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Willful Disobedience Volume 5, number 2

Various Authors

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We are at war, even if the images of spectacular daily life try to make us believe the contrary. We have not chosen these social conditions ourselves, we can only choose from what position to fight. In order to do so, it is necessary to look at what is happening in our camp and in that of the ruling order at the same time, what forces move below the empire of names and official declarations, beyond the eternal present of the media. Not at all a careful investigation by cold analysts. Rather a social reconnaissance, if you will, of those who have the urgent need to live, a breach in both sides of the barricades for perceiving and practicing a different concept of force.

A Few Words: On the Degradation of Language and the Art of Listening

When you call someone a name you stop listening to him.

I do not write, publish, speak or discuss in order to propagate a fixed set of ideas for others to embrace; I'm not interested in disciples or followers. I do so to communicate and discuss my own fluid and evolving ideas, my desires, my dreams, my experiences and my projects as clearly as possible in order to discover affinities, to find accomplices with whom to share my activities. I am convinced that the only real wealth worth pursuing is found in other people with whom one can share the creation of a life together aimed at the realization of the needs and desires of each and every one. Therefore, I gladly throw my words out into the world as a wager that they will strike a resonant chord with others with whom I can share projects of revolt against the ruling order and of taking back our lives and activities as our own. Unfortunately, often these words, chosen with so much care, seem to meet misunderstandings of the strangest sorts.

My desires, my dreams and, thus, my projects are informed by a revolutionary perspective, that is, by the recognition that it is necessary to make a fundamental, destructive break with the existing world in order to open the possibility for a world in which we can truly create our lives together on our own terms. The existing world, dominated by the state, capital and their technological and ideological machinery of control, defines wealth in terms of the things that one owns. In such a world, human beings themselves become things that are owned by the apparatus, the ruling institutions. Their value is not in the unique beauty of their being, but in their capacity to produce more things either physically in the form of products or socially in the form of roles and predetermined relationships. Thus, what is unique in each of us is suppressed in the interest of production. Wealth in this sense is purely quantitative, the ownership of a large amount of shit, possession of a greater share of the impoverished reality that this world imposes. All this must be destroyed if we are to create a world in which we recognize the qualitative wealth of the uniqueness that each one of us has to offer the other. And this is the project I try to express.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to express such a project. Finding the balance between the simplicity that makes one's language accessible and the complexity that is necessary to express how this revolutionary desire confronts the catastrophic reality of the world in which we live is not easy. It requires a certain precision and delicacy. By delicacy, I do not at all mean gentleness. Rather, I mean the use of great care in choosing the words that can best express one's meaning while avoiding the pitfalls set by the increasing degradation of language in anarchist circles that has been caused by ideological thinking. But even this is not always enough. Real communication is never one-way, and the degradation of language (and ideas) doesn't just affect how people say things, but also how they hear things. Those who make their language the servant of ideological ways of thinking will not so much listen to what someone says as

submission have ceased to exist. If I lay my wager against revolution, I am bound to lose. If instead I stake my life on immediately rebelling against the ruling order with the aim of social insurrection and revolutionary transformation, there is a possibility that I may win in the long run, and in the short run I will definitely win, because I will have made so much of my life my own against the ruling order that I will have actually lived, vibrantly in rage and joy.

filter it into the appropriate places within the frameworks of their systems for viewing the world.

The desire for simplicity itself can be a danger here. Things certainly seem simpler when we feel we have found the answers, so that we no longer need to call our ideas, our activities, our lives and ourselves into question. In a world of every day misery and catastrophe, the codified categories of ideology can be particularly reassuring. But this sort of reassurance comes at the expense of real communication and real discussion. Exchanges of words are reduced to mutual reassurances, evangelistic outreach and condemnations of those who don't agree. The capacity to listen disappears, taking with it any possibility for real debate. Let's look at a few examples of how this can work.

Activism, as a specialized role, carries its own vague ideology: things are bad, we need to do something to change them, we need to organize people for this purpose. Quite vague, indeed. But it doesn't prevent activists from being fervent believers and hard-core evangelists. For the activist, as for any evangelist, the individuals they encounter are not unique human beings with whom to create relationships or share life, they are ciphers to convert into tools for the cause. Activists have sacrificed their own uniqueness and humanity to whatever cause, so why would they expect less of others? Thus, when activists speak of communicating with others, they mean that they are out to *organize* those others to fight for their cause. The activist transforms talking with your neighbors about the realities you face together into community organizing to build a movement.

Unfortunately, this activist ideology can seep into the way of thinking of individuals who are critical of activism and leftism, leading even these people to hear meanings in words that aren't there. Thus, recently when I spoke of the need to talk with those around us about what we are facing in the world today and what we desire, one person asked if I was talking about "movement building", a term with which I wasn't familiar, but that sounds like something that would contradict my entire project as I've live and expressed it.

(This individual was at least just asking and not immediately labeling and accusing, but her question left me flabbergasted.) Another, when I was not present, said that it sounded like the same old leftist shit (or something to that effect) and then later referred to me in writing as a “reformist community organizer”. I never knew that the idea of talking with one’s neighbors could carry so much baggage. Then again I’ve never been an activist or an organizer, and have carefully kept my distance from that sort of thinking. I always thought talking with someone meant just that, *talking with someone*. But ideological filters to listening can twist the simplest things into a complex maze of hidden implications in which the possibilities for meaningful discussion get lost.

But the worst attacks against open, straightforward communication within the anarchist milieu in recent years stem from the intrusion of political correctness into the milieu. Political correctness finds its clearest voice in the identity politics that became the dominant voice of the American left in the 1980’s. I was fortunate and managed to have very little direct contact with the preachers of political correctness and identity politics for quite a while. It was clear to me that they were promoting an ideology based in victimization. Identity politics is an ideology based upon identifying with the category (or categories) through which one is oppressed: race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or whatever. In other words, one identifies with the categories that the ruling order has imposed. This identification is then supposed to be embraced as a source of pride, unity and strength. I don’t want to go into a full critique of this here, but only want to deal with the aspects relevant to communication. First of all, defining one’s identity in terms of one’s oppression is defining oneself as a victim (euphemisms such as “survivor” don’t change this). This leaves one feeling perpetually vulnerable and puts one on the defensive. Here is the basis for political correctness. People who are always on the defensive, in need of being provided with a feeling of safety, become overly sensitive to language, granting it a power over them that it need not have. In

tic and self-sacrificial connotations, but of fighting actively against roles and identities that have been imposed on us in such a way as to make the interweaving of our struggle more difficult. This battle requires us to try to understand the different ways in which each of us has experienced dispossession, domination and exploitation. And this is a further reason for seeking to understand the realities that surround us.

