Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.
In the suffocating grip of our daily routines, what space do we find for spontaneity? For wonder for this Earth we share, even as it is diminished? For companionship not relegated to sharing in the misery of (alternative) consumption, the segregated couple, the nuclear family? For the power of self-creation and subsistence outside the markets that are imposed?

The hurt and absences of this way of life too often become turned inward, a shame we carry as if it were our own. We are sold pre-packaged aspirations – always to be a little deferred so as to respond to the requirements of the dominant reality – when we want immediacy, heroic lives of adventure, belonging, caring and daring; life not survival. Always, the desires of those who exploit, imprison, toxify and repress us are posited as above those of ourselves, those for revolt.

We are kept on edge yet always distracted, close to breaking point, cowed and disempowered by disciplines or puffed up by divisions, mesmerised by the enforced idiocy of the spectacle in which even the drama of a dying world has been turned into a sort of reality TV series, portrayed as completely out of our hands.

The figureheads of economic growth and 'development' would have us turn a blind eye to misery that can't be portrayed in statistics. We have become determined to overturn their calculations. Our visions are of full unemployment, zero voter turnout, continual hi-tech breakdowns instead of breakthroughs, a rampant outbreak of the 'crime' named freedom; until we forget these categories and many more. People emerging from their different cages, forming face-to-face affinities to relearn the art of gifting not just competing, of respect for the more-than-human, of dignity and rebellion. A landscape wild with life again beaconing us to rejoin the dance, the blurring or dissolution of borders, genders, roles and prescriptions. Life without deadtime. And these nascent visions, however partial, are perpetually becoming armed. The only question is where they will find breath next.

Feel that breath, let it awaken in you.
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NOTHING NEW BENEATH THE SUN [Editorial]

“We out of this confusion will one day come formulations capable of firing point-blank on our enemies. In the meanwhile, let sentences remembered here or there have what effect they may.” – Raoul Vaneigem

We once read that the root of the word amateur is amátor (lover). What has reached your eyes here is for sure no more than the work of amateurs; but those in love with the wild forces which make our presence on this troubled Earth worth the pain, romantics in search of relationships and moments of rebellion or revitalisation.

We can’t pretend to be the most cutting-edge project in the world of anarchist thought or activity, rather, this is a fanzine in the classical sense of the term – a collection of what moves and inspires us to continue the dialogue with others who share some of these minoritarian perspectives. From the fountainhead of subversive literature we find time to encounter as it comes out, here we reserve some choice morsels for wider consumption (especially when they previously only appeared online to our knowledge).

We are an internationalist project. We find it important to arm ourselves with the divergent but informative experiences which those overseas have chosen to share (to the degree that they enable us to also analyse our local conditions or act in tandem), translated by accomplices and released into the world, while never forgetting regional specificities.

Resurrecting materials from our collective archive can serve as a nod to influences on the personal thinking behind this project, as well as an intergenerational lens we can evaluate the older texts by. What’s different in the conversation from then to now? What’s the same? What can this tell us?

We’d be naive to assume that our choice to print in paper form (though we always also make an online edition sooner or later) breaks us out of the increasing phenomenon of ghettoisation of marginal conversations via subculture or internet reliance. But we do think, from personal experience, that a print copy offers a different method of engagement for whoever does come across it. We have no idea where or who this reaches, given autonomous and usually unconnected comrades who do print runs. We can’t expect quantifiable ‘results’ of what we release into the world but while for now we make no plans to revise the aesthetic and tone which enlivens us personally, we do aim for the diverse content gathered within to be explicable to readers without (too much of) an assumed ‘background’ in these topics or circles.

With quite a few of the pieces within, we tried to explain via introductions why they were chosen. The text frames we’ve affixed amongst the articles are editorial decisions, not those of the original authors (unless written by an editor). Where we’ve included a listing of rebel acts along the lines of the question at hand, they weren’t selected as the most spectacular or ‘hard-hitting’, but as a mixture of intensities, methods, ideas and stated desires.

The largest editorial contribution this time – ‘Caught in the Net’, on the neuroses of the digital age – will accompany this volume (and, eventually, its online edition) as a separate companion piece. If you didn’t get it, email us at returnfire@riseup.net and we’ll send a copy.

We’d like to take a moment to thank the German comrades who took on the task of translating our main work ‘The Veil Drops’ from our previous volume (apparently as well as the essay ‘Smarter Prison’?, by Radical Interference, which we released as the companion piece for that issue). Props also to the folk of the Fenrir publication, who rendered ‘Sealife Deformities from BP’s Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill’ (from back in Return Fire vol.1) into both Italian and Castellano Spanish versions, and also extended the critique with a chronicle of petro-chemical atrocities. Cheers to those who’ve transcribed and/or reposted parts of our own contributions to Return Fire (namely Rabble with their own editorial summary for ‘The Veil Drops’; In the Belly of the Beast; The Acorn; Anarchist News; 325; and anyone we’ve missed out), and of course those who widen the print distribution in a self-organised way.

We’ll soon be uploading more text from this and older volumes to join that by us already available to individually reproduce via the invaluable Anarchist Library archive, as well as copies of translations which we published for the first time in some cases. Previous volumes in their entirety can be downloaded in PDF form from several sites; trying searching actforfree.nostate.net for “Return Fire” or email us directly at returnfire@riseup.net for download links, to submit material for future issues, or to communicate about the topics raised or other directions (or barriers) to an anarchistic life in the largely un-anarchistic worlds we inhabit today.

So, through this channel and project or another, we will continue reaching for those whose practices, wants, feelings and ideas resonate or inform the sense of self, pride and the impulse to walk along a similar path of struggle and confrontation, of desires and creation, that we treasure in the diverse anarchist project of joyously living despite everything we are born amongst. It strengthens us to know of others treading this path, with all the ups and downs, contradictions and successes that come from rebellious decisions and wills. We’re thinking of those who join our random conversations and bear witness to one another’s grievances in the more-or-less intimate spaces of our lives, those who we feel an insurgent closeness to despite being separated by many kilometres or the walls of the jails where they have fallen prisoner, or the encounters that surprise us most with those who have never considered themselves anarchist or such... We know that even here in the open prison atmosphere of the stifled British metropolis-isle, this nameless spirit lives on; although it often finds difficulty in expressing itself, we always keep an ear open for when it passes.

In a global moment where some prospects of insurrectionary ruptures seem tantalisingly imminent, yet elsewhere almost unimaginable, and where all the other aspects of a subversive practice (however necessary they still are) are threatened with disarming and commodification, we’ll continue to use this journal to promote conflict and sabotage, raising a voice for the unknowable and wild things we want to honour and also realise.

For disruption of the industrial supply chain and the metropolitan system of normality.

For active negation of the rule of civilised law and moral authority.

For attack on the production centres of gender, human supremacy, nationalism.

For the ones in the same struggle on the street and interpersonally, or in the clink; also for the ones who came before us and those who will come after.

For our personal joy and liberation.

Always in defence of the Earth.

Insurrection, memory, freedom, life.

To all those whose hearts are beating faster...

R.F.
The present social organisation is not just delaying, it is also preventing and corrupting any practice of freedom. The only way to learn what freedom is, is to experiment with it, and to do so you must have the necessary time and space.

The fundamental premise for free action is dialogue. Now, any authentic discourse requires two conditions: a real interest in the questions brought up to be discussed (the problem of content) and the free search for possible answers (the problem of method). These two conditions should occur at the same time, given that the content determines the method, and vice versa. One can only talk of freedom in freedom. What is the point of asking questions if we are not free to answer? What is the point of answering if the questions are always false? Dialogue only exists when individuals can talk to each other without mediation, i.e. when they relate reciprocally. If the discourse is one-way, no communication is possible. If someone has the power to impose the questions, the content of the latter will be directly functional to this (and the answers will contain subjection). Subjects can only be asked questions whose answers confirm their role as such, and from which the bosses will draw the questions of the future. The slavery lies in continuing to reply.

In this sense market research is identical to the elections. The sovereignty of the elector corresponds to the sovereignty of the consumer, and vice versa. TV passivity is called audience; the legitimation of the power of the State is called sovereign people. In either case individuals are simply hostages in a mechanism that gives them the right to speak after having deprived them of the faculty of doing so. What is the point of dialogue if all you can do is elect one or the other? What is communication if all your only choice is between identical goods and TV programmes? The content of the questions is meaningless because the method is false.

‘Nothing resembles a representative of the bourgeoisie more than a representative of the proletariat,’ Sorel wrote in 1907. What made them identical was the fact that they were, precisely, representatives. To say the same of a right or left wing candidate today would be banal. But politicians do not need to be original (advertising takes care of that), it is sufficient for them to know how to administer that banality. The irony is that the media are defined a means of communication and the voting spree is called elections (which in the true sense of the word means free, conscious decision).

A desecrated church continues to be the house of God. Commodities continue their chatter in an abandoned shopping centre. The parade ground of a disused barracks still contains the marching of the soldiers. That is what he who said that the destruction of the Bastille[5] was an act of applied social psychology meant. The Bastille could never have been managed as anything other than a prison, because its walls would have continued to tell the tale of incarcerated bodies and desires.

Subservience, obligation and boredom espouse consumerism in endless funereal ceremonies. Work reproduces the social environment which reproduces the resignation to work. One enjoys evenings in front of the TV because one has spent the day in the office and the underground. Keeping quiet in the factory makes shouting in the stadium a promise of happiness. Feelings of inadequacy at school vindicate the insensate irresponsibility of a Saturday night at the club. Only eyes emerging from a McDonald’s are capable of lighting up when they see a Club Med billboard. Etcetera.

You need to know how to experience freedom in order to be free. You need to free yourself in order to experience freedom. Within the present social order, time and space prevent experimentation of freedom because they suffocate the freedom to experiment.

[...] Only by upsetting the imperatives of time and social space will it be possible to imagine new relations and surroundings. The old philosopher said one can only desire on the basis of what one knows. Desires can only change if one changes the life that produces them. Let’s be clear about this: rebellion against the organisation of time and space by power is a material and psychological necessity.

[5] The point is that power does not allow for any other kind of management. Even if the voters wanted it (which would already take us into full ‘utopia’, to imitate the language of the realists), nothing important could be asked of them from the moment that the only free act – the only authentic election – they could accomplish would be not to vote. Anyone who votes wants consequential questions, as authentic questions deny passivity and delegation.

[5] The electorate was free to choose between the so-called representatives of the proletariat, who were, precisely, representatives. To say the same of a right or left wing candidate today would be banal. But politicians do not need to be original (advertising takes care of that), it is sufficient for them to know how to administer that banality. The irony is that the media are defined as means of communication and the voting spree is called elections (which in the true sense of the word means free, conscious decision).
communism, power before freedom, wages before taking the lot, certainty of the results before taking action, requests for financing before expropriation, ‘ethical banks’ before anarchy, etc.) means making the revolt itself a different way of conceiving relations. Attacking the technological hydra right away means imagining a life without white-coated policemen (i.e. without the economic or scientific organisation that makes them necessary); attacking the instruments of domestication by the media now means creating relations that are free from images (i.e. free from the passivity that fabricates them). Anyone who starts screaming that it is no longer – or not yet – time for rebellion, is revealing the kind of society they want in advance.

The workers who, during a wildcat strike, carried a banner saying, ‘We are not asking for anything’ understood that the defeat is in the claim itself (‘the claim against the enemy is eternal’). There is no alternative but to take everything.

1. ed. – See Return Fire vol.2 pg96
2. ed. – The prison of Bastille Saint-Antoine, in Paris, was stormed by a crowd in search of gunpowder on July 14th 1789 in the French Revolution. Seven remaining prisoners were found and released (one of these, the notorious libertine Marquis de Sade, had stoked the link between the revolution and the Bastille, addressing the public from his walks on top of the towers and, once this was forbidden, shouting from the window of his cell) and the Bastille’s governor, Bernard-René de Launay, was killed by the crowd. The Bastille was demolished, and souvenirs of the fortress were transported around France and displayed as icons of ‘the overthrow of despotism’.
The Scottish Prison Service [SPS] has confirmed that it used IMSI [International Mobile Subscriber Identity] catchers (aka “stingrays”) at two prisons in Scotland. This is the first confession of official stingray use by UK authorities, though they are almost certainly being used elsewhere in the country as well. The SPS are using both mobile and static stingray devices at HMP Shotts in Lanarkshire and HMP Glenochil near Alloa. The SPS spent more than £1.2 million slying on both prisons. It appears that the SPS were trialing stingray tech at Shotts and Glenochil before potentially rolling it out to other prisons.

While stingrays can be used to snoop on conversations or otherwise gather intelligence, it appears that in this case the SPS were using IMSI catchers to stamp out mobile phone use at the prisons (it’s supposedly a crime to use a mobile phone in prison). IMSI catchers work by tricking nearby mobile devices to connect to them, rather than an official base station. The stingray can then be used to triangulate the user’s location, or to simply block the connection [ed. – or record calls].

Somewhat amusingly, despite the rather expensive roll out, it seems the system wasn’t all that effective at finding phones or blocking calls. “Prisoners have developed innovative countermeasures to current arrangements[...]” The SPS recovered significantly fewer mobile phones at HMP Shotts in 2014 (282) than in 2013 (352). “Some of this decline is due to the increased introduction of smartphones which use 3G technology, these 3G smartphones transmit on very low power levels and so are more difficult to accurately detect and locate.” Back in 2010, when the prisoner phones only used 2G, 1417 handsets were tracked down at Shotts alone.

The report notes that the SPS wanted to use stingray tech at HMP Edinburgh, but it lost out to the rural prisons for two reasons. First, the UK’s mobile carriers had already started rolling out 4G in Edinburgh. Second, if they had used IMSI catchers at HMP Edinburgh, which is within Edinburgh’s urban area, there would’ve been a “high risk” of interfering with mobile users outside the prison.

There have been various reports of stingray use by the UK authorities as far back as 2011, but this is the first time that it’s ever been confirmed. Last year, the mainstream media reported that it had found widespread use of IMSI catchers across London, after fake mobile masts were discovered. Over in the USA apart the usual monitoring of criminal/terrorist elements, it is now becoming common for major protests to be spied upon in case of an outbreak of disorder.

How a ‘Stingray’ Cellphone-Tracking Device Works

Law enforcement officials are quietly using gadgets referred to generically as ‘stingrays’ to locate cellphones as part of investigative work.

1. The vehicle is used in a vehicle along with a computer with mapping software.
2. The stingray system, which mimics a cellphone tower, gets the target phone to connect to it.
3. Once the cellphone is detected by the stingray, the phone’s signal strength is measured.
4. The vehicle can then move to another location and again measure the phone’s signal strength.
5. By collecting signal strength in several locations, the system can triangulate and map a phone’s location.

Obviously the fear of uprisings such as those which occurred around the UK in 2011 [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg61] & in Baltimore[76] & Ferguson [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg76] in the US are on both governments minds. The state might try justifiy the use of IMSI to tackle crime or terrorism but increasingly this technology can be used to quell disorder [ed. – and has been noted so far at demonstrations in Germany and Turkey as well, including a body-worn type for agents walking amongst the crowd]. What is also apparent from the information gathered by the media is that the technology can be used not only to track but to listen into phone calls, not just of the specific targets but also the general population in the vicinity, as can be seen when HMP Edinburgh was rejected for Stingray tests.

Surveillance technology is vastly increasing around prison island, it does not shock us that they would be tested in actual prisons first, the most concentrated form of oppression, the testing ground for many forms of control through out society. The prison system was the first place to test the idea of unpaid work, then it was rolled out into society for jobseekers. New glass apartment blocks resemble more a prison complex with security doors and CCTV in every corner, the difference is that the gullible upstanding citizens imprison themselves. It will not be long before IMSI becomes a norm just as much as CCTV did, further limiting the possibility of dissent in this corner of the world.

What is clear is that there needs to be a backlash against the prison society, that it can never be reformed and will involve a complete eradication of the technology that makes it possible. The ultimate culprits are those companies that make it possible.

In the mean time, attack the prison society at its sources and maintain a vigilante security culture with phones. The police state is tracking & listening, let’s claw out their eyes & cut off their ears!

1. ed. – Multi-day April 2015 rioting and looting with many vehicles burned and cops injured in the U.S. state of Maryland after police killing of black youth Freddie Gray, provoking state-of-emergency powers in the city and deployment of the National Guard.
PANOPTICONS THEN & NOW

[ed. – One of two essays on surveillance released simultaneously by the Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare, an anarchist thinktank, along with their introductory text.]

SURVEILLANCE // PANOPTICON // SECURITY CULTURE // PARANOIA

“Why hammer out concepts – be it speculative, critical, or pragmatist – if there is a meta-authority overseeing it all? Why conspire in the light? […] We need to develop dissident knowledge of how to bring down drones, detect sensors, hack servers, distort GPS signals, and disrupt Google by fooling its algorithms. Forget the next innovation cycle. If the common hacker’s paranoia informs us correctly, we lost the war years ago and are surrounded. Soon we will be called to surrender, one by one.”


A culture of security is one which enhances an organization’s capacity to determine its interests and act on them in spite of another organization’s opposed interests. Corporate workforces and law enforcement agencies both cultivate cultures of security, as do management teams, investment rings, smugglers, unions, militia men, and academic researchers. All of these cultures are supposed to control flows of information (trade secrets, exclusive suppliers, price indexes, strategic plans, etc.) and restrict communication in furtherance of an organization’s interests.

Among dissident circles, the term Security Culture has been popularized as a response to the absence of organization and shared organizational interests. Security Culture carries a few hard and fast rules (don’t talk to cops, need-to-know basis, interrupt gossip, etc.) which have established a rough outline of best practices when daily life and sensitive operations overlap or are indistinguishable.

Best practices are fundamental to the Insurgent, who frequently operates without clear structures of command and communication, enjoys limited operational awareness, and can hardly imagine an everyday life divorced from sensitive operations. The Insurgent, however, should not be confused with a dissident or “common hacker,” as Lovink puts it, and the conflation of Security Culture with Operations Security carries heavy tolls.

Before it has a chance to protect our shared interests, Security Culture without organizational imperatives invites paranoid speculation into our attempts to determine what shared interests we might act upon. Without shared interests to balance security protocols we lose doubly, once for refusing to trust one another and ourselves enough to build power, and again for failing to connect with our comrades who lose patience with our dedication to self-policing and exclusivity.

From the Insurgent’s perspective, policing limits possibility, and possibility is a condition to be exploited and multiplied.

A common hacker is familiar with the State’s unscruptulous pursuit of persons who register on their threat spectrum, but hasn’t learned enough about the State, capital, or policing to glean how that spectrum might be composed.

A “common hacker” is also familiar with an illimitable list of methods for gathering information in the digital age. The list is illimitable (instead of just long) because known unknowns breed unknown unknowns. Assuming that such an unlistable list is in the possession of a meta-authority, and distributed to just the right hands at just the right times to prevent an eco-warrior from spiking a tree is a paranoid and debilitating procession of thought.

A “common hacker” has noticed that American people discover another egregious violation of their civil liberties and rights to privacy every few years. A common hacker assumes that this is evidence of a meta-authority orchestrating a grand coup or seizure, but an insurgent understands that managing crisis and maintaining business as usual are the only organizational imperatives shared between every federal agency and every corporate interest in the first world.

It is closer to the ISIW’s business to hammer on concepts than to hammer them out. Not so much to shape or refine them, but to see what they’re made of.

We propose that the umbrella category of Surveillance, while of great concern to issue-based electoral debates, has little to offer our understanding of Insurgent. It’s a test to see the forest for the trees, but effective policing does not follow from increased surveillance, nor does frightening our friends into placidity make us safer, stronger, or smarter than we were ten years ago.

We understand most flavors of Anarchist and many political dissidents would like to contribute to decentralized resistance to policing, but every headline and announcement with regard to State and corporate surveillance, every leak, every stuttering admission, every investigative report, every sting, every declined opportunity to comment… too often these messages reinforce the common hackers’ paranoid conception of the State (or whatever) as an omniscient and cohesive entity, one for which every badge, snitch and suit is directly employed. Security Culture could be a clever precondition for minimizing risk while building decentralized resistance to policing, broadly, but it manifests more often as a herd mentality, offering its most vulnerable constituents as sacrifice while the herd reproduces itself.

From a common hacker’s perspective the end is nigh, from the insurgent’s, it is ongoing.

The Paranoid’s shadowy network, the telos of the global Panopticon (a solitary warden who controls an entire prison) has an analog under CCTV. It is characterized as the omniscient and personified puppet master who is so often invoked in dissident circles. The growing reception of onlookers – Facebook laborers and survivalists alike – have assigned some marketable celebrity to the act of pointing cameras at rifles, trying to get a better close-up. Look how shiny, their boots.

Our inquiry must favor concepts which invite indiscernibility, opacity, camouflage, and noise in order to assess the State’s logistical capacity to stifle dissent, and the Insurgent’s opportunities to further attack those capabilities. The following [addresses] dragnet data capture, information gathering, intelligence gathering, and the deterrent effects of associating contemporary surveillance techniques with the edifice of the Panopticon.

These concepts are broken and reassembled within conceptual categories more useful to the Insurgent.

Please note that the following pieces do not address communications forensics, targeted intelligence operations, or profiling, among other considerations commonly associated with Surveillance. We eagerly await your contribution on those topics.

In his essay Hope in Common David Graeber describes the system of social control under capitalism as a “a vast bureaucratic apparatus for the creation and maintenance of hopelessness, a kind of giant machine that is designed, first and foremost, to destroy any sense of possible alternative futures.” In their quest the machine’s operators are aided by the hopeless themselves, for one simple reason. Being proven wrong is irritating in general, but in the question of hope it would be utterly devastating. What if hope turns out to exist after all, after one had given up on it forever? How miserable would you feel if after abandoning your most cherished dream, you discovered years later it had been within your grasp all along, if you had only had the courage to reach for it? Desperate to avoid such a fate, legends of amateur doom sayers labor tirelessly to convince the rest of us that all revolution is bound to fail and we might as well give up now. Their patron saint is Henry David Thoreau, who in his celebrated work On Civil Disobedience made a cogent and brilliantly composed argument for the abolition of government – only to dismiss the idea with a breezy “But that’s never gonna happen, so let’s just do random minor things the government doesn’t like and hope they don’t shoot us.”
We should not be surprised that none in spite of warning signage, uniformed leave them paralyzed with doubt. surveillance cameras that are supposed to mongering, these folks manage to pull by half-baked quasi-philosophical jargon- see resistance really is futile.

Endeavoring to persuade us that providing rhetorical ammunition to contrives to carry on his mission in a way (mention). Yet Bentham's invention still as a prison (a fact the Jeremiahs seldom mention). Multiple jeremiahs would have us believe that the current infestation of surveillance cameras, databases, smartphones, and NSA monitoring constitute an impassable barrier to uprising through the imposition of Panopticon-esque uncertainty on the entire population. The original Panopticon was a complete failure as a prison (a fact the Jeremiahs seldom mention). Yet Bentham's invention still contrives to carry on his mission in a way he could never have imagined, by providing rhetorical ammunition to pretentious armchair theoreticians endeavoring to persuade us that resistance really is futile.

Unfortunately for the theoreticians (not to mention the nation's retailers), most shoplifters have never read Tiqun [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg58]. Untroubled by half-baked quasi-philosophical jargon-mongering, these folks manage to pull about $13 billion worth of merch a year, in the US alone, out from under the surveillance cameras that are supposed to leave them paralyzed with doubt. This is in spite of warning signage, uniformed guards, and public displays of live surveillance footage – all intended to reinforce the message of deterrence. We should not be surprised that none of this works very well. Any loss prevention professional will tell you that the cameras are mostly useful only for preserving evidence in those rare cases when someone gets caught, not for preventing attempts. The Panopticon relied not only on the lone watchman, but on close confinement of the prisoners to isolate individuals and ensure that anyone not being watched at a particular moment didn’t cause trouble. Absent these strict conditions, the rough equivalent of today's supermax prisons, the Panopticon effect crumbles rapidly. Were Bentham's inmates allowed to congregate in common areas, or even housed two per cell so that one could screen the other from view, his system would break down, while if they were locked alone in their cells 24/7 the Panopticon would be unnecessary. After all, it would hardly matter whether the prisoners were being watched if they couldn’t escape no matter what they did.

Out here in minimum security the Panopticon's deficiencies multiply exponentially. The requirements of selling mass surveillance mean that much of it is voluntary. If the government tried to force everyone to carry a monitoring device with them at all times that reported their location and most of their conversations to a central authority, the outcry would be deafening, no one would comply. The only way to pull it off is to throw in Candy Crush, charge 100 bucks a month, and wait for the suckers to roll in. But iPhones can be left at home, cameras can be smashed, communications can be encrypted, Facebook accounts can be closed. Even a relatively small minority who see through the authorities' bluff can make life very difficult for them.

Worse, in any attempt to institute a real-life Panopticon uncertainty works both ways. The prisoners may never know when they're being watched, but neither can the guards ever be certain what the prisoners are getting up to in their unobserved moments. The natural response is to monitor as much activity as possible at all times. In the digital age this urge manifests itself in the massive data harvesting programs carried out by the NSA and other intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Sadly for them however, while capturing and storing data is easy, data by itself is not information. The NSA's enormous capability to intercept data has not been matched by any corresponding ability to analyze it, much less to act on whatever information is extracted. Data mining has shown some promise in keeping track of known suspects, but has been nearly useless at uncovering new ones. The forces of order are therefore left to wrestle with unmanageable masses of data on people who are little threat to them, while those harboring nefarious intent can slip.
beneath the radar merely by taking some basic precautions.

Interestingly enough, the history of the Panopticon actually does reveal a useful lesson for insurgents, one which has predictably been lost on the jargon-mongers. Bentham pitched the idea as a money saver, a way to replace a large workforce of guards with a single volunteer (yes, really!) warden. While the English government ultimately turned him down, modern capitalists have not all shown the same good judgement. Despite that $13 billion, some retail chains have reportedly been cutting back on loss prevention personnel and relying more on technology in a misguided attempt to reduce expenses. A similar tendency has cropped up in municipal budgets, which have been slashed in many cities to the point that even police departments are coming under the ax. Federal grants for surveillance systems are available to local police, and surplus military equipment can be obtained from the Defense Department, but funding for basic policing functions, such as officer salaries and patrol cars, is scarce.

The poster child for this trend is Oakland, [California,] where the municipal government is developing a network of high resolution surveillance cameras, combined with various tracking tools such as license plate recognition, aimed at suppressing mass protests. Christened the Domain Awareness Center [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg66], the project is drawing loud squawks from civil libertarians and progressives. Few seem to recall that the city cut its police force to 896 officers the week after the Oscar Grant verdict came down, losing much of their capacity to respond to anything seen in the footage. The department has since declined to 624 officers, a 20 percent reduction from mid-2010. That's not their only problem, either. A recent survey of OPD rank and file cops reveals severe deficiencies in operational logistical capacity, including broken radios, deteriorating patrol cars, and police stations so dilapidated one officer referred to them as “Section 8 housing.” Department morale has been eroded by infighting, mandatory overtime, and the withering contempt in which many Oakland residents hold cops, among other factors. Officers are quitting almost as fast as they are recruited, exacerbating the personnel shortage. Oakland’s police would be a lot more dangerous if the $12 million being spent annually on the DAC had gone toward addressing these problems, instead of generating countless hours of video footage that no one will have time to view or analyze.

And finally, leading the charge into this technological quagmire we find the Pentagon, who have been putting “toys before boys” for years now, with disastrous (for them) results. Decades of increasing expenditure on fancy weapons systems while cutting back on readiness and personnel have produced a military that has in the last 60 years proven incapable of successfully occupying any country more formidable than Panama.

The true takeaway from the Panopticon then, is that it doesn’t work, that clever schemes and high tech gadgets can never effectively replace boots on the ground. The former East Germany, where nearly a sixth of the population had been coerced into informing for the Stasi, gives us an example of a genuinely effective use of uncertainty in social control. Rebellion was nearly impossible, not because one might be recorded on video, but because there was no way to find comrades who could be counted on not to snitch.

The Stasi had an advantage, though. They didn’t have to deal with computers. Relying on paper files right up to the day the Berlin Wall came down, their data overload problems never became too unmanageable, their sense of possibilities constrained more or less within the bounds of feasibility. Today Moore’s Law and multi-billion dollar black budgets combine to appeal irresistibly to the most treacherous of authoritarian instincts — the pipe dream of complete control, no uncertainty required, all transgressions seen and punished. Attempting this by recruiting more guards for one’s Panopticon only reproduces the original problem at a higher organizational level, as Edward Snowden [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg48] demonstrated so graphically. But what if you could find guards who never took bathroom breaks, never slept, never decamped to Hong Kong with $56,000 of your most sensitive operational documents? The problem with people is getting them to do exactly what you want and nothing else. Computers, or at least computer salesmen, promise to do away with this annoyance forever.

They can’t of course, not really. Any programmer can testify that all programs have bugs, that getting a computer to do precisely what it’s supposed to and no more is functionally impossible for any non-trivial task. Cops presented with an opportunity to fulfill their deepest held control fantasies tend to overlook this little inconvenience, which is why they keep spending money on things like facial recognition software. Facial recognition made its public debut at the 2001 Super Bowl in Tampa to the usual chorus of dire warnings by privacy advocates. They needn’t have worried – at the time it didn’t work well enough to threaten anybody’s privacy. But that didn’t stop the Tampa police from adopting it that summer to surveil Tampa’s Ybor City district, although they abandoned the project after only a few months. It’s easy to guess how they were taken in. Some stories are too good to check, and the ability to do instantaneous automatic mug shot look-ups on anybody who turns up in their surveillance footage is near the top of any cop’s Christmas list.

Facial recognition doesn’t work a lot better now than it did in 2001, even though its adoption has mushroomed. A 2013 article from Ars Technica explains that far from the process being automatic, most images have to be hand tweaked before matching is attempted. Differences in camera angle, lighting, makeup, facial hair, glasses, and other variables also reduce accuracy. The technology is effective in situations like preventing drivers license fraud, where the photographs in the database were taken under the same conditions as the picture to be matched. However, facial recognition in high-profile criminal cases is still mostly done the old fashioned way, by publishing photographs of suspects and waiting for someone to recognize them and rat them out. Both digital and human approaches are far too labor intensive to be useful in large scale tracking efforts.
extend their responsibility to attack it.

In any case, cops and critics alike agree that any admission that the state is vulnerable would imply a demonstration of weakness. Klein’s analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the police state’s claims of motive, but present them, as the Electronic Frontier Foundation). Like too many other critics, she rejects as the only technological obstacle in the way of widespread use of facial recognition in China was the low resolution of existing surveillance cameras. Klein apparently never asked about any of this. She also accepted Yao’s implicit claim that the technological obstacle is in the field. Klein apparently never asked about any of this.

One’s chances of not being killed by a Hellfire missile in Yemen would therefore seem to depend about as much on luck and knowledge of cell phone security as on abstention from anti-US activity. This is unlikely to be the result of a deliberate strategic choice. The fundamental dilemma of any counter terrorism operation is eliminating existing enemies without creating more new ones, and indiscriminate killing of random civilians fails on both counts. Yet Scahill and Greenwald make it clear that accuracy is not a major consideration when targeting, that the main focus is on “feeding the beast”, i.e. keeping the drone operation running at full capacity. It is telling that reviews for civilian deaths occur only after strikes occur, not during the planning stages. US drone tactics thus appear to derive more from bureaucratic inertia, extreme resistance to admitting error, and an abiding fascination with the idea of soldier-free warfare than from any deliberate plan. These afflictions are far from unique to the NSA.

The NSA’s drone difficulties highlight another aspect of mass surveillance seldom noticed by radicals – the difference between a Panopticon and a failed intelligence operation. It is axiomatic that the value of any intelligence source plummets once the adversary finds out about it. British intelligence in World War II went to great lengths to keep the Germans from realizing that the Enigma code (used by the Nazis for communications transmission) had been cracked, even refusing to share decrypted messages with the Soviet Union lest the Russians’ own leaky codes expose the secret. The problem is compounded when the “adversary” is the population of an ostensibly democratic country, since discovery means not only loss of effectiveness but loss of face as well. Unlike Walmart, the NSA has no interest in publicizing their surveillance efforts. Their aim, however clumsily pursued, is to discover useful information without being detected, not to deter resistance by projecting the illusion of omniscience.

We can also see parallels between mass data collection and drone strikes. Both projects are carried on because they’re technically doable, and appeal strongly to the authoritarian mindset, not because they work particularly well for their ostensible purposes. In both cases public exposure alone threatens to cancel out any minor benefit generated.

“…I would like to dwell on another aspect that seems to be an obstacle to our action: the analysis of the effects and transformations of dominion. Far too often it seems that this analysis is useless and doesn’t give us the ability to affect reality; on the contrary it feeds fear and sense of impotence in the face of the magnitude of the challenge and the monstrousity of the harmfulness to be opposed. […] I’m not saying that we don’t need analyses but that they don’t have to become an end in themselves, exercises of intellectual skill detached from direct action. What’s the use of publishing endless lists of companies responsible for the destruction of nature if nobody attacks them? […] In spite of everything we are not helpless. Bare instruments of analysis, direct action and the determination of the few can demonstrate that we are not all resigned to accept passively and at the same time they show to the other exploited that it is still possible to fight back.”

– The Urgency of the Attack
government agencies are trying to accomplish a Herculean task with laughably inadequate resources. “Eliminating all enemies of the US in three separate countries one explosion at a time” vies with “establishing a real-life Department of Precrime” for the title of most ridiculous government boondoggle ever.

There is good reason to believe then, that the security establishment’s surveillance and monitoring plan, to the extent they even have one, not only isn’t working, but can’t work. If they are running a Panopticon it’s only a byproduct of the impossibility of their true goals, and therefore far less effective than it might be. It’s not difficult to peek behind the curtain to see the flaws in its inner workings and tailor one’s tactics accordingly. That few of us do so is more of a testament to the enormous weight of propaganda and indoctrination imposed by the media and school system than to any actual invulnerability of the surveillance state. When supposedly radical analysts take the propaganda at face value and repeat it the impact is doubled. After all, if one’s friends and one’s enemies are both telling the same story it must be true, right? Not necessarily. The first step in fighting the hopelessness machine is not believing everything it tells you. Or failing that, at least not repeating it...

[ed. – From the capital of Chile, anarchists taking responsibility for participating in various moments of occupation and looting early this year during the long-running student struggles in that country, which have frequent anarchist participation with a discourse critical of the education complex at base and the societies which need it; see Return Fire vol.2 pg30. Our one point of contention with these authors would be on their identification of their actions as “political exercises”, against “promoters of inequality, morality and power” etc.: we think equality is a democratic imposition of ‘rights’ (necessarily implying a universal ‘authority’), itself a morality, and politics is the art of deceptions and representation. We find our stance on such robberies as closer to the author of Nomadic Insurgence, who asserts that “the insurgent outlaw is amoral” – he rejects law in all its forms, because it restricts her life and limits his possibilities. An insurgent outlaw may destroy a stolen item, sell it on the black market, keep it or share it among friends – as it pleases her. He may rob a bank and use the money for a project, squander it on friends, take a trip or burn it. […] The insurgent outlaw is consciously trying to increase her power of self-creation…” With that minor quibble aside, we salute those keeping up an ungovernable presence within the student struggles and beyond.]

We are part of what the press call ‘vandalism’, we are part of what citizens call delinquency, we are the individuals who tend to break the murderous routine with small actions – individuals for whom self-compassion and mercy have given way to tangible reality, a reality that shows its worst face in everyday life: a life that is crying out for destruction so as to give space to the overwhelming impetus of autonomy and total freedom.

In a context of struggle, plunder and destruction become essential for insurgents, rebels and anyone who is against the system; undoubtedly its spontaneous and organized practice will always be there. As secondary school, technical and university students are begging the State for improvements in education, the minorities that long for sedition continue to annoy the authorities and to foment widespread disorder[1].

1. Infamous literally, that is – no actual Panopticon was ever built. [ed. – Bentham, a utilitarian philosopher writing in the late 1700s, based his panopticon ideas on his brother’s ideal regime in Russia; where he was running the first factories in its early industrialisation. Prison wings based on the Panopticon design do indeed exist today, but only long after Bentham’s death.]

2. ed. – From the start, Bentham suggested the panoptic model be deployed in non-prison institutes also, as follows: “No matter how different, or even opposite the purpose: whether it be that of punishing the incorrigible, guarding the insane, reforming the vicious, confining the suspected, employing the idle, maintaining the helpless, curing the sick, instructing the willing in any branch of industry, or training the rising race in the path of education: in a word, whether it be applied to the purposes of perpetual prisons in the room of death, or prisons for confinement before trial, or penitentiary houses, or houses of correction, or work-houses, or manufactories, or mad-houses, or hospitals, or schools” (Panopticon Letter I).

3. ed. – Oscar Grant III was shot dead by a transit cop in Oakland, U.S.A., 2009, sparking a few nights of rioting and looting. Over a year later, the cop was absolved of murder (declared guilty instead of involuntary manslaughter). As predicted, more disorder followed the ruling.

4. ed. – Moore’s Law is the observation that the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles approximately every two years.

“[Occupation is useful] not because of the facilities it procures for us but for the faculties it builds in us: the capacity to take over space, and within that space to destroy and create as we see fit, which means to self-organize, and to attack and erode control. All the better that occupation should be temporary, then, because knowing that we cannot, in the short-term, win any material prize, we may be all the more cruel with the infrastructure we take hostage. What we win we take with us, and can use again wherever we go: what we win is the capacity to occupy. This is another way of saying that we must be the first real Vandals, the first real barbarians, the first real horde. Because the truth of the matter is, thus far, everyone who has sacked Rome has been seduced by it. The pacifists would misquote Nietzsche [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg52] and suggest that to fight a monster is to become it, but they have simply been seduced by the democratic myth of dialogue, and they don’t realize that they are already monsters. So too were the barbarians already Romans. Those who marched through the marbled gates were not savages still green from the forest, rebelling viscerally against civilization. In fact they had already served in the legions, and were now turning on the aging Empire in order to cut it up for themselves. […] Therefore, to sack Rome, we must do so as a horde, and never as an army, in every way possible. We must smash the fortifications without planning how they might be repaired, should we ever need to close them again behind us; we must walk naked before the clothed, without feeling shame; we must talk loudly among the educated, to teach them our words; we must burn their holy books without the least awe or ceremony; we must open the prisons, walk through them until we are sure they don’t contain a soul. We must burn the libraries and museums, but let the curious and romantic among us first take out any treasure they want, to fill the streets and homes with, for we have no plans and no prohibitions. […] The question is how, then, to become a horde?”

– Here... at the Center of the World in Revolt
Without thinking twice we take advantage of certain situations in which we’ve been targeting for a while – at different times and contexts – the ‘education centres’ in Santiago of Chile, we plundered them, destroyed them and occupied them in order to spread the seed of anarchy in many ways; we took advantage of this for individual purposes and also – and mainly – for political anti-authoritarian projects.

There was no exception this year, we plundered electrical appliances and various equipment which will help us in future political actions. We stole them from the promoters of inequality, morality and power\(^2\). For our part we’re satisfied, even if we will aim higher and higher, there are plenty of places.

Plunder and destruction are political exercises that make us smile in complicity with our affinity ones as we put them into action against the target chosen during the organization of an action. Routine is being broken up, we leave no space to authority’s lovers or those who play politics and go to the police and protect the property of others who ruin their lives with huge debts.

It’s time we became faster, we expect nothing nor do we have anything to expect from education and its puppets (comrades, leaders, directors, politicians); we negotiate nothing nor do we have anything to negotiate with the State/Capital; we need to start acting towards the exacerbation of the conflict with power so as to see it being destroyed in front of our eyes.

