

Don't Die Wondering

Atlanta Against the Police Winter 2011–2012

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Introduction

The winter of 2011–12 saw a number of clashes with the police in Atlanta. Almost a year later, I'm comfortable enough to sit down to write about them. There were many other things going on around the country and even right here at home that made the following events possible, and I couldn't feasibly account for all of them here with my limited perspective. The anti-police actions in themselves were not very significant, if gauged by the limiting discourse of "effective direct action" or "community organizing." The cops still murder people, many people still have terrible ideas of how to respond. They were important, however, because they created a sense that something was occurring out of the ordinary. The excitement, the hope, and the anxiety created a whirlwind of emotions felt by dozens of people that evaporated as our sense of collective rebellion faded into nostalgia.

It's incredible how quickly things can change. It was less than a year ago but everything is different now. We experienced conflict together in a 7-month long cycle of active struggle against the police. I was beginning to feel like we were creating a space in the anarchist scene for people like me. Although we had no experience, and were making so many mistakes, we had come together to create a force in Atlanta. Despite how much things have changed, I know that the potential is always there.

Before the assassination of Troy Davis – alleged cop-killer – in September of 2011, basically nothing occurred. That's not completely true. There were anti-austerity campaigns at a few universities. There was a solidarity network with a list of wins and all of the go-to anarchist projects and initiatives. However important all of those things may be, without the willingness to act-out, no amount of infrastructure, preparation, organization or consciousness is enough. Revolt itself is a communicable social reality that draws in people and groups – not the other way around.

Nothing could have consciously created the #Occupy movement, but there are prerequisites that must be met before any explosion of activity can occur. To be blunt, if you don't have skills or a network of collaborators, it's unlikely that shit will happen in your town even if there is ample reason for it to. We can't create social movements or prolonged ruptures from thin air – at best we can prepare ourselves

and others for when they occur. But by refusing to wait, we can create the context for the next big thing.

The cycle of struggle written about in this piece ended between the Union City smash-up and the Trayvon Martin break away march. Anarchists failed to see that momentum was not going to grow again after the second eviction of Occupy Atlanta on November 5th. If the November 21st march, which immediately followed the Occupy eviction when it was still possible to mobilize with dozens of those people, had turned into a riot what would have happened in Union City? It's important to avoid escalating too quickly to avoid marginalizing ourselves in a growing movement. But once things begin stagnating, much less shrinking, it can prove to be more strategic to just go all out, pushing the struggle to its absolute limit, rather than trying to preserve it forever, which is always just a slow way of dying. This may end whatever momentum still exists and piss people off at the time, but if things are ending anyway, why not risk it all to set off a potential chain reaction that will either spin things in a new direction or at least set the bar high for next time.

Because of our lack of experience, the waning participation in the #Occupy movement, and interpersonal conflicts, we were unable to hold open the small space of revolt that appeared last winter. Our unwillingness to compromise on the discourse about the police – preferring vengeance to “justice” and attack to “accountability” – foregrounded our limited successes as well as our relative isolation. Without our participation in this cycle of struggle, the same Nothing that has plagued this city for years would have further preserved the popular discourse of victimization that leaves us so weak. Although we have burned many bridges, anarchists in Atlanta have carved out a space for ourselves in this city where there was none before. I know that the relationships built in the winter of 2011–2012, and the actions taken against the police, can be the preface for years of attack, rebellion, and hopefully insurrection and revolt for years to come.

I hope that this piece can be helpful for anarchists, anticapitalists, and other would-be rebels in medium sized cities with almost no radical or combative history. Atlanta is the 40th populated city in the U.S. with almost 2,000 police and law enforcement officers. If a few dozen people can make it pop off here, it can happen where you live too if you get organized.

The secret, as it were, is to really begin.

1. Breaking the Silence

On October 17th, many took the streets for the very first time. Some say it was 100, some say 200, but what's important is that we were responding to the murder of 19 year old Joetavius Stafford by Robert Waldo – MARTA police officer – which occurred just two days earlier. The news barely covered it, but we had an entire world of communication all our own in the occupation.

The Occupy Atlanta encampment had begun just ten days earlier, and this was going to be the most exciting event yet. The afternoon felt electrified with possibility. It was billed as a “vigil” but everyone knew that we would end up marching. There was so much anger about the shooting, and so much joy about the occupation.

The drums began to roll and the chants started: “*No Justice, No Peace: Fuck the police!*” It was only a few of us at first, but faces throughout the crowd lit up and more and more people joined in. In a way, I was almost embarrassed. It's kind of hard to describe the feeling. I was overjoyed, of course, being there with so many of my close friends and now so many new faces. Still, in some way, I felt vulnerable, exposed. I was really invested in this, and I wanted it to go well. My anxiety quickly fell away when we flooded Peachtree Street.

Behind a large banner, the text of which I can't remember, the mass immediately took over both lanes, blocking traffic. The long-shadows of the skyscrapers overtook everything as the sky grew dark. The group flooded into the Five Points MARTA station and the chanting reverberated deep into the subway. The scene was festive, a large group danced in the middle of the subway station, while many screamed about their hatred for police.

As the cops approached, the march twisted up the side of the station toward the mini-police precinct. Here, two people picked up a steel barricade and used it to block the entrance leading down toward the trains. More people were joining the march and the energy was high. Several hoodlums angrily screamed at the nearest officers who looked on at the procession confusedly.

“Cops, Pigs, Murderers!”

Heading north up Peachtree Street, someone kicked a newspaper box into the street. Someone else started yelling at them for a second, but the march continued.

Eventually, we made it back to Woodruff Park – the site of the occupation – where discussions, arguments, and excited chatter filled the air.

