



Voices of Resistance from Occupied

London #5

Disorder of the day

Fall 2013

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## DISORDER OF THE DAY

This is the last issue of *Occupied London*, a journal that started in the political freeze-frame that was London in the mid 00s. In December 2008, at the continent's other end, the frames started moving again; as they sped up, new movements, revolts, ripples of transformation appeared. We changed our shape to respond to this unfolding condition. For a few years, we focused on regular blog



updates from the streets in Greece; then, taking a few steps back and a deep breath, we put a book together, trying to understand the state of the antagonist movement in Greece with our comrades.

And now? The frames have reached a dazzling speed; the consensus of democracy's good ol' times has broken and sheds its glass all over the continent, and beyond: the old world is in crisis, and along with it is its previously imposed global consensus on what counts as "progress", "democracy" or "development". Are these the creaks and sighs of a new global order settling, are they the early days of global economic fascism, or, could they be the cracks and moaning of its collapse?

The change in everything that we live through is dramatic - and the only way to respond to this new landscape is by changing the format through which we act, communicate, the way we do and spread our politics. If there is a lesson that we should have learned by now in this prolonged moment of crisis, is that political action that isn't versatile is doomed to be paralyzed in a radical milieu that becomes rapidly outpaced, superseded by the anger of peoples the world over. What has it ever meant to be underground or radical? Whatever the answer, it

had already mattered less and less so in, say, struggles over gender, race, or sexuality - now, with revolts becoming the (dis)order of the day, old identifications become obsolete in street politics, too.

And so, this issue is an end and a beginning. It is the end of Occupied London as it existed so far: as irregular journal issues and as a single blog. From now on, we want to be able to respond faster and more acutely to what is playing out around us. Over the coming months, we will be working on both an expanded version of our "From the Greek Streets" blog and on a web platform that will allow for in-depth analysis of our time of global revolt. And then, on much more... We will not reveal much more about the full future format of Occupied London; suffice to say, we will continue updating the blog while we work on the shape of things to come.

Around four years since our last print issue, we have decided to end this phase of the Occupied London project with one final tribute to our journal format. This, our last issue, features reflections from many recent sites of mass revolts from the past few years: it is reminiscent and eagerly awaiting the times to come...





# CRISIS, CITY AND DEMOCRACY

## NOTES ON THE UPRISING IN TURKEY

*by Ali B.*

The June revolt in Turkey was marked by the heterogeneity of its participants, united in their common contempt for the country's authoritarian prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The uprising spread like wildfire across the country and brought together many different sectors of society who felt sidelined, belittled and trampled upon by his autocratic rule. Although lost in its international reverberations, the initial struggle that gave birth to the uprising was much more than saving a park and definitely much more than trees. It arose from an economic model emphasizing development that acted as a response to a financial crisis knocking at the door. Through its evolution the rebellion created a

rebel geography that captivated the imagination of those who were part of it.

Unlike the recent riots and wild demonstrations in European countries, the uprising in Turkey was not sparked by extreme austerity measures. Having been through heavy neoliberal austerity programs of structural adjustment at the end of the 20th century Turkey could be seen as a post-austerity nation. Neither was it similar to the popular revolts of the Arab Spring which removed multi-decade dictatorships from power resulting in electoral systems. Instead, and similar to its place on the world map, the uprising in Turkey contained elements from

both while also offering its own flavor to these new currents of popular resistance.

## ON CRISIS

Although the uprising is not immediately linked to austerity, it is still deeply related to the financial crisis of 2008. Initially the crisis did hit Turkey but the strategy of the government was to contain it by massive privatization of land for real estate projects and urban renewal, and through this, to redefine Istanbul as an AKP-constructed modern metropolis. The massive increase in large-scale construction projects was tied to an equally large increase in foreign debt. Capital influx was also bolstered since Turkey became a much more lucrative market for speculators after the FED slashed its interest rate following the 2008 collapse. This situation has resulted in Turkey currently having about \$340 billion in external debt (43% of its national income, 2/3 held by the private industry). This liquid capital strengthened the Turkish Lira against the dollar, while financing Erdogan's multiple urban renewal and development projects.

Privatization and debt is ingrained into the Turkish economy and have been its hallmarks since the 80s and 90s when the country was one of the primary targets of IMF and World Bank structural

adjustment policies. But today is distinct both from that period and from current IMF-imposed austerity regimes, such as in Greece. What we are experiencing in Turkey today are debt incurring measures to keep the crisis at bay and implemented as an economic growth strategy. The country has attracted foreign capital due to its balanced national budget, which wards off any fear of extreme inflation. This budget is balanced in roughly the following way: as opposed to implementing austerity, the country's national expenses are being kept mostly constant but with a shifting emphasis towards infrastructural spending for development projects that benefit the bourgeoisie, especially those in construction and its related sectors. National revenue is produced via privatization (the enclosure of land for the aforementioned development projects), indirect regressive taxes (which also have a conservative character such as increased sales tax for alcohol) and foreign debt. This debt is paid off (notably that held by the private sector) by borrowing even more money (readily available thanks to the growth rate) leading to the large sums owed today, a significant portion of which is earmarked to be paid off by the spring of 2014. Debt is incurred in order to keep the budget afloat and provides a corollary for enclosure (privatization) rather than the state being forced to privatize in order to

receive or renegotiate loans (debt) as it was during the period marked by the IMF.

What distinguishes the current neoliberal regime of the AKP from its predecessors is its emphasis on the city and the transformation of Istanbul into a full-fledged metropolis through the privatization of public land. One of the primary strategies for urban transformation has come through giving exceptional powers for land enclosure in 2003 to the Turkish Housing Development Administration (TOKI), which is tied to the office of the prime minister. The revamped TOKI took the lead in privatizing public space for the purposes of gentrifying neighborhoods such as Sulukule or Tarlabası, which had been seen as proletarian eyesores with marginalized identities such as Kurds, transsexuals and Roma people occupying some of the prime real-estate zones of Istanbul. TOKI is now being subsumed under the Orwellian Ministry of the Environment and the City, lead by the former TOKI head, and has taken over many of the powers once possessed by local municipalities.

This land grab and resulting (rent/unearned) income comes both in the form of massive development projects such as a third bridge across the strait of Bosphorus, an ecologically devastating preposterous new canal through

Istanbul connecting the Black sea to the Marmara Sea as well as a tunnel below the strait. These are in addition to the privatization of historic ports such as the Haliçport and Galataport projects and train stations such as Haydarpaşa, with the intention of converting them into high-end condominiums (“residences”), malls or other centers of commerce. Certain central zones in Istanbul now have four separate such malls one beside the other and dotted amongst skyscrapers, all built within the past few years. The enclosure and privatization of public space is accompanied with militarization to quell any dissent as evidenced today by the police state surrounding the Kadıköy ferry terminal in Beşiktaş, slated for privatization in the service of an adjacent luxury hotel. Upon completion, these gated monuments to capitalism are policed by private security guards.

The unrest across Turkey led to sharp drops in the Istanbul Stock Exchange as the financial forecasts became grim. Remarkably, Erdoğan snubbed his nose at these developments as he continued to blame the “interest lobby” (a populist move with anti-semitic undertones in order to cultivate his base since interest is seen as a sin for Islam) and “foreign powers” for the tumult in the streets. His cabinet outright dismissed European Union calls for less police violence. Picking

fighters with the liberal secular bourgeoisie (what we can assume he means by “interest lobby”) or debt-holding European nations does not bode well for the future of the Turkish economy. On the heels of the economic volatility precipitated by the popular uprising came the end of low to zero interest rates (quantitative easing) by the FED. These two factors in concert will no doubt lead to foreign capital flight and the lucrative Turkish economy has already started to exhibit a downward trend.

## ON THE CITY

Any shrewd politician would have been able to manage this revolt without fanning the flames the way Erdoğan did. His obsession over transforming Taksim Square is a sign of anxiety and arrogance due to political weakness and points to his almost feral desire to leave a neo-otoman stamp on the city. The hyper-gentrification and commercialization of Istiklal, a pedestrian avenue that emerges from Taksim Square and is the backbone of the neighborhood of Beyoğlu, and the religious conservative attacks on the street life of bars and cafes in that area are part and parcel of the AKP’s desire to transform the city into a modern, if conservative Islamic Disneyland. Despite this assault, throughout the years Beyoğlu, and the youthful

political culture it is home to has resisted the AKP’s vision for the future.

Many of the city’s protest marches emerge from one end of Istiklal and end at the other, unless they are met with a police attack somewhere in between. A multitude of leftist, feminist, queer, minority, countercultural groups and radical magazines have their offices in the same area. The Saturday Mothers, a group of mostly Kurdish mothers of disappeared or murdered political activists, have been holding a vigil on Istiklal every Saturday since 1995 demanding that those responsible for their children’s lives are brought to justice. Taksim Square is also the hotly contested site of May Day celebrations. These are only some of the numerous influences that have shaped the culture of the neighborhood that became ground zero in the June uprising.

Despite the vibrancy of clubs, bars and cafes in the area there is also an accompanying barrenness that comes from it being an extreme commercial district and shopping zone with a slew of the world’s brands having outlets on Istiklal Avenue. Perhaps anticipating the possible eruption of social discontent, the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul (also belonging to the AKP) repaved the whole of Istiklal Avenue about five years ago. Once a street lined with paving stones, Istiklal now has large

concrete slabs that have reliefs to give the appearance of cobblestones, a similar esthetic with none of the utility.

The psychogeography shifts on the streets that branch off Istiklal, with a multiplicity of independent bars, cafes, bookstores, restaurants and other small businesses. And there are still some cobblestones. These side streets are one of the primary hangout spots for the youth of Istanbul. The fact that many of those confronting the police were in a zone where they had already spent a considerable amount of time and were familiar with was a great advantage. The terrain of the urban revolt was on the side of those resisting.

Many of the street fights would follow a similar pattern. People who amassed on Istiklal Avenue would advance up to the police lines holding the entrance to Taksim Square until faced with an overwhelming amount of tear-gas and water cannons; instead of scattering, the crowd would retreat calmly and build large barricades on the avenue. When the police advanced through the barricades, people would take the parallel side streets and then emerge on Istiklal once again, either further down or behind the police lines. This would continue in the same way until the early morning hours. Not only did many of the street fighters already know the geography

quite well but also there was a large amount of sympathy, if not straight up camaraderie, from the owners and workers of the various establishments around Istiklal. As if fish swimming in the sea, people would dip into any given bar or restaurant and hide until the police had moved by or the tear-gas cleared only to reemerge and converge once again on Istiklal to face the police. It should be noted, however, that after the days of heavy conflict some of this supportive sentiment from businesses has waned, especially with the police encouraging those of them who support the AKP and promising to turn a blind eye to attacks on protestors with knives and sticks.

The battles which were won in the streets were much more victories of will and perseverance than of violence. A perseverance that was grounded in the will to resist the enclosure of commons and take back space. The taking of the square on the 1st of June was not achieved by pushing the police back with a barrage of rocks, it was a result of the determination of the massive amount of people who spontaneously emerged to shock everyone: This was a shock not only for the police, but also those resisting; suddenly, they found each other like never before. Unlike appointments given for street conflicts, such as May Day, where each side prepares their forces and

the odds of winning are extremely low, spontaneous eruptions such as the 31st of May and the 1st of June are when people are the strongest. After two days of non-stop fighting, the police had to retreat from the square and Gezi Park, leaving it to the thousands who moved in and started to construct elaborate barricades up and down all the streets leading to the zone.

Despite being the epicenter, Taksim was by no means the only place where revolt was breaking out in Istanbul, let alone in the rest of Turkey, where there were demonstrations in every major city. Especially in the capital Ankara, fighting persisted long after things had taken a lull in Istanbul. In Istanbul itself, for almost three weeks whole districts were in open revolt against the police and the AKP. In some more well-off neighborhoods such as Beyoğlu, Beşiktaş, Cihangir, Şişli, Kadıköy, but also in poorer neighborhoods with a radical left presence, such as Sarıgazi, Kurtuluş, Gazi, Okmeydanı and Maltepe, the amount of solidarity was unprecedented. People would leave their apartment doors open late into the night so that those still fighting on the street could run away from the police and lock it behind them. Furniture and large appliances were thrown from windows to reinforce barricades as were water reservoirs from rooftops. Windowsills were lined with lemons,

milk and water against the tear-gas. In main streets, where fighting would go on for hours, elderly people would bring food for those fighting. When the police would finally clear a street, residents would come out to their windows and start yelling and swearing at them to get out of the neighborhood. This would be met with another barrage of tear gas canisters, sometimes directly into the houses, for the sheer purpose of silencing the neighborhood.

It is difficult to describe the muscle memory that developed in those three weeks which were interspersed with anticipation of police operations and heavy fighting that would last for days. Leaving your house without the obligatory helmet, goggles and gas mask was more of a faux pas than leaving your cell phone or wallet behind. The taunting of the police in chants imbued with melodies and spirit reminiscent of soccer stadiums gave the crowds a collective form of life that felt invincible. When tear-gas fell, the first reaction was never to panic or run away, but to cheer its arrival. The resistance learned early on that extinguishing the canisters as opposed to throwing them back was much more effective and large jugs of water were brought from homes and stationed permanently in neighborhoods waiting for the inevitable to arrive. Building barricades and advancing them towards police lines was done



without thought and it became second nature to pass bricks hand-to-hand in human chains dozens of people long to construct them. Maybe the Istanbul Revolt did lack a coherence that would allow it to become a veritable insurrection, but it was definitely an insurgency as pertaining to the development of tactics by whole sections and swaths of the city as its partisans.

## ON DEMOCRACY

During the revolt the signs and banners of people would often call Erdoğan a “dictator” and emphasize that they were fighting for “democracy.” Clearly Erdoğan is not a dictator in the sense of Mubarak, Ben Ali or the PRI of Mexico and has been elected fair and square by democratic elections with a near 50% of the vote. There are certain characteristics of the electoral system, most notably a 10% election threshold, that some in the Gezi Resistance hope to reform. But beyond that, when the protestors ask for democracy they are not actually asking for more opportunities to vote but for certain “rights” or freedoms such as the freedom of expression, assembly, a free press and freedom to conduct their personal lives without infringement from the state. The fact that a democratically elected government has become so authoritarian and has trampled

upon “democratic” rights presents an opportunity to critique the democratic system.

The tension between the two interpretations of democracy, as an electoral system vs. as inalienable rights, have become even more acute due to the particular Turkish context of an elected neo-Islamist government attempting to transform a society with a secular legacy. Erdoğan has further exasperated the situation by threatening to unleash his voter base by saying that he is “having trouble keeping the 50% at home.” On the 16th of June, in Istanbul, Erdoğan organized the second of a series of “Respect the National Will” rallies that would occur during the following weeks. Having ordered the eviction of Gezi Park he came to Istanbul as a triumphant conqueror and spoke to a massive crowd of hundreds of thousands. He talked of democracy, how they had indeed democratized Turkey and that if people wanted to oust him the only legitimate way was the ballot box.

There is no overlooking of the fact that the prime minister is able to mobilize huge crowds for his rallies. The AKP enjoys an incredibly subservient media, a well-oiled political machine which amongst other public services controls transportation (routinely offering free transport for its rallies while canceling services for rival events) and is incredibly well organized

within a patriarchal and nepotistic party structure. It is possible that the resistance might not win a headcount in the squares, but this is why the experience of the commune created in Gezi Park and the street battles which surrounded it are a testament against the limitations of the bourgeois democratic system, despite some of the participants' insistence that it is a fight for democracy. Looking at content and experience rather than quantity and votes gives us a clue for a way out of the democratic stranglehold. Mutual aid, solidarity and direct action, all of which have been the hallmarks of the Gezi Resistance are in fact the antithesis to the democratic system run by elections and regulated by representatives. In fact, the Gezi Resistance was profoundly anti-democratic in the sense that it barricaded itself against the guardians of bourgeois democratic relations, the police. In another sense it was incredibly more democratic as people who were not agents of the state could come and go freely as they pleased, in stark contrast to the closure and militarization of the park by the democratically elected AKP for weeks after the police seized it on June 15. The two conceptions of democracy, as elections and as rights, are posed for a profound severance.

The fickleness of Erdoğan's democracy has truly come to light,

especially concerning the peace process with the PKK, put into motion since March. Maybe due to closing ranks in the aftermath of Gezi, or out of reprisal since important Kurdish figures including PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan himself expressed support for the uprising, but most likely because of already existing insincerity towards the process, Erdoğan is not holding his side of the bargain with the PKK. This is despite a great number of Kurdish guerrillas already having left the battlefield by crossing out of Turkish borders. Erdoğan has recently reneged on constitutional reforms to include the Kurdish identity and language and there are ongoing construction projects for dozens of new military police outposts in Northern Kurdistan (within the borders of Turkey). Even more atrociously, on June 28, soldiers opened fire on a demonstration in Lice to protest the construction of one of these outposts killing one and critically injuring many others. Northern Kurdistan has had to endure such violence for decades but this particular attack might have been a turning point for the Kurdish struggle for freedom and autonomy. Having endured police violence in the preceding weeks those who were part of the Gezi Resistance, who are mostly concentrated in the western and non-kurdish zones of the country, immediately staged

huge solidarity demonstrations against this attack in the Kurdish territory. Before the Gezi experience it would have been unimaginable for such expressions of solidarity to spontaneously erupt from a non-Kurdish segment of society. As opposed to a vacuous democratic peace process, people had enacted revolutionary solidarity.

Those who have been evicted from Gezi Park are attempting to recreate its spirit in popular assemblies that have mushroomed around Istanbul and in other cities. The proliferation of these public forums has led some to claim this is an experience in direct democracy. Regardless of what one might call them, they are a refreshing form of political being for those who have lost hope in a democratic system. It is still unclear what shape these forums might take, but at their onset and during the largest participation they've had, they would forego any sort of decision making structure that would pretend to speak and act on behalf of the whole assembly.

Apart from some exceptions, by and large the crowds did not seem to opt for a crippling consensus system, neither for a majority vote negating the agency of minority opinions. Instead, proposals would be made from the stage and if there seemed to be enough interest, action would be taken. Sometimes this would be in the form of a spontaneous march

and sometimes in the form of a working group.

## THE HORIZON

Financial crisis pushes democratic governments (in terms of elections) to become undemocratic (in terms of rights) and in Turkey this has been felt more acutely due to the conservative nature of the government managing the crisis. The twist and innovation of the rebellion was that it did not emerge against the classic austerity response to crisis, but against development and enclosure based on a prosperous, albeit temporary, period instead. This twist was also observed in the visceral rage that marked Erdoğan's speeches, as he couldn't seem to comprehend the ingratitude of the people he rules, especially while one neighboring country is in the grips of a civil war and the other in a deep economic crisis. Prosperity and massive construction projects have not created a subservient population and when the delayed crisis eventually hits Turkey, those affected might have more in mind than to return to the good old days of liquid capital.

Many activists had been fighting the different manifestations of Erdoğan's neoliberal city and this has been a struggle continuing for almost a decade. Neither they nor anyone else predicted the contagious revolt that would spark

from a battle against developing a park, what had seemed to be just another losing fight amongst many. Those defending the city commons converged with almost the whole spectrum of social movements and were fueled by a visceral hatred of the police and a patriarchal prime minister. It became clear that revolts happen for psychic reasons as well as for material ones. Forecasters of social revolts (i.e. orthodox marxists) should learn this and many other lessons from June 2013 in Turkey. In fact, forecasting is both impossible and counter-productive: it is best to be prepared for social explosions rather than to attempt to predict them. Those of us who are part of anti-authoritarian and anti-state currents must always be ready to push revolts, like that of Istanbul, to their farthest limits and beyond. In moments like these, which promise to be more frequent around the globe, whoever is most organized is able to transmit their ideas and tactics in the most effective manner and become more potent within the rebellion.

A further lesson concerns the ideal form of the revolutionary worker. Those who see the worker as the primary revolutionary agent must begin (as if they have not had sufficient reasons to do so already) to shift their gaze away from labor unions. Even the most leftist labor confederations in Turkey, such as DISK and KESK, were impotent in

propelling the movement into the realm of the economy. Although this is mostly no fault of their own and has more to do with the historical decimation of organized labor by the state in Turkey, it was also clear that beyond the classical factory or industrial worker, the formally unorganized, precarious, white-collar and diploma holding proletariat on the brink of unemployment now have the potential to take many initiatives in social revolts. Even the traditional blue collar proletariat might hold more revolutionary potential outside their workplaces, where they find themselves under the dominion of their unions. A crucial turning point for similar rebellions will come through the arrival of the antagonism from the squares and parks into the arena of commerce and work where this unorganized proletariat either already works at or at least is kept docile with the promise of working at.