During one march, anarchists fire upon police with high-range pyrotechnics, linking their struggle to the “war without truce on any form of authority, whether specism, patriarchy, the academic monopoly of knowledge, the state, the destruction of nature, the family structure…” etc., 21.04.18

In memory of anarchist-nihilist comrade Sebastián Oversluji Seguel, who together with unknown persons emptied a room of a great many computers and electrical appliances for political purposes in the Juan Gómez Millas campus, Universidad de Chile, on 19th November 2010.

Without any doubt such an inspiring story calls us to dedicate our raids and destructive gestures to Pelao Angry \[ed. – as Sebastián was known\], who fell in an expropriation action in Pudahuel on 11/12/2013 \[ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg26\].

SEBASTIÁN O SEGUÉL ILLEGAL GANG

WINTER, JULY – SHILE 2016

\[ed. – A selection from an anarchist text released after combative Chilean student demonstrations, by Individualist Cell ‘Birds of Fire’\]

There they were, the voracious youth again, destroying everything, erecting barricades, clashing with police, nothing could stop them... There is fire and passion in their hearts, love and hatred on their inside, courage and decision. The beauty of chaos has returned to grace the streets, it is not only fire that adorns the asphalt; it is also the energy of the youth, the abolition of the sexes, everyone in the struggle... Will this struggle bear fruit? To want to study just to be someone in life? The individual who goes searching for real happiness, does not stop at so little, she [sic] knows that she can educate herself, and although that path is longer, that doesn’t make it less interesting, because everything else is interminable...

[...] Chilean society is convulsing, it knows there’s a conflict and doesn’t know how it will end, there are students wounded, two dead and a few in jail, there are others on hunger strike. The tension increases, it’s visible in the streets every time there’s a day of action and protest, the confrontations between pacifist and violent protestors keep on increasing, so much that they have struck and snatched the masks off of some encapuchados \[ed. – hooded fighters\]. Careful, citizens[...]

To raze the school is possible today, as was done in the colegio Guillermo Cruz de Estación Central, [and] in the colegio Gabriel Gonzales Videla \[ed. – scene to rioting and arsons during a tense 2011\] [...] those places intentionally lit ablaze by those beautiful pajarillas \[‘little birds’\] who understand that this destruction is a great step towards the conquest of life...

The journey is intense and difficult, it always has been, when individuals fed up with their miserable conditions organize and attack. One cannot be afraid of those who organize only for one specific goal although it is only to destroy, because at this point we know that to build, we must destroy... And all the reasoning these petty politicians supposedly have when they talk about the problem of education, does nothing for anyone, because the bureaucrats and businessmen almost always end up winning. And they believe that to repress passion is a simple thing, that with a little tear gas and a little water \[ed. – from police water cannons\] they will snuff it out, like any other flame, so they will have to be reminded that they are wrong, again and again, those idiots. The night always illuminates our steps, just like free love allows us unlimited bliss, to find us with the beautiful silence of obscurity, or at the feet of the fresh rays of the rising sun[...] running into the heat of a barricade, it’s magic, like something supreme, or can only god be supreme? We burn the churches with their pedophile priests inside, we watch those cowardly abusers from the front to spit in their faces...

Another day comes, but this is one of the beautiful ones, because we will combine the sun that caresses us with its heat with an emancipatory fire full of joy and hope...

[...] Today it is time to kill the cops in our heads, and this, to be sure, is a great battle. It’s much easier to throw a rock at an armoured truck \[ed. – commonly deployed in Chile against demonstrators such as the students\] and believe that, from this act, liberty closely follows. It’s much easier to spend hours and hours talking about revolution and organization. It’s much easier to believe that going to a free university will change the world. Students, don’t be fooled, remember that those who control the world also attended the university, and to their disgrace, some studied for free. And what did they become? Heartless beings capable of torture in their jails and murder for a few cents, and what do you say now? That you’ll be different? This remains to be seen...

[...] The revolt is here, we must increase our participation, our generous egoism \[ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg41\] needs to contribute, for now, to the struggle, to gather and organize ourselves for specific ends such as destruction, enjoyment, loving camaraderie, encounters with chaos, advancing towards the dawn [or awakening] of the creative nothing \[ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg92\]. Then returning to our hiding places, to rejoice and dance with the birds, to nourish ourselves with the energy of the trees, to feel the ocean breeze, to hear the lovely melody of the wind...

We have said it already and we’ll say it again: our revolution has already begun, we make it from day to day, making free love, declaring ourselves against every god and religion, decontructing the dominating language that they imposed on us, openly opposing any society, we make it when we stop being men and women and become unique human beings.
What is Fracking?
Fracking or hydraulic fracture is an unconventional method of extraction of natural gas, also known as “shale gas”. This gas, fundamentally composed by methane, is found stored in small pores or impermeable rock bubbles, normally of schist or slate, located thousands of metres below the surface. “Unconventional gases” are denominated to those that for their cost or difficulty of extraction are less profitable. However, with the advance of extractivist technologies, these gases can be catalogued as conventional in a short period of time.

The hydraulic fracture consists in “breaking” or “fracturing” the mother rock that contains the gas for its extraction. For this a perforation technique is used: firstly the surface is drilled for up to 5,000 metres vertically and after that several horizontal kilometres are also perforated (from 1.5 to 5 km). After this water with sand are injected with great pressure (98%). It should be noted that this water and sand also contain a series of chemical additives (between 15 to 85%) that have invested their efforts into demonstrating and studying that we have reached the peak oil process and that the new petroleum pits discovered possess less fuel of worse quality, bigger cost of extraction and, therefore, less EROI. This theory is easily predictable by simply analysing the spectacular increase of the price of fossil fuel.

We survive in a system completely dependent on fossil fuel and electrical energy generated by the same, which also base their system of social domination on energy control. It would be stupid or ingenuous by our part to think that the big defenders of this system of social domination, which include huge petroleum companies, were not going to reinvent theirselves so that the end of cheap petroleum doesn’t suppose a threat to their businesses, privileges and power of social control. It is here where fracking serves as a tool to delay the discovery of new alternative energy sources. By improving extractivist technologies and conducting explorations in many places of the planet, the gas reserves will be able to be maintain their energy system for a short period of time and prevent the explosion of a true energy catastrophe, which doesn’t benefit in the slightest big petroleum multinationals.

Why Oppose Hydraulic Fracturing?
There are many varied motives to oppose the extraction of unconventional gas. It is obvious that such an aggressive extractivist method will provoke a series of environmental problems.

On the one hand it is of vital importance to highlight the contamination of aquifers and subterranean waters, created due to the filtration of the mixture that is injected in the pits for the extraction of gas. These 600 chemical substances injected into the surface, many of them carcinogenic, end up in subterranean waters and will consequently be consumed by all human beings and animals, thus generating a chemical contamination of all the affected ecosystems. These human beings will be affected by this consumption of contaminated water. This has already been demonstrated through the analysis in cow livestock in several areas of the United States, where many animals suddenly died after consuming water close to the gas platforms. The effects towards the human race will take longer to appear, but can go from stomach infections to cancer, along with provoking death after constant consumption.

Another type of contamination that fracking provokes that isn’t well known is the emission of radioactive substances to the atmosphere. Substances that are found naturally in the depths of the ground and contaminated water can also reach the atmosphere. One of these chemical substances is radon-222, which is the second highest declared cause of lung cancer.

The small explosions generated by the injection of pressured water are also capable of causing seismic movements into the ground, as demonstrated in places like England or the United States. This could explain, along with popular opposition and French colonialism in Mali and Niger [ed. – i.e. also over access to uranium and other fuel sources], the prohibition of this method in France, where the huge quantity of nuclear plants combined with earthquake risks could cause huge catastrophes.

Why Fracking?
Currently, even though natural gas consumption is booming, electrical energy (primarily generated thanks to petroleum and the consumption of fossil fuels) represents around 80% of the global energy consumption. On the other hand, the extraction of conventional natural gas possesses an energy return on investment (EROI) of between 1 to 6 and unconventional or “shale gas” between 0.7 and 13.3. These are ridiculous numbers compared to the current energy return on investment of petroleum, which can have rates of 100.
Extractive platforms generate a series of environmental and pollutive consequences that are hard to list. It is not only about the visual impact of the platform, the waste from concrete, gas pipelines, etc. But also the creation of roads, transportation of materials, the canalisation of water into the platform, the large water waste, the deforestation of the terrain, the erosion, the creation of residual ponds and many more problems that would require a lot of paper to write down.

These ecological and health consequences should ideally be the main reason to face and stop these projects if we truly valued the health of our surroundings. However, these are not even the most important reasons to stop fracking: if companies were truly interested in investing into improved extractivist technologies in order to guarantee that no health dangers existed there would still be enough factors for us to oppose these projects. Fracking opposition, from our part, should include the fact that it is a new method of exploitation of natural resources that only contributes perpetuating an anti-ecological, exploiting, unfair and inhuman system. We don’t only express our opposition to fracking as an aggressive method to extract gas, but also to the opposition of any type of extraction of gas.

Permissions, Licenses & Businesses

Currently there are over 30 permits of exploitation conceded in the [Iberian] peninsula, concentrated around the north, primarily. These numbers are ever-changing due to the approval of new permissions, as there are already more than 50 solicitations; but also due to the opposition and resistance from some communities to allow these projects (albeit the latter is improbable and abstract).

These exploitations will be conducted, if we don’t stop them, by businesses like SHEGA (Society of Hydrocarbons of Euskadi), BNK Petroleum, with its Spanish counterpart Trofagas, Heyco, R2 Energy and San Leon Energy.

The False Opposition to Fracking

From the arrival of the plans of exploration of shale gas in the [Spanish] State, there are many voices (from individuals and collectives) that have risen up to try and prevent these exploitations of gas. For this reason, it is important to analyse determined strategies and alternative methods of fighting presented by numerous ecologist groups which, in our opinion, aren’t effective or coherent and are even capable of benefiting the enemy that they intend to destroy.

In regards to the methods of struggle: the first thing that we must clarify is that fracking is a global problem originated by a global energy scheme. It is not only about a project in a specific area. Due to this it is important to conduct the fight against fracking on a global level and not only focus on it on a specific platform, valley, etc... (No Fracking, not here or anywhere)

The town halls and Autonomous Communities belong to a State that encourages and support this global plan of energy development based on the hydraulic fracture. Due to this it lacks sense, from a logical perspective, to use or beg these institutions to stop fracking. On the one hand, it is obvious that if we intend to stop fracking, any type of dialogue with the State contributes towards an anticipated defeat. On a moral level it is a lost battle. It is true that in some cases the collection of signatures and pressure from political groups have managed to stop some local projects. However, these are underwhelming victories, as no global opposition is ever presented, only local. On the other hand, if the governments indeed stop specific projects it is only because these are not fundamental projects for their energy development. In the case of fracking in the [Spanish] State, several specific permissions can be obtained this way, because there are countries with enormous levels of poverty that exist, with bigger gas reserves and less popular pressure, allowing businesses to easily extract gas from those places. Therefore, the only way to oppose these mega-projects effectively and coherently is through a real fight, not collaborationist, that at the same time develops a global criticism towards capitalism.

In regards to alternatives: This is probably the most delicate and controversial point. The only proposal by “eco” friendly parties, NGO’s and ecologist collectives against fracking are renewable energies, accompanied by a light decrease in the levels of consumption.

Renewable energies can pose, with a big economic investment in investigation and development, an alternative to the extraction of gas through hydraulic fracture, but they will never be an alternative to capitalism. The ideal world that these groups offer needs more roads, industries, trucks, primary resources, big factories, video surveillance and electricity cables passing through the woods to fully function. Renewable energy is also completely dependent on fossil fuels (plastics, transportation through roads, vehicles, etc...) and continues forcing human beings to work to produce cars, wind turbines, solar panels, etc; which impedes the liberation of the individual, who is still tied up and trapped in a sick, unhappy and monotonous job and lifestyle.

On the other hand, these groups don’t tend to propose any political change accompanied by their “renewable revolution” in order to change a capitalist system where the only things that matter are money and economy, thus ignoring values like friendship and nature. This approach not only represents no real alternative to the system of domination, but can also drastically benefit it. In a world where contamination reaches extreme levels, cancers increase enormously and the disasters provoked by petroleum and nuclear energy are part of our everyday lives, the best alternative to maintain the system of domination is through renewable energy. In fact, it’s what is slowly extending the system. Small steps are being taken to improve the profitability of renewable energies, creating electric vehicles, etc... This way the State and businesses clean their image towards the people that they have to exploit, whilst they also pretend to care about the planet’s health without changing the system of domination.

We don’t want a world where the same contradictions continue to be applied, where people’s lives are completely
domesticated, robotized and alienated and where the relationship between human beings and nature is inexistent. We don’t want cities painted a pretentious “eco-green” state or a scenery full of wind turbines of more than 100 metres in height. We fight for a free world where people can re-establish their relationship to nature that prevailed during centuries past. We fight for a world where capitalism and domination disappear, which is only possible by renouncing the commodities that the energy and technological system provide for us. A world without fracking, or petroleum, or renewable barbarities: a free and wild world.

1. The numbers of return of contaminated water are proportioned by the own extractivist businesses, are not validated by any independent study. Therefore it is probable that the percentage of water that isn’t recovered is bigger than as indicated.

2. One of the key concepts to understand the gravity of the energy crisis is the EROEI (Energy Return on Energy Investment). The TRE is the relationship between energy that a well provides us and the energy that we have to spend to obtain it. Hence, conventional petroleum has an EROEI of 20, which means that for each unity of energy destined to the production of petroleum (in the elaboration of materials used in wells, its installation, perforation, operation, the maintenance, etc) 20 unities of energy are obtained. The critical value of the TRE is 1: when the TRE arrives at an equivalent, lots of energy is renewed as the one invested and the system stops having any sense as an energy source.

3. ed. – Fracking near Blackpool in the north of England by the company Cuadrilla was halted after causing two minor 2011 earthquakes, while the U.S. state of Oklahoma for example has seen a spier spik in quakes of 3.0 magnitude or higher since 2008, when fracking ramped up in the area. The number of 3.0 magnitude quakes rose from 2 in 2008 to 889 last year; as of this November, there have been 572 so far in 2016.

4. ed. – Autonomous Communities are the 17 separately-governed semi-autonomous regions of Spain, i.e. Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, etc.

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**EXTRACTION IN THE SIGHTS**

20.11.16, Copenhagen, Denmark: Arson of a G4S van, “as gesture of complicity to the spirit of the warriors defending their sacred lands against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. […] G4S is a security company with a long history of part Danish ownership and they currently provide security for the construction of the pipeline after a series of arsons against the construction sites. We hope our message of solidarity with fire reaches you.” (The Dakota Access Pipeline would carry fracked oil from the U.S. state of North Dakota through to Illinois, cutting under the Missouri River less than a mile upstream from the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation’s drinking water supply. This has precipitated possibly the largest gathering of indigenous Americans ever, as members of over 100 tribal groups have converged to protect the land and water. While major disagreements have taken place between indigenous warriors or accomplices of whatever heritage pushing for confrontational action and pacifist elements or hired Non-Violent Direct Action consultant “camp leaders”, combat has nonetheless ensued with the large militarised police deployment – including horse-riding warriers rallying a herd of buffalo into police lines, burning barricades on the access roads to the camp occupations, logs and molotovs hurled at oncoming cops, and much construction machinery put to the torch, while other forms of direct action have regularly shut down pipeline work. In different parts of the world, train-lines carrying oil cars or even specific fracking materials for the North Dakota wells have been blockaded (U.S.A.), bank façade and ATM sabotage carried out in solidarity (Switzerland), and a gathering of industrialists disrupted by invaders who tussled with the guarding cops (Canada)."

![One of the U.S. military supply trucks torched after their retreat from clashes on the highway and turned into yet another barricade in the fight for Standing Rock](image)

16.10.16, rural Iowa, U.S.A.: Three bulldozers and one excavator burn, to the cost of $2million, on the worksite of the Bakken pipeline, another due to cross the state of Iowa from the gas-fields of North Dakota downwards. (In August, $1million more of damages had been wrought by another arson of another two pieces of machinery on the same spot, with two other arsons of equipment elsewhere on the same night.) The landowner admits that surveillance of the entire pipeline route is nearly impossible.

03.01.16. Cambrige, Canada: Unknown individuals “used a manual pipeline valve to restrict the flow of Enbridge’s Line 7”, a pipeline which runs crude oil from the Alberta tar sands (see “Another Figure of the Migrant”) in parallel to the company’s notorious Line 9. “We then applied our own locking devices to delay the flow. […] This action was undertaken to show our ever lasting love and support to the brave folks who’ve taken similar actions in the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, Mohawk, and Anishinaabek people. […] We fight for the land and water; and we fight for our lives.”

22.10.15, Germany: Clashes between defenders of the Hambacher Forest (see Rebels Behind Bars: Some Light on the Investigation Leading to the Imprisonment of the Comrade Arrested on April 13th) and the coal company trying to destroy it to expand their extraction. As tree-cutting work begins, around 20 assailants cross the security fence (which had been damaged in multiple places during fighting the day before) and “smashed the window of the digger and the security car, the electronics of the cutting machine were sabotaged. One security tried to intervene and to arrest a person, but other[s] prevented him from doing so. Afterwards, it was possible to do more severe damage to the digger, its hydraulics were cut and the electronics completely destroyed. The group could retreat without problem into the forest. But a smaller group of 2 persons, which was also present in the area, was missed. Police arrived soon and left the scene again together with an ambulance car. It was assumed the people had got arrested. As a direct response to the arrests, a group of 30 people destroyed the remaining parts of the fence and smashed the windows of a truck. Afterwards, the two highway bridges which are used by the securities as permanent guardings points were attacked, lights and generators were destroyed.” The mob was too large for security to intervene.

22.03.15, Elliott State Forest, U.S.A.: A few ‘mountain beavers’ emerged from the hillside and destroyed the road leading into the Dean Scholfield timber sale in the Elliott State Forest. A three-foot deep trench now blocks the sale’s entrance. Long lengths of rebar were cemented into three holes in front of the trench, preventing bulldozers from easily reconstructing the road. [For those of us who are intimately connected to this land, a clearcut is a clearcut. No matter if the trees are 100 or 250 years old: the mountain beavers will be trampled, trapped and poisoned and the coho salmon downstream will struggle to survive as temperatures rise and silt settles on the gravel beds. The ancient myrtle that is reaching towards the sky and watching the forest around it mature into old growth will be carelessly thrown into a slash pile, burned as biofuel at the mill. The human community down hill will breath in the drift and drink the water contaminated by the aerial spraying of herbicides. [...] We have been labelled many things: [vermin], [vandals], and “eco-terrorists.” So we’ll do what we do best, and continue to grow at your roads and your profits.”

In-Sahel region, Algeria: In the midst of a widespread struggle against fracking in the Sahara desert (Algeria is said to be fourth in the world in the size of its recoverable shale gas reserves), rioting breaks out after authorities refuse to release prisoners of the struggle. The police headquarters, the police chief’s house, some police barracks, and a police truck are all set ablaze, and 40 officers injured.
07.01.15, Pastaza province, Ecuador: Waorani indigenous fighters invade the Petrolbi oil field in the Amazon, causing enough damage to shuts down eleven oil wells operating at the facility. The army are called to the scene and six soldiers are wounded in the clash with seven warriors armed with blowguns, shotguns, pistols and spears. Six of the seven are imprisoned on January 8th, and the seventh "allowed to remain free with certain restrictions based on his advanced age." It is noted that in 2011 and 2012 indigenous warriors had already attacked the facilities of oil companies in the area.

04.04.14, Vancouver, Canada: Anonymous midnight attack on the $3million home of the CEO and director of Mira Resources (an oil and gas company operating in Ghana and Angola), who is also the president and CEO of Eldor Resources (a uranium company that has begun drilling in the Athabasca Basin in Saskatchewan) as well as the director of Athabasca Nuclear. Multiple gunshot is fired upon the house, before a vehicle is heard speeding away.

07.01.14, Verucchio, Italy: Some ‘Boar from Marecchia Valley’, aligned with the Earth Liberation Front (E.L.F.), enter a CAM site that quarries materials to 'carry out death projects from' and set fire to Ethiopia and all over the world, by building techno-industrial systems. The unmitigated disaster – see *Return Fire vol.1 pg29*

13.06.12, Farnham, Canada: Sabotage of a major rail-line in Québec, chosen “for the crucial nature of the merchandise it transports,” such as Alberta tar sands oil (see “Another Figure of the Migrant”)

“Another Figure of the Migrant”) “before this sole railway divides into different destinations such as Sherbrooke city, Bromont’s techno-park (which hosts some of the biggest names in the high-tech industry, including the infamous IBM) and further down on to New England. [Techno-industrial society] intoxicates the living...] There are many more fluxes that are crucial to the functioning of this system of oppression and its Holy Merchandise, and we are committed to do it again, and strike targets that will always hurt them more.”

11.06.12, Olympia, U.S.A.: The Washington State Loggers’ Association building receives threatening graffiti and all 24 windows broken. “Roughly a decade after the fervent period of Earth Liberation activity that occurred in the late 90’s and early 2000’s [ed. – see Memory as a Weapon; A Shorter History of a Northwest E.L.F. Cell] [some] cling to the idea of hope and others view this as nothing more than a deceitful delusion. Neither narrative concerns us. What truly concerns us is that the living world around us is dying, and that the strength of our heart arophies through inaction.”

26.01.12, Bima, Indonesia: A thousands-strong crowd ransack and burn two government offices to express their outrage at a controversial gold mine. The mob continue on to a nearby detention center and force the authorities to release 35 of their comrades who were arrested at a protest against the mine during the past year.

31.07.11, Santaigo, Chile: Santander bank smashed with hammers and rocks by the E.L.F. The bank finances HidroAysen, “a] hydroelectric project that intends to build 5 dams in Patagonia, in addition to the construction of a large power line. Which will destroy hundreds of hectares of wilderness and with it the lives of thousands of wild species.” In the months before, large-scale clashes had broken out over the mega-project in Colhauque while a government-appointed commission voted the dams ahead (commissioners were kept indoors for their own safety as people threw rocks and battled cops with water cannon and tear gas) and also in Santiago, with injury to police. “The logic of money over life is ultimately what we reject and fight. Nor are we interested in that false defense of the Earth only because it is “richness” that should exist in order to be contemplated as a tourist destination or because places like the south [transl. – of Chile, largely wilderness] distract from the frenzy of the city [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg52].”

09.05.11, Sarawak, Malaysia: After days of blocking the roads to defend the land, residents of ten different Bidayuh villages set fire to five logging camps and the attendant heavy machinery. Around fifty people came from each village; police are too outnumbered to intervene.

11.04.11, Chesterfield, U.K.: Some paint-wielding individuals “descended upon the Shell offices”, citing among other things the company’s gas pipeline project in County Mayo (western Ireland). "This was done because we are anarchists who are in love with this planet, and willing to strike wherever and whenever we see fit... We know this action alone will not stop Shell, but it is a manifestation of desires to see harm done to those who destroy the planet and every living creature on it. We will build and develop skills, we will strike again.”

24.06.10, Cramlington, U.K.: Sabotage at Shotton opencast coal mine. “One excavator, two bulldozers and ten heavy earth movers were damaged [including] cut electrics, cut hydraulic and coal dust in oil tanks. Also 150 meters of water pipe was slashed, flooding an area of the mine... resisted total environmental destruction, climate change and civilised culture...”

08.03.13, Solnechnogorsk district, Russia: ‘Wolfpack’ group of the Informal Anarchist Federation (F.A.I.) / E.L.F. destroy a tracked dozer and an excavator at a sand extraction complex. “The sand from this site goes to the highway construction projects in Khimki forest [ed. – see Memory as a Weapon; A Shorter History of a Northwest E.L.F. Cell] as well as some other regional development projects. [...] Because of damp weather one of the devices failed to ignite[...] With ravaging flames from the burning excavator at our back we approached the bomb and re-wired it.”

08.03.13, Espoo, Finland: While in Helsinki people protest the toxicity caused by the nickel, zircon and uranium mining of Talviaova corporation outside Finlandia Hall during a shareholders meeting, others throw smoke bombs into the corridors of the company headquarters and graffiti the exterior. The action is also in solidarity with the Kulon Progo struggle against mining and metal industries in Indonesia, and captive Tukijo (see *Return Fire vol.1 pg70*).

“Yet to focus on [high-risk extractive methods] as aberrations [is] to mystify the real operational character of an entire social and technological system. The unmitigated disaster of daily, dramatic activities [in places like Prudhoe Bay] – even before they enter the vocabulary of doom – is irrefutable proof that Valdez was no accident but the norm[1].

Modern industrialism cannot exist without [a] super-exploited colony, a “sacrifice area” of some kind – the sky, a human community, a watershed, the soil, the gene pool, and so on – to expand and extend its lifeless tentacles.”

– George Bradford
1 ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg29

“More extreme forms of eco-cide call for more extreme forms of protest.” – *communique for extensive 31.07.08 damage by molotov to Guinn's Ltd office, Tasmania, over deforestation for the Tamar Valley Pulp Mill*

*Return Fire vol.1 pg70*

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Barricades in Santiago against HidroAysen and its world

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*Return Fire vol.1 pg70*
SOLD OUT TO THE INDUSTRY
- GMB Union Backs Fracking

[ed. – A denouncement published in #11 of The Acorn, a U.K.-based anti-capitalist web bulletin. Little else should be expected of the union bureaucracy, anyone who has paid attention to their origins (see Memory as a Weapon; “An Outrageous Spirit of Tumult & Riot”) and subsequent trajectory can’t feel surprised or ‘betrayed’. Additionally we must note that despite the celebrated ‘people power’ cited in this article (in reference to long-standing civil opposition in the area), this October the Lancashire council rejection of fracking was over-rulled by the government Communities Secretary, paving the way for the shale gas company Cuadrilla to begin drilling in the English county in 2017. It will be the first time horizontal fracking has been undertaken in the U.K., and the first time Cuadrilla has fracked under homes. The move marks a major step up in the scale of exploratory fracking in the UK, as it gives four wells the green light (with another four in the not-so-metaphorical pipeline) compared to the single well approved for fracking by Third Energy in North Yorkshire earlier this year. Meanwhile, the European Union has announced £13 million research funding for shale oil corporations… UPDATE FOR WEB EDITION: After the decision in favour of Cuadrilla beginning the first new fracking well in the U.K. since the earthquakes they caused in 2011 (see footnote in the article above) a facility near Chesterfield run by PR Marriott (the largest U.K. onshore deep drilling company, which stores and maintains the rig on behalf of Cuadrilla), previously site of repeated protests, was infiltrated. The rig intended for use at the newly-cleared fracking site was attacked with sledgehammers to smash its touchscreen computers and windows. Components were drilled out, pneumatic pipes and electrical cables were cut, damages significant. Protesters have also successfully pressured some subcontractors into ending their agreements with Cuadrilla. A sign of things to come?]“Business need”? What sort of language is that for a trade union to adopt?

The GMB is a “general” trade union in the UK, affiliated to the TUC [Trades Union Congress) and the Labour Party and boasting more than 631,000 members.

As it proudly declares on its own website, its Northern Region recently had the bright idea of getting a briefing on the fracking issue. And who did these “leftists” ask? Frack Off perhaps? Friends of the Earth? [ed. – Two mainstream faces of anti-fracking sentiment in the U.K.] Nope – they went straight to the Chemical Industry Association, the leading national trade association for the chemical and chemistry-using industries in the United Kingdom. Who cares about pollution if jobs are involved?

As a result of this briefing, on June 18 2015, the GMB concluded: “Given the fragility of the oil and gas sector due to price pressures, diversification through shale gas could well become a key employer within the energy sector.”

Billy Coates, GMB Northern Regional Secretary added: “The strategic importance of fracking within the UK’s balanced energy mix must not be ignored. Along with nuclear, renewables, green coal [sic!], oil and gas, fracking could be absolutely essential to achieving near self-sufficiency which will benefit domestic and business need.”

The GMB, like others on the industrial left, seem to think they can claim to be “green” at the same time as cheerfully oiling the very machineries that are killing the planet.

The anti-fracking movement will hopefully ensure that from now on the GMB is instead recognised as a corrupt and cowardly collaborator with the business mafia which is destroying our planet for its own profit.

STOP FRACKING IN ITS TRACKS

STOP FRACKING IN ITS TRACKS

SOLIDARITY WITH ALL WHO FIGHT

Here we have the heart of the problem that has afflicted the “Left” since back in the 19th century. At heart, it is not actually against the capitalist system, it just has certain minor quibbles with the way it is run.

But, of course, these left-capitalists are in denial about all this. They refuse to admit that industrialism and capitalism are essentially the same thing – that you cannot pretend to be against an economic system and yet wholeheartedly support the physical infrastructure that enables that system to maintain and expand its control.

They are also apparently incapable of seeing through the capitalist lie that there is something inherently good about “jobs” and are happy to fight for the “right” of their members to spend their lives as slaves to the global industrial greed-monster.

Even worse is the hypocrisy surrounding this, which echoes the hypocrisy of the ruling elite with their oxymoronic “sustainable development”.

It is with no apparent sense of irony that the pro-fracking union boasts on its website: “GMB is recognised both nationally and regionally as being the leading trade union on health, safety and environmental issues.”
Occupying the House of War: Terror and State Control

Imam Abū Hanifah, an eight-century Sunni Muslim theologian from Iraq, developed a framework that has exercised lasting influence on Islamic theology. He distinguished between dar al-harb, literally the “house” (domain, abode, territory) of war, and dar al-islam, the house of peace. Dar al-islam represents the regions where the Islamic faith dominates and tranquility presumably reigns as a result of people living in accordance with the will of God, while dar al-harb designates the regions not governed by Islamic rulers and law. This is a legal rather than religious distinction: the difference between the house of Islam and the house of war is not determined by the percentage of Muslims in a region, but by what political system governs it. The designation “house of war” refers both to the assumption that any territory that has not submitted to the will of God will endure constant strife, and to the call for Muslims to undertake holy war against unbelievers.

The “houses” are defined thus because Islamic traditions, in contrast to those of Christianity, tend to emphasize proper conduct (orthopraxy) over proper belief (orthodoxy). In this view, how people behave is more important than what they believe. The pagan cults of the Roman Empire operated similarly: as long as a Roman citizen observed the prescribed rituals, he could profess whatever beliefs he wanted (ed. — until the official take-over of Christianity; see Memory as a Weapon; “One God & One State”).

In contrast, Christian traditions of defining orthodoxy and persecuting heresy valued the profession of proper belief above all; merely behaving in accord with Christian precepts did not guarantee salvation. This emphasis on orthodoxy persisted through the Cold War, with its McCarthyist witch-hunts and loyalty oaths. The government promoted social conformity and patriotism to cement correct beliefs, and professing an improper creed could be lethal.

However, with the triumph of mass consumer society in the aftermath of the Cold War, orthopraxy has supplanted orthodoxy as the dominant paradigm for governance. Belief has been relegated to the same realm as religion: private, subjective, unobtrusive, optional. In the age of internet irony, earnestness is laughable, dogmatism contemptible, credulity hilarious. Whatever power satire once had has dissolved in the general undermining of all faith.

In the postmodern US, you needn’t participate in rituals like voting or July 4th parades. All that matters is that you keep going to work, keep shopping, keep doing what you are told by authority figures. When the retail chain that employs you shows a video explaining that stealing from the store is really stealing from yourself, you can snicker with your coworkers on your smoke break all you want — so long as the till adds up correctly at the end of the day. Trumpet at the top of your lungs that the government is corrupt, capitalism is the crisis, consumerism is destroying the planet. Just make sure that when you act on your dissident beliefs, you do so by canvassing for a third party candidate or driving your hybrid to the co-op to buy high-efficiency light bulbs.

Resistance that moves beyond speech, that challenges orthopraxy via heretical action, is another matter entirely. In the electronic era, when control no longer hinges on geographical space but on diffuse networks of power, the “house of war” is everywhere and nowhere, requiring eternal vigilance and omnipresent surveillance. Today’s authorities utilize technologies of control that the Abrahamic religions could have only dreamed of. Imagine the inquisition, a papacy packed with RFID chips, CCTV cameras, and satellite-guided drones could have carried out. Yet even with such tools at their disposal, the terror of the authorities in the face of the dar al-harb only grows more frantic. As the experience of being governed becomes universal, the perceived threat of any alternative looms ever larger.

As James Scott discusses in his history of resistance to the state in upland Southeast Asia, for the vast majority of our species’ tenure human beings have lived without state power, or near enough to expansive stateless regions that they could escape. This placed limits on the deprivations to which states could subject people, since individual flight and collective exodus remained viable options. Only in the past few centuries has state control extended to encompass the vast majority of the world’s population, and only in the past several decades have transportation, communication, and military technology advanced to such a point that states can prevent people from escaping. As the state marches us towards a brave new world of total control, that shrinking fraction of undefined space is the house of war, a zone of terror.

Mountainous areas have often been among the territories most difficult to rule. High-elevation regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan that have resisted state control are represented as havens for Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The War on Terror provides the ultimate impetus for bringing every square inch of the globe into the web of surveillance and control; these few slender territories free from state domination now constitute threats to the security of the United States [ed. — and the rest of the “Western world”]. If the authorities can’t reach them with tanks, they can target them with drones; what can’t be colonized can at least be destroyed. The project begun during the Cold War of imposing neocolonial domination on all non-aligned states continues in the anti-terrorism era, as the last regions that declined to be ruled by communism or capitalist democracy are tamed.

The land mines US troops spread across parts of Southeast Asia during the Cold War anticipated the project of total control advanced by the War on Terror. By rendering regions uninhabitable that were antagonistic to state control, they opened the final chapter in the struggle of the state to dominate all human societies. In the guise of an internecine quarrel, the
superpowers expressed their mutual terror of autonomous peoples by imposing regimes of fear: the sudden explosion that maims a forest dweller, the platoon that shoots without warning regardless of which side you’re on. Petty despotism in Latin America waged parallel campaigns as dictators and paramilitary death squads imposed fear as a way of life among indigenous communities from Guatemala to Chile. Now in parts of the Middle East, no one can escape the fear that a remote-controlled aircraft will rain death upon them from the sky.

The domain of the state has expanded so far, and with such brutal consequences, that life beyond it has become nearly unthinkable. Margaret Thatcher’s infamous declaration “There is no alternative” has become the goal and vision of the security state. It aims to create the dar al-islam – peace through universal submission to authority – by waging endless war against all who challenge its monopoly on control and violence.

All space outside the control of the security state is, by definition, the realm of terror. Let’s call these regions of possibility territory.

**Blank Spots on the Map: Territory & its Discontents**

Territory is non-striated space [ed. – see ‘A Profound Dis-ease’]. When every territory has been plotted within the latitudes of power and longitudes of control, it is the terror incognita, the frontiers of the unknown beyond the edges of the map. It is the destination of our lines of flight. It is what lies outside consensus reality.

Close your eyes and imagine feeling terror. What do you see? Is it a person, an event, a setting, an environment? Throughout millennia of struggle between civilization and wildness, most who fought on the former side would have named places or landscapes. Frontiers and forests, the wilderness and the jungle: these areas loomed in the imagination, reminding us of the constant struggle between the gaping unknown and the precarious enclaves of civilization. But the spread of the state, combined with new technologies of destruction, allowed the balance of that struggle to swing toward the civilized, who ferociously domesticated wild landscapes and the peoples who inhabited them. Now, as the forces of state and capital methodically eliminate the last social groups that resist civilized control, we’re losing memory of any mode of life outside the binary of absolute control or absolute terror.

The “state of nature,” described by Thomas Hobbes as the primordial chaos from which all people strive to escape into the reassurance of state control, is the original territory. Life under state rule, which for the majority of its victims proved more “nasty, brutish, and short” than life outside of it, had to be justified by positing an even worse alternative. Yet in the first centuries of European immigration to North America, thousands of colonists “went native,” deserting to live among indigenous tribes. Maroon colonies of escaped slaves, indigenous locals, and poor white escapees flourished in the swamps and borderlands. Without a constant war against these alternatives, supported by white supremacy as an ideological incentive for exploited Europeans to identify with their masters against their African fellow workers [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg88], the North American colonies would never have survived. The United States’ racial nightmare of genocide, slavery, and exploitation originated in the terror of the European ruling classes, whose entire project of domination would have unraveled if colonists could escape to the peripheries.

Who do we find in a territory? It is inhabited by the people all Kurtzes mean when they whisper, “Exterminate the brutes!” The imaginations of rulers have populated territores with a series of scapegoats, pushing into the spotlight to be demonized and then discarding them when the next threat arose. During the Cold War, the ruling class [ed. – of the U.S.A.] attacked Communists and labor agitators, along with homosexuals and other sexual deviants [ed. – as did the Communists themselves...]. For over a century, they have blamed immigrants, recently emphasizing Mexicans and other Latin Americans. Since the 1970s, as the prison-industrial complex has expanded, politicians have targeted criminals, sexual predators, drug addicts, and young men of color. Since September 2001, Muslims have come under their scrutiny. At other times, anarchists, Jews, welfare recipients and other poor people, and a great many more have found themselves in the crosshairs as rulers fought to redirect discontent towards the powerless.

The profusion of scapegoated demographics indicates how insecure our rulers are despite the expansiveness of their control: we see this in the proliferation of gated communities with armed guards and CCTV cameras even as violent crime drops. No technologies can abate their terror so long as sinister peripheries and furtive longings lurk in the shadows of their minds. The cast of monstrous characters projected onto territores share two key features: they operate secretly, spreading subversion under the radar, and they are contagious, infecting the unsuspecting with their illicit desires.

State power is a cartographic project: an effort to map and graph and delineate all territory so as to administer it. From the earliest efforts to systematically survey territory and its inhabitants, through imperial Roman censuses and William the Conqueror’s Domesday book in 11th century England [ed. – whose completion peasants believed would signal the apocalypse] rulers have seen mapping, accounting, and enumerating as crucial to control. One of the first steps of the state apparatus in striating space is literally girding it in lines of latitude and longitude, elevation and topography.

This pursuit of total knowledge through mapping extends to the populations of states as well as their territories. Look at the state’s strategy in recent years for targeting radical social movements: prosecutors press conspiracy charges, using subpoenas, undercover agents, and social media platforms like Facebook to map relationships between potential insurgents. The strategy to criminalize youth of color operates similarly: expansive regulations targeting “gangs” [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg16], anti-loitering
"The entire history of western civilization can be read as a systematic attempt to exclude and isolate the body. From Plato on, it has been seen at various times as a folly to control, an impulse to repress, labor power to arrange or an unconscious to psychoanalyze. [...] Due to a battle-trained Christian heritage, we are led to believe that domination controls and expropriates a part of the human being without however damaging her inner being (and there is much that could be said about the division between a presumed inner being and external relationships). Of course, capitalist relationships and state impositions adulterate and pollute life, but we think that our perceptions of ourselves and of the world remain unaltered. So even when we imagine a radical break with the existent, we are sure that it is our body as we presently think of it that will act on this. I think instead that our body has suffered and continues to suffer a terrible mutilation. And this is not only due to the obvious aspects of control and alienation determined by technology. (That bodies have been reduced to reservoirs of spare organs is clearly shown by the triumph of the science of transplants, which is described with an insidious euphemism as a “frontier of medicine”. But to me the reality seems much worse than pharmaceutical speculations and the dictatorship of medicine as a separate and powerful body reveals.) The food we eat, the air we breathe and our daily relations have atrophied our bodies. Of themselves, are enclosed weakens the organism just as much as diseases for the thrill of intertwining our sweaty flesh. Are the eroticism of rebellion and the rebelliousness of the erotic all we have left, the last unmediated embodiment? When every acre has been mapped, can we imagine no other zones of possibility beyond our own unpredictable limbs? Is the body the last territory?"