2. October 19th

Since the 17th, the “fuck the police march” was all that anybody seemed to be talking about. A march was planned hastily for 2 days later, this time to the Vine City MARTA station – where the shooting had occurred. The occupation, for all of its shortcomings, provided a space for non-stop collaboration and scheming. That context cannot be understated. It’s doubtful that any of this could have happened without the park. Sensing this, there was a collective feeling of urgency. We weren’t sure how long this energy could hold up – or how long the occupation would last – so we wanted to make the most out of it. In any case, it is obvious now that you have to strike while the iron is hot, because you rarely get second-chances.

The night was strangely cold, which resulted in a smaller turnout than the previous march. Still, 40–50 people had rallied up at the corner of the camp to make the lengthy march to the Vine City station where the shooting occurred. Excitement was high and the energy was contagious. The small group took over the street with ease and style.

Drums and chants filled the street, along with what had essentially become a mobile dance party. When we reached the Vine City station, the police were already waiting for us. We cursed and yelled at them. Without hesitation, they pushed up against us, forcing our small group off of the plaza and back onto the street.

This back-and-forth went on for some time until someone wearing a mask grabbed the attention of the officers by promising them that “shit’s gonna go down”. Empowered and excited, but intimately aware of our limited capacity, we marched back up the street toward the occupation. Along the way, we stopped for a brief speak-out where several new people expressed a feeling of confidence and courage. Some of the people who spoke explained that they are beginning to understand why the police are fucked.

3. Spread the Talk

The October 22nd Coalition – which is a front group for the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) – holds a national day of action against police “brutality” every year. To promote the upcoming march, in light of recent demonstrations against the police, the RCP decided to hold a press conference at noon at the Five Points MARTA station and they invited everyone from Occupy Atlanta to attend.

Media was present and the interview was relatively brief. Immediately following the questions, however, a few cop-haters from Occupy Atlanta unfurled a large banner which read “Cops, Pigs, Murderers” and began chanting into the station. It was lunch time, so the entire plaza and station was flooded with hundreds of

commuters, who looked on happily and gladly accepted leaflets for the action on the 22nd.

The few agitators dispersed once cops began to amass at the entrance of the station.

In the months to follow, rebels in Atlanta lacked the collective creative capacity to consider combative and effective means of information distribution, especially in the face of media black-outs. There is a profound poverty in unnoticed rebellion, and anarchists must continue to find ways to avoid this to keep ourselves from being marginalized. Although small clashes with the police can serve to increase our limited capacity – *or destroy it completely* – it is not possible to spread insurrectional desires unless others hear about it. We shouldn't pander to the media, but propaganda is absolutely necessary for spreading narratives to justify revolt.

4. October 22nd: The Management of Revolt

Everything was happening so quickly, and that had its ups and downs. Although it was becoming increasingly difficult to promote for events on the fly, the repetition of anti-police actions had created somewhat of a fervor in our circle. All over the occupation – and the internet – people discussed the police and the recent shooting. The event on the 22nd, however, had been planned well in advance and was attended by over 100 people. In Atlanta, anything more than 3 dozen people is impressive.

In previous years this march had walked up the sidewalk, where the RCP leaders spoke emptily about police “brutality” and the need for a communist revolution that they, supposedly, were planning and building for. From the get-go, this year's march was vastly changed by the presence of rebels from the occupation.

In many ways, the events had a split character. The planned speeches and pre-determined chants coordinated by the event organizers felt so weak. As the speakers closed in on an *hour*, people began to trickle out and we began to get antsy. Slowly, people began to pull t-shirts and bandanas around their faces.

I felt like I was waking up from an unpleasant nap. Nevertheless, everyone looked pleased as we filled the streets and began chanting “*Fuck the pigs, we don't need 'em; all we want is total freedom!*” We were sick of being told what to do all our lives, and the solution to that was never going to be the over-determined movements of so many orthodox “revolutionary” sects.

The march, no longer constrained, did not stop at the occupation on the south side of Woodruff Park. Instead, we headed right for the police line, which had recently stationed itself at the north end of the park. Rumors spread that Mayor Reed was sitting inside of the police mobile coordination unit. The night before,

the occupation had warded off what appeared to be an eviction attempt. The anger was still very much present and directed largely at the mayor who would have orchestrated it.

The chanting and screaming at the police stopped for a few minutes, when Joe Stafford's mother began to speak. She wept about the loss of her son and lay down on the ground like her son had after he was shot. The atmosphere felt eerie and intense. We all felt like something could happen at any moment until we heard the crack of the megaphone again.

The October 22nd event organizers were, evidently, eager to remind everyone that this was their event. They spoke again, over the megaphone, about their organization, the RCP, and about the great things that they do. People in the crowd yelled that they should share the megaphone, which they did. The first speaker, a young black man, explained that "some shit is gonna happen if they don't charge officer Waldo". Frantically, one of the RCP professionals took the megaphone back from the kid and urged the crowd that "the October 22nd Coalition does not believe in that type of thing" – ostensibly referring to the threat of rioting.

The energy was sucked out from everyone and the crowd began to disperse. We had allowed the managers to regain initiative of the event, thereby limiting the possibility of rebellion.

Anarchist intervention in social movements is a necessary maneuver in the social war, but we shouldn't pull any punches. How would the dynamic have shifted if we had come prepared with agitational leaflets or if we had coordinated plans of our own? It's often helpful for us to work alongside other groups, but we should never accept the management – let alone pacification – of our activity. That being said, we often have to find ways to make decisions with people we don't have affinity with either in meeting spaces or in large assemblies, but these decisions should always play a merely supplementary role for the decisions we make in smaller, intimate, groups with people we trust and care about.

