

Destination Anarchy!

Every Step Is an Obstacle

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I find myself in the courtyard of the School of Fine Arts in Athens, Greece. It's May 25, 2011, a hot summer day. A five-day anarchist and anti-authoritarian festival starts in six hours and I am scrambling to prepare all the small details I have in mind. I'm working alone.

I walk across the campus to bring an electrician from one stage to the other. In Spain, people have been on the streets for ten days now, after 75 years of silence. They are sending us signals of revolt, bringing the flame of liberation from the Arab countries to European land. We are just setting up for our festival: sound systems for three stages and two areas for public discussions and lectures; there is a theater stage, a book fair area, and workshop areas. We are about 30 people from two affinity groups constructing an area for 12,000 people. We are acting like a Spartan army (totally paranoid ideas about the amazing abilities of a small group of determined fighters). The mind is a spaceship. People travel to other planets during the summer nights for thousands of years now. We are on our way to anarchy! Sometimes it seems far away; sometimes it is suddenly all around us.

This same afternoon, there is an assembly behind the Acropolis for people hoping to bring the flame from Spain to Greece. For a year now, a small weekly anarchist assembly has met in Syntagma Square in front of the Parliament to talk about the crises. At the new assembly this afternoon, people decide to go and camp in Syntagma following the calls for action coming from Spain, Tunisia, and Egypt. They publish a call for others to join them.

We can do an incredible amount of logistical work to prepare a space for people, but if the spirit of revolt draws them somewhere else, the important thing is to be there! We can spend our whole lives building a theoretical argument or an ideological position or an infrastructure for the movement—but when a revolt is taking place, we have to be ready to abandon what keeps us apart and find a way to meet each other, to spread beneficial ideas and revolutionary practices to those in rebellion.

What appeared that day was a tropical storm, an ocean arising in front of our eyes, vast and wild. 100,000 people gathered suddenly around the parliament, shouting the classic anarchist slogan against democracy, "We Want to Burn, We Want to Burn the Parliament, this Bordello!" Nobody was at the festival for the afternoon lectures; everybody was at Syntagma. More than 8000 people arrived late at night for the concerts and the techno-trance stage. The crowd was in a frenzy, sharing an unfamiliar and wild enthusiasm.

We went to camp at Syntagma with Void Network. We announced this in the weekly anarchist assembly “For the Self-Organization of the Society,” which we had been participating in for three years already. Some of the groups refused to come to Syntagma—they called it petit bourgeois, they kept a distance from it, just watching. Other anarchist, autonomous, and anti-authoritarian groups and individuals stayed at Syntagma all summer. We stayed there too, spreading anarchist ideas and practices among countless desperate people, participating in the organization of the Athens General Assembly to guarantee that everyone would have an equal opportunity to express himself or herself, to ensure that no political party or ultra-left group could manipulate the decisions, to keep leftists from taking over the movement.

Other groups came only for the three days of riots. The riots were vast... In the middle of financial collapse, in the middle of inhuman austerity measures, unemployment, and unbelievable state repression... this was one of the best summers of my life.

When the Greek government signed a contract with the IMF and Central European Bank in 2010, agreeing to austerity measures, it gave everyone the chance to see how global economic interests control representative democracy. People felt betrayed by politicians they had believed in for 40 years, politicians they had put in parliament to represent their interests. Furious, they imagined burning down the Parliament; many of them even tried to. Metal bars and 24/7 riot police protected the Parliament for three years, representing the final obstacle between the people and the economic interests that govern our lives.

The collapse of faith in representation was also a kind of emancipation. The obedient victims of superior logic and common sense shook free of the leadership of the politicians and the manipulation of the journalists. The unions and parties lost their influence. A new individual and collective intelligence and liberation arose in place of the old identities. Wild strikes took place after decades of apathy and obedience among what we call the general public, millions of people took part in wild riots—shouting first against themselves for believing in the politicians for so many years, and then against the politicians.

The people took a step. This is what happened during the summer of 2011 in Greece and many other countries.

I find myself in my mother’s house. It is June 2011. A 65-year-old social democrat, she wonders why people didn’t succeed in storming the parliament yet during the days they have been encircling it. She is afraid to go out in the streets because of the tear gas, but she always asks me, “Maybe I could come also to the camp during the daytime?” My uncle and my aunt are also there, members of the Socialist Party (PASOK) since it was established in 1973; now it governs the country. My aunt is 62. With her eyes shining, she describes how last night the limousine of a famous minister of PASOK passed her outside the Parliament. She punched the back of the limousine, then ran behind it with other people to smash its windows and punch the minister. She feels liberation—she feels free! *She took a step...*

But were the assemblies that happened in Syntagma liberating, in the end? Or were they “directly democratic” in a way that led directly to the parties of Syriza and Golden Dawn gaining huge numbers of new adherents, for different but fundamentally similar reasons?

