the cops were off. After that, they often charge police lines, attempting to escape off the official route as a bloc or break into small affinity groups to build barricades and attack police cars—what is precisely what the march in Hamburg did.

As the melee between protestors and cops spread down the city, people started to hop a small fence into the parking lot of the soccer stadium. Soccer in Hamburg is a big deal; St. Pauli, the local team, is world-renowned for drawing some of the most raucous fans in the world. They ripped out the fence into the stadium.

Finally, something was happening.

For two years the German autonomous movement and the Dissent Network in particular organized from the USA to Turkey for one week of action. The stakes had never been higher: the “War on Terror” had cast a deathly pall over the worldwide struggle against capitalism and the state, but at the 2007 G8, anarchists and autonomists hoped to seize the stage of history by scoring a decisive victory against capital.

The modern incarnation of the Autonomen in Germany is distinctly anarchist, mostly young, and quite, quite punk. Even though the movement had been in disarray over the preceding years, the arrival of the G8, combined with the police raids in early May on anti-G8 centers of activity, united the usually divided and overly self-critical autonomous movement. To the chagrin of the police, the raids also backfired in the popular press, and most of the media, and even much of the public, came over to the side of the dissenters. Furthermore, in “Red” Hamburg, the home of insurgencies, pirates, and the world-renowned anti-fascist football league St. Pauli, it is hard to distinguish locals from the Black Bloc in the streets.

Move swiftly. Stop. Fight a bit. Grab something. Then run. Turn around. Watch out for the Snatch Squad. Which ones are they? Wearing all black with red diamonds on their back. Damn, there are too many of them. They are yours. They are not going to let you grab their property. So what do you do? Do you comply? Do you resist? Do you take their property? Do you fight them?

In Hamburg, the police are no different from the cops in any other city. Their strategy is to use provocations to gain control of the crowd. Once they have control, they can arrest the crowd and beat us until we can be mass-arrested—so I hopped the fence—but when I looked up I found myself in a German teen anarchist’s dream come true. I’d escaped a police riot into the caring arms of the St. Pauli soccer team! Imagine running around Seattle during the WTO protests, or fleeing of tear gas and the anguish of protestors being beaten by police, and opening a door to find yourself safely inside Rage Against the Machine’s practice studio.

The team was finishing up a daily soccer practice when they were interrupted by my hooded, masked fall from the heavens. I looked at each other in silence before I asked… “ummm, can I stay here for a bit?”

“Yes—would you like something to eat?” They introduced themselves to me and told me to make myself at home. So I took off my mask and chowed down on their vegetable platters.

At the end of the march, Black Bloc affinity groups rampaged throughout the town, fighting police and wrecking cars; when the police chased everyone back to the convergence center at Rote Flora, even the locals began fighting back against the hated riot police. A giant banner reading “Total Freedom”—as opposed to any supposed freedom or democracy the State can offer—had sailed above the march. At the end, there were eighty-five arrests, but the rest of us were totally free.

They’re surrounded the Rote Flora. What? The convergence center, you know, that huge squat. Are they going in? Not likely, I think they’ll get a beating if they try. Barricades are going up, let’s get behind them. The water cannons are coming out. Well, move. Down this alley! OK. Wait, are we all together? Close, too close. I know. We were gonna go back and get you. What? That’s
insane, they would’ve grabbed you too. Hey look, they’re sending in more. Did they declare a state of emergency? I heard that too. Shit, there’s sours and waves of them. Back to the Flora? No, it’s not safe. OK, then disappear. Thousands of us in the march. Hundreds rampaging in the streets. About eighty-five arrested. Not bad for a start. No, not bad at all.

At one point in Hamburg, a police officer who had taken off his helmet and armor was caught alone outside his van as the riots drew close. In a moment reminiscent of the murder of Carlo Giuliani by a police officer at the G8 in Genoa, the officer drew his gun—but just as he raised it in the air, the back window of the van behind him exploded and he retreated. Projectilev save lives.

Every time a squadron of Polizei were sent in, little clusters of black would form and move towards the squadron, like the attraction of iron filings to a magnet. When the squadron attempted to arrest someone or attack the crowd, the clusters of the Black Bloc would rain cobblestones and empty glass bottles upon the cops. The cops then blindly rushed into the crowd, resulting in the Bloc dispensing rapidly, a reversal of their earlier magnetic attraction to the cops. Then the bloc would slowly reform to rain projectiles onto the cops until they retreated, unable to weather such a torrent of rocks and empty beer bottles. After all, the riot was at a rock concert!

Rostock, June 2: Nocturnes for Capital

In 1998, at the very beginning of the so-called “anti-globalization” movement, the G8 met in Birmingham only to find themselves surrounded by 70,000 activists organized by various NGOs and a raging Reclaim The Streets party downtown. In fear, they fled to the Barbican to a more tranquil manor. In 2001, the NGOs under the umbrella of the Genoa Social Forum organized a march straight to the forbidden Red Zone where the summit was taking place, and the whole city hosting that year’s G8 was consumed in flames.

As the police canceled both the Nazi event and the anti-fascist parade, 8000 were signed up as a different “anti-G8” rally in Schwerin, but in the end the anti-capitalist rock concert featuring musicians such as Tom Morello and Die Toten Hosen. The Nazis had been planning their own “anti-G8” rally in Schwerin, but the police canceled both the Nazi event and the anti-fascist protest at the last minute—so most of the Black Bloc ended up in the middle of the Rostock march.

At the end of the demonstration, the Bloc found itself running, nearly trampling us. If there’s one thing German anarchists have learned from Birmingham and Genoa, it’s not to allow the police “kettle” the demonstration and contain it right up to the last minute, in this demonstration the police kept a safe distance from the march, instead massing on the streets parallel to demonstrating the march. The march ends, and my elation drops into disappointment as, yet again, nothing has happened. My arms are locked with the members of my affinity group, ranging from an incredibly lanky and calm North American man to a small yet fierce Bulgarian woman. All armed with black flags, we have at least making good pictures for the spectacle. In a second, everything changes. A line of cops charge the Block, buttons swinging. The lines in front of us turn and run, nearly rampling us. If there’s one thing German anarchists are good at, it’s running from cops. Our black flags are useless in the face of the cop onslaught, and a few of us threw them at the cops. Separated from the rest of the affinity group, myself and my remaining partner join a small yet fierce Bulgarian woman. More well prepared than myself, some clever anarchists begin using chairs to tear up the paving stones. It’s not what’s beneath the paving stones that counts; sometimes, it’s the paving stones themselves.

At the end of the demonstration, the Bloc found itself running more or less without incident into the middle of the “Make Capitalism History” concert and merging with the crowd. What precisely happened next is unclear, but an altercation broke out with one of the small squads of Rostock cops that were being sent in to seemingly random intervals to maintain order. The tactic of keeping the main police forces hidden on the streets to reach us by the Disent Network, and a reflection of the delegitimization of the G8 in popular imagination.

Like some strange suburban guerilla army, the bloc gathered itself in the trees in front of the shopping center. At first, it was so small I could barely find it. After a few minutes, as I found one friend after another after another, it became clear there were thousands of us. We put on our masks—a mundane act elsewhere, but a tremendous step in Germany. In Scotland, all the white clothes had reminded me of the Scottish sheep out good shepherd, Capital was fattening for slaughter. From the moment our black masks went up in Germany, we were not sheep but a pack of wolves.

Pointless marches are still fundamentally pointless even if they endorse direct action and encourage their entourage tokip marching and start blocking the G8. Unlike the march to the Red Zone in Genoa, this was not a march, but instead a march to an anti-capitalist rock concert featuring musicians such as Tom Morello and Die Toten Hosen. The Nazis had been planning their own “anti-G8” rally in Schwerin, but the police canceled both the Nazi event and the anti-fascist counter-protest at the last minute—so most of the Black Bloc ended up in the middle of the Rostock march.

In Scotland in 2005, the bizarre ménage à trois of Bono, Tony Blair, and “anti-globalization” NGOs created the “Make Poverty History” march. In this guise, they tricked the vast majority of protesters into showing up in white—the color of surrender!—and marching in a parade through the half-empty downtown of Edinburgh, far from the summit. The theme of the parade was begging the G8 to take action on their behalf, the opposite of direct action. The government-organized fake march was the symbolic inversion of their defeats in Birmingham and Genoa.

Pointless marches are still fundamentally pointless even if they endorse direct action and encourage their entourage to stop marching and start blocking the G8. Unlike the march to the Red Zone in Genoa, this was not a march, but instead a march to an anti-capitalist rock concert featuring musicians such as Tom Morello and Die Toten Hosen. The Nazis had been planning their own “anti-G8” rally in Schwerin, but the police canceled both the Nazi event and the anti-fascist counter-protest at the last minute—so most of the Black Bloc ended up in the middle of the Rostock march.

But the powers that be learn from their mistakes; unable to beat the demonstrators, they joined them instead, to lead them astray. In Scotland in 2005, the bizarre ménage à trois of Bono, Tony Blair, and “anti-globalization” NGOs created the “Make Poverty History” march. In this guise, they tricked the vast majority of protesters into showing up in white—the color of surrender!—and marching in a parade through the half-empty downtown of Edinburgh, far from the summit. The theme of the parade was begging the G8 leaders to take action on their behalf, the opposite of direct action. The government-organized fake march was the symbolic inversion of their defeats in Birmingham and Genoa.

