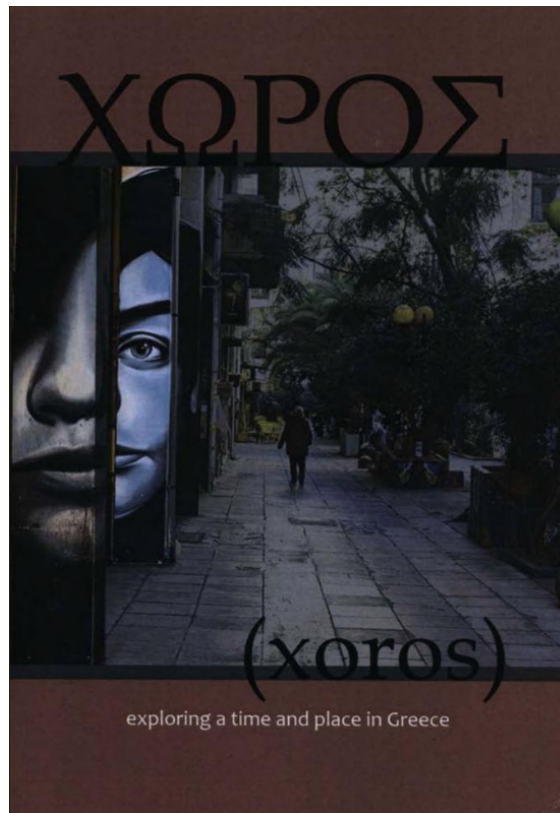


Χωρος

(Xoros): Exploring a Time and Place in Greece

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Terms:

Χωρος (Xoros)

Is generally defined as space, an opening, a place of encounter and a place where a crack has been cut or ignored, where resistance (friction) occurs. It also refers more generally to the milieu, the movement, the people engaged in radical actions, and often with conflicting people and theories. So, the term xoros both refers to the people in anarchist and other ‘opening’ movements, the movements themselves, the general atmosphere/aura they carry with them, and the space in which they operate and build. It is an almost ecological term in its outlook, in that it envelops the system/environment and its parts/functionaries.

Μπαχαλα (Bachala)

Bachala is a slang word, that generally refers to mess, or the making of a mess. In the political context (and on the streets of Exarchia) it has become inextricably tied to riots, riot makers, and the space rioters create with their actions. Its associations are lumpen: dirtiness, chaos, uncontrollable energy, trash, hooliganism, poverty, theft, revenge, raucous fun, cathartic release (almost sexual orgasmic quality), and ‘indiscriminate’ destruction/attack. Things that we associate here in America with racialized terms meant to invoke fear at the class below the working class, the (badly) hidden and uncontrollable (tightly monitored) people who do not work, and emerge in the narrative and in the mainstage of images at the time of any crisis as an object of fascination and distinction. Bachala has its own walk and timing. This image is often the same one that is associated with the caricature of ‘anarchy’ colloquially.

Κουκουλοφορη (koukoulofori)

Literally it means: the hooded ones, the hoods, the hooded. An image mostly drafted by the mainstream media of the people who make bachala. It was meant to dissuade people from entering the streets and investigating/meeting rioters, especially with the insurrection of 2008, by creating a character that was dangerous, irrational, and not to be interacted with, who thirsts for violence and destruction at all costs (kinda a caricature of nihilism as well). It is also meant as a way to discredit the political aims of anarchists, and to just paint them as violence hungry hooligans. After the insurrections of 2008 and the public disillusionment of the Syriza party of Greece, the koukoulofori became almost a cult icon, a folk hero, associated with rebellion, all things against capitalism and against the system. This character often appears in a hood, with a t-shirt mask, and knock-off Adidas apparel (the kind that you can buy off the streets from north African migrants). Often equipped with a rock, or molotov, and weaponized words (curses). Anarchists for the most part seem to distance themselves from the word, partly because it was produced by

the mainstream media, and partly because it is associated with hooligan type behavior, others see the word as an image of viral potential.

Anarcho-Tourist

This was me. Anarchists in Greece generally divide this category into two types. People who come to enjoy the autonomy and lifestyle the anarchists have developed in Exarchia and Athens more generally (collective kitchens, squats, liberated sexual practices, etc.), they are usually painted as hippies, who do yoga in the square and smoke weed all day. They sometimes participate in riots, but mostly come to live it up. The other type is the more ‘serious’ anarchists, people who came to Athens to help, learn, participate, and spread the knowledge being generated in Athens internationally. These types usually get into some serious shit, but not too serious, just enough to whet their whistles and to become addicted to action, and to the imagination that can be fostered in the safety of a liberated space that has been created in the cancerous body of a failed state (I’m sure the politicians would say that anarchy was that cancer and that Exarchia is the largest tumor). I guess the other type of anarcho-tourist is the nark, but they can generally fit into either of these two categories, and probably go after the more serious outfit. At first I was accused of being an Interpol agent, but was invited to participate in actions and assemblies anyways as someone told me, “I have no problem with undercover cops, we are very similar. We are both infiltrators.”

Καταληψη (katalipsi)

The word referring to squats. Literally it means under-taking, or against-taking. In the neighborhood of Exarchia there are around 20 squats, they serve as fortresses, operations of attack and defense, places where collective kitchens and assemblies are held, places where parties can be put together, or movie screenings can happen, they serve as both community centers / meeting places and as places where the literal resources for survival and revolution can be built and kept (weapons storage, their planning, beds for those who need them, libraries, computers, etc.). They are also usually associated with a certain clique, or coalition of cliques, with their own distinct flavor of revolutionary theory, of actions that they would consider undertaking, and of people they would extend solidarity to. When a communique is created it is usually associated with a squat, or if the action is too risky, with just a wink and a subtle reference to a squat, project, or assembly.

Πλατεια (plateia)

It means the square. In Exarchia the square is a triangle, the most structurally sound/strong shape, which can take the greatest load. The square is *the* meeting place. Because the neighborhood is protected by the police with the threat of attack, and because the plateia is a park at the center of this neighborhood, it is the place of convergence for everyone who wants to operate outside of the state. It is filled with anarchists, migrants, refugees, hooligans, old people, young people, punks, crazies, drunks, party-people, silent people. The air is filled with the smell of cat piss (there are tons of cats who have no masters, but are cared for communally), trash which

hasn't gotten picked up in a while because of a garbage workers strike and so has been cooking in the 110-degree heat, the smell of baphos (shit weed, usually Albanian moved by the mafia), spilled stale Zythos (the 80-cent beer named after the ancient Greek word for beer), pizza, souvlaki, and a hundred cigarettes. If it is a Saturday or Friday night, this will also be accompanied by the smell of tear gas and burning trash, as every weekend like clockwork there is at least one riot, a little bachala: kagelakis (everyday thing).

My First Detainment

I want to resist portraying this as a coming-of-age story, but it definitely is. A story of irony and naivety coming up against the cold and boring – and later thrilling and confusing – immersion into “the real world” and what a fantastic and terrifying place it is.

I had been preparing for this journey for months, reading vigorously, doing research, trying to teach myself Greek (mostly unsuccessfully), and gathering any scraps of information I could that might help when my feet hit Athenian concrete. It was an adventure in two distinct ways. The first was that I was going to be dropped into a world where my wildest political imaginings were possible. A place that my friends and I had seen online in videos, trying to imagine with jealous admiration what it would be like to live in that world, a world which seemed so exciting and far away. The second piece is that I was journeying alone, completely alone, for the first time ever. I was going to be plopped into a place where I would have to find housing, find friends, try to speak to people in a language I couldn't use, and where I literally knew no one. I had one person, who a teacher had told me was working on a similar project. So, I was going to this place with a friendly email and practically nothing else.

I asked my mom whether I should get a gas mask. I did this while I was showing her a recent video of the demonstrations outside the parliament building in Athens, which had turned into unadulterated combat. She asked in a way that commanded, whether I was going to be involved in these things, and I told her that this was what I was interested in and would be observing, researching. So, after a stern gaze and a couple conversations, we made our way to a military surplus store and bought a vintage army helmet, so that tear gas canisters wouldn't give me brain damage if they landed high, and I bought a gas mask on Amazon. All my preparations were in order. I said goodbye to my family, excitedly thinking about how when I returned I would be changed, wiser, and would have been through some shit. Imagining myself being trampled gloriously by the policeman's boots after taking a great photo and getting a good rock to crack under his helmet.

I left with a bag full of anarchist books, some clothing, and a helmet with a gas mask, like an idiot and a proud soldier for the cause. I passed through airport security in Philadelphia, and everything was fine for a while. But as I was waiting for my flight with my bag and leather jacket, two police officers wandered to the terminal and upon seeing me made a bee-line toward me. How did they spot me so quickly? Did they read my emails? They moved me over to the chairs by an empty gate and began to berate me and ask questions quick enough that I couldn't answer to increase intimidation; these were punctuated by long macho eye-contact accompanied by silence as a way of verifying my information. They had me unpack my bag, and I became increasingly agitated as all the people I was previously sitting next to looked in fear in my direction.

One of the cops noticed a YPG sticker on the back of my phone. “What's the meaning of this?” I tried to explain what the YPG was and he replied, “I know who they are. Why do you have this?” After explaining some more, he decided that he would interrogate me officially, all of this talk has been coming from one cop, the other has just been standing there watching. As they walked

me over he asked me a question, and in a moment of bravery I remember looking back at him angrily, wondering what reason they could have for doing this, knowing they had nothing on me. What could they have had? I stared back at him in defiant silence for a couple long seconds, and then he blurted out, “You trying to give me a hard time?!” The silence was too much for him, and they dragged me and my stuff through a door by the terminal I hadn’t noticed before.

I remember asking for a lawyer at some point and getting no response. It turns out you don’t really have any legal protections in airports, or at least that’s what it said on the little TSA pamphlet they gave me, titled something along the lines of *So It Seems You’ve Been Detained*.

I was put in a room where I waited for what felt like a day. In one room near me I could see a man crying. It seems he was in the process of being caught trying to get in or out of a country illegally. Next to me was a woman who had brought a chicken in a suitcase and was arguing loudly with the cops. For those hours all I had to entertain myself with was the despair emanating throughout the room, which had been staining this room for years as people had their hopes of mobility and life crushed. All the while the cops are talking about a new sandwich place, that’s “pretty good”, for an hour, before departing, awkwardly. The dynamics of a typical boring office workplace built on the bones and fears of so many.

Eventually they went through my luggage, and most of their questions had to do with the reading material that I had brought. Turns out the gas mask and helmet just made them curious, but the book of poems by Amiri Baraka really turned them on. They fingerprinted me, and one of them went through my phone. As I watched I thought of what to say to him if he asked what all of the strange photos of rats and dinosaur porn was, I would explain that they were for my friend’s entertainment. They went through my laptop, asked me a lot of questions about smoking weed. Why? Because if I admitted to something illegal then something else would happen? I don’t honestly know. They went onto my Facebook, looking through my photos, and found one cover photo of the twin towers burning with a banner ad with two blonde women on it which was titled “Vacation Chasers”. When they saw this, they looked at each other smugly and I tried to explain that it was a joke, that didn’t go over well. They asked if I had a copy of the *Anarchist Cookbook*, I said no, they didn’t believe me, and it continued like this on and on.

