



AT DAGGERS DRAWN

WITH THE EXISTENT,
ITS DEFENDERS
AND ITS FALSE CRITICS

With companion piece by Journey Into Night

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~~Journey Into Night~~
Cleveland, OH



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Ai ferri corti con l'esistente, i suoi difensori e i suoi falsi critici

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At Daggers Drawn
With the Existent, Its Defenders and Its False Critics
pg. 5

Thoughts On The Republication of a Uniquely Impactful Text
pg. 33

AT DAGGERS DRAWN

WITH THE EXISTENT, ITS DEFENDERS
AND ITS FALSE CRITICS

I

“Anyone can put an end to tossing about in the slavery of what they don’t know—and refusing the sop of empty words, come to daggers with life.”

—C. MICHELSTAEDTER.

Life is no more than a continual search for something to cling to. One gets up in the morning to find oneself in bed a mere matter of hours later, a sad commuter between lack of desire and fatigue. Time passes, spurring us less and less. Social obligations no longer seem to break our backs as we have got used to spreading the weight. We obey without even taking the trouble to say yes. Death is expiated by living, wrote the poet from another trench.

We can live without passion or dreams—that is the great liberty this society offers us. We can talk endlessly, particularly of things we know nothing about. We can express any opinion we like, even the most daring, and disappear behind the murmuring. We can vote for the candidate we prefer, demanding the right to complain in exchange. We can change channels at any time should we seem to be getting dogmatic. We can enjoy ourselves at specific moments, traversing sadly identical environments at increasing speed. We can appear to be young hotheads before receiving icy bucketfuls of common sense. We can get wed as often as we like, so sacred is marriage. We can employ ourselves usefully and, if we can’t write, become journalists. We can do politics in a thousand ways, even talking about exotic guerrillas. In careers as in love, if we don’t quite make it to giving orders we can always excel in obeying. Obedience can even make martyrs of us and in spite of appearances, this society needs heroes.

Our stupidity certainly won’t seem any worse than anyone else’s. It doesn’t matter if we can’t make up our minds, we can let others decide for us. Then, *we will take a stand*, as they say in the jargon of politics and the spectacle. There is never any lack of justification, especially in the world of those who aren’t fussy.

In this great fairground of roles we all have one loyal ally: money. Democratic par excellence, it respects no one in particular. In its presence no commodity or service can be denied us. It has the whole of society behind it, no matter who it belongs to. Of course this ally never gives enough of itself and, moreover, does not give itself to all. But the hierarchy of money is a special one, uniting what the conditions of life set against each other. When you have it, you are always right. When you don't, you have plenty of extenuating circumstances.

With a bit of practice we could get through a whole day without one single idea. Daily routine thinks in place of us. From work to "free time," everything comes about within the continuity of survival. We always have something to cling to. The most stupefying characteristic of today's society is the ability for "comfort" to exist a hair's breadth from catastrophe. The economy and the technological administration of the existent are advancing with irresponsible recklessness. One slips from entertainment to large-scale massacre with the disciplined insensitivity of programmed gestures. Death's buying and selling extends over the whole of time and space. Risk and brave effort no longer exist; there remains only security or disaster, routine or catastrophe. Saved or submerged. Alive, never.

With a bit of practice we could walk from home to school, the office to the supermarket or the bank to the disco, eyes closed. Now we can understand the adage of that old Greek sage: "The dormant also maintain the world order."

The time has come to break away from this *we*, a reflex of the only community that now exists, that of authority and commodities.

One part of this society has every interest in its continuing to rule, the other in everything collapsing as soon as possible. Deciding which side one is on is the first step. But resignation, the basis of the agreement between the sides (improvers of the existent and its false critics) is everywhere, even in our own lives—the authentic *place* of the social war—in our desires and resoluteness as well as in our little daily submissions.

It is necessary to come to daggers with all that, to finally come to daggers with life.

II

“It is by doing things that need to be learned in order to be done, that you learn them.”

—ARISTOTLE

The secret is to really begin.

The present social organization is not just delaying, it is also preventing and corrupting any practice of freedom. The only way to learn what freedom is, is to experiment it, and to do so you must have the necessary *time* and *space*.

The fundamental premise for free action is dialogue. Now, any authentic discourse requires two conditions: a real interest in the questions brought up to be discussed (the problem of content) and the free search for possible answers (the problem of method). These two conditions should occur *at the same time*, given that the content determines the method, and vice versa. One can only talk *of freedom in freedom*. What is the point of asking questions if we are not free to answer? What is the point of answering if the questions are always false? Dialogue only exists when individuals can talk to each other without mediation, i.e. when they relate reciprocally. If the discourse is one-way, no communication is possible. If someone has the power to impose the questions, the content of the latter will be directly functional to this (and the answers will contain subjection). Subjects can only be asked questions whose answers confirm their role as such, and from which the bosses will draw the questions of the future. The slavery lies in continuing to reply.

In this sense market research is identical to the elections. The sovereignty of the elector corresponds to the sovereignty of the consumer, and vice versa. TV passivity is called *audience*; the legitimation of the power of the State is called *sovereign people*. In either case individuals are simply hostages in a mechanism that gives them the *right* to speak after having deprived them of the *faculty* of doing so. What is the point of dialogue if all you can do is elect one or the other? What

is communication if all your only choice is between identical goods and TV programs? The content of the questions is meaningless because the method is false.

“Nothing resembles a representative of the bourgeoisie more than a representative of the proletariat,” Sorel wrote in 1907. What made them identical was the fact that they were, precisely, *representatives*. To say the same of a right or left wing candidate today would be banal. But politicians do not need to be original (advertising takes care of that), it is sufficient for them to know how to *administer* that banality. The irony is that the media are defined a means of *communication* and the voting spree is called *elections* (which in the true sense of the word means free, conscious decision).

The point is that power does not allow for any other kind of management. Even if the voters wanted it (which would already take us into full “utopia”, to imitate the language of the *realists*), nothing important could be asked of them from the moment that the only free act—the only authentic election—they could accomplish would be not to vote. Anyone who votes *wants* inconsequential questions, as authentic questions deny passivity and delegation. We will explain better.

Imagine that the abolition of capitalism were to be requested through referendum (putting aside the fact that such a question is *impossible* in the context of existing social relations). Most of the electorate would vote in favor of capitalism simply because, as they tranquilly leave home, the office or the supermarket, they cannot imagine a world other than one with commodities and money. But even if they were to vote against it nothing would change as, to be authentic, such a question would *exclude* the existence of voters. A whole society cannot be changed by decree.

The same could be said for less radical questions. Take the example of the housing estate. What would happen if the inhabitants were able (once again, we would be in “utopia”) to express themselves concerning the organization of their own lives (housing, streets, squares, etc.)? Let us say right away that such demands would *inevitably* be limited from the start, because housing estates are a consequence of the displacement

and *concentration* of the population according to the needs of the economy and social control. Nevertheless, we could try to imagine some form of social organization *other* than such ghettos. One could safely say that most of the population would have the same ideas as the police on the subject. Otherwise (that is, if even limited *practice* of dialogue were to give rise to the desire for a new environment), this would mean the explosion of the ghetto. How, under the present social order, do you reconcile the inhabitants' desire to *breathe* with the interests of the bosses of the motor industry? Free circulation of individuals with the fears of the luxury boutique owners? Children's play areas with the cement of the car parks, banks and shopping centers? The empty houses left in the hands of the speculators? The blocks of flats that look like army barracks, that look like schools, that look like hospitals, that look like asylums? To move one wall in this labyrinth of horrors would mean putting the whole scheme in question. The further we move away from a police-like view of the environment, the closer we get to clashing with the police.

How can you think freely in the shadow of a church? wrote an anonymous hand on the sacred wall of the Sorbonne during May '68. This impeccable question has wider implications. Anything that has been designed for economic or religious purposes cannot fail to impose anything but economic or religious desires. A desecrated church continues to be the house of God. Commodities continue their chatter in an abandoned shopping center. The parade ground of a disused barracks *still contains* the marching of the soldiers. That is what he who said that the destruction of the Bastille was an act of applied social psychology meant. The Bastille could never have been managed as anything other than a prison, because its walls would have continued to tell the tale of incarcerated bodies and desires.

