



# SHORT CIRCUIT

a counterlogistics reader

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## INTRODUCTION

THESE DAYS EVERYTHING IS ABOUT SPEED, FLEXIBILITY AND initiative. Goods are delivered to us before we order them, and criminals arrested before committing crimes. Mechanisms of control mirror mechanisms of profit, both in the “productive” sphere of crafting citizen-consumer subjects, and the disciplinary sphere of surveillance, monitoring, and repression. Knowledge of systems, networks, location and movement become ever more important for both the state and capital, just as that knowledge becomes ever more seamlessly integrated and indistinguishable. There are a few different words for this tendency. One word is cybernetics: the study of systems and networks, the conversion of human relations into an ecology of data points that can be tweaked

and controlled but remains self-stabilizing. Cybernetics comes from the Greek *kubernèsis*, “to pilot or steer,” as in to steer economy, society. We want to disrupt the piloting of this ship, to take what detritus is usable and leave the rest to sink in the rising oceans.

Above all, cybernetics seeks to know everything. Just as the liberal subject arose arm-in-arm with the commodity—exchangeable, formally equal—the contemporary subject is tracked with the same precision as contemporary goods. RFID chips and flexible production chains are used to ensure that each item arrives where it should, when it should, without fail. Social data mining tracks consumers just as precisely, detecting and shaping their desires. Anti-theft devices and ubiquitous surveillance are the negative reflections of RFID chips in shipping and location-based smartphone ads. Everything and everyone must be known, and all must be kept in its proper place. Just as Amazon was patenting “anticipatory shipping”, planning to ship goods before they are ordered based on consumer behavior patterns,<sup>1</sup> the Chicago Police Department was unveiling a new “predictive policing” model, using social network analysis to identify those “most likely to be involved in violent crime.”<sup>2</sup> And of course, we can trace a continuous thread from location-specific advertisements on your phone, to cell phone records being used to track comrades, to drones bombing suspected terrorists in Yemen based on the location of their SIM cards.<sup>3</sup>

What are the practices that link regimes of control and production? The ideas conceived in Silicon Valley

1 (<http://techcrunch.com/2014/01/18/amazon-pre-ships/>)

2 (<http://www.theverge.com/2014/2/19/5419854/the-minority-report-this-computer-predicts-crime-but-is-it-racist>).

3 (<http://gizmodo.com/report-nsa-phone-data-guides-drone-strikes-which-kill-151974430>)

are made material in China and shipped to us. Likewise, the ideas of cybernetic management are made material through—and in—that shipping. We can call this the applied science of cybernetics: logistics, what some man calls “the active power to coordinate and choreograph, the power to conjoin and split flows; to speed up and slow down; to change the type of commodity produced and its origin and destination point; and, finally, to collect and distribute knowledge about the production, movement and sale of commodities as they stream across the grid.” Logistics becomes more and more central to generating surplus value across the globe, creating ever more resilient networks of distribution that can defeat bursts of proletarian activity or climate chaos.

As partisans of disorder, the study of logistics becomes strategic for us as well. That shift is taking place; the last three years have seen in-depth investigations into logistics and transportation infrastructure, accompanying an increasing turn towards interrupting those networks as a primary strategy. In 2011 the blockade of the Port of Oakland, and of ports up and down the West Coast, put into practice a call that has been issued since the collapse of the global justice movement: block the flows of capital. From the piqueteros of Argentina to the sabotage of French train lines, from the port blockades of Occupy to the indigenous-led rail blockades of Idle No More, it seems that we are beginning to take our own advice.

This theoretical and practical turn takes place alongside an increase in the visibility of communication theory; Endnotes and SIC, as the two nodes of communication theory most prominent in the US, articulate a complementary understanding that any possibility of communism must unfold without a transitional stage. Revolts,



when they spread, must immediately begin to appropriate those resources necessary to sustain themselves, must immediately begin to experiment with forms of life that do not reproduce state logic, and forms of existence that do not rely on exchange, work, and value. This might sound familiar to those anarchists who in 2009 were already proclaiming “Occupy Everything!” and “Everything for Everyone!” Where the communisation milieu as expressed in Endnotes and SIC dismissed Tiqqun’s contributions out of hand as voluntaristic, non-materialist and escapist, recent turns in both have echoed the simple, practical calls issued over a decade ago. Despite our many differences, we can agree on the following: capital more than ever depends on rapid flows of goods and money, and it is only by disrupting those flows that we might exercise a proletarian power that is otherwise neutralized by the hyper-flexibility of capital. Logistics, cybernetics, movement and speed are integral parts of the circuits of value production and control. The task of struggles, if they are to approach communism, is to immediately interrupt flows of goods and circuits of control, and to communize what is available. All of this requires a level of preparation, of planning, of investigation—where are the weak spots, what information might we share when the time is right, where are the resources that can be seized.

This is not a project of vanguardism, or of voluntarism, but a wager that the upheavals of the recent past are not over. Neither is it a call to wait passively, or to build consciousness; instead it is a method of preparing ourselves, to practice, to interrupt what we can and experiment with new methods of sabotage and sharing, and above all to be ready. The forces of recuperation are strong—recently the Department of Homeland Security issued a statement

praising the anarchistic mutual aid practices of Occupy Sandy after the devastation caused by the hurricane. It is a question of how to respond to the existent and to future crises in a way that both supports ourselves and undermines the ability of the state and capital to reassert themselves once self-organized efforts address the worst of the crisis.

While most of the pieces in this book outline a theoretical understanding of cybernetics and logistics, and a practical suggestion of frameworks for strategizing disruption, “Disaster Communism” and “The Anthropocene” stand out in their suggestion that, in autonomous responses to disaster, we can glimpse some possible, positive project. Remaining apprehensive, they offer a different view than the purely negative politics of the communisation milieu. Responses to natural disasters, while always partial and almost always ultimately recuperated, also often rest on non-market, solidaristic approaches, divided as they may be by class and race. The pieces are a welcome breath of fresh air, recognizing just how fucked we are with regard to climate and capital, and seeking to position our responses in that reality.

Likewise, two pieces on the ZAD—the Zone to Defend, a long-lasting land occupation in France—give us an alternate view of struggles from the ground. Dismissing both the abstract high theory of communization and the nihilism of American insurrectionaries, they point to the intersection between affective struggle—how revolt changes the immediate social relations surrounding and constituting people—and a long-term spreading of insurrection and communization. The ZAD functions as a practical counter-cybernetics in two ways, interrupting the creation of an airport and constituting a world that can sustain itself in opposition to this one. There is resonance here as well

with the free states and blockades of Earth First! at the turn of the 21st century, and the anti-roads movement in the UK in the 1990s. Those who would dismiss this as mere activism would do well to take into account the longevity, scale of revolt, and support for the ZAD across France.

This book is a study guide centered around two complementary questions: 1) how do we interrupt the flows of capital, effectively, where we are, and relate that to where others are, and 2) what do uprisings, riots, and unrest need to spread, and how can we help to fulfill those needs. We hope that the essays within can serve as a point of departure for future investigation and activity. How do we begin careful, extremely local, investigations of our towns and cities, with an orientation towards communising material resources and spreading struggles? What warehouses contain what goods, and where are they? Just how much tear gas do the police have, and where does it come from? We remember the 2008 riots in Greece, when the police ran out of tear gas and needed emergency supplies shipped to them, as a missed opportunity. What better way to show international solidarity and to spread revolt than by sabotaging the delivery of repressive technologies? What buildings are vacant, ready to be occupied and transformed? How can we learn from the militarized failures of past occupation attempts? *Call* states that “If private property is essentially the discretionary power of depriving anyone of the use of the possessed thing, communisation means depriving only the agents of empire from it.” How do we do that, really? Just how vulnerable are the railroads, ports and highways to interruption or diversion? “Choke Points: Mapping an Anticapitalist Counterlogistics in California,” the last piece in this book, begins to concretely address these questions and points towards a methodology of research.

This book focuses primarily on the economic—how can one interrupt the valorisation process in an era of decentralized production, and how can one acquire the resources necessary to spread a struggle. The economic is never enough, however. Cybernetics works on us and through us not only through cell phones, surveillance cameras, and social networks, but through our identities, our tastes, and our activities. The human strike, the refusal to be captured by appeals to necessity and urgency, the elaboration of new relations amongst us and between those we encounter—these qualitative measures are more important than the amount of material throughput that is interrupted by a port blockade, or the amount of food or space that can be seized during an occupation. The danger of beginning a process of investigation and preparation is that our material needs are created by and within capitalism; it is hard but not impossible to become materially self-sufficient, to reproduce oneself as a social milieu or as a family. This danger of recuperation lies within all potential positive projects, and must always be carefully considered.

When imagining what to make common, the question of exploring new needs is an important one. How do we take space that challenges gender? How do we share space in ways that allow for experimentation and new encounters rather than continuation as ossified cliques? National liberation movements and past revolutions shared the same weakness of Occupy—acquiring material resources to continue life as it becomes paramount, and we return to relations of production and urgency that prevent experimentation with new relations and new worlds. In this collection, “Communist Measures” from SIC begins to tangle with some of these ideas theoretically, while texts from the ZAD point, again, to the practical manifestations

of this experimentation. Elsewhere, Claire Fontaine's elaboration of the human strike and "the revolution within the revolution," Tiqqun's *Sonogram of a Potentiality*, and "Building a Permanent Movement" in *Til the Clock Stops: Crime, Opacity, Insurrection*, investigate these questions in their own ways.

Counter-logistics is not, then, simply a matter of blocking all flows, of stopping movement, of locking things in place where they are. It is a matter of blocking those flows that constitute the material and metaphysical tissue of this world, while simultaneously enhancing our own ethical connections, movement, and friendship. Helping migrants to cross borders and remain undetected, helping information to cross through and within prison walls, destroying surveillance cameras, defending the basis of new worlds seized in opposition to the old—these are as important as blocking rail lines and disrupting commerce.

The end of this book contains a list of materials for further reading. We hope that you will use this book to create your own local study group, to meet with friends, to remain opaque while acting and preparing. Some will reject this book as too voluntaristic; others will say that we are being vanguardist, that as pro-revolutionaries our only role is to observe the unfolding of revolts and to prevent other intellectuals from intervening. We have our own critiques of militancy, of activism, of voluntarism. We know elite militants will not bring a revolution, or at least not one that we want to be a part of. However, we suspect that those with the know-how and the intention can prepare their own contributions in advance. As some friends said, "there is not a problem of the head, but a paralysis of the body, of the act."

In the ZAD they speak of counter-cybernetics in

the language of mud: sticky, gumming up gears, vehicles, police operations, trotskyite flags; hyper-local, impenetrable.

*Mud is opposite of the metropolis. Concrete covers the metropolis, hiding the soil below. Mud is polymorphous, the metropolis is angular and static. The metropolis is hard, mud is soft. And it is everywhere in the ZAD, surrounding every structure, forming along every path, the constant companion of the free people in the fields.*

We hope to muddy the waters for those who watch us, to slow down that which is fast, to throw mud at our enemies and, just maybe, to grow something sustaining from the muck.

ZAD,  
COMMUNE,  
METROPOLIS

## I

PERHAPS YOU SUSPECTED AS MUCH, BUT WHEN IT EXTENDS before your eyes it is undeniable. It starts off simply. You wake up one morning in a stone house, built hundreds of years ago, having stood through revolution, occupation and peace. After drinking tea you leave the house. The snow is still clinging to the ground below the trees but the sky is blue and there are no clouds overhead. You have nothing to do today but walk into the village to use the phone and get a drink at the bar and so you set off on a five kilometer hike through the forest.

On the way you pass small peasant hamlets and stone crosses and when you are in the trees you are directed to the village by small wooden signs. In the distance you hear the freeway but you try to ignore it, focusing instead on the sounds of snow collapsing under your boots and the



calls of the birds. But somehow the sound of the freeway becomes louder and it is only when you are staring at the river do you realize that what you were hearing was the sound of flowing water and nothing else.

When you finally reach the village and enter the bar, a few locals are there drinking wine and smoking cigarettes. They shake your hand and curiously watch you as you grab the phone and retreat into the back room. When your friend in the metropolis picks up the phone they ask where you are and you tell them about your experience with the river and how you thought it was the freeway. They laugh and ask when they will see you again and you say you don't know. After hanging up the phone you find a glass of beer with Picon liqueur waiting for you. You pick up the glass and salute the comrade who gave it you after your long walk.

## II

But then there is something else you had not foreseen. For so many years you have caught glimpses of freedom, sometimes in a riot where your comrades controlled a few city blocks for a few intoxicating hours, sometimes in a squat during a period of rebellion, sometimes just in your imagination. And then you enter the ZAD, the Zone To Defend.

It occurs to you, as your boots sink deep into the wet earth, that mud is opposite of the metropolis. Concrete covers the metropolis, hiding the soil below. Mud is polymorphous, the metropolis is angular and static. The metropolis is hard, mud is soft. And it is everywhere in the ZAD, surrounding every structure, forming along every path, the constant companion of the free people in the fields. As you enter the outskirts of the ZAD, avoiding the police check-

points, you remember the Latin word *humus*, signifying the ground, the earth, the soil. From this root comes the English word *humbleness* and *humility*, the perfect descriptors for the structures that constellate the fields and forests of the zone.

Your days pass as if in a dream. One day, you walk down a road and come to a tree house. You ask to come up and a voice from somewhere says “Yeah.” When you enter the two level tree house there is no one there. Having no explanation as to where the voice came from, you return to the road and soon come across a bar near a barricade. An old punk is dozing off inside and you don’t want to wake him. You look back the way you came and see no one. Up ahead, over the barricade, the road is also empty. And then you decide to go wander the woods. After stumbling around for a while, you come to a two story house built with tree trunks and tin. After knocking on the door and getting no answer, you climb a ladder to the second floor and find an empty bed. As soon as you lay down, you are asleep. This is the dream.

But it does not end, this dream, and you find yourself at La Chat Teigne, the center of the ZAD, a conglomeration of structures connected by walkways made of branches. There is a communal kitchen, a meeting hall, a tavern, a workshop, a shower, and several communal houses. You open the door to one of these houses and find over twenty people resting, sleeping, reading, kissing. Later, when night falls and a crescent moon hangs in the sky, you sit outside the communal kitchen, listening to crickets. Suddenly, a barefoot woman carries an accordion out from the kitchen. She walks out in the mud field in front you, stands under the moon, and begins to play. One by one, people emerge from shadows to listen, and when she begins to sing, so do

they. Although you do not know the words, you find it all quite beautiful.

### III

In your world, communal living usually means paying equal rent, sharing a bathroom, having a chore list and bulletin board to write nasty messages to each other on. The very Protestant and very Western union of egos is what reigns in your world: collectives that resemble gold miners more than rebels, banding together out of self interest, a desire for cheaper rent, greater social capital, and sometimes laziness. Every so often there have been collectives born out of struggle, collectives with a common purpose, a rebellious intention, but these flames have been quickly extinguished by the hip nihilism that is more a product of capitalism than a desire for rebellion. You have grown accustomed to defeat, and the most defeated and hopeless of your peers remind you there is nothing else. This virus of despair, of capitalist nihilism, infecting Germany, the UK, and the US (the most affluent places), is a poison passed off as the highest insurrectionary analysis, the purest form of understanding, when in fact it is nothing but a death cult, a counter-revolutionary excuse for enjoying a decadent and empty existence.

But hundreds of kilometers away from the ZAD, in the nasty suburban sprawl of the metropolis, you find a collective, a commune, inhabiting the disaster and filling it with life. You sit in a living room, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and you watch as the entire commune walks in and out of the collective house all day long. Everything is shared freely, tobacco, food, beds, drinks, money, vehicles. Down-

stairs, people fix the engine of one of the communal cars, getting it ready for the big trip to the ZAD. You are told not to ask for things so many times you begin to feel like a baby.

A group comes back from the forest. They have been discussing love and cybernetics. When you ask what they have found, they tell you two things. 1: cybernetics wants to know everything. 2: love is what cannot be known. Over twenty people in the commune were involved in coming to this conclusion. But before you can ask them any more questions, you are off to their social center for a gathering of the metropolitan comrades. Everyone sits around a long table as the food is prepared. A few children play in a corner. Two women are pregnant. You cannot tell who the parents of the children are. Everyone treats them the same. In the midst of laughter, joking, and coughing, the entire group makes collective decisions about who can use the cars and what day works best for fixing the new house.

It is decided the next day would be best, and you go with them to help, swinging a sledge hammer, tearing down brick walls, carrying wheel-barrows full of soil, and ripping out wooden beams. This is going to be a massive space, part social center, part house, part gym, part studio. When it is finished it will be in the center of an immigrant suburb and will be a hub of life for those living in the neighborhood. After working for the day you drop one of the comrades off at their apartment. It is in one of the twelve story apartment blocks, the banlieue, and as you watch them walk off towards the concrete towers, you realize the commune is possible here, in the metropolis, and that it is possible to overcome defeat. On the way back to the house, the comrade driving the collective car tells you that you will go with them to the ZAD in one week. You begin to think you are dreaming.

## IV

You watch the chain saw cut through the trunk of the tree. This is first time you have seen this take place in reality. There is snap, a scream, and soon the tree has fallen, rolling back and forth before becoming still, lying on the ground. And then you are in the communal lumber mill, feeding boards through a machine, turning them into geometrically perfect planks for the floors of a house.

In your world, you know anti-civilization anarchists who inhabit wooden houses built by other people. When they are not on their computers or texting on their smart phones, these anarchists are constantly refining their ideological purity, attacking those who do not repeat the same rote lines, and basking in their own powerlessness. They take for granted the material world they live off and within, never questioning where it came from and the thousand unseen and forgotten sacrifices that brought it into being. They would condemn you for being here as they would never condemn themselves.

In your world, you also know Marxists who constantly talk about an abstract concept called the means of production. But it is never their own means, it is the means of the enemy, waiting to be seized at the correct moment. The slavery and exploitation that brought these means into being are forgotten, as is the alienation inherent in such means. You have never seen these Marxists create their own means of production, built with joy, intention, purpose.

The planks come out of the machine and are stacked in rows, waiting to be assembled into a house. Later that day you look over the blue prints for the homes that are to be built for the commune with their own hands. In the evening, inside a stone house next to the mill, you sit at

a long table with dozens of others, eating a collective meal while a fire rages in the hearth behind you. When the meal is finished and dozens of empty wine bottles clutter the table, someone begins projecting images on the wall. They detail the construction of a two story house made with wood processed at the communal mill. It was built in pieces and then smuggled into the ZAD. The last images show the finished house standing amidst the mud and trees, a gift to the free people of the zone.

A few days later, you are in a small hamlet, staring at a flock of male sheep. When you ask your comrade if their wool will be taken, she says no, the sheep will be eaten, just like the goats, the rabbits, the pigs, and the ducks. In the afternoon you and her take the goats up into the hills. It is the first time you have seen the herd instinct in play, the way the goats follow you as they would another goat. It makes you sad to see their trust, and when you ask her if it will be difficult to kill one of these animals she says yes, she has grown quite attached to them. In the evening, with the goats back in their stone barn, your comrade cooks you pasta with beef. As you eat, she tells you she has only killed one animal, and she only did it because of all the purchased meat she has consumed throughout the course of her life. In the cupboard are dozens of jars of duck confit, preserved in their own fat, made in the commune, ready to be eaten. To be autonomous, to defeat alienation, is difficult.

## V

It is only natural that you would see the nightmare. As you hitch from Calais through the country side, you are picked up by an off duty gendarme. While doing your best to act

the nice British university student on holiday, the copper tells you how lucky you are to live in a country where you can fly the Union Jack and not be called a fascist. As you struggle to keep a straight face, he says it is a tragedy he cannot hang the Tricolor from his window. Later he says that there are too many immigrants in France and the French identity must be preserved. Also, he says, the French are lazy and need to work more. He is the first copper you meet. The second is at a toll booth on the motor-way. He arrives on his motorcycle, arrogant and cocky, and tells you to move to the other side of the toll booth. The third cop you meet is one of many and he throws a grenade at you.

But before that happens, you are in the ZAD one evening, sitting with a group at Le Chat Teigne, when you hear word that only a handful of police are guarding the cross roads beyond the barricades. Tomorrow is the Seme Ta ZAD, a manifestation meant to reclaim land and plant crops in the zone. Perhaps the police are trying to lower their profile, expecting the arrival of the media, old people and children to arrive in the morning. Regardless of the reason, dozens of people begin heading to the cross roads, you with them. When you arrive you see the first new barricades springing up, but you follow a large group heading towards the police. By the time you arrive, the attack has already begun. 50 people rush the three police vans. Several tear gas grenades go off, but the wind pushes it towards the police. Just as the gas exhausts itself, the attack resumes, and the three vans flee in terror, met with the sound of hundreds of people cheering. You return to the cross roads to help bring barricade materials to the front. Someone has brought a sound system, tuned in to Radio Klaxon, the pirate radio of the ZAD. Inexplicably, an English voice comes on and the large crowd quiets itself. A woman begins talking about

protecting the earth, the rites of spring, and for clear reason she ends her prose poem with the words, MAYBE GOD IS BLACK.

It all comes back. In the commune, in the forest, in the bar, in the house, everyone talks about the Black Panthers. It has been going on for months. It is the common thread running through this web. As the English words on the radio fade away and are replaced with techno music, you think of the autonomy, the self-sufficiency, and the self-defense of the Black Panthers. You think of the threat they posed to the order of the US and how the questions they posed still have not been answered. But as the techno music blares, you realize you have been seeing the answer this whole time, struggling to take shape. When someone hands you a spliff, you realize you are not high.

In the morning, over 1000 people arrive carrying shovels, picks, plants, chickens, seeds, and supplies. They go to different pieces of land and begin planting, tilling, building new structures. In the afternoon you go to the new barricades. There, people are tearing up the concrete road and digging into the soil. In the rear, at the cross roads, people are eating food, drinking wine, lounging in the sun. By the early evening, there are five new barricades where before there was only a skull and cross bones spray painted on the concrete, signifying police occupation. Before you arrived at the ZAD, the map you studied showed this location as a place to be avoided. Now it is a center of life, filled with happiness and celebration. At night you go to a party at an occupied farm on the other side of the zone where a new house has been constructed. There you eat sandwiches and crepes and drink wine and watch people dance inside a large tent. And then you go to sleep, content to with the knowledge that the zone has grown wider and denser.



And so it is only natural that you see the nightmare. In the morning you awake to the news that the police have returned. A group of people hiding in the forest ambushed them as they approached. One of the cops was severely beaten, another set on fire. In response a large group of riot police started an offensive against the new barricades and soon you are on your way there along with many others. The fight is in progress when you arrive, attack, counter attack. As the chaos unfolds, you remember the people on crutches, the people missing eyes, people you have met on your travels who have suffered serious injuries at the ZAD, and yet dozens of people surge forth, throwing rocks and bottles at the police, screaming at the tops of their lungs and raving like mad people. And then you see three canisters arching in the sky, heading directly towards you. You get out of the way, one of the canisters lands in the soil beside you, and rather than exude tear gas, the canister explodes, leaving a large crater in the ground. It is then you understand this is real, this is the nightmare, trying to break into the zone.

The battle goes back and forth until the police mass their forces and then push forward, overwhelming the barricade. They are met with molotovs during the final counter-attack. As you and the others retreat, someone sets the bar beside the barricade on fire, making good their promise to never let the police have it. You have time to catch one last glimpse behind you and see dozens of riot police in gas masks running through smoke and tear gas towards you, the bar burning behind them, the nightmare having reclaimed the space you all liberated two days ago. The police line comes to a halt beneath the tree house. This is the new border between freedom and order.

## VI

A few weeks later, sitting in a bar, you find out the situation at the ZAD is same as it was before you arrived. Everything continues as it did, the zone persists, and there are more manifestations planned in the future. You look up at the television screen above the bar man and see conservatives fighting police in Paris over the equal marriage law, the unemployment rate jumping to 27 percent in Spain, and a bombing in the US. You find another seat, away from the television, and read these words about life in a free zone:

At the camp we got to see our usually grouchy, unsatisfied child in a new light. Already after two days she moved up and down the steep hills on her own, queued for the peoples kitchen by herself, asked other grownups for help, and did not only cry for us parents...In the evening she helped stack the firewood and fell asleep, without any discussion, around the fire with a hundred noisy people around. Food that she would not eat normally she ate with a ravenous appetite, also because of the lack of any alternatives. She met passing cows and goats without timidness. During the day she did not search the contact with us parents so much, but was where there were other children or activities or people she found interesting.

Back in the metropolis, you see the Roma camps nestled along the side of the motor way and watch the smoke flow out their precarious chimneys. Hundreds of cars speed by, exuding exhaust and garbage. Down by the river, under a

bridge, a few young men tag the words ZAD PARTOUT. In the super markets, unseen thieves walk out the doors with hundreds of euros worth of groceries. Refugees from Syria, Kurdistan, and Libya sit at the bars, watching the world go by. The metropolis keeps running. You are reminded that the crisis has yet to hit France as it has Greece and Spain.

Back on the motor way, you hitch a ride back up north towards the UK. On the radio some analyst is talking about the recent situation in Cyprus and the selling off of the countries natural gas rights. The driver of the car informs you he works for a gas company and his job is to locate gas reserves. He says it is only a matter of time before they are drilling in Spain. The experts say this will increase jobs and put more money in the economy. This is the crisis, engineered to extract more resources from the earth. As the car hurtles down the motorway, you watch the TGV train speed past a nuclear power plant. Thirty kilometers further on, there is another nuclear power plant, and you know that before you reach Calais you will see several more. You think of the struggle against the train in the Susa Valley and when you look up in the sky and see the planes you think of the ZAD, brought into being in order to stop an airport. And then you remember words you read years ago, words you had almost forgotten:

*So lucky are the orphans – the chaos of the world belongs to them. You cry over all that you've lost; indeed, we have lost everything. But look around us: we have gained brothers and sisters, so many brothers and sisters. Now, only nostalgia separates us from the unknown.*

*You go, you are lost. The measure of your value is nowhere to be found. You go, and you don't know who*

*you are. But this ignorance is a blessing, and you are without value, like the first man. Wander the roads. If you weren't so lost, you wouldn't be so destined for encounters.*

*Let's go away. It's high time. But please, let's go together. Look at our gestures, the rising grace within our gestures; look at our abandon, how beautiful it is that nothing catches us; look at our bodies, how fluidly they mix. How long it has been since such free gestures descended on the world.*

*But you know, there are still walls against our communism. There are walls within and between us that continue to divide us. We are still not done with this world. There is still jealousy, stupidity, the desire to be someone, to be recognized, the desire to be worth something. And worse, the need for authority. These are the ruins the old world has left within us and which remain to be demolished.*

When you are dropped off on the motorway, you see ZAD PARTOUT tagged on a billboard. You walk the rest of the way to Calais, thinking of everything you have just seen of the past months. You have finally experienced it and now that the memories are within your imagination you will know what you are fighting for. Just as the edge of the port city comes into your view, you remember more words, written in 2003:

*That it might take a generation to build a victorious revolutionary movement in all its breadth does not cause us to waver. We envisage this with serenity.*

Just before boarding the ferry, you check the internet and see that the police have pulled out of two main crossroads in the ZAD. The Interior Ministry can no longer maintain its militarized presence without hindering its ability to protect Paris. In this period of weakness, the Zone to Defend will grow. You close the internet, walk out of the cafe, and into the streets of Calais, filled with immigrants trying to reach their families on the isle. It is the spring of 2013.

*Where are the words,  
where is the house,  
where are my ancestors,  
where are my loves  
and where are my friends?  
There are none, my child.  
Everything has to be built.  
You must build the language  
that you will live in,  
You must build the house  
where you'll no longer be alone.  
You must find the ancestors  
who will make you more free,  
and you must invent the new  
sentimental education  
through which once again,  
you will love.*



"That's another thing we've learned from your Nation," said Mein Herr, "map-making. But we've carried it much further than you. What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?"

"About six inches to the mile."

"Only six inches!" exclaimed Mein Herr. "We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map



of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!"

"Have you used it much?" I enquired.

"It has never been spread out, yet," said Mein Herr: "the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well. Now let me ask you another question. What is the smallest world you would care to inhabit?"

-Lewis Carrol, *Sylvie & Bruno Concluded*



LOGISTICS,  
COUNTER-  
LOGISTICS,  
AND THE  
COMMUNIST  
PROSPECT

*-Jasper Bernes*

WHAT IS THEORY FOR? WHAT GOOD IS IT, IN THE FIGHT against capital and state? For much of the left, the Marxist left in particular, the answer is obvious: theory tells us what to do, or *what is to be done*, in the strangely passive formula often used here. Theory is the pedagogue of practice. Thus, the essential link between Comrade Lenin and his putative enemy, the Renegade Kautsky, the master thinkers of the Third and Second Internationals: despite their storied disagreements, both believed that without the special, scientific knowledge dispensed by intellectuals and dedicated revolutionaries, the working class was doomed to a degraded consciousness, incapable of making revolution or, at any rate, making it successfully. The task of theory, therefore, is to weaponise proletarian consciousness, to turn it toward right action. This didactic view of theory extends across the entire range of Marxist intellectual work in the 20th century, from the comparatively crude

Bolshevist programmatic of Lenin and Trotsky to the sophisticated variants offered by Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser.

There are other, non-didactic theories of theory, however. We might look, for instance, to Marx's own very early reflection on such matters. There is no need to play teacher to the working class, Marx tells his friend Arnold Ruge: "We shall not say, Abandon your struggles, they are mere folly; let us provide you with the true campaign-slogans. Instead we shall simply show the world why it is struggling, and consciousness of this is a thing it will acquire whether it wishes or not."<sup>1</sup> The final turn in this formulation is crucial, since it implies that the knowledge theory provides already abounds in the world; theory simply reflects, synthesizes and perhaps accelerates the "self-clarification...of the struggles and wishes of an age". Theory is a moment in the self-education of the proletariat, whose curriculum involves inflammatory pamphlets and beer-hall oratory as much as barricades and streetfighting.

In this regard, theory is more a map than a set of directions: a survey of the terrain in which we find ourselves, a way of getting our bearings in advance of any risky course of action. I am thinking here of Fredric Jameson's essay on the "cultural logic of late capitalism", and his call for "cognitive maps" that can orient us within the new spaces of the postindustrial world. Though Jameson must surely count as an exponent of the pedagogical view of theory — calling for cognitive maps by way of a defense of didacticism in art — part of the appeal of this essay is the way his call for maps emerges from a vividly narrated disorientation, from a phenomenology of the bewildered and lost. Describing the

1 Karl Marx, 'Letter to Arnold Ruge', September 1843 (MECW 3), 144.

involved voids of the Bonaventure hotel, Jameson situates the reader within a spatial allegory for the abstract structures of late capitalism and the “incapacity of our minds...to map the great global multinational and decentered communication network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.”<sup>2</sup> Theory is a map produced by the lost themselves, offering us the difficult view from within rather than the clarity of the Olympian view from above.

Langushing in the shadow of its dominant counterpart, antididactic theory has often remained a bitter inversion of the intellectualist presumptions of the Leninist or Gramscian view. Whereas the didactic view tells us that revolution fails for lack of theory, or for lack of the right theory — fails because the correct consciousness was not cultivated — the communist ultra-left that inherits the antididactic view offers instead a theory of intellectual betrayal, a theory of militant theory as the corruption of the organic intelligence of the working class.<sup>3</sup> The role of theorists, then, is to prevent these corrupting interventions by intellectuals, in order to allow for the spontaneous self-organisation of the working class. As a consequence, the historical ultra-left, congealing in the wake of the failure of the revolutionary wave of the early 20th century and the victory of a distinctly counter-revolutionary Marxism, adopts a reflective and contemplative (if not fatalist) orientation to the unfolding of struggles, offering diagnosis at most but never any strategic reflection, lest it commit the cardinal sin of “intervention”, playing the pedagogue to the masses. The result is a perversely unhappy consciousness who both knows better and yet, at

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2 Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’, *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984), 84.

3 See the forthcoming ‘A History of Separation’ in Endnotes 4 for a full exposition of the betrayal thematic within the ultraleft.

the same time, feels that such knowing is at best useless and at worst harmful. This guilty self-consciousness plagues even those important theories — by Gilles Dauvé and *Théorie Communiste*, for instance — which emerge after 1968 as critiques of the historical ultra-left.

But if we really believe that theory emerges as part of the self-clarification of struggles, then there is no reason to fear intervention, or strategic thought. Any perspective militants and intellectuals might bring to a struggle is either already represented within it or, on the contrary, capable of being confronted as one of many obstacles and impasses antagonists encounter in their self-education. Strategic thought is not external to struggles, but native to them, and every set of victories or failures opens up new strategic prospects — possible futures — which must be examined and whose effects in the present can be accounted for. In describing these prospects, theory inevitably takes sides among them. This is not to issue orders to struggles, but to be ordered by them.

## THEORY FROM THE GROUND

The following essay is an experiment in theory writing. It attempts to render explicit the link between theory as it unfolds in the pages of communist journals and theory as it unfolds in the conduct of struggles, demonstrating how reflections about the restructuring of capitalism emerge as the consequence of particular moments of struggle. From these theoretical horizons, specific strategic prospects also emerge, and inasmuch as they are discussed on the ground and affect what happens there, we can only with great effort avoid them.

We can (and perhaps should) always ask of the theories we encounter, *Where are we? In response to which practical experience has this theory emerged?* In what follows we are, for the most part, in the port of Oakland, California, beneath the shadows of cyclopean gantry cranes and container ships, pacing around anxiously with the 20,000 other people who have entered the port in order to blockade it, as part of the so-called “General Strike” called for by Occupy Oakland on November 2, 2011. Every participant in the blockade that day surely had some intuitive sense of the port’s centrality to the northern Californian economy, and it is with this intuitive orientation that theory begins. If asked, they would tell you that a sizeable fraction of what they consumed originated overseas, got put onto ships, and passed through ports like Oakland’s en route to its final destination. As an interface between production and consumption, between the US and its overseas trading partners, between hundreds of thousands of workers and the various forms of circulating capital they engage, the quieted machinery of the port quickly became an emblem for the complex totality of capitalist production it seemed both to eclipse and to reveal. For our blockaders, then, all manner of questions unfolded directly from their encounter with the space of the port and its machinery. How might we produce a map of the various companies — the flows of capital and labour — directly or indirectly affected by a blockade of the port, by a blockade of particular terminals? Who sits at one remove? At two removes or three? Additionally, questions emerged about the relationship between the blockade tactic and the grievances of those who took part. Though organised in collaboration with the local section of the ILWU (the dockworker’s union), in solidarity with the threatened workers in Longview, Washington, few people who came to the block-

ade knew anything about Longview. They were there in response to the police eviction of Occupy Oakland's camp and in solidarity with whatever they understood as the chief grievances of the Occupy movement. How, then, to characterise the relationship between the blockaders, many of whom were unemployed or marginally employed, and the highly organised port workers? Who was affected by such a blockade? What is the relationship between the blockade and the strike tactic? Once asked, these questions linked the moment of the blockade to related mobilisations: the *piqueteros* of the Argentine uprisings of the late 1990s and early 2000s, unemployed workers who, absent any other way of prosecuting their demands for government assistance, took to blockading roads in small, dispersed bands; the *piquets volants* of the 2010 French strikes against proposed changes in pension law, bands of dispersed picketers who supported blockades by workers but also engaged in their own blockades, independent of strike activity; the recent strikes by workers in IKEA's and Wal-Mart's supply chains; and everywhere, in the season of political tumult that follows on the crisis of 2008, a proliferation of the blockade and a waning of the strike as such (with the exception of the industrial "BRICS", where a renegade labour formation has initiated a new strike wave).

## LOGISTICS AND HYDRAULIC CAPITALISM

These are not questions that belong solely to formal theory. They were debated immediately by those who participated in the blockade and who planned for a second blockade a month later.<sup>4</sup> Some of these debates invoked the concept

4 For an example, see 'Blockading the Port Is Only the First of Many

of “globalisation” to make sense of the increasing centrality of the port and international trade within capitalism, in an echo of the alter-globalisation movement of the early 2000s. But it has always been unclear what the term “globalisation” is supposed to mean, as marker for a new historical phase. Capitalism has been global from the very start, emerging from within the blood-soaked matrix of the mercantile expansion of the early modern period. Later on, its factories and mills were fed by planetary flows of raw material, and produce for a market which is likewise international. The real question, then, is what kind of globalisation we have today. What is the *differentia specifica* of today’s globalisation? What is the precise relationship between production and circulation?

Today’s supply chains are distinguished not just by their planetary extension and incredible speed but by their direct integration of manufacture and retail, their harmonisation of the rhythms of production and consumption. Since the 1980s, business writers have touted the value of “lean” and “flexible” production models, in which suppliers maintain the capacity to expand and contract production, as well as change the types of commodities produced, by relying on a network of subcontractors, temporary workers, and mutable organisational structures, adaptations that require precise control over the flow of goods and information between units.<sup>5</sup> Originally associated with the Toyota Last Resorts’ ([bayofrage.com](http://bayofrage.com)), a text that addresses many of the questions outlined above, and which was distributed within Occupy Oakland after the first blockade and before the second, multi-city blockade. In many regards, the essay here is a formalisation and refinement of a process of discussion, reflection and critique initiated by that text.

5 ‘Lean manufacturing’ begins as a formalisation of the principles behind the Toyota Production System, seen during the 1980s as a solution to the ailments of American manufacturing firms. See James P. Womack et al., *The Machine That Changed the World* (Rawson Associates 1990).



Production System, and Japanese manufacturers in general, these corporate forms are now frequently identified with the loose moniker Just In Time (JIT), which refers in the specific sense to a form of inventory management and in general to a production philosophy in which firms aim to eliminate standing inventory (whether produced in-house or received from suppliers). Derived in part from the Japanese and in part from Anglo-American cybernetics, JIT is a circulationist production philosophy, oriented around a concept of “continuous flow” that views everything not in motion as a form of waste (*muda*), a drag on profits. JIT aims to submit all production to the condition of circulation, pushing its velocity as far toward the light-speed of information transmission as possible. From the perspective of our blockaders, this emphasis on the quick and continuous flow of commodities multiplies the power of the blockade. In the absence of standing inventories, a blockade of just a few days could effectively paralyse many manufacturers and retailers.<sup>6</sup>

In JIT systems, manufacturers must coordinate upstream suppliers with downstream buyers, so speed alone is insufficient. Timing is crucial. Through precise coordination, firms can invert the traditional buyer-seller relation-

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The concept of ‘flexibility’ emerges from debates in the late 1970s about the possibility of an alternate manufacturing system based on ‘flexible specialisation’ rather than Fordist economies of scale, a system thought to be enabled by highly-adjustable Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machines. Michael J. Piore and Charles F. Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities For Prosperity* (Basic Books 1984).

