

Dialogue on Lost in the Fog

Lost Children's School of Cartography

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The following text is a dialogue between Ta Paidia Tis Galarias (Τα παιδιά της γαλαρίας)¹ and the Lost Children’s School of Cartography about the latter’s text, Lost in the Fog². This dialogue was produced for publication in TPTG’s journal, along with their Greek translation of Lost in the Fog.

1. Political and Class Composition

You say, “While the occupations were perhaps first populated by the same cliques of activists who had championed the previous failed American social movements,”

Could you offer the Greek reader some more details regarding these movements?

It is fitting you would ask this question, as we originally intended to include a first section of the paper recalling the recent history of American social movements in order to give the reader some idea of how we arrived at the present moment, but more importantly to reflect on how these movements ended, so that familiar pitfalls can be avoided. We were unable to finish the section before the presentation at Skaramanga, although we did quickly review it in our presentation.

For necessities of space and time, these are presented only briefly and bluntly, starting from the internationally well-known example of Seattle 1999. Where appropriate, we are including links to more in depth coverage of these moments in the recent history of struggle in America.

- The anti-globalization movement in the U.S. never managed to move beyond its dramatic debut in Seattle, where the opening ceremonies of the World Trade Organization were shut down in 1999 through a combination of mass protest, non-violent street blockades, and rioting. In the following years, protest after protest against the various functionaries of neoliberalization attempted to repeat the success of Seattle, but saw smaller and smaller groups of determined protesters meeting the more and more militarized and prepared police force.³
- By the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the anti-globalization movement had worn itself out, and readily transformed into the anti-war movement against the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Like the anti-globalization movement, the anti-war movement was largely dominated by liberal and leftist non-governmental organizations, and saw even less anarchist intervention. The movement was characterized by very large scale, peaceful demonstrations that were permitted by government officials at which generally nothing happened—especially not any real conflict with the state or capital. A picturesque example is the protest of the ruling conservative party’s electoral convention in 2004 in New York City, where a demonstration of 800,000 marched and, despite remaining entirely peaceful and lawful, faced 1,800 arrests. The mayor of New York publicly welcomed the demonstrators, commenting that New York champions free speech and even offered a discount at area eateries to demonstrators who agreed to wear a sticker that read “peaceful protestor.” In contrast, a few notable steps were taken toward meaningful action against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan:

¹ See TPTG’s website: <http://www.tapaidiatistgalarias.org/>

² English version available here: http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Lost_Children_s_School_of_Cartography__L

³ For a general review of the anti-globalization movement in America, see the article “Demonstrating Resistance” from issue #1 of the anarchist magazine Rolling Thunder, available as a .pdf here: http://thecloud.crimethinc.com/pdfs/rolling_thunder_1.pdf

- In 2003, activists and anarchists in San Francisco and Chicago organized relatively successful city-wide shutdowns the day of the invasion of Iraq, moving beyond symbolic protest toward halting the apparatuses of power. Similar demonstrations in other cities were less confrontational.
 - In 2006 and 2007, activists and anarchists repeatedly used blockades and rioting to shut down ports in Olympia and Tacoma, Washington, stopping the flow of weapons intended to be shipped to the American military in Iraq.
 - In 2008, the ports were again closed, this time throughout the West Coast, as the Longshoreman union of port workers went on a one-day strike against the continuation of the Iraq war. Closing all the ports had a tangible effect on the economy and is also notable because this sort of strike is technically illegal in the United States, where the strength of unions is marginal. The Longshoreman Union has a history of radicalism and was excluded from the major confederation of American unions in the 1950's under allegations of being corrupted by communists.
- The anti-war movement essentially ended up a voter's movement against the conservative party united under the slogan "Anybody But Bush."⁴ It ended in defeat with the re-election of Bush, and was generally a disempowering experience. While Europe experienced the "Climate Justice" Movement, in America there was next an era of in which there was no large scale social movement to speak of. It's worth noting that it was during this era of no mass social movement that some of the more interesting predecessors to the Occupy movement developed:
 - With liberal and leftist NGOs mostly out of the picture, anarchists took the lead role in organizing counter-summit style protests in North America. Major examples include the anarchist organized efforts to shut down: the Republican National Convention in Saint Paul, Minnesota and the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado in 2008; the G20 meeting in Pittsburgh in 2009; the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia; and the 2010 G20 summit in Toronto. Collectively, this string of counter-summit demonstrations represents some of the strongest street victories of anarchist efforts in North America since Seattle 1999, and also some of the most startling examples of state repression. For example, repression from the 2008 RNC alone resulted in 10 comrades facing domestic terrorism charges, and the situation was similar with some of the other summits as well. (Fortunately, most of those charges were eventually reduced.) To be sure, thanks to anarchists being at the center of organizing these efforts and the dominant force on the streets, these clashes marked a desirable development after the stifling era of the liberal/leftist dominant anti-war movement.⁵

⁴ For more thorough coverage of the anti-war demonstrations and their termination, see again the article "Demonstrating Resistance," from the American anarchist magazine Rolling Thunder, available online: <http://crimethinc.com/texts/pastfeatures/demonstrating.php>

⁵ For coverage of the RNC/DNC demonstrations, see the article "Going it Alone": <http://crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/rncdnc.php>. For coverage of the Pittsburgh G20 demonstrations, see <http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/g20.php>. For coverage of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics demonstrations, see "Riot 2010" at: <http://www.crimethinc.com/blog/2010/02/15/riot-2010/> For coverage of the Toronto G20 demonstrations, see: <http://crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/toronto2.php>

- Besides the counter-summit circuit, anarchists during this period focused on developing their will and capacity to act in their home cities. Because the U.S. is sprawling and diverse, we can only present highlights here and not a full account.
 - In January, 2009, in Oakland, anarchists participated with other Oakland residents in large scale riots after an unarmed black man, Oscar Grant, was murdered by white police in the metro tunnel. The execution was caught on camera and quickly disseminated on the internet. The riots included anarchist black blocs and also more generalized destruction, and, importantly, a growing social connection between the two. For many, the 2009 Oakland riots seemed to be an echo of Greece’s explosion only weeks earlier, although obviously its heritage is also largely the history of American race riots. Echoes of Oakland would also be heard in Portland in 2010 and Seattle in 2011, when anarchists in those cities played significant roles in the unrest following more police murders. This rekindled what had been relatively quiet anarchist spaces in these cities. Oakland rioted again in July 2010 following the verdict that the cop who killed Grant was guilty of manslaughter but not murder.⁶
 - In December of 2008 and April of 2009, students occupied the New School University in New York. Although the occupations were relatively short lived, they should be credited with being the forerunners in a new wave of student occupations. Anarchists involved in these occupations began to promote the slogan “Occupy Everything, Demand Nothing.”⁷
 - Beginning in September, 2009 and lasting through the Winter, the slogan “Occupy Everything, Demand Nothing” and the tactic of building occupation would re-emerge in the California student occupation movement, which became much more widespread than the New School Occupations, with occupations and blockades at eight Californian university campuses. This moment was important in the development of an anti-austerity movement in America as well as obviously popularizing the tactic of occupation. One piece of writing from the movement expressed the frustration of being part of an unpopular resistance and the surprise of finding growing solidarity elsewhere: “So we thought it was a matter of subtraction: to take ourselves and these buildings with us to transmit a message that ‘We will get what we can take,’ that ‘Everything belongs to everyone.’ Among some, the reaction was predictable. ‘Only children can take everything.’ ‘We must all make sacrifices.’ ‘Our leaders are doing their best and making difficult choices on our behalf.’ *Another world is unpopular.* And yet we found, despite mistakes and despite successes, that another world was recharting the global map: solidarity messages and actions from Pakistan, Japan, Ireland, Germany, Austria, South Africa, Chicago, New Orleans, New York City.”⁸

⁶ For coverage of events in Oakland, see the publication “Unfinished Acts”, available online at http://issuu.com/unfinishedacts/docs/unfinished_acts. For coverage of events in Portland, see the online article “Third Time’s a Charm”: <http://anarchistnews.org/%3Fq=node/10962> For coverage of events in Seattle, see the publication “Burning the Bridges They Are Building”, available online as a .pdf: <http://riselikelions.net/pamphlets/16/burning-the-bridges-they-are-building-anarchist-strategies-against-t>

⁷ An account of the New School occupations is available here: <https://reoccupied.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/the-new-sc>

⁸ From “Another World is Unpopular.” For this and other coverage see the publication “After the Fall,” available online at <http://afterthefallcommuniques.info/> See also “Anarchists in the Student Movement”: <http://crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/march4.php>.

