

Text III. The Strike is Not Going to Work

or, La Finitude Infinie

Anarchist International

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We who are everywhere homeless, for whom the insurrection is only ever an absence — something unreachable that has become more unreachable for our having quested after it — the only home that we could find is in homelessness and absence. For this reason we can truly say that home can be found anywhere, but also that its outside is nowhere to be found. In becoming everywhere homeless, our greatest loss has not been home itself but rather our ability to leave. Each time we have run away from home we have been returned to it. Returned, at first, to a specific door under the eye of an officer of the law, and later to a universal condition under the watch of all. It is no longer the case that in the search for what's absent we can look for it anywhere; now in the dissolution of the here and the everywhere, we are at a loss for anywhere to seek what we've lost. Because if it is not here it must be nowhere at all.

If it were given that capitalism is a universal lie, there will be found no negation of capitalism through the truths that hold us together. The universality of capitalism's logic assures that no truth is beyond it. The imaginary of capitalism, then, encompasses everything that we could consider falsehood and everything that we could call truth; moreover, the lie firstly establishes what is true and what is false and secondly forms the rift between the true and the false. The premise of a universal lie thus leads to the logical conclusion that this lie *is also true*. Capitalism is never simply a reality nor is it simply a fabrication; it is always the circulation of an imaginary that is simultaneously a reality — it is the movement of the contradiction between truth and lie. The 'truth' that capitalism is a universal lie thus does not negate the oppositional logic of capitalism, but instead affirms capitalism by applying its logic.

There is nowhere to be found the much-sought-after Common that could tie back together our lost possibilities. There is no waking from this nightmare except into another, no liberation from despondency except the liberation into a cycle of despondency at a higher level. To situate oneself, to orient oneself, to speak from a position of anything other than a place of lack is to enable the capture of that position.

I

This movement, when witnessed from afar, is a blog post, a news story, a comment, an image, the slightest stirring of desire, despondency, lack — it is the collection of all these. A reality which, like all realities, is circulating, and circulating *as unreality*, busy tracing the limits of the real insurrection and its necessarily discarded remains, taking up these clay shards it left behind, congealing them while concealing it, shaping them into a cup, a vessel to be the bearer of meaning, making it meaningful, full of meaning.

II

The old is never more than a shell because its essence is always drained, drunk out — while the new is ever refilled. To inhabit the shell of the old in the creation of the new is to be bounded and held by a corpse, animating its bones, the reproduction of its gestures — strike, blockade, riot. Even though all the events of the past have brought to us the miserable present, somehow this will be different and new; somehow this will do something, mean something.

III

Reality is the product of belief at the same time that reality gives shape to belief. To the extent that people believe in the movement, the movement becomes a reality. To the extent that the movement is real, people come to believe in it. In its contradiction between reality and fabrication, and in the manner of this contradiction's circulation, the revolutionary movement exists in the manner of all movement and in the manner of capitalism. The difference is only that, in seeking the end of capitalism, the revolutionary movement is the movement that seeks its own end, while the moving contradiction of capitalism seeks only its own continuation.

IV

The movement — that is, everything that moves and endures — exists as the circulated image of the sublime moment whose essence cannot be represented in the images that are inevitably made of it. Nothing of it can remain; what endures is this flimsy pamphlet in my hands, these words from far away, translated, reproduced, disseminated, put into circulation and, ultimately, lost. Lost is the singular impetus, that unspeakable *infinite strike* whose remnants include this piece that bears the name 'Infinite Strike'. Timelessness inevitably gives way to duration, to temporality, to forgetting, to the movement; these inevitably fail to drag anything of timelessness along but its image, its colors bleeding and blurring on the surface of time.

V

From the perspective of the movement, that which is undone is always what is remembered while *that which is to be done* is unmemorable and always forgotten. At the end, nothing is undone and nothing is forgotten. Thus nothing belongs to timelessness, and everything belongs to time. A break with the temporal takes place and yet everything will be returned to normality by necessity, though normality may change in the process. That the break with normality takes place not in time but rather as a break with time, and that the return to the norm is the return of time, makes clear the marriage of the norm and the temporal. The revolutionary project persists *as persistence* in the loss of the one time; it is the hollow reverberation of the timeless through the logic of time; it is temporality's seeking of its own end point. Atemporality is at once beyond and beneath the process of temporality; it is the singular point from which temporality emanates as well as its logical end.