A mere two years later, it was no longer “Make Poverty History,” but “Make Capitalism History”—and the team colors had changed from white to black. The march in Rostock was organized by a broad alliance of groups ranging from the Interventionist Left to ATTAC, anarchists and reformists united. In stark contrast to the “Make Poverty History” march in Birmingham, the officers of black were nothing more than a second charge. My partner is exhausted, but we rush forward like the attraction of iron fillings to a magnet. When the crowd repulsed line after line of police charges—this was the redemptive spirit of Genoa, this was the spirit of Genoa!”—a statement of somewhat dubious value out of context, but clearly the speaker thought this “Spirit of Genoa” was a good thing and intended to express support for those fighting the cops. Cars were overturned and set afire, cops retreated, water cannons came out, and the bands played as the police repulsed line after line of police charges—and this was no Bono playing to complacent crowds at Live8. This was the redemptive spirit of Genoa—the spirit of resistance in the face of state violence, spreading like a virus through a crowd everyone had expected would just listen peacefully to the bands. The battle in Rostock was a victory like the inaugural protest against the G8 in Birmingham, and the spell that had been cast in Scotland to assimilate and pacify the “anti-globalization” movement was broken.
I step around a corner and see a line of cops standing guard next to the broken windows—so I hurl a glass bottle into the face of the closest officer. My bottle leaves my hand a few seconds too late, as the cops are already beginning a charge—although I do hear the satisfying shatter of the bottle against his helmet. Panicking, I turn to run, but a baton hits the nape of my neck and I fall to the asphalt. Batons are beating my back and legs, gloved hands twisting my fingers and joints. I wrest my joints and hands free again and again, resisting to stay put as the cops pull my head up by my hair to take my picture. After some indeterminate amount of time, I see rocks and bottles soaring overhead. Black out. Darkness. Light. Then the impossible: there are no cops on top of me! The crowd has forced them to retreat! I stand up and run at breakneck speed away from the police and into the crowd, aiming for the only safe place within reach: the deck of the Greenpeace ship parked near the waterfront. Where’s my partner? Was she arrested? Hurt? Due to my reckless charge? I feel my soul collapse. Those who are not behind bars have to live with the consequences of their actions, and for the first time in my life I wish I had been caught.

Heiligendamm, June 6-7: Blockades Without End

After Genoa, the next G8 summit was moved to the literal summit of a mountain in Evian, far from the urban terrain protesters have been accustomed to since the Paris Commune. This tactic of placing the meeting in a rural location inspired a new counter-tactic: spreading the blockades across miles and miles of difficult rural terrain. The summit site was hopelessly walled off, so the idea was to block the roads leading to and from it, so reporters and other sycophants couldn’t reach the gates.

Anarchy always has at least two faces: one of chaos and one of self-organization. If the streets of Hamburg and Rostock exemplified the beautiful chaos of our movement, the self-organization of Camp Reddelich showed the other. Transforming an empty field of grass next to a slaughterhouse into a thriving village in less than a week, anarchists of every stripe proved that they are capable of running their own lives without governments or capitalists, police or prisons. Antifascist, Queer, Yellow, and Internationalist barrios sprouted organically as if from the earth. Kitchens dotted the fields along with security towers, tool-making workshops, Indymedia centers, training tents, info-booths, trauma tents, anti- sexist spaces, and thousands of other tents, all providing the physical and emotional spaces for people to organize, strategize, evaluate, share, dance, and live free. This autonomous zone, mirrored by two other rural camps and multiple urban convergence centers across Germany, was the birthplace of a million secret plans. Rural blockades require putting protesters in the countryside, so protest camps developed as a necessary prerequisite for large-scale rural direct action. In a step above the single camp at Stirling during the 2005 G8, hearkening back to
Raids were a constant worry at the camp and defensive measures were prepared in case of attack: barricades of scrap wood and metal, trenches to stop police vehicles, piles of bottles and rocks. The alarm was sounded one night at 3:30 a.m. when six vans pulled up to the front gate and rocks. The alarm was sounded one night at 3:30 a.m. when six vans pulled up to the front gate. The vans left as quickly as they’d arrived and the camp returned to sleep.

The camps were all incredibly well-functioning, with security shifts on watch-towers, self-organized canteens feeding thousands, anarchist-run bars (not serving the day before the blockades!), tents to deal with mainstream press, mobile Indymedia centers on wheels, endless conspiratorial meetings—and even showers! There was only one component missing: in the aftermath of Rostock, the alliance between the Interventionist Left and the autonomous movement started fraying, and the Dissent Network—perhaps having last minute qualms as the day of action approached—did not convene a public meeting about plans.

From the helicopters’ perspective, we must have looked quite threatening. Groups of eight to twelve all over the camp were huddling in circles, poring endlessly over topographical maps and transportation routes. Whispers circulated in thirty languages from barrio to barrio about which intersections to target, how to get there, when to move on, whether to join the official blockades or form a suicide bloc to charge the gates. The bars and kitchens swarmed with international anti-capitalists debating past summit strategies, victories and failures, similarities to the present and new challenges. How would the sixteen thousand cops respond to a direct attack on the fence? To an attack on the police themselves? Which roads are still open? How can we get there? How will we hold them? Block G8 had a plan, but the insurrectionary anarchists didn’t—or if any of them did, at least no one would discuss it publicly. Paranoia filled the air and meetings got more and more clandestine, finally to a point at which the decentralization of knowledge was almost debilitating. Fuck it, we have to try something.

Earlier rural blockades in both Evian and Gleneagles had failed because they didn’t last more than a few hours and so could not “shut down” the summit. As one popular poster in Germany put it, Bewegen, Blockieren, Bleiben—“Move. Block. Remain.” That critical “remain” had been left out of previous summit attempts. The strategic change was not to blockade as either mobile blocs or small groups jump ing in and out of the road, as at previous summits, but to mass as many people as possible in the roads near the main entrances to Heiligendamm to blockade them in a non-violent manner, staying until the police literally dragged people off. While previous blockades had aimed for small numbers and offered virtually no training, the “Block G8” campaign returned to the mass non-violence civil disobedience that was so crucial to success in Seattle but curiously and detrimentally absent at almost all subsequent summit protests. While the pacifist nature of this approach caused many of the “more-militant-than-thou” anarchists to mock it, the simplicity and accessibility of this approach enabled thousands of untrained Germans to join in the blockades.

Due to their long history of anti-nuclear Castor blockades, the German autonomous movement—unlike autonomous movements in places like Greece and the US—is experienced both at throwing rocks and erecting peaceful blockades. Internationals were bewildered as the Autonomen changed tactics from throwing rocks to sitting in streets for the day of blockades. When Block G8 moved into action on Wednesday, the cops more or less permitted it happen, much to the surprise of all—as they had quashed all demonstrations in the area after the riot in Rostock. Perhaps now that the G8 had officially begun, the police had to prove Germany was a civilized country without a near-fascist police force. Combined with Rostock, it was like a left punch of Black Bloc aggression followed by a right hook of colorful and effective blockades.

It wasn’t until I saw the multi-colored array of 5000 people marching in the bright green fields under a soft blue sky with helicopters above and police below that it hit me: we shouldn’t have underestimated the official blockades. Although the international anarchists and autonomists had decided against forming a militant presence at these blockades due to pressure from Block G8 organizers to remain nonviolent, there were still a number of us in black ready to throw down if necessary. As we tore through fields evading police lines, you could feel the growing excitement and power of the crowd. Breaking up into different columns to get past the police, we succeeded again and again in reaching the streets. Finally we saw it, the fence, with six layers of cops protecting it. Many hopped onto the main street and laid down immediately. The autonomous bloc started tearing down a barbed wire fence next to a forest that would serve as our escape route if necessary. The official organizers were scared and tried to dissuade us, while the media captured their sexy images. The cameras played their games, the cops stood their ground, and everyone just sat there, waiting, for days.

Since the Block G8 campaign organized openly, it’s possible that the police knew the locations of the blockades and the multiple camps at the 2003 G8 in Lausanne and An nemasse, the Dissent Network and the Interventionist Left set up three different camps. The first, Camp Rostock, was nearest to the city and held innumerable communists and NGO organizations—not to mention quite a few punks too drunk to get to other camps and a few clever anarchists who wanted some cover. The second, Camp Reddelich, was the closest to the “Red Zone,” and accordingly held almost entirely anarchists. The third, Camp Wehmannsdorf, was the domain of the more traditionally non-violent anti-nuclear blockaders—though in Germany, the line between nuclear weapons is thin.
fanned all important delegates down another road, letting the protesters blockade the "main gates" to Heiligendamm. This raised the disturbing possibility that the G8 leaders are happy to allow the spectacle of a blockade to happen so long as it remains colorful, non-violent, and does not interrupt their actual operations. While the Block G8 plan and non-violence guidelines were mostly respected on Wednesday, on Thursday all bets were off.

Protesters swept across the fields of Heiligendamm and tried to blockade nearly every road. The day started off with a nearly comic attempt to repeat the "Suicide March" Black Bloc that was so successful at Genoa during the 2005 G8. Only a few hundred people, the Bloc barely got out of Camp Reddelich before being assaulted by cops and fleeing back in; in retaliation, the cops surrounded the entrance to the camp, preventing the 6.4 a.m. Dissent Bloc from leaving. At the same time, mostly German groups struck with a series of decentralized blockades on major roads, achieving varying degrees of success. The paranoia

Berlin, June 8: Anticlimax

Our hopes weren't dashed yet. The next morning our rural fun was to begin. We started early, around 3 a.m. First decision: suicide march or autonomous blockade? We choose the latter and moved slowly into position. Cars were dropping off packs of people by the woods. Affinity groups disappeared into the forest as endless lines of cop vans appeared. It seemed like the setting for a Wild West shootout, with both sides building up their arsenals and waiting for the other to move first. Seventy-five of us made it safely inside, transformed into a black mob, and moved like a guerrilla army through the brush, dodging under tree cover when helicopters swooped by. Camouflage would have been better—but hey, we're city folk; black's our forte. With saws and combustibles in hand, ready to light up the morning with a spectacular blockade, we called a last-minute meeting. Speaking in four languages through our masks in the black forests of northern Germany, we called it off. It was a trap.

Other blockades on the same road happened and all were arrested immediately with no effect. Disappointed yet feeling good about our judgement, we dispersed into our casual clothes and loaded for Berlin, where the final show was about to begin.

Some of the internationals were frustrated with the entire "Plan A" of the blockades. Coming out of a year-long analysis of previous mass mobilizations, Genoa in particular, various insurrectionists decided that it was time to take the initiative and try something new. Instead of following the lead of the traditional Left, using its large marches and demonstrations as cover for breaking windows and burning cars, they decided to see if they could launch a strategic attack by themselves, one that would violate the traditional set-piece roles of mass mobilizations. With the help of some of the German Autonomen, a secretive "Plan B" was organized in case the blockades failed. While the blockades appeared successful, on the final day of action a banner appeared on the two decrepit cement towers overlooking Camp Reddelich: "Plan B: Burn Berlin!"

