

Notes on partisanship

A New Form Of Militancy

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I

To be *polarizé* can mean to be obsessed with someone or something; more generally, it refers to the convergence of a field of energies or forces around a single point. When in English one speaks of a “polarizing” figure or event, it indicates the production of irreconcilable differences between groups or parties. Here, the term evokes a process in which a body is affected by a form-of-life in such a way as to take on a charge that orients it in a specific manner: it is attracted by certain bodies, repulsed by others.

Note from Tiqqun’s *Introduction to Civil War*, p. 227–8

We must surmount our rage and disgust, we must have them shared, so as to elevate and enlarge our action as our morale.

René Char, *Leaves of Hypnos* (100)

On May 28th, at around 10 PM, the world records our first recent victory against the police: during an uprising unleashed by Derek Chauvin’s murder of George Floyd, the third precinct is set alight, a signal fire that sees the seemingly-remote irruption of rage that seized Minneapolis resonate across the nation. From Atlanta to Portland, centuries of suffering and abuse split through the already-strained seams of the social order. A wall in Madison, WI reads “YOU HAVE STOLEN MORE THAN WE COULD EVER LOOT.”

Hostilities run tense, and the counterinsurgency seems to deploy itself, coasting on centuries of psychosocial conditioning – a nation built on chattel slavery and settler colonialism, one that relies on their ritual reassertion every day, is primed for their semi-autonomous deployment at a moment’s notice. From the inside, the abolitionist substratum that prepared the ground for the insurrections is pushed aside, replaced by a menagerie of liberal figureheads and professional organizers. Protestors are warned about “outside agitators,” property damage is attributed to anarchists, or, interchangeably, COINTELPRO-style infiltrators. Peace movements, from “#8cantwait” to a staged photoshoot between actors styled after the BPP and a police force, are invented out of whole cloth to displace calls for the abolition of the police – “abolish” yields “dismantle” which fades to a whimper with “defund” and “reallocate.” Questions of “optics” and respectability file down the fangs and claws of a movement.

But the sheer brutality of the police ensures this strategy of liberal recuperation cannot hold forever. Protestors mistake a line of cops kneeling to fire teargas as an act of solidarity. Cheering and cries of relief – “they’re kneeling, they’re kneeling!” – give way to screams of “Gas! Gas!” as the crowd scatters.¹ Tactics that have been deployed for decades are brought to bear on unsuspecting crowds, who learn the ins and outs of kettling, catch-and-release, and chemical weaponry – while international allies offer remedies for teargas, de-arresting tactics, and designs for shield walls. Even the media leviathan can’t keep up the act for long – reporters are arrested on live TV, others express their shock that the riot police are firing at them, and another camera captures the moment its lens is shattered by a rubber bullet. Multiple photographers and reporters are partially blinded by “nonlethal” munitions. Repression spreads into suburbia, with tear gas floating

¹ < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Rhfx9UzRQ0> >

under doors and through windows into hundreds, if not thousands, of homes across the country. Fleeing protestors are housed in basements and interior rooms while the National Lawyer's Guild struggles to respond – its representatives are targeted as well.

As protests stretch on for months and police show no sign of breaking from their habits of extrajudicial murder, All Cops Are Bastards becomes a national rallying cry. Online recuperation via black squares and hashtags cannot prevent a general hatred of the police from seeping into the consciousnesses of millions. Footage of police abuse at protests goes viral despite its notable absence from the media, from police lines pinning and gassing a crowd on the side of a highway to peaceful protestors being fired on. The president mobilizes riot cops to gas an otherwise-docile demonstration in Washington, DC – for a photo opportunity.

Empire tends to eliminate its *hostis* with the use of auxiliaries, among them Kyle Rittenhouse, or simply state executions, like the outright death squad that gunned down Michael Reinhoehl outside his home. It permeates our efforts to get free, with the self-styled police of the CHAZ murdering two black teenagers, and Portland's ongoing uprising coalescing around a squat that quickly gained its own security force. These small-scale reenactments of police violence are recycled through right-wing media channels to justify the continued funding and popular support of the police.²

In the early hours of Christmas day, just under seven months after the third precinct falls, a homemade explosive device detonates in downtown Nashville. At exactly 6:30 AM, an RV is vaporized by the bomb it carries, the shockwave followed by shrapnel that shreds through a commercial building and an AT&T telecommunications hub, shutting down telecoms capabilities for the city's airport and cutting 911 access for thousands. The blast is preceded by a recorded warning, carefully planned to ensure no one is killed.

It is followed by absolute silence. No group claims responsibility for the attack, and no motive is readily available. No manifesto is uploaded following the remote detonation. Despite the best efforts of former FBI heads and anonymous sources, no one can make sense of the event. Rewards for further information creep higher and higher, and a chill sets in.