Anarchists all over the country made mistakes about direct democracy and the general assembly form – a mistake revolutionaries have been making for decades. It could be useful to attend assemblies, but it is not useful to be governed by them.

5. First Eviction of Occupy Atlanta

Following an illegal hip hop festival, the mayor decided that it was time to evict Occupy Atlanta. With overwhelming force, including multiple helicopters, nearly 75 fully-uniformed riot police, a dozen horse-mounted police, dozens of squad cars, and soft-clothed uniformed police, the police moved in and cleared the encampment. There was very little resistance to the eviction. The crowd seemed shocked

and angry, but unsure of how to respond. Much of the movement was still committed to pacifism, and those of us who would normally create the conditions for active resistance had little internal coordination and next-to-no street fighting skills.

Aside from a few anti-police chants, and an attempt to barricade the street (which was thwarted by liberals), most of the focus was on the occupiers who remained in the park, encircled, and committed to arrest. This was another instance of anarchists lacking the autonomous self-organization necessary to pull off anything meaningful. There were 52 arrests that night and a profound sense of frustration and rage. Simply yelling at police as they arrested our friends, and cleared the park was not enough. Everyone wanted more, but nobody knew exactly how to make that happen.

6. Second Eviction of Occupy Atlanta

Somebody put out the call, and everybody was talking about it* (The call to re-occupy the park was not put through the “modified consensus” process of the general assembly at all, but it was announced at it; this could be a useful way for anarchists to participate in such assemblies going forward: visible and accessible but not needlessly populist or submissive). We were going to hold a huge day of activities in the park on the next Saturday, November 5th, and then stay in the park at night. For the better part of the day, the plans went perfectly. 300–400 people filled Woodruff Park all day long. There was music and food and child care alongside workshops and know your rights trainings. For many people who had met in the park, it was a beautiful thing to be around each other again – we were all used to seeing each other all day and night, depending on each other for food, comfort, and entertainment.

By nightfall, it was obvious that the police were once again going to evict us. The park closed at 11pm but by 10:30pm, police were double-barricading the park and beginning to mass up on all sides. Falling into old habits, some sought to dominate the form resistance would take. They insisted that the nonviolent, passive resistance of the previous eviction was the superior way to fight back, and that we had won the sympathy of thousands because of it.

Regardless, we responded, we had been evicted. It is not good enough to have the passive support of a million invisible allies if you can’t meet your needs and desires in a material way, immediately and collectively. If we want to stand alongside others in a meaningful fight against capitalism, we argued, we would have to illustrate that collective resistance to repression was happening in the present-tense.

Rather than engage in an endless argument about tactics, we decided to take a more active stance against the eviction. As opposed to the last time, there were

many masks in the crowd on Nov. 5th. There was no visible black bloc, and no clear plan but we decided that when the cops began to move in, we would march out of the park and attempt to generalize a conflict outside of the occupation zone. This “plan” failed miserably.

An active minority began tearing apart the barricades and writing graffiti on nearby surfaces. The march was going to circle up Auburn Avenue, on the north side of the park, and move toward the university. This would take us out of the surveillance network that covered the downtown area. From there, we had no idea what would happen. The march was stopped early when a cop on a motorcycle sped into the crowd. Some stood with their bodies in front of the cop, blocking the way through. The pig revved the engine on the motorcycle and ran into several demonstrators, before being knocked off his bike. As debris was tossed at the officer, dozens of police rushed the crowd.

Someone wearing a mask, dressed in black, was tackled to the ground and began screaming for help. Newspaper boxes were dragged into the street, and the crowd pushed their bodies up against the police, forcing them onto the sidewalk. In response, a massive snatch squad of police formed, with cops in full riot gear behind them. The snatch squad lunged forward and grabbed anyone off the street they could reach.

The night ended with about 20 arrests, but not without a fight. Many people were de-arrested throughout the clash, and the area was covered in anti-police graffiti. The sound of screaming and grating steel had given way to the sight of blood and a huge wall of armor. The entire mass of over 200 people wound up kettled on Peachtree and Edgewood Avenue and was slowly allowed to leave without further arrests.

The lights of the cop cars seemed to paralyze many this night. People marched slowly backward facing the advancing line of cops, without actually doing anything to get away from them. Several people booed at the graffiti writers and anyone who screamed at the police. The people who dragged shit in the street were physically assaulted by other demonstrators. Attempts to lead a march up a side street failed. Why is this? Why wasn't a concerted effort made to collectively decide on a better course of action? We didn't know it at the time, but this was the last time hundreds of people would flood the streets to showdown with the police and if there was ever going to be an anti-eviction riot, it was going to be right then. It's important to know when a movement is ending so that you give it one last swing for the fences.

Our inability to collectively develop a fluid plan for intervention completely insured our inability to incite riots or widespread confrontation with the police. We ran into this problem over and over and over again.

The ability to rapidly communicate in high-stress situations is a skill that could greatly advantage rebels going forward. To circulate feelings, plans, information, and materials quickly through a crowd without attracting too much unwanted attention can help us to spread police thin while accomplishing other objectives as well. The basic unit for this type of organization should be the affinity group. Anarchists in Atlanta can greatly increase offensive and defensive capacity by remembering this.

7. Police Violence is Never an Accident

Another half-assed re-occupation attempt was scheduled for the next day. The self-appointed leadership planned, unilaterally, for a half-hour “silent protest” outside of the park, with just one symbolic arrest inside. They thought that this would reveal the absurdity of using overwhelming force against “peaceful protesters,” who are always victimized by the State and never go on the offensive.

