

# **To Get to the Other Side**

**A journey through Europe and its anarchist movements**

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# Credits

Put me in your suitcase, let me help you pack  
cause you're never coming back,  
no you're never coming back

— Devandra Banhart

Dedicated to Lisanne, for being brave and crazy enough.  
We'll always have Gulyaipolye.

Special thanks to all the people who opened their doors to me, all the people who brought solidarity alive when the going got rough, and to my family, for supporting me in these fiascos with love and hopefully not too much stress. Thanks to x, for the criticism that made these writings worthy of being a book, to Gabriel and Liza, for proofreading, and to Andrey (taipoint.org), for the beautiful website.

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# The Borderland

My last night in Denmark I sleep on a park bench in the borderland between anarchy and the state. There is no clear boundary line. A few dozen meters one way shoppers and commuters drive home and cops ticket people for crossing on red. A dozen meters the other way people organize their own lives and property relationships hold little sway. And there in the middle, in the falling darkness, my dreams pull the world into a black hole of such gravity the very particles of existence fly apart and reassemble themselves in impossible arrangements. Time curls up on itself, the past marches back before my eyes and the future turns around and presents itself in hindsight, the possible and the definite trade masks and mannerisms. Choices and their consequences mingle with lucid omens, impossible desires, and suppressed regrets.

Drops of moisture fall on my cheek. I open my eyes. It's raining.

The park bench is hard, but I needed it this night. A jogger runs by in the pre-dawn glow. Behind him is a lake. In the lingering surreality of dreaming he seems like some underworld messenger, the boatman on the River Styx. Off to one side is a low grumble. I realize it's the morning traffic of København, Denmark's capital city. On the other side there is no evidence of automobiles or commuters. Only trees and tranquility and the dim outline of houses through the fog. That is Christiania.

This far north, this time of the year, it never gets dark for long. If the sky is still colorless, it must be early. More importantly, it's starting to rain, and I have miles to go before I sleep. Kilometers, I remind myself, and roll out of my sleeping bag.

Christiania may be the most populated, established manifestation of anarchy I have experienced. It comprises an entire neighborhood in the city of København, and it has been squatted and autonomous since 1971. It used to be a military fort, but the government abandoned it and now Christiania holds nearly a thousand people building a life outside of capitalism and the state. I first heard about Christiania from some articles on the internet, and received the news with the same dull pleasure anarchists always feel when we read that anarchy is actually possible, in some faraway land or distant time. I almost didn't come, except that I was following a little sign, the coincidence of meeting some Danish punks in Berlin who drew me a map showing the way to some friends I could stay with there. København lies several hundred kilometers from Berlin, which is a long way by bicycle, through shadowed forests in Brandenburg, over the rolling, golden hills of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, a ferry ride across the Ostsee, a long lonely bridge over dark waters to Vordingborg, short trees and squat cottages in Sjælland...But I am here in Europe to learn about things like Christiania. Ultimately, it is revolution I am interested in. Not the shrines of revolutions past, but the seeds for revolution now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when no sane person believes in revolution. When capitalism is destroying the planet; when genocide, racism and colonialism have continued for 500 years and counting despite all the ostensible solutions offered by the state; when the privileged countries the rest of the world are supposed to emulate are a wasteland of alienation and psychopharmaceuticals. Now, when revolution is least realistic and most necessary. There is nothing especially romantic happening in Europe, and in fact the historians of the

state are attempting to write the ending of the autonomous movement and all other possibilities of bringing political revolt to the streets of this continent, while many anarchists themselves are concurring that history has moved on, that the age of squats, clandestine groups, streetfighting on May Day, is fading. But I think that the anarchists where I come from have a lot to learn from desperate attempts, especially in countries that, like the US, have no culture left besides that of the Market.

I had spent the last six years of my life in little ole Harrisonburg, Virginia, through the heady days of the antiglobalization movement — the protests and the struggles that seemed to be uniting the world against capitalism and the US empire — and then the deadening stupor of the War on Terror.

We had some successes, there in the Shenandoah Valley. Set up an infoshop, an anarchist social center. The authorities shut it down, we opened another one. Started the clichéd Food Not Bombs group to serve free food to the homeless population, and to enjoy a communal meal ourselves. Organized the first ever Virginia Anarchist Gathering, a Copwatch group, a prisoner support group. Some friends started a permaculture farm nearby with a Community Supported Agriculture program. It was pretty good, considering there were just a few of us. But we never could quite extend beyond that wall of isolation that seems to suffocate the anarchist movement in the US. And the whole time I had to sacrifice my wanderlust, my desire to see the world and learn new languages, in order to keep up with my weekly commitments. When there's only ten anarchists in a town, it's hard to take vacations. The stress mounts up. Best friends move away, others go complacent and try to turn the struggle into a social club with a radical façade. And the state is so powerful, eventually it becomes more attractive to create a perfected anarchist space, attacking the imperfections of your friends rather than attacking your bosses and governors. You become your own worse enemy. People prove themselves to be more valiant on internet blogs and local gossip circles than in the street, and those you trusted to watch your back end up sticking a knife in it.

Sometimes, in order to find your community, you have to find yourself first, and in order to clearly see the struggle you're involved in, you have to look at it with new eyes, comparing it with a completely different situation in order to see what's possible and what's necessary. Sometimes, there's nothing to do but move on and hope you've left some seeds behind. For me, this journey was a long time in coming, not only in terms of the dead end local activism had wedged itself into, but also in how long I'd been looking forward to a chance to go travelling. I had been working as a taxi driver two years to save up money for a yearlong trip. I spent it all to self-publish a book I'd written, but somehow the shoelace DIY distribution operation pulled through and I made the money back just in time. My first stop was Berlin.

# Berlin

The 4<sup>th</sup> of July was a hell of a day to get out of the States. I'd originally planned my trip to last from May Day 2006 in Berlin to May Day 2007 in Barcelona, but I left late, and so it was another sort of holiday that marked my arrival. My older brother met me at the airport. Carl had been living in Berlin for two years, teaching English. At the end of the month he would leave to go to Palestine as a volunteer teacher, around the time Israel was bombing Lebanon. In the meantime I could stay with him in his little apartment in Moabit. The neighborhood shares the name with the huge prison that still holds some members of the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF: Red Army Fraction), an urban guerrilla group that attacked German capitalism throughout the 70s and 80s, placing itself politically somewhere between the autonomous movement and the Stasi. For this yearlong trip, I had only saved up enough money for the airplane ticket and some food – the lodging and transportation had to come free, so it helped that I had already had a place to sleep that first month while I figured out how to pretend I was a rugged vagabond. I also needed some time to refresh my German, which I had learned in high school and hadn't used much since.

The wide, tree-lined avenues of Berlin echoed with a history of struggles that continue to resound today. The signs along Karl Marx Allee marked the locations of the barricades of 1848, the old path of the Wall was still traced across the cobblestone streets, and great hulking buildings draped with banners and graffiti testified to the survival of the autonomen. In the 80s and early 90s, neighborhoods like Kreuzberg were semi-autonomous zones, filled with immigrants, squatters, and punks, fighting to defend their streets against gentrification, neo-fascists, and police. Writers like Ramour Ryan and George Katsiaticas describe how every year the anticapitalists celebrated May Day with a massive battle against the cops and the luxury stores, even starting the previous evening, Walpurgisnacht, Witches Night. And the rest of the year was characterized by fights against neo-nazis, attacks against the authorities responsible for deporting Kurdish refugees back to Turkey, squatting and the organization of autonomous social centers, trashing bourgeois restaurants that drew yuppies into the neighborhood. And within these popular and militant neighborhoods, Marxist and anarchist armed groups like Rote Zelle, Rote Zora, 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, and Rote Armee Fraktion found hiding places and large bases of support.

Now Berlin is heavily gentrified. The working class neighborhoods in the center have become trendy and expensive. There are fewer squats and most of the remaining ones have been legalized, though the fact that they still exist in any form is a direct testament to how forcefully they were defended from eviction in years gone by. The May Day riots still continue every year, though they are shorter and less intense. And throughout the year the tradition of opposing gentrification by directly attacking the rich finds its manifestation in the burning of luxury cars. Every year in Berlin hundreds of shiny, expensive vehicles meet their fiery deaths. Sometimes these actions are claimed by the "Militante Gruppen," often by no one at all.

While I was there the city was calm, enjoying a warm July that brought everyone outdoors to sit alongside the canals, sunbathe in the parks, or bike to one of the nearby lakes to go swimming. In Berlin I saw an anticapitalist community far more developed than anywhere I had seen in the



US, where community tends to be an abstract — an ideal or a pretty lie. But here there really was a liberated culture existing alongside the commercial one. Take a copy of *Streß Faktor*, the monthly booklet publicizing all the concerts, people's kitchens, debates, film showings, presentations, and other events happening in the many social centers in the city, and you could find a way to partake in this community every day of the week, even if you were an outsider.

Perhaps the most common sort of event was the *Volksküche* — a people's kitchen — a communal meal which is like a Food Not Bombs except they generally ask for a little money and it's not at all service-oriented. Several times I went to the *vökü* at Köpi, Berlin's most famous squat. It was over 17 years old at that point, though technically it's an ex-squat, as the city legalized it years ago. The building is huge, and along one of its outer walls runs a bold declaration: *Die Grenze verläuft nicht zwischen den Völkern sondern zwischen Oben und Unten*. The borders run not between peoples but between above and below.

Köpi's junky front gate and dirty, punk-strewn courtyard are hardly inviting, but such an aesthetic is a defense against gentrification. Few bourgeois people would want to move next door to such a place, and they certainly wouldn't park their cars there. At first the people there seemed cold and unwelcoming, even to a fellow anarchist, and in fact the German movement has a reputation throughout Europe for being closed, suspicious, and arrogant. But in all fairness, the place receives a constant stream of visitors and radical tourists, so it doesn't make much sense for the regulars to spend the time getting to know people they'll never see again. And later in the month, at a presentation about the prison system, I met several nice people and even got invited to stay for the night so I wouldn't have to bike all the way back to Moabit.

The radical community in Berlin contains many different circles and hubs that extend well beyond the punk scene and the squatters' scene. My brother had found himself a niche at Baiz, an antifascist bar. This was another interesting phenomenon in Berlin and other cities in Europe: anticapitalist businesses. The idea was a bit jarring at first, but the logic has a certain appeal to it. A radical group of friends get together to start a bar, a restaurant, or a shop, in order to create a stable place to hang out and hold events, and to employ themselves without having to tolerate a boss. They're not trying to sell revolution, just recognizing that until they abolish capitalism they're going to have to pay for beer so they might as well be supporting a friend at the same time. This is not entirely alien to the US, but every example I know of back home that's not a book store (for some reason that's the one permitted exception) does not portray itself as a cultural hub within a revolutionary anticapitalist movement but as a cooperative or some other positive alternative project within capitalism. By being honest that they're a compromise and not an end in themselves, and by availing themselves to a broader revolutionary movement that intends to go much further than the cooperative form, the spaces in Berlin seemed to have more potential.

Like many neighborhood bars, the people who drank together at Baiz were friends. It was a community hub. However this place was draped in red and black, and the back room was used for presentations and discussions. But not everything had to be explicitly political. After all, community is what exists between meetings and protests, when people form friendships and share food. My favorite moment in this bar was the night when everyone crowded in to watch the final match of the World Cup and erupted in delirious cheers when Zidane lost the game for his team by headbutting the fascist Italian player who had provoked him with a racist insult.

The World Cup wasn't all fun and games though. It marked a frightening milestone in the reemergence of German nationalism. Under the innocent alibi of "rooting for their team," the World Cup had made it acceptable for normal Germans to fly their flag for the first time since

they were waving a different flag entirely. And you saw it everywhere, draped from people's balconies or attached to car antennas. The media had rigged a debate on the subject, and in the street you could hear people repeating what they heard on TV as though it were their own opinion, that this was the "good kind of nationalism." At one antifascist march the protestors even yelled at people flying the flag from their homes, calling them nazis. I had to smile, imagining such a protest taking place in the US, where after September 11 you couldn't spit without hitting a flag.

Sun and stormclouds play checkers in the sky over Berlin. My bicycle weaves the days and neighborhoods together as I travel from protest to vokü to film showings to the fussball table at the bar where tricky-fingered antifascists are waiting to hustle you. The passing time is filled with activity but empty of some deeper contact. Friendship and political affinity can take years to develop: will my trip through Europe be peopled by mere acquaintances? Am I here just to tour, to observe, to stay on this side of the glass wall and accumulate experiences superficial enough that they fit on a postcard? Or will I break through and enter a new world so completely that I lose the way back home? Somewhere down the road, someone is cracking open a door. Somewhere down the road, someone lights a match. My brother flies away, but he leaves me his bicycle to speed me down the road.

# Ungdomshuset

In December 2006, a few months after I had left København, Denmark's capital experienced the largest public disturbances the country had seen since World War II. And it all revolved around an anarchist social center, *Ungdomshuset* — literally, “youth house.” Denmark is a relatively prosperous country, most people aren't afraid of going hungry or homeless, yet when the city government moved ahead with plans to evict and demolish the building, thousands of people put their lives on the line to fight back. For many of them, it was the only non-commercial cultural space they had — the only space where they were truly *free*. Perhaps they had gone to their first punk concert here years ago, maybe they were able to stay here a while after running away from an abusive home. Maybe they had never even come here but were glad that such a place existed.

Ungdomshuset was first and foremost a youth house but it did not suffer from a lack of history. From 1897, the building had been a *Folkets Hus* — a People's House — integral to the radical labor movement. In 1982 it was given over to the youth group that formed Ungdomshuset. Once the city, which had come into ownership of the building with the decline of the labor movement, began trying to sell the property at 69 Jagtvej, the Ungdomshuset folks put up a banner reading: “For sale along with 500 autonomist, stone-throwing violent psychopaths from hell.” Perhaps some buyers were scared off, but fate spun out an insulting twist: a Christian sect bought the property and gleefully rejected all attempts at compromise, even turning down offers to buy the building.

Hundreds of punk anarchists came from across Europe to defend Ungdomshuset. Thousands of people barricaded the street or formed black blocs and marched on police lines. They protected themselves with masks and helmets, in violation of Danish law, and fought the police with rocks and molotov cocktails. The police beat protestors viciously, and admitted to using a potentially lethal form of tear gas. Three hundred people were arrested. Numerous police and demonstrators were injured. One protestor had a finger blown off by a teargas canister. Protests against the Danish government took place throughout the world, and arson or vandal attacks occurred against Danish consulates in Greece, Nederland, and other countries. The eviction would not come for some months yet, but people had shown the state — and more importantly themselves — what kind of resistance to expect. And it was not just young punk anarchists coming out in support. Although many so-called normal Danes were shocked by the rioting, thousands of others came out and participated in peaceful, candlelight vigils organized by Ungdomshuset supporters to create a diversity of resistance and broaden the possibilities for involvement. And many people from outside the movement, people we often presume to be alienated by violent resistance, took part in the riots themselves, glad to have an opportunity to vent their rage against the cops.

Police finally evicted Ungdomshuset on 1 March, 2007, and the city demolished the building five days later. The eviction was backed by a military helicopter and special forces who sprayed the entire building in a flame retardant foam to neutralize the molotovs. Supporters of Ungdomshuset rioted again, setting up burning barricades throughout the Nørrebro district and at

Christiania, prompting the police to declare martial law in both these districts. Afterwards, police raided several addresses around the city, arrested the members of the legal support group, and rounded up a total of 690 people, including 140 foreigners, on the presumption that they posed a danger. Plainclothes police agents from at least four other countries were brought in to aid the repression. It was an instant of warfare, a rupture in the illusion of democracy and the tranquility we are supposed to believe in.

Aren't I glad to have been a part of this? Ha. Comically, when I passed through Denmark I dismissed Ungdomshuset as a worthless place, not so long before it made history. I approached the brooding edifice on a day an event was supposed to be held, only to find the doors locked. Around back some punks looked at me like I was stupid and muttered a few unhelpful words, and I left. Fuck 'em. It was clearly my loss, and I should have known that many things worth finding are not encountered on the first try. There is of course something to be said for friendliness, a trait that is sorely lacking in many circles. But in tackling the problem of isolation, a problem I had identified as one of the biggest obstacles to the anarchist movement in the US, I assumed the solution could be seen through a lens of accessibility. Was it possible that Ungdomshuset was not an accessible place for people outside a certain subculture, but could still inspire a fairly broad popular rebellion?

I don't begrudge a space its subculture, and in fact every social space has its own subcultural norms and aesthetics, whether it admits to them or not. Since workers have been turned into consumers, there is no unifying proletarian culture anyway, and attempts to cater to mainstream culture only indenture us to the bourgeois values that infuse that culture and the corporate media institutions that shape it. We need, after all, a pluralistic revolution, which will be waged by a plurality of cultures in resistance. Myself, I probably would have been more comfortable, upon gaining entrance and acceptance, in punked-out Ungdomshuset than in hippy-infested Christiania, but I spent most of my time in the latter because that is where I was welcomed.

To what extent can a space tie itself to a single subculture while still being socially powerful? How can a group of outcasts be welcoming to others while maintaining their autonomy? And if a lack of accessibility is not the primary cause of the isolation of today's revolutionaries, what is?

## Leaving Christiania

By the time I packed up my bike, the clouds covering the sky over København were promising a storm. I was sad to be leaving after just a few days, but to really be able to participate meaningfully, I would have to stay months longer. For some reason I felt compelled to move on, and wasn't too comfortable with the people who were putting me up. They were real friendly and welcoming, but all they did was smoke and party every day and every night. It seems to be a common problem of the autonomist strategy that once you occupy a place and set up a bubble of freedom, some people are going to be content just living free, acting like they have already won. I could sympathize.

It was impressive, Christiania. An entire quarter of a city, living in anarchy, a self-made hodge-podge of gentle streets, unique buildings, lazy parks, and lively workshops. By the 80s the government was forced to recognize that Christiania was autonomous and they declared the area a social experiment. Now, real estate companies were interested in the valuable land and the city government was trying to take it back. For the first time in years, cops had started entering Christiania to carry out drug raids. A large part of the hippy enclave's economy was based on selling hash. There were no laws here, but they collectively upheld a ban on hard drugs. They also made bicycles, their own houses, ceramics, and just led a relaxed life. What fascinated me most was its imperfection. Although life in an autonomous zone is a million times better than life under the direct administration of the state, it is not a utopia. There was still a necessity for rebellion within the microcosm of Christiania, and there were anarchists taking on that role, fighting against complacency and against the old-timers who owned houses there and exerted more influence, trying to move the economic relationships, many of which are still based on exchange and wages, further away from capitalism, and trying to organize resistance against the Danish government and the planned eviction. Unfortunately, the kids I was staying with were not among these activists, or I might have stayed longer.

The black clouds were loosing a steady drizzle that promised to get stronger. There was a faint hole in the clouds on the southern horizon, but the wind was blowing in to fill it. I too was going south, and I would have to race the wind to stay dry. I mounted my bike and left Christiania, going fast and steady down the road to the Rodbyhavn, where I could catch a ferry to Puttgarden in Germany. By the day's end I had biked 180 kilometers. I found a stand of trees just outside the little town of Großenbrode where I could write some letters and pass the night.

## Adrienne Gernhäuser

Perhaps because American society suffers from such a strong case of amnesia, I find histories of resistance so intriguing. The Red Scare destroyed anticapitalist movements in the US, erasing them to a degree unparalleled in Europe, and creating a disconnect between present and past resistance, a lack of continuity and perseverance. Furthermore, the social fabric is made of such thin stuff, the real estate itself so impermanent, that physical and social markers of past rebellions do not remain. Looking at the morass of shabby duplexes in the town where I was born reveals no hint of the fact that it was a hotbed of immigrant Italian anarchists a century earlier. The industrial farms draped over the rolling hills around Harrisonburg emit not a whisper of the people who lived there before, who gave the Shenandoah Valley its name, nor of their brutal expulsion.

While travelling in Europe, I discovered a whole web of rebel stories, secret monuments, and reminders that struggle is eternal. Some of these histories dated back a century, others only to the last generation, but all of them could serve to inspire, inform, and fertilize resistance now. Like the US, Germany had its fair share of revolutionary groups in the 70s, driven underground by the state repression of anticapitalist movements. In the US, these groups were crushed and largely forgotten about, their members killed or imprisoned for life. In Germany, many people also fell to repression, but the story has not ended so conclusively.

As recently as late 2006, a member of one clandestine group turned herself in to police after decades living as a fugitive. Adrienne Gernhäuser was a member of Rote Zora, an armed German feminist group that carried out 200 bombings and other attacks between 1977 and 1995. Their actions targeted the commercial exploitation of women, nuclear power, genetic engineering, landlords, government restrictions on abortion rights, and so forth. Their statements called on other women to reject the passivity they had been schooled in and fight back against patriarchy and capitalism. Rote Zora took great care to ensure that people were not hurt in their bombings, though they did not restrict themselves to damaging property. On a few occasions, their sister organization Revolutionäre Zellen, with which they greatly overlapped, kneecapped kidnapped officials, such as an important judge responsible for deporting Kurdish refugees back to Turkey where they faced severe torture and death. They also carried out one assassination.

Rote Zora and the Revolutionäre Zellen differed from the more famous RAF in several key points. The RAF saw itself as a military formation fighting on behalf of the armed anti-colonial struggles in the Global South, whereas the former groups connected their actions more directly to domestic social struggles. Additionally, the RAF was Marxist-Leninist in its analysis and more dogmatic in its style, while the RZ were anti-authoritarian.

Gernhäuser, now 58 years old, admitted to participating in two attempted bombings, one of the Berlin Genetic Technical Institute and another of the Adler clothing company in Bavaria in solidarity with striking South Korean garment workers. Because of the widespread firebombing campaign that cost Adler millions of dollars in damage, the company gave in to the demands of their mostly female workers in South Korea. Adrienne Gernhäuser began trial in Berlin in April

2007, though the maximum penalty is a suspended sentence because of the time that has elapsed and the fact that she turned herself in.

## Arriving in Hamburg

The storm I left behind yesterday in Denmark finally caught up with me in beautiful Lübeck. I was exploring the city center when the clouds unleashed a heavy, furious rain that soaked me and all my things before I could run back to the place I had locked my bike, along a canal west of the Innenstadt. Couldn't find anywhere to stay in Lübeck, or in the suburbs, so I kept biking along until I was drowned in darkness and the city was lost behind me. A roadside map indicated an autobahn overpass ahead. I thought I might sleep under the bridge in case it rained again, but when I arrived it proved impossible to climb down there with my bike. I finally settled on a little bus shelter surrounded by farm fields and laid down in my wet sleeping bag on the concrete floor, with nothing to warm me but the bottle of wine the folks at the tourist information center had been kind enough to leave unattended. I was cold, wet, uncomfortable, and even worse: I was turning into some kind of caricature.

I woke up at the first sound of morning, afraid the proper German locals would see me sully their proper little bus shelter and level me with a glare of sheer disdain, or perhaps call the cops. Still wet, I got on my bike well before sunrise and started pedaling hard towards Hamburg. By noon, I was sprawled out to dry in the delicious sunlight in a little park on Lübeckerstrasse.



# Affenstrasse

My first night in Hamburg, I took the advice of an Italian punk from Köpi and made my way to the St. Pauli neighborhood and its bevy of sex shops, bars, and falafel huts, all plastered with the skull-and-crossbones stickers of the local soccer team with the famous anti-fascist fan club. At the epicenter of peeling layers of graffiti and wheatpasted posters, the bulk of them punk and antifascist, stood Hafenstrasse, where I was told to look for a place to stay. Initially, led astray by the Italian's accent, I was searching fruitlessly for "Affenstrasse," Monkey Street, which sadly does not exist. In half an hour at a punk bar surrounded by former squats I scored myself a room, for the remainder of the week no less, with some cheery Polish anarchists and their endearingly swine-like dog. That Monday morning was my first shower since I'd left Berlin 840 km earlier. Delicious.

I really wish that before I had come I had read the section in Georgy Katsiaficas' *The Subversion of Politics* about the battle for Hafenstrasse in the 80s. The city's mayor had declared war on the squatters and announced the eviction of the Hafenstrasse squats. There were major street battles which the police were unable to win, and arson attacks against commercial centers. The city gave up on its plans for eviction, and announced the legalization of the squats. If I had known this history I might have seen Hafenstrasse through different eyes. Instead, I only saw that they hung out a lot at the bar and that we didn't have much in common, so it was all I could do not to dismiss them as lazy punks, since after all they were nice people and they were open and hospitable enough to let a stranger with a different aesthetic stay in their house. From the US, I was used to a different way of doing things, in distinct activist groups that have scheduled activities and meetings that are open to newcomers. Whereas they didn't seem that interested in me, politically, if I met a travelling anarchist in the US I would welcome them and look for common projects even if they didn't dress like I did, and if they were from another country I would keep them up all night with questions. It hadn't yet occurred to me that the anarchist movement in a city could be so large that people could work exclusively on lines of affinity and ignore everyone else who seemed to do things a different way, or that travelling anarchists from other countries might be so common you actually get a bit tired of them. It may be a bit similar in New York or San Francisco, but certainly not in Harrisonburg, Virginia. In some ways I was the country mouse, come to the city.

It was a bit easier for me once I found Rote Flora, Hamburg's main autonomist social center. Aesthetically it was the same as Köpi or Ungdomshuset: graffiti-covered walls plastered with posters and stickers announcing punk shows and occasional protests. A few beautiful pieces of spray-painted art, a few skulls-and-crossbones and other intimidating representations, a few broken bicycles, closed iron doors. But once I finally found out when they were open and how to actually get in — and this was no simple task — I found that, as a social center, they operated in a way I could pretty much understand, and moreover, it was a friendly place.

In the evening there was a bicycle workshop around back. Everyone was trading tools and parts, taking bikes to pieces and putting them back together. I couldn't tell who was running the

workshop and who was there to be helped: rather everyone was united by a love of bikes or a practical obsession with fixing them. The bike my brother had given me was quality. No sooner had I arrived then several of the workshopers gathered around it, which made it easy for me to find someone to help me fix my brakes. I think he was glad just to be able to take apart such nice brakes and see them from the inside.

Up on the deck someone called out that food was ready, yes it was another vokü. I went upstairs to eat but the other people in the workshop only had eyes for their bikes. A tight crowd was gathered around the vegan meal, old people and young people, talking, laughing, drinking, and even asking strangers like me where they were from. Some folks seemed to know each other from way back, and others were there for the first or second time. Someone who worked with the social center told me a little about what they did: hosting art workshops, debates, discussions on the local social movements. They also put out a monthly magazine.

I was only at the beginning of my trip, but it already felt like such a long time since I had seen my friends and devoted my time to familiar political activities. Being there among friends, even if they weren't my friends, warmed me all over, I didn't want to leave. So after the vokü I stayed to clean the dishes and sweep the floor. Alas, not one of the apparent insiders asked my name or started a conversation with me. They were wrapped up in what seemed to be an interpersonal drama. Nostalgia: it felt just like a Food Not Bombs back home.

# Four Storeys of High Culture

## A Declaration of the Rote Flora<sup>1</sup> to the Commercial Culture in the Schanzen District

Translation of an article that appeared in *Zeck*, the magazine of Rote Flora, no.133 July/August 2006 pp.5–6. Thanks to Filip for helping with some difficult words and inside references that only a Hamburger would know.

### I. What the Schanze Has Lacked until Today Is Obvious, According to the Press: Culture

Reading the future in the grounds left at the bottom of overpriced Macciato's hardly reveals a cultural milestone in this desolate wasteland between Altona, St. Pauli, and Eimsbüttel, which now receives that which was so long missed. Now everything will finally be different, now the Schanze too gets neat dance-café's for seniors, sewing courses, family brunches with live music, and, we mustn't forget, the long pined for meditation classes. Naturally we're talking about the promised "Culture House 73" soon coming to Schulterblatt 73 and with it hip jazz sessions, readings, comedy, lectures (about whatever), theater, concerts, and — brace yourselves — tada! live football on video projectors. Finally, culture!

At least the Hamburg Morgenpost and the Springer'sche Abendblatt<sup>2</sup> were unanimous in their respective 22- and 23-02-2006 editions, that with the new bar and restaurant of Pferdestall Kultur Inc. in the until now empty building at Schulterblatt 73 next to the Rote Flora, the dream of a visible neighborhood culture project in the Schanzen district could finally be realized. While the Abendblatt, under the headline "A Chance for the Schanze" (we recall that this slogan was already in play within the framework of the drug debate), fantasizes over a promised development that would assign itself the task of culturally stimulating the district, the Mopo has already gone a step further, projecting a triumph for Business Führer Falk Hoquel and his project. In fact, Pferdestall Kultur Inc.'s project might be a great step forward in the development of the Schanzen district as a Party Mile and a lucrative zone for commercial bars and pleasure spots. The Piazza Project 2001<sup>3</sup> blew the opening whistle, and now, right in time for the World Cup ("football on video projectors"), the Abendblatt has announced the end of the days "in which around Schulterblatt more is protested than consumed." It couldn't be said better.

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<sup>1</sup> The Rote Flora is Hamburg's main squatted social center and autonomous space. It is located in the Schanzen district of Hamburg, at 71 Schulterblatt St. The "Culture House" next door is four storeys tall.

<sup>2</sup> The two largest newspapers in Hamburg, liberal and conservative, respectively, and the latter owned by Springer, the major German media baron. Later in the article the former is referred to ironically as the Mopo.

<sup>3</sup> A commercial project for the development of the plaza — or piazza — just next to Schulterblatt street.

It fits the idea of urban planning, under the authority of the STEG<sup>4</sup> since 1989, if the opening of a commercial restaurant and leisure spot under the name of “Culture House” can be posed as an addition to neighborhood culture. But it also bespeaks the depressed state of public consciousness in this neighborhood that no criticism has been formulated of PK Inc.’s obvious swindle.

## II. STEG: Godfather with Tradition

In this situation, one cannot accuse the STEG of not remaining true to their political line. The ostensibly “gentle urban renewal” that the STEG wants to accomplish, as official urban planner of Hamburg since 1989, has mainly taken the form of a silent reconstruction of the Schanzen district from an alternative scene neighborhood at the end of the ’80s to an “in” quarter with fashion boutiques, bars, high rent antique apartments, and also trendy mortgaged apartments. The in-this-context formally proposed neighborhood participation has exhausted itself in “round tables” and public comment processes that mainly just give the nod to long-decided political proposals. The STEG has consequently known to keep itself outside of all city development conflicts in the last years, instead playing a role of neutral mediation (most recently, in the closing of the Fixstern<sup>5</sup> and the remodeling of the Wasserturm<sup>6</sup>). The chief goal of the STEG was above all not to contradict the political programs of the city council or districts, which is to say, the interests of the investors.

## III. Student Start-Up: from the Campus to the Schanze?!

It’s no surprise when STEG’s Julia Dettmer appears as the advocate for PK Inc. The behavior of the company is more than noteworthy. PK Inc., which has entered into a nonprofit partnership with the university, faced a need to stimulate student culture on the university campus in closer cooperation with the Asta student culture commission.<sup>7</sup> Therefore they ran, among others, the Ponybar, next to the Abaton cinema.<sup>8</sup> For this reason the university marketing firm is a company of PK Inc.

Meanwhile PK Inc. has monopolized the operation of the university event hall with their “hip events,” and set itself in direct competition with the smaller, self-organized student cafés at the university. The highly demanded cultural offerings of the Ponybar exhaust themselves these days in televised football, childrens’ books on tape and hip DJs. PK Inc. has since spread out from campus with the opening of the gallery “14 Dioptrien” and its investment in the Astra bar in January of this year.

And now that PK Inc., under the direction of Business Führer Falk Hocquel, is embarking on another commercial project in the neighborhood of the Rote Flora, one might wonder if anyone is privately enriching themselves with university subsidies?

The PR strategy for achieving these plans, for which even TAZ and Scene Hamburg<sup>9</sup> have placed themselves alongside the Abendblatt and Mopo as the uncritical executors, functions ac-

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<sup>4</sup> Hamburg’s urban development bureau, like HUD in the US.

<sup>5</sup> An institution for junkies to shoot up in a safe environment.

<sup>6</sup> An abandoned water tower in a park that was converted into a 4 star hotel.

<sup>7</sup> Asta is the official student union.

<sup>8</sup> A student-oriented movie theater.

<sup>9</sup> Two alternative Hamburg magazines.

ording to a relatively see-through pattern. Offerings for children, families, and pensioners will be indiscriminately presented as a profile, as if anyone could earnestly believe that in Schulterblatt 73, senior citizen dances, family brunches, or neighborhood-oriented youth activities will regularly take place, beyond a few superficial events to keep up the alibi. Instead of this we believe there will be up to ten events a week, but these will be marketed to yuppies.

This formulation recalls the former promises of the Schlachthof Project on Feldstrasse in the mid-90s.<sup>10</sup> The STEG also proclaimed then that a neighborhood culture center would be created for the Karo district, but in the end it has become a poorly run concert hall after the STEG got rid of all the neighborhood-oriented initiatives.

When in public opinion culture has its place only under pure economic interests and neoliberalization<sup>11</sup> holds more and more force in the mediation of culture, then nothing stands in the way of the growing stupefaction of society. Finally then nothing will be protested, only consumed. Congratulations.

#### **IV. The Downfall of Noncommercial Neighborhood Culture**

Without question the current development in the Schanzen district is merely the consistent continuation of the neoliberalization of all aspects of society. Perfectly according to plan, the neoliberalized Schanzen district meets an economically molded student milieu<sup>12</sup> in an amusement park almost totally cleansed of junkies, dealers, and the homeless.

In social and cultural spheres, usefulness — or, more exactly, demand — is woven together more and more with the principles of capitalist value: only those with money can use it. Claims to an equal share of public life, expectations of equal opportunities and equal rights in society are only valid for those who can afford it. Concomitant with this is the replacement of state-guaranteed employment, through rigid budget cuts, with a reference to the now politically desirable “charitable” social and cultural work.

A “culture project” like that planned at 73 Schulterblatt is the beginning of the end of a neighborhood culture oriented to the common good. When the so-called “Culture House 73” can be presented so far indisputably as an addition to “neighborhood culture,” that is the downfall of a notion of culture that falls short even by the minimal standards of Hamburg’s cultural authorities.

#### **V. The Future is Here**

Parallel to the discussion of “internal security” and the drug scene, the Schanzen district has also been placed under the rubric of public interest through intensified restructuring and investment plans. As the new information economy firms progressively establish themselves in the

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<sup>10</sup> The Schlachthof was an abandoned slaughterhouse that was transformed into a community center but eventually came to offer little more than yuppie bars, galleries, a pricey concert hall, and offices.

<sup>11</sup> I’ve translated “Ökonomisierung” as “neoliberalization.” Sadly, in English “economizing” means to make more efficient, and “privatization” is too limited and technical a term. “Neoliberalization” suggests the necessary broadness and capitalist agency, but the reader should not get the sense that the writer is speaking within a newer antiglobalization framework so much as an older and deeper anticapitalist critique.

<sup>12</sup> In tandem with the rest of the European Union, German universities have recently been overhauled, away from earlier forms that encouraged free study and towards a new model similar to that of the US, in which students are produced to meet economic needs and moved quickly from scholarship to employment.

neighborhood and the Messe<sup>13</sup> expands, the Schanze can make an attractive starting offer for the upwardly mobile in the international real estate competition. The neighborhood possesses these and other winning factors. Schulterblatt gained a chic plaza (which is one-third privatized and lies in the domain of the respective bar owners). The Fixstern has been closed, because in a Party Mile there's no more space for facilities to help drug addicts (recall what the STEG previously proposed: banish the Fixstern to Lagerstrasse<sup>14</sup>).

No shopping streets, no event rooms without cameras and security service. Social and racist criteria for who belongs and who doesn't ever more comprehensively determine the movement of individuals and accessibility in a literal sense. The debate over video surveillance in the Reeperbahn shows the direction the Schanze is headed as well.<sup>15</sup>

Here another consequence of the gentrification process becomes clear. The effort to clean up the Schanzen district is based on a massive exclusion. Those who no longer fit into the image of the Schanze as an attractive neighborhood for pleasure and consumption must go. Above all the homeless, drug users, drug pushers and the people with dark skin who are all assumed to be pushers; all but a folkloric remnant have been successfully disposed of through chicanery, racist police controls, arrests, persecution, and expulsion.

In the long-term, all those who cannot afford the rising rents – another consequence of the no longer creeping gentrification process – will be forced out of the Schanze and other inner city areas. And also those whose rent contracts expire and who receive the option to buy their apartments will have to leave the neighborhood for lack of capital. Even those who celebrated the restructuring methods used to gentrify their neighborhood face the same problem of rising rents and now may have to pack their bags. Anyone who doesn't have enough money in his pocket and can no longer maintain is no longer desired here.

*But it doesn't matter, because finally in the Schanze, nothing will be protested, only consumed.*

Plenum of the Rote Flora, May 2006.

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<sup>13</sup> A sort of economic expo, located in any major city, where new products are showcased.

<sup>14</sup> An out of the way street which at the time was in a run down area.

<sup>15</sup> The Reeperbahn, one of Hamburg's red light districts and a major tourist destination, is now under complete video surveillance.

## Between the Weser and the Ems

Lonely days of biking past stubbly fields, rivers and canals, land stretched flat and low towards the elusive sea, which suggests itself in the salty air and drunken earth though it hides far beyond the horizon. I navigate from one village to the next with a compass and list of waypoints copied out the night before. Bike all morning in a serene trance digesting dreams and birdsongs, roadside visions, tender thoughts of friends; stop around noon to fill up on bread and apples and cheese. I cycle through the afternoon heat with angry strokes, pushing past the fatigue and soreness, cursing cars that cut me off or fill my lungs with smoke, reviewing all the failures, all the disappointments of the year gone by, and finally by evening fall into a sort of peace that floats through the last twenty kilometers and does not transcend the pain and weariness but forgives them, knowing they'll be back

There's something to be said for solitude in an isolated world. Alienation does not necessarily build walls between us and others, so much as damage our ability to relate. Alone on the road, far from anyone I know, I am left with the sounds of the world the thoughts in my own head, no matter how much distance I put between one night's dreams and the next. What I get to know most in this shifting world is myself. Maybe that will be a good place to start to find others.

Sometime late in the glimmering of twilight, I reached Bremen. One of the punks in Hamburg gave me the address of a friend of his. When I showed up on her doorstep that Friday evening she invited me in before I even had a chance to ask if I could stay, then proceeded to feed me, show me the old town, and take me to the main anarchist social center, also a former squat now legally owned by its activist tenants. I was taken in by such a feeling of welcome and possibility, I thought about staying longer, but something I could not explain in any rational way was pushing me on. I was not ready to stop yet. So the next morning I packed up my bike again, eased my protesting fundament slowly back onto the seat it spent most of its days pressed against, and rolled out over another bridge, another river, more fields, into another unknown. She had drawn me a map out of town, but neither she nor anyone else had any contacts in Nederland. Lacking any particular reason, I was heading to Groningen, with no plan other than to try to meet folks when I got there. But it was another two days away.

That day I almost made it to the border. I ended up resting my bones in Leer, a small city nestled in the crook of the Leda and the Ems, watching a gibbous moon rise over construction to the sound of swallows and crows. The border was a dozen miles away, but all day I had to convince myself I was still in Deutschland. The old folk in Ostfriesland speak a strange dialect, its own language really, and everywhere the accents, the spelling, the architecture were all different. Old buildings still bore inscriptions in either Friesen or Plattdeutsch, and I could hardly understand it. The differences are dwindling with time, or more accurately under the onslaught of a homogeneous culture that blares forth everywhere from the same TV screens. But for now it felt like a different country, and without the state, without the imposition of borders and the concomitant homogenization it *would* be a different country, one of many, each flowing seamlessly into the next.

# “Weet je waar een kraakpand is?”

Maandag, 7 Augustus

Yesterday afternoon I arrived in Groningen, where I had some faint notion to spend a month, gain some appreciation of the anarchist movement in the country, and try to learn Nederlands (the word “Dutch” is actually a bastardization of “Deutsch,” which means German, whom some time ago the English evidently mistook for Nederlanders). Right as I was biking into the city I suddenly began to wonder why exactly I thought Groningen was the city to find anarchists in. I didn’t know anyone there and had never heard the place being mentioned in connection with radical activity. All around me I saw a thoroughly mediocre city startlingly devoid of radical graffiti and plastered propaganda. *Hold on a second, why the hell did I come here?* Even a solitary spraypainted circle-A would have flooded my heart with joy, and in fact my first glimmer of hope, the first good omen, came from the sight of an Anti-Fascist Action sticker stuck boldly to a lamppost on Hereweg. Little did I know that the person who had placed it there would later give me a tour of all the city’s squats. At the time it was just a little sign that somewhere in this city, hiding amongst the shoppers and students, was one of my kind.

By now the routine of scouting a new city had become automatic: memorizing the main thoroughfares and looking for squat symbols, signs of political life, parks with hidden places I might sleep in at night, places safe and dry to lock my bike, dumpsters, cheap internet cafés, places to get water and go to the bathroom. After hours of fruitless searching I finally decided to join, if only temporarily, the 21<sup>st</sup> century, get on the internet, and look for mentions of social centers or squats in Groningen. I soon got an address for Oude RKZ: once a hospital, then a squat, and now an alternative residence for some 300 retired hippies, lefties, punks and sundry others.

An acquaintance I made there permitted me to put down my sleeping bag in a storage room for the night, and pointed me towards a protest in support of asylum seekers happening the next day in the Grote Markt, where I introduced myself to a rapid succession of people that in the span of four hellos and three minutes landed me with floor space at a squat just west of the center.

## What exactly is a squat?

A squat is a vacant building occupied by people who for a variety of reasons do not respect the property rights of the absentee owner, and either openly or covertly take up residence therein. Once inside they fix up the decaying building, hence the connection of the squatters’ movement with the DIY (do-it-yourself) culture. They often hang a banner with some concise “fuck you” to established order, or cover the façade of the building with graffiti of varying aesthetic and political content, perhaps also peppering the surrounding neighborhood with the squat monogram to point the way to travellers. In Nederlands, the word is *kraakpand*, in Deutsch *besetztes Haus* and in Español *casa ocupada*.

Squatting, in Nederland, is legal in buildings that have been abandoned at least a year. There are a number of loopholes, and to the business-sympathetic ear of the courts and police who



retain sole power to interpret the concept, “abandonment” takes on a startling degree of metaphysical complexity. In other words, liberal Nederland deals with the potentially insurrectionary phenomenon of squatting with a strategy of legalization, a permissive release-valve that tolerates discontents creating their subcultures in buildings truly abandoned by capitalists, and forces resistance, from those squats the powerful wish to retake, into disarming legal channels. To defend your squat, you don’t pick up a brick the honest, old-fashioned way — you need to get a lawyer. Property owners have also taken up the tactic of establishing anti-squats by renting out vacant, squat-vulnerable apartments to people willing to sign away all their rights in return for a rent as low as 20 euros a month. Owners have no obligations to anti-squat tenants, and they can kick them out with a couple weeks notice. In Groningen and other cities in Nederland, many of the best buildings that would otherwise be available have been filled with anti-squats.

The opportunistic socialists in Nederland have come to the defense of anti-squats. In Groningen for example, they are known to dramatically squat a big building, co-opting the enthusiasm of the youthful participants; they win publicity for themselves as humanitarians by moving students, poor, or homeless people into the building; and then they pressure them all to sign an anti-squat contract and trumpet it as low-income housing. It’s not unheard of for them to stage-manage the whole thing with the owners from the get-go. This sort of action is great for the owners, and it opens a back door to destroy Nederland’s progressive housing rights, creating the reality that poor people must surrender all their housing rights in exchange for a cheap place to live, which the speculators can maintain as flexible properties because at any moment they are able to kick out the tenants and demolish or sell the building.

