

For The Insurrection To Succeed, We Must First Destroy Ourselves

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Contents

A Theory Of Social War	4
The Limits of the Anarchist Identity	9
The Last Chance to Save the Insurrection in Greece	15
Notes	22

Sky News ran into difficulty about five minutes ago when they attempted to go live to one of their reporters on the ground. She appeared to lose her temper as students standing around her began to pitch in with comments like “Ladies and gentlemen, the insurrection has started.”

– Paul Lewis, *Guardian* coverage of London protests against austerity measures, 10 November 2010.

We are surrounded by the picturesque ruins of all explicitly *political* ideas: schools at which no one learns, families bereft of love, banks whose coffers are empty, armies that only lose wars and laws that are merely expressions of “anti-terrorist” paranoia. What does this mean for any kind of *new* politics—if “politics” is even a suitable word? This question must be answered because strangely enough, insurrection against the entire social order is increasingly the only option left on the table. After all, everyone knows *nothing* works. To be realistic, a system in the midst of both global resource depletion and a global fall in the rate of profit could not possibly concede any sort of demand even if it was in its best interest to do so. In election after sorry election, people are throwing out their so-called representatives—¡*Que se vayan todos!*— yet they are not really voting *for* anyone, but they vote *against* politics itself using the only feeble expression of politics remaining to them, the ballot. The youth know better, as the absenteeism that increases in every election shows. Even though the vast spectacular machine of the empire will never admit its own litany of failure—a failure self-evident since the financial crisis of 2008—for the first time in generations, from Greece to France to even Britain, the kids of the planetary bourgeoisie are getting hip to this truth.

The entire imperial apparatus is no longer held together on a mass scale by objective evidence or even faith in “progress,” but only by a certain mixture of depression and repression. The bitter fruit of the end of history is the lack of any horizon even in the face of the collapse of our present. So what occult forces maintain this world? In an inversion of Hobbes’s classic argument, only fear can maintain the present order, and there is no fear more terrifying than the fear of an untimely death. The murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos was precisely the kind of untimely death necessary to prop up a failed state, a human sacrifice intended by the police to restore a respect for their elders in the increasingly restless youth. The Greek police did not invent this recipe: the formula of state-sanctioned murder of those who refuse to assimilate has been repeated with miraculous results in other more “civilised” states. When an African-American youth is murdered by the police in the United States of America, the murder is not even mentioned in the back pages of newspapers unless somehow the act itself has been caught on film and released on the Internet, as befitting the most spectacular society on the planet. It should be no surprise that eventually police murder as an act of social control would come to Greece, and it is not even surprising that riots would follow, as very intense rioting also happened after the death of Michalis Kaltezas there in 1985. What was new about the murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos was that what began as a riot soon was on the road to becoming an insurrection against the totality of capitalist life that generalised throughout high-school students to immigrants in Greece. Just in time for Christmas, the spectre of insurrection haunted Europe yet again. Putting a few people in prison in France, murdering a youth in Greece, declaring all anarchists to be “terrorists”—all of these acts by the state are unable to restrain the rising tide of insurrection. Even if the most pacified of countries like Britain and the United States, buildings are occupied, demonstrations run riot, and tears are

wept by politicians over broken windows. And they all know, a broken window is just a *sign* of disorder—and soon the *real* disorder may arrive.

Around the world, anarchists of the previous generation are puzzled. Why, after such a long absence, are *the People*—who we were never sure we even believed in—back? Even more puzzling, two years later in Greece, in the very the country that seemed closest to the brink of collapse after the financial crisis, the anarchists have (at least temporarily) foiled their own insurrection after the accidental killing of three people in the burning of the Marfin bank. While it is true that such an accident could have easily occurred in earlier protests, the timing of this event was almost tragic on a world-historical scale (and all too convenient for the Greek state), for it happened just at the very moment that the insurrectionary process was generalising even to Greek workers. In the months after this event, it was as if the momentum has been knocked out of the coming Greek insurrection.

Perhaps what is missing in these times is no longer action, but a certain collective intelligence that can both surpass the previous height of insurrection in 2008 and push through its nadir mid-2010. So in addition to the practice of Molotovs and barricades, a collective revolutionary theory that can account for both the current concepts and actions in terms of an insurrectionary process is necessary for any insurrection to avoid simply fizzling and dying. What we mean by this strange term “theory” is a certain strategic debate amongst those on the front lines of the global social war, the war in which the death of Alexis was merely one attack by the state and the insurrection of December but a single social response.

A Theory Of Social War

Hitherto the murders and seditions had been internal and fragmentary. Afterward the chiefs of factions assailed each other with great armies, according to the usage of war, and their country lay as a prize between them... the Senate, fearing lest they should be surrounded by war, and unable to protect themselves, garrisoned the sea-coast from Cumae to the city with freedmen, who were then for the first time enrolled in the army on account of the scarcity of soldiers. The Senate also voted that those Italians who had adhered to their alliance should be admitted to citizenship, which was the one thing they all desired most.

– Appian, *The Civil Wars*

In an era when the global economy is so intertwined that the primary conflict between nation-states involves demolishing their borders for “free trade,” a military war on the scale of the Second World War is simply a financial impossibility. Increasingly, such traditional military war is reduced to the periphery of empire, while a *different* kind of war is waged inside the centre of empire. What is this new kind of war, and is it actually just the return of a forgotten form of warfare? What is the genealogy warfare? Historically, the Greeks recognize two different kinds of war, the civil war [*emfyllos*] and the social war [*koinonikos polemos*].

The civil war, *emfyllos*, is the primordial taking of positions that binds together opposing collectivities. From the perspective of the state, civil war can be a war interior to itself, such as the English Civil War or the French Revolution of 1789, but it can also be a war before and beyond the existence of the state, ranging from the various religious wars that came before the formation

of the modern nation state to the Commune of Paris in 1871 or the revolt in Oaxaca in 2006. It is this last kind of civil war that gains increasing importance as the form of the nation-state mixes with the universalised state of empire. Inside empire, civil war polarizes an otherwise uniform citizenry, forcing them to take either the side of the partisans or the side of the empire itself.

Let us remember that a civil war is between any collectivities that may be latent within a state, and these collectivities may very well be counter-revolutionary, as the phenomenon of political Islam in the Middle East shows all too well. Even in Greece, as the possibility of the actual dissolution of the Greek state became increasingly possible, counter-revolutionary fascist collectivities like the Golden Dawn arose, who are trying to create an ethnically clean stronghold in Ayios Panteleimonas,¹ not too far from Exarcheia. Luckily, the first civil war in Europe since the financial crisis of 2008 was not between a quasi-fascist nationalism and a neo-liberal state (a very real possibility glimpsed in the revolt of 2008 in Bulgaria), but between anarchist-inspired revolution and the state in Greece. As no individual nation-state stands as an island due to their interlocking into the global state of empire, so the insurrection in Greece also naturally raises the possibility of global civil war against empire. The true nightmare of empire is revealed: The seeming historic abnormality of civil war is *always* present even within the so-called “peace” of capitalist representative democracy, and global civil war will return to the stage of history as that very image of “peace” rapidly unravels in the wake of the financial crisis.