People expressed themselves through the assemblies all around the country. Common people who had never taken part in any kind of public event spoke openly about their deepest fears and their most precious desires, in front of thousands upon thousands of people, with megaphones to guarantee that everyone could hear their voices clearly. It was like some kind of group therapy, a catharsis from the delusions of the past, a jump into public space, an expedition into the vast

possibilities of social power. It was a wonderful summer when everyone was staying out in the streets talking with everyone about everything.

And then democracy was re-established.

Most of the anarchists were absent, anyway, committing their biggest political mistake so far this century. In any case, we—the anarchists of our times—do not yet have anarchist answers for most of the problems our societies face. We know very well how to deconstruct the ideas of our enemies, but our worst enemy is our own inability to bring our ideals from the clouds of anarchism down to the rough and dirty ground of anarchy.

Under these circumstances, with no other concrete options, people felt obliged—or forced—to choose between the party of social control offering them a totalitarian leader for a father figure, or the social-democratic party promising them free schools, hospitals, and some amount of protection from the wild neoliberal sharks that govern this world.

And so, after speaking in the assemblies, after participating in “direct” democracy, people got in line once again to vote, to reaffirm the democracy of the state. Every step you take towards freedom becomes an obstacle to going further. Democracy itself is an obstacle.

The democracy of our times, the highest achievement of bourgeois civilization, has built-in properties that go all the way back to its origins here in Athens thousands of years ago.

The Founding Fathers of every nation imagined themselves as the governors of uneducated savages, perverted masses of poor people ready to commit all kinds of crimes as soon as they were not controlled. Democracy was constructed by people with a political and economic interest in keeping the masses under control by means of words rather than the sword (and with the sword whenever words are not enough). Representative democracy is a system of mind control offering a pseudo-reality of freedom in which you cannot have any serious influence over the fundamental decisions about your life.

The Founding Fathers of democracy—like all fathers, perhaps—fear the critical thinking of their children. Democracy keeps people stupid: we are forced to remain in a childish state of mind, participating in obligatory social structures in which we cannot realize the totality of our capabilities and desires. There is no need to know the exact details of the decisions that determine your life: you have just to vote for who seems good enough to govern your life. Democracy spreads corruption: the leaders drain the resources of the community. Democracy keeps people apathetic. Nobody gives a damn about your opinion; you are just one statistic among millions. Democracy will never teach you to speak in public, just to remain silent and listen to your governors speak. You are there to applaud. Throughout your entire political life, you have been absent, *represented*.

Democracy keeps you afraid, afraid of the enemies of democracy that have hidden within your tribe, your democratic community, your nation. Democracy created borders in your life and now you have to protect these borders with your own body. The borders are imaginary, social inventions, but your dead body on the battleground is real. Democracy excludes the rest of humanity from your community and it prepares an army, including you, to kill all the excluded ones. The moment you refuse to kill for the sake of democracy, you too are excluded.

This system has an amazing ability to reproduce itself. It produces schools, hospitals, theaters, kindergartens, military camps, university campuses, galleries, museums, and amusement parks. You can spend your whole life inside those institutions, and if you try to escape from them, you will probably end up in an asylum for homeless people, a jail, or a psychiatric clinic (all of which are also democratic institutions). The flipside of this amazing ability to reproduce itself is that democracy is unable to surpass itself, to evolve into something different, in the same way that

the Soviet Union never arrived at a communist paradise. Listen to what the democratic states say against those who revolt: “Nobody can blackmail democracy.”

So democracy never changes. Statutes and politicians may be replaced, but it is always the same oligarchic system, aristocratic in its core. Democracy is always searching, through elections and business contracts and nepotism, for the best ones to perpetuate it.

This should come as no surprise. Democracy is a conservative tribal method by which certain ancient Greek tribes reproduced themselves. It will never allow you to become different until you escape from the tribe. And today, when the control of the capitalist market and democratic state are absolute all around the world, there is no other way to escape democracy except to destroy it.

Even knowing all of this, some people defend democracy. They want to find a form of democracy that doesn’t end up in oligarchy, just like the 21st century communists who are searching for communist systems that don’t lead to totalitarianism. But the Founding Fathers of all nations stand over democrats of all kinds, looking on approvingly as normality reasserts itself—the same conditions of exploitation, new faces in the same old positions of authority.