- In February of 2011, around 10,000 demonstrators gathered around the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison, Wisconsin to demonstrate against austerity measures that would be put into effect according to the Wisconsin Budget Repair Bill. The bill was widely opposed as an attack on public workers in Wisconsin, in that it would drastically cut workers' pensions, reduce access to and raise the cost of health care for workers, gut collective bargaining power, increase employers' power to fire workers, severely threaten the power of unions, and more. Demonstrations continued and, by the end of the month, numbers had grown to about 100,000. When the bill was passed on March 9th, thousands of demonstrators surged into the capitol building to chants of "break down the doors!" and "general strike!" At the time, it seemed that the struggle was ready to supersede a battle over a bill and look to the horizon for new possibilities. Yet, despite the dramatic occupation of the capitol, the movement was defeated. Notably, the police were ordered not to remove demonstrators from the building; instead, the movement was left to defeat itself by putting its trust in the legal and political system. Leftist, liberal and labor groups seemed to have already constrained people's conceptions of possible outcomes, and as the battle moved from the seizure of the government building to courtroom and political election campaigns, the number of demonstrators dwindled. By June, the number of demonstrators had fallen to about 1,000. One progressive journalist summed up the decline: "People see that Walker [the governor of Wisconsin] won everything big that he asked for, and despite all the great activism, we don't have anything to show for it."

Again, our coverage here is necessarily limited. It is also worth noting that we have included counter-summit style demonstrations not only from the U.S., but from Canada as well. It seems to us that between the anti-war movement and the beginning of Occupy, anarchist involvement in counter-summit organizing and demonstrating was central and outperformed the liberals and leftists of the previous era generally in North America. This partly explains the influence of anarchist politics in the Occupy movement. It must be noted, however, that we do not include in our summary activity in another North American country, Mexico, perhaps most notably the uprising in Oaxaca. Of course, this is not out of disregard for that uprising, which was incredible and inspiring. Although we have not seen direct correlation between that moment and the development of the Occupy movement, we also do not doubt its influence.

You say "the encampments and demonstrations have grown because they have attracted the self-identified American 'middle class'." What is the class composition of the movement? What is middle-class for you and how do you define it? Could it be an alternative term for the white working-class (with more or less well-paid, stable jobs) or something else? By characterizing them as 'self-identified', it makes us think that, according to you, they are not really part of the middle-class. In case you imply that they call themselves 'middle-class' (while they are not), should we take what people say about themselves –based mostly on ideological beliefs- as an objective category?

Later you say "One perspective from U.S. comrades has been that... it is only through participation in struggle that American citizens will lose their illusions." What does 'American citizens' mean? What is their class position?

What we mean when we say that the middle class is illusory is that the wealth that once appeared to separate the middle class from the working class was never "real"; to a large extent their relative comfort was built on the debt bubbles being exploited by capitalists which have

now burst, exposing the “American Dream” of upward social mobility as a fantasy of the capitalist system. Thus we see what was recently acknowledged in the New York Times: American suburbs, “long a symbol of a stable and prosperous American middle class,” which grew as poor urban workers gained opportunities to move out of the city thanks to capitalist scams like subprime loans, are currently outpacing cities in growing poverty rates.⁹

Illustrating the meaninglessness of the term “middle class,” according to a 2008 report from the Pew Research Center, about half of all Americans described themselves as middle class—yet the annual incomes within this group varied from under \$20,000 a year to over \$150,000 a year, a vast difference.¹⁰ The reason that we emphasize that the middle class citizens *self-identify* as such is because they do not meet a (hypothetical) set of requirements for a class group so much as they compose an identity based upon values they uphold. To put it concisely, many who self-identify (or previously did) as “middle class” are proletarians who nonetheless identify ideologically with the ruling class and thus would like to distance themselves from other proletarians. What we characterize as a process of proletarianization is the revelation of what was once partially hidden: the dispossession of the middle class, and thus creates identity crisis for them.

We use the term “citizen” to describe this ideological identification with power: those of the middle class who flock to the Occupy movement to protest the unfairness of their proletarianization but carry with them the values of the good, obedient citizen are the ones who would have it be, as we say, “movement for the survival of capitalist democracy in a moment ripe with potentials for true rupture.” We do not, in our usage of ‘citizen’ intend to comment on those who have citizenship status and the social exclusion of those who do not (although there is obvious overlap between these two meanings.) The citizen is the biopolitical product of Empire. The citizen is the subject which carries the norms, and is himself the apparatus, of governance.

2. Capitalist Crisis

You say “As American society comes under further blows of the so-called ‘crisis’ of capitalism, “ and then below “It is precisely because the movement for a preservation of the illusory American dream is doomed to fail that the Occupy movement has the potential to supersede itself.” Here, we think there’s a contradiction: you claim that the increasing dire economic situation will result in the disappearance of the illusory American dream and yet you describe the current crisis as the “so-called crisis.”

We don’t see a contradiction here, so it must be necessary to clarify what we mean. Firstly, when we cast doubt on the classification of the current moment as a “crisis” of capitalism, we mean that the current economic conditions as such do not present a serious threat to the survival of capitalism in and of themselves. We are not witnessing the inevitable (or even surprising) self-destruction of capitalism. Periods of boom and bust in capitalism are to be expected as a part of its normal functioning and do not constitute a crisis for capitalism. During a severe global economic downturn we see states move to ensure their own stability and the stability of the owning class using measures like increased policing and austerity policies, which certainly do pose a sort of crisis for the rest of us and threaten our very survival. In America, this shift has wiped away some

⁹ https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/25/us/suburban-poverty-surge-challenges-communities.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all

¹⁰ Available here: <http://pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/MC-Middle-class-report1.pdf> See page 5.

of the illusion of the American dream of economic prosperity for all who are willing to work for it, revealing abruptly to many who regarded themselves as “middle class” that their relatively comfortable lifestyles were floating on bubbles built to burst, bringing them back to the reality of their dispossession.

Even if we do not regard the current “crisis” as a true threat to capitalism, we are acknowledging that the terrain on which we stand and fight has shifted, and thus we must consider new strategies of how to proceed. What we propose is that, if Occupy continues with rhetoric of rebuilding the American dream, it is doomed to fail in that goal but could potentially supersede itself by seizing what is impossible for capitalism to provide. (It is also necessary to avoid certain pitfalls, some of which are laid out in the “Dead Ends” section.) A massive direct seizing of our needs and desires in contradiction to what is healthy for the capitalist economy could develop a true crisis to capitalism: its destruction.

You say “any revolution ...will wind up providing capitalism with the modifications it needs to survive the superficial crises of its own design.” This also seems contradictory to us, as you seem to have the position that the crisis is superficial and designed by capitalists, yet at the same time you argue that the struggle may provide capitalism with the modifications it needs to survive. It is important to clarify your positions about the capitalist crisis. For example, just below you say “But it isn’t hard to imagine that, in a world turned upside down by capital, social movements would be animated by the need to resolve the internal contradictions of capitalism in order to ensure its survival for another era, rather than the drive to set the world on its feet.” But can we claim that people are mobilized within social movements in order to resolve the internal contradictions of capitalism?

We see the potential for confusion here and trust that our position on crisis is clarified in our response to your above question. To reiterate, the current economic bust does not in and of itself constitute a crisis for capitalism, and certain forms of social movement that relieve tensions caused by the so-called “crisis” help the capitalist system to implement the reforms it needs for stability. To play the game of war strategically on this terrain we need to discern the ways of escalating the conflict with capitalism, not ameliorating it. Without strategic assessment, we argue that social movements can serve to smooth over the points of rupture that develop in the social fabric, regardless of the motivations of its participants.