It was simultaneously terrifying and boring, which seems to be the state’s favorite combination. A combination of threats and talk of how the TSA guy actually likes the YPJ, and that he saw a good documentary about Rojava on *Vice*. They thought I was going to join, and also simultaneously join ISIS, and also go to Greece and riot, and be a naïve student and write.

When I finally got out I had gotten to know the cop’s problems with his wife, learned why I should never get married, learned that I should hide in this country, learned that he was going to make a personal phone call to Greece so that when I tried to get in they wouldn’t let me, and learned what an interrogation feels like. I was abandoned in Philadelphia and had to find a place to sleep.

When I finally arrived in Greece the next day the security personal looked at my passport for two seconds and let me in. Turns out he didn’t get the call.

My dumbass gear splayed on the table

My dumbass gear splayed on the table:

They checked my Facebook,
interested
in which feed, what news,
what graffiti & how much,
ancestors & occupation, lovers
& enemies all splayed all
interested, dead & dangerous.

People

say that a pressure has
a direction but it's not in
our plane, it comes down
from the gallery of history
& fears presented over
& over again, trusting authority
& its obligations to specificity
& cruelty.

-the morning of June 2nd, 2 hours, 25,000 feet.

This is a piece of the fiction.

The invasion was announced for the 29th. It felt like a slap in the face to all of us, that they would dare come in, to the center of the square, and give a talk about making Exarchia like any other neighborhood. Some local politician looking to gain some favor and respect from the public for standing up and facing the anarchist menace, the mindless hooligans and mastermind terrorists. We heard talk of it at a cafe, which is where you always hear talk, or I would've if my Greek wasn't limited to 'freddo (iced) espresso' and 'ti kanis malaka?' (whatsup asshole?). The politician planned to come in, escorted by at least one squadron of MAT (riot) police, and speechify in the middle of the plateia.

The plateia is the convergence point and the point of departure. Everyone meets here for beers, coffee's, bummed cigarettes, music, and molotovs. The old, young, smart, stupid, hipster, hooligan, refugee, rioter, maoist, anarchist, punk, poser, and progressive all convene here. It's extremely small and lively, smelling a bit like piss and a lot like bophos (shitty weed). In the center there are a group of hippies, eyes closed, in circle, chanting and holding hands while someone strums an acoustic guitar. By the beer shop, a couple anarchists sit, dressed in all black, asking, "why did they have to come to our neighborhood?". There is political talk, talk of sex, too many cigarettes, and of homes, lots of talk of homes. The square is home to some of the people, others came here for jobs that didn't exist or to escape bombs, and found refuge in the bomb center. Exarchia is a bomb in the middle of Athens. Not only are there plenty of molotovs hurtling through the nights, but the area is gunpowder. Radical ideas, stories, connections, safe houses, and a 'fuck you' attitude combine with a complete disillusionment with the government and economic warfare being enacted plainly, a spit in the face, have made Exarchia fertile. Add the friction of contact, of meetings, of disputes and of passion, and you have an explosion. The area is encased in metal, like the gunpowder in a bomb. Riot police vans stationed on all the streets surrounding the neighborhood have turned it into a veritable ghetto. The danger from a bomb comes not just from the explosives but from the shrapnel of its restraints. In Exarchia if the explosion is big enough the police splinter and spread into "civil" life, instead of containing the blast it helps it rip apart the fabric of "peace". Politicians and capitalists treat Exarchia carefully and directly, with flak jackets on, feeling for the wires. Exarchia could explode at any moment in the middle of the capitol, and it has before.

This politician talked about making Exarchia into a neighborhood like every other neighborhood: diffused. There have been plans for a metro stop (a classic gentrification tool) in Exarchia (even though there are two that are both around 10 mins away), but it was put on the back burner after anarchists attacked several metro stations in response to the plan, breaking cameras, tagging trains, and smashing windows and ticket machines. This event, planned for the 29th, was a trap. No politician in their right mind would host such an event in the very center, at the beating heart of their enemy. It must've been a setup. I was reading *The Art of War* at the time, and thought that if your enemy expected you to attack, feign instead. But, even if it was a trap, if they could get away with such an event, it would have signaled the end of Exarchia, it would've

shown that the neighborhood had given up and that its streets could be reclaimed: a blow to the jaw which exposed the enemies swagger as a stagger. Opposing bodies, within and without.

As soon as the word spread from the square outwards, it reconvened in the mouths of the squats. What to do? There's only one thing to do, prepare. In squats around the neighborhood, people were being taught and teaching themselves once again how to make fire. They were entering the fiction, the world only put in screens, that I admired, but never touched, the world that we are told exists, but which is forbidden, the world which flirts with us, but never comes to party. Every party needs cocktails, no one wants to come unprepared, but when one does come, and they do, they are welcomed with open arms, and a suspicious eye. These actions of defense of the neighborhood are their own training grounds and filtration system. A small bearded man might carefully instruct you while smoking a cigarette, whose ash artfully lands an inch from an open gasoline can as the bottles fill around you. Or perhaps you heard the news and showed up on the street, with a mask in pocket like the YouTube videos told you to or like you saw on a Friday night at thirteen years old leaving the plateia for your first real night out. Either way, plans were drafted, materials gathered, and the solutions of many connected but separate groups reconvened in the square the morning of. The solution involved concert, watchers, backup, and patience.

Waiting is most of a riot. In any piece of riot porn, or story of revolution, there is never shown the waiting. People making small talk, in a plaza, waiting for the invisible queue to sweep through the crowd until someone shouts, "Μπατσοι, γουρουνια, δολοφονοι!" (cops, pigs, killers), at which point everyone moves, some stumbling behind, as people towards the middle of the crowd duck down and mask up, then move to the outer ring to provide cover for the rest in a cycle until everyone is ready. The always present anxiety of boredom, the boredom before participating in an *event*. A riot is an event, it's something that will become historicized, it's a thing that exists outside the normal life, transcending reality, but before it is boredom, it's tether. Boredom is excitement and anxiety. It is like existing in a movie, with suspense music, waiting as something builds in an explosive act, it is draped in idle chatter, the need for another energy drink or pastry, the looking around, "Is my friend here?", "I think that's them.", "This is going to be incredible.", "I wonder how many cops will show and how quickly.". What we are waiting for is the synchronization of image and reality, for our lives to make their rendezvous with spectacular energy. Everything normal becomes tense, suspenseful, and weighty in the approach of an imminent future. This waiting is having the future known to be unknown. You know the riot is coming, you wait for it, you wait for the moment when you will no longer be waiting, for the moment where the future is erased.

A riot is defined, when in its midst, with the erasure of planning. Once it begins every second that comes next is undetermined. In a strange way, we are waiting for real life, we are waiting for the feeling of existing in the precarious present of mass improvisation, of course inspired by history and fantasy, but full of peril and uncertainty. There are many methods of waiting: sitting on benches, smoking cigarettes, talking about weather and stomachs, imagining every person who you don't and will never know to, once adorned in the riot, become the thing which we know all too well, from dreams and dreams of our dreams. Will it be like we saw? Will it still feel like this boredom, when it starts? Will it transcend monotony like the text we read taught? Will it be wild like an orchestra of solos? Or will it be coordinated like techno which puts us all in the collective trance of a steady beat which we make our improvisations upon? It is collectively coordinated, the sound of glass breaking, the rhythm, the chorus the chant and its returns, the footsteps, the shouts that warn of the police closing in which signals a retreat and the sound of

a thousand footsteps. Before it begins, I imagined a helicopter shot of myself and the crowd, the seething dangerous group, the view from outside and above. When inside, it feels like endless possibilities and no time to think of them, it is instinct and it is trust. I was inclined to make this memory an American experience, like in some ways I have done with this essay, one where a space and a change is recorded and empathized with (made a world through) a protagonist and their change i.e. me. The only thought that concerned myself specifically was, will I make it out of here, or will I be one of the people swept up, in custom, will I be one of the unwilling sacrifices. The protagonist in me faded into the event, the riot is a school of communal chaos, and of collective excitement. The protagonist was no longer myself, but the unknown possibilities waiting in each passing second; when this happens the riot has begun. Waiting time and riot time are parallel and also distinct. Waiting time is social anxiety, it is expectation, but a shift from what's going to happen today, and how it will look in a book or video, to what's going to happen now, what do we do. It is the difference of being within and without. Outside and inside of the six minutes that will determine the next six months.

Waiting doesn't have revolutionary potential in itself, but all revolutionaries play in it. In America we wait to be hit to make our history, we wait for the first couple words to be placed on the page before we make it our poem, we wait for the title to be completed by our enemies before we make our claims on its conclusion. In Athens, it seemed as though, the slaves (as those in power would like us to believe of ourselves) knew their condition as a constant state of warfare, and so need no particular provocation to make their move, they do not need to be hit by the whip to make an attempt on their master, instead they plan and break into the house while the master is asleep, burning the place to the ground. Are victims just those who wait? Anarchists who end up in prison do not see themselves as victims, they see themselves as those who have made their decision and who were punished by the enemy for it. A riot is a reclamation of agency I suppose, but it's a terrifying one, and one that doesn't feel like it's guided by ideology or history. Or from the outside it appears to be branded by ideology, when it is viewed in video or read, but when on its inside, it appeals to nothing but instincts: love, rage, courage, and one of the biggest fears of the modern world, seeing where our limits exist, testing our capacities for courage and consequence. There are of course those who 'keep their head' and warn not to smash that shop, because it is not 'big capitalism', but those are the ones that have either been jaded (by repetition or by bringing waiting time to the riot (seeing the riot as a wait for the revolution)) or were always too rational to be trusted.

I remember reading one text that basically made an absolutist claim about the spectacular, saying that it was an outgrowth of bourgeois individualism and of fantasy transcending reality. Reality transcending reality is reality I'm afraid, even if it didn't use to be that way, it is now. The word for guerrilla in Greek is κλεφτοπολεμος (kleftopolemos) which translates roughly to thief-war. When in riot, we stole reality and fantasy from its definers, I feel ashamed to say it, but riots do live up to their reputation/hype/image, spectacularity brought into action.

The action to attack the invasion was centered on subverting the square, or re-asserting the character of the neighborhood against a foreign claim. It was a hip-hop concert, started early in the day, before the police and politicians could set up, which would occupy the space, and make it impossible to gather. The concert, the music, brought people into an occupation through party, it was a friendly occupation, an occupation without its name. On the outskirts of this party, there were watchers, people ready for the attack. The anarchists had placed a trap inside the trap which they were supposed to walk into. If the police tried to move this party so that this

politician could have his event, the watchers would've moved to action, coordinated by walkie talkies, and would take the molotovs which they had armed the neighborhood with and strike at the convergence. The rule of guerrilla warfare, is to make attacks on your terms, and never defend a singular space, which gives the advantage to the larger better equipped group. While the party was ensuing, the fire which existed in the minds of the neighborhood and in the square were moved around it, and the anarchists made the fire which is part of the landscape literal. They hid fire in electrical boxes, sewage covers, potted plants, so that the environment was equipped and the infrastructure which the state hoped to expand became the hiding place of the weapons which would bring them down. When the environment is armed, the entire terrain is mobile, and dangerous, every step forward contains a thousand imagined attacks. Everything normally passed with less than a glance becomes a hiding spot (the active use of sites of inaction).