This world will never change as long as we are afraid to cut the roots of this order. Democracy is the final alternative for all who are afraid to step into the unknown territory of their own desires, their own power. Likewise, the demand for “real” democracy is the last way for social movements to legitimize themselves in the supposed “social sphere” (and to avoid criminalization). Just as it is the final step, democracy is also the final obstacle to new possibilities arising in social movements.

Could any form of democracy save us from democracy?

Direct democracy offers us an alternative way to govern our lives. But is this really what we need? Do we want to reproduce the limits of the old world on a smaller scale? Do we want the “general assembly” to decide about our lives? Or do we want to expand our lives into new forms of self-determination and open sharing of creativity, to offer our power freely for the benefit of all humanity, however we (and those with whom we share our lives) see fit?

When I take part in the assembly of Void Network, I have to take into account the needs and interests of all my comrades, and our group has to take into account the needs and desires of the greatest possible number of people in this world. If we do not take care of each other, there can be no Void Network, and if we do not take care of the people outside our group, there will be no connection between us and the world. There is no general assembly that could know better than we do how we can make the most of our abilities to benefit the people around us. This is the difference between an affinity group, which produces a collective and expansive power, and a democratic assembly, which concentrates power outside our lives and relationships, alienating us from ourselves and each other.

Direct democracy is supposed to get rid of the apathy produced by representation, since it appears as a “participatory” form of democracy. But is the idea that we will have an assembly of millions of people? Would such an assembly really be capable of offering us freedom and equality? Each of us would just feel like a statistic in it as we waited for days for our turn to speak. On the other hand, if we reduce that form to the miniscule level of a neighborhood assembly, don’t we trap ourselves in a microcosm like oversized ants?

Any kind of “direct democracy” reproduces the same conditions as representative democracy, just on a smaller scale. The majority suppresses the minority, driving them into apathy. Often, you don’t even try to express your opinion, as you know you will have no chance to put it into practice. Often, you are afraid to speak, as you know that you will be humiliated by the majority. Homo-

geneity is the ultimate imperative of any democratic procedure, “direct” or representational—a homogeneity that ends up as two final opinions (the majority and minority), losing the vast richness of human intelligence and sensibility, erasing all the complexity and diversity of human needs and desires.

This is why even directly democratic assemblies can end up deciding to carry out inhuman genocides, like the one ancient Athens inflicted upon Mylos in 416 BC. Excluded people have been enslaved and raped as a result of direct democratic decisions. Direct democracy is “members only.” Because it is smaller, it excludes even more people than representative democracy—producing isolated bubbles that fight each other like the city-states of ancient Greece. Everybody is an outsider, a foreigner, a possible enemy; that’s why the community has to build armies to defend itself and you have to die to protect the opinion of the majority even if you disagree with it. Whoever will not go along with the decision must be punished—like Socrates, the world-famous victim of democracy, and thousands of others. The charismatic leaders find the best possible direct connection with their followers, and the democratic mechanisms for manipulating public opinion work directly better than ever! *Direct democracy will never liberate us from democracy.*

Months later, I find myself at my mother’s house again. It is early in September 2011, a few days before Occupy Wall Street begins. I am sending out emails to comrades in the USA, urging them to expand the encampments all over the states, to spread anarchist ideas and methodologies in the Occupy movement assemblies.

My uncle is also there. As I am looking at my screen, he says to me, “We decided now to move”—I look up at him—“away from PASOK, to try the European communist party of SYRIZA.” I feel terror, because I know that when he says, “We decided,” he speaks for about two million people. It’s as if he knows them all individually—they are the betrayed followers of PASOK, and he was in the social-democrat party from the first day to the last. Syriza had only 4% of the votes just one day ago. I am looking at him, seeing two million zombies walk just a few steps from one party to another. I want to shout, “YOU HAVE TO MOVE FURTHER! EVERY STEP IS A NEW OBSTACLE! YOU CAN’T STOP THERE...”

Anarchists have a lot to do before we can speak to this kind of people. They are the realists, these people who understand politics as the management of reality.

I imagine history as a beautiful girl: she smiles, and riots explode in Athens. I feel history going away from Athens after staying a long time in my city, now that the Parliament has found a new way to reestablish delusional hopes in people’s minds. Three and a half years later, in 2015, the streets are still silent and the Euro-communists of SYRIZA win the elections with just one word for a campaign slogan: HOPE. (The last thing left in Pandora’s box.) To me, it seems more like DESPERATION.

One of the first decisions the new government of Syriza makes is to remove the protective metal bars and riot police from around the Parliament. The Parliament is safe again. Democracy never changes. It just reforms and reproduces itself.