6 Business writer Barry Lynn’s *End of the Line* is devoted to demonstrating the dangerous fragility of today’s distributed production system, where a ‘breakdown anywhere increasingly means a breakdown everywhere, much in the way that a small perturbation in the electricity grid in Ohio tripped the great North American blackout of August 2003’. Barry C Lynn, *End of the Line: The Rise and Coming Fall of the Global Corporation* (Doubleday 2005), 3.

ship in which goods are first produced and then sold to a consumer. By replenishing goods at the exact moment they are sold, with no build-up of stocks along the way, JIT firms perform a weird sort of time-travel, making it seem as if they only make products that have already been sold to the end-consumer. As opposed to the older, “push production” model, in which factories generated massive stockpiles of goods that retailers would clear from the market with promotions and coupons, in today’s “pull” production system “retailers share POS [point-of-sale] information with their vendors who can then rapidly replenish the retailers’ stock”.<sup>7</sup> This has led to the functional integration of suppliers and retailers, under terms in which the retailers often have the upper hand. Massive buyers like Wal-Mart reduce their suppliers to mere vassals, directly controlling product design and pricing while still retaining the flexibility to terminate a contract if needed. They gain the benefits of vertical integration without the liability that comes from formal ownership. Whereas in the early 1980s some thought that the emphasis on flexibility and dynamism would shift the balance of power from big, inflexible multinationals to small, agile firms, lean production has instead only meant a phase change rather than a weakening of the power of multinational firms. The new arrangement features what Bennett Harrison has called the “concentration without centralisation” of corporate authority.<sup>8</sup>

Lean manufacturing, flexibility, just-in-time inventory systems, “pull” production: each one of these innovations now forms a component part of the so-called “logis-

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7 Edna Bonacich and Jake B Wilson, *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution* (Cornell University Press 2008), 5.

8 Bennett Harrison, *Lean and Mean: The Changing Landscape of Corporate Power in the Age of Flexibility* (Guilford Press 1997), 8-12.

tics revolution”, and the corresponding “logistics industry”, which consists of in-house and third-party specialists in supply-chain design and management. Enabled by the technical transformations of the shipping and transport industry, containerisation in particular, as well as the possibilities afforded by information and communications technology, logistics workers now coordinate different productive moments and circulatory flows across vast international distances, ensuring that the where and when of the commodity obtains to the precision and speed of data. Confirming the veracity of the oft-quoted passage from Marx’s *Grundrisse* about the tendential development of the world market, through logistics, capital “strives simultaneously for a greater extension of the market and for greater annihilation of space by time”.<sup>9</sup> But logistics is more than the extension of the world market in space and the acceleration of commodity flows: it is the active power to coordinate and choreograph, the power to conjoin and split flows; to speed up and slow down; to change the type of commodity produced and its origin and destination point; and, finally, to collect and distribute knowledge about the production, movement and sale of commodities as they stream across the grid.

Logistics is a multivalent term. It names an industry in its own right, composed of firms that handle the administration of shipping and receiving for other corporations, as well as an activity that many businesses handle internally. But it also refers, metonymically, to a transformation of capitalist production overall: the “logistics revolution”. In this latter sense, logistics indexes the subordination of production to the conditions of circulation, the becoming-hegemonic of those aspects of the production process that involve circulation. In the idealised world-picture of logistics, man-

9 Marx, *Grundrisse* (MECW 28), 448 (Nicolaus trans.).

ufacture is merely one moment in a continuous, Heraclitean flux; the factory dissolves into planetary flows, chopped up into modular, component processes which, separated by thousands of miles, combine and recombine according to the changing whims of capital. Logistics aims to transmute all fixed capital into circulating capital, the better to imitate and conform to the purest and most liquid of forms capital takes: money. This is impossible, of course, since the valorisation process requires fixed capital outlays at some point along the circuits of reproduction, and therefore someone somewhere will have to shoulder the risk that comes with investing in immobile plant and machinery. But logistics is about mitigating this risk, it is about transforming a mode of production into a mode of circulation, in which the frequencies and channel capacities of the circuits of capital are what matters. In this the logistics revolution conforms to the hydraulic conception of capitalism outlined by Deleuze and Guattari in the 1970s, in which surplus value results not so much from the irreversible transformation of worked matter but from the conjunction of one flow (money) with another (labour).<sup>10</sup> In this account, influenced by Fernand Braudel's description of the origins of capitalism, and its revision by world-systems theory, capital is nothing so much as the commander of flows, breaking and conjoining various currents in order to create a vast irrigation and drainage of social power. Logistics turns solids into liquids — or at its extreme, into electrical fields — taking the movement of discrete elements and treating them as if they were oil in a pipeline, flowing continuously at precisely adjustable pressures.<sup>11</sup>

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10 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press 1983), 227-228.

11 Braudel, notably, treats capitalism as the intervention onto a pre-ex-

## THE USE-VALUE OF LOGISTICS

So far our project of cognitive mapping has successfully situated our blockaders within a vast spatial horizon, a network of reticulated flows, against the backdrop of which even the gargantuan containerships, even the teeming thousands of blockaders, are mere flyspecks. But the picture we have given is without depth, without history; it is, in other words, a picture, and we might wonder whether some of the disorientation to which the concept of the cognitive map responds is aggravated by the spatial (and visual) approach. Perhaps “map” functions as metaphor more than anything else, referring to an elaboration of concepts and categories in both spatial and temporal dimensions. A map, but also a story, chart, and diagram, because once we adopt the view *from* somewhere, the view *for* somebody, we place ourselves between a past and a future, at the leading edge of a chain of causes that are as much in need of mapping as the spatial arrangement of the supply chain, especially if we want to have any sense of what might happen next.

In other words, we will want to know why capital turned to logistics. Why did capital reorganise in this manner? In pursuit of which advantages and in response to which impasses? One answer, hinted at above, is that logistics is a simple accelerator of commodity flows. Logistics is a method to decrease the turnover time of capital, and thereby raise total profits. Short turnover times and quick production cycles can produce very high total profits with even the very low rates of profit (per turnover) which isting plane of market transactions by powerful actors who are able to suspend the rules of fair play for their own benefit. Capital is, fundamentally, a manipulation of circulation and the flows of a market economy. Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, (University of California Press 1992), 22.

capitalists encountered in the 1970s. Logistics was one solution, then, to “the long downturn” that emerged in the 1970s and the general crisis it ushered in, as opportunities for profit-taking through investment in the productive apparatus (in new plant and machinery) began to vanish. As we know from numerous accounts, one result is that capital flowed into financial assets, real estate, and the like, amplifying the velocity and bandwidth of the money supply and the credit market, and concocting novel forms of finance capital. But this well-documented process of financialisation had as its hidden counterpart a massive investment of capital in the complementary sphere of commodity (rather than money) circulation, increasing the throughput of the transportation system and accelerating the velocity of commodity capital through a buildout in the form of tankers, port complexes, railyards, robotically-controlled distribution centers, and the digital and network technology needed to manage the increased volume and complexity of trade. The shipping container and the commodity future were thus complementary technical innovations, streamlining and supercharging different segments of the total circuit of reproduction. The ever-faster rotations of credit and commodities around the globe are mutually enabling relays. However, investment in these areas is not just about brute velocity; it also aims at reducing the associated costs of circulation and thereby increasing the total load of the transport systems. Alongside the obvious economies of scale and mechanisation afforded by container technology, integrated information systems vastly reduce the administrative costs associated with circulation, freeing up more money for direct investment in production.<sup>12</sup>

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12 In Marxist value theory, circulation is often treated as an ‘unproductive’ sphere separate from the value-generating activities of the sphere

But these developments cannot be understood in terms of quantitative increase and decrease alone: increase in speed and volume of commodital flows, decrease in overhead. There is an important qualitative goal here as well, described by logistics as “agility”— that is, the power to change, as quickly as possible, the speed, location, origin and destination of products, as well as product type, in order to meet volatile market conditions. Corporations aim for “responsive supply chains”, as the chapter title of one popular logistics handbook has it, “such that [they] can respond in shorter time-frames both in terms of volume change and variety changes”.<sup>13</sup> In their interventive role, logistics experts might seek to identify and remedy bottlenecks in order to maintain agility. But as a matter of preventive design, spe-

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of production. Because no surplus value can be added through ‘acts of buying or selling’, which involve only the ‘conversion of the same value from one form into another’, the costs associated with these activities (book-keeping, inventory, retailing, administration) are *faux frais* pure and simple, deductions from the total surplus value (Marx, *Capital* Vol. 2 (MECW 36), 133). However, Marx argues that certain activities associated with circulation – transport, in particular – are value-generating, for the persuasive reason that it would be inconsistent to treat the transport of coal from the bottom of the mine to the top as productive but its transport from the mine to a power plant as unproductive. Circulation, then, refers to two different processes that are conceptually distinct but in practice almost always intertwined. First, there is a metamorphosis in the form of the commodity, as commodities change into money and vice versa. This is ‘circulation’ not in actual space but in the ideal phase-space of the commodity-form. As Marx notes, ‘movable commodity values, such as cotton or pig iron, can remain in the same warehouse while they undergo dozens of circulation processes, and are bought and resold by speculators’. We need to distinguish this type of properly unproductive circulation – ‘where it is the property title to the thing and not the thing itself’ that moves – from the physical circulation of the object in space, which might be thought of as an extension of the value-generating activities of the productive sphere (ibid., 153).

13 Martin Christopher, *Logistics and Supply Chain Management* (FT Press 2011), 99.

cialists will strive to synchronise and distribute information across the entire supply chain so that suppliers can take appropriate action before intervention becomes necessary. This distributed information is referred to as a “virtual supply chain”, a chain of transmitted symbolic representations that flows opposite to the physical movement of commodities. Entirely separate firms might use distributed data of this sort to coordinate their activities. The result, as Bonacich and Wilson note, is that “competition ... shift[s] from the firm level to the supply chain level”.<sup>14</sup> But transparency of data does not level the playing field at all; typically, one of the actors in the supply-chain network will retain dominance, without necessarily placing itself at the centre of operations — Wal-Mart, for instance, has insisted its suppliers place Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags on pallets and containers, allowing it to manage its inventory much more effectively, at considerable cost to the suppliers.<sup>15</sup>

Before we consider the final reason for the logistics revolution, a brief historical note is in order. Until WWII, the field of corporate or business logistics did not exist at all. Instead, logistics was a purely military affair, referring to the methods that armies used to provision themselves, moving supplies from the rear to the front line, a mundane but fundamental enterprise which military historians since Thucydides have acknowledged as a key determinant of the success of expeditionary wars. Business logistics as a distinct field evolved in the 1950s, building upon innovations in military logistics, and drawing upon the interchange of personnel between the military, industry and the academy so characteristic of the postwar period, interchanges superin-

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14 Bonacich and Wilson, *Getting the Goods*, 5.

15 Erick C. Jones and Christopher A. Chung, *RFID in Logistics* (CRC Press 2010), 87.



tended by the fields of cybernetics, information theory and operations research. The connection between military and corporate logistics remained intimate. For instance, though Malcolm McLean introduced stackable shipping containers in the 1950s, and had already managed to containerise some domestic transport lines, it was his Sea-Land Service's container-based solution to the logistics crisis of the Vietnam War that generalised the technology and demonstrated its effectiveness for international trade.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, RFID technology was first deployed by the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan, at which point Wal-Mart began exploring its use. Shortly afterwards, the Department of Defense and Wal-Mart issued mandates to their largest suppliers, requiring them to use RFID tags on their merchandise. The link between corporate logistics and military logistics is so strong that the many of Wal-Mart's managers and executives — who set the standard for the industry as a whole — come from the military.<sup>17</sup>

Logistics, we might say, is war by other means, war by means of trade. A war of supply chains that conquers new territories by suffusing them with capillary distributions, ensuring that commodities flow with ease to the farthest extremities. From this martial perspective, we might usefully distinguish, however, between an offensive and a defensive logistics. The offensive forms we have already described above: logistics seeks to saturate markets, reduce costs and outproduce competitors, maintain maximum throughput and maximum product variety. In this offensive aspect, lo-

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16 The story of Malcolm McLean and Sea-Land is narrated in Marc Levinson, *The Box* (Princeton 2010), 36-75, 171-178.

17 Walmart CEO Bill Simon, a former Navy officer, initiated programs which recruit managers and executives from the military. Michael Bergdahl, *What I Learned From Sam Walton* (John Wiley 2004), 155. He has also established 'leadership' programs modeled on military academies.

gistics emphasises flexibility, plasticity, permutability, dynamism, and morphogenesis. But it finds its complement in a series of protocols which are fundamentally defensive, mitigating supply chain risk from blockades and earthquakes, strikes and supplier shortages. If “agility” is the watchword of offensive logistics, defensive logistics aims for “resilience” and emphasises the values of elasticity, homeostasis, stability, and longevity. But resilience is only ostensibly a conservative principle; it finds stability not in inflexibility but in constant, self-stabilising adaptivity.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the defensive and the offensive forms of logistics are really impossible to disentangle, since one firm’s agility is another’s volatility, and the more flexible and dynamic a firm becomes the more it “exports” uncertainty to the system as a whole, requiring other firms to become more resilient. In any case, we can expect that, in the context of the economic crisis and the looming environmental collapse, logistics will become more and more the science of risk management and crisis mitigation.

Logistics is capital’s art of war, a series of techniques for intercapitalist and interstate competition. But such wars are, at the same time, always fought through and against workers. One of the most significant reasons for the extension, complication and lubrication of these planetary supply chains is that they allow for arbitrage of the labour market. The sophisticated, permutable supply chains of the contemporary world make it possible for capital to seek out the lowest wages anywhere in the world and to play proletarians off of each other. Logistics was therefore one of the key weapons in a decades-long global offensive against labour. The planetary supply chains enabled by containerisation effectively encircled labour, laying siege to its defensive em-

18 Christopher, *Logistics and Supply Chain Management*, 189-210.

placements such as unions and, eventually, over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, completely crushing them. From there, with labour on the run, logistics has enabled capital to quickly neutralise and outmanoeuvre whatever feeble resistance workers mount. Although capital must deal with the problem of sunk investments in immovable buildings, machines, and other infrastructures, reconfigurable supply chains allow it unprecedented power to route around, and starve, troublesome labour forces. By splitting workers into a “core” composed of permanent workers (often conservative and loyal) and a periphery of casualised, outsourced and fragmented workers, who may or may not work for the same firm, capital has dispersed proletarian resistance quite effectively. But these organisational structures require systems of coordination, communication and transport, opening capital up to the danger of disruption in the space of circulation, whether by workers charged with circulating commodities or by others, as with the port blockade, who choose circulation as their space of effective action, for the simple reason that capital has already made this choice as well. The actions of the participants in the port blockade are, in this regard, doubly determined by the restructuring of capital. They are there not only because the restructuring of capital has either left them with no jobs at all or placed them into jobs where action as workers according to the classical tactics of the worker’s movement has been proscribed, but also because capital itself has increasingly taken the sphere of circulation as the object of its own interventions. In this regard, theory provides us not only with the *why* of capital’s restructuring but the *why* of a new cycle of struggles.

## VISIBILITY AND PRAXIS

It should be obvious by now that logistics is capital's own project of cognitive mapping. Hence, the prominence of "visibility" among the watchwords of the logistics industry. To manage a supply chain means to render it transparent. The flows of commodities in which we locate our blockaders are doubled by flows of information, by a signifying chain that superintends the commodity chain, sometimes without human intervention at all. Alongside the predictive models of finance, which aim to represent and control the chaotic fluctuations of the credit system and money, logistics likewise manages the complex flows of the commodity system through structures of representation. We might imagine, then, a logistics against logistics, a counter-logistics which employs the conceptual and technical equipment of the industry in order to identify and exploit bottlenecks, to give our blockaders a sense of where they stand within the flows of capital. This counter-logistics might be a proletarian art of war to match capital's own *ars belli*. Imagine if our blockaders knew exactly which commodities the containers at particular berths, or on particular ships, contained; imagine if they could learn about the origin and destination of these commodities and calculate the possible effects — functionally and in dollars — of delays or interruptions in particular flows. Possession of such a counterlogistical system, which might be as crude as a written inventory, would allow antagonists to focus their attention where it would be most effective. Taking, for example, the situation of the French pension law struggles of 2010, in which mobile blockades in groups of twenty to a hundred moved throughout French cities, supporting the picket lines of striking workers but also blockading

key sites independently, the powers of coordination and concentration permitted by such a system are immediately apparent.<sup>19</sup> This is one example of the strategic horizons which unfold from within struggles, even if most discussions of such counterlogistics will have to be conducted with particular occasions in mind.

But beyond the practical value of counterlogistic information, there is what we might call its *existential value*: the way in which being able to see one's own actions alongside the actions of others, and being able to see as well the effects of such concerted action, imbues those actions with a meaning they might have otherwise lacked. The contagiousness of the Arab Spring — for example — arises in part from the affirmative effect of transmitted images of struggle. Being able to see one's own action in the face of state violence reflected in and even enlarged by the actions of others can be profoundly galvanising. This is another one of the values of theory with regard to praxis — the ability to place struggles side by side, to render struggles visible to each other and to themselves.

This importance of visibility — or legibility, as he calls it — is essential to one of the best discussions of the restructuring of labour in late capitalism, Richard Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character*. Sennett suggests that the “weak work identity” of contemporary workplaces — dis-

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19 The blockades I am talking about differ from the classical barricade in that they are offensive rather than defensive. The main purpose of the barricades of the 19th century was that they dispersed the state's forces so that small groups of soldiers could either be defeated with force or fraternised with and converted. But the weakness of the barricade fight, as described by writers from Blanqui to Engels, was that partisans defended particular territories (their own neighborhoods) and could not shift around as needed. See Louis-Auguste Blanqui, ‘Manual for an Armed Insurrection’ (marxists.org) and Engels, ‘Introduction to Karl Marx’s “Class Struggles in France”’ (MECW 27), 517-519.

tinguished mainly by computerisation, in his treatment — results from the utter illegibility of the work processes to the workers themselves. Visiting a bakery which he had studied decades earlier for his first book, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, Sennett finds that, in place of the physically challenging processes of the 1960s bakery, workers now used computer-controlled machines which can produce any kind of bread according to changing market conditions, simply by pressing a few buttons. As a result, unlike bakers in the past, the workers do not identify with their jobs or derive satisfaction from their tasks, precisely because the functioning of the machines is fundamentally opaque to them. The difference between entering values into a spreadsheet and baking bread is negligible to them. Concrete labour has become fundamentally abstract, scrambling at the same time distinctions between material and immaterial, manual and mental labour:

Computerized baking has profoundly changed the balletic physical activities of the shop floor. Now the bakers make no physical contact with the materials or the loaves of bread, monitoring the entire process via on-screen icons which depict, for instance, images of bread color derived from data about the temperature and baking time of the ovens; few bakers actually see the loaves of bread they make. Their working screens are organized in the familiar Windows way; in one, icons for many more different kinds of bread appear than had been prepared in the past — Russian, Italian, French loaves all possible by touching the screen. Bread had become a screen representation.

As a result of working in this way, the bakers now no longer actually know how to bake bread.

Automated bread is no marvel of technological perfection; the machines frequently tell the wrong story about the loaves rising within, for instance, failing to gauge accurately the strength of the rising yeast, or the actual color of the loaf. The workers can fool with the screen to correct somewhat for these defects; what they can't do is fix the machines, or more important, actually bake bread by manual control when the machines all too often go down. Program-dependent laborers, they can have no hands-on knowledge. The work is no longer legible to them, in the sense of understanding what they are doing.<sup>20</sup>

There is an interesting paradox here, which Sennett draws out very nicely in the following pages: the more transparent and “user-friendly” the computerised processes are, the more opaque the total process they control becomes. His conclusion should trouble any simplistic conception of the powers of visibility or the “cognitive map” as such, a problem that Jameson recognised early on, declaring “informational technology the representational solution as well as the representational problem of [the] world system’s cognitive mapping”.<sup>21</sup> The problems for Sennett’s workers, as well as for our blockaders, are practical as much as they are epistemological, a matter of doing and knowing together. Unless the representations such systems provide widen our capacity to do and to make, to effect changes upon the world, they will make that world more rather than less opaque, no matter how richly descriptive they might be. And though Sennett’s discussion

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20 Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (W. W. Norton & Co. 2000), 68.

21 Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, (Indiana University Press, 1995), 10.

is geared only toward the world of labour (and imbued with typical left-wing nostalgia for the *savoir-faire* and stable identities that skilled work entailed) the problems of legibility pertain as much to our blockaders as to the dockworkers at the port. To persist beyond an initial moment, struggles need to recognise themselves in the effects they create, they need to be able to map out those effects, not just by positioning themselves within the abstract and concrete space of late capital, but within a political sequence that has both past and future, that opens onto a horizon of possibilities. All of this requires knowledge but it requires knowledge that can be practiced, that can be worked out.

Our blockaders are therefore dispossessed of usable knowledge by a technical system in which they appear only as incidental actors, as points of relay and insertion which require at most a stenographic compression of their immediate environs into a few kilobytes of usable information. Bernard Stiegler, who despite an often tedious Heideggerian theoretical apparatus is one of the best contemporary theorists of technology, describes this process as “cognitive and affective proletarianization”, where proletarians are dispossessed, as producers, of *savoir faire* and, as consumers, of *savoir vivre*. This is part of a long history of what Stiegler calls “grammatization”, in which knowledge and memory is discretised into reproducible and combinatorial bodily gestures — phonemes, graphemes, keystrokes, bits — and then exteriorised through inscription in matter.<sup>22</sup> The digital and telecommunication technology of contemporary grammatisation is the final stage of this process, such that our memories and cognitive faculties now exist in the data cloud, as it were, part of a distributed technological prosthesis without which we

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22 Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, (Polity, 2010), 40-44.



are effectively incapable of orienting ourselves or functioning. In this largely persuasive account, which thankfully cuts against the optimistic readings of information technology as a progressive socialisation of “general intellect”, we are dispossessed not just of the means of production but the means of thought and feeling as well.

In many ways, Stiegler shares a great deal with the rich exploration of the concepts of alienation, fetishism and reification that followed the popularisation of the early Marx in the 1960s, by Herbert Marcuse, Guy Debord and others. We might, for this reason, wonder about the latent humanism in Stiegler. Sennett, however, provides us with an important caveat against reading Stiegler in humanist terms: whereas a certain kind of classic Marxist analysis might expect his bakers to want to reappropriate the knowledge of which they had been dispossessed by the machines, few of them have any such desires. Their real lives are elsewhere, and hardly any of them expect or desire dignity and meaning from their jobs as bakers. The only person who conforms to the expected outline of the alienated worker, in Sennett’s bakery, is the foreman, who worked his way up from apprentice baker to manager, and takes the wastage and loss of skill in the bakery as a personal affront, imagining that if the bakery were a cooperative the workers might take more interest in knowing how things are done. The other workers, however, treat work not as the performance of a skill but as a series of indifferent applications of an abstract capacity to labour. Baking means little more than “pushing buttons in a Windows program designed by others”.<sup>23</sup> The work is both illegible to them, and utterly alien to their own needs, but not alien in the classic sense that they recognise it as a lost or stolen part of themselves they hope to recover through

23 Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*, 70.

struggle. This is one of the most important consequences of the restructuring of the labour process superintended by the logistics revolution: the casualisation and irregularisation of labour, the disaggregation of the work process into increasingly illegible and geographically separate component parts, as well as the incredible powers which capital now has to defeat any struggle for better conditions, mean that it is not only impossible for most proletarians to visualise their place within this complex system but it is also impossible for them to identify with that place as a source of dignity and satisfaction, since its ultimate meaning with regard to the total system remains elusive. Most workers today cannot say, as workers of old could (and often did): *It is we who built this world! It is we to whom this world belongs!* The restructuring of the mode of production and the subordination of production to the conditions of circulation therefore forecloses the classical horizon of proletarian antagonism: seizure of the means of production for the purposes of a worker-managed society. One cannot imagine seizing that which one cannot visualise, and inside of which one's place remains uncertain.

## THE RECONFIGURATION THESIS

The difficulties which Sennett's bakers (or our blockaders) encounter are not simply failures of knowledge, ones that can be solved through pedagogical intervention; as valuable as a cognitive map of these processes might be, the problems we confront in *visualising* some self-management of existing productive means originate from the *practical* difficulties — in my view, impossibilities — that such a prospect would encounter. The opacity of the system, in this regard, emerges from its intractability, and not the other way around. In an

insightful article on the logistics industry and contemporary struggle, Alberto Toscano (who has lately devoted considerable effort to critiquing theorists of communisation) faults the “space-time of much of today’s anticapitalism” for its reliance on “subtraction and interruption, not attack and expansion”.<sup>24</sup> Toscano proposes, as an alternative, an anti-capitalist logistics which treats the various productive sites and infrastructures of late capitalism as “potentially reconfigurable” rather than the object of “mere negation or sabotage”. No doubt, any struggle which wants to overcome capitalism will need to consider “what use can be drawn from the dead labours which crowd the earth’s crust”, but there is no reason to assume from the start, as Toscano does, that all existing means of production must have some use beyond capital, and that all technological innovation must have, almost categorically, a progressive dimension which is recuperable through a process of “determinate negation”. As we saw above, the use-value which the logistics industry produces is a set of protocols and techniques that enable firms to seek out the lowest wages anywhere in the world, and to evade the inconvenience of class struggle when it arises. In this sense, unlike other capitalist technologies, logistics is only partly about exploiting the efficiencies of machines in order to get products to market faster and more cheaply, since the main purpose of the faster and cheaper technologies is to offset the otherwise prohibitive cost of exploiting labour forces halfway around the world. The technological ensemble which logistics superintends is therefore fundamentally different than other ensembles such as the Fordist factory; it saves on labour costs by decreasing the wage, rather than increasing the productivity of labour. To put it in

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24 Alberto Toscano, ‘Logistics and Opposition’, *Mute* 3, no. 2 (meta-mute.org).

Marxist terms, it is absolute surplus value masquerading as relative surplus value. The use-value of logistics, for capital, is exploitation in its rawest form, and thus it is truly doubtful that logistics might form, as Toscano writes, “capitalism’s pharmakon, the cause for its pathologies (from the damaging hypertrophy of long-distance transport of commodities to the aimless sprawl of contemporary conurbation) as well as the potential domain of anti-capitalist solutions”.

For workers to seize the commanding heights offered by logistics — to seize, in other words, the control panel of the global factory — would mean for them to manage a system that is constitutively hostile to them and their needs, to oversee a system in which extreme wage differentials are built into the very infrastructure. Without those differentials, most supply-chains would become both wasteful and unnecessary. But perhaps “repurposing” means for Toscano instead a kind of making-do with the machinery of logistics as we find it, seeing what other purposes it can be put to, rather than imagining an appropriation of its commanding heights? Any revolutionary process will make do with what it finds available as a matter of necessity, but it is precisely the “convertibility” or “reconfigurability” of these technologies that seems questionable. The fixed capital of the contemporary production regime is designed for extraction of maximum surplus value; each component part is engineered for insertion into *this* global system; therefore, the presence of communist potentials as unintended features — “affordances”, as they are sometimes called — of contemporary technology needs to be argued for, not assumed as a matter of course.<sup>25</sup> Much of the machinery of

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25 Marxist theories of technology often diverge along two paths, each of which can be traced to the works of Marx. The dominant view holds that capitalist technologies are fundamentally progressive, first because

contemporary logistics aims to streamline the circulation of commodities and not use-values, to produce not the things that are necessary or beneficial but those that are profitable: individually packaged boxes of cereal, for instance, whose complex insignia distinguish them from the dozens of varieties of nearly identical cereals (sold and consumed in sizes and types that reflect certain social arrangements, such as the nuclear family). How much of the vaunted flexibility of

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they reduce necessary labour time and thereby potentially free humans from the necessity of labouring, and second because industrialisation effects a fundamental 'socialisation' of production, obliterating the hierarchies that once pertained to particular crafts (e.g. e.g. Marx, *Grundrisse* [MECW 29], 90-92 [Nicolaus trans.]). In this Orthodox account, communism is latent within the socialised, cooperative arrangement of the factory, whose technical substrate increasingly enters into crisis-producing contradiction with the inefficient and unplanned nature of the capitalist marketplace. But there is also a heterodox Marxist perspective on technology, whose exemplars are writers such as Raniero Panzieri and David Noble, and whose clearest sources lie in the chapter in *Capital* on 'Machinery and Large-Scale Industry,' and in particular, the section on the factory. There, Marx suggests that, in the modern factory system, capital's domination of labour 'acquires a technical and palpable reality'. In the factory 'the gigantic natural forces, and the mass of social labour embodied in the system of machinery...constitutes the power of the master' (Marx, *Capital* vol.1 [MECW 35], 420-430 [Fowkes trans.]). But if machinery is a materialisation of capitalist domination – an objectification of the 'master' – then we have every reason to doubt that we can undo such domination without negating the 'technical and palpable aspect of machinery. If workers were to seize production machinery and self-manage the factories, this might only amount to another mode of administering the domination sedimented inside the production machinery. The heterodox perspective is obviously in line with the conclusions of this article, but much work remains to be done in developing an adequate theory of technology. We cannot merely invert the Orthodox, progressivist account of machinery which assumes that every advance of the productive forces constitutes an enlargement of the possibilities for communism and declare, in opposition, that all technology is politically negative or inherently capitalist. Rather, we have to examine technologies from a technical perspective, from the communist prospect, and consider what affordances they really do allow, given the tragic circumstances of their birth.

the logistics system is really the flexibility of product variety, of wage differentials and trade imbalances? How much would become useless once one eliminated the commodity-form, once one eliminated the necessity of buying and selling? Furthermore, the contemporary logistics system is designed for a particular international balance of trade, with certain countries as producers and others as consumers. This is a fact fundamentally entangled with the wage imbalances mentioned earlier, which means that the inequality of the global system in part has to do with the unequal distribution of productive means and the infrastructures of circulation — the concentration of port capacity on the West Coast of the US rather than the East Coast, for instance, because of the location of manufacturing in Asia. Rebalancing the amount of goods produced locally or at a distance — if such a thing were to be a part of a break with capitalist production — would mean an entirely different arrangement of infrastructures and probably different types of infrastructure as well (smaller ships, for instance).

We might also question the reconfiguration thesis from the perspective of scale. Because of the uneven distribution of productive means and capitals — not to mention the tendency for geographical specialisation, the concentration of certain lines in certain areas (textiles in Bangladesh, for instance)— the system is not scalable in any way but up. It does not permit partitioning by continent, hemisphere, zone or nation. It must be managed as a totality or not at all. Therefore, nearly all proponents of the reconfiguration thesis assume high-volume and hyper-global distribution in their socialist or communist system, even if the usefulness of such distributions beyond production for profit remain unclear. Another problem, though, is that administration at such a scale introduces a sublime dimension to the con-

cept of “planning”; these scales and magnitudes are radically beyond human cognitive capacities. The level of an impersonal “administration of things” and the level of a “free association of producers” are not so much in contradiction as separated by a vast abyss. Toscano leaves such an abyss marked by an ominous appeal to Herbert Marcuse’s concept of “necessary alienation” as the unfortunate but necessary concomitant of maintenance of the technical system. Other partisans of the reconfiguration thesis, when questioned about the scaling-up of the emancipatory desires and needs of proletarian antagonists to a global administration invariably deploy the literal *deus ex machina* of supercomputers. Computers and algorithms, we are told, will determine how commodities are to be distributed; computers will scale up from the demands for freedom and equality of proletarian antagonists and figure out a way to distribute work and the products of work in a manner satisfactory to all. But how an algorithmically-mediated production would work, why it would differ from production mediated by competition and the price-mechanism remains radically unclear, and certainly unclouded by any actual argument. Would labour-time still be the determinant of access to social wealth? Would free participation (in work) and free access (in necessities) be facilitated in such a system? If the goal is rather a simple equality of producers — equal pay for equal work — how would one deal with the imbalances of productivity, morale and initiative, which result from the maintenance of the requirement that “he who does not work does not eat”? Is this what “necessary alienation” means?

But the non-scalar (or unidirectional scalar) of the logistics system introduces a much more severe problem. Even if global communist administration — by super-computer, or by ascending tiers of delegates and assemblies

— were possible and desirable on the basis of the given technical system, once we consider the *historical* character of communism, things seem much more doubtful. Communism does not drop from the sky, but must emerge from a revolutionary process, and given the present all or nothing character of the international division of labour — the concentration of manufacturing in a few countries, the concentration of productive capacity for certain essential lines of capital in a handful of factories, as mentioned above — any attempt to seize the means of production would require an *immediately global* seizure. We would need a revolutionary process so quickly successful and extensive that all long-distance supply chains ran between non-capitalist producers within a matter of months, as opposed to the much more likely scenario that a break with capital will be geographically concentrated at first and need to spread from there. In most cases, therefore, maintenance of these distributed production processes and supply-chains will mean trade with capitalist partners, an enchainment to production for profit (necessary for survival, we will be told by the pragmatists) the results of which will be nothing less than disastrous, as a study of the Russian and Spanish examples will show. In both cases, the need to maintain an export economy in order to buy crucial goods on the international markets — arms in particular — meant that revolutionary cadres and militants had to use direct and indirect force in order to induce workers to meet production targets. Raising productivity and increasing productive capacity *now* became the transitional step on the way to achieving communism *then*, and in anarchist Spain, as much as Bolshevik Russia, cadres set to work mimicking the dynamic growth of capitalist accumulation through direct political mechanisms, rather than the indirect force of the wage, though in both cases



economic incentive structures (piece rates, bonus pay) were eventually introduced as matter of necessity. It is hard to see how anything but a new insurrectionary process — one mitigated against by the establishment of new disciplines and repressive structures — could have restored these systems even to the labour-note based “lower phase of communism” that Marx advocates in “Critique of the Gotha Program”, let alone a society based upon free access and non-compelled labour.

The traditional discussions of such matters assume that, whereas underdeveloped countries like Russia and Spain had no choice but to develop their productive capacity first, proletarians in fully industrialised countries could immediately expropriate and self-manage the means of production without any need for forced development. This might have been true in the immediate postwar period, and as late as the 1970s, but once deindustrialisation began in earnest, the chance had been officially missed — the global restructuring and redistribution of productive means leaves us in a position that is probably as bad as, if not worse than, those early 20th-century revolutions, when some large percentage of the means of production for consumer goods were ready to hand, and one could locate, in one’s own region, shoe factories and textile mills and steel refineries. A brief assessment of the workplaces in one’s immediate environs should convince most of us — in the US at least, and I suspect most of Europe — of the utter unworkability of the reconfiguration thesis. The service and administrative jobs which most proletarians today work are meaningless except as points of intercalation within vast planetary flows — a megaretailer, a software company, a coffee chain, an investment bank, a non-profit organisation. Most of these jobs pertain to use-values that would be rendered non-us-

es by revolution. To meet their own needs and the needs of others, these proletarians would have to engage in the production of food and other necessities, the capacity for which does not exist in most countries. The idea that 15% or so of workers whose activities would still be useful would work on behalf of others — as caretakers of a communist future — is politically non-workable, even if the system could produce enough of what people need, and trade for inputs didn't produce another blockage. Add to this the fact that the development of logistics itself and the credit system alongside it, greatly multiplies the power of capital to discipline rebellious zones through withdrawal of credit (capital flight), embargo, and punitive terms of trade.

## HORIZONS AND PROSPECTS

The whole is the false, in this case, not so much because it can't be adequately represented or because any attempt at such representation does violence to its internal contradictions, but because all such global representations belie the fact that the whole can never be possessed as such. The totality of the logistics system belongs to capital. It is a view from everywhere (or nowhere), a view from space, that only capital as totalising, distributed process can inhabit. Only capital can fight us in every place at once, because capital is not in any sense a force with which we contend, but the very territory on which that contention takes place. Or rather, it is a force, but a field force, something which suffuses rather than opposes. Unlike capital, we fight in particular locations and moments — *here, there, now, then*. To be a partisan means, by necessity, to accept the partiality of perspective and the partiality of the combat we offer.

The weak tactics of the present — the punctual riot, the blockade, the occupation of public space — are not the strategic product of an antagonist consciousness that has misrecognised its enemy, or failed to examine adequately the possibilities offered by present technologies. On the contrary, the tactics of our blockaders emerge from a consciousness that has already surveyed the possibilities on offer, and understood, if only intuitively, how the restructuring of capital has foreclosed an entire strategic repertoire. The supply chains which fasten these proletarians to the planetary factory are radical chains in the sense that they go to the root, and must be torn out from the root as well. The absence of opportunities for “reconfiguration” will mean that in their attempts to break from capitalism proletarians will need to find other ways of meeting their needs. The logistical problems they encounter will have to do with replacing that which is fundamentally unavailable except through linkage to these planetary networks and the baleful consequences they bring. In other words, the creation of communism will require a massive process of delinking from the planetary factory as a matter of survival. We will not have the opportunity to use all (or even many) of the technical means that we find, since so many of these will be effectively orphaned by a break with capitalist production. But what, then, of strategy? If theory is the horizon which opens from present conditions of struggle, strategy is something different, less a horizon than a prospect. Strategy is a particular moment when theory reopens to practice, suggesting not just a possible but a desirable course of action. If a horizon places us in front of a range of possibilities, the strategic moment comes when struggles reach a certain crest, an eminence, from which a narrower set of options opens up — a prospect. Prospects are a middle ground between where we are

and the far horizon of communisation.

What are our prospects, then, based upon the recent cycle of struggles? We now know that the restructuring of the capital–labour relationship has made intervention in the sphere of circulation an obvious and in many ways effective tactic. The blockade, it seems, might assume an importance equal to the strike in the coming years, as will occupations of public space and struggles over urban and rural environments remade to become better conduits for flows of labour and capital — as recent struggles in both Turkey and Brazil have demonstrated. Our prospects are such that, instead of propagandising for forms of workplace action that are unlikely to succeed or generalise, we might better accept our new strategic horizon and work, instead, to disseminate information about how interventions in this sphere might become more effective, what their limits are, and how such limits could be overcome. We might work to disseminate the idea that the seizure of the globally-distributed factory is no longer a meaningful horizon, and we might essay to map out the new relations of production in a way that takes account of this fact. For instance, we might try to graph the flows and linkages around us in ways that comprehend their brittleness as well as the most effective ways they might be blocked as part of the conduct of particular struggles. These would be semi-local maps — maps that operate from the perspective of a certain zone or area. From this kind of knowledge, one might also develop a functional understanding of the infrastructure of capital, such that one then knew which technologies and productive means would be orphaned by a partial or total delinking from planetary flows, which ones might alternately be conserved or converted, and what the major practical and technical questions facing a revolutionary situation might look like. How to en-

sure that there is water and that the sewers function? How to avoid meltdown of nuclear reactors? What does local food production look like? What types of manufacture happen nearby, and what kinds of things can be done with its production machinery? This would be a process of inventory, taking stock of things we encounter in our immediate environs, that does not imagine mastery from the standpoint of the global totality, but rather a process of bricolage from the standpoint of partisan fractions who know they will have to fight from particular, embattled locations, and win their battles successively rather than all at once. None of this means setting up a blueprint for the conduct of struggles, a transitional program. Rather, it means producing the knowledge which the experience of past struggles has already demanded and which future struggles will likely find helpful.



As we apprehend it, the process of instituting communism can only take the form of a collection of *acts of communisation*, of making common such- and-such space, such-and-such machine, such- and-such knowledge. That is to say, the elaboration of the mode of sharing that attaches to them. Insurrection itself is just an accelerator, a decisive moment in this process. As we understand it, the party is not an organisation - where everything becomes insubstantial by dint of transparency - and it is not a family - where everything smells like a swindle by dint of opacity.

The Party is a collection of places, infrastructures, communised means; and the dreams, bodies, murmurs, thoughts, desires that circulate among

those places, the use of those means, the sharing of those infrastructures.

The notion of the Party responds to the necessity of a minimal formalisation, which makes us accessible as well as allows us to remain invisible. It belongs to the communist way that we explain to ourselves and formulate the basis of our sharing. So that the most recent arrival is, at the very least, the equal of the elder.