Certainly, in order to be able to experiment with the transformation of social relationships, we need to steal back some space from the terrain of domination in order to create a terrain of liberation. In this sense, what some people have said about creating a “counterculture” makes some sense, if by counterculture they mean a way of living against the ruling order, a sustained attack against civilization. But in order to be such an attack, this counterculture cannot be a culture set apart in its own little world. Otherwise it is nothing but another form of escape, perhaps less stultifying than TV and video games and less harmful than alcoholism and heroin, but still of little use in the project of destroying the present social order and transforming social relationships. The struggle against this world requires that we find our accomplices wherever the dispossessed, the exploited, the excluded and those who are simply disgusted and enraged with life as it is are beginning to rebel. And this means refusing to isolate ourselves in our scenes and enclaves.

The world as it is today can seem overwhelming. The idea that revolution is “unrealistic” is not an illogical conclusion, but regardless of the fierceness of the rhetoric of those who assume this, it indicates a surrender to the present reality. No matter how we choose to encounter the world, we are taking a gamble. There are no certainties, and for me this is part of the joy of life. It means that I can make choices on how I will act and that I can base those choices on my own desires. I desire a world in which the relationships between people are determined by those involved in terms of their needs, desires and aspirations. I desire a world in which every system of domination, every form of exploitation, all forms of rule and

also carry this transformation within itself, then we will tend to reproduce the very relationships we are out to destroy in the way we carry out our activity. And attempts to transform social relationships that are not also aimed at the destruction of the present social order tend to fall into a reformist logic centered around identity politics and the struggle for equality within the institutional structures or else into pure subcultural escapism. So the destructive and transformative aspects of the project cannot be separated; they are in fact one.

So I feel that the revolutionary project requires the means by which we go about this project to carry our ends within them, so that we don't reproduce the social relationships that we are trying to destroy. I have heard one argument against this that claims that we can never know the consequences of our actions with certainty. We cannot know that such means will bring about our ends. No determining law of cause and effect exists to guarantee this. This is true enough; we cannot know with certainty that any of our projects will succeed whatever method we may use. If we could, there would be no wager, just the smug certainty of those who know the true path. But a lack of certainty about the outcome of this method is no real argument against choosing to use means that carry our ends within them, because my dreams of a radically transformed world are not dreams for a far distant future where I will no longer exist. They are my desires for this moment, for my life here and now. And this is the most significant reason why my ends must exist within my means. It is the only way to guarantee that on some level I will begin to realize my dreams in my own life.

Social reality cannot be ignored; it must be destroyed. The destruction of class society, and of the race, gender and other identity roles it imposes, does not come about by simply ignoring class, race, gender, etc. Rather it is necessary to fiercely confront them with our dreams, to wrestle with them in terms of the world we desire. This is not a matter of dealing with "privilege" as that word is generally used these days among certain so-called anarchists, with its moralis-

"communication", such people no longer look for actual meaning, but put their radar out for the code words and phrases that they have defined as inherently oppressive. Their rage will scream out at the wrong word in the wrong place or at another's refusal to use the words and categories of their ideology. In the meantime, their real oppressors in the ruling class use smooth, politically correct language to enforce their oppression. A linguistic moral order is established that creates only one real change: the reduction of our capacity to communicate. In addition, creating a group identity involves identifying an opposing group to which the first group contrasts itself. If one defines oneself in terms of race or gender or sexual orientation, then this contrasting other must be defined in the same terms, and so the world gets divided into "people of color/white", "female/male", "gay/straight", etc. (or more accurately, this supposedly radical ideology maintains and enforces the divisions the ruling order has already created). Since the first group in each set is oppressed, obviously the second group must be the oppressors, regardless of what any of them as individuals have actually done. Individual responsibility is swallowed up in an automatic collective guilt. But precisely because this collective guilt is detached from the real concrete acts of individuals, some mechanism to explain it must be developed. And so we learn that all "white people", all "males" and all "straight people" are "privileged". And people from oppressed groups who adhere to these categories, along with their humble auxiliary of willing political correctness cops drawn from the "privileged" groups, can use this alleged "privilege" to automatically discredit someone. Thus, this ideology justifies the worst sort of *ad hominem* argument, the kind based on supposedly inherent traits, not on real actions of the person involved. It should be obvious how this closes down the capacity for really listening, and thus for real discussion and communication. A statement such as "...white folks, straight people and men need to shut the fuck up" is not on offer for discussion or communication and certainly not an attempt to open up an exploration of affinities and possibilities for

shared projects. It is a command clearly intended to call someone to accept a subordinate position. Again, people are seen as things, as categories, and “communication” is reduced to the arrangement of these things, making real listening irrelevant.

Communication and the capacity for listening have also deteriorated due to the entrenchment of positions that has become prevalent within anarchist circles in recent years. This entrenchment can be seen in the ongoing tendency to create categorical dichotomies: social anarchism vs. life-style anarchism, green anarchy vs. classical anarchism, and the like. The capacity to make distinctions and even complete breaks where necessary is important and must not be lost in some ecumenical haziness in which we all just embrace each other in an incoherent orgy of contradictory conceptions drained of meaning. But the capacity to make distinctions also means the capacity to recognize false dichotomies that serve no other purpose than to define one’s own ideological identity. In fact, there is much in the entrenchment of positions within the American anarchist milieu that parallels the functioning of identity politics. For example, there tends to be a hyper-sensitivity to words that are taken out of context and drained of meaning (recent discussions about the word “communism” provide a fine example). There is also a tendency to use labels to consign the “other” to a hostile ideological camp and end discussion in this way. A sad example is the way some people have begun to use “leftist” to label anyone who disagrees with them. In this way, the necessary harsh critique of the left loses its content and degenerates into a vacuous “anti-left” ideology that serves no other purpose than to silence one’s critics. If we are to ever discover where our real affinities and differences lie, we need to leave the safety of our entrenched positions, throw away our ideological filters, and actually listen to each other, sharing fierce but principled critiques and recognizing that since we are still living and the world is still changing, none of us has found the answer. We have so much we need to talk about, but it is useless to try if we cannot listen, if we only put up the radar for signals that help us place

if we are not rising up here, where we are, against the powers that condemn us to lives of obedience and that are destroying the ways of lives of people over there, this is just a lot of chatter. Real solidarity exists in the interweaving of our own revolt with that of those in revolt elsewhere, because the same institutions, the same powers, that impoverish our existence are also destroying the way of life of the indigenous people of West Papua, supporting the police terror in Algeria and promoting their own agenda of exploitation and control in Latin America, so our revolutionary battle for our own liberation is the most useful form of solidarity. And perhaps most importantly, staking our lives on the project of creating social revolution, means wagering on our own capacity to act. Thus, we actually can take some responsibility for the outcome of this wager.

Once a person has made the decision to take her life into her own hands against the ruling order and to begin a project aimed at a revolutionary break with the existence it imposes, he has already changed the way he relates to the world around him. This becomes evident in the way she views this reality. If we want to battle against the ruling order and begin to create a terrain of liberation, we have to understand the terrain of domination, the terrain of capital and the state, as well as that of resistance and revolt. We need to know what forces are at play in the field of social struggle. Without this knowledge, our ideas and dreams have no place to gain footing for actually doing battle with the ruling order, and it is easy to drift into ideology and become irrelevant. But we grasp this knowledge as a weapon to wield against the ruling order so that we can realize our dreams of a new world. Let’s consider a bit more deeply what this means in order to avoid confusion.