3. Content and Form

You say “One could characterize the Occupy movement as a citizens’ movement for the survival of capitalist democracy in a moment ripe with potentials for true rupture.” You say that the occupy movement is a ‘movement for the preservation of the illusory American dream’ or a ‘citizens’ movement for the survival of capitalist democracy’. At the same time you argue that the moment is ripe with potentials for true rupture.

Yes. To us it is clear that at least one strong tendency in the Occupy movement—arguably the strongest at the time we wrote the essay—is a citizen’s movement for the survival of capitalist democracy. This does not contradict that the particular moment in history presents unique opportunities for rupture. In our paper we are exploring those potentials and warning against the former tendency.

You say “This park, like most parks and squares in American cities, has gradually been emptied of life by anti-social ordinances to keep people from inhabiting it, or even sharing any meaningful

amount of time within it. Thus ensued the 'festival' atmosphere which would characterize much of the 'Occupy' movement. This celebratory tone of social movements is familiar to activists and wholly apart from the realm of conflict." In which ways is the "festival atmosphere" connected with the reformist aspects of the movement you have mentioned before? Why do you argue that riots and celebration are "totally apart"? Aren't riots usually permeated by a carnivalesque feeling of joy?

We appreciate the characterization of riots as carnivalesque. We would add that this joy comes from the relationship between play and time. The riot enters us into another dimension of time, the world of free play (although also a world that is by turns potentially terrifying, a world of open conflict with the forces of order). However, what we are wary of is the pseudo-activity of many of the encampments. As we elaborated in the essay, many of the occupations resembled alternative or even 'counter'-institutions, offering temporary housing, medical care, and other services. These institutions, like all institutions, can be breeding grounds for control. Arguments about the organization of the encampments were common. For instance, in Seattle a self-appointed staff team developed a floor plan for the occupation as soon as it moved from the central square of downtown to a centrally located college. They numbered the tents and positioned the staff tents in a location that was most conducive to oversee the other tents, those accused of being drug users in particular. Needless to say, this policing activity had to be fought with fists and words. This illustration of the dynamics within the encampment in Seattle is indicative of some larger forces at play, excuse the pun. If riots were a more common happening in this movement than self-policing political battles, the characterization of the movement as festival-like would not be used pejoratively.

To go a bit further with our point and the answer to the question of the division between festival, carnival, and reformism: A riot is a situation that has become out of control. The festival, as in the medieval Latin 'festivalis,' usually denotes a religious commemoration or celebration. In the case of the Occupy movement, the celebratory tone of the encampments was contained by a religious quality, a worshipping of the occupation by the occupation. A sort of ritualistic festival that was limited by self-enchancement dominated there; it was not a carnival, as in the figurative, riotous mixture. What was ritualistic about the occupy encampments was the re-invigoration of previously outmoded forms of protest and symbolic actions such as performance art. It is important to remember that at the same time that many people grasped for familiar and comfortable forms of protest, others were learning new tactics of direct action and the former worked as a transition to the latter and therefore cannot be totally disregarded.

The "festival atmosphere" is connected with the reformist aspects of the movement, thus, by the shared inability to destroy everyday life, or even to impact it. Rather, it fits perfectly in the spectacle driven commodity economy. We would like to shatter the compartmentalization of everyday life (as it is locked into spheres of economic, political, social, etc.) and the relegation of celebration to the realm of the symbolic (i.e. wearing costumes, musical performances, making signs and parading) because it is, well, frustratingly dull.

The court jester is analogous to this pseudo-activity of which we are critical— a performance for the king, a protest for the eyes. In American society, the protest is all too often a vacation from everyday life, not its destruction. Performance art and symbolic protest reinforce the spectator role by affirming a watching authority. American culture has a long history of festival which is a consumerist occasion for excess and indulgence of one's desires before returning to the normality of the Judeo-Christian logic of deprivation and obedience. Once a few hours have passed, the lights come up and the show is over and jester is ushered out of the royal chambers.

That said, the ritualistic practices of the occupation were always doomed to fail and it is not our intention to focus on uninspiring activities but only to present a critique. The occupations in some cities, such as Oakland and Seattle, took on a much more playful quality when they successfully shut down the city on numerous occasions. When Oakland rioted in response to the police attacks on the encampment, it was not a performance on a stage; it was not a street theater. The occupations of private property, the blockades at the port of Seattle, the potential carnival of the upcoming May 1st General Strike, these are all examples of riotous play. For some of the occupations that stayed within the confines of the law, however, the festival prevails with its play-crushing formula.

You say "In North Carolina, after a building was occupied for only one day, the police invaded with assault rifles to evict the occupation in the early hours of the morning." What was the aim of this and other similar occupations? Who were the people and groups that took such initiatives? This is a very important part of your text as the Greek occupy movement did not move on to squatting buildings.

The occupation in North Carolina was brief but it signaled a series of similar occupations with some shared aims in other parts of the country.

In Seattle occupiers marched from the encampment at the local community college to an abandoned house in an always gentrifying but recently more rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. This was one of many similar occupations in a wave of building occupations that happened in response to the coordinated repression of the encampments across the country. In Seattle what began as a symbolic march and temporary occupation quickly grew into a full fledged indefinite occupation hosting many people and gaining the support of the neighboring residents. The more liberal elements of the Seattle occupation attempted to distance themselves from this sort of illegal activity by denouncing the building occupation as a defilement of private property. The occupation lasted nearly two months and ended in a SWAT team eviction and enormous media spectacle. Although, we are happy to report, there were no arrests.

This occupation stands out against the numerous short lived occupations more characteristic of building occupations in the states. Many building occupations happened in direct response to the eviction of the encampments. Numerous cities marched with the slogan "You Can't Evict an Idea" and attempted to create spaces for the occupations to remain and flourish. To reference Seattle again, the occupation of December 2nd was very short lived, lasting only twelve hours, but seemed to be a meaningful action in the direction of conflict for those involved. We view this development as an important one as it involves seizing space and thus negating private property relations, which is a direct threat to capitalism.

See also our discussion below of "Move-In Day" in Oakland and housing occupations generally.

You say "The citizens' values that the middle class carries into the movement prepare the occupations to be buried in the ballot box. Through insisting on a discourse and practice grounded in non-violence and at times even legality..." If not with the existing parties, do you see any attempt/ possibility of reorganization of the political scene with the creation of new political parties/formations? If yes, then why do you argue that, "their attempts to co-opt or control the current movement have been laughably inadequate. Combining this with the simple fact that for a long time very few people have taken elections seriously in the U.S., with the majority nearly always abstaining from voting at all, perhaps it is true that the electoral machine will be powerless to transform the Occupy movement into a voter's mobilization."

At the time we wrote the essay, we did not see any hint of attempts to create new political parties. There is not a significant recent precedent for such a development in American politics, which are wholly dominated by the Democratic and Republican parties. When we presented a very similar talk in Thessaloniki at the Yfanet squat weeks before our talk at Skaramanga, we had the opportunity to discuss the phenomena of the American Tea Party movement, a grass-roots phenomena of right wing populism. As we pointed out, this conservative social movement eventually became nothing more than a voter's movement for the Republican party, despite its initial resistance to the Republicans for not being populist or conservative enough. This was despite some predictions and calls for the Tea Party to become a "third party" (a common phrase in American politics since we have only two powerful electoral parties). Similarly, if elements of the Occupy movement were to push for the creation of a new political party, we expect that the effort would end up swallowed by the Democracy party, or totally ignored. And we hadn't even heard of such an effort at the time of our writing.¹¹

We are now in the midst of the next presidential election, and our suspicions have proven correct. Seemingly even the progressive third party Green Party has not successfully used Occupy as a platform for building their party. Of course, the discourse of Occupy has affected that of the elections, with Obama having some success portraying himself as a populist progressive defending the population from elite interests and the leading Republican candidate seemingly unable to shake the image of the billionaire "one-percenter." But for the most part participants in Occupy have kept their skepticism for the political system and see the focus of their movement as taking some sort of action for themselves. Nonetheless it seemed necessary to warn against the threat of developing a voters' movement, since the politicians were posturing for such an outcome, and since, as explained above, such a development was one major factor in the gutting of any potential from the movement against the war in Iraq.