Despite Nederland’s progressive laws, owners commonly win eviction processes against squatters, and then the police come to kick them out. Other times, owners skip the courts and hire goons to attack squatters with crowbars. Not too many years ago, squats in Groningen were defended forcefully. The high point was in 1991, when the city evicted the Walters-Noordhof Complex, a huge squat near where the university library stands today. All of Boteringestraat was covered in burning barricades, rubble, and riot police, where now shoppers stroll past yuppie stores consuming above all their illusion of social peace.

In Germany, squatting is less legal, hence the term “former squat” used so frequently in reference to the occupied dwellings in that country. If they do not want to retake a particular property by force, the government or property owners can bring it back into the pale of legality by making the attractive offer to the rogue tenants to purchase or rent the building for an extremely low amount, “legalizing” it.

In the US, there has never been a countrywide squatters’ or autonomous movement as has existed in Europe. The only squats I knew about in Virginia were either covert, or “permission squats” allowed by the absentee owner. Housing and building-use codes seem to be stronger tools in the US for preventing any unorthodox use of buildings. It certainly would be much harder in the US to run a squat bar and sell alcohol to raise money. Some of the key squats on the Lower East Side during New York City’s squatting heyday were evicted because they were “not up to code” and supposedly presented a danger to the occupants. Not that we have to pine for irretrievable days of glory or covet Europe’s fabulous squatting movement. These days, squatting seems to be a growing phenomenon in the Rust Belt, where municipalities do not have the money to demolish all the condemned buildings in the largely abandoned cities.

Here in Nederland, the center-right government in power was proposing a law to illegalize squatting, sparking a number of protests, mostly around Utrecht and Amsterdam, and also a

number of raids by police, who had just forcibly evicted a large squatted farm in the center of the country, in the week I arrived. In Amsterdam a large squat was repeatedly evicted and reoccupied. Elsewhere a squatted castle was stormed by police. The occupiers resisted, though I was told they were hippies and didn't put up a good fight — no catapults, crossbows, boiling oil, or anything like that.

Vrijdag, 11 Augustus

The guy I was staying with, Joop, lived with a friend, Jan, at 31 Taco Mesdagstraat, in a small squatted apartment just above a pizza place. We hit it off easily, going on long walks, dumpster-diving for groceries, discussing economics, media, radical propaganda, and similar themes. After getting to know me for a couple days, they invited me to stay there the whole month I was in Groningen. I was considering going on to Utrecht, but Joop described the anarchist movement locally as experiencing a decline. I'm a sucker for hard cases, so I decided to reject the big city syndrome and stay on to help them with a few projects, and to explore this smaller, less exciting city and its fascinatingly apprehensible routines.

Three days a week there was an open air market on the Vismarkt, and you could skip vegetables. Outside the city center were a few supermarkets with generous dumpsters. And you could use the internet for free at the university, if you could get a password. It would be pretty easy to provide for myself this month. I felt immediately comfortable there, and satisfied with my new home after days on the road. I used to think it was impossible to make real friends in less than a year, but as my friends back home seemed increasingly distant with each meager email, I was amazed by how quickly I could become close to new people I met, brought together by hospitality and a shared struggle. It wasn't enough to hold off a heavy nostalgia, but it did make living worthwhile.

A week after we met, Joop, Jan, and a friend of theirs took me out for my birthday. We saw *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, Ken Loach's latest film, a brutally honest chronicle of the struggle for independence in Ireland. People can desire freedom so strongly they will sustain torture or take a life, and at the threshold of victory they can suddenly begin to doubt themselves and sell the revolution short. I wonder, if we ever get that far, will we miss these calm days of powerlessness?

# Noorderhaven Canal

Sunset over Noorderhaven canal. Orange fire fights to find gaps in the algae-green carpet lying atop the water. Weather-worn houseboats moored on both sides have been there since before the first photograph, some of these same boats since before the first television commercial, and they will be there still after we've torn all the advertisements down, or they'll be turned into floating billboards by some wallflower of a man regarded as a genius in his field.

## She Shows Me

She shows me the piece of metal on the string around her neck. It's the inside of a lock she broke open on one of her many squat actions. Her nose crinkles as she tells me how she got it. "Look, here, and here," she points out the marks a crowbar left on the door frame two years earlier. And on the wall, stenciled spraypaint demanding: "Make Capitalism History." This too has a story. : when Bono inserted himself at the head of the antiglobalization movement under the slogan "Make Poverty History," local anarchists went out into the night to cover the walls with their response.

We're taking a tour of Groningen's former squats, a dozen of which my new friend helped to occupy. Her forest-colored eyes flare as she talks of battles with goons sent by an owner to clear the squatters out, in more militant days removed by only an intractable year or two, a glass wall of history for me to peer through.

The day is long and the city is under our feet. We abandon ourselves like children on an empty playground, walk through rainshowers, help ourselves to free chocolate and wine from a supermarket, and sit on a park bench laughing at the sad, dripping festival tents and their failed gaiety. Often we're so close our arms brush, and I bite my tongue and hold back my sighs with all my strength.

Travelling and living are hard, lonely things.

# Action Tour Against the Squatting Ban Begins with a Squat in Leiden

Translated from an article on Netherlands Indymedia, with invaluable idiomatic assistance from L

Activists have just occupied the office building on the corner of Stationsplein and Schuttersveld in Leiden. The building, which is located right near the infamous hole of the speculator Van de Putte, is on a long lease with Bonavella Holding B.V. from the same speculator. The squat-action, which also signals the start of an action tour through the whole of Nederland, addresses the role speculators like Van de Putte play, and also the planned squatting ban of the Balkenende II cabinet. The activists intend to continue holding actions during the rest of the week, and in one week's time to turn the dilapidated building into a social center or free space in which the Multipleks, among others, can have a new space for all its current projects.<sup>1</sup>

## The Action Tour in Different Cities

The renewed attack against the squatters, which Minister Dekker<sup>2</sup> has insisted on in the House of Commons for about a month and a half, has been answered in the previous weeks with a number of actions, large and small. After banners appeared on squats through the entire country, beginning this month the Dam, Amsterdam's main square, was occupied by activists. Woonstrijd!, which surprised the Minister the previous year with an action-week at her villa resort in Wassenaar, today begins a continuation of this protest with an action-tour through different cities in the whole country.

## Minister Dekker and Her Principles

Minister Dekker's attack was aimed at the ideology of squatters: with the disappearance of the problem of vacant buildings, the ideological basis of squatting also disappears. This identification of squatting exclusively with the problem of vacancy is actually an attempt to annul the diverse motives that people have to squat and the various actions and initiatives that are undertaken by squatting groups. That squatting is also a part of a social struggle against the housing crisis<sup>3</sup> and for the conservation of subsidized housing for the poor is totally ignored by the Minister.

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<sup>1</sup> The Multipleks is a squatted free-space/autonomous zone in Leiden that has existed since September 2004, and hosts internet cafés, info-evenings, eetcafes (roughly, food-café), squatting network meetings, cinema evenings, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning, and Environment, in the cabinet of the second conservative coalition government under Jan Peter Balkenende.

<sup>3</sup> Literally "housing-need," the word here refers less to a specific crisis and more generally to the compulsion under capitalism to acquire housing as a commodity and not a right, whereby people can need a house but not have one despite the availability of houses.

Moreover, the Minister has prattled lightly, from her villa, about the absolute and principled protection of ownership. In current juridical practice, squatting rests on the assessment that in some situations the right to housing outweighs the absolute use-rights of an owner who, please note, does nothing with his private property. The absolute protection of ownership desired by the Minister lines up with what speculators have achieved through underhanded means for years: to have housing and commercial space at their disposal in as flexible a manner as possible, so that they make robust profits off them. Usury profits at the expense of many small shopkeepers and above all the tenants.

## **Duke of Dilapidation Van de Putte**

The argument that squatting is outdated, and that a squatting ban is therefore inevitable, becomes clear particularly from the practices of Sir Ronnie van de Putte. With over 30 years of speculation under his belt, the “work” of this “project developer” still has not come to an end. After this slumlord left hundreds of houses to fall into shambles in the second half of the 70s, used goon squads [i.e., to beat up squatters] and illegally demolished apartments, especially in Amsterdam, he hasn’t stopped terrorizing society through his ruthless acquisition of property. And through an extremely obscure and mercenary chain of businesses that, among other places, end in Curaçao, the ex-“Slumlord of Amsterdam” can easily escape prosecution.

In Leiden, Van de Putte is well known due to the yawning hole (which is now screened off by what is known in Leiden as “the shame-strip”) in front of Central Station. It doesn’t stop there. Elsewhere he is known for a crater in Noordwijk, a scandalous stain on Oisterwijk, and a collapsed building in Sluis. And everywhere the story is the same: no municipalities can take action against the speculator. Although the municipality of Leiden has been talking since the beginning of 2002 about dispossessing Van de Putte’s vacant lot, there’s not much to be seen in the way of actual results.

Because the project developer has held the Leiden office building in a long-term lease since 20 March, 2003, he threatens to take over large parts of the neighborhood around the station. This is an even greater danger since the municipal council changed the lease terms for city grounds in a way that favors developers.

## **Social Center and Free Space**

Leiden has just as little protection as other villages and cities from people like Van de Putte – people who make everyone’s social concerns and the personal lives of multitudes subordinate to their exclusive proprietary interests. The newly squatted building stood empty for the better part of many years and, consistent with Van de Putte’s track record, was already considerably advanced in its decay and headed towards eventual demolition. In response to this drawn-out drama, something needs to be done now. During the Leiden action-week, we will clean up this considerably destroyed building and construct a free-space there. The neighborhood around the station in Leiden can surely use some spicing up. Ultimately, the intention is to get a spot in the squatted building for the projects from the Multiplex, such as an open source internet project,

a food-café, cinema, and a bakfiets<sup>4</sup> workshop. Numerous new initiatives will be developed as well. Finally, a group of people will also come to live in the building. In the rest of the week, more actions will follow. Van de Putte out of the city! Squatting lives on!

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<sup>4</sup> A bakfiets is a quintessentially Dutch cross between a bicycle and a wheelbarrow, very useful for transporting heavy things around a city if you don't have a car.

# The Martini Tower

The church tower  
is the tallest building in this flat city.  
They used to let people to the top  
and charge them for the view  
until one pragmatic local  
threw himself off  
and hit the cobblestones  
in front of the German tourists  
drinking in their cafés  
on the market square.



# Citizens Afraid, Government Happy

Translation of an article in the Dutch anarchist magazine *Buiten de Orde*, no.19 issue 2.

Present day Dutch politics is ruled by the codeword “Muslim terrorism.” Laws are changed, civil rights are trampled, and prohibitions are applied. But we’re not familiar with any Muslim terrorism in Nederland. A brief examination of the how and why of the existing Muslim policy.

## The Beginning of “Muslim Terrorism.”

Since 11 September 2001, Muslim terrorists have been talked about in politics and in public space. From that date a discourse has developed in which citizens are deluded with the frightening prospect of Muslims taking power. “Western democracy” is said to be in danger. As an answer to the attacks America invaded Afghanistan at the end of 2001. In 2003 Iraq followed. Both wars were and are supported by the Dutch government. First Nederland maintained that it supported the war “politically,” and it was later revealed that in secret it was giving practical support in the form of Dutch commandos and F-16’s from the Royal Airforce. The Dutch government pumped an enormous amount of budget money into these wars.

## Who Are the Dutch Muslim Terrorists?

Muslim terrorists are not said to exist only in faraway lands. We also have them in Nederland. The group of people pushed forward by the Dutch state as an organized Muslim group with the goal of carrying out terrorist attacks was the Capital Group. One of the people supposed to belong to this group was Mohammed B., who killed Theo van Gogh.<sup>1</sup> After this murder the entire group was arrested and locked up for varying periods of time.

## What Has Happened in Pursuance of the Supposed Presence of a Terrorist Group of Muslims in Nederland?

Politically: Politicians have painted a picture of a great danger that threatens our Dutch democracy. Against this danger hard measures had to be taken. There was talk of an emergency situation, in which civil rights (such as privacy) would have to make way for the national well-being.

In the Press: Certain stories were reinforced and exaggerated. The media functioned as a mouth-piece for politicians. Through newspapers, magazines, TV and internet, over the past few years

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<sup>1</sup> The Capital Group was a high profile group of people arrested in Den Haag, the Dutch capital. Theo van Gogh was a progressive filmmaker who made a film perceived to be critical or insulting towards Islam.

the picture has been constructed of a situation that has “gotten out of hand,” and that poses a danger for Western society and freedoms.

Juridically: Because of the emergency situation that rules our land, politicians began initiatives to change the laws. It was maintained that due to the protection of civil rights, the struggle against Muslim terrorism was being frustrated. For everyone’s safety the Dutch citizens had to surrender a small piece of their rights. Here follows merely a small number of examples from laws that were changed after the appearance of the struggle against terrorism.

- The law on mandatory identification (29:218): the requirement to bear and show a valid identity card for all people residing in Nederland. Adopted in 2003.
- Expansion of the possibilities for the investigation and prosecution of terrorist crimes (30.164). This bill expands the ability of police and the courts to take action at the earliest possible moment to prevent terrorist attacks. With this bill the government can intervene sooner in the case of a major threat. The use of these special investigative powers no longer requires the reasonable suspicion that a punishable offense is being committed. Mere indications are sufficient. Adopted in May 2006.
- Increased ability of the intelligence and security services to investigate and take measures against terrorists and other dangers in relation to national security (30.553). That means among other things the introduction of mandatory data distribution and uniform automated databases. The bills intend to help increase the efficiency of the various branches of the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and the Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD). Adopted in October 2007.

Though this is just a small sample from many possible examples, we can draw a number of conclusions. First of all state control over private matters has intensified and the state has greatly expanded its mandate for control. All data can be examined and the secret services have secured many more opportunities to do so. Secondly the state no longer needs to justify arrests with the suspicion (or even just the presumption) of a punishable offense. Nowadays they need only point the finger. This means that any individual could be arrested at any moment and the state need not even give a substantial reason.

It’s not only easier for the state to carry out arrests now, but also prosecutions. Trial can be delayed for longer; where the maximum wait used to be 90 days, it’s now two years. In other words, with just a vague suspicion, without any accusation based on actual facts, a suspect can sit in jail for two years without trial.

The end of these changes to the law is not yet in sight. Even more serious, it seems like it’s barely begun. Thus people who “incite hate or violence” can be taken out of action more easily. The cabinet is also looking for ways to make “glorifying or praising serious crimes” a punishable offense. The writing of this article that you are now reading would also be a crime, under this law.

## **How was the Capital Group judged juridically?**

For three and a half years we were hearing that the Capital Group was a terrorist cell of radical Muslim fundamentalists with the goal of carrying out attacks and killing people. Recently the Den

Haag court announced that the Capital Group was not a terrorist organization (there was no talk of a criminal organization with a criminal intention). Now it's not as though we as anarchists put much value in the judgment of judicial power. This will always be devoted primarily to protect the interests of the ruling class. The significance of this judicial verdict, however, lies in what it reveals about the objectives of the politicians. You might think that we can now breathe freely, because there is no Muslim terrorist organization in Nederland! Moreover, the anti-terror laws can be revoked: but the politicians are sending out the opposite message. Among others the CDA and VVD were displeased by the verdict.<sup>2</sup> Instead of recognizing that the Capital Group was no terrorist organization, the CDA and VVD advocated a sharpening of the anti-terrorism legislation. Such a reaction demonstrates that the governing parties don't have the intention of letting factual information be tested by a judge, only that the fiction of Muslim terrorism remain in place.

## **Why do the authorities want the fear of Muslim terrorists to remain high, whatever the cost?**

In a society that traffics in fear, politicians can set themselves and their institutions up as the defenders of the people. It is thus necessary that the citizens believe in the "actual" danger, that they fully trust the authorities, and that they themselves are happy to enjoy such protection. The feeling of fear must be so deeply rooted that people are prepared to give up basic human rights for the good of the "security situation." Also the many millions that will be spent on war in the Middle East must be legitimized to the people. It just doesn't sound good to say that the goal of the war is to conquer a land with large oil reserves.

The creation of a sphere of fear isn't anything new. This tactic has been around for years. Think for example of the "Red Scare" in America. There the fear of communists after the Russian Revolution and in the fifties was cranked up and exploited to such an extent that all sorts of laws could be introduced and undesirable people could be silenced and estranged.

One of the characteristics of this tactic is the selection of a suitable group of people to get it started with. This must be a group of people whose experiences are far removed from the people in the country in question; a group against whom there already exist many prejudices that can be encouraged and multiplied. In the case of the "Red Scare" this was the communists, and now the Muslims have been chosen for this role. In short, the authorities profit from a total climate of fear. To keep this climate in place and to fuel it, they will do anything to exaggerate situations of terror and to let them develop in a controlled manner.

## **Summing up...**

Within the period of fear the legal system is transformed and military operations are executed. The admission (years later) that the reasons for these happenings and interventions were fictitious is unimportant for the authorities. After all, the damage has already been done.

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<sup>2</sup> The Christian Democrats and the Liberals, major political parties on the right and center, respectively, that make up the ruling coalition.

Firstly the military intervention has already taken place and the Dutch state has already participated in the murder of many thousands of inhabitants of Iraq and Afghanistan. Secondly we see that the transformation of the legal system is a well advanced project.

Once these projects are completed, the emphasis on Muslims will fall away. Then it will be apparent that they were only used to garner public support on racist grounds for the projects in question. Afterwards the transformed and newly created laws will be utilized to increase the repression against anyone who criticizes the system. So we see once again that the state does not want to protect us, but rather to come up with false pretenses in order to oppress us, to control us, and to exploit us

“First they came for the Muslims, and I did not speak out — because I was not a Muslim. (...) Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak up for me.”

## Leaving Marks in a City of Glass

Groningen was a solidly bourgeois city, though the surrounding province is the poorest in Nederland and constitutes the country's socialist belt. Nonetheless, one noticed little sense of conflict, which was typical for a society that prided itself on compromise. The city center was a well organized ballet of bicycles and buses, open air markets and cute little stores, student fraternities and restaurants. The few cars in circulation unfailingly came to a stop by the time a pedestrian put her foot down on the crosswalk. Serene canals spiraled around the center, remnants of the city's defense system from centuries before. Groningen's current defenses were less obvious, though they ruthlessly blocked the paths to insurrection and, like the ring of moats once had, shaped the city itself. At the middle of everything were the shops. The city guards were the advertisements, babbling to us incessantly from every wall. The welfare state and the externalization of poverty allowed by neocolonialism meant that the wealth gap was minimal, and nearly all Groningen's inhabitants were offered tidy lives of consumerism with all their needs apparently met. The conscientious citizens could buy organic at the eco shop, or subsidize starving Third World peoples by purchasing their arts and crafts from the humanitarian store. Progressives could join the Labor Party, dissidents could join the Socialist Party. One could criticize this closed system, but the means to spread that critique were prohibited. A soft but firm array of laws against posterering, stickering, handing out flyers, and so forth meant that the public relations and advertising companies who could afford it were the only ones able to sculpt the mental landscape on a large scale. It was a nearly perfect propaganda bubble.

Joop and I talked long and hard about how to reach out to people under these circumstances. He was a methodical thinker. A few minutes into any conversation he was likely to say, "So if I understand you correctly, your hypothesis is that..." With the meager means before us, we proposed to change the surface of the world we lived in, allowing signs of the subterranean resistance to register in people's consciousness. There needed to be some counterinformation, an urgent writing on the wall, disputing the image of the world created by advertising and corporate news. And the illegality of the medium itself would add to the message. A stencil spraypainted on a wall is a sign that people are going outside the sanctioned channels to communicate, and that they are willing to break the law to do so. It is a sign, however slight, of rejection and discontent. Enough angry, subversive, critical writing on the wall attacks people's illusions about the stability of the world they live in and the degree of democratic consensus. The police view this from the other side, through the Broken Window theory: signs of disorder in the environment signify to people that disorderly behaviors are possible.

Wheatpasting posters and putting up stickers were two other media easy to use. Posters and sticker paper provided an attractive medium but the costs added up unless you could find a place to do free shopping or printing; however I think if anarchists gave up drinking, smoking, buying music, or any other vice, they would find it affordable. In Groningen, the authorities had made it illegal to walk around town with poster-paste, so the police don't even have to catch you in the act to give you a ticket. It seemed the safest time was early Sunday morning, when the cops were

exhausted from a busy night, and there were plenty of other people on the street but most of them were drunk and bleary-eyed, unconcerned about what other people might be doing. We made one poster directed at the very consumerism that seemed to be the local population's most debilitating pastime. Bearing a photo either of an armed column of Zapatistas, a Pakistani mob trashing a McDonalds, or Nigerian militia members with a kidnapped European oilworker, the poster was framed with the words: "You shop for happiness while the victims of your consumption fight for freedom."

Joop and I supposed another step was creating opportunities for new people to get involved. Groningen was a university town and school was starting around then, so at the last minute some of us put together pamphlets and banners and tabled at the student orientation, pretending to be a university club. From there we advertised a few events: a Food Not Bombs, a film screening, and a presentation. A week later, a smattering of Groningen anarchists cooked up a meal under the aegis of Gratis Eten, Groningen's Food Not Bombs. From Laage der A, the city's largest squat, we wheeled the food out to the Grote Markt on a bakfiets, and served free food to about a hundred people, standing out quite noticeably amidst the bustle of shopping. There are lots of critiques and internal discussions regarding the Food Not Bombs tactic — serving free food in public — as a response to poverty: whether it recreates dynamics of charity, whether it is effective at getting new people involved and under what circumstances. But in the center of a busy shopping district, the format offered different possibilities. Here it was a minor interruption of capitalism, a demonstration of different economic relationships: that you can share things and enjoy public space for free. It caught people's attention. Some seemed scared, others were attracted, and a few people even stayed and talked — about world hunger, capitalism, anarchy, and other topics that our presence and our flyers brought up.

A couple days later, a city-sponsored festival in the park was interrupted by a minor act of guerrilla theater. In the thoroughfare between two different venues, with no stage in sight, suddenly appeared people in costume, people growing coffee, going on strike, a soldier beating them down, George Bush greedily gathering the coffee and trying to sell it to the people in the crowd, the farmers putting on ski masks and fighting back. Then someone walked through the crowd that had gathered and passed out flyers announcing the upcoming screening of a film about resistance to globalization. Meanwhile, someone playing his own role came up and informed us that we weren't allowed to make a skit in the park, and he would call the police if we stayed there. With all the people crowded around, there were all sorts of possibilities where the play could have gone from there!

Throughout this month, Joop was producing a documentary on journalism, examining the mythology of the press and critiquing their actual practice. We were constantly having long, electrifying conversations on the topic while cutting out stencils or walking around the city. Sometimes we talked a bit too much. Early one Sunday morning, immersed in debate, we suddenly noticed that on the other side of the storefront window, which we were redecorating, a man was approaching us at full speed. We took off running just as the door opened and the shopkeeper burst out, cursing and yelling. There might be bike cops or plainclothes cops around any corner here in the shopping district. We took the first side street to throw the shopkeeper off our trail, and after getting out of sight of any witnesses we turned a corner and slowed to a walk. I took off my outermost layer of clothing so I wouldn't fit whatever description the zealous shopkeeper might be calling in to the police. My heart was racing. I wondered what would happen to me if I were arrested in another country. Once we got far enough away to feel safe, Joop

and I discussed what had gone wrong. The answer was simple: it was Shopping Sunday. The one Sunday of the month when stores were open, to encourage people to overcome their tradition of not buying things one day of the week, and to ease a transition to an American-style 24/7 consumer economy. The shopkeeper was in his store because he was getting ready to open it for the day. We doubled over laughing. On the way back home we picked up where we left off in our conversation about journalism and communication.

For me it all came back to the question of isolation. How do we break on through to the other side? In the past months I had seen radical scenes in three different countries, each like a petri dish growing different strains of bacteria in a different solution. What would come to seem an obvious conclusion was starting to occur to me: that the isolation that plagues the anarchist movement is not caused by internal factors. So far I had seen anarchists exhibiting a huge range of behaviours from inclusive and friendly to hostile and cliquish. These made some difference in terms of how accessible a particular group was, how comfortable I felt as a newcomer, and how good the group's relations were with other pre-existing groups of different political stripes. But in all places people still spoke of the same isolation and I noticed it myself. Later, in southern Europe, where social life still thrived in the streets, I would see that the isolation was not as strong, though in some places it seemed to be growing.

This isolation is caused by the mass media and the social structure of capitalism. Anarchists today are isolated because everyone today is isolated. The difference is that most other people are not reaching outside their cliques to build relationships of solidarity and mutual aid. The local bingo hall or church might draw a bigger crowd than the anarchist book club, but at the edge of that crowd lingers the same silent void. Alienation is the condition we all share in common. And while anarchists seeking to abolish capitalism have to overcome alienation and build strong communal relationships, the so-called anarchist ghetto, in the meantime, isn't all bad. Ghettos open space for autonomy. They are cauldrons in which outcasts can brew their rebellions, or in which they can stew indefinitely, if they choose to remain complacent. The Warsaw ghetto was the site of the greatest insurrection against Nazi power, and ghettos in the US are hotbeds of radical culture and anti-state sentiments.

Hopefully all anarchists realize that we will never be able to communicate our ideas through the mass media, nor should we want to use such an authoritarian technology that turns billions of people into spectators – recipients of what an elite group determines to be news – and invades their trustingly opened minds to transform them into a market for advertisers. All the mass media, including the news media, are moralistic, and above all they tell stories. The vast majority of stories they tell do not lead people to believe in a world of mutual aid, self-organization, horizontal networks, solidarity, or resistance to a system of deliberate and thoroughly constructed domination. The manner they receive these stories does not train people to tell their own stories, to talk back, to investigate their world, to meet their neighbors, or to create a network of collective information. It trains them only to be consumers.

# Storming the Ghetto

While many anarchists are trying to leave the ghetto, the wealthy are always trying to recolonize it. They have the Midas Touch, and everything they possess becomes a dead thing. But the ghettos to which they expel the outcasts and rebels stew and bubble with life. Innovative, rejuvenating, they give birth to new cultures and feed resistance eternal. Then the artists and hipsters move in, trying to capture that vitality, and then the investors, trying to profit from it, and they bring the police with them, and development, and death. It happened to Hamburg's Schanze and is advancing on St. Pauli; Berlin's Kreuzberg was lost this way; and in Groningen the process is so far advanced that it has devoured its own history, leaving no sign that things were different once. In the US all the major cities have their own stories of vibrant ghettos lost to gentrification, with the added racial dimension of ongoing colonialism.

Even little Harrisonburg knows the score — at least those who care to remember do. The black neighborhood used to be right next to the downtown, right along North Main Street. But in the 50s the town elite smelled the changing winds rising off the civil rights and black liberation movement. Like hundreds of other towns and cities, they applied for federal urban renewal grants and bulldozed the entire black neighborhood in the name of fighting poverty. The people were moved wholesale “up on the hill,” along with the Jewish cemetery, which was also uprooted. The only business remaining in the original neighborhood after that act of ethnic cleansing is Kline's Dairy Bar, a white-owned ice cream shop. Now it's all stores and restaurants.

Nowadays, the new black neighborhood is one of the poorest in the city, and by far the most heavily targeted by police. I didn't learn any of this until some friends and I started working with black activists from that neighborhood to start a Copwatch group. Many of the residents supported our group and shared our understanding of the criminal justice system and the police as racist and controlling. Yet despite some commonalities, such cross-racial collaborations are rare. Usually the authorities need only rely on the racialized fear of crime to prevent these connections from ever occurring — I knew many white people who would never go up on the hill.

It reminded me of a similar dynamic in an entirely different situation. Miami, 2003, the protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas — “NAFTA on steroids.” The Black Bloc had attacked the security fence surrounding the summit site, and was being steadily rolled back by police. Files of crazed riot cops advanced and the anarchists, nerved by weeks of psychological warfare waged by the pigs and a few intense days of terrorism during the summit, kept backing down. Our side would construct some hasty barricades and throw a few things to keep the cops honest, but it was all done in retreat. Not that this was the worst idea; many people caught by the pigs were brutally beaten or repeatedly tasered, and some of those arrested were tortured or raped. Intentionally, the police forced us back into the black neighborhood — the feared ghetto. The all-white cops smirked from overpasses, commenting: “those black folks are going to tear you up!”

On the contrary, hundreds of neighbors leaned out of windows to give us raised fists, faces beaming as they watched us fight back, however meekly. I thought of all the faces that were



missing. My friend Earl was from this neighborhood. I met him in prison a year earlier, and he was still there, on drug charges. We had also found common ground in our fight for dignity and survival against the prison system, and backed each other up several times. It seems that the strongest relationships of solidarity are to be found in the ghettos themselves, yet too often anarchists try to communicate with an imaginary, non-marginalized public whose opinions are created by the mass media.

As the day went on, police snatch squads directed by helicopter took their toll on the diminishing crowd and it became apparent to everyone that we were being hunted. The ghetto was probably the safest spot for us. Some people were invited to hide in the apartments of locals. After a friend and I made an escape through a hole in the fence, a guy came up to us and offered to give us some of his clothes so that we could blend in. Every other day of the year, this army of police was pointing its guns at them. The cops had projected their racist fears onto us, and though their predictions did not come true, they weren't without reason. For centuries black people in the US and around the world have been brutalized and exploited to a degree few white people know. Slavery still exists. The wars of colonialism are still being fought. One day, hopefully soon, there will be shit to pay. All the people who stand on the side of the pigs, the prison wardens, and the bosses will have to answer. If they go peacefully, they face at best a radical change in their place in society, which up until now has rested on the backs of others. If they do not go peacefully, they still have to go, by whatever means necessary. But there is no clear line in the sand. Everyone knows where a cop stands, but what about the rest of us? In the jails and the ghettos, people turn snitch, trading their dignity for privileges. In Harrisonburg, college kids, without knowing it, stand on the graveyard of the black community, waiting in line to buy ice cream.

# **Emergency Call-out for Mobilization and Declaration of Solidarity**

translated from Nederlands

## **Protest on the initiative of refugees in the deportation center at Ter Apel.**

5 June, 2005, 13:30, Ter Apelerven

The refugees being held right now in the deportation center (DC) Ter Apel want to SELF-organize a demonstration on Sunday, 5 June at 13:30 at the deportation center on Ter Apelerven, against the injustice they have been subjected to as hostages in a years-long asylum process. There is a petition in their name filed by GreenLeft and the Socialist Party (SP) Ter Apel/Vlagtwedde to seek the protection of the refugees and permission for the protest.

The first contacts between the refugees and people in solidarity were made on Saturday, 14 May, after a spontaneous solidarity action from the Pinksterlanddagen (anarchist camp) in Appelscha. In the meantime many more people and organizations have affiliated to support the protest of the refugees in DC Ter Apel. The refugees and supporters see the action on 5 June as a warm-up for the Refugee Alarm that will take place in many more regions of Nederland on 6 June from 12:00 to 13:00. We want to ask you to sign on to and distribute the attached call-out from DC Ter Apel as soon as possible, to help mobilize people on 5 June, and to arrange buses and cars for transporting people to Ter Apel. From Groningen it takes two hours with public transportation to arrive in the neighborhood of the DC.

## **Call-out for the protest from the refugees in the Deportation Center Ter Apel**

“Against the foreigners policy that leads to our exclusion or expulsion and the psychological torture and apartheid regime we experience.”

We, residents of the deportation center (DC) Ter Apel, experience not only the situation here in DC Ter Apel, but also in the rest of the foreigners policy as psychological torture and as an apartheid regime. We want to make this recognizable by organizing a petition action against the DC, but also by organizing a protest at DC Ter Apel on 5 June at 13:30. We do this with the support of individuals and organizations who still take human rights seriously. Upon arriving in Nederland we were viewed as untrustworthy and treated as such. From the very first moment the power of the IND (Immigration and Nationalization Service) and the Dutch authority was placed precariously over us, leaving us to feel insecure and anxious. Through fear we were forced to make statements that were not true. The location, the fences, the cameras and the (armed) patrols

at the application center, and especially at the expulsion center, make us afraid. We experience Ter Apel as a prison. In the AZC's (Asylum Seekers Centers), after years of strong repression, we have gotten used to outright physical violence against us, which out of fear we may not talk about. We cannot experience this treatment as anything other than racist.

Already these experiences make not just us, but above all our children, earnestly sick. Many of us develop — if we did not already have them — great psychological problems and don't leave our rooms any more. Our children must share all this with us and threaten to break down. Despite the fact that we cannot return to the countries we come from, many of us, often in vain, have already cooperated with our return — insofar as it is possible. But this means that via Ter Apel we almost always land on the street in an illegal existence or in a refugee prison.

Gladly we call on all social and political organizations to come see and openly condemn our human rights-violating situation here in DC Ter Apel. Further, we call on everyone to protest with us on 5 June against the current expulsion- and exclusion- policy, in particular at DC Ter Apel, and against the foreigners policy that is unleashed upon us.

All of us have been imprisoned between 4 and 16 years, through no fault of our own, in what we experience as a racist asylum procedure. We also have the right to a humane existence. Residency rights for everyone!

*Stop the psychological torture and bureaucracy against refugees  
No person left on the street without resources, no one is illegal*

## Domela Nieuwenhuis and Appelscha

In Friesland, a northern province with its own language, there is a small village outside the city of Drachten called Ureterp. I told me how way back in the day there was an anarchist group in tiny little Ureterp, and between them all they managed to get a pistol, which they took turns religiously guarding and cleaning. One day, while a member of the group was cleaning the gun he shot himself and died, after which the whole group was discovered. We wanted to visit the cemetery where he was buried in a sort of pilgrimage to tragicomedy, but couldn't find his name.

A more famous anarchist in Friesland was Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, a contemporary of Pyotr Kropotkin and Emma Goldman. Instead of going to Ureterp, we visited his museum in Heereveen. Although he was not much of a direct actionist, for such a peaceful, compromising society he was considered a rabble rouser, an ex-priest who put his writing and speaking to use in the service of anti-militarist, worker, atheist, and socialist causes. He made an impression that has lasted long after his death in 1919. He frequented the village of Appelscha to talk to workers, and even today there is still an annual anarchist gathering in that town, extending directly from the tradition of anarchist groups he inspired there. I got to go to the gathering in May 2007, when I happened to be back in that corner of the woods. A group of us biked to Appelscha from Groningen, 40 kilometers away. In the village there's a trailer park and campsite occupied by anarchists year round. Every May, they host the yearly gathering. Anarchists from all over Nederland came and set up book tables, put on workshops, and made big meals together.

I was pretty amazed by the diversity of ages among participants, with plenty of old folks and lots of children, about 300 people total. Well beyond simple childcare, there was a fully developed childrens' program that seemed more interesting than the adult schedule of workshops. Unfortunately I missed my chance to pick the brains of some of the older folks to learn more of the history of the event, which had been going on for 74 years! That was one thing that continuously fascinated me about the European anarchists — how many of them are connected to and influenced by the revolutionary struggles of past generations, whereas in the US many of us absorb the legacy of struggle retroactively, once we become radicalized and start reading histories that no one else knows about.

There was a quote from old Domela inside the main building: “drinking workers don't think and thinking workers don't drink;” and in fact the gathering was alcohol free. Having organized a conference myself I can say how frustrating it is when people can't muster the discipline to lay off the booze for one weekend of workshops. Nonetheless the gathering was laid back and fun, and I daresay people were better able to enjoy it with clear heads.

I gave a workshop on the US prison system, and another one that presented a criticism of nonviolence. The latter caused a minor stir. The Appelscha conference was traditionally under the influence of the old school anti-militarist pacifists, and apparently mine was the first anti-pacifist talk to ever occur there, though there had been plenty of antifascist or animal liberation talks that were implicitly not pacifist. It was really comforting to see both the presence of an anarchist tradition, something that can provide resources, continuity, and inclusion, from one

generation to the next, and also a flexibility in that tradition, allowing it to be challenged by the younger generation. The older folks didn't try to prevent the talk, and some even came and participated.

## To Get to the Other Side (part 1)

On Dinsdag, 5 September, I packed my bags once again, saddled up my trusty bicycle, and left the little home I'd found in Groningen. Saying goodbye was difficult. Joop had become a good friend, and then there was L. I had only just met her a couple weeks earlier, as we cooked together for Gratis Eten, and I was pretty sure I was falling in love. But she had her own life, and I had to leave town. My path led southeast, through Stadskanal, and to the border at Ter Apel. There wasn't even a control point, just a sign – EU deregulation at its best. Passing over the unfenced frontier, I was flooded with a feeling of nostalgia, and an irrational and sudden fear of Germans. I slept in a bus shelter in the open countryside somewhere between Haselünne and Fürstenau, 140km away. The next day I skirted north of Osnabrück, on the way to Minden on the Weser. With each cycle of the pedals, the loom of my thoughts gave another turn, pulling tighter on the threads that led back to all the people receding behind me, and ripping apart the fabric of my future. At the day's end I was just 20km from Rinteln, where I wasn't due to arrive until the next afternoon, to stay with the Oma of my dad's German family.

The path to Rinteln took me over the Weser mountains. The sight of mountains was invigorating; I had been in the flatlands for months, and where the Autobahn took the same even path through the hills as did the Weser river, my little country road rewarded me with a climb straight over the top, and a swift descent into the valley, where I was soon knocking on Oma's door. What a strange idea that with nothing but an address we can come from another country and arrive at someone's doorstep, that in this expanse that spreads beyond the horizon, all comprised of little patches of earth like the one beneath our feet, live all the people on the planet. We allow the distances of our known world to be mediated by telephones and automobiles, each carrying its own sort of magic. It's liberating to go from one point on a globe to another on your own sweat, and have a chance to see every blade of grass in between.

My dad had stayed close with a family he had lived with as an exchange student in his youth. We called them our German family, and had visited them a couple times when I was in high school. I stayed in Rinteln a few days, Oma and I shot some dice and she stuffed me with food till I had a potbelly. On the 10<sup>th</sup> I set out again and crossed into former East Germany. The Harz mountains spanned the border region. On their highest peak, the Brocken, the witches were said to converge on Walpurgisnacht, the night before May Day and a time for rebirth and rebellion, bonfires or burning police cars, since the times of resistance to the Christian genocides and the early expansion of state and capitalism.

The weather was perfect: warm in the day and crisp at night, and the earth rejoiced in the change of seasons and came to fruit. On a curving road up a hill near Querfurt I ate the best apple I've had in my life. It was a windfall, beneath one of the ubiquitous roadside fruit trees, colored with a pale pink that seeped beneath the skin and into the flesh of the fruit itself, which had a flavor and consistency like a cider so confident it had left its liquid state to form itself into a shape of its own choosing.

Dienstag, 12 September

On the mountain below Eisenberg I slept in a stone tunnel going through the hill, across the back of which ran an old railroad. I was lucky to find it: I needed some cover over my head because the cold of the previous night had soaked me and my sleeping bag with dew. I had been warned by old-fashioned Oma about the dangers of the East — the Gypsies and the Poles — while the younger members of the family shook their heads but pointed out, with a touch more realism, that nazi skinheads were a big problem. They advised me not to sleep outside on the other side of the old border. In actuality I was threatened throughout the night by a much more old-fashioned bogeyman: what sounded like a bear tramping around one end of the tunnel. Thinking of Werner Herzog's movie, *Grizzly Man*, I imagined it would be comical if I were gobbled up by the wee black cousin of North America's titanic ursine, accompanied by a heavily accented and cynical voice-over. Of course, I was safe from all manner of beasts and vagrants, and in the end the point of such fears is not to keep people safe but to keep us divided. White Americans told never to go into the inner city at night share a common experience with the children of these hills half a millennium ago, who were frightened with big bad wolves and witches, even as 1,000,000 people accused of witchcraft were executed in just a century, in the name of Public Safety. The result of the "Burning Times" was to sever any last cultural remnants of gender equality, herblore, spiritual use of organic hallucinogens, nature worship, transgender identities — basically anything healthy that would stand in the way of Christian dualism, scientific rationalism, and unbridled capitalism.

The next day I made it to Zwickau after a long detour around an imposing wall of highway construction. In Zwickau I rested for a couple days and met up with my dad, who was taking a vacation from his well paying and hellish 70 hour a week computer job to bike with me for ten days on my way to Ukraine. I had decided to stay in Ukraine for the winter because I had a free place to live and would not have to worry about sleeping on the streets. My slavophile mother was working there at the time, and had room for me. So, I abruptly lost my rugged independence. How much cooler would I be if I biked the whole way to Ukraine by myself, and found some squat with pirated electricity to keep me through the Russian winter, no mention of embarrassing things like parents? And have you noticed how the heroes in bildungsroman fantasy stories are always orphans?

An interesting distinction I was soon to notice: in Western Europe I hardly ever met the parents of anarchists I otherwise got to know quite well. Just like in the US, anarchists made their families disappear in favor of an independent lifestyle, and parents were decidedly uncool. But in the East, people found ways to balance their lives of rebellion with their family lives. Sometimes it seemed they had to; economically speaking it was often impossible to move into apartments of their own, so many still lived with their parents. Perhaps this even had some benefits, giving them practice at explaining and presenting their beliefs to people who did not share them.

So there I was, travelling with my dad for a bit, trying my best to get over my silly embarrassment, and also missing the freedom of scraping by for free and the ability to decide how I travelled. But there were plenty of bonuses for my epicurean side: since my dad was past his years of sleeping on the ground and I couldn't afford to travel the way he did, he payed my fare. Weighing all the factors, I prefer my way of travelling, and I would prefer it even if money grew on trees and it weren't necessary to work 70 hours a week to travel in luxury. However, I'd be lying if I pretended that I didn't enjoy living it up a little while travelling through the region with the best beer in the world, and damn good food to go with it. In Zwickau my dad insisted on taking us to the city's brewery, which I do hope becomes collectivized rather than burnt down

when the revolution comes, because it would be a shame if only people with money ever got to enjoy those beers.

My favorite part of the city was east of the center, at the convergence of four walls. The first and oldest of these walls was the Mulde, Zwickau's river. Central European cities identify strongly with their rivers, a welcome relief from the SimCity landscape of the US. Rivers can be natural barriers, separating societies and eventually causing enough divergence to create new languages and cultures. But they can also facilitate transportation or spread a common identity. As barriers they are natural, organic, and fluid. The people on either side are allowed to negotiate their own relationship with the river.

The next of these walls, dated to 1408, were the Pulverturm and Stadtmauer: still standing segments of the massive battlements that once surrounded the entire city, testament to the constant warfare of the time as minor polities conquered one another and grew, scrambling towards the State's vision of peace in which all power is centralized under one Authority and everyone is subjected to a single system. The third wall comes from a time when the only thing standing in the way of peace was the competition between the two remaining state powers in the world. It is just inside the old Stadtmauer: a solid line of homogeneous apartment blocks, symbolizing the old Soviet satellites, more for their humourless and authoritarian aesthetic than for their relatively universal housing rights. And the final wall is the unassuming fence sealing off the area around the river, where construction crews work ceaselessly to upgrade a highway. For me this has come to symbolize the advance of the European Union into the East, and really neoliberalism in general: raising a destructive ideal of the "standard of living"; speeding the transportation of resources and manufactures from the new internal colonies to wealthy consumers in the West; and slowly expanding the heavily fortified borders to absorb more "underdeveloped" countries into this suicidal machine.

Having crossed the Erz mountains at Horní Blatná, we were now in *Čechy* — Czechia, or the Czech Republic if we insist on following tradition and conflating the country with its government. Whispering rivers traced gentle contours like the fingers of a lover over the broad shoulders of forested mountains that stretched to forever. We ended the second day since leaving Zwickau in Horšovský Týn, where I washed my pants for the first time in three months. I should have known better. It was the grease holding them together. No sooner had the scourge of cleanliness been visited upon them than a worn spot on the rear I hadn't the time to patch up in Groningen burst forth with several promising holes. Alas! my only pair.