Plan B resembled the idea behind the Seattle Black Bloc, when an autonomous bloc took advantage of police being distracted by blockades to wreak the shopping district—but instead of happening outside the summit, it was to take place in the heart of the city. Tactically, it was attractive, since on the day when a thousand German police would be distracted by dealing with the blockades a Black Bloc could more easily strike the heart of financial capital in Berlin. However, only a few hundred people showed up, scattered by riot police and infiltrated with undercover cops. A piece of paper went from hand to hand notifying protestants they should move to Rosenthal Place to begin a riot, but by the time the crowd got there the police were already there. Strangely enough, there were almost no Germans at the Reclaim the Streets, and it ended without more incident than a few destroyed cars.

While the Berlin police may not have known about Plan B, many anarchists did not either. Perhaps the vast decentralized infrastructure of three separate camps made communication impossible; it takes more than a good idea to get people involved. Also, there was a real lack of support from many Berlin Autonomen, who originally seemed to pledge their support. This might be understandable: their primary social center, Kopi, is threatened with eviction, and a major riot in Berlin would have brought harsh repression upon them. It would have been far better for all involved if locals had been more up-front about their doubts instead of simply not showing up.

The idea of separating aggressive demonstrators from pacifists by giving each their "own" day of action divides the movement tactically and temporally, which plays perfectly into the hands of the police. It’s far better to divide spatially if numbers allow, but to act all at once on the same day. Dividing the movement spatially over Rostock, Berlin, Hamburg, and Heiligendamm definitely stretched the police to their breaking point, but made co-ordination difficult at best. In hindsight, doing anything new and dangerous requires not only an adequate assessment of your numbers and strength but also truly believing it will work: Plan B failed on account of a crisis of faith.

As we sat in the darkness, Berlin far from in flames and only the ghosts of our dreams to haunt us. Slightly drunk, a comrade from Greece muttered, "In Greece, you are welcome in my house. In Greece, all of us will make bottles together, and throw them at the fascists, and..." He was almost choking. He turned to me and said, "Now is time for that most sad of moments, the emptying of the molotovs."

Tentative Conclusions

When revolutionary movements take the historical stage, as the "movement of movements" did at the end of the last century, there inevitably follows an equal and opposite wave of counter-revolution. As the curtain falls upon the tradition of "anti-globalization" known as the "War on Terror," it becomes ever more urgent for a new rupture to re-orient the world for another revolutionary moment. Today, the crises of migration, climate change, and the failure of global capital are far more immediate than the bankrupt narrative of terror. Despite the hype of the Dissent Network, the 2007 G8 was not the rupture we were waiting for—but it was a strategic realignment of the global movements to re-focus us to strike and tear the seams of history apart to create that much-needed rupture. As any martial artist can tell you, the positioning for the strike is as important as the strike itself. Movements decline, dissolve into fragments and micro-parties, failing to grasp the imaginations of even their own most dedicated adherents. Movements rise, consolidating
To even begin to hear the voices of our desires, which are proach. Humans are creatures of habit, socially imprisoned those invested in open space, but there is a logic to this ap takes the stage once the G8 is in the grave. 

ethnicities. It may be the battle between these two forces that fascists want to reconstitute a closed world based on mythical movement of movements is how to deal with those other "anti- anti-capitalist, " the resurgent fascists—who took advantage of the movement of movements with anti-capitalism as its center. Due to the climate is changing: it's becoming anti-capitalist. 

One question for the new manifestation of the movement of movements is how to deal with those other "anti-" the fascist critique of global capitalism incu...
There's a lounge with a pile of dusty board games and a fleet of recliners. There is a dining room where you are dosed with whatever drug is being tested, after which our mouths are searched with a flashlight. Every room is equipped with a television and a red trashcan for bloody gauze. Computers are stolen, fights break out over the television, and sometimes someone sells bootleg DVDs in the corner.

For the first half of the day, blood draws are twenty minutes apart, so we can't really do much but read or watch television—no lying down or crossing your legs until after lunch. We are required to be at the blood draw station at least two minutes before our designated draw time. If we are late for a draw, our pay is docked $1000. The blood draw room is spectacularly Orwellian. A row of phlebotomists stand ready to draw your blood. When your number is called, you sit down at the station listed on your schedule and the phlebotomist scans your barcode bracelet—beep—then scans barcodes on the empty tubes—beep—and when it is the exact minute listed on your schedule, takes your blood: "Thank you. The room is filled with this sound—beep, beep… "Thank you. " Off you go to the waiting room, takes your blood: "Thank you. " The room is large, so we don't talk to each other much. Phlebotomists, nurses, and we have a great deal of mental freedom. The money earned, the uncertainty is shared with the subjects about the conditions of our work, and inevitably someone will say, "I guess I shouldn't complain since I'm getting paid for doing this. " It's interesting to compare the hours to work faster or smile more. Still, despite these freedoms, the fact remains that we are selling our bodies for cash. Perhaps we are less likely to view our work as "real" because we are using our bodies passively; we are rarely required to do anything but be a receptacle for medications and a storehouse of valuable bodily fluids. Between the blood loss, experimental medications, the overcooked unhealthy food, lack of exercise, and the psychological effects of staying inside a building for several days or weeks, being in a medical study is hard on your body and your mind. Participating in a pain or stress study can be particularly upsetting. One friend was in a study where he was paid according to how long he was able to withstand various types of pain such as putting his hand on a hot pad or holding it in ice water. The longer he was in pain, the more money he made. Another friend was shown disturbing, violent images without warning while having an MRI, causing him anxiety that lasted the rest of the day. A study in which I was subjected to a stressful mock interview and made to do math aloud while having my blood drawn triggered my depression. Sometimes I think there are rich people behind a one-way mirror at these studies, drinking champagne and eating foie gras and laughing at us. "How much would we have to pay healthy people to take toxic experimental HIV drugs for two weeks? " It's like a reality TV show—America's Funniest Poor People.

For me, participating in studies is work in its purest form: I give you control over my body for a set period of time in exchange you give me money. During a study, so much of our lives are controlled by the researchers: when we sleep and wake up, when and what we eat, if we smoke, what drugs we take, if we can exercise—all this is decided or supervised by them.

When I first started doing overnight medical studies, I imagined it would be some sort of retreat—a quiet place where I could get a lot of writing done. Though we do have a certain degree of mental freedom during the day, between the frequent blood draws, the absence of breakfast (if in a "fasted" study), the noise from the televisions, and the lack of sleep, I find it extremely difficult to focus on anything that requires analysis—for example, writing an article such as this. Thus, while some people do work for school or their other jobs, most tend to spend their time watching television or on the internet. It’s true that sometimes it doesn’t feel like work. You can wear a barbeque all day if you want, you are free to read, watch movies, or write (if you can) between blood draws, and there is no hess peering over your shoulder telling you to work faster or smile more. Still, despite these freedoms, the fact remains that we are selling our bodies for cash. Perhaps we are less likely to view our work as "real" because we are using our bodies passively; we are rarely required to do anything but be a receptacle for medications and a storehouse of valuable bodily fluids. The term has been specifically applied to either intermittent work or, more generally, a confluence of intermittent work and precarious existence.

To work faster or smile more. Still, despite these freedoms, the fact remains that we are selling our bodies for cash. Perhaps we are less likely to view our work as "real" because we are using our bodies passively; we are rarely required to do anything but be a receptacle for medications and a storehouse of valuable bodily fluids. The term has been specifically applied to either intermittent work or, more generally, a confluence of intermittent work and precarious existence.

Precarity: a condition of existence without predictability or security, affecting material or psychological well-being. The term has been specifically applied to either intermittent work or, more generally, a confluence of intermittent work and precarious existence.
characterized much of the “feminine” labor in capitalist countries for centuries. On a final note about precarity, many anarchists in the US raise the question whether precarity is a useful framework for this context. Many radicals argue that precarity is clearly present in the United States, but that “precarious conditions” are not a recent phenomenon and have actually been on the rise since at least the economic downturn of the early 1970s. Also, the dismantling of social safety nets in Europe referred to by “precarity” has been less marked here, simply because much of the social welfare that Europeans enjoyed never existed here in the first place. Nevertheless, the job losses brought about by free trade agreements, the Democrats’ 1996 welfare reform, the proposed privatization of social security, the decline of union membership, the rise of the service sector economy, and the repression, persecution, and deportation of undocumented migrant workers all point to “precarity” as a very real phenomenon in the United States. Whether or not usage of the term itself grows here, U.S. anarchists would do well to engage with precarity within a comprehensive framework, understanding such conditions as interconnected and interdependent.

IRBs were created as a response to public outcry over the dark history of unethical, dangerous medical studies. The most well known example is the medical experiments done by Nazis on prisoners of war and civilians of occupied countries during World War II. As a result of the Nuremberg trials, a code of ethics, titled the Nuremberg Code, was developed which contained the idea that informed consent is essential when testing on human subjects.

While Nazis doctors were on trial in Nuremberg, an egregious human experiment was taking place in the U.S.—the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. In this study conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service, 399 poor and mostly illiterate African-American men in rural Alabama were denied treatment for syphilis so that researchers could watch the progression of the disease. The study subjects were not told they had syphilis and underwent countless dangerous and non-therapeutic “treatments” over the course of the study, resulting in the deaths of many of the participants. This experiment lasted from 1932 until 1972.

In the wake of the Nuremberg Trials and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, several human studies codes of conduct were developed, leading to the establishment of IRBs in 1974.

Each institution that conducts a study has an individual IRB with its own rules and regulations, including a standardized pay rate for studies depending on how many hours are worked and the procedures involved. All of the IRBs, however, are regulated by the Federal Department of Health and Human Services.

