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Pacifism

Tom Nomad

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7/15/2020 (written in 2009)

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form of definitionality becomes pure simulacra, a generated construct that by design exceeds everyday life and forms its Subject in the cryogenic time of Newtonian equivalence. This becoming-cryogenic prevents any form of nonviolence from responding to attempts by the forces of the state to enforce stability over a situation, the tactics are set, the participants are “responsible” and harmless, and the action becomes nothing but theatre, and ineffective theatre at that.

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rejects the equivalence of situationality posited by the state and its civil disturbance approaches.

Conclusion

The practical meaning of the tactical impasse of nonviolence is that the Subject *qua* nonviolence frames and limits acts through the definitionality of a fluid nonviolence immobilized in the nonviolence guideline. In other words, the adherence to an abstract nonviolence supersedes the tactical necessities of the situation itself, it is nothing but institutionalized ineffectiveness. There are a series of equivalences made in the calculations of the nonviolent action. First, the guidelines are determined through the naming and defining of the concept of nonviolence which comes to supersede the act and agents themselves, substituting the equivalence for the actual participants and situation. This is the very same move made by the state, just in a microcosmic form. Secondly, the Subject *qua* state is taken as the plane of engagement, they are the Subject of consent, doing nothing but reinforcing the Newtonian equivalence of the state as such and generating another appropriation of mass politics — negating the actual existence of actual agents. In positing this series of equivalences, the defining of nonviolence comes to supersede the actual goals of the action itself in favor of building mass consent and support for nonviolent tactics and politics. Can someone explain to me how this is different than the assumption of mass movementism from Leninism to electoral neoliberalism?

Nonviolence refuses to engage in tactics that would be effective to rather serve the interest of preserving the mass image of nonviolence. But how is nonviolence possible in an apparatus that has formed us in the image of total war? To define nonviolence means to section it off from violence; but if everything is saturated with violence, the battlefield abolished, then this

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facilitate actions at the 2008 Republican National Convention protests.

“The principles are: 1) Our solidarity will be based on a respect for a diversity of tactics and the plans of other groups, 2) The actions and tactics used will be organized to maintain a separation of time or space, 3) Any debates or criticisms will stay internal to the movement, avoiding any public or media denunciations of fellow activists and events, 4) We oppose any state repression of dissent, including surveillance, infiltration, disruption and violence. We agree not to assist law enforcement actions against activists and others”
(<http://www.nornc.org/st-paul-principles/>)

These have become the standard point of departure for discussion and deployment of destabilization actions, which has been useful in forging an agreement between various groups and collectives around tactical limits. This framework is a fluid and dynamic way of making sure that all groups — regardless of tactics — have space for their own desires, regardless of how totally ineffective many of these forms are. Diversity of tactics at once rejects the equivalence of all acts by generating an “ecosystem of resistance” (a term used a lot on the ground in St Paul during the RNC) which knows no limitations. This move away from the essentialized act creates a space which is always already destabilized to the degree that there is a multiplicity of actions, either announced publicly or not, while still making sure that there is a support infrastructure in place for legal and medic support. It is an approach based in a approach firmly rooted in theories of the multitude; “for Spinoza, the *multitudo* indicates plurality which persists as such in the public scene, in collective action, in the handling of communal affairs, without converging into a One” (Virno, 21). It generates an environment of potential non-reducibility, an environment which

another form of equivalence, nor are all violences the same — a point missed by many pacifists in their admonishment. War machines and the reappropriation that intends to counter them are fundamentally different, yet it is problematic to begin to argue for the tactical universality of violence without also generating a negotiable equivalence.

This seems to have landed us at an impasse, given the terms of the discussion as it exists. We clearly cannot speak of a tactical nonviolence, which becomes separated from the particularity of action in tactical scenarios through its retreat into moral generalities. We also cannot speak of a generalized violence without falling into the same trap. However, the question is not an impossibility; only the attempt to have a singular total answer is. The reality of our scenario is that tactics shift, goals differ and situations are fluid. As such, the question of the correct, or proper, tactics is one that is often discussed in the abstract, even if that abstraction eliminates the subject of the discussion, tactics itself. If we are to approach the state as a fluid, complex logistics, rather than some sort of monolithic entity or reductive concept of a mythical consensus, then we have to come to terms with what is actually occurring; that we are placing ourselves into situations of acute conflict, which are complex, kinetic, shifting situations which we are doing the best we can to survive and be as effective as possible. Just as with perspectives that argue to a universalized violence, nonviolence is also completely incapable of responding to, or even discussing, actual material dynamics and actual tactical scenarios without preconditions and overabstractions.