In *Čechy*, we frequently passed gravestones along the road put up for people who died in traffic accidents. Well, just after *Kašperské Hory*, I believe that translates to Kasper's Mountains, I had to pee real bad. But I had a good rhythm going and didn't want to stop biking. So I'm in the woods, quiet mountain road, nobody coming, coasting down a gentle slope, peeing off the side of my bike. Ultimately, and you can see coming due to my obvious narrative structure what I could not due to the day's dozen distracting concerns, I accidentally pissed on somebody's grave. The grave of a small child, I think. I'm a bad, bad American.

Ponděli, the 18<sup>th</sup>

My dad had already left Vimperk. He preferred to bike in the cold mornings, whereas I liked to bike through without breaks, so I would catch up to him before lunch. So I spent the early morning exploring Vimperk's castle. Here as elsewhere, the oldest and tallest structures that tower over the rest of the town were the churches and the castle, the symbols of moral and political authority, the architecture of each still holding high some of the terror they were meant to inspire. There



were no museums for the rest of the bygone society – the objects of that authority – but their descendants still lived here, mixing concrete on the high road, tending a garden under the castle wall, selling postcards in the giftshop. The little houses that huddled under the twin towers of God and State were still inhabited, but today's forms of control were different: the church and castle were empty. Whoever inherited those institutions was out of sight, removed from the rage of the mob that any day might finally coalesce and storm up the hill, torches and pitchforks in hand.

And the threat of this twin authority is intangible – it stares out the eyes of shop-window mannequins and comes in with the radio waves. Some things have gotten harder. Others have hardly changed. Under feudalism the peasants often had to work four or five days on the lands of the lord, and only had a day or two for themselves. Today it's not uncommon for people to lose 80% or more of their income to the mortgage or rent, car loans, health insurance if they have it, and taxes. Voila: progress.

Perhaps less has changed than we think. The simple pleasures of life also seem timeless. By a mountaintop village before Prachatice, a shawl-wrapped old woman sits in her yard reading a book, with her goats and her chickens. Nothing else matters but the story she is reading and the contented clucking of the birds around her feet. When I see her I think she has been there forever.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> the rain clouds that had gathered over Český Krumlov dissipated and we had another day of gorgeous weather for biking, which we did all the way to Slavonice, just north of the Austrian border. Around this time we crossed the continental divide, and where before all the little streams had flowed into the river known here as the Vlatava and farther down as the Elbe, through Hamburg into the North Sea, now they were flowing through the Danube into the Black Sea, thousands of kilometers in the other direction. It's not the only crossing that occurred that day. Going up the second to last hill of the day, right in front of me, I saw a chicken cross the road. And she really did act like she needed to get to the other side. Now my life is complete.

Pátek, 22 Zář

Speeding down highway 430 from Brno to Vyškov. On my right, potholes, gravel, and warps in the asphalt threaten to throw me down into the ditch. On my left, freight trucks whiz by an inch past my ear. What's that in centimeters? Diarrhea is an awful mix with biking. Three days running and aside from damned uncomfortable I'm dehydrated and drained. Furious thoughts are my fuel down this hellish road. My dad's some half an hour behind me. Our communication has been strained, and the worst of it is that I can notice in myself all the things I don't like about him. Biking across a continent gives you plenty of time for regret, if that's where your mind's at. I'm fuming at the weaknesses of bad friends back home, and pissed at myself for not being more like the few true friends I've held onto. Embarrassed by surfacing memories of the dumb things I've done over the years, disgusted with society for stupidly buying the transparent lies that are poisoning the whole world. I'm pedaling as fast as my spindly legs can on this narrow strip of road between failure and oblivion.

Is it too late for us? Are we cursed to rebuild the prisons we were born into? It's hard to believe in something better and hard to hold ourselves to the ideals we believe in when fucking up is so damn easy. There's so much ugliness in this world, like trucks racing down highways, belching out tarry smoke to deliver crates that might as well be filled with old news for all it would matter to the driver, the road-builders, or me. Forgetting the magic of mountains I had ridden through in the previous days, or the promise of new discoveries for which I was bound, I might as well be

commuting down this ugly highway. If we are to be judged for all the potentials we do not live up to, we are doomed, and we deserve it.

On the roadside a burst of tender blue catches my eye. A weed, a wildflower, chicory, digging its bitter root through the surly gravel to seek out and suck up the slightest drop of anything that could be treasured, and from this treasure sending forth a tough spine of green at the top of which, finally, blossoms the azure petals that comfort my lonely eye. I think of all the ways my father has tried to escape the legacy given to him, and wonder if I'll fare any better. In the end, we are all responsible for reproducing this world of slavery and abuse, submission and poison. Every day we put on our manacles and if someone steps out of line we hand the overseer the whip. A few bear a greater share of the responsibility, and we will make them answer for it if we ever get the chance, but in the struggle to put one foot in front of the other amid all this ugliness, the hardest thing is to forgive one another, love ourselves, and know we deserve something better.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the sun crossed into the southern hemisphere. Fall had begun, and at Horní Lideč we crossed the border into Slovakia. The *Biele Karpaty* – White Carpathians, are steep, forested dark green, crowned with bare rocks. Here and there decaying castles are part of the geology. Families of farmers, peasants even, were out in the sun harvesting potatoes and apples by hand, and pushing plows, or at most riding small tractors. Gone were the deserted, monocrop fields of the West, with metal signs bearing the logo of the seed-patenting corporations standing in the place where the scarecrows used to be. The houses on the hillside accompanied small fields sectioned into orchards, pastures, and rows of a dozen different vegetables. In small towns people were building their own houses or working in sawmills. From Puchov the road followed the Vah, a deep blue river wresting a wide valley of serenity from the wild mountains.

Another two days of biking got us through Poprad and past a village called Podhradie, “under the castle.” From a distance, the village seemed to still exist in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. On a large hill above the town, built into the rock, stood an immense castle at least 600 years old, with its towers and walls still standing. Bails of hay awaited collection in the fields around the battlements. The last ten kilometers into Prešov were less idyllic. The road passed through a wasteland of super-highway construction, again courtesy of the EU. It was no doubt appreciated by the dispossessed and besooted locals, because in a modern economy such projects of desperate carnage always bring with them that magic snake oil, “jobs,” which are in short supply here since control of employment was given over to the Free Market.

After a day of rest in Prešov, my dad unexpectedly had to bike 30km to Košice to catch the train back to Germany, and his eventual flight back to the States. They had closed the train line here after the discovery of an unexploded bomb from the War. But we didn't know this at the time. The people at the station just sealed their faces and shook their heads, as though Košice was a relative who had been hustled off to jail for some unspeakable crime. So my dad jumped back on his bike, we said our hurried goodbyes, “see you in a year,” and off he went.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> I was on my own again, heading back north, through Svednik, across the border into Poland. The leaves were falling off the trees, and I was rushing towards my winter home. In Mieszcze Piastowe a one-eyed butcher shook my hand when he found out I was biking across Europe. The teenagers on the corner looked me over with suspicion.

Anarchists and fascists were fighting an intense graffiti war on the walls of Sanok. Unfortunately, the fascists were winning by a landslide. Since East Germany, I had had to read the writing on the walls, keeping an eye out for fascist graffiti, especially when looking for safe spaces to sleep. Around the end of the Cold War, neonazi and fascist movements had exploded in Ger-

many and spread east. Nazis killed dozens of immigrants and many Roma, even carrying out full scale pogroms in Rostock and elsewhere. The antifascist movement grew out of the need for self-defense and a popular disgust that the fascists were back. The “antifas” were a diverse group. There were the antifascist skinheads, derived from the skinhead movement in the UK, which was originally a phenomenon of working-class youth of color before whites started mimicking the style and then nazis started corrupting the scene. Nowadays the antifa skinhead scene is largely comprised of street gangs who fight back against nazi attempts to dominate a certain music scene. Sadly, there is no shortage of these groups that lack political content and revel in machismo and homophobia, though they may be on the frontline in the fight against fascists.

There are many types of antifascists besides the skinheads, that unify along a socialist or anarchist politics instead of unifying along a music culture that may or may not include a political content. Basically, antifascism in Germany and some other countries is a major, unifying movement, so groups that are involved in other political projects, be they of an anarchist or Marxist nature, also participate. One of the strangest strains of these are the anti-Deutschen, who believe that Germany has a special status as the most despicable of nations for perpetuating what they see as the worst atrocity in history — the Holocaust. Thus, Germany needs to be destroyed as a nation, Israel needs to be supported, the Palestinians are bad because some of them use anti-Semitic rhetoric, and the US is great because it supports Israel. You can imagine there’s some bad blood between them and the other factions.

Immigrant communities also carry out antifascist actions, and were one of the first groups to fight back, even killing a number of nazis in earlier years. Ramor Ryan’s account of the movement in Berlin shows that in past decades immigrant antifascists and ethnic German antifascists mixed and fought side by side in hotspots like Kreuzberg; but all the antifascist groups and protests that I saw from Nederland to Russia were segregated and overwhelmingly white.

This paradox highlighted one of the gravest weaknesses I noticed in European anarchist movements: a generalized misunderstanding and minimization of race. Nearly the only forms of racism I heard mentioned were xenophobia and white pride — personal attitudes held by backwards individuals. Race wasn’t seen as a social structure or an oppressive system that sometimes trumps class; it was just a random fabrication used to mask capitalism. Many white anarchists in the US also hold this view, but throughout Europe the blindspot seemed to be broader and more general. I hardly came across any deeper critiques or analyses of race, and I don’t recall a single anarchist bookstore or library, out of all the ones I visited, that had a section on race. If there had been one, it would have been filled with translations from the US. This is not surprising: Europe was able to externalize its racism through colonialism, while the US had to brutally hold together conflicting populations as a society that was built from the very beginning on slavery and immigration.

On a more bizarre note, it struck me that people in Europe had not yet realized it’s not okay to make fun of Asian people. It’s a hefty generalization to make, but all across the continent, and coming from popular stand-up comics or committed, intelligent anarchists, I heard time and again the same jokes, enjoyed by everyone around but me, mocking the sound of Chinese (which they could not distinguish from Japanese or Korean) or joking about differently shaped eyes. I questioned a few people about this and received the earnest explanation that these jokes were not racist, they were funny. And it almost was funny, how ridiculous and nearly universal this blindspot was. On the plus side, white European radicals are generally lacking in the Puritan guilt and obsession with privilege that tend to sabotage US attempts to address problems of race.

Color blindness or no, the commitment of the antifascists to fighting the more obvious forms of racism was not to be minimized. In the former Soviet bloc, nazis were multiplying like rabbits, and regularly killing immigrants and leftwing activists. Antifascist combatants fought back against this directly.

When I saw the walls of Sanok, I knew I had to find a good hiding place to sleep for the night. Fascist graffiti was everywhere. They also had the resources to make thousands of stickers, many of them encouraging fear and violence towards queer people. One common sticker showed “pedophiles” chasing small children alongside a message about protecting Poland. Polish fascism is well connected to the political mainstream, and bolstered by the fundamentalist Catholic resurgence. These incarnations of nationalism have received US government support before and since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, and there has also been a good working relationship between the CIA and the Vatican. The CIA’s predecessor worked with the Holy See to smuggle out Nazis who would be useful for the US Cold War machine, including founding figures in NASA and the CIA itself. And there are allegations of CIA involvement in the Vatican’s election of the Polish pope who played an underappreciated role in bringing down the Iron Curtain.

As an outsider who didn’t know any of the few anarchists standing up to the nazis in Sanok (though I would later meet one in Barcelona), there was little I could do. But as long as no one saw me, it couldn’t hurt to scribble over the stickers and leave anarchist and antifascist graffiti on some walls and park benches. I hadn’t brought along my paint markers for nothing.

## Pawel Lew Marek

(text adapted from two articles in issue #29 of *Abolishing the Borders from Below*, May 2007).

Recently, Polish anarchist Michal Przyborowski put out a book on the life of Pawel Lew Marek, illuminating the anarchist movement in Poland before World War II and the crucial participation of anarchists in both the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Pawel Lew Marek was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, 1902, near Przemysl in southeastern Poland. As a youth he threw himself into union organizing and labor unrest. These were years of instability and tension. The Soviet Union was trying to cement its control over communist movements around the globe, but in Poland, which had just fought a war for its independence from Germany and Russia, nationalist and anti-communist sentiments were in full bloom. Much of Europe suffered economic depression after World War I, and the depression would soon become a full scale crash. In several countries, fascism was on the rise.

Despite it all, anarchists in Poland continued to grow stronger. In 1926 Pawel helped form the Anarchist Federation of Poland and he served for several years as an editor of the illegal anarchist newspaper, *Class Struggle*. The heavy state repression in those years drove the anarchists to form the structures that would become crucial to their survival under fascist occupation. In 1941, Pawel, as a Jew, was sent to the ghetto in Warszawa — Warsaw — but he managed to escape with his life before the ghetto was liquidated. Once they realized that the thousands of people who had been sent out with the first deportation wave in 1942 were not resettled in the East, as claimed, but exterminated, those who remained in the ghetto decided to resist the next wave. The Jewish Combat Organization, including many anarchists, seized weapons, smuggled them in, or made their own. On 18 January, 1943, hundreds of women and men in the ghetto rose up and halted the Nazi deportation efforts after a few days. With a small number of guns and molotov cocktails, the resistance fighters took control of the Warszawa ghetto and defeated the first Nazi counteroffensives. Many Jews were able to escape, often with the help of Polish partisans. Polish communists, anarchists, and nationalists smuggled in weapons and attacked Nazi guardposts on the wall around the ghetto. The Nazis took hundreds of casualties in crushing the rebellion and had to devote several thousand troops direly needed on the Eastern Front.

On 19 April the Jewish fighters defeated another Nazi offensive. But the Nazi leadership made it a priority to crush the rebellion; they had replaced the commanding officer and would not tolerate failure. The Nazis pushed on, with superior forces and weaponry, but ultimately they had to burn the ghetto down block by block. Throughout the process, they continued to lose troops. Resistance fighters were also able to destroy several armored vehicles. On 8 May the Nazis seized the main command post of the Jewish Combat Organization. The people inside fought to the death or took cyanide to avoid capture. The Ghetto Uprising was officially crushed on 16 May, 1943, but the Nazis did not win their final battle against armed Jews hiding out in the ruins of the ghetto until 5 June. In the meantime, hundreds of Jews had escaped to continue the fight against the Nazis in the city or in the forests, and those who did not survive had won a dignified death and contributed to the defeat of the Nazis. The Allied governments, meanwhile, had given almost

no support to the Uprising. Later the same year, on Marek's birthday, another insurrection broke out in the Białystok ghetto.

Pawel personally took part in the general uprising in Warszawa in 1944, which resulted in over 26,000 Nazi military casualties and perhaps 200,000 Polish deaths. The Nazi commanders called the city at this time a "center of chaos" responsible for most of their problems on that front. The plan of the Polish rebels was to liberate Warszawa before the Soviet Army arrived. They knew the Allies intended to divide Europe into spheres of influence, Soviet-occupied or US-occupied, and they wanted to change the course of history. But Stalin slowed the advance of his army, allowing the Nazis to free up the troops they needed to crush the uprising. With the Soviet occupation, Pawel continued to be active in the labor movement and to work with a cooperative publishing house in Łódź and a union newspaper in Warszawa. He died on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November in 1971, and is buried in Powązki Cemetery in Warszawa.

Today, Poland's Anarchist Federation (FA) is alive again, and labor organizing in Poland is gaining strength as Western European countries move their factories here. The FA has active sections in over a dozen cities, with the newest section created by Polish emigres in Ireland. The FA has general meetings twice annually, while a coordinating section keeps the different groups in contact throughout the rest of the year. In 2001, a network of labor activists, mostly within the FA, founded Inicjatywa Pracownicza, Workers' Initiative, which later transformed itself into a trade union. Workers' Initiative organizes unions in several factories, and they also have a presence in the Polish Post. They have been influenced by the Italian workers' autonomy movement: they make use of illegal strikes and support wildcat strikes when these crop up. The group has a presence in some of the most important factories in Poland. Labor organizing in the West was co-opted across the board, and shaped into a tool to recuperate resistance and involve workers in managing their own exploitation. Now, factory organizing in the wealthiest countries is generally obsolete because nearly all of the factories have moved to poorer countries. Some anarchists have no more faith in unions. Others are waiting to see if movements in Poland and elsewhere can learn from past mistakes and develop surprising forms of resistance to capitalism.

## To Get to the Other Side (part 2)

The clouds that hid the morning threatened rain, and the forecasts promised it. But just before I got to Ukraina that day, the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, with little more than mist to impede my passage, the weather broke and I was rewarded with the Ukrainian colors in the sky: blue and gold. Then the real bearers of that flag informed me I couldn't cross into their country on a bicycle, because of regulations. So I had to wait for someone with a van to agree to ferry me across and let me out on the other side of all the gates and soldiers. Apparently there was this important line that they were all protecting. I looked really hard but I couldn't see any line, except for the one we had to wait in, but everyone else insisted it was there, so I must be either blind or insane.

After an obnoxious customs interrogation, I was back on the bike and pedaling again — only this time dodging potholes and dung, looking out for cars because the concept of lanes wouldn't keep me safe anymore, and sharing the road with cows and horse carts. After an exhausting bikeride I made it all the way to ЛЬВІВ — L'viv — around sunset. Many maps still call the city L'vov, ЛЬВОВ — the Russian name. Not too terribly long ago it was a Polish city, and they called it L'wow. But despite the game of musical chairs that has been played with its identity, the city is currently the heart of the Ukrainian national rebirth. Embarrassingly for them, many of the street signs are still in Polish.

The eastern part of Ukraine is predominantly russified or even straight-out Russian, but here in the west many people were part of a new independence movement, so the name was most emphatically L'viv. Whatever the case, in all three languages the name means: "Lev's," Lev being the son of the king who took credit for founding the place, though I'll wager neither he nor his son ever got their hands dirty building it.

My first impression was that traffic was hell. Just into the city I got hit by a bus, but it's okay, because I hit it back. Honestly, though, Critical Mass bike rides here would need handguns and RPGs. Not such a bad idea anyway. But I would not have to worry any more about killer cars, because my bike ride was over. The roads here were a wreck, the drivers dangerously unpredictable, and a train ride across the country cost the same as lunch back in Germany. I had biked 2100km in 24 days, and soon I would be in Kyiv, my home for the winter.

## My First Contact

I arrived in Kyiv at the beginning of October, and started looking for local anarchists. I had few good ideas on where to start. The city was huge, and it wasn't the place you'd expect to find a radical social center. Even the tradition of having social movements, however pathetic they may be, had been pretty well mauled by the Soviets. So, I opened up the magazine some stranger had pressed into my reluctant hands way back at the Köpi. *Abolishing the Borders from Below*, a magazine by and about the anarchist movements of Eastern Europe, written in admittedly bad English, and published in exile in Berlin. I found it to be a treasure trove of interesting articles, written in an earnest, non-dogmatic style. More important to my present purpose, it contained a lengthy contact page at the back. The section on Ukraina was worryingly thin. I sent out an email, and tried not to think what the winter would be like if no one wrote back.

A week later, I got a response. "Yes, let's meet." I proposed the central square. "We don't like this place. Too many nazis." They suggested a statue by a certain metro station. It was an open area, lots of people moving through, and from several approaches you could see who was out on the square before they could see you. In other words, not a spot for setting up an ambush. I waited in the cold for half an hour before two people, unmistakably anarchists, approached me. Katya and Andrey. I later found out that they screened all new people this way to protect themselves from fascists and police. It was a common necessity in the former Soviet Union. Little by little, they showed me the ropes, and we became friends.



# Gulyaipolye

It's Sunday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, we're on the night train out of Kyiv, and we have the whole coupe to ourselves. We never would have guessed we'd be here when we met two months earlier at an old squat smelling of dog piss, where we cooked together for Gratis Eten. L has come out from Nederland to visit me for a week. A strange adventure, considering we've only known each other for two weeks and then two months of letter-writing. It's all the better for its strangeness. In such a lonely world it's delightful to discover someone who is moved and angered, who dreams of the same things you do.

Presently, it's nice that she's as much of a history nerd as I am. Our first destination on this trip is Gulyaipolye, the town in southern Ukraine that was the birthplace of anarchist Nestor Makhno and the center of a stateless society of seven million people who fought for freedom from the Germans, the nationalists, the White Russians, and the Bolsheviks in the years after World War I. The train doesn't go any farther than Zaporizhye, which used to be called Alexandrovsk and was one of the largest cities in the anarchist zone. The morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the train crosses the Dnepr, and we peer at her map, trying to piece together our route through the night and our present position. We spend the next hours before our arrival deep in conversation, passing from the Ukrainian anarchists of the last century to the modern-day rebels in Oaxaca, Mexico, who were fighting at that very moment to recreate their society. The revolution is alive! We promise each other that as soon as we can, we'll travel to Mexico.

Zaporizhye, renamed to reflect its Cossack pedigree, is grimy and post-Soviet, and trekking from the train station to the center is like walking from West Asia to Europe; from street-side vendors located in little shacks or simply standing on the curb selling fish, soda, and shoarma, to clothing shops and restaurants with neon signs. Between the train station and bus station one wall is painted with a huge swastika. The Makhnovists liberated the nearby city of Ekaterinoslav, now Dnepropetrovsk, simply by dressing in their peasant clothes, riding in on the train past the enemy fortifications, congregating around the strategic points of the city, and throwing down. The cities on the edge of the territory changed hands often with the fortunes of war, but much of southern Ukraine was stateless and self-organizing for two years. They organized workers' and peasants' *soviets* — councils — and held periodic assemblies for the entire region. When the anarchists took a new town or city, they did not set up a new government but advised the people to form a council and organize themselves. Some historians fault them for this, as a few cities stopped functioning. Rather than self-organize, they simply waited to be occupied and dictated to by the next army.

In the areas where the anarchists had a more consistent presence, people redistributed wealth and land, set up schools, and put themselves in control of their own lives. Ultimately the anarchists died a slow death as the Bolsheviks, under cover of alliance with Makhno's army, gradually co-opted the free soviets and eventually arrested and shot the anarchists. Trotsky, cynically questioning the loyalty of the anarchists, pressured them to go to the most dangerous fronts in the war against the White Army — the motley force of tsarists, aristocrats, and republicans with

backing from France, Britain, and the US. After defeating Wrangel's army in Crimea, one of the strongest anarchist fighting units was ambushed by their erstwhile Red Army allies and mowed down.

Gulyaipolye is a different world from grungy Zaporizhye. Tree-lined streets, soft and rainy air, whitewashed houses with gardens and blue-painted shutters, the sound of chickens and the smell of pigs, rolling fields in the distance. Gone is the aggressiveness of the urban Ukrainians and their overt disgust with foreigners — for the first time someone even compliments me on my Russian. That night L and I huddle in her sleeping bag, splitting a bottle of wine and telling stories. The next day, we're the only ones in the Gulyaipolye Regional History museum: the curator turns the lights on just for us, and prattles my ear off as though I were fluent. Every now and then I stop her to translate something for L, but mostly I just smile, say "Da, da, konyeshna," and pretend I understand. I learn that the director is an ardent fan of Richard Gear and Julia Roberts, her son is studying medicine, we have beautiful smiling faces, and after guessing that it was an interest in Makhno that brought us to the museum, she also tells us there was a Makhno Festival in August that brought many artists, writers, and intellectuals — she says with eyes raised skyward — and yes, also some anarchists and drug-users.

Finally we're left in peace to explore the museum, one exhibit of which focuses largely on Makhno, featuring photographs, newspapers, posters, banners, even one of the machine gun-mounted horse carts they used to wreak havoc on the more cumbersome armies of the Reds and Whites. One black banner that used to fly in the town carries an especially forceful phrase: "*Osvobozhdyeniye rabochikh — dyelo ruk samikh rabochikh!*" "The liberation of the workers is a task for the workers themselves!" The Makhno exhibit, and the entire reintegration of Makhno into Ukrainian history after the Leninist purges, minimizes or altogether omits his anarchism, presenting him instead as a national hero. Thus, L and I feel it is our responsibility to leave anarchist messages in four different languages in the museum guest book.

Later we go to Sevastopol, on the Black Sea. Russian sailors walk the city, on leave from the naval base Moscow still maintains here. The architecture seems to bear a Greek influence, and the Greeks certainly left their mark on the name of the city. It's a good thing that people travel so much, I think. The world would be a more boring place if borders were respected.

On the night train back to Kyiv we each have top bunks. The bottom bunks are occupied by two women who are more fluent in the pan-Slavic night train ritual. They are chatting dutifully beside their bags of food and special slippers. L and I are sharing one of the bunks, so we can talk about our uncertain future, draft fanciful travel plans, and play hangman with phrases in Russian and Nederlands. When the lights go out and we retire to our separate bunks, I lie back and think about life.

## Snowing Again

Вторник, 7 Ноябрь, Київ

In Kyiv, it's snowing again, just a week into November. I love it. But it's easier to become house-bound in such cold. Read books, write, study Russian, compose a letter to a friend. Pet the cats. Nothing to draw me outside but more sightseeing. I've only met two anarchists in a month. This is the drawback of not having to rely on the generosity of strangers for housing: you don't have to leave your bubble. But it's just as well because my two new friends live with their parents and couldn't put me up. Right now, they're both travelling. Actually, one's in Berlin staying at the Köpi.

Not too many anarchists in Ukraina. But there are plenty of fascists. This past weekend, they fought each other in Bessarabski Square. The Russian nationalists vs. the Ukrainian nationalists. Five hundred in total facing off, with police on the side trying to keep it from getting too far out of hand. The few anarchists could do nothing but keep off the streets. Poland and Russia at least have large anarchist movements to hold back the fascists there. In Kyiv they have to keep the location of their infoshop a secret so it doesn't get destroyed. They haven't had a show — for fundraising or just to have fun — in months, because they could't get enough people together to defend against the likely attack. And the situation is getting worse. In late October, a Nigerian immigrant was murdered on the Dnepr's poorer left bank — one of the first killings of its kind by Kyiv fascists. That same week the former Imperial Wizard of the KKK, David Duke, spoke as an invited guest at the city's largest private university. In the magazine *Abolishing the Borders from Below*, an article about the recent development of fascism here described how after the fascists had made themselves an embarrassment to the government with one particular murder, they became the target of a neutralization campaign by the police, who infiltrated different factions, spread false rumours, and turned the Russophile or Pan-Slavic tendencies against the more provincial Ukrainian ultra-nationalists. Apparently the strategy quickly produced measurable results, and splintered what had been a well organized fascist movement.

Such windfalls rarely come from the state. Throughout Europe it has been the organized, militant antifascist movement keeping the nazis in check. It seems to be strongest in Germany, where with great dedication people collect information on the fascists, shut down their shops, hack their websites, attack their rallies, and pressure venues to cancel their events. In St. Pauli a nazi-connected boutique had opened up. They sold jackboots, clothing, jewelry and stickers with pagan runes on them — this was something that anti-Christian factions among the nazis were keen on. Folks had pasted posters all around the neighborhood denouncing the shop, as part of a campaign to shut it down. In Nederland as well as in Germany the antifascists published a well produced magazine full of action reports and information useful for guiding actions against the fascists: their pictures, their names, their location, their relationships with other fascist groups and with political parties, any events they were planning.

I would later come across a graffito on a squat in Barcelona: *el feixisme avança si no se'l combat* — fascism advances if it is not combated. This certainly proved true the first time around, and

it was coming true again. Fascist gangs were taking over the streets, especially in places where economic and social turmoil might otherwise bolster revolutionary movements. And mainstream political parties, many of them with direct links to skinhead gangs, were reviving fascist rhetoric and political programs on a degree unseen in Europe since World War II. Dutch politicians were talking of protecting their cultural purity, the Polish president proclaimed the need to defend the country from immigration and homosexuality, Italy's media baron also held the position of prime minister and led a right wing coalition fighting to restore the country's glory. In Germany in 2006, the NPD (Nazis without the socialism) won over a tenth of the vote in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, a northern German state where unemployment is especially high. Yet it's no surprise, to anarchists at least, that while nazi skinheads are killing dozens of people of color every year, the border guards are killing hundreds every year, and the media are spreading fear of immigrants and provoking conflict with Islam, governments from Nederland to Germany to Russia are classifying antifascists as extremists, persecuting them as a security threat, and putting many of them in prison for defending themselves and their communities against fascist violence. Two generations ago everyone in Europe was either an antifascist or a collaborator. Under the new regime, people are again told to look the other way as groups the media and government identify as enemies are attacked on the streets or herded into detention centers.

Europe was moving towards fascism all over again, and the Chamberlains of the day were letting it happen because nationalism is necessary to capitalism. Those who benefit from neoliberalism were happy that someone else was framing up a scapegoat for the unemployment, the loss of social guarantees, the commoditization of culture, and loss of sovereignty, which fascists reinterpreted as threats to a mythologized homogeneous national identity. Meanwhile, white people resented the millions of immigrants flooding in from the peripheral regions that served as sacrifice zones to the European and North American economies. In Groningen Joop had showed me a British publication that featured nearly identical quotes from EU bureaucrats and ministers under Mussolini and Hitler, calling for the common market and a European government; the magazine also pointed out all the former Vichy officials who went on to become influential architects of the European Union. *Der Markt über alles.*

## Wrapped in Fog

Voskrisenya, 17 Dekabr'

Uniformed Soviet-style, the woman behind the glass at the train station rolls her eyes when she hears I am a foreigner. No helpful hand gestures, no speaking slowly, no writing numbers down on paper. The people in line behind me start crowding, elbowing, edging in past me, even though the previous person negotiating three tickets to Almaty took twice as long. Outside, too, the city is aggro, a jackhammer heartbeat clashing with its candy coating, ostentatious and metallic as a cellphone ringtone playing "Ode to Joy."

The chatter of machines and mouths fills the air. Russian, Ukrainian, Surzhik — the local dialect combining the two. The languages are delicious in the mouth, plagued by an infuriating grammar, and make every conversation between native speakers sound like an argument. Bourgeois shops and peasant street vendors mingle on *Chernovo-Armeiska* — Red Army street. Casinos and slot-machine halls flash out false promises: "Dzek-pot!" the letters are in Cyrillic approximations but the neon hues translate perfectly. Farther along, Khreshatik is closed to car traffic: it must be a weekend. A golden angel perches on a pedestal a hundred feet in the air. Seems timeless, but it could be just a few years old. Dozens of monuments and historical buildings have gone up since Independence, as Kyiv tries to portray itself as a city that has always been steeped in its own past.

Before the *Maidan Nezalazhnosti* — Independence Square — youth on rollerskates wave orange flags and speakers mix words like snake oil from the beds of shiny pickup trucks. It's hard to tell, until you read their banners, whether this is a commemoration of the recent Orange Revolution, which peacefully toppled the Moscow-aligned autocracy, or if it's a commercial parade sponsored by a cellphone company. They become indistinguishable. The Revolution was sponsored by the US, yet at the same time it brought out tens of thousands of people unaware of this backing to take over the streets and attempt to assert power over their government. One column of a building along the Maidan is shielded with clear plastic sheets that protect the high water mark of urgent, delirious graffiti they left behind. Elsewhere it's been washed away. The most common graffiti is the slogan of the Revolution itself: "Tak!" It means "Yes!" in Ukrainian; in Russian it's the nothing-word you say before changing the subject.

Timoshenko is one of the Revolution's politician-heroes; her face is for sale on t-shirts on the Maidan. She looks like Princess Leia. Which would make Putin the Emperor. I bet he really can shoot lightning from his fingertips, though, that evil KGB bastard. And this winter the Empire has struck back. The pro-Russia gang got back into the electoral saddle after Moscow clarified the bread and butter question by toying with the westward flow of natural gas. How's that for getting out the votes?

Throughout Kyiv the most common graffiti is written in homage to UPA, the Ukrainian Rebel Army. Trapped in the middle, they fought the Nazis and the Soviets during the "Great Patriotic War" and now their veterans want pensions. Ukrainian nationalists see them as heroes and try to suppress the fact that they had a cozy relationship with the Nazis in the beginning. Red Army

veterans see them as enemies. The Soviets left their own graffiti behind in the form of monuments and statues, hideous socialist realism depicting the most stout-chested, square-jawed men a patriarchal society could possibly envision, heroically harvesting wheat or charging Nazi tanks. Included in all the scenes, from the battlefield to the factory, were enough token women in support roles to signify socialism's politically correct gender equality. Standing alone high above the banks of the Dnepr, some stern-faced Soviet goddess of war holds aloft a squat sword, which was shortened in production by the "godless" communists so it would not stand taller than the tallest spire of the city's preeminent monastery. Around the goddess's feet, pedestaled tanks and jet fighters bid for the people's loyalties and spell out what threat awaits the treasonous.

What are the Ukrainians looking at these war monuments thinking? What are the Ukrainians walking in the streets thinking as a paroxysmic demonstration of the best the West has to offer in Mass Communications is grafted onto the cracked landscape? Pedestrians and SUVs fight it out with one another, violently darning a new social fabric, drab buildings build themselves to the sky, dark coats hurry by; new town of mud, ice, steel beams and homeless dogs, old town of cobblestone and souvenir stands, pastel apartments with balconies and windows in long stacked rows, stone edifice in curving angling texture (neo-classical?), like Paris or Sankt Peterburg; churches, monasteries, onion domes of slatted wood, onion domes of gold, bulbed steeples of patient green on square whitewashed bodies; everywhere icons, saints, for sale or salvation; babushkas sell icons, young women cross themselves on the threshold, black-cassocked priests clasp their hands at the small of their backs, marriage celebrations stop traffic on weekends, on weekdays babushkas in their shawls wear reflective traffic-worker vests and sweep the gutters with homemade wicker brooms, girlfriends stroll arm in arm, well preened women mince down the street in stiletto boots, eyes flitting aside to appraise, sharklike, the fashions of their sisters, women wearing bambi and thumper, glancing for frequent reassurance to their prophets in the storewindow posters whispering kill thy neighbor as thyself; old women with purple or hennaed hair, ancient women — babushkas — wrinkled faces, shawls around their heads, look away from the unbridgeable gap of history between them and the young: they are going extinct, there will be no more babushkas; young men with soft faces and equine hair, men with evil faces, men with haggard faces, smoking cigarettes, talking football, conducting business deals, puffing out chests or hurrying to the Next Thing, old men dressed like Bela Lugosi; gangsters wearing shiny black clothes and shiny black cars, wearing the women on their arms; body guards, security guards; Megamarket parking attendants wearing blue camo and jackboots; policemen, militsiya, traffic cops, honor guards, officers, everywhere, with their doofus-caps and their dumb faces of happy power. Boneheads in the metro. Bundled men sit by sandwich boards, selling phone cards, internet cards, waiting; advertisements, advertisements, shiny things to buy, shipments of Coca-Cola, bent grandmas begging, gypsy families begging, cold, cold, cold. Women in short skirts and homeless dogs defy logic and extinction as the temperature drops. The city wakes up wrapped in fog. Questions, contradictions, and mostly the long bland pauses in between. Walks to the park, traffic sounds, early darkness. Every night, fireworks. No reason, just fireworks. In a graveyard on a hillside covered in trees, you can walk in peace and mouth the names of the dead, their syllables freezing in the air. Then a thaw comes, the warmest December ever. Global warming brings smiles and drinking in parks. I'm pining for a blizzard.

## **New Fascist Attack in St. Peterburg**

15-1-2007. A collective translation from an anonymous article in Russian put up on Indymedia.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of January in St. Peterburg, after the traditional action "Food Not Bombs" (FNB, serving a free meal for everybody who needs it), a group of 10 neonazis armed with knives attacked one of the activists. He was taken to the district hospital with 21 knife wounds. It should be noted that during the action there were already about 7 nazis watching from nearby. The victim is in critical condition. He lost much blood, and has taken damage to vital organs. He was operated on yesterday and today he needs a blood transfusion. Police instituted a criminal investigation under clauses 30 and 105 (murderous assault) of the criminal code of Russia.

It is no wonder that in a situation of legal apathy young people start to act by themselves in reply to the fascist terror in many Russian towns. More and more people are joining the antifa movement.

20-year-old Timur Kacharava, a musician from the band "Sandinista!" and an FNB activist, was killed by nazis armed with knives on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, 2005. The trial stemming from the murder still hasn't started.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April, 2006, in Moscow, 19-year-old Alexandr Ryuhin was killed on his way to a punk/hardcore concert: about 10 fascists attacked him with knives. He also was killed for his antifascist views. The murderers have been found but they are accused of "hooliganism" rather than premeditated murder with fascist motives.

Not long ago, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, 2006, fascists in Moscow tried to blow up an antifascist in his house. He escaped any injuries miraculously, but 5 policemen were hospitalized.

Fascist attacks are becoming more and more impudent and brutal. In the first 11 months of 2006 at least 44 people were killed by members of extreme right groups, according to the analysis center "SOVA". Nearly every murderer has been accused of hooliganism and given a suspended sentence.

## Olga Taratuta and Alex Grossman

Abram Solomonovich Grossman, also known as Aleksandr, was a Jewish Ukrainian anarchist who joined with Italian Errico Malatesta in opposing the syndicalist currents in the movement. “The essence of revolution is not a strike, but mass expropriation,” he wrote. One of the *chernoznamets*, a group of anarchist-communists who favored violent direct action, he spent two years in prison before the 1905 revolution, went to Paris and wrote for the anarchist journal *Burevestnik* for a while, then returned in 1907 to lead the Ekaterinoslav battle detachment. In February 1908, he was cornered in the Kyiv train station and shot to death while resisting arrest.

Olga Taratuta was imprisoned as a young woman after participating in the 1905 bombing of the Libman café in Odessa, one of many actions targeting the bourgeoisie as a whole carried out by parts of the anarchist movement during the 1905 revolution. Olga broke out of the Odessa prison, but after a short exile in the West returned to Ukraine and joined the Ekaterinoslav battle detachment. She was recaptured in 1908, and released from Lukyianivski prison in Kyiv in 1917. Ninety years later Kyiv’s anarchist infoshop was located nearby this same prison. After release Olga worked for the Red Cross for a while, and in 1920 in Kharkov she joined the Anarchist Federation and the Anarchist Black Cross, a prisoner support group, in response to the Bolshevik repression. That same year she was rounded up by the Cheka, taken to Butyrki prison where she was brutally beaten, and then sent to a polit-isolator in Ural, in Siberian exile, where she suffered scurvy. In the mid-1920s she was paroled and returned to Kyiv, but I could not find out whether she was swept up again in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, as were nearly all the other surviving anarchists and ex-anarchists.



## Ideas about Sex at the Illegal Festival “Gender Paths 2”

An article written by my friend Vlasta, which I translated from Russian for *Abolishing the Borders from Below* #28.

“Gender Paths,” occurring once a year, is an attempt to bring together all people interested in gender — primarily from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine — in one place; this time in the city of Minsk, from 8–10 December, 2006. I would name its distinguishing features as illegality, a full schedule, the diversity of visitors and participants, and the absence of censorship on the part of the organizers. Here it felt wonderfully like studying with artists, as well as punks, anarchists, and other subcultural elements. The organizers made sure to balance the discussions and artistic parts of the festival. The illegality of the festival becomes clear with the political situation in Belarus: dictatorship, no free press, certainly no gender festivals, where alternative politics must live underground.

So it is that the brightest occurrence in the post-Soviet expanse in the field of gender in 2006 occurred under the sign “Private Party” in one of the youth clubs in Minsk. It was basement accommodations with long corridors, a few small rooms, a huge bar, wardrobe, huge double halls, and finally, technological accoutrements. One of the big halls had a few rows of soft, comfy couches that served as the starting point of the conference. In the second hall, the photo exhibit “Femininity” was stationed, and in the evening concerts were held there. The photo exhibit “Taina” was located in the small room to the left. Hanging on the wall of the corridor a little closer to the entrance were some impressive photos of feminist stencils.

For me, as one of the participants, the festival began early in the morning, with the setting up of my photo exhibit under the name “Femininity” — a consciously scandalous project. The goal — in a subject which in official culture would be dripping with brutality, was to give the understanding, to those who still don’t have it, that the physical can never surely reflect a person’s identity.

The idea for an exhibit under the name “Femininity” arose in the summer of 2006, like a quest... Just what is femininity? For me, as a subject to whom this quality is assigned regardless of my wishes, determining me in various moments of my life to be either feminine or unfeminine, and marginalizing my existence on every level (physical, economical, political, emotional, sexual), such an order arouses visions and aspirations of finding myself, not attaching any meaning to hegemonic patriarchal concepts of living. I never believed and hardly ever agreed that I was less strong or less smart than a man, but I can say with certainty that for her personal development a woman has much fewer choices, inasmuch as the state makes her weak, dooming her to the function of domestic servant and childbearing unit. The outcome that flows from this, like menstruation, is a bloody answer to the question, “what is femininity?” With masculinity as with femininity — it’s an illness. A social, unconscious illness. And it has already hurt women for many centuries, and maybe for more to come.

From more than sixty photographs I took thirty, in three working categories — body-image, menstrual, and fecal. People entered the hall to look around at what I had prepared for them... it seemed to me that they were in shock. They hardly spoke, maybe they couldn't find the words? But I suppose it opened new horizons in the minds of those who were held back from similar self-expressions and quests. The exhibit produced such reactions as I'd expected — shock, amazement, and with some photos even disgust... But all those people who asked me to give them a picture for their personal collection can't but make one glad.

But enough about me, let's return to the festival. For convenience, it was divided into two parts — conversational and artistic. The discussions began at 13:00 and the art showings opened at 17:00 and lasted until 21:00. This year the discussion segment took up such questions as: the creation and distribution of tactical media; gender marketing; "A Different Femininity" (the styles of homosexual youths); deliberate parenthood; gender studies in architecture; women's bodies and postcolonialism; erotica in Soviet film from the 1930s to '50s; reproductive politics in modern Russia.

The artistic segment this year consisted of a series of performances, photo exhibits, concerts, and two shows by the underground and very classy "Free Theater" of Minsk. People also awaited Mariolla Brilovskaya, who delighted crowds last year with colorful cartoons and porno-karaoke, as well as the Polish group "Maskotki," but for various reasons they could not come.

And now, for the best parts, in detail. I wish the lecture on tactical media would have been a workshop on this theme, because I already realize the necessity of such things — it is the practical knowledge I lack. Marketing research into gender is always interesting, since unfortunately we live in an age of consumerism and collide with advertising regularly, even when we consciously limit our contact with it. And that means it has influence over us. Therefore, it is very important to perceive the hidden message that it carries.

Arrogant specialization seems to be the distinctive feature of some researchers from Ukraine, on account of their excessive academism. But, ignoring this, the lecture on "A Different Femininity," in the course of which they showed photographs of young women from the homosexual subculture in the city of Kiev, aroused interest and a lively discussion. The most emotional discussion turned out to be the one about deliberate parenthood, in which, aside from parents, a two-year-old child also participated... One of the funny things about Soviet ideology was the denial of sex, which was reflected in the culture and most immediately in cinema. A very funny lecture was dedicated to this subject, illustrated by Soviet films from the '30s-'50s, which put all those present in a good mood that lasted to the end of the day.

The presentation about the reproductive situation in modern Russia brought us all back to reality. The prohibition of abortion without the written permission of the husband; the prohibition against marrying foreigners (this concerns only Russian women, the men are free in their choice of partners), which is also a goal of the fascists by the way: the preservation of the Russian genepool; the official discussion on the possibility of polygamy — it's understood this would only apply to men. Themes similar to these are openly discussed on TV and utilized in advertising. Fascism is not just one of the possibilities for Russia, it's already a reality today. Various other post-Soviet countries are also taking this path. It's a huge problem and we shouldn't passively think that it will fix itself. Nothing will happen if we don't make it happen.