Social revolution is the overturning of the social relationships of domination and exploitation in order to open the possibility for creating our lives together on our own terms. This is a destructive project – an attack against the institutions and structures of the ruling order aimed at their complete demolition. But it is also a project of social transformation. If the destructive project does not

already assumed their own incapacity to act effectively in the world to realize their own desires and dreams. They, therefore, look at the realities of the world not as challenges to be faced and overcome, but as inevitabilities that must be endured. What is missing is the reversal of perspective referred to by Vaneigem, the individual insurrection that is the first step toward social insurrection. To take this step, it is necessary to have the courage to wager on ourselves and our ability to act, on our own when necessary, and together with others whenever possible.

Those of us who desire the end to all forms of domination and exploitation have every reason to wager our lives on the possibility of social revolution – not as a cause above us, but as something desirable and necessary if we are ever to be able to grasp our lives as our own, as something that we create together with others in the way we desire. There are several levels on which the desirability and necessity of social revolution exist. First of all, the social relationships of domination and submission, of exploitation, dispossession and exclusion that are imposed on us leave their scars. Even if it were true that a collapse of civilization was inevitable, if a radical transformation of the ways we relate on the broad social level did not occur, we would simply begin to recreate the old hierarchies and institutions most likely in their ugliest forms. If anyone thinks otherwise, they should look at a few of the places where collapse has occurred on a regional level, such as the Balkans, Rwanda, Somalia or Chechnya. Furthermore, beginning to act towards social revolution in our lives means beginning to change the way we relate with each other and with the world here and now. Our project becomes the exploration of new ways of being in the world based on affinity and the interweaving of our desires, our dreams, our projects and our lives. And that in itself can make life much more enjoyable. In addition, there are places in the world – such as West Papua, Algeria and Latin America – where resistance and revolt are ongoing but where the interests of the West play a major role in keeping these revolts on the defensive. We can talk all we want of solidarity, but

others and their ideas into our ideological categories. So among the anarchist projects worthy of effort is the revival of the fine art of listening that makes communication as peers possible. But this is not an easy task since it involves attacking one's own entrenched positions as well as those of others.

Communication is hard enough where the art of listening has been nurtured. A few words are never enough to express all that a person has to say. The passionate reasons that goad one into action cannot fit into a few lines on a few pages. In fact, an endless flow of words would still not be enough to express it all. But the point is not to express it all in words; the point is to leave a clue, a verbal finger pointing toward the moon of one's ideas and dreams that says just enough to find accomplices in the crime of freedom. Unfortunately, these days most people only “think” from the entrenched positions of their confused ideological conceptions and contradictory dogmas, and so one cannot expect to be understood by very many. From such confinement, most can only see the pointing finger. But the few who can think and feel and dream outside of every ideological fortress may be able to hear these words and respond with comprehension, critically, their eye upon the moon. And maybe a few critical voices, striving fiercely for clarity, will be able to break through the entrenched positions, and the art of listening will make real discussion a possibility again.

Critique of the Happy New World That is Coming: A Self-Interview with Los Amigos de Ludd

(The following text was originally used as a basis for enlivening a debate on technology and industrial society in the context of the initiatives of the camp organized by the Assembly against the High Speed Train at Arribe in Navarra, Spain in July 2002. I am printing the in-

terview not because I agree with every word of it, but to introduce this group to English-speaking anarchists and to further this significant debate.)

What does the reference to Ludd and luddites entail for you?

The luddites were English workers who become the protagonists of an insurrectional movement between 1811 and 1813 and took action, destroying industrial machinery. They called themselves by the collective name of General Ludd, King Ludd or something of the sort. Currently in the Anglo-Saxon world, it is common for someone who opposes technological progress to be contemptuously tagged with luddism. However, since the 1980's and 1990's, there have been many in America who have raised the banner of luddism (with varying rigor, of course). The actions against transgenic cultivation in France, Belgium and the United Kingdom, the sabotage of the high speed train in Italy, the rural occupations in the Spanish state, the peasant resistance movements in Brazil and India, all this is a further sign of a rebellion against a techno-scientific progress that increasingly reveals itself for what it is: the planned strategy of an endless exploitation. To summarize, we can state that for us luddism is an example of active popular opposition to a technology that the industrial tyranny of capitalism wants to impose.

But it seems to me that your operational level isn't very high.

To be precise, we are not a mass movement. For the moment, we are limited to spreading a healthy distrust in the face of industrial society.

But to what extent do you think that luddism can be transplanted into the present?

Transplants are not our passion. The problem is something else. It is necessary to understand that the luddites reacted against a type of technology that was the clear manifestation of the accelerated destruction of their community and of their way of life. The luddites reacted not only against the damages caused by the machines, but also against the machine system as such and the type of production that it implied. This is an important point. In this way, they noticed

perspective manifests. The rejection of the possibility of revolution is the rejection of the dream of consciously creating life together in a different manner (except maybe among a small group of friends). The advocates of this apocalyptic gospel no longer recognize the social wealth that exists in other human beings, a wealth that is beyond measure, beyond calculation, because it is precisely in the relationships we develop with other human beings that we create our own unique and boundless individuality. Having lost the social, human aspect, the attacks they conceive to speed up the collapse degenerate into mere revenge against this society or expressions of moral superiority. Calculating, militaristic thinking begins to infect their activity with conceptions of "acceptable loss" and comparative body counts.

But the reality of a world that seems to be perpetually on the edge of catastrophe is perceived more clearly by others, not in terms of apocalyptic *hope*, but rather of increasing fear that soon all may be lost. Fear and despair seem to be the dominant feelings of these times. This is no accident. Those who rule this world find their most useful weapon in fear and the paralysis of despair. But only in those places and times where the catastrophic explodes forth in specific disasters – wars, epidemics, environmental devastation, slaughters, etc. – does this take the form of explicit terror. Far more often, at least here in the Western world, it takes the form of resignation and an underlying dread that eats away at the most sensitive minds. Those who cannot or will not embrace religion, patriotism, apocalyptic hope or any other ideology to gain the illusion of security can be driven to the edge of madness by this dread, making the horrors of this world personal. The sufferings in the Sudan or Iraq or Palestine find their reflection in the emotional suffering of people that I love. What I see collapsing around me is not the civilized social order, but the dreams, the courage and the minds of my friends.

But both hope in a collapse and despair in the face of the present catastrophic reality involve looking at the present world on its terms, not on our own. Those who hold to either perspective have

of something completely different from anything we have known, a new world as yet undefined. What we might create in the place of these civilized monstrosities is an open question, but the methods of self-organization we develop in the course of our struggles against this world of money and domination can provide a clue for the ways in which we might begin to organize our lives together for the fulfillment of our own needs and desires.

The Revolutionary Wager

The world has to change now; if it doesn't we'll all die as exiles in an inhuman world.