One recent approach to moving beyond this impasse — outside of agreeing to disagree — is the discourse of a diversity of tactics. Employing a diversity of tactics creates the space for agency to be situationally, politically and positionally dependent; one engages in the tactics with which they have a desire to engage. To illustrate a real-world application of this paradigm, examine the St. Paul Principles, developed to

“Put quite plainly, nonviolence ensures a state monopoly on violence. States- the centralized bureaucracies that protect capitalism; preserve a white supremacist, patriarchal order; and implement imperialist expansion- survive by assuming the role of sole legitimate purveyor of violent force within a territory. Any struggle against oppression necessitates a conflict with the state. Pacifists do the state’s work by pacifying the opposition in advance. States, for their part, discourage militancy within the opposition, and encourage passivity”

— Peter Gelderloos. *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (2007, South End Press)

Introduction

Perhaps one of the most exhausting debates within “activist” movements is the discourse concerning the effectiveness of “violent” vs “nonviolent” tactical sets. For numerous reasons, and for quite some time, this debate has gone nowhere. In many instances, both sides of this debate make sweeping generalizations about the other, which engages tactics on the level of effectiveness without examining the very constructed abstractions inherent in either approach. This debate has gained some energy once again with the success of insurrectionary anarchist tactics at the IMF/World Bank demonstrations in the Fall of 2007, the Republican National Convention in 2008, and the recent uprising in Greece; all at a time when the mainstream pacifist antiwar movement has been relegated to the dustbin of ineffective social movements, and one that sees many in the “official” Left defecting in droves to join the “Obamanation” (as many anarchists have come to call the recent cult of personality around the election campaign of Barack Obama). Many involved in social movements have to come to grips with one

stunning fact that many of us seem to forget: none of the tactical sets that we have employed have resulted in a substantial victory over the moves of capital and state. Despite this, I cannot count how many times I have been subjected to a lecture from an old pacifist claiming “Well, these are the tactics that we have always used, and they have worked so far.” If the current social and political condition is what results from nonviolence *working*, I would hate to see what happens when it fails! What this all comes down to is the reality that nonviolence has not worked as a force of social change, and that historical precedence of a tactic does not guarantee its legitimacy. This historical precedent is just another glaring example of the near-total inability of pacifists to make sweeping social upheaval a possibility – for this reason we must deal a critical blow to the legitimacy of nonviolence as an organizing tactic that hopes to threaten the order of things as they exist.

Nonviolence has become accepted by the state as a generally harmless form of action, a classic example being the action done in front of the White House on September 26, 2005. Over 150 people – including the activist celebrity Cindy Sheehan – sat down in front of the gate of the White House to wait to be arrested. Outside of the utter pointlessness of this action (as if the state cares if people get locked up for political action in an age of vast prison expansion and privatization), there were details that many of the observers of this action were unaware of. The organizers had told the police that they were planning an action, and entered into a process of negotiation with them a month prior. They came to agree that people would be arrested and not cuffed, walked over to a processing van which would be on site, and asked to pay \$50, then they would be released. In essence, organizers negotiated with the police an agreement to make the action the least disruptive that it possibly could be. This is where the nonviolent paradigm has led us – the question is why? I suggest that this is not an unintended

anarchists off the street from behind while the pigs attacked from the front. Are the actions of those employed by the organizers to “keep the peace” between radicals and the state not replicating the very form of action which the state treats as its limit before the attempting to control a situation by force – allowing the participants to police themselves and mitigate any potential destabilization within their ranks – here in a very literal sense?