People who study art are like a thermometer for the illness of the world. Thanks to them, we can provide a diagnosis, and with that, begin the treatment. For that reason, the Free Theater's show "Psychosis 4:48" amazed me. The production was based around a monologue of a woman

with a split personality. You can apply this metaphor to today's world, to the oppressed position of women, and not be mistaken: the politics are discernible. The double standard applied to women permeates everything in the world today. This dichotomy has reached its critical point. It is time to throw down these enslaving forces, individually and globally. In the last scene, amidst all the spectators attracted to this show, both actresses bared their bodies.

No less interesting to me was the second show of this same theater, under the name "Technology Breathing in a Vacuum." And what emotion did that play bring? For some reason — nostalgia, although unlike the frightening "Psychosis," the second play was funny. If you're ever in Minsk, definitely find and watch some of those plays. This is no easy task, but you won't regret it.

I loved the monologue "Domestic Hedgehog," as told by V. Sinkareva, with elements of street and puppet theater. A performing artist, using Soviet styles of street theater, portrays the whole world in two meters of space. A hospital, the fate of an artist, love intrigues, a warm fireplace, a train on the way to the city, Soviet *chernukha* [*perestroika-era film noire*], alcoholism. But it was all just puppets: the hedgehog, cat, dog and ferret, they weren't real! No, they weren't real, but I cried anyway. And also the puppets were homemade, DIY, which in and of itself is very valuable.

Over the course of three days, in the artistic segment about six performances took place, and at the conclusion of the festival the group *Serebrenaya Svad'ba* — Silver Wedding — appeared in colorful costumes. We danced and smiled. And afterwards I packed up "Femininity" and left.

In the future I would like the festival to take the form of a camp, or if possible, to happen twice a year — in the winter in festival format, without changes, and in the summer in the form of a camp, somewhere outside a city, with workshops and large discussions of a general or specific character.

# Snowballs

Voskresenye, 28 Yanvar' 2007

The entrance hall to the little apartment that secretly houses Kyiv's infoshop is full of shoes, and each shoe releases a puddle of black water as the muddy snow filling its treads begins to melt. The people who have come to the presentation depart in groups back into that snowy world, and the shoes disappear, but the puddles grow and conjoin. I fill a bucket with water and push a mop side to side. The featherweight kitten they've adopted attacks the mop with zeal. Yeva, the demanding two-year-old daughter of Vlasta, who has also stayed to clean up, insists on taking over, and of course she does it all wrong, from the perspective of one who wants to clean the floor in a reasonable amount of time. And before her, I was doing it all wrong, from the perspective of one who has no time for boring repetition and needs to see what interesting forms this mess of mud and water can take. I do my best to explain to her Proper Methods of Mopping Very Muddy Floors and, perhaps amused by my strange accent and childish vocabulary, she humours me, though soon goes on to pursuits more permissive of the layman's creativity. Ha ha! The Ivory Tower of Professionalism is once again defended from an insufficiently obsequious apprentice!

As the floor slowly turns white I think about the presentation — “Nonviolence or a Diversity of Tactics?” Some time after arriving in Kyiv they invited me to give a talk at their infoshop and of the few I offered this was the topic that interested them the most. I had done something similar in Berlin and Groningen, and in the US before I left, on the basis of a book I wrote criticizing nonviolence. Every time had been much the same because I could draw on a common heritage of official history, interlinked movements, and culture. But here on the other side of the old Iron Curtain I couldn't just drop the name of Martin Luther King or the buzzphrase “diversity of tactics” and expect them to know what I was talking about. So I planned for a talk with less historical reference, more analysis of the philosophical and practical weaknesses of nonviolence, useful frameworks for an effective diversity of tactics, and so forth. A lot of people came and Andrey, the translator, did a good job and got help from English-fluent audience members, but I felt like there was a failure to communicate. People had asked a number of questions that seemed to miss the point and suggested the questioners thought I had my head in a burlap sack.

Afterwards I realized that the lack of a common history had created a much wider gulf than I was imagining. Nonviolence wasn't even a concept in Russian — the translation was “not-violent methods.” And here I was refusing to define violence because the dichotomy is counterproductive, thinking I'm talking about a philosophy and practice when through the translator I'm actually criticizing an ill-defined set of actions and advocating instead another ill-defined set of actions. The Soviet Union had so destroyed social movements, and such movements were especially slow to reemerge in Ukraina for some reason, that apparently the conversations about nonviolence and militancy as philosophies and practice had never taken place — to a certain extent they were still looking for tactics, rather than the analysis that binds them together.

Damn I felt stupid...

Sreda, 7 Fevral'

Today I learned that natives of Kyiv are reputed to speak an especially fast and convoluted version of Russian, so now I don't feel so bad about my lengthy tribulations with the language. In any case, Russian has an extremely complicated and fickle grammar, which makes it all the more gratifying as it haltingly begins to flow from my own mouth. But all the times friends back home — or, ahem, editors — have told me my sentences are too long and complicated come back to me and make me want to live in Kyiv — or for that matter Berlin, German being similar in this respect — where four dependent clauses in one sentence is nothing to write home about.

What's more, to speak Russian you need a comparatively huge operative vocabulary because their words are so specific, whereas we tend to get by with just a few stock verbs that each carry a bathtub full of meanings. For example in a detailed Russian-English dictionary the word "go" will take up three whole pages because each of our various meanings requires a distinct Russian verb. Anyhow this evening I was hanging out with Katya, Andrey, Vlasta, and an anarchist visiting from Slovakia. It seems to me that when Slavs get together they like to compare notes on accents and idiom; of course the best thing to do is trade jokes and learn foreign curse words and tongue-twisters — skorogovorka — and amidst all our polyglottonous perambulations I realized, mid-sentence (I think the sentence was: "It's like one of those jokes that everybody knows, like "why did the chicken —") that these people had never heard the joke: why did the chicken cross the road? Here I was, nigh on quarter of a century old, about to tell people my own age for their very first time why the chicken crossed the road. The godfather of all English-language jokes! It was so exciting, I had to get up and do a little dance first. And the best thing? Because we really don't know, in the court of world opinion, whether that joke is funny or not, to us it's more an example of a joke, a sentence that signifies a joke rather than a joke in itself, we've already heard the punchline in utero... So the best thing? They laughed! Substantially! (Maybe it was my dance?) Sweet! N'est-ce pas?

Vtornik, 13 Fevral'

My mom has had to go back to the States for back surgery. This year she gets to retire from her hated job, but she has not escaped soon enough. Too many stressful hours behind a desk have ruined her spine. But it seems as though her life will only begin after retirement. She's like a small child, in the best possible sense, planning out what she wants to do with her life, though on the bad days she wonders if the years of work have stolen her health before setting her free. It's funny: her passions were languages and travelling, so she started this career thinking it would let her be who she wanted to be. Her parents, in their time, had escaped generations of poverty in the South by becoming a career officer in the military and the attendant housewife. And my little brother, now, is being vigorously prepared for a similar compromise. He's living with my mother this year, attending an international school and trying desperately to graduate. John is a natural genius with a camera and with any musical instrument he picks up, but the bureaucratic demands of high school leave him little energy to develop these talents: he has to learn chemistry equations he might never use again in his life, he has to complete homework assignments that may or may not be helpful for him, and his own particular needs and idiosyncrasies are considered irrelevant in this process. Every day he comes home I see they've beaten a little more of that vital spark out of him.

School is the prison for the submissive, like prison is the school for the defiant. The successful students adopt the challenges that are put before them as their own. They will do well, valuing themselves based on their performance in whatever career is placed before them — this choice also they will adopt as their own. The other students, at least, will be trained to accept the impo-

sition of external criteria. The most important lesson we learn in school, the one single fact that without exception will follow us throughout our entire lives, no matter what job or economic role we end up in, is the compulsion of adhering to arrangements we had no part in making. The ultimate answer to every child's curious questioning is the simple, authoritative "Because." No matter whether the question regards the color of the sky or why they have to go to bed or do their homework. The conclusion of adulthood's logic, that we are no more free to change our society than we are to change the way light refracts through the atmosphere producing the color blue, is that we are, simply, not free.

Subbota, 17 Fevral'

A low-hanging sunlight slides through the window and paints the wall a hue of yellow as thick as butter, carves out shadows distinct and black as iron, and already fades to memory and second-guessing — no, surely "thick as butter" and "black as iron" are clumsily overdone even for such light, I think to myself, scratching my head, forgetting already how it looked. The sun sets behind the hill of the Baikova cemetery where the crows in their hundreds spend all day in a treetop chorus, a single organism of a thousand beaks and a million midnight feathers that any minute now on some twilit cue will take to the sky, as it does every evening in a great wheeling whirlpool ritual that floods towards my window and rolls over the building, disappearing, in a stirring sort of death. Tomorrow I leave Kyiv for points south and west.

These last weeks here winter has tantalized cruelly. I came to Ukraine hoping for the strongest winter of my life, but it didn't arrive until late January, two weeks of near solid snow and temperatures rather tamely approaching — 10, the mid-teens in Fahrenheit. Then a little bit of teasing, a few days of thaw, a few days of snow, each time leaving me to worry that a good honest winter would become a bygone experience, receding irrevocably into some mythologized Calvin and Hobbes past.

And beneath this bitter nostalgia, I've been tying up all my loose ends as haphazardly as might be expected for someone who never got the Boy Scouts badge for knotsmanship, quickly finishing, or getting just a little further along, pamphlets, stencils, group discussions, articles, translations, and other collaborations with the anarchists I've met and befriended these past months.

Soon enough I'm off, hoping that Odessa is as beautiful as I've heard, that Moldova will let me through their wee country without a visa so I can meet my contacts in Romania as scheduled, that distractions such as these will mask the sadness of leaving this place behind, and of going alone once more into a future that stays blank because no expectations could possibly describe it.

# Of War and Mountains

Τετάρτη 14 Μαρτίου

The people on the television here in Athena are saying it's a war, which most everyone I'm talking to has met with giggles. And the weather, first it was too gloriously warm and balmy for there really to be a war, and now it's too cold and grey. Still, there's a strange feeling in the city – the riot cops standing in large squads on random corners, police with submachine guns guarding all the government buildings... It's been just a few weeks but such a great distance in getting here.

On Sunday night, 18 February, I left Kyiv. My dear bicycle I entrusted to my younger brother, and we said our goodbyes on a train platform in the freezing cold, our bodies casting deep shadows in the shallow yellow lamplight. On creaking joints the train clanked and strained and pulled itself south on electric ropes, settling into a fast canter that lulled all the passengers to sleep. The sun's first rays caressed our tired faces as we lugged bags down onto the platform in Odessa and looked out at the silver domes and spires of the city outshining the pale sky, while the flocks of gulls called out for the sea to deliver up their breakfast. Odessa was the end of the line, but there was a bus to take me over the wide fens of the Dniestr delta, through the forlorn hills of Moldova draped with a sad mist, to Chisinau, where another train could take me to Romania.

I got to Craiova, in southern Romania, on Marți, 20 Februarie. Members of *Initiativa Autonoma* and the anarcha-feminist group *Love Kills* met me at the train station, and I wondered how this first meeting would go. I was headed for Barcelona, via Greece and Italy, but I didn't know a soul in the world ahead of me. After months of making friends and a temporary home, I was on my own again. In *Abolishing the Borders from Below* or from friends in Kyiv I had gotten a few contacts in Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, so I already had places to stay and was even scheduled to give a few presentations, but I had no idea what kind of people they were. I hoped to find enough solidarity and hospitality to get me by.

Ioana and Corva brought me to their apartment and put me up in the bed usually claimed by their dogs. I was nervous and shy at first, but these two strangers were so earnest that in the end I could feel nothing but the love that pours out from the heart and fills up one's belly when people who share a struggle that is real in its dangers and sincere in its dreams cross paths. They took care of me because I was a comrade. That's an ugly word in American English, thanks to Soviet dishonesty and the Red Scare. Perhaps it's better to say *companion*, someone who accompanies you on the long path forward. For a few wonderful days I shared their path with them, hearing about their projects, the obstacles they faced, and telling them about the things I had seen and learned. We traded enough of ourselves that years later, reading letters from one another, we could see that we were still on the same path, looking for the best way forward.

Anarchy is a gift: it is a meal you cook in order to share it, and it is the pleasure you get from sharing. Ioana and Corva fed me well on rich, salty, oily food, always accompanied by bread, wine, and pickled peppers, much of it made by their family members in the countryside. And they showed me their town. They lived in Craiovița, a working class neighborhood that held

a fifth of the city's 400,000 inhabitants. Arrayed around it like immobile constellations were a graveyard, a Roma village, and a toxic waste dump.

The anarchist movement in Romania was tiny. The dictatorship fell in 1989 during a stage-managed spectacle that took its cues from events in the rest of the region. Well connected people knew where to invest their stocks in the transitioning economy when the state sold off its properties, while ordinary people typically invested in their places of work. The higher ups, who were investing elsewhere, bilked and bankrupted these local companies, so the workers lost everything while the party aristocracy seamlessly transformed into a private aristocracy. There was no history of social movements in Romania. The very idea of a social movement is often criticized by the more insurrectionary of Western anarchists, but I think they don't understand how vital these movements are, not as an end in themselves, but as a starting point. The dictatorship had destroyed social movements as a popular habit, a social feature, a tradition, even as a memory, and left behind the mutually destructive, cynical individualism characteristic of the post-Soviet world. Punk music gave a voice to the alienation one would expect in such a setting. To paraphrase Corva, reading Kafka made them punks and listening to Dead Kennedys made them anarchists.

After some years there were over a hundred anarchists centered around the punk scene in Craiova alone. They had no literature at first: Corva told me in all seriousness that they even resorted to looking up anarchy in the encyclopedia. But their foundation was not strong enough. As government repression mounted people gave up, moved out, fought one another, or turned to an increasingly escapist punk culture. Now the group was very small. The few remaining members were doing their best to spread ideas — by holding protests and publishing zines — to overcome the isolation built into the social fabric.

In Romania I learned that to a passing tourist, a police state will probably look like a pleasant place. Someone spending a few weeks in Romania, staying in a hotel, and not befriending any marginalized people would never know about the visits by the secret police, about the torture in the police stations, about the special attention given to anyone who wanted more from life than shopping, about the unmarked car parked outside an anarchist's apartment, watching them for weeks. The police visited members of the anarchist group after an anti-election campaign, after political stickers went up, after they checked out the library's sole anarchist book — an old one by Bakunin. If the cops wanted to "invite" an activist to an interview at the station they would leave the summons with the neighbors so everyone around would know the person was in some kind of trouble, and become suspicious, and help with the surveillance. If the cops saw that a young person was starting to radicalize, starting to talk with the anarchists, they would talk to the person's parents, to the employers, to mobilize social pressure and bring that person back into line and isolate the committed anarchists from the world. While I was there some anarchist graffiti went up in the city, and afterwards one of the few employed members of their group got fired from his job after the police paid a visit to his boss.

I never thought to stay long in Romania but Ioana and Corva convinced me to stay a few days more and go with them to a punk concert in Timișoara. We took the bus, through the southern spur of the Carpathians, supine and steely-eyed mountains looking down on the river. On the other side was Serbia. Here they call the river Dunăre, following the Dacians, the ancient Celtic inhabitants, who called it Dunerius. In English we've shortened the Romans' Danuvius to Danube, and some of the other ten nations through which this river flows call it the Donau, Dunaj, Duna,



and Dunav. Danu, incidentally, in Proto-Indo-European, means river, and the same root can be found in the Dniepr, Kyiv's river, and in the Don of Russia.

The concert was in a building like an old citadel, which Timișoara's anarcho-punks often used. Six bands played, but the only ones I remember were the two I enjoyed — Pavilionul 32 from București, and Aktivna Propaganda from Slovenia. It was sad seeing the punks drinking themselves to death, and sadder still for the opportunity that was missed. Concerts like these were some of the few times that anarchists from the whole country could come together and talk and network, but not enough people were motivated or sober enough to make it happen. Ioana and Corva were distressed Resistance can't stay still. It can either become more effective or it can become a posture; a posture soon becomes a gesture, and finally these gestures only mask hypocrisy as they become self-defeating. There is a final unintended honesty in their gestures: "smash the state" say the lyrics and the patches for sale. By now they're so much a part of the state of things, and they're smashing themselves to bits.

I wished fervently to be able to pull the word "solidarity" out of a hat and have it manifest as something real, something born out of the sheer desire to give them something that would make their struggle a little easier. With the typical guilt of the outsider, I felt awful about leaving them in those circumstances. And I felt awful about feeling awful; of course they can take care of themselves and keep on fighting. But sometimes one wants to take on all the despair and hold it close; take that rich, heavy sadness that like a buzzard shadows our lives of fighting against everything, for everything; turn it into beauty that cuts just as sharp; and turn that into insane hope, and enough craziness to believe in it, that we will win, and that maybe even our ghosts will be substantial enough to smell, just once, the sweat and breath of these things we dream about.

But I could say nothing more poetic than "take care" and "keep in touch" when I finally headed out of Romania in the midst of a series of hassles like those that always accompany and overwhelm the pursuit of things lofty.

## **A small group of anarchists persisting in a police state**

The way they conspire in smoky cafés  
ducking the watch  
of the secret police  
to plan their desperate rebellion  
is as beautiful  
as the sight of a rich blue sky  
through gray bars  
framed in a dirty concrete wall.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, I was scheduled to give a presentation in Sofiya, the capital of Bulgaria. I had intended to get there on Sunday the 25<sup>th</sup> — Nedeli, 25 Fevruari. But the Romanian train system was just switching to computers, and I was thwarted by a ghost train. The next non-phantasmic transport would get me to Sofiya four hours after my presentation. In the end I crossed the border on foot at Giurgiu, walking over the Danube bridge. Then I hopped on a bus that rushed me through the brown, stubbled mountains, and made it to Sofiya a few hours early. Georgi, my contact, met me at the bus station and took me to his place, where I could wash up and prepare.

The event was at an NGO-funded cultural center that often let the anarchists in the back door, under the radar of the Western donors, among them George Soros, comically enough. Similar to Kyiv, the anarchists here had no social center and had to rely on the generosity of liberal friends who supported free speech in a way the chairpersons of the Western NGOs employing them would not have appreciated, had they known.

Lots of people came and seemed to enjoy the discussion on the concept of a diversity of tactics. I detailed some actions and struggles from the last few decades that had used a combination of peaceful and destructive tactics to good effect. I wanted to give a wide range of examples that would be both accessible and inspiring for people in a movement with a low capacity for action, so we talked about things like simple education and solidarity work in support of militant struggles abroad like in Oaxaca or Iraq; popular riots like the Stonewall Rebellion; and urban guerrilla groups like Direct Action in Canada. A number of social movements were on the rise in Bulgaria, but people were unsure what actions might be effective, and how the struggle could develop. There was plenty of passivity but fortunately that was recognized as a weakness. Nonviolence as such hadn't really emerged and hopefully it never will, unless George Soros has his say.

As in Ukraina and Romania and the rest of the region, the dictatorship had prevented the emergence of any social movements in Bulgaria. The common apathy and isolation were at work here too, though the social movements seemed relatively larger, and growing faster. Interestingly, Bulgaria had a huge anarchist movement up until the 1940s, and those members of it who survived the war and passed through the prison camps of the Communists had in recent years handed the torch on to the next generation. There was a bit of a split in Sofiya between the old-fashioned anarchists who minimized the importance of gender and ecological issues — a couple were even homophobic, I'm ashamed to say — and the newer anarchists for whom these latter issues were very important. Quite in contrast to Romania, Bulgarian anarchism had little to do with punk, and most of the anarchists would not stand out in a crowd. But just like the Romanians, their hospitality was heartwarming. One night, we stayed up late in one guy's apartment, talking about the struggle, sharing experiences and stories of our various efforts. The next night, they brought me to a film showing at a bar whose owner was sympathetic to the movement. The place was packed, and they were excited about using the place for more events, but after I left I heard fascists visited and made the proprietor afraid to associate with anarchists any more.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March I came by train through the evocative, snow-capped mountains and into Greece. Twenty minutes after I arrived in Thessaloniki, still tired because I'd stayed up late saying goodbyes in Sofiya, my contact picked me up on a motorcycle and, with my big hiking backpack pulling me precariously backward, whisked me through the busy city streets, shouting over his shoulder that I had come just in time for a major student demonstration. He took me to their squat to quickly drop off my backpack and retrieve two black flags which he had me hold, and away we sped to the university. The flags were really transparent pretenses: a little bit of black cloth stapled to a thick and sturdy club which was the real purpose and substance of the affiliation flags usually denote.

In Greece, universities were public. When I told one anarchist here how much I had to pay at my relatively cheap state school before I dropped out, he said "That's not a public university." Here, studying at a university was free and available to all, by constitutional guarantee. Universities also had asylum, meaning the police could not enter. This was in recognition of the role student riots played in toppling the US-backed military dictatorship in 1974. Now, as part of the authoritarian, neoliberal social engineering of the European Union, the Greek government

was trying to pass a law to privatize the universities, give them a more corporate management structure, such as exists in the US, and take away or at least weaken the asylum. They even had to change the constitution to accomplish this. The law was tremendously unpopular among the students, and since last spring — with a short break in the fall to allow for exams for the previous semesters — the students and teachers had been on strike, and the universities had been occupied.

The buildings were all covered with graffiti and draped with banners. They held frequent assemblies at which the students made decisions about the resistance. Every week for a while now, there had been protests against the education reform in Thessaloniki, Athena, and other cities. Various communist parties controlled a large part of the student movement, though everyone worked together, with a strong dose of that acidic arguing that seems typical of Greece.

When we pulled up, several thousand students were assembling just inside the university, safe from police because of the asylum. The march started off, and soon the air filled with energetic, rhythmic chants. The people of the city watched the demonstration pass by, supportive or at worst unoffended. Young people leisurely spraypainted slogans or stencils over all the buildings they passed. If a surveillance camera was low enough they would boost up a comrade to spray-paint the lens black or just smash it. If it was higher up they would open the box that contained its electrical wiring and set it on fire. An ATM or two got smashed for good measure.

At some intersections we saw groups of riot police a block away, hiding around the corner, shadowing the march, constantly in defensive posture. In Greece, people saw the situation more clearly than in the States. If police showed up at a protest, it was a provocation and they should be beaten. At this protest, the police were choosing not to fight, so they kept their distance. This experience crystallized for me a feeling I had from US protests, how the riot cops stomp boldly on both sides of the march, as well as in front and in back. This obviously is not to keep the peace or protect anybody, and I realized it isn't even primarily to maintain control or prevent rioting: in fact throughout the 70s and 80s police experts determined it was better to show less force at protests because physically threatening crowds provokes riots. So they began a decades long project of social engineering to make people accustomed to policing and social control. On the one hand they created friendly neighborhood police units that would get involved in community affairs, coupled with an increase in surveillance and stricter control of light crimes like graffiti, and on the other hand they developed hyper-militarized riot and counterterrorist police meant to be used in increasingly frequent states of emergency, and intended to terrify normal people and bystanders into perfect obedience and submission. Nowadays, they have brought back the overwhelming display of force, the threat of violence in protest situations, specifically because it provokes people — it makes people live under constant provocation by the authorities and accept it as normal and even comfortable. The goal of the state was not to keep the peace but to increase their power. The fact that they had to change their policing tactics to avoid rioting must have left an awful taste in their mouths — it reminded them that they were not omnipotent, that there still existed a thing called society which they had to be afraid of. So they retreated, but only temporarily, changing course in order to sculpt society and get one step closer to engineering humans that they have dreamed about for millennia: humans that are completely passive, that respond to provocation and domination only with more obedience.

In Thessaloniki that day, there was no fighting with police, because the police chose to avoid it. The march got back to the university after having redecorated much of the city, and finally I got

to rest. Later in the week the student assemblies at the majority of universities voted to continue the strike, as did the teachers' union if I'm not mistaken.

Thessaloniki was a chaotically calm city. Motorcyclists wove carefree through traffic, pedestrians crowded the streets, lazily sidling out of the way of passing cars. Flowers blossomed and orange trees bore fruit, palm fronds tossed in the wind. Everywhere trotted amicable street dogs, street dogs who walked into parties on the university or converged in their dozens on the protests and came along with the marches. Mountains gathered close around the city, an eager semicircle facing the sea, which extended flat and forever. Thermaikos Gulf: oily water straitjacketed with piers and cargo cranes. Apartments lined the harbor down to the White Tower — a former prison — and the statue to Alexander the Great, known to others as the Butcher. Cats fucked in open pit archaeological excavations that revealed ancient layers of Thessaloniki. These pits just lay there throughout the city, alongside apartment blocks that looked like stacked sediment rock. It created the impression that over time new stories were simply added on top of these sinking blocks; that if I were to descend to the long abandoned basement of one of these apartments I would find the ruins and mummies of what a hundred years ago had been the first floor. The streets I walked those days will be buried in a thousand years. Curiously, it may be up to us to determine just what kind of society will be up there peering down at the ruins, shovel in hand.

Revolutionary politics in Greece were immediately more complicated than in the old Soviet bloc. It helped that there were tens of thousands of anarchists, several major leftist parties, and everyone was fighting everyone else. In broken English, my hosts explained to me the infighting among the Greek anarchists. The worst split, but by no means the only split, was between the insurrectionary Black Bloc anarchists and the more leftist, formally organized Antiauthoritarian Movement, also known by its Greek initials, alpha kappa. The folks I was staying with hated alpha kappa, and when they found out that I planned to visit a social center in Athena that happened to be run by alpha kappa, they urged me not to go. The feud seemed to be at its worst in Thessaloniki, where people from alpha kappa had allegedly beaten up a few anarchists they suspected of stealing a computer at one of their events, and in retaliation some people firebombed alpha kappa's social center.

The movement in Greece clearly had many strengths, but in my short time there it seemed flagrantly obvious that healthy communication and restorative forms of conflict resolution were not among them. Neither was their resolve to combat patriarchy that strong. Many of the anarchists were quite macho and dismissive of gender problems. There was an important minority of remarkably strong women who were empowered and respected, but in a curious dynamic I noticed in other macho countries as well, the leading women seemed to have the same attitude towards feminism as the men. They were, I suppose, self-made leaders, and didn't need any women's movement to support them. I imagine it would be a very difficult movement for milder women to participate in. For me, as a man who doesn't want the role society has given me, I was sometimes uncomfortable in the tangibly macho atmosphere, though the people around me were so gregarious that for better or worse I nearly always enjoyed myself.

Paraskevi, 2 Martiou was the day of my presentation. In the morning we walked around the city pasting up the last of the 1000 posters they had printed to announce the event. I'm still amazed at how prolific the Greek anarchists are at making posters and other propaganda. Some of the people hosting me ran Thessaloniki's chapter of the Anarchist Black Cross, which supports political prisoners and anti-prison struggles. When they had found out, during our email correspondence, that I was involved in similar work in the States, they had invited me to speak in their infoshop

about the prison system and prisoner support work in my country. About 40 people came, and I was very pleased by the Greek attention span. They stayed three hours, and most of it was questions and discussion. Generally, people were already sympathetic to the idea of supporting not only political prisoners but all prisoners. I also pushed the idea that a large part of getting rid of the prison system, and the state itself, was forming strong community relationships that can repair conflicts and social harm without reliance on the police and courts.

On Sabbath the 3<sup>rd</sup>, I finally went to Fabrika Yfanet, a huge squatted factory with housing, meeting and event space, a bar, a library, ping pong tables, art rooms, a climbing wall, and an indoor halfpipe set up for bikers. The squat had been the center of a weeklong meeting on fighting the EU immigration regime. Greek and immigrant anarchists had come from all over. In addition to a lot of protests, No Border camps – in conjunction with Bulgarian or Turkish anarchists – and other solidarity work, Greek anarchists had even broken into and shut down some of the concentration camps where Europe’s undesired refugees were warehoused. After watching some video clips of protests against the detention centers over the past few years I sat alone on the steps on the edge of the crowd. But I soon found myself, over a bottle of cheap wine, in a moving discussion with a small group of immigrants who came up to me and just started talking. We spoke about nationalism, nationality, violence, compared the situation in the US and in Greece, and discovered even more reasons why the state needed to be destroyed.

Later, after some rounds of ping pong, we found ourselves three stories up on the roof of the squat, watching the shadow of the earth swallow the full moon whole. Amidst the chatter of Greeks, Albanians, Turks, and Arabs, I felt, perhaps with unforgivable meaninglessness and sentimentality, like the dark silent exocenter of the universe, the ring of points where the outer edges come together, opposites meet and continue in the other direction. And the world went on like we can hardly keep it from doing, the shadow began to slip off the other side and back into the pool of nightblack sky, and the irrepressible Greeks, a group of Situationists in this case, soon began belting out, for all the neighborhood to hear, the traditional protest chants modified to urge people to come outside and watch the eclipse. And then there was a punk show in the occupied university – the previous night had been disco, there’s no music monoculture in the movement here – and a little later I went off by myself to find an internet café and see if I had any emails from friends, as World of Warcraft and Cindy Lauper sounded in the background.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March I came to Athena. My hosts were steeped in the revolution of everyday life. Inhabiting a comfortably ill-defined ideological terrain somewhere between insurrectionary anarchism, mystical Buddhism, and Dadaism, their group explored the radical potential of raves and street parties in the Reclaim the Streets tradition from the UK. Some of them seemed like normal Greeks, some like hippies – but without that mushy, noncritical edge that pisses me off about American hippies. They generally didn’t take sides in the infighting, tried to work with all groups, and they liked having long conversations, so we got along pretty well. The first night we had dinner at Petros’ apartment, feasting on cheese and olives and oregano from his village. I liked the concept of having a village. I wished I had one. I wonder how much we can retrofit ourselves into the life and past we find ideal, whether we have to be born with it or forever pine for it, or if alienation is really the human condition – even for those who have roots – and we’re all just imitating imitators.

The next day they took me to Exarchia. That’s the neighborhood’s official name. It means “outside of authority,” and it wasn’t an exaggeration. Exarchia was a countercultural haven. Many people who lived and hung out there were radicals, and they left their mark. Anarchist posters and

stickers outnumbered and overwhelmed the corporate graffiti — the advertising. The autonomy of the area was visible in other ways as well. Police rarely entered. Gangs of riot cops stood on watch at all hours on the borders; alert, nervous, shields at the ready. In Greece, anarchy was a feature on the map.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> there was to be a demonstration: the weekly student protest march. Two weeks earlier, 30–40,000 people had marched from the university to Parliament, and many people were saying that was the high water mark. Nobody was expecting to make history this day. And folks were a bit worried: they recognized that if anyone got arrested at this protest, “they will be fucked.” For one thing, three anarchists who got arrested almost a year ago finally got released after going on hunger strike and winning international solidarity, so as they saw it the state needed some more prisoners. More importantly, the police had been embarrassed in the media lately, and they needed to show force. The other day, police had shot live ammunition over the heads of a group of anarchists destroying a surveillance camera. The Minister of Public Order justified their actions, saying that in Greece the police are “at war” with the anarchists. But students and others came out anyway to take the streets this day. We all gathered in front of a university building until our numbers swelled to match the size of the protest two weeks ago. An hour or two after the scheduled time, the march was ready to start. On the way to Syntagma Square a few luxury stores got smashed. It was almost customary: the anarchists did it calmly and the employees watched unhappily but unfrightened until the security gate came down and everyone moved on. Masked protestors set fire to some banks and took down more security cameras. Others covered the walls in painted slogans. Constant and exuberant were the chants of the crowd.

Certain areas of the march were less savory, less lively. The communists always marched behind their banner, every time led by a tight line exclusively made up of men with locked arms and faces of self-righteous severity. And there was a certain martyr complex about them, clear in the way they lined up against the riot police on the edges of the march. Their intention was to control, or from their perspective protect, the crowds behind them and prevent fighting, but you could see in their stern faces their real motivation was a desire for the police to beat them. They apparently could not conceive taking the initiative themselves, but if they were attacked, they won a moral high ground, and a pretense for demanding justice. Fortunately, others in the protest did not need to wait for the police to misbehave in order to fight them.

After the march reached Parliament, the tempo picked up. With growing anger, people yelled at the squads of riot police guarding the intersections and entrances to Parliament, and in the background an ominous “*tock tock*” began to sound. Evidently someone had brought a big hammer to break the pavement into stones to throw. This single innovative person would change the course of the entire protest. The clock ticked down. A dangerous calm gripped the crowd. Then there was a flurry of red and black flags. A bloc from the Antiauthoritarian Movement charged ahead, clubs at the ready, clashing into a line of riot cops and trading blows. It had started. Soon there was the boom of tear gas, and people ran back, then pushed forward again. A few molotovs were thrown and cops ran around trying to extinguish themselves. Trash cans, recycling receptacles, and wicker chairs from the luxury Hotel Bretagne on the corner were set aflame, and they burned much longer than the cops. If only the people had realized that the Big Day comes when we bring it. We could have used more molotovs, but judging by their scarcity it seemed that only one or two affinity groups had considered it worthwhile to make them. Fortunately, someone had taken along a hammer. The results were spectacular. A thick rain of white rocks pelted the

cops for what seemed like an hour. At the most intense period the rocks kept the police at bay, but in the end it was not enough to drive them off. They had to be cautious, and try to catch the rocks on their shields, so during the barrage they were kept busy even though they weren't in much danger with all their armor. It was the molotovs they were really afraid of, but these were already used up.

With a little bit of tear gas the police were able to push back the main group, separate the march, and arrest a few people. This really shouldn't have happened. A charge might have forced the police back, but nobody dared. And the rocks, of course, were not a good tool for unarresting somebody — they were just as likely to hit unarmored comrades as the fully protected cops. There were other targets, however, and it seemed someone had saved up one last molotov. We saw it sail through the air, perfectly aimed, completing its graceful thirty meter arc to burst into flames directly atop one of the ceremonial guardhouses that stood before Parliament. The guards, the kind so honorably decorative they had to wear these ridiculous skirts and go around with a silly, stiff-legged march, had to beat a dignified retreat, abandoning their 24-hour vigil at the memorial of the unknown soldier, right at the front of Parliament, for the first time in the history of the current government. The anarchists cheered.

There were a few hours of restive peace, while the guardhouse burned to a crisp and gas continued to waft through the crowd. The air tore at one's nose, lips, and lungs. People walked around, their faces streaked in maalox to counteract the teargas, or they sat and waited, argued over what to do next, walked forward to throw the occasional rock. Around six in the evening, after many of the more militant people had gone home, the police attacked in force, beating, gassing, and arresting anyone they could get their hands on. They put perhaps fifty in the hospital, and arrested dozens of others, bringing the total number of detainees up to 61. Most of them were students. About twelve of those were charged with felonies, one with attempted murder, just for fighting the well armored cops. The media that night said the burning of the guardhouse was sacrilege, and they said the Minister of Public Order should resign because the police were not strong enough. Many of them said it was a war. The right wing of the media blamed it on the communists and socialists, saying they protected the anarchists, and of course the communists and socialists flocked to the cameras to blame a small minority, just anarchists, for ruining the movement and acting on their own.

For the most part, the coverage blamed it on a hundred, or even just ten *koukoulofori*, masketeers — their depoliticized term for the anarchists. In the US, dissidents often fall all over themselves conforming to this “good protestor, bad protestor” divide, never realizing how much they're weakening their own position, much less backstabbing allies. Sanctimoniously they'd say, “see, violence hurts the movement,” without realizing that they're the ones dividing the movement and siding with the police and the media. The anarchists in Greece don't fall into this trap so easily. Many people still remember the dictatorship, and they understand that desiring freedom goes hand in hand with fighting cops. That day, the education law was passed, though the politicians had to do it with the smell of teargas in their hallowed halls. A few of them came out to watch the protest, presumably after voting to screw over the students, but they were sent running back inside by a well aimed bottle rocket.

On Friday, several thousand students and anarchists marched again on Parliament to protest against the police action and support the prisoners. Among other things, they ironically chanted “We are the ten masketeers” to show their solidarity with the tactics being demonized by the media and the movement leaders. Along the way, they spraypainted the walls, took revenge on

at least half a dozen surveillance cameras, bashing the hell out of them, and they set a large fire in a rich commercial district.

On Saturday night, coming back from the 17 year anniversary party of the squat Villa Amalais, two of us on a motorbike ran into a group of riot police. They looked scared as they swarmed us, took us off the bike, separated us, questioned us, and went through my bag. The two of us probably would have gotten beaten and taken for questioning if I hadn't been a US citizen: the police, and few others in Greece, like Americans, because of our perceived right wing politics. Still, it didn't help that I had a can of spraypaint in my backpack. Ummm, I'm an artist? Fortunately we both came up with the same lie, and were sent on our way. We learned later that about a dozen anarchists that night had caught a squad of the MAT, the hated riot police, and beat them up with sticks and molotovs, hospitalizing two of them for several days.

The same weekend another group firebombed a police station. On Monday, when they were supposed to give up and go back to school, students began blocking roads throughout the city; they even rushed the courthouse where the authorities were prosecuting the arrestees from the protest, though they were unable to get inside.

And every night there were meetings in the occupied buildings. Meetings that lasted for hours, until 3:00 in the morning or later. I went to a few of them, while Petros provided occasional translations. They consisted largely of sharing information and perspectives. No facilitator, no clear progression, and in the end, hardly any decisions. Discussion drags on, everybody is smoking. The air gets thicker, finally it's saturated, nicotine precipitates out of the atmosphere and starts running down the walls, the people start evolving, we grow gills to keep breathing, drink it up. At no certain time the meeting ended, perhaps there was some formal conclusion after we walked out or perhaps it kept going, quiet and haphazardly, until there was only one person left in the room, arguing with himself. At one meeting, the only major decision they came to, after five hours, was not to do a certain thing. To be fair, they also shared a lot of thoughts that would inform the actions of smaller affinity groups. It was a culture of action, so things would still get done, but they wouldn't be as coordinated as they could be. Many of the anarchists here, in fact, struck me as passive, opining that the student movement would give up soon enough, rather than working out strategies to work with the heavy sense of opportunity that filled the air these days.

As reflected in the nightly news coverage, the conflict had captured the attention of all Greece. One national news program managed to get in touch with some anarchists and pushed them to come on the air. None of them wanted to do it, both because they did not trust the media and because they thought they would be portrayed as representing all the anarchists, which was strictly taboo — many anarchists here opposed all contact with the capitalist media. But they were also seduced by the possibility of getting their point of view, however briefly and poorly edited, to all of Greece, and counteracting the constant dehumanization of the anarchists pursued by the media, on behalf of the police as part of their strategy to justify harsher repression. It was wonderful to see that in Greece the struggle was not being fought in the media, where it instantly becomes a dead thing, but the culture of aggressive infighting and factionalism probably scared many anarchists away from doing certain things only because it would be unpopular. Although the mass media need to be abolished, there have also been times when radicals have successfully exploited democratic hypocrisy and conflicts within the elite by using the media on a limited scale. But whether anarchists decide to avoid the media or not, we face the struggle of building a capacity to communicate with society ourselves.



Yiorgos, one of the people I was staying with, said, “anarchists come up from the ground in Greece.” To a large extent, the culture does not respect authority, and thirty years after the fall of the dictatorship they still carry anti-government sentiments. They are not at all crippled by pacifism, and there is a strong and conscious effort by anarchists to build a foundation for action. They organize social centers that stay busy with events of all kinds — music, theater, film screenings, classes, discussion groups, presentations — and many of them put out their own newspapers. They are not sequestered to any single subculture, but contain all manner of dress and musical tastes. Well, maybe not all: I didn’t see any anarchists wearing business suits or fur coats. But the anarchists here won the support of the surrounding community to a far greater extent than I’ve seen in the US. I remember in Thessaloniki how one anarchist pointed out a cellphone tower on top of a neighboring residential building. “That shouldn’t be there. It can make cancer. I want to go burn it, but it would be best to talk with the neighbors first, and maybe they will come to burn it with me. This would be much more powerful.”

Yiorgos and I continued on our tour of the city, talking about the struggle. He explained Greek culture to me, the history of the movement, and the possibilities before it. We ended up on the famous trinity of hills above the city: Acropolis, topped by the Parthenon, the temple of wisdom, open only to a select few; Areopagus, the hill of justice and executions, dedicated to the god of war and revenge; and the Orator’s rock where the slaveowners made democracy. It was a breezy day with the whimsical feeling blowing around that if we just pushed hard enough and kept pushing, the whole flimsy stack of lies would come tumbling down.

## Bandits and Arsonists

After World War II, Greece was gripped by a civil war that pitted the communists against the conservatives. With help from the CIA, a constitutional monarchy triumphed in 1949, outlawing the Communist Party, and preserving the Cold War spheres of influence. With US complicity, the military and intelligence services of Greece did away with the pretense of democracy and installed a dictatorship that lasted until 1974, when student insurrections forced a change of government. The anarchist movement grew in Greece throughout the 80s, nourished by an anti-authoritarian culture that had fostered anticapitalist bandits and bankrobbers for over a century. In the middle of the decade, the Anarchist Attack Groups formed in Athena, one of many groups to specialize in petrol-bombing police cars on a massive scale. Other groups robbed banks and attacked representatives of the state. The Anti-State Struggle group shot dead the Public Prosecutor of Athena. In a subsequent gun battle with police in May, 1985, anarchists killed three cops, and they in turn shot to death Christos Tsoutsouvis. On 17 November, 1985, police chased anarchists to their stronghold around Exarchia Square. They shot 15-year-old anarchist, Michalis Kaltazas, in the back, killing him. Outraged students occupied the University of Chemistry and the Polytechnic. Riots, demonstrations, and occupations spread to many other cities. Thirty-seven anarchists arrested in the occupation at the Chemistry University were brutally beaten, then jailed and fined. In a wave of repression, police conducted house-to-house searches, arresting many anarchists. Riot cops beat up anyone who looked different.

As a new tradition of anarchist struggle was being created, other social rebels continued an old tradition of anticapitalist banditry that would come to inspire the anarchists. Vasilis and Nikos Palaiokostas came from a poor family, but rather than becoming wage slaves, they started robbing banks. They had great success throughout the '80s, expropriating from the capitalists, getting away in stolen cars, and giving much of their money to the impoverished communities that supported and sheltered them. Despite the huge quantities of cash that passed through their hands, they did not adopt a bourgeois lifestyle nor take to wearing nice clothes and driving fancy cars.

In 1988 Nikos was caught and imprisoned, but his brother rescued him a few days later. In 1990 Nikos was arrested again, and Vasilis was subsequently arrested with a comrade while trying to break his brother out a second time. However, at the end of the same year, Nikos escaped from Korydallos prison under cover of a major uprising, and Vasilis soon escaped from Halkida prison and went back to robbing banks with his brother. Four years later they kidnapped a factory owner for the ransom money. Police caught up with Vasilis on Corfu the next year, but he managed to elude them. Eventually Vasilis was arrested, but Nikos bust him out of Korydallos prison with a helicopter in 2003. Not long after that, after 16 years on the run, Nikos was finally arrested again when he had the bad luck to get in a car accident.

While preparing to return the favor and spring his brother out of prison, Vasilis was caught along with two other anarchists — Polikarpos Georgiadis and Vagelis Hrisohoides. The three of them had kidnapped Georgos Mylonas, the president of an employer's union who had justified

ongoing structural adjustments in Greece, saying that the workers simply needed to tighten their belts and work harder. So the anarchists tightened Mylonas' belt a bit, demanding a ten million euro ransom, which his wife duly paid. Police think the money was intended for the upcoming jail break. They were able to apprehend the three anarchists because the fourth member of their group took off with a share of the cash and starting throwing it around in Crete. He was detained and squealed out the location of the others. When police captured Vasilis, Polikarpos, and Vagelis, they also found an impressive cache of weapons and explosives.