While in the era of the formation of modern capitalist nation-states—ranging across the American Civil War to the emergence of the Greek state in the 1940s—civil war is primarily military, in the era of empire civil war takes a more subtle form. The insurrection of December in Greece is a perfect example of such a post-militaristic civil war, in which previously isolated collectivities such as students took a position with anarchists and immigrants to form a new kind of partisan war machine. This new kind of form is revealed even in how civil wars are brought to their end by the state. While earlier civil wars such as the Paris Commune were destroyed through military massacre, something changed after World War II. Remember that DeGaulle defeated the civil war of May 1968 in France by ordering the police to not fire a shot, and then ordering an election instead. The same sequence emerges in Greece: the brutal military repression of the original Polytechnic revolt reduced the popular tolerance of the military junta, which was one of the factors that eventually led to its collapse in 1974—a fact not lost upon Karamanlis. So in the footsteps of DeGaulle, Karamanlis did not order traditional military (or even police) repression against the insurrection of December. How is it that civil war can now be averted without military repression, by only deploying generalised “counter-terrorist” arrests and elections? The answer may yet be another kind of warfare.

In Greek, *koinonikos polemos* means the *social* war. *Koinonikos polemos* is separate from civil war, although in other languages there is only a single word for both kinds of war, like *Bürgerkrieg* in German. Although the term “social war” is often thrown around in a sloppy and confused manner in anarchist propaganda, yet the history of this term reveals that a certain powerful concept is being deployed, a concept that can help us understand a distinct transformation in the form of warfare since the Second World War. The concept of “social war” should directly address the repressive side of the transition from the localised nation-state to the global state of empire—as the function of counter-insurrection is too often ignored by certain ivory-tower theorists, but of immense and immediate concern to practising revolutionaries.

¹ Also see Dalakoglou and Vradis, *Revolt and Crisis in Greece*.

In contrast to civil war, which signifies the breakdown of the apparatus of the state, social war is the low-intensity war by the state against the social relationships of its own population in order to maintain its continued existence. The social war then encompasses the totality of everyday life: To be alive today is to be at war, to never sleep properly, to awaken at odd hours to work, to be constantly surrounded by surveillance and police. A further recital of the various symptoms is unnecessary. Unlike in military war, demands of any kind are futile: demands would only make sense as long as the social war was limited in time and space, yet the capitalist form of life today encompasses the entire globe and imagines its reproduction extending into the infinite future. Another response is to pretend the social war doesn't exist—perhaps the most popular option. More so than in any other moment in history, the temporary relief that bread and circuses provide the population from the social war has been transformed into an entire global industry. One does not win a war by pretending it does not exist. One does not even survive a war in that manner. One wins a war by understanding the terrain and acting accordingly. So a theory of social war will be our weapon against the social war itself, allowing us to recognize our common terrain and devise a strategy to end this state of affairs.

Historically, social war emerged during the same time as the concept of empire itself. The first mention of “social war”—the war between allies (*socii* in Latin, also denoting companionship and hence related to *social* in English)—occurred when Athens failed to transform its confederacy of allies into an empire. So let us not forget that Athens, the long-reputed originator of democracy in the West, nonetheless was also the first aborted empire of Europe. When Athens created a confederacy of city-states in its war against Persia, it was the first among equals, the proto-imperial capital of the Delian League. The true intent of Athens became crystal clear to the other city-states after the Athenians massacred the islanders of Milos, who had in “good faith” believed that they could preserve their independence from the Athenian Confederacy. Increasingly threatened by Athenian domination, the former allies of Athens revolted to preserve their equal standing in the confederacy, and so shattered the prospects for a unified Athenian empire. However, the fall of Athens destroyed only a possible materialisation of empire, not the concept of empire itself. A generation later, the same ambitions re-emerged with Alexander the Great's failed universal empire. What Alexander realised too late was that military war is not enough to establish an empire: Empire can only be created by universalising a form of life, which Alexander took too literally by having his Greek soldiers marry Persians. Again, Greek attempts to become empire-builders were foiled by their adherence to the concept of citizenship as a blood-right, rather than understanding citizenship as a form of life involving language and customs regardless of ancestry.

The first true social war occurred at the birth of the first actual empire in the West: the Roman Empire. Before becoming an empire, Rome was an unimpressive little city-state built upon seven hills, far from the glories of Athens or Babylon. After nearly losing their independence to the Etruscans, the Romans discovered that the best defence was a good offence, and thus began the long and bloody transformation of the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire. The Romans gathered a league of Italian allies around them in return for a share of the bounty of their wars. Yet secretly the Romans also determined that Rome would be the first amongst equals, and kept the wealth and land accumulated from their conquests to themselves, slowly building massive slave plantations instead of parcelling out the spoils amongst Italian freemen from other cities. The former allies of Rome demanded to be treated as equals and declared themselves a new republic—known as “Italia”—with its capital at Abruzzo. Let it not be said that history lacks a

sense of irony; at the G8 in 2009, the new Roman empire of late capitalism had its most imperial of meetings on the earthquake-devastated rubble of Abruzzo.

After decades of bloodshed between the former allies, Rome emerged triumphant and granted all of those that did not revolt the right to become Roman citizens. By this act, the Roman empire expanded Roman citizenship outside of Rome, a process that soon spread across all of the Mediterranean world. Even those who had revolted could become Roman citizens if they submitted themselves at the feet of a Roman praetor! Why was this forgotten war between Rome and the other city-states a *social* war, rather than a *military* war? Unlike a military war where the vanquished are either enslaved or slaughtered, the Romans created a new kind of asymmetric war in which the war was won by transforming the vanquished into citizens.

What does it mean to think through the social war not as a historical event, but as a strategic concept? Which is worse: to die in a military war or to become a citizen in a social war? At least a slave can dream of insurrection against his master: the insurrection of Spartacus against the Romans followed shortly after the social war. Part of the strategy of social war is to avoid the inevitable slave revolt of those excluded from citizenship with its concomitant framework of rights. Yet to be a citizen is to adopt a whole new form of life, a form of life taken from the outside either willingly or through the threat of force: *Death or citizenship!* In contrast to the Greek concept of citizenship that ensured the barbarians would always be excluded, the Romans re-conceived the notion of the citizen to be based on shared customs, shared language, and being bound to a single legal-juridical framework—transforming the ethnic nation-state into an expansive empire capable of expanding across the entire world, at least in theory.

Advocates of empire would have us believe there are two phases to its expansion, which always occur in succession: the first phase of conquest and bloodshed and the second one of peacefully assimilating the conquered into empire as citizens. This is a lie—the social war shows that the assimilation of citizens into empire is just a different kind of war, one that takes place simultaneously via outward military forms of colonisation and via a more inward war on social relationships that begins before and continues long after any military operations have ended.

The social war is a war between forms of life in which the victorious form of life subsumes the conquered one. A form of life evades definition; it exists as the totality of lived material conditions, whose very basis is the social relationships that compose a world. We find ourselves always expressed by and taking part in such forms of life. They are more real than the very concept of the individual, for they are something that simultaneously conjoins and forms the foundation for objective conditions and subjectivity.

Subsumption is the primary tactic of social war, as via subsumption a form of life can be replaced with another form of life. A form of life acts as a configuration of habits and a sort of certain order of life; subsumption reconfigures these habits and re-orders these differences. Social war does not result in destruction for the vanquished: the subsumed do not disappear into ashes like the victims of Hiroshima, but instead the losers of the social war are remade in the interest of the dominating form of life, be it Rome or late capitalism. Subsumption was originally theorised by Kant in terms of the application of abstract concepts to the particulars of the vast manifold; some concepts allow us to register “red apples” despite the fact that each apple is on some metaphysical level indescribably different in tone and hue. Something in Kant still rings true, for the violence of subsumption destroys the concrete particular, reshaping reality into the image of a concrete universal.