IRBs limit the amount of money that an institution can pay study subjects based on a fear of coercion. The idea is that if too much money is offered, a study subject will be coerced into participating in the study and will be incapable of giving voluntary consent. For the same reason, some IRBs prohibit stating the exact monetary amount offered for the study in the advertisement. As well-intentioned as these regulations are, the people who make up IRBs fail to realize that the entire capitalist economy is based on coercion.

Poor people are going to participate in medical studies to get quick, easy cash no matter how much money is offered. Paying subjects less simply means that we are forced to sell our bodies more often, for less money. It also means we are more likely to surreptitiously do more studies at once, potentially skewing the study data. As a medical study subject, I appreciate the existence of IRBs. Now, voluntary informed consent is required before entering a study, subjects’ pay must be prorated (so that one’s entire pay is not contingent upon completing the study), and it is much more difficult to conduct studies using prisoners as subjects. However, there are limits to what an IRB can control. An IRB only requires researchers to stay within the parameters set in the protocol. An IRB will not penalize researchers if you are injured during a blood draw, your check is mailed three weeks late, or if after you have driven a hundred miles and taken a week off at your other job you arrive to find the study cancelled.

Additionally, researchers can avoid the restrictions of IRBs by doing studies in countries where there is no similar oversight, such as giving experimental drugs to people in the Global South. In 1996, only 24 years since the Tuskegee Syphilis Study was exposed, Pfizer Inc., the world’s largest drug manufacturer, tested an unapproved experimental antibiotic on 200 children in meningitis in Nigeria, resulting in injuries and deaths.

Our demands as medical study subjects are really quite reasonable: compensation for screenings, compensation for transportation expenses if a study is cancelled without notice, healthier food, a more comprehensive informed consent process, higher pay for more invasive studies, more phehlostrimts so blood draws are less horrid. So what can we do? Though there are many frustrating aspects of being a precarious worker, we also benefit from the precarity. Each job is short, we can work whenever we like, and the employers don’t communicate with each other about study subjects. Even if it were available, the last thing I would want is a steady 40-hour week job being a medical study subject with a contract and paid vacation days. The first question is how medical study subjects can organize together to improve our working conditions while maintaining and strengthening the underground networks we already have. The second and more difficult question is how we can make the work we do subversive.

Due to the precarity of medical study work, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to organize while at the workplace. We have no regular coworkers, many different employers, and each job lasts a few months at the longest. The pool of potential workers is almost

Like many people working precarious jobs, medical study subjects face the fears, anxieties, and legal limbo that millions of migrant workers face throughout Europe and the rest of the world. We can see this playing out right now in the U.S., as the government is increasingly pressuring employers to fire undocumented workers and this pressure is transferred in turn to immigrant families. It has largely been anarchist- and autonomist-feminist groups in Europe that have popularized this term and are developing forms of struggle to engage with these “new” conditions. Groups like Precaricà a la Deriva, the EuroMAYDAY network, and others have used theater, building occupations, and creative media disruption to challenge Europe’s state Left and inject this analysis into the anti-capitalist and “antiglobalization” movements of recent years. Much of the activity of these groups revolves around a urgent question: In an economy in which workplaces are increasingly casual, part-time, unpredictable, and decentralized, how and where does effective class struggle take place? It is not surprising that feminists are playing such an important role in this development, considering that the kinds of work and living conditions referred to by the discourse on precarity have
This is about two Barcelona squats— one ending, and one beginning— and the collectives that run them.

Barcelona is a city wracked by a remarkably accelerated process of gentриfication. It's like bombs are falling on the city every day, and wherever they land, immigrants, graffiti, and street corner conversations between old-time neighbors disappear, and tourists and expensive shops pop up out of thin air. The laws and the political situation also make squatting difficult, yet despite this Barcelona’s famed squatting movement is still strong. In the end, a particular building occupation may not last a year. But the social relationships of the collectives responsible prove much more durable than the physical structures, and it is these that determine the survival or demise of the occupations and the movement as a whole.

In late March I was greeted at the squatted social center Ruinamalia with the warning that it could easily be evicted before the end of April—at one point the people running the library even started packing up their books. Around the same time, the group of squatters fixing up the newly occupied Antic Marti celebrated the news that the owner of the building was involved in legal proceedings that would take four years to resolve, during which time he could not initiate an eviction process against them. Now, at the beginning of June, Ruinamalia is still hanging on and experiencing new life, and Antic Marti is a memory but the collective that squatted it has started a new project.

Eviction and Cohesion: Antic Marti

Antic Marti was located at Consejo de Ciento 58, in the Sant Marti neighborhood of Barcelona. The building consisted of three stories of apartments on top of an abandoned restaurant. Eighteen people, mostly students, lived in the apartments, and the restaurant was to be turned into a social center. It only existed about two months before it got evicted, and during that time they were busy fixing it up. Throughout its vacancy the owner had periodically smashed up the building, attempting to undermine its structure in order to get permission to demolish and rebuild the property—so the squatters had a lot of work to do. They had high hopes for the place, and the corner restaurant would have made a great social center. The very night they received news that they had four years before an eviction proceeding could start, they dumpstered a big wedding cake. All the ovens seemed good, and the optimism was infectious. On 7 May, at around 6-10 in the morning, several vans of the Mossos d’Esquadra (the Catalan national police) came to the house. The cops had their faces masked and

Building Collectives in Anarchist Barcelona

A Tale of Two Squats

As medical study subjects, together we can escape the implications of precar in our precarious work—instead of asking, praying, and wishing for stability in our jobs from our hours or the government, we can take and create the stability we crave by organizing together and subverting the work. The first step is to examine together the conditions and the meaning of our work. From here, we can organize to improve our working conditions. More importantly, through organizing together we can build connections with other precarious workers in our communities so that we can provide each other with the stability that capitalism will never provide us. Medical study subjects, link your bandaged arms!

Contact the author: oliver_sees_stars@hotmail.com

* For an account of successful research study subject organizing within a study, see the ‘zine anthology Guinea Pig Zero by Bolt Helion.
† The limitation here is that not everyone has access to the internet.
‡ The limitation here is that not everyone has access to the internet.
§ For a great discussion of the results of unannounced participation in the production of terror and the abuses of human labor, see Jill Godmilow’s film War Survival Guide (1997) about the production of Napalm by Dow Chemical Company for the Vietnam War.
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affirmative on a city-wide basis. it seems unable to muster the resources needed to act out the point of being a group of friends, and it has never had a sense of being an organization. for autonomy-minded (dare i say "cowboy"?) anarchists, this requires a greater degree of cooperation and playing well with others than is common.

conflict and formality: runamalia

runamalia is located at 11 reina amalia in the raval neighborhood, one of the few squatted social centers left in the center of barcelona. it was squatted by a collective of six people in october 2004, though some flats had previously been squatted by neighbors, pensioners, immigrants or drug users on an individual and clandestine basis. one neighbor used an entire floor to house dozens of racing pigeons, whose left-behinds the new squatters had to clean up—thus one of them wanted to call the new place "la pluma." since 1993, the owners had been trying to declare the building an economic ruin in order to get permission from city council to demolish it and build a newer structure, for which the rents would be much higher; this would contribute to gentrification in raval, which has slowed that process so far with its reputation as a rough neighborhood. for ten years, the owners had been evicting individual squatters quickly and easily, but when they found out the new squatters were organized and had support, they hesitated. the collective did not receive papers notifying them of their names and numbers removed. they bashed down the door, pulled everyone out, and searched the place, copying computer files and cell phone logs. they also charged the collective with using a criminal rather than a civil eviction process, and also had experience in their daily activity with a collective model that used conscious power-sharing and formal decision-making to achieve mutually satisfying cooperation between groups with varying politics and communication styles—such as exist even just within the squatters’ movement itself. on the neighborhood level, this would probably mean not only building amicable relationships with neighbors, but working in coordination with neighborhood organizations (such as those against gentrification) in a way that nourishes a plurality of differences without silencing any members or reducing action to the lowest common denominator. for autonomy-minded (dare i say "cowboy"?) anarchists, this requires a greater degree of cooperation and playing well with others than is common.

affirmity and coordination: the squatter’s assembly

clearly, it’s easier to organize a social center—not to mention live—with people you have a lot in common with: the easy of smaller groups. there’s nothing wrong with a large collective splitting into two smaller ones to squat two separate buildings. but what about matters that require the coordination of a greater number of people, such as resisting gentrification and the growing police repression throughout barcelona as a whole? meetings of the barcelona squatters’ assembly have been getting smaller. this may be a sign of something to do with the fact that the squats involved are organized in a more informal, affinity group model, and that informal structure seems to have been subsumed uncritically into the organization of the assembly. however, this model lends itself to a diverse assembly to coordinate actions across an entire city; an organizational form capable of bridging differences where there are no affinities is necessary. the assembly is shrinking to the point of being a group of friends, and it has never had a concrete decision-making process. it coordinates important protests and other actions regularly, but given its limitations it seems unable to muster the resources needed to act out strategies to resisting or reducing police repression and gentrification on a city-wide basis.

perhaps it would help if more of the squatters involved day-to-day existence in which material and collective needs are shared, “a break with solitude.” several of the folks who live there are immigrants; some of them are students, some are older, few have regular jobs—it helps not to have to pay rent. it is much more diverse than the exclusively punk youth squats of northern europe.

runamalia’s social center has expanded the infrastructure of the anticausal and anarchist movements in barcelona. as a common physical space for the various events and organizations that make use of it, it is also a conduit for linking and uniting various social movements. the social center lacked structure at first, but each collective using the space had the autonomy to start its own projects, allowing them to build strength and thus organically create the need for coordination at a higher level. unfortunately, they didn’t start meeting frequently as a social center and acting as a coherent social force (organizing protests or educational actions in the neighborhood, for example) until the beginning of the eviction process. the social center enjoys strong participation from others in the movement, but not enough involvement with the neighborhood. only a few of the barcelona squats i’ve seen are deeply and mutually involved with their neighborhood, though this seems to be the desired ideal of most of them. granted, it is extremely difficult. squats are abnormal, and participating in them forces people to go against the aesthetic and routine in which capitalism socializes them. many people have minimal relationships with their “normal” neighbors; entering into a relationship with people who expect not just a daily hello but rather mutual aid and a rethinking of the foundations of capitalist existence could be intimidating and possibly unattractive for neighbors even if they stand to gain
from it. So even when a squat isn’t dirty, disrespectful of its neighbors, or clishy, it still faces an uphill battle.