Vasilis had met Polikarpos in prison in 2004, where the latter was waiting trial for an attempted arson against a private security company. Polikarpos and Vagelis were described as "dear comrades in the anarchist scene since many years who have been very active." After their arrests, many anarchists in other countries, and even a few in Greece, refused to support them, feeling moral disgust with the tactic of kidnapping. From prison, Polikarpos wrote:

"a handful of capitalists have organized a criminal gang and kidnapped proletarians demanding for ransoms their working power, the commercialization of human activity, their time – that transforms into money, even their whole existence. Wage slavery is a permanent crime against human dignity. It's not just because of the usual casualties of work "accidents" in the class war. It's not just because of the dead, wounded and amputated people of the work "accidents," but also because of the diseases related to the working environment and space. It's not just because of the strawberry fields, which show us we've never escaped the time of slavery. It's not just because of the sacrificed workers – locals and immigrants, expensive and cheap labor – at the altar of every "American dream" or "Greek miracle." It is the existence itself of waged work that constitutes the permanent crime! And the criminals, the kidnapers and the blackmailers are all the Mylonas's of this world. [...] Comrades! Life is short. If we live, we live to step on the heads of bosses and their slaves. For anarchy and communism!"

## A Conversation on Exarchia Square

Somehow it came to pass that over a year later I was sitting in Exarchia Square with Petros, enjoying a beer and taking in the warm evening air. Even in the little time that had passed I noticed that Exarchia was being gentrified. There were more alternative fashion stores, more nice bars and restaurants for young urban professionals. First come the hipsters, then the investments, then the police. Petros tried describing to me what it was like ten years ago.

“But, there’s nothing you can do. It always happens this way.”

“I disagree.”

His voice was tired when he responded. “Yes, you can go and smash up the nice shops, we’ve already tried that. But what does that do? You can’t have everyone as your enemy. And this bar, for example, the owner’s a good guy, he’s friends with my friends.”

“No, no, I’m not talking about smashing things up. But that’s a necessary part of it. Although, better than rocks — I read that in the autonomous neighborhoods in Berlin they used to throw heaps of shit in the expensive restaurants right during dinner time. That can’t be good for business!”

We both shared a good laugh.

“So, my friend, what do you propose?”

I leaned forward. “There’s no reason to just smash these places up, because the people who come here — of course they want to enjoy a drink with friends in the park, or eat in public sometimes, instead of always in their own house. There’s nothing wrong with that. It’s natural. And after all, the anarchists have their own bars in this neighborhood; it would be a little hypocritical to just go and smash other people’s bars.”

“Yes, of course.”

“So, autonomy has two aspects. The police are afraid to come into this neighborhood, because they might get attacked. And that’s great. But defense isn’t everything. Really it’s just a chance for autonomy. And I know this is presumptuous of me, I don’t know the situation here so well, but I don’t see anyone trying to develop the material basis of that autonomy.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, people are coming here to buy alternative clothes, have a beer, a meal. There’s a big park here. Anarchists could be serving free meals in the park. Folks can learn how to homebrew beer and sell it here at cost. Artists who make patches and do screenprinting can bring that stuff here, give it away, sell it for a little bit of money, or to raise funds for the prisoners.”

“Hmmm.”

“I mean, the people coming to these fashion stores aren’t total scumbags. They come here because Exarchia is cool. Because resistance is cool, and because everyday life under capitalism is boring as hell. But if they’re not brave enough, or even if they don’t have the right social skills, they can’t join in. There’s no place to sign up to be an anarchist. And in the meantime, if we’re not making clothing ourselves, or making food ourselves, people are going to get it somewhere else.”

“Yeah, but I think you’ll find little support for that. Anarchists in Greece are very skeptical of charity. We don’t give charity, we’re not like a church or a welfare organization. I don’t think people would support that.”

“Okay, it doesn’t have to be charity. The purpose doesn’t have to be feeding the poor. You could announce a potluck —”

“A what?”

“Oh, a potluck. It’s an indigenous tradition, from North America I guess, a big meal where everyone brings a dish and everyone shares.”

“Ah, great.”

“So you announce a shared meal right here in the park, ask everyone to bring a dish, spread word among your friends. It wouldn’t be charity, just a shared meal among friends, but anyone is welcome. And if someone comes their first time and they haven’t brought anything to share, then of course they can eat with you, you just ask them next time to bring whatever they can to contribute to the meal. And if they continue taking without giving, then they violate the spirit of sharing, and they lose their chance to become accepted. But in the meantime you have an expanding circle of friends, and friends of friends, everyone coming to share free food in the park, maybe drinking some cheap homebrewed beer, getting some patches or screenprinted t-shirts. And it can expand from there.”

“Hmmm, I like this.”

“And if any of the businesses around here are hostile towards us or treat us like competitors, then we target them and shut them down, while the places that are sympathetic, the ones that don’t want to gentrify Exarchia, they can stay until we abolish money and figure out what comes next.”

“Sure.”

“But if we don’t create the alternative, of course the neighborhood will gentrify and die out. Exarchia has been autonomous for decades, right? And only now capitalism is moving in to fill a niche we’ve left open.”

“So, when are you going to move to Athens and get started on this?” he laughed.

“Who knows?” I sighed nostalgically.

“Hey, look behind you, slowly,” Petros instructs me. “The guy, sitting at the table there, the one missing an eye? Blue shirt.”

“Yeah.”

“He was in the armed struggle groups, years ago. A bomb blew up in his hands, that’s how the police caught him.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah, you can always see people like that here in Exarchia.”

“What a great neighborhood.”

“Cheers to that, man.” We clink our beer bottles together and drink.

## A Good Day (part 1)

Παρασκευή 16 Μαρτίου

My last night in Athena, Yiannis, Yiorgos, Heleni, and I watched *The Fountain*, Darren Aronofsky's haunting movie that had just come out in the theaters. The next morning I was up and off before anyone else had awoken, on a train to Peleponnesus. The boat leaving from Patras, *Ikarus Palace*, sat in a bay surrounded by steep mountains. The water was a pool of melted turquoise crystals lapping up the sunlight.

I spread my sleeping bag on the floor of the almost empty steerage deck, draped wet clothes across the backs of seats to dry, and unrolled my sleeping bag. Land disappeared, the sun set, a star too bright to be a star, a planet or the space station, hung in the west, then it too fell below the edge of the earth. In the night we passed by strange cliffs hidden in the darkness, and the twinkling of distant cities. There must have been mountains because on top of them were lights, mingling with the stars.

I woke up upon a churning metal island in the middle of the Adriatic, with no land in sight. The sunlight soaked into my hungry skin and the sea air gave my heart wings, turned it into a bird beating at its cage, a great seagull eager to leap out and take to the wind and never come back to land. The waves carried distant faces to my mind. I grounded myself with a careful poem out of Martin Espada's bilingual *Rebellion is the Circle of a Lover's Hand* (*Rebelion es el giro de las manos del amante*), sent from the New World by my friend Patrick, to help me learn Spanish and warm me on the way.

First there was trash in the water, then birds in the air, and finally land coalesced out of the smudgy horizon: the sheltering cliffs of Ancona, Italy. Oddly, I had only decided to go to Athena because Yiorgos, over email, told me that if I was going to Thessaloniki I might as well come to Athena, because from there it would be easy for me to catch a ferry from nearby Patras to Ancona. Just the previous day I had come across a reference to Ancona as the place where the Italian anarchist Malatesta had hid out while the police were searching for him at the turn of the last century, and where he wrote his book *At the Café*. So, I had decided to follow the little coincidence, and take the route Yiorgos recommended.

Ancona looked pretty but I had already found a ride with one of the drivers on the ferry. It was a mixed blessing because it left me no time to look around, but hitchhiking in Italy is hell and if I had not gone with this one German all the way to Milano, I might have been stuck for days. Nine hours later I arrived in Genova, and before midnight I made it to Ca Favale, a little autonomous village above Chiavari which a friend of mine from Virginia had visited.

## Berlusconi and the New Fascism

Strange things were afoot in Italy. What had been known from afar as a powerful movement seemed to have disappeared from the map.

In the decades of the Cold War, Italy was a hotspot for anticapitalist struggle. Inheriting the legacy of communist resistance that fought against fascism during World War II, the next generation carried on the fight against the next totalitarianism: NATO backed capitalism. From the 70s and 80s, anarchists formed an increasingly visible part of these struggles. They also had a global impact, formulating some of the more effective antiauthoritarian critiques of the Left to emerge in this era.

From the 90s, Italian anarchists and Left organizations like Tute Bianchi played an influential role in the antiglobalization movement, and some of the earlier and more militant actions against the anti-immigration policies of Fortress Europe also occurred in Italy. When the G8 met in Genova in 2001, 200,000 people took to the street in protest, and thousands of anarchists rioted and fought with police, who arrested and injured hundreds, and killed one anarchist, 23-year-old Carlo Giuliani.

Just six years later, the anarchists were suffering under repeated waves of repression, and people outside of Italy could find little information about what was going on. Even when I was there I couldn't make sense of the situation, but after talking with different people I began to assemble a picture in my head.

One thread in the story goes back to the 70s, when a man named Silvio Berlusconi, who had already made a fortune through shadily financed real estate development, moved into the media industry. He began acquiring television stations and news magazines, eventually coming to own about half of the market. But for Berlusconi, the media were not only a way to make money, they were also a perfect tool for re-engineering a society that was constantly threatening the country's political and economic system. His ability to control the news was critical: however the wealthy have always controlled the media and shaped the news to reflect their own interests. Berlusconi was one of the pioneers to go further in using the media as a cultural tool. Everything from news to soap operas to commercials and infomercials were used to change the very values of society and replace a proletarian identity with a bourgeois one.

Beauty standards and peer pressure can become powerful tools for social control when they can be coordinated by a small elite and intensified through a constant bombardment of images. When those images enforce a racialized national identity, an idea of beauty that can only be achieved by buying expensive clothing, cosmetics, and surgery, a fear of dirtiness, foreignness, and poverty, an obsessive interest in the lives of celebrities, and the application of a soap opera morality to politics, most of society will become alienated from the social movements, which in turn will specialize, becoming the domain of professional Left organizations.

In the 80s Berlusconi acquired AC Milano, quickly turning the football club into European champions. This too had political as well as financial objectives, as the football club had long-

running associations with fascist hooligan groups, and with its new victories it became a rallying point for national pride.

After two decades of empire building and social re-engineering, Berlusconi was ready to go into politics. In 1994 he formed Forza Italia, a new political party uniting center-right Christian Democratic parties with nationalist and fascist political parties like Lega Nord and Alleanza Nazionale. They took a majority in parliament and Berlusconi became the new prime minister. His government soon fell but in 2001 he became prime minister again.

As the other political parties mired themselves in stale controversies, Berlusconi's party took a bold populist line, turning its leader into a hero and thus wriggling out of major corruption charges and other scandals. Berlusconi seemed only to grow in popularity after being implicated in bribery and being caught with underage prostitutes. After all, don't all Italian men want to get rich and have lots of women?

The reenergized Italian rightwing created a strong legal base for the coming repression. Strict anti-immigration laws were passed, and "citizens' groups" began patrolling the streets of many cities to look for people without documents. Anarchists were targeted with subversive association laws that criminalized an increasing range of political activities. The state legislated itself greater powers to use wiretaps and bugs, preventive detention and house arrest, raids and evictions.

Of course the State is not the only protagonist, and it would be wrong to see this history as the creation of one institution, one group, one man. But the Italian Left had long participated in the anti-terrorist hysteria that first had been used against urban guerrilla groups and was now targeting anarchists, and there was little opposition to the ambitious moves made by the Italian state.

The anarchists had also made ambitious moves during these years, developing a theoretical maturity and a capacity for stronger tactics of attack. Some anarchists told me that at the beginning of the decade a large part of the movement made the conscious decision to escalate the struggle, and for the first few years they carried out impressive sabotage actions with good results, but the state soon responded with a campaign of repression the movement was not able to withstand. Soon police had bugged the social centers, houses, vehicles, and even clothing of the anarchists. Many people went to prison just for joking about illegal actions or militant activity: all the police had to do was transcribe the recording, quote a selective part, and show it to a judge, who without hearing the tone or the context would issue an arrest warrant.

Dozens of social centers and houses were raided, literature, computers, and other material confiscated, and many people sent to prison or made to wait for trial in provisional liberty. One friend estimated that ten percent of the active anarchists in the country were jailed or had to go through a court process during these years.

Repression is inevitable. There is no way to avoid it. Even if we give up the struggle, we may save ourselves personally but in the absence of resistance the State will only expand its control over our lives at a faster rate. Those who say we must wait for the right moment to attack the system do not understand history, or the world we live in.

It was the Marxists who believed in accumulating forces and attacking when the time was ripe, in forming a military organization and launching a political rather than a social war. But it is only by responding to the everyday social war waged by the State that we can win.

The Italian anarchists provided an inspiring example of how the time is always now, but they also showed that without the support of society, revolutionaries will be crushed. What better



way to attack capitalism than to overcome its isolation by making relationships of mutuality with other people, and building the commune? What better way to attack the State than by building popular support for sabotage and illegality?

Destruction is a creative act, as Bakunin said, but it goes beyond that. In order to succeed, the attempt to destroy the system must simultaneously be a creative force.

## A Good Day (part 2)

Lunedì, 19 Marzo

Ca Favale was a little village in the mountains east of Genova. It was abandoned thirty years ago, and now going on five years a group of anarchists lived here, restoring the crumbling buildings of stacked stone. The village sat on about fifteen acres of land. There was a quartet of chickens, two beehives, dogs, a wriggling pile of newborn puppies, a hillside of olive trees, grapevines, a couple orange and lemon trees built into a microclimate on the south side of a stone wall, terraced gardens, and about eight residents; though the number climbs as high as twenty in the summer. Most of them are Italians and German-speaking Swiss in their twenties or fifties. One of the older people there had been in the struggle for decades. At the end of the '70s, early '80s, her partner was locked up for belonging to an armed anarchist group. He died in prison, when their son was four.

There were an indeterminate number of buildings in Ca Favale, with perhaps twenty rooms between them, though half of these were under renovation, and some even lacked roofs and floors. The architecture bespoke an organic collectivity, with a common kitchen, one compost toilet, many bedrooms, and buildings built very much into one another. The ambiguity between passageways, halls, and courtyards even tested the separation between inside and outside.

The people of Ca Favale were mostly involved with construction and renovation, building roofs and the like. My first full day we hauled thirty years worth of mud from the spring-fed pond that served as their reservoir, then rebuilt the little dam and reinstalled the pipes that carried water down the hill. Others were also expanding the gardens. This work took up most of their typical day. Afterwards they would gather for a hearty meal and long, involved conversations, emptying a two-gallon jug of wine in the course of the evening.

Here they countenanced no dichotomy between destroying capitalism and building a replacement. Though the work of the village kept them busy, they tried to stay involved in the struggles in the cities, and their idyllic situation was no doubt a summer haven for city activists. Several of them also translated anarchist books into Italian.

My second full day there, 20 Marzo, was a day for lying in bed with a book or a lover listening to the wind howl. Fortunately I had a book, *Notes of a Native Son*, another gift from a friend, but outside of the sleeping bag my hands got too cold to enjoy the arrangement. After having my fill of lying around I went out to turn soil for a new garden on a terrace below the houses, along with two others. The rain began to freeze and bounce off us in white balls, but this too felt good in a way, so we worked until it was too dark to see. I asked “What is the difference between work, labor, and play?” We laughed at the primitivists who said that agriculture was inherently alienated; that farming was necessarily work in the negative sense. We were enjoying ourselves there on the mountaintop terrace — the exertion, the assault of the cold wind, the sense of accomplishment, the anticipation of watching the growth of delicious vegetables. Then I got a blister and said: “if I turn one more shovel-full it will become labor,” so we stopped and went inside for supper.

At Ca Favale I felt they had really created libertarian communism. There was plenty of work to do, and some days it was exhausting, but you invented the curious tendency to do it willingly and happily. You could sit around all day if you wanted — if you were feeling sick or low it was encouraged — but before too long you felt moved to get up and participate in an act of creation. There was no separation between work and leisure, and the pace of activity, whether resting or working, was relaxed and self-guided. Certain days brought a burst of energy to finish some project, and those involved worked fast and hard, but the next day would happen to be a rainy day and we would do nothing but talk and cook or nap under warm blankets. There was no system of inducements, no rewards and punishments, and if you had a problem working with someone else you talked about it as a group, argued a little, laughed and resolved it. Or, I heard, personal dramas would grow and deepen, and maybe they would go away in time, or maybe somebody would leave. This wasn't paradise. Some of the folks in the collective got sick of one another, and they often had to work hard to communicate well or find common ground. But it was great to see in practice how people need no wage or fear of punishment as long as they are living for themselves, not working for someone else.

Martedi, 21 Marzo was a glorious sunny day in the mountains. Three of us turned more soil, preparing gardens for planting, talking in capering Italiano or the knock-kneed singsong of Schwitz-Dutch. Later we split wood. Around noon I sat on sun-warmed slate and wrote a letter to L, the puppies napping around my feet or nibbling my toes. Only then did I realize it was the first day of spring. This would be a good year, I decided. I sensed there was some tribulation waiting in the wings; not an easy year, but a good one nonetheless.

That night we welcomed spring with religious abandon: seizing the ever present jug of wine I introduced the rip-roaring game, "The Way Things Used to Be." All you need is wine in a jug (so you can drink it like the old-timers do, with one hand, propped up on your shoulder), a circle of friends to pass it around, and enough creativity or at least shamelessness so that everyone, when it's their turn, can tell a story, beginning: "Ya wanna hear how things used to be?" Though a hallmark of Appalachian culture, the game translated well, the main change being that the irrepressible Italians found cause to argue with one another's stories. And they really do use all those stereotypical hand gestures; even the Swiss said they started doing it too after a few months. I think Italians would die if you cut their hands off. Most people would, without proper medical attention.

Domenica, 25 Marzo

Yesterday I left Ca Favale, got to Torino by 3:00 in the afternoon, and found my way to El Paso Occupato, the squat recommended to me as far away as Athena. When I finally found some occupants, they said I could stay a few days, no problem, and showed me to the guest room, an attic-like chamber lined with homemade bunkbeds where the members of the bands were also sleeping that first night. Naturally there was a hardcore show about to happen — every Saturday night at El Paso, in fact, and on another night of the week a film showing, as announced in their attractive monthly program. So, I put up my bags and then dodged my awkwardness in the best way I know how, by offering to help clean, and was given the meditative task of sweeping the floor. The folks there were a middle-aged crowd, all older than me, and most of them were loosely classifiable as punks. They were reasonably friendly, though few of them spoke English, and none spoke it well, so I was relying largely on the basic Spanish cognates I could pick out.

El Paso was a 19-year-running squat, a big complex in the pleasantly shabby southern part of town, walls painted with graffiti and murals, and mounted with strange, weirdly painted junk,

like the dislocated shell of a VW bug. The yard inside was filled with much more junk, some useful in a contingency, some apparently decorative. It was like a small Köpi. The show that night, featuring L'Abile and a couple other bands, caused me to switch immediately back to Greece time — going to sleep at 4 in the morning — from Ca Favale time, which is farmer time and also closer to Peter time. When I finally went to sleep, something about a room full of bunk beds and loud, masculine camaraderie caused the prison dreams to start again. It had been a couple years since I had dreamed I was back in jail, though in the first few months after my release they had been an almost nightly occurrence. At their worst the dreams simply featured a faceless authority who announced they had miscalculated, I had not yet finished my full sentence, and had to turn myself in to serve one more day. Torino was the center of the revolutionary occupied factory movement after World War I and a hotbed of antifascist resistance in World War II. After the war its Fiat Mirafiori plant became a key point of struggle in the militant labor movement that gave birth to the Red Brigades and other clandestine communist and anarchist groups that tried to foment revolution in the 60s, 70s, and 80s. In recent years Torino had been reputed to have a strong anarchist movement. But I never got a feel for anything going on. The people I met seemed content to be living in a squat and organizing shows and occasional other events. Clearly my short time there and inability to understand Italian contributed to this weak picture. But the atmosphere was nothing like Greece.

I would meet other people from the region who considered the anarchist movement through much of Italy basically dead. The major cause was no mystery: starting around 2004, police around the country launched a series of raids and found cause to imprison dozens of anarchists. Nearly two hundred more were searched. That's a benign term; it fooled me too until I read a first-hand account. So imagine for a moment the police breaking into your house and stealing your computer, your CDs, your address book, a great many books and other printed materials, and then imagine trying to get on with your life after that. The various police operations extended from Lecce, in the boot heel, to Genova. They targeted the eco-anarchist group Il Silvestre and for now have wiped out Italy's Anarchist Black Cross. In one instance the state arrested the members of a radical newspaper because in their house they had a communiqué mailed to them for publication from an anarchist group connected to a letter-bombing campaign in 2003. By a creative application of the laws this made them members of the group. Other anarchists were placed under house arrest.

Torino was also mauled by the 2006 Olympics. The great games were used as always as an excuse for gentrification and repression. Half of Torino's squats were evicted, especially those downtown. Poor people and people of color were forced out of the center, and millions of euros flooded the city to improve its image, subsidizing the conversion of housing and shops for working class people into expensive apartments, fashion boutiques, chain stores, and businesses catering to tourists and the elite. As far as I saw, the fashionable downtown accomplished that idiotic distinction it aimed for, making Torino "the Paris of Italy," which I suppose makes Paris the Wal-Mart of France. *Passion lives here* proclaim the banners in expressive script along all the better avenues. Translating the language of advertising, we understand the banners are getting directly to the truth in the only way advertisements can: "Boredom shops here." But sadly, much of the city really was beautiful — the renaissance buildings, the synagogue, the Parco del Valentino along the river Po, the avenue of claw-like plane trees gripping the air, Alps on the western horizon like monstrous shattered ice cubes.

Martedì, 27 Marzo

At the time, there was a major popular movement against the construction of the Treno Alta Velocita (TAV), a high velocity train line that would destroy a large chunk of the mountains and several villages around a valley near Torino and Genova. Basically the socialists were going ahead with a construction project they had originally backed, and then pretended to oppose while the neofascist Berlusconi was in charge. Now that they had ridden popular dissent back into power, they showed their true colors and lined up again behind the TAV. How lucky the politicians are that so many people suffer from amnesia. They are scam artists who need never invent new tricks, because the same one works again and again.

Fortunately, not everyone bowed to the ballot box. There was strong popular opposition to the TAV, and upwards of 50,000 people regularly gathered in the mountains to protest against it. Beyond protesting, they were occupying the site, sabotaging equipment, resisting attempts by the police to push them out, and making construction impossible. Everyone I met at Ca Favale and in Torino was talking about the protests. I could have stayed longer to participate more — I would have had to learn Italian — but that would have left me little time to go to Spain. Since Spanish would prove far more useful back in the States than Italian my choice was simple. I thought I would be going back to the US in another three months, and I also wanted to have some time to go back to Nederland to be with L.

So on Tuesday I hiked down to the on-ramp for the autostrada to Savona, held out my sign, and waited. Maybe 7,000 cars drove by, and not a single one stopped. Some people stared like it was novel, many people looked away, like it was uncomfortable. Some people smiled, like it was romantic, some people laughed like it was ridiculous. Some people squirmed, like it was frightening. A few gave the thumbs up, like it was appreciated, vicariously, and some wagged their fingers, like it was forbidden. All drove by in their climate-controlled bubbles, isolated on their way to work or leisure, consuming or producing, unable to enjoy any other way of relating to their world. I was amazed to learn again how many people are scared, self-defeating assholes. That's all we're meant to be in this world.

Well, ask and it shall be given. If not, take it. After four and a half hours of waiting fruitlessly in wind and sometimes rain, I gave up, shouldered my bags, walked to Lingotto station, and hopped a train. For shy people, hopping passenger trains can be more stressful than the prolonged misery of hitchhiking because you're just waiting for the inevitable confrontation when you have to tell the controller that nope, you don't have a ticket. The fear can drive you to hide in the bathroom or pretend, when they finally catch you, that you bought a ticket but somehow lost it. No troubles this time, though. Just two hours to Savona and another two, right along the Ligurian Sea, to Ventimiglia and the French border.

An hour before midnight an Italian gent took me a few kilometers to a big truck stop at the autostrada entrance, but it was the time when all the truckers were boozing up and getting a few hours sleep before heading out at the butcrack of dawn. The "all-night" restaurant wasn't — it closed in the early a.m., so I had to stay out in the cold. I planted my gear at the exit of the parking lot, where all the truckers would have to drive by on their departure, and tried napping a little on a concrete curb against the wall where I wouldn't get run over should I fall asleep. Soon I took to pacing to keep the blood flowing. After eight and a half hours a French truckdriver stopped for me quite unexpectedly

## The Banlieues Are Burning

On 27 October, 2005, two teenagers of North African descent died while trying to escape from the police in a neighborhood outside Paris. A group of them coming home from playing football ran from a police patrol to avoid yet another of the lengthy interrogations to which police in the neighborhood frequently subjected youth of color. Several of them climbed over a wall to hide in a power substation, and two of them, Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré, were electrocuted to death. It was just another police action in the banlieue — the ghetto suburb that exists on the outskirts of many French cities; impoverished, crowded with second generation immigrants who are alternately exploited and excluded in the informalized, deregulated economies. It was just another couple of marginalized young people of color whose deaths were certain to go unanswered. Except that their friends, their families, neighbors, people who didn't know them but could still identify, all started to gather. Their rage grew like a storm. Rather than forgive, they fought.

Cars started going up in flames. The growing crowd ferociously beat any cops or firefighters who came near. Soon it was a full-fledged riot. The next night people came out again, and the next night. On 3 November, the riot spread to the banlieues in other cities, until all fifteen of France's major urban centers were affected. Streetfighting was intense. Roving gangs torched cars and moved on, using hit and run tactics, dispersing when the police came. When a group of cops was small enough to be engaged, they were pelted with bottles and rocks. The most common targets for attack were police and cars, but additionally rioters burned down power stations, government buildings, tourist agencies, daycare centers (at night, when they were empty), schools, police stations, churches, and mosques; in other words, key infrastructure and locations ghetto youth identified with their daily oppression.

The riots were uncontrollable. On 8 November, then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy declared a national state of emergency, allowing police to institute curfews, conduct house-to-house searches, and ban protests. On 16 November, with the uprisings still continuing, the government voted to extend the state of emergency for three months. Though the media tried to portray it as a specifically Muslim or even Islamist uprising, second-generation Portuguese immigrants and native French youth also participated. In total, the rioters injured 126 police and firefighters, torched nearly 9,000 vehicles, and caused 200 million euros in damage spread over 274 towns and cities. Police arrested 2900 people, and brutalized many more. Sarkozy declared a policy of zero tolerance, and called the ghetto youth "scum." Afterwards, politicians across the country clamored for the prosecution of hip-hop artists who they said encouraged violence.

Some observers compared the burning of cars — an action that spread spontaneously from one riot and one city to the next and came to symbolize the uprisings — to the spontaneous smashing of clocks that accompanied proletarian rebellions over a century earlier. The clocks were seen as a tool of wage labor, capitalism's latest imposition. Nowadays, cars can be seen as tools of alienation, the vehicles of the consumer-citizen, and thus the symbol of capitalism's most dehumanizing developments today. Or maybe they were simply an object that was easy to find and simple to burn.

The riots presented the greatest threat to the French state in some time, and naturally the media placed them in a moralistic vacuum, outside of any political context. Despicably, most leftists and even many anarchists denounced the riots. Denouncing the spontaneous byproduct of human rage in the face of overwhelming misery is an act of stupidity, like denouncing a hurricane. The real significance of such denunciations is to signal allegiance to the current power structure in the face of an incomprehensible threat, and to participate in the media's dehumanization of the rioters. Instead of empathizing with them, these commentators conferred on the rioters the status of benighted victims, and advocated development programs that would help incorporate the slum-residents more solidly into the economy.

Other anarchists saw in the rioters an example of insurrection. A few texts compared the rioters and the swelling underclasses from which they came to the barbarians that brought down the Roman Empire, and theorized that this population would be the next revolutionary subject with a chance of defeating the system. I couldn't help but wonder what the African and Arab ghetto residents would think to know they were the theoretical barbarians on whom some white anarchists were depending to abolish capitalism. From a distance, it was impossible to know what the people of the banlieues thought, in what various ways they saw their struggle, how they would characterize the system, and what they wanted. I read of ethnically French radicals taking to the streets in an attempt to build solidarity with the rioters meeting distinct outcomes – some got beaten up and had their cellphones stolen, others were tolerated or even welcomed as allies in the street fighting.

Some insurrectionists claimed to have gotten close to groups of these banlieue youth, and said they had a lucid understanding of capitalism, which is much more credible than the stale media portrayal of blind violence perpetrated by unthinking brutes, although I'm suspicious in how it confirms our wish that they have the same analysis as we do. I hoped it were true that relationships of solidarity and mutual understanding were indeed springing up. One group, Les Amis de Nemesis, wrote an article defending and attempting to explain the rioters. In their view, the rioters faced the typical revolutionary question: do they fight to break with the market system, or to demand that the system save them its worst abuses, which they may not yet realize are inherent to it. As for their tactics:

“The dominant system is no longer [...] a centralized system that possesses a “seat of power” against which the jacqueries must march, with pitchforks and scythes in hand; there is no longer even a network of factories that the workers can blockade or appropriate, but a diffuse order of which the manifestations are everywhere, like the market values that constitute themselves through all of the moments of the economical cycle (through production, circulation and consumption of commodities), and in which human beings vegetate without jobs and especially without income; that the offensive against the system consequently recognizes that system's existence everywhere, in the supermarket as in the school, in a Public Treasury building as in the auditoriums, in automobiles and the means of transportation; and that it seems easy to understand, at least after the fact, that to undertake one or the other of these objectives inevitably involves annoyances for third parties: there hardly exists an accessible place where only Power can be hindered or attacked[...] “[...]It is only in questioning the dominant order that those to whom one has refused all power, and thus all power to constitute themselves as subjects, can accede to the condition of

being human. By being insurgents against the absence of their lives, the young banlieue residents will not show that they are human wreckage, but, on the contrary, that they no longer want to be reduced to such. And, faced with such a project and such a necessity, only fools will deplore the fact that they make several mistakes in their syntax.”



## Nathalie Ménigon

In August 2007, Nathalie Ménigon was released on parole after 20 years in prison. In 1978 she founded the urban guerrilla group Action Directe, along with Jean-Marc Rouillan. The group was libertarian communist in orientation, viewing itself as a political-military coordination for the large autonomous movement struggling in France at the time. They had commonalities with anarchist segments of the movement, and Rouillan had fought with the anarchist group MIL against the Franco regime in Spain. Action Directe also served as an inspiration for the clandestine anarchist group Direct Action in Canada.

Action Directe carried out a number of bombings, expropriations, and machine gun attacks against French military and government buildings, employers' and property management groups, Israeli government concerns, the nuclear industry, and others, as part of a general struggle against capitalism and imperialism. She and Rouillan were arrested after a firefight with police in 1980, but they were released in 1981 after fierce prison struggles prompted President Mitterrand to declare an amnesty for all communist and anarchist prisoners. In 1985, Action Directe assassinated René Audran, manager of French arms sales.

On 21 February, 1987, four leading members of the group, including Ménigon and Rouillan, were arrested and given life sentences, with no possibility of parole for 18 years. After 20 years, she was transferred from Bapaume detention center, and was allowed to work on weekdays but at nights and on weekends must return to prison. She was also not allowed to make public statements during the period of semi-liberty, which may be followed by conditional liberty.

## A Good Day (part 3)

Mercredi, Mercredi, Miercoles, Dimecres, 28 Marzo, Mars, Marzo, Març

Within a minute we were in France. The sun came up over the sea, blood red, as we drove the mountain highway over Monaco, looking down on those rich bastards and their gorgeous beach. The Frenchman drove carelessly, when one hard turn would send us tumbling off a viaduc fifty meters down onto some village. Nonetheless I slept, and when I awoke there was a mountain like carefully folded sand sunburned the color of a light mousse. On the left, mustard-yellow villages. The truckdriver answered my dreams by promising to take me all the way to Spain. He could drop me off an hour from Barcelona. First he just had to take care of some business at home, in Nîmes, so he left me waiting at the toll gates at the entrance of town. I never saw him again. By one of those strange coincidences this trip had been full of, Nîmes was the closest large city to La Vieille Vilette, an entire squatted valley of rural anarchists highly recommended to me at Ca Favale. I hadn't thought I would have time to go, or the opportunity for an easy ride, since the most direct roads to Barcelona hugged the coast, and here I was, so close. But there were some contradictory signs a little less mystical. My legs had only just warmed up from the cold of the previous night, I was tired, dirty, and wanted to get to Spain without further delay. So when I was pretty sure I wouldn't see my truckdriver again, I put out the cardboard sign for Barcelona and within half an hour I caught a ride with an immaculately dressed, soft-faced young man. First he said he could take me to Montpellier, a couple hundred kilometers away, but in five minutes he was shooing me out of the car with the assurance that I could catch a ride much more easily at this random toll gate in the middle of the highway. I think it was my smell. My clothes hadn't been washed since, mmm, Bulgaria? and it takes one to wear one.

But ten minutes later a trucker in a Spanish rig pulled over for me, offering a lift to Barcelona. The driver himself had been living in Spain four years, but he was Romanian, and he had the folk music collection to prove it. He also had pickled peppers: this was part of the lunchtime feast he made us at a rest-stop on a propane burner, along with boiled eggs, bread, hotdogs, and garlic. And on we drove, past hills of rocks and blooming brush, viniculture wastelands, French roadworkers in their fluorescent jumpsuits. So it was I came to Spain, across the frontier in a bubble of pop-folk from Craiova. And in one day of hitchhiking I managed to come through five major Romance languages – Italian, French, Spanish, Catalan, and Romanian. The Pyrenees were thick green carpets frozen in a placid moment from violent shaking, and when we crossed they were tangled in rain clouds.

With some parting gifts of food, my truckdriver left me at a gas station in the morass of highways west of Barcelona. For a while I wandered the directionless industrial suburbs in the rain until I found a train station at Cerdanyola, and I hopped the train to Plaça Catalunya. The folks in Athena had recommended a Barcelona squat where I could stay a while, but they never gave me the address and I was having trouble remembering the name. I found El Lokal easily enough, and when I asked about places to stay the folks at this perennial anarchist bookstore directed me three blocks down to RuinAmalia, which by some miracle happened to be the place named

to me in Athena. At RuinAmalia, located on the street Reina Amalia, they said I could stay a few nights. They were having legal troubles at the time — in fact they had just received notice of an eviction process — so they weren't taking in strangers. But I was welcomed for the time being, only because of those contacts from Greece. I got to take a shower and wash my clothes, sleep in a bed, and think of what to do with a month in Barcelona.

Jueves, Dijous the 28<sup>th</sup>

My first morning in Barcelona, the sun is shining, clothes are drying in the wind, and up to the balcony of the squat reaches the sound of a neighbor practicing Beethoven piano concertos. It's going to be a good day.

## 25J

A flyer translated from Spanish 22 May 2007 — Trial for the 25J Detainees in Barcelona

On 25 June, 2005, there was a protest in Barcelona in solidarity with the Italian anarchists being repressed that summer, during which 180 houses were searched and 25 people were arrested, as part of a wave of repression. That day, the demonstration passed with a strong police pressure, beginning with the searching of all who approached the rally point, and ending with the demo surrounded by riot police, who charged indiscriminately at the protestors. They arrested seven people and took them to La Verneda. Two were minors and were released hours later. Against the other five detainees they opened a deportation process and, contradictingly, a penal process, with the request for preventive detention.

After two days in the commissary, two received provisional liberty, though the authorities prohibited them from leaving Spain, confiscated their passports, and required them to sign in at court every week [all of the five were Latin American immigrants].

The remaining three were transported to jail. One of them spent fourteen days in jail at Wad Ras, received a speedy trial, and was condemned to nine months in prison and two and a half years of conditional liberty. For sentences of less than two years imprisonment, those without prior convictions receive a suspended sentence. The others were sent to Modelo, where they spent between twenty and thirty days, were made to pay a bail of 3,000 euros each, and were released on provisional liberty.

On 22 May, 2007, they begin trial in Barcelona. The prosecutor is requesting three years and nine months in prison for the alleged crimes of transgressions against authority and public disorder. Additionally, he is requesting that three of them receive a fine of 4,800 euros for damages, or the equivalent in prison of ten additional months, and for civil damages the payment of 2,200 euros to Telefonica and the government of Barcelona, among others. [After police attacked the protest, some property was destroyed, and those arrested were blamed for it].

The repression is not only directed against these individuals, but against society in its entirety, to annul feelings of mutual aid. In solidarity we continue to fight against the repression.

*...Until all are free. Absolution for the detainees of 25 June 2005.*

Prior to embarking on my trip, I didn't really speak Spanish. I had picked up the words and phrases you can't help but come across in the US, went to a couple Spanish-English language exchanges the Rising Up Collective had organized back in Harrisonburg, and for a few days in prison back in 2002 I was locked in a tiny cell with a friendly Dominican who couldn't speak English. Basically I had a grasp of about ten verbs and one tense. But from the moment I arrived in Barcelona I had to speak mostly Spanish, or Castellano, as I learned I was supposed to call it, since it's not the language of all of Spain, nor is all of territorial Spain Spanish. Castellano was not the first language of many people in the house — it vied with Catalan, French, Galician, and Euskera — but it was the lingua franca, and most folks there couldn't speak English. So, hola, me llamo Peter... By this point in my travels my name had become, even in my own mouth, "Pi-terr," since no one really gets the American "Peedur."

My first few days I spent absorbing the neighborhood. When you're fleeing Plaça Catalunya, braving the jostling tourist orgy on Las Ramblas, L'Hospital seems like a street that might go somewhere nice, and after just a block the expensive restaurants and shit shops with FC Barcelona jerseys begin to disappear, and soon the tourists come only in pairs or quartets, and now they share the streets with students and immigrants and old folks. Swarthy men unload jugs of water from wee trucks parked in front of corner stores, sanitation workers in fluorescent green sweep the gutters by hand, and the horizon opens up as L'Hospital intersects with a broad pedestrian avenue flanked by parallel roads (id est, a "rambla"). This one is dusty, unassuming, and shaded — just a little — with massive palm trees. This is Raval, el Barrio Xino. Raval is loud and lively; the neighborhood lends itself to montage. All the scenes and characters jostle one another as they line up: narrow streets down which the sun screams only for the hour when it's in alignment, halal butchers, Lebanese sandwich joints, international callshops advertising the rates to Pakistan and Ecuador, three Bollywood video rentals, a Sikh temple, "Da Hussle Store" of hip hop fashions, a diminutive man with bleached hair and beard, wearing tracksuits in the unlikeliest of colors, following his three toy dogs on their daily walks, the little cars of the Mossos d'Escuadra, the Catalan police, doing their rounds, bakeries and döner kebab and haircutters and paella, a Pakistani man pushing a cart loaded with orange propane canisters, which he raps six times in succession, the sharp clanging following him down the street and announcing his wares for sale. On la Rambla del Raval you can sit in peace to write postcards or read a book while the Arabic men sitting next to you converse in serious tones, stopping only to rise and shake hands with a friend who has just come along to join their circle. From here it's only a three block walk back to Reina Amalia, on the edge of the neighborhood near the Mercat de Sant Antoni.

Farther south is Poble Sec, Dry Village, and back the other way, back across Las Ramblas, is Ciutat Vella, old town, where the streets still bear the names of the artisans who used to live and work there. Now it's filled up with conspicuous consumption, choking on tourists strolling with what impossibly seems to be sincere interest past all the boutiques and fashion stores, filled with goods whose artisans probably live in a free trade zone in another country. The skyrocketing rents brought on by *haute couture* have forced out most of the residents, leaving a ghost town that is only filled up, and to the brim, during shopping hours. The windows of many of the apartments above the stores are inconspicuously bricked over, just above the eye level of the tourists who are in part responsible. A tactic of speculation, an anti-squatting measure: if no one can pay this rent, no one will live here, but every once in a while you see someone has broken breathing holes through the mortar between the bricks that seal a third story window, just one small sign, a few inches across and ten meters off the ground, of a clandestine existence. Elsewhere the edifices are cloaked in scaffolding and mortuary sheets as workmen gut them and make them new, sometimes even reconstructing the building farther back to make the street wider — and to increase the distances, to keep neighbors from talking to each other from window to window, across the growing void, mutters Maduixa, my sometime tour guide, in angry, conspiratorial tones. Once, peering inside the corpse of such a building, amid the workmen and wheelbarrows of rubble I saw graffiti left on the wall by the last occupants, raging against eviction — this used to be a squat.

Like all the other English-speaking anarchists who read *Homage to Catalonia* and later found themselves in this city, I tried to imagine Barcelona, and in particular Las Ramblas, as it was back in 1936, draped in red and black flags, all the shops collectivized, militia volunteers on break from

the front. Really, the imagining was easier at home; little of this history has survived — nothing I could see save what might have been an old bullet hole in one wall. On Las Ramblas, it's hard to remember even what country you're in, so many languages are being barked out. "Das ist ja schön!" "...time we have to get to the hotel?" "¡Mira!" "kan ik een eis kopen?!" "Le but de la vie c'est cigarettes pas cheres et..." and on and on and on. One squad exits a store with a newly purchased football already in play, presumably the dad yells "Don't run out in the street" in a voice like a scoutmaster and I shrink inside myself. It occurs to me that a hundred, two hundred years ago, before tourism, these streets and these ramblas and plazas must also have been full, or else why build them. Yet today if you took out all the tourists large sections of central Barcelona would be eerily abandoned. With people spending more time in the car or in front of the TV, the public areas empty out, the city loses its life, and it needs to fill up again with tourists. This is like selling your blood to hide the fact you're bleeding. So, the tourists fill up Las Ramblas and in turn vacate the streets of their home cities — this process of desertion is even acknowledged in the official term: vacationing — and the vacationers, having been evacuated from their hometowns at just the moment when they have nothing left to do but converge and meet in the streets, fill up that vacuous place inside themselves that longs for adventure and fulfillment but can be satisfied with a cheap facsimile, and soon they are ready to return to their home, their car, and whatever cubicle or sales counter to which they have been assigned.

As though holding the tourists' hands, the police are everywhere — the Guardia Urbana and the Mossos d'Esquadra. For the longest time they never seemed menacing to me, in their tiny little cars, though half of them look like fascist skinheads. The ubiquitous security guards are even worse. One prominent company that had guards stationed at government buildings and in the metro retains some of the lesser known fascist iconography in the logo on their uniforms; no doubt it's an insider's point of pride that the liberals haven't robbed them of all honest forms of self-expression.

Even more numerous than the police are the crews of BC Neta, the sanitation service, forever and at all hours scouring the city by hand, broom, hose, and truck. And then there are the security cameras, hundreds of them, "for your protection," the signs assure us. One particular unit demonstrates their protective function amply — an oblong camera gazing like a zealous robot at nothing more than a single blank wall that used to be a favored graffiti spot.

The first new squat I visited while exploring the scene in Barcelona was Metges. Every Thursday they had a movie night. Currently they were running a series of transgender-themed movies. That particular night it was *Virgen*, a Serbian film about a farming couple that gave birth to a third daughter, and rather than kill it, they decided to raise her as a son; other nights they featured the French film *Ma Vie en Rose* and Ed Wood's *Glen or Glenda*.