Looking closer at it, the Party could be nothing but this: the formation of sensibility as a force. The deployment of an archipelago of worlds. What would a political force, under empire, be that didn't have its farms, its schools, its arms, its medicines, its collective houses, its editing desks, its print-



ers, its covered trucks and its bridgeheads in the metropole? It seems more and more absurd that some of us still have to work for capital - aside from the necessary tasks of infiltration.

The offensive power of the Party comes from the fact that it is also a power of production, but that within it, the relationships are just *incidentally* relationships of production.

Through its development capitalism has revealed itself to be not merely a mode of production, but a reduction of all relations, in the last instance, to relations of production. From the company to the family, even consumption appears as another episode in the general production, the production *of society*.

The overthrowing of capitalism will come from those who are able to create the conditions for *other types of relations*.

Thus the communism we are talking about is strictly opposed to what has been historically caricatured as "communism", and that was most of the time socialism, monopolist state capitalism.

Communism does not consist in the elaboration of *new relations of production, but indeed in the abolition of those relations*.

Not having relations of production with our world or between ourselves means never letting the search for results become more important than the attention to the process; casting from ourselves all

forms of valorisation; making sure we do not disconnect affection and cooperation.

Being attentive to worlds, to their sensible configurations, is exactly what renders impossible the isolation of something like "relations of production". In the places we open, the means we share, it is this grace that we look for, that we experience. To name this experience, we often hear about everything being "free" in the sense of "free shops", "free transport", "free meals". We would rather speak of communism, for we cannot forget what this "freedom" implies in terms of organisation, and in the short term, of political antagonism.

So, the construction of the Party, in its most visible aspect, consists for us in the sharing or communisa-

tion of what we have at our disposal. Communising a place means: setting its use free, and on the basis of this liberation experimenting with refined, intensified, and complexified relations. If private property is essentially the discretionary power of depriving anyone of the use of the possessed thing, communisation means depriving only the agents of empire from it.

From every side we oppose the blackmail of having to choose between the offensive and the constructive, negativity and positivity, life and survival, war and the everyday. We will not respond to it. We understand too well how this alternative divides, then splits and re-splits, all the existing collectives. For a force which deploys itself, it is impossible to say if the annihilation of

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a device that harms it is a matter of construction or offence, if seizing sufficient food or medical autonomy constitutes an act of war or subtraction. There are circumstances, like in a riot, in which the ability to heal our comrades considerably increases our ability to wreak havoc. Who can say that arming ourselves would not be part of the material constitution of a collectivity? When we agree on a common strategy, there is no choice between the offensive and the constructive; there is, in every situation, what obviously increases our power and what harms it, what is opportune and what is not. And when this is not obvious, there is discussion, and in the worst of cases, there is the gamble.

In a general way, we do not see how anything else but a force, a reality able to survive the to-

tal dislocation of capitalism, could truly attack it, could pursue the offensive until the very moment of dislocation.

When the moment will come, it will be a matter of actually turning to our advantage the generalised social collapse, to transform a collapse like the one in Argentina or the Soviet Union into a revolutionary situation. Those who pretend to split material autonomy from the sabotage of the imperial machine show that they want neither.

It is not an objection against communism that the greatest experimentation of sharing in the recent period was the result of the Spanish anarchist movement between 1868 and 1939.

*-Anonymous, Call*

COMMUNIST  
MEASURES  
IN NOTRE-  
DAME-DES-  
LANDES

- *Max L'Hameunasse*

*The struggle against the NDDL airport is an attempt to breach the capitalist ramparts. Because for many, to attack capitalism, one has to start somewhere!*

*It's 2000 ha that will first be razed and then paved over, with the insane goal of creating an international HQE (High Environmental Quality) airport. The part of the local population favorable to the project, which imagines prof- iting, makes it no laughing matter. But the rich will get richer and the poor, poorer. The realization of this airport project led by VINCI, a multinational corporation present on every continent (in Khimki too, near Moscow, where VINCI wants to destroy the last local forest, and where the weak on-the- ground resistance faces ultra-violent far-right militias, and political assassinations are common), is going ahead with contempt for local populations, who launched a call to occupation in 2009.*

*The occupation has gone on then for two years,*



*time used by a handful of anti-capitalist resisters to develop autonomy – dietary, cultural, and political. But the squat of this zone à défendre (ZAD) slows the work, leads to surveillance and repression of militants, and recently eviction procedures, but we will resist whatever the cost!*

*So today we make a call for the reoccupation of the sites and for international rebellion!*

*It goes without saying that when they evict us, we will resist!*

*(and international support is needed if we want to see the end of capitalism!)*

*Against this rampant capitalism, and against the all-power of money, one solution, insurrection!*

-From the site [zad.nadir.org](http://zad.nadir.org)

THERE THEN IS WHAT SCARES THEM: AUTONOMY, attack, insurrection. They know the relative fragility of the society of capital in this current moment of restructuring in which a situation dawns, a time of hierarchical redeployment of the constitutive authorities of the society of capital, a time of uncertainty. At the heart of this situation there are possibilities, potentialities as much for capital as for its antithesis, communism. There is also and above all a necessity: the ideological struggle by which each dynamic will tend to lead it right to the end, until the abolition of one or the other of its opposing forces. For capital then it is a matter of maintaining its hegemony and deepening its hold in minds, eradicating all contestation that could take the appearance of a localized abolition of its order and its rules. More than defending the construction of this airport, it's really a matter of attacking the insolence of a band of "anarcho-auton-

omous ultra-leftists” vindicating another way of conceiving social life, of building differently social relations no longer mediated by the categories of the society of capital.

The struggle of the puppets of “politics” and of those they serve, the capital-ist class itself in service of capital for its greater good, is then an ideological struggle. They have no choice but to take it all the way. To make of Notre-Dame-des-Landes a concrete desert in order to further reduce the distance between consumers and merchandise. But above all, to impose by force of Law the necessity of all this and to reveal it as sole “alternative” to the naive face of the proletariat awaiting solutions to current problems. Any radical (taking things at the root) contestation must then be banished from the public sphere. Any discordance then cannot spread beyond what capital could tolerate for a time, the time to be amused by those hippies and their shacks in the trees. But that time is done, we’re finished laughing, it’s time to whistle the end of the game and prevent an experience and a struggle starting to take shape in the social body (the famous “cyst” of Valls – priceless, that guy!) from spreading further.

But the question is whether this struggle would really have been able (or would be able, since it was not at all finished on this day, 24 November 2012) to spread to the heart of the machinery of the market: into the sector of production, to connect with (relatively little) existing struggles in the regional factories. Or, in other words, would it have been able to use the autonomous onsite dynamic that it built with a part of the local population, to spread and carry forward toward the heart of production and of social reproduction the iron of revolt?

The struggle against the airport of NDDL is a precious experience of what can be carried out locally, in

building autonomy and in defending it. But it is also precious in the sense that it shows that it could only be an attack on capital (yet it's as such that some of its protagonists present it: against the air- port and its world!) if this fragmentary autonomy concerning but one sector of rural life surpasses itself at some point and connects with other struggles in other sectors of capitalist social life, namely the factories, the ghettos, the struggles of the unemployed, the struggles of the worker proletariat, etc. To build oneself an identity through such a struggle is to positively affirm oneself in constructive opposition to an enemy, but it's also to take root in a position of which the particularity tends to confine its actors strictly within a defense of autonomy, the result of which is to attract a mob of vultures at a loss for representativeness (EELV and *Front de Gauche* members of parliament among others, ATTAC and other "alternativists").

That being said, the tipping point is never far, and the political and economic officials know it well. If the buzz created by this struggle spreads, then certain links will be possible with other struggles, other angers, in other zones closer to the heart of the sacrosanct commodifying dynamic of capital. And so then BOOM?!? Valls, VINCI and consorts on Mars... There will nonetheless be a limit to overcome, that of the mediations of the society of capital, up against which is the struggle in Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Because this struggle is contradictory like all those taking place right now: to attempt to expand, they cannot prevent the entry of, on one hand, the diffuse mediations of simple exchange (the farmers and the "alternative"), and on the other, the opportunist presence of political mediation ("green" members of parliament, *Front de Gauche*, etc., or "negotiator" organizations).

Communist measures have been and remain to this day applied on these 2000 hectares in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, as well as even outside of this now symbolic place (by support committees elsewhere in France). But it will take quite a lot more to initiate a sustainable process of communization. Or let's say that the latter remains circumscribed within this struggle and this cause, that of the defense of a site, of a vision of production, of the earth. Could struggle in its course abolish production and the mediations that are the process of capital (and counter-revolution)? Could it irreversibly expand the practices and immediate social relations between individuals engaged in conflict?

Capital necessitates also its limit, directly, violently in the material form of helmeted decerebrates trying to put an end to the experience, and above all the expansion of this struggle beyond the markings of mediation, of negotiation. It knows that there is a risk in this period of disruption, and that explains the panic of the henchmen, the ministers, the capitalists, the prefects and others. The youth recoils? Then the senile (age is no criterion) must retake control... to save their own life!

This struggle will at least serve as example, will show that self-organization is the first act of revolution... but that what comes after will work against it. In this it deserves respect and support. What dawns through this struggle and many others in other places (in Egypt, Tunisia, South Africa, Greece, Italy, etc.) is the present culmination of the contradiction – between classes and between genders and which we may identify as the commodifying dynamic of capital – which can no longer resolve itself by the affirmation of one of its terms. It becomes necessary now to oppose the Unity of humanity to the Totality of capital.

THE  
CYBERNETIC  
HYPOTHESIS  
PART IV

- *Tiqqun*

*If motorized machines constituted the second age of the technical machine, cybernetic and informational machines form a third age that reconstructs a generalized regime of subjection: recurrent and reversible 'humans-machines systems' replace the old nonrecurring and nonreversible relations of subjection between the two elements; the relation between human and machine is based on internal, mutual communication, and no longer on usage or action. In the organic composition of capital, variable capital defines a regime of subjection of the worker (human surplus value), the principal framework of which is the business or factory. But with automation comes a progressive increase in the proportion of constant capital; we then see a new kind of enslavement: at the same time the work regime changes, surplus value becomes machinic, and the framework expands to all*

*of society. It could also be said that a small amount of subjectification took us away from machinic enslavement, but a large amount brings us back to it.*

-Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980

*The only moment of permanence of a class as such is that which has a consciousness of its permanence for itself: the class of managers of capital as social machine. The consciousness that connotes is, with the greatest coherence, that of apocalypse, of self-destruction.*

-Giorgio Cesarano, *Survival Manual*, 1975

NOTHING EXPRESSES THE CONTEMPORARY VICTORY of cybernetics better than the fact that value can now be extracted as *information about information*. The commodity-cybernetician, or “neo-liberal” logic, extends over all activity, including that which is still not commodified, with an unflagging support of modern States. More generally, the corollary to the precarization of capitalism’s objects and subjects is a growth of circulation in information on their subject: this is as true for unemployed workers as it is for cops. *Cybernetics consequently aims to disturb and control people in one and the same movement*. It is founded on terror, which is a factor in its evolution — the evolution of economic growth, moral progress — because it supplies an occasion for the production of information. The *state of emergency*, which is proper to all crises, is what allows self-regulation to be relaunched, and to maintain itself as a perpetual movement. Whereas the scheme of classical economy where a balance of supply and

demand was to permit “growth” and thusly to permit collective well-being, it is now “growth” which is considered an endless road towards balance. It is thus just to critique western modernity as a “infinite mobilization” the destination of which is “movement towards more movement.” But from a cybernetic point of view, the self-production that equally characterizes the State, the Market, robots, wage workers, or the jobless, is indiscernible from the self-control that moderates and slows it down.

It comes across clearly then that cybernetics is not just one of the various aspects of contemporary life, its neo-technological component, for instance, but rather it is the point of departure and arrival of the new capitalism. *Cybernetic Capitalism* — what does that mean? It means that since the 1970s we’ve been dealing with an emerging social formation that has taken over from Fordist capitalism which results from the application of the cybernetic hypothesis to political economy. Cybernetic capitalism develops so as to allow the social body, devastated by Capital, to reform itself and offer itself up for one more process of accumulation. On the one hand capitalism must grow, which implies destruction. On the other, it needs to reconstruct the “human community,” which implies circulation. “There is,” writes Lyotard, “two uses for wealth, that is importance-power: a reproductive use and a pillage use. The first is circular, global, organic; the second is partial, death-dealing, jealous... The capitalist is a conqueror, and the conqueror is a monster, a *centaur*. His front side feeds off of reproducing the regulated system of controlled metamorphoses under the law of the commodity-talion, and its rear side off of pillaging overexcited energies. On the one hand, to appropriate, and thus preserve, that is, reproduce in equivalence, reinvest; on the other to take and destroy, steal and flee, hollowing out an-



other space, another time.” The crises of capitalism, as Marx saw them, always came from a de-articulation between the time of conquest and the time of reproduction. The function of cybernetics is to avoid crises by ensuring the coordination between Capital’s “front side” and “rear side.” Its development is an endogenous response to the problem posed to capitalism — *how to develop without fatal disequilibrium arising.*

In the logic of Capital, the development of the piloting function, of “control,” corresponds to the subordination of the sphere of accumulation to the sphere of circulation. For the critique of political economy, circulation should be no less suspect than production, in effect. It is, as Marx knew, but a particular case of production as considered in general. The socialization of the economy — that is, the interdependence between capitalists and the other members of the social body, the “human community” — the enlargement of Capital’s human base, makes the extraction of surplus value which is at the source of profit no longer centered around the relations of exploitation instituted by the wage system. Valorization’s center of gravity has now moved over to the sphere of circulation. In spite of its inability to reinforce the conditions of exploitation, which would bring about a crisis of consumption, capitalist accumulation can still nevertheless survive on the condition that the production-consumption cycle is accelerated, that is, on the condition that the production process accelerates as much as commodity circulation does. What has been lost to the economy on the static level can be compensated on the dynamic level. The logic of flows is to dominate the logic of the finished product. Speed is now taking primacy over quantity, as a factor in wealth. *The hidden face of the maintenance of accumulation is the acceleration of circulation.* The function of the

control devices is thus to maximize the volume of commodity flows by minimizing the events, obstacles, and accidents that would slow them down. Cybernetic capitalism tends to abolish time itself, to maximize fluid circulation to the maximum: the speed of light. Such is already the case for certain financial transactions. The categories of “real time,” of “just in time,” show clearly this *hatred of duration*. For this very reason, time is our ally.

This propensity towards control by capitalism is not new. It is only post-modern in the sense that post-modernity has been confused with the latest manifestation of modernity. It is for this reason that bureaucracy developed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and computer technology developed after the Second World War. The cybernetization of capitalism started at the end of the 1870s with the growing control of production, distribution, and consumption. Information regarding these flows has since then had a central strategic importance as a condition for valorization. The historian James Beniger states that the first control-related problems came about when the first collisions took place between trains, putting commodities and human lives in peril. The signalization of the railways, travel time measurement and data transmission devices had to be invented so as to avoid such “catastrophes.” The telegraph, synchronized clocks, organizational charts in large enterprises, weighing systems, roadmaps, performance evaluation procedures, wholesalers, assembly lines, centralized decision-making, advertising in catalogues, and mass communications media were the devices invented during this period to respond, in all spheres of the economic circuit, to a generalized crisis of control connected to the acceleration of production set off by the industrial revolution in the United States. Information and control systems thus developed at the same time as the capi-

talist process of transformation of materials was growing and spreading. A class of middlemen, which Alfred Chandler called the “visible hand” of Capital, formed and grew. After the end of the 19th century, it was clear enough to PEOPLE that *expectability [had] become a source of profit as such and a source of confidence*. Fordism and Taylorism were part of this movement, as was the development of control over the mass of consumers and over public opinion via marketing and advertising, in charge of extorting from them by force, and then putting to work, their “preferences,” which according to the hypotheses of the marginalist economists, were the true source of value. Investment in organizational or purely technical planning and control technologies became more and more salable. After 1945, cybernetics supplied capitalism with a new infrastructure of machines — computers — and above all with an intellectual technology that permitted the regulation of the circulation of flows within society, and making those flows *exclusively commodity flows*.

That the economic sectors of information, communication, and control have taken ever more of a part in the economy since the Industrial Revolution, and that “intangible labor” has grown relative to tangible labor, is nothing surprising or new. Today these account for the mobilization of more than 2/3 of the workforce. But this isn’t enough to fully define cybernetic capitalism. Because its equilibrium and the growth depend continually on its control capacities, *its nature has changed. Insecurity, much more than rarity, is the core of the present capitalist economy*. As Wittgenstein understood by looking at the 1929 crisis — and as did Keynes in his wake — there is a strong bond between the “state of trust” and the curbing of the marginal effectiveness of Capital, he wrote, in chapter XII of *General Theory*, in February 1934 — the economy rests definitively on the

“play of language.” Markets, and with them commodities and merchants, the sphere of circulation in general, and, consequently, business, the sphere of production as a place of the anticipation of coming levels of yield, do not exist without conventions, social norms, technical norms, norms of the truth, on a meta-level which brings bodies and things into existence as commodities, even before they are subject to pricing. The control and communications sectors develop because commodity valorization needs to have a looping circulation of information parallel to the actual circulation of commodities, the production of a collective belief that objectivizes itself in values. In order to come about, all exchanges require “investments of form” — information about a formulation of what is to be exchanged — a formatting that makes it possible to put things into equivalence even before such a putting of things into equivalence has effectively taken place, a conditioning that is also a condition of agreement about the market. It’s true for goods, and it’s true for people. Perfecting the circulation of information will mean perfecting the market as a universal instrument of coordination. Contrary to what the liberal hypothesis had supposed, to sustain a fragile capitalism, contracts are not sufficient unto themselves within social relations. PEOPLE began to understand after 1929 that all contracts need to come with controls. Cybernetics entered into the operation of capitalism with the intention of minimizing uncertainties, incommensurability, the kinds of anticipation problems that can interfere in any commodity transaction. It contributes to consolidating the basis for the installation of capitalism’s mechanisms, to oiling Capital’s abstract machine.

With cybernetic capitalism, the *political moment of political economy* subsequently dominates its econom-

ic moment. Or, as Joan Robinson understands it looking from the perspective of economic theory, in her comments on Keynes: "As soon as one admits the uncertainty of the forecasts that guide economic behavior, equilibrium has no more importance and History takes its place." The political moment, here understood in the broader sense of that which subjugates, that which normalizes, that which determines what will happen by way of bodies and can record itself in socially recognized value, what extracts form from forms-of-life, is as essential to "growth" as it is to the reproduction of the system: on the one hand the capture of energies, their orientation, their crystallization, become the primary source of valorization; on the other hand, surplus value can be extracted from any point on the bio-political tissue on the condition that the latter reconstitutes itself incessantly. That the ensemble of expenditures has a tendency to morph into valorizable qualities also means that Capital permeates all living flows: the socialization of the economy and the anthropomorphosis of Capital are two symbiotic, indissoluble processes. In order for these processes to be carried out, it suffices and is necessary that all contingent action be dealt with by a combination of surveillance and data capture devices. The former are inspired by prison, insofar as they introduce a centralized system of panoptical visibility. These have for a long while been monopolized by the modern State. The latter, the data capture devices, are inspired by computer technology, insofar as they are part of the construction of a decentralized real-time gridding system. The common intent of these devices is total transparency, an absolute correspondence between the map and the territory, a will to knowledge accumulated to such degree that it becomes a will to power. One of the advancements made by cybernetics has consisted in enclosing its surveillance and

monitoring systems upon themselves, guaranteeing that the surveillers and the monitorers are themselves surveilled and/or monitored, with the development of a socialization of control which is the trademark of the so-called “information society.” The control sector becomes autonomous because of the need to control control, since commodity flows are overlaid by their double, flows of information the circulation and security of which must in turn be optimized. At the summit of this terracing of control, state control, the police, and the law, self-legitimizing violence, and judicial authority play the role of controllers of last resort. The surveillance one-upmanship that characterizes “control societies” is explained in simple terms by Deleuze, who says: “they have leaks everywhere.” This incessantly confirms the necessity for control. “In discipline societies, one never ceased to recommence (from school to barracks, etc...) [the disciplinary process], whereas in control societies nothing is ever finished.”

Thus there is nothing surprising about the fact that the development of cybernetic capitalism has been accompanied by the development of all the forms of repression, by hyper-securitarianism. Traditional discipline, the generalization of a state of emergency — *emergenza* — are transplanted to grow inside a whole system focused on the fear of any threat. The apparent contradiction between the reinforcement of the repressive functions of the State and the neo-liberal economic discourse that preaches “less State” — and permits Loïc Wacquant for instance to go into a critique of the liberal ideology hiding the increasing “penal State” — can only be understood in light of the cybernetic hypothesis. Lyotard explains it: “there is, in all cybernetic systems, a unity of reference that permits one to measure the disparity produced by the introduction of an event within

the system, and then, thanks to such measurement, to translate that event into information to be fed into the system; then, in sum, if it is a regulated ensemble in homeostasis, to annul that disparity and return the system to the quantities of energy or information that it had before... Let's stop here a moment. We see how the adoption of this perspective on society, that is, of the despotic fantasies of the masters, of placing themselves at the supposed location of the central zero, and thus of identifying themselves with the matrix of Nothingness... must force one to extend one's idea of threat and thus of defense. Since what event would NOT be a threat from this point of view? All are; indeed, because they are disturbances of a circular nature, reproducing the same, and requiring a mobilization of energy for purposes of appropriation and elimination. Is this too 'abstract'? Should I give an example? It is the very project that is being perpetrated in France on high levels, the institution of an operational Defense of the territory, already granted an operating Center of the army, the specific focus of which is to ward off the 'internal' threat, which is born within the dark recesses of the social body, of which the "national state" claims to be the clairvoyant head: this clairvoyance is called the national identification registry; ... the translation of events into information for the system is called intelligence, ... and the execution of regulatory orders and their inscription into the "social body," above all when the latter is racked by some kind of intense emotion, for instance by the panicked fear which would seize hold of it if a nuclear war were to be triggered (or if some kind of a wave of protest, subversion, or civil desertion considered insane were to hit) — such execution requires an assiduous and fine-grained infiltration of the transmission channels in the social 'flesh,' or, as some superior officer or other put it quite marvelously, the 'police

of spontaneous movements.” Prison is thus at the summit of a cascade of control devices, the guarantor of last resort that no disturbing event will take place within the social body that would hinder the circulation of goods and persons. The logic of cybernetics being to replace centralized institutions and sedentary forms of control by tracing devices and nomadic forms of control, prison, as a classical surveillance device, is obviously to be expanded and prolonged with monitoring devices such as the electronic bracelet, for instance. The development of community policing in the English speaking world, of “proximity policing” in France, also responds to a cybernetic logic intended to ward off all events, and organize feedback. Within this logic, then, disturbances in a given zone can be all the better suppressed/choked off when they are absorbed/deadened by the closest system sub-zones.

Whereas repression has, within cybernetic capitalism, the role of warding off events, prediction is its corollary, insofar as it aims to eliminate all uncertainty connected to all possible futures. That’s the gamble of statistics technologies. Whereas the technologies of the Providential State were focused on the forecasting of risks, whether probabilized or not, the technologies of cybernetic capitalism aim to multiply the domains of responsibility/authority. Risk-based discourse is the motor for the deployment of the cybernetic hypothesis; it is first distributed diffusely so as then to be internalized. Because risks are much more accepted when those that are exposed to them have the impression that they’ve chosen to take them on, when they feel responsible, and most of all when they have the feeling that they control them and are themselves the masters of such risks. But, as one expert admits, “zero risk” is a non-existent situation: “the idea of risk weakens causal bonds, but in so



doing it does not make them disappear. On the contrary; it multiplies them. ...To consider danger in terms of risk is necessarily to admit that one can never absolutely protect oneself against it: one may manage it, tame it, but never annihilate it.” It is in its permanence in the system that risk is an ideal tool for affirming new forms of power, to the benefit of the growing stranglehold of devices on collectives and individuals. It eliminates everything that is at stake in conflicts by obligatorily bringing individuals together around the management of threats that are supposed to concern all of them in the same way. The argument that THEY would like to make us buy is as follows: the more security there is, the more concomitant production of insecurity there must be. And if you think that insecurity grows as prediction becomes more and more infallible, you yourself must be afraid of the risks. And if you’re afraid of the risks, if you don’t trust the system to completely control the whole of your life, your fear risks becoming contagious and presenting the system with a very real risk of defiance. In other words, to fear risks is already to represent a risk for society. The imperative of commodity circulation upon which cybernetic capitalism rests morphs into a general phobia, a fantasy of self-destruction. The control society is a paranoid society, which easily explains the proliferation of conspiracy theories within it. Each individual is thus subjectivized, within cybernetic capitalism, as a Risk Dividual, as some enemy or another [a “whatever enemy”] of the balanced society.

It should not be surprising then that the reasoning of France’s François Ewald or Denis Kessler, those collaborators in chief of Capital, affirms that the Providential State, characteristic of the Fordist mode of social regulation, by reducing social risks, has ended up taking responsibility away from individuals. The dismantling of social protection sys-

tems that we've been seeing since the start of the 1980s thus has been an attempt to give responsibility to each person by making everyone bear the "risks" borne by the capitalists alone towards the whole "social body." It is, in the final analysis, a matter of inculcating the perspective of social reproduction in each individual, who should expect nothing from society, but sacrifice everything to it. The social regulation of catastrophes and the unexpected can no longer be managed by simple social exclusion, as it was during the Middle Ages in the time of lepers, the logic of scapegoating, containment, and enclosure. If everybody now has to become responsible for the risks they make society run, it's only because they couldn't exclude so many anymore without the loss of a potential source of profit. Cybernetic capitalism thus forcibly couples the socialization of the economy and the increase of the "responsibility principle." It produces citizens as "Risk Dividuals" that self-neutralize, removing their own potential to destroy order. It is thus a matter of generalizing self-control, a disposition that favors the proliferation of devices, and ensures an effective relay. All crises, within cybernetic capitalism, are preparations for a reinforcement of devices. The anti-GMO protest movement, as well as the "mad cow crisis" of these last few years in France, have definitively permitted the institution of an unheard of tracking of Dividuals and Things. The accrued professionalization of control — which is, with insurance, one of the economic sectors whose growth is guaranteed by cybernetic logic — is but the other side of the rise of the citizen as a political subjectivity that has totally auto-repressed the risk that he or she objectively represents. This is how Citizen's Watch contributes to the improvement of piloting devices.

Whereas the rise of control at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century took place by way of a dissolution of personalized

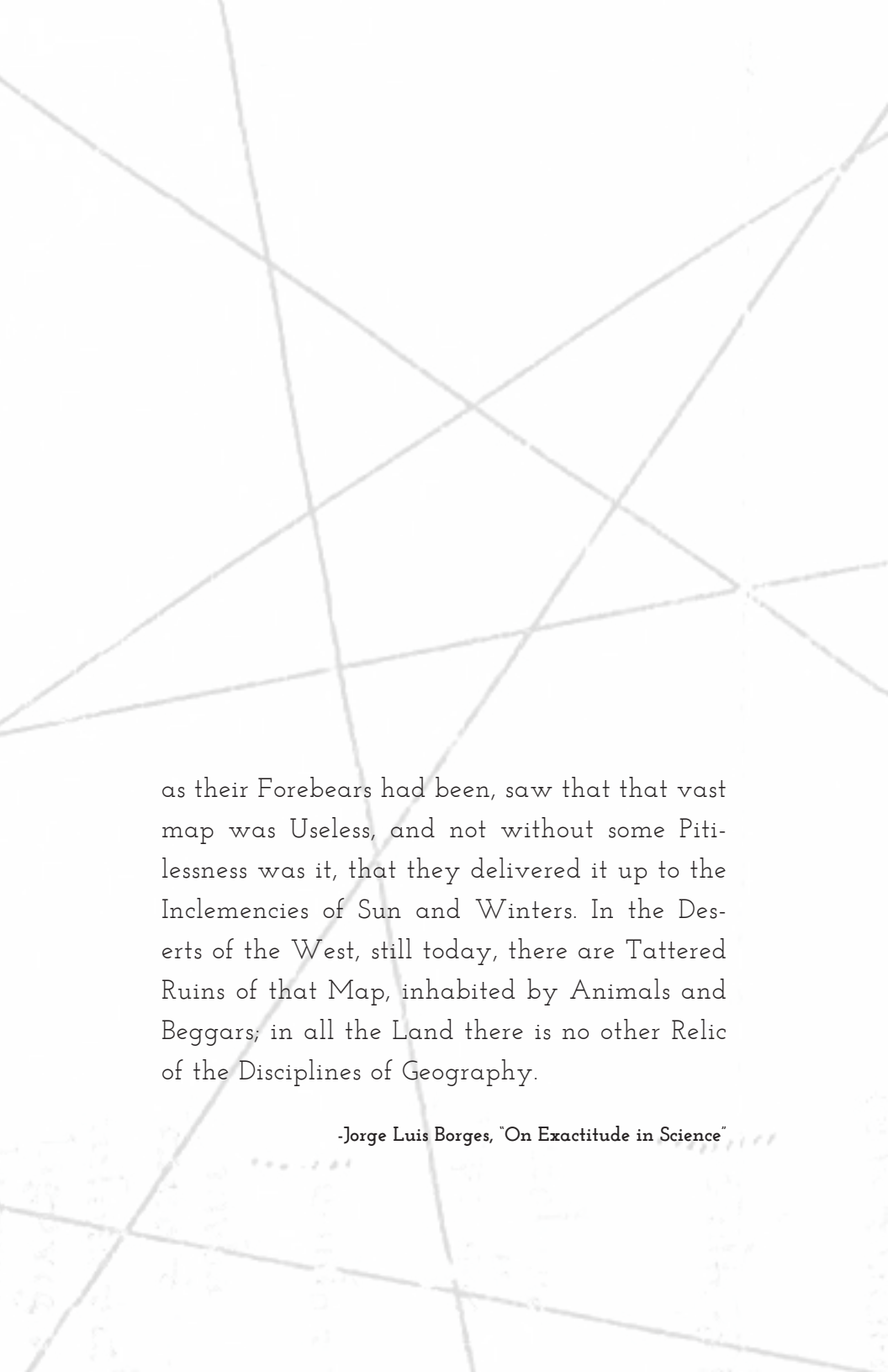
bonds — which gave rise to PEOPLE talking about “the disappearance of communities” — in cybernetic capitalism it takes place by way of a new soldering of social bonds entirely permeated by the imperative of self-piloting and of piloting others in the service of social unity: it is the device-future of mankind as citizens of the Empire. The present importance of these new citizen-device systems, which hollow out the old State institutions and drive the nebulous citizen-community, demonstrates that the great social machine which cybernetic capitalism has to comprise cannot do without human beings no matter how much time certain incredulous cyberneticians have put into believing it can, as is shown in this flustered epiphany from the middle of the 1980s:

Systematic automation would in effect be a radical means of surpassing the physical or mental limitations that give rise to the most common of human errors: momentary losses of vigilance due to fatigue, stress, or routine; a provisional incapacity to simultaneously interpret a multitude of contradictory information, thus failing to master situations that are too complex; euphemization of risk under pressure from circumstances (emergencies, hierarchical pressures...); errors of representation giving rise to an underestimation of the security of systems that are usually highly reliable (as might be the case of a pilot who categorically refuses to believe that one of his jet engines is on fire). One must however ask oneself whether removing the human beings — who are considered the weakest link in the man/machine interface — from the circuit would not definitely risk creating new vulnerabilities and nec-

essarily imply the extension of those errors of representation and losses of vigilance that are, as we have seen, the frequent counterpart of an exaggerated feeling of security. Either way, the debate deserves to remain open.

It certainly does.

... In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography



as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast map was Useless, and not without some Piti-  
lessness was it, that they delivered it up to the  
Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Des-  
erts of the West, still today, there are Tattered  
Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and  
Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic  
of the Disciplines of Geography.

-Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science"

# COMMUNIST MEASURES

*-Leon de Mattis*

## THINKING A COMMUNIST HORIZON

COMMUNISATION IS NOT A PROPHECY. IT IS NOT THE declaration of some future or other. Communisation is nothing but a certain perspective on the class struggles taking place right now. The task is to conceive, starting from those struggles but proceeding beyond their limits and their contradictions, what a communist revolution could be today.

Thinking a communist horizon requires us to begin from the class relation as it is, that is, as it has been transformed by the period of restructuring; and to understand why that which was in the past the bearer of a communist vision cannot today play the same role, in any case in the same way.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The ability to think a communist horizon is one of the things at stake within the struggles themselves. To be convinced of that it should suffice to review the history of the last thirty years, a period during which the



Up until the end of the 70s the proletariat were seen as the dominated class which, in order to bring about communism, only had to become dominant. Of course, there were many ways of conceiving that, and those various conceptions were often antagonistic towards each other. There were also approaches which wanted to break with this dominant conception, while all the same having to position themselves in relation to it.<sup>2</sup> And in the end that way of looking at things could not be overcome, not because the ideas of the epoch were universally mistaken but simply because the reality of the times—the affirmation of a proletariat which was socially more and more strong—was obvious to everyone.

The debates which opposed revolution to reform, the immediacy of communism to the transitional period (which could precede or follow the victory of the proletariat) all belong to this shared paradigm. But it is just that which is put into question, dynamically, in the current moment.<sup>3</sup>

The disappearance of a strong affirmation of the class and the erosion of the workers' movement is the symptom of a major turning-point in the class struggle. Class-be-

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question of communism as good as vanished from the radar. This obliteration was not a coincidence; it was the direct consequence of a defeat, of the vanquishing of the contestation that took place in the '60s and '70s.

2 There is been some controversy lately over the question of the novelty or otherwise of the theory of communisation, in which some play has been made of the fact that what is affirmed in that theory can already be found here and there in previous periods. But the question of novelty cannot be posed for each assertion taken separately, but only of the way in which those elements, perhaps already thought or expressed some time before, are brought into relation with one another and linked to the contemporary period.

3 'Dynamically' means that the survival of a few residual traces, not yet totally dissolved, of the old workers' movement is not a serious objection to the current thesis.

longing no longer seems to be the basis of a shared identity or of a possible power, but seems rather, on the contrary, to be an element that is foreign to everyone's life: the hostile embodiment of the dominating power of capital.<sup>4</sup>

Certain theories have concluded that the notion of class struggle no longer works to characterise the revolt in today's world. The persistence of capitalist social relations and of all their determinations (value, for starters) is however the sign that the classes have certainly not disappeared. The theory of communisation does not, therefore, abandon the theory of classes, but thinks it in the era of the collapse of the workers' movement. To give an overview one could say that communisation advances three essential ideas: first, the immediacy of communism (that is, the absence of any period of transition at all;) second, communism as means and end of struggle; and, lastly, the destruction of the class relation and therefore of the proletariat by the proletariat itself. It is on this last point that one has to place the emphasis in order to understand how the theory of communisation links an element of the current class struggles (the end of the affirmation of the proletariat and the decline of workers' identity) to a conception of the revolution (the destruction of the class relation by the proletariat.) This vision, which is a little paradoxical, nevertheless turns out to be extremely fruitful if one wants to seek out within the current struggles that which, *starting from now*, could be the harbinger of the destruction of capitalist social relations. The revolution is the destruction of the class relation, which is immediately also the destruction of the proletariat—which is to say that the revolution is the activity of a proletariat in the course of its own self-abolition. And we can already observe, in to-

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<sup>4</sup> For more details, see 'What is communisation?' *Sic* no. 1, of which this text is a sequel.

day's class struggles, situations in which a proletariat which is striving to defend its condition is paradoxically driven to attack it. In this way the class struggle appears in its fundamental ambiguity, a reflection of nothing other than a contradiction internal to the capitalist social forms themselves: the class struggle can just as well be the recapitulation of class relations as their destruction. So—it is by linking these two ideas (that there are aspects of the current class struggle which drive workers to attack their own condition; and the vision of revolution as proletarian action consisting in proletarian self-destruction) that the theory of communism proposes to think communism.

The role of theory is not to reveal to struggles what they 'are' in their heart of hearts.<sup>5</sup> The point is not to go about trying to 'raise consciousness'. Thinking revolution and communism is not a magic formula which would transform the current struggles into something they are not. The task is to manage, to link theoretically, current struggles with the possible production of communism, while understanding that this is something that is at stake within struggles, and not a matter only for the future. Without the thinking of revolution, the horizon of struggles is necessarily that of capital. In the course of an ambivalent class struggle, which is at the same time the renewal and the putting into question of the class relation, the absence of a revolutionary horizon obviously contributes to the first pole, to the renewal of the class relation. This is reflected, in the struggle, in the persistence of mediations which express this renewal (union hierarchies, the media, spokespeople and negotiations,

5 The discussion in this text will often revolve around 'struggles'. This plural, which has a certain currency these days, is one of the things that shows up the end of the period of the proletariat's affirmation. The struggles are so many different aspects of the class struggle which today it is necessary to attempt to grasp in its full heterogeneity.

amongst others) or, when those mediations have given way in the face of the intensity of the struggle, by their decisive re-emergence at the moment of the *return to normality*.

Working out a theory of revolution and of communism is therefore an activity carried out on the basis of struggles and for the sake of those struggles. The success of such an activity is obviously not in any degree guaranteed. The generalisation of a contemporary theory of revolution—that is to say its existence beyond a restricted circle of theoreticians and militants—will not take place unless it is adequate enough to what, within struggles, might express the breakdown of the class relation. To the extent that this theory involves taking a stand within the matters at hand, it is necessarily a wager. A rational one, since it involves the production of a certain understanding of struggles by the struggles themselves; but a wager, nevertheless.

## COMMUNISM AS A PROCESS, NOT AN ALTERNATIVE WORLD

Communism is no more a prophecy than communisation is. The possibility of speaking about communism is at stake within current struggles. That is why it is indispensable to seek out what, within them, could be the harbinger of communism—rather than dreaming about a state far off in the future which humanity might one day be able to attain. Or, to put it differently: what is essential for the reconstruction of a communist horizon is above all the discovery of the ways in which communism might be able to emerge from the present situation—rather than describing what communism might be as a worked-out form of organisation.<sup>6</sup>

6 We are not going to get into the controversy over whether or not com-

But speaking of communism in the present must not lead us into an error that has a certain currency nowadays, that of taking ourselves to be able to find, here and there in the interstices of capital's society, communism in gestation or even already part-realised. Communism cannot exist by itself in the current world, neither as an existential or a political choice nor as a way of life.<sup>7</sup>

One must, therefore, think communism in the present tense, but not as a present state of things. That is what the theory of communisation lets us do. In communisation, the production of communism and communism itself run together. Communisation is a struggle against capital by communism, that is to say that for it communism appears simultaneously as the means and the end. That is why a vision of the production of communism is for it at the same time a vision of communism itself, but a communism grasped through the prism of its production. We can not respond to the question 'what is communism?' by describing its supposed completed form but only by evoking the forms in which it could be produced.

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munism could one day be described as 'finished' (even only relatively) or if it will never be anything other than the process of its production—for the simple reason that none of that changes a thing. On the one hand it is unavoidable for us to conceive of communism as a stage to be achieved when the destruction of current social relations shall have become definitive; if we did not, we would hardly have any way of differentiating it from an existential choice within capitalism. But on the other hand, in the position we find ourselves in we cannot speak of communism any other way than as a process. There is no doubt that there is an essential difference between the period of the production of communism during the struggle against capital and the period in which capitalism has been destroyed; but we've got no theoretical tools to describe the second period other than vague abstractions.