Some squats successfully integrated themselves into and invigorated the neighborhood struggles against gentrification, and these win the respect of their neighbors. But RuinAmalia has scarcely participated in the anti-gentrification movement is Dublin in an organized way. The various collectives of the social center have only united to be able to organize common actions recently, and the house of RuinAmalia has faced other problems I’ll describe below.

This is not to suggest they have been unsuccessful in this important part of the squatting ideal; currently, they enjoy amicable relationships with nearly all their neighbors, whether from the United States, Canada, or countries that they have constantaneously squatters. No one is afraid of them or hostile towards them anymore, and neighbors sometimes come into the social center to use the internet or listen to music.

The folks of RuinAmalia have accomplished this by inviting the neighbors to events or to share concerns and complaints directly, by not holding loud shows that go late into the night, and by maintaining an aesthetic that is clean and welcoming (ahem, at least by squat standards).

RuinAmalia has also experienced difficulties in meeting its ideals. Collective life, emotional openness and mutual aid are not as strong as some would like, and at least part of the problem stems from differing ideas about communication and decision-making. In the first instance, it is problematic that people in the collective have conflict about how things should work, and it is probable that the differing ideas are not equally valid or effective. But as I don’t have the answers of how to make a collective work, the best I can do is describe the conflict and the questions it raises.

From one perspective, there is a failure to reach and respect open decisions. It seems to be characterized Modesto’s squatters are more open to use informal forums to make collectively decisions, without clear process or even commonly agreed standards and are often difficult to resolve because of the difference in the understanding of what is considered acceptable or not.

When I first came to RuinAmalia and expressed appreciation for what the space meant to me, the conflict was worrying me. The people with more power may dislike open, formal meetings because they feel their political responsibility dominates them, accordingly, they tend to discuss problems in a safe, comfortable, and closed setting, while hanging out with close friends within the collective. Within this setting, criticisms are formulated, as are preferences that become informal decisions, without being shared with the entire group—particularly the person those criticisms are aimed at.

This informally creates another site of power, and the conflict between these rival groups within the platform discourages any resolution of the problem—largely because even if they can get over their egos to seek resolution, they seek it through contradictory means. The most likely result is that people will leave the collective, the dynamic that caused the problem will probably recur when new people move in. This self-destruct mechanism plays itself out in a generally anarchistic group and makes what should be an inspiring act of creation a stressful and disillusioning experience.

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other anti-abortion groups have a history of activity, which culminated in 1995 with an arson attack that destroyed a Planned Parenthood facility in town. This is not an area where you can pick out liberals by their bumper stickers or count the bikes outside the local health food co-op—there is no co-op. There are more Baptist Churches than health food stores, but all the same, there are visible class tensions and, in certain communities, widespread disgust for the forces of law and order.

Because of the importance of agriculture to the local economy, the need for immigrant labor, and significant and racial class divisions persist. These divisions are often perceived as being between “whites” and “Mexicans,” those who align with the settler culture against everyone who is brown. But while the local news media sensationalizes the threat of Latino gangs—the Nortenos [Northern] and the Sureños [Southern]—the reality is that the underclass and insurgent populace is comprised of a variety of races.

On the environmental front, pesticide spraying (either for crops or to stop West Nile Virus by killing the mosquitoes that carry it) and chemical contamination are causing more and more people—especially farm workers—to develop asthma, cancer, and other ailments. Health care is non-existent or, if you are touting as being better than the sprawl that is quickly replacing them, many of the farm owners in the area play a role similar to Southern California’s “fire department,” diverting the poor and exploited from the county and the city to keep their farms going. The Modesto area is also home to large polluters like the Cevanta plant, which burns trash from across the West Coast and pumps pollution including the cancer-causing agent disin (back into the nearby working-class Latino community. Urban sprawl is changing the landscape by gobbling up farmland as waves of newcomers from the Bay Area flood the area. This is not only visible in the landscape, but also in the growing social stratification between the working class and community of color in the West and South Sides of Modesto and the affluent, largely white communities living in the East and North areas of the city.

Modesto is a large city with a small town mentality. It is rife with small-time fascist behavior, chauvinistic Christianity, brutal police, and the power of the local property-holding elite all contribute to a reactionary and repressive environment. But with all of this going on, there has to be some resistance, right? Since the 1960s, probably the most documented opposition to the current state of affairs in the United Farm Workers movement, headed by the United Farm Workers labor union—UFW. Peace and anti-war groups in Modesto were also active during the Vietnam era. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, it was reactionary and fascist forces such as the Klan and anti-abortion groups that grabbed headlines by taking action in town. It wasn’t until the post-9/11 world that a new period of social struggle emerged in Modesto including anarchists, illegal immigrants, rent strikers, cop-killers, Wobblies, and a whole host of other outsiders.

Working Class Heroes

Up until the early 2000s, there were no collective, crews, or affinity groups doing anarchist projects except what came out of the local punk scene. In the late 1990s, probably the most influential Modesto-based and anarcho-punk band was Piss Off!, who distributed free literature and utilized visual projections in their performances. Piss Off! influenced other bands, some of whom began tabling with anarchist literature and playing benefits for anarchist projects. The friendship networks and social atmosphere of the punk scene created an easy environment for radical ideas to spread organically, anarcho-punk exposed young people, many working or lower middle class, to anarchism.

As the Modesto punk scene was beginning to feel the tangling of anarchist sensibilities, other formations of young people were getting involved in various activist groups and causes. Some of these people were involved with local progressive anti-war groups, and many traveled to the protests in San Francisco during the buildup to the most recent Iraq war. Many young people were growing disillusioned with liberal activism, some met anarcho-punk, and new connections were made. Out of this college activism, some small-scale actions, protests, and events grew: mainly animal rights protests, banners, drop, anti-war protests, and outreach. A Food Not Bombs chapter was also formed by anarcho-punks and college activists. However, by 2003, many of the older junior college students were poised to graduate and move to other places in search of higher education. The DAAA Collective formed in this vacuum.

“Community Foot Soldiers”

The Direct Action Anti-Authoritarians Collective existed from the summer of 2001 into late winter 2006. The collective maintained a core of four to eight people, the leadership of the collective stabilized around a large group of supporters of varying levels of commitment. This collective was mostly male, with an equal balance of white folks and people of color. The group was almost always made up of young people; the oldest member was in his 30s. While the makeup of the group may have helped the participants avoid the pitfalls of predictable peace activism, this also meant that youth subculture colored its efforts to an extent that could be limiting or alienating.

The community organizing of the DAAA Collective could be divided into a few basic categories: public outreach, actions, educational events, and solidarity work with other groups and individuals. It could be said that the DAAA Collective started from an activist orientation, in that the group often participated in social struggles that made demands of the existing social order, worked on a variety of different issues, and hoped for a greater struggle.

People within the DAAA Collective rea- soned that homelessness was a consequence of the class struggle, and that the problem of the government not being compassionate enough to consider the plight of the homeless. Despite this, the literature that the group put out simply pointed to the problems created by the city elite without emphasizing the need to destroy the elite structure itself—leaving the door open for a reformist interpretation.

Considering the amount of energy it consumed, Food Not Bombs was both bad and good for the overall growth of the collective. It enabled the participants to discover new ways to get food and cloth- ing outside the exchange economy, which allowed them to live more comfortably, and it also diminished their feeling of dependence on capital. This got people in the group thinking about how they could use those resources to bring them together, and, in turn, bring them in contact with many homeless people, to which they, TOO COOL! and the police, the rich, the city elite, and the religious institutions that sought to convert them.

As with many projects that are rooted in social activity and interaction, the work of the project ultimately rested in its ability to transcend the simple matter of sharing food and give rise to social struggle. In this way, Food Not Bombs was partially successful, in that it served as a launch pad for homelessness and non-homeless ac- tion against the abuse directed at them by the police. However, Food Not Bombs in Modesto hinged on the efforts of a beleaguered few. Because not all collective members had access to reliable transportation, picking up or dumpstering the food, cooking, and driving to the “feed” was dependent on a very small number of people—the others involved simply wouldn’t or couldn’t take the work. The seeds of tension and burnout were sowed very early. Several times throughout the collective’s exist- ence, there were calls to rotate tasks and redistribute the workload—not just for Food Not Bombs, but for various collec- tive projects. These calls were presented at informal meetings and were generally forgotten about by the following week. Often this meant that the person or people who had the most invested in the project simply did the work.