I personally witnessed one of the Declaration of Peace actions occur at the Hart Senate Office Building where the organizers and pigs negotiated the terms upon which the demonstration would be able to occur. All signs and banners were confiscated, and activists were told that if they talked they would be arrested. In the end, a mass of 50 or so people stood in the lobby of the building – silently and without signs – until they were all arrested one-by-one and put on a bus to be dropped in another area of town. Following the action, the organizers attempted to present this as a victory – to which I say again, if this is victory I would hate to see defeat.

Diversity Of Tactics

Naturally, much like the Subject *qua* nonviolence, there is also a possibility for the Subject *qua* violence. If it is accepted fact that violence and total war are conditions of possibility for everyday life in the age of globalization, then while violence is endemic to all relations of power the construction of a Subject around the definitionality of tactical violence recreates the problematic equivalence of the Subject *qua* nonviolence. If nonviolence, in its positing of a generalized equivalence, creates another form of stability and a space for negotiation with the state, that does not mean that one can generate the ideology of violence. Violence, if it is to maintain the potential for destabilization of the political apparatus, cannot become

constitution of agency, which in turn limits the agent; when action is defined, and the possibilities of existence in that moment limited, the autonomy and agency of that who acts is also consequently stolen away. We can see this theft of autonomy clearly in the tendency of pacifists to form “peace police” groups to police the actions of others. It became common at demonstrations to endure the presence of people clad in orange or green vests tasked with preventing people from violating these guidelines and acting as a de-escalating buffer between the crowd and the pigs. By the inclusion of these “Peace Police,” nonviolent organizers attempt to mitigate as much destabilization as possible by forcibly limiting the actions of the more insurrectionary among us, thus effectively prohibiting us from manifesting a resistance that departs from our lives and contexts by substituting our positionality for one within an abstracted nonviolent Subject.

A sobering example of this took place at the first major anti-war movement march in DC following the commencement of this most recent phase of the genocidal Iraq War, wherein the pigs attacked the black bloc while still on the permitted march route. Instead of allowing space for self-defense and tactical fluidity, the organizer-appointed “Peace Police” physically prevented the bloc from leaving the permitted route to get to a space that was more easily defensible. This resulted in a shouting match that eventually escalated into a fist fight between anarchists and “peace police”, all while still attempting to repel a police assault on the protest. The march ended when the pigs decided to tear gas and charge the crowd; most of the pacifists ran, leaving the bloc to defend 35,000 people trapped in a park fearing arrest and further brutalization by the state. While the bloc ultimately prevented the pigs from entering the park — giving everyone else space to rest and recover — it resulted in a slew of broken bones and arrests within the bloc. Meanwhile, the bloc once again had to fend off the “Peace Police,” who were attempting to de-escalate the situation by attempting to push

consequence, but rather a mentality which is inherent to the nonviolent perspective.

We need to first examine the ontological assumptions that structure the kernel of nonviolence. Two pieces of writing stand out in particular in how well they represent the two most common arguments for nonviolence outside of those offered religious / new ageism (which are based on the mass-authoritarian imposition of religious norms over movements rather than a ground-up tendency toward nonviolence upon which this piece intends to focus). The first piece is “The Politics of Nonviolent Action” by Gene Sharp, a tactician on a series of “nonviolent” campaigns, well-known and often cited (and often challenged) theorist and historian of nonviolence. In this piece, Sharp puts forward the common belief that nonviolent struggle is necessary to create a nonviolent world. He bases this theory around an articulation of a networked idea of political power; that the state persists in its actions because of structuring of social consent, and that nonviolent action presents a mechanism to hinder undesirable actions by the state while constructing the basis for a new political paradigm through the exercise of popular or constituent power. The second piece worth examining is the anarchist pamphlet “You Can’t Blow Up A Social Relationship”, which presents an argument uniquely suited to the framework of anti-authoritarian movements. The central argument made in the pamphlet is that revolutionary violence is a “strategy of impatience,” (12) and a characteristically vanguardist tactical set that presents nothing but authoritarian possibilities. The arguments within these two pieces mutually reinforce each other in several interesting ways (which we examine later) — but perhaps most fundamentally they share the common assumption of the legitimacy of mass politics and the pure ideality of the state. This assumption of the nature of the state and our ability to withhold consent from its perpetuation forms the crux of their arguments and would have to be the case in

order for nonviolence to be more than an individual aesthetic morality in one's self-discovery quest. The very contradictory nature of reality illustrates that this assumption is also the basis of their collective failure — and thus, the pivot-point that leads to the latent authoritarianism of nonviolence.