7 From which follows the critique of alternativism in general. See 'Reflections concerning the Call', *Meeting* no. 2, reproduced in *Communization and its Discontents*, Ed. Benjamin Noys, Minor Compositions, Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson

That said, the theory of communisation does encounter certain difficulties. Since communism is the means of communisation, it is necessary that in a certain fashion it be brought into play from the beginning of the process; but at the same time we're maintaining that communisation is a process within which communism is produced in the course of period which unfolds over time, and which takes time.

This question was resolved in the traditional Marxist conception by the notion of the 'period of transition'. The social form that was to be produced in the course of the revolution, and as its ultimate result, was not to be directly communism but an intermediary stage, socialism. Communisation breaks with the notion of the period of transition because communism is a means of the struggle itself. So for it communism is necessarily immediate, even if it remains only partial.

Communisation therefore takes on certain seemingly-paradoxical forms: simultaneously immediate and extended in time, simultaneously total and partial and so on. To be able to think communism, it is necessary to find an answer to these questions.

## THE NOTION OF A COMMUNIST MEASURE

It is at this point that the notion of a 'communist measure'—an elementary form of the production of communism—comes in.

The production of communism is nothing but the multiplication and the generalisation of communist measures taken at this or that point in the course of the confrontation with capital; measures whose objective is precisely to make of the enactment of communism a means of struggle.

Communism may not be immediate, but within the communist measure it seems to be so. Within the communist measure there are not any stages. There, communism is already in play—even if it cannot be thought of as completely realised. The communist measure makes the gap between the immediacy of communism and the time that is required for its realisation disappear, without in the same moment abolishing the necessity of this time. And this conception lets us avoid thinking about communisation itself as an intermediary period between the present and a communist future.

The term ‘measure’ should not lead us into error.<sup>8</sup> A communist measure is not a prescription, a law, or an order. It does not install any rule which everyone would have to submit to. It does not decree a general and impersonal norm. The communist measure, by definition, implies from the first moment those who carry it out. And it is not a declaration of intentions, either, or in any case it could not only be that. The communist measure is a deed. Getting off on the sound of your own voice proclaiming the abolition of value, of social class or of capitalism is not a communist measure. Sharing out resources seized from the enemy, or producing in common whatever the struggle against capital needs—that could be.

A communist measure is a collective measure, undertaken in a specific situation with the ways and means which the communist measure selects for itself. The forms of collective decision making which result in communist measures vary according to the measures: some imply a large number of people, others very many fewer; some suppose the existence of means of coordination, others do not; some

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<sup>8</sup> Instead of the expression ‘communist measure’ one could just as well have used ‘communist initiative.’

are the result of long collective discussions, of whatever sort (general assemblies, various sorts of collective, discussions in more or less diffuse groups) while others might be more spontaneous... What guarantees that the communist measure is not an authoritarian or hierarchical one is its content, and not the formal character of the decision which gave rise to it.

The communist measure is an example of the way the production of communism is organised. It is not direct democracy or self-organisation.<sup>9</sup>

Such a measure does not necessarily have authors, or in any case identifiable ones: communist measures which generalise can very well have been undertaken simultaneously, here and there, since they are, simply enough, possible solutions to a problem which poses itself everywhere, that is to say, generally. Their origin thus rapidly becomes impossible to locate. Any body which arrogates to itself the power to prescribe communist measures for others, by that very act, instantly negates, the possibility that it can undertake a communist measure.

A communist measure is not, all by itself, communism. Communism is not achieved by one solitary measure, nor indeed by a single series of measures. But then again communism is nothing but the effect of a huge number

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9 There is no way of determining in advance the way in which communist measures are taken. It is by reference to its content as a communist measure that it is possible to assure oneself that it is not a way in which a domination, a hierarchy or an authority might be reestablished—and not by applying some democratic formalism or other to the decision-making process. And it is not ‘self-‘organisation, either. Self-organisation is certainly, in the current moment, necessary for the existence of struggles when they venture beyond the cramped times and forms of legalised and unionised struggles. But the communist measure is a break with self-organisation, since such a measure involves a passage beyond partial struggles which need to organise themselves around their specific objective.



of communist measures—the onset of which characterises the period of communisation—which fold themselves into each other and which ultimately succeed in giving to the overall organisation of the world an altogether different quality. There is not necessarily any kind of continuity; it is perfectly reasonable to anticipate both advances and disordering retreats before a tipping-point is reached when the rupture has become so profound that class society no longer possesses the means to keep itself going. Communism and class society are mutually exclusive. Before the tipping-point, communist measures are by their essence ephemeral: they exist only within the space of the struggle, and are snuffed out if they do not generalise themselves.<sup>10</sup> They are simply moments when overcoming is possible but not yet secured. The production of communism is not necessarily a story told all at once. One can perfectly well imagine that one day a communising dynamic will unleash itself, violently recomposing communist measures taken in the course of particularly radical and extended struggles, and that nevertheless this dynamic will be defeated. And that it will be reborn, later and elsewhere, and conclude by destroying class society.

Generalisation does not mean uniformity. There are many ways for a communist measure to extend itself. It can of course be a question of rallying to some or other existing communist initiative (dedicated to production in common or to coordination...) just as it can be of a adoption, sometimes in an adapted form, of measures already put into practice elsewhere. Equally, the communist measure can easily install itself within practices, experiences,

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10 Generalisation of communist measures corresponds in the first place to the generalisation of the struggles within which they were born and without which they cannot survive.

and solidarities which pre-exist it—while being at the same time a creative rupture with these inheritances in virtue of the potentiality which the generalisation of the production of communism can bring into being.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to understand the process whereby a communist measure generalises. If the communist measure generalises itself, it is because in a given situation it corresponds to whatever the situation demands, and it is thus one of the forms (perhaps not the only possible one) which respond to the necessities imposed by the situation (intense struggle against capital). The moment of communisation is a situation of chaotic confrontation during which the proletarians undertake an incalculable number of initiatives in order to be able to carry out their struggle. If some of these initiatives extend themselves, it is because they correspond to a need which exceeds the different particular configurations of the confrontation underway. Choosing amongst the measures which generalise and the others takes place under the burden of a social relation in the course of collapsing under the blows of its own contradictions. And it is only at that level, the level of generalisation, that one can speak of measures ‘imposed by the very necessities of the struggle’,<sup>12</sup> or indeed of the revolution as ‘immediate necessity in a given situation’ undertaken by proletarians ‘constrained by their material conditions’.<sup>13</sup> It is in this respect that the theory of communisation is not deterministic

11 Such a potentiality expresses itself as much in the multiplication of material possibilities (with the destruction of the State and the seizure of the forces of capital) as in the sphere of representations and of the imaginary—all of which are in practice indivisible.

12 *Sic* no. 1, Editorial.

13 ‘Crisis and communisation,’ Peter Åström, *Sic* no. 1. In the production of the first issue of *Sic* a debate took place concerning whether or not Åström’s article employed formulas that were too deterministic. It is possible to find traces of this debate on pages 38 and 39 of the journal.

and allows us to understand the production of communism as an activity.<sup>14</sup>

## COMMUNIST MEASURES AND THE PRODUCTION OF COMMUNISM

The communist measure is the positive aspect of a communism which theoretically we are only able to grasp negatively. Communism is the annihilation of all currently existing forms of domination and exploitation. Communism defines itself as a series of abolitions: abolition of value, of classes, of gender and race dominations and so on. Said otherwise, if it is true that our attempts to describe communism are restricted to weak definitions (we know what it is that communism abolishes, but we do not know what it will concretely resemble) we have however a positive vision of its production: the communist measure.

The communist character of a measure derives from its capacity to reinforce the struggle against capital while all the while being the expression of its negation. It is, therefore, a definite and concrete way of putting into play the overcoming of exchange, money, value, the State, hierarchy, and race, class and gender distinctions—and so on. This list is presented in no particular order of priority because of the singular capacity of a communist measure to attack everything which makes up capitalist social relations. We know that communism is the overcoming of exchange, value and

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14 This functioning is not specific to the period of communisation. All widespread forms of social activity, that is all those which traverse the social body, operate in the same way—in contrast to the centralising and unifying activity of hierarchical or Stately structures. The practices of contemporary struggles can already in this way extend and generalise themselves, to their own proper extent.

money; but we do not know how a world without exchange, value or money could function. We know that communism is the abolition of classes, but we do not know how a classless universalism could function. A communist measure does not answer such questions in an overarching or global way, but tries instead to respond to them where they develop, and in the framework of the necessity of struggle.

Thanks to the communist measure, we understand that communism is not something which is all that foreign to us. Communism rests, to a very significant extent, on very simple things many of which are already able to exist: sharing, co-operation, the absence of socially-distributed roles and functions, and immediate and direct social relations, for instance. However, something which exists on a secondary basis does not have the same significance, qualitatively speaking, as that which exists in its generality (one thinks for example of value, and of the way in which its nature was changed by the emergence of the capitalist mode of production). That is why the concept of generalisation is essential. No content is communist in itself (even if, on the other hand, some can very well be anti-communist in themselves). The very same measure could be or could not be communist, according to its context: it is not communist if it remains isolated, but becomes so if it generalises. It is for that reason that it is necessary to understand that an isolated communist measure is not a communist measure, even if it is true that no communist measure is able to break all by itself its isolation; that cannot take place except by the enacting of *other* communist measures by other *collectives*.

Generalisation cannot by any means be the only guarantee of the communist character of a measure. A measure which does not generalise by one means or another, or anyway which does not resonate with other measures under-

way, cannot be communist. But at the same time it is of course perfectly possible that measures which are not communist at all generalise. One should obviously exclude, here, everything which is an initiative of the capitalist enemy, in the form of laws, prescriptions, orders or coercive state control. But on the side of the revolution itself the various contradictions, which result from the complex segmentation of the proletariat (the unity created in the struggle is always problematic and it can never be taken for granted) and from the often confused and contradictory setting for any particular struggle, can engender counter-revolutionary dynamics which have, nevertheless, the form of the revolution, that is, the form of measures which generalise.<sup>15</sup> To repeat oneself: no communist measure is communist in itself, and the communist character of a measure derives solely from its overall relationship with the struggle of which it is a part. Some measures long retain, during the chaotic and non-normative process of the insurrection, an ambiguous character. Equally, others which may have been communist at a certain moment can very well become counter-revolutionary in response to the deepening of certain problematics which emerge in proportion to the disintegration of the capitalist social relation. That is how the *revolution within the revolution* can reveal itself: by open combat between measures that are communist and those which are no longer.

Communist measures and insurrection cannot be separated. Communist measures are absolutely opposed to whatever, within the class struggle, enables the integration of the proletariat as a class belonging to capital. Such measures break with legality, with mediating institutions and with ha-

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15 For an uneasy and tormented presentation of these contradictions on the side of the revolution, see the articles of Bernard Lyon (*Meeting* and *Sic* no. 1).

bitual, admissible forms of conflict. You can count on the State to react with the violence and the cruelty which is customary to it. Communist measures are a confrontation with the forces of repression, and in this case too victory can be won only by a dynamic of rapid generalisation.

So there is necessarily a limit point with the generalisation of communist measures, a quickly-achieved tipping point at which the objective of the struggle can no longer be the amelioration or the preservation of a certain condition within capital, but must instead become the destruction of the entirety of the capitalist world—which becomes in this moment, definitively, the enemy.<sup>16</sup> From that point onwards, amongst all the things which are necessary for the production of communism, there is confrontation with State forces vowed to the defence of the old world—then the total destruction of all state structures.

## COMMUNIST MEASURES AND ACTIVITY

No-one consciously constructs communism in its totality. But communist measures are not undertaken unwittingly: the choice to have recourse to them within a struggle nec-

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16 As we've seen since the beginning of this article, the class struggle is ambivalent. It is simultaneously a struggle within capitalism and a struggle which heralds its destruction, a struggle for the defence of a certain position within capitalism and a struggle against that condition. The proletariat, in its struggle, oscillates between its integration and its disintegration. The communist measure builds towards a break with that ambivalence, and makes of the struggle of the proletariat a struggle against capital as a system; a struggle in the course of which the proletariat bit-by-bit dissolves itself. But it is only when communism has already become somewhat overt that this dissolution can become obvious. It is not possible really to talk of anticapitalist or revolutionary struggle except from the moment when communism begins to be positively produced.

essarily involves an awareness that they contribute to the destruction of capitalist social relations, and that this destruction will come to be one of the objectives of the struggle. It is the case, of course, that there is no separation between the necessities of the struggle and the construction of communism. Communism is realised on the occasion of the struggle, and within its context. But the choice of a communist measure, considered in isolation, does not impose itself because the struggle has left no other way forward than to undertake it: communism is not what is left over when one can no longer do anything else.

Communism is produced: that means that it is not the effect of a pure act of will, nor the mere consequence of circumstances which make any other outcome impossible. Every communist measure is the effect of a particular will. This will does not at all need to take as its object the creation of communism in its most general sense, but only in its immediate aspect, local and useful for the struggle. So the universal adoption of the communist idea as a kind of general, abstract principle to be realised is not a necessary precondition for the concrete production of communism. On the other hand, the social activity of the production of communism has its own consciousness; that is to say that in a period of communisation, when communist measures are linking up and becoming widespread, the overall pattern of what is being established becomes obvious to everyone.

There are, of course, 'conditions' for the production of communism. There is a struggle, which is class struggle, expressing both the breakdown of the capitalist class relation and the possibility of its regeneration. At the same time included in the negation of capital's fundamental social forms (a negation which those very forms ceaselessly put into play), is the vision of the possibility of its own overcoming. The

activity of the production of communism must nevertheless understand itself as an activity, that is as something which is not induced mechanically by its preconditions. There is no necessity within the struggle which imposes the production of communism, leaving no other option.

What makes it possible to make communism effective is activity. At the level of the single communist measure, this activity is necessarily encountered as will, consciousness, project (*collective* will, of course). But the generalisation of communist measures exceeds all will, because even while each measure taken individually is an action, the overall set of communist measures is beyond the grasp of the will of those who undertake them. The more the activity intensifies, and the more it consists in the production of diverse and multivalent measures, the higher the probability will be that these measures will fulfill the necessities of the global production of communism.

What is more, since this activity really is an activity, it changes the conditions within which it develops. That is: the more that communism is produced, the more it increases the potential for its own production. That is all that is meant by the concept of a communising dynamic. The first communist measures which generalise themselves demonstrate through their generalisation itself that they can be means of struggle; but at the same time they open up possible routes towards the overcoming of the specificity and of the constraints of the struggle itself. Measures which undertake the sharing-out of resources seized from the enemy open the way towards measures which undertake the satisfaction of needs by communist means.<sup>17</sup> Measures involving local co-operation open the way towards co-operation on a larger scales.

17 Needs themselves transformed by the struggle underway.



This indicates the great strategic importance of the first communist measures.<sup>18</sup> If they succeed in providing an adequate and prompt response to the problems which arise in a particular struggle, and if for that reason they are able to generalise, then a dynamic can be unleashed which makes of their expansion the motor of their ever-greater expansion. The role of communist theory, which devotes itself not to legislating what must be done but to making it possible to name what was done (that is, the undertaking of communist measures) is therefore considerable.

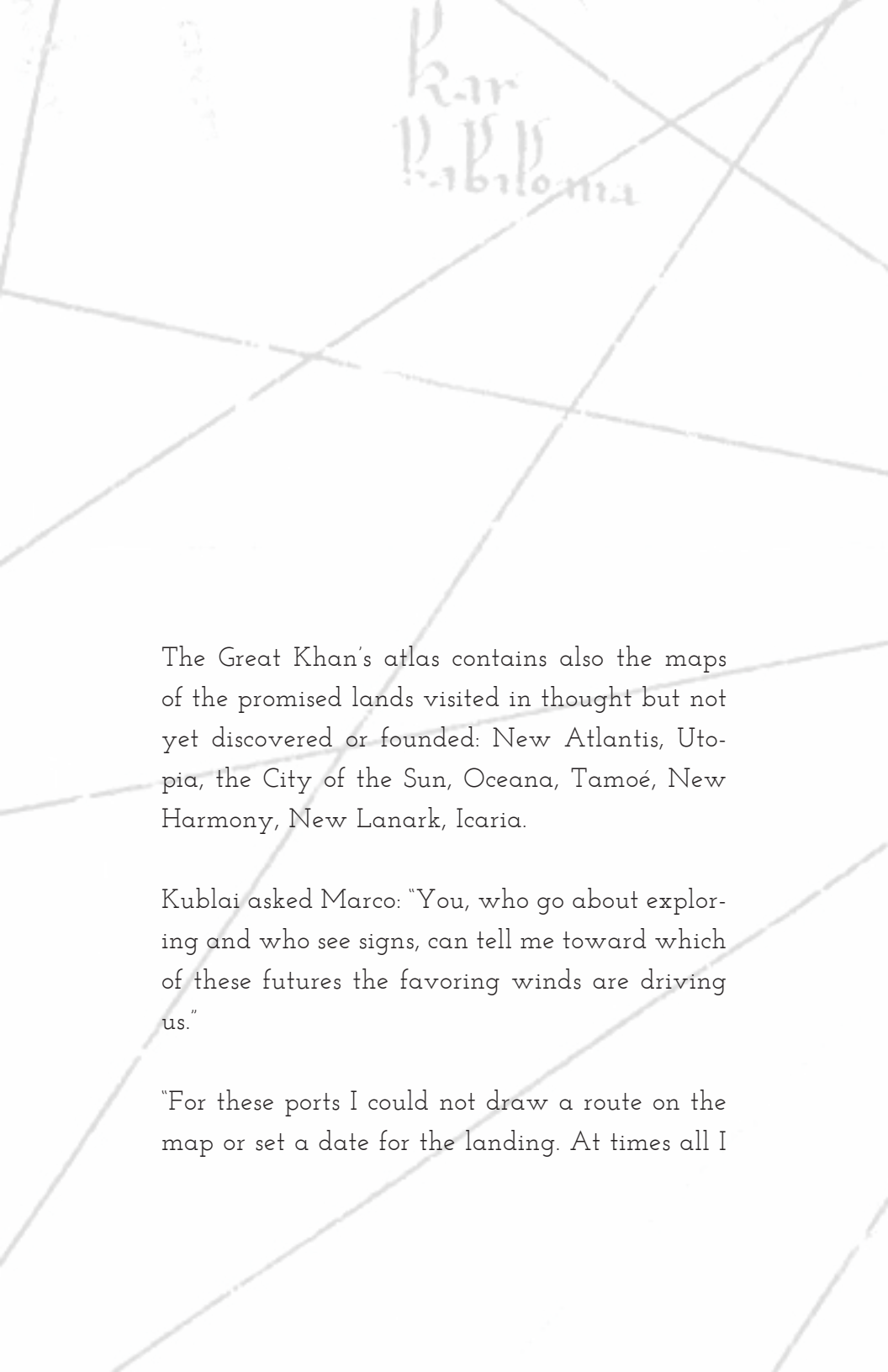
The big mistake would be to imagine any sort of mode of struggle as a 'communist measure'. Communist measures indisputably presuppose a depth and an extension of the class struggle beyond the ordinary extent achieved by the common run of struggles. Communist measures therefore only receive their significance within the framework of a communising dynamic which rapidly draws them beyond their timid beginnings.

By definition it is impossible to construct a model for the communist measure. But one can nevertheless offer a few hypotheses, so long as one properly understands their function. The point is not to realise a prophecy, but to clarify our current theoretical understanding of communism. Hypotheses concerning communist measures derive directly from the manner in which the current epoch enables us to conceive of communism. All conceptions of this sort are, like the era which has given birth to them, eminently mortal and destined to be overcome.

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18 'Strategic' should not be taken to mean that there is a strategy for the extension and the generalisation of communist measures; such a strategy could not exist. 'Strategic' means here that the first measures must be as adequate as possible to a given situation, while at the same time being a concrete instance of the use of communism as a means of struggle.

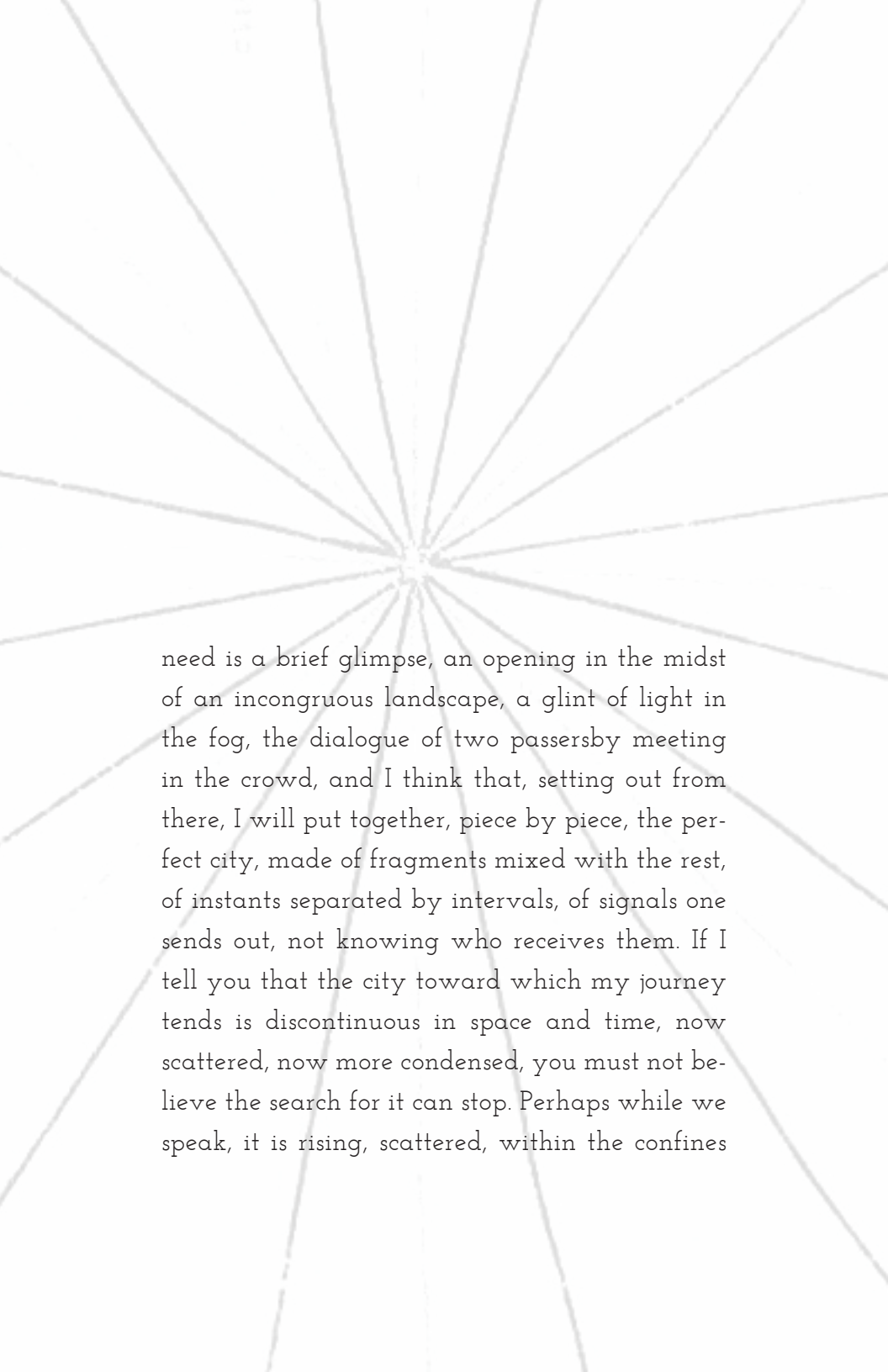
Likely to be communist, then, are measures taken, here or there, in order to seize means which can be used to satisfy the immediate needs of a struggle. Likely to be communist also are measures which participate in the insurrection without reproducing the forms, the schemas of the enemy. Likely to be communist are measures which aim to avoid the reproduction within the struggle of the divisions within the proletariat which result from its current atomisation. Likely to be communist are measures which try to eliminate the dominations of gender and of race. Likely to be communist are measures which aim to co-ordinate without hierarchy. Likely to be communist are measures which tend to strip from themselves, one way or another, all ideology which could lead to the re-establishment of classes. Likely to be communist are measures which eradicate all tendencies towards the recreation of communities which treat each other like strangers or enemies.

The background of the page is a faint, stylized map. It features a network of intersecting lines forming a grid. In the upper right quadrant, the text "Kar Babilonia" is written in a decorative, calligraphic font. In the upper left quadrant, the word "TAMOE" is written vertically in a similar font. The map lines are thin and light gray, creating a subtle geometric pattern across the entire page.

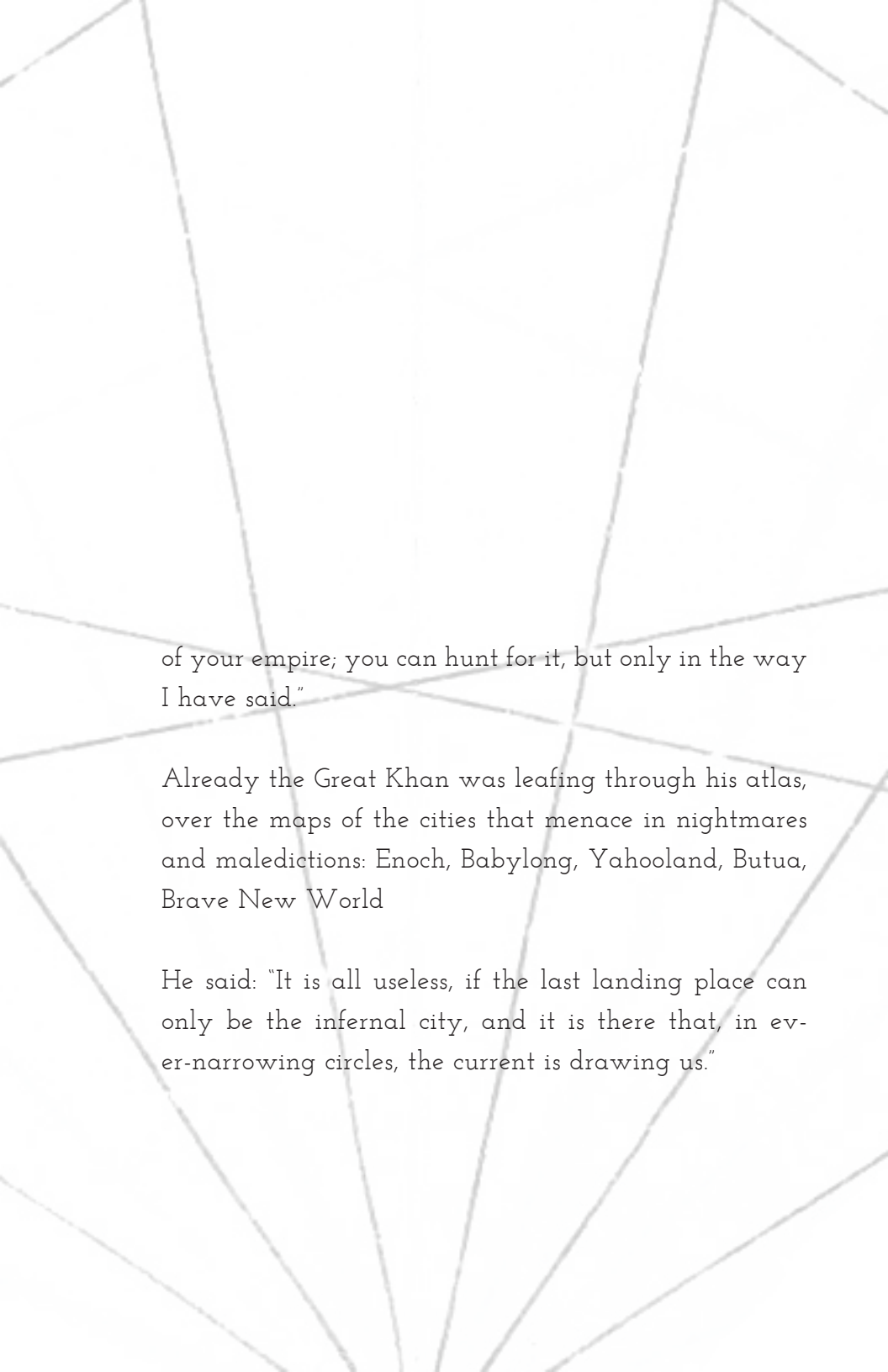
The Great Khan's atlas contains also the maps of the promised lands visited in thought but not yet discovered or founded: New Atlantis, Utopia, the City of the Sun, Oceana, Tamoé, New Harmony, New Lanark, Icaria.

Kublai asked Marco: "You, who go about exploring and who see signs, can tell me toward which of these futures the favoring winds are driving us."

"For these ports I could not draw a route on the map or set a date for the landing. At times all I



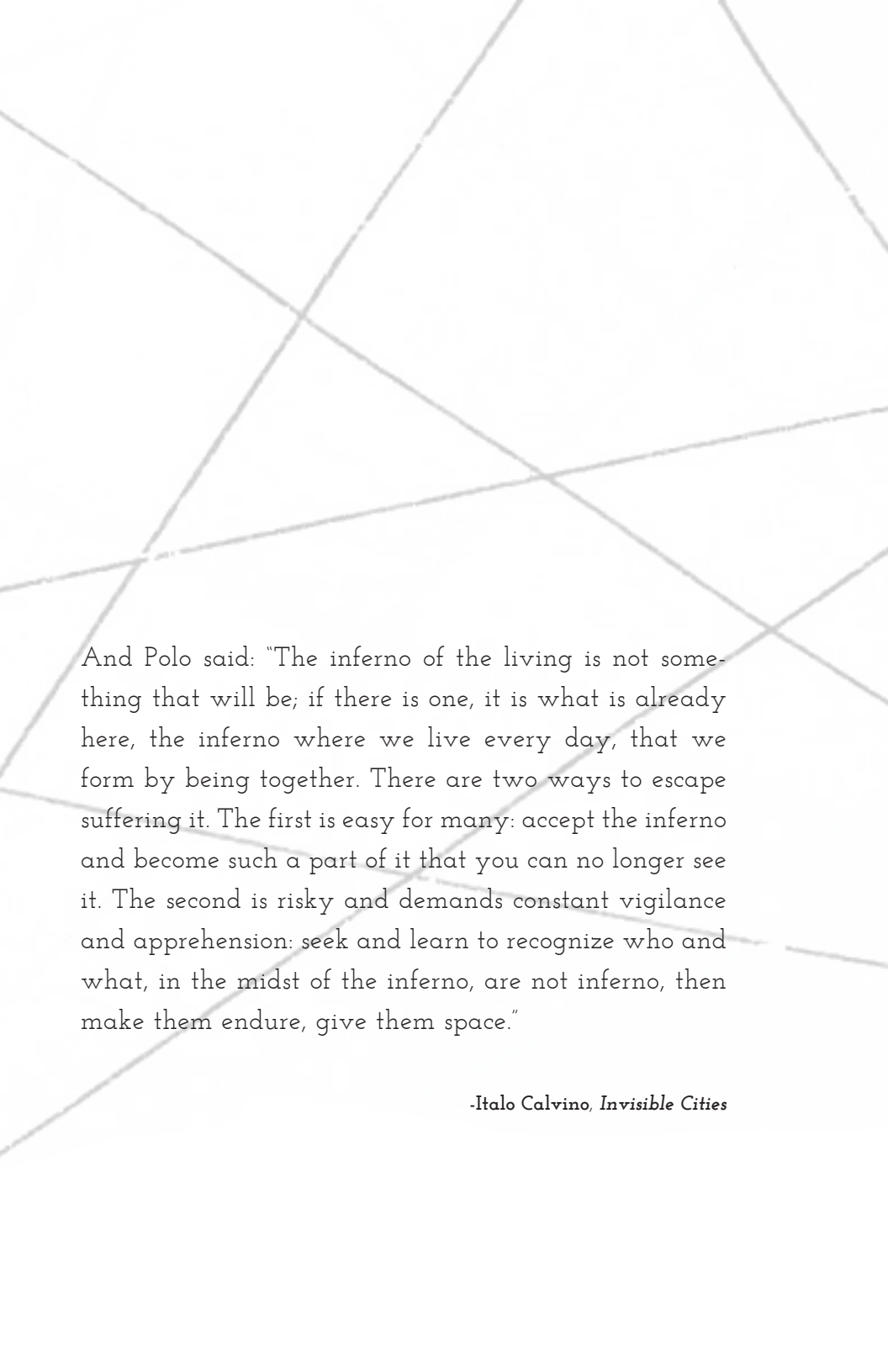
need is a brief glimpse, an opening in the midst of an incongruous landscape, a glint of light in the fog, the dialogue of two passersby meeting in the crowd, and I think that, setting out from there, I will put together, piece by piece, the perfect city, made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them. If I tell you that the city toward which my journey tends is discontinuous in space and time, now scattered, now more condensed, you must not believe the search for it can stop. Perhaps while we speak, it is rising, scattered, within the confines



of your empire; you can hunt for it, but only in the way I have said."

Already the Great Khan was leafing through his atlas, over the maps of the cities that menace in nightmares and maledictions: Enoch, Babylong, Yahooiland, Butua, Brave New World

He said: "It is all useless, if the last landing place can only be the infernal city, and it is there that, in ever-narrowing circles, the current is drawing us."



And Polo said: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space."

-Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

# DISASTER COMMUNISM

*-Out of the Woods*

## PART 1

*Tens of thousands of people showed that we don't need capital or governments to get things done. They demonstrated the will of people to take part in comforting each other, re-building, creating and moulding their own futures.*

THIS QUOTE IS FROM A BLOG CALLED REVOLTS NOW. Libcom readers often see this kind of inspiration in strikes or uprisings, moments when the working class seizes the steering wheel, or stomps on the brakes (pick your metaphor). Revolts Now was talking about the aftermath of the Queensland floods. They write of:

...efforts of communities hit by disaster that do not wait for the state, or allow capital to take the



initiative, but instead ‘negotiate with their hands’, rebuilding their own communities and ‘healing themselves’, resulting in communities that are stronger. I call these efforts disaster communism.

We think disaster communism is a useful concept for thinking about climate change. Although it’s far from common, we can already identify at least two different meanings of the term. The first meaning is collective, self-organised responses to disaster situations. The second concerns the prospects for an ecological society based on human needs in the face of climate chaos, or to put it another way, the possibility of communism in the Anthropocene.<sup>1</sup> We can call this first sense ‘disaster communities’, and the second ‘disaster communisation’, and consider both of these as moments of the wider problematic of disaster communism.

### Disaster communities

Rebecca Solnit popularised the idea of disaster communities in her book *A paradise built in hell*. Solnit points out that the goal of the state in disasters is usually to reimpose ‘order’ rather than to assist the survivors. In the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the army were sent in, killing between 50 and 500 survivors and disrupting self-organised search, rescue, and firefighting efforts.<sup>2</sup>

1 Jason Moore argues that “as a metaphor for communicating the significant – and growing – problem posed by greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, the Anthropocene is to be welcomed”, but that in pinning the problem on ‘anthropos’ - humanity - rather than specific forms of social organisation - capital - it naturalises the problem and smuggles in neo-Malthusian assumptions.

2 This reminds us of the famous Freudian slip from Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, while defending police repression: “The policeman is not here to create disorder. The policeman is here to preserve disorder.”

The fires and booming explosions raged for three days. It sounded like war. When they were done, half the city was ash and rubble, more than twenty-eight thousand buildings had been destroyed, and more than half the population of four hundred thousand was homeless. Mansions burned down atop Nob Hill; the slum district south of Market Street was nearly erased. The disaster provoked, as most do, a mixed reaction: generosity and solidarity among most of the citizens, and hostility from those who feared that public and sought to control it, in the belief that an unsubjugated citizenry was—in the words of [Brigadier General] Funston—“an unlicked mob.” (p.35)

For Solnit, the current social order requires constant effort to maintain. She likens it to an electric light, and disasters to a power cut. When the power goes out, literally or metaphorically, there is a spontaneous “reversion to improvised, collaborative, cooperative, and local society” (p.10). The repressive actions of the state – in San Francisco 1906 as much as Katrina in 2005 – are about reimposing state power and capitalist normality.

The state sees localised self-organisation, collaboration and mutual aid as a threat to be crushed. Which is why the state is often quicker to provide its own citizens with hot lead than fresh water: order must reign. Solnit draws on the ground-breaking work of Charles Fritz, who studied numerous disasters and found that stereotypes of selfishness, anti-social individualism, and aggression were completely without evidence.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the opposite is true:

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3 We're not claiming people are angels, only that the evidence consistently shows co-operative, pro-social behaviour is the predominant re-

Disaster victims rarely exhibit hysterical behaviour; a kind of shock-stun behaviour is a more common initial response. Even under the worst disaster conditions, people maintain or quickly regain self control and become concerned about the welfare of others. Most of the initial search, rescue, and relief activities are undertaken by disaster victims before the arrival of organized outside aid. Reports of looting in disasters are grossly exaggerated; rates of theft and burglary actually decline in disasters; and much more is given away than stolen. Other forms of antisocial behaviour, such as aggression toward others and scapegoating, are rare or nonexistent. Instead, most disasters produce a great increase in social solidarity among the stricken populace, and this newly created solidarity tends to reduce the incidence of most forms of personal and social pathology. (Fritz, p.10)

Fritz also astutely notes that the distinction between disasters and 'normality' can "conveniently overlook the many sources of stress, strain, conflict, and dissatisfaction that are imbedded in the nature of everyday life."<sup>4</sup> The difference is that disaster situations suspend the institutional order, cre-

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ponse. However, this solidarity is mediated by identity, and this means race is a major factor in who lives and who dies. The media like to focus on exceptional cases to fit a Hobbesian narrative of anomie wherever state order breaks down, but cases like this are perhaps better understood as the effect of racial othering – when a black person knocks at the door asking for help, white people don't necessarily answer, and maybe they even shoot them dead just to be sure.

4 For example see this blog (<http://libcom.org/blog/nervousness-politics-14042014>) by 'sometimes explode,' arguing that anxiety/nervousness is the dominant affective state in the contemporary 'society of stimulation'.

ating an unstructured situation amenable to change. Thus the privations felt in the disaster, as well as the stresses and strains of everyday life, can be addressed collectively. This provides both the psychological support and the collective power to restructure social life around human needs.<sup>5</sup>

### **An opportunity for social transformation?**

People see the opportunity for realizing certain wishes that remained latent and unfulfilled under the old system. They see new roles that they can create for themselves. They see the possibility of wiping out old inequities and injustices. The opportunity for achieving these changes in the culture lends a positive aspect to disasters not normally present in other types of crisis. (Fritz, p.57)

Importantly, disaster communities are not intentional communities, drop-out communes, or activist temporary autonomous zones. They're self-organised, non-market, non-statist social reproduction under adverse conditions, not an attempt at voluntary secession from capitalism. However, they still suffer some of the shortcomings of such projects. First and foremost, they are typically short-lived, even if the experience changes the participants for life. Fritz points out

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<sup>5</sup> James Lovelock argues along these lines, linking anxiety to a sort of calm before the storm, which can only be resolved once the inevitable happens: "Humanity is in a period exactly like 1938-9, he explains, when "we all knew something terrible was going to happen, but didn't know what to do about it". But once the second world war was under way, "everyone got excited, they loved the things they could do, it was one long holiday ... so when I think of the impending crisis now, I think in those terms. A sense of purpose - that's what people want." We can't share the nostalgia for wartime, but a sense of impending doom certainly pervades contemporary culture.

that practically, such communities persist until some kind of basic societal functioning and stability is restored, typically a matter of weeks to months in peacetime disasters, or several years in wartime or in case of chronic or serial disasters.