Subservience, obligation and boredom espouse consumerism in endless funereal nuptials. Work reproduces the social environment which reproduces the resignation to work. One enjoys evenings in front of the TV because one has spent the day in the office and the underground. Keeping quiet in the factory makes shouting in the stadia a promise of

happiness. Feelings of inadequacy at school *vindicate* the insensate irresponsibility of a Saturday night at the disco. Only eyes emerging from a McDonald's are capable of lighting up when they see a Club Med billboard. Et cetera.

You need to know how to experience freedom in order to be free. You need to free yourself in order to experience freedom. Within the present social order, time and space prevent experimentation of freedom because they suffocate the freedom to experiment.



“The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.”

—W. BLAKE

Only by upsetting the imperatives of time and social space will it be possible to imagine new relations and surroundings. The old philosopher said one can only desire on the basis of what one knows. Desires can only change if one changes the life that produces them. Let's be clear about this: rebellion against the organization of time and space by power is a material and psychological necessity.

Bakunin said that revolutions are three quarters fantasy and a quarter reality. The important thing is realizing where the fantasy that leads to the explosion of generalized rebellion originates. *The unleashing of all evil passions*, as the Russian revolutionary said, is the irresistible force of transformation. For all that this might make the resigned or the cold analysts of the historical movements of capital smile, we could say—if we did not find such jargon indigestible—that such an idea of revolution is extremely modern. Passions are *evil*, in that they are prisoners suffocated by that gelid monster, normality. But they are also evil because the will to live rather than shrink under the weight of duty and masks, transforms itself into quite the opposite. When restricted by daily duties, life denies itself to reappear in the guise of a servant. Desperately searching for *space*, it manifests itself as an oneiric presence, a physical contraction,

a nervous tic, idiotic, gregarious violence. Does not the massive spread of psychotic drugs, one of the latest interventions of the welfare State, denounce the unbearable nature of the present conditions of life? Power administers captivity everywhere in order to justify one of its own products: evil. Insurrection takes care of both of them.

If they do not wish to deceive themselves and others, those struggling for the demolition of the present social edifice must face the fact that subversion is a game of wild, barbarous forces. Someone referred to them as Cossacks, someone else hooligans; in fact they are individuals whose anger has not been quelled by social peace.

But how do you create a new community starting from anger? Let us put a stop to the conjuring tricks of dialectics. The exploited are not carriers of any positive project, be it even the classless society (which all too closely resembles the productive set up). Capital is their only community. They can only escape by destroying everything that makes them exploited: wages, commodities, roles and hierarchies. Capitalism has not created the conditions of its overcoming in communism—the famous bourgeoisie forging the arms of its own extinction—but of a world of horrors.

The exploited have nothing to self-manage but their own negation as such. That is the only way that their bosses, leaders and apologists in various guises will disappear along with them. In this “immense task of urgent demolition” we must find joy, immediately.

For the Greeks the word “barbarian” did not only refer to the stranger, but also to the “stammerer,” he who did not speak the language of the polis correctly. Language and territory are inseparable. The law fixes the borders enforced by the order of Names. Every power structure has its barbarians, every democratic discourse its stammerers. The society of commodities wants to banish their obstinate presence—with expulsion and silence—as though they were nothing. It is on this nothing that rebellion has founded its cause. No ideology of dialogue and participation will ever be able to mask exclusion and internal colonies completely. When the daily violence of the State and the economy causes the evil part to explode, there is no point in being

surprised if someone puts their feet on the table and refuses to accept discussion. Only then will passions get rid of a world of death. The Barbarians are just around the corner.

IV

“We must abandon all models, and study our possibilities.”

—E.A. POE

The necessity of insurrection. Not in the sense of inevitability (an event that *must* take place sooner or later), but in the sense of a concrete condition of possibility. The necessity of the possible. Money is necessary in this society. Yet a life without money is possible. To experience this possibility it is necessary to destroy this society. Today one only experiences what is socially necessary.

Curiously, those who consider insurrection to be a tragic error (or an unrealistic romantic dream) talk a lot about social action and areas of freedom for experimentation. One only has to squeeze such arguments a little, however, for all the juice to come out of them. As we said, in order to act freely it is necessary to be able to talk to each other without mediation. And about what, how much, and where can one engage in dialogue at the present time?

In order to discuss freely one must snatch time and space from social obligations. After all, dialogue is inseparable from struggle. It is inseparable materially (in order to talk to each other it is necessary for us to take time and seize the necessary space) and psychologically (individuals like talking about what they do because that is how words transform reality).

We forget we are all living in a ghetto, even if we don't pay rent and every day is a Sunday. If we are not capable of destroying this ghetto, the freedom to experiment will be a poor thing indeed.

Many libertarians believe that social change can and must come about gradually, without any sudden rupture. For this reason, they talk of “areas

free of the State” in which to elaborate new ideas and practices. Leaving aside the decidedly comical aspects of the question (*where* does the State not exist? *how* do you put it in parentheses?), you can see that the point of reference for such questions remains the self-managed federalist methods experimented by subversives at particular times in history (the Paris Commune, revolutionary Spain, the Budapest Commune, etc.). What one omits to say, however, is that the possibility of talking to one another and changing reality was taken by the rebels with arms. In short, a small detail is left out: insurrection. You cannot remove a method (neighborhood meetings, direct decision-making, horizontal linking up, et cetera) from the context that made it possible, or even draw it up against the latter (e.g. “there is no point in attacking the State; we must self-organize, make utopia concrete”). Before thinking about what the proletarian councils signified for example—and what they could signify today—it is necessary to consider the conditions under which they existed (1905 in Russia, 1918–21 in Germany and Italy, et cetera). These were insurrectional times. Will someone please explain how it would be possible for the exploited to decide in first person on questions of any importance today without breaking social normality by force? Only then will you be able to talk about self-management or federalism. Before discussing what self-managing the present productive structures “after the revolution” means, it is necessary to be aware of one simple thing: neither the bosses or the police would agree to it. You cannot discuss a possibility while omitting the conditions required to make it concrete. Any idea of freedom implies a break with the present society.

Let us see one last example. Direct democracy is also talked about in libertarian circles. One could retort that the anarchist utopia opposes itself to the method of majority decision. Right. But the point is that no one talks about direct democracy *in real terms*. Leaving aside those who pass it off as quite the opposite, i.e. the constitution of civic lists and participation in the municipal elections, let us consider those who imagine real citizens’ assemblies where people talk to each other without mediation. What would the so-called citizens be able to express? How could they reply differently, without changing the questions? How make

a distinction between so-called political freedom and the present economic, social and technological conditions? No matter how you twist things, you cannot escape the problem of destruction, unless you think that a technologically centralized society could at the same time become federalist, or that generalized self-management could exist in the true prisons that the cities of the present day have become. To say that all the changes that are necessary could be done gradually merely confuses the issue. Change cannot even begin to take place without widespread revolt. Insurrection is the *whole* of social relations opening up to the adventure of freedom once the mask of capitalist specialization has been torn off. Insurrection does not come up with the answers on its own, that is true. It only starts asking questions. So the point is not whether to act gradually or adventuristically. The point is whether to act or merely dream of acting.

The critique of direct democracy (to stick to the same example) must be concrete. Only then is it possible to go *beyond* and think that the social foundations of individual autonomy really exist. Only then is it possible for this *going beyond* to become a method of struggle, here and now. Subversives need to criticize other people's ideas and define them more precisely than those who swear by them.

The better to sharpen their daggers.

V

"It is an axiomatic, self-evident truth that the revolution cannot be made until there are sufficient forces to do so. But it is an historical truth that the forces that determine evolution and social revolutions cannot be calculated with the census lists."