For a moment, it seems we may be on the precipice of an upswing in the tempo of violence and escalation that crosscuts our political and social fabric. Everything is blanketed by the knowledge that nothing will ever, ever be the same again. At the height of our alienation, following a contested election and in the middle of a pandemic, in the capital of the virus' hardest-hit state in the world, it dawns on us: no return to normal will be possible. And we welcome the coming years of change, we flourish in the break between the old and the new-to-come. These years will be terrifying, but regardless, this is *our time* – a dehiscent moment where the seams begin to split, when we claw our way out of the carcass of this world.

12-26-2020

The emptiness of our lives calls out for a politics with teeth, capable of sharpening its propositions on the daily miseries we share and launching attacks from the nothingness we occupy. This document attempts to offer notes on how one might be forged.

² For a full analysis of the movement from a similar perspective, see Idris Robinson's "How It Might Should Be Done," published in full at <<https://illwilleditions.com/how-it-might-should-be-done/>>

II

Only Lenin, as a professional revolutionary of the world civil war, went even further and turned the real enemy into the absolute enemy. Clausewitz spoke of total war, but still presupposed the regularity of an existing statehood. He could not yet imagine the state as an instrument of a party, and a party that commanded the state at all. With the absolutism of the party, the partisan had also become absolute and was elevated to the bearer of absolute enmity.

Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*, p. 76–77

Autonomia [...] is also the autonomy of militants from the figure of the militant, from the *partinini*, and from the logic of the groupuscule, from a conception of action always deferred – deferred until later in existence. Contrary to what the sociologizing half wits-always hungry for profitable reductions may lead one to believe, the remarkable fact here is not the affirmation of “new subjects,” whether political, social, or productive, young people, women, the unemployed, or homosexuals, but rather their violent, practical, active desubjectivation, the rejection and betrayal of the role that has been assigned to them as subjects. What the different becomings of Autonomia have in common is their call for a movement of separation from society, from the whole. This secession is not the assertion of a static difference, of an essential alterity, a new entry on the balance sheet of identities managed by Empire, but a flight, a line of flight.

Tiqqun, *This Is Not A Program*, p. 54–55

It is common practice to trace the origins of the partisan to the French invasions of Spain in 1808 and 1813, which saw small bands of tellurian and autochthonous units disrupt and undercut the French army, bleeding it to death by a thousand cuts. The life of the partisan is traced to its maximum height in 1917, with the Leninist integration of the partisan with the party and the party with the state. This history is incorrect, not in its reporting, but in its conclusions. *Partisanship both precedes and exceeds the party*, just as war precedes politics. The capture of the partisan by the party-form was only another capture of the war machine by the state apparatus, with the party-form granted retrocausal responsibility for the existence of partisanship.

Unsurprisingly Carl Schmitt, ever the fascist, is quick to associate partisanship with a homeland, a social order that the partisan defends or a people they represent. He claims this defensive character is enough to prevent a partisan exercise from declaring absolute war on its enemy.³ Similarly, Che Guevara said of guerrilla warfare: “Hit and run, wait, lie in ambush, again hit and run, and thus repeatedly, without giving any rest to the enemy. There is in all of this, it would appear, a negative quality, an attitude of retreat, of avoiding frontal fights.”⁴ We agree that partisanship, and its tactical deployment through guerrilla warfare, has a fundamentally negative

³ “Another limit of enmity follows from the partisan’s tellurian character. He defends a piece of land with which he has an autochthonous relationship. His basic position remains defensive despite the increased agility of his tactics. [...] With such a fundamentally defensive stance comes the fundamental limitation of enmity. The real enemy is not declared the absolute enemy, nor the ultimate enemy of humanity in general.” C. Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan* p. 76

⁴ C. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* p. 11

character. This is not to say that partisanship is limited to negation, but instead to recognize that it is a form of *offensive flight*, always in motion, encircling its targets while remaining fluid, seeking the lowest points on the terrain and locating itself in the subterranean, the motile and mobile territory that exceeds the map. Guevara reassures readers that guerrilla warfare is but one stage in a linear progression, giving way naturally to a binary opposition between parties to a conflict – we recognize that this is a long-dead dream. Whether by attempting to outcompete Empire on its own infinitely-mapped and regulated territory, or reverting to its language of policing and order, the movements of the past decade have never stopped reminding us that the only way out is found in going under. It is necessary to embrace the negative aspect of guerrilla warfare, to turn our exclusion into a point of attack.⁵

Schmitt is a scholar of the political, and he operates on the level of politics, a game of possession and enclosure, mapping and annihilation – and it is from this field, with its reduced and dissected understanding of war, that he draws his model of partisanship. Just as Clausewitz could not imagine a unification of the party and the state that would unite the partisan and the state-form, Schmitt cannot comprehend a partisanship without recourse to the party-form.