In a social war, the concrete universal takes the form of the citizen, the *being without social relationships*. The only relationship allowed to the citizen is that of being dominated by the state, which today has expanded its power via domination by commodities. The particular is all forms of life that resist incorporation into the state apparatus. To ward off civil war, citizenship must expand to subsume all other forms of life, which is only possible by having a new kind of war that destroys the possibilities for social relationships. Under late capitalism, this is accomplished by constantly consuming citizens with work or by isolating people via artificially instilled fear of each other (as done via primitive scaremongering around race or religion). The citizen is not just stripped of social relationships by the social war, but also re-composed in terms of language, habits, and inclinations. Witness the mania for learning English in Greece—the surest sign of the spread of empire is a universalising language! The Roman form of life spread in lock-step with the Latin language, much as English is spreading over the entire world as the new lingua franca of global capital. The social war even expands into the very geography of a town (as Baron Haussmann realised all too well); where once each city had its own building style, the skyscraper is the monstrous form of life of capitalism made real, an inhuman abode fit only for capital. It is not by accident that every metropolis appears eerily similar and that everywhere the same miserable citizens rush to and fro, driven mad by work. Even in Greece, one can see in Ermou Street the eternal return of shopping in the form of anorexic girls and strangely “American”-looking men wandering amid the sterile display of commodities, with Athens being no different than any other metropolis. The victory of the social war is complete only when the citizen feels deep metaphysical anguish at witnessing the destruction of commodities and other violations of “private” property and fails to wince at the death of living beings.

A form of life can be destroyed by attacking and dissolving the social relationships that compose its autonomous world one by one, replacing them with relationships to images and dependence on the state and capital. In order to transform indigenous populations to citizens, the state must also strategically destroy their relationships to each other (families, tribes, friends) and their connections to the natural world, substituting a wholly imaginary relationship to the idea of the nation and absolute dependence on wage labor for these primordial relationships. In this way, the social war of the present empire is far more advanced than the social war of the Roman era, since today the military war is always limited to living bodies while the social war has the unlimited scope of social relationships. As the primary goal of social war is the elimination of any social relationships outside domination, social war is inherently *anti-social*.

It is true that the Greeks invented tragedy, and so perhaps more than superficial Americans they take the death of one of their own with a proper measure of seriousness. Yet their insurrection reflects also that many Greeks intuitively understand the horizon of what lies ahead for the future of this world far better than the most well-read of activists. It is no surprise that Alexis was murdered by the police—it was the most predictable response of the empire of capital when faced with a renegade youth who refused to become a citizen, instead inclined to loiter in Exarcheia amongst the excluded. The empire needs such examples, just as Rome needed to hang the bodies of rebellious slaves on the highways. Far from an accident, police killings of those who refuse the assimilation of the social war will doubtless become increasingly common as the social war intensifies. Again, what was surprising was that the consequent December insurrection generalised to attack the totality of the symbolic order of capitalism itself, reaching its height in the torching of Europe’s largest Christmas tree. It was not in terms of violence that the events of December stepped outside the normality of Greek anarchist demonstrations, as Molotov cocktails are often

to be seen in Greece at large demonstrations. What was abnormal even to Greece was that those outside the anarchist milieu *also* simultaneously aimed for the transformation of everyday life while assaulting capital in acts of pure negation. In this way, the insurrection is a rupture with the previous forms of protest that emerged over the last ten years even in Greece: the first battle of a new sequence in the global civil war.

The Limits of the Anarchist Identity

From 1969 on, the spectacle, in order to still be believed, had to attribute to its enemies incredible actions, and in order to still be accepted, it had to credit proletarians with unacceptable actions, and thereby ensure sufficient publicity so that people who allow themselves to become frightened always choose “the lesser evil,” namely the present state of affairs.

– Gianfranco Sanguinetti, *On Terrorism and the State*

One hypothesis that has been put forward for the power of the insurrection of December was the incredible strength of the anarchist movement. Credit must be given to the Greek anarchists, as it was their quick response that sparked the events on the evening of Alexis’s death. Furthermore, the tactical forms of the anarchist movement did diffuse throughout other sectors of the population like students and immigrants. Yet in retrospect, the insurrection of December was both the apogee and the limit of the insurrectionary anarchist movement in Greece. For what the hypothesis of giving all credit to the “incredible Greek anarchists” does not account for is their subsequent paralysis. On the anniversary of December in 2009, as students took the streets again in Athens, many of the anarchists remained surrounded by police and isolated in their squats—the most visible example being the raid of the anarchist space Resalto in Keratsini, Piraeus.

In the midst of a general strike in May 2010 that nearly led to the storming of government buildings, a handful of anarchists burned down a bank, accidentally killing the three bank employees inside. This event was ready ammunition for the state and media, and used to full effect to nearly abort what appeared to be an even more wide-scale insurrection against the austerity measures being imposed on Greece by the IMF and EU. Although it is true that many people—far more than three—are likely to die in any insurrection, and that it was almost sheerly a matter of luck almost that such events did not occur earlier, the deaths in May 2010 led to massive demoralisation and infighting, including the departure of many of the voices of intelligence like those from the journal *Flesh Machine*.²

While revolutionaries must never in bad faith attack other revolutionaries that in good courage put themselves on the front line, nothing should be above analysis and critique from comrades who are involved in the same struggle. To avoid analysis and critique would lead anarchists to the same sort of ideological blindness that stopped many communists from critiquing Stalin (which shockingly many authoritarian communists in Greece somehow *still* refuse to do). Analysis is a sign of fidelity to insurrection and critique is honesty to our sisters and brothers in insurrection. We do not want to assign blame, like collaborators with the state. It is obvious that the deaths were caused by both a lack of care on the part of insurrectionaries and the twisted logic of capital

² For the dissolution text of the *Flesh Machine* project, see “The Morbid Explosion of Ideology,” *Occupied London*.

that caused the boss to demand them to be at work on the day of a general strike. Instead, we want to understand why the aftermath of such an event could so easily thwart a growing popular insurrection.

One possibility is that it was the resurgence of a kind of anarchist identity in Greece after December that led to a careless cult of militaristic attack by anarchists, which in turn let the state and media isolate anarchists from the general population. Our counter-hypothesis is that the anarchist identity—as developed in Western Europe and North America since the 1980s and taking hold increasingly in Greece—is structurally counter-revolutionary. If this is true, while the first step of insurrection may be started by insurrectionists, for it to be complete the insurrectionists themselves must destroy their identity as “insurrectionists” so that the insurrection can generalise.

Following Badiou, the modern European sequence of insurrections starts with the Paris Commune, which expressed in a few days the ability of people to self-organise their lives without the accumulation of capital or domination of the state.³ However, the Paris Commune was short-lived, as it was unable to defend itself from the inevitable military war that massacred it. The result of this failure of form was thirty years of successful counter-insurrection until revolutionaries adopted the form of the Leninist party, which adopted the Fordist factory-form—a strict discipline and hierarchy—to the revolution in order to create a revolutionary army that could withstand the capitalist counter-offensive (and did, after the insurrection in Russia). While the form of the Leninist party could defend an insurrection, such a centralised form failed to abolish relationships of domination, leading to the worst of all worlds: the professional revolutionary activists used “communism” as an attempt to intensify capitalism in pre-industrial societies.