Basis For Nonviolence

Before attempting to move further, perhaps it is necessary to draw a simple distinction, to identify what we are concerned with here. Many nonviolent actions are carried out for reformist goals, for example the mainstream antiwar movement or other protests aimed at putting political pressure on the state spurred onward by popular demonstrations of grievance with the system and its functions. For many of us engaged in political movements, a pig in makeup is still obviously a pig — putting restrictions on police violence still makes it police violence, and making capitalism “ethical” (a complete impossibility) still preserves the forced equivalence and channeling of everyday life through the commodity form as condition of possibility. Reformist movements are worth even less than the wasted paper, money and gas spent on mobilizing huge spectacles of conformity. What we prefer to focus on is the *destabilizing potentiality* of the tactics and ontological frameworks of nonviolence. Put another way, the only paradigm of nonviolence that is even worth considering is some set of tactics amounting to “revolutionary nonviolence”. All other forms, because they do not even maintain the illusion of attempting to combat the violence endemic in capitalism, are merely a neoliberal lifestyle choice.

The position of a revolutionary nonviolence has been argued by such widely divergent people as The Catholics Workers, Crass, and Albert Einstein. The actions that have emerged from this tradition are spectacular and tactically

tential to challenge the state on their original premise — that a date should be set for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq or else trigger a wave of direct action across the US. Any entropic potential which the mobilization possessed dissipated upon the unilateral institution of nonviolence guidelines by the organizing group. The Declaration Of Peace guidelines set the parameters upon which actions will be carried out:

- *Our attitude will be one of nonviolence, openness and respect toward all we encounter.*
- *We will use no violence, verbal or physical, toward any person.*
- *We will not destroy or damage any property.*
- *When engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience, we will accept the consequences of our actions.*
- *We will not carry anything that could be construed as a weapon*
- *We will not bring or use alcohol or drugs (except for medical purposes).*

(<http://declarationofpeace.org/nonviolence-guidelines>)

Under these guidelines any participant cannot be stoned, hostile towards the pigs, smash windows, and must voluntarily allow themselves to be arrested- need I say more? The very framework prevents confrontation or any attempt to destabilize a situation. The goal of these actions is to “invite the majority in this country to take steps to call for an end to the US war in Iraq.” Thus we return to the stated goal of nonviolent action to encourage the building of the mass nonviolent Subject — the Subject of nonconfrontation. The generation of the Subject *qua* nonviolence exceeds and limits the potential for action, and thus the potential for the

Recall the two fundamental characteristics of the nonviolence discourses analyzed earlier: that pacifists approach the state as a pure ideality which — and this is the second point of agreement — can be combated through mass noncooperation. The state as the state of technique and stabilization responds to acts of destabilization to the degree that they are potentially entropic. This leads our nonviolence proponents into their ideologically self-defeating trap. The mass Subject of nonviolence is the Subject of necessary mass action, or unified and striated action, based in the definitionality of nonviolence. So they become presented with a choice: the Subject of nonviolence — always already generated as an equivalence- can engage in only those acts that are limited in the potential for destabilization. If the action carried out is not effective, if it fails to generate a potential destabilization (most nonviolent actions fall into this category), then the action defeats itself. If the action does become effective, then the violence of the state — which forms the condition of possibility for the state - goes unopposed. The nice pacifists sit in the road till they either get bored with the police escort or get dispersed through the use of force. The posited equivalence of the Subject *qua* nonviolence is, like all Newtonian moves, an equivalent impossible to act situationally; thus it is no wonder that the pacifists almost never achieve anything.