A small black bloc of about 25 refused to submit to the general assembly decreed plan of silence. The bloc instead chanted “SILENT PROTEST, SILENT PROTEST,” as loud as they could, played tag in the park, tore apart police barricades and danced in the streets, screaming. We were still angry at the police for the shootings, we were angry about the evictions, and we were angry that a person arrested the night before now faced felony charges. We weren’t prepared to go on playing the victim for our whole lives, and we needed to illustrate that some of us won’t just roll over.

Surrounded by police and over 100 “silent protestors”, a few androgynous, black-clad, persons climbed up a two-story fixture in the center of a shopping plaza across the street from the park. They dropped a hastily made banner reading “Police Violence is Never an Accident” and distributed a leaflet explaining why the police are not to be trusted.

Although it is never preferable to having larger participation, even a small group can have a profound impact on unfolding events. In the face of state repression, especially when brutality is involved, showing solidarity with comrades can be tremendously important for building and sustaining strength. The relationship between radicals and Occupy Atlanta was greatly strained by this night and the eviction the night before. By the end of the year, the relationship ended completely.

8. November 21st and On: Going it Alone

On November 17th, the police murdered Dwight Person in front of his whole family in an illegal “no-knock” warrant that was addressed to a different house.

A few days later 70 people gathered in Woodruff Park for another anti-police march. Half the march showed up in black bloc or with some sort of mask on. This new development shows that anarchists can have influence well past our numbers. The terrain felt familiar but many of the faces were new; many occupiers had been hardened and embittered by the last eviction and were looking for revenge.

From the start, the march rushed toward the police station that sits across from the park and began banging on the glass windows and doors. The few cops inside stared out at us fearfully and confused. Howls of laughter and clapping filled the air. Leaflets titled "*Fuck the Police: Atlanta's Cop Problem*" littered down on the crowd from within the march and we quickly moved up Peachtree toward the Five Points MARTA station. This time the cops had headed us off. More leaflets were strewn around and tossed in the faces of the officers. With black flags blowing in the wind and angry screams bouncing off of the empty city walls, we continued up Peachtree.

At the Suntrust plaza, a few people mounted the big statue out front – someone even peed into the fountain. Some people in masks jumped onto the bumper of an Escalade and pumped their fists into the air. One man, who had earlier been urging the march to stay nonviolent, tossed a stack of fliers at a cop car and flashed both middle fingers at the officer inside.

A few traffic cones were tossed into the street, but it was obvious that people still weren't quite prepared, materially or emotionally, to really go on the attack. Later, we would realize that this was our last chance to really set shit off. We completely lacked the experience to come up with a plan and the insight to know that this is when it really counted. Had anarchists come to this march with a general agreement to set it off, with a route in mind, affinity groups could have potentially made the most of the large, supportive, crowd and the total lack of police presence.

The march ended, *after an hour of marching aimlessly*, in an empty lot with no arrests, after a scout reported that riot cops were stationed a few blocks up.

2,000 leaflets were distributed at the beginning of the march, and people were urged to read it, pass it around, and toss them into the air throughout the march. This leaflet was referenced for months. The leaflet detailed the particular events surrounding recent cop shootings in the city, as well as the following polemic:

Fuck the Police: Atlanta's Cop Problem

The police, protectors of this social order, security guards of the 1% who control us, are everywhere. Their control, their violence, is everywhere that **nothing**

happens. All adventure, managed; all desire, disarmed: all passion, sated; all fires, extinguished — but in us is a fire that never goes out.

There can be no dialogue with the terrorists in blue. As they run over our comrades with motorcycles, abduct our friends from the city sidewalks and quarantine our loved-ones inside their prison walls, they fan the flames of our discontent.

In Seattle, Chapel Hill, Greece, Chile, Bahrain, Egypt, Oakland, Denver, Moscow the struggle against the police grows. Inside Pelican Bay, the memory of Attica lives.

Fire to the prisons and the society that created them. (A)

9. Union City aka “Where da gasoline at?”

Just a few days before Christmas, 19 year old Ariston Waiters was shot in the back, while handcuffed, by Union City police officer Luther “Machine-Gun” Lewis. This was the third straight month of officer-involved shootings. A rally was planned by the National Action Network who personally invited some of us to the event – they insisted that they wanted “something to happen.”

Union City is a small suburb south of Atlanta known mostly for car dealerships. The “downtown” area consists entirely of a few empty store-fronts, a post-office, City Hall, the “Justice Center” and the city jail. The lawn of the city hall was filled with hundreds of demonstrators, many from Union City, and many who had traveled down from Atlanta. People were pissed about the shooting and wanted a response. All night long, speaker-after-speaker shot fiery references to Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party. Nearly every speaker ended their speech with the mantra “by any means necessary.” We couldn’t have been more overjoyed.

Immediately following the rally, a black bloc of about 35 and roughly 40 other demonstrators began a break-away march behind the same “Cops, Pigs, Murderers” banner from the month before.

As the march began slowly on the otherwise empty city street, the streets signs were ripped up out of the grass and dragged into the street. Parking and traffic cones were tossed, and the local youth laughed and clapped. For many in the march, “downtown” Union City had served no purpose at all. The familiar sound of a shaking spray paint can perked our ears, and we all laughed when someone painted a large “NO” over the sign in front of the “Justice Center.”

If people hadn’t known what they were getting into by now, it was undeniable after a few people tossed a trashcan into the glass doors of the Justice Center. Immediately after the crash, an officer ran after the vandals. Some people from inside the bloc threw sticks and curses at the cop who stumbled into the grass and ran

back, horrified, into the safety of the jail. A street sign was tossed loudly at the front of the Justice Center.