You say "If we accept, then, that the encampments themselves as protests are not threatening to the state or capitalism, and that the violent repression of any movement in the direction of occupying private property reveals how this movement might actually become threatening to power..."

The self-management of social welfare organized by the NGOs and the leftists constitutes a specific response to the needs and demands of the mobilized proletarians. The radical alternative should be made clearer and more articulate. Specific initiatives (such as expropriations of commodities, housing occupations, foreclosure blockades, etc) should be highlighted.

At the time we were writing the paper, many of the particular actions were yet to be developed. As we've said, we were warning against the ameliorating tendencies in social movements, and advocating the development of a threat to capitalism through strategic escalations, praising in particular the escalations sparked by Occupy Oakland, namely the November 2nd General Strike and the Port Blockades, which we discuss in other places. It wasn't our desire to write prescriptively on the tactics insurgents should develop but to map a general trajectory, in particular because we were in Greece and not in the U.S. at the time. We can, however, now point to some other examples of ways that occupiers have escalated conflict with capital by directly interfering with its functioning—for example, the occupation of foreclosed homes that has occurred in many American cities. Some of these efforts are the re-seizure of homes by the families formerly evicted

¹¹ Since we wrote this, but before we published it, the Democratic Party affiliated non-profit moveon.org has launched its "99% Spring" mobilization, an explicit attempt to route the Occupy movement into a voter's movement. We still predict that such attempts will fail.

by combined effort of banks and police, with the support of occupiers. These re-occupations have successfully occurred in Riverside, California and Minneapolis, Minnesota, for example. In both cases, the occupations forced the banks to renegotiate terms with the occupants, allowing them to stay in their homes but maintaining the bank ownership of the property through mortgage agreements, which is to say that this direct action did halt the bank's foreclosure and defend the homes but fell short of being an expropriation of property. In other cities—Chicago, Illinois for example—people have occupied many abandoned buildings and helped move in homeless families. And in cities such as Cleveland, Ohio and Atlanta, Georgia, Occupy activists have disrupted bank and police controlled auctions of foreclosed property.

Generally, in the places where property has been seized not in order to force banks to negotiate more reasonable terms with occupants but rather to directly appropriate the property and negate the capitalist ownership, repression has been harder and more swift. As we discuss in the paper, police raided the occupation of a building after only one day in a military-like operation. In Seattle, numerous squats have started and been evicted, the most notable being the occupation of the large warehouse that occupiers intended to convert into a “center of resistance” and others and the squatting of a foreclosed home in a residential neighborhood that was turned into a relatively open “revolutionary household.” A communique from the warehouse occupation action read “This is not a protest or simply a response to the current economic ‘crisis’ (for we saw it coming all along), this is a response to the crisis of economics. This is an occupation.”¹² One statement from the group squatting the house read, “There are homeless people. There are empty houses. That makes no sense.”¹³ Police evicted both by force; the warehouse was raided within hours, although the house was held for nearly two months and inspired other residential squats. In February, anarchists in North Carolina again seized an empty building and were evicted only hours later.

The most dramatic example of occupiers attempts to expropriate buildings and facing violent repression occurred on January 28th—what was called “Move In Day” in Oakland. On this day, occupiers attempted to seize an empty convention center and make it the future base for the Oakland Commune. They were prevented by a large show of violence from police, who used tear gas, flash bang grenades, bean bag rounds, kettling and mass arrests to try to clear the streets. For hours demonstrators held their ground against police, using homemade riot shields and throwing rocks and bottles. After hundreds were arrested, those remaining proceeded to city hall and broke in, trashed offices, smashed windows, and burned flags.

Although in recent weeks we have seen the frequency of actions decline, we have also seen the emergence of massive collective action related to the Occupy movement. On March 29th, 2012, tens of thousands of people rode the New York Subway for free in an action organized by Occupy Wall Street in co-ordination with rank and file transit workers¹⁴.

As we write this, preparations are being made in cities all over for a general strike on May 1st. The call for this strike originates from Occupy Los Angeles, and it is difficult at this point to tell how many cities will be involved. Like so much in the Occupy movement, the demands, motivations, and desires vary greatly within cities and between cities—some call outs demand justice for immigrant laborers, some demand a universal living wage, and others decline any

¹² See <http://pugetsoundanarchists.org/node/1157>

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ For more information, see: <http://libcom.org/news/successful-fare-strike-new-york-subways-29032012%29>

demands at all—although everywhere there is a call for a disruption of capitalism. Like with the Oakland general strike of November 2nd, the call for a general strike is not aimed at convincing the bureaucrats of labor unions to order their members to participate (no doubt some unions will choose to participate, and remember that very little of the American workforce is unionized), but to compel people to participate in a diverse effort to shut down cities by dropping out of all the roles capitalism makes for us—workers, shoppers, students, homemakers, etc—and take to the streets. For more on this unconventional take on what a general strike could be, see the quote we borrow from the group Society of Enemies below. It is difficult to predict what will happen on May Day, but it will represent another escalation among many attacks against the system of misery. We are getting ready.

Reviewing the diverse locations of these actions, we can see that one particularity about our present moment versus past social struggles is its diffuse nature. Interestingly, a G20 meeting was planned for this May in Chicago, and there was some debate among occupiers as to whether they should travel to participate in a counter-summit. Adbusters weighed in and argued for people to converge—to “flock to Chicago, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and #OCCUPY-CHICAGO for a month”¹⁵. In an unprecedented move, the U.S. government called off the Chicago G20, and instead world leaders will meet privately at a secluded government resort near D.C. Now, instead, insurgents are focusing on strikes, demonstrations, and disruptions in their home cities on May 1st. This is a strength of the organizing model being used, and it will be interesting to see how the diffusion affects repression. This is difficult to predict; whereas a city will request and receive boundless security budgets from the state in order to militarize the protection of a summit, it may be more difficult to spread those resources across many cities at once—or to fortify multiple cities without sparking unrest from populations who have yet to get involved, as has occasionally been a problem for the state at city summits (for example, the Free Trade Area of the Americas summit in Quebec City in 2001.) On the other hand, perhaps every local law enforcement agency potentially dealing with disruptions on May Day will receive the kind of special assistance typically reserved for counter-summits, but demonstrators and rioters will be spread more thin. We are cautiously expecting to see the strategic benefits of decentralized actions.

You say “this time calling for the coordinated shutdown of all West Coast ports on December 12th”
“

Since the day you sent us the text, this mobilization has already taken place. It would be good to write what happened in this shut down. What were the demands, which unions participated, was the shutdown successful etc?

The coordinated action to shut down all West Coast ports on December 12th resulted in partially or fully closed ports in Oakland, Long Beach, San Diego, Houston, Portland, Seattle, Tacoma, Vancouver, and Anchorage, as well as the Port of Maui in Hawaii and the Port of Hueneme, a major inland river port.

The Seattle port shut down was the most inspiring example of the blockades all across the country on that day. Around one thousand people marched from the central occupation in downtown Seattle to the port. Along the way, a police museum and two banks were paint-bombed and anarchist graffiti was painted beneath an overpass. Comrades reported to us that the group of one thousand was varied and no particular group could be said to compose the majority of the affair.

¹⁵ <http://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/tactical-briefing-25.html>

Anarchist youth had organized walk-outs of their high schools, and many students participated in the strike and the action to shut down the port.

Due to the blockade, union arbitrator deemed conditions unsafe for the workers to carry on that day and the operation of terminal 18 at the port was successfully stopped. The crowd did not rely on the decision of the arbitrator to shut down the port, however. After this announcement a large group moved to take terminal 5. Demonstrators erected a strong, large barricade, physically blocking access to the port. The police eventually attacked the crowds with stun grenades, in order to clear the barricade. Demonstrators counterattacked with paint bombs, flares and bottles. For the time that it lasted, the barricade and some amount of rioting interrupted the normal operation of the port.