This is because he, like Clausewitz, cannot grasp the dynamic relationship of war and politics. Schmitt is a theorist of the state, and it follows that he accepts Clausewitz’s formulation that war is the continuation of politics by other means. This establishes the paranoid scene of politics as the basis of all common life. We move in the opposite direction: war precedes politics, and the form it takes determines the character of any given use of force. “We reproach this world not for going to war too ferociously, nor for trying to prevent it by all means; we only reproach it for reducing war *to its most empty and worthless forms*.”⁶ Empire’s war is one of absolute annihilation, an unending conquest of its *hostis*, the figure of the terrorist, black, queer, disabled, exploited, or unexploitable – in short, anything that it cannot neutralize and internalize. It is the unending conquest of an outside that is not allowed to exist.

Empire’s war is one whose fronts cut through each one of us: one of brutal elimination supplemented by dispossession, waged by the entire population against all forms of excess and ungovernable life. It reaches down into the depths of the social order, forming a lymphatic system that accumulates and purges waste. This is the root of the war on the homeless, the hatred of the dispossessed, the great confinements and die-offs, of mass incarceration and police executions:

As a rule, social homogeneity is a precarious form, at the mercy of violence and even of internal dissent. It forms spontaneously in the play of productive organization, but must constantly be protected from the various unruly elements that do not benefit from production, or not enough to suit them, or simply, that cannot tolerate the checks that homogeneity imposes on unrest. In such conditions, the protection of homogeneity lies in its recourse to imperative elements that are capable of obliterating the various unruly forces or bringing them under the control of order. [...]

⁵ “The fort really was surrounded, is besieged by what still surrounds it, the common beyond and beneath – before and before – enclosure. The surround antagonizes the laager in its midst while disturbing that facts on the ground with some outlaw planning. Our task is the self-defense of the surround in the face of repeated, targeted dispossessions through the settler’s armed incursion. And while acquisitive violence occasions this self-defense, it is recourse to self-possession in the face of dispossession (recourse, in other words, to politics) that represents the real danger. Politics is an ongoing attack on the common – the general and generative antagonism – from within the surround.” F. Moten and S. Harney, “Politics Surrounded,” from *The Undercommons*

⁶ Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War* p. 59

Violence, excess, delirium, madness characterize heterogeneous elements to varying degrees: active, as persons or mobs, they result from breaking the laws of social homogeneity. [...] Heterogeneous reality is that of a force or shock. It presents itself as a charge, as a value, passing from one object to another in a more or less abstract fashion, almost as if the change were taking place not in the world of objects but only in the judgments of the subject.⁷

While Bataille locates the heterogeneous as fundamentally internal to society, we understand the opposition between homogeneous social functioning and excess, between Empire and *hostis*, as one of absolute interiority versus absolute exteriority. Because Empire's war of pacification is one that seeks to reduce its *hostis* to absolute non-existence, it grafts our status of absolute enemy onto our bodies via an ethical designation: we are *evil, unnatural, unsalvageable, worthless, inassimilable, monstrous*. What unites us is not some mirrored position relative to the interior of the social order, but rather that we're all being killed by the same self-perpetuating process of ethical imperatives. For the sake of explanation, this surplus violence can be traced back to the ontological break that conferred blackness, fungibility, object-status to chattel slaves, the doctrine of *terra nullius* and conquest that reduced indigenous people to soulless and killable animals, the obsessions of reproductivity and homogeneous social functioning that marked queer and gender-variant people as waste matter, and countless other exclusions that mark the ever-shifting bounds of civil society.

This form of violence can be traced back to the founding of the State, whose ability to designate populations as criminal and naturalize its own use of force grants it a unique role in the transformation and diffusion of warfare. This is fundamentally a question of politics – and under Empire, the “lawful violence” inherent to the political becomes universalized, ripped from its historical conditions and projected not only across space but indefinitely forward and backwards in time as well.

Deleuze and Guattari explain:

State overcoding is precisely this structural violence that defines the law, “police” violence and not the violence of war. There is lawful violence wherever violence contributes to the creation of that which it is used against, or as Marx says, wherever capture contributes to the creation of that which it captures. This is very different from criminal violence. It is also why, *in contradistinction to* primitive violence, State or lawful violence always seems to presuppose itself, for it preexists its own use: the State can in this way say that violence is “primal,” that it is simply a natural phenomenon the responsibility for which does not lie with the State, which uses violence only against the violent, against “criminals” – against primitives, against nomads – in order that peace may reign.⁸

This relation between the State and its exterior allows us to better advance a study of politics, and the ground it operates on. Our fundamental thesis is derived from Schmitt, whose most notable achievements demonstrate that his understanding of the political, with all the velvet-gloved brutality it supports, cannot be doubted. “The core of the political is not enmity per se,

⁷ G. Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,” from *Visions of Excess* p. 139–143

⁸ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* p. 445

but the distinction between friend and enemy, and presupposes both friend and enemy.”⁹ To elaborate: politics is essentially a medium of ethical designations, acts of naming and defining, a war of designation and containment that pits politics against that which has never stopped evading its apparatus of capture.