Paint markers were passed around and people immediately got to work. The entire strip was redecorated with graffiti. There were no cops in sight when someone throws a brick through the front entrance to the city jail or when someone set an American flag on fire after tearing it off of the post office. Although there would be much debate later about whether or not it's appropriate to enter "someone else's community" to vandalize a city jail, many of us will never forget hearing the local youth urgently asking us "where the gasoline at??"

Although the local would-be vandals/arsonists didn't have the chance this time, maybe next time they'll be the ones who come prepared to throw down. The black bloc was hardly prepared either. Many looked around anxiously for tools of destruction, forgetting to bring their own. We are so accustomed to hit-and-run swarming that, in many ways, we lack the skills to make the most of the moments when there are no police around. This march lasted almost 20 minutes without any cops showing up. What if every other person had tucked a hammer into their belt on the way there or even just brought some rocks? At another time, some people who were in the march overheard someone excitedly recall watching the black bloc attack the jail from his window inside the facility! Could we have done more to incite the inmates to riot inside? Although the black bloc distributed markers and leaflets, we should always remember to shoot for the stars and to come materially prepared to let our musings become reality.

Although the news would paint the night as a series of random acts of violence, this night was, for many of us, just another event within a months-long conflict with the police. We had been building the nerves, relationships, and skills for just this type of thing.

The actions in Union City became extreme points of contention within Occupy Atlanta. The local newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, ran an article featuring a quote from the media-identified leader of Occupy Atlanta denouncing the "violence." The quote blamed the actions on a small group of opportunistic, white, male, anarchists. In addition, a local radio host and sometime participant in Occupy offered a \$500 reward for information on the masked demonstrators.

In response anarchists attempted to get Occupy Atlanta to refuse to work with those who gave information to police or the media. This led to an 8 hour long General Assembly, in which anarchists continued to try to go through the consensus process of the GA. The night ended in frustration, and many anarchists ended their participation in Occupy Atlanta.

10. From Oakland to Atlanta: Fuck the Police

The month of January was a time of reflection. Debates and arguments circulated in multiple circles about the events that went down in Union City. Questions of legitimacy, agency, self-determination, and violence were discussed over and over again. This type of discussion is a sign of a healthy movement, but can be draining.

Between the New Year's noise demonstration and ritual house parties, a culture began to develop that many people felt invested in. Whether or not these relationships managed to transcend the one-dimensional, "political", bonds that created them is yet to be seen. But what had started just a few months earlier, when a small and inexperienced black bloc ended in arrests after the execution of Troy Davis, had grown into something more fierce and confident.

On January 28th, we all eagerly watched the livestreams from Occupy Oakland's "Move-in Day." We watched the crowds take over the streets in the morning, and attempt to hold them in the afternoon. Oak Street. Tear gas. Flash bangs. Our hearts wrenched, but our hopes for the future soared seeing the bravery of the west coast rebels. That night, a solidarity demo was held at 8pm.

This was a small march. It must have been only 35 or so of us, maybe less, and there were news cameras present when we showed up. Rumors about what was happening circulated. People huddled around in small groups of 2-5. Everyone dressed in head-to-toe black.

As soon as we began, surrounded by reinforced banners, someone kicked a planter into the street. Black flags waved in the air, and someone spray painted a large circle-A on a wall right outside of Woodruff Park. There wasn't much chanting and things felt kind of tense. Still, there was something electric about the night.

Cop cars up ahead. We had only gone two or three blocks.

We turned left.

On the right sits the Peachtree Center MARTA station. Someone ran out of the bloc and painted "FUCK COPS" on the veneer of the station. Another person ran up and smashed out one of the stations large windows with a hammer. Everyone started walking a little faster and you could hear muffled laughter from all sides of the tight bloc.

Already there were 3 or 4 squad cars behind us. Nonchalantly, marchers dragged everything into the street that wasn't already bolted down. Newspaper boxes, steel barricades, trash cans, traffic cones, construction signs. Someone ran up to the Zone 5 Precinct and spray painted a circle-A right on the huge plate-glass windows. They narrowly escaped an upset cop, and the reinforced banners were put to use holding back the police.

We began running. I couldn't believe it while it was happening. Helicopters overhead. Motorcycles, bicycles, squad cars. At this point there were only two dozen of

us. The news cameras had abandoned the march. Behind the bloc was a small contingent from Occupy Gwinnett (a suburb in the metro area) who were mask-less and overjoyed by the intensity of the march.

We hurriedly snaked between the narrowest streets we can find. More debris and barricades were dragged into the streets which bought us only a little bit of time. One motorcycle cop who drove around a barricade had his visor spray painted. Some people dragged a mattress into the street.

We cut through some neighborhoods and worked our way back outside of the downtown area where there are less cameras, more alleyways, and less overhead visibility for helicopters. It must have only been 3 or 4 people initially but soon everyone was scattering, running in every direction. We hopped fences, dove through yards and bushes and crawled into dog houses. Black clothes littered the streets.

The night ended with 3 arrests for “moving in and out of traffic” – essentially, a jaywalking charge. The next day we held a successful fundraiser party and were able to bail all of our friends out in no time. I never imagined that a group so small could invoke such a great police response so quickly. The cops must have outnumbered the marchers four to one, yet almost everyone got away.

It’s amazing what you can do with just a few people, but celebratory and playful destruction is always better than self-serious military clashes. How can we avoid the theater of the “loyal opposition” who commit themselves to a specialized resistance when nobody else is joining in? Although there is nothing wrong with commitment, we should be honest about the effects militancy has on our momentum. Does seriousness increase our capacity or hinder it? Of course, anarchists shouldn’t limit ourselves to representational politics and populism. We are not simply committed to fulfilling the desires of “the people” as they already exist, but of creating situations and worlds where new, currently unimaginable, desires are possible. We are committed to the destruction of the existing social order. Because this is the case, we have to remember that “the force of insurrection is social, not military” and to judge our maneuvers accordingly. The night was an interesting one, but Occupy was over and large turnout for any event has been hard to come by ever since.