We are living in desperate times. The capacity to dream and desire appears to be depleted. Most people merely seem to resign themselves to what is. It is, therefore, not surprising that even some anarchists are turning to apocalyptic visions of “the end” rather than pursuing projects of revolutionary transformation – projects which require a capacity both to dream and desire and to look at the world as it is in terms of how to go about realizing those dreams and desires.

I have recently heard certain anarchists declare that revolutionary projects are “unrealistic” and that people should instead prepare for an inevitable collapse of civilization. The determinism inherent in this view may give those who hold it a kind of hope, but it is a sad hope, lacking joy. The joylessness of this perspective stems from the fact that those who hold it are placing their bet on an apocalyptic event that is beyond their control rather than on their own capacity to act and interact, to join together with others to create a rupture with the present. Some of those who hold to this perspective advocate acting to speed up the collapse, thus supporting a kind of violence against the civilized order. But in rejecting the possibility of a revolutionary project, they remove the acts of violence they advocate from any social context. And this is where the sadness of this

that the harm was both in the private ownership and exploitation of the machinery and in a type of mechanized organization of production and work, which in their eyes entailed the irruption of a new life with anti-social laws. In other words, they intuited that industrial technology could only correspond to a specific form of the exploitation of human nature within its environment of life together: the capitalist form that needs to destroy community links, isolate individuals and deprive them of any means that could offer them a possibility of material autonomy.

But wouldn't this be a much too indulgent and idealistic way of judging the pre-industrial past and its community?

It is our epoch that requires the most severe critique. Today, the present instead tends to be idealized. We do not support an improbable return to the past. What we intend to show is that industrial society – with its ideal of progress – has completely falsified our vision of the past. Today we know that the creation of a Market and a State – once more or less limited to the national sphere, now planetary – on a universal scale has hidden the small-scale history of forms of social and communal organization that were more equitable and rational and less harmful for the environment, that coexisted with forms of power and religious systems that, although unacceptable, did not completely oppress the social autonomy of the community, not everywhere and at all times as happens today. This will all seem like a dubious reality for the progressive minds of today that tend to see the past as a dark time that has been superceded. When populations rebelled in times past against the inequity and arbitrary justice of the powerful (nobility, rich bourgeois, clergy and Crown), they at least knew what their means of support that were at stake were – land, timber, grains, pasturage. They never separated their social ideals – no matter how poor they were – from their direct means of sustenance (which, at that time, were still in their hands), nor from their direct means of self-governance (the assembly or the council). Today, all social demands must pass through the abstract domination of the market, through state bureaucracy or through

union reformism. Every conflict is played out around mediocre exigencies that obey the economic logic of those in power (in other words, they are all about buying power or civil rights). The identification of wealth with “money” is today at such a banal point (and has been since the time of Balzac) that almost no one asks if there is a way of life that is not a purchasable commodity. One works without pause for eleven months in order to be able to see or eat a trout from a river, bathe in the ocean or escape the ferocious noise of the city. The weekday rest is the sinister prank of those in power for the use of their slaves. In industrial capitalist society, most struggles are focused on negotiations relating to living conditions that are already in themselves deteriorated. A better distribution of income is demanded, but what can really be obtained with this income (survival on the outskirts of the city? better superhighways on which to die more quickly? more sports clubs? greater consumption of surrogates?). Wages are discussed, but not the nature of wage labor itself. Greater social protection is demanded in the face of the Market, but the anti-social existence of the Market itself is not called into question. Refuge is sought in the state and people forget that the state is what made it possible for the social terrain to become the economic battlefield of the economic war of capitalism. In the meantime, the biosphere is deteriorating in the face of an ever growing, spreading assault. Capitalist exploitation would never have been possible if nations and populations had not been industrialized. The opposition between the countryside and the city cannot be a choice for weekends. In the destruction of every form of rural and communitarian life, the origin of the total domination that we suffer today is quite clear.

If I understood you well, you criticize the industrial society that is in the hands of capitalist power, but you would accept a type of industrial society governed by the self-organized power of the people.

You have understood rather poorly. For us, industrial society – its organization of time and work, its harmfulness and the use of

language of the masters. Unfortunately this does not automatically mean the dispossessed have a common language among themselves, and they are as likely to lash out randomly as to clearly aim at their real enemies. The development of ways of acting and expressing ourselves as clearly as possible is thus one important project, finding a language that can defeat the rhetoric of nationalism, ethnic hatred and religious fundamentalism that often takes over the anger of the exploited and excluded.

Another central area of conflict with the ruling class is that of the use of space. The capacity to create our lives on our own terms requires having the time and the space for doing so. In a certain sense, the precariousness that has been imposed on us offers us some time, though we end up using much of this time scrounging for the means of survival. But the battle for space to meet, create projects and build our lives together is central. It has been the intrusion of capital into the spaces where people were creating their own lives that has caused the dispossession behind the current mass urbanization of the globe. And the reappropriation of space from the state and capital is a necessary aspect of the social war. It is in this sense that the use of occupations and blockades in recent struggles becomes important. And the attacks on the capitalist and state uses of space is also important in this struggle.

Just as it is ridiculous to think that we could take over a productive apparatus that was designed to enforce control of the workers and use it in a liberatory manner, it is equally absurd to think that we could take over cities that are designed for social control and commodity consumption and use them to create a free way of living together. The social struggle over the space and time of our lives will have to be a destructive struggle, aimed at putting an end to the prison-malls that we call cities. This is why we have nothing whatsoever to say to the rulers of this world why in their eyes even those of us who aim clearly at our enemies rather than lashing out randomly will nonetheless appear as barbarians inside the gates, outlaws and criminals who don't belong. So our dream is that

ruling class is aware of the situation it has created by pushing so many into precarious conditions. It understands that it has created conditions in which the social war could heat up, and it is taking preventative measures that do not conflict with its need for profit (the development of surveillance and less-lethal weapons technology is a money-making enterprise).

New possibilities for revolt?

My interest in examining these matters is to understand the forces at play right now in the field of social struggle, in understanding the nature of class relations and where the points of battle against the ruling order are.

The old class analyses of syndicalists and Marxists that centered on the industrial working class and taking over the means of production can't really be applied to the reality of urbanized impoverishment we face today. The structure of production and work has changed too much. It is no longer possible to imagine the unity of the underclass in terms of a shared project of production. Considering that since the rise of industrialism, production technology has been developed explicitly to serve the needs of the rulers to control workers, such technology could hardly serve the interests of people who want to create their lives on their own terms in any case. Instead, what we have in common is what has been done to us: dispossession, proletarianization, exploitation, exclusion. The only common project we could share as a class at this point is the destruction of our class condition, and thus the destruction of class society as such.

The process by which civilization has spread itself to every corner of the world, bringing with it the poisons of commerce and the state, has certainly eradicated any outside. But at the same time it has created a huge and growing number of people with no place within this world. In this sense, it has brought the barbarians inside the gates of the city, desperate individuals who do not speak the

its technology – is integrally connected with the economic model of capitalism. The two things are inseparable.

But if you are so interested in criticizing capitalist society, shouldn't you return to the Marxist analysis of political economy and put an end to these sensational critiques of technology and scientific progress?