This war is comprised of two sides. One fights to preserve the present state of things, waging an unending war of imperial pacification, with no beginning or end. It abstracts itself outside of time, claiming to be superior to that which undoes it. The other is made up of motion, of refusal and excess. This is the core of the partisan project: always remaining in tension between the exterior and interior, hanging onto the edge of the pack, advancing the decay of the frontiers of this world as they stretch and tear under their own extension. To borrow a phrase from Fred Moten, we are partisans of the *surround*, the mobile space that precedes enclosure, that which cannot be captured without first being killed.¹⁰ We take refuge with the knowledge that everything that survives does so in opposition to the creeping death-machine of settlement.

III

Imperial war has neither a beginning nor an end, it is a permanent process of pacification. The essential aspects of its methods and principles have been known for fifty years. They were developed in the wars of decolonization during which the oppressive state apparatus underwent a decisive change. From then on the enemy was no longer an isolable entity, a foreign nation, or a determined class; it was somewhere lying in ambush within the population, with no visible attributes. If need be, it was the population itself, the population as insurgent force. The configuration of hostilities specific to the Imaginary Party thus immediately revealed itself in the guise of guerilla warfare, of partisan war.

Tiqqun, *This Is Not A Program*, p. 90–91

Insurrections ripen under ice, like a mass desire to trample on all that has trodden us down, a sudden burst of dignity after decades of humiliation, a will to put an abrupt end to all that we have suffered for no reason. [...] Contrary to what leftists and rulers like to think, it is not revolutionaries who make revolutions, it is revolutions that make revolutionaries.

The Invisible Committee, *As Beautiful as an Impure Insurrection*

While the politicians rely on the fine-tuned manipulation of economies of coercion and complacency to maintain their order, we find our base medium of coordination and circulation in the form-of-life, the intimate ethical polarization of bare life, the pain and complicity of our exclusion from the political and the commonness it creates between us. *Polarization* should not be understood as a gravitation to two binary poles, but instead the adoption of a charge that orients

⁹ C. Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan* p. 75

¹⁰ This is the closest we come to meeting Schmitt’s tellurian characteristic – engaging in what Moten and Harney call “the self-defense of the surround”

a body around certain bodies and repulses it from others.¹¹ It does not proceed from a political tract or party line, but from the recognition that we are excluded and alienated, and that must change. The description of Zapatismo offered by Subcomandante Marcos provides an example: “Zapatismo poses the question: ‘What is it that has excluded me?’ ‘What is it that has isolated me?’ ...In each place the response is different. Zapatismo simply states the question and stipulates that the response is plural.”¹²

Elsewhere, in a speech titled *Until Death If Necessary*, his reflection on the spread in reach of Zapatismo demonstrates that ethical polarization spreads by resonance, by mutual recognition in struggle:

“We are traveling all over the country and we are finding many people who are fighting and who until now have fought alone, who have resisted plundering, who have resisted repression, who have resisted each of the injustices that each one of us sees, we were alone and now we are learning to say, Compañero, y Compañera, with meaning, not as a slogan, but knowing that we are already together” – with that contact, and that complicity, revealing to us that we are all common.¹³

This model of politicization places us outside the traditional bounds of the party-form and locates us squarely in the domain of the *partisan*. To repeat: partisanship precedes the party, which has long been subsumed by the state-form. Take, for example, Donald Parkinson’s assertion that “if we understood communism to be a project of humanity talking *conscious* control of its own conditions of existence, then placing hope in the *unconscious* spontaneous energy of mass actions is not sufficient... As partisans of communism who believe that we have a duty to fight for our ideas, it is necessary that we develop an analysis of our situation, determine what is needed to further advance the struggle for communism, develop a plan of action based on this analysis, and put it into practice.”

Who are “we?” He elaborates:

“To ask the strategic question of ‘*what is to be done?*’, there needs to be a collective ‘we’ that can act as a subject... The ‘party’ is simply this organized collectivity that allows a ‘we’ to form and act in a decisive way.”¹⁴

Donald fails to recognize that the strength of the partisan can only ever be imitated by a bounded revolutionary subject, that locking partisanship within a strictly defined *we*, especially one that focuses on statecraft-in-miniature and electoralism,¹⁵ is guaranteed to eviscerate the radical potential it carries.