11. End of the Active Struggle; Trayvon Martin

So everyone already knows the story. A teenager from Sanford, Florida is murdered by a self-appointed neighborhood watchman named George Zimmerman. Outrage envelopes the country, and in March dozens of cities hold “Million

Hoodie” marches numbering in the thousands. Participants in the marches and rallies are expected to wear hoodies resembling Trayvon’s when he was killed.

In Atlanta, a Facebook event goes up and the “Attending” stats skyrocket immediately. This city is 54% African-American, and people are fucking pissed about this shooting. We excitedly brainstorm about the possibilities. For the first time since Troy Davis, people everywhere are seriously discussing white supremacy and, unsurprisingly, the police.

The whole feel of the rally, however, did not meet our expectations. A friend of ours had made an anonymous Facebook profile to create the event and had billed it as a march. This was all very intentional. A few careerists, however, used the opportunity to get a permit for the event and to move it to the Capitol. They hold press conferences announcing that it is happening there and that it is simply a rally, not a march. They, of course, get to decide who speaks and who doesn’t.

We were unsure of the implications of this until we showed up.

We expecting maybe 1,000 people and were totally shocked to see more like 5,000. I can’t speak for everyone, but I felt totally unprepared. We showed up together as a black bloc and managed to catch the attention of the police immediately. While some people seemed to understand our intentions, others seemed confused. Few in the bloc were prepared to explain ourselves to a few questioning members of the crowd, but those of us who did seemed to have the sympathy of those nearby. The leaflet written for the event was never printed. It’s worth mentioning that some people felt anxious and uncomfortable as a mostly-white bloc at a mostly-black event. White participants in the bloc felt like the other attendees must have thought we were white supremacists. I personally did not experience this sensation and thought that a crowd of thousands would be able to directly confront a “white supremacist” group with more than just a few awkward glances. In any case, it’s worth considering the limits of the black bloc as a representational form in the stage of “extraparliamentary” politics.

The rally dragged on and on. The shooting became nothing more than an abstract jumping-off point for all of the predictable Democratic Party talking points. They managed to touch on everything from Gun Control to Abortion Rights. They constantly urged the crowd to get registered so that they could vote. Needless to say, we felt demoralized and many of us left early.

About an hour later, we began receiving frantic phone calls. A few people stayed afterward and were on a break-away march. They said people seemed down and that we should meet up with the march.

We shed the black clothing and tied t-shirts around our faces.

When we showed up, the march was wild as fuck. People had returned to the Capitol and were screaming at the cops and blocking traffic. It was probably only 60 or 70 folks, but they looked excited to see us when we showed up even though

we didn't really recognize any of them. I remember exchanging a few nods and some quick hugs with some especially excited people.

"We got 'dis shit tonight as long as we got each other's backs," someone said to me when I walked up.

"Hell yeah! We fuckin' got this!" I yelled back and he laughed.

A young woman, no more than five feet tall, stood defiantly in front of a police car popping her collar and telling them to go fuck themselves. Our participation, as anarchists and "revolutionaries," was embarrassingly small – no more than a dozen.

We were all laughing. I fucking love this shit. This is the social element that was missing from the January 28th march. We had confidence and everyone had each other's back. *(It seems like people were more likely to join in when we were in plain clothes and masks rather than moving as a black bloc. This is worth considering: is it worth sacrificing some individual anonymity if it means more people will participate in street fighting or riots? Might it even be the case that the larger a crowd is, the less precautions individuals in the crowd need to take to remain anonymous? How do we account for cameras in this scenario?)

Leisurely, we strolled up the street behind someone chanting "We ready, we ready, we ready for y'all!" Effortlessly, someone jogged up to a ParkAtlanta meter and smashed the screen with a black flag nailed to a large wooden dowel. Someone else, without a shirt tied around their face, kicked a newspaper stand into the street, and several others dragged them into the intersection. A capitol cop kind of jogged up from behind the march and began chastising us: "Hey you! Pick that box up this minute!" People yelled back at him and picked up the pace a little bit. The march turned a corner and found itself on an empty street with a large number of police cruisers parked outside a government building. The lone cop following the march quickly turned and ran when someone jogged up to the nearest squad car and smashed out its front window with a wooden dowel.

"Ohhhhh!!!!" the crowd all yelled at once. Someone else ran up behind them with a hammer. They took out the windows of another squad car, and someone after them jumped up onto the car and stomped in the windshield.

While some people dragged barricades into the streets, others continued smashing the windows out of every police vehicle and luxury car on the street for 2 blocks.

Dozens of people scattered into multiple directions after the 2nd or 3rd cop car and several other people speed up across the bridge above Underground Atlanta. The whole thing, starting with the ParkAtlanta meter, must have only lasted 10 minutes, maybe less. Regardless, there were no police and no arrests. The local Copwatchers were detained for a bit but were subsequently let go.

There was absolutely no news coverage about the break-away march the next day, or ever, and this is most likely because the culprits were able to casually walk off into the night. Like everything else about the last few months, there were no pictures, which is both good and bad.

Hopefully everyone we met that night that we may never see again has a crazy as fuck story that they will tell everyone they meet. If George Zimmerman gets off, hopefully they remember what they saw that night. If so, we can only hope they remember the ending: “Everyone got away with it.”

Just as quickly as it came...