Peace Police

The ineffectiveness and technocratic aspects of nonviolence manifest most practically in the sets of nonviolence guidelines that many of us have grown completely sick of being handed printed upon small fliers before every mass demonstration that we choose to attend. Many of these sets of rules tend to be very similar — as such here is the guideline set by the Declaration of Peace. This was an antiwar campaign which had some po-

diverse, and have ranged from the “nonviolent” barricading of a military research lab in Pittsburgh, the “nonviolent” breaking and entering into draft offices and subsequent arsons of draft records, the “nonviolent” sawing-down of telephone poles at NORAD which connected global positioning satellite dishes from the central computer infrastructure, the “nonviolent” hacking the US military missile targeting system which delayed the invasion of Iraq (unfortunately only by 48 hours), etc. In other words, nonviolent actions without the goal of reform can be effective at sabotage and disruption given the right circumstances, clandestine planning and strategic structure. Despite these moments of rupture, is there a greater possibility for nonviolent acts to smash the state apparatus?

Many pacifists take their lead from Sharp, who at many points described himself as a “tactical pacifist”, and notable in that his vision of nonviolence departs from a discussion on the functioning of political power. He states,

“There appears to be two views of the nature of power. One can see people as dependent upon good will, the decisions and the support of their government, or any other hierarchical system to which they belong. Or, conversely, one can see that government or system dependent on the people’s good will, decisions and support” (Sharp, 8).

The division that Sharp illustrates here lies between understanding of the state as an entity as such which controls and oppresses the actions within its area of control, and an understanding of the state as the structuring of consent. Sharp goes on to argue that the structuring of political violence is the structuring of violence to combat the state *qua* *monolith*. In other words, what Sharp lays out is a matrix in which the state can only be viewed through two lenses, as a complex relationship of theoretical investments which structures a form of consent —

a sort of philosophical state — and a monolithic material structure which represses through force. From this simple reductionism, Sharp then proceeds to argue that political violence can only function to attack the state as a monolithic structure of force, which is bound to fail. There are a wide array of issues with this view, including the vast historical reductionism that lays at the heart of this matrix; but most problematically, this simplistic matrix is grounded in a fundamental misunderstanding of how logistics of force function, how dispersed apparatuses of force can emerge, and how this complex dynamic of shifting force is the only actual way that we can understand the space through which ideas can leave the conceptual space to be imposed materially through force. By misunderstanding how dispersed logistical force functions, Sharp renders himself incapable of speaking of the state in a material way, in the sense of actions taken, and as a result, is incapable of understanding the relationship between ideas and action, let alone the tactical logistics of state action, without which it is impossible to speak of tactics at all.

As Paolo Virno argues, the state is the entity which turns multitudes into people (21), it functions to the degree that it can eliminate difference and impose sameness, and as such presents itself as equivalence, as a force which creates sameness. Though this seems abstract, we experience this constantly through law, the imposition of sovereign determinations of how we must act, and the concept of citizenship, the transformation of a person into a person as defined by the state. Within the Newtonian assumption of equivalence, the equivalence posited is an ontological determination — that of the necessary equivalence of like and like. The positing of the Newtonian move — the generation of the frozen temporality of the equivalence — in being ontological is a claim on space-time generally, it names some and space as nothing other than an expression of that equivalence, that definition imposed through state action. This is borne out in practical

facts. In other words, they will attempt to develop a matrix of escalation, moving from warnings to disperse to shows of force and finally escalating force (2–13).

Current crowd control doctrine places an emphasis on crowd dispersal. Forced dispersal may result in a crowd breaking up into multiple groups that scatter over a large area. This may pose even greater public order problems and may pose a continued threat to control forces. A crowd is often controlled better by means of containment (confining its activities to a given area). A crowd has limited duration, and its numbers are likely to diminish as individual needs take precedence over those of the crowd (2–22).

This all provides the revolutionary anti-authoritarian with valuable insight into the mindset of the pigs within the state. The goal of the pigs is not to prevent actions, nor to put a blanket level of force around the action itself; rather the goal is to respond to destabilization with increasing armed stability. The main variable within in the approaches laid out here is that the pigs need to have a situation which they can generalize and respond to. The manual states, “forced dispersal may result in a crowd breaking up into multiple groups scattered over a large area. This may pose even greater public order problems and may pose a continued threat to control forces” (2–22). In other words, the decentralization of insurrectionary violence generates a potential entropy within their strategic framework. The concern of the pigs is to contain and de-escalate the situation, by force if necessary. The state tolerates and even solicits certain political acts (notably, large self-regulating nonviolent demonstration actions), in order to maintain the myth of political freedom within the state apparatus to the degree that these acts are emptied of their destabilizing and entropic properties.