Partisanship draws its effectiveness and impact from its irreducibility to a single organization – which is why Empire will always invent a killable enemy if it cannot produce one. This was at the root of the PCI’s attempted infiltration and manipulation of Autonomia, and it underlies the ongoing attempts to reduce riots, the Gilets Jaunes, black blocs, and antifascist groups to unitary bodies. This is likewise why the only communist parties in the United States are infested

¹¹ See the definition of *polarizé* provided on p. 227–8 of Tiqqun’s *Introduction to Civil War*, included at the beginning of this text

¹² Sup. Marcos, *Our Word Is Our Weapon*

¹³ Sup. Marcos, *Until death if it is needed*, translated by Ewatomí Abara and available at <<https://intheredautumn.wordpress.com/2020/11/08/until-death-if-it-is-needed-supmarcos/>>

¹⁴ D. Parkinson, *Without A Party, We Have Nothing*

¹⁵ For more details on Donald’s “insurgent electoralism” see <<https://cosmonaut.blog/2018/10/17/from-workers-party-to-workers-republic/>>

with moles and bureaucratic wormrot, the festering wounds of a decades-long assault on the American left.

Donald's particular iteration of the party, with its inseparable attachment to bourgeois electoralism, is almost a caricature of modern "socialist" projects. His self-prostrating brand of neo-Kautskyism seems to offer itself up for annihilation, with its prioritization of liberal-democratic pluralism, democracy, and the proliferation of the committee, assembly, and debate floor spelling untold regimes of bureaucratization. Armed struggle is framed defensively – *if necessary*, we will have armed the proletariat, *if necessary*, we will overturn the status quo by force, because it is *likely* that the military, the swollen bourgeoisie with its internal ranks of career politicians and Pentagon chairs, will not take kindly to being disbanded and expropriated, respectively. Donald entertainingly advocates for an "alternative culture" to be established, one painstakingly created to foster party unity and class consciousness. He recognizes that anarchist subcultures have been far more durable and effective at fostering dissent and dissatisfaction than the self-parodies that are the United States' notable communist parties – but complains that anarchists, possibly due to "cultural barriers" (which his party's "hiking club" would surely overcome), or our deficit regarding a "working class orientation, level of centralization, institutionalization, and access to resources" that the party would provide. It is notable that out of these criticisms, two are dubious (it's unclear what Donald means by "cultural barriers," and the vast, overwhelming majority of anarchists in the United States, especially the street medics, bloc organizers, and antifascists, are working class). The rest have *absolutely nothing to do with forming a "culture"* – Donald's trust that better funding, centralization, institutionalization, explicit adherence to a political program would foster an "alternative culture" is clarified by his description of what the party offers. "A workers party would bring a level of professionalization and discipline to such activities, as well as incorporating them into a larger political project with democratic accountability to a mass movement, moving beyond the limits of current left 'counterculture'." This is what the anarchists have been missing all along – uniforms, discipline, and suffocating ties to a labyrinth of committees and assemblies that keep them from feeding people or fighting outright fascists without receiving permission from the proper channels ahead of time.

Partisanship, irregular warfare against Empire, is best attuned to the negation of the current order – not its management or adjustment. If his goal is to better manage the production and distribution of commodities, to attune the economy to the needs of the people by passing a "minimum program," Donald is aiming for the renovation of the present state of things, not its complete destruction. "How can such a machine, the economy itself, be de-activated, relegated and backgrounded? I believe revolutionary thought has not reached a clearing or threshold where the question can be addressed. But at least some radical thinkers understand that there can be no true vision of a better, fairer economy, even a socialist one; it's becoming clear, finally, that economy equals capitalism and vice versa."¹⁶ Our odds are not favorable enough to trust electoral bids and bourgeois parties to get us free – ignoring for the moment the idiocy inherent in believing liberal democracy offers a safe haven for any idea, no matter how "dangerous" – and to stop short of demanding *everything* guarantees our politics falls short of the force required to shift the foundations of this world.

¹⁶ Robert Hurley, *Communist Ontology* <<https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Communist-Ontology-Robert-Hurley.pdf>>

The same formula has held true for a century: when the partisan has been overtaken by the party, and the party by the state, partisanship has been reduced to yet another captured military apparatus, its war machines transformed into instruments of state violence. And on the opposite hand, some of the most notable partisan efforts, responsible for incredible successes, began outside the bounds of Communist parties – for example: “In 1940, Georges Guingouin, the ‘first French resistance fighter,’ started with nothing other than the certainty of his refusal of the Nazi occupation. At that time, to the Communist Party, he was nothing but a ‘madman living in the woods,’ until there were 20,000 madmen living in the woods, and Limoges was liberated.”¹⁷ Russell Maroon Shoatz provides examples in the black radical tradition, stretching from 17th century maroonage into the present day, with localized resistance in Suriname, Jamaica, Haiti, and elsewhere capable of folding in on itself and out into its environments proving far more durable than an isolable and killable party.