Eleven people were arrested and one person was threatened with a felony charge for assault on an officer but the charges have yet to be filed. The next morning occupiers with members of Seattle Solidarity Network (a direct action group operating on anarchist principles) shut down terminal 5 once again, this time on behalf of some rank-and-file ILWU members forced to pay medical costs for on the job injuries the shipyard wrongly contested.

There was longshoreman involvement in the port shutdown. In Seattle, a few rank and file union members attended the organizing assemblies for the shutdown. After their union official released a statement condemning the December 12th action, the relationships between the union and the rest of the assembly became contentious, despite the fact that Occupy Seattle had already been given unofficial endorsement from ILWU officials who claimed the need to publicly distance themselves from the action. The union then banned workers from attending any Occupy Seattle related events on threat of losing their jobs.

We have recently heard that ILWU local 19 Seattle is notoriously the most conservative longshoreman local on the West Coast. The ILWU's international leadership, at the time, claimed that the Occupy movement was trying to "co-opt" their struggle and continues to withdraw their support from Occupy related actions, despite also recognizing solidarity from the Occupy movement as crucial to winning critical battles against the anti-union company EGT¹⁶. These relationships are ever-developing, however, and differ from city to city.

Comrades in Seattle suggest they have little reason to believe the solidarity expressed between occupiers on the West Coast and the ILWU will become reciprocal, though the occupiers have demonstrated their ability to shut down the ports, with or without the approval of union leadership.

You say "What some have described as the confusion of this movement is in fact one of its greatest strengths in that it contributes to the movement's uncontrollable nature. By declining demands..."

In our opinion, demands cannot be rejected as a principle. Sometimes it is very important for a movement to win specific concessions within a struggle. Actually, winning a specific demand may provide the strength and the stimulus to promote the struggle further. For example, if the movement in Greece managed to cancel the referendum, or the medium-term program, the implications for the class struggle would be tremendous all over Europe. Only "political demands" (such as "work for all", "free education and health", etc.) should be immediately equated with social-democratic reformist programs.

Our criticism of demands is straightforward: to make demands of your enemy is, in the same breath, to affirm him. To make a demand of the State acknowledges the authority and power of

¹⁶ For more information on this, see <http://www.occupytheegt.org/content/longshore-workers-name-occupy-movement>.

the State to grant the demand. Demands imply a dialogue, a common language, and a comprehensibility between combatants, and in the case of insurrection the establishment of any such common ground favors the State. The power of a struggle without demands lies in its refusal to speak the language of the enemy; in doing so, combatants reject dialogue and make central the *act* of rejection of the existing order. As we argue in the paper, it is in the favor of resistance to remain incomprehensible to power, to not speak its language.

Yet opposition to the logic of the demand must be strategic and not simply an ideological position. As such, we find it promising that the Occupy movement has thus far mostly avoided the pitfall of demands, but we do not think that the enemies of the existing order should refuse participation in any struggle that orients itself towards demands. To do so preserves the purity of one's ideological political identity at the cost of influencing or creating ruptures at vulnerable points. So, for example, we find it agreeable that comrades from Seattle made connections with non-union, mostly immigrant truck drivers during their organizing to shut down the Port of Seattle as part of the West Coast Port Shutdown, and then weeks later demonstrated in support of those workers when they went on wildcat strike. The truck drivers had specific demands for better working conditions, and although we favor the refusal of demands in the war against capital, to refuse solidarity to these workers would be a strategic mistake and a stubborn act of ideological righteousness.

We do not think that demands can be simply divided into those which are political and those which are not, or those which are good demands and those which are not. But we should also mention a way of playing with the concept of demanding: in Oakland, months before the Occupy movement started there, comrades distributed leaflets that stated "Two Simple Demands: Cops Off the Trains and Buses, and Free Transit for Everyone."¹⁷ This was in response to multiple murders by police on or around public transit in Oakland and the rising costs of fare and the cuts to transit lines due to austerity. In conversation, those comrades pointed out that many of them had been of the "Occupy Everything, Demand Nothing" mindset during the student occupations of 2010, and yet were now offering "two simple demands" as a point of struggle. Yet, these demands are practically impossible: the city of Oakland would never agree to take the cops off the buses and trains or to make public transit free, and those making the demands knew so. The point was not to win the demands, but to use the form of the demand to link together two vulnerabilities of the State at that current moment: growing popular outrage over repeated police murders and the growing pressure of austerity. The implication here is that the demand can be used in theory not as a means of dialogue with the enemy but as a strategic framing of unrest, in this case by connecting two potentially explosive situations. We do not think it's a stretch to think such efforts contributed to the strength of the Oakland occupation later.

But in the end, we are deeply skeptical of the demand and assert that the most threatening explosions of social unrest are those that make no demands, for even if apparently impossible demands are used to frame struggles they may in the end limit potentials. For example, while it was the murder of Alexis that sparked the uprising of 2008, it is clear to see that the insurrection was not against only police violence, but the misery of life under capitalism and the state. Had insurgents rallied around demands—even improbable ones such as the abolition of police forces—we believe those demands would confine rather than accelerate the upheaval. While the example of December is perhaps an exceptional one, the same could be said of many other situations.

¹⁷ See <http://www.bayofrage.com/featured-articles/free-transit-for-everyone/>

You say “The most revolutionary potential of this situation lies not in the building of a movement of some mass identity, but in the Occupy movement superseding itself by remaining a fluid, moving, and thickening fog of non-subjects realizing their desires and material needs in the immediate.”

What is the meaning of “non-subjects”? Further, it should be made clearer what exactly is meant with the “immediate realization of desires and material needs” and how you distinguish it from ‘self-managed austerity’. See also a previous comment on the issue.

Let’s look at two common meanings of the word “subject.” One would be that which thinks, feels and acts—the self, the “I”, “he”, or “she” of a sentence. Another meaning would describe an individual under the authority of a sovereign. Under capitalism, we might see how these two meanings relate: that the individual exists as a subject precisely insofar as he is hailed or interpellated by the ideology of capital. Under the rule of capitalism and the state—confronted by our own activity separated from us and manifested as economic and political power—our very identities and “selves” are concrete manifestations of the dominant ideology. We are skeptical of new ideological positions or political identities that develop within capitalism and regard even those that present themselves in opposition to capitalism as potential avenues for its survival or further development.

Throughout the essay, we argue against the creation of new political identities as locations of struggle. This shows in our critique of the so-called 99%, of the suggestion of new voters’ movements, of the repetition of previous activist endeavors, and even of the spreading of anarchist identity. What we are proposing is that a powerful threat to capitalism exists in the frenzy of revolt that is difficult for power in any form—from police to sociological to activist to leftist—to make sense of. We are opposed to the creation of a new political identity of “the occupier,” whether that identity contains reformist or radical ideological content.

Here we are echoing arguments of other recent writings that the hollowing out of previously held political identities—what some have called “desubjectification”—is paradoxically a strength of and threat to the current stage of capitalism. In the United States, our generation has never seen a powerful worker’s movement or even a strong institutional left, much less anything resembling a revolutionary moment. Activist identities are offered to students and other youth to fill that niche. (During the crisis, we are also seeing threats to the identity of worker and consumer as jobs disappear and poverty increases, and also to middle class identity as we already explained.) Participation in what seems to the individual to be a meaningful political identity provides stability to the political system, whereas the loss of those identities produces the potential for instability. As we say in the essay:

“[...] it is critical to understand beyond material elements what the occupations may be providing for people that they can no longer get from the political system. At the same time that disillusionment with democratic representatives soars, capitalism seemingly no longer has any use for the people who have relied on the dual role they are now denied — worker/shopper — for their very identities. This could create a very volatile and unstable situation for power, and left unaddressed would likely contribute to an increase in riots that generalize — with insurrections that are totally irrational and uncommunicative to democratic government and capital becoming the ‘general strike’ of the new era.”