This helps explain why a smart state has more options than just repression, and hence why the US Department of Homeland Security can praise the self-organised, anarchist-influenced Occupy Sandy relief efforts.<sup>6</sup> Since self-organised disaster communities are more effective than state agencies and market forces and responding to disasters, the state can simply sit back and let people suffer, then reassert itself when the community dissipates as normality returns. This is the state's interest in 'resilience', exposing proletarians to disaster, abandoning them to survive by their own efforts, and then moving in with the 'disaster capitalism' of reconstruction and gentrification once the moment of disaster has passed.<sup>7</sup>

Disaster communities alone, then, do not inherently pose a revolutionary threat to the capitalist social order – and may even be recuperated as a low-cost means to restore capitalist normality. If they can be called communist, it's in the sense of 'baseline communism', a term used by David Graeber to describe the basic sociality and free cooperation which makes any social order possible (including capitalism). In part two of this article, we'll look at what disaster communism means in relation to a wider revolutionary, anti-capitalist dynamic.

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6 <http://truth-out.org/news/item/22837-dhs-study-praises-occupy-sandy-with-murky-intentions>

7 As an article in the Endnotes journal comments, "resilience is only ostensibly a conservative principle; it finds stability not in inflexibility but in constant, self-stabilising adaptivity." In disaster communities, neither state power nor supposed entrepreneurial 'genius' can generate this adaptive self-organisation, rather they act once it has stabilised the situation.

## PART 2

### Disaster communisation

Recently in the libertarian communist circles we are connected to, much of the recent discussion of what an anti-capitalist revolution would look like has taken place as part of discussions of ‘communisation theory’. To our knowledge, little of this discussion has directly engaged with climate change. A definition given by Endnotes serves as a helpful point of departure for thinking about disaster communism.

Communization is a movement at the level of the totality, through which that totality is abolished. (...) The determination of an individual act as ‘communizing’ flows only from the overall movement of which it is part, not from the act itself, and it would therefore be wrong to think of the revolution in terms of the sum of already-communizing acts, as if all that was needed was a certain accumulation of such acts to a critical point. A conception of the revolution as such an accumulation is premised on a quantitative extension which is supposed to provoke a qualitative transformation. (...) In contrast to these linear conceptions of revolution, communization is the product of a qualitative shift within the dynamic of class struggle itself.<sup>8</sup>

This passage probably caricatures its unnamed opponents, however, it’s a helpful way to think about disaster communism: no amount of disaster communities will lead to revolution. Revolution would only happen when the self-or-

8 <http://libcom.org/library/what-are-we-do-endnotes>

ganised social reproduction of disaster communities came into conflict with existing property relations, the state, and so on, and overcomes these limits. That in turn is hard to imagine without the extension and linking up of different disaster communities, class struggles, and social movements.

Disaster communities are typically short-lived and tend to dissipate back into capitalist normality. Unless these communities compose themselves as antagonists to the prevailing social order, and link up with other struggles, they will be isolated and dissipate (either through repression, recuperation, or simply outliving the conditions of their formation). Both the intensive aspect (overcoming of limits within a struggle) and extensive aspects (spreading and linking up) matter: no local struggle can overcome its internal limits without extension. No widespread movement will become revolutionary without a qualitative shift from an ameliorative to a transformative horizon.

This line of thinking also rules out any kind of catastrophist ‘the worse, the better’ approach: there is no reason to think disasters will lead to social transformation any more than austerity will inevitably lead to revolution. However, climate change does change the parameters for revolution. Things like rising food and energy costs, mass displacement, and water scarcity will increasingly stress the capacity of proletarians to reproduce themselves within the prevailing social relations. For example, hunger reflects distribution of income not absolute scarcity, and this will remain true even with significant climate-induced reductions in agricultural productivity, so social property relations will increasingly come into conflict with biophysical reproduction.

As Endnotes, umm, note, an activity is only communisation if it occurs at the level of the totality - that is,

if it's part of a class- and social-system-wide attack on capitalism in the form of creating communist social relations. If it's not part of that, then activity is part of the totality of capitalist social relations and their reproduction (as we see in isolated disaster communities). The capitalist class and its governments are aware of this as well to some extent. Their responses to disasters are not only about the short-term situation but are about the long term as well.

Harry Cleaver writes in his article on the aftermath of the Mexico City earthquake that landowners and real estate speculators saw the quake as an opportunity to evict people they'd been meaning to get rid of for a long time, to tear down their quake shattered homes and put up expensive high rise condos. The Mexican working class fought back, successfully:

...thousands of tenants organized themselves and marched on the presidential palace demanding government expropriation of the damaged properties and their eventual sale to their current tenants. By taking the initiative while the government was still paralysed, they successfully forced the seizure of some 7,000 properties.<sup>9</sup>

Cleaver identifies two conditions that made this possible, the history of struggle prior to the earthquake and the ways in which “the earthquake caused a breakdown in both the administrative capacities and the authority of the government.” The first is important for helping understand the conditions of emergence of disaster communities which might challenge state power or take direct action in their own interests. The second is important for helping us un-

9 <http://libcom.org/library/uses-of-earthquake-cleaver>



derstand how disasters can limit the forces of the state and capital that seek to keep society capitalist.

### **The two moments of disaster communism**

The apparent universality of disaster communities gives strong grounds to believe self-organised social reproduction will emerge wherever capitalist normality breaks down, whether that's due to disaster or social antagonism. Contra-Endnotes, this means we are not restricted to purely negative injunctions:

Endnotes wrote:

What advice [communization theory] can give is primarily negative: the social forms implicated in the reproduction of the capitalist class relation will not be instruments of the revolution, since they are part of that which is to be abolished.

We disagree. We think that disaster communities offer a glimpse of what non-capitalist social reproduction can look like under abnormal conditions. Since a revolutionary movement is by definition abnormal, it would be as much of a mistake to dismiss disaster communities as to claim them as sufficient in themselves. This does not mean a simple quantitative accumulation of disasters adds up to communism – only that there are glimpses of non-capitalist social relations in disaster communities. Indeed, it would be impossible to account for disaster communities degenerating back into capitalist normality if they hadn't at some point operated on at least a partly different logic to that of value and capital accumulation. We argue this is a commu-

nist logic of self-organised production and distribution for human needs, without state or market mediation.

Furthermore, while it's true that capitalist social forms (wages, value, commodities...) can't form the basis of non-capitalist social reproduction, social forms do not exhaust the content of the current world. For example, David Harvey identifies seven 'activity spheres':

1. *Technologies and organizational forms*
2. *Social relations*
3. *Institutional and administrative arrangements*
4. *Production and labour processes*
5. *Relations to nature*
6. *The reproduction of daily life and the species*
7. *Mental conceptions of the world*

The mistake Endnotes make is to take the totalising tendencies of capitalism for an already-totalised capitalism (for example: "What we are is, at the deepest level, constituted by this [class] relation").<sup>10</sup> We would surely hope that any revolution would see each of these seven aspects transformed: some abolished and/or replaced with altogether new social forms, others reorganised and reconfigured, as well as the emergence of novel ideas, forms, technologies and so on.

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10 This point is borrowed from a friend in discussion on Facebook. It can be contrasted with Marx's position in *Capital* that "here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests" (our emphasis). The communisation argument would be that 'real subsumption' has subsequently advanced to the point that Marx's 'only in so far as' caveat has been rendered moot. We disagree, and think this caveat is vital to any theoretical analysis of capitalism.

## Concrete utopia

If we take seriously Murray Bookchin's dictum that "we must escape from the debris with whatever booty we can rescue (...) the ruins themselves are mines,"<sup>11</sup> then we are not restricted to apophatic communism.<sup>12</sup> Of course, we cannot fully specify in advance 'what is to be done', nor would we wish to. That has to be worked out by the participants in the movement as it develops. But that doesn't mean we can't identify some of the constraints, the possibilities, and the latent potentials which are unable to be realised under capitalist social relations.

We wouldn't be going far out on a limb in saying that distributed renewable energy generation is more compatible with a libertarian communist society than centralised fossil fuel energy generation. That doesn't mean it's 'inherently' communist or necessarily prefigures communism - the solar panels appearing on rooftops around our cities show otherwise. Similarly, in the case of agriculture, there are biophysical parameters which constrain the possible (such as the carbon, nitrogen, and water cycles). We cannot say definitively what the communisation of agriculture would look like, but we can identify at least some of the constraints and possibilities, and even speculate as to how these might play out.

Disaster communities are informative in this regard - both in showing how present-at-hand technologies, knowledges, and infrastructure can be rapidly repurposed to meet human needs, and in how these emergent innovations

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11 <http://libcom.org/blog/murray-bookchins-libertarian-tech-nics-11032014>

12 Defining communism only by what it is not; a purely negative conception of communism

can dissipate and be reabsorbed into capitalist normality.<sup>13</sup> We could go further still, and insist on the need to rediscover a concrete utopianism. Increasingly, it is capital which relies on abstract utopia - for instance building new 'clean' coal power plants with vast empty halls for carbon capture technology that doesn't exist. By contrast, a concrete utopianism looks to the already-present possibilities which are frustrated by the prevailing social relations.<sup>14</sup>

Labour-saving technology is everywhere but is experienced as speed-ups and unemployment. Industrial ecology is largely limited to a corporate social responsibility gimmick in a world ruled by value. Collaborative, self-organising, and co-operative forms of production are pioneered but often experienced as self-managed, precarious exploitation. Viable, sustainable, and low throughput agricultural practices exist but are marginalised in the energy-hungry world market. Biophilic cities and regenerative design are largely restricted to isolated demonstration projects or gentrifying urban spaces for the well-off, their potential constrained by class relations.

With Endnotes, we can say 'the determination of these potentials as 'communising' flows only from the overall movement of which they are a part, not from the things themselves'.<sup>15</sup> Against Endnotes, we can insist this gives at least some positive content to disaster communism, even if

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13 A communist movement mirrors capital in this one sense – it must grow or die.

14 The distinction between concrete and abstract utopias comes from Ernst Bloch, who sought to show – against Marx's protestations – that Marx was in fact the greatest utopian thinker. Whereas the utopian socialists Marx criticised only posed abstract blueprints of future societies, Marx sought utopia through detailed analysis of concrete tendencies and latent potentials that are already present.

15 Arguably Endnotes are simply paraphrasing classic Marx here: 'communism is the real movement that abolishes the present state of things.'

only as a broad outline of incipient, inchoate, yet concrete utopian potentials.

In part three, we will try and tie the micro level of disaster communities to the macro level of disaster communitisation via the example of contemporary logistics.

## PART 3

### Debating logistics

The purely negative approach to communism discussed in part 2 has already come under criticism from, amongst others, Alberto Toscano.<sup>16</sup> This has taken the form of a debate notionally regarding the politics of capitalist logistics — the global network of shipping, ports, warehouses, just-in-time production, stock control algorithms. Toscano argues that contemporary logistics is clearly a capitalist creation. However, he insists that a purely negative approach of sabotage and blockades overlooks the potential, or even the necessity, to take it over at least for a transition period into a post-capitalist society. This is the real substance of the debate, with logistics standing in as a case study for the existing infrastructure of production and circulation in general.

Toscano wrote:

Materialism and strategy are obviated by an anti-programmatic assertion of the ethical, which appears to repudiate the pressing critical and realist question of how the structures and flows that

16 Alberto Toscano, *Logistics and opposition*, *Mute*.

separate us from our capacities for collective action could be turned to different ends, rather than merely brought to a halt.

This seems to echo our criticism of the purely negative advice put forward by Endnotes. However, there are some important differences which are worth teasing out. Toscano approvingly quotes David Harvey:

The proper management of constituted environments (and in this I include their long-term socialistic or ecological transformation into something completely different) may therefore require transitional political institutions, hierarchies of power relations, and systems of governance that could well be anathema to both ecologists and socialists alike.

Harvey's fallacy here is in moving from the (true) premise that a revolutionary movement inherits the old world and not a blank slate, to the unwarranted conclusion that 'proper management' means holding our noses and putting up with hierarchies and governance a lot like the old world for an unspecified transition period. If this sounds familiar, it's because this has been the core leftist-managerialist trope at least since the Second International (1889-1916). Workers! Listen to your betters! The orders are for your own good!

At the core of this trope is a deep distrust of workers' self-organisation, and a reflexive belief that the solution to complexity is hierarchical command. David Harvey has made this argument explicitly with regards to nuclear power and air traffic control. Harvey's arguments rely heavily on straw men ('what if the air traffic controllers all had an

endless consensus meeting while you were on a plane!!’), and are persuasively rebutted here.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, a response to Toscano by Jasper Bernes in Endnotes offers a very different objection to self-management.<sup>18</sup> The problem is not that workers are incompetent compared to technocrats, but rather that workers are only too capable. That would mean self-managing an infrastructure structurally hostile to their needs:

*For workers to seize the commanding heights offered by logistics — to seize, in other words, the control panel of the global factory — would mean for them to manage a system that is constitutively hostile to them and their needs, to oversee a system in which extreme wage differentials are built into the very infrastructure.*

The Endnotes piece offers a persuasive argument that taking over the logistics infrastructure is not desirable (or desired by the workers in question) — its purpose is to exploit wage differentials between core and peripheral zones — and probably not even possible — since logistical networks have been designed precisely to bypass disruptions such as strikes, occupations or natural disasters, seizure of any node would just see it cut off from the logistical network.<sup>19</sup> If you seize a

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17 <http://libcom.org/library/i-wouldnt-want-my-anarchist-friends-be-charge-nuclear-power-station-david-harvey-anarchi>

18 Jasper Bernes, “Logistics, counterlogistics and the communist prospect,” *Endnotes 3*.

19 But see this piece by Ashok Kumar for Novara, which argues that “large suppliers have expanded horizontally across the supply chain to include warehousing, logistics and even retail. This development has led to the emergence of quasi-supplier monopolization, leading to greater value capture at the bottom of the supply chain (...) It is now extremely costly for companies such as Adidas and Nike to cut-and-run from large-scale suppliers such as Pou Chen.” (<http://wire.novaramedia>).

just-in-time warehouse, you've seized an empty warehouse. "Capital attempts to route around these disturbances by building resilience and 'fault tolerance' into its financial, logistical and extractive systems", as a piece by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Nielson puts it.<sup>20</sup>

The disagreement here seems to centre on treating 'logistics' as a unitary whole (in philosophical terms, a 'totality'). The question is then posed as 'can we take it over, and should we?'. It is only in the final paragraph of the Endnotes piece that a solution to this impasse is hinted, though scarcely elaborated:

This would be a process of inventory, taking stock of things we encounter in our immediate environs, that does not imagine mastery from the standpoint of the global totality, but *rather a process of bricolage* from the standpoint of partisan fractions who know they will have to fight from particular, embattled locations, and win their battles successively rather than all at once. None of this means setting up a blueprint for the conduct of struggles, a transitional program. Rather, it means producing the knowledge which the experience of past struggles has already demanded and which future struggles will likely find helpful.

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com/2014/04/5-reasons-the-strike-in-china-is-terrifying-to-transnational-capitalism/)

20 Sandro Mezzadra & Brett Nielson, "Extraction, logistics, finance: global crisis and the politics of operations," *Radical Philosophy*. This piece compliments the Endnotes one and is worth reading alongside it. The conclusion, proposing a 'counter-operations' echoes Endnotes' advocacy of 'counter-logistics'. The former arguably offers a richer concept in stressing not just cognitive mapping for the purpose of disruption, but also the generation of struggles, alliances, and subjectivities throughout the global logistical-extractive network.



## Repurposing as bricolage

It is this notion of repurposing as bricolage that we wish to elaborate, as it seems to unify the localised mutual aid of disaster communities with the global problematic of disaster communisation. The term was introduced into social theory by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1962, and developed by, amongst others, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari:

Bricolage (...) the possession of a stock of materials that or of rules of thumb that are fairly extensive and at the same time limited; the ability to rearrange fragments continually in new and different patterns or configurations.

Deleuze and Guattari, with their psychoanalytic hats on, are here concerned with elaborating schizophrenic cognition: the ceaseless connection and reconnection of seemingly unrelated words, concepts, objects. The translators' note to the quoted passage offers a more useful and plainly stated definition: "bricolage: (...) The art of making do with what is at hand." This is precisely the logic of disaster communism.

Toscano is therefore right to insist that "what use can be drawn from the dead labours which crowd the earth's crust in a world no longer dominated by value proves to be a much more radical question" than simply disrupting the logistical network of capital. But he's wrong to consequently endorse hierarchical 'proper management' as a necessary 'transitional' measure. The examples of disaster communities in part 1 amply illustrate this point: 'proper (hierarchical) management' pales in comparison to the efficacy of self-organisation.

This efficacy is premised on a pragmatic and improvised repurposing of whatever is to hand; bricolage. This in turn presupposes that logistics — and by extension, the existing infrastructure in general — need not be treated as an organic whole (a totality).

Today, the main theoretical alternative to organic totalities is what the philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls assemblages, wholes characterised by relations of exteriority. These relations imply, first of all, that a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different.<sup>21</sup>

What does this mean in plain terms? Simply that while logistics as a whole may well be irredeemably capitalist (as Bernes/Endnotes argue), it is made up of countless components at various scales: ships, trucks and trains; ports, roads, and railways; computers, algorithms and fibre optic cables; atoms, molecules and alloys; and not to forget, human beings. Just because the current organisation of these parts is optimised to the valorisation of capital does not mean there cannot be other configurations with other optimisations. Indeed, the possible configurations are practically infinite. It doesn't matter too much whether these wholes are considered as 'totalities' or 'assemblages' so long as this potential for reconfiguration is recognised. There's no necessary re-

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21 Manuel De Landa, "A new philosophy of society: assemblage theory and social complexity," *Continuum*, p.10-11. We agree with Mezzadra and Neilson that "We are not without sympathy for these network and assemblage approaches that insist upon tracing the multiple and shifting relations that compose any social entity or form. But we are wary when such approaches are marshalled in ways that deny analytical validity to the category of capital."

son a new configuration would need resemble logistics at all.

Most obviously, warehouses trucks and trains can be put to other uses. So can ships — and not just the obvious ones. The current volumes of world trade probably don't make sense without the exploitation of global wage differentials. But ships can serve other purposes, from moving people, to being scuttled to initiate coral reef formation, to being stripped or melted down and remanufactured into other items altogether.<sup>22</sup> Communications infrastructure is self-evidently multipurpose, and even the stock control algorithms may have potential uses if hacked, repurposed, and placed in the public domain.

It is clearly impossible to specify in advance whether trucks will be repurposed to deliver food to the hungry, retrofitted with electric motors, stripped for parts, and/or used as barricades. Disaster communities give us ample reason to believe that local, emergent bricolage can efficiently meet human needs even under the most adverse conditions. But emphasising the nature of things as potentially reconfigurable — and stressing the sufficiency of self-organisation to reconfigure them — also informs the wider problematic of disaster communisation. In this way the question is not 'to take it over or to abandon it?' considered as a whole, but how to pull it apart and repurpose its components to new ends: an ecological satisfaction of human needs and not the endless valorisation of capital.

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22 For example, a TV show recently attempted to upcycle an entire Airbus A320.



## VIII

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "emergency situation" in which we live is the rule.

We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency; and our position in the struggle against Fascism will thereby improve. Not the least reason that the latter has a chance is that its opponents, in the name of progress, greet it as a

historical norm. The astonishment that the things we are experiencing in the 20th century are “still” possible is by no means philosophical. It is not the beginning of knowledge, unless it would be the knowledge that the conception of history on which it rests is untenable.

Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

# THE ANTHRO- POCENE

*-1882 Woodbine*

## PART I: INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THE ANTHROPOCENE

TONIGHT'S TALK IS THE INTRODUCTION TO A SEVERAL part series called *The Anthropocene or, "The work is going well, but it looks like it might be the end of the world."* For tonight, I'm just going to explain the Anthropocene and lay out some starting coordinates. The next discussion will be in two weeks and will focus on apocalypse-and crisis, then there will be others on resilience, organization, worlds and form-of-life, and so on as feels appropriate.

What we want to do tonight is to simply to begin elaborating and discussing the common situation that we find ourselves in.



## I. The Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is the name recently proposed by geologists at the RGS for the new geological epoch in which we are living. Geological epochs are the way geologists measure the time scale of the earth, they are grouped according to the layers strata or bedrock of the earth, new epochs are named when there are significant changes in the strata, changes which could have been caused by volcanos and lava, the movement of rivers and silt, ocean tides, earthquakes, etc.

According to geologists, up until recently and for about 10,000 years the Earth has endured the “Holocene,” the geological epoch of stable climates and all of human civilizations. However in the past several years there is a growing consensus amongst geologists and other scientists that in the 18th century, *humanity inaugurated an entirely new age, the Anthropocene.*

The term was proposed around 2000, by a Dutch atmospheric chemist named Paul Crutzen, who won the Nobel Prize for discovering the causes of the ozone “hole.” According to Crutzen, the Anthropocene began in the mid-1700s when humans became “geological agents” with a stratigraphically more significant impact on the earth than any other process, element, animal, or body—more than volcanoes, more than oceans. Some of the stratigraphic effects most commonly cited as evidence of the Anthropocene include:

*Deforestation.* 80% of the earth’s natural forests have been destroyed, half of the world’s tropical forests have been cut, most of North America has been logged. As a result of this and industrial agriculture there has been massive topsoil

loss, every inch of which took 100 years to accumulate.

*The reshuffling of the biosphere, deliberately and not, through global transportation chains.* Invasive species are taking over in many places. Flora and fauna, like this kudzu, moved around the world, invading and taking over local ecosystems, blocking out sunlight, dominating water sources, or actually asphyxiating roots and branches, etc.

*Urbanization.* More than half of the world's 7 billion people now live in massive built environments, many of which cover 100s of square miles and comprise more than 20 million people.

*The widespread destruction of habitats,* resulting from the construction and development of buildings, offices, suburbs, resource extraction, industrial farming, highways, pipelines and so on.

*Mass extinction.* 1 in 10 plants and animals will be extinct by 2050, including tigers, koalas, millions of plants and insects, and sea turtles. There's a sad story of them approaching artificial light as opposed to moonlight and thus laying eggs in the wrong place. Polar bears could be gone in less than 100 years due to melting ice. Warmer ocean temperatures are killing coral reefs, considered a sensitive early indicator that "tipping points" have been crossed. It's predicted that all seafood fisheries will collapse by 2048, at which point more than half of the world's butterfly species will have disappeared.

*The homogenization of environments and decrease in biodiversity* due to things like industrial agriculture and mono-

cropping, which have created sprawling barren landscapes in which nothing can grow.

*Desertification from deforestation and intensive industrial livestock grazing.* The Amazon rainforest is becoming a desert.

*The acidification of the ocean, caused by the absorption of carbon dioxide into the sea* (not just atmosphere, ocean is a regulating sink). This saturation of the ocean with carbon is making it impossible for the billions of marine organisms that rely on calcification to build their skeletons and destroying their existing ones. The bottom of the ocean is strewn with dissolving starfish, dead mollusks, and coral reefs. Coral reefs, the “rainforests of the ocean” support 25% of marine life. 30% of the coral reefs worldwide will be dead in the next 30 years, the Great Barrier reef will be gone by 2050, as will the tropical fish that live in it. Then there’s the proliferation of jellyfish that’s occurring in these acidic deadzones, until it becomes too acidic, and then they’ll die too.

*And, of course, climate change and global warming.* The emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere is leading to an increase in overall planetary temperatures with effects including shifting rainfall patterns, spikes in hot and cold weather, increased risks and strength of hurricanes, rising sea levels, etc. Global temperatures have increased 1.53°F (0.85°C) since 1880.

A lot of these images are seemingly environmental, but there’s another side to this. Anthropocene literally means the “the age of Man” (anthropo, cene), and what it does

is call us to examine *the particular kind of human life* that has dominated this era, that made everything I've just said possible.

So let's talk about this life that the Anthropocene both calls our attention to and names as a disaster. We ought to pretty familiar with it because it's the very kind of life we have been living since the day we were born, a life in which the world supposedly begins and ends with the I—the subject—who assumes the task of ordering a world full of objects—trees, the ground, other people.

The completely mad idea of a world divided into subjects and objects comes from Christianity, Platonism, the Enlightenment, modern science, all those bodies of thought that overtook myriad other ways of seeing the world—animistic, sensible, magical, religious, etc.

But it isn't just an *idea*. It's a civilization, a state of things, constructed through a double movement that simultaneously posits a *vision of life* and constructs that very *life*.

No humans had ever lived in this way before. Thus, to create this civilization, it was necessary to destroy *worlds*, to separate human communities from land, traditional practices and knowledges, animals, forests, machines, and gods, all the other beings with which humans build worlds, with which worlds build. It required deskilling and the setting up of an environment that everyday, to this day, forces us into apartments, jobs, and desires that make it very difficult to feed ourselves or even to *love*. Proletarianizing us, as Marx called it, didn't just separate us from our conditions of existence: it literally recreated how we live, setting up walls against any other ways of living.

To take an example, in the late 19th century, after decades of warfare and massacres, the US government sponsored boarding schools to “Kill the Indian, and Save

the Man.” Hair was cropped short, use of native languages outlawed, names were changed according to biblical stories, and children were separated from family and land base. As Capt. Richard H. Pratt of the Carlisle school in Pennsylvania said of his school, “[we] preached against *colonizing* Indians, and in favor of *individualizing* them.”

This operation didn't take place just once, nor did it happen uniformly across space and time. So we could equally take the enclosures that separated peasants from land and communities, thus creating the possibility for wage work, or again still, why not, the witch-hunts. Those accused of witchcraft in Europe and America during the 16th and 17th centuries practiced magic and healing, delivered children, performed abortions, and consorted with close animal companions such as mares, frogs, cats, and goats known as “familiar,” thus leading to the suggestion that they were at a slippery crossroad between men and animals. The witch lived together with friends and family, traded spices and herbs with neighbors, was skillful with natural oils and powders. She traveled where she was needed, to ‘mark’ an animal, visit a sick person, help people carry out a revenge, free themselves from the effects of medical charms, find missing objects or deploy love potions. The witch performed incantations and divinations, communicated with ghosts, devils, and other beings, and lived in an animated, sensible world through which coursed a force in all things: water, trees, substances, and words.

The witch moved between multiple spheres, her life was irreducible to pure presence or a particular set of attributes, what we call identity. The witch was part of a world, composed of spirits, healing practices, medicinal knowledge, herbs, animals, peoples, sexuality, friendships, places. In the witch-hunts, all these elements of life are extracted

from the world of birth, death, knowledge and memory of which they were apart, and created as separate. Once separated, practices passed down through generations are made exterior to the lives of which they were apart (exteriorization of healing practices in the rise of professional medicine that accompanied the witch-hunts). In this process of separation, beings are separated from ways, forms, activities, all the determinations of which they were a part, and being is reduced to constant presence. Such is the basic condition for the existence of the Anthropocene.

The separation of the “human” from the “non-human,” “consciousness” from the “world,” “knowing” from “power,” “work” from “existence,” “form” from “content,” “being” from its “determinations,” “contemplation” from “action”... the denial of world is a never-ending process. Hence today companies like Monsanto sue farmers who save seeds. Hence the erection of apparatuses everywhere, at every moment, whose job is to produce and maintain life and its world in their separation.

The invention of the notion of individual freedom as life’s highest quality and aspiration was concurrent with these historical processes. Recall what Foucault said: the modern individual is and has long been an extremely effective vehicle for governing in a moment where individual freedom was pronounced existence’s principal virtue. As humanity was detached from its conditions of existence, human beings were made to identify themselves, their very happiness and horizons, with that detachment, thus naturalizing the newly created life and forming its immanent control.

The Anthropocene: biopolitical epoch, epoch of government.

Now here's the other side of the coin for Man. Once the human was separated from worlds, it was then possible to imagine that human as the *orderer* of the world, as a replacement for God, as the center of the universe.

In the same way that humanity was transformed into a collection of individuals, the flipside to that process was the creation of what we now call "the non-human"—animals, stones, tools, etc., whatever is now outside the individual—as an objective, as opposed to subjective, standing reserve of resources.

This brings us full circle then to the Anthropocene evidence cited in the beginning: the damming of rivers for power supply, the construction of vast electrical grids, synthetic pesticides and fertilizers to eliminate chance and maximize yield, nuclear power, lawns, cities. (Calorie diaries, heart rate monitors, 125-130 BPM? 145? 120? etc.)

Up until recently all of this stuff was almost always framed in a narrative of modernization, improved standards of living, images of mankind's triumph over nature, conquering wild landscapes, progress, etc.

Increasingly though, the myth of Man standing triumphant over nature has fallen from grace—not because of its devastating implications— but rather from its failures in actually taming nature. Think of Fukushima, the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, or the recognition that we simply have to live with hurricanes and other catastrophes.

The Promethean orderer who stands apart from and dominates the world looks like a joke.

This kind of life and its world: this is the Anthropocene.

## II. The Crisis is the Age

We live in a world permeated by crisis, both those we're told define the present like the economic crisis, the environmental crisis, etc. as well as those we're told will make up our future: the seas are rising, the city's going to be underwater, there are going to be resource wars, the dollar, the oil reserves, the civilization, they're all going to collapse, whatever.

Whether or not the phenomena named by these crises exist or will exist or not isn't the point. Crisis is an operation, a technique of government that works by making us anxious, afraid, or excited, by mobilizing us.

However amidst all this talk of coming crisis and disaster that colors our lives, the geologists who are measuring the Anthropocene are telling us that the disaster is not the next hurricane, the Rapture that will swallow Rihanna alive, or the zombie hordes. Rather with the Anthropocene, *the catastrophe is here in the form of the age itself, meaning our entire civilization, and its requisite way of life, is already a ruin.*

In fact, the stratigraphers who are trying to measure and delimit the Anthropocene are studying places like New York as they would normally investigate an ancient long-gone site. Normally they locate the collapse of civilizations in rocks, in the trace fossils that can be found there, but, measuring the Anthropocene, they are locating such trace fossils in things like subway systems, which they see as representative of the catastrophic nature of this civilization.

But this doesn't just mean the objective world. Exhausted by the imperative to hold the self together, to be somebody, to go to work, to treat our neuroses, whatever – the crisis of life, the subjective unraveling that we saw and experienced together in 2011 when Occupy revealed this unraveling not as *my problem*, but what we share in common, the common



of our epoch— this subjective crisis is part and parcel of the devastation the Anthropocene names.

So if our epoch is full of worry over so many impending catastrophes, it's because for a century or more, maybe since their very creation, the subject and object, the bedrocks of our civilization, have been deteriorating toward their present state. If so much satisfaction is derived from surveying the devastation of the environment, it's because it mainly serves to conceal the shocking destruction of *interiorities*. Every oil slick, every sterile plain, every species extinction is an image of our souls in tatters.

When we inhabit the Anthropocene, our past and present appear differently. They look like one single catastrophe, piling its wreckage endlessly at our feet. Geological, metaphysical, historical, spiritual.

*“The event of devastation began long before the explosion of something like the atomic bomb: the age of devastation consists in the fact that everything —world, human, and earth— enters into the abandonment of all being.”*

—Martin Heidegger

### III. So, War Then

What does it feel like to live in the end of a world? The Anthropocene is a moment of profound disorientation: we're living in a world that still *functions*, but which is increasingly unlivable in every regard. It's on this exhausted terrain that a war is underway.

There is this French scientist Bruno Latour —who normally talks about how speed bumps are just like human beings and so forth— recently he discovered the Anthro-

cene, and it was a revelation to him, it's got him saying the most amazing things. Last month at a talk in Paris he said: "*To live in the Anthropocene is to live in a declared state of war.*" And he's right.

You know, the end of a civilization might be the most fiercely fought war, between those who are getting organized to prevent this civilization's end at any cost, and those of us who want a less impoverished existence, who are getting organized for an altogether different future.

Currently, one of these sides is more attuned to what is at stake, and more organized than the other. I think we all know which one that is.

Latour also remarked that, "*The state of war that is the defining trait of the Anthropocene, is constantly downplayed or euphemized.*" We have been taught, since childhood, to avoid conflict at all costs. But war has nothing to do with morality. It is the state of the world. And in any case, Latour again: "*It is even more dangerous to deny that there is a war when you are under attack.*"

Just like the Native American worlds that I talked about before weren't destroyed by military force alone, but by the creation of new environments and new kinds of life, *this* war is not reducible to a military conflict. This a war in which what is at stake is being, or life itself. It's a metaphysical war.

Let's look at how the "side" that's currently (but not for long) more organized in this war is deploying itself.

When people try to imagine the political future that climate change or the Anthropocene might entail, they often image some kind of totalitarian eco-fascist government (*Elysium*, etc.) – but if we look around, this is incorrect. Government in the Anthropocene is a blind, out-of-control, ad hoc machine, or rather *dispositif*.

What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, first-ly, a thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.... [a *dispositif*] has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The *dispositif* thus has a dominant strategic function (Foucault, 1980a, p. 194).

We can see what I mean by this if we look around New York today, especially in the discourse and myriad architectural transformations underway after Sandy to make the city “resilient.”

Resilience is a term that comes from cybernetics and systems theory, and it is both a view of life as made up of systems, and the ability of those *systems* to survive disturbance. Today resilience is the defining term for government in the Anthropocene, providing the epistemological impetus for a thoroughgoing reorganization of the urban.

After Sandy, newspapers, Bloomberg, and urban planners agreed that the city as it stands is an out-of-date, brittle composite of aging infrastructure, disconnected subjects, and trashed waterways built in a hubristic era of Prometheanism and individualism. In magazine exposés and press conferences, the story is told and retold: two hundred years of modernist urban planning have separated the human and non-human and denied their true relationality, leaving us poor metropolitans the inheritors of devastated,

vulnerable cities. Resilience rejects human mastery arguments, and presents itself as a project of survival and disaster management for a civilization on the brink.

Toward this end, we are told: saving the city in and from the turbulent Anthropocene will require undoartifacts of modernity must be put back together. The aim here is to *connect* subject and object into complex systems capable of weathering –figuratively and literally— any and all disasters to come.

And just like the construction of the subject and object, here it's not just about reimagining but also concretely creating a resilient environment. But now instead of subjects and objects, things are to be recreated as complex adaptive system. So resilience reconnects what was separated, but in its separation.

This thing called oyster-ecture –from the MOMA Rising Currents exhibition but now underway in various forms across the city— is a really good example of the transformations resilience entails. Instead of constructing barriers to keep water out a la modernism, oyster reefs will be curated in the Hudson River and the bay in order to both filter out polluted bodies of water and attenuate storm waters. In this process, humans and oysters are meant to act side by side as ecosystems managers, reengineering the and reuniting city/nature/animal/human to attenuate storm surges and the blackouts, floods, and the logistical bottlenecks they generate as well as surviving the catastrophes to come.

So it's clear that this is working on the individual too. From the resilience perspective, disconnected individuals are the least resilient. So now FEMA gives grants for neighbors to meet each other and train in emergency preparedness, government agencies connect with us through Twitter. From social media to neighborhood preparedness,

the resilient (smart) citizen will be less an individual than it will be a connected and communicating cyborg.

The assemblage of these different initiatives, discourses, and architectural plans: this is resilience qua *dispositif*, as apparatus. In the constantly threatened and threatening ‘new normal,’ it hopes to bring everyone and everything—oysters as well as citizens and the smart grids and twitter feeds that sustain them—into a ‘democracy of things’ around a series of pervasive threats that we will all play a part in managing. Like the devastated Gulf Coast fishermen hired by BP to clean up the oil spill, this *dispositif* aims to enroll all of life in its latest crisis management operation, in which everyone and everything, human and non-human, will play the role of *critical infrastructure*. In the resilient vision, life and its management will coincide in a ‘city that is its own solution’: a communication-saturated life support system, a “self-healing city,” that organizes and reorganizes itself, in the face of—on the basis of—whatever crisis to come.

#### IV. Conclusion

We are living within the collapse of a civilization, a declared state of war over the definition of life. We take *this* reality as our starting point.

In doing so, we can be finished imagining that these resilience measures are their attempts to save us, and we can be finished evaluating them, or anything else, in moral terms. All this evidence listed tonight of the disaster is not an opinion or a viewpoint: they are evidents. In the Anthropocene, the critical gesture is finished. It’s so liberating. New land, new horizons. Everything is to be reinvented.

The word ‘crisis’ in ancient medicine, just like in the bible, meant a judgment, a *decision*, the decisive moment in which it was decided whether the patient would survive or die. Today, however, crisis is our prolonged state, in which the decision is endlessly deferred.

By deciding to become party to the war that’s already underway, we put an end to this uncertainty. This can only be done through the building of worlds, materially, spiritually, and combatively, in other words, by inhabiting this desert, by making it blossom.

## PART II: THE AWAITING ROOM: NOTES ON THE APOCALYPSE

### I. Introduction

The Anthropocene, the new geological era stratigraphers have named, was the subject of last week’s talk.

In it we argued that the geologists have sort of done us a favor by giving a name to an era that is defined almost exclusively by the fact that it is catastrophic. We also examined the unspoken human side of this disaster, the liberal and promethean subject that was a key piece in building the Anthropocene. Finally, we discussed how the declaration of the Anthropocene has amounted to declaring more than just a catastrophe but also a war in progress for the definition of the future. Last week’s talk ended with the words “this war can only be fought by inhabiting this desert, by making it blossom.” While this may have sounded like a poetic flourish to cheer you up at the end of an otherwise totally depressing talk, what we want to do tonight is show why it’s not.

It seems evident that we live in apocalyptic times and that the present is filled with a plethora of disastrous phenomenon and that we move within multiple overlapping and ongoing crises, whether at the level of the personal or on the scale of the civilization as a whole. In this situation, people are preparing themselves. Some of us are putting together and testing our Bug Out Bags; some of us are helping spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to speed up the onset of the rapture; some of us are getting organized to take up these questions in a material way; while others of us are drag-racing lamborghinis while drunk and high at the same time like Justin Bieber, which is fundamentally a result of being eschatologically paralyzed by the coming apocalypse.

But there's a problem here. What is the apocalyptic? What kinds of relations to the world and what kind of temporalities does the apocalyptic produce? What is it about the apocalypse that draws us to it, that excites us and at once terrifies us?

This talk will be long and crazy. So you have a sense in advance of where it's going, it will begin with the apocalypse and apocalyptic time, then discuss apocalyptic government and crisis as a technique of governing, a bit on how we see this playing out in resilience today, and finally conclude with a discussion of a qualitatively different experience of time that has never ceased to move within the apocalyptic—the messianic. I just want to say that I think it is this experience of time that the Anthropocene has opened up.

## II. Many Apocalypses in an Apocalyptic Time

Apocalypse in its Greek origins means to uncover, reveal, or disclose, having the sense of lifting a veil especially as per-

tains to knowledge. With the rise of Christianity however, Apocalypse begins to take on the meaning it carries today. In what would eventually become the New Testament's final book, *Revelations* – originally titled *Apokalypsis*— John of Patmos describes the end of days through the coming of the antichrist and a cataclysmic battle between good and evil that once and for all establishes the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. John's apocalypse irrevocably shifts the Western imaginary: the four horsemen of the apocalypse, fire and brimstone, 666, lakes of fire, a seven-headed and ten-crowned beast that arises from the sea. John of course is working within a much longer Judeo-Christian eschatological tradition in which the revelation of divine workings are inseparable from great catastrophe, but, just as importantly, he was writing in a time that many considered to be *the end times*.