His study leads with the example of Suriname, where escaped slaves fought a 150-year guerrilla war against their slavers beginning in the 17th century, with their descendants still remaining autonomous today, four centuries after the birth of their struggle.¹⁸ He concludes that the various groups succeeded and persisted “because the Maroons’ decentralized formations prevented the Dutch from concentrating their superior resources against any one centralized leadership,” and that their survival over hundreds of years can be linked to “their refusal to allow themselves to be subjected by any broad centralizing forces” – both antifragile organizational benefits that democratic centralism cannot hope to provide, especially in the Kautskyist format Donald is partial to, with its focus on public-facing United Front tactics and defensive framing of armed struggle.¹⁹

Here Shoatz discusses Haiti, juxtaposing the decentralized and secretive *vodun* societies against the monolithic and hierarchical military-states of rulers ranging from Desallines to “Papa Doc” Duvalier:

[T]he decentralized hydra forces never veered from their objectives of winning as much freedom from servitude and oppression as possible. From the pre-revolutionary times of Mackandal, up through the 1791–1804 Haitian revolutionary war, and even down to our time, they’ve continued to struggle towards those ends. And it’s highly instructive to know that in addition to fighting the French during their revolution, they were also under attack by Toussaint’s dragon forces, who

¹⁷ The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*

¹⁸ “Over a 150 year period, the various Maroon communities of Suriname would wage a guerrilla war with the Dutch and English slavers to remain free. Today in Suriname their direct descendants still occupy the areas their ancestors fought on, and most of them have never suffered under slavery – even before the U.S. signed its own Declaration of Independence in 1776.” R. Maroon Shoatz, *The Dragon and the Hydra: a historical study of organizational methods*

¹⁹ This is also applicable to typical vanguardist democratic centralism: “[A] sober analysis of that history [of democratic centralism] points to a struggle for supremacy – not only over the bourgeois ruling class, but also against the working class and all other oppressed people; against any and all formations either of the latter pull together that escape their control. [...] history has shown that such ruthless methods are effective: if the objectives of those who used the DC methods were simply to seize power, then their record during the 20th century was impressive. It has proved itself as brutally efficient and capable of outdoing anything the bourgeois forces are capable of. Nevertheless, in the end those who gained power using DC method have always ended up using it to defeat the aspirations of the workers and oppressed, and subsequently install the users of it as a new oppressive ruling class.” R. Maroon Shoatz, *The Dragon and the Hydra: a historical study of organizational methods*

displayed hatred and fear of everything from their refusal to relinquish their maroon/decentralized organizational formations, to their practice of their traditional *Vodun* (Voodoo) spiritual systems, the latter which did a great deal to inspire their soldiers to martyr themselves for the cause of freedom... after being pushed to the side after the French were driven out, the decentralized hydra elements were forced to – again – go underground and eventually morph into semi-secret *Vodun* societies that until today remain a little recognized or understood autonomous element amongst the oppressed Haitians.²⁰

Every maroon effort Shoatz studies draws its successes from the same characteristics: prioritizing their origins in a specific social fabric and promoting a self-propelled and diffuse set of tactics. Cells were made more mobile and effective by decentralizing decision-making, and even the drawbacks – such as many maroon groups in Suriname taking out contracts with the Dutch to hunt down other escapees – are counterbalanced by the overall decentralization. This lent every instance of rebellion an incredible durability: each movement lasted for centuries, and, true to the image of the hydra Shoatz assigns them, proved capable of surviving brutal repression.

Domination perpetuates itself, power gravitates towards normative structures, management is self sustaining and propagating. This means the solution to the problems of the party and the state apparatus, contrary to the solution offered by CLR James by way of Shoatz,²¹ does not lie in the expansion of the current party-form or the state apparatus. Neither are compatible with freedom, as the European project's slow dissolution of the state into the diffuse forms of control offered by Empire has proven definitively. Instead, it is necessary to redefine the party, abandoning the definition offered by bourgeois parliamentarism in favor of one that reflects the reality of civil war, in which no disinterested party exists. We are already in the party, that of the Spectacle or the Imaginary, social homogeneity or irruptive heterogeneous elements. We locate our power in the fact of social exclusion, the radically other, the inassimilable – and we recognise that is what must expand. Empire's hostis must grow capable of encircling it, like barbarians at the gates, partisans of the surround, we must increase the intensity and reach of our circulation, "...a million earthworms / tunnelling under this structure / till it falls"²²

This is not a binary conflict against a set enemy, because power is diffuse and productive – instead we propose a dual struggle against the imperial war of pacification that excludes, atomizes, and contains us, and against the environment, the medium our exclusion occurs within, the plane of alienation and infinite reduction which we call Empire.