What exactly a “non-subject” is, what “desubjectification” is, and where we find even a starting point for resistance if our identities are constituted by capitalist ideology—these are difficult questions for us to answer, but necessary points to think on. Exploring the issue leads us directly to what differentiates our call for “the immediate realization of needs and desires” and

“self-managed austerity,” which we warn against. The difference is between disrupting the flows and material machinations of capitalism—an act of negation that opens up new potentialities—and finding ways to survive out of the way of a new form of capitalism that no longer has use for us, or even finding new ideological beliefs and identities that provide us with new avenues of participation in the system. It is an old and familiar difference between destroying capitalism and merely finding so-called alternatives within it, alternatives which often end up reinforcing capitalism by developing its new techniques. (Of course, we do not fault anyone for struggling to survive.) Similarly, there is no internal metaphysical trick to freeing ourselves, no new belief system to take on; only the active, concrete disruption and destruction of the dominant order opens the space within which we can find new potential forms of life beyond mere subjects of capital.

In general, could you elaborate on the internal conflicts within the local assemblies? Are you aware of incidents where peaceful demonstrators managed to self-police other demonstrators? Or ways they used in order to control the discussions during the assemblies, or the communiques/public announcements etc.?

An unfortunate example of this conflict playing out is taken from the Seattle warehouse occupation in early December. A march titled “You Can’t Evict An Idea” was scheduled for December 2nd, right after the Seattle Community College administration ruled to evict the unpermitted encampment on school property. Anarchists scouted buildings in the neighborhood and found an abandoned cultural center scheduled for demolition to make way for luxury apartments. An assembly was held, after the building had been successfully entered, to decide how to utilize the space. Many individuals were eager to form a “constitution” of sorts to develop as a way of managing the activities of the space. This constitution, which would ban certain substances and activities from the space, gave rise to debates over law and order. Some individuals felt that it was important to establish rules so that conflicts could be dealt with smoothly and efficiently. This, of course, sounds a lot like establishing centralized governance in place of a decentralized approach to dealing with inevitable conflict.

It is important to mention that the conversations were not limited to order and control. By taking the opportunity to challenge elements who favored control and managed order within the movement, comrades were able to move the conversation into a discussion on the causes of homelessness, racism within the camp, and the roles of private property in society. Comrades and acquaintances had a larger discussion of the capitalist colonization of daily life. According to people that were present, it was some of the most meaningful time many had shared together.

Another example from Seattle would be the attempt by some pacifist occupiers to push the assembly to pass a statement committing all future actions to strictly non-violent terms. A similar debate played out at nearly every occupation in the country. These liberals were upset that some demonstrators had defended the barricade built to block the port by throwing paint bombs, flares, and other debris at the police. When the proposal could not pass a vote by the assembly, the pacifists acted shocked, drafted fake “pro-violence” proposals intended to mock occupiers who would not accept the tactical limitations of non-violence, and complained to the media about the “violent” demonstrators that had “coopted” the Occupy movement. Some formed a group promising to “take back” Occupy. Fortunately, the influence of such groups has been marginal, and most participants recognize and abhor their attempts to control the assemblies. Nonetheless it is critical that occupiers stay alert as to the activity of such good citizens, so eager to self-police the movement.

Here it is worth noting a recent document released to the public on March 29th: a statement of proposed reforms from Seattle’s mayor that will be implemented to the Seattle Police Department. Although the report is ostensibly an effort to reign in a violent and racist police department—sparked by a federal investigation of the SPD’s numerous recent attacks on citizens, especially people of color—the first promised change is conveniently to “reform management of public demonstrations.” The new model of policing will focus on “peacekeeping” and “conflict avoidance”—sure to appease the above-mentioned pacifists! But in case that’s not enough, SPD will also turn to “segregation and arrest of disruptors,” which may be easier after “meetings between police and [...] protest groups when large scale or ongoing protests are expected [in order] to encourage police and protesters to find common ground and to assist in deterring illegal activity and supporting free speech expression.” The effect the city hopes for is for SPD to become “a national leader in crowd management, crowd psychology, disruption of illegal behavior, and public relations.”¹⁸ Obviously, the police will be trying to use divisions such as the one described above to further develop the tendency of self-policing in the future, and to isolate and contain the uncontrollable elements.

Finally, some leftist groups in Seattle seemed to have formed an informal alliance with more liberal factions of the assembly in an attempt to control assembly decisions by blocking initiatives supported by anarchists, youth, and less controllable elements. For these Leninist, Maoist, and Trotskyist groups, any will to act that they do not control is a threat and must be opposed, since their goal is generally to build their party rather than an offensive on capitalism. Apparently with no sense of the irony, these authoritarian “revolutionary” parties take the position of opposing the general strike and accuse those in support of it as being “vanguardist.” Not all of the leftist groups support self-policing as a means to exert their control over the assembly, though. One Maoist group, calling itself The Red Spark Collective, and affiliated with The Kasama Project (related to, and drawing inspiration from the Greek KOE) has tried to hide their authoritarian nature and work with anarchist and anti-state communist groups. Still it is clear that these small scale politicians seek to route any insurrectional energy or radical tendencies into their statist political cult, and thus must be opposed.

4. Experience-Communication

You say “Experience is transmitted not by the extraordinary but by the everyday and it is the very ability to share and communicate everyday experience that has been lost.” but although the chapter is titled ‘The destruction of experience’ there is hardly a definition of it in it. There is a vague reference to the ‘loss of meaning or individuality’ but no clear definition of experience and its destruction. An analysis here will be necessary for one to understand exactly your point.

The purpose of this section was to get to the root of alienation as we see it as an entry point to the larger field of our analysis. First, let’s trace a few important influences which will help to clarify what is apparently somewhat opaque. In the 1930’s Walter Benjamin determined that post WWI trauma had left us unable to communicate experience and this loss signaled a shift from lived experience to the poverty of experience, or life as “Event.” In his text on language and time, *Infancy and History*, Giorgio Agamben outlines the current conception of time as related to the loss of directly lived, and thus, communicable experience and further explores Benjamin’s

¹⁸ Document available here: <http://www.seattle.gov/mayor/media/PDF/SPD2020.pdf> See page 4.

concepts of the poverty of experience and the Event. In our text, the use of ‘the destruction of experience’ is taken from this work. Against this destruction of experience, which is also extended in modern philosophies of the subject such as Kant and Husserl, Agamben argues that the recovery of experience entails a radical rethinking of “experience as a question of language rather than of consciousness”, since it is only in language that the subject has its site and origin. We found Agamben’s argument, that the age in which we live is characterized by the banality of everyday life as rooted in the separation of experience and knowledge, exceptionally useful in thinking about alienated subjects and what we were seeing as the spectacular representation of the occupations in the U.S.

Time is the medium that binds our view of the world with our view of the self. Our conception of time has shaped the way we understand our very lives and struggles, and this relationship returns endlessly back onto itself. With the claim to universality the spectacle commodity economy has enforced the homogenization of individual life and created irreversible time. We are not believers in historical progress; we saw these phenomena mirrored in aspects in the Occupy movement. We highlight this argument in our critique of the movement as lacking real experiencing by drawing on examples of the level of mediation in the movement.

Before we attempt to define the destruction of experience, it is necessary to define the word “Event,” another word we employ to describe this process. The “Event,” which cannot be experienced but only passed through or passively observed, is connected with the rise of modern science, communication technologies, and the loss of distinction between the subject of experience and the acquisition of knowledge. With that, the destruction of experience is both the process by which directly lived experience becomes mediated and the end result of that process. As such, we are against the destruction of experience and for the recovery of directly lived and communicable experience which requires a rethinking of language as the origin of this loss.

You say “The ‘People’s Mic’ is a technique which developed out of the police prohibitions of voice amplifying devices, such as microphones and megaphones, and has rapidly become a symbolic tool for the expression of a unified voice in lieu of any pretense of individuality.” The way you refer to individuality in this chapter gives the impression that for you social relations are inter-personal relations.