The following week, or perhaps the one after that, I went back to Metges, and I was looking through dumpsters and trash piles as I went, seeking non-corrugated cardboard fit for making stencils. In one little trash heap on the curb in front of an office I not only found cardboard, but also discovered an incredibly gaudy bronze statue of a naked man in some unlikely pose that must have been an unsolicited wedding gift. Nearly half a meter high, it was too large to hide away on some obscure shelf, and not small enough to escape attention among all the other tacky things people put on their desks or mantels. Naturally I took it with me. In front of Metges one of the squatters was playing with his dog. There was no movie that night, he informed me, it was the week after Easter and many people were on vacation. I turned to go, then stopped to ask him a question.

My friends in Craiova had shown me a documentary about El Forat, a community garden in Barcelona that the authorities wanted to turn into a parking lot. A large group of neighbors young and old, including the occupants of the squat overlooking El Forat, organized to oppose the city plans. They occupied the garden, the police took it and built a wall around it, they tore the wall down, the police came back, they fought with police — there was some great footage of a tiny black bloc holding a narrow street while the police attacked — and eventually they won. It was a great example of how fighting back does not alienate people but helps them express themselves, and how in fact direct action gets the goods; but more than that it's a beautiful story in its own right. Gardens are great, and even better when we fight for them! After arriving in Barcelona I had inquired about El Forat and was heartbroken to learn it was the ugly, decimated vacant lot under construction right in front of Metges, which was also featured in the film. I asked this particular squatter about it, as we stood there surveying the ghost, and he told me it had been beautiful, a lovely garden used by the whole community. But after several years of occupation, the city finally seized it last October. However, the neighbors had won on one important point — the city would make the space a park rather than a parking lot. This is the logic of the state: it cannot allow any autonomy, any freedom outside its regulation, so it must destroy the community's garden in order to build them a new one.

Swept away by the sentimentality of the moment, and pleased with one of the longest conversations I'd had to date in Castellano, I asked the guy if he wanted this statue I was carrying around. "Si tu no lo quieres, claro." He seemed about as happy to receive it as I had been to find it. I gave it to him on one condition, that they call it "Peter." He agreed and I handed it over, wished him a good night, and walked home, full of life. If my situation had not changed dramatically, I would have left Spain with the happy illusion that in one of the Barcelona squats was a statue named after me. As it turned out, some weeks later I met someone living at Metges who told me there was in fact a strange statue in their house (how did I know?), they were trying to figure out where it had come from, they did not know its name, they kept it hidden under a bed, and it was hideous.

But I did not have to learn this sad news for some time yet. The first few weeks I was busy getting to know the neighborhood, the network of social centers, and the people at RuinAmalia. All told, there were nearly fifty squatted social centers in Barcelona, and they provided something of an autonomous shadow society. Hundreds of people took direct action against capitalism, and freed themselves from the compulsion of wage labor because they didn't have to pay rent. The social centers also provided other services to the social network, created for free and shared by all usually without exchange or money, though several events served as fundraisers, especially for prisoner support. These services included bicycle repair and bicycle building workshops, free stores, communal meals, movie showings, concerts, self-defense classes, yoga, and so on. Other events focused on solidarity for the struggles in Mexico or Chile, homage to the anti-Franco resistance fighters, Catalan independence, animal liberation, prisoner support, transgenics, or a thousand other themes and struggles people were learning about and participating in.

Many people were content simply living in a squat, and not carrying the battle against capitalism any further, never organizing more than a concert. But it seemed that for most people squatting was a political act, and this was apparent in their day to day life, which was full of protests, actions, campaigns, and self-education. Some people burned out under the strain of repression and accelerating evictions, and it seemed as though fewer young people were squatting. But other people were in it for life, and I saw many mothers raising their children in squats,

though the structure the family took in such a setting was like nothing imagined in traditional society. It was often hard to tell who the parents were, or more accurately it seemed as though the children had many more than two parents. In other words it was the beginning of a new society, and it was a society I enjoyed. The Barcelona anarchists were endearingly warm and cute. They greeted one another with calls of “Guapa!,” or “Guapo!” followed by kisses — they seemed able to pass the whole day talking, cooking, or eating together.

But they faced strong pressures as well. The European Union had identified the anarchist movement in Spain, particularly in Barcelona, as part of the “Mediterranean Triangle” along with Italy and Greece, and they classified this triangle as one of the greatest internal security threats. The severity of repression was dismaying. To compound matters, hundreds of millions of euros in global capital were pouring into Barcelona, investors and developers were rapidly gentrifying the whole city, and the entirety of city politics, currently in the hands of the Socialists, was aimed at remaking Barcelona for tourists and capitalists. People said that in just the last few years, they could not recognize the city any more, and countless oldtime neighborhoods were torn up, low-income people pushed out. Squatting was an obstacle in this plan, and the city government, courts, police, media, and developers responded accordingly.

As an immigrant neighborhood, Raval was something of a refuge, but the signs of gentrification were everywhere here too. Down the street from RuinAmalia was a construction site. It had been a pool, the last in central Barcelona. The city filled it in, and now they planned to build a retirement home. City propaganda in the form of huge billboards announced how wonderful the city was for taking care of the residents, building an old folks home. In reality, most of the old folks in the neighborhood preferred to remain in their own apartments as an active, visible part of the community. The city figured that if they could sequester the elderly in one compact building, more buildings would be vacant, and the only other residents of Raval would be immigrants, who could be pushed around or kicked out with methods the authorities usually don’t use against white people. With the old citizens and immigrants out of the way, that would leave the students and artists, who typically have little neighborhood or class loyalty and generally participate gladly in the opening rounds of gentrification, flocking to the hip new bars and clothing stores until rents have risen and they are forced to move to the next frontier. Those motherfuckers at Lonely Planet, sounding the clarion for apocalypse, spelled it out in their Barcelona travel guide of a few years back: Raval was a rough, scary neighborhood (read: not white), but that was starting to change, the neighborhood was quieting down, and a few hip bars were beginning to move in. What pleasant language tourism has developed for ethnic cleansing.

At RuinAmalia I stayed in a spacious room on the top floor with a south-facing window. The pastel blue walls were decorated with the surreal stencils of the previous occupant. The other people living there were always coming and going, and it took me a while to become acquainted, even to learn their names. As a group they were not at all homogeneous or closed like many other collectives I had come across. They were all within ten years of my age, mostly older, but they included immigrants, longtime locals, grad students and full-time activists, punks, hip-hoppers, flamenco singers — all of them open and welcoming.

The house was full of music. Xavi played guitar, and in the carpentry workshop he was making his own percussion instrument, some wooden drum in an unlikely but euphonious shape that apparently was common to flamenco. Maduixa and Ira sang flamenco in the afternoons. Marie taught herself the accordion. At night Juan, who lived in the room next to mine, recorded his own songs, rapping over music arranged by a DJ friend who lived two floors down. And in the



kitchen the radio was regularly tuned to a station that played American oldies, well, 80's music, which led to some memorable cooking and dancing sessions. On Fridays there were flamenco evenings in the courtyard of the social center. People would sing and play music until dark, the guitar running swiftly ahead of the tender flamenco moan; the swallows swooping down over this urban canyon would go to bed as the night shift arrived and the bats picked up the job seamlessly, but there was no end of bugs for them to eat, and no end to the music dancing up over the rooftops.

Later in the spring, there was a rap and vinyl show at RuinAmalia. Juan's raps held everyone captivated, his Colombian accent rolling like waves falling insistently to the shore. Alto, another of the Ruinosos, scratched, though more accurately I would say with a hint of awe that he tortured the most delicious rhythms out of his records, threw them running in synch and pulled them apart without ruining a beat. There were a couple other DJs and MCs there as well — one freestyled in Catalan, Castellano, and Arabic, and damn I wish I could have understood him. The music went on for hours, though we started early and ended around twelve out of respect for the neighbors. Near the end I threw down one of my pieces, "We apologize for this break from your regular programming," and there were even a few people who understood what I was yelling about. I missed making poetry, and pined for times past and future when I could share my words in English, when my Spanish was good enough to sound the rhythms that pounded all around me.

The people in the house were wonderful. Some were not so active in the social movements, while others were extremely committed, and this discrepancy created some tension in the house. Maduixa in particular poured her life into the squatters' movement, fighting to prevent or at least delay the eviction of RuinAmalia, and helping new squatters occupy houses. Another member of the house was a little burnt out from activism after a long time of living on the street with homeless immigrants, helping them fight deportation or opening squats for them to live in, but when trouble came she was a good friend and ally. Interestingly, she was also the daughter of one of the people who had started the Mondragon worker cooperative complex in Euskadi, the Basque Country, back in the day.

Connected to the house was RuinAmalia's social center. Next to the front door of the four-storey residence, a garage-style double-door opened into a quiet courtyard, shaded by two fig trees. Around the courtyard a number of small buildings had been fixed up to house all the collectives that used the social center. The carpentry workshop, the Kilombo library, the hacker/computer collective that offered a computer lab with free internet, a theater and dance group, the anti-prison assembly, the Oficina d'Okupacio, which was an office for legal and technical assistance for squatters, and the flamenco group that made music every Friday night. There was also a little bar that filled up with friends and passersby many a night, and hosted a weekly cafeta to raise money for a group of anarchists facing trial after the police attacked a protest held in solidarity with the Italian anarchists.

And RuinAmalia was just one of forty such social centers throughout the city. Of course some of them were decrepit, inactive, or poorly organized, but others were better than any I had seen before. Warm, alive, aesthetically welcoming and culturally broad; a part of, rather than a black hole in, the neighborhood. Some had really broken through the barriers that separate the socially radical from the mainstream, and they impacted their neighborhoods well beyond the concentric rings of graffiti and posters that radiate out inevitably from occupied buildings. Some squats enjoyed meaningful participation from the neighbors, others, like RuinAmalia, were the focus of

friendly interest — plenty of people stopped in for the freestore, the bar, or the flamenco nights. Some social centers, like the Ateneu del Besós, produced their own community newspapers.

The anarchists and squatters of Barcelona printed more newspapers and magazines than the entire movement in the US, I think, although they weren't necessarily of higher quality. A collection of neighborhood associations, anti-gentrification organizations, and anarchist groups in Ciutat Vella and Raval contributed to Masala, a monthly newspaper that ran at 8000 free copies and included articles in Catalan, Castellano, Arabic, and Urdu. The CNT, the anarchist labor union that played a pivotal role in the Spanish Civil War and revolution, put out their own newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*, going on a hundred years now. Much more recently, another group of anarchists had begun printing a newspaper, *Antisistema*, that served as a platform for news and debate. They distributed 4000 free copies a month. The Info-Usurpa and Contra-Infos collectives published weekly news and events bulletins in Catalan for distribution to all the social centers. Many neighborhoods had their own alternative newspaper, and there were also many Catalan left-independentista newspapers. I wasn't always impressed by the level of thought in the content or by the quality of the production; nonetheless these papers made radical news accessible to hundreds of thousands of people and provided a forum for popular debate within the movement.

Even more impressive were the piles of posters and stickers Barcelona's radicals put out. Every week at Espai Obert, the central collection point, you could find between ten and thirty different posters, printed in the thousands, often in color and beautifully designed, along with copies of Contra-Infos and Info-Usurpa for every squat in the city. The posters announced talks, concerts, and protests; they called for solidarity with political prisoners; presented perspectives on current political questions; or attempted to explain anarchism or squatting. These posters and stickers inevitably went to decorate the city's walls and constantly illustrate manifestations of resistance. Few cities in the US bore obvious signs of resistance on their surfaces, but in Barcelona the very walls shouted out for revolution.

Before too long, I started meeting people and making friends, and finally I could do more than just wander quietly from squat to squat, workshop to movie showing. One of the first people I met outside of RuinAmalia was Alex, an activist involved in the anti-prison struggle in Barcelona. The group he worked with was organizing a conference on prison issues. A major focus was moving past simple support for political prisoners to deep-rooted opposition to the entire prison system. They invited me to a conference at the Ateneu del Besós — an ateneu is a type of social center a little like a free school or debate hall: the name is related to Athena, goddess of wisdom. The Besós is one of the rivers that borders Barcelona. It was a great day, with food and workshops and relaxing at cafés between long discussions. In the course of it, I met a woman from South America who was facing trial soon on fabricated charges of transgression against authority and public disorder. On 25 June, 2005, Barcelona anarchists had organized a protest in solidarity with the Italian anarchists who were facing a major wave of repression that summer. The police attacked the march, and arrested her and six others. The prosecutor was asking for three years and nine months, as well as huge fines.

Later, I went with Alex to Radio Bronka, a long-running pirate radio station that broadcasts through much of the city. We talked again about prison issues and alternative ways of dealing with the social problems criminal law pretends to address.

My time in Catalunya was going fast. Towards the end, a friend from the States and Georgi from Bulgaria were visiting for a week. Mostly we walked around a lot laughing about culture and I tried not to notice the minutes slip by. There were so many friends I hadn't had the time

to make, so many projects to get involved in, social centers facing eviction, that everything I did had a sad and rushed quality. On 28 April, one month after my arrival, L would be coming down on a bus from Amsterdam. After a couple days in Barcelona, we planned to go to Huesca to drink a cup of coffee for George Orwell, putz around Euskal Herria a few days, and then hitchhike back to Nederland together. There she would finish her teaching internship and I'd hang around for the last two months of my trip to Europe, minus a couple weeks in early June for the massive protests against the G8 in Germany. I joked occasionally that maybe I would get arrested and then the German authorities would pay my plane ticket home. My time in Spain was coming to an end. It would be great to see L, but I was already missing Barcelona. ...I only wished I could stay longer...

# La Confederación Nacional de Trabajo

In the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish workers and peasants struggled against a succession of governments — monarchy, dictatorship, and republic. On the cusp of modernization, Spain suffered the combined deprivations of an entrenched feudalism and an emerging capitalism. A growing anarchist movement spread critiques of the current society, published newspapers, opened social centers, carried out assassinations, expropriations, and bombings of bourgeois targets, created libertarian communes in a few villages during short-lived insurrections, and launched massive strikes. The dominant forces in society — the church, the landowners, the royalists, the bourgeoisie, various nationalist parities — fought amongst themselves, though they often unified to wage bloody war against the anticapitalists. Amidst this turmoil, the anarcho-syndicalist confederation of labor unions, the CNT, expanded to contain millions of affiliates. In the early 30s, anarchist activists within the CNT stopped an attempt by reformist syndicalists who held top positions to steer the organization towards parliamentary methods, and for the next several years the CNT played a pivotal role of subversion, supporting electoral boycotts, wildcat strikes, and insurrections. However, continuing power struggles often prevented coherent action. It might happen that a strike or insurrection was prepared and promoted and then abandoned on its very first day when part of the leadership decided conditions were inopportune.

Nonetheless, the CNT was perhaps the most effective revolutionary organization on a national scale in Spain; when they boycotted the elections, the leftists didn't have a hope of winning; when they didn't, the leftists won overwhelmingly; and when they launched a strike, it was not uncommon for it to spread across the country and result in major struggles and even small insurrections. In July, 1936, the Falangists and Carlists — fascists and monarchists, respectively — decided to launch a coup with the help of a large part of the military. In Catalunya and much of Andalusia it was anarchist militias, generally *cenetistas* — CNT people — who stormed the barracks and put down the putsch. Socialist militias and loyalist soldiers along with anarchists kept Madrid, Valencia, and Asturias out of the hands of the fascists. In many parts of Spain, the government had effectively ceased to exist. Workers and peasants militias were the only real social force, and they began to collectivize the fields and factories. In Aragon and Catalunya millions of workers and peasants lived in libertarian communes and worked in collectivized industries that lasted a year or longer, depending on the fortunes of war. Sometimes they organized independently of the CNT, and sometimes the CNT served as a coordinating structure. But the CNT leadership helped to neutralize this nascent revolution, joining the socialists and republicans in an antifascist unity government and directing the course of the struggle without putting these decisions to a general referendum. Although many people were organizing the revolution on their own initiative, influential people in the CNT decided the time was not right, and in the end the Republican government and their Communist backers destroyed many of these anarchist social experiments before the fascists got the chance.

Throughout the war, Hitler and Mussolini supported the fascists — and even the British gave covert support — but the antifascists only had the dubious aid of the Soviet Union. Stalin in

fact wanted to prolong the war but not to win it. What was more important to the Comintern was that Hitler would be enticed to make a non-aggression treaty with the Soviets; that the Spanish government would send Moscow its gold reserves in exchange for armaments; and that Spain would become the graveyard of Stalin's enemies, namely the Trotskyists and anarchists. He accomplished all three goals. For the latter, the Communist Party established secret police and political commissars that acted with impunity in Spain, supposedly in service of the Republic but under the full control of Moscow. The secret police liquidated Spain's small Trotskyist party. The anarchists had too much support to confront directly, but the bureaucratic anarchists were brought into the government and thus neutralized, and the militants were incorporated into the army and sent off to the front. The famed International Brigades were an opportune tool for the Stalinists to execute hundreds of political opponents, accused of being fascist informants, who had come from all over Europe to give themselves into the service of the revolution. Ignorant of local conditions, they also helped suppress the peasant collectives in Aragon.

The fascists won the war, and their dictatorship reigned for forty years. During this time, the resistance never stopped. The communist guerrillas, betrayed by the Soviet Union, were quickly liquidated in Andalucia and elsewhere. Others were more successful. The Basque leftwing nationalist organization ETA began a guerrilla war that continues today. Numerous anarchist guerrilla cells formed after World War II and remained active for the duration of the dictatorship. From exile in France, the CNT coordinated weapons smuggling and numerous assassination attempts against Franco, although progressively the organization became more conservative, not wanting to upset the French government. And their security practices were woefully inadequate in a world of evolving police tactics and technologies. The French police passed names and plans to the Spanish police, who were able to catch and kill many of the guerrillas that associated with the CNT as they crossed into Catalunya. Many of the young militants broke with the CNT leadership in order to continue the guerrilla war.

From early on, the anarchists and groups like ETA were largely alone in their fight against the fascist dictatorship. In 1950 the United States restored diplomatic relationships with Spain, openly enlisting Franco in the Cold War and financially backing his regime. The United Nations followed suit shortly thereafter, even giving the fascist state a post in UNESCO. But solidarity was not lacking. The 1<sup>st</sup> of May movement, active throughout Europe, and later the Angry Brigades in the UK, supported the antifascist struggle with bank robberies, forgeries, and attacks on Spanish embassies and other targets. This guerrilla movement was an important factor in reviving the anarchist movement across the continent, after it had died a protracted and violent death in the 30s under fascist and stalinist dictatorships.

After Franco died peacefully in his bed and ETA assassinated his successor, ending the possibility of a smooth continuation of the fascist government, anarchists began to act publicly again in Spain. The CNT played an important role in the "Transition," though there is little information in English about this period. One day I walked into the CNT bookstore on Joaquin Costa street in Raval to interview Nacho, an elderly member of the organization who lived through these years. Sitting down at a table in the event room, Nacho told me about the development of workers' movements after Franco's death. Workers organized small demonstrations and strikes on a local level. In 1976, the anarchists and communists began presenting themselves publicly for the first time. The CNT had practically disappeared, but they began to organize protests and surprised themselves with the results. Evidently, the people still remembered the anarchists, and as many as 30,000 people came to early marches in Valencia and Madrid, even though the fascists

were still in power, negotiating a transition to a democratic monarchy that left many of the same people in office.

The anarcho-syndicalist organization found its greatest support in the Catalan villages. Soon the CNT had two hundred unions and 100,000 members in Catalunya. Workers with the CNT launched major strikes in the Roca ceramics factory, and in the gas stations of Barcelona. The strikers had to defend themselves from fascist gangs and from socialist and communist attempts to break the strike. These early successes made an impression on the workers, and the movement kept growing. In July, 1977, the CNT held its first public meeting. 300,000 people crowded to the meeting at Montjuic, in Barcelona. Shortly thereafter the CNT helped convoke an international libertarian gathering, which attracted 600,000 people to the various meetings, debates, and activities. The police went on attacking and torturing dissidents, but people were talking of a new revolution.

The communists and socialists expected to be able to control the workers' movement, but they were quickly becoming overshadowed. The Communist Party attempted to bring popular dissent within official channels: in exchange for legalization they changed their statutes to remove words like "Marxist-Leninist" and to erase their opposition to monarchy. The socialists, republicans, and communists entered the "Monclau Pact," duly joining the monarchists and the fascists — renamed "conservatives" — in the new government, but the anarchists refused to cooperate. Spain's Interior Minister said he was most worried by the anarchists, out of all the social movements.

The CNT organized a protest against the Monclau Pact. Over 20,000 people marched down Avinguda Parallel in Barcelona. After the march, around 1:00 in the afternoon, a young man threw a molotov cocktail at the Scala party hall, near Passeig de Sant Joan on the other side of the city. The building quickly went up in flames, killing four workers who had been working in the back. Three of them were CNT members. The evening papers, and all subsequent media coverage, accused the anarchists of setting the fire. Starting the very next day, police began arresting large numbers of anarchists, blaming them for the arson. An ex-cop working at a kiosk across the street said he saw several well dressed men enter and exit the building before the fire, but he was killed before the trial. The courts did not accept the testimony of CNT affiliates, nor did they allow evidence that the building had been rigged with phosphorous. Also, the government quickly paid about 200 million pesetas in indemnity to the owners of the Scala, even though they weren't required to. Nacho pointed out dryly that if ETA kills a cop, the government doesn't give the family money; they can only collect if the death is an accident. After the fire and the arrests, the CNT began to decline and the revolutionary atmosphere slipped away.

According to some critiques, the CNT's mythic status made it the center of attention and the chief instigator, ultimately obstructing the revolution. When the organization was demonized and responded by distancing itself from violence and conflictivity, nothing more could happen as long as the masses were looking to the CNT to start the revolution. According to Nacho, many people were scared off by the wave of arrests, thinking that the dictatorship would return if they kept rocking the boat. Others had little information besides what they saw in the media, and thought that anarchists really did just want to burn everything down.

The CNT persisted as a major force, focusing on social problems as much as labor problems. CNT sections throughout the villages began printing bulletins and organizing to win the right to abortion and divorce, improve water quality and health care, stop highways from being built through their town, and other issues. As a whole the organization began mobilizing to bring the

work week down from 48 hours to 35 hours. Soon, the government manufactured a new situation to weaken the anarchists.

The new labor laws declared that a company's workers would vote for their union representatives, electing a labor council comprised of delegates from the different unions. These councils would then make decisions and negotiate benefits on behalf of the workers for the next four years. The delegates were not in danger of losing their jobs, they received 40 free hours a month, and other benefits. The unions, meanwhile, would receive tens of millions of pesetas in government subsidies. Nacho explained that the CNT refused to participate in these labor elections, because they would turn the union representatives into politicians. "The dog doesn't bite the hand that feeds him," he grumbled. But after these reforms, they were excluded from negotiations in labor conflicts. It became harder to make demands or organize a strike. A strong conflict spread through the organization as some members proposed that they change their principles and participate in the elections. They argued that becoming an integrated union would allow them to organize without fear of getting fired, and to spread CNT propaganda in the workplace, like the other unions were allowed to do. From 1979 to 1983 the members argued over this question at several national congresses but they reached no agreement. Many CNT locals began to participate in the elections on their own. In 1984 all the dissident unions assembled in Madrid. Nacho's description of the event was almost Orwellian. The government lent them a palace for their meeting place, and police guarded the gathering, supposedly to protect them from an attack by orthodox *cenetistas*. At this congress, all the groups that wanted to integrate formed a second, parallel CNT.

From that point there began an argument about whether this second organization should be allowed to use the CNT initials. There were also fights over money. As part of the Transition, the government had to pay damages to entities that had lost assets to the fascists. The CNT fought for its inheritance, and in the end it only won a small sum, much smaller than what was given to the UGT, the socialist union, even though the two had been of a comparable size at the time of the fascist coup. Still, the CNT got payments worth several million euros, and the different sections fought over who got to keep this. Naturally, the press gave lots of ink to the dispute, reveling in the stereotype of infighting, disorganized anarchists, and the union lost more members. Nacho also said there were full page stories in all the papers featuring the unions that wanted to participate in the labor elections, portraying them as the responsible faction.

Some within the orthodox CNT wanted to fight for the name, while others thought it was a bad idea. Ultimately, a new CNT member who had previously been kicked out of a communist group, and was thought by some to be a provocateur, brought a lawsuit demanding that the second CNT not be allowed to use the name. After three or four years, they won, and the second group changed its initials to CGT – Confederación General de Trabajo.

Over the next decades, worker participation in the unions dropped sharply, as workers saw that the unions didn't protect them any better than the political parties. The diminishing CNT had a few mixed victories in this period, though in general they could do little more than help workers in small conflicts and win good severance pay for those who got fired. In one case, ten years ago, people working in the transport of dangerous materials in Catalunya organized with the CNT to go on strike after their employers adopted changes that would allow them to fire the older workers. The socialist union was upset that the CNT had been able to organize the workers and sideline the official union, so they met with the bosses just before the strike was to start and took credit for the resulting victory.

A couple years ago, CNT workers in the Mercadona supermarket chain organized a strike against their short-term contracts and insecure employment. Nacho was critical: the workers were inexperienced, they wanted to conduct a peaceful, legal strike, few of the workers participated, and they gave up after an early setback. “The struggle doesn’t work if you don’t fight the company. You don’t have to go back to the 20s and 30s, shooting at the bosses, but it’s good to throw stink bombs or release rats in their offices. A little glue in the locks,” he smiled at me. After the failure of the Mercadona strike, many of the workers burned out and left the movement.

Currently, there were only thirty to forty CNT syndicates in Catalunya, and they could do little more than focus on local problems and maintain the organization. There was a further split, and now some of the CNT locals, including the group on Joaquin Costa, were no longer federated. Nacho chalked it up to internal tensions resulting from various problems and failures, which were exacerbated “because we are few people – you notice it more.” But lately they were trying to unify more with all the libertarian syndicates, including the CGT. In the meantime, the Joaquin Costa group continued to run the libertarian bookstore, hold anarchist events, support labor struggles where they cropped up, and publish *Solidaridad Obrera* – the century old anarchist paper.

I asked Nacho how the anarcho-syndicalist strategy had changed over the decades, with all the changes to the economy and society. Factories were closing down, there was little left of workers’ culture or common solidarity, so what role could labor organizing play? He thought a moment and said, “I would suggest that there is no adopted strategy. We do it while marching forward, confronting power.”

Why was the reclaiming of history important for the struggle? Because for forty years they said that the murderers were the reds, and all the reds were communists, and now that the fascists had fallen from grace, the communists became the heroes. But they were bigger traitors than the fascists, according to Nacho. Since the 60s, Marxism had been taught in Spanish universities, but anarchism was suppressed. Under the socialist Interior Minister of Catalunya, Saura, there were plenty of television programs about the Civil War and the resistance against Franco, but the anarchists always joined the fascists in playing the role of the bad guys. Even in Spain, many people didn’t realize that anarchy is possible, and that the anarchist movement played a crucial role in the struggle against capitalism and fascism. The socialists, Catalan left republicans, and right-wingers were united in erasing anarchism from history. Who controls the present controls the past. Who controls the past controls the future.

I remarked that English-speakers were lucky in this respect, because one of the most popular English books on the topic was George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*, one of the few accounts by an outsider to portray the anarchists fairly. At the other extreme, Hemingway faithfully toed the party line, portraying the anarchists as drunkards, idiots, and fascist infiltrators, and glorifying the Stalinist secret police, even as the Party paid for his lodgings in a luxury hotel in Madrid. It’s sad: Hemingway was a much better writer than Orwell, but through the simple lack of honesty and courage, a talented genius could become a sordid hack.

Nacho fumed for a while about all the revisionism, and then said he was done; he had to get back to the bookstore. We had been talking an hour, though the conversation stretched over years. As Nacho led me out the door, I mentioned the squatters. He hadn’t understood that I was one of them. “They’re hard to work with,” he shrugged. “They don’t like us. They think we stop other people from taking action.” I knew immediately which critique of the syndicalists he was referring to. Many of the autonomous-minded squatters had little sympathy for formal organizations, representatives, and federalism. Some felt that they provided the state a means for



recuperating the struggle, others thought they inevitably became bureaucratic and top-heavy — though few would deny solidarity to people in the CNT. “But I don’t want to stop anyone,” said Nacho. “I just do it this way.

## Alex, Rodrigo, y Juan

On 4 February, 2006, nine young people were arrested by the Guardia Urbana in Barcelona – the prisoners of 4F. Two of them were charged with attempted homicide, one with inciting attempted homicide, and the other six with lesser charges. Early Saturday morning, three squatters – Alex, Rodrigo, and Juan – had left a friend’s house after a party. On the way home, they had to pass El Teatro de Anarko Peña Cultural, described as “an illegal disco disguised as a squatted social center, with very little connection to the community of squatted political spaces in Barcelona.” El Teatro had an eviction order for months, but the police had protected it. The house had a reputation as a place to buy drugs, and several suspected police informants lived there. It is probably no coincidence that El Teatro, which stands just at the top of El Forat, was squatted right around the time that resistance in the occupied community garden was going strong, uniting young and old, squatters and renters. A place like El Teatro, that disturbs the neighbors and brings in addictive drugs, was just what the authorities needed to break those growing connections of solidarity.

The night of the 4<sup>th</sup>, a raucous party was going on at El Teatro, with perhaps a thousand people inside. Four Guardia Urbana were at the entrance, supposedly trying to shut the party down, although this claim seems unlikely. The three squatters tried to pass by, but the police began to shout racial insults at the three – all of whom were from Latin America. A fight started, and the cops took out their batons and beat anyone nearby. The fight turned into a riot as people in the area began throwing rocks and the drugged up partygoers joined in. Just as quickly, police reinforcements that had been stationed in the area arrived on the scene, leading many to believe that police had been planning to provoke an incident. Alex, Rodrigo, and Juan were beaten to the ground, and one of the original four cops also lay prone, after a flower pot was dropped on his head from a window above. Medics induced a coma to attempt to stabilize his condition, and he still had not come out of it a year later. Police ordered sanitation crews to clean up the scene of the fight before the forensics teams arrived. The very next day el Teatro was evicted, and police escorted fifteen to twenty people out of the building. These people were never identified in the investigation.

Nine people were arrested in total, including two squatters who were not present that night, but who had admitted themselves to a hospital for injuries from a bike accident. Alex, Rodrigo, and Juan were accused of throwing a rock and hitting the cop in the head. All three of them were disappeared by the police. Friends and family did not know where they were for the first couple days, and police initially claimed not to have them in custody. In fact, police kept them in prisoner vans rather than admitting them to the jail, and over a period of hours tortured and beat them. Juan had both of his arms broken, Alex had one arm broken, all had swollen faces and needed dozens of stitches. Finally on Monday, the nine were brought before a judge, and the three of South American nationality were sent to prison while the others were released to await trial. Police testimony was contradictory, and the judge rejected all the witnesses of the

defendants, saying that anyone who viewed the events and was not a cop was a participant in the riots and also subject to prosecution.

Even the mayor of Barcelona initially said the cop was injured by a flower pot thrown from el Teatro, and this is consistent with his injuries — a major injury on the back of his head from the flower pot and a small one on the front where he fell and hit the ground. But they quickly changed their story so they could blame the squatters, saying that the minor injury on the front of his head was from the rock, which threw him backwards onto the ground, where he hit his head and received the major injury. During their initial testimony, the police contradicted one another, and one cop who was on the scene broke down crying, saying he did not know if the injured cop was hit from the front or the back. The media and the political parties used this incident to talk about the “murderous squatters” and to call for the eviction of all the squats in Barcelona.

Over a year later, Alex, Rodrigo, and Juan were still in prison awaiting trial. One day, walking past the building where El Teatro had stood, where the cop was injured and the three compañeros were beaten down, I learned about another bit of neighborhood history. Decades earlier, at Plaça de Sant Pere, just down the street, the police gunned down Josep Sabate, the brother of the more famous anarchist urban guerrilla, Francisco “El Quico” Sabate. La lucha sigue.

## Desórdenes Públicos

Lunes, 23 Abril, 2007, was a beautiful day. I was hanging out with Georgi from Bulgaria. It was the festival of St. Jordi, though all that meant to me was that people were setting up tables everywhere to sell books and flowers. We passed some time looking at books, sitting in the sun, shooting the shit. Later, I finished up a stencil I had been working on that protested the growing police state. It said “Yo No [heart] Karcelona,” a play on the “Yo [heart] BCN” design mass-produced for the tourists here, which in turn was stolen from the quintessential NY merchandise. Karcel, or cárcel, means jail. Karcelona was a common nickname given to the city by radicals. In the afternoon, the *Asamblea d’Okupes* — squatters’ assembly — organized a little protest, carrying a balloon-laden banner up Las Ramblas and passing out flyers explaining the problem of gentrification and the reasons for squatting. The weather was gorgeous, everyone was really friendly, and it was nice to see a low-key action that just involved talking with people and spreading information. I turned to Juan and said “This is my favorite day so far in Barcelona.” Georgi and I were about to leave — we were meeting someone in Raval in a few minutes.

And then there was a loud boom.

I turned around, leaflets fluttered down through the smoke in the air, the crowds stood frozen for a moment, some stunned, some laughing, and after some moments police rushed onto the scene.

I would learn later, what would seem a long, long time later, that this was a petardo, a traditional Catalan device, cannon-like, used as a firework or for shooting flyers into the air. I imagine it had some tongue-in-cheek value: El Quico, Francisco Sabate, the anarchist urban guerrilla who long eluded the fascists, famously goaded them by taking a taxi around the city and firing off leaflets by the thousands urging the people to keep resisting. But alas, humor is in the eye of those with the guns, prisons, socially conferred legitimacy, and, incidentally, absolutely no sense of humor. Some of these same squares, always preparing for the worse, came in and made it worse, made all of us speak the only language they knew. Questionable gimmick was now terrorism. The people in the demonstration made themselves scarce. The pigs started chasing one of the squatters. I saw them running; no one else seemed ready to help, so I decided to follow them, mostly out of a habit I’d developed from Copwatching in the US — is anyone arrested, is anyone beaten, do they want to pass on a message before they get taken away? The cops were running down Escudellers, and other people were following too. I assumed it was for curiosity’s sake though many of them might have been undercover. Around a corner, the cops had swarmed someone. They yelled and manhandled him for a while, then they told the crowd to disperse and led him away. I lingered longer than I should have, hoping to catch his eye and give him a friendly smile, and as I was walking back to Las Ramblas, one of the cops looked me over and decided I was suspicious. I had completely forgotten that that day I happened to be wearing a shirt with a circle-A on it, given to me by the anarchists in Bulgaria. The cop asked me a question.

“Yo mala habla Español,” I said in my best American accent. He demanded my passport. I gave it to him, but instead of looking it over and giving me a chance to demonstrate my touristiness,

he walked off with it. Shit. “Uhhhh, what’s the problem? *Que es la problema?*” I asked, following him. No answer. Shit shit shit. On Las Ramblas, he told another pig to walk behind me. I’m fucked. And just like that, we walked right into the police station.

In the basement of the Guardia Urbana, the other person they arrested was on a bench, surrounded by three cops yelling at him and pushing him around. I demanded to know what was going on, demanded to speak to the US consulate, told them I was a tourist. They made me empty my pockets, looked suspiciously at the black handkerchief, which I tried to convince them was just a handkerchief — see the snot stains? Then one of them asked me to raise my shoes. These were white New Balance tennis shoes, the cheapest and most comfortable I’d found before leaving Virginia. But I later found out that in European countries where it was forbidden to display a swastika, the neonazis had appropriated the New Balance logo, which is a large N — subtle, no? So, in Berlin I had colored my shoes black with a marker, and left a few uninspired slogans on them while I was at it. One, sort of a good luck inscription like the blessing on a newly launched ship, was soon to prove worse than useless. It read: “run to live and fight another day.” Well, no use running when they have your passport, and now in the police station it was the center of attention for these troglodytic cops. The only word they could understand between them, lucky me, was “fight” and once they read that they all began grunting “*ocupa! ocupa!*” (squatter, squatter) like happy trolls. I started making demands again — isn’t that what American tourists are supposed to do? and asked what the hell was going on. One of the Guardia Urbana said I had to speak Spanish or nothing; that if I kept speaking English they would beat me, and he raised his hand menacingly. I kept going, but they were only bluffing. I tried to explain I was a tourist, but one of them corrected me: “¡Tourist, no! ¡Terrorist!”

Just to make sure they hadn’t accidentally arrested an innocent tourist, the cops pulled a fast one. They had been interrogating the other guy pretty harshly, and then they caught him off guard with a slow pitch — they asked him an easy question. “*¿Quien es?*” they asked, pointing at me. “Peter,” he replied, confused. Though at that point I didn’t really know him, he remembered my name. And now the police knew I was connected to the squatters, which, in their terms, meant I was guilty. They took us to a holding cell. The other detainee was named Xavi, and he had never been arrested before. I knew it would just be a matter of waiting, but it was frustrating as hell to think that the whole thing could be cleared up immediately if only we were allowed to talk to a judge before the cops had a chance to get their story straight. Ask two different cops the same questions and it would become obvious that they were lying. But that wish was a non sequiter: it simply didn’t apply to the situation. The purpose of a trial is not to find the truth, anymore than the police are there to protect us.

The cops came back a little later for the contents of our pockets, our belts, and our shoelaces, and then deposited us back in the holding cell for more waiting. Now I had the opportunity to realize that they would likely try to deport me, that this would come with a ban of several years from the Schengen visa territory, which includes all of Western Europe, and that after waiting four and a half months I probably would not get to see L on Saturday. But doing the natural, human thing — trying to break down the door or punch the next cop who came by — would only make the situation worse. So I went through the yoga routine taught to me by my friend Greg. I met Greg in prison in the US. In the end, prison killed him. He did a dozen years on the inside, and stayed healthy as much as possible in that environment, but less than a year after getting released he died of a heart attack, just that past October. He was only in his forties.

That night the Mossos d'Escuadra picked us up and drove us in handcuffs to the commissary. I lost sight of Xaveliño and got put in a cell about twelve feet across, with four others. The next two days there was nothing to do but wait. Wait, get called out for fingerprinting, get photographed, wait, attempt to sleep, wait, try to drown out the ceaseless sound of the junkie in withdrawal begging for medication pounding the bars insulting the guards and screaming before going back to sleep to rest up and start it all over again. Wait.

## Esperar

24 April

They use the same word  
for waiting and hoping  
but as I'm pacing the sullied floor  
of this Barcelona cell  
1 day after my arrest,  
2 days before the deadline  
to appeal my deportation,  
and 4 days before someone I love  
shows up at the bus station  
looking for my face,  
what I'm awaiting and what I'm hoping  
are exact opposites.  
Yet I'm surrounded  
by the agonized marriage  
of these two antitheses  
as I pull and push the prison bars,  
which are the strongest symbol  
of the desire for freedom  
and its final impediment.

Martes, 24 Abril, the next day, I found out that the Mossos had notified the US consulate of my arrest, and the consulate would contact my mother. I wasn't allowed to talk to them — it was set up so I couldn't get any help at this stage. I did get to talk with a court-appointed attorney, accompanied by a translator. The translator was very nice, which delayed my realization that the lawyer was incompetent. I chose not to make a statement to the police: by now they were irrelevant to the process and waiting until I saw the judge would give me the chance to speak to the lawyer first. The most important things I found out from her was that I would see the judge tomorrow and might be released after that, but I would need to give an address. Someone from RuinAmalia had contacted her and would find an address that I could use — one that was not a squat.

After more hours of waiting, I was again called for a meeting with a lawyer, this time an immigration lawyer. I learned the national police were starting a deportation process against me, accompanied by a seven year ban from Schengen, on the totally fabricated argument that I was in Spain illegally. They said I had entered Schengen in February, 2006, when in reality the date

of entry, from Bulgaria to Greece, was 1 March, 2007. In February 2006 I was in Harrisonburg, and didn't even come to Europe until July, although the whole winter I was in Ukraina, outside of Schengen. I had 48 hours to appeal, but my passport, which had the stamp that could prove my legal status, was locked up with me. The lawyer assured me that I would be released the next day after talking with the judge, and I should go immediately to her office with my passport to file the appeal.

The next morning our wing of the commissary was emptied out and we were rounded up into prisoner transport vans — those inconspicuous, windowless police vehicles that are constantly ferrying strangled futures across the streets of your city without drawing a second glance. The Barcelona courthouse, just like the courthouse of any other city that is big enough, had a back door with a garage that allowed the prisoners to be driven directly into the illusionless dungeons that are the necessary though invisible companion to every lofty hall of justice. While the police and prosecutor were on the streets or in their offices preparing their case, working to keep us behind bars, we were confined to more agonized waiting. Nearly everyone else crowded into the holding cell was an immigrant, arrested for possessing marijuana, getting into a fight, being accused of stealing a tourist's cellphone, stuff like that. Xavi was there too. After hours and hours, he got called up, and then I did. Throughout the agonized waiting, I had been preparing something to say to prove my innocence, but I should not have been so naïve. I was talking with a machine. This was to be a routine meeting in the judge's office, with a translator, my lawyer, the prosecutor, the judge, and a secretary. On the way up I saw Maduixa, from RuinAmalia, waiting in the lobby, but I pretended not to know her, and she followed cue. They took off my handcuffs just before sending me in. I've always suspected this ritual is more to preserve the judge's illusions rather than to ensure the comfort and equality of the accused.

The judge started out by describing at length what had happened, based on the information given to him by the prosecutor, which was an elaboration of the police story. The squatters organized a protest, they were on Las Ramblas handing out flyers, and then they fired off "a mortar," intentionally choosing the Catalan national holiday of St. Jordi, the busiest tourist spot, and the busiest time. The police were watching the demo, they saw the protestors form a circle, they saw Xavi take the mortar into the circle followed by me, and then they chased and arrested us after it went off. Then the judge said that two people were injured by the explosion. I was shocked by this part of the story, though it all made sense when I later learned that the police had pressured two older people to say they were injured by the so-called mortar, but they refused to make a denunciation and ultimately testified against the cops. At the time, though, all the judge knew was the bullshit spilling out of the mouths of the cops and prosecutor, though he had been in the trade long enough to realize that whom he chose to believe was an entirely political decision. The prosecutor piled on some more claims: it was a serious attack, an "urban guerrilla" action, designed to send the message that the squatters were a "paramilitary force." I was starting to realize how fucked up the situation was.

I found out the charges were manifestación ilegal — a minor offense in the city code — and desórdenes públicos, public disorder, with heightened sentencing provisions because the disorder was allegedly committed with explosives. The minimum sentence was three years in prison, the maximum six years. The judge's first question for me was why I didn't make a statement to the police. I said the police had been lying and threatening me from the beginning so they were hardly the people to talk to. I tried to add that in the US, lawyers tell people not to make statements to the police but the judge interrupted me to yell that "in the US they would throw you in Guantanamo

for such an act!” I wasn’t sure if he was upset by the apparent influx of American terrorists taking advantage of Spanish leniency or sad that Spain did not also have such an efficient system. I assumed this judge had been a fascist when that was still fashionable, just a few decades ago, but it turned out he was one of the left-wingers who hates anyone farther to the left.

Finally I was allowed to make my statement, and briefly argue why I should be released rather than sent to prison. The judge made sure the secretary got it all down, and then sent me back to the dungeon. On the way I was asked if I needed medical attention, and I said I did. I had been arrested wearing my contact lenses, and had to sleep with them in for two nights so I could make eye contact with the judge and see what was going on. Without glasses or contacts, I can’t even read billboard-sized writing from more than a few meters away. But after seeing the judge, I had to take them out. My eyes were dry and burning. They put them in a little container for me and promised to send them along with my property bag. I never saw them again. Didn’t see much of anything for the next few days.