I’m finishing up this piece 1 year after some of the events written about above. At this point, everything has been turned on its head again. Last winter, it was common to hear excited discussions about “how far we’ve come in just 3 months” and “how much better things are gonna be in 3 more months.” But that didn’t happen. Not at all. In fact, things took the opposite turn. Why is that?

When a cycle of struggle is at its peak, it’s very hard to imagine it ending. For those of us who had never felt anything as magical, decline was the last thing on our minds. A more honest analysis of last winter might be this: in a national atmosphere of heightened conflict and collective resistance, a small group of people came together to pull off some impressive shit relative to their capacity. We thought we were “finding each other”, but not everyone involved had a thoroughly developed political analysis and this resulted in some tension as things went on. In the wake of this dissonance, study groups and discussion are some of the most important things we can be doing. I can only hope that by now people are more confidently finding affinity with others and recognizing differences when they see them.

Forward?

Two months ago, another anti-police march/dance party was attacked by the police. The police body-slammed people onto the concrete, and cracked a few ribs. The smashed windows of the Bank of America remained boarded up for two weeks, reminding us of the screams of our friends. The next day, a noise demo was interrupted by dozens of cops ready with zip ties. A week later, a passive march organized by Occupy Atlanta was kettled, and snatch squads arrested two off of the sidewalk.

In early August, a grand jury in Seattle subpoenaed anarchists from all around the Pacific-Northwest. Since May Day, street actions all across the country have been met with heavy police repression. The arrests in Chicago have had consequences for rebels all across the country. The cameras and hype about Occupy are long gone and the State is using the opportunity to crack down on existing pockets of antagonism.

Anarchists around the country meaningfully participated in the Occupy movement in a ton of different ways, some good and some bad. We used the momentum as an opportunity to initiate a dialogue about power and capitalism, but have we maintained contacts with the people we ran into last fall? We are less marginal than we have been in a decade, and new networks of rebellion have popped up in places they hadn't existed in previously – including here in Atlanta – but are we effectively capitalizing on this popularity? This summer has seen a profound proliferation of nocturnal attacks and solidarity actions, and this may be the first time in North America that so many cities have had consistent black bloc marches. Noise demonstrations have become an important ritual for anti-prison activists in cities big and small. In short, anarchist culture has developed in exciting ways. We are thrilled to participate. But is this enough? Are we trapping ourselves in another self-referential milieu “concerned only with its sad existence?”

The context has shifted drastically, but have our tactics and strategies? Now that people are looking for new forms of resistance, it makes sense for us to create new points of entry rather than turning inward. Furthermore, it makes sense for us to come out with more public and bold economic disruptions rather than trapping ourselves in a cycle of low-level vandalism. How can we balance this with the need to meet each other's emotional and material needs? The police are cracking down on us everywhere. How can we sustain combative momentum without becoming more marginalized and disconnected, let alone more specialized and irrelevant? How can we use instances of repression to our advantage without reinforcing narratives that victimize us? *How can we recreate the tension that existed in the build-up to Occupy so that something else, something better, can kick off?*

Is it possible that anarchists in cities with smaller scenes, like Atlanta, are ineffectively trying to reproduce the uprisings we have seen in cities like Oakland and Seattle? There must be dozens of cities across the country with just a few dozen active anarchists. How can we, as medium-to-large cities, publicly attack power in ways that make us stronger rather than weaker? How can we avoid the lure of “social justice activism” while retaining contact with others in society who may want to attack as well? Can we find forms of public resistance to power that are easily reproducible, combative, and that materially provide for our needs and desires in a lasting way? We need to find ways to independently circulate information and

propaganda in creative, exciting, and antagonistic ways. We need to begin figuring out how to develop an autonomous material force.

There are always new obstacles – and sometimes, they feel like impenetrable limits – so we need to be consistent and honest about our capacity. With that said, we should never forget that sometimes the entire world is turned upside down by a few profound gestures and risks. In the summer of 2011 no one was anticipating a North American resistance as large as we've seen. Let's continue to be critical of ourselves and our shortcomings, but let's not forget that the State follows the contours of our momentum and that where there is crackdown, there is the potential for more and more exciting ruptures, openings, and revolt.

Timeline of events + overview:

September 19:

Occupation outside of the Georgia Board of Pardon and Paroles – evicted the next morning by Amnesty International so that they can host a prayer vigil.

September 20:

Breakaway march organized spontaneously after an Amnesty International event. Hundreds follow. Debris and barricades are dragged into the street. This is the first action of this sort in recent Atlanta history.

September 21:

The execution of Troy Anthony Davis. Davis was convicted of killing a police officer in Savannah, GA in 1989. Seven out of the nine witnesses who testified against him recanted, citing police coercion as a primary factor in their testimony. After the execution, a black bloc met at the CNN Center and marched through the streets screaming anti-cop slogans. The march ended with a dramatic de-arrest as well as several arrests. The following weeks brought radicals much closer together. The events paved the way for future events.

October 2:

Large general assembly for Occupy Atlanta. The presence of radicals in facilitation roles, and speaking polemics about occupations, created an atmosphere supportive of an occupation the next week.

October 7:

Hundreds attend an Occupy Atlanta General Assembly and begin an occupation of Woodruff Park.

October 15:

MARTA police officer Robert Waldo shoots 19 year-old Joetavius Stafford in the back 3 times at the Vine City MARTA station while he was on his way home from a homecoming football game. Police claim he was armed but eye-witnesses say this is

not true. Witnesses claim that Stafford's body was flipped over after he was shot and that it laid there for several hours before EMTs arrived.

October 17:

First anti-police march following the murder of Joetavius Stafford by MARTA police officer just a few days before. When the march of nearly 200 returned to the occupied park, the entire park exploded in a heated conversation about tactics and state violence.