Nonviolence plays neatly into the state’s strategy of containment and mitigation — and that is why pacifists pose no threat.

disturbance operations, it is this particular manual upon which that most of the police civil disturbance operations manuals are based, including the recently-released RNC Civil Disturbance Manual used by the St Paul Police Department. The main goal of the procedures outlined in the manual are based on the generation of equivalences in order to respond to a situation in order to maintain stability, but not necessarily to end all political acts – thus preserving the illusion of acceptable political expression within the confines of state surveillance. Beyond this, Field Manual 3–19.15 is the standard operations manual for crowd control situations – repeatedly cited and mimicked by pigs all over the country learning how to deal with the rise in political demonstrations. The manual proceeds by generating a series of categories of analysis. Firstly, the crowd is analyzed and positioned into three classes: “public disorder” is when a small crowd is gathering; “public disturbance” is when a crowd begins to chant or engage in mild actions like marching or non-violently blocking a road; and finally, “riot” when the crowd begins to engage in property destruction or other forms of violence (1–5). “Commanders must be aware of the possibility that some individuals or groups within an organized demonstration may have the intent to cause disruption, incite violence, destroy property, and provoke authorities” (1–3). Their pre-action preparation lays out a series of considerations for the pigs to take into account; they are advised to avoid confrontation, focus on prevention, and define goals beforehand. “Crowd situations are highly unpredictable, but one thing seems certain: confrontation will likely cause crowd resistance. When pushed, people tend to resist opposition to the realization of their purpose” (2–5). It goes on to recommend that the pigs communicate with the “leaders” of the protest (which in the context of anarchist blocs has led to some quite funny situations with very confused pigs) in order to form a working relationship which results in “protest groups largely policing themselves” (2–7). If this fails, the pigs then move into what they call scaleable ef-

experience; the state is an apparatus which frames, limits, and channels actions into acceptable channels – legalistic or informal. This activity of generalization, however, is not simply an ideological process, which would assume a total sameness in how different persons understand ideas. It is also not borne out of the activities of a monolithic structure, which does not exist without this sameness already being existent.

Rather, the state functions as a complex mechanism. On one hand, the state departs from defining existence based on the declarations of the sovereign (that one or those that hold power). To the degree that we approach existence as unique, that we approach those that exist as unique, and to the degree that we assume that our actions have effects which change the conditions we exist within, in even simple ways, then nothing can possibly function monolithically. Rather, the state is a logistics, constructed from the attempt to structure cohesion in the midst of difference and historical fluctuation, which deploys force in an attempt to end difference, eliminate historical flux, to structure existence through force; a paradoxical process of utilizing a logistics grounded in difference (those that make up the actions of the logistics) and operated through actions which are supposed to have effects, only to eliminate difference and the effects of actions or historical flux. Everyday over a million people get up, put on uniforms, and go to work in the bureaucracies and control mechanisms of the state, every cop makes a decision every day to be a cop. Hobbes surmises:

“The only way to erect such a Common Power...is, to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, onto one Will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or Assembly of men, to beare their Person... This is more than Consent or Concord; it is a reall Unitie of them

all, in one and the same Person...This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a Commonwealth...”(227)

The state is the generation of the Subject from the multitude of discontinuous acts, it forms the conditions of possibility for the act by structuring the continuity within which the act occurs. In this sense Sharp is correct — the state is not a monolith. He departs from this correct argument and combines it with the absurd reductionism at the heart of his critique of violence — that it can only attack monolithic structures, to form the foundations of his notion of revolutionary non-violence. This becomes important, as he goes on to claim that nonviolence gains legitimacy because it deals with power “at its source” (Sharp, 10). His claim that nonviolence builds the basis of a new presumably-nonhierarchical form of power, through the absence of the act *qua* coercion. Sharp claims that nonviolence can be deployed as a form of non-cooperation which attacks power at its base: the very structuring of consent necessary for the state to function (36). This begins to sketch out a concept of revolutionary nonviolence based around the generation of mass noncooperation; in essence, he is attempting to construct a concept of nonviolence as war machine unto itself.