A similar sentiment animated *Autonomia*: as the authors of *Tiqun* explain, "autonomy" referred not to the autonomy of subjects *as such*, of workers *as workers*, women *as mothers*, the homeless *as dispossessed* – instead, it was an active refusal, a betrayal of the roles granted to them. *Autonomia* meant a refusal of the position of the outcast, a weaponization of exclusion

²⁰ R. Maroon Shoatz, *The Dragon and the Hydra: a historical study of organizational methods* <<https://4struggle.org/2010/07/23/the-dragon-and-the-hydra-a-historical-study-of-organizational-methods/>>

²¹ "The party as we know it must disappear. It is disappearing. It will disappear as the state will disappear. The whole laboring population becomes the state. That is the disappearance of the state. It can have no other meaning. It withers away by expanding to such a degree that it is transformed into its opposite. And the party does the same... for if the party does not wither away, the state never will" CLR James, referenced by R. Maroon Shoatz, *The Dragon and the Hydra: a historical study of organizational methods*

²² Diane di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters* <<https://illwilleditions.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Di-Prima-Revolutionary-Letters.pdf>>

that requires we move outside of our narrowly-defined sites of confinement. We can locate similar calls for *flight from society* in the politics of Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson's Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, or Third World Gay Liberation, even as recent as Bash Back!, whose politics were built around a fundamental negation of this world. What prevented STAR and TWGL from advancing an offensive strategy was the problem of coalition: both relied on, but were largely ignored by, the GLF, which essentially cut ties with them with the GAA split and the GLF's later spiral. Bash Back! faced a different problem – one of coordination and identification of strategy and tactics. While it took a decentralized and relatively autonomous form, and left many of its actions to claim themselves, Bash Back! never looked beyond the surface of negation into what a genuine flight from the social order would look like. Its most spectacular actions targeted high-visibility and suitably damaging institutions with sabotage and interruption, but an understanding of power – that logistic, cybernetic, diffuse phenomenon that is equally productive as it is coercive – allowed the rage that animated Bash Back! to filter down into dead-end performative oppositions instead of sabotage, disruption, and blockage of substantial organs of civil society.

What unites these irruptions is not a political program or set of distinct principles, but a common refusal of the death-machine of civil society in favor of flight. Each carries the germinal tissue of a new movement, one that refuses the placative identities of Empire, that recognizes that there is no freedom or glory in the general subjection to subjectivity. Partisanship refuses to be confined to a single being, it prefers the hydra's proliferating points of attack to the dragon's singular offensive thrust. And it necessarily refuses to enter the trap of politics, it recognizes that the self-possessed individual finds its origins in conquest – it means freedom from atomization and enclosure in a carefully-molded and micro-adjusted subject.

Our partisanship is deployed through diffuse guerrilla warfare, a strategy of quietly distributed foci, a free-wheeling and functionally anonymous war effort with its origin in every flight from a point of capture and exploitation. Its activities are never limited to war – the underside of partisanship lies in the territory, in its social connectivity and the power of the partisan's communication. Power is *productive*, it generates new subjectivities and cloaks capture in liberation. Social control operates through a diffuse panopticism, creating an environment of constant surveillance and self-surveillance that requires every enunciation to be individualized and individualizing. Interactions are pre-planned, conversations are scripted, there's the feeling that nothing is allowed to go unsaid, but the only permissible statements remain within the bounds of our atomization. All of this seems to drown out any hope of community in the harsh light of criticism and coercion. But the fundamental condition that panoptic social control relies on and reproduces – our atomization – is also its point of failure. "All communication participates in suicide, in crime" – friendship and complicity, which always carry a political charge, are found in communication that lacerates us, quiet sub-surface exchanges that makes us vulnerable and foster a *shared criminality* among us. This is inseparable from our emphasis on ethical polarization, and reflects a foundational characteristic of diffuse guerrilla warfare: it often speaks silently, not reducible to a voice, but an *ethics*, a *how*. "War acts were anonymous, that is, signed with fake names, a different one each time, in any case, unattributable, soluble only in the sea of Autonomia. They were like so many marks etched in the half-light, and as such forming a denser and more formidable offensive than the armed propaganda campaigns of combatant organizations. Every act signed itself, claimed responsibility for itself through its particular *how*, through its specific meaning in situation, allowing instantly to discern the extreme-right attack, the state massacre of subver-

sive activities. This strategy, although never articulated by Autonomia, is based on the sense that **not only is there no longer a revolutionary subject, but that it is the *non-subject itself that has become revolutionary, that is to say, effective against Empire.***²³ We advance a dual strategy of irruptive action and functional invisibility, a paranoia-inducing encirclement of the cybernetically self-adjusting machinery of Empire. When we make ourselves known it is always anonymously, we speak polyvocally and univocally, a trick learned from the militants of Autonomia and Subcomandante Marcos alike.