If we look at the end of the Roman Empire, a civilization, like ours today, that was in ruins, we can see the intersecting, sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting lines of apocalypticism as they developed there. With their dying gods, enfeebled social bonds, succession of emperors, virulent plagues, decaying and neglected shrines and public buildings, besieged from every side by 'barbarians,' the Roman people were possessed by a sense of decline and end. Frederick Turner describes it as a time characterized by, "a weariness with living and an increasing tendency to disbelieve that this world and its sorry existence were all that was meant to be. Perhaps the world was growing old and like the empire was fated soon to die: its colors seemed faded, its harvests of grain and ore more meager, and life in general seemed meaner than in the past."



Rome was traversed by many different responses to that situation. “Crisis cults” appeared everywhere, as “organized, conscious effort[s]... to construct a more satisfying life... out of what they perceive[d] as the ruins of the present.” These took different forms: a plethora of mystery cults were imported from the east and established all across the empire, such as the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis, the cult of Persian sun god Mithras –popular with soldiers—or the Bacchanalia, the Roman version of the Greek Dionysian mysteries, with its immense mystical rituals and orgies that overturned social roles and laws. According to Livy, much earlier in the 2nd century BC Bacchanalia had become so popular and had so scandalized Roman authorities that its members were tried or killed and laws put in place to ensure that no more than five worshiped together in any one time or place.

There were all the Jewish sects, like the Essenes, who lived life communally in the Judean desert near the Dead Sea, without personal property or money, and there were messianic sects like Christianity, which developed first not as a church but as a form of life. For these early Christians, Jesus was often depicted not as a martyred or ethereal figure, but as a dancing sorcerer, a sun, an Orpheus who charmed nature. The life of early Christian cults after the crucifixion, the ‘primitive church’ and its ‘*agape* feasts,’ are described in Acts 4:31-32:

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the

things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common.

It was in this context that John of Patmos (c.60-90AD) received his visions of the end of times, an end that many believe depicts the Roman Empire as the beast and the emperor Nero as the antichrist. Ironically, it is in the decline of Rome that Christianity and its version of the apocalypse begins to erect a new imperial order of things. John's *Apokalypsis* is one of the works ultimately selected for inclusion in the New Testament, in fact serving as the final book, the sign of what is to come, the direction of all things.

We'd like now to take a broad look at what is at work in the form of apocalypse put forth under official Christendom.

### *Apocalyptic Operation of Time and Space*

First, the apocalypse introduces a special sense of time: it is unidirectional and irreversible, but also teleological. Its direction and very meaning are ultimately defined by and given sense through their movement towards the end point. Jacob Taubes describes apocalyptic time as something that is essentially set between two eternities, of creation, of the Garden of Eden, and the end of time itself, of redemption. The present, the earthly time of sin, is geared towards the future. Its time is a time obsessed by what is coming, what must necessarily arrive, with little regard for what is present.

Second, the apocalyptic carries in it the necessary separation of heaven and earth, heaven being the Kingdom of God, which will either fall out of the sky one day, or to which we will one day be 'caught up' – rapture— to replace the inadequate life on earth.

The feeling of an eschatological time, a time destined to end after traversing an *eschaton* representing its completion or fulfillment, leads to several immediate consequences that exert a still powerful effect on our minds. First of all, there is a consequence at the ontological and existential level. If a completion must occur, centuries hence or in a short while, if a higher order of fulfillment is promised to us, this means that things and beings are languishing in a state of incompleteness and unfulfillment. It's as if the telos of each thing, of each substance were thrown outside itself, as if its origin no longer coincided with its end, and its life consisted in a painful quest to meet this unattainable goal. As a result of this anticipation of an eschatological event through which things and beings will be saved from their decrepitude, the whole of reality is *derealized*. The disenchantment of the world has closely followed this strange *derealization of the real* where, everything being referred to a "something" that doesn't come but which paradoxically claims the status of the only real presence. As a result one gradually loses the ability to see what is in front of one's eyes, and to believe in the substance of what is *there*. If the apocalyptic mind is fixed on the end, aimed toward the end, then what is the status of the time and space "in between"? It is precisely that, *time in between, waiting*. The apocalyptic's soul is a fundamentally restless and tormented soul that lives its sojourn on earth as a passage, in a world that is itself passing away. "Our hearts are restless, Lord," wrote Saint Augustine, "until they find rest in you." Deleuze put it plainly, "the apocalypse reveals its own aim: to disconnect us from the world and from ourselves."

One can easily see parallels here of Hegel's notion of the spirit or Marx's thoughts on revolution as something far off in the future towards which we are inevitably marching. In each case, the horizon remains the *exiting* of the world

(fleeing earth to the sky). Like Christians waiting for Jews to convert, like Marxists waiting for the development of the means of production, like how, once I finally read all these books on fitness, get those Nikes with the barefoot soles, then I'll finally go to the gym, then I'll run a marathon, be happy with my body, then. Even the modern idea of revolution as a progressive movement toward an ideal state (in which men will give themselves the constitution they want, in which war will be prevented, *in which communism would finally be possible*) is not only an essentially Kantian idea of completed Enlightenment, it is, clearly, apocalyptic. It repeats the world-denying structure that Revelation set in motion; politics, happiness, whatever, can only ever be that which is *outside* of life, outside of the world, thus appearing to life as a norm or law to be applied, as critique, or as the awaiting of a salvational event somewhere in the future. Match that up to the cherished idea of freedom as the freedom from all that binds and attaches us to the world, freedom to do whatever, be wherever. As Taubes put it, “[a]pocalypticism negates this world in its fullness. It brackets the entire world negatively.”

### *Apocalypse and Government*

This conception of time and its purpose necessitates the government of men and women on their path to the apocalypse, the “meeting place” by the throne in heaven. Thus the role of the Church is to guide the flock, and within it, each soul, along their way in this unidirectional movement. In other words, the apocalyptic trajectory of time requires what Foucault called “pastoral power,” which is instituted concretely by laws, techniques, and rules of the Church. But to recap, at the end of the line is redemption, so the shepherd or pastor acts as the intermediary towards that end, on the part of the

well-being of this flock and on the part of a broader cosmological order. Deleuze argues that the Apocalypse of John, in particular, helps foster the reorganization of the awaiting of the second coming of Christ. After John, "... this waiting becomes the object of an unprecedented and maniacal programming," because after all, "[t]hose who wait must be given something to do." We can read this in one way and say that it's about distracting people, but rather, it's important to note how official Chrisendom's apocalypticism necessitates the government of everyone and everything on the long march to the end. In fact, one of the biggest challenges to this pastoral guidance come from the tensions Christianity sets up, wherein the Kingdom of Heaven is to be found in the sky or perhaps inside of you, but never around you.

Take, for example, the story of the Taborites. In the early 1400s, 100 years before the Peasant's War and Munster, the most determined sect within the Hussite rebellion in Bohemia (which invented defenestration, mind you) set up camp around Mount Tabor, rumored to be the site of Jesus' transfiguration, where they immediately proclaimed the Millennium of Christ and declared there would be no more servants nor masters. With a rag-tag army led by a blind, master strategist and warrior they defeated the Holy Roman Empire and reigned over their own Kingdom of Heaven on Earth for two decades, during which time the settlement operated gold mines, and was joined by many Brethren of the Free Spirit. The Hussite War marks the beginning of a near-continuous 200-year religious civil war/millenarian apocalypse, because according to the Church, you really can't have people just going around calling the Kingdom of Heaven into existence.

There's another dimension to this. Writing in the 3rd century, Tertullian, considered one of the theological fa-

thers of the West, articulated an interesting idea of earthly *political* authority in relation to the apocalypse. Following Paul's utterances in the second letter to the Thessalonians, Tertullian argued that in spite of its lengthy history of persecuting Christians and of course killing Christ himself, the Roman Empire in fact played a divine role. The empire was that which restrains the apocalypse; meaning that the empire, in its prevention of chaos, and in its preservation of earthly order, played the key role —this is a positive thing in Tertullian's mind— of holding back the coming of the antichrist and the end of days. Here we have a linking up of government's continual role of warding off disorder and catastrophe with the warding off of the end itself. In some ways this seems a little ironic, because, after all, doesn't the anti-christ coming signal the arrival of the kingdom of heaven on Earth? Isn't that a good thing? Tertullian though, like many others, saw the trials and tribulations of the end days as so horrific and so undesirable that it would in fact be better to hold off the end at all costs, at least until the appointed time, whenever that would be.

### III. Crisis Government

It was Carl Schmitt who famously established the political importance of the katechon vis-a-vis the end. According to him, the katechon is the constituted power that resists and wards off the end of the order of things. And for Schmitt, like Tertullian, this was a good thing. This political theology persists today, though it has been significantly transformed. Rather than the government of the world in reference to a single end (apocalypse), today's government of the world proceeds by reference to endless catastrophes, endless apocalypses but apocalypses without redemption.

## Crisis

Let me switch gears now. While it's considered a bit impolite to talk about the apocalypse or maybe a little bit crazy, *crisis* is a term that's acceptable everywhere. In fact there's an entire field of crisis management that really took off in the Cold War; it focuses on preventing the evolution of crises—which are deviations from some presumed stable norm—into full blown disasters. It asks the question, how can we understand what's going on, and how can we prevent the situation from reaching a tipping point?

According to all accounts the United States has been wracked by crises in recent times: the government shutdown and almost going over the dreaded “fiscal cliff,” the knockout game in which dozens of people were punched—with some dying—in a nation of 300 million, the polar vortex—2 times—that brought the coldest day in a century as well as winter-like weather to winter affected areas across the country, crazy ants which are coagulating into heavy masses during their invasion of AC units across the South, and of course we are still recovering from the economic crisis, the housing crisis, and the biker beatdown crisis. And we are *still* in a major ecological crisis, but at least 2012 didn't happen or that weird preacher's prediction about the end of the world—2 times in 2011.

All of that is to say, what is a crisis?

## *Crisis Function*

We ought to think crisis as more of a signifier, a sign that a certain kind of governmental operation is being pursued. Through its naming power, this operation produces a legible crisis by problematization, rationally and irrationally in-

terrelating other phenomenon and rendering the resultant object something actionable, something that can be worked on and worked over. This could be equally applied to the ecological crisis, but to see how the same thing is at work in many areas. To make sense of this, let's take the knockout game crisis. In New York, preexisting narratives and images of black criminality are paired with narratives of Jewish victimization as well as phone-captured video of unprovoked attacks, anecdotal evidence, sensational headlines, and importantly, a name. This then produces the crisis, which in turn calls for a decision to be made and for action to follow. Here in New York you had the police department holding press conferences and increasing police presence in Crown Heights, Al Sharpton's National Action Network leading a protest in East New York against the game, myriad news reports, discussions, special coverage, etc. We're not saying that no one is actually being sucker punched or that there may not be some kids playing a game that involves punching people; the question we are interrogating rather is how something *becomes* a crisis.

We can see a few other components of the crisis operation. One, it's productive of subjects—thug attackers & innocent victims, or in the case of the economic crisis, greedy bankers & predatory lending or laid-off victims, etc. That much is clear, but on another front, as the 'public' to whom these crises are being declared, we can even say that they produce us as neurotic subjects. Why? Because they push for a heightened, perpetual attention to the signs of potential disaster—to see something and say something—or constantly remind us of the possibility of a future crisis; the number of weather alerts and 'tests' of the city's emergency management system I get on my cellphone are out of control. Or if we think the multiplicity of overlapping



crises again, I'm watching what I eat, washing my hands after touching anything in public, pretending that the sea levels aren't rising, not playing dumb with my smartphone, trying not to become a statistic on the subway tracks, either getting stuck on the tracks, getting pushed, or by slipping during wintery weather conditions. Cannibal rats! So from this angle, crisis produces a frantic mobilization that sets us upon a course that is in line with the problematizations setup by the crisis itself. Put plainly, we are being governed through this constant crisis.

But we have to also admit that that the crisis operation pushes our buttons in a pleasurable way as well. This is something we will return to in a minute, but for now I just want to emphasize that some crises also promise the possibility that everything could change, that life could be absolutely completely otherwise. And that is exciting.

But what accounts for the ubiquity of crisis today? Reinhart Kosselleck, writes that the *idea*, that "the crisis in which one *currently* finds oneself could be the last, great, and unique decision, after which history would look entirely different in the future ... is taken up more and more frequently, the *less* the absolute end of history is believed to be approaching with the last judgement." We could say then that the last judgment has receded, replaced by the permanent judgment of the present, but unlike the last judgment, there is literally no sense and no hope of redemption. There's only a future of more crisis and actions on that crisis.

We've reached a paradoxical moment today. In our time, many climate scientists, advocates of resilience, urban planners, evangelical pastors, you, me and everyone we know, etc.— see the catastrophe as already here or at least imminent and immanent. This is the basic idea of the

Anthropocene, that, as it was recently put in the *New York Times*, “this *civilization* is already dead.”

Resilience responds to this situation, hoping to govern the end that has already been declared. In this context, apocalypse has evolved.

An off-shoot of cybernetics and systems science that emerged in the 1970s, resilience defined colloquially as the ability to bounce back from disorder only gets at one small part of what’s going on. Resilience, like we discussed last time, offers up and helps construct a vision of the world as a system of complex adaptive systems, meaning that everything is and must be a system.

If we can understand Rome as catechon, warding off a single catastrophe in space and time (Armageddon), resilience multiplies and diffuses this structure across the whole of the globe, posing itself as our only hope to avoid an infinite array of catastrophes located potentially anywhere in space and in time, feeding into one another and cascading across space and time: (storm surges that flood power substations causing equipment malfunctions leading to surge protection overrides leading to local grid network failures that feed into regional grids causing blackouts from Canada to Washington DC. causing riots in Brooklyn and Queens—this is resilience’s Armageddon). And, whereas the Christian catechon was tied both to catastrophe and to redemption, resilience does not even bother presenting itself in terms of progress or guidance toward salvation. Salvation has become unimaginable, unthinkable. Resilience presents itself, rather, as a project of survival; there is no paradise to come, only the endlessly emerging crises through which an eternal present must be sustained.

If Christianity’s apocalypticism could be represented as a linear line of chronological history. The apocalypse

and that which will hold it back, that we are given today, appears rather as an attempted series of feedback loops, enveloping us in a static present punctuated by endless catastrophe, in hopes only of avoiding “state shifts” by staying within its “safe operating space” by preventing “feedbacks” from breaching “thresholds” or “tipping points.” As co-chair of the post-Sandy New York commission on long-term resilience put it, “to avoid the unmanageable and manage the unavoidable.” And as she emphasizes elsewhere, “we want to say this isn’t just climate-related. We’re not just thinking about hurricanes or floods, we’re really thinking about any vulnerability to the system that could take it down, and how to build against that.”

If the Anthropocene-past divided the world spatially in order to unite everything as points along and in a single homogeneous time, in the name of resilience the Anthropocene-present is reconnecting what it divided spatially (city and nature, man and machine) while dividing from within at the level of time. That is: resilience evokes an ‘eventful’ time of this world of systems —emergent, full of tipping points, ruptures— which it creates, uses, and works upon in order to maintain the homogeneous time of a government without end, an eternal repetition of the latter endlessly feeding into the former.

Catastrophe is possible everywhere, from waterways and electrical grids to communities that might revolt, but these are exactly the same means to govern the catastrophes. Life and government now coincide. From oyster beds to attenuate storm surge, and automatic sensors designed to respond to changing flows of people, information or energy, the resilient city will self-order and self-heal in order to sustain the frozen present.

Is this the new katechon, warding off the end? Is

this the end times, or the time after the end? On this point, the Anthropocene is confused. On the one hand, it says we need to connect subject and object to ensure the survival of humanity. Then it says we are in a world of tipping points and need to maintain a safe operating space. But beneath all of this its basic premise, as we discussed last week, is simply that there is no catastrophe to come, it is the very world in which we live.

Unlike other ‘apocalypses without apocalypse,’ such as the 1980s nuclear threat, as a way of understanding the present moment and as the emerging force beyond the latest techniques of apocalyptic government, the time that the Anthropocene gives to us looks more like *messianic time*. From its perspective, each infrastructure, each dead zone, is not simply a technology or landscape occupying a point in space: each must be seen as bringing together the past and future in the present, assembling them in a constellation, forcing a new recognition of them.

### *Desire*

So resilience uses and creates crisis in the same gesture, but this gesture produces two temporalities. Can we try to separate these?

One of the things that we have not touched upon thus far is the element of desire in its relation to the apocalypse. Clearly throughout history, there have ebbs and tides of a yearning for the end times because of its close connection with redemption. The Taborites who we mentioned before were but one example. One could equally include the 16th century rise of Lurianic Kabbalah in the aftermath of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, or the 19th century apocalypticism of the Cangaceiros of northeastern Brazil.

Today, this desire is no less evident —perhaps it only expresses itself in a different guise.

But also America. The apocalyptic runs deep here, on the one hand because America's conception was in apocalypse with the destruction of so many native worlds, but it must be said that many of American hopes for redemption—as varied as they were, whether for a city on a hill, the eradication of the continent's slave system, or the Ghost Dance and the return of the buffalo—were equally apocalyptic.

One of the key aspects of the excitement and expectation of apocalypse is that, like any catastrophe, it promises a complete disruption of normality. In our imagination, and in our practical experience of catastrophes, work, commute, email, sleep routine is completely overturned. This opens up new questions, new horizons, and new intensities in our life. Implicit within this desire is a judgment of the order of things, which mirrors apocalyptic desires of the last two millennia. On the other hand, like John of Patmos, the apocalypse or catastrophe sometimes stands in place of our own strength and our own ability to do anything about our situation—I'd wager that the degree of pleasure we take in watching an enemy facing divine retribution is directly proportional to our own weakness.

But there's more to it than that. I would also say that there's obviously a sense of adventure and danger, which we have ample opportunity to play out in our minds or in our consumption of the apocalyptic, as much through newspapers as *Walking Dead* episodes, or for those of you who have any sense at all, *The Hunger Games*—may the odds be ever in your favor. But for a lot of other people, the apocalyptic begins to take the shape of lived experience, the shape of a messianic *now* that pulses and moves *within* empty, homogenous time, that transforms and explodes it from within.

Following this other current, that has never ceased to be present within the apocalyptic, draws us into an immediate *practice* of these desires and requires us to take up their implications.

### *Messianic Time*

Inhabiting the messianic means no longer waiting—for the end of the world, the zombie hordes, the great flood, the utopia or revolution to come. Messianic time is not that of the clock where one advances second by second in anticipation of the final and fateful hour. Messianic time is above all a ‘qualitative transformation of lived time.’ The time of the messiah—*ho erchomenos* as Paul says—is not about a person or an event that is to come, in the future tense, but is rather lived in the present, in a kind of absolute present that is constantly actualized. It is instructive to read what Paul writes to the Thessalonians: “About dates and times, my friends, we need not write to you, for you know perfectly well that the Day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night.”

In this passage the day of the lord comes: it is in the present tense, as the messiah, in the Gospels, is called *ho erchomenos*, “he who comes” —“that is, he who never ceases to come.” For Paul the kingdom was not something coming in the future; it was *ho nyn kairos*, “now time.” “*Idou nyn*, behold, now is the time to gather, behold the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians, 6.2). The possibility of the kingdom is not *to come*, but rather *comes*, in the present tense, and never ceases to come. “Each day, each moment, is the little door through which the messiah can enter,” wrote Walter Benjamin. From this perspective “the messiah” is not an individual or collection of individuals at all, but the shared actions and practices of human beings in the world. I really like how

Agamben expresses this, he says:

The time of the messiah is the time that we ourselves are, the dynamic time where, for the first time, we grasp time, grasp the time that is ours, grasp that we are nothing but time. This time is not some other time located in an improbably present or future time. On the contrary, it is the only real time, the only time we will ever have. To experience this time implies an integral transformation of ourselves and of our ways of living.

This is the messianic time that we find living in the sects, crisis cults, millenarian uprisings, the desert fathers, the peasant insurrections.

### *Messianic Space*

For the messianic practice there are *not* two worlds – the inadequate one we’re in that is destined to pass away, and another world (in space and time), the perfect kingdom, that at the end of a long line will replace it. Rather there is *this world*, in which we are called, and from which nothing is missing. From the messianic perspective — what Luria expressed in the 1500s applies equally to our situation today— for the messianic perspective, what is in exile, what is scattered, is not a people or persons. Being itself is in exile and everything reflects that. In Luria’s vision, the Messiah is not a man as in Christianity and the messiah does not usher in redemption, rather the accumulation of *acts*, practices, that rehabilitate a shattered world, restore being, acts that assemble worlds, that is redemption. The Messiah comes merely as the period on the sentence.

## World, War

This is why we said last time that we must inhabit the desert: the desert is this world, the world in which we are called, and into which we are thrown. There is no other. As we discussed last week, the Anthropocene shows us that this is a world that denies world. If there is any devastation, beyond all else it is this. “we have lost the world, worse than losing a fiancé or god,” said Deleuze. Where there is everything to cry for, there is no longer anything to cry for. Precisely like Proust showed of time, nothing is really lost. The messianic is the living realization of this truth.

To enter messianic time is to believe in the world, in its possibilities of movement and intensities, and to create worlds. Not worlds like the ancient worlds, not worlds like this world, but, beginning from the ruins of the present, sensible worlds that will take on their own shapes. Being in the world is the truly political, because to be in the world is to take a position there, to take part, to become party, and to attach ourselves to that. Never as the achievement of a final goal, but the playing out of, *between*, worlds. Faced with the desert, we do not negate it; we must become a plenitude. As Kafka wrote, “a world of lies cannot be defeated by its opposite, but by a world of truth.”

This is a war in time, a war for time.

It is by taking up that war that we can live “the end of days that is every day.”



### PART III: REVOLUTION

Invitation:

*If the one certainty of the 90s was that nothing would ever change—the end of history, LA riots, Nirvana, Columbine—today if anything is certain, it is that everything is changing, that everything is uncertain. Alongside ever-amassing accounts of colossal earthly transformations that proceed regardless of human involvement —epitomized in modernity’s culmination in a ‘world without us’— we see our time as equally defined and profoundly shaped by a massive wave of human efforts to break through the age, to take it on as historical beings, to transform and create a new existence from within a world that is passing away.*

*GREECETUNISIAEGYPTLIBYASYRIAANONYMOU-  
SOCCUPYTURKEYEGYPTBRAZILBOSNIAUKRAINE:  
thus to adequately think the present, in addition to imagin-  
ing New York halfway underwater, we must think our time in  
its growing disposition towards the revolutionary. Everywhere  
the age strains against itself, pregnant with the desire to create  
something new. Yet in spite of the rich proliferation of experi-  
ences, strategies, gestures and relationships, we have witnessed  
the simultaneous suffocation of the life born therein in the resus-  
citation of ossified concepts of revolution, themselves the wither-  
ing and fossilized remnants of the age. Revolution as the seizure  
of power, a problem to be solved, revolution as the replacement  
of one government with another: “In Kiev, an ordered transfer  
of power seems underway.” Revolution as a delimitable event  
in space and time, after which, finally, we could live: “...and  
the oceans will run with lemonade!” Revolution as a normative  
question, to be judged in the court of opinions: “but there are*

*fascists in Maidan –wait is this gluten free?” Revolution as the calculable result of economic forces beyond our control: “The Math That Predicted the Revolutions Sweeping the Globe Right Now –black dots are the food prices, and red dots are the riots!”*

*To read recent events in this way is to miss the mark, to be deaf to the world, and hence, to be as caught off-guard by events as professionals in the United States foreign intelligence services have been over the years. The collapse of a civilization isn't just a mass extinction of coral, bats, and forests, but also the withering of the certainties to which this civilization was tethered, the fissuring of the grounds that gave sense to what was done and what was known. If those ideas of revolution were always wrong, today they're doubly wrong, and it's obvious that we need entirely new conceptions of revolution, conceptions beginning from existence and not its abstraction. Following a line of power? Cooking a thousand ćevapčići? Destituent power? Building barricades? An idea of happiness? Survival tactics, forever? Cooking ten thousand cevapici? Ethical revolt? Self-organized triage units? An art of civil war? Revolution as just a technique? A new SENSIBLE education?*

## Introduction

DISTRESS. EXISTENTIAL, METAPHYSICAL, PLANETARY. IF OUR time resonates with that of other civilizations in the process of collapsing, we have to also note that the collapse we are experiencing is so much worse than that of say ancient Rome. Whereas the inhabitants of these eras witnessed and aided in the passing away of a certain order to the world, the catastrophe we live today is not just a crisis of a world, but of the world. The extent of what we face, as we watch species, languages, and coastlines disappear before our eyes,

while we watch ourselves disappear a little more and more with every selfie, is a devastation so total, so encompassing, that we can literally say we have utterly lost the world. Unlike us, the Romans could probably know that even if the structuring, knowledge-giving ground of the empire, or the gods, wouldn't be there, the literal ground they walked on would in fact still be there. We can't really say the same.

Responding to the distress we feel growing, we look for ideas, answers, ways out, ways to cope, ways to put an end to the devastation, to create something new. But most of what we find are what can only, no, what must be called fossils: ways of thinking and acting that are themselves a part of the civilization we'd like to be done with. We don't need to wait for the time-traveling geologists from outer space to come analyze earth to comprehend that the ideas of transformation and of revolution we have inherited are as fossilized as the subway system, each forming a key support beam of our civilization and playing a role in holding us hostage to its untenable way of life. Thus even in our attempts to flee, we find ourselves caught, and so our distress multiplies.

One of our tasks—all of us—is to adequately think our epoch, and, to do so, in addition to imagining New York halfway underwater, we have to think our time as a revolutionary time. Two things stand out to us as expressions of this. The first is the global sequence of uprisings, insurrections, and occupations that has been unfolding worldwide since 2008 and especially since 2011. The second phenomenon is the massive proliferation of experiments in making, hacking, growing, prepping, and modding that both overlap with the aforementioned insurrectional moments and trace out similar lines of power, but which generally elaborate themselves in what seem at first to be different temporalities. From this perception—mesmerized and stunned by images

over the last weeks coming from Ukraine, Bosnia, and Turkey once again, and perplexed and excited about our own attempts here to build— we thought it was a good time for a collective meditation on revolution. Or, more precisely, we want to rethink, fundamentally, the ideas of revolution and building themselves. So what I'm going to present then is the preliminary stab at that collaborative rethinking.

### **Inherited Ideas of Revolution**

The incredible number and diversity of insurrections and occupations over the past years radiate with a mood that traverses the globe: a mood of confusion, of disarray, of unease, but one combined with a kind of deranged freshness, a readiness to see the world born again, to make the world again, in whatever way. But as the age strains against itself, we grasp for any tools at our disposal—platitudes, certainties, metaphysics, classical politics— making use of what we have inherited. Ironically, the very ideas we have of revolution are those bequeathed to us by the same fading civilization revolutions seek to overcome. Thus it's not only that they are old and inadequate forms, wrong from the beginning, but they are the forms of a world that is passing away. Flailing, floundering, when we use them, it's like trying to stand on a ground that is collapsing under our feet, crumbling like the paving stones of Maidan and Taksim.

I'd like now to run through a few of the most common of these ideas, these operations, and lay out their logic.

“But what do they really want?” The eternal question, which is raised by all sides explicitly or implicitly, in each case to measure and define the event.

The assigning of discrete goals to insurrections transforms unfolding intensities into delimitable events in time

and space by establishing criteria that, upon being fulfilled, can bring an end to the event itself. The question “what do they want?” suggests simply that revolutions are a means to an end. If we get X, we will go back home. If we get Y, we will stop rioting and be happy. They may as well just say, “let’s get this over as quickly as possible!!” Like pity sex! The idea of revolution contained in such a question –read operation— is that revolution has its end built in from the beginning, in the form of the satisfaction of this or that demand or need or condition. This also posits a culminating point, an after which we could, finally, live? when, at last, communism/happiness/paradise would be possible? With the implicit assertion that what is revolutionary, or what is desired, is not what goes on here, but what is always to come and must inevitably come; thus in the aftermath of any insurrection, there is the ritual cleansing and the revision of the days and weeks spent fighting to a teleological movement that was always already headed toward its own neat, consensual end. The apocalyptic nature of this kind of thinking ought to be clear.

Beneath assigning reducing a lived experience to a point on an empty timeline, the “but what do they want” also operates as an anthropology, a way of defining and ultimately circumscribing what it means to be human. The vision thrown up, often buffeted by some “economic crisis,” is that of humans as *Homo economicus*. The rational people, waking up one morning with an idea, “I think today I will protest x,” as if we placed reality in front of us each morning alongside our cereal. Then there are the charts of revolution as the calculable result of economic forces beyond our control –all of which are very useful for predicting insurrections— after they’ve already started of course. See the slide, “The Math That Predicted the Revolutions Sweeping the Globe Right Now” – It’s pretty simple. Black dots are the food prices; red

dots are the riots. In this scenario, we are to image that as bread prices magically rise, like puppets, like automatons, so do the people. In each we have a humanity defined by its “needs,” and the whole of existence is circumscribed to the defining of those needs, solving of those needs, and governing of those needs. Thus we have something like *Homo egenonicus* (needy man?). And as Foucault, again, has shown, to govern is to organize the needs, desires, movements, bodies of men—to govern life—with a view to preventing insurrection and sedition. This interpretive rubric for “human nature” (needy man) is the human nature bequeathed to us by government, and we can only use it to our detriment.

By the way, I think it’s kind of hilarious to see such a great range of complex charts, diagrams, models and journals on offer to explain what these very same analyses assume to be an incredibly simple, infantile humanity. Then again, language carries a world, and we can only assume this to be the life of those making the charts!

Then there is the question of assessing the answer to “what they want.” I won’t spend a lot of time on this because it’s been said elsewhere, but perhaps the predominant metric for measuring the supposed needs of the revolution is in the realm of the said. Right, they say they’re “nonviolent” (while they’re tackling police)—or some of them say that at any rate. And so here, what is man? Oh right – man is an animal but with speech. That was Aristotle, right? We have to continually ask ourselves: how did we come to be unable to hear as meaningful anything other than human speech? It is through the rendering of language and life itself as mere means to an end; thus when thinking the revolutionary and thinking what it means to fundamentally transform the world, it’s incredibly important for us to begin working through other frameworks. I suppose it was to its credit that

the media kept repeating about Occupy that nobody knows what it wanted.

“But who are they?” Finally, there is the simplest question, “But who are they?” which tries to assign authorship to the insurrection, representing it through particular subjects. In the 2008 and 2009 riots in Greece, activity was attributed to anarchists and later expanded to contain anarchists and youth, labeled as the 700 euros generation. You can see here how it serves to delimit actors—no one over 30 is there, if you’re not an anarchist or kid you shouldn’t be there—and in this particular case, it also implicitly designates a motivation and potential goal—higher wages or welfare. In the United States this kind of thing is used against ANYTHING that comes into existence—it’s just kids, outside agitators, “the blacks,” professional protesters, or over-privileged and, of course, white college kids. Hilariously you can hear this last from both the Right and the Left, one to malign an event like Occupy as just a bunch of spoiled brats, and the other to malign it as non-inclusive, and not speaking to the “real issues”—read representable, solvable, governable needs—of whichever more authentic subjects.

These ways of thinking are precisely those that ground our civilization, a relation to the world where we are spectators, looking in like aliens, attempt to compose a picture, judge, and explain. Thus if this kind of thought reproduced a particular form of reality—that today been deemed a monstrous failure by most all sides, continuing these ways of thinking is not just wrong, it’s DOUBLY wrong. But, it’s a multivalent process, it’s the way we’ve been raised to think, and it doesn’t necessarily make you bad—these are ways of thinking about reality that structure our thought and our lives. But what we are left with, to quote Captain Anthro-

cene himself, Karl Marx, is “thought revolving solely within the orbit of thought, thought devoid of eyes, of teeth, of ears, of everything” (*Economic Manuscripts of 1844*, 169).

Breaking free of the age, or, to say the same thing differently, really grasping our age, means training, establishing for ourselves, new ways of thinking and experiencing just as much as it does figuring out how to purify water, or build a fire, whether campfire, on a rag stuffed in a bottle, or a ring of burning barricades.

That begins by looking at what is happening around us. To do so in a place like Kiev is to see a series of gestures, techniques, expressions, movements that resonate with us here, resonate with what happened in Zuccotti Park, in Gezi Park. To impose upon these uprisings a causal narrative, an economic motive, etc., is not only missing the point – it is actively denying what is the most simple, what is the most revolutionary in this sequence, that is, what is most joyful. We speak then of these events in the same breath because from Tahrir to Maidan, by way of Syntagma and Zuccotti, something else is obviously growing that is irreducible to thought alone: messages on placards from Egypt to “don’t afraid” in Oakland, green lasers to blind the police from Athens to Kiev, combatants traveling from the American Fall to the Quebec Spring, inspirational videos in Tunisia that resonate just as much in Spain, the Guy Fawkes mask on the face of Greeks and Turks, Arabic language riot tactics circulated by Anonymous across North Africa, and of course the ubiquitous squares and parks filled with thousands of people sleeping in tents, cooking in massive freekitchens, meeting in absurdly large assemblies, surrounded by barricades and street battles for months on end. What each of these pose in their particularity and what they pose together in their embryonic consistency, is a fundamental redefini-



tion of revolution: not intellectually, but vitally. That this resonance, this new sensible education, is composing itself in a symphony of fire across the boundaries erected to contain it, is all the more proof that what is lived is becoming irrevocable.

### **Just look around**

That the image of the occupied square has become synonymous with revolutions today should come as no surprise. In myriad countries, movements and rebellions were organized around such places –Tahrir, Zuccotti, Taksim, Maidan, etc.— where countless material means were brought together and put in common. Kiev of course is one of the most recent. I had seen the news stories about how servers and busboys at Veselka have been pooling money to send back to Ukraine, how they're trying to raise money to pay for the medical care of an insurgent whose arm was blown off in an explosion while fighting the police, so I went over there to try to meet them. Yesterday I met a young guy who had actually just gotten back from Kiev, where he had gone to help fight during “the bloody days.” So I asked him, what was it like in Maidan? While I repeat what he told me, you have to imagine a young guy, tall, blonde, very handsome, incredibly serious, but letting little smiles break through his so serious expression, talking for half an hour without moving with brunch rush happening all around him.

Everyone was there, most of the country is against the government, everyone was involved. All of my friends were in Maidan, which was the main square in the center of the town, so I went there. It was 50,000, 100,000 people. Everyone was doing some-

thing different. We were collecting tires, crates, wood, construction materials, anything we could find, to try to build barricades to defend everyone from the police. Here, I have some pictures, that I took just for myself, on my phone. [he showed me a really large barricade made of sandbags, tires, beams, trash, blocking off a wide boulevard, I said oh, that's really big, he looked at me really seriously and said, that was a small one] Other people were cooking, other people were building armor. My mom would bring food from her work when she got off. The brave ones who were fighting on the front lines, they were training all day. It wasn't just Maidan either, it was the whole city. There were lines of people waiting for an hour, like they are here for brunch, but to donate supplies, medicine, pallets, food. On one day, the people who worked in the airport decided they didn't want the politicians to be able to flee, so they shut down all the flights for that day.

Everyone was making it happen. Everyone was so brave.

We showed that this is possible, we showed that everything is possible.

### Whatever Singularity

In its particular grey urban camo and ice-hued tonality, Maidan is but the most recent elaboration of what we have been witnessing and participating in over the past years, as it plays out in different languages, different places: Tens and

hundreds of thousands of people gathering in squares, refusing to be dispersed. They camp out there, set up barricades, fight off incursions and attacks, risk injury and death, form alliances, take care of the wounded, stockpile food supplies, holding their ground like they were defending their homes, homeland, or territory. Faced with this incredible sequence of uprisings, to ask “who are the insurgents?” —“is it the workers, no, they are the middle class, the poor, wait where are the poor? The white, the black, no wait where are the black people? Where are the women?” — is to miss the point entirely, to treat a situation as an object to be judged, to treat living beings as a mass of subjects. But we are not subjects and the world is not an object. These are operations. To be able to judge a situation, or a being, you must introduce some standard of measurement, and hence reduce a living, breathing fullness to an abstracted mass of equivalents. A subject or an object is thus the stripped bare life that can be replaced.

What is unfolding around the world today—what you see in the eyes of the young man just back from Maidan, in the grinning through the gas that filled Taksim night after night, in the soccer clubs defending Cairo, you or me at Zuccotti at 4am, the kid we met there on the way to defend the park, who saw it on Reddit and just had to go, in these women giving a new meaning to cocktail party—this is absolutely singular. Hence historical. Hence common.

To say that the people we meet in Maidan, Gezi, Zuccotti are not definable in terms of identity is not to say that they are beyond or outside of the determinations in which they find themselves —precisely the opposite is the case. Singularity just means the way, whatever way, in which we begin to take up our possibilities, take up our sensible worlds. Whatever singularity is simply the inhabiting, really

inhabiting, of the being that we already are, the factual vocations in which we find ourselves, their polarization, their destitution from within.

I'll talk about this in terms of Occupy because that's where we were, but as an aside I want to say that some friends who were in Spain and some friends who were in Turkey described the situation similarly. In New York, a city that has some of the strongest techniques for governing through the individual—an incessant work day, a culture of loneliness, hundreds of noxious cultural milieus—during Occupy, thousands of people were ready to disaffiliate from their lives as they had known them and attach themselves to what was opening up in the movement. Someone once described it as “students cease to study and workers cease to work” but it's not quite that; instead it's that the distinctive works that define these very roles started to be made inoperative and put to a different use, thus undoing the very function of student, worker, hipster, or whatever in the same process. This manifested itself in outright desertion like people quitting work, cutting out early, or calling in sick to go live the movement, or people peeling off their subjective straightjackets—unconfident introverts who don't often leave the safety of their bodies, critics and “father figures” who know better than everyone else, hipsters who are too cool to let anything really touch them. These subjective traps and what held them together really started to break down. While for some people it was all about desertion and disaffiliation, for others this also took the form of a radical inhabitation or polarization, an overflow of the boundaries of the normally partial parcels that make up our lives. Some artists still were making what you could call art, but it wasn't aesthetic art nor was it “art in the service of the revolution,” it was bringing its weirdness and weight to bear on and from the event they were living.

Meanwhile there were programmers and techies who were literally building the ability to communicate between occupations, and in Egypt, Turkey, and the Ukraine as well, soccer clubs attached themselves to violent confrontation with the forces of order and a warpath that in effect rendered the meaning of a soccer club altogether other. So even though some people discuss what happens in these moments with Bartleby's famous, "I'd prefer not to," (why does Agamben pick the WORST examples?) what's going on here is quite unlike Bartleby's refusal until the refusal of life itself.

"Desubjectification" destitutes liberal subjectivity in that it both undoes it and elaborates other ways in the same movement, so that what is refused is not life or power, but the distinction between refusal and affirmation itself. It was about living MORE, not less. "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!"

## Logos

In other words: Even if people did come out in this or that uprising because they hate Mubarak, or to put Wall Street fat cats in jail, what they find there, if they are there, is nothing about banks, nothing about dictators, it is nothing abstract—it is a whole rich world, of dangers, of idylls, weirdnesses, and annoyances, with living breathing bodies, colors, smells, tastes, sensibilities, particular situations that we relate to primarily not on the basis of rational ideas, but SENSIBLY, through moods, dispositions, attunements, touch. It's only THERE that you can figure out who's a friend (the unlikeliest ones, the opposite of putting people in a room because they say they are X) and who's an enemy (possibly the people in that aforementioned room). I remember the sign, "lost my job, found an occupation." There is nothing

hokey about this. In any case, what's lived in this time and space is qualitatively better than the one left behind— no matter how annoying, no matter how difficult, because it is a life. What's more, it's the consistency elaborated therein, no matter how embryonic—in the street battles and encounters, assemblies and meals, words and marches, that make up each movement— that destabilizes the order of things, that destitutes them. Destituent power is also the power to destitute.