Nothing happened. The party went on, people moved in and out, refueling on energy drinks and cigarettes, and sitting in the hot sun of the square. After four hours of small talk and dancing, we realized that the invasion was a hoax. We found out the politicians cancelled the event, they said because they hadn't received the correct permits. Perhaps it was a conflict between the politicians and the police, the police warning them that they wouldn't protect such a dangerous and stupid adventure, a political stunt that would undoubtedly result in a battle. Either way, the night before, anarchists had been preparing themselves for war, had been making their hugs, their goodbyes, their decisions as to whether or not they actually cared about this struggle enough to go to prison for it, "What is the risk of this action? Should I bring my girlfriend?", "The risk is federal rioting and 15 years in prison, so make sure she knows that." I was told every anarchist must prepare for prison, like a mafioso, that it is a rite of passage, one that teaches you what you are fighting for, what the wrath of the state feels like at its mightiest, and what it feels like to live truly communally.

The people, waiting for a riot that didn't happen, waiting for an event to bring them to the transcendental state out of life and into life. But riots are always on the rioters' terms or in the rioters' time, and if the provocation/invitation from the politicians fell through, the anarchists had been equipped with expectation and molotovs already, and were not ready to give up on some fun (and finding a home on the street for their fire). The night was filled with fire and gas. In an alley somewhere people gathered, opening up a bag to reveal a hundred bottles, which were clasped by gloved hands which hid the sweat. They moved swiftly in the street, and as they did, the drinkers and sellers in the street calmly (and excitedly) moved inside and toward the windows, the bachala was to begin, their shouts to everyone not with them of, "Get out of the way!" was metaphorically perfect. The police, seeing the masked ones coming, lumbered down the streets, hopefully questioning their job choice as they saw lighters being drawn to the gas soaked rags. The first group would charge, screaming or silent, I can't remember, close enough to see that each policeman was the same, their faces obsolete, and tossed their fire, some miss hitting a parked car, another lands in front of the police (as useful as hitting them, because it impedes their advance), and one lucky one lands on a cop's helmet, and a whoop moves through the crowd. The first group retreats so as not to be hit by the next volley, the second group moves up, one novice throws their fire too early and it lands next to the feet of a retreating comrade, "What the fuck?! Watch where you're throwing malaka!". These riots are training grounds of attack as much as they are the attack themselves, they are pregnant with their own regeneration, and with a transformation of their future. It is a lot to be thrown into, but it is an introduction none will forget, and fear loses its grip on you the moment you attack. The attack is also a personal test: *Is this me? Can I do*

this? Am I also one of the ones I see? The moment decides for you, and this is the lesson of the riot. After it feels like this specific instance is finished or the police are advancing too quickly, a retreat is set in motion by running, random people on the street ‘watchers’ (perfect word, because they appear as impartial observers, but like all watchers, in their seeing they participate in the event) will pass by without saying a word, their only communication a hand with a finger pointed to a particular street, the masked ones listen. It is repeated this time with a barricade, a burning trash bin, filled to the brim (they are on strike, remember?), pushed to the center of the street, making a temporary zone of retreat, some without molotovs lodge stones from the street turning them into weapons of courage and machismo more than anything else. It is a machismo which I was taught to despise in my anarchist ways, but which part of me had respect for, as one hooded individual with a small stone in his hand, rushed screaming straight towards the police battalion, tear gas and concussion grenades ricocheting all around him, and tossed it right as they made their move towards the crowd. Maybe this machismo is not machismo, but only self-confidence, and a willingness to impart his feelings into the world and share them (I wonder how masculinity has been made to demonize rage). His courage frightened the police, because it was irrational, in their salaried positions they could not understand such an impetuous and stupid move, something that seemed ineffective, but in their incomprehension was fear. What situation had they put themselves in? Their stumbling fear was their mistake, and with the individuals scream the entire crowd followed, and the police left that street for the night. Afterwards, people de-masked in corners where the eyes of the security cameras were blind, and made their way back to the plateia, where it all began. They stopped by the souvlaki shop, got a wrap, rolled their cigs, bought their beers, some pouring them on their faces to cool off the burn from the tear gas. Lively chatter and good fun, a night well spent, I felt alien in that moment. I walked back to my apartment that night, face red, from the burning of tear gas and the smoke in the air, and when I lay down in bed, I couldn’t reconcile my life with the day. A day with riot time, transcended a life of waiting, with an irrefutable present. During world making sex, one is merged incomprehensibly with the present, all thought of the outer world, of anything out of the moment is disengaged with to the point of it not even taking a foothold in the brain, once it is done there is the ‘rude-awakening’ of returning to the real world, leaving the world you created with someone. This was that feeling, of returning to the ‘real world’ with an experience I couldn’t reconcile with how life felt when I woke up every morning and all the mornings before.

The Revolutionary Project

The revolutionary project has been given many appearances and characteristics: a day that breaks, a process, moments escalating, an abolishment of strata, quick change, the peoples united effort in drama (and maybe comedy), an accumulation of contradictions that moves small conflicts to open conflict, the destruction of work and of capital's mediation. Revolution is often seen as an event, one that transcends normal life, but which can also be put on the calendar. An event that during its process stands outside of time and history, but which once it has been 'completed' (ended, consolidated) it can be made stationary and explained. We only have 'failed' revolutions to learn from, so our definitions are made in relation to and in commemoration of failure. Activity is at the crux of the debate. Does one make revolutionary attacks now, does one spread the theory and wait until everyone can participate before the revolutionary activity can start, does revolutionary activity infect the minds who observe them causing them to participate, does one lead by example, lead literally through party, lead through instigation, or follow the 'masses'?

Not only is there a question of activity here, but also its environment, i.e. waiting. Do revolutionaries wait for a moment, when the break with previous life makes itself evident? Do they make their attacks now and keep waiting for ripe opportunities and not for the full break? Are revolutionaries even separate from the environment, or are they (supposedly) the most observant and active arm of the environment, the readiest to destroy and create new landscapes, or are they the dust storm that changes the conditions of the atmosphere so much that a recalibration and balance must occur.

Do they build structures that can be used once revolution has begun? Here we see waiting as an environment, and revolutionary activity as the map making, the observation and analysis of the environment, and alterations to and with that life. The occult projection of desires onto the landscape, that once delineated can be enforced and manifested. So the revolutionary is the connection between stasis and planning.

Revolutionary activity contains planning, but the problem of revolutionaries is that their actions and dreams can only be realized in a moment of uncertainty, and the greater the uncertainty the greater the potential, to the point where 'one' does not know what will happen in the next second. When 'one' is living in a nation-wide rebellion that didn't exist the day before, the dreams and not yet dreamed fantasies could be just around the corner and can be 'realized'. Uncertainty has potential by its very definition, but there are certain characteristics of uncertainty which make it especially dangerous. When a person doesn't know what will happen tomorrow, all the rules of alienation and engagement with the world at large become obsolete or silly, they seem preposterous and even risky. What is happening is twofold, one comes to realize one's situation, and in doing so, more greatly comprehend what the situation of 'normal' life was before the present. The other thing working here is that this sudden understanding by comparison also reveals the absurdity of 'normality', its undesirableness, and its lack of promise, future, and security. The dream of security, the only thing that the state purports its usefulness in, is vanquished with even the smallest amount of uncertainty, and not only is the state's promise of certainty

and safety revealed to be untenable, but also undesirable. This of course puts the state in crisis, and makes the state always on the edge of crisis. The state whose job it is to manage crisis and act as a buffer will go into crisis when crisis occurs, what makes our times particular is that the piece meal work that gives the illusion of culpability and ability of the state to manage crisis has been completely eroded. Most crises now plainly come from the state and its unwillingness to deal critically with its own position atop the razor (and we must balance on its head). In response to the hurricane in Puerto Rico, it moved soldiers not aid into the territories affected, in Houston it abandoned ship, in Flint it covered its eyes, in North Dakota it was insulted by its own failings and nudity. What makes uncertainty so dangerous to the state (it is also a fire that it plays with often) is that it reveals its own fragility. It means the collapse not just of the specific project of a couple politicians, but the project of statehood itself (which is why in school we always learn about the fertile crescent).

So uncertainty leads to an increased awareness of normal conditions (or a louder confrontation of life with its foundation) by contextualizing normal life in comparison to this new situation of uncertainty. The two forces at work then in an uncertain situation concern this potential, whether it leads to a new and improved security or a future without the causes of oppression an opening to a new dynamic. This is where history becomes weaponized by the capitalist state and its associates, when the present is uncertain one thing that can be both a marker for the future and a refuge because of its 'stability' is the past. History in its present form, cemented in writing, made stationery/stationary, becomes the promise of the future, and it works because it is both secure in that it promises a time when things were secure, and because its form has been secured, and won't be changed. It is the bones of those who've died becoming tar in history, where it's slow degradation away from light and life deep below the soil turn it into the dirty fuel of the present. When the capitalist state is in crisis it promises its two histories of recovery: fascism and social democracy. One is aimed at spreading an uncertainty that doesn't promise anything but death, so that it can implement a brutal repression and order. The other promises an incorporation of the bright future, where the change we seek and is possible becomes monopolized by the state, repression comes to those who threaten its hope. The main difference between them is who is targeted by repression, who is invited into inclusion, and how admitted the conflict/crisis is. If the crisis is accepted by the public to be an existential crisis of the state and of capitalism and that both systems should be destroyed, then social democratic policies must be implemented to offset the brutalities of capitalism. If the conflict becomes one of identities then this 'problem' is admitted by fascism and transformed as such, and the products of contradictions (discontent, poverty, revolutionary activity) are eliminated by force.

The problem of waiting comes up again with these two examples, because if people are to be moved beyond these two options they need to plan for reformism and misdirection, and to bring uncertainty to a higher stage, to open conflict. Uncertainty is waiting, or maybe it is waiting with greater consequences, with a sense of urgency, with a sense of coming to something historic. Then the question of planning again, do we plan, can our plans get in the way of better plans, in planning do we determine ourselves to history, or can we move beyond history.

So what gets us to this place of uncertainty, and what kind of uncertainty? I've found in modern theory and in practice a divide amongst revolutionaries. I'll call it the red/black divide. I apologize in advance for my caricaturing, which is the case with all theories and generalizations, but this is done with honesty as well, as many revolutionaries are indeed caricatures.