Turkey is not the only country where democracy, which is supposed to produce social peace and prosperity has had its alarm bells ringing. An even more dramatic example is Egypt where only a year after the democratic election of Morsi the revolutionaries of Tahrir Square came back in order to continue where they had left off. So much for the pundits who were quick to label the Egyptian January 25th movement as one purely

against the dictatorship of Mubarak. Although the real movement of the people has once again been stalled by the Egyptian military one can predict that this will not be the end of the spirit of Tahrir. Looking from Istanbul and considering that both the military drafted constitution of Egypt and the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brotherhood are modeled upon Turkish examples, it appears that there is a growing number of people who desire to do away with both.

The rebel geographies of the world are becoming less and less content with the poor choice between a democracy or a dictatorship and social explosions challenging the roots of the liberal democratic paradigm are sure to continue. In the meantime the anti-capitalist and anti-state revolutionaries of the world must not be idle. Getting organized and staying active so that our valuable muscle memory does not atrophy is crucial. Updating our age-old praxis to consider these emerging new contexts and coming up with a fresh and appealing formulation of a post-capitalist world based on contemporary social, ecological and economic realities is also just as important. Ultimately what will make us the most effective within these revolts is to produce in action the new sets of social relations that will expand our sequestered horizons.





# repressive MEMORIES

TERROR, INSURGENCY, AND THE DRUG WAR

*by Dawn Paley*

In 2010 and 2011, grenades exploded at city hall buildings in Reynosa, Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Victoria, four cities in the Mexican border state of Tamaulipas.

Organized crime was blamed for the explosions, particularly members of the Zetas or of the Gulf Cartel. I visited the

region in early 2011, at a loss for what could be driving criminal groups to fight against local governments that are, for all intents and purposes, under their control.

It wasn't until I met Francisco Chavira Martínez in early 2011 that things began to become clear. The first time we met, he suggested we eat together at the

back of a Reynosa restaurant that caters to well-heeled locals. Waiters dressed like penguins bowed in and out, while other tables were occupied mostly by older men. Chavira spoke loudly, unafraid. He was the only person out of over a dozen I interviewed in the city who agreed to let me use his real name.

Local governments “use car thieves to steal the cars of anyone who opposes them; house thieves who will rob your house to frighten you; narcotraffickers, who they use as a way to create fear in the people, so that you don’t participate, so that you don’t raise your voice or go against the government; they even send their own to throw grenades at city halls,” Chavira explained.<sup>1</sup>

Maybe he noticed the quizzical look on my face. I didn’t yet grasp how terror works, and the purposes it serves. “Why?” he asked himself, pausing for a moment. “So that the people are scared and don’t go to City Hall to make demands; they won’t go and demand that public accounts be transparent, or [ask] what the money is being spent on.” Months after our interview, Chavira, a candidate for the left-leaning Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), was arrested on trumped-up charges and held in jail until after the elections, in what he referred to as a “legalised kidnapping” by the state.

The second time I met with Chavira was two years later, in early

2013. We ran into each other in front of the US embassy in Mexico City at a demonstration organized by families and friends of people who are working without papers in the US. I took him to a nearby café where we did a short interview. While we walked he marveled at how wonderful it felt to be able to walk down the street without fear, something no longer possible in his hometown.

Chavira’s comments to me that afternoon need some introduction.

The official line on the drug war, which is parroted by governments and the media, claims that the war in Mexico is between bad guys (drug traffickers) and good guys (police and the army, assisted by the US, Canada, and EU countries). According to this version of events the “bad guys” are organized into the following hierarchy: at the top are the Capos, or drug lords, then come their Generals or security chiefs, who look after the boss and his regions, then the *jefes de plaza*, local bosses in charge of a particular border or drug distribution area.

I call this frame (which is the dominant frame) the cartel wars discourse. Cartel wars discourse includes a few salient features: an almost exclusive reliance on state/government sources for information, a guilty-until-proven-innocent/victims-were-involved-in-drug-trade bias, and a foundational

belief that cops involved in criminal activity are the exception, not the rule, and that more policing improves security.<sup>2</sup>

It's been a little more than two years since I started reporting on and researching different facets of the transformation taking place in Mexico, which I consider to be a kind of counter-revolution and a deepening of the North American Free Trade Agreement through intense militarization. Once one begins to consider the wide ranging social and economic consequences of the "war on drugs," official versions of what is taking place stop making sense, almost completely. They do more to obscure the real dynamics of the war than they reveal. It is what I learn from people like Chavira that teach me what's really going on in Mexico-at-War.

Tucked away on the back balcony of a bookstore-café in Mexico City's nightclub district (right across from the US Embassy), post-jail Chavira was a lot like he was before he was put away. He said he actually managed to enjoy his eight months inside, working with prisoners to better their living situations, and organizing so that children imprisoned with their parents could be afforded the semblance of a normal childhood. I asked Chavira if he could explain how the narco-war interacts with the state in Mexico. "In my point of

view, I think the true criminal, the true capo in Mexico is the president of the republic, the governors are the same in each of their state, and the *jefes de plaza* are the mayors," Chavira told me. "They all got where they are with financing from illicit sources. They protect each other; they are the same thing."

We talked a little longer, about everything—about migration, about the dead (he speculates that the official number of dead because of the drug war since 2006, which is now around 60-70,000, represents a fraction of the victims), and about our own lives. Just like the time before, I left the conversation with even more questions about the war, but also with the conviction that seeking space to develop other understandings and narratives of the war in Mexico is an urgent and important task.

#### TERROR AND THE HEMISPHERE PLAN

What is happening today with regards to the drug war in Mexico has important precedent elsewhere in the hemisphere, namely, in Colombia. There is a legitimate focus on how events in Colombia preceded what is taking place in the "drug war" in Mexico. Key to the importance of Colombia from 2000 onwards in understanding Mexico today is Plan Colombia and



the multi-billion-dollar investment the US government made in the war on drugs there. Plan Colombia officially ended in 2006; the next year, the Mérida Initiative, or Plan Mexico, started. In 2008, the US introduced the Central America Regional Security Initiative (Plan Central America), and in 2010, the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (Plan Caribbean). Central to all of these initiatives is the militarization of local, state, and federal police, and an increased domestic deployment of police and army (supposedly) against drug producers, traffickers, and sellers.

History teaches us that the amount of drugs being trafficked to the United States did not decrease significantly because of Plan Colombia.

I argued in my 2012 essay “Drug War Capitalism” that the application of the Plan Colombia model in Mexico and elsewhere has more to do with improving the conditions for foreign direct investment and encouraging the expansion of capitalism than it does with stemming the flow of drugs.<sup>3</sup>

But when it comes to the application of repression and terror in Mexico, the tactics employed by the state repressive apparatus go far beyond the Colombia experience, and are nourished by generations of US and other imperial warfare around the world.<sup>4</sup> In this context,

I believe the experiences of US-backed counterinsurgency war in Central America, and in Guatemala in particular, are of great importance in understanding events in Mexico and the region today. Though rarely considered as linked to events in Mexico today, these conflicts must be considered part of the repressive memory that has been activated in order to carry out the ongoing “war on drugs” in Mexico, Central America, and elsewhere.

As Laleh Khalili argues in her work on Palestine and counterinsurgency, “officials and foot soldiers, technologies of control, and resources travel not only between colonies and metropolises but also between different colonies of the same colonial power and between different colonial metropolises, whereby bureaucrats and military elites actively study and borrow each other’s techniques and advise one another on effective ruling practices.”<sup>5</sup>

There are certain lines of continuity among the wars (including genocide) in Central America in the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s that are clearly traceable to Mexico today. For example, grenades used by the Zetas in attacks in Mexico have been traced back to the 1980s, when they were sold by the US to the military of El Salvador.<sup>6</sup> Another thread connecting the 36-year war in Guatemala to today

is the Kaibiles, the country's elite special forces, whose members were responsible for horrific massacres then, and who today are active both as an elite government force and as members of criminal groups.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these concrete examples, many of the practices of terror used by armies such as Guatemala's have resurfaced in Mexico and Central America at the hands of criminal groups. In today's war, the "war on drugs," violence deployed against civilians—especially migrants and the poor—comes from official, uniformed troops, as well as from irregular forces including "drug cartels" or paramilitary groups.

The *New Oxford American Dictionary's* primary definition of terror is "extreme fear: the use of such fear to intimidate people, esp. for political reasons; terrorism." Mass killings and the public display of bodies is one example of a terror technique, practiced over centuries, by government and irregular forces, often in tandem with the imposition of political and economic regimes. Terror plays a specific role in ensuring control over the population.

"In all its forms, terror was designed to shatter the human spirit. Whether in London at the birth of capitalism or in Haiti today, terror infects the collective imagination, generating an assortment of demons and monsters."<sup>8</sup> Whether it

is bodies hung up on public display or cut into pieces and dumped one on top of another on a highway, or explosions and massacres leaving dozens of civilians dead and injured, Mexico has seen an unprecedented array of bone-chilling episodes since former President Felipe Calderon launched the drug war in December of 2006.<sup>9</sup>

Disappearance is another technique used against civilians and activists in Mexico, where at least 26,000 people (as of March 2013, this figure is consistently revised upwards) have been disappeared since 2006.<sup>10</sup> It is also routinely practiced in Central America (the use of disappearances against political activists is said to have been invented in Guatemala), Colombia, and elsewhere. Disappearance is a selective terror tactic perfected by Central American armies, who kidnap and torture their victims before summarily executing them and burying the bodies in clandestine graves.

The horrific actions carried out against civilians by criminal groups in the context of the drug war are regularly featured on TV, shared on social media, and printed in newspapers. Few media reports explain and contextualize the use of terror; instead, they portray it as random, wanton, out-of-control violence. The police and army are often presented as the only institutions capable of responding to

such acts, which are soon forgotten, and whose perpetrators are often absolved through impunity, which is created by the state repressive apparatus and institutionalized by the state. The reproduction of these media narratives on screens, iPhones, and tabloids across the region terrorizes the entire society.

Part of this transformation is the transformation of life ways and socialization as part of a general shift towards a more repressive society. Mobility—understood as peoples’ ability to move freely on their own will—is restricted by increasing border surveillance and police and military checkpoints, as well as by the fear generated through mass murders of bus passengers, shootouts on major roadways, and disappearances that occur while the victim is traveling. Reduced mobility is one of the first impacts that terror has on the affected population. Meanwhile, forced migration and involuntary displacement increase as the transition to a more repressive

society claims victims and threatens survivors.

As described by Guatemalan writers Gomis, Romillo, and Rodríguez in the early 1980s, “With domination through terror, in addition to the physical elimination of those who oppose the interests of the regime, there is also the pursuit of ‘the control of a social universe made possible through the intimidation induced by acts of destruction... (and with) acts of terror there is an overall impact on the social universe, —at a social and generalized level—, of a whole series of psychosociological pressures which impose an obstacle to possible political action.”<sup>11</sup>

The notions of opposition and political action described in the quotation above need not call to mind guerrilla organizations or even a highly organized public. The end goal of terror can be as simple as preventing residents from requesting even the most basic level of openness from state institutions,



as described by Chavira at the beginning of this article.

### WHO ARE THE INSURGENTS?

Insurgent, in noun form, is defined by the *New Oxford American Dictionary* as follows: “a rebel or revolutionary.” In 2010, Hillary Clinton, former US Secretary of State, compared the situation in Mexico to an insurgency. “It’s looking more and more like Colombia looked 20 years ago,” she told delegates at a Council on Foreign Relations event. Drug cartels “are showing more and more indices of insurgencies,” she said.<sup>12</sup> In 2009, the head of the US military stated that he backed the use of counter insurgency in Mexico.<sup>13</sup>

Reading information from the US government and the status quo media, one finds a careful reiteration that the war in Mexico is non-political. “The Mexican gangs are motivated by profit, and have no visible ideological agenda. Their only political goal is weaker law enforcement,” reads a 2011 report by the Soros-funded research group Insight Crime.<sup>14</sup> As I outlined in “Drug War Capitalism,” crime/drug trafficking groups (and particularly Los Zetas) play a role closer to that of paramilitary groups than of an insurgent group.

“The Zetas are a paramilitary force,” Dr. William Robinson, author

of *A Theory of Global Capitalism*, told me when I interviewed him in 2011. “Basically it’s the creation of paramilitarism alongside formal militarization, which is a Colombian model.”<sup>15</sup>

Paramilitarization took place in two waves in Colombia, the first as state-created and elite-supported groups formed in the 1960s and ’70s, and later as elite-created, state-supported groups through the 1980s and ’90s.<sup>16</sup> The second wave of paramilitarization in Colombia took place as the cocaine industry began to reap previously unforeseen profits for local drug runners, with the drug runners representing a new elite group whose irregular forces were backed by the state. The latter wave is when the parallel militarization-paramilitarization process mentioned by Robinson took place. Those impacted by these processes are, of course, poor people in urban and rural areas across Colombia, where there are over four million internally displaced people. According to a paper published in *World Development*, “Paramilitary groups not only bear the bulk of the responsibility, they are also more effective in instigating displacement.”<sup>17</sup>

One example of how Zetas are more like a paramilitary group than an insurgent group is evidenced by events like the murder

of 72 migrants in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, in the summer of 2010. This kind of act directly serves the US foreign policy goal of discouraging migration from Central America. Massacres and mass kidnappings and extortion are *always* political acts linked to the establishment of control over or elimination of a given community and, by extension, its territory.

If we understand the role of groups like Los Zetas as being closer to a paramilitary group than an insurgent group, and we are told that the US is backing a counterinsurgent strategy in Mexico, we must then ask ourselves: Who are the insurgents in this war? At this juncture, it is particularly useful to reflect upon recent history in Guatemala.

Through the 36-year conflict there, 200,000 people were killed, mostly by the state, and another 50,000 disappeared. The war in Guatemala had three basic phases. The first, from 1960 to 1980, consisted of selective and clandestine strategies, mostly against leftists and political opponents. The second, a transitional phase practiced over a single year, 1981, included selective and clandestine as well as massive and open acts of state terror. From 1982 on, the country lived through the generalization of terror and psychological operations designed to control the entire population,

especially Mayan communities, some of which were politically organized. The victims of the conflict were principally men but also women and children; many of the dead were executed merely for belonging to a social or ethnic group, not because they held any particular ideology. While there were guerrilla movements in Guatemala at this time, entire rural and Indigenous populations were essentially considered insurgent groups in the war.

In Guatemala, “the development of terror and the politics of terror have their origin in the incapacity of the state to confront social conflict through consensual methods; its objective was to inhibit any attempt at opposition emerging from civil society as a whole or from specific groups within it.”<sup>18</sup> This sentiment is echoed in a forthcoming essay by Kristian Williams, who writes that “from the perspective of counterinsurgency, resistance is not simply a matter of the population (or portions of it) refusing to cooperate with the state’s agenda; resistance comes as a consequence of the state failing to meet the needs of the population.”<sup>19</sup>

Today in Mexico, insurgents could be considered members of social worlds outside of the dictates of the hegemonic, transnational marketplace. Communal landowners and street

vendors (people in the informal economy) could thus be labeled insurgents along with migrants and Indigenous peoples. Already, these groups find common cause as those who fill mass graves, and as those upon whom the brunt of terror tactics are deployed.

One of the crucial differences between today's wars and those of Central America in the 1980s is that the perpetrators of many (but not all) of the most gruesome massacres and acts in the drug war are so called "drug cartels." This demonstrates how in addition to the experiences in Central America through armed conflicts there, repressive techniques employed in the war in Colombia through the 1990s and 2000s are influencing the war-making process in Mexico. In taking a broader view of the drug war in Mexico and looking at who the victims of violence are, it is essential to consider how state forces in Guatemala were using the specific language of insurgency when in fact the entire population was being targeted. This was taking place with open, and later tacit, US support. It follows that such language and barbarity may be transposed onto the drug war in Mexico, Central America, and elsewhere today, and that we should not lose sight of the region's history, often ignored in the context of the drug war.

How we understand the so-called non-political insurgency in

Mexico and the state response to it helps inform our understanding of the entire drug war project, as well as possible future repressive strategies in other parts of the world. Take, for example, a recent US State Department push to promote the ideological framework for bringing the drug war to West Africa, claiming that "Transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking, is a major threat to security and governance throughout West Africa."<sup>20</sup> Seeding these ideas in Africa and elsewhere opens new possibilities for US agencies to justify the need to intervene, as they have in Mexico.

One of the most glaring misconceptions about the war in Mexico, and the drug war more generally, is that it is somehow post-political or non-political. It is foolish to only ascribe "political" status to a war when there is a national liberation movement or a guerrilla struggle. The war in Mexico is political: it is a counter-revolution, 100 years late. It is decimating communities and destroying some of the few gains from the Mexican Revolution that remained after the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1994.

For people like Francisco Chavira, speaking out against the political class and their entanglement with criminal groups will continue to be a dangerous activity. For hundreds of thousands

of others who have lost loved ones, there will be no end to the suffering generated by this war, which is about so much more than drugs. In Mexico, according to Robinson, authorities are struggling to manage the contradictions generated by massive inequalities and by global capitalism. The savagery, panic, and terror of the drug war embody the 21st-century state response to these conditions.



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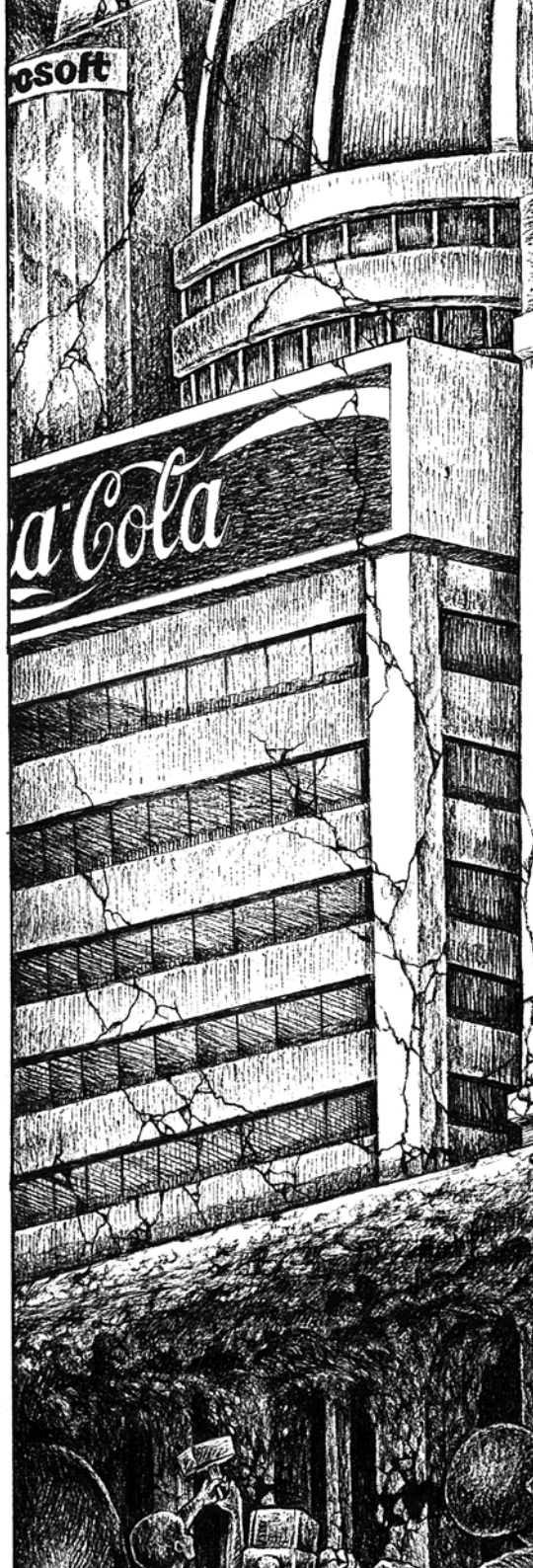
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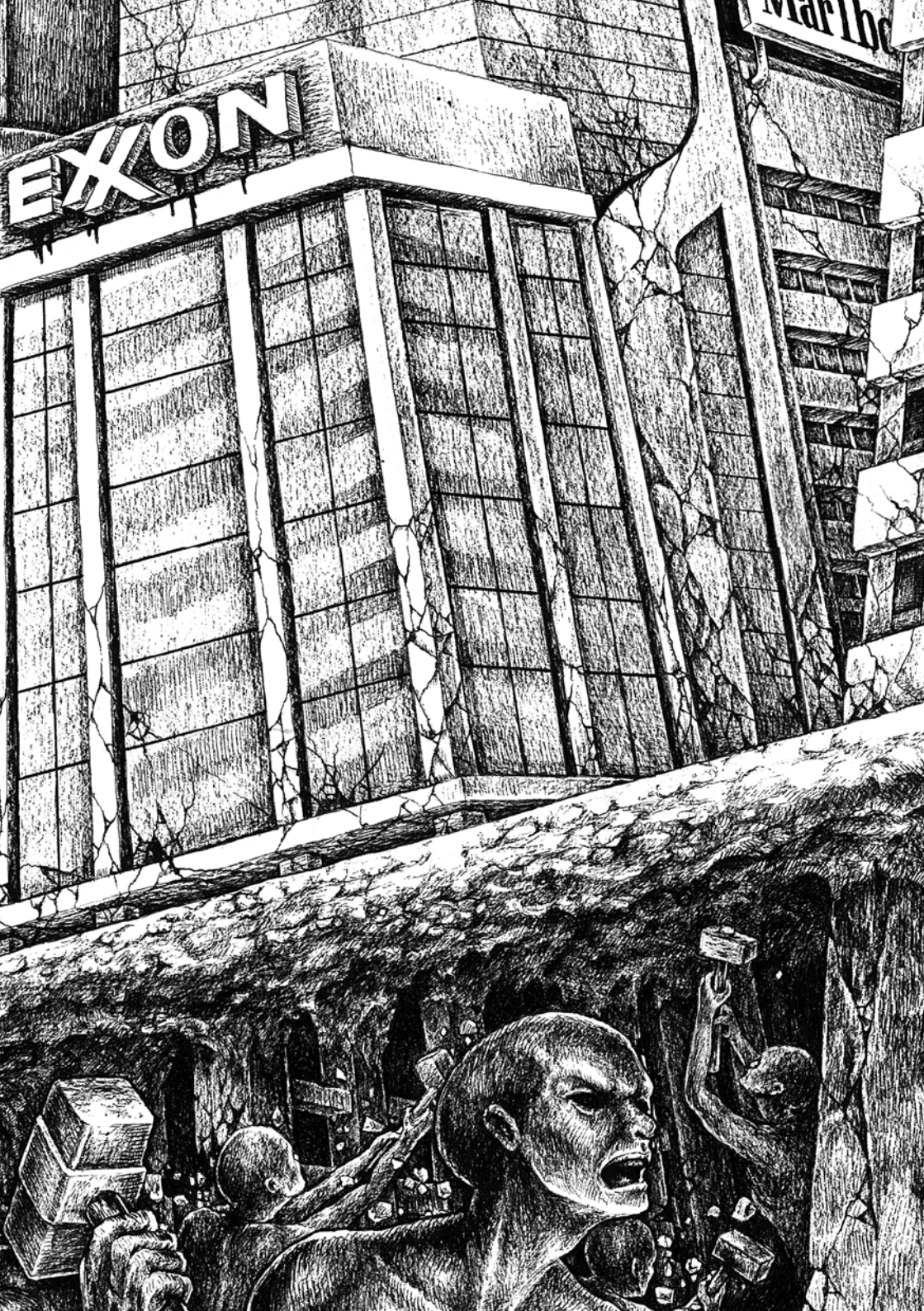
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a movement of  
**ANTAGONISM**  
in the city

LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES  
EVEN IN THE MOST HOPELESS CASES

*by Alessio Lunghi*

Athens, February 2013. It had been ten years since I last visited the city. Back then, I was involved in a struggle to release seven comrades (known as the ‘Thessaloniki 7’) that had been brutally arrested and tortured at the protest against the EU summit in Thessaloniki, in June 2003. They were nearing the end of a long hunger strike, the end being either death or freedom: luckily, it was the latter. During those days, London couldn’t seem further away. With my limited knowledge of the Athenian city-scape, its complex and conflictual neighbourhoods where political memory was as present as the layers of graffiti and political posters that adorned every wall,

lamppost, dumpster and bank... It was far from a so-called post-political, post-industrial, post-ideological, post-whatever city like London. Like many things in Athens, and indeed Greece, they are left unreconstructed. From left to right, the methods, the slogans, the divisions continue to exist and to regenerate. Conflict remains apparent and the rebellious spirit that surges more often than not, still reminds us how the will for a collectivity not mediated by institutions or markets articulates itself and continues to shape the city.

Heading down to Exarcheia, what is termed the “anarchist neighbourhood” by anarcho-tourists like myself, due to the high density of anarchists and leftists that have lived and worked in the area over the decades, occupied spaces, “stekia” or clubs for dozens of political groups, bars, print shops and publishers all in close proximity to the Polytechnic, where the uprising against the military junta broke out in on November 17th 1973. Back in 2003 it came as a shock to me that the police were not allowed to set foot on any recognised university campus in Greece, having been given the status of asylum under the socialist PASOK government in 1982. This concession was given in face of the blood of 24 civilians (some will say a lot more) massacred by the

colonels’ regime. The contract of the state with the people in struggle for all those years, the insurance of the freedom of speech and thought away from state intervention and police repression, was revoked on August 2011, when the asylum was abolished as part of a series of higher education reform measures. And yet of course its memory is still alive: both the stage (the streets, the neighbourhoods) and the actors (the people who lived and fought during those days) are still there; the struggle is told through stories, remembered in songs and poems, graffiti and images. Though those memories still exist, they may often not be enough in themselves to invoke the everyday citizens to rise up anew to defend the legacy of those struggles.

I wouldn’t have been surprised if the same graffiti I saw ten years prior had been left intact; what, after all would have been the purpose of removing it? To cleanse an idea? To sterilise the capacity for such sentiments to be given a platform? It reminded me when some friends in Camden, North London, decided to graffiti a newly opened Gap and Starbucks – both of which were some of the first high street brands to open in what had been a non-homogenous, bohemian and distinct part of the city. After spraying slogans on windows, walls and part of the bridges crossing over the canal, the morning quickly came,

ready for the tens of thousands of tourists to descend on the area. I had gone back out, in the hope of taking some pictures of our fine work only to discover that all of it had been washed off: the windows spotlessly clean, the bridge by Camden Lock even repainted with the correct paint colour. What we had hoped to achieve, a disruption of sterility, was swiftly dealt with. What Camden council did in two hours, the Athenian municipality failed to do in ten years. And this form of innocuous policing of space continues: Everyday that I walk through Camden to work, a new semi-political (we are of course post-political aren't we?) slogan appears in front of the job centre on a small white wall. Every following day, the wall is repainted, every following day a new slogan appears, then repainted, and so on: both parties seem reluctant to concede.

I had a week to spend in Athens. We travelled by car to the squatted botanical gardens in the

westerns suburb of Petroupoli. The gardens, which were built for the Olympic games of 2004, apparently only opened and were staffed for a few months after the games ended, before the municipality ran out of money and desire to keep them open. The space was occupied by anarchists who have since put it to use as a political-cultural venue for the neighbourhood. I always judge how active a group or movement is based on the amount of initiatives they organise; on the wall in the foyer of one of the buildings, dozens of monthly posters were advertising a diversity of events with a strong antifa element throughout. It was interesting to see a space abandoned by the municipality, left to decay, to be then brought back into use by the community. It is interesting as the state will recede and renounce their control sometimes with little contestation. The ability to contest a space, to aspire to create commons, is a great potential outcome wherever there is a need and good sense.

Heygate Estate, Elephant & Castle, South London. In sharp contrast with most of London, the Heygate estate, this sprawling mass of concrete tower blocks built in 1974 as social housing for 3,000 people, lays deserted. It is now waiting for bulldozers to make way for 1,000 luxury urban living apartments, sold on the international market as far away as China. Heygate stands, with periodic patrols by private security and police, as the perfect location for street art to flourish and illegal black economies to find refuge. The Heygate has been taken back into another era, albeit temporary. It illustrates that when areas are suspended from the normal runnings of things, when more than just nature attempts to reclaim them, at that time, not one but many alternatives flourish. Heygate reminded me us of the de-industrialised areas of many Italian cities, with their large abandoned factories that were occupied by the antagonist movements as social centres to provide a surplus space and time in which to live and organise. Though Heygate is empty, its several thousand flats long evicted and boarded up, it still represents a glimpse of what occurs elsewhere, and how close such possibilities may be for us in the future.

Ed Soja comments on his experiences traversing the Bonaventure Hotel in downtown

Los Angeles, in the way the aim of the city, the city of control is, is a submission to authority. He reflects that the “postmodern city de-centres you, makes you feel lost, dislocated. You feel that your only recourse is to submit to authority. You’re helpless, you’re made helpless, you’re peripheralised, you’re lost in these spaces. And the way you accommodate yourself to them and the way you survive in them is essentially to submit to forms of overseeing, social control, authority. Often invisible authority, because even part of being lost is that even if you are willing to submit to authority, you can’t find it”. I can completely relate to this, I think many feel it: cities produce these feelings precisely because of their submissive effect; they induce a subject, prevent and hinder meaningful forms of collectivity to emerge. Their stability and domination means our continual dislocation and alienation from our immediate urban environment: The sterile, banal, functional and instrumental, the coming to life of the CGI graphics of the glossy brochures advertising new “urban living” developments. Their normal is far from normal. Their normal is abnormalness, framed by those moments of social conflict and re-imagination that occurs when struggles appear and attempt to reconfigure the urban. What we experience as incidental or

innocuous and unconscious, is the totality of violence. David Harvey, who has done much to reorient the urban dynamics in class struggles, claims: “today’s working class is part of a wider configuration of classes in which the struggle centres on the city itself. I replace the traditional concept of class struggle with the struggle of all those who produce and reproduce urban life.” And it is this capacity to reproduce urban life as a means of struggle that holds a potential for anyone who wishes to see things become different. The creation of a politics that interconnects with the urban, the territory, as the sites of our political practice and by that, reflect the local specificities that would enable the territory to become amenable to political action.

The city continues to act, directed by capital investment programmes, public works, the uprooting and displacement of established areas, the creating of non-places – places with no history – sterile, vacuous. “The idea of a common is also the construction of a social base as a precondition,” tells us Silvia Federici. Yes, for us to even talk of commons, we must first understand what are their preconditions, what can be constructed now, to enable future struggles to play out. When we find ourselves immersed in struggles with little resources, we should aim

to mobilise the resources we have now and to acquire the new ones needed. The discontinuity between cycles of struggles render these impotent as time and time again, the initial surge of enthusiasm recedes, either through repression or frustration. Our future struggle contributions rely precisely on our ability to maintain ourselves as dormant actors between this discontinuity, with some foresight that we haven’t had so far.

I stop and look at the street art on the pillars outside the botanical gardens. I ask a friend if the beautifully painted figures represented anyone in particular. He points to one: Katerina Gogou. ‘She was a poet, an anarchist, she committed suicide in 1993’; she wrote a very famous poem called “Patisson”...

*‘In dirty blind alleys, rotten teeth,  
faded out slogans, bass clothes  
cabinet smell of piss, antiseptics  
and moulded sperm. Torn down  
posters. Up and down. Up and down  
Patisson. Our life is Patisson.’*

The city is full of stories like this: when we stop telling them, that’s when we lose everything.







# heroes

## OF THE STREET

### THREE RADICAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN BRAZIL THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

*by Tucker Landesman*

Urban resistance has rocked Brazil since June 2013. On the largest day of protests, 20 June, two million citizens took to the streets in over 100 cities and municipalities. One million marched on the streets of Rio de Janeiro until police fired tear gas, flash grenades, pepper spray, and rubber bullets from police lines, helicopters, motorcycles, and armored trucks. Both national and international media scrambled to explain the uprisings, allowing far-flung experts, everyone from Manuel Castells to Francis Fukuyama to Slavoj Žižek, to mold the protests to their respective academic theories and political ideologies. But the reality of the Brazilian resistance

is not easily summed up in a single essay. From the cacophony of voices on the streets, one usually hears what they listen for.

In this essay I do not offer explanations, much less conclusions, about why urban citizens of Brazil are rising up to protest everything from rampant political corruption to individual municipal policies concerning public transportation. The task is too large, the nuances too many. Rather, I outline three groups (in one case a tactic) that I find inspiring and that I argue are fundamental in order to grasp the ongoing tumult. My personal experience is specific to Rio de Janeiro, where I have

accompanied the protests since their commencement; however I start with the group in São Paulo responsible for organizing the first protests against unjustifiably high bus fare. Those protests reverberated throughout the country and continue in various forms of resistance and movement building.

## MOVIMENTO PASSE LIVRE / THE FREE FARE MOVEMENT

It all started when a group of two-dozen urban transport activists organized a protest in the city of São Paulo against a 20-centavo (about €0.07) hike in bus fare. Within a week tens of thousands took to the streets. “It’s not just about the twenty cents” was chanted and written across banners. São Paulo’s residents were fed up of costly transport that delivered poor service while further enriching private companies that hold public contracts, which pay their employees pitifully low wages and receive substantial public subsidies.

The Movimento Passe Livre (MPL) has been resisting neoliberal urbanism since its inception in 2004 in São Paulo, although the group cites protests in 2003 against high bus fares in the cities of Salvador, in the north, and Florianopolis, in the south, as the first moments of inspiration. The MPL is a group of

urban activists originally composed of a few university professors, undergraduates, and high school students (although now their ranks have grown considerably due to their sudden national fame). They organize according to horizontal, direct-democracy principles. They have no designated leader, and they have a loose structure that allows for a national network of affiliates (currently in seven cities) which follow common principles and trajectories agreed upon at national assemblies but which otherwise act autonomously.

The MPL is a radical organization. It’s impossible not to use the word beautiful to describe their discourse. A passage from their mission statement:

*The MPL is not in itself an end goal, but a means for the construction of another society. Likewise, the fight for free transport for students is not an end goal. It is an instrument to initiate debate about the transformation of the current concept of urban public transport, opposing market-based logic and beginning the fight for free, high-quality public transport as a right for all of society; for public transport outside private interests and under public control (of the workers and users).*

The influence of the radical urban philosopher Henri

Lefevre is apparent in their published materials, and there are hints of Guy Debord and the Situationists International in their uncompromising visions of a city for all. They view the movement of bodies in urban space as fundamental to culture and social structure, and thus consider public transport a necessary battlefield for the reorganization of urban society. Public transport should function to serve the needs of “the people” (defined in their literature as youth and workers) rather than to benefit the workings of capital and the capitalist class.

The MPL is suspicious of corporate media, and their national guidelines stipulate that the group should prioritize alternative media to disseminate their messaging. During the first week of protests most of the major newspapers ran editorials attacking the MPL and the young people who joined them on the streets, labeling them disenchanted middle-class university students without just reason to cause such urban disruption. Even when attacked by São Paulo’s military police the mainstream media focused on “acts of vandalism,” implicitly condoning the harsh crackdown in response to violating the sanctity of private property. It wasn’t until police attacked journalists covering the protests for the major newspapers—one of whom was shot in the eye

with a rubber bullet—that the media almost uniformly began supporting the protests (now called “democratic”), condemning police violence, and reporting on the many irregularities of the opaque public transport system. They also began to profile the MPL, which became an overnight sensation.

In a Sunday edition of *Folha de São Paulo* dedicated almost exclusively to the protests that had spread like wildfire across the country, members of MPL argued that the high cost of public transport acted as a barrier to movement, facilitating only laborers’ commute to and from work rather than the “appropriation of the city”. The result is a form of “urban apartheid”, and the fight for free fare is a fight to “finance the right to liberty.”

## MIDIA NINJA AND THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA MOVEMENT

The revolution might not be televised, but you can bet NINJA operatives will be live streaming from the thick of it. NINJA stands for Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action; and their live coverage of protests in cities around the country as well as charismatic leaders who unapologetically support resistance to the status quo has boosted the network of activist-journalists

into the national spotlight. I offer them as representative of the growing alternative media scene in Brazil. While there have long been “opposition” newspapers, newsletters and magazines covering events through the lenses of radical political ideologies in Brazil (news media during the 1970s and 80s aligned itself fairly consistently with the military dictatorship), we can differentiate the contemporary wave of independent media projects and collectives, such as NINJA, by their push for the *democratization of media*. It’s not ideology served through media but an ideology of media: citizen-journalism, participatory and transparent organization, and a rejection of corporate profit-based revenue models.

NINJA and the broader movement stand as a critique of and response to mainstream media in Brazil. At the 19th annual ‘Cry of the Excluded’, a counter-march to rival the official military processions on Brazilian Independence Day, the Popular Youth Uprising (a group formed during the June protests) targeted the media conglomerate Rede Globo. A street theater performance portrayed police killing black and brown youths with impunity and a Globo news reporter justifying the killings, calling the dead bandits and drug dealers. A pamphlet from the same group proclaims that less than ten families

effectively control the Brazilian media landscape, a country of 200 million. A popular protest chant rhymes “*A verdade é dura, a Rede Globo apoiou a ditadura*” (the truth is ugly, Rede Globo supported the dictatorship). And during a recent teach-in at one of the ongoing occupation sites outside of the municipal government building, an activist-academic explained how two decades of military rule shaped Brazilian media to produce uncritical content that encourages popular support for fascist forms of power as well as brutal class and race hierarchies. The teach-in was of course live-streamed and then uploaded to *Vimeo*.

Traditional news outlets feel far away from the tumult of the streets. Content is filtered and spliced and edited and auto-censored by journalists and editors that do not understand the nuances of the politics playing out or respect the vulnerability and empowerment that bodies on the street experience. In contrast, NINJA feels *close*; they transmit raw and unedited images. They interview dozens of participants at length at every event they attend. From the beginning, NINJA worked from a privileged position to explain and give voice to the resistance, especially radical thought. These media activists—armed with smartphones, helmet-cams and extra battery packs—are able to articulate the frustrations

and outrage expressed by Brazilian youth and explain, for those willing to listen, the logic behind some protestors' radical tactics. NINJA leaders argue that their objectivity is uncompromised despite their *closeness* to the resistance movement. With discourse reminiscent of the "reflexive turn" in the social sciences, they argue that they can explicitly support the constitutional rights of Brazilians to protest and resist while producing content that gives the viewer freedom to develop informed opinions.

The close proximity to the happenings transformed not only the coverage of citizen resistance, but also affected the relationship between police and protestor, citizen and state. It is common, for example, to hear people call out for NINJA when they see police officers who have illegally covered or removed their identification numbers from their uniforms; and when police begin searching the bags of Black Bloc and other protestors, dozens of cameras film each and every time to ensure that a smart phone would capture any planting of incriminating evidence. Perhaps most sensationally, it was NINJA and other citizen-produced media that saved one protestor from years in prison. Police arrested Bruno Ferreira Teles and accused him of throwing a petrol bomb that resulted in severe burns to a police officer. They produced a backpack

with ten additional petrol bombs that they said belonged to him. But a NINJA operative had footage that showed Bruno without any backpack and activists pieced together footage filmed by citizens that strongly suggests the bag belonged to an undercover police agent also captured on film throwing the very petrol bomb they associated with Bruno. The story was reported widely in the international press. It was one of the most embarrassing moments for the Rio de Janeiro state government, and it played a part in the sacking of the chief of military police a week later.

The self-expressed challenge for Mídia NINJA and independent journalism is of distribution. Due to its close connections with an existing network of grassroots music festivals, NINJA is well organized and connected throughout the country. The question is how to produce, host, and distribute quality content to a mass audience, a costly and time-demanding affair. Recently networked media activists have founded an internet news channel to host debates and content, and NINJA is exploring crowdfunding, subscription services, and micro-donations as possible sustainable funding options.

## BLACK BLOC

If the appearance of small groups of (mostly male) agitated youth,

masked and dressed in black startled and amused protestors and bystanders and confounded the media during the June protests, within a month the same groups were akin to the knights of the street, fearlessly protecting peaceful marchers from police brutality. Their ranks swelled (I have since seen many female participants) and protestors chalked “Thank you Black Block” on the streets during protests.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to speak of Black Bloc (BB) as one social movement, so I will couch my observations here to BB of Rio de Janeiro (BBRJ). They do not call open meetings or assemblies; they have no organizational structure or mission statement since they are not an organization; likewise they have no leader or designated spokespersons. However, as of August 2013, Rio de Janeiro was considered the vanguard city of resistance in no small part due to the influence of BBRJ.

In Rio de Janeiro Black Bloc is explicitly anarchist and informally endorses political demands, for example the impeachment of Governors Cabral (of Rio de Janeiro) and Alckmin (of São Paulo) and the demilitarization of Brazil’s police force. Here it is important to understand the history of the Military Police in Rio de Janeiro, for even as radicals throughout the

world may deem police power a State tool of social repression, in Rio de Janeiro their history is particularly repugnant.

The Military Police date back to colonial times, when the Portuguese crown fled Napoleon and declared Rio de Janeiro the imperial capital. When the ruling elite decided that urban militias could no longer adequately police the city and its then 60,000 residents (over half of which were African slaves), they created the Royal Police Guard, which in 1920 became known as the Military State Police of Rio de Janeiro, or by the Portuguese acronym PMERJ. Included in the public services offered by the Royal Guard was the flogging of insolent, disobedient slaves. Fast-forward to the military dictatorship that spanned 1964-1985, the PMERJ was instrumental in violently quelling public actions that defied or critiqued military rule.