– The Body & Revolt

But we’ll never get there from within the cozy confines of queer identity. If deterritorialized [ed. – see A Profound Dis-ease] sexuality is reserved for those of certain bodies or sexual identities, then it remains an identitarian [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pp37] rather than a seductive goal. If queer is to have any meaning, we have to transform our sex lives into a space where queer desires – which circulate without reference to citizenship in any queer nation – can take terrifying hold of us and spread.

The Continuing Appeal of Sex & Violence

But really, why all the fuss about sex and violence? Why are anarchists so hung up on breaking windows and fucking? Are these the only spaces in which terror and the unknown can come into play? Perhaps we fetishize riots and sex as the last frontiers of unmediated relation to the body. What are you doing after the riot or the orgy or whatever, after all? Let’s all die on the barricades in the throes of orgasm, confident for the first time that we’re really alive!

We risk years in prison for the rush of glass shattering beneath our hammers, or pregnancies and diseases for the thrill of intertwining our sweaty flesh. Are the eroticism of rebellion and the rebelliousness of the erotic all we have left, the last rapidly eroding foothold of unmediated embodiment? When every acre has been mapped, can we imagine no other zones of possibility beyond our own unpredictable limbs?

Is the body the last territory?

Terror & Contagion

In his introduction to Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes described the state via an extended metaphor of the body, with different parts and functions corresponding to those of the state. In this metaphor, he identified sedition with sickness. The urge to rebel is indeed infectious. The FBI attempts to track it epidemiologically. In crowds, it can spread like wildfire, reaching epidemic proportions.

Fear of contagion often reduces to a fear of being penetrated. The discourses deployed to target scapegoats reveal a disquietingly sexual theme. Spies and infiltrators penetrate secure networks; homosexuals and perverts penetrate forbidden parts of the body. Illegal immigrants penetrate the border [ed. – between Mexico and the U.S.], despite the 700-mile chastity belt across it. The brutal violence against scapegoats likewise takes on horrifyingly erotic casts: white obsession with the bodies of black men, the sexual mutilations that often accompanied lynchings, the forced sterilization of women of color on welfare [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg31], hysterical hyperbole about gay male promiscuity by the God Hates Fags set. Terror of penetration by perverts penetrates forbidden parts of the body, infiltrators penetrate forbidden parts of the body, showing a radical potential for subversive desires.

Queer bodies terrify because of their refusal to conform to narratives of appropriate, authorized penetration. Hetero-patriarchal sexual narratives strive to make penetration predictable and unidirectional; queers interpenetrate, destroying the boundaries between self and the other, merging the erotic object and subject, being filled with it and becoming it, showing a radical potential for reciprocity. They’re right to fear and hate us; queer sex declares war on the estration of the body, reclaiming it as terror incognita.

Sounds good, doesn’t it? But wait – hasn’t queer sex been reterritorialized by the apparatuses of state and capital? Is there anything inherently radical about sex between people of similar anatomy? We can fight to make our own bodies into territories, zones of radical potential.
analysis is not the individual human being, but the desire, with humans as the medium.

How can we conceive of desire and selfhood as they relate to consent and political action? The existing consent discourse presupposes static notions of self and desire. It presumes that desire is monolithic, composed of a single thrust rather than multiple pulls in different directions. When we have multiple desires, the desire that garners the plurality in our internal electoral process is assumed to be the only one that counts. Consent discourse presumes that what we want is knowable and can be articulated within the framework of our shared reality.

In reality, the desires we experience are not fixed or unitary. They shift constantly based on our experiences and contexts. They are multiple, contradictory, and divergent, surprising us with their diversity, frustrating us with their mutability. They resist our attempts to confine or domesticate them. They simply can't fit into a two-dimensional binary model of consent, wherein we either want something or we don't. This realization is terrifying, but it opens up new ways of understanding the anarchist project in relation to the consensus reality arrayed against us.

The nature of desire is complex and centrifugal, in contrast to the simplifying and centripetal nature of interests. The traditional approach of the left is for organizers to assist constituencies in winning victories that build power, which will presumably be deployed towards increasingly radical ends. The goals of these victories are generally framed in terms of the interests of the constituency, not their desires. This is a clever trick: as interests appear to be an objective rather than subjective matter, it is easier for an outside managerial class to get away with defining and representing them. Interests can be framed as unitary, coherent, and integrative, whereas desires are multiple, inchoate, contradictory. Identity groups share interests; friends and lovers share desires. Interests are composed of calcified blocks of desire standardized to make sense within consensus reality.

Not only is desire far more complex and unstable than our discourses allow, it's also shaped by the conditions of our misery and exploitation. Even amid contradictions and chaos, the range of what it is possible to desire rarely escapes the confines of consensus reality. Who really imagines that in a free world, we'd dream of ergonomic chairs for our cubicles, more TV channels and brands of detergent, longer chains and softer cages? This is not to demean the struggles of those who fight for better conditions within this system. It's just to say that we would be paltry revolutionaries indeed if we based our programs merely on the consensus desires of groups whose allies we want to be.

The task of the revolutionary is not the task of the ally. We are not here to make the dreams of the proletariat come true. The proletariat is produced by capitalism, which we want to destroy. The task of the revolutionary is to shift our collective sense of the possible, so that our desires and the realities they drive us to create can shift in turn. We are here to transform reality beyond where our notions of consent can lead us. We need a different discourse to imagine the transformations that can open pathways out of consensus reality.

Sociologists studying prison life speak of “situational homosexuality,” explaining previously heterosexual prisoners' homosexual behavior in terms of the conditions of their confinement in a single-sex environment. But isn't all homosexuality, and indeed all hetero- and bi- and other-sexuality, “situational” in the sense of being influenced by the context in which it occurs? Our sexual desires are shaped by the demographics of the places we inhabit, by our early experiences of longing and experimentation, and by the media and education we’re exposed to, among innumerable other “situational” influences. Sociologists see prisoners who have same-sex sex in prison and then return to cross-sex relationships upon release as being “really” straight and only “situationally” queer. Who knows what patterns of desire and sexual expression would emerge if the omnipresent context of hetero-patriarchy, enforced through every carrot and stick known to us, were transformed?

Many people experience their “sexual orientation” as unalterably fixed. Probably we all experience a mixture of seemingly intrinsic inclinations that frame a certain range of possibility and pleasure within which we make choices. But the queer project is not to carve out a space within capitalist hetero-patriarchy where those with unbearably persistent inclinations towards same-sex sexuality can endure them in relative peace. The queer project is to obliterately capitalism and hetero-patriarchy so new forms of desire can emerge. In prison society, our desire, homosexual or not, will always be “situational,” constrained by countless limits. Let’s destroy these constraints, opening the way for desires more powerful and terrible than we can imagine.

Introducing Seduction

There’s another discourse we could try out here, a framework that seems to be implied by our current practice whether or not we wish to acknowledge it. That framework is seduction.

What is seduction? It’s a rather unsavory concept, bringing to mind manipulative attempts to induce others to let themselves be used for one’s own ends. In a sexual context, it can imply either a romantic, charismatic, persuasive use of charm to propose a sexual encounter, or a way to trick someone into succumbing to one’s advances. The connotations are discomfiting, but the salient factor is the implication that the seducer creates a desire, rather than simply unearthing it; she produces an impulse that did not exist before. It is this sense that we find most interesting in considering the problems of desire and consensus reality on the political level.

When we seduce, we present someone who ostensibly doesn't want something with a new situation in which they may want it after all. Whereas consent focuses on obtaining the go-ahead for an external action – “Is this OK?” – seduction focuses internally, on desire: “How could you want this?” Our practices of seduction don’t aim to induce others to do things they don’t want to do, but to induce others to
want to do them, in the most meaningful sense: to want to take on all the risks and pleasures they entail.

Again, we don’t believe that we can persuade everyone to consent to anarchist revolution; not only is the deck stacked against us, the dealer, the table, and the whole house are as well. We don’t buy into the idea that our goals are what everybody “really” wants, nor do we assume that everyone would adopt our views if only they had access to all the right information. We don’t claim to represent anyone beyond ourselves, nor to stand in for any silent majority; in this sense, anarchist revolution is not a democratic project. Nor do we, despairing of those things, decide that to be true to our principles we must give up on anarchist revolution altogether and retreat into isolation among the few comrades with whom we can establish meaningful self-determined consensus. We don’t think it’s hopeless to resist in the face of the stranglehold of consensus reality. We want a different path forward, one that doesn’t assume desire to be fixed, that doesn’t rely on liberal consent.

We neither wish to impose our will on others by force, nor to disregard their desires. Instead, we want to perform a kind of dark magic, an alchemical operation. We can think of these as being produced by the domination of state and capital. But in our strange cruel love for our friends and neighbors, we cannot abandon them to the mediocrity of consensus reality. How can we sleep at night, knowing that their heads resound with capital’s bleak dreams[…]

Queer Peripheries as Territorities

The most politically interesting senses of queer locate it at the antagonistic margins of dominant forces, sexual or otherwise — a periphery that is always shifting in relation to centers of power. In this light, the flight into territory is a queer project.

If this is true, it’s not important for anarchists to be queer, whatever that might mean, so much as it is for us to seek out peripheral positions from which to attack consensus reality, seducing others into these zones of possibility. Fascinating innovations in relationships and sexuality continue to emerge from queer communities because marginality catalyzes creative resistance. Likewise, our political queerness and rejection of respectability afford us a perspective from which we can continue to precipitate ruptures in the ruling social order.

In that spirit, our prime advantage as anarchists lies not in the coherence and reason of our ideology, but in the passionate actions we undertake and the ungovernable people we lead. Let’s not try to convert people to anarchism; let’s set out, with mischievous glee, to infect everyone around us with the anarchy that flows in our veins. Let’s produce situations in which anarchy is possible – even likely – even desirable to those who might not feel any inclination towards it today. Of course, this is a violation of liberal consent: the right to be left alone to one’s desires as they have been produced by the domination of state and capital. But in our strange cruel love for our friends and neighbors, we cannot abandon them to the mediocrity of consensus reality. How can we sleep at night, knowing that their heads resound with capital’s bleak dreams[…]

【ed. – From a statement by Turkish comrades of the infiAl collective, after stalling a militarised police raid. Anarchists around this time also clashed with riot police who were attacking the LGBTI+ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and more] Pride ‘demonstration (which had been banned by the city governor), pelting them with bottles and having rubber bullets shot back in response. Police blockaded about 20 demonstrators into Taksim Square, then allowed fascist groups in to assault them.]】

20.6.2016. Last night around 23:30, the anarchist space infiAl in Istanbul was raided for the second time by cops going out for a LGBTI+ hunt targeting the 24 Pride Week events and using completely made up scenarios of someone having notified the police with suspicions.

The cops, who are leading a violent campaign targeting Pride Week and TransPride and teaming up with fascists to take over streets and even spaces, have come with 2 Scorpion-type [armoured] vehicles and around 20 plain clothes officers to intimidate and threaten those planning to join the ‘Self-Defence Against Homo/Transphobic Attacks’ workshop on 20.6.2016 at infiAl. They had come with the intention of searching the space but had to retreat to doing a GBT control because of the reaction they got.

This fascist mentality, that has been patrolling the streets for months and harassing everyone, looking for the first opportunity to criminalise the space and those around it, showing cheap and ungrounded allegations as reasons for their raids, seeing the right to self-defence as a potential threat while we witness trans murders every day in these cities, is obviously not going to surprise us [ed. – an Islamist paper headline ‘Anarchists prepare for civil war’ preceded a second police raid over the workshops four months later; three comrades face terror charges].

However, infiAl for us is just a ‘space’; today in Tarlabası [in Beyoğlu district] and somewhere else tomorrow, it is not the whole but just a part of the anarchist struggle and social revolution. That is why we support many of cities but in all localities. Be it a squat, social center or any other format, we stand in solidarity with everyone who tries to raise the anarchist fight and will do all we can to realize such organisations.

1. ed. – Arthur Evans noted that Roman Catholicism had ‘no monopoly on the terrors’ unleashed during the 12th-13th Century global Inquisition against ‘heresy’ and dissent. ‘Some of the worst atrocities were perpetrated by the Protestants, who introduced the Inquisition to countries that had been lenient. John Calvin hunted down his religious enemies, as well as witches. He once boasted of luring the Unitarian Michael Servetus to Geneva under the guise of safety and then having him burned alive as a heretic. Al Goa, the most trivial offenses were also suppressed: dancing was illegal; a group of bridesmaids were once arrested for decorating a bride with too much color; a child was beheaded for striking its father.” “What the Puritans and Calvinists achieved at the Reformation was the re-establishment of the depressive, guilt-ridden attitude as the whole source of religion” [G. Ratnay Taylor].

2. Joseph Conrad’s novella Heart of Darkness personifies the European colonial project in the deprivy ivory trader Kurz.

3. Wait, there’s nothing liberating about attempting to induce desires in others. That’s the function of the advertising industry, the lever of demand that has driven capitalism over the past century. Democracy purports to be a marketplace of ideas where we can all talk about what we want, and that different configurations of desire are constantly at war. Ad firms don’t just create specific desires, they enforce a mode of desiring that can be routed through the consumer economy. Propaganda, subliminal messaging, induced addiction, outright violence: these comprise a brutal arsenal aimed at us every moment of the day. Around the globe, the military clears the path for neoliberal pillaging, while NGOs get into the business of inducing people to want to be successful at generating currencies that can be exchanged on the global market. Ought we not be suspicious of a project framed in such transparently manipulative terms? As grim as it looks, this vista reveals that if we are not partisans of certain modes of desiring, we will remain objects rather than subjects within these desiring wars. We cannot retreat into essentialist notions of unearthing our “true” desires from some internal vault, nor a Buddhist project of extinguishing desire on an individual level while the world burns. What sets us apart is that we strive to create a world in which every person can realize her or his unique potential on her own terms, rather than simply pushing for this or that option within the current conditions.
ON THE CATASTROPHE OF THE SALMON FARMS AND MARITIME DEVASTATION

[ed. – This article is regarding the context which framed a wave of disorder around Chile during May 2016, starting with over 2,000 striking fishers on the Pacific island of Chiloé – joined by indigenous Mapuche (see Return Fire vol.3 pg59) living on the island – barricading access roads after a government ban on collecting or selling seafood. This is due to a large die-off along Chile’s coast, with many creatures washing up on the beaches since 2015 and a ‘Red Tide’ toxic algae bloom. People point the finger at the State-supported salmon farming industry and its toxins; towards the end of April, the President declared the coastal area of Los Lagos a disaster area (bringing it under the authority of the National Defense who can take command of the Armed Forces in that area, set up checkpoints and monitor transit into and out of the affected zone, sort out collection, storage and distribution of food items and give instructions to local officials). Many people nevertheless took to the streets, blocking main highways and roads in Valparaíso, Santiago, Concepción, Temuco, Valdivia, and Osorno. In Puerto Montt, over 10,000 people rioted, destroying government buildings and banks, and battling police by using molotovs well into the night. According to one researcher, the effects of the ocean contamination will be long-lasting and severe. “The salmon industry in five years has increased its production by 15 times within the Chiloé sea… they paved the sea with nutrients, [and the algae proliferated…] [We have an active red tide and a latent red tide being deposited in the sediment around the sea inside the Lakes Region and therefore this will never end; the red tide will never leave the sea of Chiloé, because when these conditions are met, cysts will appear and you’ll have red tide again…” A month later, a state-of-emergency was also declared along the Treasure Coast of Florida, U.S.A., after an “unprecedented” algae outbreak swamped miles of waterways and beaches with toxins noted to harm seagrasses, turtles, humans and other mammals. Fire to those who toxify our surroundings!]

“Ecosystems will mutate rapidly and radically thanks to human stupidity, expressed in buckets of genetic manipulation. Once a new agent or gene is released on an ecosystem, it cannot recuperate itself: the ecosystem mutates. The number of variables is infinite, impossible to predict, impossible to regulate and there is no turning back: once an ecosystem is modified it cannot go back to what it was. One mistake kills hundreds of species, and mutates many others…. And human beings do not live beyond the ecosystem.” Anti-Civilization Manifesto

“The last few catastrophes were not caused by ‘nature’, they were caused by Capitalist configuration of the space affected.” 8 Critical Hypothesis on the Latest Ecological Catastrophes in Chile

Devastation and extraction have reached disproportionable levels of death and toxicity. The true and only face of Capital, the State, and their technocrats demonstrate the misery of their path of destruction.

The exploitation of nature has always been a necessary condition for the accumulation of Capital and Power. All societal machinery (understood as a hierarchical relationship as a fundamental principle) functions through the exploitation of the earth, the sea, living beings and all which can be considered part of enriching its merchandise. The use of fossil fuels are an example of this, carbon emissions and whatever else allows them to make more weapons for their wars and generate new forms of control. This is not chauvinism speaking; it is the crude reality of a tentacled monster!

In recent time, we have bourne witness to the arrogance of the salmon farms, the State, their authorities that endorse these farms, and their technocrats that sicken us with their justifications. These companies glorify themselves by claiming they provide jobs, doing nothing else than impose capitalist ways of life in areas where people still manage to live differently. It is here where they have left death in their path, where they install their machinery and cause social disaster in communities both in material dispossession, as well as with the natural surroundings.

The same company (Marine Harvest) that introduced the salmon virus in so-called Chilean territory, now uses 5 times as many chemicals in the water than they did two years ago. The salmon are in a situation of enclosure and holocaust, introduced as objects in disgusting cages to the taste of citizens hungry for consumption. The salmon industry had been affected by “sea fleas,” bacteria, and viral sickness in situations of environmental collapse the Patagonian sea could not detain. The face of this agony is seen today in the Regions of Los Lagos and Aysén, with thousands of rotting salmon reaching the shores of the austral region after having been killed by the algae bloom by the very industry and services supported by the State.

It isn’t a climate phenomenon which unleashed the Red Tide that caused the disaster. It isn’t just rising sea temperatures, the lack of winds, the high solar radiation. But mainly, it is also the eutrophication of the ocean from the stellar enrichment of nutrients generated by the Salmon farming industry, from companies such as SERNAPECA and SUBPESCA in the Patagonian ocean, supported by the State, hiding behind the broader issue of climate change. The eutrophication of the ocean not only reflects the appearance of the “Red Tide” or algae blooms, but also the anaerobic (or suffocating) conditions in the ocean, due to the amount of organic material (or carbon) within the water that surpasses the capacity of the ecosystem to absorb, recycle or dispense of waste. An anaerobic condition is a situation in which aquatic life cannot survive, due to the low levels of oxygen dissolved in the water or sediment. The Salmon farming industry supports this condition perpetually, since every kilogram of salmon feed placed in the ocean is equal in nitrogen to the sewage waste of 15 people.

Currently, there are 32 million kilograms of dead salmon because of the virus of capital, which were left in the sea, destroying everything in its path, generating a collapse of maritime species, as well as the social collapse of adjacent communities in all aspects. The death of these salmon allowed for the appearance of the Red Tide, which resulted in an organic mass that began emitting sulfuric acid that is highly contaminating and quite dangerous. The venom of Capital becomes concrete.

These events demonstrate that the State along with the mega salmon farming industry, continue to use the ocean as an industrial wasteland, with the objective of lessening the financial costs of the corporate elite. These companies continue to pass on the costs of sanitary crisis to the marine environment, surrounding habitats and communities. The role of these technocratic State institutions, such as the Institute for Fishing Promotion (IFOP),
have pointed out these catastrophes as having developed through “natural causes.” These include the growth of deadly algae in Cochamó and Reloncavi, the massive death of 10,000 sardines, anchovies, and smelts in the fishing town of Quellón, the mass sickness of crustaceans in Cucao and Quetalmahue, and the massive Red Tide along the north shore of Aysén towards the Mansa Bay in Osorno. We should also add the mass sickness and death of 300 Sei whales on the coastline of Aysén, due to the consumption of toxic algae among other causes.

Capital in its most concrete manifestation is toxic (in what it carries). The only problem of this catastrophe and all others is that of CAPITAL, its imposed way of life, the devastation and exploitation of habitats, their surroundings, human beings and all other living beings. This machinery cannot live without the State, which supports it through its laws and its repression. Law and Power that simply reproduces itself.

Unto all of this, mobilizations throughout the entire southern region have developed, which have included fishermen, indigenous communities, and people in discontent. The point is to understand that the enemy of life are the usual culprits: The State, Capitalism, the authorities, the technocrats, those that impose a way of life. Only decentralized anarchic positions can negate all of these forms of power in practice. It is important to agitate and radicalize on the issues that matter most. We must deepen our analysis, which is not just an issue of mere bureaucracy. It is the inherent toxicity and devastation of Capital and the State that has caused a disaster wherever it has been imposed.

Individuals and collectives must continue to agitate and move with our anti-authoritarian principles unto a new attack from Capital. We must struggle against all toxicity that seeks to turn the territory into Capital. These extraction industries, whether in mining, forestry, fishery or salmon all cause the same harm. They destroy the territory, they destroy the environment, they impoverish and sicken communities!

The State and Capital are death, are imposed!

To agitate towards insurrection and disobedience against the same old culprits!

Where their power, their death machinery and their ideology does not live is where Anarchy lives!

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A month has passed since the attack against the antenna of Zürich-Waidberg, a month of suspicious silence from the side of the media and the authorities. Only last week the first details started came to light, and we have learned from the media that the attacked antenna was no less than the emergency radio system of the Zürich police, supposed to be a back up in case the normal radio system isn’t functioning. A fire destroyed the cables at the basis of this antenna, causing hundreds of thousands of francs damage, and putting the antenna out of service “for several days”. We also learned that an international warrant has been issued against the comrade the cops are looking for.

In light of these new details, the silence that followed this sabotage isn’t surprising to us; because what has been touched by this attack is a raw nerve that has embarrassed the entire police forces of Zürich, showing their vulnerability. What could have happened if at that moment, for one reason or another, there had been a breakdown of the radio system of the cops? Without the use of the radio to communicate, transmit orders and information, the Zürich police would probably have been seriously limited in its capacity to coordinate and react, creating a favourable situation for anyone who has some scores to settle with this society. But let’s go a step further. And what if such a sabotage would have taken place during moments of social tension; for example during the riots in Bellevue[1] a few years ago, or the ones in the Europa-Allee[2]? When the defenders of order are not able to coordinate, they would have faced serious trouble to retake control of the situation and guarantee a return to normality. These riots, instead of brief riots of some hours, could maybe have had enough oxygen to spread in space and time. Even their characteristics could have transformed into something different: by creating a cartography difficult to control for the authorities because of their incapacity to coordinate, they could have opened up new spaces of thought: Europa-Allee, and then? What do we want? How do we want to live? Questions that would have got practical and immediate answers on the spot. The problem of gentrification for example is linked to the problem of wealth, of those who have and those who have not, and without the protection of the police forces, expropriation by those who have not could have been an answer. The revolt could even have gone beyond the single issue of gentrification, putting into question private property, and therefore one of the roots of the society of authority.

Facing the injustice and the abuse of this society, we feel often impotent. In the end, transforming society is an almost impossible objective; so what can a single person do about it then? Without giving it much thought, we surrender ourselves to traditions, rituals, collective identities and repetitions of acts simply because it is what has always been done. The quantity of people in the streets, of the provoked damage and of the injured cops become parameters of success or not for a demonstration. We do not want to admit that only measuring the quantitative side isn’t anything else than an illusion we create for ourselves in order to keep on repeating the same rituals. The logics of “ten today, hundred tomorrow” prevents us from looking beyond
our own nose, to see that something else can be done, that even a small act can more drastically change a situation than permanent repetitions of "recipes which proved themselves". We think it is necessary to develop the capacity to look beyond all these rituals and convenient habits which are atrophying our capacity of imagination, so as to find other ways of acting.

The silence that followed this attack has therefore been the fig leaf that tried to cover up a simple truth: the superiority in numbers and weaponry do not count a lot when facing human intelligence and ingenuity. A bunch of cables put on fire at the right moment and in the right spot by a singular person has the strength of taking a whole army apart, of transforming a situation that might seem static into something new, different and unforeseeable. Now, if one thinks about the fact that society as a whole can only function thanks to the presence of infrastructures that allow the circulation of flows, transformations, electricity, commodities, persons... about the fact that these infrastructures are present everywhere in the physical space, a whole world of possibilities to act and interact opens up in front of our eyes.

These last months, we have seen how a small fire on the right spot can also paralyze “half of Switzerland”[1], how the burned cables of an antenna can also put part of the communication systems of the police out of functioning: what could have happened if these sabotages would have taken place on particular moments and interacting with other events?

State, economy and authority are not at all abstract and untouchable, it is enough to find weak spots, it is enough to have a little bit of spirit and imagination. For those who know where to look, the emperor is naked... and vulnerable. We wish the comrade who is on the run good luck, wherever he might be.

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1. ed. – 2009 World Trade Organisation summit in Geneva, where demonstrators burned cars, three molotovs at cops, attacked bank, jewelry shop and hotel targets, and looted stores.
2. ed. – At a 2014 ‘Reclaim the Streets’ party, all shop windows in this Zürich zone were destroyed, with around 1 million CHF damages. Police were taken by surprise, several injured, and even had equipment stolen from them.
3. ed. – July 7th, twin blazes ravaged the cabling of the Zürich railway security system, causing immediate halt to all traffic on the lines for hours.

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**“ANOTHER FIGURE OF THE MIGRANT”**

[ed. – This interesting interview was conducted by the journal Hostis, Thomas Nail is the author of The Figure of the Migrant, a 2015 book. While we may disagree that there is any one universal “place to start” in the sense he mentions (i.e. that of building so-called ‘counter-power’), we agree that attention to migrant strategies (past and present) could yield important insights/tactics for rebels.]

**Hostis:** One may see the aims of Hostis and feel a tinge of moral discomfort when it begins to ask questions regarding the status of migrants, of refugees, and of exiles[2], if only for the very reason that there remains some commitment on our part to the idea that to be content with a politics of recognition and a strategy of representation perpetuates the illusion of emancipation when all that can be achieved is Statist inclusion. In other words, once recognition as political strategy is exhausted, the very people who are indexed by this representation are left wanting. In this same vein, then, we might say that the question of representation, recognition, and the figure of the migrant forces us to go one step further – to say that “the real content of the demand ‘citizenship papers for all!’ could also be formulated as: everyone must have citizenship papers so that we can all burn them.”[3] How does your concept of “migrant cosmopolitanism” deal with the potential merits and many shortcomings of this exhaustive and truncated application of Statist inclusion?

**Thomas Nail:** Historically, there have been numerous figures of the migrant. For example, the nomad, the barbarian, the vagabond, and the proletariat are four major kinds of migratory figures. For me, the figure of the migrant is not a class or identity; it is a vector (a position in motion). As such, anyone can move into and out of it as territorial, political, juridical, and economic factors change. This position is one defined by the primacy of movement and can be formulated in the following way: the figure of the migrant is the political figure who is socially expelled or dispossessed as a result, or as the cause, of their mobility. The migrant is the collective name for all the political figures in history who have been territorially, politically, juridically, and economically displaced as a condition of the social expansion of power.

Migrants are the true movers of history and political transformation, but this does not mean their movements are immune from cooption by states, capital, or other forms of expulsion. In fact, it is their captured motion that is the very condition of social power in the first place (slavery, serfdom, waged labor, and so on). In this sense I think it is too simplistic to say that all of their movements are either antisate or reformist, in part because the difference between reformist acts and revolutionary acts is not an essential or formal one, it is a contingent and material one. An act is revolutionary when it results in revolution. Burning passports may or may not be revolutionary; it depends on the collective effects.

However, what is interesting to me about the figure of the migrant is that it has produced some pretty incredible collective effects that are completely outside territorial, statist, juridical, and capitalist circuits of social motion (slave and maroon societies, vagabond collectives, workers communes, and so on). If we want to think seriously about the possibilities of some kind of social organization distinct from the reactionary forces of territorial nation-states and capitalism, then we should start with those historically invented by migrants. Cosmopolitanism is the name often taken by the reactionary forces of states toward “including” migrants. This is not the worst thing that could happen, but it also does not accurately describe the tendency of what I am calling “migrant cosmopolitanism” to create nonexpulsive social structures outside such structures of representation.

H: Do you see “migrant cosmopolitanism” as something distinct from more reformist and liberal notions of seeking the inclusion of, and the granting of rights to undocumented persons? The occupation of the Saint Bernard church[3], which you have thought a lot about and which lasted from June 28 to August 23, 1996, strikes one as being something more than a politics of recognition. You also mention the No One Is Illegal migrant justice group based in Toronto as embodying the subversive and more radical aspects of the struggles around immigration, political refugees, and exiles. Obviously the tenacity of these struggles came from their
level of self-organization and their ability to gain various forms of popular support, both materially and symbolically. What is it about these examples of migrant struggles that point beyond the shortcomings of a type of liberal approach to piecemeal reformism?

TN: What is so exciting to me about these movements is that they are not just asking for rights, they are demanding the abolition of citizenship altogether in a very specific way: by creating autonomous communities open to anyone regardless of their status. The slogan “Status for All” can be interpreted in two ways: “Everyone who lives here should have legal status within the jurisdictional state” or “If everyone has status, no one has status.” The latter is consistent with No One is Illegal’s demand for the abolition of nation-states and borders. Universal status undermines the territorial and national aspects of the state, and therefore undermines the state tout court. I have written elsewhere about the details of their Solidarity City campaign in Toronto. The aim of this campaign is to bypass the state altogether and organize migrants, social service providers, and allies into mutually supportive relations, regardless of status. Another example I have written about in Returning to Revolution is the Zapatistas. The Zapatistas are indigenous people in Mexico expelled from their land. As migrants in their own country, they have decided to not simply demand rights from the state or migrate to the United States, but to build autonomous communes with their own nonexpulsive social structure.

H: Between 2008-2010 there was some publicity around the notion of migrant struggles taking up the idea of “demanding the right to stay home.” This idea of trying to force a situation on the State where migrants don’t have to leave, don’t have to live the vicissitudes of migration itself also strikes us as something of interest, primarily for two reasons. First, the demand is situated in terms of an initial refusal to migrate, the demand to not be forced to live the life and fate of migrants moving from the global south to the global north; and second, because this initial refusal also refutes what capitalism has increasingly gained ahold of, namely, public imagination and a people’s way of investing in and/or desiring a certain future. As Guattari said, “In my view, this huge factory, this mighty capitalistic machine also produces what happens to us when we dream, when we daydream, when we fantasize, when we fall in love, and so on.”

So this initial refusal of being forced into the life of a migrant also acts as a refusal of investing in a future that coincides with whatever capitalism codes and reformulates as a desirable life for everyone – moving to a Western country, living a suburban lifestyle, replicating the heteronormative narratives found in Hollywood/Blockbuster cinema in one’s own personal life, or what have you. Simply put, this “demand for the right to stay home” fights at the level of “forms-of-life,” and not simply at the level of Statist recognition of certain rights. What, if anything, has your work on these issues helped you clarify for yourself and others regarding this difference between struggling for State inclusion versus struggling for a ‘form-of-life’? Or do you perhaps find this distinction unhelpful, outdated, conceptually ineffective, and so on?

TN: This is a great example and I deal with it at more length in The Figure of the Migrant. But in short, let me make two points. First, the “right to stay home” is a migrant movement and not the rejection of migration. Most folks involved in this movement are people who have already been expelled from their homes at one point or another. “The right to stay home” could just as easily be called “the right to return home” since most are already migrants. Take for example the millions of Mexican migrants in the United States who would much rather be back home in Mexico with their families. Or think of the millions of indigenous people around the world who are being expelled from their land by the capitalist accumulation of agricultural land. Even if they are not yet territorially expelled, they are already juridically, politically, and economically expelled from their social status in order to facilitate their geographical displacement. Even if some people are allowed to stay, what does this mean if everything around them has been destroyed by mining companies, monocrop farms, hydroelectric dams, and so on. One can become a migrant even if it is only the environment that changes.

Second, the idea of a migrant social movement around the right to stay or return home is a very old one. This strategy was the invention of the ancient figure of the migrant: the barbarian. The ancient world (Sumer, Greece, Egypt, Rome) is absolutely filled with slave revolts...
by captured barbarians, only a fraction of which were recorded in any detail, unfortunately. The primary demand of almost all of these revolts was the same: to return home or find a new home. In fact, this is the etymological meaning of the world “revolt” in the context of mass slavery: to return home. There is a fascinating reason why this becomes the dominant form of counterpower in the ancient world. For me this is less an issue of “form-of-life” than the “form-of-motion” proper to the migrant.

H: In Means Without End, [Giorgio] Agamben presents the refugee as a figure of the threshold. Agamben’s other chosen figures are quite tragic, the most famous being Bartleby and the muselmann of the camp. This is all to say that theoretical takes of the refugee routinely associate them with the power of incapacity. We’re curious about why popular media seems all too ready to also characterize them in this way. Most high-profile news events, such as the recent migrant boat disasters in the Mediterranean, depict them as helpless. What is the form of power you find most useful in your analysis?

TN: Ah, yes. Agamben has this great line in his essay “Beyond Human Rights” that is very inspiring to me. He says, “It is even possible that, if we want to be equal to the absolutely new tasks ahead, we will have to abandon decidedly, without reservation, the fundamental concepts through which we have so far represented the subjects of the political (Man, the Citizen and its rights, but also the sovereign people, the worker, and so forth) and build our political philosophy anew starting from the one and only figure of the refugee.” It’s too bad he never followed up on this claim. I agree with the spirit of his point but I disagree never followed up on this claim. I agree with the spirit of his point but I disagree.

H: We are quite inspired by migrants’ penchant for burning down the detention centers in which they are held captive. High-profile events include riots where inmates have taken over or destroyed large parts of facilities, as in Texas, Australia, and across the EU. Most political commentators have nothing positive to say about these events, though sometimes a litany of abusive practices come to light. Hostis is happy to celebrate these moments as a collective demonstration of the anarchist principle “destroy what destroys you.” What do you see in this insistent desire to rebel?

TN: This brings us to another figure of the migrant: the vagabond. The masterless men and women of the Middle Ages (serfs, peasants, beggars, witches, rogues, and so on) significantly developed the migrant art of rebellion in its strictly etymological sense: turning back in direct violence. Since barbarians are kidnapped from their home, their counterpower is related to their desire to return home. All violence is a means to the ends of escape. While barbarian slaves could potentially escape the limits of their empires, by the Middle Ages there were fewer and fewer places left to flee outside the jurisdiction of some lord or another. Thus, vagabonds increasingly began to directly confront authority from within, by rebelling. This is not to say that there were not also raids or revolts of some kind, or that direct violence was missing from raids and revolts in previous ages, but simply that during the Middle Ages the primary goal of most migrant counterpower was less about supplies (raiding) or radical escape (revolt) than about direct assassination, political murder, burning, revenge, and desecration from within society without the goal of leaving it. Today the figure of the vagabond persists in migrant attacks on detention centers, the burning of passports, squatting, theft of electricity, property destruction, violent battles with police, and so on.

H: To hazard a deceptively straightforward postcolonial question: what does the migrant tell us about ourselves?

TN: Well, for one, we are all becoming migrants.1 People today relocate to greater distances more frequently than ever before in human history. While many people may not move across a regional or international border, they tend to change jobs more often, commute longer and farther to work, change their residence repeatedly, and tour internationally more often. Some of these phenomena are directly related to recent events, such as the impoverishment of middle classes in certain rich countries after the financial crisis of 2008, subsequent austerity cuts to social welfare programs, and rising unemployment. The subprime mortgage crisis led to the expulsion of millions of people from their homes worldwide, 9 million in the United States alone. Foreign investors and governments have acquired 540 million acres since 2006, resulting in the eviction of millions of small farmers in poor countries; and mining practices have become increasingly destructive around the world, including hydraulic fracturing [ed. – see Special Hydraulic Fracture] and tar sands.2 This general increase in human mobility and expulsion is now widely recognized as a defining feature of the twenty-first century.3 A specter haunts the world and it is the specter of migration.4


H: In A Profound Dis-ease, Antonio Negri is asymmetrical. How does that mean all refugees are helpless?

TN: My point is simply that the political figure of the refugee has a long genealogy that is still active today and tends to imply in its genealogy someone who is simply looking for a new master, a new nation-state, church, or refuge. Nation-states prefer dealing with this figure and would like to keep this historical meaning. Compare this to the refugee’s historical twin, the barbarian! The barbarian is wild, chaotic, destructive, mobile, active, powerful, and so on: the destroyer of civilization. Historically, the barbarian is to be feared and the refugee is to be pitied by the gods. On this point I am against Agamben and on the side of Nietzsche [ed. – see Means Without End].

H: In his essay “Beyond Human Rights” that is almost all of these revolts was the same: to return home. All violence is a means to the ends of escape. While barbarian slaves could potentially escape the limits of their empires, by the Middle Ages there were fewer and fewer places left to flee outside the jurisdiction of some lord or another. Thus, vagabonds increasingly began to directly confront authority from within, by rebelling. This is not to say that there were not also raids or revolts of some kind, or that direct violence was missing from raids and revolts in previous ages, but simply that during the Middle Ages the primary goal of most migrant counterpower was less about supplies (raiding) or radical escape (revolt) than about direct assassination, political murder, burning, revenge, and desecration from within society without the goal of leaving it. Today the figure of the vagabond persists in migrant attacks on detention centers, the burning of passports, squatting, theft of electricity, property destruction, violent battles with police, and so on.

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Multiple structures burnt down by inmates at Villawood detention centre, Sydney, Australia, 20.04.11
Justice Organizing,” Upping the Anti no. 11
5. ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg41
6. Félix Guattari, Molecular Revolutions in Brazil
7. ed. – “Bakunin’s [ed. – see To Love the Inhuman] appeals to the ‘unleashing of the wicked passions’ of the oppressed and exploited were seen by many of the more reasonable revolutionaries of the time as a barbaric call for the destruction of civilization. And Bakunin himself did call for ‘the annihilation of bourgeois civilization’ along with ‘the destruction of all States’ and the ‘free and spontaneous organization from below upward, by means of free associations’.

But Bakunin’s French contemporary, Ernest Coerderoy, was less conditional in his rejection of civilization [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg52]. As he, along with [Joseph] Dejacque and other anarchist revolutionaries of that time, appeals to the barbaric spirit of destruction…” (The Rising of the Barbarians).

8. With the rise of home foreclosure and unemployment people today are beginning to have much more in common with migrants than with certain notions of citizenship (grounded in certain social, legal, and political rights).

9. ed. – The tar sands deposit in Athabasca, Canada, is the largest known reservoir of crude bitumen in the world, underneather boreal forest and peat bogs, and needs intensive processing to produce fuel, and so one of the highest-carbon oils. The enterprise to extract it was described in the commune for a May 2010 firebombing by ‘Fighting for Freedom Coalition’, that destroyed a branch of its major financier Royal Bank of Canada in an Ottawa shopping district, as “one of the largest industrial projects in human history and perhaps the most destructive[…] cause of the second fastest rate of deforestation on the planet, [and] slated to expand several times its current size.” (Roger Clement, 58 at the time, was sentenced to three and a half years for this attack, including six months for also smashing windows and ATMs at a different RBC branch, and refused to apologise in court.)

10. I use the word “expulsion” here in the same sense in which Saskia Sassen uses it to indicate a general dispossession or deprivation of social status.

11. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire

“In Brenner” hundreds of anarchists, anti-racists and people angry at this world clash with the police for hours. It was a demo deliberately made to cause clashes, the press say, and yes, it was so, because there’s always a good reason to clash with the cops and one more if they threaten to close yet another border. To erect walls on imaginary lines decided by the states and the authority in order to put us in a cage of rules, labels, documents. A CIE (prison for people without documents) in Bari [Italy] is thrown into turmoil by the prisoners while outside people in solidarity are encouraging the revolt: some fresh air at last! In July cops murder a twenty-three-year-old banlieu [suburban estate ghettos] boy in a Paris police station. A week of street clashes, fires and anger against the cops follows. The same anger against the State’s assassins that the Afro-American community has unleashed in the streets following the umpteenth murders of black boys by white cops in the USA (Dallas, Baltimore [ed. – see Authorities Finally Confirm Stingray (LMSI) Use in Prison Island – in Scottish Prisons]). Even Nobel peace prize winner Barack Obama has talked of ‘racial war’. Yes, and not only: class war. The hit men paid by the white rich killing the black poor. All these images—these pictures one has in one’s head because the TV, social networks, newspapers and YouTube must reproduce and spread everything making a spectacle of all the events and saying nothing of the reasons (or lying, manipulating them) - might be just images. Just more pictures to be shown off amidst the ever present indifference. Otherwise there’s anger and the impossibility to stay put. This world is a prison, these lives of ours are half-survival. All the information and counter-information of the globe serve nothing if those who receive them don’t have the impulse to act in order to change what they think unacceptable. […] Each one according to their attitudes, ends and consciences, but to act because the life that capitalism often makes us curse can be beautiful. [When as revolutionaries we feel we are ever more surrounded by increasingly hostile contexts and subjects (from the disgusting average citizen to the prosecutor passing through the militant fascist), it is necessary for us who are writing to reinforce relations of solidarity and complicity, forge new ones, give ourselves time to meet up: give ourselves chances. To create spaces and times free from cops, money, hierarchies, social roles, so as we get to know one another as individuals and understand our desires, tensions of attack against the system. The present time is swirling like a seemingly untouchable giant, a fury and a one-way direction against which it seems impossible to act: it’s always us who decide the threshold of possibility, taking good care not to confound the risk of repression with objective impossibility.”

1. ed. – At the Italian border 07.05.16, after the Austrian State had announced its closure and sent troops.
that invasive species are more an indicator of a crisis in a particular environment and not the cause. The main culprit in most cases in the phenomenon of species invasion is [ed. -- civilised] human intervention and the destruction of habitat. Indeed, some writers would consider invasives to be a sort of bandage that nature puts over one of its wounds to heal various ecosystems and prepare the way for life to continue after environmental disruption. It is my contention that invasive species represent the failure of humanity to control its own environment, a failure that will only get worse as climate change and environmental degradation continue to change life on Earth as we know it.

The Official Story
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines invasive species in the following passage: "Invasive species means an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. Invasive species are one of the largest threats to our terrestrial, coastal and freshwater ecosystems, as well as being a major global concern."

A book geared toward children, Plants Out of Place by Courtney Farrell, states the following concerning invasives and their harmful effects on environments: "Invasive plants compete with native plants in many ways. Some invasive plants create a lot of shade. Without sunlight, certain types of native plants die. A few invasive plants even make toxins in their leaves. The toxins poison the soil so other plants cannot live there. After a while, some native plants completely die out."

How to Eradicate Invasive Plants by Teri Dunn Chace is a book geared toward gardeners in particular and states the following concerning the persistence of invasive plants in urban and suburban gardens: “You may have heard the famous Ralph Waldo Emerson quote to the effect that, ‘a weed is a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.’ A pretty thought, Ralph, but you did not get out in the mud and pastures much, or live in the times in which we now live. Some people might argue that a weed is a plant with no virtues.”

One of the key contemporary figures in the biology of invasives is Dr. Daniel Simberloff, the Gore Hunger Professor of Environmental Science at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN. His most recent book for the consumption of policy makers and laymen [sic] is entitled, Invasive Species: What Everyone Needs to Know, published by Oxford University Press in 2013. In this work, Simberloff seeks to give a broad overview concerning important elements of invasive biology and particularly its effects on human society and development. Simberloff is a major exponent of the “orthodox” biological view that invasive species have an overall negative impact on humans and nature, and he goes over the history of control and eradication of these species.

For example, Simberloff states that invasives can alter entire landscapes permanently and for the worse if not dealt with by conscientious human intervention. For example, he writes: “Because so many species are closely tied to particular habitats, impacts that greatly change the habitat can ripple through an entire community. For example, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the northeastern North American coast was composed of extensive mud flats and salt marshes. Nowadays, it is usually characterized by rocky beaches. This dramatic change is all due to the European common periwinkle snail... introduced (probably for food) to Nova Scotia around 1840. It slowly spread southward, eating algae on rocks and also root stocks of marsh grasses and transforming vegetated coasts into barren rocky shores. Thus, the periwinkle has modified the entire physical structure of the intertidal zone, and in the process has affected many other species. It displaces native snails, and prevents barnacle larvae and young seaweeds from settling, and marshland birds move away.”

European Common Periwinkle
This is not the only case of an invasive species drastically altering a regional environment. Charles Mann, in his book,
Simberloff offers the following example of an ecosystem that has already been invaded. Relationships can lead to trophic cascades, unexpected changes in predator/prey other native living things. For example, of place,” for the benefit of humans and eliminate elements of nature that are “out to and including outright eradication, to of human activity. Nevertheless, they still do not have natural predators. Similarly on island environments in particular, such creatures as European house cats, rabbits, and feral pigs can devastate animal and plant populations due to their taking advantage of novel conditions where they are considered neither prey nor predator by native species. This does not include invasive plants, such as Japanese kudzu, that can crowd out native vegetation and alter the appearance of entire landscapes. Many species today, Simberloff states, “on continents as well as islands, are dwindling toward extinction, even if the final death throws will be centuries from now. The decline of a substantial fraction of those is due wholly or partly to introduced species.”

Simberloff and other scientists working in invasive biology readily admit that invasive species are almost exclusively the product of human activity. Nevertheless, they advocate for even more human activity, up to and including outright eradication, to eliminate elements of nature that are “out of place,” for the benefit of humans and other native living things. For example, unexpected changes in predator/prey relationships can lead to trophic cascades, introducing further imbalances in an ecosystem that has already been invaded. Simberloff offers the following example of this phenomenon in his book: An interesting trophic cascade occurred on subantarctic Macquarie Island, a World Heritage site discovered in 1810. This case demonstrates how indirect effects such as trophic cascades can lead to unintended harmful consequences. Sailors introduced cats to control rats and mice that they had inadvertently introduced and that threatened their food stores. In 1878, sealing gangs introduced rabbits as a local food source. The rabbits thrived and also proved to be a common prey item for the cats. The rabbits caused enormous damage to the vegetation, so the rabbit myxoma virus was introduced in 1968. Rabbit numbers quickly plummeted, and vegetation began to recover. However, the cats then turned to native ground-nesting birds as alternative prey, spurring a cat eradication program initiated in 1985. All cats were eliminated by 2000, but then the rabbit population exploded and again devastated the vegetation. Thus, through a trophic cascade, introduction then elimination of cats led to a decline in vegetation.

Thus, invasive biological orthodoxies dictate that there is an equilibrium within a given ecosystem that existed prior to human intervention. Should this equilibrium be thrown off for some reason, it is the human obligation to try to restore it, either by quarantine of the invasive, introducing predator species to reduce the number of the invader species, or outright eradication by chemical or other means. In spite of the setbacks that may present themselves like the trophic cascade scenario mentioned above, scientists working on invasives usually recommend vigorous intervention as soon as possible to root out these plants or animals before they become too much of a problem. Indeed, even where invasives appear to be relatively harmless or even beneficial, they counsel that the harmful effects of these species will sometimes only manifest themselves decades after initial introduction. It is better, so the reasoning goes, to be safe than sorry.

Invasive Biology Revisionism

In the past few years, many scientists and writers have come to question the premises behind this zero-tolerance attitude towards invasives. Dr. Ken Thompson is a Professor in the Department of Animal and Plant Sciences in the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom and author of the 2014 book, Where Do Camels Belong? The Story and Science of Invasive Species. In this book, Thompson like Simberloff endeavors to provide a comprehensive introduction to the topic of invasives, but this time from the view that they are not as harmful as most scientists to this point have stated. Thompson tells the story of Charles Elton, one of the early pioneers in the study of invasive species, and his rather problematic attitudes toward “invaders” that were a product of having lived through the tumultuous war-ridden years of the early 20th century. As Thompson states: “Elton had lived through two world wars, so ‘invasion’ was a more loaded idea for him than it is for you or me. Indeed, in the Second World War, he worked on controlling rabbits, rats, and mice – ‘alien invaders’ that were eating stored food and farmers’ crops, and were thus practically in league with the Nazis.”

Moreover, Elton firmly believed that nature was a static thing, and the contemporary order of nature was rational just as is: “Elton believed firmly that species belong to wherever they happen to be right now, irrespective of length of tenure or of where they had evolved or migrated from. More than that, he believed that belonging confers rights of occupancy, that these rights extend indefinitely into the future, and that natives are morally superior to aliens.”

This is all to say that for Elton and many conservation biologists influenced by him, the idea of “invasive species” comes from a political preference for stability as pictured in idealized human societies. Thompson spends much of his book documenting why this static vision is not very realistic.

For example, Thompson discusses the persistence of the much-villainized purple loosestrife in the wetlands of North America, and cites one review article by Canadian ecologist Claude Lavoie stating: “There is certainly no evidence that purple loosestrife ‘kills wetlands’ or ‘creates biological deserts’, as it is repeatedly reported. For instance, 63 insect genera, representing 38 families and seven orders, have been collected from purple loosestrife invaded sites in Manitoba. There are no published studies (at least in peer-reviewed journals) demonstrating that purple loosestrife has an impact on waterfowl or fishes.”

Nor is this the only invasive with an unmerited bad reputation. Tamarisk is often blamed in the U.S. Southwest for crowding out species and negatively disrupting ecosystems, but such damage is more imagined than observed: “Tamarisk illustrates another important principle: once an alien invader gets a bad name, it becomes easy to blame it for any
perceived environmental problem in the vicinity. The original riparian woodlands were the home of the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, and tamarisk was widely assumed to be one of the reasons for its decline, but it now turns out that in some areas many of the flycatchers nest quite happily in tamarisk, and that fledging success there is indistinguishable from that in native trees. Indeed, concerned over loss of habitat for the flycatcher, the US Fish and Wildlife Service refused permission for the release of tamarisk biocontrol insects in parts of the bird’s range."

Nor is it at all evident that invasive species automatically cause mass extinctions of native species. Thompson cites marine invaders as an example: "The 80 alien marine species introduced to the North Sea in recent centuries have caused no native extinctions so far, ditto for at least 70 species established in the Baltic, and the massive influx of species into the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal has so far failed to cause more than a tiny number of local extinctions."

Finally, Thompson exhorts readers to give up on the idea of nature as neatly ordered and static. He summarizes his thoughts in the following passage: “The view of the biosphere you learned in school, disturbed to varying extents by humans, is seriously out of date. The modern world is essentially a mosaic of new ‘anthropogenic biomes’ (croplands, plantations, settlements, cities, rangelands), with here and there natural ecosystems embedded within them. It’s because so much of the world has been transformed so dramatically that there is now a consistent ‘winning’ syndrome. In a world before significant human influence, there was room for everyone, and all available tickets had some chance of winning. It’s only in the last few thousands years, and especially in recent centuries and decades, that being a rat or a weed has turned out to be the golden ticket in life.”

For Thompson, the “invasion” of out-of-place species is best tackled by no action at all. Since invasive species often prosper only in environments adversely affected by human behavior, once that particular environment has “healed” itself, the invader often goes away or is severely curtailed by the renewed dominance of native plants. Thus, Thompson suggests the best way to get rid of invasives is just to ignore them.

Environmental reporter Fred Pearce has an even more optimistic view of invasive species in his recently published book, The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature’s Salvation. This book outlines even more emphatically why invasive species are almost entirely a product of human negligent intervention into the environment, and how often invasive species arrive on the scene to “clean up” the mess that people have made. More importantly, the premise underlying Pearce’s book is that the “fragility” of nature in general and ecosystems in particular is a myth. Most researchers have worked from the premise that various organisms within an ecosystem co-evolve within it, and invasives upset a delicate balance between all of them. Pearce however echoes other scientists who believe that “ecological fitting” is a better explanation for the interactions between organisms in a given environment, citing Green Mountain on Ascension Island in the Atlantic: an environment entirely made up of non-native species that have formed a completely functioning ecosystem in the space of 150 years. Pearce’s idea of nature in this book emphasizes self-organization and versatility rather than stasis and fragility. The appearance of invasives is usually a sign of extreme environmental stress due to human activity, and can also have a “healing effect” depending on the circumstances.

Examples of this phenomenon occur in many water-borne invasives. Lake Victoria in Uganda in the 1990’s was massively invaded by water hyacinth, to the point that it was almost impassible by boat. However, in 1998, due to the heavy rains of an El Nino year pouring fresh water into the lake, the plant began to recede. Scientists realized that the water hyacinth thrived due to the amount of pollution in the lake that had deprived the water of oxygen in its bottom layers; the fresh rain water had “washed” the lake clean. As an Amazonian plant, the polluted environment low in oxygen was ideal for its growth. When such heavy rain ceased, the pollution began to build up in the lake again, and so did the water hyacinth.

This sequence of events has been repeated in such cases as the infestation of Caulerpa taxifolia [ed. – a species of seaweed, native to the Indian Ocean but widely used ornamentally in aquariums] in the Mediterranean and the zebra mussel in the North American Great Lakes: due to pollution, an invasive organism takes advantage of the polluted environment to become an apparent menace, only to recede again once the environment recovers. While the organism may still be present, it is no longer able to dominate in the context of a healthy ecosystem. In some cases, if biodiversity is something to prize, invasives may also augment biodiversity, and not diminish it. Pearce argues that for a dominant group of scientists: “[A]llien species don’t count and are not counted. They do not exist as part of nature. They have no place. They are un-nature, if not anti-nature. They should be gone. Under this definition, biodiversity in the twenty-first century can only go down. Extinction could cut the number of species, but introductions can never increase it. Thus the inconvenient fact that alien species actually increase real..."
biodiversity in many places is simply defined away... It sounded more like ideology than good science.”

Indeed, Pearce names names and states that Simberloff and other scientists seek evidence to confirm their bias against invasive species. For example, Pearce breaks down the cases mentioned in Simberloff’s *Invasive Species: What Everyone Need to Know*, showing that Simberloff focuses inordinate attention on “tiny specks” of the planet like isolated islands while devoting few pages to places like Africa where invasives seem to do far less harm. Pearce calls out the philosophical biases of many scientists and policy makers: “The idea of nature’s balance and how humans were capable of transgressing or destroying it [...] is implicit in the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, in which sinning humans are cast out from the garden. They were separated from nature and doomed to damage her. The idea has persisted right into the modern world, in which our view of nature is, ostensibly at least, based on science. The balance of nature has become a ‘foundational metaphor of ecology,’ says Stephen Trudgill, a British geographer from Cambridge University who specializes in what he calls our social engagement with nature. Ecology, he says, is science built on ‘the guilt-laden notion that we have disturbed the natural order, and it is now all wrong and our fault.’”

Thus, the central thrust of Pearce’s idea of a “new wild” is that there was no “natural balance” to upset in the first place. And thus there is not a central cast of characters that is supposed to occupy a certain region or ecosystem, if “ecosystem” is even an appropriate name for a group of organisms living together in a particular area. (Often, people mistake a native organism for a non-native organism based on how much of a nuisance it seems to them, as in the case of the highly problematic sycamore tree in Great Britain.) Nature here is dynamic and on the move. If new actors appear, they may at first seem to get the upper hand in some cases, but soon these regions reconstitute themselves, and nature continues what it has been doing for millions of years.

Some writers take a more holistic approach toward invasives, articulating how these species can have a “healing effect” on the earth and human bodies in the face of severe disruption of ecosystems. One such writer is Timothy Lee Scott, a Chinese medicine practitioner and herbal medicine specialist. In 2010 he came out with a book entitled, *Invasive Plant Medicine: The Ecological Benefits and Healing Abilities of Invasives*. While the primary aim of the book is to provide health care with the plants that are becoming pervasive in our environment, Scott also takes the opportunity to reflect philosophically on the meaning of invasives in a polluted and tainted world. Like one of his mentors, Stephen Harrod Buhner, Scott believes in the agency of plants and not merely their being passive towards the actions of other sentient beings. Scott is openly a proponent of the Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis in which the Earth is seen as a “living organism of interdependent biosystems that feed one another in order to sustain the whole life of the planet.” In this sense, Scott states that: “Gaia has been fully self-regulated by all life on earth for hundreds of millions of years, and our unprecedented time in the planet’s history is requiring extreme adjustments of ecosystems.”

For Scott, the pervasiveness of invasives signals a time of general illness of the planet, including for humans who inhabit it. His main premise is that, just as ecosystems are getting sick and susceptible to invasive organisms, so are our bodies: “The degradation of the health of the whole as an unintended consequence of futile attacks on invaders is not an isolated phenomenon but instead it is a pattern that repeats on the macrocosmic as well as microcosmic scales. The deteriorating health of our forests is analogous to the current weakening of the human immune system. Widespread chronic disease, antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and emerging, endemic diseases result from modern medical practices just as Gaia’s infected biosystems are caused by modern industrial and agricultural practices. Invasive epidemics are based on the widespread use of toxins and poisons that infect all biosystems, great and small, and these destructive influences trickle down into cellular life, mortally impregnating all Earth’s species with deformative and abortive destiny.”

In spite of their being a sign of a sick environment, invasives can be not merely part of the problem but also part of the solution. Very often, supposedly ominous invasives can be the “first responders” to scenes of ecological devastation. As Scott writes: “When my wife and I moved onto this piece of land, it had been recently logged, and a couple of acres had been cleared for a house site. Blackberry colonized this desolate hillside and protected it from further erosion and intrusion. The plant descended on this land like a lion protecting her cub, showing her thorny fangs with ferociousness. It was angry, protective, reclaiming the wild, and there was no venturing onto this space without bloody repercussions.”

Scott also explains that invasive plants also serve as filtration systems that take dangerous pollutants out of environments. They can absorb harmful chemicals left by industrial production, much as our kidneys, lungs, and other organs keep toxins out of our bodies. In this instance, Scott comes to the defense of kudzu, “the vine that ate the South”: “Expansion of infrastructure, abandonment of farmland, and the establishment of plantations of trees for the lumber industry are major contributors to helping move this plant throughout the area. Kudzu is a warrior plant that tries to protect these areas with its vine presence, creating a fenceline barrier to keep out further intrusion. This ability is exemplified by not even allowing battle tanks on a Virginia military base to move through their vine entanglement. Kudzu follows along the trail of petroleum that is left behind by massive fossil fuel-based machinery, and it helps clean this contaminant and other toxins from the environment as it protects it. This steadfast plant essentially counters the agro-military-industrial fossil fuel based encroachments, and in order to do so, has to be a very powerful entity indeed.”

Although invasives are often blamed for bringing about human illness, as Scott shows throughout...
the book, they also heal human illnesses that are brought about by the encroachment of civilization. Lyme disease in the U.S. Northeast is often blamed on the incursion of invasive plants, but Scott has alternative explanation for the arrival of Japanese knotweed in Lyme disease-infested areas: “Knotweed is now widely used for the treatment of Lyme disease, and according to Stephen Buhner, the plant tends to move to infected areas six months to one year prior to the arrival of the disease. In addition to addressing a variety of invading pathogens with potent antimicrobial tendencies, Japanese knotweed’s abundance of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants help the body to process numerous toxins and cancers.”

Thus, one can conclude that invasive species are helpers that come to the aide of ecosystems and our own bodies. “Invasive plants are the warriors of the landscape, pioneering toxic and infected terrains, where they fight in the battle against pathogenic influences of our ecosystems. Sometimes they engage the warrior within us and impart potent messages to our being so that we make use of their medicine.”

Tao Orion, a permaculture designer and writer based in Oregon, has recently published a book based on her own experience with invasives entitled, Beyond the War on Invasive Species: A Permaculture Approach to Ecosystem Restoration. In this book, Orion takes a more systematic ecological approach towards invasive species, and as well as speculates concerning their wider use in permaculture management endeavors. Orion’s experience comes through working in conservation and witnessing firsthand that attempted chemical eradication with herbicides such as glyphosate does not work in restoring habitats (these species kept coming back to invaded areas), and that another approach must be taken to restore disturbed ecosystems. As she states in one passage: “If the goal of restoration is to return the site to its ‘original’ state – and this is the stated goal of many restoration projects – then glyphosate-treated soil with artificially limited zinc, iron, calcium, manganese, and magnesium cannot possibly approximate historical soil characteristics... Native species rely on a vast array of functional relationships among soil microorganisms and fungi whose populations are depleted or destroyed by the use of glyphosate-based herbicides. If the goal of ecological restoration is to approximate precontact ecosystem conditions, then herbicides like glyphosate cannot be part of a management strategy.”

Such a realization has made Orion and other conservation practitioners more aware that a holistic and “macroscopic” view of an entire ecosystem is needed to know the role of the invasive within it: “The organism-centered analysis so prevalent in the literature of invasion ecology leads to organism-centered management, revolving around the eradication of specific species in an attempt to return ecosystems to their former diversity, abundance, and resilience. Although there is little research suggesting this works, eradicating invasive species is considered normal and necessary within the framework of contemporary ecosystem restoration. Although many restoration ecologists know that there are larger ecological processes at work in the context of any invasion, invasion ecology as a discipline remains rooted in the idea that invasive species are the drivers of, rather than passengers on, the seemingly runaway train of ecosystem change. A more holistic approach would look at the dynamic of invaded ecosystems as interdependent with the invading organism rather than focusing on details like whether a particular plant contains more or less vegetative biomass than another plant that lived there before.”

Orion then proceeds to offer multiple examples of cases where the reintroduction of a native species is practically impossible due to an altered environment far more favorable to the invasive plant. She then describes the role of a niche in a given habitat, that is, the function that a particular species play in providing food, shelter, and other benefits to organisms living around it. One notable example of this is the declining number of beavers throughout North America who shaped the landscape with their dam building which in turn created wetlands and meadows, allowing many other organisms to thrive. Orion notes that the giant reed, an invasive, performs a replacement role in the California landscape: “In the absence of an animal whose engineering feats increased sediment retention, spread water beyond the channel, and decreased water flow velocity, there is a plant growing that does many of the same things. As Parmenides mentioned nearly two thousand years ago, nature abhors a vacuum. Robust stands of giant reed do preclude the growth of native riparian vegetation. They also don’t provide habitat for the diversity of animals that native species do, but given the alteration of stream structure engendered by the loss of beavers and other related changes in land use and hydrology, there is no indication that native riparian vegetation, including flood-adapted willow and cottonwood, would survive in the altered conditions.”

Thus, according to Orion, invasive species are neither totally harmful nor totally harmless, and they can get out of hand if not properly managed. But the only effective way to do address them is to take into consideration their role in a given ecosystem, and work with them rather than against them in the process of restoration.

On a related theme, Orion polemizes against the idea of wilderness, or land untouched by human hands, stating that places that we perceive as “wild” are often really abandoned projects of land management that went on for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans. The prevalence of “food forests” in places like the Amazon and the environments full of medicinal and edible plants noted by various European explorers were neither happy accidents nor the product of untainted nature, as Orion states: “The plants and animals that are now considered native are not static features of an ecosystem; they are relics of conscientious stewardship, and it is this stewardship that is required if their populations are to be maintained. Many native plants are well adapted to proliferate with the disturbance that harvesting and other cultivation activities provide.”

Orion’s permaculture approach to the environment is one of “use it or lose it,” The wilderness model, created artificially by the descendants of white settlers in the 19th century, dictated that the only way to respect and save a land was to leave it alone and keep it off limits to all human activity. Orion states that, paradoxically, the only way that we will save a piece of land is if it sustains us and we develop a symbiotic relationship with it.

Orion thus spends the last part of her book presenting various ideas on how to restore environments utilizing invasives and their products to create alternative economic prospects, thus defending habitats by integrating them into human societal endeavors. Orion indicates that the predominant manner by which humans
take care of their environment is to employ it wisely in a sustainable way of living. Invasive species in her estimation will help humanity get from our current ecocidal regime to something more harmonious and holistic: “Restoration in this sense is not so much a process of going back, but of moving forward into the unknown, and using our creativity and the tools available to us to create conditions in which life can thrive... In so doing, we will learn how to best encourage the proliferation of highly diverse and abundant ecosystems and manage invasive species in the process. We will not achieve anything of the sort by continuing to eradicate these novel organisms in the vain hope that the ecosystems where they live will be the same as they were in some idealized time in the past. We are here now, on the cusp of the sixth great planetary extinction, with climate change intensifying, and the ways that we relate to the land that sustains us will become ever more central to designing our way through the challenges to come.”

Some would state that drastic environmental change has already happened. The distinguished Professor of Biology, Richard B. Primack, wrote a book released in 2014 entitled, Walden Warning: Climate Change Comes to Thoreau’s Woods, documenting his years of research studying the change in the environment around Walden Pond in Massachusetts, famous as being the inspiration of 19th century U.S. philosopher Henry David Thoreau [ed. – see Panopticons Then & Now]. Thoreau, being one of the first environmentally-conscious writers [ed. – of modern Euro-American heritage], took meticulous notes concerning the behavior of the flora and fauna in the 19th century, including when certain flowers bloomed, when certain birds returned from migrations to the south, when pond ice melted, etc. What Primack and his fellow researchers found is that the behavior of these plants and animals has slowly but surely changed, as has the landscape of Walden Pond itself: “We gradually realized that there were a lot of species that Thoreau and later botanists recorded in Concord that we were not seeing. Of the species seen by Thoreau in the mid-nineteenth century, mainly in the 1850’s, we failed to find fully a quarter of them during our first years of searching in 2003, 2004, and 2005 – and no one that we spoke with seemed to be able to tell us where to find them.... And for many other species, the plants were still present in Concord, but in very limited numbers.”

Primack speculates that many species of plants in particular have disappeared due to the climate becoming warmer earlier in the spring, throwing off native plants and opening up opportunities for such invasives as purple loosestrife and other flowers: “This result shows clearly that the success of invasive plant species is at least partly due to their ability to adjust their flowering time (and presumably their leafing-out time) in response to a changing climate. This physiological flexibility gives these invasive species a great advantage and allows them to outcompete native species and increase greatly in abundance.”

The effects of climate change are thus slowly occurring before our eyes, and native species cannot be preserved by conservation efforts alone, if at all: “The effects of climate change are already here in Concord, right now, and are already determining which species are winners and which species are losers. These simple and startling results tell us that global warming – something many of us consider to be a problem of the distant future that will affect our grand-children or even great-grand-children – has already begun its advance right in Thoreau’s Concord. Species that can deal with a warming climate will be able to persist and expand in Concord, but species that can’t deal with climate change are declining in abundance and are heading toward local extinction.” (Emphasis in the original.)

Conclusion
From these diverse conversations concerning invasive species, the most undisputed point is that we are entering in an epoch of great unknowns. One thing that is certain is that the consensus that considered invasives to be a massive threat to ecosystems and biodiversity will require greater nuance and revision as we go forward. Major premises of invasion biology may have been based on questionable ideology and bad science. In a discussion of the lackadaisical manner in which researchers have cited one particular influential paper against invasives, Professor Matthew K. Chew of Arizona State University notices the following in his own 2015 paper, “Ecologists, Environmentalists, Experts, and the Invasion of the ‘Second Greatest Threat’”:

“Lax citation practices are a well-known rattling skeleton in academe’s closet. Categorising and quantifying their occurrence to determine whether ecologists, conservation biologists, or invasion biologists are any more predisposed to citing unrear sources based on their reputed content than practitioners in any other discipline would be a monumental undertaking. But the flexibility with which the claim of Wilcove et al. has been deployed is impressive. There are so many extant permutations that it is impractical, even electronically, to inventory them. Many paraphrasers fail to acknowledge that the finding was limited to the United States. Few ever note that it was strongly skewed by the inclusion of Hawaiian cases, and virtually none that it was grounded in anecdotal data.”

No matter what our predisposition towards the idea that invasive species are harmful to ecosystems overall, much of the actual data to support the claim ranges from inconclusive to highly dubious. And in particular cases where they seem to be a plague of Biblical proportions, they are often the scapegoat for larger human-driven problems in an ecosystem, such as pollution or the loss of habitat.

The main theoretical lesson that I conclude with is that a proper understanding of invasive species prevents us from falling into two seemingly opposite but related errors. On the one hand, invasives show that, even if there is no “purely natural” apart from human intervention, human agency has not achieved perfect dominance over what would commonly be deemed as “nature”. In spite of modern pretense to the contrary, humanity cannot and perhaps will never totally control nature, and its plans will continue to be frustrated by unruly and undominated life that invades manicured and cultivated spaces. On the other hand, invasive species undermine the idea of “wilderness” and perhaps “wildness” itself, showing that our modern ideas of what “untouched” nature should look like are just as problematic as the Prometheus impulse[2] to bring all things under human control. Going forward into an epoch of perhaps extreme environmental change, we will have to navigate between these two extremes. We will continue to rely upon and manipulate the environment as we have always done, but as always we will be checked and even humbled by the great mystery that lies beyond us; a mystery that can cause both destruction and wonder, death and plenty, and life and death for particular organisms in the long parade of existence. For successful creatures of the Anthropocene[2], to paraphrase John Henry Newman, to live is to change, and to survive is to change often.

1. ed. – El Niño is a term for the warm phase of the so-called ‘El Niño Southern Oscillation’, associated with a band of warm ocean water that develops in the central and east-central equatorial Pacific, which causes drought in Asia and huge floods in America and the Caribbean, cooler weather in north Europe and north-east U.S., at two- to seven-year intervals for at least the past 300 years, possibly longer.
2. ed. – In reference to Prometheus, the one in ancient Greek mythology who stole fire from the sacred Mount Olympus and gave it to humankind; the term conjures themes of the “over-reaching of modern humanity into dangerous areas of knowledge”.
3. ed. – see Return Fire vol2 pg17
SMART ATTACK!
– from Linky electricity meters to smart cities

[ed. – From #10 of Le Postillon, from the ‘European Silicon Valley’ of Grenoble, France, Europe’s capital of technological development and so subject to rampant gentrification as to remain attractive to researchers, start-up creators and engineers. On the introduction of Linky, the first three million should be fitted by the end of 2016, with 80% replacement of old meters (35 million) intended. From 2017, installation will be compulsory for welfare recipients and any insulating their homes. Bills will rise 10-20% due to new consumption calculations. Linky contains R.F.I.D. chips (see the supplement to Return Fire vol.3; Smarter Prison?); also, radio frequencies emitted are linked to cancer, leukaemia, etc. (not to mention the toxicity created in their production) – all electrical appliances nearby to the units then re-emit these radio frequencies. Following pilot schemes in southern France, University of Nice Sophia-Antipolis researchers in 2015 recommended “incentive systems, smart tariffs, and technologies to increase potential [user] behavior changes” to speed up adaptation. Spain has made it mandatory for every household to have a smart-meter by 2018, other European nations like Italy and Poland already have many, and the U.K. plans to deploy 50 million to all customers by 2021.]

We know that little children make up extraordinary stories for themselves so they can live out the adventures that they don’t have in real life. It’s the same process which makes the scientific and political elites create “smart” objects. Looking at the expanding list of these gadgets destined to become indispensable, or even compulsory – from meters on fridges to textiles – you have to say that some of them must be very needy individuals. Rather than inventing a smart newspaper, Le Postillon here offers you a story – not extraordinary but all-too real – telling the adventures of the Linky, the invention of the smart city and the role of Grenoble in the coming of the smart revolution.

Presumably you’ve heard of Linky? No? Yes you have, remember, it’s that so-called “smart” electricity meter. Which means, according to Wikipedia, that they can “identify in a detailed and precise manner, eventually in real time, the electricity consumption of a household, a building or a business and communicate this by phone or power-line communication (PLC) to the data administrator”. You’re wondering what use that is? ERDF (Électricité Réseau Distribution France), the offshoot of EDF [ed. – State-owned energy firm, largely nuclear] charged with running the electricity distribution network in France, says: “Linky will simplify your everyday life: services such as meter reading, changes to the power level or switching on a supply will from now on be carried out remotely and in under 24 hours. Linky makes it easy to control your energy use thanks to more detailed information on your consumption.” These new meters are in an “experimental stage” and have [as of 2011] been installed in around 100,000 households in the Tours area and 200,000 around Lyon. But soon you too will be able to have one, for the outcome of the experiment was known even before it began. They are therefore going to be rolled out across the whole of France. In the end, 35 million households will be lucky enough to have a Linky.

Does Atos Origin mean anything to you? No? It’s a big company, though: annual sales of 5 billion euros, 50,000 employees across the world of which 15,000 are in France. What do they do? “We provide consulting, systems integration and outsourcing services that help provide added value to our clients’ IT systems. Our primary mission is to optimize the use of new technologies in our customers’ IT systems and thus develop with them a new generation of services.” Hmm... And what does that mean? Basically, they devise and install IT systems for a variety of “customers” ranging from oil companies to nuclear power stations by way of the Olympic Games [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg26]. And the connection with Linky? It was Atos Origin who “landed the Linky project with ERDF”. So they are in charge of creating and installing the meters. Actually, we forgot to tell you that the boss of Atos Origin is a certain Thierry Breton. That doesn’t ring a bell? Come on, you remember, he’s the former Minister of the Economy, Finance and Industry, between 2005 and 2007 – in other words at the time when it was decided to launch the Linky project. Things worked out rather well, didn’t they? “Thierry Breton is thought to have negotiated an annual salary of 2.2 million euros for his nomination to the position of President of Atos. Additionally he is said to have also insisted that he should be allocated 700,000 euros worth of low-priced stock options.” ([www.informaticien.com, 25/10/2008] ’The French IT company Atos Origin more than tripled its net profit in 2010 to 116 million euros and reported a ‘return to growth’, declaring itself ‘confident for 2011.’” (Le Figaro, 16/02/2011).)

So what’s all this got to do with Grenoble, you’re asking (because you know that, as a Grenoble newspaper, Le Postillon only talks about Grenoble)? To get Linky running, Atos Origin created a new subsidiary, with the lovely name of Atos WorldGrid (great, eh?). This new subsidiary is for now based in the charming and leafy Innovallée business zone at Meylan. But it’s outgrowing its home and will soon be moving into the new Grenoble district of Bouchayer-Viallet, in a building currently under construction, where it will easily be able to accommodate its 700 ‘collaborators’. And if you are looking for work, they are currently recruiting ‘C++ designer/developers’ and ‘CMMS project leaders’. Which means if you aren’t highly qualified, there’s no point applying. If you like, we can get back to Linky.

“For despite all the good intentions of ERDF and Atos Origin, the experiment isn’t going as well as it could and, as ever in France, moaning Minnies are making themselves heard. The list of complaints raised by the first users on internet forums (such as Rebellyon info) is so long that we couldn’t fit it in here. So we will make do with summing up a few of them, on a thematic basis.

– Money. The cost of the meters, ranging from 150 to 300 euros per household, is apparently added to the electricity bill, in installments.

– Technical. The new meters are causing a lot of power cuts. ‘At the slightest surge, it cuts out!’ Some meters have even burst into
flames a few days or weeks after installation.

- **Common sense.** According to ERDF, the great plus point for the “customers” is to be able to reduce their bills by closely monitoring consumption, by reducing the use of heavy-consumption appliances or by using them during off-peak times. But the meters that have been installed don’t let you see the details of what you have consumed. To do that, you have to get an extra “box” costing about 100 euros. Hardly anyone is going to do this.

- **Health.** The smart meters are yet another electromagnetic source, causing unknown [sic] effects on people’s health.

- **Social.** Everything can be done remotely (switching on the supply, repairs…), which means fewer jobs and less human contact. The supply can also be cut or reduced remotely, while previously it required a visit from an engineer and thus a physical encounter with those whose power he [sic] was supposed to be cutting off. Now it’s just a click away.

- **Freedom.** “Information on energy consumption transmitted by the meters is very detailed and reveals much about the occupants of any home, such as their waking times, the time that they have a shower or when they use certain appliances (oven, kettle, toaster)”. This is the very sensible CNIL (Commission Nationale informatiques et Libertés) saying so. Even according to several engineers, personal data is not secure and thus easily used for policing or commercial purposes.

All of that doesn’t set you dreaming? That must be because you just haven’t understood anything about Progress, The Future Life and smart grids. About what? About smart grids, or “intelligent networks”. What? “Smart grids use computer technology to optimise production and distribution and to better co-ordinate supply and demand between providers and consumers of electricity.”

Smart meters, like Linky in France, are thus one of the elements of the smart grid. You’ve no doubt grasped that by “enabling better use of energy” smart grids are supposed to be environmental and part of “sustainable development”. But they have nothing to do with that old-fashioned backward-looking environmentalism, which wanted us to think about our consumption, steer us towards energy conservation and encourage us to return to the age of the candle, the ballpoint pen and the landline. Oh no, smart grids allow you to be “green” while continuing to profit from all the joys of modern life, without challenging your lifestyle but by reinforcing it: “In the light of the explosion in energy demand, the time seems to have come to trade in our old energy networks for communicating, intelligent and thus more efficient systems”.

Even better, the smart grid boosts growth because the manufacture of smart meters needs lots of energy, as do the central control systems. To save energy, we have to use more. Smart grids – and more generally smart energy – thus guarantee a rosy future for our splendid nuclear industry, which has been having a rough ride of late. And, in any case, as Innovallée Mag (Summer 2010) reminds us, “smart” is the future of the world: “One thing is sure, however, and that is that the smart revolution is underway! Tomorrow, the world around us will be riddled with sensor networks, charged with communicating between themselves by standard protocols and with sending their information in real time to a more or less automated central control system. Welcome to the smart world ruled by… distributed intelligence!”

Guess which city is piloting smart grid stuff? Bingo, you’ve got it! “As a real local technological speciality, the smart grid has found in Grenoble a space for innovation and experimentation,” the “CleanTech République” website tells us. This site, whose slogan is “green innovation at work”, simply loves the smart grid and more generally everything which allows things to be made under the banner of “sustainable development”. So a team of its “journalists” came to Grenoble to make some “web-TV” with local actors on the theme of smart grids and smart cities. The result is about as thrilling as a Soviet propaganda film. If you ever look at the local press, you will already have read 9,522 times that Grenoble is a “laboratory city”, “at the forefront of the latest technology”, “where the world of tomorrow is being invented”. Well, that’s not wrong. Around nanotechnology, the loss leader which sells Grenoble to the world of investors, there are clustered a large number of technological projects which are going to “revolutionise our lives”, not in a messy and unpredictable way like the Arab Spring [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg87] but rather in a calculated way, planned and organised by the political and scientific elites. For the greater happiness of us all, of course, even if we are not asked for our opinion beforehand. Among the advances are “Senscity”, a project from the Minalogic business cluster in Grenoble involving our friends at Atos Origin, which wants to establish a “city-scale Machine-to-Machine eco-system”: You what? “The functioning of cities necessitates the establishment of certain important services: waste management, public lighting management, water management etc. The M2M [Machine-to-Machine] provides solutions of supervision and control which allow us to Optimise these processes: it is thus a crucial element in the sustainable development of the city”. You see, you mustn’t be afraid of control and supervision because it’s good for sustainable development. In any case, you are about to be plugged into all that because CleanTech Républic tells us that the people of Grenoble are going to be guinea pigs. “To respond to challenges like the rise in population or the changes in its energy networks, the city of Grenoble is currently preparing the roll-out of several big technological experiments within its borders. Whether this consists of smart grid demonstrators or eco-centres, these projects will involve elected officials, businesses, universities and of course residents”. If you haven’t yet been contacted, don’t worry, you’ll soon be “mobilised”.