—MALATESTA

It is out of fashion to believe that social transformation is still possible. The "masses," it is said, are in a deep trance and fully integrated within the social norms. At least two conclusions can be drawn from such a

remark. That rebellion is impossible or that it is only possible in small numbers. This either becomes an openly institutional discourse (the need for elections, legal conquests, etc.) or one in favor of social reform (union self-organization, struggle for collective rights, etc.). The second conclusion can become the basis of the classical vanguardist discourse or of an anti-authoritarian one in favor of permanent agitation.

Here it can be said that throughout history ideas that were apparently in opposition to each other actually share the same roots.

Take social democracy and bolshevism for example: they clearly both came from the supposition that the masses do not have any revolutionary consciousness, so need to be led. Social democrats and Bolsheviks differed only in the methods used—reformist party or revolutionary party, parliamentary strategy or violent conquest of power—in the identical program of bringing consciousness to the exploited from outside.

Let us take the hypothesis of a “minoritarian” subversive practice that refuses the Leninist model. In a libertarian perspective one either abandons all insurrectional discourse (in favor of a declaredly solitary revolt), or sooner or later it becomes necessary to face the problem of the social implications of one’s ideas and practices. If we don’t want to resolve the question in the ambit of linguistic miracles (for example by saying that the theses we support are *already* in the heads of the exploited, or that one’s rebellion is *already* part of a wider condition) one fact remains: we are isolated, which is not the same as saying we are few.

Not only does acting in small numbers not constitute a limit, it represents a totally different way of seeing social transformation. Libertarians are the only people to envisage a dimension of collective life that is not subordinated to central direction. Authentic federalism makes agreements between free unions of individuals possible. Relations of affinity do not exist on the basis of ideology or quantity, but start off from reciprocal knowledge, from feeling and sharing projectual passions. But projectual affinity and autonomous individual action are dead letters if they cannot spread without being sacrificed in the name of some claimed higher necessity. It is the horizontal link that concretizes the practice of liberation: an informal link, *of fact*, without

representation. A centralized society cannot exist without police control and a deadly technological apparatus. For this reason, anyone who is incapable of imagining a community without State authority is devoid of instruments with which to criticize the economy that is destroying the planet. Anyone who is incapable of imagining a community of *unique individuals* has nothing to put in the place of political mediation. On the contrary, the idea of free experimentation in a coming together of like-minded people, with affinity as the basis for new relations, makes complete social upheaval possible. Only by abandoning the idea of *center* (the conquest of the Winter Palace or, to bring things up to date, State television) does it become possible to build a life without imposition or money. In such a direction, the method of spreading attacks is a form of struggle that carries a different world within it. To act when everyone advises waiting, when it is not possible to count on great followings, when you do not know beforehand whether you will get results or not, means one is already affirming what one is fighting for: a society *without measure*. This, then, is how action in small groups of people with affinity contains the most important of qualities—it is not mere tactical contrivance, but already contains the realization of one’s goal. Liquidating the lie of the *transitional period* (dictatorship before communism, power before freedom, wages before taking the lot, certainty of the results before taking action, requests for financing before expropriation, “ethical banks” before anarchy, etc.) means making the revolt itself a different way of conceiving relations. Attacking the technological hydra right away means imagining a life without white-coated policemen (i.e. without the economic or scientific organization that makes them necessary); attacking the instruments of domestication by the media now means creating relations that are free from *images* (i.e. free from the passivity that fabricates them). Anyone who starts screaming that it is no longer—or not yet—time for rebellion, is revealing the kind of society they want in advance. On the other hand, to stress the need for social insurrection now—an uncontainable movement that breaks with historical time to allow the emergence of the possible—simply means: we want no leaders. Today the only real federalism is generalized rebellion.

If we refuse centralization we must go beyond the quantitative idea of rallying the exploited for a frontal clash with power. It is necessary to think of another concept of strength—burn the census lists and change reality.

Main rule: do not act en masse. Carry out actions in three or four at the most. There should be as many small groups as possible and each of them must learn to attack and disappear quickly. The police attempt to crush a crowd of thousands with one single group of a hundred cossacks.

It is easier to defeat a hundred men than one alone, especially if they strike suddenly and disappear mysteriously. The police and army will be powerless if Moscow is covered in these small unseizable detachments[...] Do not occupy strongholds. The troops will always be able to take them or simply destroy them with their artillery. Our fortresses will be internal courtyards or any place that it is easy to strike from and leave easily. If they were to take them they would never find anyone and would lose many men. It would be impossible for them to take them all because they to do this they would have to fill every house with cossacks.

—Warning to the Insurgents, Moscow, December 11, 1905

VI

“...poesy, ...is referred to the Imagination, which may at pleasure make unlawful matches and divorces of things.”

—F. BACON

Think of another concept of strength. Perhaps this is the new poetry. Basically, what is social revolt if not a generalized game of illegal matching and divorcing of things.

Revolutionary strength is not a strength that is equal to and against that of power. If that were the case we would be defeated before we

start, because any change would be the eternal return of constriction. Everything would be reduced to military conflict, a *danse macabre* of standards. Real movements escape the quantitative glance.

The State and capital possess the most sophisticated systems of control and repression. How can we oppose this Moloch? The secret lies in the art of breaking apart and putting together again. The movement of intelligence is a continual game of breaking up and establishing correspondences. The same goes for subversive practice. Criticizing technology, for instance, means considering its general framework, seeing it not simply as an assemblage of machinery, but as a social relation, a *system*; it means understanding that a technological instrument reflects the society that produces it and that its introduction changes relations between individuals. Criticizing technology means refusing to subordinate human activity to profit. Otherwise we would be deceiving ourselves as to the implications of technology, its claims to neutrality, the reversibility of its consequences. It then becomes necessary to break it up into its thousand ramifications, the concrete realizations that are increasingly mutilating us. We need to understand that the spreading of production and control that the new technologies allow makes sabotage easier. It would be impossible to attack them otherwise. The same goes for schools, barracks, and offices. Although they are inseparable from the whole of hierarchical and mercantile relations, they still concretize themselves in specific people and places.

How—when we are so few—can we make ourselves *visible* to students, workers, unemployed? If one thinks in terms of consensus and image (making oneself visible, to be precise), the reply can be taken for granted: unions and cunning politicians are far stronger than we are. Once again what is lacking is the capacity to put together and break apart. Reformism acts on detail, *quantitatively*: it mobilizes vast numbers of people in order to change a few isolated aspects of power. A global critique of society on the other hand allows a *qualitative* vision of action to emerge. Precisely because there are no centers or revolutionary subjects to subordinate one's projects to, each aspect of social reality relates back to the whole of which it is a part. No matter whether it is

a question of pollution, prison or urban planning, any really subversive discourse ends up putting *everything* in question. Today more than ever a quantitative project (of assembling students, workers or unemployed in permanent organizations with a specific program) can only act on detail, emptying actions of the strength of putting questions that cannot be reduced to a separation into categories (students, workers, immigrants, homosexuals, etc.). All the more so as reformism is less and less capable of reforming anything (think of unemployment and the way it is falsely presented as a resolvable breakdown in economic rationality). Someone said that even the request for nontoxic food has become a revolutionary project, because any attempt to satisfy it would involve changing the whole of social relations. Any demand that is addressed to a precise interlocutor carries its own defeat within it, if for no other reason than that no authority would be capable of resolving a problem of general significance even if it wanted to. *To whom* does one turn to oppose air pollution?

The workers who, during a wildcat strike, carried a banner saying, “*We are not asking for anything*” understood that the defeat is in the claim itself (“the claim against the enemy is eternal”). There is no alternative but to take everything. As Stirner said: “No matter how much you give them, they will always ask for more, because what they want is no less than the end of every concession.”

And then? Then, even though you are few you can think of acting without doing so in isolation, in the knowledge that in explosive situations a few good contacts are more useful than large numbers. Sadly, it often happens that rights-claiming social struggles develop more interesting methods than they do objectives (for example, a group of unemployed asking for work ends up burning down a dole office). Of course one could remain aloof, saying that work should not be asked for, but destroyed. Or one could try to link a critique of the whole economy to that so passionately burned office, or a critique of the unions to an act of sabotage. Each individual objective in the struggle contains the violence of the whole of social relations ready to explode. The banality of their immediate cause, as we know, is the calling card of revolts throughout history.