VI

Forgetting is the process by which ecstatic recollection is lost and the reason it is able to return. There is no recollection not bounded on either side by the process of forgetting. Indeed, the first attempt to hold on to the truth-paradox of the ecstatic out-of-time marks the very moment when that truth becomes lost. The ungraspable slips away precisely at the moment one tries to grasp it, and the mere image of it is left caught between one's fingers. The search for truth and the forgetting of it are processes that unfold in time, but recollection is the ecstatic moment whose break with temporality is complete even while it is bounded by the temporal processes by which

it is come upon and lost. Each strike in itself resonates purely out-of-time with each other strike in itself — more to the point, these are all in essence a singular point of non-work, an infinite strike. The representational image of the infinite strike, meanwhile, is brought at various points into the fabric of time by the movement. The form in which this representation passes through time is the form of the revolutionary project.

VII

The reason for which the movement cannot touch the truth of our friendships, the real of the unknown, or the purity of infinite strike is precisely because it is *movement*. The movement of time is the process by which the infinite is always absent even as it is quested after, even as its image is unfurled as the banner of the movement's aims and inspiration, even as the movement skirts the issue of its own inevitable demise that lies in the realization of its end.

VIII

An event is not a thesis. The true beauty of the stone thrown at a cop's head cannot be captured in the logical elaboration of processes; or, to the extent that the event is sequenced *as a thesis*, its singular atemporality is nullified and its beauty lost. The paving-stone becomes a statue, not in that the moment of its flight is frozen in ecstatic timelessness — a lodestone resonating purely across time with every other stone whose arc reaches for a cop's head — but in that the image of pure vengeance is cast in stone and then cast through time at our own heads. The revolutionary project paves over its own end by sculpting these false idols for us to worship. We are meant to repeatedly bang our heads against stones, against the fact that the stones are not *vengeance itself*. The keeping of such sculpture gardens is only ever the staving-off of the end of the revolutionary project, that end which was always the true beauty to begin with.

IX

The sad fate of all times is that class society persists. Indeed, time itself will be knowable and measurable by this persistence. The attempt to rework the division as “those who still want to work and those who would prefer not to” is workable only insofar as it makes progress towards the insidious continuation of *work by other means*. One needn't be reminded that the rich prefer not to work and, what's more, they don't have to work because *they have everything*. There is an eternal antagonism between those who, having nothing, have to work and those who, having everything, do not have to work. It is not simply the possibility of not working but rather a whole convergence of impossibility — for instance, everything for everyone and work for none — that points in no particular direction but towards the out-of-time vengeance.

X

It is not *omerta* but incitement, not prohibition but arousal, that governs speaking of the rejection of work. The masses plod silently in a world where Work and the Worker have disappeared

while the logic of work expands into all times and deepens into the most shadowy of territories. It is of the places where the logic of work has not yet been established that the revolutionary movement incites one to speak of in the grand terms of the rejection and refusal of work. Speaking of refusal is itself productive as by tracing the contours of these mysterious territories, one's work can be employed first cartographically and then strategically in the struggle of productive logic to root out refusal.

XI

The cybernetic project of generalized governance and the anarchist ideal of autonomous self-governance proceed not on one hand and the other but hand-in-hand. The myth of full employment and the fable of voluntary self-managed work are not two sides of a coin but the twists of a Möbius strip that has only one side. They affirm more than the mere obligation to “make a living” — they insist that sooner or later we will not only have to make it, but we will have to like it as well, and we will manage everything even in the absence of either obligation or oversight. What is taking place is not merely the affirmation of work but the proliferation of work by other means — the continuation of work *by any means necessary*.