Are you wondering what tomorrow’s city will look like? Go and pay a visit to Bouchayer-Viallet, to admire the “Les Reflets du Drac” building. It’s true that, particularly close up, the aesthetics are those of a prison. But the solar panels mounted on top and the bright colours make it obvious that it’s actually an office block. This building has got everything going for it: High Environmental Quality, Low Consumption Building and… “double skin”.

Listen to how Florence Audouy, programme manager for Urbiparc (the subsidiary of Bouygues Immooblitzer which constructed the building [ed. – the building, incidentally, also builds prisons]) explains the concept, still on the CleanTech Républic site: “The double skin was the great idea of Jacques Ferrier [the architect]. The building has been designed with an initial concrete skin which is very well insulated. But he got round a number of constraints to attain the performance levels we were targeting by proposing the option of a double skin on three sides of the building: on the west, south and east sides there is a metal frame with a mesh of perforated panels which fulfils four main functions. First function: improving the thermal comfort of the building (this double skin protects the envelope, prevents an overheating effect in summer and reduces the consumption for cooling the building). Its second role is to produce an umbrella effect; it acts as a sunshade, filters the light and provides light levels that are much more pleasant for the people inside who are constantly working on computers and thus have to protect themselves from direct sunlight.”

There you have just learnt that modern architecture protects fragile human eyes from the scourge of the sun and allows them to spend all their time in front of friendly screens rather than being assaulted by the horror of natural rays. But what should be done with the sun, then? “There are 1,000 square metres of solar panels on the building,” Florence Audouy tells us. “The energy is sold to the grid but represents around 20% of consumption. It’s the equivalent of the energy needed to light the building.” And here you have just learned that this building actually uses lots of energy (but it will be smart!) and the solar element is just there to make it look nice and friendly. What you don’t know yet is that the building under
construction for Atos Origin (see above) is called “Les Reflets du Vercors”, that it is right next to “Les Reflets du Drac” and that they look like two peas in a pod. The smart attitude is all about uniformity!

You know how when politicians push ahead with their big schemes, they are always worried about potential opposition which might scupper their plans, even though they are acting for the good of the people? So it is with Stéphane Siebert, who combines the role of sustainable development assistant at Grenoble city council with that of deputy director of research at the Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), and who says, still via CleanTech République: “What I find extremely interesting in this approach, which I would term collaborative, is that it allows the behavioural aspect to come into play. [...] Nobody today knows how all these new forms of technology are going to be able to work when they are available to thousands of users at the same time. We absolutely need to have a full-scale demonstration, with real people, to allow us to check that everything we have in mind works properly. [...] Of course, the key to success is that people adhere to the approach.

And it is much easier to do that in a new district like La Caserne de Bonne or La Presqu’île, because eventually we will see the arrival of a massive number of new residents who have not yet been tied down with real people, to allow us to check that everything we have in mind works properly. [...] Of course, the key to success is that people adhere to the approach.

As always, the usual question is left unanswered: what are we to do with this information? What can we do against it? We are talking of yet one more field of scientific research among the thousands of despicable things that are being done in laboratories in half the world. Personally I think that the point of keeping an eye on the flood of news on ‘miraculous discoveries’, ‘exceptional inventions’ and ‘new research with a thousand and more promises’ is no more than the information they contain, which is useful to understanding who, where and how scientific progress is being championed in ‘our’ cities. On the topic of what to do against it, instead, also discussing the subject with other comrades, a sensation has emerged that as we talk and talk about what ‘they are doing’ in the information they contain, which is useful to understanding ‘our’ cities. On the topic of what to do against it, instead, also discussing the subject with other comrades, a sensation has emerged that as we talk and talk about what ‘they are doing’ in the normality of everyday life, permits the functioning of the mega-machine: infrastructures of transport, communication, the supply of energy resources, the first attempts at creating ‘smart cities’ with IT networks that allow their administration. It is important to look ahead, at what the techno-scientific system is preparing and the directions it wants us to be dragged into. But the reality to be attacked in the struggle is the present one, the one that we are already experiencing.” — Luca Bernasconi[1]

1. ed. – see Rebels Behind Bars; Let’s Relaunch the Struggle Against Nocivity

Stab-proof vest
De-friend associates
Emotional balance simulator
Stress-free life
Shrink-wrapped corpse
Mono-crop harvester
Low-paid
Sun-dried refugee
Oven-ready Holocaust victims
Classless society
Boil-in-the-bag prison rations
Space-age birth control
Diet-junkie syndrome
Well-dressed cyborg
Jet-lagged climate dodger
Real-estate suburban boredom
Rohypnol speed-dating club
Flat-pack logistic boredom
Direct streamline contamination
Intergalactic waste-disposal unit
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Intergalactic waste-disposal unit

As always, the usual question is left unanswered: what are we to do with this information? What can we do against it? We are talking of yet one more field of scientific research among the thousands of despicable things that are being done in laboratories in half the world. Personally I think that the point of keeping an eye on the flood of news on ‘miraculous discoveries’, ‘exceptional inventions’ and ‘new research with a thousand and more promises’ is no more than the information they contain, which is useful to understanding who, where and how scientific progress is being championed in ‘our’ cities. On the topic of what to do against it, instead, also discussing the subject with other comrades, a sensation has emerged that as we talk and talk about what ‘they are doing’ in the information they contain, which is useful to understanding ‘our’ cities. On the topic of what to do against it, instead, also discussing the subject with other comrades, a sensation has emerged that as we talk and talk about what ‘they are doing’ in the information they contain, which is useful to understanding ‘our’ cities. On the topic of what to do against it, instead, also discussing the subject with other comrades, a sensation has emerged that as we talk and talk about what ‘they are doing’ in the information they contain, which is useful to understanding ‘our’ cities.

Don’t you find it impressive, how everything is now ‘interconnected’? How, starting from one small object – the electricity meter – they can reach the point of talking about new districts and smart cities [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg31], about the world of the day after tomorrow. That’s always an important element in these projects, in the evolution of the world, in progress: giving the impression that all this is inevitable, that it is ordained from above, that we can do nothing about it. You will point out that Linky stems from a European directive which stipulates “that 80% of electricity meters must be smart by 2020 to encourage competition and energy savings”. That’s true, but as we have seen in this article, lots of promoters of Linky and the smart revolution are active in your city, close to your home, in laboratories or shady offices. And so? Imagine: if you were hostile to the machine-world, if you resisted the incursion of electronic sensors and chips into every area of social life, if you considered yourself sufficiently “smart” to have no need of objects which identify themselves as such, you could make use of this proximity to express your disagreement. You could refuse to become a guinea pig for the “smart city” and make your refusal public. In any case, it would be more interesting than moaning about “this latest piece of rubbish” and sounding off about “directives from Brussels” [ed. – seat of the European Union], wouldn’t it?

But then, of course, thanks to our little story, you will have truly grasped all the many benefits we can expect from Linky and the smart revolution.

[All non-sourced quotes come from the Linky, Atos Origin, Wikipedia or CleanTech République websites.]

1. ed. – Notorious in the U.K. for their privatised examination of individuals’ eligibility for disability welfare. Also, as ‘Some Angry People’ wrote after smashing up their offices in Nottingham for the above reason near the time this article was written, “Mos are becoming experts in the business of identifying groups to contain and exclude them. They were one of the groups who tendered for the government’s ID cards contracts...”

2. ed. – “Minatec”, as of then the biggest European research centre for micro- and nano-technologies (see Rebels Behind Bars; Let’s Relaunch the Struggle Against Nocivity) – on top of military, surveillance, and historically there also nuclear developments – is for example located in the area. Around the time its opening was resisted, with an occupation of the Isere town hall leaving damaged offices, Minatec staff transport being blocked by flaming barricade or researchers being heckled and pelleted with eggs during their conferences, while there and also at an IT firm computers were sabotaged. The inauguration itself, with the area in a quasi-militarised state, saw rioting in the city, trashing of banks, a firm producing R.F.I.D. (already in use in public transport tickets and highways in Grenoble) and nanotech, a work agency and police station. Cars were burned and barricades raised against the police charge. The Grenoble-Chambery electric line was sabotaged in three different points, causing delays in electricity supplies. Some “Opponents of Necrotechnology” reported that “three issues of a fake magazine pretending to be official propaganda promoting the new technologies have been posted through the letterboxes of the city’s residents. The latest, for example, talks about the supposed plans for a huge dome made of nanotech materials which will enclose the alpine corridor between Grenoble and Geneva for 120km, and where people will need chips embedded in their body to enter. These magazines have caused a huge scandal because so many people believed what they read – and then found out that it wasn’t so far from the truth anyway.”
In his profound work, *Nature and Madness*, human ecologist Paul Shepard offers what he feels to be the culmination of his life's work. An interdisciplinary, comprehensive exploration of the 20-year psychogenesis of the human animal, the environmental conditions that create that human animal, and the consequences of removing the human animal from these conditions. One of the many important ideas discussed in this beautiful text is Shepard's description of the general stages of human development. Although I risk the painful reductionism or simplification of these stages, for the sake of this talk it is pragmatic to understand them as a compounding, widening series of relationships between a self and other.

At the beginning of a human life, the infant begins to make sense of its first experience of self and other through its relationship to the mother. This is the primary relationship with other, which will act as the base that supports all developmental stages to follow. As mobility and awareness are gained, the infant enters the phase of childhood, and begins negotiating a relationship between self and other, where other is material environment. Much of this relationship will be modeled after the pre-existing maternal relationship. During childhood, every substance is put in the mouth, unknown locations must be explored, knowledge is literal and direct, and non-human life is observed, categorised, named and mimicked – and is self-understood further through likeness and difference during this play process. A vast amount of time and argument could be expended on these two phases and their implications and expressions, but what I am more concerned with today are the processes that follow.

The onset of adolescence marks the beginning of the third phase, which once again expands and negotiates the relationship between self and other, where other is now social environment. The framework for this process will still primarily be an extension of the relationships to otherness formed throughout infancy and childhood. During adolescence, the complex aspects of personality emerge, and a sense of place and identity within the social environment is understood through negotiating relationships with peers, elders, social customs, and a guided preparation for adulthood. The challenging adolescent phase of life comes to a close with the process of initiation, in which the youth identity formally ends and the new hard-won identity of adulthood is not only taken on, but understood and recognised by all other participants in this social environment. At this point, the struggle for identity is ended, and the individual, now knowing themselves, is free to begin the adult phase of life, in which the scope of relationship expands once more to negotiate the question of self and other, where other is now a complex universe.

The problem here may be obvious to the listener. Most people unlucky enough to be born within industrialised civilisation will rarely – if ever – even have the opportunity to interact with a person who has made it to the fully-realised phase of self-development. Even fewer will have chance to experience this transformation for themselves. This is not a reflection of personal unworthiness or poor choices, but a result of the utter void of culture and deprivation of initiation. The system of rewards and punishments that enforced the logic of industrial civilisation worked very hard to prevent maturation out of indefinite adolescence. The permanent psychic teenager – regardless of biological age – lives in a state of unending insecurity and doubt, experiences a constant compelling confusion about the sense of self, and strongly prioritises batting for a precarious position within the surrounding social environment. This is a completely anthropocentric [ed. – see *Return Fire* vol.2 pg11] experience, and creates and manages citizens of empire wonderfully.

The ache of indefinite adolescence and the empty promise of an adulthood based on social indicators fuels nationalism, fuels the military, sells condos, builds careers, populates cities. On the other hand, the cultivation of relationships to the complex living world, where humans are not above all else, is one of the first things that civilisation works to destroy upon making contact with an uncivilised group of humans; and the annihilation and prevention of these non-human and non-material relationships arguably defines civilisation itself.

In this absence of initiation, some people eventually still drag themselves away from adolescence, and into something like a partial adulthood... to varying degrees. This process seems mostly composed of slowly accumulating experiences that each inform small aspects of the persons’ relationship to the world around them, and gradually alter their core motivators away from that which I have described as a solely adolescent experience. While this does not seem to fulfill all the aspects of fully-matured psychic adulthood, nor operate on a time-frame that matches human biological development, it is the best that most people have to work with, given the context.

In the absence of actual inter-generational cultures to be initiated into, the adolescent that feels resistant to mainstream imperial void-culture has, since the mid-twentieth century, been offered any number of aesthetic societal microcosms, in which to enjoy their pathologically-extended teenager experience. By this process of subculture, even seemingly deviant elements of society have a comfortable place to politic and jockey for unstable social capital, repeatedly attempt to prove their worth through dramatic visible gestures, seek membership and validation in the ways that appeal to them, and otherwise be solely driven by the same adolescent motivators that industrial civilisation rewards constantly, and attempts to prolong. In fact, for a social environment to be a scene or subculture at all, it is essential that all content and relationships follow the anthropocentric priority structure previously described.

When the adolescent subcultural environment intersects with an individual's inquisitive crawl into partial adulthood, the reactions are often conflictual. The de-
prioritisation of the adolescent value system is correctly perceived as posing a threat to the insecure and precarious social value that others possess within that system. The defensive responses are commonly intense, and a final result seems to often be a severing of relationships – not solely with the youth subculture itself, but often with the ideas that subculture claims ownership of... which is where most of this recuperative power is held.

This, however, never happens as an immediate transition, and many people hold on to large aspects of social priority for a long time. Some simply reinvest in a new social identity, subculture or location, beginning the process again and attempting to repetitively renegotiate the adolescent experience throughout their lives.

As people slowly begin to seek answer to questions which fall within the realms of the spiritual, the loudest voices demanding to be heard are, of course, the stories which civilisation holds as sacred.

As the inheritance of rationalism and a de­spiritualised Christianity, the religion of science is currently the purest form of monotheism in the world. Having done away with a single sacred other that lives outside of this world, science simply holds the sacred as its own mechanical philosophy of the universe, and the circular logic of self-defined, self-generating objective truth. This holy writ is intended to be taken as unassailable and timeless; and the purpose of this should sound familiar at this point. A straightforward outgrowth of traditional monotheism, [rational] science is still based simply upon a fear and hatred of the living world. Its actual practice still follows a clear moral imperative to force this world into conformity with its vision of a hypothetical and more tolerable humanistic world. The annihilation of the relationship between the self and the non-human other is total within this state – with not even a jealous sky-dad to reach out to. The complete dominion over the world which was once promised [ed. – in the Judo­Christian version] in the Book of Genesis is now called Progress [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg11], and is pursued with the fervour of unshakable zealots and the wealth of nations.

The creation of this current nightmare reality of alienation, toxicity and mass extinction is not so much a product of greed, but following a deeply moral religious mandate to dominate the living world regardless of material consequence. Like all evangelical practices, the missionaries of rational science take to every corner of this world in order to teach their faith to the poor ignorant locals, and bring that locality under the control of their religious law. And like all evangelical practices, this is good, because what they have to offer and what they teach are good. Some dream of taking to the stars, so that they might “go forth and multiply”[ed. – imperative preached in Genesis] and enforce their practices and beliefs on entirely new worlds; and the exceedingly devout and cowardly fringes of the scientific faith even hope to achieve a more immediate salvation by uploading their “digital souls” directly into internet-heaven[1], in order to escape this world that they find so wretched and frightening, while retaining their isolated sense of self.

All of this of course is comfortable and familiar to most humans raised within industrial civilisation. The morality, duality, objectivity, hatred of the living world, and neurotic devotion to humanism that is the mythology of monotheism is taught to everyone in this culture, whether religious or secular, and almost everyone embraces these myths deeply and lives by them. This includes almost all subcultural radicals as well... if not especially. Most radicals are driven by a deeply-entrenched belief in good and evil, and often an intense preoccupation with the importance of human life. Even most of those who claim to have thrown off the morality of their childhood teachings rarely do anything but indulge an reactionary teenage impulse, and strictly follow the inverted form of their earlier moral lessons. Immorality is, simply, still a morality [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg41]; a dualistic list of goods and bads, and is ultimately the same as any other expression of monotheism in the way that its practitioner relates to the living world.

“The human being will struggle for freedom, for strength, for self-realisation against all the odds. As adolescents we do this through the formation of gangs, initiations, uniforms and clothing indicators and of shared standards, identities and an arcum peculiar to itself. Subcultures. These hold within them the danger of being inherently reactionary and in terms of political groupings, unless we want to remain tiny and reproductive of insidious power structures, we would do well to be aware of the psychological impact of these structures and behaviours. Living in a state of arrested development is not reclaiming one’s full humanity.” – Secrets & Lies
In this light, it seems not so strange to me at all that Marxist materialists might devote themselves to the worship of [undecipherable]; that humanitarian activists might begin praying towards Mecca; that deviants and criminals might return to Wednesday Mass. For many, these so-called changes and conversions are not really changes or conversions at all, but simply adjustments in word-driven language, practicing the same way to relate to the world which was learned long ago.

And yet the questions that drive these impulses are real. In this void of guidance and culture, some people still want to know how they are to relate to the living world around them; and I imagine that many find it comforting to listen to even these stories of dominion and salvation. But what other voices are there? What stories are there that speak of how to broker and negotiate the relationships between the self and a complex living world in which humans are participants, and neither masters nor exiles? What paths are there to follow, when friends speak quietly about matters of the spirit, but still feel themselves to exist in an amoral reality, in which the beautiful is wrapped inextricably with the terrible – and what of those poor souls who do not feel inclined to abandon a worldview, even as they abandon the reactionary teenage subculture that claims to own it?

It can become difficult to explore answers to these and more vulnerable questions using the language of a culture in which these answers are not supposed to exist. What I find most difficult in speaking about polytheism and animism is that not a single aspect of these subjects can be easily or accurately approached using ideas defined by monotheism. Please remember that, at least since the slaughter of the Canaanites, this culture has engaged in thousands of years of genocide trying to erase these practices and beliefs from the world.

Commonly, polytheism is used to mean a belief in a multiple iterations of what monotheistic people mean when they use the word ‘God’. This understanding misses the mark widely enough to be useless. I described monotheism earlier not as the intellectual belief in a single deity, but as an absolutist moral worldview regardless of the flavour of its expression. In that vein, I also use a definition of polytheism as a comprehensive worldview in which the sacred is not remote, but the very essence of the material world itself, forever intertwined with the banal and profane. Polytheism does indeed lend itself to a belief in a plurality of divine entities, because it affirms the plural character of reality itself. In this understanding, the monotheistic definitions of entities like gods, spirits and the dead lose their meaning. While modern language fails to accurately describe a polytheistic relationship to other, direct experiences of life serve to demonstrate phenomena and truths that seem to prohibit, preclude and negate each other... yet exist and intermingle all the same. For the polytheist, nothing in this complex living world can be reduced or isolated to a duality of any type, be it good and evil, objectivity and subjectivity, spirit and flesh, or life and death. From the polytheistic viewpoint, agony could never be unwoven from bliss, and the dead may walk alongside the living – even though they are not here.

When people speak of it at all, the world animism is commonly used to mean the belief that everything in the material world possesses its own spirit and life. While this is not a statement that I would call false, it glosses over most of depth and content that I find important, and requests that monotheistic people in industrialised civilisation assign their own definitions to the idea. Although it barely scratches the surface, I would like to offer a rough working description of animism as a practice of relational engagement with the others encountered in a reality where everything is complex, interactive, and alive on its own terms – and in ways that often do not feel familiar to civilised concepts. The key here is that animism is relational. There is a big difference between liking the idea of trees and brokering an ongoing mutual relationship with an individual entity that is living an engaged existence rooted in the soil. Again, this only scratches the surface, but is somewhere to begin.

The most common place that I run into conversations about animism is among anthropologists, and sometimes primitivists [ed. – see To Love the Inhuman] – supposing that those two groups are in some way separate. I have often heard animism described in these circles as the fairly uniform pre-religion of all primitive [sic] people, practiced before the belief in imaginary gods seduced humanity’s spiritual attention away from the material world. People like this description of animism, because it still works pretty well with the modern monotheistic worldview. It places animism as a historic thing that other people – who do not exist anymore – used to do. That perspective feels pretty safe, since it doesn’t challenge the historian’s personal practice of monotheism with any other possible way of relating to the world. In that same vein, this anthropological view of animism also includes an inherent dismissal of polytheistic divinity, and upholds the monotheistic separation of the divine from the material world. The other thing this description does is cast animism as a religion, in the way that monotheism
“Countless anthropologists have managed to overlook the ecological dimension of the shaman’s craft, while writing at great length of the shaman’s rapport with “supernatural” entities. We can attribute much of this oversight to the modern, civilized assumption that the natural world is largely determinate and mechanical, and that that which is regarded as mysterious, powerful, and beyond human ken must therefore be of some other, nonphysical realm above nature, “supernatural”. The oversight becomes still more comprehensible when we realize that many of the earliest European interpreters of indigenous lifeways were Christian missionaries. For the Church had long assumed that only human beings have intelligent souls, and that the other animals, to say nothing of trees and rivers, were “created” for no other reason than to serve humankind. We can easily understand why European missionaries, steeped in the dogma of institutionalized Christianity, assumed a belief in supernatural, otherworldly powers among those tribal persons whom they saw awestruck and entranced by nonhuman (but nevertheless natural) forces. What is remarkable is the extent to which contemporary anthropology still preserves the ethnocentric bias of these early interpreters. We no longer describe the shamans’ enigmatic spirit-helps as the “superstitious claptrap of heathen primitives” – we have cleansed ourselves of at least that much ethnocentrism; yet we still refer to such enigmatic forces, respectfully now, as “supernaturals” – for we are unable to shed the sense, so endemic to scientific civilization, of nature as a rather prosaic and predictable realm, unsuited to such mysteries. Nevertheless, that which is regarded with the greatest awe and wonder by indigenous, oral cultures is, I suggest, none other than what we view as nature itself. The deeply mysterious powers and entities with whom the shaman enters into a rapport are ultimately the same forces – the same plants, animals, forests, and winds – that to literate, “civilized” Europeans are just so much scenery, the pleasant backdrop of our more pressing human concerns. [...] To be sure, there has always been some confusion between our Western notion of “spirit” (which so often is defined in contrast to matter or “flesh”), and the mysterious presences to which tribal and indigenous cultures pay so much respect. I have already alluded to the gross misunderstandings arising from the circumstance that many of the earliest Western students of these other customs were Christian missionaries all too ready to see occult ghosts and immaterial phantoms where the tribespeople were simply offering their respect to the local winds. While the notion of “spirit” has come to have, for us in the West, a primarily anthropomorphic or human association, my encounter with the ants was the first of many experiences suggesting to me that the “spirits” of an indigenous culture are primarily those modes of intelligence or awareness that do not possess a human form.” – David Abram

understands the word, rather than as a perspective that determines the way in which any number of unique cultural practices may be conducted.

This rears its head again when animism intersects with the inheritance of North American environmentalism. Widely popularised by the writings of Thoreau [ed. – see Invasive], this moral tendency only seeks to reinforce the concept of nature [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg24] – which is this culture’s name for the imaginary outdoor place that is completely separate from humanity and the sacred. Starting from this alienation, the environmentalist position then takes a bath in its own self-loathing, with the belief that this separate nature is pure and perfect – precisely insomuch as it is free of the taint of humanity.

This idea that nature is good and humans are bad is, then, essentially the same as the original idea that nature is bad and humans are good: a shining example of the uselessness of inverted morality, this attitude towards the living world continues to simply confirm anti-relational monotheism.

This is still a popular and unexamined sentiment among radicals; many of whom recognise that the consequences of industrial civilisation are counter to their own desires, but still inherently accept the myth that this void-culture encompasses all of humanity itself. When this dualistic thought process engages with the concept of animism as a religion, it is a short step to the ideal of animism as pure and perfect spiritual connection with nature, free of the taint of human culture. I find this vision of a pure animism to instead be a product of monotheistic story-telling, a familiar voice that insists that no other cultural practices are actually possible. So, if it is not a religion, or something to be intellectually believed in, it may be more accurate to say that a person does not practice animism, but instead engages in a cultural practice that is animistic.

Let me return once again to the absence of initiation, the slow exploration away from the anthropocentric obsessions and insecurities of adolescence. If this search for a way to cultivate the relationships between a self and a complex universe is not stunted and prevented by monotheism, then it will lead at some point to a world full of different traditional cultural practices – which are animistic and polytheistic, and come from people of literally every background. While the human cultural aspects are unique in each of these traditions, they all have origins in personal, relational engagement with the others in a living world; including those entities which are often misunderstood by the modern language of gods and spirits. Most of these independent cultural practices have another thing in common: and that is that their traditions have been sundered, lost, and damaged by the genocide of this culture. This can create difficult and uncomfortable questions for some people who want to walk these paths. Where is the value in a partial tradition? What is the validity of a reconstructed practice? How can a person living in one location practice a tradition that has its origins in another place? How can most people living in industrial civilisation even claim access to one or more of these cultural traditions? And what about the reality that many other people may already be claiming to practice these traditions in ways that seem offensive or undesirable?

Within the subcultural social environment, this is quite a pot to stir. The adolescent relationship with identity is defensive, precarious, and highly-prized. All manner and form of social and personal politic come into play, as people battle for position and attempt to gain leverage over others while remaining hyper-vigilant of attack and vulnerability... and none of this is very interesting to me. Especially when compared to the question of whether or not a cultural practice is indeed animistic or polytheistic.

I find that any cultural tradition, of any background, and any aesthetic, that a person connects with deeply, can be a beautiful and important answer in this quest to follow a path out of adolescence and into a human adulthood that cultivates relationships with the complex living world. Provided, of course, that that cultural tradition in question in being practiced in a way that actually does that. I say this because I feel that any tradition can also be expressed in ways that ignore relationships, deny the plural experiences of life, and prioritise only
systems may or may not hold a polytheistic perspective, but are united by their focus on the practitioner’s cultivation and accumulation of personal power. I find this to be anthropocentric and disinteresting from an animistic perspective.)

So what does it look like to take on a tradition, and practice it in a way that is both polytheistic and animistic? Most people don’t feel like they have points of access to cultures that not enveloped them for their whole lives. Not only that; most people who find themselves born in North America feel uneasy about the idea of lineage. What is available to people with diverse or unknown family backgrounds? I think that it is important to remember here that basing a person’s entitlement to a spiritual practice on a hereditary determinism is the logic of racial nationalism.

Another thing to think about is that this entire exploration is based on relationship. It can come as a serious surprise to the children of this culture, but developing a relationship with strangers is fundamentally the same; whether it’s with plants, the ‘gods’, other living humans, or the mighty dead themselves. A person has to make themselves available, and then engage with the others that choose to engage with them. If a person has made it to the point in their life where they are open and looking, they will almost certainly be called in no uncertain terms to the path they are supposed to walk. In a plural living world, can anyone confidently separate the voice of intuition from the loving guidance of the dead? The beautiful thing about engaging in an animistic polytheistic tradition is that each person has the autonomy to practice as they wish and develop relationships with non-human others that are actually based on free association and mutual aid. The act of rejecting social fears, crossing the threshold into such a spiritual practice, is a transformative moment in itself; maybe not the step that arrives at a finalised adulthood, but certainly a step that begins the next leg of the journey through life. And it is one that most people from this culture will never make.

In the end it turns out that a person cannot believe in animism; they can only be animistic. A person cannot believe in polytheism; they can only be polytheistic. And a person cannot believe in anarchism; they can only be anarchic. Unless they are still an adolescent.... and then they can be anarchistic!
ARE THERE SIMILARITIES, BEYOND THE OBVIOUS, BETWEEN HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN PRISONS?

We understand that the comparison of the captive subject — animal or human — has been practically impossible until the penetration of libertarian ideas in the field of animal rights. Generally the detained is analysed, if human, from a psychological or sociological approach whilst the animal prisoner is attempted to be understood through zoology — or its branch called ethology that specifically studies the behaviour of animals. These disciplines rarely overlap and literature about animal behaviour in zoological captivity is extremely careful about comparing its results with prison for humans, for obvious reasons.

Comparing a human being to an animal is still considered to be an insult, along with animal behaviour. It is not compared to ours, to justify the consequent exploitation.

To speak about the similarities between the prison environment and the zoos in the first place we must break the big taboo; the taboo of jail, that place which nobody wants to see, that place where supposedly the scum of society is found. Where they surely have a bad time, but we continue believing that it is necessary to reform them so that they fit into society or to simply punish them. Let’s see then, how this punishment is and if we can draw anything to light by comparing them to captive animals. We must remember that “the animals” are composed by all living beings with certain alimentation and cellular structure, however here we are going to particularly refer to the animals with clear similarities to us like mammals, birds, vertebrates in general that are more used for zoological exhibitions. These animals share with us many behaviours and senses, let’s see how they react to these traits in incarcerated life.

I will base the work here upon “THE EFFECTS OF JAIL ON THE PRISONER: CONSEQUENCES OF PENITENTIARY DETENTION” by Dr. Jesus Valverde Molina. In his work the doctor tells us that “All human conduct is adaptable” and that “the conduct is adapted to the environment in which the person is living”. Here, apparently there would be no significant difference with animals, as their behaviour is adaptable and connected to their surroundings. On a zoological level the inevitable question arises: adaptable on an individual level or species level? Here is the point in which vertebrates that we analyse are effectively influenced by the surroundings of the zoo.

The Dr. continues that “what is formulated as personal characteristic that adapts to a non-instinctual behaviour are not “healthy” mechanisms of adaptation in jail, but strategies of survival”. This is significant in comparison with the conduct of animals. Let’s reflect a second on this. Could the “sick” behaviour be a “healthy” adaptation to the sick conditions from their surroundings? The same Dr. tells us then: “What is “crazy” is the context of the jail, not the conduct that is adapted to that environment”. To understand the conduct we must understand the surroundings. Here we will think of both cases: prison and zoos.

What is the architecture?
- Based on the function of security
- Differences in the “existing space” and the “available space”; wild captive animals in small cells see, effectively, a big space in front of them, a space that they can’t access, designated to human beings
- Restriction of mobility
- Physical overcrowding (jails are big, but not for the prisoner)
- Psychological overcrowding
- De-personalized space (standardized, without any possibility to count on material outside of the place for the construction of housing, nest, bed; a non-place or in the best cases of zoos a built place with the criteria of a professional human in charge)

How is the use of time and space?
- Inhospiatable, reduced and dangerous space. (We must ask ourselves if for the animals their stay in the zoos is considered by them a constant danger, surrounded by human beings, noises and a modified environment which make many wild animals feel...)

We will never be able to pit levels of human and animal suffering against one another, but this text reflects a little the implications of prison on any individual that values their freedom...
threatened. It is something that leaves as time passes or do they continue in this state of constant fear all the time?

- Nothing to do and not being able to do anything
- The presence of strangers in the prison
- “In jail you don’t live 365 days each year, but a day 365 times”
- Life in the yard (and the life in the enclosure for wild animals)
- The absence of activities (just walking or sitting down)

Consequences of the stay in the yard:

- A general feeling of emptiness (we don’t know what the wild animals are feeling because they can’t explain to us things that happen, but through their behaviour we can predict certain things and we find common grounds between human animal captive behaviour, we can understand better what happens)
- A constant state of anxiety (observed especially in zoos)
- Obsessive thoughts and conversations. (Can we suppose the existence of obsessive thoughts in the case of wild animals who show clear signs of “zoocosis”? Moving from one side to another, trying to exit the compound? Obsessive conducts are known in animals and are generally linked to life in captivity.)
- Definite loss of decision-making skills
- The personal staff (the uniform, security and punishment methods)
- Efficacy (things must be done in a certain way to not allow any chance for escape)
- The formation (equal through the personal in prisons and zoos; security rules, treatment with the captive – it’s best not to engage on an emotional level with any captives; a work routine: feeding hours, cleaning, sleeping timetables)
- The relationships between officials and prisoners (them vs us, an important dualism in the case of prisons due to what is considered criminal and a differentiation between human/animal – negating the physical and psychological suffering of captive animals)
- Volunteer staff (visitors in the case of zoos)

Therefore, there are similarities in the regulation for the prisoners:

- Regulation as a restriction of life
- Regulation as a system of domination

CONSEQUENCES OF PRISON ON THE PRISONERS

1. SOMATIC CONSEQUENCES

1.1. SENSATORIAL PROBLEMS

1.1.1. Vision.

“In this situation the state has complete control over your physical existence, and physically isolates you from the rest of society. While “outside” it is still possible to extract yourself in one way or another from the overpowering authority of state and capital, here you are confronted to a crystallization of the societal relations. When you’re living in the rich West and are part of the correct population group, you can give yourself the illusion that you are more or less free. You can consume as much as you want, you can take part in all sorts of virtual fake realities, and if you have money you can even travel around a bit, and treasure the illusion that you are free (to move). “Inside”, the illusion gets crushed by the omnipresence of the repression machine which controls all of your movements and cleanly writes them down in reports, and if you don’t behave you get a negative report and/or go to the black hole or you are put on strict and certain “liberties” are taken from you, like making phone calls, having visits, and so on. Inside, just like outside, certain privileges we have (which are artificial liberties) are being regarded as real liberties, you get used to certain privileges (like having a walk, making a phone call and so on) and you don’t regard the fact of being locked up as a problem anymore, but the maintaining of certain privileges as the solution to your problems. In the end, here as well, you can consume how much you want, and feel better because of that, and start to feel like you’re staying in a cheap hotel, with the only difference of course that you cannot go to walk on the beach to inspect some monkeys, but that you have to stay the whole fucking time in your cell, without complaining.” – Paolo Melis[

1. Arrested during the disorder in Gent, Belgium, against a 6.10.09 fascist event; four of its leaders were beaten in the street, while cars, ATMs, rubbish containers and construction materials of a prison building firm burned, as well as many Palace of Justice windows being broken. Paolo was accused of arson that night, and Jürgen Goethals of eight more. Both are now free.

“These zoos for humans or concentration camps – I’d rather call them this way – are functional to the maintenance of the social and political status quo. We are fed twice a day; as the food trolley passes by, its shaking noise is like a fork thrown at the bowl normally used for pet dogs and cats; and then they ‘walk’ us out like the pet dogs they probably have at home. Surely these places mark you psychologically and physically beyond the time you spend inside. I can’t eat the good produces I used to cultivate in my garden, and have to content myself with the flavoured crap, tasteless and deprived of nourishment, offered by the house; but at least I always try to keep fit in my body and mind. Besides the DNA database there is now forced labour for ‘social’ prisoners: cleaning roads, highways and rail-tracks and producing more motivations for the breeding of humans in captivity. Some might find my words and images abnormal but this is the crude reality of what make us paradoxically similar to other animals exploited and imprisoned for others’ consumption. We can well undertake a thousand struggles but we must free ourselves from one single cage, be it real or social. Those who think they are superior or more important to other living beings or other forms of struggle simply justify submission, the practice of locking up living beings in a cage and the control of others considered inferior and therefore to be submitted to their ideological will. The comrades who are close to me and to all other prisoners in their different ideas and actions make me feel I’m not alone, and in spite of the restrictions on my freedom they encourage me to continue the struggle against the existent that is poisoning the earth. Rehabilitation methods and reintegration into society are meaningless. We don’t want to know anything about big or little works that companies are undertaking in the name of progress, nor do we want to know what they are doing for the government… I’ve already got everything I need to sabotage them. For the actions of liberation of the earth and all living beings from techno-industrial dominion!” – Gianluca Iacovacci[2]

2. See Return Fire vol.3 pg71: he is now off house-arrest
1.1. MUSCULAR TENSIONS
- Loss of motivation to clean the environment
- Deficiency in self-care
- Lack of personal hygiene
Consequences:
- Headaches
- Deformation of visual perceptions
- Special perturbations
- Impoverishment of life (a world in black and white). In zoos it is very common to see cement precincts, practically without vegetation for the captive animals. In these conditions it would be possible for alterations in their vision. These aspects are not easy to perceive in animals and rarely does a zoo know the terrible states in which their animals live in.

1.2. Hearing
- High level of noise
- Permanent noise
Consequences:
- Auditive problems
- Concentration problems
- Monotony of sounds (The majority of zoos in the world are in the big cities, metres away from roads, with hundreds of people that visit daily)

1.3. Taste
- Insipid food (this is common in zoos with little resources and budgets – mainly in Argentina – and all its jails)
- Poverty in the diversity of flavours. (How many flavours can be perceived by animals that live in captivity? How many would be capable of perceiving in their natural environment?)

1.4. Sense of smell
- Jails smell (zoos, generally, even worse)
- Lack of smells [from outside habitats]

1.2. PERSONAL IMAGE ALTERATIONS

1.2.1. Deficit in the perception of their own body
Two types of phenomenon:
- Loss of the image of their own body
- Lack of intimacy has grave consequences for everybody’s identity.
  (Many zoos are built so that animals can’t hide from visitors or have any privacy.)
- Effects on their own body image (avoiding looking into mirrors). It is known that some animals identify with the first individual they see when they are born, so what happens when animals in zoos have more contact with humans than with their own species?
- Can’t measure distances (confusion between the limits of their own body and surroundings, especially those closed in isolation). Lots of captive animals in zoos are condemned to solitude.

1.2.2. Lack of personal care
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Deficiency in facilities
- Loss of motivation to clean themselves

1.3. MUSCULAR TENSIONS

Causes:
- Excess fat in diet
- Scarcity of mobility (reduced space to assure the spectacle and entertainment)
- Anxiety (typical in captive animals)
- Feeling of danger (by being surrounded by humans constantly)
Consequences:
- Frequent muscular contractions
- Pains
- Sleep alterations (common in captive animals)
- Rigid movements (symptom of “zoocosis”, an illness in zoos)

2. PSYCHOSOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

2.1. EVERY DAY LIFE
- “Total context” (all life is structured around the jail)
Consequences in jail:
- Exaggeration of situations (relevancy of little things)
- “Living the jail”
Subsequent consequences:
- “Stuck in time”. (Liberating a wild animal from a zoo with relative success is a very hard task. Unless rehabilitation is provided these animals would simply not be able to have a natural life, being submissive or too aggressive in their pairs, incapable of reproducing. It is very necessary to expand studies to understand the drawbacks for their free lives after captivity. Dependency on somebody? The inability to handle their lives? These are huge parallels to human beings. Maybe we will find more answers forward one…)
- Difficulty to elaborate future projects

2.2. AGGRESSION SELF-AFFIRMATION OR SUBMISSION FACING THE INSTITUTION
- Power structures in jail (perception of vulnerability for the inmate)
- Necessity for self-affirmation to maintain self-esteem
- Jail as a form of annihilation. (Wild animals can’t understand human motivations. They don’t know why they’re kidnapped, so there is constant tension.)
- Choice between extremes: confrontation vs. submission

2.2.1. Confrontation:
- Diagnosis: mechanisms of survival, adaptation to the penitentiary system. (We are all guided by circumstances: if the puma doesn’t show their teeth they won’t be feared.)
- Confrontation as an indicator of mental health. (In animals this is observed all the time: when they are captured they resist a lot, bite, try to escape, and after – as their mental health declines – they begin to domesticate themselves and lose a lot of the capacity for confrontation.)
Consequences:
- In jail: institutional hardening
- In freedom: no recognition of the damage
(Captive animals normally show themselves more aggressive with their captors and with their own pairs. This conduct can persist unless there is a proper rehabilitation.)