The nonviolent war machine is a tactic of refusal based in a destabilization concept. If the state is the structuring of consent for its existence as a series of acts, then refusal of the mandates of the state undermines the states ability to implement equivalences. In other words, the assertion here is that the world does not function through this monolithic consent, but rather, that this consent has been functioning as a sort of ruse of complex deception; in this he is positing a sort of division between the organicism of life in its complexity and the inorganicism of the state, in its monolithic process. In taking this position, Sharp is constructing a conflict between masses; the mass of “fools” who are convinced by the state, and the masses of organic be-

The Impossibility of Nonviolent Revolution

The question of so-called non-violent revolution is not merely a moral question, as it is often framed, or a tactical question, as framed by the pieces discussed here, but exists at the confluence in which morality, an abstract generalization of actions within a discourse of proper action, and tactics, the material dynamics of action at a particular time and space. This raises a clear problem however. The discourse of tactics, as discussed by Clausewitz and others, is one in which the concept always fails; in which the idea never grasps the complexity of the moment in, and relies on simplifications and equivalencies to be able to identify objects and phenomena with concepts and names. In other words, the simplifications of the concept — the ways that concepts speak in general and attempt to speak of equivalencies — eliminates the complex uniqueness of the dynamics of any present moment. As such, to posit a conceptual qualifier to a moment, and to attempt to speak of the moment through the concept, abstracts the particularity of the moment out of existence. As such, to attempt to place a conceptual universal morality at the core of materially particular action means that, at best, we are left with a framework that is incapable of speaking of the moments — of tactics themselves — in the process of only processing the dynamics of action as they relate to an abstract moral framework. This abstracts tactics into a discussion of morality, limits the possibility of action, imposes this sameness of action, and fails to be capable of elastically responding to shifts in the tactical scenarios of lived moments.

Take, for example, the crowd control procedures outlined in “Field Manual 3–19.15: Civil Disturbance Operations” issued by the US military to National Guard forces and police departments. Although there are many manuals which address civil

approach has been the downfall of both authoritarian communism (which was able to take power in certain sites but left the general social structuring of power untouched while imposing another structure to control those flows), and anarchist assassinations (which did cause a general amount of chaos in the ruling structures of the Western early 20th century but failed to accomplish its larger goals). They reject the imposition of a mass political solution imposed by a minority group, only to rebuild the idea of mass politics.

The argument that both put forth is that noncoercive non-violent acts attack power at the level of deployment — everyday life — by opening up a non-authoritarian social refusal. Yet both pieces rely on the construction of the nonviolent equivalence. Rather than the mass Subject imposed by the violent imposition of social order through violent action, they both construct the Subject of mass action based in a definitionality of nonviolence, where the legitimacy of participants is defined through their adherence to an externally defined morality. This imposes the restriction on temporality and action through the assertion of an inherent nonviolent noncooperation; the argument is that we always have the ability to withdraw consent from the state through mass nonviolent action. Yet, if violence is considered as inherently authoritarian, nonviolence then becomes the condition of possibility for action. For example — an imposition of nonviolence occurred in Seattle during the WTO demonstrations in 1999 where pacifist demonstrators pepper-sprayed anarchists attempting to smash windows in Niketown (Nike’s corporate store in Downtown Seattle). Here is an axiom of nonviolence that was violently imposed against so-called authoritarian violence. Like the state apparatus, nonviolence generates a Newtonian equivalence. Once a certain tactical set is rejected absolutely, all attempts at this can be repressed to preserve the nonviolent aspects of the act.

ings fighting against the consensus of the “fools”. Life within this structure becomes defined absolutely, both by the state in the process of creating the mass, and in the claim Sharp makes about some sort of inherent human existence. In a sense it is the theory of *nonviolence as virus* — the hope is that noncooperation will spread exponentially throughout the base of consensus. In this sense, nonviolence is a defensive move against the inorganic construction of the state — in defending an already present human condition from encroachment by the state, the nonviolent activist is exercising an ability that is always already latent. But because of this defensive character inherent within the base, Sharp creates the condition that the nonviolent act must always be the mass act. Everyone in the factory needs to seize the factory or strike, all people need to march to the sea to pound salt, etc. In this sense, nonviolence is the genesis of a form of alternate stability — formed around the maxim to not impose upon the consent of the base.