Every step is a new obstacle. 2600 years ago in Greece and two centuries ago in Europe the struggle for democracy liberated the poverty-stricken masses from their misery. They found themselves some years later in exactly the same conditions—in eternal war with all possible outsiders, plus the right to vote for it. Christianity and Islam attracted millions of poor people with promises of social justice and eternal love; some years later they became ideological tools for massive genocides all around the world, absolute enemies of human emancipation and obstacles to the arising of human spirituality. The Communist Party, proclaimed to be the voice of

all those without voices, became the worst enemy of freedom of expression. Anarchists became ministers and governors in the Spanish revolution—and the CNT, the great organization for the liberation of the workers, organized them to work at the factories for their whole lives until their heroic deaths. It is very possible to sacrifice our lives to liberate ourselves from the old world's prisons and find ourselves entrapped in a new high-quality jail.

Anarcho-communism, an emancipatory vision that we all share in Void Network, is an old vision of a world without money and without borders. But it needs to be updated for the 21st century—otherwise, it will remain in our minds like a mythological ghost, another obstacle. If we want a world without money, this means we have to transform labor into open-source creativity, to turn workplaces into beautiful parks of voluntary creative participation in a global web that freely distributes all material and mental production. Life has to be organized around the production of desires and the enjoyment of needs. If we want a world without borders, that means a world without “foreigners”—so you will not be a “stranger” anywhere in the world at any moment of your life. We have to transform “societies” into open and inclusive communities that will be fully connected in a global network, so that everyone is welcome and useful anywhere and anytime on this planet, not divided into isolated, self-sufficient, xenophobic groups. We have to open “ourselves” to the difference of all the “others.”

In the eight decades since the collapse of the Spanish Revolution, anarchists have avoided offering solid plans for anarchist revolution on this scale. Meanwhile, during those years, capitalism has evolved to levels that the revolutionaries of late 19th century could not have imagined. Global capitalism is here, global anarchism is not.

The only possible way that an anarchist revolution could happen is on a planetary scale—not on a local scale, not on isolated islands. Even if it will take 200 years for an anarchist revolution to extend to every corner of this world, this has to be envisioned, planned, and realized.

If we reduce the scale of our organizational structures to tiny neighborhood assemblies or miniscule eco-communities, we will find ourselves dealing with problems that pass through our small community like the huge ocean waves pass over a small, fragile fishing boat. Neo-totalitarianism will never leave us alone in alternative-lifestyle eco-paradisiacal bubbles (though neoliberalism might sell vacations there to the rich). We cannot close our eyes to the suffering of this world.

On the other hand, if we permit old or new forms of authoritarian mass structures to oblige us to embrace their notions of efficiency and practicality, we will end up in the belly of a new bureaucratic monster. We need a global network of communities on struggle, a network of millions of flexible groups ready to fight against totalitarianism, to create public liberated zones, to defend them against their enemies and connect them in a revolutionary wave of global social emancipation—and to do all this without central control.

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan wrote in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* that

The Greeks had the notion of a consensus or a faculty of “common sense” that translated each sense into each other sense, and conferred consciousness on man. Today, when we have extended all parts of our bodies and senses by technology, we are haunted by the need for an outer consensus of technology and experience that would raise our communal lives to the level of a worldwide consensus. When we have achieved a worldwide fragmentation, it is not unnatural to think about a worldwide integration. Such a universality of conscious being for mankind was dreamt of

by Dante, who believed that men would remain mere broken fragments until they should be united in an inclusive consciousness.

Could anarchy—total freedom, absolute social and economic equality, and global fellowship—offer an inclusive consciousness to fragmented humanity for the 21st century?

It is not simple even to begin thinking about it. And if we want a vision of emancipation that is created socially and collectively, we have to avoid simplistic solutions and the leadership of specific individuals. For example, Karl Marx was a very smart man, but Marxism is an obstacle for free thinking.

In any case, we are anarchists. We are fighting against the state and capitalism to open passages—practices, strategies, and methodologies—that lead to total freedom, social equality, mutual aid, and self-determination. We have to find a way to connect with the many, in order that together we may transform the conditions that produce our reality. Against homogeneity, we have to empower diversity; against certitude, we have to allow all truths to come true; against exclusion, we want to defend the stranger, the queer, the old, the young, the freak, the unknown; against borders, we want to live openheartedly; against atomization, to care for others, to learn from each other, to carry out our great plans and achieve our ultimate goals. Otherwise, established political authority and economic interests will reassert themselves in endless versions of the same conditions. This world will never change until we dare to *live free*, to *share everything*, to *spread anarchy*!

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