One of my first nights alone in Exarchia I wandered drunkenly into the square and sat by a statue that is always covered in posters and graffiti and which has been the locus of more than a few battles. A group formed on one side of the square with flags and was chanting loudly seemingly to the entirety of the square. I thought excitedly that some action was about to be pulled off, one of those fantastic battles with the police, this is the prelude, what a lucky night! One of the people I had been drinking with didn't seem so excited by what was happening and was instead looking around nervously, she wasn't really a part of the movement, but not opposed to it at all either, and her restlessness made me stay on my ass and not join in. Then I noticed a man in a leather jacket standing near me, he had on reinforced gloves and as I noticed those I also noticed the long piece of rebar extending from them, which he gripped tightly, preparing himself, was he also going to fight the police? No, he was facing the crowd, and then two other men with metal joined him. I recognized in the chanters some people I had been with in an assembly and went over to them, saying hello, they seemed totally disinterested, and when I asked what was going on they ignored me. After an intense 10 minutes the two groups dissipated. I found out later from a friend who was there that I had witnessed the near implosion of the anarchist movement, as two factions which had been slinging mud, and beatings towards each other had almost had their first real battle. I had made friends with people on one side and found out from them, that since I had been seen walking with them, I should not walk alone past certain squats for fear of getting the shit kicked out of me, I had made myself associated without knowing it.

There are two mouths of the anarchist movement in Greece and one gets fed and kissed more than the other which tends to curse more. The Red is associated with the more traditional anarchist movement focusing on labor, class warfare, more formalized mutual aid structures, the goal of building a mass movement, federated structures, and remaining combative in ways that are familiar to the leftist tradition while remaining more faithful in its opposition to capital. The other side is the Black, which is associated with more informal structures, illegalism, guerilla attacks and riots, anonymity, expropriations, autonomous mutual aid structures, associations instead of strictly bound groupings, and is tied more with the "second wave" anarchist movement and post-left. These titles also allude to presupposed class designations, the red with the traditional proletariat and the black with the lumpen and the labor reserve army.

The anarchist movement in Greece originally began in the late 19th century with anarchist immigrants from Italy and it was mostly an anarcho-syndicalist (red) movement although it did have its black moments with the notable assassination of King George the 1st by an anarchist. With the rise of the 20th century communist movement and the ensuing civil war, anarchism moved to the background as the struggle became between the Leninist left and the right. The left was smashed over and over again with its own aid and through impotence in parliamentary politics and intense political repression. The polytechnic uprising in 1973 resurrected the anarchist movement from a grave which couldn't be found and suddenly anarchists were in the streets. This was the case for most anarchists I talked to as well: red or black or neither, they all traced their lineage to this spontaneous birth-uprising and didn't believe me when I told them that a Greek king was assassinated by an anarchist. The movement grew considerably in the 80's and 90's and 2000's, all the while anarchism is being popularized in Greek culture in conjunction with the rise of Bachala. The uprising in 2008 marks its second birth and this one brought it actually into mainstream discourse, mostly through disavowal, but also because the uprising popularized anarchist approaches. Bachala, expropriations, attacks on banks and police stations, which had been quarantined in the anti-authoritarian xoros became popularized. Once these things became

widespread enough where they couldn't be ignored anarchism moved out of the fringe lunatic category and had to be recognized as a political force. This was cemented in the anti-austerity riots and demonstrations after and during the referendum of the SYRIZA government, whose failure and betrayal only solidified the position of anarchism as the only real alternative for "the left".

For the Red, this was the moment they had been waiting for. The traditional left had broken and they were poised to absorb the incoming proletarian rebels who had finally become disaffected by years spent toiling in useless and oftentimes reactionary political parties. The Black was equipped to deal with this in its own way, but their audience and participators were coming more from youth, drop-outs from the Red movements, those who had been made houseless, and those who had little left to lose and had decided that any and all political systems were in their way.

The conflict between these groups might not seem apparent at this juncture, but with the popularization of anarchism came the opportunity for incorporation, this could've been made into a schism in mainstream discourse, and in a way it was, but it also made legitimacy a game that might have a real future for anarchists. With the influx of refugees fleeing from the Syrian Civil War an urgent need for housing was created which couldn't be fulfilled by the state, already austerity ridden, with no interest in helping its own citizens let alone Others. Anarchists took up the call, making refugees squats around the city. These were mostly associated with the Red current and because the work seemed to be charity by the mainstream (and was in-fact too much charity based for many anarchists looking for more inclusive and non-hierarchical models, where the anarchists wouldn't be the patrons) it became a well-liked and encouraged phenomena, that even had the tacit approval of the state. These squats still operate in precarity because they could be raided at any time or attacked by fascists or the police or both. With the squats and the increasing popularity of anarchists and of riots, the media saw a need to make a divide between anarchists and the public by including anarchists in the public. The Red, especially a few outstanding organizations became known as the "good anarchists" by the mainstream, and the "mainstream anarchists" by the people in the square.

What this really meant was that certain anarchists were given a voice and certain anarchists could not be heard except through their actions. The media would politely if not resentfully talk to the Red, while the Black would be heard only as the latest news-fear for the public. Not only this but Bachala began being used by the news media as a way of discrediting the anarchist movement, "oh, some good ones are doing work for refugees and for the homeless, but some bad ones are making a mess for the police." These "bad ones" were made out to be either a dangerous threat or a trivial ill-intentioned nuisance. The Red was let *in*, with that came a position to protect. Sadly this was internalized by the movement to the point that one of the major Red squats put out a communique and posted it all over the square denouncing the riots take place in the neighborhood. This was too much for many of the anarchists in the neighborhood, even the ones who affiliate with the Red, and gave the split not just a tactical difference but an actual antagonism, the Black felt that it had been abandoned to the police, that their comrades wouldn't support them when the cops came calling or when the fighting broke out, which was almost explicitly what this communique said. The arguments were that bachala has no place in our movement, it is aimless, only for enjoyment, "lifestylist", is not productive, alienates people from our movement, etc. The argument for bachala was that it in fact invites people into the movement, explicitly creates propaganda of the movement as antagonistic to the established order, it is what separates the

anarchists from the rest of the political parties, and is what makes Exarchia what it is: a cop-free haven.

This split was extended and reinforced with the trials and tribulations of the Conspiracy Cells of Fire (hereafter CCF). The CCF is an anarchist urban guerilla group which is the most recent iteration in the rich legacy of urban guerilla groups that have operated in the last 40 years including Revolutionary Nuclei, Revolutionary Struggle, Revolutionary Sect, and 17th November (named after the polytechnic uprising). The CCF made an explicit departure from these groups in that it was very much anarchist and of the milieu. It distinguished itself through its efforts to use anarchist theory in an effort to avoid the traps usually set for those who engage in terror based politics. They stated that they would still be active in the movement, that their way of operating was not the priority or end-point of all other struggles, that this was a tactic being employed in relation and solidarity with the rest of the movement, that specialization of tasks/skills would be avoided, that they would stick to replicable tactics, and that there would be no underground. This already distinguished them from the 20th century, and seemed to promise not only a break from the Greek history of spectacular failures, but also a break from the Red Black divide.

The CCF states that they started with a group of friends who wanted to do different kinds of actions and also wanted to make something consistent. They advocated for people to create their own cells and solidaristic groups, making informal networks more formal but without becoming federated, retaining their individual autonomy and also security. This seemed to at once transcend the split and make a synthesis, in fact this was as much their goal as was their attacks:

“In that context, we forged our own alphabet. Speaking the language of *direct action*, we openly raised the issue of creating organized infrastructure. As anarchists, we often distance ourselves from the concept of organization because we equate it with hierarchy, roles, specialization, “you must,” and obligations. However, words acquire the meanings given by the people who use them. As the Fire Cells Conspiracy, we stormed into battle over the meaning of revolutionary anarchist organization.”

I keep on employing the word “seem”, this is because despite their goals they only entrenched the divide. The Black supported the CCF more or less, with critiques, but solidarity. The Red for the most part completely disavowed it, despite the long history of red urban guerilla terror groups, on the same grounds that they disavowed Bachala: it was alienating, extreme, irrelevant to the people’s struggle, self-indulgent, and futile. The funny thing that I found was that the group was actually more popular outside of anarchist circles than they even were within them. Before I came to Greece an attack had been carried out, allegedly by the CCF, where a bomb had been left in the car of Lucas Papademos (the unelected prime minister of Greece during the economic collapse, “bailout”, and ensuing austerity measures). It injured him, a banking official, and his driver. This attack seemed to be heralded as a good thing by the people I had talked to on the street, in Exarchia square, even my landlord wasn’t upset by the bombing. The responses ranged from, “he got what he deserved”, “should’ve gotten worse”, to “every member of parliament should be bombed”.

This highlights to me the failure of engaging in the popularity game. Yes, the goal is a mass-movement, a change at a fundamental level in society as a whole, but if you chase after “the people” you end up falling behind, aiming at a supposedly historical image that never really existed in the first place, or worse, succumbing to the elitism and ridiculousness of a conversional

project. If you dive into the pocket of the state you will be made into loose change. Pursuing positive media attention, especially from a state which has been as widely discredited as the Greek one, will not bring a movement closer to “the people”. This bombing was evidence of that. There was obviously not a single mainstream media report on the bombing which favored it or thought it justified, but that had little to no effect on the people whose lives were ruined by the economic policies he implemented.

What seemed most offensive to the anarchists associated with the Black, was that the public condemnation of not only the CCF but of bachala by the Red made the movement weak. It drew a line which allowed certain anarchists, anti-authoritarians, and revolted peoples to be taken by the police and the state. It was taken as a statement which proclaimed some of our comrades aren't our comrades, if you capture them and put them into prison we won't say a word. This weakened the already fragile trust and solidarity networks kept intact only through the necessity of maintaining the neighborhoods functioning and autonomy. Diversity is the strength of the movement in Greece and the multitudes of theories, actions, squats, cliques, riot-gangs, all functioning in friction and overlap, bridging and creating new gaps and spaces is what keeps the xoros strong, but all that is brought to an end when a fight can result in complete abandonment: to be stranded in the straights of history.

What this also does is turn disputes along personal lines into ideological ones and the reverse, making an ideological difference into ones that involve messy break-ups and underwear being tossed into the street. Most dangerously, it reveals the divides in the divided, which the state can move through like water (if it is competent or moves with enough weight). A measure taken by one squat to overcome these breaks was the creation of an assembly for the defense of squats which took a non-aligned position; meaning the people involved would come to the defense of any squat under attack, in spite of personal and ideological differences, and also to involve people from the communities in which they operate as a way of expanding stakes and terrain of the squatters struggle. Instead of an eviction being a battle for one building, where the anarchists are the disrupters, it becomes an issue of the police in a whole section of the city, where they are the troublemakers.