We think that the greater part of the Marxist school of thought has submitted to the enchantment of the capitalist revolution in production, along with mechanism and the urban working class. The problem begins here. Marx greeted the birth of the proletarian class as a beneficial thing. He believed that from the negative – the total misery of the industrial working class – the positive – communism – would come. This is why he saw the capitalist revolution and the bourgeois economy as a critical but necessary time, the moment in which the revolutionary class that was supposed to conquer power would come to be. The bourgeois economy was supposed to impose the objective conditions for this fundamental change: the destruction of all the old communitarian links and the total dispossession of the individual. Essentially, the idea was that the working class would take the reins of the progressive movement of History and leave the old world behind. We believe that this vision of social antagonism is poor and historically misleading. Thus we hold that there isn't any progress in history, nor does the positive extreme have to arise from the negative extreme. The process of social degradation to which the industrial revolution gave impetus certainly destroyed the links with a past full of shadows and light, but it wasn't so helpful in forging a class with a clear consciousness of emancipation. Mainly because the generations born since the rupture have lost contact with practices of direct sociality, non-fragmentary knowledge, communitarian benefits, simple production techniques, mutual aid, etc. The most orthodox Marxism accepted the progressive vision of history, inherited from liberal capitalist thought. It blessed Science and its industrial application.

Do you consider Science to be an objective ally of capitalist power?

The mere formulation of this question already contains its response in itself. In the modern age, Science requires large quantities of means and a gigantic field for experimentation in order to develop its research. The corporations and the state together provide these things: money and the entire social body on which to experiment with its innovative discoveries.. In exchange Science must accept criteria of heightened productivity, specialization, division of labor and industrial discipline ...ah! we forgot, also a complicit, rigorous silence when any experiment gets out of hand and produces a catastrophe, something that is not infrequent.

It seems to me that you are trying to terrorize people by presenting an idea of technology and science as products of a totalitarian incubus. Perhaps your observations were useful for a time – a dark time – of industrial civilization. But today, you can't deny it, technology is put at the service of people's comfort. It doesn't deprive them of their way of life, but rather creates the conditions for an ever renewed well-being.

You might just earn a good wage for the rest of your life publishing such nonsense. As for us, we think that it is natural for the technology of consumption to appear today as a miraculous compensation in world in which all true values necessary to the human being are prohibited. In this divided society, any technological proposal seems like a blessing. To modern slaves who have lost even the capacity for getting together, nothing is left except the reinforcement of their isolation through increasingly refined technological instruments. In this way, imprisonment still seems bearable to them.

Surely, you exaggerate...

The new society that they want to impose is prepared to cheerfully support its increasing dehumanization. It will be necessary to render the consciousness insensitive to the degradation of human relationships – a degradation that is already in a very advanced state –, to lose every prospect for personal and collective autonomy. With regard to material conquest, however, it will be necessary to accept the possibility of technologically reconstructing the biosphere – and human substance – in order to prepare both for

is there to remind us of the only reason capital ever wants us to associate – to buy and sell. But at the same time the ruling class understands that cities have filled up with those who cannot or will not follow the rules of this game. The realities of life push many to find their own ways and make their own rules alone or with others. And others choose this consciously. Social war is part of the urban reality. And so those in power send in their guard dogs to occupy the city and set up a technological apparatus of surveillance in the attempt to maintain control.

City planning is designed to limit the existence of open public spaces where free interaction can occur. Parks are increasingly monitored and controlled, and often fenced in and locked at night. Streets, sidewalks and alleys are increasingly designed to control movement and make it easier for cops and troops to maneuver in situations requiring crowd control. Laws against loitering, vagrancy and gathering together in groups give cops an excuse to harass those attempting to use public space for their own purposes. And cops act as an armed force of occupation in the poorer neighborhoods. Surveillance cameras are popping up everywhere to create the image of an all-seeing eye of authority. In short, cities are being redesigned to create the appearance of a thoroughly monitored existence. They are being transformed into open-air prisons.

But just as the panopticon in prisons of earlier times was an image to scare prisoners into policing themselves, the monitoring of urban spaces is also largely illusory. It is a public image of surveillance intended to instill fear among those who can't or won't fit into the happy culture of the mall. And occupying forces never know the terrain that they are occupying as well as those who create their lives there on a daily basis. Those desperate or determined enough can find this out very quickly simply by using a little care in taking whatever action they find necessary or desirable.

Nevertheless, the image of surveillance and the presence of police as an occupying force in poor neighborhoods indicates that the

living in the city, they are outsiders, people with no place in this social order.

This exclusion at the very bottom is a reflection of the precariousness that is becoming the condition of more and more of the exploited. As the production of goods becomes less dependent on skilled human labor power and is spread in smaller units across the social terrain, the sort of work available ceases to offer security. More and more workers find themselves in shitty service jobs with no guaranteed future, in temporary work or having to find means of survival in the underground economy. The income is not only low, but precarious as well – one never knows when she might lose the job and suddenly not be able to pay the rent. So we can consider this precariousness to be the common trait of the exploited and dispossessed class at the present time, the point from which common struggle might develop.

The prison-mall: the city today

The flood of desperate, impoverished people into the cities combines with the increasing impoverishment of those already there to create a volatile situation. The ruling order finds itself facing a growing number of people for which it has no place. While humanitarian reformists call for the creation of places for these undesirables, demanding jobs, homes, aid and a variety of other stopgap measures to maintain the social peace, the rulers seem to understand that the process of dispossession and of increasing impoverishment and precariousness are happening much too fast for profitable stopgaps to work. The humanitarian mask becomes a thin veil for the real aim: the maintenance of control. Repression is taking the upper hand in the maintenance of social control, because the masters of this world understand that the dispossessed do not speak their language, do not have a place in this world.

Cities nowadays have too intertwining aspects: they are open-air prisons and malls. Everywhere we go the image of the commodity

an economic exploitation of dimensions never seen before. Starting from here, some will choose their mode of survival and adaptation. We, in the poverty of our possibilities, will seek allies who don't accept the conditions of this surrender of consciousness.

Los Amigos de Ludd

The Terrifying Face of Despair: Some thoughts on the Beslan Tragedy

At the beginning of September, a group of Chechen militants took over a school in Beslan, Ossetia, Russia. They held about 1200 schoolchildren, parents and teachers hostage in the overheated gymnasium of the school. The militants placed bombs in the school and some of them had bombs strapped to their bodies. They were demanding the release of several of their arrested comrades. The situation ended after more than two days with the slaughter of nearly four hundred people, mostly children, but also including all of the militants. Truly a tragedy. But it is not of interest to anarchists to simply mourn the tragedies that are the daily fare of this world. Rather we want to draw a deeper understanding of the world in which we live in order to do battle against this tragic social order.