In modern history, the Military Police have waged war in favelas, informal housing settlements home to 22% of Rio de Janeiro’s population. BOPE, a special tactical squadron created to combat organized gangs in the favelas, does not investigate; it confronts, it kills. The official, state sanctioned symbol of BOPE is a skull and bones with a vertically penetrating dagger and two rifles crisscrossing at the diagonals. Human rights groups have charged the Military Police

with the extrajudicial killing of tens of thousands of favela residents (disproportionately young black and brown men) during “anti-trafficking raids.” Until recently, police received bonuses the more “criminals” they killed (not joking). Various instances have fueled public vitriol since the June uprisings. One occurred on 24 June, when a BOPE battalion entered Nova Holanda, one favela neighborhood of the Complexo do Maré (the largest complex of favelas in Rio de Janeiro), killing nine and wounding two-dozen more. Several of the dead were bystanders caught in crossfire between the police and armed gang members. The massacre is widely considered a revenge killing after a BOPFE sergeant was shot dead earlier that day pursuing a group of thieves that had sought refuge in the winding narrow streets of the favela. The commander of BOPE, admitted that he did not order the operation, nor did he know who did. Days later, protestors marched the streets with signs that condemned the extreme force used by police inside the city’s favelas: “the police that repress in the streets kill in the favelas” and “bullets in the favelas aren’t made of rubber.”

Despite wide recognition of police brutality, the fame of BBRJ quickly turned to infamy in the eyes of the public. After the Papal visit in July, numbers of protestors dropped dramatically and have

never since compared to the million-person march of 26 June. On 6 September, the day before Brazilian Independence Day, police arrested administrators of the BBRJ and Anonymous facebook pages. Both groups had been instrumental in building up momentum for counter protests during the Military processions. The following week, the State Legislative Assembly approved a law that criminalized the covering of the face with a mask or cloth during public actions (except for cultural events such as Carnival, of course). Such measures are unconstitutional according to Brazilian human rights lawyers, but have support among many Brazilians who don’t like so-called protesting with “anonymity” and have been convinced by the popular media that BBRJ is a gang of rioters who just want to fight with police, break banks, and destroy public property.

Such are the challenges facing BBRJ. The state is acting with increasingly repressive tactics; including stop-and-search of any protestor with a bag or backpack; BB organizers have a hard time turning out more than 100 people to their actions, and the newspapers cite opinion polls that say most people who support the June protests have stopped attending for fear of violence. A more existential challenge is the inherent contradictions between Black

Bloc discourse and their actions. Black Bloc is a tactic, not a group, but BBRJ organizes protests and endorses demands without clear, transparent or democratic decision making processes. BBRJ has no leaders, but the BBRJ facebook administrators, which have been essential to the organizing of BB actions, have become *de facto* leaders, even releasing unofficial statements.

During the July protests, I was inspired to see members of BBRJ facilitating forms of consensus decision-making during street protests, using the human microphone technique. Lately I have seen such tactics replaced by argument, heightened tempers, hyper masculinity, and a decrease in female participation in decision-making. Rio de Janeiro doesn't have a group of radical urbanists, such as the MPL, to organize and lead the struggle for the 'right to the city,' and perhaps that task unfairly fell on the shoulders of BBRJ. The whole of these problems represents a crisis of identity. However, at time of publication, certain experienced anarchist activists have stepped up to host teach-ins and documentary screenings, always hosting a debate about tactics of resistance afterwards. This may be exactly what the community needs to dialogue through these major issues.









# one message leading to ANOTHER

*by John Berger*

The wonderful American poet, Adrienne Rich, pointed out in a recent lecture that: “This year a report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics finds that 1 out of every 136 residents of the United States is behind bars - many in jails, unconvicted.”

In the same lecture she quoted the Greek poet, Yannis Ritsos:

In the field the last swallow had lingered late,  
balancing in the air like a black ribbon on the sleeve of autumn  
Nothing else remained. Only the burned houses smouldering still.”

You just phoned and immediately I knew it was an unexpected call from you, speaking from your flat in in the Via Paolo Sarpi. (Two days after the election results and Berlusconi’s comeback.) The speed with which we identify a familiar voice coming out of the blue, is comforting, but also somewhat mysterious. Because the measures, the units, we use in calculating the clear distinction that exists between one voice and another, are unformulated and nameless. They don’t have a code. These days more and more is encoded.

So I wonder whether there aren't other measures, equally *uncoded* yet precise, with which we calculate other givens.

For example, the amount of circumstantial freedom existing in a given situation, its extent and its strict limits. Prisoners become experts about this. They develop a particular sensitivity towards liberty, not as a principle, but as a granular substance. They spot almost immediately, fragments of liberty whenever they occur.

On an ordinary day, when nothing is happening and the crises announced hourly are the old familiar ones, - and the politicians are presenting themselves as the only possible alternative to CATASTROPHE - people as they pass one another, exchange glances to check whether others are envisaging the same thing when they say to themselves: So this is life!

Often they *are* envisaging the same thing and in this instant of sharing there is a kind of solidarity before anything further has been said or discussed.

I'm searching for words to describe the period of history we're living. To say it's unprecedented means little because all periods were unprecedented since History was first discovered!

I'm not searching for a complex definition of the period we are living through - there are a number of thinkers, such as Zygmunt Bauman who have taken on this essential task. I'm looking for nothing more than a figurative image to serve as a landmark. Landmarks don't fully explain themselves, but they offer a reference point which can be shared. In this they are like the tacit assumptions contained in popular proverbs. Without landmarks there is the great human risk of turning in circles.

The landmark I've found is that of prison. Nothing less. Across the planet we are living in a prison.

The word *we*, when printed or pronounced on screens, has become suspect, for it's continually used by those with power in the demagogic claim that they are also speaking for those who are denied power. Let's talk of ourselves as they. They are living in a prison.

What kind of prison? How is it constructed? Where is it situated? Or am I only using the word as a figure of speech?

No, it's not a metaphor, the imprisonment is real, but to describe it one has to think historically.

What kind of prison?

Michel Foucault has graphically shown how the penitentiary was a late eighteenth, early nineteenth century invention, closely linked to industrial production and its factories and its utilitarian philosophy.

Earlier, there were jails which were extensions of the cage and the dungeon. What distinguishes the penitentiary is the number of prisoners it can pack in, and the fact that all of them are under continuous surveillance - thanks to the model of the Panopticon, as conceived by Jeremy Bentham, who introduced the principle of accountability into ethics.

Accountancy demands that every transaction be noted. Hence the penitentiaries' circular walls, the cells arranged in circles and the screw's watchtower at the centre. Bentham, who was John Stuart Mill's tutor at the beginning of the 19th C., was the principal utilitarian apologist for industrial capitalism.

Today in the era of globalisation, the world is dominated by financial, not industrial capital, and the dogmas defining criminality and the logics of imprisonment, have changed radically. Penitentiaries still exist and more and more are being built. But prison walls now serve a different purpose. What constitutes an incarceration area has been transformed.

Twenty-five years ago Nella Bielski and I wrote *A Question of Geography*, a play about the Goulag. In Act Two a Zek (political prisoner) talks to a boy who has just arrived, about choice, about the limits of what can be chosen in a labour camp.

When you drag yourself back after a day's work in the taiga, when you are marched back, half dead with fatigue and hunger, you are given your ration of soup and bread. About the soup you have no choice - it has to be eaten whilst it's hot, or whilst it's at least warm. About the 400 grams of bread you have a choice. For instance, you can cut it into three little bits: one to eat now with the soup, one to suck in the mouth before going to sleep in your bunk, and the third to keep until next morning at ten, when you're working in the taiga and the emptiness in your stomach feels like a stone.

You empty a wheelbarrow full of rock. About pushing the barrow to the dump you have no choice. Now it's empty you have a choice. You can walk your barrow back just like you came, or - if you're clever, and survival makes you clever - you push it back like this, almost upright. If you choose the second way you give your shoulders a rest.

If you are a Zek and you become a team leader, you have the choice of playing at being a screw, or of never forgetting that you are a Zek.

The Goulag no longer exists. Millions work, however, under conditions which are not very different. What has changed is the forensic logic applied to workers and criminals.

During the Goulag political prisoners, categorised as criminals,

were reduced to slave-labourers. Today millions of brutally exploited workers are being reduced to the status of criminals.

The Goulag equation: criminal = slave labourer has been rewritten by neoliberalism to become: worker = hidden criminal. The whole drama of global migration is expressed in this new formula: those who work are latent criminals. When accused, they are found guilty of trying at all costs to survive. Fifteen million Mexican women and men work in the U.S. without papers and are consequently illegal. A concrete wall of 1200 km and a “virtual” wall of 1800 watch towers, are being planned along the frontier between the U.S. and Mexico. Ways around them though - all of them dangerous - will of course be found.

Between industrial capitalism – dependant on manufacture and factories, and financial capitalism – dependant upon free-market speculation and front office traders (Speculative financial transactions add up, each day, to 1,300 billion dollars; 50 times more than the sum of commercial exchanges) the incarceration area has changed.

The prison is now as large as the planet and its allotted zones vary and can be termed work-site, refugee-camp, shopping mall, periphery, ghetto, office block, favela, suburb... What is essential is that those incarcerated in these zones, are fellow prisoners.

It’s the first week in May and on the hillsides and mountains, along the avenues and around the gates, in the northern hemisphere, the leaves of most of the trees are coming out. Not only are all their different varieties of green still distinct, people also have the impression that each single leaf is distinct, and so they are confronting billions (the word has been corrupted by dollars), not billions, they are confronting an infinite multitude of new leaves.

For prisoners, small visible signs of nature’s continuity have always been, and still are, a covert encouragement.

Today the purpose of most prison walls (concrete, electronic, patrolled or interrogatory) is not to keep prisoners *in* and correct them, but to keep prisoners *out* and exclude them.

Most of the excluded are anonymous – hence the obsession of all security forces with identity. They are also numberless. For two reasons. First because their numbers fluctuate; every famine, natural disaster and military intervention (now called policing!) either diminishes or increases their multitude. And, secondly, because to assess their number is to confront

the truth that they constitute most of those living on the surface of the earth - and to face this is to plummet into absolute absurdity.

Have you noticed - small commodities are increasingly difficult to remove from their packaging. Something similar has happened with the lives of the gainfully employed. Those who have legal employment and are not poor, are living in a very reduced space that allows them fewer and fewer choices - except the continual binary choice between obedience and disobedience. Their working hours, their place of residence, their past skills and experience, their health, the future of their children - everything outside their function as employees has to take a small second place beside the unforeseeable and vast demands of Liquid Profit. Furthermore, the Rigidity of this house-rule is called Flexibility. In prison words get turned upside down.

The alarming pressure of high-grade working conditions has recently obliged the courts in Japan to recognise and define a new coroner's category of "Death by Overwork".

No other system, the gainfully employed are told, is feasible. There is no alternative. Take the elevator. The elevator is as small as a cell.

“Les peuples n’ont jamais que le degré de liberté que leur audace conquiert sur la peur.”

Stendhal

I'm watching a five year old girl having a swimming lesson in a municipal indoor swimming pool. She's wearing a dark blue costume. She can swim and doesn't yet have the confidence to swim alone without any support. The instructor takes her to the deep end of the pool. The girl is going to jump into the water whilst grasping a long rod held out towards her by her teacher. It's a way of getting over her fear of water. They did the same thing yesterday.

Today she wants the girl to jump without clutching the rod. One, two, three! The girl jumps but at the last moment seizes the rod. Not a word is spoken. A faint smile passes between the woman and the girl. The girl cheeky, the woman patient.

The girl clammers up the ladder out of the pool and returns to the edge. Let me jump again! she says. The woman nods. The girl inhales, hissing, and jumps, hands to her side, holding nothing. When she comes

up to the surface, the tip of the rod is there in front of her very nose. She swims two strokes to the ladder without touching the rod. Bravo!

At the moment when the girl jumped without the rod, neither of them was in prison.

Look at the power structure of the unprecedented surrounding world, and how its authority functions. Every tyranny finds and improvises its own set of controls. Which is why they are often, at first, not recognised as the vicious controls they are.

The market forces dominating the world assert that they are inevitably stronger than any nation-state. The assertion is corroborated every minute. From an unsolicited telephone call trying to persuade the subscriber to take out a private health insurance or pension, to the latest ultimatum of the World Trade Organisation.

As a result, most governments no longer govern. A government no longer steers towards its own chosen destination. The word horizon, with its promise of a hoped-for future, has vanished from political discourse - on both right and left. All that remains for debate is how to measure what is there. Opinion polls replace direction and replace desire.

Most governments herd instead of steer. (In U.S. prison slang, herders is one of the many words for jailers.)

In the 18th C. long-term imprisonment was approvingly defined as a punishment of "civic death". Three centuries later, governments are imposing by law, force, economic threats and their buzz, mass regimes of "civic death".

Wasn't living under any tyranny in the past a form of imprisonment? Not in the sense I'm describing. What is being lived today is new, because of its relationship with space.

It's here that the thinking of Zygmunt Bauman is illuminating. He points out that the corporate market forces now running the world are *extra-territorial*, that's to say "free from territorial constraints - the constraints of locality." They are perpetually remote, anonymous and thus never have to take account of the territorial, physical consequences of their actions. He quotes Hans Tietmeyer, president of the German Federal Bank: "Today's stake is to create conditions favourable to the confidence of investors". The single supreme priority.

Following this, the control of the world's populations, who consist of producers, consumers and the marginalised poor, is the task allotted to the obedient national governments.



The planet is a prison and the obedient governments, whether of right or left, are the herders.

The prison-system operates thanks to cyberspace. Cyberspace offers the market a speed of exchange, which is almost instantaneous, and which is used across the world day and night for trading. From this speed, from this velocity, the market tyranny gains its ex-territorial license. Such velocity, however, has a pathological effect on its practitioners; it anaesthetises them. No matter what has befallen, Business As Usual.

There is no place for pain in that velocity: announcements of pain perhaps, but not the suffering of it. Consequently, the human condition is banished, excluded, from those operating the system. The operators are alone because utterly heartless.

Earlier, tyrants were pitiless and inaccessible, but they were neighbours, who were subject to pain. This is no longer the case, and in the long term this will be the system's fatal flaw.

The tall doors swing back  
 We're inside the prison yard  
 in a new season.  
 Tomas Transtömer.

They (we) are fellow-prisoners. That recognition, in whatever tone of voice it may be declared, contains a refusal. Nowhere more than in prison is the future calculated and awaited as something utterly opposed to the present. The incarcerated never accept the present as final.

Meanwhile, how to live this present? What conclusions to draw? What decisions to take? How to act? I have a few guidelines to suggest, now that the landmark has been established.

On this side of the walls experience is listened to, no experience is considered obsolete. Here survival is respected and it's a commonplace that survival frequently depends upon solidarity between fellow prisoners. The authorities know this - hence their use of solitary confinement, either through physical isolation or through their manipulative brainwashing, whereby individual lives are isolated from history, from heritage, from the earth, and, above all, from a common future.

Ignore the jailer's talk. There are of course bad jailers and less bad. In certain conditions it's useful to note the difference. But what they say

- including the less evil ones - is bullshit. Their hymns, their shibboleths, their incanted words such as - Security, Democracy, Identity, Civilisation, Flexibility, Productivity, Human Rights, Integration, Terrorism, Freedom, are repeated and repeated in order to confuse, divide, distract and sedate all fellow-prisoners. On this side of the walls, words spoken by the jailers are meaningless and are no longer useful for thought. They cut through nothing. Reject them even when thinking silently to oneself.

By contrast, prisoners have their own vocabulary with which they think. Many words are kept secret and many are local, with countless variations. Small words and phrases, small yet containing a world, such as: I'll-show-you-my-way, sometimes-wonder, pajarillo, somethings-happening-in-B-wing, stripped, take-this-small-earring, died-for-us, go-for-it, etc.

Between fellow-prisoners there are conflicts, sometimes violent. All prisoners are deprived, yet there are degrees of deprivation and the differences of degree provoke envy. On this side of the walls life is cheap. The very facelessness of the global tyranny encourages hunts to find scapegoats, to find instantly definable enemies among other prisoners. The asphyxiating cells then become a madhouse. The poor attack the poor, the invaded pillage the invaded. Fellow-prisoners should not be idealised.

Without idealisation, simply take note that what they have in common - which is their unnecessary suffering, their endurance, their cunning - is more significant, more telling, than what separates them. And from this, new forms of solidarity are being born. The new solidarities start with the mutual recognition of differences and multiplicity. So this is life! A solidarity, not of masses but of interconnectivity, far more appropriate to the conditions of prison life.

The authorities do their systematic best to keep fellow-prisoners misinformed about what is happening elsewhere in the world prison. They do not, in the aggressive sense of the term, indoctrinate. Indoctrination is reserved for the training of the small elite of traders and managerial and market experts. For the mass prison population the aim is not to activate them, but to keep them in a state of passive uncertainty, to remind them remorselessly that there is nothing in life but risk, and that the earth is an unsafe place.

This is done with carefully selected information, with misinformation, commentaries, rumours, fictions. Insofar as the operation succeeds, it proposes and maintains an hallucinating paradox, for it tricks a prison population into believing that the priority for each one of them

is to make arrangements for their own personal protection and to acquire somehow, even though incarcerated, their own particular exemption from the common fate.

The image of mankind, as transmitted through this view of the world, is again, without precedent. Mankind is presented as a coward; only winners are brave. In addition, there are no gifts; there are only prizes.

Prisoners have always found ways of communicating with one another. In today's global prison cyberspace can be used against the interests of those who first installed it. Like this, prisoners inform themselves about what the world does each day, and they follow suppressed stories from the past and so stand shoulder to shoulder with the dead.

In doing so, they rediscover little gifts, examples of courage, a single rose in a kitchen where there's not enough to eat, indelible pains, the indefatigability of mothers, laughter, mutual aid, silence, ever-widening resistance, willing sacrifice, more laughter...

The messages are brief but they extend in the solitude of their (our) nights.

The final guideline is not tactical but strategic.

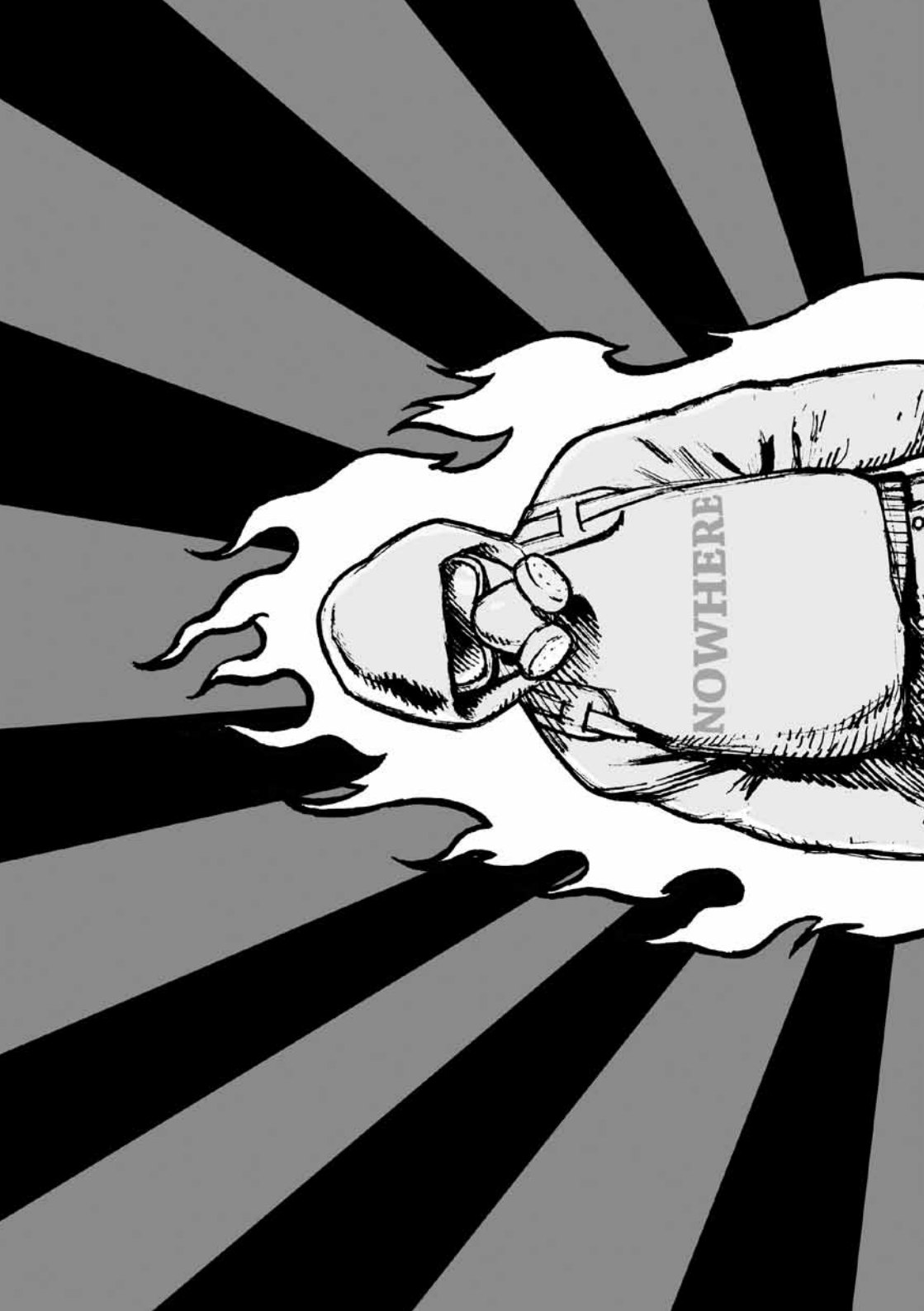
The fact that the world's tyrants are ex-territorial explains the extent of their overseeing power, yet it also indicates a coming weakness. They operate in cyberspace and they lodge in guarded condominiums. They have no knowledge of the surrounding earth. Furthermore, they dismiss such knowledge as superficial not profound. Only extracted resources count. They cannot listen to the earth. On the ground they are blind. In the local they are lost.