There are some dirtier divides which don't fall into the dualism devised in this chapter. One of these is the relationship of anarchists to the mafia and to drugs and drug dealers more generally. The mafia has a strange relationship to the movement, it has been made part of the neighborhood of Exarchia for reasons that seemed ethereal to most people I talked to. One connection is that the mafia is involved in the drug trade, which has been moved more and more into Exarchia by a coordinated police effort of relocation wherein they allow or physically move drug dealers into operating in the neighborhood. I have heard stories of police arresting drug dealers and dropping them off near the neighborhood, telling them to sell there or they'll bust them. I've also heard stories of police making raids on junkie hangouts and telling them to move their activities to Exarchia. Because of the police-less nature of Exarchia dealers already make the migration thinking they can operate more freely there. Drugs (coffee, weed, and cigarettes excluded) are seen by many anarchists as irrelevant to the struggle at best, and instrumentally damaging to it at worst. There is also a moralistic element to the rejection which see's drug dealers as petty capitalists who exploit proletarians and drug dealers as degenerates who impede movement momentum, criminalize the neighborhood, and make the carefully protected public spaces dangerous. This attitude has been combined with the states weaponization of drugs and drug dealers as a criminalization tool to create a very antagonistic relationship between drugs and the anarchist movement. Most

anarchists don't bring drugs into the squats because of the fear of corrupting the political processes and the fear of addiction that can take hold of a movement. They also don't allow dealers into the plateia or into parties, as they invite a dangerous element that threatens the well-being of the people there. I witnessed in my time in Exarchia a heroin dealer getting the shit beat out of him at a techno party for dealing on the dance floor, and a dealer stabbing a migrant in the square for supposedly interfering with his business, these relationships have dramatic consequences and also inform how the movement relates to the public. The other connection to the mafia is the alleged ties of some anarchist squat protection groups to the mafia and of urban guerilla groups for the acquisition of weapons. These two issues greatly divide the movement in that they foster distrust and also elevate sectarian struggles to a possibly lethal level. Should anarchists involve themselves in inviting criminals into the movement? This could lead to more efficient and effective underground networks, a larger base of supporters, access to an illicit economy, and a large strata of disaffected anti-law people who could become potential comrades, not only that it doesn't allow the state to define ethics. However, in involving the criminal element one risks further demonizing the movement, allowing for easier repression from the state, and inviting even greater violence and infiltration into the movement, one doesn't need the states ethics to know that inviting someone into your organizing who would shoot someone for a bag of coke is not a good idea.

The other question, and the main focus of the questions in this chapter, is how does the movement relate to those outside of it? Does the violence enacted by certain elements in the movement alienate people from these politics which have a radical potential or does the violence in fact connect the movement to the greater whole and to a long history of violent resistance to oppression? Does Exarchia provide the movement with a base or does it quarantine the struggle? Can the anti-authoritarian movement use mass-media to further its struggle or does that delegitimize and divide the movement?

The juries have left the assemblies, and there isn't one body to begin with.

Tending to the flame of rebellious knowledge is, in my opinion, one of the main purposes of the anti-authoritarian movement. They keep these ideas and actions going, constantly giving them new life, new lives, and new grounds to develop, so that when the time comes they can spread without anarchist kindling, as what happened in 2008. These debates are crucial, their scopes are overlapping, and rarely their goals and means are conflictual, but the key to increasing the friction is ensuring that these separate pieces are bonded together in solidarity. If so, the conflict and contestations that the plateia gives birth to produce a powerful and sturdy movement through the exposure of faults and the repairs. We are not trying to bolster an ideology, we are trying to empower each other. As the old saying goes: a good friend is one you can argue with.

Back to bachala.

Bachala is confidence in uncertainty, or maybe just confidence period. The cultural climate of Greece and Athens lends itself to anarchists, or maybe the anarchists made the culture lend itself to the politic, but either way there is a symbiosis that makes what they do there possible. But this symbiosis is not the sole cause of the powerful politics they have developed, they have something that we here (myself of course included) in the US lack more than anything else: self-confidence. Bachala is wild and uncontrollable, once felt it makes you move to the rhythms that felt too shameful to be displayed in public or even thought. The situation's uncertainty forces a situation upon the present where one must act. Confidence in bachala becomes secondary, a chance feeling which can be trusted or not to get you out of and into a dangerous situation, the confidence to jump out and into is most useful in the waiting period, in the event that births the event. "Oh, making bachala?" It comes with a wry smile, and gleeful mischief in people's eye, or a scornful look from the more tactful and serious comrades.

It is too indulgent for 'real' revolutionaries. I want to linger with indulgence, because most of the discourse around bachala from its detractors, both revolutionaries and media figures, comes from a demonization of indulgence. Revolutionaries fear the indulgence in the excitement of destruction, the forbidden libidinal rage at the core of many people's personal investment in radical change, the thrill of a dangerous situation that one has agency in (not the blind danger of the everyday), things that anarchists have been caricatured with for the last 150 years and things which continue to fuel the spasmodic eruptions of conflict in the social sphere. The stigma of the bomb throwing anarchist is powerful for anarchists, but they do not realize that their quest to extinguish the flames of misrepresentation often leads to their own repression and the stemming of generalized insurrectional activity. This activity is the same activity which brings new people to the neighborhood every weekend, which gives the migrants the power to reveal themselves in the limbo they are trapped in and put on a mask and make their struggles heard on a sweaty Friday night. The thing being danced over here, is that the fear of indulgence is the fear of indulging in catharsis. Maybe the detractors feel that catharsis would be premature, and that we must wait till the day of reckoning to let loose upon the world, but fire breeds fire, and fire is used to clear land as much as it is to prepare it for the next seeds, the char is the fertilizer for the generations.

Catharsis is also the unsaid starting point for the demonization of bachala for mass media, and the reason for the creation of koukouloforoi as an entity. Bachala is demonized as being the irresponsible act of taking your frustrations and desires and putting them into action in the public sphere. The public sphere is now everywhere thanks to surveillance and online media, and by public I mean a place where everyone resides, not necessarily a place that is free from private property or the state, in fact quite the opposite, the public here is the terrain of statehood. The streets are the public space of the public spaces, the pure and super mobile terrain of cross-class interaction and Exarchia is more of a true public in that it really is open and 'free' for everyone (except the police) which is why the death of Alexis happening where it did had such

impact, but I digress. In not having catharsis mediated by the processes of emotional institutions like congressmen, grief centers, or courts, it becomes extremely dangerous in its momentum. Koukouloforoi, the separate beings who enact these catharses, become the outside other who instead of being a normal person who is attracted to catharsis, is a thug instigator who lurks in the landscape and who ruins good political actions with their violence and arrogance by wanting to immediately enact justice, without considering the proper authorities or the other protesters wishes. They embody the subaltern, the lumpen whose actions dare to enter the public space, ruin the possibility of the good life, they also embody the lumpen in that they are ignored and hyper-visible, in they are useless and also extremely dangerous and importantly in that they make themselves 'below' the 'good public' in that they bring forth the uncouth desires residing in the depths of the metropole. This invocation is the acknowledgment that this class doesn't have the power of the traditional proletariat of being able to take hold of the sites of production of society. They only have power in their destructive capabilities, their power is to disrupt and attack all of the things that make this paradise of boredom and emotional abandon possible. Their powers of destruction do make things however, Exarchia being one of those things, and the countless friendships that burst through the political divides of the neighborhood, are all encouraged in the acts of courage, power, desire, and emotional fulfillment that is bachala.

It has been a suspicion of mine, that the etymology of bachala comes from the Greek god Bacchus or Dionysus, the god of revelry. Bacchus is the liberator, he encourages indulgence in sensual pleasures, bringing to bear the individual against its restraints. When in the drunken revelry of bacheia (the frenzy) one loses all sense of oneself, freed from care and the insecurity that comes from the constraints of public life: the constraints on people within themselves on how they move and live, the encouraged self-paralysis. Bacchae is enacted in festival, dance, music, wine, fire, ceremony. The cult of Bacchus is also called 'the cult of souls' because of the blood sacrifices enacted in these rituals (those killed or captured by the cops or the police themselves), and also because Bacchus was said to be a conduit between the living and the dead. The cult of souls might also refer to the liberation of one's soul from the bodily constraints of the world, an invitation for spiritual communion and relation that can be enacted in the here and now, and not through the martyrdom of the monotheists where communion lies beyond the pale. The connection between the living and the dead is also the connection of the past to the present. Those who have moved out of sight, who once walked in the light, and have now become subaltern, a remnant of the history that was never written, come back to haunt the present with the new enactments of the desires of the past. In the festival, their stories come to bear, the hidden angers and truths of all the failures and successes and struggles of the past are made onto the present. Bacchus is sometimes called a 'dying and rising god':

"In Greek mythology Dionysus, the son of Zeus was a horned child who was torn to pieces by Titans who lured him with toys, then boiled and ate him. Zeus then destroyed the Titans by thunderbolt as a result of their action against Dionysus and from the ashes humans were formed. However, Dionysus' grandmother Rhea managed to put some of his pieces back together (principally from his heart that was spared) and brought him back to life."

Bacchus is a demi-god, half man half god, he transcends humanity, but does not leave its realm. He accesses divinity, and through the frenzy his followers can touch that holy ecstasy.

But his followers achieve that ecstasy not by following a program of sacred words, but through embodying their own pleasure and will unrestrained. Abolishing alienation, people no longer are themselves by fully enacting themselves in a destructive and creative communion (as I write this, it feels dangerous, it is something I should not be praising or even describing, falling for the seduction of 'evil', or that such a desire cannot be enacted because its destructive capabilities are too great). The riot enacts reality through its transcendent spectacularity, it is a true spectacle, a spectacle that breaks through the specter of normal life, a festival of retribution and destruction, a forging of new relationships to police, to streets, to strangers, to normalcy in the heat of its fire. A street you would normally only walk on to get from your apartment to the bus stop, becomes the site of a furious battle between people and their would-be destroyers. The people you pass on that street, who you avoid eye contact with so as not to breach the fortress walls of their life (we have been taught to believe bodies are walls), are suddenly your friends, people who you can and do trust your life with as you combat the police, trusting them to keep you out of prison and in the sustained present. This friendship, or comradeship, bleeds through communal and personal experience through the 'event' and into everyday life via the *plateia*. The one-way street suddenly has a car being pushed down the wrong direction, and then being lit on fire so that, for that night at least, no one can have proper access to the proper procedures. But its power doesn't just come from its 'newness' if it did, it would become impotent once ritualized, because the nature of riot is free form.

Once *bachala* is seen in person it is not forgotten, and I'm sure every cop feels the same way. When you hear a loud bang from a concussion grenade as you turn the corner with a beer in your hand and see at the end of the street a bunch of young people in masks attacking the police with molotovs, pushing the police away from a squat and out of the neighborhood, it leaves something with you besides the stench of teargas and burnt plastic. But the '*bachala fad*' has proved itself in Greece and in Exarchia, and the places where it springs forth it does not easily recede from. This attack may find itself in lull for a few years, but when the time arises it generalizes again. In Exarchia, the anarchists and *koukouloforoi* tend to the flame carefully, but with great relish, and their diligence to explosiveness has paid off in the small world which has flourished in the center of Athens. The cops are actually afraid to come in, and this has allowed opportunities for things that are otherwise even harder to accomplish. Attack as defense has proven itself as an accelerant, making other struggles possible as it spreads, defending the new struggle.