What can a group of resolute comrades do in such situations? Not much, unless they have already thought (for example) about how to give out a leaflet or at what points of the city to widen a protest; and, what is more, if a gay and lawless intelligence makes them forget numbers and great organizational structures.

Without wanting to revive the myth that the general strike is the unshackling of insurrection, it is clear enough that the interruption of all social activity is still decisive. Subversive action must tend towards the paralysis of normality, no matter what originally caused the clash. If students continue to study, workers—those who remain of them—and office employees to work, the unemployed to worry about employment, then no change will be possible. Revolutionary practice will always be *above* people. Any organization that is separate from social struggles can neither unleash revolt nor extend and defend it. If it is true that the exploited tend to line up behind those who are able to guarantee economic improvements during the course of the struggle—if it is true, in other words, that any struggle to demand better conditions is necessarily of a reformist character—libertarians could push through methods (individual autonomy, direct action, permanent conflictuality) that go beyond making demands to denying all social identities (teacher, clerk, worker, et cetera). An established libertarian organization making claims would merely *flank* the struggles (only a few of the exploited would choose to belong to it), or would lose its libertarian characteristics (the trades unions are the best qualified in the field of syndicalist struggles). An organizational structure formed by revolutionaries and exploited is only really in conflict if it is in tune with the temporary nature of one specific struggle, has a clear aim and is in the perspective of attack. In a word, if it is a critique in act of the union and its collaboration with the bosses.

We cannot say that subversives have a great capacity to launch social struggles (anti-militarist, against environmental toxicity, et cetera) at the moment. There remains (for all those who do not maintain that “people are accomplice and resigned”) the hypothesis of autonomous intervention in struggles—or in the fairly extensive acts of rebellion—that arise spontaneously. If we are looking for a clear expression of the kind

of society the exploited are fighting for (as one subtle theoretician claimed in the face of a recent wave of strikes), we might as well stay at home. If we simply limit ourselves—which is not very different—to “critical support,” we are merely adding our red and black flags to those of the parties and unions. Once again critique of detail espouses the quantitative model. If we think that when the unemployed talk about the right to work we should be doing the same (making the obvious distinction between wages and “socially useful activity”), then the only *place for action* seems to be streets full of demonstrators. As old Aristotle was aware, *representation* is only possible where there is unity of time and place.

But who said it is not possible to talk to the unemployed of sabotage, the abolition of rights, or the refusal to pay rent (whilst practicing it at the same time)? Who said that when workers come out into the streets on strike, the economy cannot be criticized *elsewhere*? To say what the enemy does not expect and be where they are not waiting for us. That is the new poetry.

VII

“We are too young, we cannot wait any longer.”

—A WALL IN PARIS

The force of an insurrection is social, not military. Generalized rebellion is not measured by the armed clash but by the extent to which the economy is paralyzed, the places of production and distribution taken over, the free giving that burns all calculation and the desertion of obligations and social roles. In a word, it is the upsetting of life. No guerrilla group, no matter how effective, can take the place of this grandiose movement of destruction and transformation. Insurrection is the light emergence of a banality coming to the surface: no power can support itself without the voluntary servitude of those it dominates. Revolt reveals better than anything else that it is the exploited themselves who make the

murderous machinery of exploitation function. The wild, spreading interruption of social activity suddenly tears away the blanket of ideology, revealing the real balance of strength. The State then shows itself in its true colors—the political organization of passivity. Ideology on one side, fantasy on the other, expose their material weight. The exploited simply discover the strength they have always had, putting an end to the illusion that society reproduces itself alone—or that some mole is clawing away in their place. They rise up against their past obedience—their *past State*—and habits established in defense of the old world. The conspiracy of insurgents is the only instance when “collectivity” is not the darkness that gives away the flight of the fireflies to the police, or the lie that makes “common good” of individual ill-being. It is what gives differences the strength of complicity. Capital is above all a community of informers, union that weakens individuals, unity that keeps us divided. Social conscience is an inner voice that repeats “Others accept.” In this way the real strength of the exploited acts against them. Insurrection is the process that unleashes this strength, and along with it autonomy and the pleasure of living; it is the moment when we think reciprocally that the best thing we can do for others is to free ourselves. In this sense it is “a collective movement of individual realization.”

The normality of work and “time off,” the family and consumerism, kills every evil passion for freedom. (As we write these words we are forcibly separated from our own kind, and this separation relieves the State from the burden of prohibiting us from writing). No change is possible without a violent break with habit. But revolt is always the work of a minority. The masses are at hand, ready to become instruments of power (for the slave who rebels, “power” is both the bosses’ orders and the obedience of the other slaves) or to accept the changes taking place out of inertia. The greatest general wildcat strike in history—May ’68—involved only a fifth of the population of a State. It does not follow from this that the only objective can be to take over power so as to direct the masses, or that it is necessary to present oneself as the consciousness of the proletariat. There can be no immediate leap from the present society to freedom. The servile, passive attitude is not something that can

resolve itself in a few days or months. But the opposite of this attitude must carve out a space for itself and *take its own time*. The social upheaval is merely the necessary condition for it to start.

Contempt for the “masses” is not qualitative, but ideological, that is, it is subordinated to the dominant representation. The “people” of capital exist, certainly, but they do not have any precise form.

It is still from the anonymous mass that the unknown with the will to live arise in mutiny. To say we are the only rebels in a sea of submission is reassuring because it puts an end to the game in advance. We are simply saying that we do not know who our accomplices are and that we need a social tempest to discover them. Today each of us decides to what extent others cannot decide (it is the abdication of one’s capacity to choose that makes the world of automaton function). During the insurrection choice elbows its way in, armed, and it is with arms that it must be defended because it is on the corpse of the insurrection that reaction is born. Although minoritarian (but in respect to what unit of measure?) in its active forces, the insurrectional phenomenon can take on extremely wide dimensions, and in this respect reveals its social nature. The more extensive and enthusiastic the rebellion, the less it can be measured in the military clash. As the armed self-organization of the exploited extends, revealing the fragility of the social order, one sees that revolt, just like hierarchical and mercantile relations, is *everywhere*. On the contrary, anyone who sees the revolution as a coup d’état has a militaristic view of the clash. An organization that sets itself up as vanguard of the exploited tends to conceal the fact that domination is a social relation, not simply a general headquarters to be conquered; otherwise how could it justify its role?

The most useful thing one can do with arms is to render them useless as quickly as possible. But the problem of arms remains abstract until it is linked to the relationship between revolutionary and exploited, between organization and real movement.

Too often revolutionaries have claimed to be the exploited’s consciousness and to represent their level of subversive maturity. The “social movement” thus becomes the justification for the party (which in the

Leninist version becomes an elite of professionals of the revolution). The vicious circle is that the more one separates oneself from the exploited, the more one needs to *represent* an in-existent relationship. Subversion is reduced to one's own practices, and representation becomes the organization of an ideological racket—the bureaucratic version of capitalist appropriation. The revolutionary movement then identifies with its “most advanced” expression, which *realizes* its concept. The Hegelian dialectic of totality offers a perfect system for this construction.

But there is also a critique of separation and representation that justifies waiting and accepts the role of the critic. With the pretext of not separating oneself from the “social movement,” one ends up denouncing any practice of attack as a “flight forward” or mere “armed propaganda.” Once again revolutionaries are called to “unmask” the real conditions of the exploited, this time by their very inaction. No revolt is consequently possible other than in a visible social movement. So anyone who acts must necessarily want to take the place of the proletariat. The only patrimony to defend becomes “radical critique,” “revolutionary lucidity.” Life is miserable, so one cannot do anything but theories misery. Truth before anything else. In this way the separation between subversive and exploited is not eliminated, only displaced. We are no longer exploited alongside the exploited; our desires, rage and weaknesses are no longer part of the class struggle. It's not as if we can act when we feel like it: we have a mission—even if it doesn't call itself that—to accomplish. There are those who sacrifice themselves to the proletariat through action and those who do so through passivity.