Late that night, all the other people from all the other cells had been released pending trial. There was only one psychotic Cuban in another cell, and me and Xavi. We speculated what would happen, ran around the cell to work off the stress, and, figuring that he might get out, I had him memorize a short message to send to L. And we waited some more. After hours we were both summoned to the all-purpose processing room at one end of the dungeon. Xavi and I exchanged a good luck squeeze. There was a blur of people around what must have been a table. Xavi was told he would be released pending trial. I was being sent to Modelo prison on a 30,000 euro bail. I later had an opportunity to talk to the judge’s secretary and she told me she sympathized with me and had never seen so high a bail for such charges in her 25 years of working there. In the next few minutes of waiting I wrote a note for Xaveliño to take out with him. Then my ride came.

Modelo is a prison built in a panopticon-influenced style in the Eixample neighborhood of Barcelona. Half of the renowned Spanish anarchists did time there, which titulated my dorky historical side. This reminded me of USP Atlanta, where I spent three weeks out of a six month prison sentence, and where Alexander Berkman did two years before being deported to Russia. The similarities ended there. Going into Atlanta was like being taken into the Death Star. At Modelo, reproductions of famous paintings hung in the entrance hall. Though equally sterile, Modelo was a little softer around the edges, and to be admitted I only had to go through one control point — a pair of remotely controlled doors that only open one at a time. The strip search was remarkably unobtrusive, and the person processing me was so docile I thought he was an inmate trustee at first. They gave me something like dinner even though it was going on midnight, and sent me to my new cell. My cellie was the psychotic Cuban from the courts.

He was a good guy, though periodically he would start punching the door, yelling for guards, and insulting Spaniards. Early on he explained to me his plan: he would keep requesting drugs to sedate him for his stay, and if he didn’t receive them he’d freak out, get sent to whatever medical unit they had, and ensure himself a steady supply of tranquilizers. By Thursday, he had followed through.

I was surprised by the conditions at Modelo. My cell was a little larger than those at USP Atlanta, though the bunk bed had three bunks instead of two, so more people could be crowded in. But the room, which measured about six feet by twelve feet, also had a desk, a stack of cubbies, a shower, and a toilet. The shower was completely unprecedented for me — in the US it’s always common showers, often without curtains. The toilet was graced with a partition so one could actually shit in privacy. The newcomers’ goody-bag, in addition to the standard mattress, blanket,



and soap, also contained shampoo, shaving cream, washcloth, and a condom! The latter really blew my mind. It was like we were actually human. In the federal prison system in the US, having sex is categorized as the second worst level of offense, just below murder. And the phone calls at Modelo, when we got to make them, cost the same as on the street. In US prisons and jails phone calls cost three to fifteen times more.

While it's important to be optimistic when entering prison, and the conditions in a Spanish prison pleasantly surprised me, especially given that Spain has a bad reputation within Europe, nothing can erase the fact that all prisons are horrible institutions that kill you day by day. Outside the temporary wing, conditions worsened, and politically active prisoners faced severe violence. Every few years in Catalunya a rebellious prisoner would die in his cell, having committed some impossible form of suicide, like beating himself in the face, tying his hands behind his back, and hanging himself from the ceiling. Throughout the 90s and the beginning of this decade, there had been a major struggle inside the prison system, with hundreds of prisoners rioting, going on hunger strike, and occupying parts of the prison. Anarchists on the outside gave support — protesting, spreading the news, raising money, and attacking prison industries and government buildings. There was also a letter-bombing campaign. None of the letter bombs went off, and it is unknown whether the purpose was to actually harm any of the officials responsible for murdering prisoners, just to scare them, or to generate media attention. If I stayed in Modelo long enough, I might get to meet some of the active anarchist prisoners. One of the 4F prisoners was also locked up there.

My first morning waking up in Modelo wasn't so bad. The future spread before me within much diminished horizons, but I could make do. The Mossos had told me, and for whatever reason I stupidly believed them, that it would probably be two to five months before trial. I could do that. I'd receive visitors, friends would send me letters and books, I'd get a lot of writing done, exercise, meditate, stay in control, and come out fluent in Spanish. The food turned out to be really good, and plentiful — at Crisp County Jail in Georgia, while I was still vegetarian, I had to survive on the navy beans my cellies didn't want to eat, and the diet at FPC Cumberland left me with persistent health problems. But in Modelo the meals filled me up and sometimes even tasted good. In the afternoon I could make phone calls, every day I got two hours in the exercise yard where I could jog and practice hand-stands, and on the weekend I'd get to go to the gallery, where there was a library, and I might meet the other anarchist prisoners.

What scared me much more than the prospect of a few months in Modelo was the deportation and seven year ban. I put L on my visitor's sheet, hoping she would still come to Barcelona even though I had suddenly gone incommunicado. Then I made a To Do list with everything I needed to accomplish to prepare for trial, communicate the situation to folks back home, coordinate support, and live my life in the meantime, and once I couldn't think of anything else to write down, I tried not to worry about it. There would be plenty of time later for the inevitable sea of depression, but for now I was finding bright sides. There was more privacy and less aggression than in US prisons. No one threatened to beat me up, neither guards nor inmates, and anyway I was one of the larger prisoners in my wing, which is hilarious in comparison to Crisp County Jail, where they nicknamed me Sugar Slim, i.e. skinny white boy. In my experience in the US there was strong camaraderie among prisoners, plenty of really nice people, but you always had to keep your guard up. Of course in Spain the police frequently torture detainees, but torture and assassination are prison universals. You don't lock people up like files in a filing cabinet unless you're willing to go all the way. That same violence existed here, but the threats and degradations

didn't permeate every single interaction. It was a violence the guards held in reserve, rather than one they rubbed in your face every single opportunity they had. For example they tolerated the verbal abuse of my Cuban cellie much longer than I expected; it was only when he upped the ante and threatened to kill them that a large guard actually capable of hurting him came to the cell and took him off somewhere.

At some point on Thursday, the day after I got there, I got taken for a medical interview. TB shot, a few questions, then they dismissed me. I stayed to inquire after my contact lenses. They didn't know anything about it. I explained that I couldn't see a damn thing; I couldn't even tell the inmates from the guards. The apocalyptic undertones of my little speech — “how disastrous for discipline, not being able to tell the inmates from the guards!” — should have stirred some sympathy in the prison doctor's heart. In the back of my mind I was hearing some mix of John Lennon's “Imagine” and Bette Middler's “From a Distance”. Alas, I didn't quite infect the good doctor with my intended sense of urgency. He promised to look into the problem and nothing more came of it. I guess from a distance we all have enough and no one is in need. And people who imagine there's no authority can be brought around with a number of other means. Squinting: can someone tell me how to get back to my cell? I have more waiting to do.

## **One Open Window**

26 April

My two cellies sleep long and late  
sedated by pills or the depression of captivity.  
I stand in the dark on a trim metal stool  
stretching my face towards this one open window  
watching, for hours,  
the sky change colors and feeling  
the air cool and quicken,  
dancing graceful spirals  
these mute steel bars can neither see  
nor comprehend.

## **Men of Steel**

26 April

These window guards are men of steel.  
In some prisons they bark razor-edged commands  
that leave your skin bleeding from contact.  
In others they are encased in smudged and indelible  
plastic —  
unapproachable, apathetic,  
but always letting through  
the regulation quantity of sunlight.  
Here they are painted pastel,  
almost easy to reach and smooth to the touch,  
they even say please and thank you.  
But everywhere when you jump  
to catch a shooting star  
or reach out to touch  
someone you love or someone you've wronged  
they throw you back  
bruised and denied.  
They may laugh, they may look away,  
they may apologize and say  
they are only doing  
their job.  
And so it is our job,  
those of us who would catch a shooting star  
or take a lover or an enemy by the hand  
to greet men of steel not with handshakes  
but with sledgehammers.

There's something about the acoustics of prison cells that make even a tone-deaf bastard like me sing the blues. I didn't know the lyrics of many songs so I had to make them up, but when you stand right by the door and sing with no embarrassment, you can hit a note that resonates along all the sharp corners of what is not in fact a cell but the chamber of a musical instrument whose euphony says unequivocally that you are in tune and exactly where you need to be.

Then the jangling of keys strikes a note of a different kind, always registering like an electric shock in that one notch low on your spine. The guards sang out to me in the musical tones of Spanish, translated jarringly into English: "¡Peter Alan!" They didn't know what to make of my last name, or they didn't know the difference between a middle name and a first last name.

It was Friday now. This time they were calling me to meet a lawyer. Telephone and glass wall affair. When he showed up on his end I saw that this was not the incompetent public lawyer but a private one, semi-political — the same guy they had gotten for Xavi in time for his meeting with the judge. We had a good conversation. He disabused me of the notion that it would be a short wait. I could be locked up two or three years until trial.

Then he dropped a bombshell: the Barcelona collectives had already raised the 30,000 euro bail. If I wanted to there was a chance I could be released that afternoon, though I'd have to stay in Barcelona and sign in every two weeks at court. I was blown away by this news. He also told me they were in contact with my family and with L, and she had gotten on the bus down to

Barcelona even though I was locked up. I might have a chance to meet her at the bus station after all. While I was digesting all of this, the lawyer showed me the letters that folks had written for me — Alex and some people from his house, people in RuinAmalia, people from the ill-fated protest — sending me love. I felt pretty guilty about all the money being wasted on me, and it was jarring to be suddenly pulled out of the little world I'd resigned myself to living in, but if it would give me a chance to meet L at the bus station, I said yes, spring me out of this joint.

Then I was taken back to my cell, paced for an hour in smiling silence while my cellies slept, ate the big lunch that came, paced some more, and went out to the exercise yard. A poem was coming to me but I had lost my pen. The guard called me out to use the phone — I called my dad, but there was still no answer. The previous day I had left a message that I was locked up. After hanging up I asked to borrow the guard's pen. She gave it to me and stood watching as I started pouring out verse onto a scrap of paper. "¿Que es?" "Tengo una poema, necesito escribirlo," I explained. She threw up her hands in official disgust; she thought I needed the pen for a phone number or something important. As she led me back outside I assured her "es muy importante." She couldn't keep a straight face any longer, and broke out in a smile that was most incongruous with her ugly uniform. A few minutes later another guard opened the door to the rec yard and searched me out. "For your inspiration," he said laughing, handing me a sheaf of blank paper. A short time after rec ended, they opened my cell door and told me I was being freed.

## **Solidarity is a beautiful thing**

27 April

Politics pollute poetry  
set the stanzas marching side by side  
in adjacent party lines  
thus it is impossible to write a poem  
demonstrating that solidarity is a beautiful thing  
But the day my visitor  
held letters from friends and strangers up to the glass  
for me to read  
YOU ARE NOT ALONE  
was so beautiful  
the prison walls melted  
words failed me for hours  
and no poem ever written  
was any more  
than decorated paper.

It seems to be a prison universal how they make you wait inexplicable periods while they are in the act of releasing you. Ten minutes in front of this door, fifteen minutes by this guard station, twenty minutes in these holding cells, rarely with any justification. Their legal right to imprison you has expired, but they can still do as they like. The message is clear: all liberty is provisional, there are always more hoops to jump through. I finally got to the property office to reclaim my things, though my belt and shoelaces were missing. The bastards. Everything was still a myopic

blur, so I had to ask where the exit was, which must have confused the guards. It was big enough for a car to drive through, and I was standing right next to it.

And beyond that door was the street, and on the other side of the street a very large yellow blob, consistent in size and shape with a banner. After a few seconds loud cheering came from the direction of the yellow shape. Eventually, I picked out the sound of my name, or the Spanish rendition thereof. Yup, a banner, and the crowd that goes with it. What appeared to be cars were coming. I waited. The cheering went on. Road seemed clear, so I crossed. About twenty people were waiting for me, and as they came into focus they surrounded me with hugs and kisses.

“¡Tio! ¿Que tal?”

“Me roban el cinturón. Cabrones.”

And there’s laughing and more stories and more hugging as we walked away from Modelo. Most of the people from Monday’s protest were there, along with the people from the house. I got a ride to RuinAmalia on the back of Xaveliño’s bike, and it’s so much better than going in a Mossos van.

# ¿Anarquisme i Nació?

Three articles on the question “Anarchism and Nationalism?” from *Antisistema* no.6, September 2007. The first two are translated from Spanish, the third from Catalan with much appreciated assistance from Maduixa.

## Anarchists in National Liberation Struggles

Dr. Koyac

I’m not going to speak about the philosophical or theoretical implications of the relation between anarchism and nationalism. I want to go to the practical history. Here is a brief review of the connections anarchists have had with diverse national liberation struggles in the last two centuries.

Since the commencement of libertarian socialist ideas, a part of us have cried out for help for the weaker nations. It is symptomatic that Bakunin was implicated in the attempt to create a Pan-Slavic commonwealth, uniting all the Slavic nations as one. The affair came to naught due to the authoritarianism of the Polish nationalists, the immense slice of territory the Russians would lose (the Balkans), and the few clear benefits that this union would have for the peoples involved.

What was more tangible is that years later various anarchists supported diverse struggles for independence, for example the Italian anarchists helping the Bosnians in their struggle against the Ottoman Empire. It was no minor amount of help that the Iberian anarchists gave to the independentistas of Cuba and Puerto Rico. In fact one of the motives for the assassination of Cánovas of Castille was the war in Cuba.

And later anarchists were giving aid to the nationalist organization IMRO of Macedonia and to the insurrection of Thracia and Macedonia in 1903. This revolution is scarcely known to have produced the first libertarian communes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the liberated lands (for example the Independent Republic of Krushevo). They were anarchists and socialists and without exception struggled against the Turks for the national liberation that would allow them to initiate socialism in those lands. They didn’t see it as incompatible. The nationalist Serbian organization of Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, creating the excuse for beginning World War I, was in contact with anarchist ideas.

In those years something similar happened to the anarchists of Armenia, though sadly later they had to compete and fight with the nationalists, whose movement had distanced itself from their own. There are also the Jews of the socialist movement the Bund and other Jewish anarchists who created their own movements only for people of similar origin.

Neither was it strange that the Korean anarchists were also fighting for national liberation and during their war and revolution from 1929–31 they liberated several territories such as the Shinmin Commune.

On the other hand, anarchists have always celebrated internationalism almost without limits. They have been advocates of apatriation, of Esperanto, of travelling the whole world spreading an idea and a practice.

As we can see, there's some of everything, from the armed confrontation between Makhno and the Ukrainian nationalists of Petliura, to the creation of a movement agglomerating anarchists and nationalists in the case of the Koreans.

## **Anarchy and Nationalism**

Jaris T.

By nationalism I understand the feeling of belonging among members of a concrete entity, who share common features such as culture, language, traditions, or history. This feeling can exist in different ways in each individual, and in a series of strata – neighborhood, town, province, region... this feeling as such is perpetuated by the passion drawn from the exaltation of common values.

Historically this feeling has been utilized by the dominant class to subjugate the people under the pretext of exhibiting the sovereignty of the nation. With the arrival of the liberal bourgeois state, nationalism was institutionalized, its symbols (flag, anthem, coat of arms) affixed, and the people were deceived into defending against or attacking other states in the interests of power as though they were their own interests.

The defense or attack of the values of a nation, apart from being a strategy contrived by the dominant system to manage the consent of the dominated, is antagonistic to development. The transmission of knowledge, the mix of values, the fusion of realities, in a word, interculturalism, is that which has advanced humanity, and not borders, wars, homogenization, nor patriotism.

Anarchy can achieve the atomization of each and every one of those levels of belonging until arriving at the sovereignty of the individual; thus anarchists embrace all cultures, understanding that each one of them has something we value, without putting one over the other.

Apatriation is the concept that most approaches my own feeling of not belonging. It is understandable that other experiences result in a greater attachment to the local culture, but whenever they put one over the other, or exclude other options, it is a symptom of the abuse of a corrupt power.

## **Against Libertarian Doctrine**

Ricard de Vargas Golarons

extracted from the anarchist zine "Vultur Negre," no4, Tarragona 1995.

Anarchism has not known how to understand national oppression in this most particular form, and therefore it has confused the nationalist liberal initiatives of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with all possible paths for national liberation. Based on the idea that all national reclamation has as its objective the creation of a new independent state controlled by the local bourgeoisie, anarchism has ignored that and implicitly come to favor the statist project of uniformization.

Such an error as confusing the state with the national community is to think that taking up a struggle for national liberation will separate, if not turn against one another, the popular classes of the different nations within a plurinational state in favor of the local bourgeoisie. International

solidarity, in this case between different national communities subsumed by the Spanish state, in the face of this common enemy, must be produced in an equality of conditions. The use, for example, of the language of one of these in the press and propaganda read by the others imposes a new hierarchy, and finally a sacrifice of the minority communities in favor of the official. What was ostensibly federalism has converted to centralism. The daily struggle of the Catalan popular classes is in solidarity with the popular classes of other nations, but not within the artificial and narrow geographical boundaries of the Spanish state; rather beyond its borders. We are not enforcing separation, we are recognizing each person's individuality, prior condition, and need to confront the common enemy, the state.

But the Espanyolismo of the libertarian movement is not only a confusion of names, but also a conception much more profound. Identifying oneself with the territory of "Spain," adopting it as the boundaries of organization in the present and future, feeling oneself to be a "Spaniard," represents the acceptance and prioritization of the political administrative-repressive criteria of the state against the popular criteria.

Historically, the "Spanish libertarian movement" has condemned on repeated occasions the national reclamations, labeling them as "separatism." What does that mean then, about their federalism? Federalism supposes the grouping or association of individuals that were previously independent, and that remain free to associate or separate whenever they consider it best. To speak of "separatism" supposes a model of organization that is obligatory, and therefore, that cannot be changed freely.

It is necessary to combat the Espanyolismo of the libertarian movement and all the conservatism that infects the stereotyped "paradise." We aren't going to create new borders, but destroy the existing ones. We will dissolve the old world.



# Libertad Provisional

I still don't know how this will turn out. I'm making the most of this bizarre Iberian exile, navigating the psychotic labyrinth of the legal system, riding the fickle waves of revolution that wash away the best laid plans like castles of sand and throw our lives tempestuously about, pulling some of us down into the deep and tossing others soundly onto the shore. In the days after Modelo abruptly opened its baneful mouth to spit me out, I began to piece together what had happened and what was to come. Late Monday night the people who had organized the protest found out I had been arrested along with Xavi, and from then on they were working constantly, figuring out a strategy to support us, looking for lawyers, and also coming to terms with how the action had gone so poorly — why the petardo was much stronger than anticipated and not everyone had even been informed about it. They had no idea how we were coping, considering we didn't know about the petardo and weren't at all prepared to be arrested. Once Xavi got out and I was sent to Modelo with a bail higher than they'd ever seen for charges stemming from a protest, they began going around to all the collectives, all the neighborhoods, digging into their own pockets, and they surprised even themselves when they collected the 30,000 by Friday.

Once they got me out, we had to figure out how to try to make the money back, how to prepare our defense, and how I could adapt to my new home for the foreseeable future. I met with the public immigration attorney and found out that although she had fortunately appealed the deportation before the 48 hours expired, she did not have access to any of the evidence proving the accusations of the national police — that I was in the country illegally — to be completely false. She said there was still a chance the judge might consider evidence that we sent in late, so I had to get high quality scans of my passport and collect secondary evidence that I was here as a tourist — things like receipts from hostels and tickets from museums. Hmmm. The attorney got pretty frustrated when she found out I didn't have any of these, not even any travel receipts, since I had been hitchhiking and not exactly sleeping in three star hotels. But where there's a will, there's a way, and I was able to rustle up a few items.

And then there was just a lot of waiting. We did not expect a response to the appeal for six months, during which time it was not at all clear if I could leave the EU visa territory, since there were open deportation proceedings against me. Ambiguous prison bars fading in and out, as though obscured by some passing fog, sprang up around the continent, too far away for me to know if they were really there, but felt, sure enough, like cold in the bones. Soon the mists flooded the landscape, but the only thing they obscured was me. My visa was expiring, I was legally obliged to stay but not permitted to do so, not allowed to work, not allowed to steal my sustenance; the only legal resolution was a death certificate. I was squeezed excruciatingly out of official existence until there was nothing left of me.

Just the address I had registered with the courts — where I could not live, not having the money to pay rent there — a passport, and the card on which every two weeks I collected my stamp at the courthouse, affirming if not my existence then my protraction: a slow, slow heartbeat, the padded stamp of ink on paper, a metabolism of the outermost minimum. Just a passport and a

provisional liberty card hurrying along the streets, held by some entity invisible in its hibernation, moving back and forth to the foreigners office with new forms, new documents, somnambulently pursuing the permission they would never give: to wake up.

Meanwhile, there appeared another inhabitant of Barcelona: remarkably like me, but without a name, without a paper existence, living in squats, working black market jobs, rooting through dumpsters, shoplifting, stealing survival from the excesses of a careless system. There were thousands of others in this city living in the same precarity or much worse; undocumented people, hunted people, illegal people, selling the tourists sunglasses all laid out on a blanket with the four corners attached to a length of string so they could pull it all up in a second and run should the police come by. People who are not seen and do not see, who, for instance, were working in the restaurant kitchen or at the hotel desk on the little street Escudellers, next to Las Ramblas, on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, who saw the police chasing and arresting only one person, not two, who remembered it well, but, on consideration, not well enough to talk to a lawyer, to a judge, to contradict the police who could easily ruin their lives.

Legality is never meant to be logical. It is rationalized control, and though it is strange, in the global scheme of things, for it to be applied to a US citizen, it works just as well. No exceptions were made for me on the basis of my passport, nor did I expect them. For one, First World Spain would chafe at the indignity of having its legal procedures interrupted by big brother, and secondly, the US government would not intervene on the behalf of someone like me. If anything, they were sending the Spanish police my files, which might explain the unusually high bail and the double whammy that the national police were hitting me with through the fabricated deportation proceedings. And even in this latter case, which was in the clear purview of the US consulate to respond to — the demonstrably false deportation of a US citizen — the consulate refused to help. In contrast, we heard from the lawyer that Americans arrested for drunken fights were quickly released at the behest of the US embassy.

During this time, Xavi and I had meetings with our defense lawyer, a sympathetic type who was giving us a discount. It was hard at first to participate when I couldn't understand a lot of what was being said, but often people from the house who spoke a little English were able to come along to translate for me, and gradually my Spanish got better. We found out what evidence the police had against us: they had the petardo, on which they were performing a chemical analysis, and there was a good chance the forensics lab would say whatever the police wanted to hear. The police story was fairly absurd. They said they were closely observing the protest, they saw Xavi and me participating in it, then the whole group formed up a circle. Xavi took the petardo into it, and I followed him. Subsequently, in a statement to the Associated Press, they described me as a leader of the protest, which is ridiculous for any number of reasons. Then the protestors yelled "there's a bomb! there's a bomb!" and everyone ran as the petardo went off. They said they arrested Xavi and me running away from the scene. So basically, we needed witnesses to show that the police were lying out of their asses. Some folks working at a hotel next to where the arrests took place remembered that day well. They remembered only one person was running and got arrested by the police, and they gave Xavi's description. Xavi had already admitted running away in his police statement, so this didn't hurt him. But when they were asked if they could get in touch with our lawyer and make a statement to the courts, the hotel workers suddenly didn't remember so well — they were illegals, undocumented workers, and understandably wanted nothing to do with the law. But other witnesses came forward: three people who were sitting at

tables on Las Ramblas selling books right next to where the petardo went off, two old folks who had been in the crowd, and a US mormon who was assigned to Barcelona to solicit souls.

The people at the tables said the noise was just a loud firework, they never thought it was a bomb, no one got hurt, the protestors were festive and unthreatening, they never formed a circle, they even went around and warned the tablers in advance that they were about to shoot off a petardo, and the only ones panicking were the police. The two old folks said the same thing and added that the police had tried to pressure them to say they were injured. And then there was the fucking mormon. He said he was scared witless, that the protestors were all terrorists, and that because of the trauma he had to miss work for a couple days. Clearly the pigs had found their man. Up until that guy testified, the judge had refused to grant the prosecutor a public accusation. In Spain, someone needs to file an accusation for there to be a trial, and the prosecutor can always do it, but an accusation “on behalf of the people” is more powerful. So this was a sign that the judge for the investigation period — fortunately a different judge from the dickhead who had been on call when we were first brought to make statements — was not maniacally hungering for our blood. But once the American made his statement, there was basis for an accusation.

During my arrest, interrogation, and statement to the judge, I had kept my cards close to my chest regarding my politics and my connections to squatters and anarchists, and focused on the immediate truth that I knew nothing about the petardo, hadn't organized the protest, and was just in Spain for a short while. Subsequently, I talked about it with the lawyer and other folks, and decided there was no point hiding my politics. It was a political trial: I was facing prison time because I was an anarchist associating with squatters, and I wouldn't let the police pretend it was about explosives. I couldn't wait in Barcelona for two years or more and pretend not to be an anarchist — better to be in prison. Anyways the Spanish police could find out I was an anarchist with a quick search. Recognizing the political dimensions of the trial made it easier to talk about, and to organize support. There was a great need for the latter. The collectives that had raised the bail money were pretty broke, and had plenty of problems of their own. We set ourselves the goal that they should not have to wait two years until trial to recover that money.

In the midst of organizing fundraisers and preparing for trial, I had to figure out how to live my life in a new home I hadn't chosen. Plans to see dearly missed friends and aging grandparents, work in a garden that had been waiting for me, go on tour to distribute the two books that had come out since I had left, move to a new city, all of it was off. More immediately I had been planning to finish my last couple months in Europe with L in Groningen. In fact when I got out of Modelo she was on the bus to Barcelona, thinking she might not get to see me after all. Early that Saturday morning I walked to the station, only to find out that the Eurolines bus had arrived way ahead of schedule. I rushed back home. She had already gotten there, though not speaking Spanish had not understood that I was out on bail. I ran up the stairs to find her in my room unpacking. She cried out in surprise and we wrapped our arms around each other. It was one of those hugs that you'll never forget. But it was a bittersweet meeting. She had to go back in a week, and I could not go with her.

The folks who were to become dear friends came to the rescue, arranging a short vacation so L and I could leave the city and all its troubles behind for a spell. Barcelona's squat movement was not without its peaceful refuges, and the greatest of these was Kan Pascual, an old squat on top of a mountain. A good hike from the paved road, surrounded in trees and gardens, the squatted farm offered a sweeping view of the hills and valleys west of the city. The place was comfortably simple, with a compost toilet, limited electricity from the wind and sun, wholesome wooden

architecture, thick wooden tables in the kitchen, a huge wood-fired oven for making bread, a rope swing that launched one out into the void over terraced gardens and the open valley. Just what I needed.

It was something of a shock being out of prison, and even more scary how quickly I had adapted to being inside. In the first days I felt the usual discomfort with crowds of happy people and wide open spaces. Later I encountered a deeper problem: a persistent feeling of guilt that I had accepted the bail and cost the movement that much money, that I had left behind all those people on the inside whom I was just getting to know. Adding to all this was the difficulty of living under the restrictions of provisional liberty. In some ways, provisional liberty was worse than prison, because I had to build the prison walls in my own head. An insulting mockery of liberty, having to step so carefully every day, being afraid of police for the first time in my life because of everything that would happen to me and other people if I were arrested again.

One day I was walking down a street in Sants, and I suddenly saw a squatters' protest coming from the other direction. Normally I would be overjoyed by such a chance encounter, but here I was overcome with a grim humor, thinking a fight might start all of the sudden and I'd be swept up by the police. And every time a firework went off nearby, I was swept by a wave of nervousness, thinking the police would appear out of nowhere and arrest me for another bomb. Later, during the holiday of St. Juan, in which it was high tradition for everyone from children to grandmothers to set off fireworks — small, large, and window-shakingly huge, by the thousands, sounding like a goddamn war — I realized how cynical and manipulative it was for the police to react to the squatters' petardo like it was something grave and dangerous. Shit, at one point during the festivals I passed an innocent group of children at play on Reina Amalia, gave them a smile as I walked by, then did a double take and dove for cover as I realized they had just placed a massive firework beneath a glass bottle. Public Disorder my ass.

But I was lucky to be out. The Barcelona jails would happily swallow me and forget about me for however many months or years it would be until trial. This was the fate of a number of others. Alex, Rodrigo, and Juan, the prisoners of "Cuatro Efe" — 4F — were still locked up after a year and a half on fabricated charges. All over the city one saw banners, stencils, and stickers demanding their freedom, and nearly every week there were events to raise funds and to remember them. L and I went to one, a cabaret at Can Masdeu, which is a beautiful squat on a hill just outside the city. The hillside was covered with gardens that the squatters shared with their neighbors. It was always heartwarming, walking up the dirt road and seeing them cultivating together.

The cabaret for the prisoners of 4F began around twilight. A hundred people gathered in a semicircle on the grass, leaning forward in eager innocence as their friends behind the curtain transformed themselves into storytellers and stories, magicians and magic. The host spun introductions and stories and jokes out of clever webs of words, threw the yarn out to the audience and impelled us to throw it back, traded places with performers and always reappeared to recapture our attention and carry us into the next performance, until everyone was tied in. Musicians played accordions and violins, clown cops fought clown anarchists, acrobats stacked themselves to the sky and caught themselves inches from the ground when their tower toppled. Two ghosts crept over the lawn as slow as ice, produced from thin air large steel bowls and caressed these foreign instruments to produce an eery wailing and moaning that sounded from another world.

Too soon, L had to leave, and I threw myself into a new rhythm. We had our own events to organize to raise money for our case. The people of RuinAmalia organized a cabaret in the courtyard. Others set up a bar in Gracia during the neighborhood Fiestas, amidst all the surreal,

decorated streets. I travelled to Nederland for two weeks — the longest I could leave Barcelona since I had to sign in at court — and got some aid from prisoner support groups there, though naturally for me the more important part was seeing L again. Together we went to the yearly anarchist camp at Appelscha, and spent another few dreamy days in rainy Groningen. But in no time I was back in Karcelona. The squatters' assembly planned to organize a huge concert as the major fundraiser for our case, and a group of us began meeting to look for a venue and bands. For a while we thought Keny Arkana might be able to play, which would have rocked. As summer progressed support began to fall off, until it was just three of us in a meeting, then two, then one. I was painfully helpless as I waited for my Castellano and Catalan to improve; how was I supposed to look for a major venue in a foreign city? It was sad that people were forgetting about the repression, even though it was as serious now as when the case was dramatically new. Sad that most of the people who involved themselves in that ill-fated protest and were lucky enough to get away were not dealing with the consequences; sad that the person saddled with this immense bail that was a major blow to the movement was an incompetent *guiiri*, a foreigner, whom no one knew all that well.

And at RuinAmalia there were other problems, threatening the house itself. The appeals were running out, the eviction process was steadily approaching its inevitable end. But it seemed I would not be able to stay in the house to the very conclusion, or help open a new house, because I could not risk arrest, not with the 30,000 euros everyone had put up for me hanging over my head. I was living in a cage.

The movement itself was getting beaten down. Squats were being evicted one after another. Any time there was a radical protest, the police surrounded it, row after row of them in riot gear, backed by a fleet of vans and helicopters. Just a couple years ago, people rioted in response to such aggressions, they blocked roads, and threw rocks at the cops. But the successive cases of repression, of torture, of violent evictions, of prison sentences, were wearing people down. It was sad to see such a strong, idealized movement as the one in Barcelona pushed back so forcefully by the State, though admittedly the gentrification of Barcelona was the focal point of a great deal of global capital, and their police force was backed up by the might of the European Union for the strategic purpose of neutralizing the anarchists. It wasn't exactly a weak point of the system, and anarchists simply are not strong enough yet to go up against anything else.

There were plenty of strengths in the movement here, and it was truly impressive to enter not just an autonomous space but an autonomous world, a network of liberated zones in which thousands of people passed a good part of their lives and created and shared what they needed to live. On the other hand, aspects of the movement left much to be desired. The famed militancy of Barcelona was overrated. In fights with the police I found protestors here to be passive and inexperienced. In anarchist and antifascist protests, when the cops clashed with the experienced hardcore at the front, the rest of the crowd instinctively started running before waiting to see if the front line was trying to retreat or needed backup. "This would never happen in Germany," another foreigner might mutter. I would find myself — dubbed by folks in the squatters' assembly as "the most expensive man in Barcelona," or "Mr. 30,000" — suddenly standing out in the crowd, despite my best intentions to stay safe and inconspicuous, because I was holding up my arms trying to get people not to run.

The movement here suffered from a drain on experience because on the one hand the city was so fashionable and on the other hand so conducive to burn-out. After a few years of living here many of the anarchists and squatters tended to move away. Many of the new people would come

because Barcelona had a reputation as a place where things were happening, so to put it bluntly they were often people who didn't have what it takes to make things happen in the place they were coming from. Then again I can sympathize with this, because a strong movement is more attractive than the prospect of living in a place with few allies. I think most people were waiting for a critical mass that was no longer available, now that the movement had shrunk. They were waiting for a riot to happen rather than learning how to start one themselves.

For me the worst part of the movement was internal: namely the meetings. Somehow, with all the opportunities for improvement — there were after all hundreds of meetings a month — I never saw a clear idea of decision-making put into practice. The meetings went on for hours, topics changed randomly, needless details were exhausted while overarching questions were missed, and the meetings ended all too often without any clear picture of what was accomplished or decided. Of all the hundred plus hours I spent in meetings there, I almost never heard someone ask another person what they thought of a certain idea, or check whether a proposal satisfied everyone, or encourage people who were remaining silent to share their thoughts. Generally, it was a matter of talking until anyone who disagreed gave up. It was especially hard for me when I had a definite investment in a certain group — for example a living group or trial support group — but couldn't communicate as well as I needed to. If I finally summoned up the words to express my disagreement with the way a decision was going, almost every time the other people in the group explained to me why their way was best rather than trying to understand or embrace my concerns. These problems transcended the gender divide on which authoritarian decision-making is often blamed; I witnessed the same patterns coming from mixed groups of squatters and from radical feminists. It was very much a culture of debate, and the culture of reconciliation that seems second-nature among the anarchists I usually work with in the US was simply absent.

In addition to the disillusionment, I had material problems of survival to worry about. If we couldn't open a new squat, where would I live? I couldn't work legally, and with the marginal work I could find I would have to give up all my time and my sanity to be able to afford the city's high rents. On some bleak days I thought I might just have to go back to the free hotel at Modelo. The question was always on my mind: how do we survive repression for the long term? If they can't figure it out in Barcelona, with so much repression to learn from, then where?

And there wasn't always refuge in our mortal bubble of autonomy at RuinAmalia. Even when you do speak the language fluently, and don't have to deal with depression, living in a collective is hard. Though life in a space outside capitalism is so much more than what is understood to be life in the mainstream, in that it fills up an emptiness that stares you in the face every day of your bought and sold life, it also requires you to use muscles that you've hardly even flexed before. I didn't always feel emotionally comfortable, sharing my life with these people who were warm and beautiful but still in many ways strangers. Sometimes it's just easier to surrender your humanity, isolate yourself in a house, imprison yourself in a job.

One day I got a letter, passed through a long network of friends and family until it came over the sea and into my hands. It was from Jameel, a prisoner in Virginia I had been writing with. He had been locked up in maximum security for years, and since being incarcerated had become an anarchist. I had told him about what happened to me in Barcelona, and that it would be a little longer before I got back home and could start writing him regularly again. He reminded me that repression is inevitable for those who struggle against the system, and many end up dead or in prison. But I should keep my head up, because to demoralize us was also a goal of their repression, and to stay strong and hopeful was a way of defeating them.

Another day a stranger wrote me offering to help me publish one of my next books. Reinvigorated, I threw myself back into the work, and even in exile, life could go on.

## Lucia Sanchez Saornil

One day I became disillusioned and upset when I found out that members of a squat I respected had denied the request of an anarcho-feminist group to host their self-defense class at that squat. The squatters said that because the group was for women only, it was sexist. One of them even said feminists hated men and just wanted power for themselves. I was shocked to hear from the mouths of anarchists arguments that in the US I had associated exclusively with right wing radio hacks, but with my poor Spanish I couldn't express myself strongly enough. It didn't help that one of the squatters kept interrupting me, though in this case it was hard to say if his behavior was typically masculine or typically Mediterranean. Later, after thinking it out a lot I was able to share my feelings with one of these squatters. In my opinion, just because radical men suddenly realized that patriarchy was wrong and binary gender needed to be abolished did not mean that five thousand years of history, conditioning, and abuse could be eliminated. Nor was a society-wide power structure the same as an individual's opinions, so the rare feminist who actually did hate all men bore little resemblance to a misogynistic man whose prejudices were backed up by social institutions. The one can deny people resources, safety, and health; the other cannot. By forming a women-only self-defense group, these feminists were not depriving men of power — a couple men could very easily start their own group, and society already offered men more opportunities to learn self-defense. Rather, they were utilizing the anarchist principle of voluntary association to create a safe space where they could undergo the training necessary to overcome one of the many inequalities patriarchy had created: the capacity for violence and self-defense, in which men are encouraged and women are discouraged. I also pointed out that I had seen some martial arts groups organized by squatters in Barcelona that were nearly all men. The feminists had an explicit gender policy and they had created a comfortable space for certain people, whereas the other groups being gender-blind had ignored the issue entirely, allowing the sexism from surrounding society to creep in and make the space apparently unwelcoming to women. Seen in the broader context, the feminist group was doing the work necessary to overcome the continuing legacy of patriarchy, and it would be absurd to suggest that if they continued with similar work they would eventually create an oppressively matriarchal society. The guy I talked with was very receptive to these criticisms, and I felt a lot better that I had tried again to express myself.

The incident really contrasted with my experience of the anarchist movement in the US. There, anarchism largely owed its rebirth to radical feminist and queer movements. Most anarchists I knew in the States had thought a whole lot more about gender issues, and also about race — few clung to a conservative or liberal analysis or seriously used phrases like “reverse racism” or “reverse sexism.” On the other hand, people here seemed to be much better at arguing and criticizing without moralistically crucifying anyone, as often happens in the States. There wasn't a culture of thin skins and victimization. On the downside this meant there was less support for the idea of safe spaces, but to its credit the radical culture lacked the patronizing idea of the fragile oppressed person who needed to be protected. The common assumption was, if you wanted to improve your condition, you fought for it.



Sometime after this conversation I finally found an occasion to leaf through the book, *Free Women of Spain*, and read with some interest about sexism in the Spanish anarchist movement during the much romanticized Civil War. One particular anarchist who fought for women's equality during the revolution piqued my curiosity: Lucia Sanchez Saornil. She was born on 13 December, 1895, in Madrid, and later became a telephone operator and member of the CNT anarchist labor union. She was also General Secretary of Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista, and just before the revolution broke out she helped to found Mujeres Libres, a women's liberation group that published a newspaper and situated itself within the anarchist movement. The male leadership tried to convince her and the other founders, including Mercedes Comaposada of Barcelona, to limit their efforts to a women's column in the CNT newspaper, but fortunately they launched their own project to give their perspective more attention and autonomy. Sanchez, who was also a poet and an out lesbian, was probably the most radical and outspoken of the founders. She rejected the arguments of male anarchists that sexism would wither away after the revolution, or that it would be divisive and dangerous to talk about women's liberation while the fascists were at the gate. Mujeres Libres helped mobilize tens of thousands of women to fight the fascists and further the anarchist revolution. They organized schools, childcare programs, and women-only social groups to help women gain skills and confidence that would allow them to participate as equals in the movement. They set up shooting ranges to help train women who wanted to join the militias, delivered food to the front, supported women in the militias, and combated sexist attitudes. The group explained their position in words that had striking relevance to the problem I found in today's anarchist movement in Spain: "It is necessary to work, to struggle, together because if we don't we'll never have a social revolution. But we needed our own organization to struggle for ourselves."

## Between Borders

Immigration is one of the major points of conflict in the new global economy. Because of the deportation process brought against me by the national police, I experienced the precarity that marks the life of a non-citizen: prohibited from working legally or receiving medical care, threatened with the possibility of being stopped and sequestered every time I crossed a border within Europe, denied freedom of movement, exposed to a greater vulnerability and graver consequences if I were arrested. But unlike the vast majority of the millions of people in Europe and North America who are denied the privileges of citizenship, I had white privilege. This meant that the police were much less likely to stop and search me on the streets, and if arrested — though I would be sent back to prison because of the criminal case — I would probably not disappear into one of the immigrant concentration camps where torture and abuse are commonplace. One night when I had a bad infection, I was turned away from the first hospital I went to, but at the second hospital, the secretary kindly looked the other way and let me see a doctor without paying or signing for anything. I wonder, would she have done that if I were black, or Arabic, or Pakistani?

Throughout the European Union, the various member states have constructed dozens of concentration camps for warehousing tens of thousands of immigrants. Governments outside the European Union — those like Ukraina that want to join, or those like Morocco seeking good relations — agree to help fortify the borders and set up their own concentration camps. Many immigrants are tortured and beaten, denied contact with the outside world, denied legal help, and disappeared. Their families and friends might never know what happened to them. In Barcelona and dozens of other cities, unknown numbers of illegal people sit in the police commissary, for years, without ever seeing a lawyer or being allowed to contact the outside world. Many countries, such as Turkey and Iran, torture political refugees who are denied asylum in Europe and heartlessly shipped back. Some countries, such as China, do not allow refugees to be sent back. These people simply become wholly illegal. In progressive Nederland, Chinese refugees spend years locked up in immigrant prisons. If they are released, they are turned out onto the streets, homeless, not allowed to work or have a home, though sometimes squatters help them find a place to live. In the United States, immigrants who cannot be deported or who do not have any paper identity are imprisoned indefinitely. Every several years, their cases come briefly before an apathetic court which usually denies their release. There is no limit on how long they can be locked up, and generally the easiest solution is that they are kept behind bars until they die. They are illegal people.

In the past decade, a No Border movement had spread across the continent. Anarchists and other radicals worked together with immigrants to oppose “Fortress Europe.” In Nederland, activists broke into a detention center for unaccompanied immigrant children, contacting the prisoners there, making a documentary about their situation, and eventually shutting the center down. During other break-ins, Dutch activists managed to sneak some immigrants out. With chants of “No Border, No Nation, Stop Deportations!” activists in Germany hung banners and locked themselves down to the gates of detention centers there. Anarchists travelled to Spain’s

colonial territories in North Africa and protested the fortification of borders and the concentration camps in Morocco. When crossing the border back into Spain, they mobbed the checkpoint in a surprise move, allowing several immigrants to slip across in the confusion. In Italy, anarchists firebombed companies that profited off the construction or operation of the concentration camps, or companies involved in deportations. Actions like these occurred across Europe. On at least a dozen occasions, people from multiple countries organized No Border camps, coming together in a border region near major detention centers or along the routes immigrants used for crossing into the EU. They held workshops and strategy discussions, tried to build sympathy among locals for the immigrants, and often held actions on both sides of the border or outside the detention center. Sometimes they managed to temporarily open the border or enter the detention center to talk to the prisoners.

After centuries of gory, nationalistic wars, European radicals have a strong tradition of opposition to nationalism, though nationalism is on the rise again in the mainstream. Major political parties in every European country have begun speaking of national pride for the first time since the days of Hitler.

Interestingly, I noticed a strange sort of reverse nationalism among many European anarchists. They were not proud to be German, or Dutch, or Italian, or whatever, but proud *not* to be American, while still enjoying all the privileges of citizens of the empire. They may chafe at the notion, but the US is the best thing that has happened to Europe in terms of its self-image. The European Union is a powerful junior partner to the US within the military and economic processes of global imperialism. European governments hypocritically talk about human rights and moderate the worst excesses of the cowboy politics of the US. Such excesses are perhaps inherent to the role of imperial enforcer — one recalls that the British lacked their characteristic reserve when they had to engage in police action in India. At the end of the day, Europe is always there to supply peacekeeping troops and investments for whatever project the US has initiated; neither is the EU too timid to launch its own wars. The states of western Europe have been imperialist for longer than the US, and they are no less imperialist today despite their relative decline in military power, yet somehow they have cloaked themselves in an image of humanitarianism and innocence that European radicals often uphold, by pretending that imperialism is an American phenomenon.