Bachala is not enough, direct action catharsis and the space it opens up as an offensive defense and a place of communion and new relations is invaluable, but it can also become stagnating, as its capabilities become a crutch. Some comrades I was staying with, in discussing their decision to squat in Exarchia, told me that their options and strategies were two: one was to make their occupation in Piraeus and the other in Exarchia. Piraeus is arguably the most defunct part of the city, known as one of the biggest hotspots for the Golden Dawn in Athens, it has its own housing crisis, a complete lack of jobs, lots of dilapidated buildings, and the main industry is tourists who get off the train there to leave for the islands; there are almost no anarchists there and near no political action beyond the occasional anti-fascist demo (which are somewhat dangerous in the neighborhood). Exarchia is the other option, a veritable heaven for anarchists where the cops have a hard time catching people, where there is a community, the square, cheap food (sometimes free), squats, demos, plenty of occupations, good parties, it is where the work has already been done. They chose to go to Exarchia and build from the base that had already been created instead of trying to transform Piraeus, this is one of the pitfalls of having a designated home.

Capital flows freely through the neighborhood, profiteering from its movement as it does everywhere it goes. If they began communizing the neighborhood, then the absence of the presence of constant occupation and warfare in the minds of the neighborhoods residents, partakers, and participants would be eliminated. I say absence of presence because the neighborhood exists in occupation, but can be forgotten in the normalcy of daily life and in intoxication (although often drunkenness elucidates conflict: bachala). The strength of their movement comes from its visions and its ability to transform life, but if they enacted this now the neighborhood would be destroyed: riot police is one thing, the army is another (although the army is made up of conscripts and would likely be as disobedient as the rest of the population, unlike the police who are mostly made up of fascists).

The insurrectionists play the waiting game heavily. They wait for insurrections to spread, and they wait to communize life and the environment. It also comes from the unfair, but often true sentiment that exists or at least represents in part, the attitude and activity of bachala which is this: that the only thing that stands between the people and history is the police. The police do have the power to destroy the neighborhood, if only the public eye was removed and the media hadn't promoted koukouloforoi in the public landscape.

Κουκουλοφοροι – Hoods

The word *koukouloforoi* came about as a warning to the public. In 2008 a 15-year-old boy, Alexis Grigoropoulos, was murdered by the police in the anarchist neighborhood of Exarchia. His death was filmed and news of it spread quickly, police arrived at the scene and started to attack witnesses, anarchists on the scene immediately spread out attacking everything that made this world kill this boy, the situation exploded and led to a revolt that shook the country for a month. The hoods as an image were born in the occupations, arsons, and street combat. The hoods as a term came about a little after the riots had begun, as a warning to those not in the streets, to avoid the streets at all costs, because the hoods were out and they would attack anyone at will, and were coming after *you*, the ‘public’.

Koukouloforoi means ‘the hooded ones’, ‘hoods’, and one favorable reclamation ‘the maske-teers’. The term ‘hoods’ may seem like a thing that arose from the streets over rollies (rolled cigarettes) and energy drinks, but in actuality it is a word that was created and propagated by the news media, a term that was put on the streets from above (From security cameras, balconies, helicopters, satellites, heavens, CEO’s, etc.). The word came lagging after the beat of mass molotovs and riots, as fire became (or perhaps was resurrected as) a spectacular staple of politics in Greece. *Koukouloforoi* was a way of turning political actions into criminal acts, a way of associating revolt with poverty, criminality, dirtiness, to turn a threat to the established order into a threat to ‘normal people’s’ established order of work and quiet. *Koukouloforoi* are depicted not just as criminal provocateurs taking advantage of political and economic crises to steal and cause havoc, but also as a group of people so fringe and so on the edge of society as to exhibit the nihilistic urge for destruction, and in this they opaquely admit that these ‘hoods’ are the living embodiment of the futurelessness that now pervades all aspects of social life.

Part of the fear of *koukouloforoi* comes from the intense alienation that our age is steeped in. Where nearly every person outside feels like a stranger, an age where any and all information can be true, because we are so removed from reality that we have no ability to verify life, where we are more likely to trust what we read in an article than what we see out our window. “The Net-surfer is a traveler equipped with a map the size of the country he wishes to explore.” In this climate of mass fear and distrust, our own libidinal desires can be projected, and the *koukouloforoi* stands in for this fear, of our own violent will for destruction of normal life, and a will for embodying spectacular life, instead of the boring, slow, creep towards an uncertain and increasingly bleak emptiness. The hood here doesn’t hide a familiar figure (grandma, son, etc.) as the Zapatistas envisioned, but of the wandering stranger, whose willingness to enact havoc combines with anonymity and signs of the lower class to make it the ultimate foreign threat. This is the pragmatic reuse of the archetype of the ‘foreigner in our midst’, the other who comes from amongst us, but is not one of us and is predatory (like the vampire, werewolf, and terrorist (which comes with the classist and racialized metaphors of savagery, a constitution of man and beast).

The term *bachalakithes*, which means those who do or make *bachala*, does come from the streets, from slang. This term has some similar associations as *koukouloforoi* besides the obvious overlap in terms of actors and activity. They both have disorder, mystery, destruction, and an emotional release or drive as a component of their being. A desire for emotional release, destruction, and mystery is a component of most people's lives, but by putting them in the realm of the Other, of the agitator, there is an attempt to move them out of the realm of normality. Emotional drives for justice, liveliness, and catharsis are made into an unknown Other by their association with these words, once the actions and feelings are Othered the actual people can then be ostracized from discourse and from voice. The weapons employed with the creation of *koukouloforoi* are those of poetics: namely metaphor. Words that describe drives necessary for humanity are associated with those describing 'criminal' phenomena, which remove them from the possibility of realization on mass and also attempt to remove them from the realm of imagining its self-enactment (so they say, as if capitalism doesn't require criminality, as if crime wasn't appealing).

This is also partly why students have been counterposed to *koukouloforoi* so often by news media and popular discourse as well. Students activities, are like those of the parties, they are formal, respectful, unmasked, and are seen as aspiring members of Greek society who are hoping to transform Greece into what it could be (through the proper channels). Because of their position and credentials, students supposedly occupy a place where their voices can be heard, because their demands are articulate and researched. *Koukouloforoi* on the other hand only have the voice which their spectacular actions force upon the national (and global) stage, the riot forces you to look at it, and imposes interest. This is, of course, the media representation of student activities. In reality there is huge overlap between these two 'groups'. Lots of hooded one's are students, and lots of these combative actions take place around universities, as universities have some protected status from the police.

Media representations of *koukouloforoi*, and their need to invent such a term, comes from the necessity of mass media, civilization, and capital to objectify things which cannot be sold so that they can become impotent commodities. To make this a possibility, phenomena have to be made into image, into archetypes which can be associated with histories and fears. What we are talking about is the poetic battlefield, where the powers of dictionaries, encyclopedias, and poets fight poetry, life, slang, and humanity in an attempt to carve up and (re)associate ideas and metaphors with the dead. This is the memorialized dead, the fixed dead. Not the forgotten dead who come alive again in struggles for life. So, the *koukouloforoi* is an archetype which has been invented to be projected onto this lively phenomenon, which doesn't mean it can't be re-weaponized.

What makes *koukouloforoi* such dangerous fire for the media to play with is that it blurs the distinction between politics, fun, and catharsis. This blurring is aided in part by the people who participate in these events who are usually bonded by friendship (and if they aren't, the event does that for them). The cult hero of the *koukouloforoi* can be found everywhere now, it has become a symbol of modern revolt. From Ferguson to Athens to Santiago, the hoods are becoming a locus of unmitigated action, a symbol for movements whose aims are themselves and the associations that swirl around them, who make no demands only poetry. The media stoked the fire too long in its morbid fascination with subaltern, lumpen, criminal, dirty beauty. The fire is spreading, and the broken trees of humanity have become kindling. Revolt is in movement, its self-confidence and daring generalizes itself, and the media in its attempts to associate the phenomena with historical 'evil' has instead attached all of the power of the dead who dreamt of

living, of the real history outside of books, who haunt the world to join their descendants when the change awakens.

A man in a wheelchair

A man in a wheelchair
in a squatted park near my flat
asked me for a cigarette.
He said, "Half is for me...half for my friend."
He then wheeled towards his bench,
facing the street he looked once at me smiling,
pulling out an air-horn which let out a deafening
scream sending a couple hundred pigeons
scattering in unison all over the park.
He was communicating with the busses,
every horn they made he replied with
his own artificial cry. It seemed no one
would look at him, but the horn brought
people to attention, people are aroused by their
annoyance, and he was that.

The story of the liberation of a migrant

One morning, after a discussion in the plateia a previous night about knock-off Adidas over some beers, some people were informed by other people of the need to protect the migrants outside of the economic school in the center of Athens. Recently the police and fascists had come to harass the migrants who peddle their wears (knock-off Adidas and the like) outside the school, beating up and arresting them. This was not only an encroachment of the police on the public space and on the vulnerable, but also on the fortified institutions which are the universities of Greece since the fall of the dictatorship. The selling is done on the outside of the economic school ASOEE, 'outside' the logics of classroom economics. The school has had its funding cut, its study of abstraction has become confused, its own relevance has shown its futility. The school is still packed, the flood of students coming to study their own situation, but in a context with more equations. The jobs aren't here, the ones that are won't be of use as the economic meltdown and SYRIZA dealings made so clear, the jobs that are around are represented along the perimeter of the school.

It is not just on the perimeter, but also on the perimeter of each student's daily life, that there is no money waiting, the only option being the straight path into the fog of a future, which lies on all sides. At the end of the study they will be thrown out from the study and into the study. The universities are also much more diverse in terms of class composition than universities in the US, so the reality and conflicts of the situation aren't a shock. This future for the migrants selling Adidas comes from the lack of the right papers, papers which the students have, but will they deliver? Will the papers that they hope to earn from the completion of university deliver? Most of the students I spoke to had no such aspirations or fantasies and saw their study as a way to stay out of the job market for a couple of years and get cheap housing and food. Their future in the prophesizing of moneys whims seemed as ludicrous as ever. Even the progressive 'socialist' ministers with all the right policies, predictions, weapons, and public support at their back had no power in following through on anything, especially a rehabilitation of the past and a past based on hope. The universities and their protections are in fact a testament to the lack of a future for the young.

Let us stroll through history for a moment.

In 1967 a military dictatorship was established by right-wing generals backed by the US and other NATO allies, who feared that the center coalition parties winning the election would provoke a red infection. This combined with the countries long history of conflict between the left and the right, including a massive civil war. The junta was brutal, exiling 'leftists' to the Greek islands, these islands are a history of 20th century Greece of their own, as they were used by the British under colonial rule as a prison for those struggling against them, by Greeks during the civil war to house communist guerillas, in the junta against leftists (anyone who opposed

the dictatorship including democratists), and more recently as a purgatory for those unfortunate refugees who get caught trying to live.