2.3. ALTERATIONS OF SEXUALITY
2.3.1. Sexual relationships:
- There are no times for subtilities (“quick, quick”). A very interesting study in “Interpreting animals” from Temple Grandin describes how rescued chickens from factories were incapable of appropriately courting hens and they raped them. The idea that everything is instinct in animal life is a thing of the past, we now know how complex the world is and what we have in common: learning from pairs, socializing in a natural environment.
- Bedrooms (animals are all the time visible for the public)
Consequences:

In jail:
- Sexual poverty, sexual rigidity (absence of fantasies)
- Problems with couples. (Of course we are not going to talk about sexual fantasies in animals, but it is clear that courting is fundamental and animals don’t learn this in zoos, in fact, it is difficult for them to reproduce in captivity. Lack of desire? Maybe the high level of stress that they constantly are exposed to prevents them from reproducing.)

2.3.2. Masturbation:
- Absence of fantasies
- Constant relief to deal with the absence of pleasure. (This is often seen in captive animals. They masturbate all the time due to lack of stimulation; it is a behaviour [ed. among others] described as “zoocosis”.)

ABSENCE OF CONTROL OF THEIR OWN LIVES
- A powerful institutional situation, violent and normalised and hierarchised relationships centred on domination
- The prisoner has practically no control over their own lives

2.4. PERMANENT STATE OF ANXIETY
- In prison they are always in danger
- Constant state of anxiety, which will be generalized in all types of situations
- This leads them to live with more anxiety in permanent situations in their lives in jail, increasing risk situations

2.5. LOSS OF VINCULATIONS (compared with kidnapped animals in their natural habitat)
- Entering prison means immediate isolation
Consequences in jail:
- Restriction of personal relations
- Gradual loss of connections
- The time of jail as time empty of content
- The notion of exterior reality will be lost
- Memories will slowly distort and idealise

2.6. LANGUAGE
Language as an element of exclusion:
- Exclusive verbal terms from jail
- Peculiar intonation
- Different gesticulation

These are only some ideas, vague notions of what happens with prisoners in jail and in zoos. It is necessary to investigate doing funded comparisons, more scientifically corroborated, as those who write are simply amateurs who want to raise attention to these similarities so that we try to better understand prisoners and animals that are captive.

The facts were taken by the work of Dr. Jesús Valverde Molina: me.gov.ar/curlform/publica/valverde_ehec_carcel.pdf and the internet in general.
I recommend this page to understand more about zoocosis: www.infozoos.org/comportamiento_saberantes.php [Spanish language]

1. ed. – In 2006 it was discovered that detainees at the U.S.A. internment camp in Guantanamo Bay, Puerto Rico, were being fed 4,200 calories per day to make them mostly obese and less rebellious. However the same year some clashed with guards, armed with fan blades and broken light fixtures.

“...We are a small stone of the mountain, a drop within the ocean, a sigh running through the wind, we are the minoritarian struggle, the despised, the dangerous, the reckless, those who love violence, those who make the fire to sing the insolent song of their dead...”
– claim for fires set to barricades and PDI police bus, Curicó, Chile, 21 & 23.05.11

“...As anarchists, we do not make a fetish of death, out of the way that fascists, armies, and nations do. We do not prefer our comrades, friends, and lovers as cold and stern memorials, or as rose colored memories revived in the haze of sentimental poetry. We prefer them beside us, creating with us the spaces and struggles of our liberation and fighting alongside us in defense of our lives. We do not ask for martyrs. We do, however, know that is inevitable... We are born in the history of the Haymarket Martyrs [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg86] hanged for resisting the industrialist’s police, of Suga Kanno strangled by the Empire of Japan and of Carlo Giuliani shot down by the Italian cops [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg68]. We inherit a flag stained black in the remembrance of our dead, in the negation of their killers, and in the promise to never surrender.”
– Seeds Beneath the Snow

1. ed. – An anarcha-feminist who published a banned newspaper and in 1910 plotted the assassination of Emperor Meiji.

SANTIAGO: THE CONTEXT OF THE MARCH FOR THE CLOSURE OF THE METROPOLITAN ZOO

Brief ideas surrounding the International Day of Struggle to Close All Zoos, 24th, 25th and 26th July [2015]¹¹

Anarchists and other liberationists tear down fences and clash with police at Kızılkaya animal ‘shelter’ near Istanbul, Turkey, a “last stop” for strays rounded up off the streets, which also opens up development of a ‘protected’ forest among the 200 most important ecological sites in the world: Ankara and İzmir also saw demos

The conflict against the culture of domination imposed by the State/Capital means that we have to bring our values and ideological reflections into the fight to strive for liberation.

Our detachment from values like empathy and solidarity are signs of a sick society, whose only aspiration is consumerism. This irrational lifestyle treats each human or animal as exchangeable goods for the process of production for world trade.

Power has made us into a society that views torture and assassinations as a natural aspect of life. This explains why other oppressive institutions like jails are also presented as normal elements, either as a form of punishment or as a way to correct the faults of the productive system. For non-human animals this reality is presented through zoos: their “social function” is to provide education and entertain humanity. Meanwhile, behind bars the suffering of thousands of animals is regularly maintained by distancing them from their natural conditions and instincts. These animals only gain stress, sickness and death.

This tragic reality remains in front of us, along with the isolation of thousands of animals that wait for their turn to die and continue to give their services to humans through food, clothing or decorations.

And here we are: we are the ones who have to act. Liberation is a path of constant confrontation where the choice is to stop being apathetic bystanders and take action by abandoning our harmless “lifestyles” that don’t seek any resolution or conflict, whilst millions of lives suffer and end behind the bars of vivisection centres, breeding farms and zoos.

Propaganda & Sabotage for Total Liberation

We remember the young anarchist fighter Javier Recabarren, who died on the 18th of March this year after being run over by a bus from the company Transantiago.

On the 18th of March our comrade Javier Recabarren died after being run over by a bus outside of his school. However, this 11-year-old boy was no ordinary kid. Whoever crossed his path noticed his unshakable desire for freedom.

He was a member of the “Animal Collective: Raise Your Voice” and participated in extensive manifestations for animal liberation initiatives. He also performed anarchist activities that involved revolutionary solidarity with our comrades in prison. Naturally, he was also involved in the street fights, fearlessly facing the police and burning flags of the United States. These actions led him to be detained by those bastards.

The war that Javier started is a clear sign to keep fighting against all forms of power and authority, along with continuing the fight for animal liberation and practicing revolutionary solidarity to ensure that Javier’s vision prevails and transcends... This young fighter inspires us to maintain our chosen path towards Total Liberation.

The young combatant, at a demonstration

Transantiago are targeted...

COMRADE JAVIER RECABARRREN: IS WITH US!

Today we will give you a minute of silence... and a lifetime of combat!

Revolutionary Struggle Collective

25th July 2015, Santiago

¹¹ ed. – Coordinated between Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Costa Rica “to end these monuments to the domestication and commercialization of life”.

47.
A key premise of this work is that there is a profound dis-ease at the heart of modernity. Psychiatry is interesting in this regard in that it is both culpable in the problem as an artefact of that modernity whilst also being a ‘warning beacon’ identifying anxiety and distress in the population. There will be those who disagree with this premise, arguing that things are generally getting better and in this case why attempt to fix that which isn’t broken. To explore this issue it is helpful to identify what we are referring to with the term ‘modernity’. In the one sense modernity can be seen as a particular period in time emerging after the European Enlightenment. Felix Guattari described Modernity as the emerging after the European Enlightenment. We find ourselves a constellation of stories that become a whole. We reflect on our practice and contemplate theory and practice, to write our theory into action. To put our theory into action. To contemplate and intertwine tentacles of modernity and mental distress are very much a part of one organism and cannot be neatly prised apart for dissected analysis. The crux here is that most attempts or techniques developed or proposed to alleviate mental distress are from exactly the same linear ‘myth of progress’ thinking that is so inseparable from the genesis of the distress in the first place. Hence the intertwining tentacles of modernity and mental distress.

Disciplinary Modernity & Control Hypermodernity

[...] The emergence of the scientific technique as rational movement of linear progress was mirrored in social and political thought by figures such as Hegel[25]. He carries the idea of society moving in one direction from a past of disorder to a future fulfilment through the resuscitation of the dialectical method of thesis meeting antithesis and correcting in a synthesis. Enlightenment thought, however, does not represent such a radical break with the pre-modern as it could be argued it simply exchanges the metaphysics of an all-knowing God for the metaphysics of a rational subject. So ‘the enlightenment’s metaphysical and epistemological assessment of the world was continuous with pre-modern thought in so far as it also still seemed to assume the idea of an ordered whole’ ([Simon] Lumsden).

[...] This modernity of faith in an ordered whole is, however, a refrain of life that has grown old. We find ourselves ‘at the point of the decay of an epoch’ where the
dominant stories have “begun to lose their explanatory cogency” (Lumsden). Hence the scramble to adequately theorise the stage we are at, which some call post-modern, some hyper-modern, others late-modern and a host of other terms. Zygmunt Bauman captures the lack of clarity and shifting sands of the time very visually with his term “liquid modernity”. This is also where [Gilles] Deleuze’s “control society” emerges as a term of reference, for describing a new phase of organising beyond (but also co-existing with) [Michel] Foucault’s sovereign and disciplinary societies. I have argued that psychiatry found its genesis in the early modern Enlightenment period and has been fixed in lock-step with the twists and turns of the project of modernity ever since. This helps to explain the seeming liberation that many thought would be heralded by unlocking hospital ward doors and the scaling back of the large psychiatric institutions in the western world over the past 30 years. I continue to suggest that this has, unsurprisingly, not been a liberation, just a shift mirroring the wider post/late/hyper/liquid modern context. The institution has been totalised across the social field, as John Berger puts it “across the planet we are living in a prison” and all are fellow prisoners, while “penitentiaries still exist and more and more are being built. But prison walls now serve a different purpose. What constitutes an incarceration area has been transformed”.

[New forms of resistance are required, specifically in this case new approaches and explanatory tools to comprehend mental distress. The anti-psychiatry of Laing, Cooper, et al(7), is no longer up to the task, likewise the critique of Oedipus and Psychoanalysis(56) now seems quaint as mental distress has passed into the hands of bio-medical epistemologies and pharmaceutical marketing. Those earlier critiques were appropriate to the disciplinary modern society but “psychiatry is [now] so heavily bent toward a biomedical understanding of mental illness and so dependent on psychotropic solutions for emotional problems that it might be characterised as not simply modern but rather hypermodern” “[Andrew] Michel].

[…] An insight I drew from the Dark Mountain Project and from ‘The Coming Insurrection’ was that we are currently living through a “live pragmatics of collapse” and I aim to hold this in creative tension with an anarchist prefigurative hope. My two-fold resistance relies on one major crux of my critique; the existence of an ‘outside’ to modernity. This is the base which makes any critique not just a nihilist despair but a ready possibility to be productive. Modernity rests upon the assumption of its universality: “Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear” [(Theodore] Adorno and [Max] Horkheimer]. This is true of utopian Enlightenment thought in its teleological(59) progress, and it remains true of a late/post/hyper-modernity with its generalised techniques of control. As previously stated, these claims to universality are a “myth of myriophreness” or a “tradition not aware of itself as a tradition”. Getting a purchase on the chinks in modernity’s armour is reliant upon upsetting this universalist claim. […] The existence of an ‘outside’ to modernity is a conclusion to be draw from all three of the case studies explored in previous chapters. The Zapatista struggle was in large part an embarrassment to a modernist/modernising Mexican state, the existence of actors who would rather not partake in the building of a ‘first world’ state was not a role the dominant story had accounted for. This led, in their ‘constructivist turn’, into getting on and creating different modes of organisation, actively demonstrating that there was more than one way to exist in a space and to construe social relations. To be immersed in this kind of prefiguration is to very soon see modernity as just one story among many. Similarly in my analysis of ‘Idea No More’, in their refusal of modernist laws, naming schemes and borders in favour of non-Cartesian embodied ways of understanding, we can see a suppressed outside being re-opened and explored. What was particularly interesting here was the trauma and distress involved in many centuries of enforcing a demarcated modern colonial ‘inside’(113). There is insight to be gained from the search for healing of trauma by these indigenous groups, an example being the blockading of problematic ‘flows’ and the re-opening of healthy flows (flows that ignore borders) to engage with a landscape therapeutically. Finally I characterised ‘Uncivilisation’ [the Dark Mountain manifesto] as a “re-wilding from within”, with a “keen eye to an ‘outside’ that hasn’t been colonised [or] that is loosening the colonising grip.” This project is the search for new stories that can be an insurrection to derail the death ride of progress. What draws all of these expositions of an ‘outside’ together is a drive to ‘de-colonise’, that is they are not static critiques but are in ‘movement’ actively looking to shake off the totalised colonial present. […] They are all engaged in de-colonial practices, if we accept that modernity itself is, as [Jürgen] Habermas suggests, a colonisation of the lifeworld. This perspective points towards post-colonial and de-colonial theory and practice as being useful approaches to my pre-figurative and pragmatic resistance to modernity’s ‘rational management’ of mental distress.

[…] Remaining cautious of the risk of expropriating ideas in a classically colonial fashion, I should point out that other figures have directly made these connections between the domains of modernity, colonialism, psychiatry and mental distress. Most notable among these figures is arguably Frantz Fanon, a French educated psychiatrist of Algerian descent(9). Fanon identified the social and political elements of mental distress that he saw while working in Algiers from 1953 until his resignation from his medical post in the colonial administration in 1956 to join the Algerian liberation movement. What is instructive for my use of decolonisation as resistance is Fanon’s identification of not just a neutral biological disease pathway in those experiencing mental distress, but the functioning of colonialism on the libidinal and psychic planes. This analysis took him within a matter of years from the hospital to the scene of a violent rupture of colonialism; just as I am searching outside the hospital for the ‘cracks’ or ‘ruptures’ within modernity to get some purchase on an analysis of mental distress. This position acknowledges that it is not enough to simply put ‘service users’ in already extant positions of power, as this is merely playing around with the roles in an already present colonial game. More than this game is needed, as Samira Kawash situates this Fanonian ‘rupture’; “true decolonization is something much more radical than the reversal of position and the replacement of rulers; decolonization is the uprooting of the system as a whole, the supplanting of the political, existential, and corporeal reality created by colonization”. She also suggests that Fanon’s analysis doesn’t take a Hegelian view of ‘progress’ but something more akin to Walter Benjamin’s redemptive dialectic of revolution; this is the position that the moment we find ourselves in and the possibilities therein are not reduced to a point on a one way line of ‘progress’ or historical teleology, but that this moment can “blast open the continuum of history” (Benjamin). This is thus the fear that the Algerian resistance struck into the French colonial psyche and also the fear that a resistance to modernity strikes into those invested in the project of progress; “the ‘terror’ of decolonization is the terror of radical possibility generated from within the scene of colonization” (Kawash).

Abstract Space: Abstract Distress
The scene of de/colonisation within which I am seeking a Fanonian rupture is the abstract space of modernity. Within such an abstract space mental distress has become and can only be seen as an
The meaning of such an assertion will become clear if we explore theoreis of abstract space further. Mick Smith elaborates this concept of ‘abstract space’ by drawing upon Le Corbusier’s modernist writings on city planning. He suggests that “modernity’s principle is repetition” and that its modus operandi is the “creation of types and through the eradication of difference”. Le Corbusier champions this principle by demanding “the erasure of the specificity of both past and place [to] break free from both the ‘slime’ of social history and the unwelcome intrusions of nature’s ‘disorderly’ conduct”. I am arguing that Le Corbusier’s modernist dream of city planning echoes exactly the dream of modern psychiatry. The overt aim of so-called “evidence based” psychiatry is the establishment of ‘objective’ universal standards, diagnostics and interventions that can shake off the weight of the checkered history of approaches to mental distress. This aim is to “build on a clear site [to] replace the ‘accidental’ lay-out of the ground” (Le Corbusier). The modern city and the modern technique of ‘health’ thus become one and the same thing, they are the embodiment (if embodiment hadn’t been banned from psychiatric discourse!) of the intertwining tentacles discussed previously. Thus “the nature and origins of our distress remain hidden from us, and it becomes ‘free floating’; unanchored to any recognisable ‘cause”’ (David Kidner), just as the interior of our mass produced car, office with its suspended ceilings and plastic carpet or brick box in suburbia are shy at disclosing their origins, are ‘free floating’ and literally ‘could be anywhere’. David Kidner analyses this abstraction in the case of ‘depression’, arguing that the industrial domain comes to re-define ‘human welfare’ thereby ‘misconstruing human needs’ as an unacknowledged emergent property of the normal functioning of industrial society. Thus he concludes that as the ‘natural’ world of a healthy bio-diverse environment is systematically impoverished and destroyed, so is the human psyche in exactly the same fashion. The crux of this matter is, however, that a ‘firewall’ is built between the two domains thus obscuring their virtually identical unfolding, leaving depression, anxiety and the like as individual problems, “reflecting personal inadequacy” and demanding individualised solutions/treatments. In this setting mental distress becomes a matter of the individual and a universal individual at that. The ‘gold standard’ of psychiatric classifications such as the ICD-10 (WHO 1992) or symptom/treatment rating scores such as the Health of the Nation Outcome Score (HoNOS) or Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA) is that they could be applicable to a person anywhere on the globe, despite the European and North American origins of these classifications. The ICD-10 manual gives each disorder a numeric code that is then able to be integrated into digital record keeping systems. Even though there are many hundreds of such codes within the manuals, there are many millions of people experiencing mental distress and inevitably these individual embodied subjectivities existing in particular places, spaces and times will have their experience reified into a ‘type’ that allows limited room for ‘difference’. This abstraction of mental distress also demands the presence of professional divisions of labour [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg6] and these

“The foundations of psychology lie within Enlightenment philosophy rather than in the day-to-day experience of the person-in-context; so it should not surprise us that the covert aims of psychology are closely aligned with those of the whole industrial project. Only if we naively accept [the experimental psychologist’s] claim to be “objectively” studying the person would we anticipate that psychology might offer a welcome and necessary corrective to the personally alienating and distorting influences of industrial life. What we find, instead, is that it is one of industrialism’s chief accomplices, proposing and legitimating views of the individual that are consistent with the development of a market economy, and denying legitimacy to any cultural and spiritual structures that might challenge the hegemony of the economic determination of our lives. Experimental psychology, then, has a certain ironical truth value, as David Ingleby has pointed out: it posits as “natural” a model of the person that is consistent with a domesticated world increasingly determined by industrial and commercial requirements, and in so doing it helps to bring about our conformity to this model. […] Even when the significance of social and occupational factors in the causation of “mental illness” has been recognized, the roles of “genetic” and “environmental” factors are often mapped out in a way that assumes that their prior separation is a fact of life rather than an ideological construction. For example, the aetiology of schizophrenia is conventionally viewed in terms of an interaction between genetic predisposition, on the one hand, and “psychosocial stressors,” often located within the nuclear family, on the other. But what is concealed here is the relationship between these two classes of influence. A particular “genetic predisposition” may incorporate an incapacity to adapt to the specific, and arguably less than ideal conditions offered by urban society, insisting on the need for a way of life that is currently unavailable. This genetic predisposition therefore carries a concealed social component. It is not a genetic predisposition to say, schizophrenia as such, but rather a genetic preference for one sort of environment rather than another. Genetic predispositions are therefore relative to particular ways of living: genotypes that are adaptive in one environment may be disastrously unfitted for another. For example, one of the “risk factors” in schizophrenia has been found to be “emotional responsiveness.” In an urban world saturated with fast-moving traffic, huge amounts of information, ever-changing occupational demands, and a good deal of sheer physical noise, it is not surprising that an emotionally responsive person would often feel bewildered and overwhelmed by the number and intensity of stimuli demanding their attention. Under these circumstances, the ability to ignore a large proportion of this input and to remain detached will be essential for emotional survival. On the other hand, is the individual inhabited the sort of environment within which our nervous systems have mostly evolved – that is, one that is closer to a wilderness situation where attentiveness to every sound might prolong one’s chances of survival – then the “risk factors” identified [by researchers] might instead become predictors of survival. Such example make clear what the abstract discussion of “genetic predispositions,” “risk factors,” and so on conceal: that risk is relative to the lived character of specific environmental conditions, and that to separate “genetic” factors from “environmental” ones is radically to misunderstand the character of both.” – David Kidner
disciplinary divisions then come to define what is understood as mental illness and the appropriate ways of approaching such a condition.

[…] Thus with the emergence of a range of psy­professions in the past 100 years the issue of mental distress has become reified and reduced. The use of numeric coding discussed above is a prime example of this process of capture and reduction. To be effective, however, in helping someone in distress often demands resisting this reification and capture. The psychotherapist Nick Totton criticises the regulatory professional culture as being bound up with the processes of domestication of the wild discussed in previous chapters. He argues that therapeutic helping practices are “impossible to domesticate without disempowering[…] therapy is, in fact, inherently wild, and cannot be rendered safe in the way that regulation processes intend”. Thus, despite the fact that professional regulation may indeed “protect” the public in a mass culture and in professional regulation may indeed safe in the way that regulation processes are designed to be, they can still become reified and reduced. The use of numeric coding discussed above is a prime example of this process of capture and reduction. To be effective, however, in helping someone in distress often demands resisting this reification and capture.

Subversion 1: Scaling Up the Diagnosis

The first tactic of resistance that I will offer as a response to this individualising and de­skilling enclosure is the appropriation of the diagnostic codes and their re­application at a different and unintended scale. This is an appropriation of the weapons of colonisation, their modification and redeployment as tools of de­colonisation. Gary Genosko illustrates his discussion of [Felix] Guattari’s ‘smooth and striated’[14] with just such a re­deployment of tools of oppression. One of the cases he applies is the use, until 1967, of ‘disc numbers’, ‘E numbers’ or tags on individual Inuit persons in Yukon and Northwest Territories of Canada to identify them. This numbering system was later replaced by a ‘census’ requiring individuals to select a recognisable European­style name. Both names and numbers were re­deployed in multiple ways, often an individual using a complex combination of names, nicknames, numbers and so forth to describe themselves. Also the discs themselves were physically used as decoration, to identify houses lacking street numbers, on snow­mobiles, in works of art, etc. In one particular instance in 1991 a symbolic numbering system was started by the issuing of ‘mock disks’ with ‘Q’ numbers applied to ‘Qallunaat’ – white people. These examples are the ‘escape’ of codes from bureaucratic ‘overcoding’ techniques repeatedly applied as part of the violence of colonialism. In terms of the smooth and the striated Genosko suggests that state bureaucrats will attempt to apply the stria­tions of organisation to indigenous communities; but “there is something smooth about Inuit life that keeps issuing challenges to the self­appointed bestowers of names and number crunchers in state bureaucracies and elsewhere (churches, mining companies, etc)“. My resistance of re­appropriation takes the diagnostic manuals and their numbered codes as medico­legal­bureaucratic stria­tions applied to individuals. In my cases the escape of the code is its application not to individuals but whole societies and institutions. The first example of this is Chellis Glendinning’s book “My Name is Chellis and I’m in Recovery from Western Civilization”. Glendinning, a psychotherapist, takes the diagnosis of post­traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suggests that it represents the ‘normal’ state of societal functioning in civilisation. “[T]he traumatized state is not merely the domain of the Vietnam veteran or the survivor of child­hood abuse; it is the underlying condition of the domesticated psyche”.

She methodically goes through the diagnostic criteria and symptoms demonstrating that they are applicable on a society­wide scale and at this scale are seen not as pathologies but as a typical way to go about everyday life. For example the recurrent intrusive recollections of trauma common to individual PTSD are displayed in the frequent themes of violence, horror and terror in mass entertainment such as films. Another symptom is the naming of affect, which Glendinning suggests is akin to a “dead to the world” approach to life that has become the modus operandi of most people living in mass technological society[…] caught in rush­hour traffic, watching television, glued to [the] computer screen[…] the crowd of paralysed people in the elevator”. Another symptom, arrested psychosocial development, playing out as widespread infantile approaches to relationships in adults [ed. – see ‘The Stories Which Civilisation Holds as Sacred’] and governments conducting knee­jerky military operations as acts of “revenge” [ed. – see Panopticon Then & Now: A final, and pertinent to my argument, symptom she describes is addictions, particularly the largely un­questioned techno­addiction which is the assumed position of ‘progress’ and growth economies. Paul Virilio’s work touches on some of these themes. In his “The Original Accident” he describes the “havoc wreaked by progress” as the “integral accident” of modernity. In this analysis he scales­up suicide; this final act has ceased to be a matter simply of psychology, “associated with the mentality of a few disturbed”[15] individuals, but sociological and political”. As stated previously, these societal scale symptoms are mostly either denied, not analysed or are naturalised as simply a part of ‘human nature’. The strength of Glendinning’s position is that these symptoms cannot be ignored in such a fashion, they stand as an indictment of a pathological modernity that is every bit as ‘mentally ill’ as the individuals inhabiting it and to whom diagnostic codes are applied. The second diagnostic re­appropriation to be raised here is the book “The Corporation” by Joel Bakan, the material of which also became the topic of a documentary film by the same name. The material of which also became the topic of a documentary film by the same name. The diagnosis to be used in this case is Psychopathy and rather than a society wide application, here the ‘patient’ is an institution: The Corporation. Bakan’s methodological application of the DSM IV and ICD­10 criteria bring him to the conclusion that modern corporations can accurately be described as ‘psychopaths’. So while individuals within corporations may present with psychopathic traits in
their working practices, they “compartmentalise” these traits and behave differently in their personal lives. The corporation itself, however, is a psychopath through and through, meeting the diagnostic criteria comfortably. Thus “the corporation is singularly self-interested and unable to feel genuine concern for others in any context.” It is “grandiose” in its thinking and planning and is “manipulative” to achieve these ends. It lacks “empathy”, is incapable of feeling “remorse”, refuses to “accept responsibility” and relates to others “superficially”. The significance of applying this diagnostic formula to a corporation is that in many legal situations these institutions claim the rights of individuals. […] When something usually reductionist and restricting is reapplied in this fashion it shows starkly the farce that the individualising process of categorising distress is, along with the structures of hegemony and power (such as corporations) that maintain and legitimise this process. Similar factors can be seen to come into play with Glendinning’s “socialising” of PTSD; so it is not just individuals alone fighting their intrusive recollections of trauma, but the entire ‘civis’ together struggling to forget their collective trauma. In some cases this approach could point towards therapeutic practices genuinely helpful to the distressed individual. An example of this is a recent ‘novella’ “Liminal”, written by Natasha Alvarez. Her writing is a journal of a year of ‘mourning’ that she chose to take in response to her overwhelming feelings [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg69]. She describes “wrestling with a deep and painful sadness” after the birth of her son. She responded with a widening of the issue, captured beautifully in a brief passage: ““Post partum” people said. “Grief,” I replied, “mourning for a collapsing ecosystem and a dying planet.””

This resistance of re-appropriation is transversal in that it crosses the intended boundaries of application of the diagnostic codes. It crosses the artificial divide between the monadic individual subject and the social practices and institutions of which they are a part. In this way it highlights “the erroneousness of dividing the Real into a number of discrete domains” (Guattari). This re-appropriation is an example of schizoanalysis as a ‘radical materialist psychiatry’ (not just another ‘technique’ to dwell within the ‘psy’ domain) and it begins to get some leverage on my problematic of mental distress in the spaces of modernity.

Overtly Spatial Distress: or Traversing the Firewall

“What has congealed as an environment is a relationship to the world based on management, which is to say, on estrangement. A relationship to the world wherein we’re not made up just as much of the rustling trees, the smell of frying oil in the building, running water, the hubbub of schoolrooms, the mugginess of summer evenings. A relationship to the world where there is me and then my environment, surrounding me but never constituting me. We have become neighbours in a planetary board meeting. It’s difficult to imagine a more complete hell.” (The Invisible Committee).

Using The Invisible Committee’s description of a ‘complete hell’ in contemporary France as a starting spring board I intend now to carry a line of flight over (or through) the fire wall discussed above. ‘Distress’ within this ‘complete hell’ is not ‘abstract’ distress, neither is space an abstraction in this process. In the place of the desire to see distress as a-historical, a-social and a-spatial my transversal movement will place distress as overtly spatial, specific, relational and embodied. Let me take a detour into archaeology to illustrate this point further and to find another spatial “hell”.

In his narrative description of the finds from numerous archaeological digs around the eastern Mediterranean, Steven Mithen characterises the creation of an everyday living ‘hell’. The site he particularly describes thus is a Neolithic village dating from 9000-7000BC called Catalhoyuk, in present day Turkey, near the Syrian border. In these early sites of domestication (a problem discussed previously) we see the kinds of spaces both facilitated and necessitated by the technology/technique of sedentary agriculture. Displays of human skulls and images of animals were found here that suggested [ed. – as one plausible interpretation] a fear of nature and systematised rituals, the ‘wild’ as something external and a felt need to secure their community from incursion. These images were within an architecture of little variation, with repeated designs and rigidly demarcated areas for specialised activity; “different types of people – old and young, male and female, specialist toolmakers and those without skills – were very restricted as to where they could sit and work within each room. To me it seems as if every aspect of their lives had become ritualised, any independence of thought and behaviour crushed out of them by an oppressive ideology manifest in the bulls, breasts, skulls and vultures. This sounds like living in a Neolithic hell...” (Mithen). This ‘hell’ is in sharp contrast to the ‘heaven’ [ed. – theorised by some] of pre-domesticated hunter-gatherer life from 20,000BC to 11,000BC for which he found evidence from other archaeological investigations.

This experience of taking up settled farming has surprisingly strong resonances with the spatial relationships produced (or exacerbated) by hyper-modernity; if we remember the “complete hell” of having become “neighbours in a planetary board meeting”. Just as the first farmers had re-situated the ‘wid’ as separate and external, we ‘moderns’ now find ourselves as “me and then my environment, surrounding me but never constituting me”. The “bulls, breasts, skulls and vultures” may have been replaced with smart phone adverts, plastic wrapped factory chickens and badger culls, but the message is much the same. These are two concrete examples, in the 21st Century and in 7,500BC, of Glendinning’s societal PTSD. We find ourselves trapped together in an everyday that is colonised by dysfunctional practices that stem from trauma and are reproducing the trauma. [Herbert] Marcuse calls these practices “enslavement contentment”, the daily activities that are little more than “performances required to sustain destructive prosperity”. Awaking daily to participate in routines so familiar and numbing that they are barely even recognised as questions in need of examination, let alone as practices that are built upon resource depletion, slavery (wage and forced) and species extinction. This is the ‘uneven’ ground that Le Corbusier would like to erase from the equation, there can be no ‘commons’ for sustenance here, only techniques developed by professionals. The straight and even lines must be built to enable the smooth continuance of ‘progress’, citizens must forget the uneven ground hidden under and repressive practices hidden by the level concrete floor. If you feel distress in this space it must be a technical problem of biology, chemicals or genes requiring an empirical solution that can be manufactured and reproduced wherever the concrete floor stretches. However, concrete isn’t yet everywhere and where it is it has a habit of cracking, and these edges and cracks are where we could begin to situate what Guattari calls “aesthetic-existential” approaches that refuse to ‘objectify, rely [or] ‘scientifise’ subjectivity”.

[…] Our task then in drawing this schizoanalysis to a close and to suggest resistances is to make these “new coefficients of freedom” possible. Rather than spatial practices of standardisation and banal repression a possibility of ‘anarchic space’ can be opened up. Within anarcho-space there is a need to address the inherited distress, as the trauma won’t just disappear, thus pragmatic practices can be explored drawing upon a hotch-potch of re-directed existing approaches and what is left of the richness of the psyche-commons. There will also be pre-figurative practices that envisage an existence that
isn’t stuck in constantly re-producing trauma. These practices are akin to health promotion, remembering the cliché that ‘prevention is better than cure’. To make an illustration of what is required let us consider factory farming as a problem of modernity. This issue can be subdivided into particulars, such as routine over-use of antibiotics. Thus one could campaign against this use of antibiotics, demanding that the practice is stopped. This would, however, ignore the ‘assemblage’ of factors that make the factory farm what it is. The antibiotic use is necessitated by the crowded conditions and the vectors and mutations of disease in such a space. The crowded space is necessitated by the imperative to maximise profit with the highest yields possible in the area available. This argument goes on through multiple levels of organisation, philosophical and material considerations, and in a complex non-linear causative fashion. Through this we find that factory farming is another ‘technique’ that is hyper-modern through and through. Thus to effectively challenge the problem of factory farming one would need to take an ‘assemblage’ view and not just look at one single issue. This methodological insight remains true in an assessment of mental distress. One could demand the cessation of the use of psychotropic medication, but fail to address the reasons that the use of such medicine has become the accepted way to approach mental distress. It would also risk stigmatising people who find such substances genuinely helpful in managing day to day to day. Thus I want to suggest that pre-figurative resistances to create anarchospace and the pragmatic approaches also will need to be such ‘assemblage’ views.

This is why a richly spatial approach is helpful – by refusing to see distress as ‘free-floating’ and abstract and thus requiring interventions that are every bit as reductionist, we can see the fire wall that we plan to traverse. […] I shall now appraise the interventions, tools and skills at hand.

Subversion 2: Luddite Health Promotion

Preventing distress and helping someone who is in distress are tasks requiring skill. I want to suggest, using an argument developed in anthropology by Tim Ingold, that what currently passes for ‘health promotion’ and ‘helping’ in situations of mental distress is closer to de-skilling machine operation. Ingold dismisses the traditional idea of technology evolving on a linear trajectory from simple to complex and thus seeing ‘primitive’ societies as possessing less technical know-how and awaiting development. His suggestion is that it is in fact a matter of the subject being “drawn from the centre to the periphery of the labour process”. […] This move to the periphery turns the “workman” [sic] into “an operative, putting into effect a set of mechanical principles that are both embedded in the construction of the instruments he [sic] uses, and entirely indifferent to his own subjective aptitudes and sensibilities”. In this way the operative is “detached from” the process and end product. Ingold calls the opposite approach “technique” (not in the sense that Jacques Ellul uses this term). This way is at the “centre” and “immanent”, seeking to minimise the distance between the subject and the process. In this approach the tool is inert until the skilled subject “delivers a force that is personal rather than mechanical”; there is no pre-given or independent instrumental objective embedded in this type of tool. Rather the ‘process’ is embedded in social relations.

To use such a tool is to be highly skilled, overturning the old notion of the ‘primitive’, this skill being “at once a form of knowledge and a form of practice”. Thus, “acting in the world is the skilled practitioner’s way of knowing it”.

Having defined Ingold’s use of the term ‘technology’ and ‘technique’ let me return to my earlier assertion about current interventions for those in distress. I would argue that most ‘psy’ professions, guided by notions of ‘evidence based practice’, are more akin to the ‘operatives’ on the periphery of the process using machines with pre-determined functions. This situation has been an emergent property of the push to standardise interventions coupled with the drive by different ‘expert’ groupings to professionalise their domain. Thus recalling my discussion of Susan Griffin’s essay on ideology “[What if all our efforts toward liberation are determined by an ideology which despite our desire for a better world leads us inevitably back to the old paradigm of suffering?]” (Griffin) it seems that “despite our desire” well intentioned professionals find they are wielding machines over which they have little agency. These machines are of numerous forms, for example mental health legislation is just such a machine, as are prescription guidelines, pharmaceutical formulations, assessment protocols, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) sessions, shift working patterns and the built environment of wards and clinics. So if this straited space of abstract universal interventions represents an undesirable mass factory of psy-labour, how can we pre-figure an anarcho-space of immanent skilled technique (Ingold’s meaning of ‘technique’)? How can the bored operative putting in a shift at the psy-factory be replaced by the alert, engaged and nuanced hunter-gatherer of the psyche moving with skill in a smooth space?

In answer to this I will suggest another subversive practice: Luddite health promotion. The Luddite actions of the early industrial period were discussed previously [in the book] in the context of the Dark Mountain Project, and here I will briefly revisit some of the issues raised. The Luddites of the nineteenth century English midlands were generally skilled crafts people, concerned about the dramatic changes they saw coming from the implementation of standardised machine operations in their industries. This situation sits comfortably within Ingold’s characterisation of technology with the ‘operative’ on the ‘periphery’.

While the Luddites were far from pre-civilised skilled tool users, they were on this trajectory from tool use by skilled subjects in the ‘centre’ towards an alienated ‘periphery’. Their response “violent in its rhetoric and as direct as a sledgehammer in its actions” ([Steven] Jones). For a core period of three years numerous autonomous groups donned masks and smashed the machines responsible for the deterritorialisation of their daily life (ed. – see Memory as a Weapon; “An Outrageous Spirit of Tumult & Riot”). While being cautious not to simplify or distort historical events from 200 years ago it seems that to negotiate and accommodate became unthinkable for many in a situation that was driving thousands in the midlands and north of England into poverty and drudgery.

Returning to the alienation and limited efficacy of machine interventions in the psy-factory (remaining cautious of clumsily appropriating a 200 year old movement, as neo-luddites have been accused of) I want to open up a space where these type of questions of technology may be asked. This could be in dialogue, in epistemological questions, or equally it could be in visceral direct actions. The question of flows could be re-visited here, as it has been a topic emerging at numerous points in my investigation. Deleuze and Guattari examined the flows of desire, the decoded capitalist flows and the schizophrenic flows. The Zapatistas created their own autonomous flows, whilst ignoring or fighting the statist and neo-colonial flows of capital, commodities and rancher-paramilitary thugs. Idle No More saw blockaded flows to disrupt the violent
The nature of the questions and the situation of hyper-modernity that we find ourselves in will determine the level of questioning required. As with any health promotion the benefits may not be immediately apparent and there may well be some up-front costs. But with an eye to the long game and the pre-figuration of something different there could be our sanity to (re-)gain.

1. ed. – “[A] move away from a rigidly imposed hierarchical, arborescent context, which seeks to package things (concepts, objects, etc.) into discrete categorised units with singular coded meanings or identities, towards a rhizomatic zone of multiplicity and fluxuant identity, where meanings and operations flow freely between said things, resulting in a dynamic, constantly changing set of interconnected entities with fuzzy individual boundaries” (Wikipedia).

2. ed. – “17th century thinkers dethroned scholastic Aristotelianism and instead, theology itself. Not only Church orthodoxy, but animism [ed. – see ‘The Stories Which Civilisation Holds as Sacred’] and magic that had survived into the Renaissance were rejected. [...] The scientific revolution of the 1600s was a decisive break with the past, a thorough re-evaluation of what had come before.”

3. The age of Enlightenment and emergence of modernity coincided with the exploration and colonisation of continents beyond Europe. This is the social project of modernity that exported European-Western ways of living and governing at the same time these new rationalities were being established at home. It is interesting in this regard that although Celtic monks are believed to have sailed as far as North America in the period commonly known as the ‘dark ages’ (the legendary “Voyage of St Brendan”) the continent was not appropriated and exploited until maritime expeditions in the centuries leading up to the Enlightenment. The appropriation and exploitation required the technology, methodology, ideology and other factors tied up with the cultural and social project of emerging Modernity.