For fellow-prisoners the opposite is true. Cells have walls that touch across the world. Effective acts of sustained resistance will be embedded in the local, near and far. Outback resistance, listening to the earth.

Liberty is slowly being found not outside but in the depths of the prison.

Not only did I immediately recognise your voice, speaking from your flat in the Via Paolo Sarpi, I could also guess, thanks to your voice, how you were feeling. I sensed your exasperation or, rather, an exasperated endurance which was combined - and this is so typical of you - with the quick steps of our next hope.





NOWHERE



JEANARZ

# one Revolt Leading to another

A RESPONSE TO JOHN BERGER

*by Occupied London*

Sitting down, preparing to write this response, we read through the text one last time. We read these words, then repeat them: “On an ordinary day”... And we try to think of the last day of such that we lived through, the last day that capitalist order’s frantic dismantling and reassembly did not cause a sense of urgency to run through our bodies and minds.. There are, to be sure, such ordinary moments, quiet days. There must be. But it does not feel like that anymore, lost as they are in the constant of the urgent. Yes, the prison might very well be the figurative image of our condition, with its near-complete bodily stillness and mental compartmentalization, but there is something peculiar about it. Sure, the more people are trapped in their familiar spaces, their routes and

routines, the forces that dictate this entrapment reach them, swirlingly, from an ever-increasing distance; authority stems from further and further away, yes, and still it manages to reach into our intimate.

But authority no longer has the monopoly in this reach. Somehow, in-between the flickering images of burning cars, in barricades encircling squares, the inmates talk to each other. Talk? No, that is not the word to look for. “The speed with which we identify a familiar voice”, you say, “is comforting and somewhat mysterious”. How does the image of a burnt car in Istanbul feel from a favela in Rio? From a room in a Stockholm suburb? The speed with which the unfamiliar image is identified, picked up, felt through, reproduced, is gripping and mesmerizing.

What a contradiction: we live through history's in-between moment, through a transition toward a still indiscernible horizon but still, us global prisoners, flicker between the urgency of revolt and the idleness of *meanwhile*: Meanwhile is history's in-between, it is what lies at the interval of its one key moment and another, it is history's brackets. By now, it clearly feels that we stand just before such a closing bracket. Yes, the prison might be the figurative of our condition, of this historical split-second – but then by now, its walls are set alight by countless torches; by now we are all watching; by now we cling to sense the fading flames of one revolt signal for the next one to take over. By the time that the high priests of contention have started to grapple with one of these revolts – to define it, assign it meaning, force it into their understanding boxes prior–, by the time that self-gratifying experts have managed to utter enough sympathetic or condemning words (both mouthed from equal distance) the flames of the revolt have moved on. Another fire, another prison wall lit up, another smoke signal to fellow inmates the world over.

How do we read, how do we recognize each other in-between our different conditions, our life packaging? What is the identifying nod that we pass on? A Brazilian banner reads, “We are all Greeks,

Turks, Mexicans”. A brief clip from Iran gives the insurgents in Greece an idea about how to fight off their notorious motorcycle police. A leaflet from Cairo, street fighting and self-defense 101, makes the rounds. There are commonalities in the practicalities, of course. But it is also possible to now discern, to sense a commonality in the single structure we are up against. The flip-side of our single figurative image – not a, but the prison – is that we all face it, this same condition and so, everything matters for everyone, once again. How can you possibly ignore the rise of fascism in Greece? The shutting of borders in the UK? China's looming crisis? We no longer operate in a vacuum; our shared anger reaches across borders, generations, certainties.

From those flooding Taksim and Tahrir to those taking to the streets of Rio and Sao Paulo in the millions, no prisoner's act is solitary any longer. They are open, visible, with millions to witness them. They send messages, they communicate: fires, banners, communiques, cheers. The messages are received. Is there distance between the prisoners? Of course there is; but this is some distance that can and will be often curtailed, annihilated even. A prisoner might revolt when they receive no ration (a reaction to a human instinct, survival) or when the ration becomes bigger – big enough for them to momentarily

forget that they are prisoners and to perhaps demand a say in the way the prison is run.

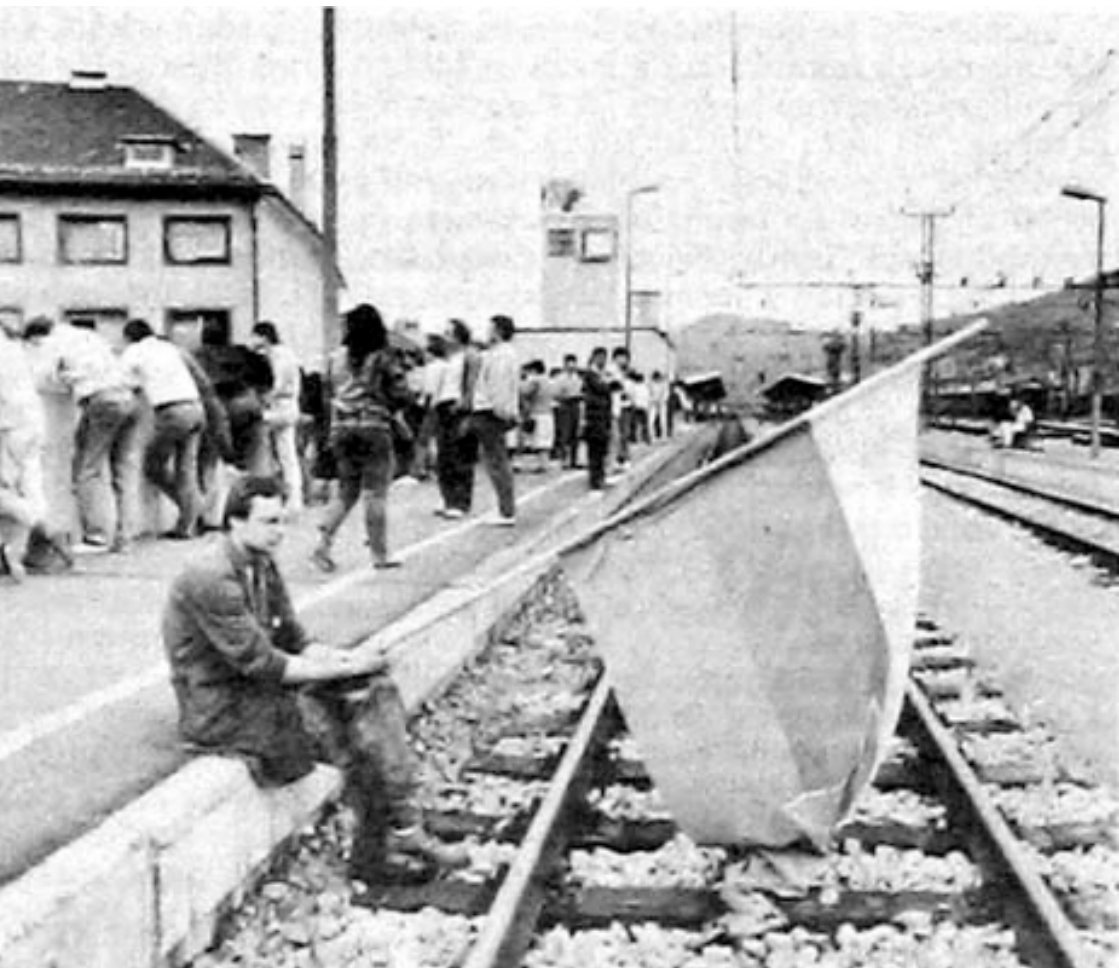
Where are we now? The prisoners communicate their revolts to one another, for sure; yet at the moment of the revolt-act, they are alone. Each still stands inside their persistent packaging, “difficult to remove” just like the commodities to which they revolt. But the packaging is transparent enough for the others to see them struggle. The revolt has reached across the globe, but for now, it is still out-of-tune: if there is one thing still preventing it from turning global, it is precisely this asynchronism. One city burns; meanwhile, the others do not. Another city burns; meanwhile, the others do not. A discrepancy in a seemingly infinite loop. A now defunct magazine’s running head would roughly translate as such: “*so that you can pleasantly spend your time between one catastrophe and the next one*”. In its irony, it got one thing right: back then (remember those times?) in neoliberalism’s soothing era, the prisoner was first and foremost a spectator who would expect to be entertained. And now? As the prisoner watches the calls for her to revolt, as she responds, history’s meanwhile, which had been everywhere, swiftly comes to a close: every flame, every codified salute, every glance through and beyond the prison edges us to history’s closing bracket.







ON CONTOURS OF URBAN  
IN MARIBOR



# AN REVOLTS

## WANING INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE AND SHATTERING OF POST-INDUSTRIAL DREAM<sup>1</sup>

by Gal Kirn

INTRODUCTION: MARIBOR FROM 1988 TO 2012

Maribor is the second largest city in Slovenia, with around one-hundred thousand inhabitants, and it is located in the North-eastern part of the country, in the region of Styria that borders Austria. In the 1930s Maribor became known as the “Manchester of (first) Yugoslavia” thanks to its booming textile industry; it also saw an impressive industrialization in socialist times. However, the city had remained largely unknown (except to its immediate neighbours) until it was catapulted in the center of discussion in 2012: at that time, Maribor became the *European Capital of Culture* (ECC), and even more importantly, in late November of the same year, mass urban uprisings against the political establishment took off and sparked a series of protests all over Slovenia.

This resulted in a mass movement that should be seen within the frame of ongoing struggles of the European periphery against the dominant EU-neoliberal handling of the economic crisis.

But if the present crisis is acquiring an ever more brutal face on the periphery, we should not ignore the fact that a certain continuity of crisis and market brutality followed Maribor from the late 1980s already. Let us not forget that Maribor’s workers set the stage for the biggest workers’ protests in the history of socialist Slovenia: In June 1988, more than ten thousand workers from all its factories occupied the streets for a week. In this essay I propose to read together both urban revolts – despite their differences in terms of the class composition and political demands– as the markers of the end of certain historical periods: The revolt in 1988 announced the



defeat of socialist industrialization, while 2012 shattered the capitalist dream of post-industrialization. The private-public strategy of deindustrialization was most emphatically captured by the ECC's mission of urban revitalization for the industrially decayed urban milieu. It was hoped that creative industries will overcome unemployment (19%) and growing indebtedness of the city<sup>2</sup>. But the most recent urban revolt in Maribor did not take place as a simple consequence of the ECC's failure. Rather, the urban revolt was a political answer to a deeper structural crisis. My thesis could be read in parallel to theoretical observation by Andy Merrifield, who poignantly demonstrates a dialectical relationship between the forces of "strategic embellishment" (here, the ECC) and "insurrection" (here, the uprising):

*This dialectic is immanent in our current urban-global condition, and respective antagonists feed off one another in dramatic ways. They are both immanent within the upheaval of our neoliberal market economy, just as Marx said that a relative surplus population was immanent in the accumulation of capital; and therein, borrowing Benjamin's valedictory words, 'we can begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled'.<sup>3</sup>*

This dialectic of “surplus population” and the desired “strategic embellishment” is unquestionably strongly at work in the historical-urban fabric of Maribor, but one needs to be alert of its specificities. Maribor has been undergoing a long process of urban (under) development that brings together the complex interplay of trajectories of the past socialist industrialization and undergoing capitalist de-industrialization. This contribution will outline three important strategies that might shed some light on the recent uprisings: 1. The death of industrial culture and infrastructure of Maribor; 2. The shattering of the post-industrialist dream via ECC and 3. The ongoing urban revolt that is building an alternative infrastructure of direct democracy and management.

#### 1. JUNE 1988: THE BREAK-UP OF SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA IN INDUSTRIALIST MARIBOR

Andreja Slavec made an in-depth study on industrialization of Maribor, which unfolded in different stages: after the initial phase that expanded thanks to the railroad infrastructure in 1850s (the Vienna-Trieste railroad was of utmost importance for the Habsburg monarchy) the second most important period came in the 1930s, with the booming textile industry

and emerging factories<sup>4</sup>. Maribor, however, grew tremendously as a city from the 1950s onwards when it entered the golden age of socialist industrialization. Three industrial branches were of vital importance for this industrial success: metal (development of cranes, *Metalna*; Maribor’s foundry, production of cars and trucks, *TAM*), textile industry (*MTT*) and electro-metal industry (*Elektrokovina*).

The industrial growth brought workers from other sister republics to Maribor. During the 1960s, a major breakthrough happened in the cosmetic (*Zlatorog*) and construction (montage of houses, *Merles*) industries. Slavec rightly argues that Maribor was on the beneficiary side of the market reform that took place in 1965<sup>5</sup>. The market reform was designed to transfer political power onto the micro level, that is, to workers and social(ist) enterprises. Despite its counter-tendency that strengthened the role of management over workers in enterprises, the reform at least in Maribor partially succeeded in further developing independent capitals. It was under this condition that a demand for a university in Maribor was created, which was founded in 1975. Broadly speaking, the creation of the university answered the need (in a fordist fashion<sup>6</sup>) for the education of new cadres in the growing industries, which was also enabled by the

investment in the knowledge to be used in industry. Maribor's urban landscape, with its social housing, factories and other "industrialist" infrastructure, was born in those times - and it lives vividly in the memories of older generations and in new industrial ruins, such as vacant factories.

But the fairy tale of socialist industrialization ended in the late 1980s, when Yugoslavia underwent a major economic crisis. The rising inflation, growing unemployment, intensified exploitation (more work for less payment) brought a general sense of social insecurity. The internal conflicts between republican elites were further strengthened by harsh austerity policies from IMF, policies that Yugoslavia had to implement if it wanted to refinance its debt.<sup>7</sup> The major political event for Maribor took place in 1988, the event which announced the beginning of the end of socialist Yugoslavia. In June that year, after months of receiving low wages, workers of TAM, the biggest enterprise, decided to take to the streets. Their walk-out was joined by workers of all other major factories. Against the sense of social insecurity and imposed austerity, workers were able to build ties and a sense of solidarity instead. More than ten thousand workers occupied streets, squares, railroad stations and strategic routes in Maribor. The strike went

on for a week and pressurized the management of factories, which needed to make some concessions. But the workers' opposition - even if strong and important for the future trade union movement - came too late. Let us not forget that it was in this period that the entire socialist block was crumbling. Already the following year the very first bankruptcy of the social(ist) enterprise in Yugoslavia took place. The shoe factory *Lilit* was privatized in 1990, and due to continuing delays of wage-payments, workers started to occupy the factory over day and night.<sup>8</sup> *Lilit* was eventually closed down; this was the beginning of the end for Maribor's industrial age.

Contrary to the established narrative, which made Slovenia a "success story" of transition without neoliberal orthodoxy, one needs to revise this fairy tale and conclude that the transitory processes on the periphery of Slovenia showed a very brutal face right from the beginning. The transition started already in late 1980s and after what we could ironically call the first 5-year plan of deregulation and de-industrialization, which took place from 1989 to 1994 and resulted in catastrophic socio-economic consequences for the everyday life of majority of people in Maribor. Most of the above mentioned industries went bankrupt and closed down (e.g. *Lilit*, *MTT*, *TAM*) in particular

due to the loss of the Yugoslav markets and also due to their partial integration in the military-industrial complex of the Yugoslav People's Army. A few surviving enterprises were rationalized and massively shrunk their economic activities (e.g. *Metalna*), others were cheaply sold to foreign capital (e.g. *Zlatorog* was bought by Henkel). The unemployment rate in Maribor reached around 25% and, even worse, around 70% of those stayed long-term unemployed; what Marx would call "surplus population". Even in the first years after 2000, when the rate of unemployment started dropping and the economic situation was "normalized", the major thirty enterprises combined employed less workers than the factory TAM alone in the 1980s (almost 9000).

It goes without saying that the industrial infrastructure deteriorated and along with it, the whole urban landscape was radically transformed. Maribor became the monument to the past, both to *Yugoslavia*, as it brought together many people from all over the former country, and to *industrialist times* that had provided the city with socio-economic prosperity. Recently, it seems, beside the haunting industrialist specter from its past, the city is also haunted by the dream of its post-industrialized future.

## 2. EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2012: DREAM OF DE-INDUSTRIALIZATION BY CULTURAL EMBELLISHMENT

Every major project holds a promise, or is interwoven with a dream of future. To understand the dream of *European Commission* in the light of the *European Capital of Culture* one does not need to enter into long hermeneutical research, but simply look at the surface, on its most transparent level: the dream-mission of ECC is to commodify the culture and supply Europe with new de-industrialized creative industries. As is written on their internet site, ECC fosters tourism in the region, promotes cultural exchange in Europe, and most of all, it works as a re-organization of the creative potentialities.<sup>9</sup> According to the study of Palmer from 2004 ECC has become the major "catalyst" of urban revitalization and most of interviewed representatives of the local organizations enthusiastically confirmed this thesis.<sup>10</sup> Initially it seemed that Maribor finally got its historical chance: it became nominated for the European Capital of Culture (2012) with Portuguese city of Guimarães, it was also nominated for European Capital of Youth (2013) and was granted the organization of the *University Winter Olympics* (2013). The last

project – Olympics – failed due to the insufficient funds, while ECC started functioning as a collective dream for new Maribor. It was seen as a possibility to overcome the “peripheral” and marginalized position that it acquired vis-à-vis the center (Ljubljana). Local patriotic tensions would be overcome in the team spirit that would be beneficiary for the regional development and revitalization of Maribor that would attract young.

However, this utopian promise of de-industrialized future soon hit hard rocks. The ECC’s organizational committee was faced not only with folkloristic tensions between Ljubljana and Maribor, but also with the troubled local authorities, where now the former mayor of Maribor, Franc Kangler, already by mid 2011 received 15 different criminal charges. I do not wish to enter into discussion of the complicity between the ECC and local municipality, but would rather like to focus on results of the ECC policy, what it actually brought to the city itself. And not all was negative.

Let us first start with positive effects: there was a wide range of inspiring events that connected local cultural groups and projects with exciting guests from abroad. I would like to stress especially one long-term project that sprung and went beyond the mission of ECC. *Urbane Brazde*

(Urban Furrows<sup>11</sup>) is a collective that runs many projects within the frame of the Center for alternative and autonomous production (CAAP): the project to re-connect urban and rural communities in and around Maribor that would nurture sustainable ecological production and distribution (ecological farm); a project of library to store old seeds; projects that promote urban gardening and bicycle culture; digital nomad workshops that produce video material and lectures; and other activities. *Urban Furrows* ploughed through the old-fashioned division between rural and urban and attempted to build a different community that brought together at first glance odd mix of different generations, professions and political affiliations.<sup>12</sup> This is a project that is self-sustainable and will continue with its work on a more long-term basis.

Contrary to these positive developments one needs to critically conclude that the most important mission of ECC was not accomplished. The mission being the structural embellishment and development of cultural infrastructure. Haussmann of today cloaked in fancy creative discourse of Florida, does not need to destroy anything, since the industrial ruins are omnipresent, rather it integrated arts and cultures in the fabric of urban life, opening the nexus of all social relations to



capitalist subsumption. But the creative plan did not work and there will be extremely little cultural infrastructure left in Maribor after the end of local ECC. What was designed to trigger the local and regional creative industries is at the moment (still) running on a large degree of self-exploitation, and voluntary activism. Many “creative” young people and their exciting projects are again left to themselves, that is, to the market discipline. ECC did not prevent the tide of rising unemployment, which has reached almost 19%. Moreover, some of the funds of ECC have been “lost” or spend for unknown municipal activities.