It was so bad that other anarchists, upon learning that I was American, would quip that I was an imperialist, or ask if I liked Bush, as though their own government's practices were less imperialistic, or their own elected leader any better. And it was not uncommon to hear, from people who had never even been to my country, that we had no culture, just McDonalds and Starbucks. Most visiting Americans rushed to confirm the misconception, hoping to join the cool kids' club. With such an idea of culture, one got the impression that European radicals were not opposed to imperialism so much as nostalgic for the days of more refined imperialism under the British and French. And in fact anti-Americanism has long been a tool of the European Left, an easy populist substitute for anti-capitalism used by Communist and Socialist Parties who, from Greece to Portugal, had no intention of abolishing capitalism.

It was perhaps worst in Spain. I was constantly called a Yankee, or a *guiri* — their word for rich foreigner. In general, Spain had the audacity to consider itself a poor country, and the people felt a trifle oppressed by those wealthy northerners. There was, naturally, much more attention given to US imperialism than to Spanish imperialism, even though Spain practically invented colonialism, and Spanish corporations were currently devastating Latin America.

Meanwhile, the already pronounced Spanish xenophobia was exacerbated by the Catalan independentistas and their mistrust of foreign influences. This mistrust, in turn, was duly justified by the waves of northern squatters who flocked to Barcelona and scoffed at anything Catalan as “nationalistic.” The parents of many of the young Catalan anarchists and squatters had been prohibited from speaking Catalan under the Franco regime; moreover it was their first language, the language they spoke at home. Yet the unwillingness of foreign squatters to learn Catalan, their full agreement with Franco and much of the present day Spanish government that because Catalunya fell within the borders of the Spanish state the inhabitants should speak Castilian Spanish, would either force the movement to conduct its meetings and print its posters and newspapers in Spanish, a second language for most of the natives, or to exclude those foreigners who did not speak Catalan. This exclusion resulted in an English-speaking squatter ghetto in Barcelona, populated by the punks and travellers who were too timid or too lazy to integrate themselves and at least learn Spanish in order to participate in the movement, despite the cold shoulders they received upon arrival.

## The Neighborhood Tour

Every neighborhood in Barcelona seemed to have at least one resident historian, an old militant who collected newspaper articles and stories, flyers and posters from protests, to add to old archival materials and the memoirs of earlier generations. The veterans of the revolution and the long resistance against Franco were dying off, the gentrification of the city left no reminders of past struggles even as the new urban architecture facilitated greater social control. The surveillance cameras, the wider streets, the buildings without balconies, the enclosed parks, the dumpsters without wheels — these were all direct responses to us anarchists and rebels and our history of riots and sabotage, yet each change erased both the memory and the possibility of fighting. In Spain the isolation of the present was even more marked than in other democracies, because for the government to have legitimacy everyone had to accept the alibi of a disconnect between the fascist regime and the democratic one. That also required people not to connect present resistance with past resistance, because a continuity of resistance also suggested a continuity of oppression. Thus for the anarchists, for the survivors of fascism who have never stopped fighting, it was vital for the new generation to learn their history. Here and everywhere, history is a means of survival.

In Raval there were quite a few people who set themselves the task of documenting the long history of the struggle and keeping these memories alive. One older man gave walking tours of the neighborhood every year, on the anniversary of *La Semana Tragica*, the Tragic Week, when the people of Catalunya launched a general strike to protest a war against Morocco, and were brutally repressed, resulting in the artillery bombardment of several working class neighborhoods and the execution of several people, including the anarchist educator Francesc Ferrer i Guardia.

On Nou de la Rambla 12, a new hotel for the tourists stands where the Ateneu Llibertari Faros used to be, an important social center used by several anarchist groups over the years. At number 40 on the same street stood the police commissary which was assaulted on 28 July, 1909, during *La Semana Tragica*. In heavy fighting which left several workers and several police dead, the strikers stormed the commissary to free arrested comrades and seize weapons. They also defended barricades from police assault and attacked the nearby office of a military veterans organization that was mobilizing to help put down the strike. Josefa Prieto, the madame of a bordello and an important figure in the neighborhood, played a leading role in mobilizing people for the fighting. Raval is still the neighborhood of the putas and they have often been at the forefront in the present fight against gentrification, even though there are fewer connections these days between them and the anarchists.

Farther up, towards carrer de l'Hospital, at Junta de Comerç 19, was the office of Solidaridad Obrera. In 1910, the CNT was created here, to provide an anarcho-sindicalist organization for all of Spain and unite workers across the peninsula. This was largely in response to the official story that *La Semana Tragica* was a specifically Catalan nationalist uprising that had nothing to do with the rest of Spain. And just next door, at number 17, was the last home of Teresa Claramont,

a libertarian fighter from Sabadell, who struggled against capitalism her entire life, for which she was imprisoned in Montjuic in 1893 and later deported to London.

I don't think it's a coincidence that one of the few buildings with the same occupants then as now is the church building on Ronda de Sant Pau. A large seminary, it was one of the 55 Catholic buildings burned in 1909 as the people expressed their rage against the participation of the Church hierarchy in their daily oppression. Like most other burnt church buildings, it was rebuilt on an even larger scale. Just down the street, where today there's a school, were the offices of Germinal, an anarchist group that published *Tierra y Libertad*.

In between Reina Amalia and Ronda de Sant Pau, just below our squat, there's a park where the city's prison used to be. In 1904 Modelo was inaugurated and Cárcel Amalia was turned into the women's prison, though executions continued to happen here. The only reason there's a park here now is because in 1936 Mujeres Libres, the anarchy-feminist group, got together with the construction syndicate and started tearing the thing down, without waiting for any kind of decree, and without waiting for the CNT leadership to agree or for the congress to pass a resolution.

And at the bottom of Ronda de Sant Pau, at the intersection with Parallel, was a site for one of the most important barricades in 1909, 1936, and the other major strikes and insurrections in the first decades of the century. In 1936, the Wood Syndicate built and held this barricade. When the fascists tried to launch their coup, a detachment of troops marched down Parallel, trying to get to the port and relieve other soldiers there. They were blocked by this barricade, and the workers fought tooth and nail to turn them away. If they had lost and the fascist soldiers had made it to the port, it would have been much more difficult for the workers in Catalunya to defeat the fascist coup and launch their revolution.

On the other side of Parallel, there's a store called Bazar Regalo. It used to be the bar *Tranquilidad*, and it was an important anarchist hangout. Here the younger generation of anarchists in the CNT, like Durruti, Oliver, and Ascaso, won a long-running debate and decided to embark upon a new strategic course: going all the way for the revolution. Rather than engaging in petty politics and debating with liberals, they would start the *pistolero* phase of the movement, carrying out expropriations and seizing arms to supply the struggle and prepare for the insurrection. The tourguide opines that it was two currents in the anarchist movement that made the revolution possible in 1936: the young militants who were armed and prepared to fight the police and military in the streets, and the older anarchists who had long been creating alternatives and studying how to organize society themselves. "That's why," the neighborhood historian tells us proudly, "the revolution here was the only revolution where you had the trams running the next day. Because they already knew how to organize the whole society."

And just a little farther down on Parallel the power company building still stands. This used to be Barcelona's power plant, owned by a Canadian company. La Canadiense strike of January 1919 was a major episode in international labor history. The electricity workers with the CNT, with great social support, walked off the job and left the city mostly without electricity for three months. Our guide said it was the first strike to actually win the eight hour workday, spurring a number of similar victories in other countries — workers in Paris followed some months later; however in 1905 and 1906, workers in Bialystok and other parts of Poland had already won the eight hour workday, supported by bombthrowing anarchists who often assassinated repressive bosses and police.

At the end of the tour, after pointing out the place where the Barcelona delegation to the First International met in 1870, our tour guide thanks us and brings us back to the park where the alternative festival of the neighborhood is starting to pick up. Banners flutter in the air, a pirate radio station makes a live broadcast, and volunteers stand around a huge pot of paella, stirring it slowly over the fire.

# Surviving

Lutxo lived in the room next to the computer where I did my writing. Out on the balcony, over which I always looked when thinking of what to say, thoughts trailing off into the deep blue sky... on this balcony he kept a modest plant in a pot. “De El Forat,” he told me. Lutxo used to live near that occupied community garden, and the plant had lived in it. This was a squatter plant; it had enjoyed a brief life in the free soil of El Forat, and Lutxo had rescued it just before the bulldozers came. Shallow roots but deep relationships

I think we survive repression with the relationships we make — with the friends who help us endure our many evictions, our many transplantings, and the neighbors who shelter us. As I got to know the people of RuinAmalia better and found new friends, I realized I wouldn’t want to go back to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April to change a few trivial choices that would have kept me out of the way of the police, because then I would never have created all these friendships. And the more support that came in, the healthier I was and the more able to give something back to the movement in Barcelona. Ultimately, repression can backfire, as it brings people together, strengthens solidarity, and sharpens our desire to destroy this system. I got letters of encouragement from people I’d met in Ukraina, Romania, and Bulgaria; offers of help from Greece and France and far corners of the US. Anarchists in Nederland raised a great deal of money for me, and had me come speak about what was going on in Barcelona. I put together an English-language pamphlet about the systematic repression of the anarchist movements in Spain, Italy, and Greece — what Europol refers to ominously as the Mediterranean Triangle — to inform people in the US about the general situation.

In the US they couldn’t raise much money — the Green Scare was in full swing, and the dozen people facing decades in prison for charges of involvement with the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front needed all the help they could get. And generally the movement in the US did not have strong anarchist support groups or good fundraising capacities in place — instead these arose, or not, on an as-needed basis. But friends in the US created a support page on the internet, organized a day to call in protests to the Spanish Embassy, and got media attention that ran into the international press, forcing the Spanish government to moderate their accusations a little, because their claims of squatter terrorism were so exaggerated it was embarrassing for them.

Friends and family in the US also supported me emotionally, sending me letters, books, and music. It had been hard enough to go a year without listening to some of my dearest albums, and now I was sedentary again, and in need of uplifting songs. So they mailed me CDs: nostalgia-inducing Virginia bands like Dirt Pond and Strike Anywhere, the new albums by Defiance Ohio and Arcade Fire, classics like Tom Waits and Fugazi. My mom and dad sent me care packages with peanut butter or clean socks. For my birthday my brother mailed me Thomas Pynchon’s hefty *Against the Day*, a masterful book in which the aging author, as though making a departing rebuke on this horrible society we’ve made ourselves, follows the lives of bombthrowing anarchists and truth-seeking alchemists at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the dawn of the modern world.



Soon enough, Barcelona felt like home. Every two weeks I had to present myself at court and receive my stamp, but the intervening times were filled with so much vitality they eased much of the burden of that odious event. Every day the sounds of the street called to me through my open window, bouncing up the narrow walls of Reina Amalia and inviting me out to play. I still missed the US, of course. A friend, Cindy, came to RuinAmalia one day to make us all an American dinner with ingredients and recipes brought over from a trip home to her native Florida. When I walked in to see the table set with ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, root beer, easy cheese, and baco bits, I was swept with a wave of nostalgia so strong it convinced me that it is our stupidities and weaknesses that are most dear to us.

And then the veggie dogs, the baked beans, the potato salad, and the cole slaw came out, and we tucked in, some more enthusiastically than others. The Catalonians all refused to drink the root beer. They said it smelled like medicine. They treated the jar of baco bits more like a maraca than a condiment, which is probably for the best. Ah, but then there was the easy cheese. It was approached quizzically, like an object from outer space, and the braver few sprayed some on the corner of their plates — in fact, it was way over here in Barcelona that I had my first taste of easy cheese, and I squirmed ironically from the minor horror of it. But by the end of the evening, Xaveliño, who strikes one as the Galician equivalent of a redneck, was guzzling it straight from the can. My terror and perverse pleasure at this collision of cultures reached its climax a couple days later when I caught Marie, the French woman who lives here, a Parisian no less, sucking pensively on the bottled cheese while browsing the refrigerator. And once again I was overcome with homesickness as I watched one of globalization's more amusing episodes, but it was comforting to see how parts of home will follow you wherever you go, and sometimes home can be more foreign than a strange land.

Dissabte, 9 Juny

A collection of anti-gentrification activists, squatters, and Zapatista solidarity groups held the third annual football tournament for humanity and against neoliberalism, in a park in the Barceloneta neighborhood. There were 24 teams, and I got to play on the El Forat/RuinAmalia team. In a tickling parody, the games were broadcast live on the local pirate radio station, and the announcers awarded us with that characteristic wail, “¡Gooooooooooooooooooooo!” every time someone scored. When they weren't narrating the play, they were talking about the Zapatistas, or about squatting, or about how the city government had declared that the public places of Barceloneta were not for the neighbors but for the tourists. Many neighbors came by and watched the games. In between matches the local kids took to the field and played a while. The tourists walked past curiously on their way to the beach, probably unaware they were being disparaged. It was a genuinely popular event. And fun as hell. Our team, which included some of the older neighbors of El Forat whom I recognized from the documentary, made it into the quarter-finals. We scored ten goals and only conceded one in the first two matches. Sweet! I played defense and Leon, from RuinAmalia, was goalie. We kept our end locked down tight, while Lutxo and Angel swept up the wings. Later, sunburned and sidelined, I wondered how anyone could surrender to the televised reality when life lived directly is such a joyous thing...

A week later, the next chapter in Barcelona's ongoing story of resistance unfolded. From the beginning of that year, in addition to accelerating the pace of evictions, the police had begun to employ the *kessel*, a tactic they learned from their German counterparts. Whenever there was a radical protest, they surrounded it on all sides, and did not let it move. The participants had to wait in the street for hours before finally being released. The cops had first used this tactic

against a permitted protest for housing rights. The organizers opened a lawsuit. Meanwhile, other people throughout the city began organizing major protests against the police repression. The first of these occurred on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June. Thousands of people convened on Plaça Universitat and began marching towards the top of Las Ramblas. After two blocks, the police surrounded them and detained the entire march, same as before. We waited until evening before they finally let us out.

Another significant episode was a squatters' protest. It was smaller and contained a more radical crowd, so the police attacked it with a new non-lethal weapon: kubotans. These are small, handheld spikes with rounded tips so they bruise rather than break the skin. With quick jabs to the midsection, police can cause a good deal of pain and force a crowd back. With batons, the police must adopt a posture of photogenic brutality as they swing the big sticks over their heads. But with the little kubotan, they could brutalize the crowd with underhanded jabs, and the cameras a few meters away would not have noticed. Except that one squatter, upon being jabbed, instinctively responded by punching the cop in the face, breaking the bastard's nose. The cop fell to the pavement, kubotan still in hand, as the media vultures flocked around him. The pictures of the groaning cop with the strange little spike in his hand made it into the news, and soon the police had to answer for this weapon they were not legally permitted to use. The squatters, meanwhile, plastered the city's walls with posters about the kubotan and police violence in general.

Later in the year, people organized a second major anti-repression protest. Around this time the police had lost the lawsuit filed against them for blocking a permitted protest, but a victory in the courts was meaningless unless we could win in the streets. Again, thousands of people gathered on Plaça Universitat, and as before, the police blocked us off just at the top of Las Ramblas. It looked like we would have to wait there for hours. Curious crowds gathered on the other side of the police lines — neighbors, tourists, activists who had not come to the protest but heard about what was happening. People on the outside began to throw bottles of water and bags of food over the heads of the cops to the people trapped on the inside. We cheered and got the folks on the outside to chant with us and hassle the police. The solidarity grew as the crowd swelled. In one moment, people on the inside gathered up a banner and threw it over the cops' heads. People on the outside caught it and unfurled it.

Enraged, the cops reacted in the way they were more accustomed, charging and preparing to beat them. But these were just normal people. You could hear the entire city suck in its breath and raise its fist. The people now holding the banner were not an isolated group. There were hundreds at their backs, and at their backs thousands more. There were no longer radicals and citizens. Everyone became a potential subversive. The charging cops pulled back. If they beat these people, the entire city might fight back, and the pigs would be decimated. Solidarity had jumped over the wall of repression and spread beyond the capability of the authorities to contain it. I asked someone how to chant, in Catalan: "give up, we have you surrounded!" And it was true. Soon the police lines withdrew, and we were free to go. After that day the police were noticeably more hesitant to use the *kessel* tactic. As far as I could tell, they only used it against protests they knew intended to get out of hand, rather than against every single radical protest that was organized.

Before this victory had played out, we received another piece of good news. On 21 June the defendants of 25J, the four remaining people facing charges for the protests in solidarity with the Italian anarchists two years before, were acquitted of all charges. It was the first day of summer

— a warm, beautiful, long day with a waxing moon; the pinnacle of what still might be a good year yet.

# A Walk in the Graveyard

Diumenge, 26 Agost

L was back in Barcelona, this time to stay. Love, like all things in life, is harder with a prison sentence hanging over your head, but my days were so much richer when I could share them with her. Finally, we had more than just a week at a time to get to know each other. One Sunday we decided to further our tradition of geeky anarchist history tourism, and try to find Durruti's grave up on Montjuic. It's a long, hot walk up the mountain. There's hundreds of tourists, most of them packed two high in buses, or riding the cable car. Seems we're the only ones walking. Past the fortress of Montjuic, the traffic dies down and the tourists disappear. There's only a few old men, along one bend of the road, who have parked their lawn chairs in the shade, to lounge the day away. The hideous Olympic stadium sprawls out below us. I wonder what used to be there, what got torn down so humanity could express its progressing perfection in the one-tenth of a second some singleminded athlete shaved off the record for jumping a line of hurdles as the whole world leaned towards their television sets, bound together in vicarious unity as the next commercial break began.

The cemetery appears like some abandoned city rising above the palm trees. The dead are sealed into little cubicles, row upon row of tombs set into tall grim buildings of piled stone. So much like apartment buildings, it leads me to joke that the squatters should announce that for every new eviction inflicted upon them, they would evict some famous dead rich person. There are no Sunday mourners; the City of the Dead is abandoned. Winding roads go between the apartments and bus stops wait for a phantom bus. We enter through some forbidden opening around back, and set off down the winding rows, searching for Durruti's grave.

Buenaventura Durruti was an oldtime Spanish anarchist. A militant in the CNT labor union, he pushed the organization to organize workers' insurrections, or support them when they broke out spontaneously. For these activities he served time in prison. He was also instrumental in defeating an attempt by the reformist syndicalists who had gravitated to positions of power to take over the CNT.

When the fascists launched their coup, he and his comrades seized the Barcelona military barracks, and he lost a close friend in the fighting, Francisco Ascaso. Durruti was one of the leading anarchists who was seduced by the idea of cooperating with the political parties in an antifascist united front. As the CNT began to play politics — a role in which it was inept next to the communists and the Catalan republicans — Durruti left to form the "Iron Column," a volunteer anarchist militia that pushed back the fascists on the Aragon front and supported peasant collectivization. The same year they went to Madrid and plunged into the heaviest areas of fighting. Durruti was killed in battle, tragically early in the Civil War. His funeral procession in Barcelona, that ultimately interred him at Montjuic, brought out tens of thousands of people. There's a photo of the funeral hanging in the CNT bookstore on Joaquin Costa street.

That bookstore was one of the places that often hosted memorial events. Veterans of the Civil War and the antifascist guerrilla struggle, that lasted from the 40s all the way until the end of

the dictatorship, would hobble in and sit at the front, doubled with age. One of their number would give a presentation about the resistance group they had fought in – crossing the Pyrenees with weapons from France, living in caves, fed by villagers, or in a safehouse in the city, robbing banks, clashing with police, plotting to kill Franco. Younger folks would pose probing questions, trying to understand what it was like, and other old-timers would ask, did you fight alongside so-and-so and perhaps they would begin talking about some of the maquis whom they had known as friends. In the US the Spanish Civil War can hardly be mentioned without romanticism or apathy. The most fascinating thing for me in Catalunya was seeing that it's just history, directly connected with the present, and that its veterans are still in the struggle. And they talk about the old times like our fathers or grandfathers might trade stories about their minor parts in World War II.

At a book presentation at Espai Obert, I learned about one resistance fighter who almost survived to bridge the gap between the dictatorship and the democracy: Salvador Puig Antich, a Catalan anarchist. Born in Barcelona in 1948, well after the fascists had taken over, he threw himself into the struggle after the May 1968 uprisings in France. He joined an urban guerrilla group, el Movimiento de Liberación Ibérico, MIL, that continued the fight against the Francoist regime up until the very end. Mostly, he acted as a driver during the bank robberies the group carried out to raise money for the group's publications and for supporting striking workers and prisoners. In 1973, not long before Franco's death, a MIL member was arrested and tortured into confessing the group's secret meeting locations. Police caught Salvador and Xavier Garriga. During the arrest, Puig Antich was involved in a shootout that killed a member of the Guardia Civil – the military police. On 2 March, 1974, he was sentenced by a military tribunal and executed by garrote in a cell in Modelo. His execution caused worldwide protests, and was commemorated in "Assassins," a set of lithographies by Catalan painter Antoni Tapies.

The torturing still goes on today. Immigrants and other poor people are regularly abused by the cops, guards, and judges. Anarchists in prison still face death for their activities – on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June we held a protest outside of Modelo to commemorate the third anniversary of the "suicide" of Jose Antonio Cano Verdejo, a friend of some of those organizing the protest. The difference is that now these things happen in a sea of amnesia. Each time, people don't believe something like that could actually happen. We have to fight to bring the story to light, to convince people we're not making it up, and a few people finally believe and shake their heads at the tragedy. But in a week they forget, and the next time it happens they have to be convinced all over again that such things are a part of their world.

Earlier, people had other sets of illusions, but knew their world was one of torture and executions. On both sides many were aware that if those being tortured and executed had half a chance, they would destroy the world of their jailers. It was a social war. Today, it is a perpetual humiliation. The tortured and abused, and all of us alienated and exploited, wonder who is doing this to us, and why, time after time. We seek justice, redress, the hollow promise of a thorough investigation, anything to get back to the normality that exists only within our heads.

## Homage to Barcelona

Sometimes it seems like all Europe is heating up this summer. After Sarkozy won the elections in France, another tide of protests and riots swept across that country, at times uniting the youth in the banlieues who had rioted in 2005 with the anarchists, students, and workers who had rioted against the CPE, the labor deregulation, in 2006. There were more major riots in Denmark, with blockades erected once more in the streets of København, after authorities made moves to demolish an old building on the outskirts of Christiania, clearly a practice move in preparation for the real thing, their plan to evict the “free state” of Christiania itself. The Love Kills group from Craiova put on a feminist festival, and they and other anarchists from Romania organized a black bloc to attack the fascists who were protesting the Gay Pride parade in București. A number of groups in Ukraine and Russia, including my friends in Kyiv, organized a No Border camp near Uzhgorod, in the Carpathian part of Ukraine, and three hundred people from seventeen countries participated.

Some time later, antifascists from Ukraine and Russia converged on Kyiv to take action against a planned nazi rally. In the train station they found and beat up an infamous Russian nazi blogger. Little did they know, the blogger was under surveillance by Ukrainian intelligence agents, and they assigned a tail to follow the antifascists, who went around the city beating up a few other known boneheads. The antifas noticed the spy following them making phone calls, and — thinking he was another nazi — beat him up too and stole his cellphone. The hunt was on. A few of the dozen antifascists escaped, but most were rounded up in the following hours by cops and intelligence agents. They were beaten badly, and subsequently tortured. The authorities released the Russians, not wanting to create a diplomatic incident, but charged a few of the Ukrainians. Fortunately, thanks to a strong support campaign and good fundraising, they got off with light sentences.

In Greece, there were massive riots in a dozen prisons throughout the country, starting on 23 April, the same day I was arrested. The riots began in solidarity with the anarchist bankrobber Giannis Dimitrakis, after he had been beaten by prison guards. Anarchists on the street also protested in solidarity outside the prison. Dimitrakis was a member of Thieves in Black, an anarchist group that had stolen hundreds of thousands of euros. In 2005, three Greek anarchists arrested in connection with several petrol-bombings spent over a year in prison as suspected members of Thieves in Black before they were released and declared innocent. But in early 2006, Dimitrakis was apprehended during a shootout directly after the robbery of the Central Bank in Athena by the Thieves in Black. The other members escaped, and Dimitrakis refused to name them. Petros, from Athena, wrote me about the situation:

“The last two weeks the situation has gone a bit wild in athens (in thessaloniki too but in smaller scale). Three police stations in athens were attacked (the one in exarchia where all the police cars and motorbikes were completely burned and cocktails were thrown at the entrance, the second one in the area of Nea Ionia where the police cars

and the station were shot with a machine gun as well as a grenade was thrown and the third in the area of Zografou where a few cocktails caused minor damages to police cars), cocktails were also thrown in the headquarters of the riot police and a cop who was guarding the president of the superior court was attacked and removed of his equipment. A police station was also attacked in thessaloniki. At the same time, as a response from inside, an insurrection started in the prison of giannis dimitrakis as well as to other prisons in greece with the prisoners taking over the prisons for 3–4 days . Of course the media and the ministry of public order didn't know what to do or say...but all the newspapers, tv channels etc. are openly talking about city guerrillas and refer to exarchia as “an area taken over by anarchists, and where the government has no control of, or as a state within a state”.

And in Thessaloniki around 20 August, African immigrants and anarchists rioted for several nights after police killed a Nigerian immigrant and the media reported the immigrant had killed himself.

The protests against the G8 in Heiligendamm, Germany, was for many anti-capitalists the big event of the summer. People had been preparing for two years. The previous year, the G8 — the Group of 8 conference of the eight leading states and their lackeys — met in St. Petersburg, protected from protest by the might of the Russian police state, which preventively arrested a good third of the activists, including a friend from Kyiv. This year, they had to meet in a more democratic country, so they convened the summit in an isolated resort that could easily be locked down by the security forces.

Some of the protest organizers started writing on the internet that their riots might be the start of the revolution, and I winced a little at the naiveté and eurocentrism. Nonetheless the protests had the attention of the movements — and police forces — throughout Europe. We all waited to see how the famed organizational skills of the German anticapitalists would pair off against the intimidating competence of the German police. The preparation was marked by a high degree of tactical seriousness and complexity. I fear this came with a sacrifice of emphasis on strategy. Granted, organizers certainly debated strategy, but in the end they were afraid to try anything new. Parts of the movement seem addicted to counterprotests, and though other options, such as decentralized protest plans, were discussed, the focus was always on disrupting the G8 conference. There is nothing wrong with this goal, but Germany in particular offered several exciting possibilities for action beyond simply reacting to a summit.

The summit itself could not be shut down, with all the police and military there protecting it, although protestors could ruin their party and make opposition to the world's leaders obvious. And this success would boost the morale in the movement and generate energy most likely to get funneled into the next mass mobilization. From what I witnessed, in a few places the protest organizing drained from the local movements, and in other places new groups were formed and new people were involved and initiated. More than once — in Greece and Spain — I had visiting Germans tell me not to go to some other event — a talk on the prison system, an antirepression meeting, a social center meeting — even that those other events should not have been scheduled at those times, because the G8 info-event happening at the same time was more important.

There were some more serious problems with G8 outreach, though thankfully the Dissent Network — the main anti-authoritarian grouping taking part in the counterprotest — had the grace to put some of these criticisms on their website. One came from a Palestinian grassroots activist

who had been approached by organizers of the G8 infotour, and who took offense from the reportback written by the European delegation about the tour to Israel/Palestine. “After a lengthy account of meetings with Israeli groups, praising their deep understanding for veganism and animal rights, you start to voice your opinions about the Palestinian struggle,” said the criticism from the Anti-Apartheid Wall campaign. In the reportback the G8 activists claimed they were unable to find anarchist, communist, and grassroots groups in Palestine, even though they had met with a grassroots group — the one authoring the criticism — and there were quite a few communist groups in Palestine. The reportback wrote off the Palestinian resistance as institutional, ignoring the very basis of the intifada, which was grassroots and spontaneous. With a very eurocentric attitude, the anti-G8 activists claimed that the Palestinian resistance did not have a global analysis, apparently because they did not prioritize the same global issues like the G8 summit.

The delegation apparently also criticized the Palestinians for refusing to work with Israeli groups who do not recognize the right of return for Palestinian refugees or who support Israeli settlements on the West Bank. The criticism ended by saying the infotour delegates from Europe came to teach and not to listen, and rebuked: “Your report is an extreme example of the degree to which colonialism and racism is not only a system of institutions that exploit, expel and occupy all over the world but how deeply it is rooted within the consciousness of many that pretend to combat it.” The criticism noted in passing that anarchism has never been strong in Palestine, and I’m sure that as long as its primary representatives continue to hold the eurocentric and neocolonial outlooks that we tolerate in our movement, it never will be.

Despite some serious problems, the counterprotest model has proven several times that when we organize with a high dose of creativity and dedication, we can still overcome the police in limited moments, capture the attention of the world, and give thousands of new people their first taste of directly fighting back. But one wonders what future weaknesses such a limited model is building into the movement. More than once, when we have managed to tear the gates down or push past the police, we stand there, mouths open, hesitating, because we cannot imagine going forward, carrying our attack to the elites themselves. If this is our primary model for struggle, it fosters a dependence on the powerful to plan events to which we respond, and a preference for fighting the police rather than the elites or the social order they are protecting.

Let the NGOs march outside of G8 meetings begging for scraps and complying with the riot police — what if groups across Europe had conferred and debated and coordinated with the same dedication and fervor not for a mass mobilization in Heiligendamm but for decentralized actions in every town and city where anticapitalists existed? The police ability to repress and control this wave of protests would be stretched thin, while the actions would enter directly into the consciousness of a great many more people — and without the reinterpretation of the mass media. The information campaign leading up to it would educate people not on why the G8 is bad and how it can be protested but on why capitalism is bad and how folks can fight it or create alternatives locally. The sense of global solidarity that one central protest can bring would still be built up during the preparation as people held conferences like those that occurred in France, Poland, and Germany leading up to the June protests. These conferences would enable people from different cities to share ideas on effective and innovative actions, pool resources, and debate strategies — but without having to agree on one centralized strategy.

Unless people took this approach seriously, it would end up like most other anarchist calls for decentralized waves of action — something small is done by the couple groups who put out the call and a few other especially bold cities, but most other groups are hesitant to take the



initiative and organize an action because they don't see other people doing the same thing. There is no momentum for them to join and take strength from, as there is in a mass mobilization. But surely the organizers who prepared so thoroughly for the massive Heiligendamm protests could think up solutions to this inertia, for example by holding preparatory conferences where everyone could get together and breathe in that intoxicating sense of impending action, or an organizational structure that secured commitments from groups in different cities to carry out actions and that provided a central communication point for them to share ideas and resources. They could even nurture a friendly competitive spirit by giving stolen champagne bottles to the collectives that organized The Most Creative Event, The Biggest Reclaim the Streets Action, The Greatest Act of Expropriation, The Best Autonomous Space, The Most Cop Cars Set On Fire, etc.

Another possibility would have been to let the politicians have their resort town to discuss global capitalism, and instead organize a mass mobilization in another city — it would be crucial that there were a large local anarchist presence, perhaps in Hamburg or Berlin — to Abolish Capitalism for a Week within a certain neighborhood, to resurrect that most potent of anarchist strategies and declare a commune, an autonomous zone. With a year of preparation talking to neighbors, learning about people's desires and boundaries, finding space for the hordes of out-of-towners to fit in without upsetting the locals, and then holding a mobilization of ten thousand anarchists; such an action would have near impunity to destroy banks and tear down all the advertising, rob from and even evict the chain stores that the locals don't like, provide DIY entertainment, free health care, free food — this would mean that some anarchists, perhaps those coming from the Mediterranean, would have to deal with cooking meat in addition to the usual vegan fare, as people probably would not appreciate anarchy if it also meant the imposition of veganism. Thousands of police would still have to go to the G8 summit site as a necessary security expenditure, both to satisfy their habitual paranoia and to control the counterprotest of the progressives and socialists. Thus there would be fewer police to control the real action, and it would be on terrain chosen by the anarchists, not terrain chosen by police experts for its defensive qualities. Another advantage is that the skills we would develop in such a protest would be much more useful in this unfolding revolution than the range of skills needed in the typical counterprotest. And ideally the results would last much longer.

Hopefully one day we'll see more creative approaches like this, but for now we're stuck with the counterprotests, and the results aren't all that bad. When successful, these protests do spread images of discontent and ungovernability, they can provide another opportunity for burned-out old-timers to see the collective strength of the movement, and they give newcomers an opportunity for combat and an initiation ritual, a meaningful experience. In the end the protestors at Heiligendam did quite well, about as well as could be expected, given that they faced off against the focused might of the German police. Despite the pacifying efforts of the big NGOs, on the major day of protest several thousand people took part in what the police described as some of the worst rioting in Germany in years.

It turns out, however, the police account was largely exaggerated, and the cops had utilized their pull in the media to justify their infamously paranoid and heavy handed security preparations. They wanted to show that their harsh measures were desperately needed, because these were dangerous rioters who injured hundreds of the brave cops. Apparently other segments in the elite were not at all pleased by how this maneuver set the tone for and overshadowed the coming summit just to satisfy the public relations interests of the police: instead of symbolic handshakes sealing bullshit deals on poverty and greenhouse gas reduction, the front page showed

the riots. Consequently, in the following weeks the corporate media included a number of denunciations of police exaggerations, showing how contradictions among the elite can benefit and be exploited by radicals.

Nonetheless, the riots were not altogether small, and they provided a satisfying opportunity for those participating in them. Many people who had worked on organizing the protests felt this day was not the best for a riot, raising the question of how to construct strategy without controlling the participation of all the protestors. The following day, unfortunately, was an agricultural protest organized with a largely pacifist character, so the cops were able to sweep up nearly everyone whom they thought was involved with the previous day's festivities, while the demo organizers yelled at people trying to prevent the arrests, because self-defense and solidarity were "provoking the police." From there on out it got better, and the organizers of the immigrant demo the next day helped keep the march tight and prevented the police from arresting anyone, which is especially good considering the crowd included a number of undocumented people.

The rest of the week was filled with hours-long meetings, reconnaissance, planning, and the building of affinity groups. The protestors worked out ways to balance the strategy so that people were able to choose from a range of confrontation levels without endangering or suppressing the other people involved. Affinity groups that were blocking a road, throwing stones at police, carrying out hit and run attacks with molotovs, or trying to sneak past the police and get closer to the conference site all had different needs and operated best in different situations. By talking it out, they could organize those different situations together, across the different zones where the actions would take place, and decide which approaches were complementary, which were not, and how much space each group needed from the others.

Ten to fifteen thousand people cooperated in this way in an attempt to seal off and physically shut down the conference. Using blockades, lockdowns, barriers, and roving attacks, they repeatedly blocked the roads leading to the conference site, preventing journalists, translators and service workers from entering, and preventing delegates from leaving. A car with the Russian delegation was damaged, and the Japanese Prime Minister's family was unable to take a nice little outing along the coast. For a short while the sea route was even closed off when some activists came in on rubber boats.

In Spain it was also an active summer. Multiple acts of sabotage and arsons occurred across the peninsula, targeting the construction of the TAV — the new highspeed train line that the state was extending into Catalunya and the Basque country. The night of 8 July, two police vans were torched in Terrassa, Barcelona, in solidarity with Gabriel Pombo Da Silva, an anarchist prisoner who had escaped from Spain and was now locked up in Germany. The media covered up the incident but a group calling itself the Célula Xosé Tarrío claimed responsibility in a communique distributed at infopoints in Barcelona. The same night in Manresa, the courthouse was attacked with paintbombs in solidarity with Juan Sorroche, an Italian anarchist whom the Spanish police had helped to arrest on trumped up accusations of belonging to a terrorist group. His friend Nuria had only just been released on bail after months in Soto Real, a high security prison in Madrid. In Navarra in July about a dozen people were arrested and given heavy charges for resisting the eviction and demolition of a village — carried out in the name of progress, no doubt. Somebody hacked the website of the Ministry of Housing, so the only thing on the site was a popular anti-gentrification slogan. On 13 August, masked saboteurs in Euskadi, the Basque country, attacked police vehicles, courthouses, and banks as part of the ongoing independence struggle.

After the surprise evictions at Miquel Angel in Barcelona, a wave of vandalism and sabotage targeted real estate companies. One protest was left to roam freely through the streets, perhaps because it occurred in Sants, a neighborhood known for its strong popular support for the squatters, the anarchists, and the leftist Catalan independentistas. The march was able to rub right up against one of the real estate offices in the neighborhood. People in masks soon began re-decorating the exterior. Some men in business suits who apparently worked there actually came running to try to stop it, yelling “Nooooooo!” like in a movie. Naturally they got a faceful of spraypaint. In the middle of July in Sants, several activists locked themselves to the top of a crane in a construction site for the TAV, temporarily halting construction. They were protesting against the devastating construction project, and also against the impending eviction of Can Vies, a ten-year-old squat bordering the site.

The movement here still had teeth, and it was in for the long haul. With an extra dose of perseverance, people kept printing their newspapers, broadcasting their radio shows, organizing cabarets and book discussions, and when their spaces got evicted, they recovered what they could and found another place to occupy. There were, after all, 150,000 vacant dwellings in Barcelona, and though local capital was rapidly mummifying the city and the government and police were expanding the legal basis of their dictatorial powers, the movement would not run out of room any time soon. However the energy did seem to dwindle. The state was playing a game of exhaustion and gradually winning. Where a few years before the slogan was “un desalojo, una ocupación,” one eviction, one occupation, the reality was now perhaps two evictions, one occupation. Just in the few months since I had come, the number of squatted social centers in the city had declined noticeably. By July, the Info Usurpa, the weekly bulletin listing all the squat events in the city, shrank from three to two pages. A few years ago, there had been 800 squats in the city; at the beginning of this year, nearly 300; and at the end of the year only about 200 would remain. There were about one hundred new occupations that year, which was impressive, but not enough to outweigh the nearly 200 evictions that occurred in the same period.

A few of the better known, well established squats were shut down in this time. CSO Toxics and La Opera in Llobregat, Dynamo in Salut, Miquel Angel in Sants, Miles de Vivienda in Barceloneta, Can Massol in the hills outside Barcelona. A wave of evictions had also swept Madrid in recent months, claiming la Ramona, la Perrera, el Milano, la Facultad Okupada y Autogestionada, until only a few squatted social centers remained, and some of these, such as La Alarma, were given eviction orders.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, exactly one year after I arrived in Europe, and a couple weeks after I would have returned to the States if my life were still my own, RuinAmalia got its eviction orders. We had one month to remove our things, and the police were authorized to evict in the first two weeks of October. Of course, the police would probably come whenever they chose, and might prefer not to come when we expected it; so after the first month there was little certainty as to how much more time we had. The courts were closed in August, but starting in September there was a growing risk. Maybe they would try to surprise us with an early eviction, or maybe they would wait to see what resistance we mounted in October, and then just sit back and wait for us to tire of the state of siege and relax our guard. In the meantime, we had to go on with living, to keep the social center open for the summer, and try to build more support. I had gotten involved in Kilombo, the library, and even though we only had a few months left we started putting out flyers and getting more people to come by and check out our books before it was time to put them in boxes and find the library a new home.

Finding myself a new home wouldn't be as easy. I missed Virginia. There was no substitute for long, flowing conversations or just comfortable silence with childhood friends. And the smell of the air on a warm summer night there was like nothing else. But I couldn't waste years of my life waiting. I was developing a soft spot for the city I could not leave, and a fierce affinity for the people I had found in trying times. Together we could beat this frame-up, this attempt at repression, and push the struggle forward. In the end, home is where you make a stand. Everything else is just real estate.

Some people tried to convince me not to go to unpermitted protests or take part in illegal actions, fearing that I would be arrested again, that the 30,000 euros would be lost, and I would be sent back to prison. They thought that, after RuinAmalia, I should let other people break open a new house and wait a few weeks for the chance of a surprise eviction to diminish before moving in. But life itself is illegal if it refuses the boundaries imposed by governments and markets. One of the strengths of the movement in Barcelona was its defiant illegality, and it was not possible to fully participate without taking part in that illegality. It was enough that every two weeks I had to get a new stamp in my provisional liberty card — which I had to carry around with me at all times; that I had to wait for trial for a year, two years, maybe more; and that to leave the EU visa territory I needed permission from the judge, and even then it wasn't certain if the border guards would let me back in; and that the state was threatening me with three to six years in prison. I could not also neutralize myself, for however long I had to wait, and play the part of a good citizen — or rather, a good illegal resident — until the state deigned to absolve me.

In the end I decided I would rather be free in prison than imprisoned on the streets, and my friends accepted that. For now, my home was here, with them, and we would fight side by side — against evictions, against court cases, against the daily pressures of capitalism. As soon as that winter it would become apparent that the authorities had failed to break the back of the movement. We would have a new house in a new neighborhood, and a community garden; the number of squats in the city would be growing again, and many of the new social centers would evidence a reborn tenacity. The entire city would stir with sympathy for striking bus drivers and an anticapitalist bank robber, and a financial crisis would undermine people's faith in the system. But we didn't know any of this yet. This future would only be ours if we kept reaching for it.

In the meantime, I wrapped myself in warm memories from the year gone by. I had not found any simple answers to the questions of overcoming isolation, surviving repression, building solidarity, and spreading revolutionary ideas and actions; but I had not expected any. It was more appropriate that I was sewing myself a patchwork quilt of stories and experiences. Scenes of black-clad youth lounging outside a social center — their social center — which they will go to war to defend. Babies and wizened elders playing together on an autonomous campground during the 74<sup>th</sup> year of an anarchist gathering. Brave, secret scenes in the East, of clandestine actions behind the backs of the fascists and the secret police. The tock tock of a lone hammer before the Greek Parliament. Turning soil in the gentle rain on a mountain farm in Italy. Walls covered in subversive posters. Letters of encouragement from people I hardly knew, held up against the glass in Modelo prison. A protest banner thrown over the heads of bewildered riot police, into the eager hands of a crowd swelling forward to rescue us.

It's another blue, Mediterranean day as I settle down in my chair at the top of RuinAmalia to decide whether I'm going to pen a letter to a friend locked up in Maryland, or to start typing out my first article in Spanish, for an anarchist newspaper here. And there's a flyer to draft with Juan, to alert the neighborhood of the impending eviction, and link our struggle to their rising rents.

The library needs cleaning, I have a design for a stencil I want to finish up, and some research to do for a book, and on and on. There are plenty of little tasks to distract me from thinking of impossible futures and rewards that seem too far away to be reached in any lifetime I can imagine.

I have a friend who tells me that to find hope we need the courage to be hopeless. It's a quote from somewhere. And I look back at the little things. The to-do list in front of me, the blue sweep of sky and a tight horizon of crooked roofs forested with TV antennas; behind them the shadows of construction cranes leering over this ugly, wonderful city. There are a dozen little projects I dream about starting whenever I get back to the States, and a dozen more projects begging for my attention here. As much as my thoughts are drawn to the uncertain future, what I am searching for is all around me, just below the surface. In the silence you can hear it: a heartbeat rooted so strongly in the moment it has the force to survive a thousand moments more. It is the sound of persistence and dignity, of strength and vulnerability; the sound of life. One day we will see what lies on the other side of the prison walls, but first we must find comfort in the journey.

Because whatever the outcome of these trials the repression will never end, not in any timeline that can fit in a single book, and the travels too will go on forever, into still unexplored corners of a world that is seismically reinventing itself, tumbling down our prisons and our utopias alike.

THE END.

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Peter Gelderloos  
To Get to the Other Side  
A journey through Europe and its anarchist movements  
2007

Retrieved on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 from [togettotheotherside.org](http://togettotheotherside.org)  
Written in 2007, although not published until 2009

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