Above all else, it's this reality that's covered over in the definitions of revolution we inherit, which today continue to accumulate in the endless stream of analyses. Yet recent insurrections show above all else that this reality is becoming more and more impossible to cover up. After months of fighting and occupation in Kiev, politicians and journalists as well as many of the insurgents celebrated a successful end to the insurrection with president Yanukovich having fled, leaving his “assets” unattended. The images of the Ukrainian insurgents inside the presidential palace, exploring the grounds speak volumes.

First off, the images were deployed as part of a larger operation to shift attention and affect onto the figure of a politician, Yanukovich, drawing, as is always done when convenient, on the deep reservoir of class hatred that runs throughout America, igniting populist anger around this extravagant man (“Ukrainian president Yanukovich lived in lavish estate — with private zoo, exotic gardens and tall ships — while country suffered”...or: “Ukrainian President Surrounded Himself Like a King with menagerie of peacocks, elaborate baths, manicured gardens, a vast greenhouse packed with exotic flowers — and a garage packed with Rolls Royces and other exotic cars” ... “Let them eat Borscht” etc)...

So, we are told that all those months of fighting were about a single figurehead, thus reaffirming the fiction that government is but governments, and that revolution is the process that culminates in the replacement of one by another. Cue credits, cue images of crowds celebrating and weeping, cue relieved headlines (“A Successful transfer of Power in Kiev”), thanks for your work everyone, now remove your helmets, it’s time to clean up the square and go on home, etc., as the story seems to always go.

But what is really so amazing is that we see such boredom in many of the images of the presidential palace. Those who yesterday exuded such thickness, even through the idiotic newspaper covers, today are taking cellphone pix of the tall ship, languishing on the golf course, looking totally bored. What is all this crap lying in wait behind all the walls of these so-called great “centers of power?” Infantile men and the sad contraptions with which they fill their emptiness, just like us! Inside it’s a void, the same void as outside, the same void soothed by our screens, he just had more money. Here the image of the eternally empty throne at the end of Apocalypse 2.0 — a throne henceforth destined to remain empty because no salvation is promised and no salvation is coming— finds its other half: just as the heavenly throne lies empty, so too do the earthly seats of power, empty of any “one” who governs us. And so. These images lay bare the fiction that we’ve been given of what revolution is. The revolution as teleology, the revolution as means to this end in the vacated presidential palace.

In reality, where is government? It’s the organization of the world. Where was power? It was in the organization of the revolt itself, in the thousands of new lives, relationships, experiences born in the square, in the joy and terror of fighting, eating, sleeping, defending, together, and,

conversely, in the suspension of the isolated drudgery one normally lives on a daily basis. This is what the narrative of revolution as leading from constituent power (the people, rising up) to a new constituted power (new government) tries to cover over, push to the side, or bury. So here is the revolutionary horizon: the bored insurgents in the empty presidential palace. To me this image says everything: it's pure BOREDOM, born of the classical revolutionary victory, born of the reduction of forms-of-life that this effects, exhibiting worldwide, on the cover of every newspaper, both the fiction of classical revolution, and the possibility of its overcoming, that is, in being itself.

From Maidan to the President's Palace, it is all the difference between bare life —measurable, comparable, because indifferent, equivalent— and life that begins to take on its being, gives shape to it, in one way or another, in whatever way, such that it could never be judged, compared, counted, but could only be known in its singularity. If in these extreme moments of encounter, of a shared experience—such as Occupy was for us— the rich possibility of a world opens up, maybe also at the same time, precisely in that experience, what we come to know is the profound unlivability of the life that we normally live. And so we say, “I wish this would never end.” (“all day, all week, occupy wall street”). The same goes, in some way, for what happens when we try to learn a new skill or technique —we experience something, like a charge, a reconnection (why not, pathosformel, Warburg's choreographic intensity, is a good description of this), and we find ourselves saying: I wish I could do this full time (thus acknowledging the utter impoverishment of what we do do full time, and all the myriad barriers in place to make sure we don't start doing it full time).



We don't know what we lack in advance; it only registers in the experience of something so profound that it fundamentally shakes our being. But this is a wonderful thing, no matter how painful, if we can learn how to follow it. Following it through doesn't mean we have to stay in the same place, necessarily, or that we continue doing exactly the same thing that gave birth to the event. It means we follow what was powerful there, what was happiest there, in whatever way, wherever we are. This line isn't traced out in accordance with a rule, a law, or an image set forth in advance. As Merleau-Ponty once said, placed in front of the scissors, needle, thread, we do not need to look for our hands or fingers, to think of them in advance.

What is revolutionary? Maybe it's the decision, to no longer be hurled from one situation to another haphazardly, carelessly, but rather to find the means to continue, with intention and care, the joy experienced in the event. As we develop these skills, arts, and techniques, we open up more and more possibilities: possibilities that then allow us to be with each other, to be in the world. This is how a body becomes thick. Only this body could go to war, be a friend, or an enemy. Civil war simply means the world is practice.

Foucault once asked, "how can the growth of capabilities [capacities] be disconnected from the intensification of power relations?" That is, the growth of capacities is the intensification of power relations, the play between forces, understood as forms-of-life, thick bodies. And this is a good thing. Power is a relation to the self that allows us to be together with each other. Power is a relation elaborated between things, between people, between people and things, that allows them to be together. If we look outside of this series of insurrectional events that has so strongly

shaken our world in the last few years, we see some means and capacities already being developed....

### **Skills, Techniques, Arts**

Worldwide, with things like Youtube, open source CAD programs, and a million different kinds of workshops, people are taking up tools and techniques in a massive way. There are groups like Open Source Ecology on their weird farm in rural Missouri who are designing a “civilization starter kit” of the 50 to 100 machines most necessary for a new society. There is Tom Brown Jr.’s Tracker School in New Jersey, which teaches hunting, tracking, and survival skills to thousands of people every year, and whose entire program is being increasingly couched in revelations of an apocalyptic civilizational meltdown. Then there are the myriad hack spaces in larger cities that declare themselves part of the Maker movement and who bring people and tools together in a collaborative environment for design-oriented problem solving. And of course there are the millions of people by themselves or in small groups taking up app development, permaculture, wild fermentation, and survival skills. That such gestures are ubiquitous—at the very moment when we are almost completely separated from making up our lives—is a profound statement on the present.

There is something binding all of these experiments to each other, to the insurrectionary processes, to the generalized, diffuse, global attempt to break free of the age. They come from life, they address life, they overturn life, opening up the possibility of a new one, in the same moment that they illuminate the impoverishment of the one we live and the separation it demands. What’s done in an

insurrection is not qualitatively different from other things that are outside of that moment.

Now, one could certainly take up skills or crafts for purely aesthetic reasons—look at me, I'm rugged on the weekends with my salvaged axe and Northface gear—or perform them as a simple productive phenomenon—I love kombucha and want to find a cheaper way to enjoy it.

But neither of these even begins to get to the heart of the matter, nor speaks to how their boundaries are so often overflowed. There's a power there, and I think this is why crafts and skills that we learn sometimes render other parts of our lives superfluous or make us feel that those other parts, like work, are inferior, giving us that desire to take those paths on wholly, to wholly take up the way of life they expose.

## Skills

Take dance. First you learn PLIE, ten plies (no interpretation). Then, as you start to acquire experience, you are able to recognize other situational phenomenon that cannot be calculated by rules or words: speed, demeanor, posture, expression, and so on. But then, as we get into the real world experience and practice of the skill, the possibilities become infinite. To cope, we might first try to find new rules, but quickly realize they can't cover the situation anymore, because we have become involved. So, although it's a little overwhelming, we have to begin developing an aptitude for situational decision-making. From there, it really becomes almost impossible to step back out of this world that has opened up and try to think of what we're doing from outside, in terms of rules again. We aren't what we were before. Now we're involved, we've actually opened up a pathway

connecting our bodies and surroundings and senses, and this opens up possibilities. One could run through a similar logic with the acquisition of plant-based knowledges and skills and how that opens us and plants up to our myriad potential unfoldings—to even being able to be in the world. Or you could say this with practically any craft, which when followed—and I think many of you know this from your own experiences—open us onto a completely different terrain where things look a lot different.

Things start to get even more interesting when these skills and practices are taken to their logical conclusions and when they begin to take on a certain consistency. Preppers immediately encounter new questions as they follow the logic through: a bugout bag is clearly useless after a few days and the probability of you surviving out there on your own is slim to none. Immediately, every obstacle and potential solutions pose themselves. And not so surprisingly, our experiences today don't allow us to say that things we prepare for are somewhere off in the future—think Katrina, Irene, and Sandy, the Colorado floods, wildfires and droughts across California. Suddenly the shift is very much to the now, to the catastrophe of the present, which is made up just as much as those disasters as the various obstacles in place to prevent you from really carrying this trajectory forward. But the same could be said of anyone taking up the question of health. No amount of tinctures, juicing, homegrown superfoods, and exercise will allow you to escape the omnipresent toxicity of our environments. So seriously following this line means there's either no way out or we need a revolution.

But these aren't just possibilities, this is happening as we speak. Going back to Open Source Ecology and their civilization starter kit, it's an interesting case of very technically skilled people, or people who trained themselves to

be technically skilled, setting up and flocking to a project whose goals are to render many of the forms of this society obsolete. It involves a variety of programmers, mechanics, and engineers, and they've got their own compound, their own connections to projects like urban farming, and they started out with two people living in a hut built with mud-packed plastic bags. A decision was made, and they are going for it. Then there are preppers, like John Wesley Rawles, who advocate and are organizing for evangelical Christian and Orthodox Jewish self-sufficiency types to relocate along ethical lines to the Northern Rockies. While this may not be your cup-of-tea, we think it's an interesting shift towards taking up the political—they aren't trying to save this civilization, they figure it's nearly over and are constituting themselves as a force. We could go on with this point, either from the point of view of techniques that people think are "obsolete" like wildcraft and farming without heavy machinery or with phenomenon emerging from supposedly more sophisticated mechanical and digital arenas. We think something is opening up here: a renewal of the terrain of the ethical via the reappropriation, invention, and putting to use of techniques—with the majority of it taking place outside of insurrectional events.

While it doesn't perfectly fit under this particular heading that I have been discussing because it didn't come together around "skills," Anonymous is an important phenomenon that speaks directly to the question of craft and techniques. The Anonymous hive mind first gestated on 4chan where it began reshaping the very texture of internet culture, producing memes like lolcats and rickrolling and LOONGCAT and perfecting the art of trolling, both online and in real life. 4chan, "the most terrible thing on the internet," became a place to find your people, and across

the thousands and thousands of posts, there were “certain words, certain phrases, certain images that created a pattern, and that pattern was the origins of anonymous.” Taking on greater consistency over time, this pattern became the realest and most important aspect of anon’s lives, and in 2008, Anonymous tipped over into an open conflict with the Church of Scientology, launching its coming out party, Project Chanology. In the words of one participant: “all these people who were geared up, the infrastructure was built up to war with other anons, [but now] everybody was going to get together to pound the fuck out of scientology.” Years of chatting and trolling became a declaration of war, and the event generated a growing intensity amongst anons

What happens through this, in a nutshell, is a freaky nerd subculture evolving very quickly into a social force that has its own forms of communication, territories, and a powerful machine for waging war. This is an impressive thing because totally inadvertently Anonymous became, “the internet’s first army.” In some ways this stems from pure chance and in other ways from the hacker mentality that approaches the world as an open, usable, and transformable, that assesses things strategically.

Before we go on, I’d like to address a couple of things here since I know how these conversations can go. First, the question of survival. The project of governing today, whatever we call it, literally has no goal, no purpose, other than to hold itself together, to hang on. We say this a lot, but we really have to grasp that, and the ways in which it would like to circumscribe our horizons to match its own. A bit like earlier techniques trained a proletarianized and revolutionary humanity to accept as the horizon of its happiness wage increases, job security, a home-bringing into existence the Fordist working class—today what is expected of us is

that we circumscribe our horizons to match those of a dying civilization, of government. That is, surviving machines, resilient surviving machines, or they want us to really become explicitly what we already are, what we have been raised to be since the day we were born, people that just survive. We refuse this, and that we don't accept it means that our only choice is to get organized together, learning skills, becoming capable: these are not just "technical" means to hang on, what we make possible in doing, learning, knowing them, together, is *something qualitatively* better and more powerful.

Secondly, on the question of obsolescence or going forward or going backward. As soon as we talk about learning skills, especially survival skills but really anything that doesn't involve spaceships or pillaging outerspace, someone inevitably says "but you know we can't go back." To that we would say simply that no one is trying to go back at all; what we are doing is beginning from here. But saying "here" does not mean simply accepting what is given as good or the inevitable result of "progress." Many tools and techniques were rendered outmoded or obsolete not by "technological advances" at all, but through a deliberate process of imposing ways of governing and valuing what we now know as work, reversing the fact that the "manager's brains [were] under the workman's cap." That being said, we don't validate prior conditions as a golden age or treat them as somehow better simply because they aren't the present. We don't advocate the aestheticization and moralization of techniques—*I only cut kale with my obsidian hand axe on a salvaged olive wood cutting board*. Nor do we accept this civilization's mythology of progress and its "onward christian soldiers" forced march; after all the same civilization, remember, is saying now that it itself an epic disaster—Anthropocene! The question for us

is not about high or low, sci-fi vs. fantasy, but a question of what it means to set tools and techniques free of their measurability and equivalence, to restore them to a relational and situational existence in worlds, to wage war. In the end, “we can’t go back” is just another way that this civilization tries to say “nothing else is possible,” and the fact that it shouts all the more vehemently today is only proof of the opposite.

Thinking through the hacking, building, and growing phenomenon helps us uncover what’s revolutionary in our time, giving us a chance to look at not only how these techniques open us up to a new terrain, but also how they have taken on a consistency and even a conflictual valence that is outside of the context of a movement or insurrection. This tells us much about the different revolutionary cadences it is possible to inhabit.

But they also tell us something about materiality, how worlds are revealed and built, and how much experimentation is going to be necessary.

## Conclusion

Today in Kiev, there are still people in Maidan. No one’s being starry-eyed here. People are fighting. People are dying (some of those in the video). This is nothing trite, this is nothing small. The age strains against itself from within, yet the means for our exit are right in front of us. They are being elaborated in the global wave of insurrections and in the polarization of techniques. What is underway, in practice, then is a redefinition of the historical conflict, not intellectually, but vitally.

Wherever there are worlds, rich with means, know-how, trusts, thicknesses, powers, and places, gov-



ernment becomes superfluous. Revolution is this becoming-superfluous of government. And this process has no privileged site, but rather spreads, takes on different tenors, those we call, because we use language without thinking, “the everyday” or “the event.” If the Anthropocene is a threshold moment, its horizon lies here, in recognizing that revolution is not an isolated moment, coming to hit us one day. There is not the moment of the event and then a return to reality, but one time, that we weave together, a time in which the past never disappears, but rather imbues all that we do, giving it sense, and weight.

To be clear: if a self-organized neighborhood after a flood and a city organized for revolt both show that everything is possible, we cannot accept that it is only possible in these isolated moments. This is the potential promised in the experiments, skills, techniques, and the desires they contain —the means to make that real. To put an end to the eternal repetition of uprising after uprising fading back into the nothing, leaving us to start over again, from nothing. Between an autonomous area organized to feed itself and a territory in insurrection, defended for weeks by rings of fire and stockpiled pickles, maybe it is not really that what is done is so different, but that the latter takes on a different tenor that appears more explicitly as war. Both, however, are war.

The gods have fled and the desert keeps growing. But opportunity knocks; she is already at the door, and the door is standing wide open. Kiss her, you idiot, this may be our last chance.

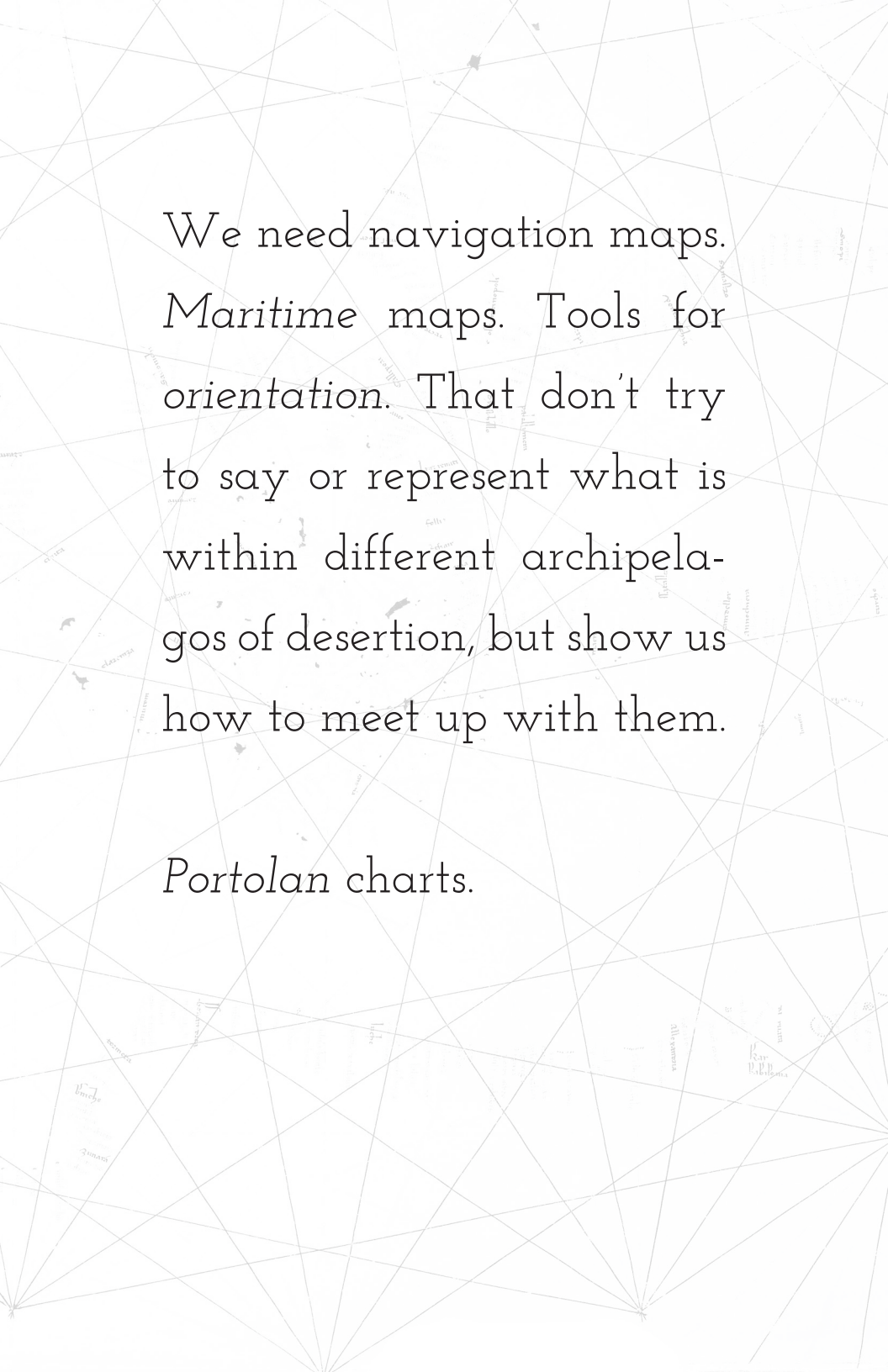


Rather than new critiques,  
new cartographies are what  
we need.

Cartographies not for Em-  
pire, but for lines of flight  
out of it.

How is it to be done?

We need maps. Not maps  
of what is off the map.



We need navigation maps.  
*Maritime* maps. Tools for  
*orientation*. That don't try  
to say or represent what is  
within different archipela-  
gos of desertion, but show us  
how to meet up with them.

*Portolan* charts.

CHOKE POINTS:  
MAPPING AN  
ANTI-  
CAPITALIST  
COUNTER-  
LOGISTICS IN  
CALIFORNIA

*-Degenerate Communism*

*“It should be obvious by now that logistics is capital’s own project of cognitive mapping. [...] We might imagine, then, a logistics against logistics, a counter-logistics which employs the conceptual and technical equipment of the industry in order to identify and exploit bottlenecks, to give our blockaders a sense of where they stand within the flows of capital.”*

– J. Bernes, “Logistics, Counterlogistics, and the Communist Prospect”<sup>1</sup>

*“California occupies an economically strategic position in our State, the Nation and the world. All modes of*

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<sup>1</sup> Jasper Bernes, Endnotes 3, “Logistics, Counterlogistics, and the Communist Prospect”

*freight transportation – trucking, shipping, air cargo,  
and freight rail – are critical to this success.”*

– Caltrans<sup>2</sup>

THE POST-OCCUPY STAGNATION OF CLASS STRUGGLE WITHIN the US context is becoming increasingly typified, in this period of ever deepening crisis, by a rather simplistic dual nature. The more radical milieus that emerged in the midst of Occupy, those that precipitated the emergence of a political non-subject, the refusal to enter into an articulable “political” discourse, the intentional lack of “political” demands, etc. have retreated into a period of convalescence, through which hopefully will emerge more critical self-reflection and evaluation of the post-Occupy landscape. On the other hand, the more traditional leftist elements within Occupy, those that felt the need to frame their struggles in purely positive prefigurations (e.g. direct democracy advocates, certain political reforms, calling for political and economic accountability, a tempering of capital – not its abolition) have ushered in a series of reactionary forays back into a politics which grotesquely repeats old narratives of identity politics and/or single-issue reform. That this bifurcated nature of the current antagonism aligned against capital presently exists in the North American context, should come as no surprise since this binary was inherent in the generalized functioning of Occupy from its inception. There was a clear rift between what seemed like metaphysical sets of qualities and temperaments, which concretely manifested as very different sets of politics and/or antipolitics. Reductively (admittedly problematic), this split, this Janus of Occupy, could be interpreted as a series of contradictions that effec-

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2 Caltrans, “Freight Planning Fact Sheet: California Freight Rail”

tively formed into the limits of that struggle: prefiguration vs. abolition, prescriptive language vs. refusal of discourse, affirmative politics vs. negative antipolitics, and perhaps most contentiously, as Zuccotti Park vs. Oscar Grant Plaza.

The claim that Occupy ushered in questions of class and wealth into the forefront of the American popular consciousness is not enough, for it presupposes that counter-ideological consciousness-raising is in and of itself revolutionary. In the current crisis, the restructuring of globalized speculative capitalism in this age of neoliberal austerity, the raising of revolutionary consciousness seems inherently redundant. False consciousness is a meaningless concept now, as most proletarians (our understanding of the term broadly being all those excluded from the means of production, not only those that sell their labor-power) will recognize something fundamentally wrong with the social, economic, and political relations under the capitalist mode of production, yet even with this understanding we cannot extricate ourselves from our roles in the maintenance and reproduction of these relations by our counter-ideological will alone. This is one of the fundamental ironies about the current crisis; we viscerally feel the weight of capital's increasing exploitation and can identify it as such, yet we still have not been able to overcome our implication in its prolongation and reproduction.

In the context of Occupy, consciousness-raising stopped at merely calling attention to the widening income gap in the United States. It couldn't move from superficial condemnations of wealth inequality to cogently theorizing disruptions to the production of surplus-value and the accumulation of capital, let alone the abolition of the value-form in its entirety. This is not surprising, given the dissolution of all pretense towards class identity, the decline of American



manufacture and the transition into pure post-Fordism, the rise of service work and immaterial labor, the rise of indentured servitude via the debt relation, increasingly precarious labor, and of course the persistent ideological conception of capitalism as the end of history with no alternative. Faced with these relatively deterministic qualifiers, it would simply be idealistic revisionism to impart a much more radical reading of Occupy's potential than there actually was. That said we are concerned with taking from Occupy's demise the fragmentary remains of certain tactics in their stillborn form. While they failed to become extensively generalized both within the moment and the immediate aftermath of Occupy (hence aborting their ability to become communising measures), the tactics we are choosing to excise and examine from that context are those that seem, theoretically of course, to possess a certain dormant potentiality. Admittedly, this process is purely speculative, as in any tactical translation from one unique moment with its own exigencies to another moment not yet manifested can only be one of conjecture (prefiguration encounters limits, theory informed by praxis supersedes them). This essay is merely a set of interrelated questions-without-answers about the potential to disrupt the valorization of capital in the present post-Occupy US context. If they are to be answered at all, the answers are only to be found in our generalized direct confrontation against capital and its abolition, in the immediate process of the production of communism itself.

## THE THEORETICAL LOGIC OF THE DISRUPTION OF THE CIRCULATION OF CAPITAL

*“From the 1970s on, one of capital’s responses to the reproduction crisis has been to shift its focus from the sites of production to the (non)sites of circulation. Once the introduction of labor-saving technology into the production of goods no longer generated substantial profits, firms focused on speeding up and more cheaply circulating both commodity capital (in the case of the shipping, wholesaling and retailing industries) and money capital (in the case of banking).”*

– Bay of Rage, “Blockading the Port is Only the First of Many Last Resorts”<sup>3</sup>

The historical legacy left by the defeat of the worker’s movement and dissolution of proletarian identity aside, the following alone radically necessitate a reevaluation of the sphere of production as a viable site of contestation within the context of US struggles: 1) the growth of low-skill service sector employment, 2) the decline of traditional goods-producing and manufacturing labor, 3) the exponential rise of precarious forms of labor (an aggregate of all the Bureau of Labor Statistics categories such as “long-term unemployed,” “involuntary part-time workers,” “persons marginally attached to the labor force,” and “discouraged workers”) and 4) the diffusion of immaterial labor. We are then left with following proposition: *While it is indisputably within the sphere of production that the value-form is created and the obfuscation of social relations under capital begins, perhaps the notion that it*

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3 Bay of Rage, “Blockading the Port is Only the First of Many Last Resorts” (<http://www.bayofrage.com/from-the-bay/blockading-the-port-is-only-the-first-of-many-last-resorts/>)

*is within sphere of circulation that the value-form can **begin to be destroyed** necessitates more tactical experiments explicitly targeting this realm in the US context of struggles.*

These experiments must necessarily have a temporal dimension to their tangible application, for the power of any blockage, reduction, or delay in the inherent flow of the circulation of capital derives from its ability to disrupt and sustain periods of non-exchange. In Chapter 14 of *Capital Vol. II* Marx differentiates between two stages of “the time of circulation”: “the time of selling” and “the buying time.” We are presently only concerned with former of the two. The “time of selling” is privileged as “the most decisive” and Marx identifies this stage as “the period during which capital exists in the state of commodity-capital. The time of circulation, and hence the period of turnover in general, are long or short depending on the relative length of this selling time. An additional outlay of capital may become necessary as a result of expenses of storage, etc.”<sup>4</sup> While the emergence of production developments such as demand flow technology, just-in-time production, demand-driven manufacturing, make-to-order production, logistics automation, and mixed-model production have assuaged the risk conventionally assumed in the relationship between sales forecasting and production by virtually eliminating inventory overhead, these are still capitalist stratagems that have yet to be generalized in global production.

The temporal nature of any experiments attempting to disrupt the circulation of capital (specifically here in the form of “commodity-capital”) should aim to exacerbate the length of the time of circulation and general period of turnover to an unsustainable amount of concrete time between production and consumption. This tactical maneu-

4 Marx, Karl. *Capital Vol. 2*

vering finds its potential power precisely in the logic of a sustained blockage of any “additional outlay of capital” that will be deployed to address the ruptures in the temporal chains of circulation. Thus, as the general strike is temporally articulated as a “widespread time of non-production,” the generalized disruptions in circulation proposed here are temporally articulated as a “widespread time of non-circulation.” The limits of struggle within the spheres of reproduction and circulation are precisely that they often do not generalize to the sphere of production. The error that derives from this simple iteration of capitalist relations (the privileging of productive labor within the context of class struggles) is that struggle must necessarily start at the level of productive labor. The Italian autonomists challenged this idea by arguing that individuals squarely within the sphere of reproduction of the proletariat class were still producers, albeit indirectly, of surplus-value. Our insistence that the sphere of circulation is the preeminent site of contestation in the first zones of capitalist accumulation during this period of austerity and precarity, acknowledges such struggles as a means to disrupt the productive sphere by applying pressure to circulation logistics.

It of course can be argued that focusing on the sphere of circulation is nothing new, given the precedents one can examine in US labor history such as the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 or the 1894 Pullman Strike. Or perhaps even within California’s own specific labor history one can find examples in the eighty-three day long 1934 West Coast Waterfront Strike precipitated by the four-day long San Francisco General Strike – the former ultimately resulting in the unionization of all West Coast seaports. As production and circulation, labor and consumption, cannot be viewed in isolation from one another we do nonetheless concede

that it is *labor* which *drives* circulation—simply stated, commodities do not move themselves. Yet contemporary tactical questions regarding circulation in the first zones of capitalist accumulation must necessarily come to terms with the fact that the labor involved in circulation has been significantly reduced by logistics automation and technological development. The sheer amount of variable capital involved in earlier forms of “proto-logistics” has given way to an industry comprised almost exclusively of incredible amounts of constant capital. Because of this, the questions now posed must be those that explore the ways in which individuals removed from the direct labor (a more expansive rendering of the proletariat) that facilitates commodities-circulation can in fact disrupt such capital flows.

Production only maintains its primacy in its purely abstracted connotation, as the site in which the value-form emerges – nothing more. Thus, disrupting circulation is merely a one-step-removed means to attack the construction and constitution of value itself.<sup>5</sup> With the theoretical target proposed as such, the tactical questions are subsequently formed as: What can these disruptions through delay, extension, or outright rupture, concretely appear as? Where is such intervention viable, given the rhizomatic nature of the hypermediated networks of circulation in both the global and domestic capitalist context? Proposing an answer, one of hopefully many more to be theorized through enacted

5 We realize the inherently negative position we assume here in our belief that the disruption of the circulation of commodity-capital and the destruction of the value-form is both a means and the end. For a cogent argument against this type of purely negative reading, see Alberto Toscano’s “Logistics and Opposition” in *Mute* – in which he asks what it would look like to repurpose networks of circulation for communist aims rather than simply disrupting them. (<http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/logistics-and-opposition>) Also see *Out of the Woods*’ “Disaster communism part 3 – logistics, repurposing, bricolage”

self-reflexive experimentation, takes us back to our initial desire to excavate the corpse of Occupy for a set of tactics and techniques.

Much has already been written on Occupy Oakland's attempts to engage with and surpass the limits imposed by capital's reproduction,<sup>6</sup> and while we concur with such readings, for the immediate purpose of this essay we are only concerned with exploring the tactics that targeted the circulation of capital (whether or not the intent of such actions were explicitly framed as such). In such previous analyses it has been rightly asserted that, "production won't be able to be the centre that it used to be, but only as a part of a whole,"<sup>7</sup> and that whole of the capitalist mode of production is constituted precisely by the interaction (re: relation) between the productive and reproductive spheres. We simply wish to make more explicit the role of circulation in facilitating the relation between the production of value and capital's inexorable reproduction and the subsequent reproduction of all the social relations and categories inherent to the capitalist mode of production. For the purposes of this analysis of the viability of disruptive experiments in the sphere of circulation, the tactic, or perhaps more appropriately, the set of tactics that we wish to explore further (explicitly framed in the context of Occupy Oakland) stem primarily from the port shutdown.

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6 Rust Bunny Collective, SIC 2, "Under the Riot Gear" (<http://www.sicjournal.org/en/under-the-riot-gear>)

7 Ibid

## THE PORT SHUTDOWN

The shutting down of the Port of Oakland on November 2nd and December 12th both represented significant tactical experiments in the disruption of the circulation of capital (in the form of commodity-capital). What complicates these actions is their seemingly defensive nature in the immediate historical unfolding of Occupy Oakland.

The second, smaller blockade on December 12th was ostensibly done in solidarity with the Longview ILWU in their unarguably defensive stance to legitimate their collective-bargaining authority with the introduction of a transoceanic EGT grain terminal that would have employed non-ILWU longshoremen. The defensive nature of this blockade was never intended to be a protracted assault on the reproduction of capital, rather it was a purely an act of survival indicative of the moving contraction of capitalist relations – namely the contradictory need to secure one’s means of reproduction (crystalized in the wage-form and exchanged for simple subsistence commodities) as being precisely that, which upon the selling of one’s labor-power, reproduces capital and the extraction of surplus-value itself. Upon the signing of the February 2012 collective bargaining agreement between the Longview ILWU and EGT, a quote from ILWU President Robert McEllrath made explicit the purely defensive nature of the Longview struggle: “The men and women of the ILWU have crafted hundreds of collective bargaining agreements over the past several decades that have made many companies profitable while also providing family wage jobs for communities like Longview. This agreement between EGT and the ILWU was crafted with the goals of safety, productivity, good jobs for the community, and stability for the grain industry in mind.” That said,

the fact that the inherent purpose of this second port blockade in Oakland and all along the West Coast was purely defensive in nature, is irrelevant to our task at hand – the analysis of the tactical manifestation of the blockade in its pure materiality.

The first, much larger (both in terms of participants and “ideological” resonance) blockade of the port on November 2nd was an explicit reaction to the police raid and destruction of the encampment at Oscar Grant Plaza. While we cannot deny the significance of the reaction to the police destruction of the encampment in constituting the initial planning around the tactic of blockading the Port of Oakland, the danger in such a passive reading lies in discrediting the actual material context – namely, if only for a brief period, the circulation of capital in one specific capacity (commodity-capital via the port) was disrupted. Herein lies the fundamental limit to the struggle in that particular moment, one that Occupy Oakland was ultimately unable to overcome. The encampment, by its very nature as a plaza occupation, possessed within itself limits that appeared as the parameters to its tactical form. The disruptions to the sphere of circulation caused by the encampment’s presence were marginal at best (e.g. certain businesses in the immediate vicinity of OGP noticed a decrease in sales, had to close early on certain occasions, etc.), but for the most part the tactic of plaza occupation was largely concerned with experiments aimed at diminishing the role of capital in the proletariat’s reproduction<sup>8</sup>.

When the police forcibly repressed these reproductive experiments on October 25th, the struggle then attempted to disrupt circulation by means of the port block-

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8 See Rust Bunny Collective, SIC 2, “Under the Riot Gear” for more. (<http://www.sicjournal.org/en/under-the-riot-gear>)



ade. Given the context of that particular moment of struggle, we contradictorily claim: in arguing that the port shutdown on November 2nd could not have happened without the initial repressive police measures, one must also acknowledge that for many participants of the Nov. 2nd blockade the shutdown was therefore a reprisal for the destruction/eviction of the encampment on October 25th. We feel this is worth noting, because this moralistic/ideological reaction hindered the ability of the material tactic of the blockade to become protracted, dynamically sustained, and generalized as an overcoming of the limits encountered by the occupation of the plaza. Nonetheless, the blockades of the Port of Oakland materialized within the flow of history – and that fact alone is enough to warrant the exploration of the tactic of the port blockade as a legitimate avenue of attack against the circulation of capital in current struggles.

## THE MATERIAL LOGIC OF THE DISRUPTION OF THE CIRCULATION OF CAPITAL

*“The national economy could lose as much as \$2.5 billion a day and disrupt thousands of jobs if labor talks between longshore workers and their employers force a shutdown of West Coast seaports, according to a new study released Thursday [6/26/14]. The 17-page report<sup>9</sup>, generated by economists at the Interindustry Forecasting Project at the University of Maryland, asserts that a five-day work stoppage could lower the national GDP by \$1.9 billion a day and disrupt 73,000*

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9 <https://nrf.com/sites/default/files/Port%20Closure%20Full%20Report.pdf>

*jobs, while a 20-day shutdown could lower the GDP by \$2.5 billion a day and disrupt 405,000 jobs.”*

– Long Beach Press Telegram, “National Economy Could Suffer from Shutdown of West Coast Ports, According to Study”<sup>10</sup>

Hierarchizing the flows of commodities according to direct volume throughput we will explore the following options for freight transport in what we view as their ranked order by importance to the overall infrastructure of the circulation of commodity-capital: seaports, railway lines, freight truck routes, intermodal rail yards, and air cargo warehouses. We argue that the overall infrastructure and logistics of commodity-capital circulation depends on a reading of post-modernist society precisely as network society. As Manuel Castells writes:

...because the network society is based on networks, and communication networks transcend boundaries, the network society is global, it is based on global networks. So, it is pervasive throughout the planet, its logic transforms extends to every country in the planet, as it is diffused by the power embedded in global networks of capital, goods, labor, communication, information, science, and technology<sup>11</sup>

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10 Long Beach Press Telegram, “National Economy Could Suffer from Shutdown of West Coast Ports, According to Study” (<http://www.presstelegram.com/business/20140626/national-economy-could-suffer-from-shutdown-of-west-coast-ports-according-to-study>)

11 Manuel Castells, “The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy”

The danger of such expansive readings of networks, or even the propensity to speak about networks in purely qualitative terms, is that they often tend towards abstraction.

In our use of the term network we wish to reiterate, as Eugene Thacker states in his foreword to Alexander R. Galloway's *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization* that

**the first point is that networks are not metaphors.** [...] The concept of 'protocol' is thus meant to demonstrate the nonmetaphorical quality of networks. Or, put in another way, the concept of protocol shows the predilection for general discussion of networks in terms of general tropes. **Networks are not tropes for notions of 'interconnection.'** **They are material technologies, sites of variable practices, actions, and movements**<sup>12</sup> (our emphasis).

When we speak of the networks through which capital in its commodity-form circulates, we are aiming to speak about the networks and the high-traffic nodes within them precisely in this material manner. Our use of the term network also does not assume a flattening into equivalence, or a pure horizontalist reading of the materiality of circulation flow. We also do not mean to assert that capital's networks and global supply chains are inherently static in their composition, for they are flexible and perpetually in the process of reconfiguration – a fact ever more indicative of this current period of capital's globalized restructuring.

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12 Eugene Thacker, "Foreword: Protocol Is as Protocol Does" – Foreword to Alexander Galloway's *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*

Our use of the term “high-traffic nodes” is both an attempt to argue for the existence of actual material sites, similar to vertices in graph theory, of high intersections or throughput of value in the commodity-capital form. We argue that “high-traffic nodes” are simply that, spatial, physical, topographical points of super-intersection where many lines of circulatory flow converge. In this post-industrial age we feel it is pointless, if not impossible, to identify originating or terminal points in the networks of circulation precisely because the divisions between the traditional spheres of production, reproduction, circulation, and consumption have become virtually indistinguishable in the current phase of capitalist development. For as Research & Destroy claim: “It is no doubt true that the spheres of circulation and reproduction depend upon the sphere of production and productive labor; however, the converse is also true. Production can be halted from beyond, by proletarians who are not productive labourers, through an interruption of the circulation upon which production depends. [...] If the commodities (raw materials, half-finished goods, finished goods) and bodies which capital needs don’t arrive at the factory, the warehouse, or the retail outlet, then all labour and all production of value stops.”<sup>13</sup> Focusing our analysis on circulation is not to say that it exists independent from production and consumption, but rather that all such spheres are inherent to the forms of the others.