This world is poisoning us and forcing us to carry out useless noxious activity; it imposes the need for money on us and deprives us of impassioned relationships. We are growing old among men and women without dreams, strangers in a reality which leaves no room for outbursts of generosity. We are not partisans of abnegation. It's just that the *best* this society can offer us (a career, fame, a sudden win, “love”) simply doesn't interest us. Giving orders disgusts us just as much as obedience. We are exploited like everyone else and want to put an end to exploitation right away. For us, revolt needs no other justification.

Our lives are escaping us, and any class discourse that fails to start from this is simply a lie. We do not want to direct or support social movements, but rather to participate in those that already exist, to the extent to which we recognize common needs in them. In an *excessive* perspective of liberation there are no such things as superior forms of struggle. Revolt needs everything: papers and books, arms and explosives, reflection and swearing, poison, daggers and arson. The only interesting question is *how to combine them*.

VIII

“It is easy to hit a bird flying in a straight line.”

—B. GRACIAN

Not only do we desire to change our lives immediately, it is the criterion by which we are seeking our accomplices. The same goes for what one might call a *need for coherency*. The will to live one’s ideas and create theory starting from one’s own life is not a search for the *exemplary* or the hierarchical, paternalistic side of the same coin. It is the refusal of all ideology, including that of pleasure. We set ourselves apart from those who content themselves with areas they manage to carve out—and *safeguard*—for themselves in this society even before we begin to think, by the very way we palpate our existence. But we feel just as far removed from those who would like to desert daily normality and put their faith in the mythology of clandestinity and combat organizations, locking themselves up in other cages. No role, no matter how much it puts one at risk in terms of the law, can take the place of the real changing of relations. There is no short-cut, no immediate leap into the elsewhere. The revolution is not a war.

In the past the inauspicious ideology of arms transformed the need for coherence of the few into the gregariousness of the many. May arms finally turn themselves against ideology!

An individual with a passion for social upheaval and a “personal”

vision of the class clash wants to do something immediately. If he or she analyses the transformation of capital and the State it is in order to attack them, certainly not so as to be able to go to sleep with clearer ideas. If they have not introjected the prohibitions and distinctions of the prevailing law and morals, they draw up the rules of their own game, using every instrument possible. Contrary to the writer or the soldier for whom these are professional affairs so have a mercantile identity, the pen and the revolver are equally arms for them. The subversive remains subversive even without pen or gun, so long as he possesses the weapon that contains all the others: his own resoluteness.

“Armed struggle” is a strategy that could be put at the service of *any* project. The guerrilla is still used today by organizations whose programs are substantially social democratic; they simply support their demands with military practice. Politics can also be done with arms. In any negotiation with power—that is, any relationship that maintains the latter as interlocutor, be it even as adversary—the negotiators must present themselves as a representative force. From this perspective, representing a social reality means reducing it to one’s own organization. The armed clash must not spread spontaneously but be linked to the various phases of negotiation. The organization will manage the results. Relations among members of the organization and between the latter and the rest of the world reflect what an authoritarian program is: they take hierarchy and obedience seriously.

The problem is not all that different for those aiming for the violent conquest of political power. It is a question of propagandizing one’s strength as a vanguard capable of directing the revolutionary movement. “Armed struggle” is presented as the superior form of social struggle. Whoever is more militarily representative—thanks to the spectacular success of the actions—constitutes the authentic armed party. The staged trials and people’s tribunals that result are acts of those who want to put themselves in place of the State.

For its part, the State has every interest in reducing the revolutionary threat to a few combatant organizations in order to transform subversion into a clash between two armies: the institutions on the

one hand, the armed party on the other. What power fears most is anonymous, generalized rebellion. The media image of the “terrorist” works hand in hand with the police in the defense of social peace. No matter whether the citizen applauds or is scared he is still a citizen, i.e., a spectator.

The reformist embellishment of the existent feeds armed mythology, producing the false alternative between legal and clandestine politics. It suffices to note how many left democrats are sincerely moved by the figure of the guerrilla in Mexico and Latin America. Passivity requires advisors and specialists. When it is disappointed by the traditional ones it lines up behind the new.

An armed organization—with a program and a monogram—specific to revolutionaries, can certainly have libertarian characteristics, just as the social revolution desired by many anarchists is undoubtedly also an “armed struggle.” But is that enough?

If we recognize the need to organize *the armed deed* during the insurrectional clash, if we support the possibility of attacking the structures and men of power from this minute on, and consider the horizontal linking of affinity groups in practices of revolt to be decisive, we are criticizing the perspective of those who see armed action as the transcendence of the limits of social struggles, attributing a superior role to *one* form of struggle. Moreover, by the use of monograms and programs we see the creation of an identity that separates revolutionaries from the rest of the exploited, making them visible to power and putting them in a condition that lends itself to *representation*. In this way the armed attack is no longer just one of the many instruments of one’s liberation, but is charged with a symbolic value and tends to appropriate anonymous rebellion to its own ends. The informal organization as a *fact* linked to the temporary aspect of struggles becomes a permanent and formalized decision-making structure. In this way what was an *occasion* for meeting in one’s projects becomes a veritable project in itself. The organization begins to desire to reproduce itself, exactly like the quantitative reformist structures do. Inevitably the sad trousseau of communiqués and

documents appear, where one raises one's voice and finds oneself chasing an identity that exists only because it has been declared. Actions of attack that are quite similar to other *simply* anonymous ones come to represent who knows what qualitative leap in revolutionary practice. The schema of politics reappears as one starts flying in a straight line.

Of course, the need to organize is something that can *always* accompany subversives' practice beyond the temporary requirements of a struggle. But in order to organize oneself there is a need for living, concrete agreements, not an image in search of spotlights.

The secret of the subversive game is the capacity to smash deforming mirrors and find oneself face to face with one's own nakedness. Organization is the whole of the projects that make this game come alive. All the rest is political prosthesis and nothing else.

Insurrection is far more than "armed struggle," because during it the generalized clash is at one with the upsetting of the social order. The old world is upturned to the extent to which the insurgent exploited are *all armed*. Only then are arms not the separate expression of some vanguard, the monopoly of the bosses and bureaucrats of the future, but the concrete condition of the revolutionary feast: the collective possibility of widening and defending the transformation of social relations. Subversive practice is even less "armed struggle" in the absence of the insurrectional rupture, unless one wants to restrict the immensity of one's passions to no more than a few instruments. It is a question of contenting oneself with preestablished roles, or seeking coherency in the most remote point, life.

Then, in the spreading revolt we will really be able to perceive a marvelous *conspiracy of egos* aimed at creating a society without bosses or dormant. A society of free and unique individuals.

IX

"Don't ask for the formula for opening up worlds to you in some syllable like

a bent dry branch. Today, we can only tell you what we are not, what we don't want."

—E. MONTALE

Life cannot simply be something to cling to. This thought skims through everyone at least once. We have a possibility that makes us freer than the gods: we can quit. This is an idea to be savored to the end. Nothing and no one is obliging us to live. Not even death. For that reason our life is a *tabula rasa*, a slate on which nothing has been written, so contains all the words possible. With such freedom, we cannot live as slaves. Slavery is for those who are *condemned to live*, those constrained to eternity, not for us. For us there is the unknown—the unknown of spheres to be ventured into, unexplored thoughts, guarantees that explode, strangers to whom to offer a gift of life. The unknown of a world where one might finally be able to give away one's excess self love. Risk too. The risk of brutality and fear. The risk of finally staring *mal de vivre* in the face. All this is encountered by anyone who decides to put an end to the *job of existing*.

Our contemporaries seem to live by jobbing, desperately juggling with a thousand obligations including the saddest of all of them—enjoying themselves. They cover up the incapacity to determine their own lives with detailed frenetic activity, the speed that accompanies increasingly passive ways of behaving. They are unaware of the lightness of the negative.

We can choose not to live. That is the most beautiful reason for opening oneself up to life with joy. "There is always time to put an end to things; one might as well rebel and play"—is how the materialism of joy talks.