After decades of further counter-insurrection, May 1968 identified the crux of the problem that Lenin failed to understand—that capitalism was based on social relationships rather than merely military domination. Yet the abortive insurrection of May 1968 failed to find a new form outside of the Leninist party, and so was incapable of generalising into a global insurrectionary process. Focusing on social relationships but unable to comprehend the new historical positioning of capital and the state, the movements of May ’68 could only articulate the necessity for a revolution in social relationships in terms of recognition of the differences in domination, rather than their commonality. This led these movements to fall into an increasingly schizophrenic identity politics that was ultimately only compatible with further subsumption, via the creation of new markets around identity. However, the memory that it could have been otherwise still haunts the state. It is not by accident that Sarkozy stated in response to the December insurrection in Greece that “We don’t want a European May ’68 in the middle of Christmas.”⁴ In the last round of struggle, the anti-globalisation movement finally developed an alternative to the Leninist party through the network form of organisation, but was unable to develop any further revolutionary content, instead becoming trapped in the identity politics of 1968.

In contrast to the revolutionary anarchist tradition of those like Bakunin, anarchism as a specific “countercultural identity” is a relatively new phenomenon that developed after 1968, although traces of it can be found in historical movements such as the nihilists of pre-revolutionary Russia and the moralism of the Spanish revolution. In its current form, the anarchist identity as the “hooded one in black” descends—in dress, at least—from the German Autonomen. The Autonomen first appeared in Germany at the tail end of the seventies; their open street-fighting

³ As quoted in Campbell, M. “Sarkozy drops reforms amid fears of riots” *The Sunday Times*.

was a self-conscious rejection of the tactical stance of armed guerrilla groups like the Red Army Faction. This new generation (who were called the “Black Bloc” first by the media, and then by themselves) are best understood as revolutionaries whose discontent came not in particular from the exploitation of their labor at their jobs (contra traditional Marxism), but from the capitalist subsumption of their own daily life. This accounts for the fact that this generation’s most elementary form of resistance was cultural: the “barbaric” inversion of bourgeoisie morality known as punk. The tradition of wearing black occurred as if by accident, although the tactical advantages of remaining anonymous were soon obvious to all and repeated with success.

This subcultural anarchist identity was globalised with the rise of summit-hopping at the turn of the millennium. Yet while this anarchist identity must be given due credit for helping reinvigorate an explicitly anti-capitalist trajectory in street protests, the anarchist identity never fully disassociated from the more confused reformists of the anti-globalisation movement, as exemplified by the explicitly social democratic pretensions of Naomi Klein and Ya Basta! This is likely due to the dissolution of the proletarian insurrectionary anarchist movement in Europe and the United States after the crushing defeats like those of the Industrial Workers of the World and the Spanish Civil War, which led to a veritable erasure of the revolutionary anarchist tradition. So the new anarchists of the 1990s made an almost infantile return to a sort of radical democracy and Proudhon-inspired federalism, despite the fact that such ideologies were anathema to revolutionary anarchists generations before, who learned all too well the theoretical and practical failures of these dead-ends. While there is no doubt that the anti-globalisation movement led to the valuable development of techniques and a renewed internationalism, the anti-globalisation movement was more a global petite bourgeois movement for the reform of empire into a global democracy than an explicitly insurrectionary movement. Anarchists were either side-lined as a sort of “out of control” element or fell into a sort of confused radical democratic posturing, as witnessed by the fetish of many anarchists for formal consensus even when such consensus exiled the Black Bloc to the fringe of the movement.

Let us give an honest funeral oration for the anarchist identity and the anti-globalisation movement from which it emerged. In precious few years, the form of networks pioneered by the anti-globalisation movement was able to produce a new kind of decentralised organisation that took the power of capital and the state off guard, an answer to a Leninist party for the 21st century. It was as if a new Internationale had materialised out of thin air. However, are networks revolutionary merely by virtue of their form? If somehow networks are indeed always structurally revolutionary, what a curious agreement between Silicon Valley marketing firms and autonomist theory! Our second hypothesis is that this absurdity results from a fundamental confusion between content and form, one that must be solved for the insurrection to proceed. The anti-globalisation movement pioneered a new form, but failed to provide it with revolutionary content.

From the standpoint of those enslaved to the centralised Fordist factory-form, the anarchic network-form seemed inherently revolutionary, perhaps even anti-capitalist. What is obvious in retrospective is that the network form has been given the content of capital. Soon after the anti-globalisation movement had taken centre stage, other groups with less-than-revolutionary content also began forming networks. Police were creating affinity groups and corporations like Google organised themselves in a decentralised fashion. When the reactionary elements of political Islam also adopted the network form, within a day the shock-waves set off by the events of 11 September 2001 destroyed the momentum of the anti-globalisation movement. At the present

moment, the situation has become even more deranged. Invented by Indymedia, digital user-generated content is the heart of capitalist production. More and more youth belong to digital social networks like Facebook that serve as unimaginable treasure troves for police and surveillance. Given that Israeli military strategists read Deleuze,⁴ one cannot help but agree with Fredric Jameson that there is something about Deleuze that strangely resonates with contemporary capitalism.⁵

Forms like networks (or hierarchies) are methods of organisation, but their content is the intentions that fill the form. While there can be no content without form and no form without content, the two do not necessarily march together hand in hand, but can even become dislocated temporally. Each historical epoch has its own limits, and so the determination of revolutionary content requires historical analysis. What was revolutionary in St. Petersburg in 1909 or Seattle in 1999 may not be revolutionary in Greece in 2009. If capitalism can be thought of as a particular form of life, any content is revolutionary insofar as it seeks to completely abolish this form of life and replace it with a new form of life without monetary exchange or domination. An insurrection in turn is a concrete event that, to a greater or lesser degree, expresses the emergence of this new form of life and negates the power of capital and the state.

Identity as such forms when the image of a form of life the possible social relationships, and therefore the proliferation of identity-based politics and subculture is merely another form of spectacular society. So it should be of no surprise that even as faith in neo-liberal capitalism collapses, a politics based on identity remains as strong as ever, as even self-professed revolutionaries are trapped within a politics based on images. Why is it so hard to overthrow the yoke of image-based politics? Could it be because the social relationships of the citizen under capital are almost gone, and so the citizen needs to have the image of social relationships—an “identity”—to avoid complete breakdown? Citizens express themselves only as a certain shifting pastiche of identities: the nationalist, the feminist, the punk, the hippie, the homosexual, the exercise-nut, the sci-fi fan, the person rediscovering their “ethnic” roots. Since subsumption has nearly stripped each person of any ability to hold onto her own presence, identities come and go, no more afflicting than a passing crush or the value of stock. These identities at their core are then just new brands of citizenship in the social war, the most advanced techniques thus far of subsumption. One can be a citizen while maintaining one’s individuality and “unique” style.