In 1973 after years of brutal rule, a revolt erupted which emanated from the Polytechnio, it established a pirate radio station, assemblies, and was literally a beacon of light as it had its own generator and the state had cut out the electricity for most of Athens. The occupation of the university ended with a tank crushing down the gates to which students were clinging, which only generalized the revolt in which dozens of people were killed by police. The revolt was successful however, and ended with the death of the dictatorship and a transition to “democracy” (democracy is in quotation marks because the democracy, like the one in Chile, would retain a good amount of the staff and laws of the disempowered junta). One of the first protections set up by the new government was making universities a sanctuary from the police as a token nod to the student revolt. These laws have been slowly dismantled ever since, to the point where over the last decade the protections only exist through custom and public remembrance. The Polytechnio which is strewn with beautiful graffiti and which features one of the biggest squats in Athens (one of the university buildings), has been slowly defanged by the State, by removing almost all of the departments which were housed there, so that now only the architecture school remains, the maintainers of the structure but not its content. This moving of the student population away from an intermingling with the powerful Exarchia history and presence has had mixed results for the state. The campus however still plays an important tactical role as a fort in between Exarchia and one of the two main streets that surround it, and acts like a big, faction neutral squat. A MAT vehicle is always parked outside.

In 2017 it was occupied again by anarchists on the anniversary of the uprising November 17th, and was systematically derailed.

On the perimeter of the school are tables, usually migrant laborers are selling knock-off clothing, sunglasses, bootleg pornos, bags, and sometimes beauty equipment (nail-clippers, combs, etc.). After a particularly brutal beat down of a migrant worker some anarchists decided that they were going to make an intervention, and so showed up in the morning with masks and sticks and waited inside of the cafeteria with subtle eyes on the street, eating free food that was gained through the bullying of school administrators by anarchist’s past. All of the universities I visited in Athens have at least one room dedicated to anarchist projects, a squatted room (steki) with locks of its own, usually stocked with books, helmets, sticks, and music equipment and walls covered with graffiti. These safe houses are embedded in the protected perimeters of the university which are built into the city, a representative of Greece’s once strong welfare state and commitment to education.

The morning was early, anarchists waiting bored smoking in the shade, away from the already scorching summer heat. Their masks and flags grabbing the occasional glance from economic students filing in for summer classes. Some stay at the front of the school some move to the rear entrance. They wait for around 2 hours when suddenly an anarchist with their head poking beyond the entrance gate has their eyes light upon the most blessed vision and a joyous cry erupts from their lips: “Μπάτσοι (Batsi)!” Everyone stands up quickly, throwing their half-smoked cigarettes

to the ground, running out onto the back street where a cop car is sitting in traffic behind some cars. Some people walking by stop to look, and a group of people at a bus stop watch with some interest as a group of fifteen people interrupt their wait by charging loudly towards a cop car. The police in the front seat, quickly look to each other and make the decision to abandon ship. Both doors swing wide, and the police bolt, the anarchists don't chase them down, appeased with the car as sacrifice. Their sticks beat the car furiously, the windows crashing everywhere, glass filling the streets and its insides. The symbol was enough for a second, until one of them yelled and found someone in the back seat. He was terrified, but quickly helped out the back window. An old man at the bus stop still looks completely unfazed. They quickly rush the arrested man inside, and begin slapping each other on the backs, as the flags are washed with a cleaning solution. The air is electric, an unbelievable thing has happened upon this boring morning, an adventure which broke through the hours usually spent staring out the windows of a classroom, the site waking a student from their back of class daydream. As the freed man realizes that the assailants are not going to harm him in anyway, as he probably assumed he was being kidnapped, he quickly explains that the cops were in the middle of bringing him to his court appointment for being caught without papers. His cuffs are still on his hands. The celebrations are cut quickly by thoughts on what to do with this 'victory'.

A pair of bolt cutters are found, and brought out to try and snap the cord, they make a dent, only enough to reveal that there was an attempt to remove them. A disguise is made instead, a long coat found laying around is draped on his back so that only a little bit of the shiny metal peeks out from underneath his sleeves. Calls are made for a car, no one has one, instead directions are written on a tiny piece of paper on how to take the bus to the courthouse, "A short twenty-minute ride, only one bus change. Good luck in the courts!", two people walk him to the stop.

Was this liberation a liberation at all? What are the breaks with normalcy, for whom, and what? The police knew the menace, the sight of the black clad flag bearers, they also knew the pistol on their hip, the prisoner behind them, and each other, and in the second between the shout, the run, and the sight, they had made their decision to avoid duty for a day. The migrant knew of his court date, his fate, his journey, the dead end ahead of him, and the interruption which swirled around him. For the anarchists the day was one of excitement and revenge, but also a proof that they had their own power. The indent that day was not in the cop car window, but the break in the role of the police. The spectacle of violence interrupted the day like a gun blast next to a deaf man's ear. An unnoticed, almost ignored event, as dangerous as it was explosive, but only for those who held the weapons and could play the liberator for a brief moment, a loud secret which could be held in the hearts of those who participated. Those who, on the dance floor later that night on the top of Strefi hill (a hill park in the middle of Exarchia), would give each other a glance and smile at the misdeeds of the day which were now quieted, but lingering in the drum and base like the beat on the car.

Perhaps the police, after having fled, decided to go to a café to discuss how they were going to break it to their boss, and also because they had earned a bit of time off. After talking about those fucking anarchists and how those nihilistic teens made their shit job shittier they wandered back to the office, got yelled at, explained themselves, got yelled at again, and then went back to the beat. After work they split, their uniforms stripped, their paid purposes taken off, they resumed their lives as unappointed unnoticed people, and as persons. One of them, after spending a long day at work and then riding home on the bus, in the packed compartment, stepped on a young woman's foot who startled him with a yell and a curse, a quick apology putting the memory of

the day back under its covers. When he finally arrives at a small apartment in Neo-Philadelphia it is dark out. He pulls some supermarket feta out of the fridge and grabs a slice of bread, eating it and considering the day while smoking, then going to bed, trying to get some sleep before doing the whole thing over again, the image of the group in all black running at him, ready to attack, lingering like the cigarette burn on his rug, before he falls into his sleep.

Maybe the migrant worker, was liberated an hour or two too late, or maybe a few days, or weeks, or years late. A court date had been pressed onto his already bad luck like a seal on a bed of wax. He was working on the street, selling pornos and knock-off crocs when the cops had picked him up. Today was that day, when it would all be decided. Was he going to go to prison and eventually be deported or was something else going to happen? No telling what the other option is because I hadn't heard of any. As he was packed into the back, he wondered what the next year was going to look like. There was no future in store, or none that he had the money to pay for. The streets he had finally become accustomed to were passing by, the heat making sweat drip into his eyes, the thoughts of the friends he made hiding in the back of his mind so as not to lose himself completely to panic and nostalgia. Traffic on the road, and then the sound of a muffled shout breaks his thoughts. Something is coming towards the car, the two officers in the front look at each other and then bolt without saying a word to him. Suddenly the car is surrounded and glass is breaking all around him, he ducks to cover his head, what the hell is going on. One of the figures shouts, the smashing stops and someone grabs his arm trying to help him out the back window. Was he being kidnapped? Why would someone besides the police want to take him? Oh no, the fascists? No, they wouldn't attack the police. The glass is brushed off of his back, the apologies said give a quick relief to the flurry of motions. He is quickly rushed inside the university into a room, escorted by, getting a better look at their all black uniforms and youthful sensibility, most definitely anarchists. More apologies are said for not noticing him, this is a theme in the life of the migrant and the main tool in possession against the police: being hidden unnoticed. But he had been caught, first by the police, then by the law, then by the police again on the way to the law, but the clean chain of bureaucratic niceties accompanied by brutal beatings had been broken in a most unruly and incapable way, the interruption was joyful despite its impotency. They took out a bolt cutter which couldn't make its way through the handcuffs, and then a ratty blazer put on him to cover his chains, but he was smiling now. He asked for directions and they escorted him to the bus, on the two-minute walk to the stop he probably received two hundred slaps on the back and shouts of good luck. The bus ride was short and he stepped out onto a hot day, walking in, 'voluntarily' to the ominous marble and cement court building and a year in prison.

I'm at a protection party at a new squat

I'm at a protection party at a new squat,
an all-nighter till the cops come,
social awkwardness is a kind of foreignness
in itself, not understanding a word doesn't help.
I've grown so much I've become a baby again.

Meetings upon meetings, graffiti
together and a photo-op,
a guard asked us to please
come back at night.

During a riot you throw stones,
molotovs, getting closer till
you are theirs.

When they are thoroughly
teased and charged they
bolt longingly towards you
knowing they can't make the catch.
They are weak in that moment,
and susceptible to your fire.

Poetry knows no borders
it doesn't stop at the body
it meets between them.
Radical eyes look for nakedness
in clothed doors, for fear in walls,
and love in stone.

Cracks open for humans
and water alike, but water
makes its own through erosion.
The hammer loves briefly and it's
effectiveness is determined
by precision and power.
Despite what you may have heard
you must be sharp with a hammer,
not with bodies (unless the hammer's
object is lesson or lesion),
a house or a nail or a word or a hammer
must travel light.

Προσφυγικά (Prosfygika)

Prosfygika is a squat in the center of Athens, about a 30-minute walk or 6-minute bus ride from the plateia of Exarchia. “Prosfyga” means refugee, and the buildings have served that name faithfully. The apartment complexes out of which it is based were built in the 1930’s to house Greeks who were removed forcibly from Turkey and traded with the Turkish government for Turks based in Greece, who were also forcibly removed. In a mutual exchange of claimed identities, lives were captured and roots cut to encourage their growth: these two mortal enemies expelled each other from their bodies as a sign of good faith, a testimony to the internationalism of nationalism, and to their shared willingness to sacrifice reality for the imaginary project. The apartments have been the asylum of those at the whims of their fatherlands nationalist agendas: first Greeks were removed from their homes of hundreds of years for a political stunt, now today’s refugees whose homes were destroyed by bombs that fell from speeches and dotted lines join those whose houses were closed by eviction and poverty. The building acts as a visible memory of not only their struggles (seen in the graffiti, repairs, banners, and families), but also of the greater history of Athens (the facades are still pot-marked from British shelling during the civil war). By the front of the complex is a building which is being transformed into a tea shop, where a cup of chai will be sold for half a euro; in front of that is an old memorial to one of the communist guerillas of the civil war.

The squat is probably the largest in Athens, accommodating around 500 people, the vast majority of whom are squatters. The Greek government promised redevelopment plans which have been in the works for the last 20 years, and in the early 2000’s the state bought most of the apartments in an attempt to destroy the complex, erase its past – and, of course, make some money. The residents fought the court, and over the course of their trials and battles with the bureaucracy they ended up squatting their own apartments. This battle with the state brought together the extremely disparate inhabitants into a more cohesive community. Out of this struggle was born a popular assembly, which has generated one of the most powerful symbols of revolt in Athens. The complex is in the center of enemy territory, to an almost comical degree, and is perhaps more surrounded by antagonists than Exarchia. Its cruel and obnoxious next-door neighbors are the Athens court of Appeals, the Supreme Court of Greece, and The Athens Police Headquarters.