4. ed. – “Protests against abusive practices of the Catholic Church by [Martin] Luther, [John] Calvin, [Ulrich] Zwingli, and others became a revolt against Papal authority. Protestant denominations were the result: a full break with Catholicism. And the anti-authoritarian spirit of the Reformation was not limited to doctrinal matters. In Germany, the Reformation, anger at Church landlords ran high, appeals to the people by Luther and other reformers brought more radical results than these preachers intended. The radical Reformation was exemplified by Thomas Müntzer, who broke with Luther early on, announcing an imminent apocalypse wherein freedom and equality would reign. Müntzer preached dispossessing of the nobility, echoing the Taborite millenarians and social revolutionaries of 15th century Bohemia. The great peasant revolt in Germany (1525-1526) was the most important event of the Reformation period and one of the biggest mass movements in German history. But sadly, the Peasants’ War is not what was arguably modern about this era. The seeds of modernity are found instead in writings of people like Ulrich Zwingli. He preached the necessity of regular, industrious habits, and warned of ‘the danger of relaxing the incentive to work.’ The origin of this modern, now-internalized ethos is the main subject of Max Weber’s classic, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. The rise of Protestantism relied upon the print culture introduced by Johannes Gutenberg’s invention: a printing press using moveable type. Printed books were available in the early 1500s, accompanied by a striking increase in literacy. For Marshall McLuhan, print was a founding aspect of modernity: “With Gutenberg Europe enters the technological phase of progress, when change itself becomes the archetypal norm of social life.” Typography made possible the first assembly line, the first mass production. Not only did authorial ownership commence, but, according to Roberto Dainotto, “By embedding language in the manufacturing process of mass-produced books, the printing press transformed words and ideas into commodities.” Walter Ong
observed another key outcome: “Before writing was deeply interiorized by print, people did not feel themselves situated every moment of their lives in abstract, computed time of any sort.” A changed sense of time seems related to a growing “passion for exact measurement” in the late Renaissance. The emphasis on precision stems from a series of Le Corbusier’s projects speeding up and tightening its grip (Modernity Takes Over).

5. Such methodologies included inductivism, in which observations of a particular case are used to generate theories that can predict future incidences/behaviours. This, and other scientific methodologies, tends to rely on the assumption that objective truths can be discovered by the rational examination of phenomena reduced to their constituent parts. This assumption is known as reductionism.

6. All of these definitions of Modernity are an oversimplification of the issue however. The way I want to characterise Modernity is as an affect on everyday lived experience [ed. – i.e., as producing and being sustained by certain feelings, attitudes, and ways of relating]. An example of this is the description by Jay Griffiths of the changing conception of time as ‘wet and round time’ and ‘dry and linear time’ and how this is connected to social organisation, interpersonal relationships and the championing of particular times. In this case the clock. Paul Virilio has also taken ‘time’ as a focus for exploring the everyday experience of modernity, using the term ‘Dromosphere’ to describe the changing relations of space and time being lost in a compulsive speed acceleration. He talks of a ‘grey ecology’ as a “pollution of distances” or a “pollution of life-size” that should be as concerning as pollution of ‘green’ ecology. To approach modernity in this way is not to analyse cities, for example, as just another space, but to see the totality and wider implications of their very existence. Here we begin to unpeel the dark side of our ‘taken for granted’ epoch and in this sense “the tragic chorus is the city itself”. To continue in this examination of negative ‘affects’ we see less the attributions and a chime of autonomy collapsing into fragmentation as common impacts associated with modernity. The experience of this is expressed by [Zygmun] Bauman as a paradox: “The greater our individual freedom, the less it is relevant to the world in which we practice it. The more that the world becomes of the choices we make, the less the game, our playing it, and the way we play it are open to our choice. No longer does the world appear amenable to kneading and moulding; instead, it seems to tower above us – heavy, thick and inert, opaque, impenetrable, stubborn and insensitive to any of our intentions, resistant to our attempts to render it more hospitable to human co-existence”.

7. ed. – Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, German philosopher of the early 19th Century. His thought has said to be summed up by the dictum “that the rational alone is real”, that all reality is possible to express in rational categories. As Jason Radeges and Lev Zlodey have put it, “[t]his is a foundation of monothemism [ed. – see “The Stories Which Civilization Holds as Sacred’] and of rationalism that there is one Truth. This is a fundamental doctrine of the reality we are fighting. But even the scientists have been forced to concede that there is no such thing as objectivity. Velocity and position are relative; observation always affects the observed. Nonetheless, the possibility that truth is multiple and contradictory is still assumed to be fallacy. Both the Enlightenment concept of logic and the State itself require all their subjects to stand in line.”

8. ed. – A tendency starting in the 1950’s typified by Ronald David Laing, David Graham Cooper and others. Laing wrote that “[i]f the human race survives, future men [sic] will, I suspect, look back on our enlightened epoch as a veritable age of Darkness. They will presumably be able to savor the irony of the situation with more amusement than we can extract from it. The laugh’s on us. They will see that what we called ‘schizophrenia’ or ‘schizophrenics’ in forms in which often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break through the cracks in our all-too-closed minds.” Cooper saw the condition of schizophrenia as the clash between one’s ‘true’ identity and our social identity (the identity others give us and we internalise). From 1961 to 1965 Cooper ran an experimental unit for young schizophrenics in South Africa, which he saw as a revolutionary ‘anti-hospital’, before travelling to Argentina in search of revolutionary currents.

9. ed. – “Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia” is a 1972 book by Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which, via human psychology, economics, society, and history, looks at the relationship of desire to reality and to capitalist society in particular. He uses the term “psychanalyst Sigmund Freud who focuses on the ‘Oedipus complex’ theory; a child’s desire that the mind keeps in the unconscious via dynamic repression, to have sexual relations with the parent of the opposite sex (i.e. males attracted to their mothers, and females attracted to their fathers), named after a 5th-century BC Greek mythological character Oedipus, who unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother. As a part of the Oedipal narratives they saw being deployed through this theory, two other Parisian psychoanalysts near the time of ‘Anti-Oedipus’ wrote a mock paper under pseudonym proposing that the anti-estableishment notates of May ’68 (see Return Fire vol.2 pg96) were totalitarian Stalinists, and psychoanalyzed them as suffering from infantile Oedipal revolt against authoritarian father figures.

10. ed. – A teleology is a belief that things are by purpose aimed towards a goal.

11. Despite the common belief in Europe that the colonial period is past, it has stayed very much present, for example, in the form of aepistemological colonialism – a process by which western hierarchies of knowledge are naturalised as the ‘only’ objective empirical logic. Thus only certain questions come to be seen as relevant or sensible and diverse practices and knowledges are dismissed as ‘other’.

12. ed. – Actually, Frantz Fanon was born on the Caribbean island of Martinique, which was then a French colony and is now a French department’, and first arrived in Algeria after fleeing the collaboratorist regime in Martinique during World War II to British-controlled Dominica to join the Free French Forces, and was deeply shocked by the racism shown towards him and other blacks within the military.

13. ed. – “Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier remains a symbol of modernist architecture and planning. Active as an architect and planner from around 1920-1960, Le Corbusier acted as a principle member of International Congress of Modern Architecture and author of The Radiant City establishing the vision of utopian modernism that provided inspiration for Disneyland. He is responsible for redesigning Chandigarh, the capital of India’s Punjab, L’Unité d’Habitation, a large apartment complex in Marseilles, designing megaprojects around the world, and inspiring the style of Brasilia [ed. – administrative capital of Brazil]. However, few of Le Corbusier’s projects mandate it to construction as political and financial limitations inhibited his work. Echoing Descartes and other mechanical philosophers, Le Corbusier’s position is clear: “Thus in order to save himself [sic] from this chaos, in order to provide himself with a basis for a tolerable framework for his existence, one productive of human well-being and control, man has projected the laws of nature into a system that is a manifestation of the human spirit itself: geometry”. In short, modernism was the extension of industrial theory with an aesthetic concern [ed. – indeed, Le Courbiusier described housing as ‘machines for living’]. Embodying the reductionary spirit of linear vision and it’s obsession with scale, geometry and a perfection of things harboured an axiom for chaos and disorder. Commenting on Le Corbusier, James C. Scott writes, “visually offended by disarray and confusion [he wished to correct] not so much a disorder at ground level but a disorder that was a function of distance, a bird’s-eye view”. Le Corbusier’s work in Brasilia, which, via human psychology, economics, society, and history, looks at the relationship of desire to reality and to capitalist society in particular.

14. ed. – A good summary of ‘commons’ is given in this extract from ‘Do or Die’ #6, sadly by talking about their destruction (or, ‘enclosure’) in a classic case; the highlands of Scotland. “This process culminated in the infamous Highland Clearances, with the people finally and fully dispossessed by the new landlords and their sheep, and driven into wage labour in the newly industrialised cities, or onto boats bound for the ‘New World’ (where they would help to dispossess others in turn). A tremendous haemorrhage of natural wealth was underway – through the export of nutrients (in the form of sheep and timber), and of people, who took the accumulated wisdom of an ancient, more sustainable culture with them. Both the land and knowledge of how best to live on it, were under attack.

Then, when the bottom dropped out of the sheep market, tragedy turned to farce – sporting estates – the ultimate colonial indulgence, a status symbol and bizarre playground for the elite (and ONLY the elite) – began to predominate. By 1912, ‘an incredible 20% of Scotland’s land area was given over more or less entirely to the hunting of red deer by a small fraction of the populace’ (A Brief History of the Origins of the Scottish Wildlands). Hot on the heels of the sheep, these deer began to deliver the death blow to the Scottish forests. While one could never claim that the indigenous Highland culture was perfect – for example, it too had presided over deforestation, and helped the eradication of such species as the wolf and beaver – it’s community-based subsistence economy differed from the colonial English model in one crucial respect. In a nutshell, it is that the original ‘social ecology’
of the Highlands was, for all its feudal failings, what is now described as a 'commons' regime. "Traditionally, clan lands were not the private property of the chief but were invested in him on behalf of the clan. Membership of the clan [gave] clan members rights of use of land and water" (Reclaiming the Scottish Highlands) – from this tradition comes the Gaelic proverb that "every man from the mountain, a tree from the wood and a fish from the river.

It was the English that brought the dynamic of enclosure to bear on this regime, having recently pioneered it upon their own people. After the defeat of the clans at Culloden in 1745, the imposition of enclosure meant 'not only the removal of land from subsistence communities, but a profound step toward viewing the land and its people as tradable, exploitable commodities' (Radical Environmentalism in Scotland, ("Labour too became a tradable commodity", as those Highlanders exiled to Glasgow and elsewhere found to their cost.)

By contrast, the commons regime had a deep-rooted sense of place – so deep, in fact, that "a farmer would often refer to by the name of the farm rather than the family name". Such an affiliation with and reliance on, a place is in marked contrast to the 'cut and run' practice of enclosure – it is a crucial built-in safeguard against the temptation to 'externalise' the social and environmental consequences of your actions – to pass the costs on to someone else.

15. ed. – "It is vital for the rebels of today to understand the enclosures of the commons that began over 500 years ago. Rather than an act of primitive accumulation or a blind, profit-motivated process, the enclosure is first and foremost a strategy of counterinsurgency. All counterinsurgency, in fact, is fundamentally enclosure. [...] After they appropriated the natural commons and broke our relation with the land, through mechanization they broke our relation with the rural community and the rhythms of life. The third great enclosure was the reengineering of urban space to break our relation with the streets that had become our home, and then to commercialize the public sphere so that, rootless, we could be swept off those streets even at a physical level; the latter part of this process is still incomplete even in some Western countries, while the proliferation of slums, the self-organized growing out of control of many of the world's people, threatens to roll back the first part of this process. The fourth enclosure, which began when the mass production of moving images merged with an affective economy [ed. – see the supplement to this volume of Return Fire: 'Caught in the Net'], is the expropriation of the imaginary from our imagination. [...] Though all of these enclosures run according to a logic that demands constant depletion, they are all current, and once completed, they will begin again at zero, albeit more rapidly, anywhere an atavistic pocket opens up" (Jason Radeges & Lev Zlodey).

16. ed. – "Some have taken issue with which of these spaces is truly "smooth"[5] and which "striated", "Smooth space" – Deleuze and Guattari’s term that contrasts with the striated space favoured by the authorities – is a misnomer. It's the friction, the darkness, the nooks and crannies that the State objects to. [...] The belief that the Highlands exist nowhere more apparent than in its campaigns against the world. The war against nature has taken many forms. The world was depersonified and dismembered by science. Gardens were replaced with monocultures because they were easier to survey, to tax, and to destroy in the scorched earth responses to rebellion. People living by natural rhythms were settled so they could be better policed. The US military defoliated the forests of Vietnam, so they could see the enemy. Mussolini drained the Pontian marshes near Rome, as Saddam Hussein drained the Euphrates marshes, as the real estate industry is draining the Everglades and the coal industry is levelling Appalachia. Each of these wild places were zones of rebellion and places of refuge for stateless or state-defying peoples right up into the 20th century. [...] As James C. Scott describes it, the State must "flatten" everything in its dominion, at every level – geographically, linguistically, ethnically, economically – to make it legible, easy to read like a tax survey, easy to police like a grid of tenement houses. The jungle of existence must be replaced with a monoculture" (Jason Radeges & Lev Zlodey).

17. ed. – "We would object (as perhaps would this author) to the stigmatisation of the suicidal as 'disturbed'; indeed, we are quite touched by reading the following words from an anonymous statement from somewhere within the Spanish State, and much in agreement. 'It's true that Christian morality, emetic and hypocritical, has sown a certain vitalism that was imposed in all areas of collective power. We have to love our life, we have to want to live, we can't say clearly that we hate our life; and when someone chooses to commit suicide, whatever the reason, and the standard reaction is to stop him/her for his/her own sake'. Even though who comes to life, we have to want to live, we can't say clearly..."

18. ed. – "While we don't doubt such well-intentioned people exist (nor question the author's own experience), we also cannot cover over the history of psychiatry as an explicit weapon against the unruly – see for example our notes in Return Fire vol.2 pg77 – not hide our suspicions about some kinds of people attracted to such a trade.

19. ed. – 31 coal carriages were derailed. The action was claimed around the time of the June 11th annual day of solidarity with long-term/eco-anarchist prisoners.

TIES THAT WERE UNBREAKABLE

On April 30th Tonni, an anarchist boy from Madrid, was kidnapped by his mother and father and locked up in a "family therapeutic center" (which is physically and experientially a jail).

In centers like this, hundreds of children are locked up because they are 'unsubmissive' to the demands of their families for their ideology, lifestyle, drug use, or even for being 'gay', 'lesbian', trans... This in exchange for €4,000 and the accusation of their families, without the need for a court order, unlike conventional reformatories.

Almost three months ago they wanted to cut ties that were unbreakable, they wanted to stop our actions and lock our ideas, but we thought about it and we did it, always one step ahead and we can't even think of acting without them knowing. We have felt everything; fear, enthusiasm, rage, motivation, anxiety, happiness... sometimes it seems that our enemies are always one step ahead and we can't even think of acting without them knowing. But we thought about it and we did it, and finally we are together. Freedom is unstoppable, and this is well-known by the thousands of non-human and human animals that manage to leave behind their conditions of confinement and/or exploitation. You also can leave behind the walls that surround us and help other ones to do so.

Our love does not fit on their cages; fire to all the prisons and long live anarchy!

Following, we transcribe some words from the companion for the miserable adults: "Every time you told me that I could not count on my friends, who were bad people and who lead me on the wrong path, I got closer to them and they showed me that I could count on them. For every time you did not accept my way of being and living, I moved farther away from you. For every time you locked me up I ran away; from the high school, from your house, from the center. And you can go and forget about me, because you will not lock me up again."
Rose Hips
Rose hips are the sweet fruit of the rose plant, and glow like rubies in the fading colours of autumn. The earliest known gardening was the planting of roses along the most travelled routes of early nomadic humans. Domesticated roses have much larger hips but they are usually not as flavorful or medicinal as wild varieties.

Wild varieties have the highest concentration of Vitamin C, with some estimates reporting 30-50 times the Vitamin C of oranges, making them excellent for prevention and treatment of colds and flu. The hips are also loaded with Vitamins A, B complex, E, K and minerals including calcium, silica, and phosphorous. They are particularly high in bioflavonoid rich antioxidants including rutin that help strengthen our heart and blood vessels, and prevent degeneration of tissue. They contain carotenones including lycopene that have been linked with cancer prevention. Natural pectin found in rosehips is beneficial for gut health. Studies show that rose hips may reduce the symptoms of osteoarthritis and help sore, achy joints. Additionally, they boast the highest known concentration of iron of any plant (and the key to processing iron in the body is to couple it with vitamin C, which abounds in rose hips, so ideal for those who are anemic). People who have menstrual periods have long used rose hips during that time; the iron (a major component of red blood cells) helps you feel lethargic during your period. Rose hips have the most nutritional value when used immediately after harvesting.

They ripen after they are touched by the first frost. They should be firm with a little give in texture and bright red. (It varies, but in general, orange hips are not quite ripe, and deep red hips are overripe. Overripe hips are sweet, but have lost much of their vitamin C.) Pick on a dry day to prevent mould.

Humans cannot eat the hairy inner seeds of rose hips because they irritate our intestines. (Other animals and birds can eat them with no ill effect and benefit from the essential fatty acids and vitamin E; we can press the oil to treat skin problems.) This isn't a problem if you just want to make a tea (because you can use them whole without breaking them open), but if you want to use them you can cut the hips in half and scoop out the seeds with a tiny spoon or round-tipped knife (supposedly easy once you've found the rhythm!) then rinse in cold water and drain thoroughly.

Dandelion (root)

Compared with the leaf of this plant [ed. – see Return Fire vol. 2 pg53], it's best to harvest the roots when the plant has finished flowering and starts to die back, transferring most of its remaining energy into the roots. The first autumn rains loosen the soil around second-year roots, making them easier to harvest. Dandelion draws up nutrients that have been washed deep into the soil, replenishing the upper layers so more shallow-rooted plants can use them. In addition, they create a micro-climate that draws earth worms, who help break-up compacted soil and spread those nutrients around. As well as providing a wealth of nutrients to a wide array of herbivores and omnivores, it provides bees and other insects with nectar when other plants cannot bloom.

As mentioned in the prior entry for its leaf, all parts of dandelion are bitter, due to the blood-purifying flavonoids. However unlike other diuretics (substances which can increase the flow of urine), dandelion contains vast amounts of potassium that restore the mineral balance in the kidneys as toxins are flushed out. It’s ironic that the poisons gardeners use to eradicate dandelions are the same toxins this plant offers to weed from our bodies! The plant's fibres have an astonishing ability to absorb and transport toxins from the bowels out of the body, balance intestinal flora, and soothe the digestive tract in the process. It's great after flus and colds have taken their toll. People with liver conditions, skin conditions, changes in hormones such as menopause or adolescence and arthritis (including gout) can benefit greatly from dandelion. The root is also a mild laxative, and studies have suggested it combats cancer. The bitter constituents are also anti-inflammatory. However, ulcer pain is worsted in most cases with bitter herbs like dandelion that increase stomach acid. This holds true for those suffering from bowel blockage and gallstones as well. Due to dandelion’s bacteriostatic and fungistatic properties, patients using prescription antibiotics would be wise to avoid using dandelion until they have finished their treatment.

Once scrubbed clean and chopped, the root can be cooked and eaten (good in stir-fries) for those who like the flavour, or dried to use as a tea (or a surprisingly satisfying coffee substitute). If you want to make a tincture to maximise the medicinal properties, harvest shortly after the first frost when the inulin levels are higher.

Dandelion prefers loose, rich, healthy soil, but it can grow just as readily in compacted, rocky, and dry soils. It grows at altitudes ranging from sea level to 10,500 feet, in broad and open meadows as well as in the inner city sidewalk cracks, and despite a wide range of difficult obstacles such as lawn mowers and herbicides. This speaks to dandelion’s ability to adapt to its environment, no matter how challenging. For this reason it is associated with the magic of adaptation. Dandelion is symbolic of the kind of magic that gently, intentionally and firmly changes those conditions that no longer serve it.
Seasons

Mama, the house is burning.
’hush child, this house is fire proof.’
As her nightgown smokes and curls
Like an offering
Like a whispered prayer
‘this house has stood for thousands of years.’
Mama, the house is burning.
‘this house will stand for a thousand more.’

This house burns down once a season.
It is rebuilt just in time for the next fire.
Every time.

Mama, the house is burning.
Mama, the house is burning.
All of my words just crumble like the beams.
Snapping like broken backs kneeling under the pressure.
Dropping to the floor.
Like spent casings.
Words slip past like smoke, silent like flames racing across the floor.

This house burns once a season,
every time it is rebuilt
it is missing something that made it what it was.
Made it what we are.
What we were.
What we hope to be.
Mama, the house is burning.
‘No, child. This house cannot burn.’
Mama, the house is burning.
All of my tears
will never be enough to quench the fire.
Mama, the house is burning.

– Hunter Hall

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Ezra Pound’s Proposition

Beauty is sexuality, and sexuality
is the fertility of the earth and the fertility
Of the earth is economics. Though he is no recommendation
For poets on the subject of finance,
I thought of him in the thick heat
Of the Bangkok night. Not more than fourteen, she saunters up to you
Outside the Shangri-la Hotel
And says, in plausible English,
“How about a party, big guy?”

– Gabriel Pombo da Silva

[ed. – Gabriel was finally discharged from decades of prison this June; see Return Fire vol.1 pg75 for further case details. However the Spanish authorities, who had always bitterly resisted his release, soon announced that he would be recalled; “Therefore”, wrote Gabriel in his last letter (from the outside), “I suppose that I have no choice but to continue, as always, fighting from the shadows, supporting those processes and anti-authoritarian projects that I consider it necessary to give life to, with all the means I can reach from my imposed clandestinity.”]
The Story of Coyote Nations (just one chapter...)

Hey is that you? Sitting there on the hill? Watching us tonight? Have you come to let us out of here? We’ve been waiting for you. Crying every night.

Trying to tell you hoping you would come. Have you heard... what they are doing to us in here? Listen, 140 coyote people crying in distress. Each with their own story of separation, pain, torture and death. Listen, they are trying to tell you, enough to break your heart. All true.

Brother. You got to let us out of here. Warrior, listen in case you’re questioning your next move. They starve us in here, then tempt us with sheep, radioactive poison sheep. And they watch us die. Feeding our pain into a computer to study. Sister-warrior listen, in case you are unsure. They mate us to have pups, then steal them, maim them, poison them, we never see them again. Only sometimes we hear them, only children. They cut us open, take our wombs, poison us, watch us die, see if we can still have pups. And when they are done with us, they dump our bodies by the ton, in mass toxic grave.

Lightning-womyn sister of mine, let us out. Thunder-man brother, pay them back. We are Coyote, and our medicine to help you stay free. Do not go down. You should only be among the enemy to raid. If you listen.

The earth spirits are strong, and are poised to help you... Come home Coyote Warriors. It is time to reweave the web, the tribe to each other, all to the Earth Mother. Build your fires, and there we will sing to you. Tell you of the days long ago, when we were all one. Coyote medicine is your strength. The earth spirits are strong, and are poised to help you... if you listen.

Warrior societies, your time is now. Find each other. Come back home. You should only be among the enemy to raid. All you warriors, keepers of the dream, do not let them have you. Do not go down. What makes you think you do not have to hide? We must. We have coyote medicine to help you stay free. Remember what it is like to live.


Hey Coyote Warriors! Where are you? We’ve been looking for you. We need you. We wait for you in the deserts, mountains, plains, our home. You Coyote Warriors belong here too. Born to the humans, still living among them in their crazy cities. The time for you to leave is now. Come home. There is much to be done. Many of our wild ones still imprisoned, remember? Being tortured, killed, destroyed. We never forget. Yours is to fight, this fight dog soldier. Keep our wild spirits alive! Sacred hoop strong, it was never broken.

And your home is here, among us your wild sisters and brothers. We have much to teach you, remind you of our power. Come home Coyote Warriors. It is time to reweave the web, the tribe to each other, all to the Earth Mother. Build your fires, and there we will sing to you. Tell you of the days long ago, when we were all one. Coyote medicine is your strength. The earth spirits are strong, and are poised to help you... if you listen.

Warrior societies, your time is now. Find each other. Come back home. You should only be among the enemy to raid. All you warriors, keepers of the dream, do not let them have you. Do not go down. What makes you think you do not have to hide? We must. We have coyote medicine to help you stay free. Remember what it is like to live.


[ed. – Based on the Animal Liberation Front (A.L.F.) raid on Animal Damage Control (A.D.C.) laboratories of the governmental Department of Agriculture in Utah, U.S.A., 24.10.92, resulting in the release of 29 coyote captives, and arson which consumed a third of the vivisection facility. The A.D.C. were – and are, renamed U.S.D.A. „Wildlife Services” – slaughtering millions of wild beings like (across the western American states) coyotes, cougars, wolves, bobcats and foxes. A.L.F. individuals then proceeded to Utah State University, entered the office of the A.D.C. project leader (fifty yards from the police station) and seized records of dumping of radioactive coyote bodies and other sensitive details of the operation, before leaving a fire which destroyed much of his research and wrecked $10,000 damages. These acts came during the convention of a grand jury investigation into a series of A.L.F. incendiary attacks or breakouts at the Oregon State University mink research facility, Northwest Food Farm Cooperative, Washington State University research facility, Malecky Mint Ranch, and the Michigan State University research facilities and offices, and the investigations which eventually led to the government hunt for fugitive Rod Coronado over the Oregon, Michigan and Washington actions, and similar attempts in Montana. Rod, of the Pascua Yaqui people (see Return Fire vol.2 pg59), was “raised with a value system that didn’t see animals as property, a value system that saw the earth as our mother, that value system not being founded on anything that took years to develop through philosophical or ideological involvement but instead being what I was brought up with”. Since 1986 the F.B.I. had him filed after he jointly sunk two Icelandic whaling ships and demolished an Icelandic whale processing plant before escaping, also fleeing sabotage charges in Canada and Denmark. (He also took action against the fur-trade and fox hunts in south-west England and London). He was captured in 1994 on his tribe’s home reservation. He took responsibility for involvement in the Michigan arson (that destroyed 32 years of research intended to benefit the fur farm industry), stating that “I believe it to be the obligation of the earth warrior to never be ashamed of ones own actions, to honor the sacred tradition of indigenous resistance", and became the first federal A.L.F. prisoner. After his release, he was re-interned after demonstrating, on a public speaking tour, how he had constructed easily-reproducible incendiary devices, and now still faces State attention in „Treadean‘’. He states that “I think that when we call ourselves green anarchists or anarchists, or we call ourselves revolutionaries, I think we really have to seriously consider what that means. [...] To me the power of direct action is about recognising what you can do away from a larger movement.” He has taken responsibility for the action this unsigned poem is based on. In various indigenous cultures of North America, coyote often shows up as ‘the trickster’; through the antics of the coyote (and other trickster figures) wisdom and many important teachings – disguised in mishaps, humor and transformational situations – are coded and passed down to the young. Such wily characters appear in old stories from diverse cultures, embodied by a spider, a fox, a hare or some other wild being.]
MAY

01.05.15, Tuscon, U.S.A.: “[Tuscon police chief Villasenor] is now part of a federal task force on improving relations between police and the populations they try to manage. Villasenor is adept at pushing a “community policing” agenda as part of a counterinsurgency strategy [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg5] to better control potentially rebellious populations and incorporate the official Left into this system of domination.” Joint attack on law enforcement targets, “in solidarity with the ongoing rebellions against police throughout the country [ed. – see Authorities Finally Confirm Stingray (IMSI) Use in Prison Island – in Scottish Prisons]. First, the office of the Combined Law Enforcement Association of Arizona, a statewide association of police unions, had a number of its windows smashed out. Later, the office of the Tucson Border Patrol Local Union also lost a number of windows and was redecorated with no borders slogans. Border Patrol was targeted for their role in the ongoing occupation of indigenous lands [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg67], their contribution to countless deaths and untold suffering in the desert south of Tuscon and elsewhere, and constantly increasing militarization of border communities across the borderlands. […] For everyone they’ve taken from us, whether by murder, deportation, or incarcera—

01.05.15, Bristol, U.K.: Vandals reach the canvassing vehicles of Conservative Party councillor Charlotte Leslie, parked outside her parents’ home shortly before the general election, which are scratched, spray-painted and get slashed tyres. The domestic heating tank is ruptured and spoils the garden. Leslie is known for attempting to whip up extra support for the police operation against combative anarchists in the region, and has also previously had her office graffitied over her vote in favour of fracking (see Special Hydraulic Fracture). “Do we really need to give reasons why we chose to damage the property of a Tory councillor? Have a look at the last five years of Tory rule and endless, savage attacks on our lives and you’ll find enough.” Coincidentally, the same night election signs for Leslie displayed in a garden in another part of the city were targeted, one burned (taking the host’s phone and internet cables with it).

05.05.15, Vilvoorde, Belgium: The fence of the police station is climbed over, an interrogation room entered by a skylight, and an incendiary charge set, inflicting fire and smoke-damage.

16.05.15, Wrexham, U.K.: “[An action took place at the site of Europe’s second largest prison in construction[…] The mega-prison, if built, will cage more than 2100 human beings at any one time. Multiple large diggers and construction equipment had their engines destroyed. Slogans were sprayed on the half-built prison fences including ‘Fuck Lend Lease’ [ed. – the construction corporation] and ‘Fire to the Prisons.’”

23.05.15, Lincolnshire, U.K.: 21 cops injured during a clash between them and around 200 of the ravers attending a party in Twyford Woods; one of the police was hit by a car, and another four also hospitalised.

Besançon, France: “During May 2015, mayhem broke out in the streets of Besançon. Flames lit up the nights of several neighbourhoods, which targeted and destroyed company vehicles, schools, various “social” state institutions… The police occupation in neighbourhoods for several months, with all that it entails, sparks a determined resistance. Throwing molotov cocktails [targeted] CRS [ed. – French anti-demonstration police unit] patrols in the neighbourhoods of Planoise and 408. Stone throwing at police and putting out of action of surveillance cameras are common. Therefore, modest attacks were carried out in solidarity with these acts of urban revolt this month in liberated zones of this prison-city. A list of vehicles that had their tires slashed: A ‘Hertz’ rental car. A ‘Fonica’ estate agents marked car. A vehicle of APRR, which is part of the Eiffage Group [ed. – see below]. Around thirty bikes of JC Decaux (besides being a well-known contributor to the gentrification of neighbourhoods where they implant bike docking stations, their role of exploiting prisoners for which the company publicity boasts is now widely known). The Departmental Council of Doubs car park (more than a dozen vehicles: total: cars and vans). An excavator of the Eiffage (prison manufacturers) construction site had its tank destroyed, who are building a gigantic luxury housing complex and a shopping centre in the heart of the city.

“In modern civilization, with the toxic wastes that extensively pollute the earth and the aquifer, air pollution that highly contributes to the reduction of life expectancy, the techno-industrial noises of every kind leading to paranoia and the luminous advertising signs that cover the starlight; even the car’s petrol tank light exists to remind us of the misery we experience! In the modern city and everywhere else the catastrophic tentacles of the industry and the social hierarchy lie (always talking about the artificial environment, the officials and lackeys of institutional authority), there is nothing more beautiful than the screwed up faces and the broken bones, the debris and embers of the means and infrastructure of the Enemy!”

Claim for arson of security company vehicles, a tourist service minibus and luxury/business tourist office, and vandalism of 27 shop security cameras in Athens, Greece, January 2015.
26.05.15, Milan, Italy: Anonymous attack on the offices of the engineering branch for the Italian national railways dealing with research and development, notably for the eccidal high-speed railway between Turín and Padua. Inflammable liquid is put through a broken window, then lit with a smoke bomb. Within minutes, the fire devours the furniture, computers and all the paperwork.

JUNE

07.06.15, Mississauga, Canada: Incendiary attack by the Animal Liberation Front (A.L.F.) against Harlan Laboratories (who supply ‘research animals’ and animal feed to vivisectors), owned by Huntington Life Sciences. “Fortunately, news reports have said that the devices ignited successfully, damaging one truck and completely destroying the other. Our only regret is that the flames were extinguished before they had a chance to spread to Harlan’s offices.”

27.06.15, Toa Baja, Peurto Rico: At the Sabana Seca Field Station of the Caribbean Primate Research Center, a cage is forced open and around thirty Rhesus monkeys are freed.

29.06.15, Honolulu, Hawaii: A congressman on the U.S.-colonised islands is confronted while filming a homeless encampment; his camera is taken and he is beaten and left with concussion and two black eyes. This congressman had previously gained notoriety by roaming the streets of the Aloha State (with one of the highest homeless populations in the U.S.) for weeks with a sledgehammer smashing shopping trolleys of vagrants’ possessions, declaring it a more practical approach to “clean” the streets than passing laws.

JULY

04 & 05.07.15, Buenos Aires, Argentina: One incendiary attack against a luxury car parked outside the Hellenic Association, in the context of the detention of Evi Statiri in Greece on the basis of her being in a life-partnership with Gerasimos Tsakalos of the C.F.P. or Conspiracy of Cells of Fire (see Return Vol.1 pg 40) and the ongoing resistance of their imprisoned Members Cell. Another attack on the train-line hours before the start of the Copa América football tournament.

10.06.15, Jalapa, Mexico: “[W]e launched an incendiary attack against the seat of the Federal Ministry of Social Development – SEDESOL – at about 4:40 AM […] The attack was as quick as it was effective, and it was reported that: “The disaster destroyed the better part of the furniture, papers, office equipment, electrical installations, and digital networks.” In sum, the place more or less went to hell.

[T]hey invented a sickness for us, one that they called “poverty”, and they convinced us that we suffered from it – only to sell, give, and force us to ingest the “cure”: the idea of development. It cures us in that it exterminates us, and bleeds out life to better entrap us in its game, its idea of life, its social “should be” of citizenship. Development has meant nothing more than the continuous extermination of forms of life, species of flora and fauna, ways of living and organizing, thinking, loving, speaking, and celebrating.

How many languages, words, or forms have been strangled, asphyxiated by kilometers of cement? Are we not in the hands of the enemy! How many languages, words, or forms have been strangled, asphyxiated by kilometers of cement? Or flattened with “mandatory, free, and public education”, or “aid” programs? If these are nothing more than cruel and vile forms of counterinsurgency, it is because “public policy” is the name which governments give to their most deadly weapons: those with which they have and continue to scar the countryside, depopulate territories… They have displaced, marginalized, and intoxicated. They have waged this kind of war against us for decades, because they knew beforehand that territories and ecosystems are formidable, strong when life flows through them, and that their inhabitants and defenders resist precisely because they are part of strong ecosystems, and would never submit if they were confronted head on. [The creation of] Mexico has been the extermination of languages, ways of thinking, watersheds, wetlands, woods, forests and mountains, many of which were put up in front of a firing squad while others were struck down with no more process than a few signatures, with no sound but the closing of a folder.

[…] They know that to construct their deadly mega-projects (be they subdivisions, ports, highways, hydroelectric dams, wind turbines, mines, or nuclear plants) they need to weaken the territories, imprison their waters, divide the land, run the rivers through pipes, spill cyanide from the mines and toxic fracking liquid into the earth to pollute the aquifers, such that – trapped and without the ability to support life – we would submit to the tyranny of society and money. Essentially they have spent decades carrying out military maneuvers on our environment, setting loose a kind of total war that we and others call social war. We see social war as all of these conflicts (macro and micro) that are released in order to submit communities, families and groups to the blueprints and dynamics of Society: to the practices and values that have been put in place to constrain us, mutilate us, and suppress us.

We do not understand social war as that which we wage against the system (in the forms of and as a substitute for what fascists of the hammer and sickle insist on calling class war), but as a great offensive employing all types of resources: from public policy, with its “models for national education” to TV series, the internet, etc, with their bombardment of dynamics and stereotypes. In order for these to be reproduced permanently, social war does not try to strike at its enemy or force it to surrender, but to completely erase it, to eliminate any way of thinking or being that does not contribute to the usufruct of capital, of the World Bank, the IMF [ed. – International Monetary Fund] and patriarchal logics, however they may be dressed.

[…] A strong and very spirited hug to the compas in Cheran, Aquila, Ostula, Uriachucino and other Purepecha and Nahua villages in the region of Michoacán, struggling for self-determination with dignity in their chests, arms at hand, and their traditions in mind. To the Yaqui compas who proudly resist and persist [ed. – see Return Vol.2 pg 59]. To the comrades in San Quintín whose subversion has burst into the media, reminding us that you are there, working from sunrise to sunset bringing jitomates to the markets and strawberries to the donuts of the same pigs who strangle them. Many of us can’t see a strawberry without thinking of you, comrades. May the armored vehicles you bashed in with rocks serve as an example for many. To the comrades of Elxochitlan, Huautla, Guixhiró, and all the corners of ungovernable Oaxaca, Magón’s cradle [ed. – see Return Vol.3 pg 41] and the godmother of insurrection, who have spent the last few days confronting the military, the feds, police, and others who want to force us to govern and be governed. […] To the other comrades in the jungles and mountains in Chiapas, greetings from one masked face to another, for your great determination and delicious tobacco, this is a demonstration of anarchist solidarity. […] Solidarity with the prisoners of war Abraham Cortés, Fernando Bárcenas [ed. – see Return Vol. 3 pg 77] and Fernando Sotelo[1]

[1. ed. – An anarchist sentenced to 33 years or burning a bus in solidarity with the Ayotzinapa 43 (radical students who ‘disappeared’ one evening in September 2014 after clashing with the cops, sparking riots.)]
**21.06.15, London, U.K.:** Report via Rabble counter-information page, concerning heartening news of rebellion in lockdown London. “Home Office immigration enforcement have been targeting the East Street market [in Walworth] all week, with no less than five raids over previous days. Today they came again at 5PM and snatched one man from a fish shop, presumably accused of working without legal documents.

But this time, things were not going to go so easy for the thugs in blue. After call-outs went out through the local grapevine and also on social media, people from the area including the next door Aylesbury Estate [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg57] rushed down to the scene. The Home Office snatch van was blockedad and penned in on a side street off the market. The bullies retreated inside the van with their prisoner while it was surrounded by people’s bodies and by makeshift barricades, the tires were let down, and it was pelted with rotten fruit and eggs from the market.

The Home Office thugs called in police reinforcements. They arrived with six cars of cops, plus dog vans and plainclothes cops, and a helicopter circling overhead, as the street was cordoned off. However, the crowd kept on growing as more people from the estate and nearby streets joined in, local teenagers called up their mates, others arrived seeing it on social media.

The stand off continued for over an hour, the local police clueless about what to do next. Then three vans of TSG [ed. – Tactical Support Group] riot cops arrived, tooled up in full body armour. The TSG pushed through, escorting the Home Office van limping out on deflated tires. They came under sustained attack as new barricades of street furniture kept getting thrown up to stop their progress and hails of rocks, bottles, road cones, etc., kept them at bay. At least one TSG cop was knocked to the floor, a riot van windscreen and other windows broken.

In the end, they managed to get their prisoner out, and also took one more arrested from the resisters. After the immigration van had got out the crowd kept blocking the TSG vans with commercial rubbish bins and other barriers to continue the fighting. Eventually, visibly shaken by the angry mob, the TSG managed to escape. After giving them a rowdy send-off, the crowd danced to a mobile sound system.

This was concerted angry action which brought together local teenagers, Aylesbury Estate residents, anarchists, and whoever was in the street and not going to take this shit lying down. If we could meet more raids with resistance like this it would seriously screw up the system of repression. This is the response we want to be growing on our streets, every day of the week.”

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**1.07.15, Modena, Italy:** Fire ravages a mobile phone mast and its cabin, “against repression and telematic control. […] Vengeance for Emilio” [ed. Ciao Soledad].

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1. Claudio is jailed since 1996 for hijacking and looting an Italian vice-consulate in Spain in solidarity with Italian anarchists on trial (escaping with money and passports), bank robbery in Córdoba which left two cops dead, as well as another attack on a bank in France. Undercover for 16 years, he now fights against the punishment and isolation regime in prison, along with other prisoners.