We can choose not to act, and that is the most beautiful reason for acting. We bear within ourselves the potency of all the acts we are capable of, and no boss will ever be able to deprive us of the possibility of saying no. What we are and what we want begins with a *no*. From it is born the only reason for getting up in the morning. From it is born the only reason for going armed to the assault of an order that is suffocating us.

On the one hand there is the existent, with its habits and certainties. And of certainty, that social poison, one can die.

On the other hand there is insurrection, the *unknown* bursting into the life of all. The possible beginning of an exaggerated practice of freedom.

**Thoughts on the
Republication of a
Uniquely Impactful Text**

“How, under the present social order, do you reconcile the inhabitants’ desire to breathe with the interests of the bosses of the motor industry? Free circulation of individuals with the fears of the luxury boutique owners? Children’s play areas with the cement of the car parks, banks and shopping centres? The empty houses left in the hands of the speculators? The blocks of flats that look like army barracks, that look like schools, that look like hospitals, that look like asylums? To move one wall in this labyrinth of horrors would mean putting the whole scheme in question. The further we move away from a police-like view of the environment, the closer we get to clashing with the police”

MEMORIES FROM A LONG TIME AGO

To begin to discuss the implications of this piece, or the impacts of its initial translation and publication within the US context, we have to go back to a time that few who are currently active can remember. This was an era in which the only forms of politics which were available to many came in the form of competing grand narratives of existence, and in which the forms of action that one could find emergent were inherently tied to a discourse of “the system” and “the movement”. This was a time—around fifteen years ago—of grand movement activity, massive street marches, a sense of hope, but also a certain listlessness. At the same time that it seemed that the streets were ripping themselves open, that the edifice of American hegemony was imploding from within, the avenues of possible activity were strangely closed, limited, absent of a pathway forward, an analysis of how power functions or the ways that contestation could move beyond the doldrums of the normal activist routine.

Within this moment the perspectives of many that found themselves within the anarchist milieu were beginning a process of becoming. While we watched the thousands march in the streets, often through a haze of exhaustion and delirium, there was always the sense that something was missing. For some the causes of this absence became clear one day in April 2003 in Washington D.C. On this day many of us saw the

police attack the anarchist bloc from behind, while still on the permit route, while the Communists from ANSWER fought us from the front, attempting to prevent us from leaving the parade, while at the same time trying to prevent us from defending ourselves. This all ended predictably, with broken windows, injuries, arrests and an array of “less than lethal” weapons fired in our general direction.

For many of us we got a glimpse into the causes of this absence on that day. It was during the launching of the smoke bombs that it all became clear; we were caught between the imposed totality of the state and law on one side, and the equally authoritarian attempt to regulate the means of resistance on the other. The gap between the liberals and the police that we ended up occupying that day was not merely a physical indication of being stuck between two enemies, it was the manifestation of something that we always knew, that the narratives of modernity, the grand political narratives that dominate the language of contestation, function to the degree that all opposition is eliminated. It was at this moment that many of us began to travel down a certain path, one in which the ends—and even the way points—were unclear. We began to attempt to understand the fallacies that we had all been convinced of, the failures of movementism, the naivety of liberalism, the reality that we are fighting a different fight, and the implications of this revelation. On that day many of us decided that we were going to go it alone, to seek out what actual revolutionary action meant, and to break with the entirety of what we had come to expect in the context of so-called political activity.

To take on this task we needed terms, concepts, frameworks that could allow us to speak in a different language. Not unlike Nietzsche, who set out to create a new language of thought, we were attempting to not only understand fighting differently, but to become different sorts of people in the struggle itself. For as trite as it sounds, certain texts came to exist in a space which allowed them to define this era for many of us, and *At Daggers Drawn* was one of these texts. It was difficult to explain at the time what about the text gave it a certain aura, what allowed it to become an integral part of the lexicon and circulations of that milieu; our ideas were still not very well formed. But, over time, with the benefit

of retrospect, what becomes clear on rereading this text is not so much the tone, or the rhetorical bent, that is important. Rather, what is being presented here functions as a conceptual machine wholly different than many of the texts that we had access to at the time. Unlike many of the texts of the time, which were attempting to still exist in a space of definitive speech and conclusions, while rejecting the idea of ideological certainty, this text seemingly rejected that very form of thought, not in declared rejection, but in the form of the argumentation itself.

What many of us saw in this text, and what enveloped many discussions around this text was less the sense that we learned anything, or obtained a different conclusion from which we could depart. No, the enchantment of the text was that it posited this new language, not from affirming the legitimacy of the language, but in articulating a language simply through the rejection of other possible, more totalizing languages. It was a text which undercut itself, challenged its own ability to speak for the readers, let alone the world, and firmly positioned itself as a howl, as a scream or an utterance; clearly enmeshed in its time and space, wholly of the writer.

Since these days a lot has been lost; a whole generation has been scattered to the winds by repression, addiction, suicide and incarceration. Increasingly it seems as if the monstrosities of movementism are on the rise again, while a small minority holds the line for liberatory concepts of insurgency. As we watch the movement celebrities reassert themselves, complete with their platitudes around mass action, pacifism, and electoral compromise the question arises, when is it going to be time to break with the forces of modernity for good; when can we find ourselves in a position to not only defeat the enemies in blue, but also the ones that masquerade as radicals, complete with stylish hoodies and skinny jeans? For us to ever find the ability to fight, to actually engage in the spaces in which we live, we have to embrace the inertia of that time, 15 years ago, when we decided that we were going to go out into the wilderness alone, regardless of the costs, impervious to the risks, comfortable with the sacrifices.

Within the contemporary narratives that underlie the majority of perspectives labeled as revolutionary there is a common existential structure, one which revolves around concepts of systems and singular solutions. Within this conceptual space we are to imagine that the “system” is some sort of monolithic structure, which exerts an almost unchallenged ability to command the particularities of everyday life. Outside of the superficialities of this sort of a narrative, and the ways in which it eliminates the complexities of the existential structure of what we loosely call capital and the state, this narrative has a profound impact on the conceptual structures deployed in the attempt to think the activity of contestation.

Out of this monolithic narrative, one which has a tendency to become more monolithic and absolutist the further one moves into authoritarianism, the structures of contestation take on a very specific form. In the current day we tend to call these structures a “movement”, or singular bodies meant to organize activity against singular systemic enemies. Our activity is channeled into the bodies of these massive political bureaucracies, run by steering committees, often for the purpose of the gains of political opportunists. We go to protests, hand out fliers, and go to meetings to determine what to do on the next day of action. All this time, through the hours of work, the exhaustion, the fervor and the crush of street actions, we never are able to move engagement beyond the simple level of symbolism, the abstract discursive engagement with conceptual enemies.

With the assertion of the primacy of unitary action through the medium of the social movement bureaucracy, combined with the insistence on pacifism, we are relegated to nothing more than the ritual of the march, the pagentry of the rally, and the inevitable discussion of the attendance at the event and how the “media” shortchanged the numbers. We become locked in cycles, cyclical attempts to get more numbers to make a louder statement to get more numbers, all the while doing so in the attempt to be able to engage in a discussion with those that inevitably command the same forces of the state that we are in conflict with

in the first place; at least revolutionaries would on occasion take parts of cities by force.

The problems that are faced in the rotting edifice of the contemporary social movement cannot be reduced to questions of strategy. This is not only a problem of a reliance on the ritual of resistance, or a question of the ineffectiveness of negotiating arrests with the police beforehand. The problems here cannot be reduced simply to problems of the ways that we engage, the questions of armed struggle and the discourse around maneuver warfare. The problem here is not merely that the Black Bloc has become nothing more than really militant activism, in all too many situations, or that we spend a lot of our time traveling from action to action to action, racking up little more than trauma and an increasingly sizable arrest record.