I think it would be helpful to outline our understanding of the trope of individuality. The People’s Mic, as we state in the essay, encourages passivity while at the same time offering the illusion of engagement. Here, the “pretense of individuality” alludes to the individuality which is part of the consumer identity or the ‘unique individual’s’ consumption of ideas and resulting assemblage of identity. The identity of the ‘Occupy’ activist is a subject that we left relatively unexplored in the essay and now is at least more detailed.

Breaking apart the self-referential title “The People’s Mic” is helpful in illustrating this example further. We allude that there is, within the occupy movement, a presentation of a unified whole. We argue against a unified front of resistance and for a chaotic multiplicity of actors and actions in a “thickening fog.” The word People, from the Latin *populus* meaning Nation, creates an obvious aversion for us.

You say “In fact we would like to point to the divisions within this 99% that are irreparable, unalienable and inexorable.” Could you analyze these divisions? Are they merely ideological or cultural ones?

It is not necessarily important to illustrate examples of differences between specific and recognizable identity groups. Rather, an understanding of why these divisions exist and come in to

conflict should suffice. The organizations and informal groups present at the first occupy demonstrations vary from city to city. To speak about New York specifically, we imagine and make a few leaps from readings and communications about that period of time at the start of the movement, and on that specific day, last September. At the first occupation of Wall Street some groups associated with political parties were present, i.e. Socialists, Maoists, and other authoritarians. Also at the Wall Street blockade attempt that day were countless individuals not representing any specific political party, although some would certainly associate themselves with a specific political identity, be it authoritarian, libertarian, or something else.

In exploring the tone of the movement we recognize the tendency to homogenize as one of many undesirable potentials. Thus, the slogan “we are all the 99%” overlooks the drastic differences that exist between individuals in favor of gathering a unified front. What we are cautious of is the managerial types who will come forward and reveal themselves as the politicians they truly are. We want nothing to do with these authoritarian sorts and, contrarily, we recognize these divisions as healthy and necessary for a developing struggle. By this we mean that the debates that were had, at the occupation for example, were important and not only did they give rise to meaningful conversation, this conflict, and conflict in general, allowed for crucial separations to be made.

You say “What would be truly inspiring is if the situation was turned completely around: if the crowds refused this ventriloquism in favor of the hundreds of conversations waiting all around them. Imagine the occupation flipped on its axis, its inhabitants acting together based upon true affinity and setting their spectator role, alight; the chaotic environment consumed in a cacophony edging toward real experience.”

Are you sure that there were no conversations / discussions in the occupation apart from this spectacular form of pseudo-communication within the assembly? Would the existence of such discussions be the only criterion for “real experience”? What about the content of such conversations and their outcome in terms of subversive practical class initiatives that would facilitate the articulation of common interests and the satisfaction of needs against the rule of capital? The concept of real “experience” is rather vague in the text, as mentioned in a previous comment.

We never made a claim that conversations beyond the People’s Mic or assembly were not happening and in fact they most definitely are. What about the content of such conversations and their outcome in terms of subversive, practical, class initiatives would facilitate the articulation of common interests and the satisfaction of needs against the rule of capital? Now, this is an interesting question and something that we proposed and explored in the essay. We caution against, criticize, and deconstruct the potential for the spectator role to be reinforced by the pseudo-communication of the assembly, yes. It was not our intention to make a claim that desirable discussion was not happening.

By experience, as we explored further in the previous question, we mean unmediated experience. And, we agree that the movement toward collective action outside of the squares is, most definitely, real experience. In fact, our argument for subversive action that poses a threat to capitalism (or against the rule of capital as you say) is practically the only inspiring direction this movement can take. It is in the practice of destroying mediated social relations that we can find real experience; we are critiquing the movement’s penchant for new forms of social mediation, which others have praised.

5. Oakland

It seems that the content of the call for a general strike on November 2nd in Oakland is rather similar with what was promoted for example in Occupy Wall Street (99% vs 1%, protest against inequality and corporate power, defense of the welfare state, etc). Further, even if the unions did not call the strike, some of them decided to join. Can you provide data about which unions joined in (apart from the Longshoreman union), what demands they promoted, about the level of participation, about possible autonomous forms of organization and about initiatives that were taken during the strike (e.g. expropriations, teach-ins, etc).

It would be also helpful to give some relevant info on the possible collaboration between the unions and the assembly on the calling and the preparation of the strike. In Greece, in the occupation at Syntagma, it was the assembly that took the initiative to call twice for a general strike through the unions; it actually called the unions to call the strikes which they would not have done otherwise. Although unionists as such did not appear at the assembly, there were channels though that facilitated the communication between activists in the assembly and the unions. How did it happen in Oakland? Were there unionists in the assembly who propagated the strike? What you mention in the Potential chapter is not enough.

The union participation in the general strike was a much contested issue at the time and certainly is re-emerging nationally as most major cities prepare for the May Day general strike. Back in late October of 2011, union officials from the ILWU and the Peralta Federation of Teachers said that their organizations would not be participating in the general strike.¹⁹ The bureaucratic leadership of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (the Local 10) supported Oakland Mayor Quan, who we mentioned was responsible for the brutal evictions of Oscar Grant Plaza, in recent state elections. We are not fully aware of union members participation in the General Assembly in Oakland but someone who actually participated in that GA would be able to answer that question.

However, we do know that many independent union members put out calls for participation publicly, giving their support to the strike. In a report from Indybay, some members of the ILWU Local 10 stated, “The history of police violence against strikers is why our Local 10 Constitution bans cops from membership in our union.” It was this union that shut down the ports after the killing of Oscar Grant in 2009. In this call, written only a few days prior to the November 2nd general strike, on October 28th 2011, some ILWU members argued for union participation, staking the success of the strike on their participation:

“At the same time there is an outrage at the bankers and the capitalist crisis which has caused massive hardship on the working class. Occupy Oakland protesters have called for a General Strike on November 2. Whether this actually means real strike action by workers depends in large part on union participation. Local 10 has always been in the lead in the labor movement and all eyes are on us. As a first step, in defending our union and others against economic and political repression, we need to mobilize our members to participate in the rally and occupation November 2 in Oscar Grant Plaza. Shut it down!”²⁰

The call is signed by around a dozen union members.

¹⁹ See <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/national/2011/10/unions-say-they-wont-strike-occupy-oakland/44287>

²⁰ See <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/10/28/18695805.php>.

In addition, the Carpenters Local 713 which represents 3,000 mostly private sector construction workers in Alameda County, California, passed a motion to support the general strike as well. This motion called for support of the strike and condemned police violence:

*“We further resolve to support the call of the 2,000 Oaklanders at Occupy Oakland for a one-day strike in Oakland for Wednesday November 2nd, 2011, to protest our country’s rising inequality and the brutal actions of the police in the city of Oakland, California.”*²¹

It is difficult to calculate exactly how many union members participated in the general strike. After all, it is illegal for unions to join in solidarity strikes under the Taft-Hartley Act, which was enacted after America’s last great General Strike, which occurred coincidentally in Oakland, in 1946. Officially supporting the General Strike could result in millions of dollars in fines and legal expenses to the unions.²²

For the above and many other reasons it is important to explicitly state the significance, then, of the unofficial nature of the strike:

*This is why the general strike on Nov. 2 appeared as it did, not as the voluntary withdrawal of labor from large factories and the like (where so few of us work), but rather as masses of people who work in unorganized workplaces, who are unemployed or underemployed or precarious in one way or another, converging on the chokepoints of capital flow. Where workers in large workplaces –the ports, for instance– did withdraw their labor, this occurred after the fact of an intervention by an extrinsic proletariat. In such a situation, the flying picket, originally developed as a secondary instrument of solidarity, becomes the primary mechanism of the strike... Such mobile blockades are the technique for an age and place in which production has been offshored, an age in which most of us work, if we work at all, in small and unorganized workplaces devoted to the transport, distribution, administration and sale of goods produced elsewhere.*²³

Participation on that day is almost incalculable. We are sure that it would have been more if the unions had officially given their support across the city and state. However, in the U.S., the defiant act of many who joined the strike is unmatched in recent history.

6. More Elaboration

Could you also elaborate more on the following point: “A society whose central strategy for control is observation and localized containment sees its greatest threat in that which it cannot identify”?