The refugees living in these squats need papers which they cannot get because of the lawmakers next door, and when they try to act without them they get a visit from the other next-door neighbors, and when they complain too loudly they get locked up in the basement of their other neighbors. These institutions already attract fascists, but recently they had an influx. Several leaders of the Golden Dawn were facing trial for charges, which included possession of quite a number of illegal guns, in the supreme court building. The fascists had to show solidarity with their leaders and so came out in mass, and what did they find right next door? A gigantic housing complex filled with refugees and anarchists, since they assembled with anger in their hearts and their enemies of the street were right in front of them, skirmishes ensued. The police eventually arrived to back up and protect the fascists.

In the days that followed this skirmish, the assembly was made more popular and began to make new plans, and to try to do what revolutionaries do, invite uncertainty to the party. Both paid off. The next day of the trial people were made ready and informed. When the fascists and police did come they found themselves equipped for dealing with “militants” but were completely unequipped and unable to deal with elderly women tossing cobblestones at them while holding their handkerchiefs over their noses and mouths to combat the tear gas. The barrage that rained down on the police was not just of objects, but shouts from all walks of life, and images which they hadn’t dreamed could affront the public vision of democracy (a project which in Greece probably has more weight to it than the US). The assembly had prepared the way, and then stepped out of the way, for the democracy that goes without a name. The battle was decisively won, and Prosfygyka became the dark spot in the middle of the legitimation center of Athens.

Let me explicate a little more about the squat. At the beginning of the 2000’s the complex was quite empty, and it was primarily squatted out of necessity. People who are homeless will look for homes, and homes without people will cry out through their empty windows to those who will take care of and love them. Those people came from all types of backgrounds refugees, migrants, the unemployed, homeless people, junkies being treated at the nearby hospital, anarchists, punks, political escapees. But they were all refugees. They were refugees from the capitalist war. Those who had been counted among the dead, despite their breath, those who had dodged bombs, left prisons with nowhere to go, and had no hope or chance with the culture or the future; those swept into the cracks. But the cracks are deep, and cracks can be made into tunnels.

The necessity bred community (which I guess now has become a trope, of the disaster communist), and as the needs began to be met they bred new needs but of a much different kind. The refugee’s covert existence of hiding their expropriation and therefore hiding their own survival and existence had become vibrant through their successes. Their conspiracy created a community which succeeded well enough to attract attention. When they were forced into a defensive position of conflict instead of sticking to avoidance and staying underground, they had given themselves the opportunity to show off their work through a series of spectacular battles with surprising consequences. The attraction of evictors and the dangers of the state had brought these people to a new (and very old) place of hiding, a place meant as a dusty, protective, blanket to problems fundamental problems to capitalism and Greek society, namely the tribulations of nationalism and the failure of the state to concretely provide for its people or even its own image of the nationalist project. The state needs squatters, without them Athens would face a drastic increase in homelessness (a massive problem already) and a drastic increase in the population being housed in prisons. The Greek state unlike the US state is not equipped to deal with mass incarceration and doesn’t seem likely to be in the future. The dangers of squatting in Prosfygyka were enormous; if a person was arrested they would only have to be moved a couple hundred yards to the police station, and then a couple hundred yards in the other direction for their court date.

Let us take the squatters as they are and move on from the history of the past to the history of the present, looking constantly around, bewildered and in need of solidarity and friendship as a cure for the constant dislocation of chronology and permanence. Prosfygyka is a squat filled with refugees of all sorts, and in coordinating the basic needs of the squat made an assembly. This assembly faced some difficulties from its diversity, mainly from the language problem, which was overcome with time, work, and acclimation, as people increasingly learned Greek and English or found one or two people from each language to act as bridges. One of the main strengths of

Prosfygika is its international character, which began materially and became intentional. The assemblies are conducted in Turkish, Greek, Arabic, Spanish, and English (often Kurdish and Farsi as well). The assemblies are not separate factions which coordinate, but are a cohesive if sometimes slow-moving unity of pluralities. The peoples position as neighbors of necessity, quickly made the economic and political situation of the utmost importance, not only as the common link, but also as the grounds on which they navigate. Barriers breed breakers, as seeds break soil. The barrier of language was not only overcome by the common assembly, where everyone could speak to each other with moderate mediations (still able to listen to each other's bodies and expressions unmediated), but also through the most commonly spoken language on the planet: food and hunger. Two important food-based measures became a link between Prosfygika's inhabitants, and also between Prosfygika and Exarchia. The first was the bakery, a place where every week people from the squat and from squats around Athens would come and bake their own bread at the bakery, paying what they could and helping each other create food, in an effort not only to feed themselves, but to connect the larger squatting community, and create their own internal economy, with the hopes of becoming economically impervious to attacks from the outside. These baking mornings were often accompanied by political debates, guarding the perimeters, discussions of necessities in terms of infrastructure and expansion, and long beautiful silences. The second was a farm defense. The grounds of Prosfygika are dry and hard, and below the dust, there is probably concrete (although who knows, the buildings are somewhat old). Not only that, the activity in the squat can be surveilled fairly easily, and disrupted, because the perimeters are permeable and open. Gardening was the solution, and so planting began with fruit trees along the perimeter to act as a wall, a wall that could serve as nourishment for the inhabitants, a way of cleaning up the landscape and improving the soil, of increasing possibility for resistance by removing a method of economic control (hunger). It also might result in your apricots tasting like tear gas, but this is living!

An old antifascist on a bike

An old antifascist on a bike
took me in his sidecar,
relaying a kindness and a story
of growing in the shadow of
the guerillas in Greece.

Their fight, their protection,
their eventual extermination.

Working the fields at four years
and fleeing into the forest when
his mother saw the planes.

That night I dreamt I was with
my high school friends in a hotel
drifting in space.

When I was finally ready it was too late.

I understood death as a technocrat,
I had to finish packing, the journey must run,
what ethics does survival bring,
but I had to accomplish my duty in accorded time.

International Psychosis

It's been a year, but Athens still burns like a dumpster lit on fire and put into the middle of the road of my life. The dumpster, filled with the debris, the refuse, the memories I thought forgotten, the little details I hadn't thought important enough to keep from the landfills (the unconscious of commodity life), all set ablaze and in their fiery light filling my skies with their smoke, as they dissipate into the atmosphere. Last night, as I attempted to fall asleep next to a loved one, the heat of that fire and the smell of that smoke wafted into the cold room bedroom of my shitty college dorm housing, and the feeling of Athens wouldn't leave me. Despite the internet I have become sequestered with my memories, and my reaching back to the past which is simultaneously a reach across the digital to the world where my comrades are still fighting, has given me few replies, leaving me alienated from the weight of this dream which I called my life. I found out a comrade died in the struggle which I had thought to die in, leaving me disoriented in the wasteland of the empty (feeling) American political landscape. Here there aren't struggles that would call my comrades to die in, and I cannot tell if that is a good thing or not anymore.

The dry heat and "militancy" of the desert of Rojava once called me, like so many Western leftists, through its projected imaginary, through the digital portal, and through my devaluation of my own life, which had given me the impetus to make it "into something", by which I mean a call to die for something, and I was ready. Now it seems I have abandoned my suicidal hero fantasies, but nothing has replaced them, except for my own desperation and increasing reliance on the presence of a transcendent struggle waiting just around the corner which will wake me from my senses like the smell of burning food, but instead sits eternally on the supermarket shelves waiting to be cooked. I am overcome with a desperation that makes this whole project lose its immediacy and its poignancy, and the struggle which awakened me now seems in vain, but maybe it's just the walls around me muffling the horizons.

"The Spanish Civil War of our day" I was ready to believe and in believing die like those in the international brigades fighting on ground but never for ground, maybe for a portrait of me which sits by a lamppost or gets posted online. I met a PKK fighter in Greece, we talked about revolution, and I argued with him over what he had experienced, like a fool. We could barely communicate with each other, so instead we got acquainted over beers and chess. I lost every game and he bought the beers. His kindness shined through the crude gestures we were both forced to make to understand each other, his mimicking of a machine gun firing, that guerilla warfare is not revolution, that he only read Apo in the years he fought, that in his years the only change he'd seen was comrades leaving and dying around him. How do you write about something which you only come to know by being far away from it? Everything turns into love poems or repudiations and disconnections. I was given love, but maybe by people with whom I couldn't share a vision, people whom I betray with every sentence which questions them in this one-sided conversation through the computer screen. I will not stop loving them, and I pray that they will not die in this struggle.

Luckily, until this point I had never known anyone personally who had died in “the struggle”, even though I’m not sure if the struggle he died in was his struggle or “the struggle”. Now I believe it isn’t my struggle, is a good death the one you choose? I hope he had friends around him when the Turkish bombs landed on his life filled body. He was an experienced fighter in all manners of the word, inside and outside the anarchist movement, but how much can spirit and strength rail against the cold plummet of a piece of metal? Many people including myself are drawn to Exarchia because of its fantastic displays of pyrotechnics: living inside the heart of an explosion, our bodies casing, our spirits powder, and our contact spark and friction. It felt like we finally had room to fly from the ground like saplings and bloom. Each squat was our planting bed, protecting us from the harsh weather, allowing us to conspire and gather resources, but which also identified us as a separate species in the forest of Athens. We are revolutionaries not because we are separate and militant, but because we are vigorous and mischievous, because we are loving, and because we are unafraid of illegality in the face of our own immiseration. But we are not gangs, and some have been lured into this, that our illegality and our self-defense are what make us revolutionaries, that our friends and networks can protect us and move us. But we aim at transcendence from the game of cat and mouse, from zones of defense, from work, and from capitals cruel cradle.

Despite its failings Exarchia was alive, the roots went deep and linked all manner of divergent measures. In its fractions and factions, in its debauchery and ascetics, there was a thing that couldn’t be broken: the lack of separation between politics and life. All of our struggles were born from our surroundings, and all of our actions mingled superfluously with the social life, without becoming stuck in the word choices that define cliques or other continuations of high-school social dynamics leftists seem so fond of. Beers were kept out of meetings, but they were not kept out of the streets, and once emptied they were filled with the gas people pretended they would fill their imaginary cars with, and tossed at the cops who would be working like any other day, kept interested only by their own ideological persuasions and the speed being snorted in their busses as they watched the game that their bets were riding on. What will jobs make of us?

There are no jobs in Athens, which is why the squats are thankfully not the property of the anarchists alone, and neither is the looting of supermarkets; the anarchists just added style and pizzazz and made them a regularity. When a supermarket was raided by the anarchists, the cashier didn’t say a word, and barely even looked up from the register. One woman asked in an annoyed way why they were cutting the line, but the day in the market continued as per usual afterwards, and did not shut down early. With wheels of cheese stuffed into suitcases, and gleeful smiles wrapped around their heads, another month’s food was secured: another month’s survival and, with it, a feast.

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