Towards the end of the collective, some participants questioned whether the group should continue a project that did little to combat homelessness other than give out a hot meal.[1] Some within the group responded that the activity was too divisive and, therefore, rather than those who were being “saved,”...
Success in terms of public interest, and donations from friends and thrift stores, set up in a Wal-Greens parking lot. It was Revolution for the Poor,” the collective stopped as attendance dropped. After several months, the clothing drives degenerated into three or so people doing to other forms of more concrete struggle. did help a lot of people get free clothing, because it provided a social activity that some Food Not Bombs did create, but it did not take off. While massive fliers at the event let everyone know that there were people, members of the collective were more interested to be a place where anyone could bring some ways Food Not Bombs did create was in the downtown community to take information owners—to discuss the Copwatch video against police harassment. For many within the group, it made more sense to get out to what they were doing consistently and when they contributed to genuine relationships things to pass the time. The collective was able to pull off all of this work frequently had to be re-invented sociability or expected such a large turnout. With the weekly Anarchist Cafés downtown other things—took a toll, and people either got burned out or felt that they were doing much too. The work. One might note a tension in that the projects that the DAAA Collective took on in early 2005 were the group’s support for (medical too—a lot, and people either got burned out or felt that they were doing too. The work. One might note a tension in the course of each weekend by either all staying at one person’s house or by squatting together. The amount of work that went into each weekend, however—doing Anarchist Café twice including Copwatch, Food Not Bombs once or twice, and other things—took a toll, and people either got burned out or felt that they were doing too much too. The work. One might note a tension in that the projects that the DAAA Collective took on in early 2005 were the group’s support for (medical and business. Another year during Earth Day celebrations in Modesto. sometimes the group would set up a table which included the distribution of zines, fliers, patches, shirts, and free food. Police quickly caught the experiment of tabling in the downtown way to interact with people and talk about some nights the group would make up to $40 in donations and have dozens of people stop by. It was a great way to interact with people and talk about the collective projects. The spaces these free food. Police quickly caught on that people were using the city’s power outlets had been screwed shut. After this, the group decided to continue the experiment of tabling in the downtown area and began to do fliers every Friday and Saturday night from 7 to 10:30 pm; the group quickly got a following of regulars. police interest and to kick the group out of the area were also thwarted. On two occasions, the police succeeded in shutting Anarchist Café down before the group could set up. DAAA Collective or mutual aid groups’ support, but it did not foster a sense of power among youth in the downtown area. When police came through, kids would run up to Anarchist Café and grab the camera. DAAA Collective members also went to the police station and presented copies of the police complaint form to give out; the police tried to stop this several times by moving the forms or denying requests for copies. The complaint process itself was rigged, anyway: it was still police who conducted the investigations of complaints made by citizens. If the Copwatch experiment did any good, it was in fostering an us vs. them mentality in youth vis-à-vis the police. DAAA Collective projects were time-consuming, but were the most rewarding when they were done consistently and when they contributed to genuine relationships through face-to-face interactions. The collective collected created a large base of people who supported or at least respected the collective. In some ways, this was problematic, because it further distanced the “organizers” from the “people.” We’re Gonna Learn You Somethin’ “While the weekly Anarchist Cafés downtown were the primary spot for disseminating anarchist literature and propaganda, the group also organized quite a few educational and “outreach” events. Through—out 2003 and 2004, the group hosted a series of film screenings and educational workshops, the group would talk with kids marched to a nearby café to confront a man with a swastika tattoo. 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The DAAA Collective sought to put anarchist politics on the streets, and indeed, that was where the Collective was best known. Anarchy cannot thrive confined to internet chat rooms and dusty conference halls—it has to be a vibrant working class movement posing an immediate threat to the rich, their infrastructure, and their ideology.

area was erected, and a lot of people simply hung out, listened to the radio, and talked with us. Throughout the day, people also listened to our speeches and then proceed to the Modesto Police, and people said a variety of things to the effect that they wanted to be left alone by the police. The Reclaim the Park actions were organized again in 2004 and 2005. In 2004, the basic idea was the same—that home- less people were harassed in the public parks and that it needed to stop—but the event was more extensive, including a film showing of These Streets Are Watching, a know-your-rights training, and, following lunch, a march through the streets to another park. The march was about 25 people strong, but managed to block traffic for about 30 minutes, and garnered the support and participation of several home- less people. At the next park, another meal was shared, and there was another film showing about OCAP, a Canadian home- less and anti-poverty group.

In 2005, the group repeated the idea of an expanded area outside the plant, expanding the reasons for the occupa- tion of Tower Park beyond homelessness to “Another Modesto is Possible.” The group tried to reach out to locals, community groups, and non-profits, but only one non-anarchist group actually made it out. Anarchist communities from Fresno, Stockton, and elsewhere showed up, however. Again, people took to the streets, this time with about 40 people. Police stopped the march after about 10 minutes of marching to the other park, and ticketed three “leaders.” The police then left and the group continued to march in the street. Terms of community in- volvement, the last Reclaim the Park was basically a failure. Homeless attendance went down the last two years it was organized. It was, however, the largest police presence at the 2004 and 2005 events following the marches. However, the involvement of other anarchists made the Reclaim the Parks events a large success for the collective, bringing in new ideas and people. While the actions may not have been what the organizers were hop- ing for, they brought together anarchists in the valley and beyond. The collective also organized several other marches. The first was a march and rally against the Bush inauguration in January 2005, in which about 30 people took to the streets of downtown Modesto until they were stopped by police. In spring 2006, the collective organized a rally to protest racist and Nazi graffiti that had been popping up in the local area, it ended with ap- proximately fifty people marching around on city sidewalks and streets. In summer 2006, the collective teamed up with fellow local radicals in Aztlan Rising to organize an event protesting the anti-immigrant save Our State, which was form- ed in a chapter in Modesto. Both sides only managed to pull in about 35 people, but after the counter-demonstration the anti- immigrant group quit. In another action the collective opened up new channels between the anarchists in the DAAA Collective and those involved in Aztlan Rising: Aztlan Rising produced a DVD about the protests of May 1, 2006 that included an interview with someone from the DAAA Collective; DAAA Collective members showed people in Aztlan Rising various skills, and explained how to make wheatpaste posters.

The DAAA Collective was able to organ- ize these demonstrations in a city without a large liberal base. In most of them, the participants were predominantly young people, though not from any one subcul- ture. The collective attended meetings of FPLAC and other groups and visited union halls to ask for solidarity at these demonstrations, but generally no leftists or liberals showed up. It’s worth noting that while a considerable number of the people who knew of the protests the DAAA Collective organ- ized generally did not increase the group’s numbers. The protest actions that the group organized were largely symbolic, even if they involved marching through the streets. While the group may have despised the liberals with their sign holding and candlelight vigils, the collective’s actions were simply a more militant version of the same approach.

Out of the Streets and into the Community

As time progressed, the collective saw that there were broader struggles going on around them that they could participate in or support. The first example of this came in 2004 when truckers in Stockton, Modesto, and the surrounding area joined in a variety of industri- al Workers of the World and began conducting wildcat strikes against various trucking companies. DAAA col- lective members showed up to the strike to hold picket signs with workers, and wrote a report of the strike, “Stockton NW Truckers Strike Again,” reproducing it in it in the Modesto Collective. In 2005, after discovering a flier calling for dead animals and fast-food deep-fat- frying oil. In essence, it was a place for workers to interact with the police, get to get rid of its dirty secrets—by turning them into pet food. The plant created a horrible smell, so bad local school kids practically two blocks away got nose bleeds and stomach aches. The plant was caught tossin trash in its processing—to that is to say, into pet food—and operating without any machinery on that would keep the smell down; Tallow itself was also caught fying to various government organizations, mak- ing false claims about its products to get it a tax benefit for Jeff “Free” Luers. After an intense surveillance scare, the event was canceled. No one was hauled away to a grand jury or even asked what they were doing. The event was included in a list of possible target cities that might become staging grounds for “eco-terrorist” actions. This run-in with the feds scared the young group and made them wise up to the fact that the collective was being monitored. After this incident, much of the interac- tions that the group had with police occurred during Anarchist Cafe and Cop- watch; police got to know some of the members of the group by name. When walking around during events downtown, collective members made a point of mov- ing together, making sure someone had a phone on them. Ceres police also knew the collective. In 2004, DAAA Collective members in Ceres organized a small-scale Ceres Reclaim the Parks, and police pre- pared with riot gear and round-the-clock surveillance for the onslaught of ten young kids—some as young as 12 years old. One
DAAA Collective member was identified by several police officers, and police officers asked after other members by name. Occasional problems with the police continued until the end of the collective, although concerning what other groups, individuals, and so-called “movements” went through at the hands of the police, the harassment the collective received was extremely mild. For instance, some people in Modesto who were organizing working class struggle had their houses staked out by police and their children threatened. The collective's experience with police also highlights that police were sharing and pooling information about the group. The head of homeland security in Stanislaus County once commented in the Modesto Bee that the greatest local threat to national security was “eco-terrorism,” implying that police repression against radicals was far from over.

The DAAA Collective maintained public visibility, which enabled the police to keep up with its endeavors. When the group organized a demonstration, it would be on their website, flyers would be posted, and stories run in the newspaper. The group avoided needless problems with the police by studying the legal rights, looking up penal codes, and learning other legal mumbo jumbo. The group probably faced so little serious repression because it was largely focused on community organizing. However, if any serious clandestine activity had occurred, the police and FBI would have immediately identified organizers in the group. Being a known face in the community is great, but when you’re handling frequently asked questions about the ELF twice a week, don’t be surprised if you develop a police following!

Aftermath

The DAAA Collective dissolved late in winter of 2006. The workload that required its continuation was unsustainable. Work within the collective was not distributed evenly; some people took on too much without any assistance, while others took on no work at all and still expected things to happen. Because of this, instead of building a group of seasoned radicals over years of struggle, many participants dropped out after a year or so, or forging the chance to develop experience and pass on lessons to others. This also contributed to the group being unable to evaluate its projects critically and consider how to refine them. The lowest common denominator of anarchist ideas and tactics remained the baseline of the group; this is why projects like Food Not Bombs continued for years despite many people within the group doubting whether it could fulfill the goals they actually wanted to accomplish. Imbalanced distribution of tasks and responsibilities is a major problem within the current anarchist movement—just look at the high dropout rate. The DAAA Collective was no exception. The group tried to circumvent this by having no real formal structure; there were no founding documents, no platform or set ideology, no formal meetings. In theory, the DAAA Collective was a fluid organization based around whatever projects took its name. In practice, the collective had a website, a post office box, a phone number, and an email account that all needed to be checked regularly, and there were always action reports to write and reporters to talk to. The fact that only a few people ever did this meant that those people determined how the group was perceived by the public. In the end, when a few individuals walked away from the collective, it collapsed.

When the DAAA Collective dissolved, however, it was a breath of fresh air for many local anarchists. No longer was there a single organization that people had to align themselves with to get something done; soon, people were taking new initiatives. One of these was Modesto Anarch, a locally-focused quarterly publication. The Modesto Anarchist Distro also started doing mail order and sending materials to prisoners, as well as tabling at events. The Wingnuts Liberation Project appeared, organizing film showings and workshops and creating zines addressing substance abuse and mental illness. Projects like Anarchist Café and Critical Mass were carried on by people who had been involved in the DAAA Collective and people who had never been part of it.