At its core the problems here are not internal to the narrative that gives rise to the concept of the unitary social movement, the concept of the revolutionary Party and the focus on policy; all of this makes sense if we understand politics as functioning primarily through the lens of unitary structures imposing commands. Just as with conspiracy theorists, who depart from a similar conceptual point of departure, or Leninists, who do nothing more than frame this point of departure in the language of pseudo-science, the effects are the same; the particularities of life are obscured, the ways in which capital and the state function are lost in their localities, and the very act of contestation occurs outside both the realities and complexities of our lives and the terrain in which conflict actually occurs within—the immediate. To be able to transcend the limitations imposed by the superficiality of simple explanations and easy solutions it is necessary for us to begin to complicate the structure of the operation of capital and the state, to begin to rethink the terrain of functionality from the perspective of events and occurrences, rather than the assertion of the unity of systems; we need to move beyond politics grounded in a narrative centered on universalized, body-less monsters.

To be able to transcend the limitations, we see in both the narrative of causes, as well as the narrative of solutions, what is required is nothing short of a total laying to waste of the structures that have grounded contestation in the dominant modernist paradigm. The necessity of understanding contestation in the context of immediacy is not merely a broad existential point, but functions in the strategic space as well. *In At Daggers Drawn* the entry point to this discussion begins with a discussion of the current state of things. Rather than the dark presentations of exceptional circumstances, which we often see populating the frameworks of breathless radical creeds, this discussion begins at a widely divergent place; normality, boredom, suspension. The context of capitalist operation is no longer located in the realm of policy, the imposition of private property and land enclosure, the forcing of the agrarian worker into the city. The context now exists in the droning on of everyday life, the absence of dramatic change, maintenance and the management of crisis.

We are facing the mechanisms of capture, the capitalist state functions along the lines of canals, framing action in the terms of economization and commodification, utilizing the state for purposes of maintaining the economies ability to function. In this operational space the locality of power, the points of departure for activity and the logistical ability to act emanates from mutable sites, all facilitated by the functionality of the state, which exists to do nothing more than manage crisis. In less obtuse language, the economy functions, companies rise and fall, jobs are gained and lost, and the role of the state is to make sure that currency is supported, subsidies flow to places that will facilitate economic growth and that the structure of private property continues. Captured motion has effects that we can begin to see clearly in microscopic forms, neighborhoods are reduced from relations between neighbors to collections of commodified structures and consumer indexes in non-profit reports. We can see this in the structure of macro-economic policy as well, in the IMF measuring the economic success of a space based on median incomes and GDP.

The functionality of this framework is less in the imposition of force, as one would find in more traditional authoritarian spaces, but functions in the construction of what is considered to be normal, in the very idea of the normal itself. Not only does this reality of late capitalism require a reorientation, especially in the West, away from a radicalism based on resisting the extraordinary, that which exceeds the expectations of normality, as in attempts to resist wars, but it also forces us to understand the functionality of what has traditionally been referred to as “the system”.

What the relationships which are prevalent in late capitalism make clear is that the modernist understanding of singular sources of power emanating from singular institutional sites is entirely insufficient to understand the functionalities of dominant paradigms in actual lived moments. The “struggle” does not occur on the level of grand, epic street battles with the police, although this is always a part of resistance. Struggles occur on the level in which the inscription of capitalist value and the logistics of the state actually operate, on the level of the moment—the immediate itself.

Examples can be offered in order to contextualize this shift. Capitalism functions to the degree that regular people go to work and use abstract resources accumulated through wage labor to perpetuate the consumer economy. The state functions to the degree that average people comply with police orders, that is, with every policy articulated by every politician. Less obviously though is the structure of conflict, the contingencies of moments and the contextualization of activity itself. The question is not whether the union organizer gets fired for being arrested during the riot, the question is why participating in the riot is unthinkable to begin with, or why electoralism is so pervasive. The terrain of conflict is not only in the material avenues or barriers for action in a physical sense, but is also in the historical conditions—the material dynamics—of what shapes our thinking of the possible in the first place.

We hear an insistence all the time, from the endless debates about better future worlds with the random person in the coffee shop, asking what we would do to replace prisons. The insistence here is an absurd injunction to imagine, from a position in which our sense of normality and permissiveness are framed through categories that depart from the

capitalist state, to ask what a world in which all these categories no longer functioned would look like calls us to achieve the impossible, to predict an incomprehensible future. To even make such a prediction would limit the possibilities opened up by contestation in the first place, this near biblical tradition of divination has been termed the end of history, or utopia. It is in this sense that the second turn in modernist notions of the grand revolution fail. It is not just merely in the reductionistic misunderstanding of the terrain of conflict, but also in the impossible insistence on predicting outcomes, on developing the plan or the programme.

The importance of the discourse around terrains of functionality is to begin to glimpse into both the failures of the modernistic revolutionary project, as well as to chart routes of escape. The recognition of the microscopic functionalities of conflict and operationalization, as well as the absurdities of predicting future worlds allows us to depart from a fundamentally different space. From a beginning point in immediacy, the entire context for understanding contestation shifts from the notion of the mass movement, grand revolution and end of history into one based in immediate action in localized space for the purposes of subterfuge, disruption and the construction of experimental possibilities. We begin our move away from the world historical grand project of utopian metaphysics and into the materially graspable scheme planned in the basement.

REVOLUTION AND INSURRECTION

The logistical operation of power within the context of everyday life, and the particularity of moments, comes to challenge not only the concept of abstract engagement with conceptually singular “systems”, but decenters the concept of contestation away its central location within modernity, that is the concept of revolution. Much of modernist discourse, from the origins of the American and French revolutions, all the way to the Arab Awakening movements and Occupy, are located around the orbit of the concept of revolution.

The concept of revolution occupies a sort of peculiar space within

the concept of modernity, specifically within the framework of liberal democracy. As Schmitt articulates, the frameworks for engagement that form around liberal democracy are predicated on the assertion that discursive engagement in rationally crafted spaces supersede all other forms of engagement; that the only legitimate form of political engagement is one that is fundamentally based on the rational discourse around ideas. A concept that is based on an entire universe of assumptions around concepts of reason, the ability to understand absolute truth, the existence of absolute truth, etc. The totality of engagement within modernist discourses is based on the assertion of a political framework grounded in some concept of truth, with all political activity occurring as discursive attempts to change the superficial aesthetics of these forms, but not the form itself.

It is from this basis that the concept of revolution emerges in order to address a problem and a paradox. The problem centers around the concept of personal and subjective autonomy, the ability to make sense of the world in particularized ways. This raises the problem of errant state structure and action, or state action that departs from the concept of rational truth; or the problem of what occurs when the state form diverges, through the actions of the sovereign, from posited concepts of rational truth. As stated in the *Declaration of Independence*, where this errant mobility is termed tyranny, the possibility of revolution emerges. What is important here is that the concept of revolution is not an object that names a process of taking control, or a reclaiming of political autonomy; it only serves to name the mass action taken in order to reinstate concepts of absolute truth. Beyond the *Declaration of Independence*, which uses revolution as an escape clause, we can also see similar rhetoric in both Leninist concepts of revolution, as well as theocratic concepts of revolution, which aim to return “society” to a state closer to a concept of truth.

Now we can begin to trace some elements of the concept of revolution that are latent in the framework itself, and which are not apparent from the outset. The initial element that becomes clear is that the notion of revolution is ahistorical. By this we mean to say that the concept of revolution exists outside of the particularities of time and space, and outside

of the contingencies of activities taken within the material world. As a concept grounded in a concept of absolute truth the notion of revolution functions as nothing more than a revelation, a coming of the inevitable end of history, the rapture, the Second Coming. Revolution in other words eliminates the past, present and future in the inevitable, universal truth of the concept of the revolution itself. It is a concept which is based in the assertion of the universality of its conclusion in all moments, before any events occur; the coming Communist utopia is always going to occur according to Lenin, the revolution is but its harbinger.