It is difficult to know the details of what actually happened in Beslan. The Russian state and its media servants have lied so often and so blatantly about what is happening in Chechnya and the surrounding region that their talk of “drugged terrorists”, connections to Al Qaeda and so on cannot be taken at all seriously. If the first war in Chechnya was painful for the people of the region, the war that started in 1998, and that has found its justification from Russia's side in the so-called “war on terrorism” since September 2001, has devastated the region culturally and socially. The Russian army and several competing gangs of “Chechen militants” have been ter-

rorizing the region, robbing, raping, kidnapping and killing people. Most of the kidnappings and slaughters are for profit... Families can get their loved ones back if they come up with the ransom (though it may only be the loved one's dead body, in which case the price is usually higher). There are no innocents here, only those with the guns and power, and those who suffer, becoming more and more desperate. And sometimes the desperate also get guns. Sometimes they join one of the Chechen militias, bringing the lust for revenge with them.

If the Chechen militias have begun to steal, rape, kidnap and kill non-combatants in the region, we must not forget who taught them these tricks. The Russian military has been doing all of this since it began its war in the region. It has been their precise, and blatantly racist, military policy, a psychological operation aimed at the cultural destruction of the Chechen people. But we must not forget the economic factors in all this, from those relating to oil and transportation access to the Black Sea to those relating to immediate profit to be made dealing in various sorts of human commodities. The latter have been the source of most of the worst abuses by both the Russian military and the militias in the region. Perhaps where it becomes most confusing is in the specific temporary alliances that arise for illegal activities between portions of the Russian military and so-called "Chechen terrorist" groups when there is profit to be made.

It is obvious that the militants involved in the mass kidnapping at Beslan were not acting for monetary profit. Their demand was for the release of their comrades, but they apparently had no real hope that this demand would be met. They were among the desperate who had taken up arms. When a hostage offered them all of the town's money in exchange for release (a reasonable offer in light of what has been going on for years in that region) one of the militants is reported to have said, "We don't need money; we have come here to die." And so the Russian media howled about the "Chechen terrorists" "contempt for life". In the meantime, the Russian military

and under the threat of being evicted at any time. On the other hand, people often find ways to create what they need together, building make-shift homes from whatever materials they can find, squatting and so on. Shantytown structures often show a great deal of creativity and ingenuity.

In addition, many of those migrating to the cities are also immigrating to new countries, often illegally. These undocumented immigrant can find it difficult to get jobs in the regular market, and so they often end up working in the underground economy. They can frequently be seen selling various trinkets on the streets, always with one eye peeled for the cops. But undocumented immigrants also provide a source of cheap labor within the mainstream economy, so that state policy walks a thin line between enforcement and tolerance. Most Western countries now have a system of prison camps (with euphemistic labels such as "centers of temporary residence") for undocumented immigrants. This keeps those on the outside willing to go on working in intolerable conditions for low wages. The aim is not so much to stop the flow of immigrants, as to keep it under control, providing a steady supply of cheap labor for capital while minimizing the potential for social unrest.

In the West, urban life is also becoming more and more impoverished. Rising housing costs combine with an increasingly tight job market to push more and more people out the bottom and onto the streets. Homelessness is rampant. In Portland, where I live, this reality is visible everywhere. It isn't possible to walk a half a block in downtown without encountering a panhandler. Police harassment, particularly in the form of breaking up homeless camps and fencing off areas that might provide shelter, is normal policy. But this will not make the problem go away. It simply emphasizes the status of the visible poor as undesirables in the current social order. In addition, the homeless and those living in makeshift shelter in shantytowns on the outskirts of cities often do not make into the censuses. In this sense, it can be said that "officially they do not exist". In other words, they have been excluded from society. Though

Slums, shantytowns, homelessness: the face of urbanization

In Europe and the Americas, the process of urbanization is nearly complete with 80% of the population living in cities. These are the centers from which this process has spread. The process of dispossession that led to the urbanization and proletarianization of most of the European population began more than five hundred years ago, together with the colonization of the Americans. Now, in western Europe and the United States, memories of the brutality with which this process began is nearly forgotten, and most of the time the exploited here seem to accept the dispossession of their capacity to create their lives on their own terms in exchange for the capacity to buy consumer goods. But even here things are changing.

In the rest of the world, this process is going forward with unrelenting ruthlessness enhanced by the modern technological apparatus through which the rulers impose their control. If half of the world's population now lives in cities, we can understand the nature of this urban life if we know that a third of the city dwellers live in slums and shantytowns.

Urbanization is more precisely, the urbanization of poverty. This is important, because there is a significant difference between rural and urban poverty. The rural poor usually have means of subsistence in their own hands through which they can guarantee their survival, in particular, land on which they can grow food and natural materials for making shelter and clothing. Pushed off the land and into the city, the poor no longer have these means and the scramble for survival takes a desperate twist. The urban population is now growing at a rate of about seventy million people a year. Legal markets are not capable of taking care of the needs of the flood of impoverished people pouring into the cities. So a black market economy (and anti-economy) grows. On the one hand this means that many people end up paying to live in badly built, deteriorating structures with inadequate sanitation, water and other services

showed the extent of its respect for life by ending the hostage situation with the death of nearly a third of the hostages, something that would never have happened had they been CEOs or bankers, diplomats or government ministers. But these were children of poor people in a poor region. The Russian state has been showing how much respect it has for the lives of people in that region for years. In this situation, its sole aim was the reestablishment of its control. If that required the death of 300 to 400 poor people, mostly children, so be it. It's for the social good.

Desperation may, at times, provide a bit of clarity, but far more often it obscures one's vision. The distinction between one's real enemies – those with the power to enforce their control and extort obedience, and to slaughter anyone who threatens their control through disobedience – and those they govern can become fuzzy in one's mind. And the result is an indiscriminate violence that breaks potential ties of solidarity before they can be formed. But desperation is not just a random trait of certain individuals. It has real social causes. In particular, isolation that leads those in places such as Chechnya to feel the need to entrench themselves against any and all potential enemies and to view all other people as pawns in their desperate struggle, potential hostages to use as bargaining chips for survival.

If, as some anarchists have said, our solidarity is not with the misery of the exploited, but rather with the vigor with which they refuse to put up with it, it is equally true that our solidarity is not with the desperation of the isolated, but with the vigor with which they strive to break that isolation in order to find comrades and accomplices in their struggle. The indiscriminate kidnapping and violence against the schoolchildren, parents and teachers does not reflect any hope in the possibility for breaking this isolation, but simply demonstrates the extent to which the Chechen exploited have been locked into a kind of ethno-geographic solitary confinement by the policies of the Russian state. Breaking through the walls of this kind of prison would require real effort from the outside. I make

no pretense of knowing how to go about this, but I do know that it cannot simply be a matter of support or charity, nor of making a particular place or people one's special cause. Such activity completely misses the point and in its own way even plays into the ruling class game of separating various struggles through nationalism, ethnic identity and similar political ploys. We need to start from the fact that we are also among the exploited and have our own struggle. So finding the points for potential solidarity means finding those places where our own struggle against the ruling order can intertwine with the struggles of others and figuring out how to communicate our attempts to do so. If we know how to act with clarity in our own struggle against the ruling order, if we are careful to distinguish and attack the mutual enemy and not resort in desperation to random acts of violence that obscure the concrete nature of the enemy and its operations, this is a great first step. From there we will have to study our possibilities, examine the forces on the field and take the sort of action that seems to offer the greatest potential to spreading the net of affinity and complicity in revolt farther and farther across the globe.