October 19 :

Follow-up march to the Vine City station, where Joetavius was shot.

October 22:

RCP march against police brutality. Anarchists and other radicals escalate the march by bringing the march, literally, to the front lines of the police. Event organizers regained control through strategic use of a megaphone.

October 26:

During the first eviction of the park, radicals dragged tents into the street and flipped over tables to erect a barricade limiting police control of the street.

November 5:

Second eviction ends in a clash with police. One demonstrator was run over by a police officer on a motorcycle, and the crowd subsequently drove the police back onto the sidewalks (some people were able to land some punches). By and large, radicals were unable to coordinate action in small groups and were kettled, while several people were snatched off the sidewalk.

November 6:

Another eviction of Occupy Atlanta. Black bloc tears apart barricades and drops a banner reading "Police Violence is Never an Accident"

November 15:

Anarchists and other radicals march to City Hall with a large banner that reads "Oakland – Wall Street – Chapel Hill – Atlanta: Our Passion for Freedom is Stronger Than Their Prisons" centered around a large circle-A.

November 17:

Police in East Point, Atlanta kill 54 year-old Dwight Person in an illegal no-knock warrant. The family claims that the police officer kicked the door in an immediately opened fire on Person. Realizing that it was the wrong house, the police then dragged his limp body onto the porch and allowed him to bleed to death in front of the family. The warrant was doctored retroactively to fit the address of the home.

November 21:

Anti-police march on the anniversary of the Kathryn Johnston shooting. Demonstrators express rage over the recent police killing of Dwight Person in a situation almost identical to the Kathryn Johnston of a few years ago: a no-knock warrant to the wrong house involving police kicking in the door with guns blazing. Thousands of

leaflets were passed out and tossed into the air titled "Fuck the Police: Atlanta's Cop Problem".

December 9:

Atlanta noise demonstration follows letter-writing party. This was the first noise demo in Atlanta and was attended, primarily, by black bloc-ers. The two police/guards who showed up were driven away. Inmates pounded their windows and flicked their lights on and off to the beat of the drums outside.

December 14:

Ariston "Asteroid" Waiters, a 19 year old father of a 5 month old baby, is gunned down by Union City police officer Luther "Machine-Gun" Lewis on his way home. Asteroid is shot twice in the back. Witnesses say he was running from police, but the police claim he was wrestling the officer. Witnesses were forced to offer testimony in the presence of "Machine-Gun," who ripped up their statements in front of them.

December 19:

Dawntrae Ta'Shawn Williams was shot and killed by Gwinnett County Police (Gwinnett County is a suburb just north-east of the city). Dawntrae was 15 years old, and is said to have been threatening his family with a machete. If nothing else, this teaches us that if we call the police, there is a chance someone we love may be killed.

December 25:

Jacquelyn "Jameela" Barnette is shot to death in her apartment by Atlanta police on Christmas morning. Jameela was the subject of an FBI investigation a few years ago for her involvement in radical Islam. This is the 5th police murder in 3 months.

December 28:

Following the murder of a 19 year old in Union City, just south of Atlanta, the NAACP and National Action Network coordinated a series of protests. AT the end of the rally, local residents and a black bloc started an anti-police march. The black bloc tore up street signs, smashed out windows, and left graffiti all around Union City. The Occupy Atlanta camp was divided over this action. An eight-hour general assembly occurred a few days after the march. Several people insist that they are willing to snitch to the police if they find out who was responsible. Anarchist participation in Occupy Atlanta ends.

December 31/New Year's Eve:

Anti-prison noise demonstration of ~50 people brings noise to the Atlanta detention center. Inmates slam their windows, flash their lights, and make heart-shapes with their hands.

January 7:

The first Atlanta anarchist general assembly meets to announce actions, initiatives, and to report-back on local anarchist activity. The assembly is not a decision-making

body or a formal structure. Over 60 people attended the assembly, and conversations continue around a large fire for hours.

January 28:

A march titled "From Oakland to Atlanta-Fuck the Police" is called in solidarity with move-in day in Oakland. Only about 40 people attend, but nearly all are en bloc. The bloc takes the street in a tight box with reinforced banners on the outside, and marches in the streets for hours trying to avoid huge amounts of police. Hooded ones still manage to smash out a window, and leave a large circle-a on the window of a police precinct.

February 12th Pre-Valentine's Day Noise Demo:

Following the arrest of several demonstrators at a Chase bank, ~30 people gathered at the DeKalb Co. jail where one final arrestee was being held. Much of the demo was in black bloc, but young children and older adults were also present. The noise demonstration set off a prolonged disturbance inside of the jail. General Population in three different buildings flipped over mattresses, jumped on tables, and chanted "No Justice, No Peace, Fuck the Police!" In an attempt to end the madness, the jail abruptly let the arrestee out.

February 14th Valentine's Day Noise Demo

March 12th Chase 14 Noise Demo:

At another Chase action, 14 people were arrested. A rowdy noise demonstration descended on DeKalb County jail once again. This was the largest noise demonstration during this period, and it featured a brass section, a spotlight, drums, pots and pans, and a handful of masked demonstrators with a megaphone. This time, people attempted to kick over some sort of transformer, and someone else beat it with some stick. Dozens of squad cars filled the streets after the street lights were knocked out. There were no arrests but demonstrators were told that if they come back, they will be charged with felony inciting a riot "for what happened last time."

March 29:

The "Million Hoodie" rally from Trayvon Martin in Atlanta attracted roughly 5,000 people. A break away march following the rally ended when several squad cars had their windows smashed out and their windshields stomped in. No arrests.

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