In our tactical evaluation of the current landscape of material commodity circulation in the United States, disruption can occur either at these points of convergence, these “high-traffic nodes” through which many lines (flows) of high quantities of value converge, enter, and exit, or along

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13 Research & Destroy, SIC 2, “Limit Analysis and its Limits” (<http://www.sicjournal.org/en/limits-analysis-and-its-limits>)

“high-traffic lines.” The term “high-traffic lines,” similar to edges in graph theory, are simply the singular lines connecting “high-traffic nodes” through which high quantities of value pass (high-value throughput).

To ground our distinction between “high-traffic nodes” and “high-traffic lines” in material examples we present the following:

1. We consider The Port of Los Angeles to be a **high-traffic** node in the network of commodity-capital circulation. The Port of Los Angeles is one of the most important high-traffic nodes in North American commodities circulation precisely because of infrastructure statistics like these: “In 2010, the Port’s cargo terminals handled an impressive 7.8 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units). Home to the nation’s largest on-dock rail assets, the Port of Los Angeles provides the highest frequency of intermodal access to 14 major freight hubs across the United States.”<sup>14</sup> Because of the staggering volume and value throughput (\$285.4 billion in 2013)<sup>15</sup> of the Port of Los Angeles, we hold it to be of the utmost importance to circulation infrastructure in the United States – it is thus hierarchized as such, in a preeminent logistical position, privileged above other American seaports, intermodal rail yards, railway lines, freight truck warehouses, etc.
2. Many **high-traffic lines** converge at, enter, and exit the Port of Los Angeles (shipping routes, rail lines, freight

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14 “A Profile of the Port of Los Angeles” (<http://portoflosangeles.org/about/profile.asp>)

15 “Facts and Figures” (<http://www.portoflosangeles.org/about/facts.asp>)

truck routes, etc). The sea transport corridors used by the Yang Ming Marine Transport Corporation from Taiwan to the Port of Los Angeles could be considered individual high-traffic lines within the network of commodities circulation. Likewise the specific rail routes from the Port of Los Angeles's Maersk On-Dock Rail Yard (intermodal facility) to the Commerce Eastern, Sheila, Hobart BNSF rail yards in Commerce, CA can also be considered high-traffic lines while the aforementioned intermodal rail yards in Commerce can be considered high-traffic nodes. The high-volume BNSF Southern Transcon main rail line from the Port of Los Angeles by way of San Bernardino and exiting California in the town of Needles can also be considered a high-traffic line connecting many high-traffic nodes in the Midwest to the San Pedro Bay Ports.

Thus, central to our understanding of this distinction between high-traffic nodes and high-traffic lines within our theorization of the network(s) of material commodities circulation in the United States, is the fact that high-traffic nodes are *localized physical sites* while high-traffic lines are *logistical routes*, often spanning hundreds or thousands of miles, on which commodity-capital traverses and circulates. High-traffic nodes can be physically massive like the Port of Los Angeles with its 7,500 acres and 270 berths, or smaller like the Oakland International Gateway (OIG) Intermodal Facility operated by BNSF. High-traffic lines can be assessed in either their localized spatial fragments (i.e. the BNSF Gateway subdivision can be viewed in tactical segments) or in terms of their historical and organizational continuity (e.g. the Southern Transcon's official designation as a rail line stretches almost 2,000 miles from San Bernardino, CA to

Chillicothe, IL). Each form, high-traffic nodes and high-traffic lines, possesses both tactical strengths and weakness as sites for potential disruption, which will be expanded upon in the subsequent sections. Each high-traffic node has a corresponding high-traffic line (e.g. intermodal rail yards = high-traffic node, while railway lines = high-traffic line). For the purposes of this essay, we have chosen to focus solely on seaports/megaports, railway lines, intermodal rail yards, freight truck routes, intermodal rail yards and air cargo warehouses.

Our choice to not analyze shipping routes (sea transport corridors), freight truck warehouses, and air cargo flight routes is intentional. We do not believe in the current context of struggles that disrupting shipping routes is a tactic that possesses the potential to be generalized. With the notable exception of piracy in the waters off of the Horn of Africa, a significant disruption of global shipping routes seems to be untenable solely because it requires substantial maritime resources; which is something the global proletariat has little access to. Freight trucks form a significant link in the logistics of commodity-capital's circulation through drayage. Drayage is the transport of material commodities over short distances, often as a section of a longer overall transport process. We believe that the sheer number of intermodal drayage facilities and warehouses in California alone (compared to California's three mega-seaports) makes it incredibly difficult to coordinate effective disruptions against these lesser high-traffic nodes, hence our omission of that particular circulation form. Finally, the absence of air cargo flight routes in our analysis is essentially due to the same reasons we ignored shipping routes (sea transport corridors): the proletariat does not have the technological means and access to aviation resources to effectively block air cargo transport en route. The circulation forms that we will

attempt to explore as viable sites for the disruption of the circulation of capital are outlined in the table below, along with their network classification, and what we abstractly posit as their limits of form – limits which we will explore further and attempt to tactically exploit in the subsequent sections.

Circulation Form	Network Classification	Weakness of Form
Seaports/Mega-ports	High-traffic node	Massive Width, Breadth
Railway Lines	High-traffic line	Linearity, Length, Fixity
Freight Truck Routes	High-traffic line	Dispersal, Diffusion
Intermodal Rail Yards	High-traffic node	Width, Breadth
Air Cargo Warehouses	High-traffic node	Width, Breadth

In what follows then, we present not a program or a set of tactics that “should” moralistically be implemented. Instead, in the spirit of adding to the cartography of the current struggles against the reproduction of capital we intend to focus on a set of questions emerging from the material tactics enacted in the immediate past within the context of Occupy. As their starting point, this set of questions starts with the material practices that attempted to disrupt the flows of capital and then problematize them through an analysis of their limits. Speculatively, this set of questions will then attempt to envisage what the generalized applica-



tion of these practices may indeed look like – not in order to institute them as a necessity for revolution, or to hold on to them as “correct” forms of struggle, but rather to map a potentiality in order that their emerging forms may be recognized *if and only if* the struggles themselves result in their manifestation.

## SEAPORTS

*“California seaports are a major economic force and are critically important elements to the growth of California and the nation’s economy. Seaports are dependent upon the goods movement chain to efficiently distribute freight around the globe and across the nation.”*

-Caltrans<sup>16</sup>

In terms of high-traffic nodes in the logistics networks of commodity-capital circulation, none are more central than the seaport-form. In using the broader term seaport, we are obviously only concerned with cargo ports (break bulk ports, intermodal container ports, etc.). The sole factor contributing to the centrality of seaports in logistics infrastructure networks simply has to do with the value of their commodity throughput. In 2012, the three largest seaports in California had a combined cargo value throughput of \$477.8 billion dollars.

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16 Caltrans, “Seaports” (<http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ogm/seaports.html>)

CA Main Seaports/Mega-ports	Cargo Value Throughput (2012)
Port of Los Angeles	\$283.6 billion
Port of Long Beach	\$155 billion
Port of Oakland	\$39.2 billion

While the majority of California seaport commodities-circulation happens at three high-traffic nodes outlined above, California actually has 12 cargo seaports. These include “3 ‘megaports’ (Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Oakland); 8 smaller niche ports (Hueneme, Humboldt Bay, Redwood City, Richmond, West Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, and Stockton); and 1 private port (Benicia). [In addition to these] The ports of Oakland, Stockton, and West Sacramento are developing a new barge shipping service funded through a federal TIGER grant.”<sup>17</sup> “Megaport” is a loose term that simply refers to the world’s largest and busiest cargo seaports. On the economic significance California’s three megaports: “The Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach comprise the largest port complex [San Pedro Bay Ports] in the United States and are key players in global enterprise. Together, they handle a fourth of all container cargo traffic in the United States. The Port of Oakland, the fourth largest port in the nation, handles trade from the Pacific Rim countries, delivering 99% of the ocean containers passing through Northern California to the rest of the nation.”<sup>18</sup>

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

In terms of the sheer economic impact of port shutdowns, one only has to look at the estimated figures of the Port of Oakland shutdown during the Occupy Oakland-led “West Coast Port Shutdown” on December 12th, 2011. Isaac Kos-Read, the director of external affairs for the Port of Oakland at the time of the December 12th port shutdown, estimated that “for the day, it was a loss of \$4 million to \$8 million, easily.”<sup>19</sup> Certain moralistic debates concerning the impact such blockades had on “the working class” emerged from both the November 2nd and December 12th shutdowns of the Port of Oakland. Some Occupy activists argued that in blocking entrances to the Port of Oakland (what we identify as one of the highest-priority high-traffic nodes in California’s logistics infrastructure), such actions were in fact making the blocked truckers trying to enter the port “working-class” collateral damage. John Carino, a Tracy, California resident and truck driver attempting to deliver rice on December 12th during the port shutdown remarked to a local news agency: “I’m trying to figure out what these people want with their movement [Occupy]. I’m trying to make a living doing this. These shutdowns are hurting us.”<sup>20</sup> In response to these views by the “working-class” directly affected by these port shutdowns, many moralistic sentiments were then proffered by the more liberal-minded Occupy Oakland activists: “We will find more effective means to take action. [...] Hopefully we will find other techniques that don’t burden a group like the truckers as much.”<sup>21</sup> Through this toxic activist guilt a subsequent orthodox privileging

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19 George Avalos, “Occupy shutdown costly for Oakland port” ([http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci\\_19540367](http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_19540367))

20 Ibid

21 Ibid.

and romanticization of the “programmatically working-class” experience emerged.

We argue that the view held by many Occupy Oakland activists that such port shutdowns actually hurt “the 99%” unintentionally, formed one of the limits to the tactic of the port shutdown within the specific context of Occupy. Given the fact that many freight truckers (central conduits among the high-traffic lines of commodity-capital circulation) felt that Occupy was damaging their right to the wage-form through such blockades, and the disheartening reality that most of the Port of Oakland’s 2,000 ILWU longshoremen make “between \$100,000 and \$200,000 a year”<sup>22</sup> which is considerably more than California’s average per capita yearly income of \$29,634 back in 2011,<sup>23</sup> it is painfully obvious to us that “working-class identity” is one of the interminable barriers to the generalization of communist measures. The identity of the “programmatically working-class” itself must be overcome, hence our insistence that there is no room for moralizing discussions in the disruption of the circulation of commodity-capital. If a set of tactics emerges from a future context of struggles that explicitly targets commodity-capital circulation and becomes generalized, it will undoubtedly impact everyone and everything simply because of our own inescapable implication in the circulatory flows of capital. Despite the utopian pretenses of many radical leftists, we cannot step outside of this flow simply because of our own capital-dependent existences and the real subsumption of life under capital and “the modification of the labour-process along specifically capitalist lines.”<sup>24</sup>

22 Ibid.

23 U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey, 2011. American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B19301”

24 Endnotes 2, “The History of Subsumption” (<http://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-the-history-of-subsumption>)

We argue that the weakness of the seaport-form is precisely their massive “width” or “breadth.” By width, we simply mean that seaports act as large material aggregate facilities in which a wide array of commodities enter, are stored, sorted, and exit. They are the super-nodes in the logistics networks of commodity-capital circulation. They are geospatial sites, which through their width or breadth possess the highest levels of circulatory “bandwidth” so to speak. The highest volume of material goods pass through these super-nodes, hence our classification of these sites as massively “wide.” While this breadth lends itself to incredible high-volume capacities and logistical centrality, this is also its structural weakness. Because such a high volume of goods enters and exits these seaport super-nodes, disrupting such sites within the circulatory network has the most economic repercussions. Unlike the less-volume high-traffic lines of railway lines, freight truck routes, and cargo plane transport, seaports are not “diffuse” forms in and of themselves – they merely act as the main node from which more “diffuse” or “dispersed” forms of transport stem from. The diffuse forms facilitating commodity-capital circulation are unequivocally more difficult to disrupt with coordinated network-wide disruptions or blockades than the “wide” seaport-form. Thus, because of the seaport-form’s “super-node” centrality in commodity-circulation networks and their relative “width” in terms of their relation to other circulation forms, we argue they are the preeminent sites for disruption in the sphere of circulation.

## RAILWAY LINES

The majority of all commodities circulation via rail transport occurs in California along 5,412 miles of “Class I railroads – the designation for the major freight rail carriers – [and] are represented in California by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) and the Union Pacific Railroad (UP).”<sup>25</sup> While “these two railroads have extensive rail networks connecting California with the rest of the nation, particularly corridors to the Southwest, Midwest, and Northwest,”<sup>26</sup> there are nonetheless still high-traffic lines within the Class I railroad network that the CA Department of Transportation identifies as “Key Freight Rail Routes.” In Southern California the CA D.O.T identifies the Tehachapi Trade Corridor (dispatched by Union Pacific) as a “major trade route which connects the State with national markets,” while in “Northern California, the Martinez Subdivision, Feather River Canyon, and Donner Pass routes serve the Port of Oakland and Port of Stockton, and are owned and dispatched by the UP but serve BNSF [Burlington Northern Santa Fe] through trackage right agreements. Donner Pass has replaced the Feather River Canyon route as UP’s primary intermodal service route eastward.”<sup>27</sup> The Union Pacific’s “Los Angeles Service Unit operating from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach is the primary route to the four major gateways of St. Louis, Chicago, Memphis, and New Orleans,” while the BNSF “Transcontinental (Transcon) route east from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach is an integral part of the California freight rail network and is

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25 Caltrans, “Freight Rail Overview” ([http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ogm/freight\\_rail.html](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ogm/freight_rail.html))

26 Ibid.

27 Caltrans, “Freight Planning Fact Sheet: California Freight Rail”

their land bridge link to markets in Kansas City, Memphis, and Chicago.”<sup>28</sup>

What is remarkably easy to overlook in terms of the railway logistics away from California’s three megaport-seaports (Oakland, Los Angeles, and Long Beach) is that in terms of Class I freight-rail routes, there are only seven that ultimately leave the state borders of California. There are two routes exiting Northern California into Oregon, two routes exiting Northern California into Nevada, one route exiting Southern California into southern Nevada, and the final two routes exiting Southern California into Arizona. Tactically, seven seems to be a relatively small number of terminal routes out of California especially when compared with the mess of Norfolk Southern, BNSF, UP and CSX routes operating trackage in the Midwest and Eastern United States. Given that the Port of Los Angeles is the busiest port in the United States by container volume and the number-one freight gateway ranked by the commodity value of its throughput, and the 9th busiest port worldwide when combined with its immediate neighbor, the Port of Long Beach, it is striking to come to terms with the fact that there are only three Southern Californian exit points for the majority of the intermodal rail freight operating between the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and the rest of the United States.

The disruption of the circulation of capital in the form of material commodities was challenged in a new, resounding way on November 2nd and December 12th – this form of blockade could potentially be expanded and generalized, in California at least, on other circulatory forms. The Port of Long Beach could not be shutdown on December 12th in conjunction with the West Coast Port Shutdown in solidarity with Longview and Occupy, and had only an es-

28 Ibid.

estimated 200 people present. The sheer size of the so-called San Pedro Bay Ports (much larger than the Port of Oakland) made it logistically impossible for 200 people to block in any material way. With no solutions, we simply ask what could a creative occupation or blockade of the Class 1 intermodal freight-rail routes in California look like? Could a group as small as 200 people succeed in blocking an isolated high-traffic line in the desert as opposed to a high-traffic node in an urban center? A nascent response may be found in the recent radical actions of First Nations activists in Canada. As recently as March 19, 2014, “protesters near the Tyendinaga Mohawk reserve in southern Ontario [...] blocked the Montreal-Toronto Via Rail line to draw attention to missing and murdered aboriginal women.”<sup>29</sup> This was one of many recent rail and road blockades by indigenous activists in Canada. While one blockade resulted in an extremely short stop-order for all CN (Canadian National Railway Company) freight trains on March 8th, and the later March 19th blockade resulted in passenger train service on Via Rail to be disrupted for several hours – the point we wish to focus on is that these disruptions, while never intending to be anything more than actions to raise media awareness, did in fact disrupt the flow of goods and persons. The March 8th action blocking the CN mainline<sup>30</sup> can specifically be evaluated as an action that

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29 CBC News, “Via Rail blockade by First Nations that halted Montreal-Toronto trains ends” (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/via-rail-blockade-by-first-nations-that-halted-montreal-toronto-trains-ends-1.2578221>)

30 “On March 8, following a week of action demanding a national inquiry into the at least 825 missing and murdered indigenous women across Canada, warriors from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory blocked the CN mainline. This action, which fell on International Women’s Day, came the day after the release of a Parliamentary report which attempted to dismiss and deny the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women and prevent any meaningful response or action. This is a continuation



possessed within itself a sketch of how generalized railway blockades could possibly manifest<sup>31</sup> – explicitly with the intent to disrupt the circulation of capital. If an action conducted by a relatively small group of people (infinitesimal compared to the thousands present for the November 2nd shutdown of the Port of Oakland) could halt a major Class I route operated by CN for a few hours, what could possibly emerge if intermodal railway line blockades became a tactic diffused and implemented in the same way plaza occupations were globally diffused in 2011-2012?

A word on the railway-form itself. Railways suffer from being remnants of a lingering modernity in a postmodern world. The concomitant rise of industrialism and the expansion of global rail networks were both apart of a worldview which viewed expansion as a pure linearity – outward almost always meant moving in one specific direction. While capital, production, and perhaps more specifically, manufacturing itself, changed with the development of new material and informational technologies, the rail system continued to exist with relatively few radical technological transformations. There are only so many technological leaps one can make in altering the physical way in which moving a certain volume of goods from Point A to Point B along trackage is done.

The notion of the “logistics revolution” underscores the rise in importance of circulatory management and the of colonization and its inherent violence against Indigenous communities, particularly Indigenous women. For more information on missing and murdered women in Canada, please visit: [missingjustice.ca](http://missingjustice.ca)” from “Warrior Publications”

31 There are other recent North American precedents for rail blockades (all emerging from the activist milieu), such as the June and August 2013 “sit-in” rail blockades on tracks in Fairfield and Auburn, ME done by 350 Maine and Maine Earth First! activist groups calling attention to transportation of Bakken crude oil by rail.

diminishing importance of the technology of transport itself. While new transport technologies have undoubtedly expedited the way in which goods physically traverse the world, the significance of the “logistics revolution” is precisely that it is the *management* of these commodity flows that has been streamlined, hypermediated, and made incredibly efficient. W. Bruce Allen argues that

“while transportation is the largest components of logistics, ordering costs, carrying costs, warehousing costs, and administrative costs are nontrivial. [...] Transportation has been subsumed, in many cases, by these broader departments. Managing the supply chain – from raw material assembly, to work in progress, to the physical distribution of the final product or service – is the essence of business logistics.”<sup>32</sup>

Physical distribution itself happens in accordance with particular modes much in the same way that it did fifty-years ago; it is the drive to maximize the capacities of the existing infrastructure and material technologies (both productive and distributive) to their most efficient and fullest extent that comprise the field of logistics. Most logistics attempts to work within the already delineated form of transport in order to maximize efficiency, much in the same way that Marx writes about efficiency and the production of relative surplus-value. This brings us now to the limits of the railway-form.

We argue that the limits of the railway-form are “linearity” and “length.” The “logistics revolution” has not been able to supersede these limits, thus we posit them as weaknesses that can be exploited. We do not mean linearity and length in abstract terms; we are speaking about these

32 W. Bruce Allen, “The Logistics Revolution and Transportation”

limits as concrete materialities. Linearity here simply refers to the fact that the railway-form operates along a purely outward and fixed course of travel between high-traffic nodes such as stand-alone intermodal railway yards, seaports, etc. Because of the fixed and relatively immutable nature of this linearity, flexibility in transport via railway is almost nonexistent. In this context, length therefore refers to the fact that while all rail routes span hundreds and even thousands of miles, one knows precisely (geospatially) where Train X must pass through if it is using Route Y. This rigidity in the railway-form is a tactical weakness, in that it gives the potential blockader an almost clairvoyance in terms of looking into the future and knowing precisely where a certain train will ultimately have to pass through. Thus, because of this length – any point along a high-traffic line in the form of a railway line becomes a legitimate site for blockage.

It is precisely this antiquated linearity and length which makes certain points in the circulation of commodity-capital via railway lines relatively easy to identify as, paradoxically, both high-traffic lines and defensively vulnerable. Block a rail route in the right place, the right way, and for a protracted duration – and there is simply no getting around it. Railway length also possesses another tactical weakness in the fact that many rail routes travel through isolated physical locations that are difficult to defend and access by road (the thoroughfares that any State-enacted counter-blockade defense would necessarily have to traverse). A perfect example of the hostility of the terrain and relative isolation that many rail routes traverse is the mountainous trackage section of the Union Pacific Roseville Subdivision that passes through Donner Pass in the High Sierras of Northern California.

Class 1 Rail Lines Leaving CA	US Dept. of Transportation Current Train Volumes Compared to Current Capacity	US Dept. of Transportation Projected Train Volumes in 2035 Compared to Current Capacity	Location: Closest City to California Border and Adjacent State Rail Line Exits Into
UP Black Butte Subdivision (I-5 Corridor)	Below Capacity	Above Capacity	Doris, CA (Northern CA into OR)
BNSF Gateway Subdivision	Below Capacity	Below Capacity	Kalina, CA (Northern CA into OR)
UP Feather River Canyon Subdivision (Feather River Corridor/Central Corridor)	Below Capacity	Below Capacity	Herlong, CA (Northern CA into NV)
UP Roseville Subdivision (Donner Pass/Overland Route)	Below Capacity	At Capacity	Truckee, CA (Northern CA into NV)
UP Cima Subdivision	Below Capacity	At Capacity	Nipton, CA (Southern CA into NV)
BNSF Needles Subdivision (Southern Transcon)	Below Capacity	Above Capacity	Needles, CA (Southern CA into AZ)
UP Yuma Subdivision (Sunset Route)	At Capacity	Above Capacity	Winterhaven, CA (Southern CA into AZ)

## FREIGHT TRUCK ROUTES

In terms of the sheer throughput aggregate that constitutes the global supply chain, the further one gets from the large high-traffic nodes such as “mega-seaports” the more diffuse the means of freight transport become and thus, are subsequently harder to disrupt. Freight truck routes, as high-traffic lines, necessarily conform to this rule. Due to the fact that, theoretically at least, any road that can accommodate the weight, length, breadth, and height of a standard semi-trailer freight truck is ostensibly a route which commodity-capital can traverse, freight truck routes are inherently diffuse modes of transport. Thus, unlike railway lines which are fixed and relatively few in number (when compared to durable load-bearing roads and highways in the United States), freight truck routes can immediately be reconfigured in the event of blockages or disruptions. While freight truck routes are the most diffuse method of commodity-capital circulation, they still are logistically significant in terms of their sheer proliferation across the entirety of the global supply chain.

The California Department of Transportation acknowledges both this centrality and the fragility of the freight truck-form: “In terms of value and weight, most commercial freight is moved by trucks. Approximately 71% of goods by value and 69% of goods by weight are carried by truck in the United States (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, September, 2009). [...] There are many factors that challenge commercial trucking such as traffic congestion, traffic accidents, weather, operating rules and regulations, scarcity of truck parking spaces, shortage of available drivers, road restrictions, and lack of intermodal connectors to ports and intermodal terminals. Increased

competition in the trucking industry, rising fuel costs, and just-in-time delivery have forced the industry to be more efficient and responsive to their customer needs.”<sup>33</sup>

The relative flexibility that semi-trailer freight truck transport affords the logistics of capital (e.g. the literal capacity to instantly and easily maneuver around material obstacles) comes at a cost: volume. The fact that most standard semi-trailer freight trucks lack the capacity to move incredibly high volumes of commodities should also be of tactical consideration for those attempting to disrupt the circulation of commodity-capital. Blocking intermodal freight truck routes far away from freight truck hubs, intermodal rail yards, or seaports does not have the same tactical significance than if such disruptions were to occur physically closer to the aforementioned high-traffic nodes. The further a semi-trailer freight truck is from such high-traffic nodes, the more possibilities for maneuvering, escape, and route reconfiguration exist for it. In addition to this ability to circumvent any material impediments to its flow, the further the once tightly aggregated commodity-capital being transported in freight trucks gets from high-traffic nodes the more that high-volume of concentrated capital becomes dispersed over a vast geographical space—as vast as the entire road and highway infrastructure. Thus, blockades along the high-traffic lines of freight truck routes can be tactically effective if they are done within a relatively close physical proximity to high-traffic nodes.

This difference in form sharply contrasts with the other high-traffic line already discussed here, the railway line. The railway line, due to its limitation of form in its fixity and linearity, can effectively be disrupted along any

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33 Caltrans, “Commercial Vehicles” ([http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ogm/commercial\\_vehicles.html](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ogm/commercial_vehicles.html))

portion of its trackage. The freight truck route is markedly different, and we venture to say that all disruptions within this particular mode of commodity-capital circulation will be most effective within a fifty-mile radius of the high-traffic node that it is arriving at/departing from. This poses another tactical problem on the part of the potential blockaders, for this necessity of relative proximity to such high-traffic nodes ultimately means that (unlike the miles of remote trackage on many Class I rail routes) such locations are more often than not concentrated in urban centers – changing the political stakes, defensive viability, and duration capability of any potential disruption along freight truck routes.

In terms of mapping potential choke points along freight truck routes, like most critical assessments of the flaws and impediments within the capitalist global supply chain capital has already done a better job of identifying these “problems” than we ever could and as such, we present the findings of studies conducted by the

American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Freight Management and Operations [organizations] monitoring freight significant highways as part of the Freight Performance Measures (FPM) initiative. A central aspect of these monitoring activities is the identification and quantification of major chokepoints and bottlenecks along highways that are critical to the nation’s freight transportation system.<sup>34</sup>

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34 American Transportation Research Institute, “FPM Congestion Monitoring at 250 Freight Significant Highway Locations” (<http://atri-online.org/2011/10/01/fpm-congestion-monitoring-at-250-freight-signifi->

These studies showed that “of the top 250 major freight chokepoints and bottlenecks in the nation, as identified by the FHWA and ATRI in 2011, 15 were in California – 6 in Los Angeles, 3 in Sacramento, 2 in Oakland, and 1 each in San Bernardino, Corona, San Rafael, and San Diego.”<sup>35</sup>

**ATRI Identified Freight Truck Infrastructure Choke Points in Close Proximity to Seaports:**

CA Main Seaports/ Megaports	Cargo Value Throughput (2012)	# of ATRI Identified Freight Truck Infrastructure Choke Points Within 50 miles
Port of Los Angeles	\$283.6 billion	7
Port of Long Beach	\$155 billion	7
Port of Oakland	\$39.2 billion	3

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cant-highway-locations/)

35 Caltrans, “Fast Freight Facts: Commercial Vehicles (Trucks)” ([http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ogm/fact\\_sheets/Fast\\_Freight\\_Facts\\_Trucks\\_bk\\_040612.pdf](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ogm/fact_sheets/Fast_Freight_Facts_Trucks_bk_040612.pdf))



**Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach Closest Freeway/  
Highway Freight Truck Infrastructure ATRI-Identified  
Choke Points:<sup>36</sup>**

Distance from Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach	Closest Freeway/ Highway Congestion Choke Points as Identified by ATRI affecting Freight Truck Infrastructure	City	ATRI 2011 Ranking Position Out of 250 Most Congested Choke Points in U.S. affecting Freight Truck Infrastructure
15 miles	I-405 at I-605	Seal Beach, CA	119th
16.1miles	I-110 at I-105	Los Angeles, CA	77th
16.6 miles	I-710 at I-105	Lynwood, CA	33rd
32.1 miles	SR 134 at SR 2	Los Angeles, CA	143rd
33.6 miles	SR 91 at SR 55	Anaheim, CA	110th
40.2 miles	SR 60 at SR 57	Diamond Bar, CA	10th
48.4 miles	I-15 at SR 91	Corona, CA	57th

<sup>36</sup> American Transportation Research Institute, “FPM Congestion Monitoring at 250 Freight Significant Highway Locations” (<http://atri-online.org/2011/10/01/fpm-congestion-monitoring-at-250-freight-significant-highway-locations/>)

**Port of Oakland Closest Freeway/Highway Freight Truck Infrastructure ATRI-Identified Choke Points:<sup>37</sup>**

Distance from Port of Oakland	Closest Freeway/Highway Congestion Choke Points as Identified by ATRI affecting Freight Truck Infrastructure	City	ATRI 2011 Ranking Position Out of 250 Most Congested Choke Points in U.S. affecting Freight Truck Infrastructure[xxxviii]
3.4 miles	I-80 at I-580/I-880	Oakland, CA	41st
11.2 miles	I-880 at I-238	San Leandro, CA	61st
23.3 miles	I-580 at US 101	San Rafael, CA	134th

What then could a disruption in freight truck route transportation possibly look like? We need look no further than the context of recent struggles in Oakland. In 2010, as a part of the national March 4th “Day of Action to Defend Education” a more radical contingent of about 200 protesters broke away from the larger march from Berkeley to Downtown Oakland and stormed onto Interstate 880 effectively forcing Bay Area rush-hour traffic to a standstill for close to two hours. While this action was largely symbolic and the temporary “blockade” was literally comprised only of stubborn human bodies, it still nonetheless points to the fragility of highway infrastructure in certain parts of California. The freeway “takeover” on March 4th took place at

37 Ibid.

the northbound I-880 entrance to what is aptly described by locals as “The MacArthur Maze” after the confluence of the I-580 (MacArthur Freeway), I-880, and I-80 freeways. “The MacArthur Maze” is identified by the ATRI as 41st out of the 250 most congested chokepoints in the US affecting freight truck infrastructure. Freight trucks entering and leaving the Port of Oakland and OIG must necessarily contend with and add to the congestion of “The MacArthur Maze,” and as such it forms a material site for potential freight truck route disruption – with a relatively recent historical precedent of blockading already enacted.

## INTERMODAL RAIL YARDS AND AIR CARGO WAREHOUSES

We end our analysis of circulatory forms within the capitalist global supply chain with two types of high-traffic nodes that we argue are strategically less-important than seaports simply according to their lower total value throughput: intermodal rail yards and air cargo warehouses. This section is admittedly brief for three reasons:

1. We believe that in terms of rail networks that railway lines (high-traffic lines) are more tactically sound to disrupt than intermodal rail yards (high-traffic nodes) – and if generalized, the successful blockading of railway lines makes the blockading of intermodal rail yards redundant.
2. Air cargo transport already possesses inherent limits to the realization of its logistical capacity that make it the less relevant mode out of all the modes of commodity-capital transport previously discussed – i.e. the technological limits to air travel and volume capacity

or the fact that out of all the various logistical transportation modes “air cargo grew [least,] by a meagre 1.4% in 2013, trailing significantly behind the 2.6% increase in freight capacity. That prompted IATA [International Air Transport Association] to call freight markets the ‘biggest worry’ for the airline industry. Although freight traffic has picked up slightly in 2014, IATA warns of ‘trends which are not in the industry’s favour.’” Consider this juxtaposed against rail’s “record intermodal growth” in 2013.<sup>38</sup>

3. Given that intermodal rail yards and air cargo warehouses are high-traffic nodes similar to seaports, we argue that they possess the same inherent weakness of form – width/breadth (though to a lesser extent than seaports) – and as such, we do not feel the need to reiterate our analysis of this weakness of form. Please refer to our discussion of this weakness of form at the end of our section on seaports.

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38 “The Association of American Railroads (AAR) today reported that U.S. rail traffic for 2013 saw record intermodal growth with a slight full year decrease in carloadings. U.S. rail intermodal volume totaled a record 12.8 million containers and trailers in 2013, up 4.6 percent or 564,276 units, over 2012. Carloads totaled 14.6 million in 2013, down 0.5 percent or 76,784 carloads, from 2012. Intermodal volume in 2013 was the highest on record, surpassing the record high totals of 2006 by 549,471 units.” From the Association of American Railroads (<https://www.aar.org/newsandevents/Freight-Rail-Traffic/Pages/2014-01-09-railtraffic.aspx#.U6n7Q41dXUc>)

## California Intermodal Railway Yards

Operating Rail- way Company	Facility	Location
BNSF	Commerce Inter- modal Facility	Commerce, CA
BNSF	Fresno Intermodal Facility	Fresno, CA
BNSF	Los Angeles Inter- modal Facility	Los Angeles, CA
BNSF/UP(trackage rights)	Oakland Interna- tional Gateway (OIG) Intermodal Facility	Oakland, CA
BNSF	San Bernardino In- termodal Facility	San Bernardino, CA
BNSF	Stockton Intermod- al Facility	Stockton, CA
UP	Los Angeles Inter- modal Facility	Los Angeles, CA
UP	LATC	Los Angeles, CA
UP	City of Indus- try Intermodal Facility	City of Industry, CA
UP	ICTF	Long Beach, CA
UP	Lathrop Intermod- al Facility	French Camp, CA

## ON FINANCE CAPITALISM AND THE CIRCULATION OF MONEY-CAPITAL

Starting from the premise that the capitalist sphere of circulation is essentially comprised of both the circulation of capital as commodities and capital as money, we must at least mention the problem money-capital poses for the cartography of the anticapitalist counter-logistics that we have been attempting to map. In regards to the transformation of capital through exchange Marx writes that, “the circulation of money as capital is an end in itself, for the valorization of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement. The movement of capital is therefore limitless.”<sup>39</sup> This forms the basis for the well-known general formula of capital, **M-C-M'** (money exchanged for a commodity exchanged for a larger sum of money). Faced with the restructuring of capital in the 1970s in the first zones of capitalist accumulation, the commodity central to the production of value, labor-power, is essentially pushed out of the production process through technological developments such as wide-spread automation explicitly as a reaction to the crisis precipitated by the worker's movements of the early 1970s. The less actual living-labor involved in the production process, meant that less real wages were being paid, and as a result capitalist firms could extract higher amounts of surplus-value from what little actual variable capital they were ultimately realizing.

Post-Fordist financialization is, as Christian Marazzi argues, a direct result of the fallout from “industrial profits not reinvested in instrumental capital [*specifically variable capital*] and wages.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, as is always the case with cap-

39 Marx, Karl. *Capital Vol. 1*

40 Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*

italism, the fundamental contradictions of its form came to bear down on capital's impetus towards valorization. As Marx points out about this paradox, "...the mechanism of capitalist production takes care that the absolute increase of capital is not accompanied by a corresponding rise in the general demand for labour."<sup>41</sup> An exclusion of labor-power alienates the only consumers of any commodities produced-in-general, and as such capital through its restructuring in the 1970s witnessed an attempt to circumnavigate this truism by the proliferation of the credit economy and the financialization of the global economy. The formula now at play within finance capitalism does away with the transformation of money into other commodities, simply relying on the pure liquidity of the money-capital form as the sole means towards capital's valorization:  $M-M'$  or according to Marx, "money which is worth more money, value which is greater than itself."<sup>42</sup> Interestingly enough, Marx initially uses this formula in *Capital* Volume 1 to describe usury – not far off from today's finance capitalism. As the universal equivalent for all other commodities, the money-form in 21st century finance capitalism circulates faster and in stranger transubstantiated modes than Marx could have ever imagined.

While it is tempting to view money-capital as the blood coursing through the veins of commodity-capital networks, this is simply too reductive a reading of the newer immaterial conduits through which money-capital moves and transforms. The terrain of money-capital's circulation is at once entirely related to the flows of material goods within the global supply chain, and paradoxically, autonomous to such structuring. Just as the "logistics revolution"

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41 Marx, Karl. *Capital Vol. 1*

42 Ibid.

ushered in a whole new language in which to understand and remake the capitalist sphere of commodities circulation through things like just-in-time production, radio frequency identification, and intermodal containerization, finance capitalism created virtual spaces and relations that are all too real in terms of their impact on the global economy. This virtual reconstitution of the money-form is incredibly complex, complete with spaces and relations in the further transubstantiations of “collateralized debt obligations,” “asset-backed securities,” “toxic assets,” “subprime loans,” “leveraged buyouts,” “hedge funds,” etc.<sup>43</sup> This is all to simply acknowledge the profound qualitative difference in blockading or disrupting capital’s circulation in its commodity-form versus its hypermediated money-form. We have no illusions about our ability to effectively disrupt the circulation of money-capital, hence our insistence that in terms of mapping potential chokepoints in the network of capital’s circulation the mere materiality of the global supply chain makes it the more viable terrain for contestation.

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43 It is also worth noting the way in which the theoretical language of money-capital’s circulation is influencing the development of the material practice of capitalist logistics. One revealing example of this integration of virtual and immaterial practices into the development of more efficient transport logistics is the notion of the “Physical Internet.” According to the Physical Internet Initiative: “The Physical Internet is an open global logistics system founded on physical, digital and operational interconnectivity through encapsulation, interfaces and protocols.” Using lessons about how to expedite interconnectivity learned throughout the information age, proponents of the Physical Internet are attempting to transpose what was originally a virtual language onto the materiality of the global supply chain. See: (<http://www.physicalinternetinitiative.org/index.php>)



## CONCLUSION

*“The generalisation of the struggle can only be the generalisation of practices that question proletarian’s existence as proletarians. [...] The generalisation of the struggle, as a coming together of conflicts within struggles, will immediately bring multiple aspects of surplus value production/capitalist reproduction to a halt, thus putting at stake proletarian reproduction itself, necessitating simultaneously the intensification and expansion of what will then be an open insurrection, or probably multiple insurrectionary fronts.”*

-Rocamadur/Blaumachen<sup>44</sup>

We have attempted to sketch out not a program, but a cartographical analysis of that which already exists. What use is any of this, beyond a geospatial recontextualization of aggregated value in the form of commodity-capital? Our aim is that through such analyses a clearer conceptualization emerges of the terrain or stage upon which “a coming together of conflicts within struggles” may materialize. We make no pretense in attempting to articulate what forms of struggle will generalize and thus be realized as communist measures; only that because struggles must happen on material terrains of contestation, we therefore believe that studying such spaces constitutes a worthwhile project. This is not the defining of the form struggle must necessarily take, but *rather the delineation of a space* in which struggles may emerge and generalize if at all. Our hope is that if a disparate set of actions, some evocative of past events like the Port

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44 Rocamadur/Blaumachen, SIC 2, “The Feral Underclass Hits the Streets: On the English Riots and Other Ordeals” (<http://sic.communisation.net/en/the-feral-underclass-hits-the-streets>)

of Oakland shutdown, the I-880 takeover, and CN railway blockades, and others without historical precedents, begin to emerge as a part of future struggles we can situate them within a broader tactical framework and understanding – a map of sorts – and evaluate their merits and limitations within a more clearly elucidated counter-logistics aimed at bringing *“multiple aspects of surplus value production/capitalist reproduction to a halt.”*

**-Degenerate Communism, July 2014**

*Many thanks to the handful of comrades that helped in refining this essay, especially LH.*



## FURTHER READING/RESOURCES

20 Theses on the Subversion of the Metropolis - **Plan B Bureau**

Human Strike Within the Field of the Libidinal Economy  
- **Claire Fontaine**

Railways, Ports, and Utilities Legal Primer - **Civil Liberties Defense Center**

Empire Logistics - **Empire-Logistics.org**

The Factory Without Walls - **Brian Ashton**

Logistics and Opposition - **Alberto Toscano**

La Zad - **secretadmirer.noblogs.org**

Against the Airport and its World - **Anonymous**

Call - **The Invisible Committee**

What is an Apparatus - **Giorgio Agamben**