Internal Enemies

The climate of war permeates all social life. The "terrorist threat" fills the newspapers and television. In the dog days of summer, the government has been closing ranks in an internal front that allows no gaps. Thus, from north to south in Italy, the repressive apparatus of the state rages, searching and imprisoning dozens of comrades. Some – in Sardinia – are charged with setting fire to an office of *Forza Italia*. Others – in Genoa and Lecce – are accused of being "caught in the middle" during one of the daily sweeps of immigrants or of aiding the revolt and escape from a Center of Temporary Residence [the euphemism for the concentration camps set up in Italy for undocumented aliens]. Still others – in Rovereto – were arrested

where they were able to create their lives largely on their own terms and are forced to go elsewhere in search of survival. This is the central reason for the movement of people from the countryside into the cities, as well as for the massive international migration of the poor around the globe creating a growing marginalized, often undocumented population in cities throughout the world. If we also take into account the millions of refugees that wars over resources, territory and the distribution of power create, it becomes clear that the current social order is the source of this uprooting.

It is inevitable that the UN report would be shortsighted, since it couldn't draw conclusions that would undermine its own role in maintaining the present world. This becomes especially clear when it attempts to make economic analysis. In keeping with its task of finding stopgap solutions that don't threaten the ruling order, the UN report looks at the question of the rapid growth of the poor urban population in terms of how to provide subsistence within the urban context. Thus its criticism of the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) is limited to complaining that they emphasize agricultural exports rather than urban economic development. The process of dispossession that is going on is ignored. Small-scale farmers growing mostly for their own subsistence with a bit extra for local urban markets do not require much land. But when international pressure (or rather, blackmail) forces a poorer nation to shift the agricultural emphasis to growing cash crops for export, land has to be taken away from subsistence production and consolidated into large-scale holdings for industrial agriculture. Local farmers are dispossessed of their land and way of life. A few may be able to find work as farm laborers, but most are forced to hit the road for the city in the hope of finding a means of survival. So the SAPs aren't simply a poor solution to the economic problems of the poorer nations; they are a precise process of dispossession and proletarianization that reinforces the global spread of capital.

Dispossession: the cause of the migration to the cities

According to a recent UN report (*The Challenge of the Slums* by the United Nations' Human Settlements Programme), the rural population of the earth has nearly reached its peak, and soon all population growth will happen only in cities. But the report fails to examine why. Is it simply because there is too little land for the number of people that exist as the report's silence on the subject would imply? Such a conclusion may offer cold comfort to the bureaucrats of this global state institution. After all, their job is to find the necessary stopgap measures to keep the global order of capital functioning relatively smoothly in the midst of the disasters it provokes. But this explanation is inadequate.

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Capitalism needs to expand in order to survive. The expansion of capital and its technological apparatus has to eat up more and more land and resources. Whether this takes the form of massive strip mines, intrusive explorations to find resources, the transformation of small-scale farming into large-scale industrialized agribusiness or the transformation of farmlands into private big game parks where the rich can pay to hunt for trophies in a controlled setting (as has been happening in South Africa in recent years), the effect on the rural poor is the same. They are uprooted from the homes

for responding to a fascist attack that occurred two years ago. Finally, in chronological order, the two investigations – one between Rome and Viterbo, the other in Pisa and the surrounding area – have led to imprisonment or house arrest for various comrades on charges of subversive association with the aim of terrorism. Some of the imprisoned comrades have been carrying out a hunger strike that has already caused them to lose 20-25 pounds.

Like always, the state is repressing those who are openly its enemies without hesitation. This is certainly nothing new that should surprise or scandalize us. But today, the relentlessness of the police, along with a media bombardment on the edge of paranoia, testifies to an increasingly explosive social situation, over which the threat of discontent and desperation looms. The state is responding preventatively, by attacking anyone who doesn't fit in. In fact, the "attentions" of the police no longer focus exclusively on the "usual subversives", but on anyone who is found to be in conflict, even accidentally, with market imperatives. From the beating of striking workers to the work orders imposed on transit drivers, from the internment and deportation of immigrants to the denunciations against those who struggle to defend their health against industrial poisons, from the eviction of houses and nomad camps to the technological and military control of neighborhoods, villages, sports arenas and cities, in a less and less metaphorical way, everything takes on the connotation of an internal front in a country at war.

A social organization that is only able to produce catastrophes, epidemics, wars, fear, precariousness and desperation, knows that it must defend itself from the rage that comes back. When it needs to tighten the screws, the laws are found, invented or ignored, as minister Pisanu candidly stated with regard to the repression of anarchists. If the conditions are lacking for situating practices of revolt that evade the canons of the penal code, this doesn't prevent the authorities from dispensing years in prison without offending the fine democratic souls who uphold civil rights. Terrorizing, isolating and carrying out a scorched earth policy against anyone who does not

submit, perhaps with the aim of convincing someone to “repent”, has become the praxis for fighting against any rebellion, active or potential, that has the risk of becoming contagious.

Thus, it is time for all the internal enemies to become aware of each other, to cultivate the anger that this increasingly unlivable daily life generates in order to turn it against power. Breaking the isolation between struggles, overcoming separations, making solidarity a weapon, promoting autonomy and direct action. This is the only defense possible against repression, a defense that is already a response, a response that is already an attack. Those who sow misery will reap rage.

Some internal enemies

August 2004

[Translator’s note: Most of the comrades from Pisa, people from the anti-civilization anarchist group Il Silvestre, have been released. The comrades from Rovereto still await trial. One of them, Massimo Pasamani, whose writings have appeared in WD in the past, will begin his trial on December 16. The trial of defendants from the events of the G8 summit in Genoa is still ongoing.]

To The Irregulars of the Civil War

(This article originally appeared as a foreword to the book *Fuoco alle Polvere: Guerra e guerriglia sociale in Iraq* [Fire to the Powder Keg: War and Social Guerrilla Struggle in Iraq], recently published by NN and Porfido in Italy. I have deleted specific references to the rest of the book from this version of the translation. I plan to translate the entire book for Venomous Butterfly Publications and hope to have it ready in a few months)

A great calm currently reigns here. Everything is quiet, as if enveloped in snow on a winter night. Only a mysterious and monotonous sound like spattering

The Barbarian Inside the Gate: Dispossession, Exclusion and the Urbanization of the World

The word “barbarian” comes to us from the ancient Greeks. They used it to refer to foreigners, to those who could not fit into the culture of the *polis*, of the city-state. But the Greek word also referred to stutterers, because the capacity to fit in was defined by the capacity to use language in the correct way. Those who spoke the language of the city smoothly and persuasively were civilized; all others were outsiders and a threat to the peace of the city. At the time of Socrates and Alexander, this conception of dangerous barbarians outside the gate had meaning. There really was an outside. But things have changed.