The initial ahistoricism leads to a secondary layer of elements, the debasing of the concept of activity from the immediacy of the operational logistics of power. By decentering the concept of action from the immediate, positing it as the inevitable result of universal truth and framing the enemy in abstractly systemic terms the concept of revolution removes activity from the immediacy of action. That begins to frame it in the context of both world historical inevitability and the notion of control over ground. The question ceases to become what form the operations of power take in their immediacy, the tactical question, which becomes irrelevant once the concept of the state is understood as a systemic entity that can be declared divergent from the concept of truth. The only goal, from this point of departure, then becomes the elimination of the “system”, rather than the prevention of local operation, the disruption of operation and the opening up of possibilities. As such, revolution tends toward the concept of frontal warfare; even in Maoist concepts of guerrilla warfare the goal is always to take space, impose political systems and build to the point of frontal mass warfare against the state.

It is in this sense that we can say that revolution performs all of the fundamental tasks of any other modernist framework (generalization, ahistoricism, the elimination of particularity and the abstraction of operational dynamics into concepts of systems), but does so as a marker of the threshold. In other words, even though the concept of revolution is fully based within the context of modernity, and serves to do nothing more than reframe modernity under different terms, it also exists as the limit of the discursive, the space where words break down into bullets.

As such, revolution is not the point in which the modernist concept of the state collapses, it is merely the last bastion of its salvation, the point before it breaks itself apart. So, if the concept is grounded in a problematic point of departure, and replicates the same dynamics that remove us from the conditions of possibility, the question is not merely what comes after revolution, but how do we destroy revolution in the act of exceeding its limitations.

The point of exceeding the concept of revolution, is being termed insurrection. Insurrection here names a point in which one takes on the exceeding of the discursive assertions of the modernist project, while at the same time eliminating the baggage of the concept of universal truth, the notion of the utopian future, the abstract framework through which contestation is thought, recentering the concept of contestation in the immediacy of lived experience. The insurrectionary project is not a positivist project, this is not an attempt to create the utopian future from the flawed present, this would be impossible to conceive of, let alone destructive and existentially nullifying to attempt. The goal is not to build the new world on some partial framework of understanding named truth. Rather the attempt is to, through the mobilization of conflict, open up the possibilities of existence through the degradation of the logistics of control. The concept of insurrection here names not only the elimination of the discursive assertions of modernity, but also marks the point beyond the last outpost of the modernist project, revolution itself.

It is not merely that the concept of revolution and insurrection are different temporally, in the sense that revolutions have longevity, as Badiou would have it. The concepts of revolution and insurrection are mutually exclusive, opposed concepts. The notion of revolution, as understood in the modernist context, is grounded in the concept that rebellions against the present order function to bring about some future order, one laid out in the theories of the parties involved and grounded in the same existential assumptions as the structure being contested. It is portrayed as a smooth process in which the conflict that destroys the present order results in a clean transition to a future state. The notion of insurrection functions in a completely different way. Far from being grounded in the illusions of

the determination of the future, and in direct opposition to the notion of social peace, the absence of political conflict, the notion of insurrection is a point of departure and condition of possibility. It functions as a point through which additional questions can be asked, from the positionality of the impossibility, and recognition of the danger, latent in the attempt to determine some future world. At the same time it functions as a term which names the possibility created in the destruction of imposed limitations. Insurrection is not a political concept, as traditionally understood, but functions as a theoretical object which names the unleashing of conflict to expand the possibilities present in all moments.

In this sense insurrection, as an object, does not merely name the generally understood phenomena of street fighting, uprising, barricades and so on. It names a litany of more mundane realities. To the degree that we exist in a universe in which the entirety of events are not pre-determined existentially, insurrection or what we term the anarchic, is inherent in moments; things can occur based on the actions taken in these moments, possibilities always exist. Beyond naming this simple existential state of affairs the term insurrection also names a positionality. It names a decision in relation to the social war that we cannot escape; the social war imposed by the state's attempt to eliminate these possibilities. It is a position against, a position grounded in the attempt to degrade the ability of these limits to function in the present.

IMMEDIACY AND THE EXISTENT

With the transcendence of the limitations of the concept of revolution, and the recentering of the question of contestation around the materiality of the logistic operations of power the discussion can ground itself in the immediate, rather than the symbolic conceptual ether of the modernist revolutionary paradigm. Immediacy here takes on a completely different structure than within the contemporary revolutionary paradigm. Within this concept of the moment within the revolutionary paradigm the present functions in a dual role, as moment of analysis, where one

merely analyzes the moment and begins to think through the process of building revolutionary capacity, and as a moment in which one builds the formations necessary to take power. Within this paradigm the present becomes displaced; displaced into the ahistorical framework of analysis and displaced into some imagination of future events. This approach, from the insurrectionary perspective, becomes a non-engagement, an attempt to think revolution without activity; an approach which fails to disrupt the state of things in favor of displacing conflict into some future moment.

Within a perspective grounded in the immediacy of action and the moment the present takes on a fundamentally different tone. Rather than a moment of pure analysis, the present becomes a moment of activity, a moment in which the possibilities that are present are leveraged in order to cause disruption, create conditions for disruption and the point of departure for active negations of limitations to the possibilities of the moment. In this context tasks like analysis or writing become framed not as attempts to write the correct theory, imagine future worlds or build the Party, but become acts of disruption in themselves, measured purely based on their effectiveness, rather than their ability to reflect some concept of truth that we could never understand, if it exists at all. The measure here is not on the level of victory, or the storming of the Winter Palace, phenomena that we cannot even imagine if we are honest with ourselves. The measure is, rather, the ability of our activities here and now to both create possibilities in the following present moments, as well as to disrupt and degrade the functionality of the limitations that exist in the present. Rather than an exercise in political fantasy, the practice of insurrection takes the anarchic as its point of departure in the attempt to expand the possibilities of the anarchic; both a strategic deployment of conflict as well as the objective of deploying conflict.

The question posed here is not one of how can “we,” framed as the grand revolutionary formation, combat the state on the terrain of open frontal warfare, as we would have it in the traditional revolutionary paradigm. It is even less the question of the “movement,” the object that has taken the place of the Party in radical discourse. The question is not one of how we build the revolutionary unitary body, the singular

entity that subsumes resistance to itself. This is both fascistic and strategically absurd. The question is not one of moments we define as moments of “political” action. It is rather, one of the immediate, the possibilities of the present, and the means deployed, alone and in small groups, to expand the possibilities of the next moments; the moments that follow this specific moment in time. The question is one of grounding; the grounding of activity back in the moments in which activity occurs, the present, the immediacy of time and space, here and now. Rather than building the context through which action becomes possible, the isolated world of the Party and the movement, the question being posed is one of acting within the worlds that we find ourselves in within everyday life, within the mundanity of social war, the occupation of our neighborhoods by the police and the indignities of wage labor. Above all, insurrectionary points of departure are a recognition that the state and capital are not abstract monsters that exist in power centers, but are constellations of actions taken in dispersed spaces, constantly constructing their existence in every moment. Every moment, therefore, becomes a point of contestation, becomes a point in which this constant reconstruction could, and sometimes does, fail.

Most importantly, the primary question being posed is not one that resolves itself in a solution; solutions are always fanciful. The concept of insurrection, as a marker, marks the posing of questions without the possibility of a solution. The solution, the end of history, the utopian moment or the revolutionary programme, posits nothing less than the end of possibilities. They posit the end of the ability to determine our present moments, the determination of the present through the vision of the future. It is not only that this perspective has led to the revolutionary failures that we live in the midst of, or that they are glorified acts of Christian fiction, but that they posit a disturbing vision of a world without possibility. The question being posed here, the question of immediacy and activity, is a question because it marks not an end but a beginning point, a point of departure. It is not that insurrection results in the glorious future, but it is that through

insurrectionary activity, in the present, here and now, we steal back the possibility of the moment. This is the only fight worth fighting.

“This world is poisoning us and forcing us to carry out useless noxious activity; it imposes the need for money on us and deprives us of impassioned relationships. We are growing old among men and women without dreams, strangers in a reality which leaves no room for outbursts of generosity. We are not partisans of abnegation. It’s just that the best this society can offer us (a career, fame, a sudden win, ‘love’) simply doesn’t interest us. Giving orders disgusts us just as much as obedience. We are exploited like everyone else and want to put an end to exploitation right away. For us, revolt needs no other justification.”