While the anti-globalisation movement created new forms of organisation, its content was still held hostage by identity politics. When the anarchist re-emerged in the anti-globalisation movement, its insurrectionary content was also neutered by an inability to supersede the image of being an anarchist. Instead of focusing on actually creating social relationships without domination or exchange and strategising how these relationships could be cultivated into an insurrectionary process capable of bringing about revolution, anarchists became identified with a particular kind of image as given by dress and music, as well as pre-defined taboos on eating and consumption. For example, in Berlin one can go from one anarchist bar to another every night for months—living and eating only with other black-clad vegans—and never leave this bubble.

One of the most refreshing aspects of Greece until recently was the relative lack of anarchist identity. One could not easily identify “an anarchist” sipping a frappé coffee on the streets of Athens. Although sometimes vaguely counter-cultural, anarchists in Greece were not easily iden-

⁴ See Weizman, Eyal “The Art of War” *Frieze* 99.

⁵ See Frederic Jameson’s quote on G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

tifiable by dress or mannerisms, unlike areas like the United States or Germany where a veritable anarchist uniform developed. Isolated linguistically and geographically from mainland Europe, anarchists in Greece also remained isolated from identity politics that became integrated within anarchism elsewhere, and Greek anarchists kept loyal to a concept of revolution that still meant the overthrow of the state. There are many diverse factors responsible for this divergence from mainstream anarchist identity politics, ranging from the unique geography of the Balkans to the still-living memory of junta in the older generations in Greece. While some Greek anarchists did travel and take action in the major summit protests that rocked Europe, they participated in these summits by arriving and acting as they did in Greece, Molotov cocktails included where possible. Despite the rather maddening paranoia of the Negriists that the Black Bloc in Genoa was composed entirely of cops and fascists, the carefully planned script of *Ya Basta!* was at least partly interrupted by Greek anarchists who just didn't care about such absurd-scripted battles with the police. While there was some traffic between the various insurrectionary anarchist milieus, the Greek anarchists' attempts to invite the dying anti-globalisation movement to the protests against the EU Summit in Salonika in 2003 only brought out a few internationals.⁶ Further attempts to gain international contacts, such as the European Social Forum in 2006, led only to further splits (with no less than four separate anarchist counter-forums organised). To a reader of the book *We Are Everywhere*,⁷ the anti-globalisation movement would seem to be everywhere but Greece, despite Greece having the largest anarchist movement in Europe.

Attracted by the images of policemen on fire and destroyed streets, anarchists from across the globe showed up in droves to Greece after December 2008. While this solidarity is part of a long and honourable tradition exemplified also by the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, anarchists from outside Greece also brought with them an increased emphasis on the anarchist identity. When the insurrection failed to generalise into a full-scale revolution after December, instead of strategically analysing what tactics could sustain the insurrection, factions of the anarchist tendency in Greece retreated into an anti-social politics based around identity, perhaps unconsciously blaming the wider population for not having the courage to rise up. Some anarchists also decided that the decreasing quantity of attacks could somehow be compensated by their increased intensity, and so there was a distinctly anarchist revival of the long tradition of the armed guerrilla in Greece.⁸ This led to increased activity after December by older socially-oriented anarchist armed groups like Revolutionary Struggle and the formation of new anarchist armed guerrilla groups like the "Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire" around a more anti-social and individualist ethos. So while the anarchist identity re-emerged specifically in Germany as a rejection of the form of the armed guerrilla, in Greece the content of the anarchist identity and the form of the armed guerrilla were more compatible. While there are clear historical reasons for the difference between the Greek and German experience of the guerrilla cell, there are also metaphysical reasons that connect nihilism with the armed struggle.

Perhaps the anarchist identity of the free individual—despite a superficial rejection of capitalism—is at the same time the most refined moment of bourgeois metaphysics. The "anarchist" is free only insofar as he rejects any force that may interfere with his desires. Expressed

⁶ In fact, the EU Summit protest made a much longer-lasting impression in Greece due to its causing a split between the insurrectionary anarchist movement and the more leftist and populist anti-authoritarian movement.

⁷ See *We Are Everywhere, The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism*.

⁸ In Greece the tradition of the guerrilla cell led back generations to their war against the Nazis and junta rather than the spectacular failure of the Red Army Faction.

positively, this concept of the individual led to the Enlightenment project of human rights, democracy, and freedom. The individual was promised the satisfaction of her ever-expanding desires by capitalism, which in turn are defined by and define the absolute freedom of the individual. When this fairy tale comes up against the harsh reality of the decline of capitalism and the consequent inability of this world to satisfy their desires, a certain nihilist individualism is produced. As history proved that the Enlightenment project resulted solely in nightmares and so, the only remaining option for genuinely “free” individuals is to exercise their freedom to destroy the totality of the world, despite the fact that their own categories of thinking are subsumed by capital. The entirety of a social and collective revolutionary force is displaced onto the individual, who not surprisingly, then shows the inevitable signs of stress and burnout as she cannot individually defeat the systematic social domination of capital. In honest desperation, the sign of true devotion to the cause becomes the intensity of the attack, nothing more. “Insurrection” is reduced to a series of actions, applying the same quantitative logic of commodity consumption to the number and ferocity of their individual attacks. To negate capitalism through acts of destruction is the first step, but to go beyond capitalism requires new metaphysical foundations for social relationships outside that of the individual and their desires.

This anti-social nihilism has unfortunately become an ever-increasing component of the anarchist identity in Greece. Forgetting its origins as a tool of empire, the social war is deployed by the anarchists themselves against anyone who does not share their identity. The anarchists can then in good conscience declare war against anyone involved in capitalism, mirroring the indeterminacy of the attack of police. While there is a truth that all citizens are complicit within global capital, so are the anarchists themselves, who exist both within and against capitalism. It is not just that the anarchists are fighting the social war *badly*, but that they engage in the social war with the goal of transforming others into anarchists *like themselves*. Taken to an absurd extreme, are people to be killed if they don’t dress in black, eat the wrong kinds of food, aren’t friends with the “right” people? More realistically, the taking up of indiscriminate social war by anarchists lets them conceive of themselves a permanent minority always in a losing war with wider society, never capable of actually achieving wide-scale revolution.

So when the events of May 2010 confirmed Victor Serge’s maxim that “carelessness on the part of revolutionaries has always been the best aid the police have,” the police had the perfect excuse to isolate and eliminate the anarchists in Greece.⁹ The combination of anarchist armed struggle groups and a certain careless anti-social nihilism allowed for them to be painted by the state and media as some spectacular monsters, whose incredible actions might even target the average man-on-the-street. This contradicts the efficacy of the “hit and run” street actions that for many years did not go wrong and the very real targets (banks, politicians, police) that armed struggle groups actually aimed for. However, it was difficult for many citizens to distinguish between reality and the spectacle, and the anti-social tendencies of anarchists prevented the truth of the insurrection—which will include a certain responsibility for carelessness and the taking of whatever measures are appropriate to prevent it in the future, from being communicated to former allies at the critical juncture in May. This led to the isolation of the anarchists and the halt of the insurrection, despite the fact that even some fellow employees understood it was the threat of being fired that kept the employees at the bank during the strike and so the bank was responsible at least in part for

⁹ Serge, V. *What Everyone Should Know About Repression*.

the deaths.¹⁰ The social war by the state upon the general population is the self-evident current state of affairs, but the declaration of social war by anarchists against the general population is suicidal.