Since this overall evaluation is rather negative, it does not come as a surprise that local organization of ECC was the loudest when late in 2012 massive uprisings took place. It is now an extremely popular thesis that the urban revolt in Maribor happened due to the rising “self confidence” and “spirit” of ECC. In this respect, I share a critique launched by a philosopher Boris Vezjak<sup>13</sup> who correctly demonstrated that this self-imposed narcissism by the organizers of ECC was only interested to credit themselves for the urban renaissance. My thesis argues furthermore that the urban revolt happened as a side effect, or even as a negative reaction to the failure of ECC in its grand cause for the urban revitalization.

### 3. NOVEMBER 2012: URBAN UPRISING RELOADED

The global economic crisis started taking a negative toll in Slovenia. The last governments, centre-left or right-wing, competed in the upgrading of the neoliberal agenda, while “recommendations” from abroad demanded ever more austerity and privatization of the whole social reproductive apparatus with state enterprises and banks. The apathy has been a frequent expression of the citizens’ attitude to the structural problems that the region and city of Maribor have been encountering for a long time. Beside the rising unemployment of the last years, what is particularly worrisome is the rising private indebtedness, which forces many into dependency on charity organizations (*Red Cross, Karitas*, and so on) that distribute food and clothes and are already over-stretched. A larger amount of foreclosures and smaller bankrupt enterprises made the situation extremely harsh. In the circumstances of failed cultural embellishment and economic devastation, in autumn 2012, the local municipality, under now former mayor Franc Kangler, decided to introduce a massive system of 1,000 radars for speed limits. Boris Vezjak stated that “more than 20,000 people were issued with speeding tickets in only two weeks – in a city



of 100,000 inhabitants. There was a sense that residents' household budgets were being targeted".<sup>14</sup> The sense of straight-cut social injustice accumulated, once the information about the company leaked out: it was a certain private-public project that went through personal ties of the mayor, who has been implicated in many corruption affairs, without any juridical consequences.

People were enraged. And still, nobody expected this public rage to be articulated or to transgress the usual ranting in newspapers and the critique by intellectuals. This time, as with every emancipatory politics, the unpredictable dimension unfolded in the most radical of ways. What started as trivial, for some vandal, night attacks on the radar systems spread with force in front of the municipality office, where a small group of people started calling for an uprising. The event was then

organized via Facebook and in the last weeks of November and early December the main square<sup>15</sup> hosted thousands of people. The major event happened on 26th November, when 15,000 people gathered and demanded the resignation of both the corrupt mayor and his local municipality. The event had started calmly, full of families and kids, but it was violently dispersed by police who used batons, excessive amounts of tear gas and other repressive methods. This triggered the uprising, with groups of young people pushing onto the municipality office, burning trash bins and using fire crackers. The images circulated all over Slovenia and public rage accumulated, due to the cynical responses by political establishment. What had been a small sparkle in late November spread across the country and shaped this mass social uprising. Slovenia encountered

the first major revolt since its independence, which happened without the organizational help of any established institutions (party, trade union, church, and so on). In December 2012 and even going into 2013, the popular uprising spread over many small towns of Slovenia<sup>16</sup> and it was greeted with general strikes and trade union support.

The mass protests created new organizational platforms which radically shook the local ruling political class, while participating in the struggle of the European periphery against austerity policies. Looking back, one can understand the reasons for the revolt in the light of the slow but insistent adoption of neoliberal reforms from 2004 onwards, when both governments “left”-center and the right-wing privatized state-owned companies and the social service (a remnant of the welfare state). But in the most recent years, the economic crisis had hit hard in the center of the society, and not only on those in the margins. The central demand of the uprisings was negative: *It is enough, they are done (gotovo je, gotovi so)*. People demanded the overthrowing of the whole political class; discussing an alternative agenda on the transformation of the current state of affairs has only happened recently. What is important to state is that the most immediate political goals of the uprising were achieved: the mayor

of Maribor, Franc Kangler, had to resign under public pressure; even on the national level, due to these mass protests, the government of Janez Janša resigned later on, as its coalition partners left the sinking boat.

Even if the major political demands of the uprising were accomplished, the majority of the groups, old and new political organizations of dissent, do not have a clear agenda, what will come after. The economic crisis is still there and the major institutions of representative democracy remain intact. The new transitory government, lead by the first female PM, Alenka Bratušek, has adopted a less aggressive, even reconciliatory tone that attempts to integrate the critique of mass protest. Despite this victory and concession on the side of the ruling establishment, one has to be very aware that this situation is only temporary and that the new political platforms will have to continue working both on the level on streets (social movements) and within more institutionalized forms, which would lead to a veritable left Party in Slovenia, which would both contribute to the struggles on/of the periphery.

#### CONCLUSION: HOW DOES “MARIBOR” CONTINUE?

It would not be an exaggeration to conclude that the political efforts

and the effect of the uprising started to shape up clearer in Maribor, in the city that saw the first mass political mobilization after almost 25 years. The Political platform of the protest started by waging two different and concrete political struggles: *firstly*, some groups organized their support for new program and independent mayor. The local elections in mid-March saw the electoral victory of Andrej Fištravec, an independent and critical intellectual, who has been present in the local scene for years already. The trouble remains with the official municipality's council, which is still full of members of the established political parties. The council will unquestionably stall the democratization of the political process. *Secondly*, there has been an important direct democratic effort by the "Initiative for city council"<sup>17</sup>, which organized the district and other communal communities. These new democratic platforms are seen as forums for the discussion and possible influence for municipal budget and planning, which both re-invents the self-management tradition and also opens the example to other cities.

If both aspects of the political process from below and from already institutionalized forms will cooperate and transform the state of affairs is a whole different question, which is too soon to be answered upon. But what

is important is that the politics itself was taken away from those that are accomplices to the present crisis. Politics was also taken away both from nostalgia of industrialist times and neoliberal enthusiasm of the deindustrialized dreams of the ECC. If Maribor already attempted to answer in 1988, it has answered again, politically, in 2012 - by starting to redefine what their city and also the "right to the city" is. If in 1988 Maribor signaled the fall of socialism that meant also fall of welfare state, could it be that this time we hear the bells of neoliberal death? This remains the question addressed by the new Maribor, but is much larger than city itself. What is more clear is that the uprising opened a future for a different Maribor that opposes both the imposed austerity and the position of periphery. Opposite to this, the struggle illuminates ways in which the periphery nowadays can become the very center for both politically engaged thought and revolutionary action.



#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have to thank Franc Trček and Tomaž Škela for their valuable comments for preparation of this essay, and Aleksandra Berberih Slana (*Museum of National Liberation, Maribor*) for the permission to publish photographs.

p 62: Photograph of 1988 Maribor revolt

p 64: top to bottom: Tekstilni institut VIR-UKM, Hutter - Tkalnice 1936 VIR,PAMB (10), Hutter -

Tkalcice 1936 VIR, PAMB (6), Hutter - Tkalcice 1936 VIR, PAMB (7).

p70: Maribor December 2012 revolt

<sup>2</sup> These are officially registered unemployed (source *Employment Service of Slovenia*: [http://www.ess.gov.si/trg\\_dela/trg\\_dela\\_v\\_stevilkah/stopnja\\_registrirane\\_brezposelnosti](http://www.ess.gov.si/trg_dela/trg_dela_v_stevilkah/stopnja_registrirane_brezposelnosti)).

<sup>3</sup> See Merrifield, this volume.

<sup>4</sup> Slavec (1992; *Industry of Maribor*, FF Ljubljana). The documentary film *Fabrika Maribor* (dir. Bojana Rudl, 2009) nicely presents 160 years of industrial development. Recently, in the context of ECC Maribor a project *Industrial Tour* (David Šalamun) made a good collection of the photographs and short descriptions of different social housing, factories and other facilities that present the industrial landscape of Maribor: <http://www.industrijskapespot.si/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> I have researched mostly the negative consequences of the market reform, which resulted in the strengthened competition between socialist enterprises, rising structural inequalities between core and peripheral regions in Yugoslavia, but also intensified exploitation of labour power. See my PhD (2012: 241-319, <http://www.ung.si/~library/doktorati/interkulturni/21Kirn.pdf>).

<sup>6</sup> One can detect also a (proto)post-fordist dimension in this process, which saw the rise of technocracy (management) and strategic importance of knowledge for (new) industries. Even the financing of the University started happening through *Self-managed Interest Groups*, which were mostly represented by big enterprises. For the market tendency in socialism see also Johana Bockman (2011, *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-wing Origins of Neoliberalism*, Stanford University Press).

<sup>7</sup> For details see Woodward (1995, *Balkan Tragedy*. Washington DC: The Brookings institution).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.muzejno-mb.si/novo/spomenik-mariborski-industriji.html> (in Slovenian). I have to thank to Tomaž Škela for some valuable insight of these events.

<sup>9</sup> This very uncreative discourse on creative industry can be reached in the promotional video of ECC and introductory text see: <http://>

[ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc413\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc413_en.htm).

<sup>10</sup> The study of Palmer was done already in 2004 and showed the positive results of the majority of the interviewed cities (80%). See: [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/european-capitals-of-culture\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/european-capitals-of-culture_en.htm), especially part II

<sup>11</sup> See <http://brazde.org/> (in Slovenian).

<sup>12</sup> There were many other examples of positive projects, such as *Cinema Udarnik*, but I would need to evaluate these contributions on another occasion.

<sup>13</sup> For a multiple critical evaluation of ECC see also new number of Dialogi <http://www.aristej.si/eng/dialogi/index.html>.

<sup>14</sup> For details see Vežjak's article on the reasons of the uprisings: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2013-01-10-vezjak-en.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See the photo: the square of freedom and in the middle of it the Monument to People's Liberation by architect Slavko Tihec who participated in the modernist movement that created new monuments to revolution in Yugoslavia.

<sup>16</sup> The last months of mass urban protest have brought together many different social groups and individuals of different political affiliations and generations, young and old, workers and students, queers and precarious, ecologists, anarchists and socialists. All have been demanding deeper social change. Instead of the usual complaining from the couch, people stepped into the realm of public protest. For details on the emergence of the mass movement see my text: <http://www.newsocialist.org/679-a-ghost-is-haunting-slovenia-the-ghost-of-revolution>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.imz-maribor.org/> (in Slovenian only). Its most general goals are: to actively engage into city politics and prevent corruption; to transform the current system by building a community of engaged citizens that participate in broader popular struggles; to discuss important topics; to be alert on all new policies and actively influence alternative agenda. The initiative also developed more specific strategies for each city district, that would radically democratize the running of the municipality.





# STRATEGIC EMBELLISHMENT AND CIVIL WAR

MORE NOTES ON THE  
NEW URBAN QUESTION

*by Andy Merrifield*

No matter how many times you read Walter Benjamin's musings on Paris they never disappoint. They never sound worn; there are always new nuggets buried within, lurking between the lines, little sparkling gems you never expected to find, nor saw upon your first reading.

There is always something, too, that speaks as much about our century as the fabled nineteenth, over which Paris, Benjamin said, majestically presided. He spent hours upon hours — years and years in fact — scribbling away under “the painted sky of summer,” beneath the huge ceiling mural of Paris’s Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), amassing piles of notes (some still apparently lying unpublished, gathering dust in BNF’s vaults) on the arcades projects that so mesmerized him, on Fourier and Marx, on Baudelaire and Blanqui, on Haussmann and insurrection. Those latter two themes — Haussmannization and insurrection — have piqued my interest recently, helped me frame my thinking about what I’ve been calling (for want of a better term) “the new urban question.”

“Speculation on the stock-exchange,” says Benjamin, commenting on “Haussmann or the Barricades,” “pushed into the background the forms of gambling that had come down from feudal society.” Gambling transformed time, he says, into a heady narcotic, into an orgy of speculation over space, seemingly addictive for the wealthy and indispensable for the fraudulent. (The two, unsurprisingly, fed off one another then and still do.) Finance capital began to make its sleazy entrée into the urban experience; beforehand

the urban was simply the backdrop of a great capitalist drama unfolding around the time Marx wrote the Manifesto. It was simply the seat of the stock market; suddenly, though, the urban itself became a stock market, another asset, now for a wheeling and dealing in space, for state-sponsored real estate promotion, for investing in new space and expropriating old space. The passionate embrace between politics and economics underwent its modern consecration.

Benjamin underscores two principal characteristics of Louis-Bonaparte’s master-builder Baron Haussmann — who, remember, prided himself on his self-anointed nickname: “l’artiste démolisseur” [“demolition artist”]. (“Baron,” too, was likewise a purely egotistical creation, having no official credence.) First was Haussmann’s immense hatred of the masses, of the poor, rootless homeless populations, the wretched and ragged victims of his giant wreckers-ball, immortalized by Baudelaire’s “Eyes of the Poor” Spleen poem. Benjamin recalls a speech Haussmann made in 1864 at the National Assembly, fulminating about the stepchildren his grand works had actively created. “This population kept increasing as a result of his works,” Benjamin says. “The increase in rents drove the proletariat into the suburbs.” Central Paris thereby



lost its “popular” base, “lost its characteristic physiognomy.” Typical of so many tyrant-visionaries (like Robert Moses, who admired his gallic antecedent), Haussmann was a bundle of contradictions: publicly-minded (his underground sewers and macadamized boulevards replaced shitty overground drains and boggy lanes) yet scornful of real people; a lover of Paris, “the city of all Frenchmen,” yet suspicious of democratic elections and progressive taxation; Haussmann saw it all as his God-given duty, his natural right “to expropriate for the cause of public utility.”

Yet, for Benjamin, there was something else behind Haussmann’s works, a second, perhaps more important theme: “the securing of the city against civil war,” a desperate desire to prevent the barricades going up across the city’s streets. A red fear. The breadth of those new boulevards would, it was thought, make future barricade building trickier, more onerous and protracted an ordeal in the heat of any revolt; besides, “the new streets,” says Benjamin, “were to provide the shortest route between the barracks and the working-class areas.” Hence the forces of order could more quickly mobilize themselves, more rapidly crush a popular insurrection. Urban space was concurrently profitable and pragmatic, aesthetically edifying

yet militarily convenient; “strategic embellishment,” Benjamin labels it, a vocation eagerly practiced to this very day, though with new twists.

The new twist is the scale of this dialectic, the depth and breadth of the twin forces of strategic embellishment and insurrection. This dialectic is immanent in the our current urban-global condition, and respective antagonists feed off one another in dramatic ways. They are both immanent within the upheaval of our neoliberal market economy, just as Marx said that a relative surplus population was immanent in the accumulation of capital; and therein, borrowing Benjamin’s valedictory words, “we can begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.” While we can pinpoint Haussmann-like acts in every city across the globe, North and South, East and West, it’s nonetheless vital to see all this as a process that engineers planetary urban space. We need, in other words, to open out our vista, to see the global urban wood rather than just the city trees, to see an individual despotic program as a generalized class imperative, as a process of neo-Haussmannization, as something consciously planned as well as unconsciously initiated, pretty much everywhere.

Our planetary urban fabric — the terrestrial texturing of our

urban universe — is woven by a ruling class that sees cities as purely speculative entities, as sites for gentrifying schemes and upscale redevelopments, as machines for making clean, quick money in, and for dispossessing erstwhile public goods. Cities therein are microcosmic entities embedded in a macrocosmic urban system, discrete atoms with their own inner laws of quantum gravity, responsive to a general theory of global relativity. Splitting city molecules reveal elemental charges within: let's call them "centers" and "peripheries," complementarities of attraction and repulsion, of speculative particles and insurrectional waves. Is there a master-builder therein, some great God presiding over these heavenly bodies, a living Baron Haussmann? Yes and No.

Yes, because there are particular prime movers in making deals, actual class embodiments of finance capital and speculative real estate interests, real lenders and borrows, actual developers and builders, breathing architects and administrators, some of whom are moguls who mobilize their might like the Baron of old; all, too, have their own local flavoring and place-specific ways of doing things, culturally conditioned dependent on where you are, and what you can get away with.

No, in the sense that

although there are complicit individuals, both in public and private office, with varying degrees of competence, who may even be cognizant of one another, in explicit cahoots with one another, it would be mistaken to see it all as one great conspiracy — a "Great Game," as Kipling quipped of English imperialism in India — as a single coordinated global conspiracy undertaken by an omnipotent ruling class. Indeed, that would attribute too much to this aristocratic elite, over-estimate their sway over the entirety of urban space.

To peripheralize en masse necessitates the insulation of centers. Insulation means controlling borders, patrolling risk, damming leakiness, keeping people out as well as in; "control," the Invisible Committee say in *The Coming Insurrection*, "has a wonderful way of integrating itself into the commodity landscape, showing its authoritarian face to anyone who wants to see it. It's an age of fusions, of muzak, telescopic police batons and cotton candy. Equal parts police surveillance and enchantment!" That's the nub of neo-Haussmannization, its law of social physics. Thus aristocrats in our age of Enlightenment acknowledge their fear of the sans-culottes they help create, the citizens they disenfranchise, the deracinated they banish to the global banlieues.

Thus the civil war is everyday, is about strategic security in the face of economic volatility; and the stakes have ratcheted up since 9/11. In fact, 9/11 set the terms of whole new set of odds about what is now permissible. The “war of terrorism” gets reenacted on the everyday civilian urban street, where “low intensity conflicts” justify paramilitary policing and counter-insurgency tactics — just in case. (For a graphic survey, we need look no further than Steve Graham’s brilliant exposé, *Cities under Siege* [2010]. “The war on terror operations in London,” says Graham, “efforts to securitize and militarize cities during G-20 summits an other mega-events, the counter-drug and counter-terror efforts in the favelas of Rio... link very closely to the full-scale counterinsurgency warfare and colonial control operations in places like Baghdad or the West Bank.”)

The fragmented shards of global neo-Hausmannization are likewise reassembled as a singular narrative in Eric Hazan’s *Chronique de la guerre civile* (2003): “nonstop wail of police sirens on the boulevard Barbès, the whistling of F16s high in the sky over Palestine, rumbling tanks rattling the earth in Grozny and Tikrit, armored bulldozers crushing houses in Rafah, bombs exploding over Baghdad and on buses in Jerusalem, barking attack

dogs accompanying security forces on the Paris metro” — all provide testimony of a business-as-usual battle scene in an ongoing global urban civil war. In fact, paramilitary policing in Palestine, says Hazan, serves as something of a model everywhere for “the war of the banlieue.” Jerusalem isn’t any further from Ramallah than Drancy is from Notre-Dame; yet it’s a war in the periphery that’s rendered invisible from the standpoint of the center. (“In Tel-Aviv, you can live as peacefully as in Vésinet or in Deauville.”) And behind all the din and shocks, the bombs and barking, global centers experiment with new depersonalized high-technology, unleashing democracy at 30,000 ft, modern warfare orchestrated on a computer keyboard. (High-tech Israelis are closely linked with American research institutes and with the military-industrial complex; arms trade and patents are worth billions of dollars. “The military and the monetary get together when it’s necessary,” rapped the late Gil-Scott Heron; he left out the academy, or “the academary,” which goes together with the military and the monetary when it’s necessary.)

A force is a push or pull exerted upon an object resultant from its interaction with another object. Centers and peripheries emanate from such interaction,

from such contact interaction, from a Newtonian Third Law of Motion: that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. We can name that oppositional reaction insurrection, even if, in the Third Law of Newtonian Social and Political Motion, that reaction is opposite but never equal; it is a minority reaction despite being voiced by a majority; it is a reaction that creates its own action, or, as The Coming Insurrection suggests, its own resonance. Insurrection resonates from the impact of the shock waves summoned up by bombs and banishment, all of which unleash reactive and active waves of friction and opposition, alternative vibrations that spread from the banlieues, that ripple through the periphery and seep into the center.

If there are twin powers of insurrection, one internal, another an external, outer propulsive energy, then it's the latter which might hold the key in any battle to come, in any global intifada. And here it's not so much a solidarity between Palestinian kids lobbing rocks and casseurs in Seine-Saint-Denis, between jobless Spaniards and Greeks taking over Madrid's Puerta del Sol and Athen's Syntagma Square, between school kids in Chile and looters in Croydon, nor even between the Occupy movement in the US and its sister cells across the globe; it's more that each of these

groups somehow see themselves in different camps of the same civil war, fighting as territorial foot soldiers, as relative surplus populations sharing a common language and, significantly, a common enemy.