The Struggle Continues

What aspects of the DAAA experience could be instructive for anarchists in similar cities and others? What distinguishes this particular experiment?

Above all, the group sought to give class struggle a public face, to put anarchist politics on the streets; indeed, it was in the streets that DAAA Collective was best known. This was the spirit that led the group to the front of the May Day march, yelling, “Don’t listen to the police—let’s shut down city hall!” Anarchists cannot thrive confined to internet chat rooms and dusty conference halls—it has to be an immediate threat to the rich, their infrastructure, and their ideology. Accordingly, the Collective didn’t shy away from being associated explicitly with anarchism. All too often, radicals have misgivings about presenting their ideas to people in fear that “regular folks won’t understand.” The DAAA Collective, on the other hand, hypothetically that if anything, “regular” people would be the ones most drawn to their politics. Anarchism at its best—for example, in the Mexican, Spanish, and Russian revolutions—has always represented the class of people with nothing to lose, the ones who possessed a thirst for the blood of their oppressors and a need for complete and total revolution. By contrast, the DAAA Collective sought to participate in and organize within ongoing class- and community-based struggles. The group aimed to be an element within the wider working class—not to “lead” these struggles, but to maximize their potential for working class self-organization and direct action. At a time when many anarchists write off regular people as “the problem,” the DAAA Collective saw those around them as possible fellow insurgents. Now that the DAAA Collective has ceased to exist, Modesto anarchists are in the midst of a new experiment: not a new single organization, but an anarchist community that responds to the current context in a less centralized manner. Make no mistake, Modesto is not a Mecca for anarchist activity—but if people can make a dent and raise some hell in the fifth capital of California, it can be done anywhere!

For more information, including copies of Modesto Anarchist:

Modesto Anarchist PO Box 3027 Modesto, CA 95353 www.geocities.com/anarchist2009

Wishful Thinking

you wake up each day as new as the first there is no reason to assume you would be supernaturally strong there is no reason to test your strength through daily disrespect and neglect you don’t need to be strong everyone supports you.

if you say much we believe that you are hurt we wait to hear how we can help to mend your pain you have chosen to be at a school at a workplace in a community that knows that you are priceless that would never sacrifice your spirit that knows it needs your brilliance to be whole

your very skin is sacred and everything beyond it is a miracle that we revere we mourn any violence that has been ever enacted against you we will do what it takes to make sure that it doesn’t happen again to anyone when you speak we listen we are so glad that you are here, of all places other women even strangers reach out to you when you seem afraid and they stay until peace comes the sun reminds everyone how much they love you.

by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, URBANTU

people are interested in what you are wearing simply because it tells them what paintings to make everyone has always told you can stay a child until you are ready to move on if you run across the street naked at midnight no one will think you are asking for anything you do so many things because it feels good to move you have nothing to prove to anyone white people cannot harm you they do not want to they do not do it by accident your smile makes people glad to be alive your body is not a symbol of anything everyone respects your work and makes sure you are safe while doing it at any moment you might relive the joy of being embraced no one will lie to you scream at you or demand anything when you change your mind people will remember to change theirs your children are safe no one will use them against you.

Naked at Midnight

The sun is sacred, and everything beyond it is a miracle that we revere. We mourn any violence that has ever been enacted against you. We will do what it takes to make sure that it doesn’t happen again to anyone.

When you speak, we listen. We are so glad that you are here, of all places.

Other women, even strangers reach out to you when you seem afraid and they stay until peace comes.

The sun reminds everyone how much they love you.
the university is a place where you are reflected and embraced. anyone who forgets how miraculous you are need only open their eyes. the universe conspires to lift you up. on the news every night people who look like you and the people you love are applauded for their contribution to society. the place where knowledge is has no walls. you are rewarded for the work you do to keep it all together. every song i've ever heard on the radio is in praise of you. the way you speak is exactly right for wherever you happen to be. there is no continent anywhere where life counts as nothing. there is no innocence that needs your guilt to prove it. there is no house in your neighborhood where life counts as nothing. nobody wonders whether you will make it. everybody believes in you when you have a child no one finds it tragic. no map records it as an instance of blight. no one hopes you will give up on your neighborhood so they can buy it up cheap. everyone asks you your name. no one calls you out of it. someone is thinking highly of you right now. being around you makes people want to be their kindest, most generous selves. there is no law anywhere that depends on your silence. nobody bases their privilege on their ability to desecrate you. everyone will believe anything you say because they have been telling you the truth all along. school is a place, like every other place. no one here is out to get you. worldwide, girls who look like you are known for having great ideas. 3 in 3 women will fall in love with themselves during their lifetime. every minute in North Carolina a woman embraces another woman. you know 8 people who will help you move to a new place if you need to. when you speak loudly everyone is happy because they wondered what you were thinking about. people give you gifts and truly expect nothing in return. no one thinks you are over-reacting. everyone believes that you should have all the resources that you need, because by being yourself you make the world so much brighter. any creases on your face are from laughter. no one, anywhere, is locked in a cage. you are completely used to knowing what you want. following your dream is as easy as walking. you are more than enough. everyone is waiting to see what great thing you'll do next. every institution wants to know what you think, so they can find out what they should really be doing, or shut down. strangers send you love letters thanking you for speaking your mind. you wake up new as anyone.

The organizing that coalesced to form the group UBUNTU came out of the emotionally charged response to the Duke Lacrosse team scandal. After team members hired sex workers for a lacrosse team “party” in March 2006, one of the women filed charges that she was raped and abused at the party. Three Duke lacrosse players were formally accused. Evidence of the team’s racism and misogyny circulated among students and Durham locals.

The details of what happened that night are gruesome. Unbelievable. Totally believable to anyone who has felt the brunt of racist or sexual violence. Women, people of color, and their allies cried out in protest for this sister. Duke officials were silent. One anonymous, African-American, working-class sex worker was taking on this class of privileged white men and the elite university that cultivates them. She was torn apart. Revictimized by the corporate media that dragged her name through the mud, by the judicial system that found those three rich boys (and their defense team, and the PR firm they hired) innocent and went on to disbar the district attorney who had pursued the charges, and by the complicity of the university that not only refused to reprimand this intolerable behavior, but in the aftermath actually awarded a settlement to the three “accused.” In the wake of this mockery, UBUNTU began formulating a new vision for justice: “Led by women of color and survivors of sexual assault, UBUNTU is dedicated to creating a world without sexual violence. We are transforming the pain and rage of lived and relived victimization in our community into healing, connection, and leadership by embodying and demanding community accountability and creative social change. A sustaining transformative love is the center of our work and the model of our movement.”

contact UBUNTU: ubuntuNC@gmail.com
The Unseen
By Nanni Balestrini

Balestrini’s thinly fictionalized tale of an- ticapitalist resistance and prison survival from the Italian Autonomia struggles of the 1970s will make exciting reading for just about any anarchist today. As is generally the case with accounts from earlier eras, it’s surprising how familiar everything is: the ragged clothes, the discovery of collective power in small-scale actions such as school walkouts and pressuring landlords, the reliance on low-intensity crime as an alternate means of survival, the escalation to streetfighting and direct action, the fragmentation of the movement over tactics and gender issues, the ultimate breakdown amid intense police repression and snitching.

The difference here seems to be a matter of scale: Autonomia took Italy seemingly to the brink of civil war, a more impressive trajectory than anarchists in the United States have accomplished in genera- tions. It might be instructive, then, to look at what worked for the Italians in broadening their resistance. One can hardly draw useful strategic conclusions from reading a single work of fiction, but there are few enough resources available in English from the perspective of participants in Autonomia that this is as good a starting place as any.

There are a lot of work-related conflicts in this book—workers on strike, workers destroying materials in their workplaces or confronting scabs—but there are just as many passages in which the insurgents take on the system at the point of consumption: mass walkouts at shopping centers, squatting actions, arson targeting bars utilized by drug dealers. Seizing the means of production has never been this smooth, and this unusual convention assists the author in achieving a persuasively skillful confessional tone. This is one of the more impressive in that this is a translation; apparently Italian translates into English better than French! As the English translation was published by Verso, a major corporate imprint, you should be able to find this at a library somewhere, despite its being out of print.

Dear Comrades
Readers’ Letters to Lotta Continua, edited by Margaret Kunzle, translated by Pete Anderson

Muto Press, 1980

Italy in the late 1970s saw intense and often violent class struggle across the country, particularly in auto factories and amongst youth. With the economy in crisis, millions participated in mass strikes, factory occupations, squatting, riots, and student walk-outs—a near revolution of even greater intensity than the most heralded events of 1968 in France. In feminist collectives and factory strike committees, squatted apartment buildings and behind barri- cades, a revolt was fought and lost. This was the time of the “historic compromise” between the ruling Christian Democrats and the Communist Party, and in these struggles it became clear that the left wing of capitalism—dominated by trade unions and the Communist Party—was just as clearly the enemy as the right. Very little of the information, alignments, and the people involved has been written in or translated into English. For those interested in a theoretical history of Autonomia, Steve Wright’s Storming Heaven is the most complete book available in English, but the book that captures the revolt most passionately is Dear Comrades.

Dear Comrades is a collection of letters written to the radical Italian paper Lotta Continua (Continu- ous Struggle) in 1977 from people all over Italy who participated in the move- ment. I have never found another book that puts together the first-person writings of militant fac- tory workers, teenage an- archists, college students, and feminist groups, de- bating tactics, the meaning of communist struggle, and women’s liberation with such love and care. Now out of print, it can be found fairly easily used or through inter-library loan.