Civilization has expanded to cover the entire planet. There are no pockets of land left that are not claimed by a state, and the projects of the global Market send their traces into the farthest wild reaches of the globe, poisoning water, soil and air. It is not really possible to speak of an “outside” anymore. And within the next year, a significant point in human history will be reached: the urban population of the world will surpass the rural population for the first time in history. For those of us who desire a revolutionary break with the existing social order, and especially those of us who understand this as a break with civilization itself, this process of global urbanization an important matter. We would do well to examine it deeply in order to better understand the forces that will be in play in social struggle over the next several years, so that we can consider how to act effectively on our own terms against the ruling order in this context. I am offering these notes as a tentative first step in this direction.

ment that brings more and more pieces of Palestine into our cities, capital and the rebellions that it encounters will explain what Benjamin meant when he spoke, in times quite similar to our own, of revolutionary violence as “the effective state of exception” as opposed to the “fictitious” one of Rights, fully laid out by fascism.

This gap between the rhetoric of flyers and the impotence of practice – as if we ourselves were the first one not to take what we say seriously – is demonstrated quite well by the blackmail that the movement manages to swallow so stoically. As soon as it takes any step forward, it immediately goes back on the defensive. The state propaganda after September 11 caused the revolt of Genoa to be forgotten. The criminalization of Iraqi resistance is causing us to forget that the opposition to the war that caused millions to go down into the streets is precisely what the insurgents in Iraq are now laying out on the field. [...]he mass media can make people move when it is a question of protesting against the horrors of that which subjugates them, but it immobilizes them when it is a question of coming to the aid of what could liberate them.

[...W]e speak about the Iraqi revolt as “social guerrilla war”. With this term, we want to emphasize that the resistance to the occupation and its second-hand governors has not yet reached the dimension of a full-fledged insurrection, but has already leapt beyond the mere guerrilla activity of nationalist and Islamic groups. The workers who strike are themselves forced to use arms in such a context. [...]

The cards are rapidly shuffled; the forces of times and countries apparently so distant intersect in constellations of events that are at the same time promising and terrible. Freedom needs the storm, but in the storm it is difficult to maintain the sense of the life for which we fight. In Iraq today an important piece of this battle is in play.

drops. It is the unearned income of capital that falls into the cashboxes of the capitalists nearly causing them to overflow. The continuous increase of the wealth of the rich is distinctly hated. Occasionally this muffled roar is mixed with a sob emitted in a low voice, the sob of indigence. Sometimes a light metallic sound echoes like the sound of a knife being sharpened.

—Heinrich Heine, September 17, 1842

The Iraqi powder keg is placed within a context of global civil war. But what does “civil war” mean?

Despite the powerful cover-up carried out by the technological and media apparatus, the present planetary order is arranging social relationships along increasingly brutal lines of force. Human relationships implode under economic and bureaucratic burdens, obliterating the very foundations of all individual and social autonomy. Supposedly universal values miserably collapse. The legal sham is unmasked by ceaseless military and police aggression that no longer hides behind the fig leaf of legality. International law is nothing but the rotten order imposed by the most powerful gangsters. Before a business mafia that extends across systems and borders, the old and false national ties come apart. In such conditions of uprooting and fear, only two ways out openly present themselves: the emergence of technologically equipped fundamentalism, or the social storm of class conflict.

We are going through a time that is, in every sense, filled with possibilities. Listening to its sounds, one doesn't just hear the dry sound of boots or the muffled sound of slippers. Taking Heine's image up again, a subterranean weapons mill is sharpening the knives of liberation.

If we look carefully, we will catch sight of an increasingly obvious thread that links the social explosions of Iraq, Palestine, Algeria to the movement of – ideological and police – troops in our neighborhoods. The operations of urban reorganization and repression

give out an odor of fear in the face of the conditions that domination itself has brought together. Furthermore, the conflict penetrates into individual sensibilities themselves, which the old collective identities (work, the family, cultural affiliation) are no longer able to hold together. At the first jolt, a deep sense of uncertainty pervades the minds opening them once again to opposing possibilities: fear of oneself and others, but also a new emotional disposition allowing one to be involved with what is common. The liberal model of the self-assured businessman imposed by city planning through the privatization of living spaces, sours in the daily lives of weak and defenseless human beings. Rational calculation is thought to govern everything, as the ruling order is believed to control the contradictions it generates, but nervous tics admit what the outward smiles ever more clumsily try to hide.

What space is the social struggle, from Los Angeles to Gaza, from Quito to Bassora, opening in the global civil war?

If anything marks the events in Iraq, illuminating at a single blow the *fabric* of social relationships, it is that no one – neither capital, nor Islamism, nor revolutionaries – knows how to govern the arranging, aligning and dispersing of the forces in the field. The quantitative model of strength – army against army, front against front – is literally falling to pieces together with the plans of the world’s masters for military occupation. The spectacle of muscles of steel is shattered by the flames of revolt through mysterious conspiracies of events – a deadly jungle for the occupiers –, triggered by a resistance the causes and reasons of which have nothing mysterious about them.

The understanding of the relationships of force has never been so decisive – for the ruling order as for its most relentless enemies. This understanding reflects in so many ways the rules of subversive play with its improvised unions and its equally sudden separations.

Pedantic geopolitical analyses have very little to tell us. In these times, the metropolitan police are shown to us as equal to advertising, guerrilla wars as equal to family conflicts. What happens at

the “periphery” is reflected at the center and vice versa. In this sense, the Iraqi insurgents are giving us a hand, weakening the global ruling order to which we are all subjected. If, after September 11, the United States conceived a gigantic plan for crushing the lands of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia under their tank tracks, the flames of Bassora, Nassiriyya and other places are stopping the murderous aims of the greatest military power on earth. Wouldn’t now be the time for the irregulars of the Western civil war to feed these flames?

If the fairy tale of rights is laid bare by the brutality and torture transmitted in global vision, the pacifism that demands respect for legality and confines opposition to the war within the single public-advertising space of the plaza, i.e., far from the gears of the capitalist extermination machine, seems equally absurd. And yet, as the wild-cat strikes of the transit drivers and other workers showed in an exemplary way, jamming this machine, blocking the movement of its troops, is possible.

The old internationalist slogan, “Carry the war into the cities” has up to now been put into practice not by revolutionaries through the attack on the common enemies of the exploited, but solely by the enemies of every common attack by the exploited: through the indiscriminate bombs of Madrid. The equation: “Western equals imperialist” is spreading in a terrible way among the damned of the Earth, desperately alone in their resistance. This is why, in the face of democratic massacres, a historically secular region like Iraq becomes favorable terrain for the “community” of militant Islam, a false realization of the real need for solidarity and liberation. It is certainly not with appeals to tolerance and lessons in civic education that this equation will be shattered, but rather by bringing the social war here.

The same people who repeat that “the state of exception in which we live has become the rule” – quoting Benjamin unsparingly – then exchange the practice of direct action, which doesn’t give a damn for the law, with the demand for illusory rights. In a move-