The crux of the problem is identity itself, not anarchism. Instead of creating an actual collective force based on shared experience, identity politics creates imaginary collectivities that are easily manipulated by capitalism as a way to divide and conquer potential revolutionaries. From the standpoint of the state and capital, identity is to be encouraged insofar as to label one as “different” and so capable of being discovered and isolated by the state’s social war. As long as any group—the blacks, the anarchists, the Muslims, the Jews, the armed guerrilla—can be isolated in terms of identity, they can be destroyed. The anarchist actions after the death of Alexis exploded precisely because many youth in Greek high schools could identify with Alexis and many immigrants could identify with the hatred of capital and the police displayed by the youth. Had the anarchists been a completely isolated element in the population, then the murder of Alexis would not have been noticed by those outside their circles. It was precisely the lack of a separatist anarchist identity in Greece that led the events of December to be a success, as diverse and formerly divided sectors of the population did come together. At the limit of any insurrection, the identity of the insurrectionaries must be destroyed or become an obstacle to insurrection itself. Far better that the insurrectionaries destroy their identity than be physically imprisoned or killed by the state apparatus.

The Last Chance to Save the Insurrection in Greece

Fire is physical time, absolute unrest, absolute disintegration of existence, the passing away of the “other,” but also of itself; and hence we can understand how Heraclitus, proceeding from his fundamental determination, could quite logically call fire the notion of the process. He further made this fire to be a real process; because its reality is for itself the whole process, the moments have become concretely determined. Fire, as the metamorphosis of bodily things, is the transformation and exhalation of the determinate; for this process Heraclitus used a particular word—evaporation (anaquiasis)—but it is rather transition.

– G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*

The lesson of May 2010 should be clear: Greece cannot repeat the 1970s in Italy. To repeat history due to a certain lack of creativity would betray the true potentiality of the events of December. In contrast to what we hope is the beginning of a new cycle of struggle in Greece, Italy was the last dying upsurge of 1968, an explosion particularly strong due to a certain failure of subsumption in the very peculiar industrial development of that country. Towards its decline in the late 1970s, the Italian movement also joined armed guerrilla groups and adopted a certain work-erist ideology that was already historically out-dated. Perhaps it should be even less surprising that some of its theorists, like Negri, later found themselves as the leading voices of the anti-globalisation movement, since this movement was itself the activists 1968. We must go beyond 1968 and beyond Seattle 1999, and the events of December in Greece give us a path towards a new authentically insurrectionary content capable of giving such momentum to the forms pioneered

¹⁰ See “An employee of the burnt bank speaks out on tonight’s tragic deaths in Athens” *Occupied London*.

in the last decade by the “anti-globalisation” movement. It is easy to be “revolutionary” with an almost religious zeal in eras when the counter-revolutionary tide seems to make questions of strategy and tactics impossible—so why not simply get yet another coffee and read another book about bygone revolutions? In revolutionary times, to be a revolutionary requires one to confront truly difficult questions of strategy and tactics with courage and intelligence.

If the very act of identification is counter-revolutionary, the first act of insurrectional content should be the desertion of the subcultural anarchist identity and the ideology of the “insurrectionary” as separate from the general population. The insurrectionary question should transform from “How to increase the intensity of the attack?” to “How can the number of people involved in the attack increase?” As the primary maneuver of the social war is to isolate pro-revolutionary individuals in order to prevent them from forming networks that could spread insurrectionary practices to the general population, insurrectionists should seek to *multiply* their social relationships. Since the image of “being an anarchist” constrains the kinds and types of relationships that one can have, insurrectionists should seek to have relationships that criss-cross the terrain of a society ghettoised into identities. To fight back in the social war, the insurrection must create and increase the *social relationships* it is founded upon.

The insurrection may have more friends than we suspect. It is through the politics of identity that capitalism staves off its true nightmare: that the majority of the population wishes to destroy the capitalism itself. To be revolutionary is to believe that the idea of insurrection can be majoritarian. Being revolutionary is the concrete destruction of the domination of the state and capital in everyday life of the population—not just inside a few anarchist enclaves. The maxim of Bakunin holds as true today as when it was first uttered, “The freedom of all is essential to my individual freedom.”¹¹ The truly important thing about the December insurrection was this majoritarian aspect—that a large part of the Greek population was in open sympathy, and that groups that had previously been outside the anarchist identity, like students and immigrants, took to the streets to attack the police and occupy spaces. Only then was the previously invincible police and machinery of the state revealed to be as flammable as a paper tiger.

After December, the question of insurrection in Greece became not how to “start” the insurrection—where, when, and how to attack—but how to sustain it. This involves far more than spectacular terrorism or printing even more posters; answering the question of insurrection affirmatively requires seriously proving to the population that this condition can sustain life better than capitalism. Technical and practical questions come to the forefront: how to self-organise sustenance and the necessary production, how to raise children, how to build defences, how to care for the wounded and elderly. In other words, not just how to open the space for a new form of life, but how to create the space so that a form of life outside capitalism can *reproduce*. When the insurrection dissolves, it is can be because even after generalising outside of a set of given identities devised by capital (anarchists, students, immigrants), the insurrection failed to answer the question of how to sustain itself.

Luckily, it will not be too difficult for the insurrection to sustain the world better than capitalism. From the perspective of future generations, it will be evident that this is the best of times for insurrection, as the reproduction of the capitalist form of life is in crisis. Greece is likely only the beginning; the crisis of 2008 and the subsequent jobless recovery points to the possibility that capitalism is itself in an ongoing a crisis due to the over-accumulation of capital. To sim-

¹¹ Bakunin, M. *Man, Society, and Freedom*.

plify dramatically, the innovative technologies behind the factories that produce commodities have accumulated to such an extent across all industries that profit is decreasing and the further production of real commodities requires little in the way of “new jobs,” leading to a paradoxical situation of an over-abundance of commodities and a scarcity of jobs, as has been more elegantly said by others.¹² The only way to increase profit is to move investment further into speculative sectors in the form of financialisation as done from the 1970s onwards, but these kinds of speculative commodities are increasingly impossible to assign a value to, leading to financial crisis. Capital is by virtue of its own internal dynamics at a period of crisis, both the moment of its highest development and its immanent end.

Despite the mule-like insistence of politicians that there must be jobs—there are no jobs either now or in the future. The increased over-accumulation of capital makes even industrial jobs less necessary, even the workers find themselves soon-to-be-unemployed. The bet of the social war waged against this ever-increasing mass of unemployed is that they can be subsumed as citizens. Still, there is a point of contradiction, for under capitalism citizenship is equated also with being a worker. Yet as there are no more jobs, the social war of the state can no longer offer citizenship and global capital’s financial markets have no other option than to desiccate the state through austerity measures in order to maintain profit. As the future of ever-increasing unemployment is nowhere clearer than in Greece, it is not surprising that the sector of the population most vulnerable to unemployment, the youth, are the first to join in an insurrection. It is precisely at school where the relations of production (the assignment to jobs) are reproduced, but in Greece even a newly minted doctorate speaking half-a-dozen languages is lucky to find a job as a waiter. The second to revolt will naturally be the immigrants, who are sensitive to the disappearance of even the most precarious jobs in the underworld of the economy. The last to revolt will always be the workers, whose identity and life is most strongly invested in the reproduction of capitalism, and who have benefited the most over the last years. The workers, the last of revolutionaries, are now joining the insurrection in Greece, as shown by their behaviour in May 2010, despite the Communist Party of Greece desperately trying to police them.