The war of the banlieue is a special kind of war, the scene of military maneuvering different from Clausewitzian warfare of old, staged on an open battlefield. This war no longer comprises grandiose campaigns by troops but is rather a micro-everydayness of peacetime intervention, a dogged affair in which the police and the paramilitary play interchangeable roles, indiscernible roles. Maintaining order and destabilizing order require new urban tactics, different from past warfare and previous insurrections. The terrain of the civil war is now at once more claustrophobic and more fluid, more intensive as well as more extensive. The urban needs to be theorized as a tissue with capillaries and arteries through which blood and energy circulate to nourish this tissue, to keep its cells alive, or sometimes to leave them partly dead from under-nutrition or blockage. This understanding let's us see the urban's complex circuit card, its networked patterning, its mosaic and fractal form, stitched together with pieces of delicate fabric; an organism massively complex yet strikingly vulnerable. Insurrectional forces must enter

into its flow, into the capillaries and arteries of urban power and wealth, enter into its global network to interrupt that circulation, to unwind its webbing and infrastructure, to occupy its nodes at the weakest and most powerful points. In a sense, given the global interconnectivity of everything, this can be done almost anywhere, accepting there are nodes that assume relative priority in the system's overall functioning. Just as cybernetic information can be hacked, so too can acts of subversion interrupt and hack flows of money, goods and transport. The system can be stymied, symbolically, like outside Wall Street or St. Paul's Cathedral; and really, like when, in December 2011, Occupy Oakland took over the US's fifth-largest port, "Wall Street on the waterfront," crippling operating revenues that amount to a hefty annual \$27 billion, striking aristocrats hard where it hurts them most: in their pockets.

Perhaps sabotage is a valid retribution for the incivilities that reign in our streets. "The police are not invincible in the streets," the Invisible Committee write, "they simply have the means to organize, train, and continually test new weapons. Our weapons, on the other hand, are always rudimentary, cobbled together, and often improvised on the spot." The power of surprise, of

secret organization, of rebelling, of demonstrating and plotting covertly, of striking invisibly, and in multiple sites at once, is the key element in confronting a power whose firepower is vastly superior. Once, in the past, sabotaging and thwarting work, slowing down the speed of work, breaking up the machines and working-to-rule comprised a valid *modus operandi*, an effective weapon for hindering production and lock-jamming the economy; now, the space of twenty-first-century urban circulation, of the ceaseless and often mindless current of commodities and people, of information and energy, of cars and communication, becomes the broadened dimension of the "whole social factory" to which the principle of sabotage can be applied.

Thus "jam everything" becomes a reflex principle of critical negativity, of Bartlebyism brought back to radical life, of Newton's Third Law of Political Motion. Ironically, the more the economy has rendered itself virtual, and the more "delocalized," "dematerialized" and "just-in-time" is its infrastructural base, the easier it is to take down locally, to create apoplexy, to redirect and reappropriate. Several years ago, insurrections in France against CPE bill (*contrat première embauche*), the first of a series of state laws to make job contracts for young people more insecure, "did

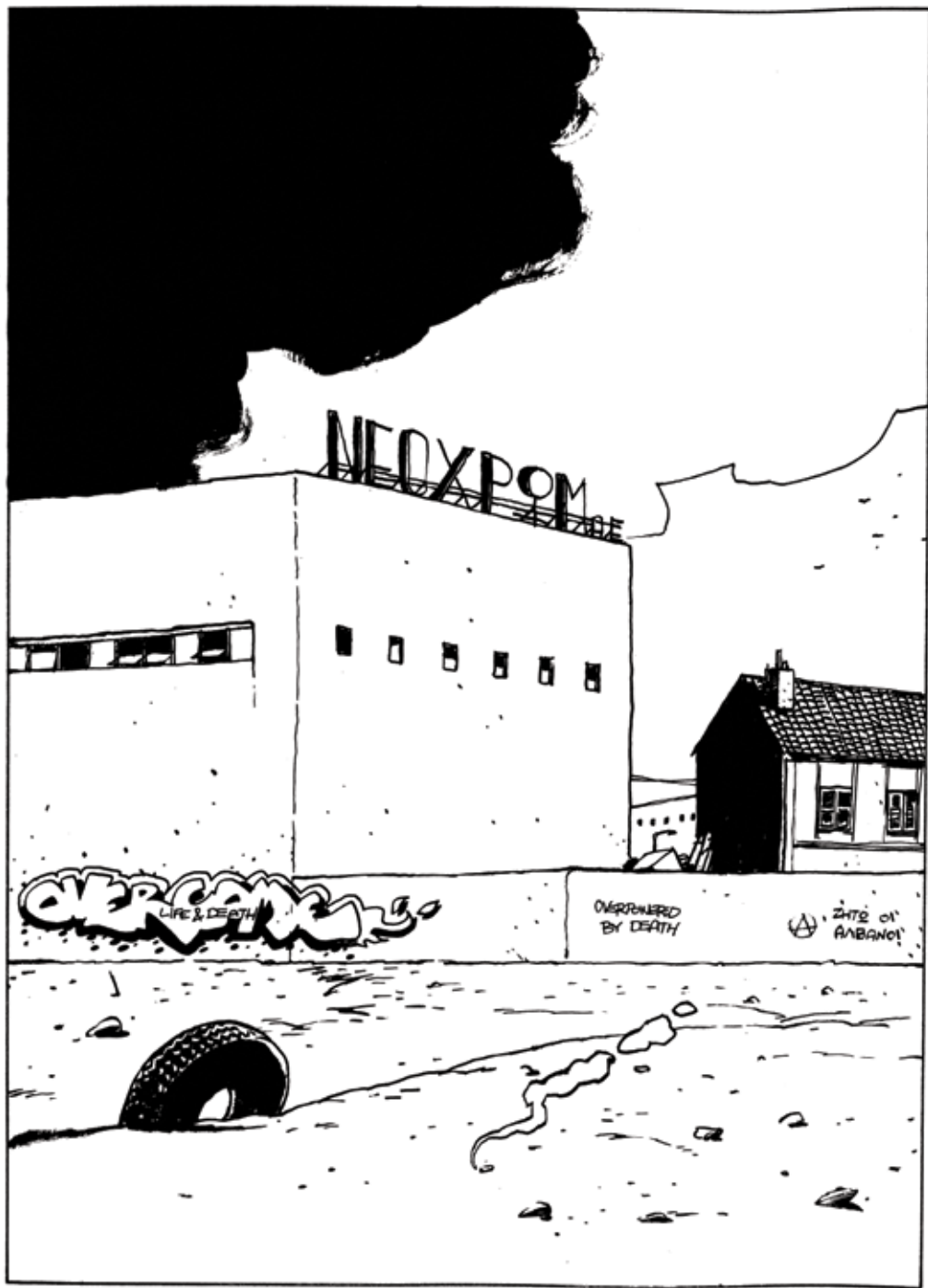
not hesitate to block train stations, ring roads, factories, highways, supermarkets and even airports. In Rennes,” the Invisible Committee recall, “only three hundred people were needed to shut down the main access road to the town for hours and cause a 40-kilometer long traffic jam.” Blanqui, too, that professional insurrectionist, the shady conspiratorial figure who so fascinated Benjamin (and Baudelaire), likewise recognized how urban space isn’t simply the theater of confrontation; it’s also the means and stake in an insurrection, the battleground of a guerrilla warfare that builds barricades and gun turrets, that occupies buildings and strategic spaces, that employs the methodology of moving through walls.

But barricades today aren’t there simply to defend inwardly. They need to be flexible and portable, and outward looking. They need to move between nodes to disrupt and block, and to foster new life within. They need to be mobilized to tear down other barricades that keep people apart, that trap people in, that peripheralize. Those latter sort of barricades are walls of fear that need smashing down like the veritable storming of the Bastille, so that new spaces of encounter can be formed — new agoras for assemblies of the people, for peoples’ Assembly.

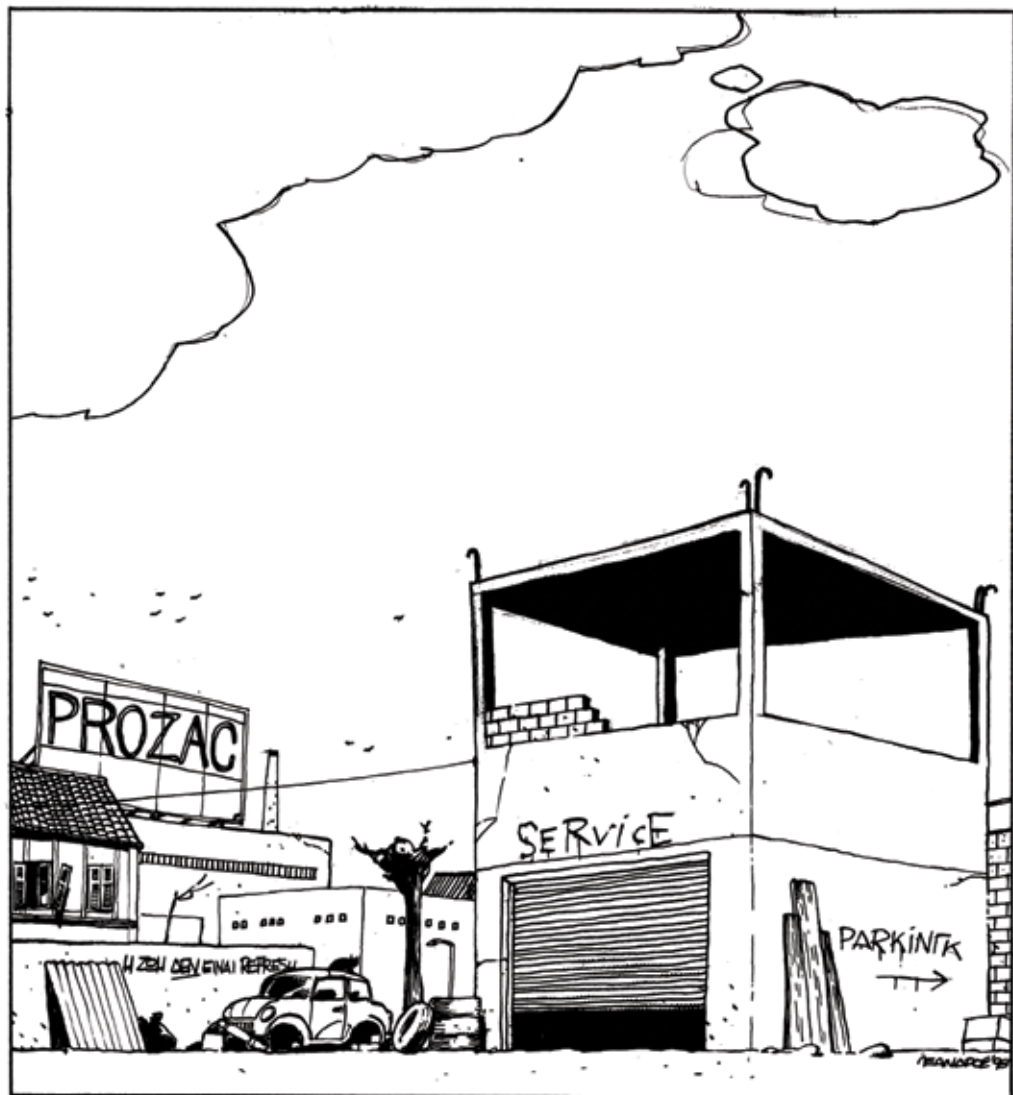
Benjamin was mesmerized by the spirit of Blanqui haunting Haussmann’s boulevards, Blanqui the antidote to Haussmannization, Blanqui the live fuse for igniting civil war, for catalyzing insurrectional eruption. And although Blanqui’s secret cells of revolutionary agents — those hardened, fully-committed professional conspirators — had an inherent mistrust of the masses, Benjamin nonetheless saw in them a capacity to organize and propagandize, to spread the insurrectional word, to figure out a plan and give that plan definition and purpose. They could even help guide an activism that seizes territories and schemes mass desertion; that could, in our day, reinvent a neo-Blanquism (neo-Jacobinism?) to confront intensifying neo-Haussmannization, an opposite and almost equal reaction. Indeed, perhaps the thing that most fascinated Benjamin was Blanqui’s notion of “eternal recurrence,” that stuff comes around full circle, including revolutions, that democratic passions don’t disappear: they crop up again and again in new forms and in different guises, with new tricks and covert tactics, with new participants whose prescient ability is to imagine the dominant order as ruins even before it has crumbled.











TRANSCORP '89

# hello Dr Strangelove

## THE NEO-NAZI GOLDEN DAWN AND STATE APPARATUSES IN GREECE

by Dimitris Dalakoglou<sup>1</sup>

*“No government in the world fights fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its grasp it has recourse to fascism to maintain itself.”*

Buenaventura Durruti,  
Interview to Pierre Van Paasen in Madrid, 24 July 1936.

Published in *The Toronto Daily Star*, 5 August 1936.

*“Why are you guys so anti-dictators? Imagine if America was a dictatorship. You could let 1% of the people have all the nation’s wealth. You could help your rich friends get richer by cutting their taxes. And bailing them out when they gamble and lose. You could ignore the needs of the poor for health care and education. Your media would appear free, but would secretly be controlled by one person and his family. You could wiretap phones. You could torture foreign prisoners. You could have rigged elections. You could lie about why you go to war. You could fill your prisons with one particular racial group, and no one would complain. You could use the media to scare the people into supporting policies that are against their interests.”*

General Aladeen in ‘the Dictator’ (2012)

### ARRESTING NAZIS?

First, some much needed background: Golden Dawn (GD) is the Greek neo-Nazi party. In the parliamentary elections of 2009, they received 0.29% of the vote (circa 20,000 votes); around three years later, in the elections of 2012, they received about 7% (over 400,000 votes). Within the same period, GD grew from a grouping of a couple of offices and a couple of hundreds of members activists grew into a party of over

fifty branches/offices and a few thousand members nationwide.

Meanwhile, GD started its now infamous Greeks-only food and clothing distributions, while the rest of its usual activities - beating up, stabbing and threatening migrants, breaking their shops, etc. carried on.

Now, to the breaking news: The leaders of the Golden Dawn were arrested in September 2013. The incident that triggered the arrests was the assassination of the antifascist musician Pavlos

Fyssas in Nikaia, Athens. Fyssas was murdered by Roupakias, a local leading GD member, because he wrote and sang anti-GD hip-hop songs, according to the interview of a former GD member in a local newspaper. Police were present at the murder, allowing over twenty neo-Nazis to attack and for one of them to stab the 34-year-old antifascist to death. Police have been present at several other neo-Nazi attacks without intervening. But go one week before the assassination and you will see that when fans PAOK, a local football club, attacked the GD office in Thessaloniki, all 43 of them were arrested on the spot. In September 2012, when the antifascist motorbike patrols started in Athens, DELTA motorbike police (which has excelled in seriously injuring protesters since its foundation in 2009) attacked the antifascists, arresting, beating and later on torturing them. On the following day, police attacked those who had gathered at Athens' courthouse to express their solidarity to the antifascists, arresting even more of them. This series of arrests brought to a temporary halt an action that was aimed at stopping what were daily racist attacks in those parts of the city. From that time on, lives of several immigrants - and now, that of one local antifascist too - have

been claimed by neo-Nazis in the Athenian streets.

#### EXCEPTIONAL KINSHIP...

Just one week before the assassination of Fyssas, Babis Papadimitriou, a government-friendly journalist, declared live on a local TV station that the right-wing New Democracy party should enter into a government coalition with the GD. Prominent ND members like Byron Polydoros or Failos Kranidiotis have made similar statements in the past. Notorious neo-fascists like Adonis Georgiadis or Makis Vorides hold offices or are MPs in the current government. Obviously, the assassination of Pavlos Fyssas by GD and the arrest of GD leaders ruined all the joyous atmosphere inside the Right in the country, maybe postponing such collaboration.

The truth is that the extreme-Right parastate in Greece is explicitly embedded within wider activities and campaigns of the official state authorities and it was rarely an autonomous political force. Acknowledging that kind of relationship is precisely the reason that in Greek, the term *parakratos* (parastate) is used in order to talk about the extreme-Right.

Historically, since the 1920s, the far-Right parastate has functioned as the long arm of the State's violent apparatus,

targeting people with Left-wing affiliations (see Kostopoulos 2005; Mazower 2006, 353–4; Mouzelis and Pagoulatos 2002, 88–9; Panourgia 2009). Unsurprisingly, GD comprises a political and physical continuation of that tradition: in 1984, the leader of the colonel's dictatorship (1967–1974) Papadopoulos founded the organization EPEN from his prison cell, where he had been sentenced for the coup. The founding and current leader of GD, Michaloliakos, was the first president of EPEN Youth Sector.

The colonels' dictatorship is notorious for its close links with the extreme-Right para-state apparatuses, both prior to and following the coup. For example, during the dictatorship, laws honouring and providing benefits to the members of the Security Battalions (Tagmata Asfaleias) for their role during World War II came into force. The Security Battalions were the Greek units of collaborators with the German Nazi occupiers during World War II. Security Battalions, to a great extent, comprised the formalization of the pre-war fascist para-state and its transformation into formal organized units. The further formalization continued after World War II by the postwar state apparatus, peaking during the dictatorship (see Kostopoulos 2005). Allegedly, Papadopoulos was

a member of the Patras Security Battalion during the Nazi occupation (Kloby 2004: 249). Certainly, as army officer of the post-war state, Papadopoulos served in the State Intelligence Service (SIS), in the department of internal security. The major task of this department was to tackle the “communist threat” within Greece, defining and targeting the state's enemy within (Keeley 2010). In 1981, after the electoral victory of the social-democratic PASOK, the SIS was reformed and renamed into Greek Intelligence Service. In a payroll slip leaked from the SIS during this reform, the name of Michaloliakos appears as that of a paid employee of the intelligence service. Meanwhile, Michaloliakos was notorious for his participation in bomb attacks in cinemas that were screening Soviet movies. This was the reason he was imprisoned in the late 1970s. Eventually, Michaloliakos left EPEN and founded GD; in EPEN he was replaced by M. Vorides. Nowadays, the latter is an MP of the conservative party “New Democracy,” which leads the governmental coalition. Vorides was the minister of infrastructure in the government of technocrats ran by the unelected banker Loukas Papademos in 2011–2012.

Despite the long extreme-Right tradition and the involvement of leading GD figures into the activities of the parastate, GD as such had very few members up

until 2010. One of the reasons for its small size was that many neo-Nazi, neo-fascist and junta-phile elements were absorbed by the parliamentary system and dispersed across other Right-wing parties. In spite of its size, GD was often the cherry on the top of the patriotic cake, baked by various governments in crucial moments of Greek post-dictatorial history. For example: the moment when the conservative government of Mitsotakis (1990-1993) was implementing the first concrete legal adjustment towards an explicitly neoliberal system, it was also the same moment when his government decided that the Republic of Macedonia should not be allowed to carry its name. That decision came with some 45 year delay, since the Socialist Republic of Macedonia (predecessor to the Republic) was founded as part of the Federal Yugoslavia in 1944. Apropos, the current PM, Samaras as Minister of Foreign Affairs was a key figure behind the nationalist explosion of the early 1990s. During the large rallies —organised by the government, the church and other institutions— the neo-Nazis of GD made their public appearance as a perfectly respectable part of the ‘Macedonia is Greek’ campaign. During the largest of those rallies in Omonoia Square, GD attacked migrants and some new squatted anarchist social centres (see Psaras 2012). The same social centres

that were attacked and eventually evicted by the police in the winter of 2012-2013.

Another example of Golden Dawn becoming the extra ingredient of the patriotic/nationalist soup came in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Back then, the country was transformed overnight into a superpower in sports with its top moment being the success of the Greek football team making it in the European Championships of 2004. That was a period when the Greek flags and the national anthem was heard more and more in stadiums across the world and from there, via TV sets, to everyone’s home. That was also the period when some of the champions were accompanied in parade from the airport to the centre of the city for the big party downtown, organised by state authorities to honour their success. Back then, Olympic champions were treated more or less as national heroes and indeed from that point on, they could automatically acquire an officer’s post in the Greek army. All these phenomena were embedded within a peculiar new type of nationalism. This nationalism was promoted by the third-way social-democrat government of Simitis (1997-2004) but also by the conservative government of Karamanlis (2004-2009). Both these governments worked hard to promote a number of adjustments towards a neoliberal

form of governance, but also to portray the small Greek state as the newly emerging superpower in the Balkans: Greece was the only EU and euro-zone country in the region, expanding (business-wise) to the newly opened markets of its neighbouring post-socialist countries. All that patriotism was boosted even further when Greece became the host for the Olympic Games (2004). Fitting with the prominent governmental slogans of 'Powerful Greece', 'Growth', 'Modernisation', and the 'European Greece' of European Integration and so on, all these "successes" were presented by corporate media and governments as a national success. It was within that climate that the 'Light-blue Army' (Galazia Stratia) appeared. This is an outright neo-Nazi fan club of the Greek national football team, controlled by GD. It started in 2000 and it was empowered during the 2004 successes of the Greek national team. The leader of the club was Panagiotaros, the current MP of Golden Dawn who acquired international fame when he declared during his interview to the BBC that GD is preparing for a civil war against the anarchists and migrants. But indeed the 'Light-Blue Army' was treated by the mass media and governmental factors either with a guilty silence, or as a respectful fan club of the team, following and supporting "our kids" to their battles around the world.