This partisan exercise with no party recognizes that insurrections die the moment they are led, but equally that the conditions for insurrection are not found in some universal trajectory towards communism. “Spontaneity” has always been a tongue-in-cheek joke, one that reveals nothing but the irrelevance of those who crow about it. The recent uprisings from Minneapolis to Atlanta were not “spontaneous,” they were built for decades by a primarily-Black substratum of abolitionists whose extensive experience and deep-set fury were finally unleashed, and who continue to fight even as the national news moves on. We cannot wait for the coming insurrection to save us – we have to fight tooth and nail to ensure the rumbling, latent rage, almost palpable, is not delivered into the hands of “peace movements,” politicians, handlers, or conciliatory measures.

Above all else: stillness is death. Stay mobile, never settle, make no demands, have no leaders, stay masked up, break cameras, keep snitches out, pay close attention to community defense and patch vulnerabilities, do your research on your enemies, and fight a war of attrition. Never kneel, never give in when confronted with the false image of a “peace movement” or compromise. Forget how to negotiate – this is not a dialogue, it is a war, and you are already on your back foot. No encampment or sedentary “autonomous zone” will be free of the creeping (and often fairly unashamed) people’s police, the anarchist cops, the watchful eyes of decentralized streaming and surveillance that will spell prison for any number of us.

IV

In enmity the partisan without rights seeks his justice. In it he finds the meaning of the cause and the meaning of justice, when the shell of protection and obedience which he has hitherto inhabited breaks, or the web of norms of legality from which he could previously expect justice and legal protection is torn apart. Then the conventional game ends.

Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan* p. 74–5

Ningún orden social se suicida.

La Hora de los Hornos

We are already in a state of total war. Empire’s fronts and frontiers cut through each of us. Our lives are animated and undone by this conflict that exceeds us, that precedes us, that we are cast into and forced to survive. We’ve watched friends give in to a general alienation, pretending their disengagement, complacency, or cowardice are reasonable decisions that place them above

²³ Tiqqun, *This Is Not A Program* p. 85, bolding mine

judgement. Everyone wants to be a spectator in a game that demands our participation. An important reminder: “The ‘power of arms’ does not imply, as the militarists believe, absolute power, because absolute power is the power-knowledge that reunifies social practices.”²⁴ The fantasy of a constant, unending partisanship, of moving out to the woods and declaring an armed struggle, is unlikely to overcome centuries of alienation and subjugation – but still, it is necessary to find ways to be *with and for* what exceeds what we are *in and against*. Remember Schmitt’s disenchanting complaint: “No one suspected what the unleashing of irregular warfare would mean. No one considered what the victory of the civilian over the soldier would mean if one day the citizen put on the uniform while the partisan took it off to continue the fight without it.”²⁵ – as those who take off the uniform to continue the fight without it, the extent of our striking force is defined by our community, by our support and vital attachment to a subsocial body that exceeds us.

We’ve long recognized that it’s impossible to be neutral in a civil war – instead, we chart our escape routes by way of a negative engagement, an offensive withdrawal. “War can no longer be discounted as an isolable moment of our existence, a moment of decisive confrontation; from now on *our very existence, every aspect of it, is war.*”²⁶

We seek to make our territories ungovernable, to split the fragile seams of social order, and to evade capture, with the understanding that “getting out is already achieved, or else it will never be.”²⁷ And in doing so, we ally ourselves with that which escaped precapitalist despotic regimes, that capital chased through primitive accumulation and into the present, where it continues to evade reappropriation: communism.²⁸

The world has been straining at its mutilated and sutured seams for decades, if not centuries. It is time we recognize the past decade of diffuse insurrections for what it really contains: not isolated instances of rebellion, but the wounds that punctuate the death of the old world in the springing forth of the new. Everywhere a dehiscent communism begins to unfold – has never stopped unfolding. Our task is to bring this polyvocal multiplicity of irruptions to bear on the present state of things, devising new tactics and organizational strategies that match the new forms of sovereignty that our enemies would use to destroy us. We *are* the weapons we seek, our reach is defined by the extent of our friendships, our community, the love and rage we carry – the secret is really to begin.

We speak of a new war,
a new war of *partisans*. With neither front nor
uniform, with neither army nor decisive battle.
A war whose focii concentrate themselves away
from the connected flows, while still remaining
plugged into them.
We speak of a completely latent war. That *has time*.
Of a war of *position*.

²⁴ R. Curcio and A. Franceschini, *Gocce di Sole nella Città degli Spettri*, cited in Tiqqun’s *This Is Not A Program*

²⁵ C. Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan* p. 74

²⁶ Tiqqun, *This Is Not A Program*, p. 67

²⁷ G. Deleuze, *Dialogues II*

²⁸ “I call ‘communism’ the real movement that elaborates, everywhere and at every moment, civil war.” Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War*, p. 63

That is waged here where we are.
In the name of no one.
In the name of our own existence,
which has no name.

Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War*, p. 203–4

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Robin Peignot
Notes on partisanship
A New Form Of Militancy
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