XII

The negation of the political appeal of futurism lies neither in the present moment nor in any form of presence; the negation of the future lies, rather, in the total absence of time and in every form of absence. Communist rewritings of *The Power of Now* only accomplish a populist affirmation of the present, and communism entails instead the abolition of the present state of things. While labor is indeed duration, there is no longer a distinction between labor-time and *time itself*, so that today one endures all time and not only the time spent at work. One could not yet say that time and work are synonymous, but it could be said that their *ends* are the same, and that they share a singular *end*.

XIII

Both the workers' strike and the weather disturbance emerge as chaotic aberrations within otherwise predictable and ordered systems. The prediction and management of disruptions in systems are carried out in the same fashion and by application of the same logic. For those invested in the existent systems as for those invested in revolutionary futures, the strike is an aberrant non-functionality, but one from which some productivity can be squeezed and profits made. The strike is the name for the singular point of non-work and, as such, it will not *work towards* any revolutionary project except to the extent that it can be *put to work*, before and after the fact, by the Left. Although the strike arises through the project of universal labor and although that project survives it, the taking-place of the strike means the death of the revolutionary project.

XIV

A strike is firstly forged by material conditions and secondly breaks from the process that produces those conditions. It emerges, then, as a break in the logic of capitalism in which the strikers take a break from the logic of work. In a time when it is not only humans who leave the workplace, for work has followed them out the door, when all time has become labor time, the strike is the only break from work that remains. A strike is essentially nonfunctional – it is a malfunction, a system failure. The extent to which strikes are converted from their essential failure and are made to function as part of a global revolutionary movement is precisely the extent to which revolutionaries are successful in repairing a failure. This is because the strike is a failure even in the revolutionary movement – the movement that, unlike capitalism, seeks its own failure.

XV

An event is still not a thesis. The coincidence of a general strike in one place and a series of blockades in another is not so much the product of active solidarity as it is the product of the unfolding of capitalism, which often produces similar conditions and symptoms in different locations simultaneously. Capitalism and class struggle unfold together as one fabric, deeply creased but of a single weave. For one to succeed simply means the continuation of the unfolding; for the other to succeed entails the end of the process and the end of meaning, the rending of the fabric.

XVI

The violence of the strike is yet the violence of the outsider, or else it would simply be the violence of everyday life. What has happened is that a world without any outside has constituted itself as such only at the cost of its own consistency – by including the outside within itself, it has become riddled with holes. Each of these holes is the same as every other – they are bound to each other across time by nature of their singularity. The strike and its violence thus do not return to the past so much as they make an ecstatic break with time. There can be no transmission of meaningful knowledge from one generation to another because the singular truth of the strike is immediately lost in the return to normality. The loss of all meaning within the frenzied circulation of meaning has brought the epistemology of cynicism in which there is nothing to be learned. The break with normality likewise introduces its own epistemology, and this ‘epistemology of the barricades’ is the resonance across time of the singular out-of-time violence of revenge – not communication, then, between temporal subjects but rather the ecstatic coming – of truth, of paradox – that collapses the divide between truth and falsehood – that is to say, the vengeful return of the *riddle*.

XVII

The riot, the blockade: old gestures, immeasurably old. Ancient rituals. The revolutionary movement would infuse these with the hope and promise of an insurrectional process to come.

But the insurrection, like the future, is always coming. It is always here and yet hopelessly far away — always present in its wrenching absence. What looming negation whose force and terror hold everything in the tension between annihilation and fixation, cast each and every thing into uncertainty — the electron, the stone, the cop, the riot, the blockade. The half-step, the desperate failure. *L'appel du vide*, the irrational desire to jump from high places.

XVIII

Let us be quite clear that the return to normality *cannot be rendered impossible* — we need only consider the logical impossibility of atemporality having duration — and from now on, all possibilities will be normalized: the blockade, the riot, the strike, desertion, love and war, the reflux of despair and the flow into emptiness. But it has always been precisely what is impossible that is at stake. The impossible is the end of all possibilities, an end that is nothing more or less than *an end in itself*. All possibilities have their end in the impossible while the impossible has no end but in itself. This end is the insurrection. It is the point of arrival. It is not something to do; it is, rather, what is to be done — as in, to be finished. To have reached the point of finality — *la fin*.

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