Our exploration of subjectivity is relevant here but this claim intends to get at something other than the construction of identities by and for power. With this idea we gesture in the direction of surveillance society and increasing use of surveillance technologies by law enforcement. Here we can look to a few examples to illustrate our point.

Lets begin with the ongoing debate between two camps within the Occupy movement, labeled as those who are “pro-transparency” and those “for security culture.” Occupy Wall Street’s “Principles of Solidarity” list, adopted by GA consensus in the early days of the movement, includes the principle of “Engaging in direct and transparent participatory democracy.”²⁴ Also appearing on this list is “The sanctity of individual privacy,” mirroring the “public sphere” and the “private

²¹ See <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/10/28/18695805.php>.

²² See <http://modeducation.blogspot.com/2011/10/unions-oppose-oakland-general-strike.html>

²³ from “Blockading the Port is the Only the First of Many Last Resorts” by Society of Enemies. See: <http://www.bayofrage.com/from-the-bay/blockading-the-port-is-only-the-first-of-many-last-resorts/>

²⁴ <http://www.nycga.net/resources/principles-of-solidarity/>

sphere” concepts that are inimical to modern democratic theory.²⁵ The trouble arises in where an abstract line is drawn between the two. In practice, the line doesn’t exist and individuals take it upon themselves to act “for transparency,” say by filming discussions and actions, all of the time.

This debate has been ongoing since the beginning of the movement and is nearly ubiquitous. Those acting in favor of transparency, or rather acting on the behalf of the “public good,” have and continue to endanger individuals who are acting outside of the confines of the law or simply wearing masks to cover their faces at demonstrations. With that, the act of filming in organizing assemblies, where nothing explicitly illegal is being *done*, has caused such a rift in Portland, when individuals who didn’t want to be filmed walked out of the Movement Building Tactics assembly after an individual who was filming refused to stop filming people’s faces. He finally conceded this request publicly, but continued to film secretly.²⁶ This sort of activity comes from the mythical claim that media, and the freedom of the press, is counter to totalitarian power and not integral to it. The other side of the argument, when reduced, takes as its central claim that information is power for the state. Thus, knowledge, in the form of personal statements in an organizing meeting or information about who is participating in an action, is likely to be used against individuals in the court of law, again, for the “public good” of national security.

This conflict relates to our claim in the essay: “A society whose central strategy for control is observation and localized containment sees its greatest threat in that which it cannot identify.” The American democratic State functions, as many democratic states function, by granting a superficial set of rights to its citizens while at the same time reserving the *exception* in which these restrictions are disregarded. However, the exception is the rule.²⁷ The state uses the threat of terrorism to suspend previously constitutionally protected rights.²⁸ The definition of “terrorist” activity is vague enough to include many types of resistance and charges of terrorism have been used against many rebels, from animal rights groups to those protesting against the Republican National Convention.²⁹ It would be unsurprising to see similar repressive efforts used against the less controllable elements of the Occupy movement, as matters of “national safety” and “public security.”

Although this next example comes from France, it is illuminating. The individuals arrested in Tarnac in November of 2008 were accused of “criminal association connected to a terrorist enterprise” and one of the central reasons for suspicion was their lack of identifiable information. After saving France from “the seed of Action Directe”, The French Interior Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie blabbed his take on the situation in the National news: “They have adopted the method of clandestinity. They never use a mobile phone. They managed to have, in the village of Tarnac, friendly relations with people who could warn them of the presence of strangers.”³⁰

Persons without data to obtain have become suspicious in the eyes of the authorities. We are certainly not the first to make this claim. The Science and Technology website from the UK ‘The Register’ contains an article entitled “Mobile Phones as self-Inflicted Surveillance,” a research

²⁵ <http://www.portlandoccupier.org/2012/03/13/transparency-vs-security-the-two-headed-beast/>

²⁶ www.portlandgeneralassembly.org

²⁷ see Giorgio Agamben’s *The State of Exception*

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Defense_Authorization_Act_for_Fiscal_Year_2012

²⁹ <http://www.aclu.org/national-security/how-usa-patriot-act-redefines-domestic-terrorism>

³⁰ http://www.theregister.co.uk/2009/04/10/mobile_phone_tracking/page2.html

piece devoted to this subject, communication technologies, and what the author calls “voluntary electronic tagging.”³¹

It is now standard procedure for hundreds of police departments across America to use cell phones to track and spy on suspects.³² In fact, law enforcement training is in favor of police conducting these investigations in secret and without obtaining a warrant.³³³⁴

“Clearly, the asphyxiation that the inclusion of police would have on the already pro law-and-order occupations is one possible dead end that the occupations face,” but it seems that this is not the case everywhere, if we take into account that there were several attempts to occupy private property, to stop foreclosures as in Seattle, etc. It would be really important if you could make a research about such cases of practical initiatives related with the articulation of common interests and the satisfaction of proletarian needs.

The question here seems to be that the statement we make, which is cynical if not directly critical of the occupations, is not adequate to your judgment of the illegal quality of many actions attributed to the occupations in general. Here we feel we must dispute your accusation. To say that the inclusion of the police would necessarily be a dead end, a detriment to the occupations, is accurate in our view. Although we don’t believe that this is contested here.

You quote us: “Clearly, the asphyxiation that the inclusion of police would have on the already pro law-and-order occupations is one possible dead end that the occupations face.” And counter with: “but it seems that this is not the case everywhere,”

To your credit, we assume that you are talking about the prevalence of illegal activities like private property occupations and the like, and the importance of a movement in this direction, but following this statement about the inclusion of the police it becomes unclear. It would choke the illegal elements to have the police, those in uniform or undercover (meaning those officially working as law enforcement) present at the occupations. There is no question about it. Is what you are asking rather whether the occupations were pro law-and-order? This is an important question and actually one that we have faced further criticism about in the U.S. Comrades of ours in America agree that within the occupations there was certainly pro law-and-order elements but that the occupation movement was and continues to be illegal by nature. What we intended to convey with statements such as this one is the fact that there are persistent legalistic elements present in the occupations, especially in the statements from the occupations claiming to be official and representing the occupations.

You say, “The Washington Post, at the time, called the bombing “an act of war.” The description you give about this act is rather positive. However, its outcome was rather catastrophic for the revolutionary movement. It signaled the intensification of prosecutions related with the first “Red Scare”, the creation of the FBI and the demonization of anarchists and communists. Further, according to Wikipedia, business continued as usual the next day.

We neither condemn nor glorify the use of explosives in the war against capital. Our intention is to describe the bombing as another sort of attack on the same target, also perpetrated by anarchists, and—in an apparent coincidence—on about the same date. You are correct here in pointing out that there was only a one-day shutdown and was followed by a much stronger attack from the state on anarchists and communists generally. It is not that we posit the bombing as

³¹ http://www.theregister.co.uk/2009/04/10/mobile_phone_tracking/page2.html

³² https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/us/police-tracking-of-cellphones-raises-privacy-fears.html?_r=1

³³ <http://www.opposingviews.com/i/politics/cell-phone-location-surveillance-now-police-dept-near-you>

³⁴ <http://www.aclu.org/protecting-civil-liberties-digital-age/cell-phone-location-tracking-public-recor>

a correct or decisive blow to the nerve center of capitalism in contrast to the failure of the call to occupy Wall Street. What's interesting to us is that 20,000 people getting into Wall Street and staying there would have been more disruptive than a bomb, but where the bombers managed to make it onto Wall Street, the occupiers did not, and certainly not with the numbers they wanted and probably needed.

Here it must also be said, in response to your statement that “the outcome was rather catastrophic for the revolutionary movement,” that insurgents cannot be blamed for their own repression. While of course it is necessary to act with strategic wisdom and consider likely and potential consequences, any development that is threatening to the state will be met with severe and even catastrophic repression—and yet insurgents must develop threats to the state! For example, while the recent repression of the anarchist, environmental, and animal liberation movements in the United States—commonly called the Green Scare—has been devastating to those movements, one should not be reluctant to speak positively or critically about the actions of groups like the Earth Liberation Front.

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