What is the spring from which the insurrectionary process in Greece swells, despite the social war of the state? The answer is obvious to anyone who has been to the country: the source of the insurrection in Greece comes from multitudinous social relationships of the people there. Walk in the streets of Exarcheia or even a small Greek village and what is striking in comparison with the desolate city streets of Northern Europe or North America is that there are simply people everywhere, chatting, sipping frappés, laying about—not *working* at all. In Greece, almost unique in modern Europe, life is still intertwined with innumerable rich social relationships, letting the streets of Athens essentially remain a social space. What is self-evident is that the source of their insurrectionary strength comes from the historical fact that Greece never went through industrial capitalism and the attendant process of subsumption: the bulk of the population went straight from an agrarian world to that of post-modern late capitalism. So social relationships are still mostly intact; one still sees extended families living together, people returning to one’s family village and the islands for the summer, gangs of friends growing up together in a single neighbourhood, the Orthodox church engaging in strange rituals of fire—and warning against multinational corporations that “have no face.” The general populace does not trust the state, and rightfully views it at best as something to be robbed or destroyed, and capitalism as a practice best

¹² See in particular Endnotes and Benanav, A. “Misery and the Value Form” *Endnotes* 2

left to the family or individual. Not so much a metropolis in the sense of Paris or London; Athens can be considered a mega-village in process of transformation to a proper capitalist metropolis, a hopeless amalgam of social relations based on friendship, gossip, and family (and thus often repressive in a regressive manner). Contra Negri, Greece was not transformed into a “social” factory (much less the use of Facebook!) leaving the subjectivity of Greeks as a bulwark of resistance to capital. What the murder of Alexis of December did was to provoke and mobilise this pre-capitalist subjectivity—which like any pre-capitalist subjectivity, has a notion of blood-debt that is foreign to the careless murder part and parcel of capitalism.

This pre-capitalist subjectivity serves as a possible hidden social reservoir of resistance to capitalist subsumption, but is it unique to Greece? Of course not—if anything these pre-capitalist subjectivities are the submerged around the globe. Due to the generalised betrayal and destruction of any sort of “progressive” anti-capitalist politics at the hands of Stalinism and the inability of the renewed anarchist movement of the last two decades to escape its own minoritarian identity politics, in times of crisis the general population falls back increasingly on to pre-capitalist subjectivities. Some of these are classical nationalist or ethnic “right-wing” movements, although many of them are at least superficially for the reduction of the state (such as the Tea Party in the US) or religious international forces (political Islam). Further subjectivities like these can be compatible with capital and so are simultaneously recuperated as its very vanguard. This is to be expected, as the false dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity is itself a product of capital, and many of these “pre-capitalist” subjectivities are at least in part creations of spectacular capitalism itself.

The situation of Greek subjectivity serving as the basis for the insurrection shows that even these pre-capitalist subjectivities can express a truth that is antagonistic to capital, a truth that can burst forth as an insurrection. In this historical period, a homogeneous internationalism cannot be majoritarian. The only abstract truth reflected by “identity politics” is that the mass of subjectivities have at their heart particular truths of domination. However, must the insurrection rely on pre-capitalist subjectivities? By this logic, there is no hope for insurrection among the more fully subsumed forms of life in places like the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany—except possibly from those non-integrated immigrants and permanent underclasses (African Americans, Celtic minorities, Turkish groups). Worse, the insurrectional process could be combined with a sort of half-baked nationalism—“of course they are having an insurrection, that’s just what they do in Greece.” This concoction fails to take into account the most elementary of truths: Empire is the truly universal condition of catastrophe created by capital.

This common condition of catastrophe, brought about by the subsumption of all forms of life to capital, is the real abstraction that provides grounds for unity across all differences and so can provide real content to a new Internationale. To the extent that this lived experience of domination and destruction is common, it reduces all differences to contingencies, although of course the insurrectional process must take these regional variations in subjectivity into account. As capital is a historical rather than transcendental force, it is not surprising that the level of subsumption varies from region to region. Yet insurrectionists should neither wait till the forces of subsumption equalise (which while theoretically possible, is unlikely due to both regressive forces and the crisis) nor depend on an imported identity. Instead, insurrectionists must first explore the common conditions of their home in order to discover how each pre-capitalist subjectivity expresses a particular resistance to the universal truth of capitalist subsumption. This requires revolutionaries to both affirm the differences in their life-worlds on the level of tactics

and unite globally on the level of strategy. In Greece, the insurrectionists must be carefully attuned to the themes of civil war and total freedom that resonate throughout a society that lived for centuries under foreign rule, while in Great Britain, insurrectionists should attune themselves to the violent expropriation of the land from the peasantry (and thus the love of the land and animals deeply imprinted on British subjectivity) and historic defeat of the worker's world by Thatcher. The history of every pre-capitalist subjectivity should be understood in order to make the concept of insurrection resonate in the widest possible circles and instead of looking to the past, the insurrection needs to create a new kind of subjectivity whose horizon is a living anarchy yet to come.

Insurrection can—and must—be re-thought in a majoritarian manner. While it may be impossible to destroy identity entirely, insurrectionists can abolish their identity “as insurrectionaries” by acting in such a way that tends to dissolve the boundaries inherent in a social terrain divided up into identities, rather than just falling back into the even more isolated subjectivity of “the anarchist who has a critique of identity.” The kinds of acts that dissolve any separatist identity are those—from propaganda to direct action to daily life—that show there exists some new collective force against the social war, an “open conspiracy” where anyone can participate in and form new social relationships in some meaningful way. The insurrectionary process is not the social war of a few lonely anarchists condemned to being a permanent minority; it is the renewal of humanity's social relationships that ends the social war, revealing all relationships as immediately social by abolishing the mediation of the commodity. As the insurrection spreads, the sign of its success will be that revolutionaries will become indiscernible from the wider population, the concrete realisation of what even Marx glimpsed in his theory of the self-abolition of the proletariat.

Revolution is the horizon that insurrection aims towards, otherwise all acts become mere resistance to a supposed permanent state of capitalism. Instead of wholesale abandoning the collective knowledge of the anti-globalisation movement, the insurrectionary process can breathe new revolutionary content into form of the network by opening this knowledge to everyone—but from the perspective of insurrection. The first step is to open the storehouse of technical knowledge to the general population, rather than sharing these techniques only with those who “fit” some absurd identity. The act of creating a Molotov cocktail should not be the secret technique of “summit-hopping” anarchists, but a technique that is known by every schoolchild. The ability to grow food and build houses should not be confined to bourgeois hobbyists, but part of the common heritage that every parent should teach their young. The courage to speak in an assembly should not be the province of a few “professional” anarchist men (who tend to always say the same thing) but an ability shared by even the most self-effacing of men and women. There are some that believe that somehow the anarchist identity as ideology is necessary to spread the opposition of authority to the general population. What is necessary to spread opposition to authority is not yet another identity or book about why authority is “bad.” Opposition to authority—a genuine lived anarchy—can spread through the real collective social relationships involved in learning how to get organised, so the population has the material base to resist authority. Otherwise anarchist ideology remains pure idealism, with no means to prevent authoritarian power dynamics.