Clandestines

The Pirate Journals of an Irish Exile by Ramor Ryan

Ramor Ryan’s Clandestines—a modern adventure chronicle of those who have fought, or are fighting now, against injustice and oppression—is inspira- tional with examples of courage and solidarity. From Europe to the Middle East and across the seas to Latin America, the Irish anarchist tells stories of his travels: the people he riots with, drinks with, makes love with and mediated consid Clandestines must-read, no matter what one’s po-
Papillon by Henri Charrière

This is the story of Papillon, the street name of Henri Charrière, one of the most popular, daring, and brilliant prison escapes in French history. An autobiography, this book conveys the feeling that Papillon, himself, is sitting at your kitchen table delivering up an unrelievably real story. The tale takes the reader from Charrière’s murderous trial in Paris to the brutally repressive and deadly penal institutions of French Guiana in South America—through his first daring escape—on a tiny prison wall so as to be carried out to a taxi by another prisoner (because his feet were still broken from a previous escape attempt) and dozens of other crazy schemes and mistakes. Peppered throughout the story are the successes, failures, and tragedies experienced by Charrière’s comrades and co-conspirators—one of whom died from three years of solitary confinement after being framed for stealing a single bicycle—through the inevitable counterattack of Empire is more twisted than any novel, and seems to be a point of reference offering insights relevant to current individual and collective struggles for freedom. It is inspiring to note that Massacre was of similar age to most of my comrades when he undertook his first escape attempt, and used the immense creativity and hope of his young friends to great advantage. He developed the patience to pace for 16 hours a day to stay in shape during a 70-day solitary confinement, the urgency never to stay in prison one very long, and the spontaneity to throw himself into shark-infested waters seventy miles from the mainland with only two sewn-together bags of coconuts for a boat. These are all qualities we would do well to bring to our own projects and organizing. The book is not without shortcomings. While the stories inside hardly suffer for the cheap tricks of the genre, Charrière’s story is as flawed as any real person. He was caught, and it never assumes a self-congratulatory tone, this autobiography also makes it sound as if the protagonist can do no wrong. Nearly every decision is commended by this bio- graphic law and order.

Convicted at the age of twenty-five for a crime he did not commit and sentenced to life in prison with hard labor, Papillon never accepted his fate and lost his determination to escape. Whether within the prison colony or on the final escape, nearly every decision—from acquiring food to taking a job to the conversations and bribes he made—was a strategic step for the protagonist to escape and achieve permanent freedom. Nevertheless, he never once committed an unnecessary act of violence or put his own interests ahead of other prisoners trying to escape. He only achieved temporary periods of freedom, it ultimately took Charrière eight different escape attempts to achieve permanent freedom. These involved treacherous voyages at sea, armed conflict with guards, staging a large-scale prison revolt, building a replica of a war prison cell as he was carried out to a taxi by another prisoner (because his feet were still broken from a previous escape attempt) and dozens of other crazy schemes and mistakes. Peppered throughout the story are the successes, failures, and tragedies experienced by Charrière’s comrades and co-conspirators—one of whom died from three years of solitary confinement after being framed for stealing a single bicycle—through the inevitable counterattack of Empire is more twisted than any novel, and seems to be a point of reference offering insights relevant to current individual and collective struggles for freedom. It is inspiring to note that Massacre was of similar age to most of my comrades when he undertook his first escape attempt, and used the immense creativity and hope of his young friends to great advantage. He developed the patience to pace for 16 hours a day to stay in shape during a 70-day solitary confinement, the urgency never to stay in prison one very long, and the spontaneity to throw himself into shark-infested waters seventy miles from the mainland with only two sewn-together bags of coconuts for a boat. These are all qualities we would do well to bring to our own projects and organizing. The book is not without shortcomings. While the stories inside hardly suffer for the cheap tricks of the genre, Charrière’s story is as flawed as any real person. He was caught, and it never assumes a self-congratulatory tone, this autobiography also makes it sound as if the protagonist can do no wrong. Nearly every decision is commended by this biography of racially motivated violence and absurdity of reality exceeds the violence and absurdity of the storyline. Bukaka, the protagonist of this Rabelaisian burlesque, quotes Foucault to explain why the inevitable counterattack of Empire is doomed to fail, foretelling the outcome of the Iraq occupation year of its advance in soft power. * There is no single locus of great refusal, no soul of word, source of all rebellions, or core law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case . . .

On September 11, 2001, I was in high school when the news came in about the World Trade Center. I knew my partner’s school had gotten out and that he would be there. I checked my phone, and then stopped and hurried through the woods to his house. We got in to the living room

A Problem of Memory

Stories to End the Racial Nightmare by Taylor Sparrow

Down here in New Orleans, A Problem of Memory is never at the forefront in the Iron Rail Library. It’s being sold and passed around to every radical educator in town because it’s basically the Day of War. Nights of Love of radical race history. A collection of short stories, history, personal experiences, and poetry, the book gives you enough dots to connect to create a detailed picture of race politics in america.

No easy task. The key to this book is that it is both expansive and readable. The author volunteered at Douglas High School in New Orleans just before the Hurricane Katrina. His experiences with radical educators mix with the difficulty of understanding why racism works for the powerful elite, and how this came to be. This union creates a powerful documentary of race and class in America. Taylor writes of the need for history as a way to understand race and resistance in the US (“to the vast majority of white people, slavery was neither moral, nor immoral—it was profitable”) to John Brown and Ella Baker. If you’re well-read on race history in the US, you’ll have heard many of these accounts before. There are, however, some details and “gaps” that the first person interviews Taylor conducts. The stories pour out effortlessly. It’s not a textbook covering the entire history of slavery, but instead focuses on several key stories that underlie the crux of the problems.

It’s a fast read and, thankless, ends with some real solid projects and perspectives from long-time educators. Doris Blackmon, a teacher for over twenty years, relates, “Every day I wake up and think, ‘What arbitrariness of cruel bourgeois law and order. Papillon can be read in many ways: as a compelling adventure story, as a primary source on the connections between racism colonialism, forced labor, and the early days of modern industrial capitalism.”
as the whole world crashed and burned outside. At one point he grabbed me and I slammed him down. He was bit- ing my nose against his forehead. There was blood all over his face and my face, all over our necks and in our mouths. He started giving me his head so I could see his face, off my forehead and neck, out of my nose and mouth. I thought it was the hottest thing that ever happened. We kept at it for hours until we couldn’t stand it anymore. It felt like we were being brought into some new education class, all of this would have been described as desperate and dangerous—teen sex, irresponsible exchange of bodily fluids, violence that would have horrified our elders. For me it was a way out, an attack on a world that couldn’t crash fast enough as far as we were concerned, a moment of snatching back our bodies and the violence that surrounded us and employing—
the only weapons at our disposal—to crash everything faster.

Liberation, when we’re lucky enough to experience it, rarely resembles the spotless utopia we paint to appeal to those we perceive as desiring white pencil pictures. Think of all the obsessions and desires we hide from even our closest companions: to not bring the same taboos to race and gender. If the world is to be big enough to hold all the perversions, compulsions, and dirty secrets that are produced, it’s best, of course, to include some debauchery and darkness. The sexual kink explored in queer communities is only the tip of the iceberg.

Identifying with these compulsions and dirty secrets, one might hypothesize that much of human behavior is determined by subterranean forces. If this is true, those groups who wish to transform human life must engage with those forces, figuring them into their equations rather than simply trying to reprogram human beings as if we were rational machines.

Protestant morality dictates that there is vice and virtue—vice being everything subjective, subjective, and bewitching of bodily fluids, and virtue the restrictions imposed by the super ego. According to this storyline, it’s both virtuous and important to include some debauchery and darkness. The sexual kink explored in queer communities is only the tip of the iceberg.

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“I promise to be sober-minded and cunning, resourceful and dangerous. I promise to act in such ways that you cannot sink me or surround me with silence. I promise to work against you smartly and cautiously, to be attentive and cool-hearted, in order to hit you slightly and strongly, where I can, as long as I have enough strength, even if there is no future in it.”

–Alexander Brener, “Third World Artist”

Appendix: The Art of Destruction

Attack is a tough and beautiful concept. A human being risks his entire existence in an antagonistic confrontation with society. To the aroma that exudes from that person at that time the word ‘dignity’ can be applied.

If Bukaka Spat Here saw Brener and Schurz hijack the formula offered by novelists like Kathy Acker, The Art of Destruction is their take on insurrectionist theory à la Alfredo Bonanno, the Italian anarchist and sometime jailbird. As such, it’s a bit more polemical in tone. Where Bukaka Spat Here found the authors in a playful mood, cheerfully disposed even towards their enemies—what fun to hate them and wish for their destruction!—The Art of Destruction is more grim. Here, anti-art rhetoric is developed into a call for the literal destruction of artists, to put paid to their complicity in capitalism, hierarchy, and mediocrity.

Such tirades can be tiresome—at worst, those who don’t already agree don’t bother with them, and the reiterations of spite only try the patience of sympathetic readers. The Art of Destruction is saved by snippets of the same eccentricity that made their earlier novel so lively. A vignette in which art critics visit the retired Idi Amin Dada, an interlude with a young woman in a bathroom at a bar, the occasional unexpected reference to porcupines. In this regard, the further over the top the diatribes go, the more bearable they become. Another thing that sets The Art of Destruction apart from other such screeds is its continuous references to artists and critics none of us at Rolling Thunder have ever heard of—just as you, dear reader, may not have heard of Alfredo Bonanno or Kathy Acker.

The high point of the book is easily their encounter with US primitivist theoretician John Zerzan, whom the authors seek out at a speaking engagement in Istanbul. On paper Zerzan might appear to have much in common with Bukaka’s opposition to language, technology, and civilization, but in person they discover him to be an entirely domesticated creature, propounding his formulas in the same tame language and academic setting as any institutional leftist. Anarchy is not created by theory alone, but out of desire and fighting spirit. A person can perpetuate the most stagnant stratification and defeat while speaking quite eloquently of anarchy, freedom, and the eradication of limits. Surprisingly, the insurrectionist imperatives that can appear so quixotic in other settings seem most sensible in the context of the art world. The emphasis on constant conflict, on action over strategy, riots over campaigns, irrationality over rationality, and spontaneity over goal-orientation might seem like a risky proposition to those who hope to take on the powers that be and win. On the other hand, such principles seem totally reasonable as a way to cash in the always-deferred promises of urgency, passion, and romance with which Art has maintained our attention for so many generations.

As for how it reflects on insurrectionist theory that it is so easy to transpose it from the streets into the gallery—that’s a matter for another inquiry.
Anyone with spray paint can write literature.
Anyone with a cobblestone can write history.