Indeed, every Greek was supposed to have a share in these successes and everyone was supposed to be proud of the team and its supporters. Meanwhile Galazia Stratia was recruiting hooligans in football fields, while orchestrating organized attacks on migrants every time a success of the national team was celebrated downtown. Their nationalist slogans ("You Albanians will never become Greeks") were chanted by thousands in these moments of national pride.

#### NAZIS AS COUNTER-INSURRECTION

This extreme - Right political column was re-formed anew as part of the post-December 2008 counter-insurrection. In spring 2009, extreme - Right groups declared the Athenian Square of Ayios Panteleimonas a no-go zone for migrants. Patrols of neo-Nazis affiliated with GD started attacking migrants in this particular area. That violence escalated further, but after the International Monetary Fund/European Union/European Central Bank (IMF/EU/ECB) loan of May 2010, this extreme-Right tendency started taking more concrete shape and coming together more firmly, multiplying and escalating more racist attacks within and outside the particular neighbourhood (see HRW 2012; Kandyliis and Kavoulakos 2011).

GD, until recently, was attacking mainly Left-wing activists and anti-fascists rather than migrants. Despite the readjustment of the Nazis' target, that part of the parastate apparatus never forgot its old target. For example, in a previous article (Dalakoglou & Vradis 2011), it was argued that although the new rule over Ayios Panteleimonas targets mostly migrants, it was in fact initially shaped as a spatial-political response by the extreme Right to the December revolt's spatial-political legacies. Neo-Nazis aimed to control an open-air public space, and to promote their racist and anti-Left agenda in oppositional reference to open-air spaces, which hosted the spontaneous political offspring of the December revolt.

The difference is that neo-Nazis often operate openly in collaboration with formal state apparatuses. For example, the government vice minister, Markoyiannakis, who was responsible for the police (in an unprecedented act) personally visited one of the anti-migratory rallies of Ayios Panteleimonas in July 2009 to chat with the "enraged local residents." After that meeting, neo-Nazis left Ayios Panteleimonas Square and attacked one of the oldest anarchist social centres in the city: Villa Amalias. As it was mentioned above, Nazis these days can concentrate on the rest of their activities since the police replaced

them in the attacks against Villa Amalias.

When migrants started to be targeted so often by gang-style neo-Nazi attacks, police stations systemically refused to record or examine racist attacks, in fact providing mute protection to these attacks (see HRW 2012). But things often go well beyond mute protection. As mentioned above, in late September 2012 during an antifascist motorcycle rally in central Athens close to Ayios Panteleimonas, there were clashes with neo-Nazis, and the police immediately intervened, arresting fifteen antifascists and torturing them in the police HQ. Back in 2009, a father who dared to challenge the neo-Nazi rule over the square of Ayios Panteleimonas was detained by the police (Dalakoglou 2012).

Certainly, within the picture, one has to mention that Ayios Panteleimonas was already notorious since 2004 for racist attacks by police officers serving in the local station (Lebesopoulou 2010). Indeed, the close links between police and GD are not a local problem of Ayios Panteleimonas. This became apparent in the elections of May and June 2012, when approximately half the police officers on duty in the headquarters of Athens police voted for GD. In spite of these explicit and conspicuous links between the formal state apparatus and GD, historically

and currently there is a desperate effort for para-state actions to be presented as spontaneous. Such effort goes back a long time and can be seen in the historical use of the term “indignant citizens” (*aganaktismenoi polites*), which was used by the police and government-friendly mass media in order to label the para-state aid against protests. For example, that was the label employed in November 1995 in order to name the group of neo-Nazis who joined the police forces who were surrounding the occupied, by Anarchists, Athens Polytechnic. Eventually, the political life of the term “indignant” in Greek changed since the Syntagma movement of the summer 2011. In Syntagma, the demonstrators directly translated the word *indignados* from Spanish. So today, the respective Greek word, *aganaktismenoi*, stands for the people who occupied Syntagma Piazza to protest against austerity, the political establishment of the country and IMF.

The extreme-Right groups escalated their activity in May 2011, just a few days before the Syntagma movement. On Ipirou Street, at the centre of Athens, an armed robbery—the victim of which was a Greek man who was stabbed to death by robbers of foreign origin—triggered a series of organized group attacks against migrants and anti-fascists. This lasted for several days, and saw the beating of migrants

and stabbings, along with attacks against some of Athens’ anarchist squats (Dalakoglou 2011; HRW 2012). Some of the participants in the rally on the ground where the assassination had taken place were suggesting that this is “our December.” So the implication was that since December 2008 was a spontaneous revolt triggered by the assassination of Alexis Grigoropoulos by the police, the murder of Manolis Kantaris in Ipirou Street was expected by the far-Right to be the event triggering a massive xenophobic semi-pogrom, attracting neo-Nazis from other cities who came to Athens for the big day. The masses did not come, but still, the attacks happened (HRW 2012).

A few days after these incidents, the Syntagma Piazza movement started. In Syntagma, members of GD tried to get involved, but were attacked by anti-fascists on several occasions. Some of the most characteristic examples were clashes between anti-fascists and Nazis during the general strikes of June 15 and 28–29, 2011. Despite their efforts to appear as part of the mass spontaneous collective action, on June 28, neo-Nazis were videotaped fleeing behind the riot police lines when they were chased by anti-fascist demonstrators. A video showing prominent members of the far-Right chatting with officers and passing behind the police



cordon toward the police-protected zone of the house of parliament caused a scandal. A potential attempt by demonstrators to go close to the police officers during that day would be unimaginable. The unprecedented police brutality during the forty-eight-hour general strike of June 28 and 29 resulted to several hundreds of demonstrators ending up in the hospital. The minister of development at the time, Skandalidis, was forced to admit publicly that there is an old relationship between the extreme Right and the police that needs to be examined (Eletherotypia 30/06/2011). A few years ago, another similar scandal broke out when on February 2, 2008, during an antifascist demonstration in Athens, members of GD and riot police operated together against the antifascist demonstrators, being again recorded on camera. One day after the assassination of Fyssas in September 2013 again members of Golden Dawn were filmed operating together with riot police against the antifascist demonstrators in Nikaia, where the musician was killed.

#### TWO SYSTEMS - ONE INFRASTRUCTURE

The difference between fascism and parliamentary democracy is only in the form of governance. The economic infrastructure remains the same: capitalism. Fascism/Nazism

is dictatorial, militarised capitalism, while parliamentary democracy is capitalism with representation - or at least a hypocritical superficial version of it on the top of capitalist economic inequalities. This does not imply that the two regimes are identical. Economic infrastructure, on the other hand remains near-identical and each of the two systems encapsulates the potentiality to exchange elements with its sibling. For example, Nazi parties participate in elections and get voted in parliament, while liberal democracy makes exceptions when the so-called 'public order' is at risk, declaring curfews and other fascist-inspired states of exception.

This relationship is well-documented in e.g. the intimate relationships between big capital and the extreme-Right parties in interwar Germany and Italy (see Guérin 1936; Wiesen 2002). Ford, Bayer, Chase Bank, BMW and General Electric are just a few among the companies which did business with the rising Nazis of the 1930s. Such links, can be attributed partly to the opportunistic and ontological immorality of the capitalist market. They would not, however, be possible if the economic infrastructure was not the same.

Another similar intimacy has been recorded historically: the one between State authorities of representative democracy and extreme-Right mechanisms. For

example, during the interwar period, almost every single State authority of the Weimar Republic saw the far-Right *freikorps* and the SA as the solution to the rise of the insurrectionists of the Left and collaborated eagerly with the first in order to suppress the second (Fritzsche 1998; Fischer 1995). Only a few years down the line, after fulfilling their political and social role, these gangs were massacred so that the Nazis could acquire a formal and serious party profile. Then people voted democratically for them. Within a decade they were able to establish a full fascist regime, and started a war which was very profitable for various big capital enterprises.

Still, it would be naive to believe that Nazism was eliminated at the end of Second World War: the majority of Nazi functionaries were adopted by post-war capitalist States. It was not only a matter of physical persons that would set the foundations of the post-war world. In many ways inspired by the dreams of Hitler, the post-war state apparatuses created collectively the infrastructure capable of causing many smaller or bigger holocausts – including weapons of mass destruction and modern armies capable of mass extermination.

The kinship between extreme-Right and capitalism was always visible in the post-war world. Today, from the Norwegian

neo-Nazi terrorist Breivik, Golden Dawn or EDL, to the Greek prime minister, Antonis Samaras, or to the British Home Officer Theresa May, many governments and far-Right groups see migrants as a danger to European countries. The part of that rhetoric which is closer to the political centre is shaped with respect to public order, criminality, public health, the de-regularization of the job market or in terms of capacities of the economy. The more extreme version employs ideas about a supposed ‘pollution’ of an imagined European racial and cultural whiteness or talks about an unknown Islamic or even Jewish plan to colonize ‘Christian Europe’. Indeed, as the example of Greece or the example of post-electoral Norway in 2013 manifests, there is no problem for centre-Right parties to collaborate with the far-Right parties at the parliamentary level in order to prevent any deviance of Europe towards slightly more anti-neoliberal or anti-racist pathways.

In terms of everyday life, when the establishment wanted to scare radicals or just the progressive middle classes, it would always bring up the fascism monster. Fascism in its pure form (as neo-Nazism), or fascism as form of “democratic” governance – interchanging, if necessary, between the two. Today, in these times of crisis and austerity, when the States are not prepared to provide any social

provisions (breaking the culture of intimacy between citizens and the State mechanisms), security, policing, borders, nationalism and even racism – if necessary – quickly become the last sources for consent that European governments can offer only to the most reactionary of their citizenry. But this situation has a very clear result: it makes European governments to increasingly identify with the agendas of neo-Nazi groups and vice versa. For them, the important point is to keep the economic system sustainable. They see it as irrelevant what happens politically; whether, that is, there is a representative or dictatorial administration that prevails.



#### FOOTNOTES

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# MOMENTS OF CRISIS

## THE AUGUST RIOTS, LONDON 2012 AND SOCIAL PRODUCTION/DESTRUCTION OF SPACE-AS-VALUE

by Jacken Waters

*'It feels really manufactured to us, a manufactured a sense of being British for one summer [...]. It's an untenable thing. Who are you selling Britain to, if not to the people who live here? And now, this next year feels really fucked. Last year worked, and was great at the time. Everyone was enjoying it, it was a really fun thing. There was no bad news because everyone was talking about the Olympics. If people accept that and have a great time, they are going to notice when its over and everything's really shit again. It's not gonna be like 'oh, there's cuts to everything to do with my life, but remember last year? The Olympics were really cool.*

London 2012, that moment of festival that possessed the capital last summer, is now receding into memory. With the Paralympic closing ceremony the last Olympic crowd dissolved itself, calling the games to finish. The spaces of the Olympics now stand empty and awaiting re-purposing, or have been reincorporated into the everyday life of the city. For a brief period these spaces were defined and dominated by those Olympic crowds. To navigate these spaces was to move with and within a crowd, following the ever-present and ever-cheerful games-maker volunteers. Interview participants employed at these sites reported that they felt that they were included as participants in the festivities; as members of the celebratory crowd even when working long hours with no breaks. Likewise police and soldiers drafted

in as security were incorporated into the spectacle. Members of the crowd continually approached them for photos wearing their helmets or posing next to their weapons.

This crowd was united in its movement and in its festival experience. Guided by the form of specially-designed Olympic spaces, by security and stewards, and by prior imaginings of London as Olympic host, the crowd produced it as such. The opening ceremony, maps, apps, signage and sponsored advertising collectively contributed to this imagining of Olympic space that the crowd enacted. This symbolic representation of London space as the festival rendered the city legible and allowed its audience to position themselves within that legibility. It imposed on the messy complexity of London the univocal network of spaces that constituted 'London 2012.' The audience of these representations materialised those spaces in their practice. In so doing they transformed themselves from individual spectators into the unified collective entity of the crowd.

This mobilisation of the crowd was at its heart a rehabilitation. 12 months before the opening of the Olympics a very different crowd moved in the spaces of London. This was the crowd as mob, as uncontrolled hostility. Crucially, this was the crowd

engaged in destruction. The riots represented a moment at which the labour of the living, in open antagonism with the structures that normally determine and limit it, was turned against dead labour, the fixed capital that constitutes the material form of London. The rioters represented a block to valorisation as shops closed and stocks were looted. The mob directly attacked and destroyed material reserves of value. After 4 days of rioting a total of 30,000 hours of trading time were lost (Rowley, 2011) and £200m of damage caused (Moore, 2011).

The motion of the rioters was only brought to an end in London by the deployment of 16,000 police. This motion is central to the character of the mob. It springs from an internal source and is by nature uncontrolled – it cannot be externally directed, only crushed. In the words of one rioter: 'some people have got absolutely nothing, come from nothing. [The destruction] is just what happens when everybody teams together' (cited in Iqbal, 2011). In contrast, the Olympic mobilisation of the crowd imbued it with an external motion. A motion represented and informed by carefully planned technologies of space and security. It is this external mobilisation that sought to rehabilitate the crowd. The crowd was rendered compliant where the mob was defiant, and

productive where the mob was destructive.

Both the riots of 2011 and the Olympics of 2012 were specific moments in the playing-out of crisis. If crises represent 'destructive moments that violently eliminate the imbalance between production and social consumption' (Heinrich, 2004; 173) then the riots in part constitute one expression of that destruction. As capital responds to and attempts to overcome crisis, new modes of valorisation are sought after. Attempts are made to resolve imbalance between production and consumption. The Olympics can be viewed as one such experiment, in which the crowd was put to work as productive of value. Within a generalised trend towards labour outside of the wage, this must be understood as a more subtle but far more insidious and immiserating moment of destruction.

The crowds were producers of the Olympic festival – explicitly so, in the case of the games-makers. Purpose-built spaces required crowds to fill them and realise that purpose. Existing spaces overlaid with new maps, signage, and symbolism were completed by crowds traversing them in newly-significant ways. Experience of these spaces was defined by the crowds filling them – for the individual navigating them as a body amongst bodies, and for the outside audience viewing the

crowds as a mass. As far as 'London 2012' was materially existent in certain spaces of the capital, it was produced in the last instant by the crowds that defined those spaces. In de Certeau's terms, this was the 'chorus of idle footsteps' that 'weave places together' (de Certeau, 1980; 97). Here, however, those footsteps were anything but idle – they were carefully directed. This was not the organic development of space through 'tactical' movements, but a strategic instrumentalisation of pedestrian speech acts to materialise the god's eye view of the city represented at the opening ceremony. This productive activity of the crowd went beyond giving shape to London 2012. Olympic spaces were also imbued with a specific character. They were spaces of (controlled) festival, wherein that festival atmosphere was defined by a particular crowd affect. It is this affective character of the space that can be seen played out in the erosion of divisions between games attendees, volunteers, workers, and security at Olympic sites. This affective character of the space defined the affective character of the games more generally. Anderson and Holden (2008) write of mega-events as horizons on which disparate hopes are pinned, becoming focuses for affect. Before the games began, they were ambiguously anticipated. The spectre of the mob was still

present in the minds of many. The Olympics' rehabilitation of the crowd was focused on overcoming these fears and producing positive crowd affect.

This affective experience of the games was central to the Olympics as commodity and thus to the Olympics as productive of value. The character of the Olympic commodity was defined by the festival spaces of London 2012 and by the crowd that produced those spaces. Debord suggests that 'the spectacle is the flip-side of money' as they are both the 'general equivalent of all commodities' (Debord, 1967; 24). The affective character of London 2012 stood as the general equivalent to the Olympic commodity periphery. The value of Olympic tickets, merchandise, broadcasting rights, sponsorship, all depended on this affective character. They were exchangeable only due to their ability to tap into it.

It is in this manner that the games can be seen as an experiment with new modes of valorisation. The riots were a moment of collective antagonism, momentarily rupturing normal relations of production and consumption. The mob erupted out of these relations and existed as a block to valorisation and a force orientated towards the destruction of value. The Olympic crowd, on the other hand, represented a collectivity entirely subsumed to

these relations. The crowd embodied a unification of production and consumption, consuming the spectacle in the same moment that it produced it as an alien object. The labour of the crowd as affective and immaterial (Hardt, 1999) in the sense that its product was the idea of the Olympics as festival. But it was also unknown. The Olympic crowd were engaged in affective and spatial labour without conscious knowledge of their activity as labour. As such, this labour was unwaged.

As the crisis goes on we are witnessing a restructuring of the class relation towards modes of labour outside of the wage. Workfare constitutes a central plank of the coalition government's industrial policy. Studio schools require pupils to work unwaged for a number of hours each week. Unpaid internships and apprenticeships are now accepted practice. Prison labour is on the increase. Social media provides a mode of interaction in order to facilitate data-mining. The mobilisation of the crowd as producer should be understood within this generalised trend. However, the specific nature of the Olympics allowed this labour outside of the wage to occur without the need for coercion that characterises many other instances of this trend. Beyond that, it allowed the incorporation of generalised social life into the production process.



This total operationalisation of social relations reflects the logical endpoint of movement towards affective labour. While living labour is becoming less necessary for the production of material goods it is central to the production of the immaterial, experiential commodities that the Olympics represented. The Olympics were a uniting of a repressive movement towards labour outside of the wage with an understanding of the potential value in social relations. They opened a new front in the attempt to overcome crisis in favour of capital by experimenting with new forms of affective and unwaged labour.

The collective value-production of London 2012 represented a mirror image to the collective value-destruction of the riots. However, the games are quickly becoming more and more distant, and as an interview participant put it, we're going to notice that everything's shit again. The mobilisation of the crowd as productive that the Olympics achieved is in no way a permanent negation of the mob that preceded them. Indeed, the recent history of other Olympic host cities is very often one characterised by post-games riots. As the games recede, and little benefit is felt by those who participated in and produced them, we may well see a similar

return of the mob in London too. Crisis continues, and further moments in which that crisis erupts as destruction are bound to come as the struggle over urban space as value continues.



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ANTIFA

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# STATEMENT ON THE 'DISMANTLING' OF THE GOLDEN DAWN BY THE GREEK STATE

*by Occupied London*

And so, on the sunny autumn morning of September 28th – a quiet, almost tranquil morning – the state and media, inside and beyond the Greek territory, woke up anti-fascist. Were the days when the exact same culprits fueled Nazism, the days when authorities meticulously wove a plexus of institutional racism, totalitarianism and impoverishment just a bad dream? Of course not. In the time that has passed since the murder of Pavlos, they have scrambled to present a clean face, but for all their pretenses the anger is still there. Just under five swirling years after Alexis dropped dead on that Exarcheia street corner, we are still faced with the same power zombies that our revolt had attacked but did not manage, it seems, to finish off. During all these years, the number of our sisters and our brothers who died in the hands of the state or its offshoots only keeps growing. Katerina Goulioni, Nikolas Todi, Cheikh Ndiaye, Mohammad Atif Kamran and Shehzad Luqman... Katerina died in the hands of her state

captors; Nikolas, Cheikh and Mohammad were assassinated by the police; Shehzad was killed by the knives of Nazis, just like Pavlos did on September 17th. Along with who knows how many others, tortured and pulled off the streets, held in Amygdaleza and all the other concentration camps, sentenced to death and then to oblivion, too - for national homogeneity reserves no space even for the memory of most of its victims. These same people in charge detained 70,000 migrants in a single year; who vilified supposedly HIV-positive women and rounded up drug addicts en masse; who drive women and men to despair and suicide daily. The list keeps growing with no end in sight.

And now, after all these years, the same state power that bred the Nazis seems to have decided that it no longer needs them, that they must be discarded. Is this justice? Of course not – how can the perpetrators ever offer justice to their victims? Whether or not it decides to keep its offshoots by its side, this is the same plexus of power that convicted all of our sisters and brothers to torture and death, in a myriad of ways. It is the one that has entrenched racism and fascism as an everyday condition, the one that has consolidated its perpetuated authority upon the bodies and the minds of migrants, lesbians and gays, anti-fascists, pariahs and drop-outs: one and all who do not fit into the suffocatingly tight frame of national unity and social order. It was not us who may have killed off the Golden Dawn; it was the system that bred it. So don't mistake this for justice; we will never see any delivered by those who breed injustice and exploitation.



there ain't no  
such a thing as  
bourgeois justice



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