Open assemblies are the primary form that allows insurrectionary content to resonate with anyone interested enough to attend, and so spread networks with revolutionary content. It is almost sad that the focus on the fire and flames of Greece led many outside observers to miss

the open assemblies in the occupied Universities that spread throughout even union-halls and small villages. Assemblies and occupations of buildings provide a space where new kinds of social relationships could form and multiply, so that people previously isolated and atomised from each other could form a collective force. Of course, in Argentina such assemblies were eventually co-opted by authoritarians and leftists. To prevent this, insurrectionary assemblies should differ in quality from any so-called “constituent” assembly that creates another state in embryo, and the more self-conscious insurrectionary elements should force out any signs of state collaboration or professional activism, although care should be taken to not impose a singular viewpoint—or worse, identity—on the assembly. The form of these assemblies will differ from activist consensus meetings. For most things, consensus matters little (although of course, it may be used as necessary); what matters is the development of a common feeling and space to debate tactics and strategy.

These insurrectionary assemblies should ask new kinds of questions that go beyond street protests. In an era where all political ideas are dead, it is in these assemblies that the post-political material questions about how to seize control of life from capital can be asked: How to raise children and nurse the wounded, how to never work at a job again yet provide bread and wine at the table, how to both destroy an economy and survive without one? Any particular open assembly will not have all the answers; often the requisite technical knowledge may simply be elsewhere, so the insurrection must grow and encompass more and more people. The assembly may need to go to the despairing workers of factories, to the elderly farmers of the fields, the isolated technicians of computers, to the outcast immigrants who still preserve their form of life, and it must gather their complicity by asking them directly and honestly: How can we create a new form of life without capitalism? Given the asylum of the University occupations in Greece, hosting an open assembly on insurrection is considerably easier there than in many other countries, but in any country such assemblies can form. After the excitement of the riot ends, the open and insurrectionary assembly is of utmost importance to *continue*.

The relationship of action to the growth of the insurrection is complex. The level of technique ideally spreads in step with the generalised level of civil war, as not to prematurely isolate the insurrection. Of course there is a tendency to go clandestine as soon as repression attacks public forms of insurrection like demonstrations or assemblies. However, more important than the amount of damage inflicted is the growth of public support for insurrection. One tactic is to focus on actions that can be easily replicated, as this undermines the spectacular relationship of passive citizens to professional “insurrectionaries.” We know that in Greece even some schoolchildren can make barricades and fight cops in the streets. Dangerously, the power of the spectacle can even spread the insurrection, as the burning Christmas tree spelled for all of Greece that the capitalist symbolic order was dissolving and something new was happening. The important aspect then is not the attack by itself, but whether or not the attack spreads the insurrection in combination with other activities—which is precisely what an attack on the Christmas tree did in connection with thousands of posters calling to gather in the Polytechnic or elsewhere to discuss what to do next and thousands of other attacks. Direct actions are the spread and self-defence of a new kind of form of life, and so can even create new and more intense social relationships amongst all who are complicit, whatever the level of involvement.

With every new form of life, there is also a new metaphysics. This new way of being comes only with a little shift, but one that makes all the difference. This new kind of metaphysics is not mere idealism, but a new material manner of being in the world. For example, let us consider an

assembly in a public space to plan a demonstration. To be in a meeting in the light of a capitalist metaphysics of isolated individuals, an individual who advocates an action may appear to be very brave, while another individual who expresses some fear that the plan will go wrong could be thought to be a coward. By being in an assembly through the lens of a new metaphysics that takes social relationships as the foundation of reality, one person may be expressing a sort of bravery that resonates with everyone, but the other is expressing equally validly the concerns and fear that everyone in the assembly feels but has been too cowardly themselves too articulate. These fluxes of fear and courage roll over the assembly like waves, until eventually it either dissipates into mere individuals or there is a phase transition into a new kind of collectivity, leading to the articulation of a plan by the assembly as a single body. The action itself becomes an articulation of a collective intelligence.

If Italy in the 1970s was the last gasp of the abortive revolution of May 1968, the insurrection of 2008 in Greece was something new: the first strike in a new round of global civil war after the financial crisis of 2008. The terrain of battle has inevitably changed. The social war cannot be fought against by the militaristic means of a vanguard party, even if that vanguard party has the content of anarchist activism or nihilism rather than the content of Leninism. Instead, the social war can only be fought by multiplying new forms of social relationships, and this can be done by taking the friendships that emerge temporarily in a riot or an occupation and determining what material organisation is necessary to sustain them to the point where they can reproduce of their own accord. The social war can only attack us when we are alone, but in open assemblies or in our most private of bedrooms, one by one, the lonely citizens can help form the collective intelligence necessary to defend and spread the insurrection. Anarchists no longer have to be content to be the perpetual losers of a social war, but can escape their identity to become only the first of those touched by the spreading common feeling for insurrection, and thus must bear the responsibility to bring its material organisation into being by re-appropriating the dead forms of activism and giving them life with insurrectionary content.

The events of December in 2008 were the first moment in a global insurrectionary process, a process that may (or may not) take years to develop in other countries to the same level as in Greece. Unfortunately it was to be expected that the Greek insurrection would not to spread outside the country except amongst a few isolated anarchists. Worse, after the events of May 2010 the fire that seemed to spark in Greece appeared to have evaporated. Yet what appears to be the evaporation of the insurrection may only be the dislocation in time of the Greek insurrection from the other moments of global insurrection. Further intensification of the pacifying operations of the social war has already led to its backfiring, as people globally become unemployed and so find it increasingly difficult to avoid the profound existential crisis of capitalist labour, and may thus be forced by the material breakdown of capital to take sides. The long-term case for global insurrection is compelling given the decline of capital's global rate of profit and possible limits to growth. In the short-term, insurrections may also break out overnight, and each insurrectionary moment will take on its own character. In France in 2010, the student and the youth from the banlieus, whose revolts were formerly entirely separated by their identities in 2005 and 2006, merged forces in common cause against capital with striking workers, and without a strong anarchist movement providing exemplary actions. Even after May 2010, all signs point to the fact that the people of Greece will be unable to tolerate further austerity cuts, so that the Greek insurrection could return with renewed ferocity at any moment. The insurrectionary process

should not become trapped as merely a series of concrete insurrections, evaporating after each of these moments ends, but link each concrete visible moment into a global one.

It can be the task of our generation to fulfil the potential of all failed insurrections. This means that the future insurrection in Greece must go beyond the limits of 2008: rather than merely the destruction of shopfronts in some sort of fiery apocalypse, insurrection signals the difficult transition to a new form of life beyond capitalism and the state. This new form of life must come with a new kind of metaphysics no longer based on individual identity, and it is this new collective metaphysics that we glimpse when we lose ourselves in a rave, fall in love, join in a riot—which is precisely why we return to such events again and again. On a more subterranean level it is even possible such a feeling is spreading throughout the everyday life of the citizens of empire. This is revealed best by this real story that could also be apocryphal:

As the financial crisis continued to take its toll on Greece, a British magazine did an expose revealing that Greeks were—against all tenets of being good citizens!—spending money on parties and absurdly expensive gifts. When the BBC reporter asked one of the Greeks why he was enjoying himself in the midst of a crisis, a party-goer said that ‘everyone deserves a beautiful life’.

Other ways of having a beautiful life are possible; one sees such beautiful smiles on the faces of those who remember the insurrection of December. Just as the metaphysics of Western civilisation was born in Athens, so it must die there. May something more beautiful emerge in its wake.

Notes

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Alex Trocchi
For The Insurrection To Succeed, We Must First Destroy Ourselves
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