The other basis for revolutionary nonviolence in an anarchist context is the argument presented in “You Can’t Blow Up A Social Relationship”. The piece’s central thesis — that violent insurrection is an inherently vanguardist pursuit — is an argument not intended for nor effective within authoritarian circles (which willingly accept the authoritarian vanguard role inherent in its strategies — hell, this pamphlet may just encourage them); rather, it is aimed at making an appeal to anti-authoritarians who utilize insurrectionary tactics within their waging of social war.

“A democracy can only be produced if a majority movement is built. The guerrilla strategy depends on a collapse of will in the ruling class to produce the social crisis out of which the revolution occurs, whether the majority favors it or not. Any reading of guerrilla strategists reveals that it is a philosophy

of impatience” (“*You Can’t Blow Up A Social Relationship*”, 12)

Although every example cited by the authors are drawn from guerrilla forces that unapologetically assume an authoritarian character as integral to their revolutionary paradigm, this argument is still worth our consideration as anti-authoritarians. What the authors are attempting to argue is that a violent revolution is incapable of being a populist revolution. In the structuring of the concept of revolutionary violence around impatience, they equated all violent action to vanguardism, claiming in essence that the violent insurrection generates its own structuring of authority around the revolutionary act — a “with us or against us” mentality. In choosing to act before waiting for the will of the masses, the insurrectionist is unilaterally defining the conditions of action within the plane of resistance. They state, “concentrating on the supposed insanity of the guerrillas or terrorists is an attempt to provide a justification for murderousness towards them and for the introduction of general repression” (16).

Now this is not wholly incorrect; violent actions do draw an increase in repression from the state. Yet this is problematic in a very basic way. The claim that the acts of the insurrectionists is the cause of political repression by the state ignores the fact that the existence of the equivalent Subject *qua* state that is the condition of possibility for generalized repression. There are practical examples that back this up; in Italy over the course of the 20th century, it has become routine for fascists (potentially acting in conjunction of the will of the state and metapolitical state if Operation Gladio is to be taken at face-value) to bomb a target and blame it on the anarchists to draw state repression onto anarchist militants. It is not the insurrectionists that generate the repression, however, but rather it is the state reaction that generates repression. The state is a posited equivalence which has exceeded and become the condition of possibility

for everyday life. Whether we like it or not, the pigs believe that they control the streets.

In the generation of the Newtonian equivalence all outlying variables need to be eliminated. Like the airstream pattern studies that generated the basis for chaos theory, as an equivalence progresses it needs to either freeze time (impossible) or reincorporate or eliminate potentially destabilizing elements in order to maintain its coherence (Gleick, 15) . If all acts present a destabilization in continuity — if acts form a continuity of discontinuity — then acts are reincorporated or repressed due to the threat of entropy which they pose to the abstracting machine. So it is not the act that generates repression, it is the existence of the abstracting apparatus of the state that generates repression in an attempt to maintain coherence. All effective insurrectionary events will draw repression by the state to the degree that they are potentially destabilizing. This is why I personally hate the anarchist complaint about police brutality following action — isn’t this the point?; we reject the state because it can employ violence to prevent us from living our desires?, because it makes us all equivalent? If we are serious about this struggle, we have to expect that the state will attack with everything they have, within the very amorphous social limits of acceptability (for instance, the pigs largely no longer use water cannons because it hearkens back to images of white pigs firing water cannons on black civil rights demonstrators — but will they hesitate to use a water cannon if they had to? We saw them deployed on the streets of St Paul during the RNC in 2008.)

Both of these arguments make a similar set of assumptions that construct a framework for nonviolent action. Both depart from the long-held idea that violence is used against the state in order to “sever the head of state” and impose a new form of organization. They are correct to argue that this frames revolutionary violence as a completely vanguardist enterprise that does not engage with power on the level of deployment. This