2. A.V. project in Italy (see Rebels Behind Bars: ‘Tato’ and Javier Sentenced). Costa, Silvia and Billy (see Rebels Behind Bars; Let’s Relaunch the Struggle Against Nocivity), and Claudio Lavazza. “Death to the anthropocentric, techno-industrial, patriarchal, and police society!”

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1. [ed. – Reference to their attempt to hush up rapes within their organisation in recent years in the UK.]

15.07.15, Zapopan, Mexico: Arson of excavators, construction equipment and transport vehicles on the building site of West Plaza Park warehouse and shipping company, which (along with subdivisions and infrastructure projects) threatens the Primavera forest. “We waited in the forest before coming out to attack. The moon and the fireflies lit up the night, before melting together with the fires of the wild ones.”

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**south-west England, U.K.:** “[Deep in the countryside.] we found one of the many pheasant enclosures in the area [ed. – to confine the birds before sport-shooting]. A 7ft high wire mesh fence, surrounded by electric wire, estimated at about 30m wide, 60m long. We took out our boltcutters and snipped away at the wire to the clip that attached it to the power source and several areas of the wire mesh fence, in total we flattened an entire 30m long side of the enclosure. We then found an empty tank with a tube that went under the fence, we snapped the tube off the tank and cut it open. We then found a shooting platform with 3 legs. We pushed cotton wool, fire lighter sticks and sponges in the foundations of 2 of the legs and dowsed them with nail polish remover, 62.
which is just as good of an incendiary as petrol. We lit it and exited the scene."

AUGUST

10.08.15, Lifol-le-Grand, France: The home of a National Agency for Radioactive Waste Management engineer (specifically, the one in charge of land transactions) is anonymously doused in paint with a fire extinguisher, and animal faeces piled on his doorstep. The action is linked to the anti-authoritarian camp against a proposed nuclear dump in Meuse. In the weeks before, ‘a few determined night owls’ had visited an analysis site for the works containing multiple electrical installations and a well, up with concrete, and all the cabinets were fractured and destroyed.

Bristol, U.K.: A.L.F. sabotage at Sainsbury’s supermarket which sells milk from dairy farms within the areas soon to be undergoing the next phase of the badger cull (see Return Fire vol.2 pg58). “We glued up their cashpoint by putting a store loyalty card covered in super glue in to the machine – the card was swallowed and will have stuck to the inside of the machine costing thousands of pounds to fix. […] We will attack any business or individual involved in the cull…"

SEPTEMBER

Montréal, Canada: “The infrastructures of State and capital continue to spread their tentacles, seeking to accelerate the extraction and transportation of resources to the market. The vast territory that is the Canadian North, often sparsely populated due in large part to the displacement, isolation, and genocide of indigenous peoples, is an immense source of profit; oil, gas, forestry, hydro-dams, uranium mines, etc. Various monstrous infrastructural expansion projects are currently trying to connect the Alberta Tar Sands [ed. – see “Another Figure of the Migrant”] through pipelines along the St. Lawrence river to the Atlantic. These projects entail expanding and constructing new infrastructure such as ports, rail lines, and highways all along this route on colonized territories. Over the past three weeks, we temporarily interrupted circulation on the CN rail lines twice in the neighborhood of Pointe-St. Charles. We placed a copper wire connecting both sides of the tracks, thus sending a signal indicating a blockade on the tracks and disrupting the circulation of the train line in particular is being worked on in order to facilitate the transport of oil eastward to the port of Belledune in New Brunswick. […] We conceive of our struggle as against civilization and the totalizing domestication it entails[…] Let’s up the tension against this world, let’s proliferate the attacks.”

07.09.15, cyberspace: A.L.F. hack the website of vivisection laboratory belonging to a neuroscience researcher at Canada’s McGill University. They “[entered] the website server and some of their directories were modified. The result was a more realistic image about what the laboratory does and a message we hope [they will never forget.] After few weeks, the website has disappeared. Which probably means it has been closed (hopefully permanently). We are proud that the goal of this action has been reached, and we’ll go on until we close all laboratories. WE ARE APPROACHING…"

20.09.15, Catalonia, Spain: “Over recent years in Spain, specifically in Catalonia, rabbit farming has been severely affected by the crisis, and many farms have closed over the past 5 years. Several times, as we were watching possible targets, we approached to see the security inside and found out they were abandoned. […] We believe this is a perfect moment to strike and cause an industry which barely survives, for several years now, to fall once and for all.” A.L.F. ‘The Boar family, the Zorrilla [striped polecat] and the Owl’ released twenty captives from a farm in the province of Barcelona. “We dedicate this action to the anarchists who have been repressed by the operations “Pandora”, “Piñata”, as well the prisoners accused of belonging to “Commando Mateo Morral” [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg82]."

OCTOBER

04.10.15, Zürich, Switzerland: An anonymous arson claims nine army vehicles at a logistics base; fourteen others are only saved by firefighters.

28.10.15, La Meziere, France: A mysterious fire destroys 100 square metres of office space at a research centre of Monsanto, near Rennes, although rapid response prevented further wreckage. The agri-business giant is known globally for its genetically-modified products and, in places like France (and not only), vast amounts of pesticides similar to their notoriously carcinogenic ‘Roundup’. Cops believe the arson to be deliberate, because the blaze started in two places…

NOVEMBER

06.11.15, London, U.K.: Window-breaking and spray-paint attack on a team base of...
the Metropolitan Police, a day after several police were injured during a demonstration against austerity and mass surveillance (during which fireworks had been deployed to great effect against mounted officers, although fifty were arrested, three of whom accused of carrying knives, lock-picks, gas cans, smoke- and paint-grenades).

“Resistance to police control is as permanent as it is necessary. There is always a police car burning [ed. – reference to one lit up the day before]. In Lambeth, Southwark and Hackney, pigs feel blows from their own batons. A family is refusing to be evicted from their council flat; a firework is hitting a pig van on patrol; a mob of people are pulling someone from the grips of Met officers. Everywhere we are creating our own lines of social war and resistance.”

24.11.15, Bremen, Germany: Six police cars and vans are set alight at a local cop station. Five years earlier, a very similar incident had wrecked the same spot...

DECEMBER

10.12.15, Canossa, Italy: Several hundred hares escape after the A.L.F. cut fencing at a farm where they were to be used to train hunting dogs. “We were worried that their imprisonment had made them slow and confused, but the quickness with which they bound into the forest made us realise that for all the time they were locked up in small, crowded cages they had retained feel capable of that long leap toward freedom.”

Lima, Peru: Burning barricade and graffiti disruption across a highway. “With this action we support the anarchist offensive around the world, especially BLACK DECEMBER (revenge for the murders of the comrades Alexandros Grigoropoulos [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg17] and Sebastian Oversluij [ed. – see ‘Education Centres’ Plundered & Vandalised, Santiago]). We welcome whoever attends the call to break the role of spectator. […] Freedom for anarchist prisoners. Long live propaganda of the deed. Freedom for all animals.”

Koridallos prison, Greece: Banners are dropped by comrades in the 1st and 4th wings: “INSURRECTION IS ALWAYS TIMELY – EVERYONE TAKE TO THE STREETS!” and “FOR THE ANARCHIST OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE SOCIAL MACHINE – BLACK DECEMBER 2015”

Athens, Greece: At the Polytechnic University, the office of the professor K. Kollias is smashed up and splattered with paint. “In 2011 the bastards Kollias and Vassiliou agreed to carry out the research program of the electrician mechanics school of the Polytechnic concerning the construction of thermal cameras and unmanned aircrafts aimed at placing them at the border, on the Evros fence, in favor of Frontex[1]. They chose to deal with a matter, carry it out, and reap the economic and careerist benefits it would yield, knowing they are painting their hands with blood. […] In conclusion there was a flying-posting in the area inside the polytechnic of a poster about the incident…”

1. ed. – Frontex is the trans-national border police force of the European Union; their guards are deployed to attack migrants at all of the EU’s main entry points, and they have partnerships with a number of universities across Europe to train its cops and develop technologies of control.

16.12.15, São Paulo, Brazil: “Between the end of November and the beginning of December, two ancient trees were cut down in the square outside the Our Lady of Remedies church at the behest of the Osasco-São Paulo municipal authorities. And, in August 2015, the armed branches of government assassinated more than 20 people in one night in the regions of Osasco, Barueri, Carapicuíba and Itapevi. All the people who were assassinated came from the favelas and the barrios.
away from the center of these fascist states. In response to these assassinations, we have brought our fire to one of the veins that keeps this oppressive system alive. [Even though it will not bring back the trees that resisted the concrete of this unhealthy civilization nor will it bring back the lives of the people] we claim full responsibility for the arson attack against the Bradesco bank branch [...] in solidarity and complicity with the black memory of our dead, our kidnapped and imprisoned comrades and those still on the run.” Another contribution for the Black December mobilisation, which by now had also been taken up in Chile, Mexico, Spain, Argentina, the U.K., Canada, the U.S.A, Cyprus, Germany, Colombia and Holland, with more territories soon to follow.

27.12.15, Athens, Greece: Incendiary device detonated at the National Insurance office, by F.A.I. Mauricio Morales Cell. “Many times we see the politicians and journalists asking each other, supposedly surprised: “But who are these anarchists who dare to challenge our democracy? Who are those who insist on disturbing the social peace and sabotage the normality and stability of economical and political life? Who are those who dare to challenge our values and our lifestyle? In the end, who are those who seek to undermine our civilization?” It’s us... We are the ones who throw molotovs against the cops in Exarcheia [ed. – Athens district with combative anarchist presence] and other places, who burn the police patrol cars, who take part in solidarity actions with the anarchist prisoners, who translate the texts from comrades from and to other countries. We are the ones who take part in anarchist squats, enjoying every form of non-commercialized art, we open paths of diffusion of the live and radical speech through the self-organized radios or through the events in our spaces. We are the ones who through the anarchist propaganda, with texts, posters, banners, spray-painting on the walls support and promote conflict and attack against the existent. [...] It’s all of us who believe that informal organization and the coordination of the anarchist action, with the essential weapons of multiformity of theories and practices and the permanent anarchist presence, became possible when each one individually chooses what they can and want to contribute in an autonomous way in the articulation and materialization of proposals, strategies and campaigns in the anarchist struggle, thus opening new roads of the collective negation of this world.”

19.12.15, Paris, France: “Despite the alarmist sirens, the state of emergency [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg5] didn't prevent us these last few days in bringing our modest contribution to the anti-capitalist offensive, more specifically to an alleged solution to the ecological crisis; the subsidiary Blue Solutions of the Bolloré Group, to the delight of their investors, green-washing their image whilst conquering new markets.

For some years the Bolloré Group, flagship of French excellence in the field of environmental innovations, sign lucrative contracts with the municipalities and RATP [Autonomous Operator of Parisian Transports], to step by step install Autolib' stations supplied with the deadly energy power that is nuclear, and soon scooters, buses and trams of the same sort.

For those who do not know Bolloré, to recall it's one of the French lords of finance, industry, transport and communication networks worldwide. Thanks to numerous subsidiaries, they built an empire exploiting resources in the former French colonies among others. To name just a few recent examples of the Bolloré empire's abuses, we can mention the displacement of indigenous peoples land in Cambodia to grow rubber fig trees; or the proposed oil palm plantation projects in Sierra Leone on the land of local communities opposed to the destruction of their cultures and forests. Also, how many lives will it cost to build the 2,700km railway loop line of Bolloré Africa Logistics to connect the Ivory Coast in Togo?

It’s also because the Autolib’ project is part of the smart city [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg31] project that is Greater Paris, within the revaluation and restructuring of entire neighbourhoods to the detriment of the poor who live there, to be replaced with a more docile and well-off population, we decided to act accordingly.

Lighting a simple box of fire-lighters placed under a vehicle wheel is enough to turn an Autolib’ into a shell, as anyone passing these previous days could see; Stalingrad Avenue in Montreuil, Pasteur Avenue in Bagnolet and Mathis Street in the 18th arrondissement. It’s one method among many others to render them unusable...”

FEBRUARY

05 & 07.02.16, Thessaloniki, Greece: “A pillar of the technological progress of the last decades [has been] the development of the telecoms sector, necessary, in its turn, for the control and smooth functioning of the techno-industrial system. Modern control and repression systems are totally based on and partly supported by telecommunications technology. Telecommunications companies, using our “need” for communication and networking inside and outside urban centres, record our conversations as well as our position with GPS systems. In good/flawless cooperation with relevant state/private bodies, they allow at anytime the collective lifting of telecommunications confidentiality calling upon national security and have often contributed to the manufacturing of charges against fighters based on wiretappings. Among other things, Vodafone in 2006 was responsible for massive wiretappings, while today they cooperate with Group4 Security and the Ministry of Justice for the implementation of the repressive project which has to do with the electronic surveillance bracelet destined for house arrest and control of detainees. Also, OTE (Greek Telecommunications Company) provided the necessary material and technical infrastructure to Frontex for the operational programme “Poseidon 2010” in order to secure the sea borders. [...] On 5/2 we destroyed 3 Vodafone mobile phone antennas, 1 OTE mobile phone antenna and 1 Wind mobile phone antenna.
[by] setting them on fire with inflammable liquid, and on 7/2 we smashed 1 Vodafone mobile phone antenna[...]. It’s an act of resistance against the ever-increasing control over the city and the continuous struggles against mobile phone antennas. Our action is dedicated to comrades T.Theofiliou[1] and G.Tsirionis[2][...].

[1. ed. – Tasos Theofiliou is imprisoned for robbing a bank on the Greek island of Paros and C.C.F. membership, both of which he denies.]

2. ed. – After nine years underground following a famous bank robbery, and decades of participation in anarchist activities, Grigoris Tsirionis was captured with Spyros Dravilas and Spyros Christodoulou in May 2015 in a safe-house raid by the anti-terror unit. Upon the raid commencing, Spyros Dravilas, who had already escaped from prison day release twice (and between liberated two other prisoners with a hijacked helicopter), put his rifle in his mouth and killed himself. His comrades and friends later asserted that “the always-smiling Spyros, the youth who had always honoured his friendships and his promises, ensuring he would do so through his dynamism, the friend who bravely faced the risks that his life and freedom ran as an outlaw, knew what awaited him. He had tasted it from the age of 21, when he first came to know of the harsh reality of incarceration. Since then, having spent several years in prison, he became a runaway and fugitive bodies stack dead or alive in seas or the dead time where nothing can happen."

15.03.15, Athens, Greece: “How many years of commercial society? How many more of “civilised” existence? And all this for what? We take part in the most paranoid experiment of human domination. From the early stages of domestication up to economy’s invasion into life, oppression, exploitation and coercion have been the most structural components of society. Power’s structures and logics have strived to ensure these present over the centuries, transformed themselves, gained flexibility by stepping on human relations and finally imposed their universality through the commercialisation of existence. Margins for non-compliance have narrowed. The ways of voicing “needless waste” are being humanised. The sometimes aggressive and sometimes passive indifference of the capitalist world towards the sustainability of human or nonhuman beings, that are deemed unnecessary in various ways, is discernible at a glance, not so far away. How many bodies stacked dead or alive in seas or the coldness of gray rooms? [...] We know that (not only in our own lives) the moments of freedom are so assimilable into the repeated everyday routine that we are unable to imagine any possible turn of events. The only sure thing is that we feel this world to be unbearably hooked in our skin, and the more we attack it, the less it leaves its marks on us. [We] torched and destroyed a van and an ATM of the Hellenic Post (ELTA) branch [...] Because of the fire’s extent, the branch required a new facade as well. [Because] memory is integral to the continuation of anarchist struggle we cannot but recall the death of comrade Lambros Foundas [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg62], on March 10th 2010, after an armed clash with cops."

28.03.16, Valparaiso, Chile: ‘Individualities for Street Struggle’ ignite a barricade against the mega-project IIRSA[3] and in defence of the Earth; a car which attempts to breach the blockade has the driver ejected by the masked lighters, who torch the vehicle. ‘From the mining projects to the expansion of the ports, these are only gestures that add to the technological industrial devastation. [...] Each one will know what to do, how and when. We only hope for the destruction of civilisation.”

29.03.16, Finland: “We burned two cars of the private security company Securitas. With this attack we want to bring to light the co-operation between Securitas and Finnovooma nuclear energy company that is known for its destruction of the environment. The 1st of April will be the first day that Securitas will be in charge of the construction site in Hanhikivenniemi, where the latest nuclear plant is meant to be built. With this arson we welcome Securitas to Finnovooma!”

APRIL

03.04.16, Spain: “Capitalist society is held up by two fundamental pillars: repression and social control. This time we have wanted to hit a part of the system of social control via communication antennas. [Led by the stars, we approached two antennas in the road between Irurtzun (Nafarroa) and with the help of pliers we opened a breach in the wire mesh that surrounds the antennas. With wooden-handled mallets we destroyed the electricity meters inside both antennae and we broke the two AC units inside each, as well. With axes we cut the cables to the antennas’ electrical device as well as wires to the distribution substation that power the antennas. [...] It’s a shame that the fire we had hoped to gift in the end did not happen... Do not fret, as we will take care of that next time.” In solidarity with José Adrián Poblete Darre, Xavier Corporales
31.12.15, Germany: “3 acts of arson and sabotage against the open cast lignite mine operated by RWE at Hambacher Forest...”

We set up home made stingers on the road used by the mine security forces to harass and distract them whilst we set fire to various bundles of cables and some wiring boxes by the side of the train tracks which are used to transport brown coal from the mine to nearby power stations. Halting the trains for some time.

Then we put the torch to a telecommunications mast on the edge of the mine and watched from a distance as the entire device went up in flames and continued to burn for over an hour.

And finally, just after midnight we attacked again, setting up more stingers on the security road closer to their compound. We then set fire to a burning barricade of car tyres and a large pile of logs by the roadside to lure security into our traps before retreating again into the forest to the sound of fireworks.

By making use of home made stingers (wooden boards with large nails through them) we send a warm and rebellious embrace to imprisoned anarchist comrade Emma Sheppard[1]... (see Rebels Behind Bars; Some Light on the Investigation Leading to the Imprisonment of the Comrade Arrested on April 13th).

12.04.16, Mission, Canada: A lock is cut off a gate to access a large piece of logging forestry equipment and a rock placed on the accelerator, driving the machinery over the precipice of a ravine.

The company laments significant losses.

26.04.16, Toulouse, France: Molotov attack on a police station. “We did this for the pleasure[...], to mark a rupture. Because we are happy and angry at the same time. We no longer want to be there where we are expected.” Solidarity with “comrades from Brussels” (see Rebels Behind Bars; ‘If Fighting for Freedom is a Crime, Innocence is Really the Worst of All’).

MAY

16.05.16, Basel, Switzerland: Fire set against a car belonging to BAM. “All over the world the ‘Bam International Group’ plans and builds zones of confinement and control such as prisons in Belgium and Germany, schools, biotech centres, police stations and other major infrastructural projects for the maintenance of the existent. The Swiss subsidiary of ‘Bam’ is also enriched by this horrible work, such as the judicial centre of ‘Burgdorf’ in Bern. New prisons are being planned and built everywhere, as well as the extension of the walls of the prison for undocumented of ‘Basslergut’ in Basel.” The authors claim this flame as the same as that “which has continually sprung up in and around the Belgian prisons in recent years (and is in fact very current[2]) [...] Offensive solidarity with all lovers of freedom who hold their heads high. 1,000 reasons to attack”...

12.04.16, Mission, Canada: “We want to break with everything established, we want to live our lives freely, and so we are against all authority that denies our free development. We are against hierarchies and this system of domination that subjects us to a uniform way of thinking based on a predetermined attitude and, for their own benefit, denies us to think for ourselves. We grew up fooled to believe that ideas and acts go separate ways in life, and to obey so as not to suffer, and in all of what this entire techno-industrial civilisation condemns us to, to live miserably. We believe that the fight must transcend from simple words to actions. By this, we perceive life as the need to act according to our acratist ideas, full of vengeance, without waiting for the moment of social revolution. We have already begun.” – Free and Informal Association of Wild Ones

“...we are happy and angry at the same time. We no longer want to be there where we are expected.”
If Fighting for Freedom is a Crime, Innocence is Really the Worst of All

– about the forthcoming anti-terrorism trial against anarchists and anti-authoritarians in Belgium

In late 2008, amidst diffuse hostilities triggered by the revolt in Greece following the assassination of Alexis by police [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg17], the Belgian Federal Prosecutor launches an investigation of anarchists and anti-authoritarians. In 2010, on the basis of a list of actions that the police attribute to the “anarchist movement” and while the struggle against the construction of a new detention centre in Steenokkerzeel is underway, magistrate Isabelle Panou is assigned to the investigation, now under the anti-terrorism law. In May, then in September 2013, a dozen searches took place within this investigation, the searches targeting different homes as well as the anarchist library Acrata in Brussels. It is on this occasion that the existence of an anti-terrorism investigation first emerges. This investigation is led by the anti-terrorism branch of the Federal Judicial Police backed by the State Security and the General Intelligence and Security Agency of the army as well as various anti-terrorism branches of other European countries. The investigation is closed in 2014, culminating in the referral of twelve anarchists and anti-authoritarians to the Court Chambers.

After a session for the legalization of the specific methods of research used in this investigation (shadowing, phone tapping, microphone placement in one house, secret searches, attempts at infiltration, placement of video surveillance devices outside homes and inside one home) in October 2015, the case is referred to the Court Chamber. The sitting of the Chamber is scheduled for May 10, 2016 and will determine whether a trial should be held, and if so, under what charges[10].

In this investigation, the Federal Prosecutor has attempted to draw up no less than 29 individualized charges. Nine comrades are accused of belonging to a terrorist organization and involvement in terrorist activities for more or less extended periods. Three of them are also accused of being the “leaders”. In addition, three other people arrested in the wake of an attack on the police station of Marolles[11] are accused of belonging to this terrorist group for a day, as well as various charges related to the attack. This is as far as concerns the general accusation.

This is then complemented by more specific charges such as participation in an unauthorised demonstration outside the detention centre 127bis in Steenokkerzeel (transformed into “attempted arson” and a “terrorist offence” by the prosecutors), preparation and participation in an attack on the police station in Marolles (qualified by the prosecution as a “terrorist offence”), assault and wounding of police officers on several occasions, obstruction of the public highway, damage in various forms, shoplifting, arson of prison guards’ cars in the Ittre prison car park, incitement to commit terrorist offences… It should be noted that these specific allegations are each aimed at specific comrades, that is to say not everyone has been charged with all the allegations.

The backdrop to this investigation that has gone on for several years and produced no fewer than 32 boxes of papers, is that the Federal Prosecutor hypothesizes that an “anarchist terrorist group” would be active, in particular in Brussels, and that the accused would have “participated” in or “favoured” those activities. For example it has produced a list of about 150 attacks, a good number of which incendiary, against the structures of domination, police stations, courts, banks, companies that enrich themselves out of incarceration, construction sites, cars of diplomats, Eurocrats and NATO officials, mobile phone antennas… All these attacks took place in Brussels and surrounding area between 2008 and 2013.

The invention of a terrorist group that would be responsible for all of these facts (if only by the fact of “having rendered them possible”) allows pretty pirouettes for the prosecution: a library becomes a place of recruitment, discussions become clandestine meetings, leaflets and newspapers of anarchist critique become urban guerilla manuals, demos and rallies become calls to terrorism, the affinity ties between people in struggle and the self-organization that might flow from them become “a structured terrorist group.” The invention of an “anarchist terrorist group” is obviously a rather clumsy attempt by the State to reduce anti-authoritarian and revolutionary subversion to the work of a single “structured group”. In trying to put a handful of inconvenient anarchists behind bars the State is seeking to discourage the refractory ones from taking direct action against what oppresses and exploits us and impose absolute silence on any desires, possibilities and critical reflections that clash with this authoritarian world.

What has been committed to trial therefore is a mosaic of struggles, revolts, ideas, direct actions, critique, revolutionary imaginaries, agitations that have been attempting to attack domination for years. In this, the possible trial concerns not only the comrades accused, but also each individual, every anarchist, every revolutionary, every rebel against order, every insubordinate to authority who resists to stand idly by in the face of exploitation and oppression. What is being targeted is the search for autonomy in action, self-organization in the struggle, direct action in all its diversity, the choice to defend and disseminate anarchist and revolutionary ideas, to participate along with other rebels in self-organized and autonomous combat. And finally, without any doubt, a combative approach of anarchism that starts off from the individual, affinity, informality.

It would be absurd to separate the repression that is striking some anarchists and anti-authoritarians today from all the repression that is seeking to subdue (often preventively) any criticism of the established order and revolt. By dint of “terrorist threats”, refugee crisis, the fight against crime and very real wars, State repression today is going into top gear. At a time when change and restructuring is changing the grounds of social conflict faster and faster, neutralizing those who disturb their thinking and their actions is part of a set that targets the exploited and oppressed: the hardening of the conditions of survival, the militarization of borders, the imposition of massive technological control, the construction of new detention camps…[12]

Defending oneself against this repressive coup that wants to send comrades to court on charges of terrorism is to defend any possibility and space of anarchist and anti-authoritarian action. […] And, by solidarity with the accused comrades, to face the State repression aimed at paralyzing all subversive action.

If fighting for freedom is a crime, innocence is really the worst of all.

68.
1. ed. – In the end, as comrades in solidarity noted shortly afterwards, the May 10th session ‘was cut short, the judge having raised the issue of the language in which the prospective trial should take place. Indeed, all of those potentially charged declared nothing during their hearings, but most of them had nothing to say… in Dutch! While the procedure was continued in French [ed. – the other ‘official’ language in Belgium]… Not knowing how to solve this “problem” at the time, the Chambre du Conseil was postponed. No new date has been set as yet.”

2. ed. – As a part of an ongoing struggle against prisons and the construction of a new deportation prison specifically, anarchists called for an offensive demonstration against borders and all types of imprisonment. Across half of Brussels, the State responded by issuing a prohibition to gather as more than five people, enforced by civil and riot police (some patrolling with machine-guns). A few hours after the demonstration should have taken place, dozens of people attacked the Marolles police station; it and and numerous police cars were heavily damaged, and two policemen were injured. Four people were arrested in the area afterwards and accused of this attack.

'Tato' and Javier

**Sentenced** (Chile)

[ed. – continued from Return Fire vol.3 pg79]

Prefix: Note that in a letter in June, Natalia ‘Tato’ Collado mentioned that she does not have any relationship with Javier; therefore they are mentioned as part of the same case, but not related in a way beyond that.

On trial, both anarchists were found guilty of burning the bus, and both sentenced to 3 years and a day of prison, without the possibility of legal benefits. Considering that the investigation process lasted approximately one year, the comrades should be finishing this sentence in May 2018.

**ONWARDS; THEY CANNOT CONTROL THE WILD**

The mural, in Lima, Peru, reads “JAVIER PINO & NATALIA COLLADO STANDING UP AND FIGHTING: DOWN WITH ANTHROPOCENTRIC SOCIETY”

['MUCH MORE THAN A BLOW']

[ed. – Comrades from Barcelona offer their thoughts on anarchist understandings of, and responses to, repression. Since these words were written, Spain has seen a wave of repression against anarchists [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg82], although we are pleased to note that ‘Operation Pandora part II’ charges have now been dismissed.]

In general, the insurrectionalist analysis of repression has been that of a blow or a series of blows that seek to punish the most combative sector and discourage future attacks. To this vision corresponds the following practice of response: knowing the list of court cases, defending the freedom of those charged, and counterattacking in order to demonstrate that the repression has managed to sow neither fear nor paralysis. Or to summarize: in the face of repression, continue attacking. And why not? To water down combativeness because there have been consequences is a disgraceful error, and one committed by the Organization [ed. – slang for the anarcho-syndicalist union C.N.T., National Confederation of Labour, in Spain] and its Libertarian Movement several times through the 20th century.

But repression is much more than a blow. It forms part of a whole process of social engineering that seeks to transform the social terrain to facilitate total surveillance and restrict the possibilities of struggle. The repressive part of the process tries above all to isolate a subversive sector from society.

[...] Repression functions like this: before any arrests, there exists a continual campaign by the State to convert everyone into civil snitches, individualistic[1], unsolidaristic people, and superficial morons. This is achieved through advertising, TV shows, movies (being that we are social and symbolic beings, narratives are extremely influential on human beings), consumerism, laws, economic competition, narcotic apparatuses like Twitter and cellphones, etc. [Silvo] Berlusconi, [ed. – four times the Prime Minister] in Italy, directed the perfect example of such social restructuring: before entering politics, he consolidated a media power that pursued this transformation of values in Italian society in order to “take the water away from the fish.” From a solidaristic and combative society that supported the forceful struggles of the 60s and 70s – struggles subdued only thanks to the ensemble formed by the compromising nature of the reformist communists, the vanguardism of the radical communists and a good application of state terrorism – a superficial, consumerist society emerged in the 2000s that didn't care about the totalitarian practices that the State used to repress anarchists; anarchists that remained alone and as such were extremely easy to repress.

If the people with the most radical critiques do not intervene to sabotage this process of social engineering, spreading counter-narratives and constructing material bases capable of supporting another way of existing, everyone will have just two options: either become superficial idiots in order not to remain isolated, or become rarities that belong to one or another urban tribe (one of which could be the anarchists).

[...] The State deals out the repressive blow and observes the results. Far from being the only ones repressed in the last few years, anarchists share this honor with independentistas [ed. – Catalan separatists], Muslims, immigrants, Roma people, and many more sectors of society. Each blow plays a distinct note as if one were dealing with a musical instrument. After a blow, they see who is agitated, who’s moving, like a vibrating guitar string. In doing so, the State can trace affinities, support of each bastion of resistance and fill in governed society with more detail, taking away opacity in the interest of facilitating future a territory previously hostile and today The effect of this continuous state cartography operation is that of increasingly controlling society through the isolation of any subversion.

1. We don't want to confuse this capitalist individualism, atomized people, with constitutes a very valid more precise to us.
Some Light on the Investigation Leading to the Imprisonment of the Comrade Arrested on April 13th [+ related events] & subsequent resistance (Spain, Germany, Holland)

What Led to the Arrest of the Comrade in Barcelona

On April 13th with a brief press release issued by the Cos of the Mossos d’Esquadra [ed. – autonomous Catalan police force], the police operation in which the comrade arrested in Barcelona currently captive in Cologne (Germany) accused of expropriating a bank in Aachen was described.

According to this press release, the operation responded to compliance with an International Letter of Request; the magistrates of Aachen had issued an arrest warrant two days before the operation for the anarchist militant in Barcelona. What the note did not explain, and what was not publicly known previously is how the arrest and the searches by the CME in the Gracia and Carmelo districts of Barcelona were not the simple execution of an international request, but the culmination of a long and focused collaboration between the German and Spanish police and judicial systems, with the active participation of the Catalan autonomous police. The involvement of the Mossos d’Esquadra in the case begins long before last April and, as has been shown, went far beyond a purely passive and executive role.

An Ordinary Morning in Aachen

On the morning of November 14th, 2014 a group of armed persons entered the Pax Bank branch in the city of Aachen, in Westphalia, in the west of the country. After emptying the safe and tying up the bank employees, they leave the office without causing damage or personal injury. In the following days, the police brigade in charge of investigations, the Landeskriminalamt Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW LKA), will link this expropriation with two other assaults that occurred in recent years in the city and will launch a true – and unsuccessful – media campaign of denunciation, publicly spreading the details of the robbery and offering rewards of thousands of Euros to anyone who can provide information on suspicious persons. The LKA insisted so much in this strategy, as to decide to use for this campaign a despicable popular television program, broadcast on one of the country’s leading channels: ‘XY Aktenzeichen XY... ungelöst’ (“File XY... unsolved”). It is a reality show of openly para-police character where there are morbidity exposed cases that the police have not been able to solve, showing images from security cameras, clothing found at the place of the “crime”, identikit and reconstructions of the facts to impress and encourage the mass of spectators to assist the state organs and to denounce other people.

The Wig, the Gloves & the Can

Four months after the action, in March 2015, the investigation takes a new direction with the arrival on the scene of the Catalan police. They send a note in response to the request made by LKA internationally, in January, by circulating the extracted genetic profiles from DNA samples that would have been found at the crime scene, looking for possible matches on databases from other states. According to the Mossos, the profile of a sample taken from a wig found near the Pax Bank in Aachen in November would coincide with a sample from its genetic database, a trace extracted from a glove found in the street after a direct action of a political nature, that occurred in the district of Sants in Barcelona in June 2009. From here begins a joint investigation in which the police forces of both states share information and undertake intensive research into what the German press has defined as “the movement of occupied houses of the extreme left of Barcelona” and, according to the arguments presented to the media by prosecutors and police in Aachen, has begun the main stage of the investigation. During the investigation (still according to the police version), at the end of June the agents of the information division of the Mossos surreptitiously collect an empty beer can abandoned on the road by the accused comrade. From this can DNA samples would have been extracted, in order to make a direct comparison with the remains of genetic material found near the Bank Pax after the expropriation. Four months later, in late October, a report of the biological laboratories of the Mossos confirmed the correspondence between the two samples. However, it would take nearly six months until April 12th this year, for a European Arrest Warrant against her to arrive from Aachen, and she was arrested the next day at her home in the Carmel district.

Repression and Social Control: DNA & States

The police process leading to this arrest therefore confirms what many already suspected, namely that the Catalan police have spent years collecting biological specimens in a massive and systematic way during actions, demonstrations, searches and protests to make a database of genetic data to increase control over the antagonist movement. What was initially introduced as an exceptional measure, arguing the need to protect against repeat offenders and similar cases, it has been implemented as a repressive and standardized technology at the service of the persecution of political activists. In the Spanish state police this modus operandi has long been practiced by the regional Basque police (Ertzaintza) in the repression of the Basque left and struggles in Euskal Herria [Basque Country]. As reported by the magazine Gara in 2007, the Ertzaintza began construction of a genetic information database, with the collection of cigarette butts and glasses during parties, toothbrushes during searches, or plastic nozzles used in false traffic stops with breathalysers. The problems of reliability and probative value attributed by experts to DNA collection techniques have not prevented the Basque regional police from initiating legal proceedings based on the genetic profile as the only evidence, which with the invaluable help of special courts of the Spanish Audiencia Nacional have often resulted in long prison sentences for the accused.

At European level, the use of gene technology in police and judicial matters has continued to gain ground from the late 80s when Interpol imported from the U.S.A. the strategy of the creation of databases for identification of persons through DNA profiling. Despite the differences depending on the socio-political and legal context of each place, in general, the common trend internationally is the exponential growth of the personal data stored in these databases and the gradual elimination of legal restrictions that limit the introduction and development of new samples.

The use of genetic technologies by the police has increased significantly throughout the European Union, and the criteria for their use are becoming more and more lax. We are therefore faced with a huge leap forward, not only in repressive strategies and practices to address them,
The context that this anonymous text was released in, is that of a tangled investigation and inter-force collaboration spanning Europe, from West to East, North to South. The trail of events that led to the situation described above could be said to have started with what the German police describe as a “series of robberies” of banks in Aachen between 2012 and 2014 (resulting in a good amount of cash seized), but in reality goes back further; to the unknown police sampling which entered the genetic archives here in the U.K.

After one robbery in 2013, in which at least one of the assailants emptying the safe was said to be a woman, a strange thing occurs; having already combed the bank for clues without success, the German cops announce that eleven days later they discover two air pistols inside, containing DNA traces. That DNA, upon German cops appealing to their international counterparts, was linked to that taken by British cops of an anarchist woman resident in Amsterdam, Holland.

Near the other robbery mentioned earlier, of Pax Bank in Aachen, police recovered the wig mentioned in the article above; the Catalan police responded with their link. Because at this time they didn’t have a face for this supposedly-recurring trace, just a target-group from the nature of the action from which they first recovered the sample. Catalan police secretly collected the DNA of many female radicals, following them one by one and picking up the cigarette butts and empty bottles that they left behind. In June 2015 they make their match; an anarchist already imprisoned for a period of time during Operation Pandora [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg82].

The other (Dutch) anarchist was arrested as she attempted to cross the Greek-Bulgarian border in July of 2015. After three weeks in Bulgarian detention, she was extradited to Germany and put into ‘investigative detention’ – a condition allowing the prosecutors to keep suspects in custody for long periods without making specific accusations. However, despite the subsequent formalisation of charges against her, after five months in these prisons the court judged evidence to be insufficient, and she was released. However the prosecution shortly after appealed; she awaits trial, but out of jail.

During her imprisonment, she released an unsigned letter containing the following: “I do not want to enter a discourse that speaks in terms of innocence and guilt, for the juxtaposition at stake is not between these two “categories” formulated in the language of domination, the language of law; a language absolutely antagonistic to my own. It is, simplistic put, between those who desire freedom and those who steal it from them. And this has little to do with the double row of bars blocking my window, with the triple layer of walls and gates surrounding this place. As one of the philosophical cadavers of the university has written in not too distant history, “prison continues, on those who are entrusted to it, a work begun elsewhere, which the whole of society pursues on each individual through innumerable mechanisms of discipline”. This work however simultaneously continues inside and outside of prison; prison is not “external” to society, it is simply another one of the many expressions of domination.

And in this panoptical world [ed. – see Panopticons Then & Now] every act of rebellion, whether it is robbing a bank or stealing a loaf of bread, is a negation of the omnipresent control imposed upon us, a deafening or barely audible No in the face of domination. Expropriation is merely one of the means in the vast array of those available to take back what is stolen from us on a daily basis – our self-determination, the freedom and possibility to construct our lives according to our own wishes and desires.”

In the raids that followed in Barcelona, two private homes and the Blokes Fantasma squat were invaded and the twenty or so people living in the building were detained for twelve hours, and the woman previously held under Operation Pandora was kept awaiting deportation to Germany. Two days before, her European arrest warrant had been issued by the same investigative judge handling the Dutch woman’s case. Before she is taken out of Spanish borders, she participated via phone call with public events around the multiple days of clashes and looting in Barcelona that followed the eviction of the Banc Expropriat occupation at the end of May; afterwards, and also due to her “inciting mutiny” among the other prisoners in the isolation ward, she was subject to various disciplines and denied contact with her partner and at least one other.

Finally, the third piece of DNA ‘evidence’, alleged to be upon clothing recovered by the cops near the Pax Bank heist; Catalan police conducted a fake traffic stop of the
the accumulated recordings of the accused walking down the video-surveilled streets in their daily lives, is an important piece in the case. But not only that; the case also tells us that for anarchists, solidarity can be more than a written word.

Since the early days of the Spanish State’s arrests, its consulate in the German city of Munich was defaced, while back in Barcelona the German Business School was also attacked and left with broken windows. Bank branches themselves have seen a large focus during the offensive, being smashed and defaced in Holland, Germany (including Pax Bank themselves in Erfurt) and Spain, while flames ravaged luxury cars of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, a mobile phone antenna over the border in Haren, and construction mega-project equipment in Toulouse. The detention complex has also been targeted, like a premises of the company responsible for maintenance of electronics in German prisons (and related surveillance of those held inside) being smashed up, or the paint-bombing of the Aachen courthouse in the run-up to the first court sessions in November. From Bristol (England) to Pontevedra (Galicia), to Greece and across the Atlantic, anarchists have hung banners about the case or publicly defended the act of stealing the money we are forced to live by in capitalist society from those who enforce the above; regardless of whether the accused were among such robbers.

We end on one such solidarity action, which brought us great joy to hear about, and pledge that no matter how the authorities try to ensnare us for our defiance and lucidity, there always seems to be another trap waiting to be sprung on them in turn; on their banks, their police stations, their infrastructures, the places they eat and rest.

COMMUNIQUE FOR COORDINATED ARSON ATTACKS AGAINST ENERGY MULTINATIONAL RWE (GERMANY)

In the late hours of 25-11-16, we carried out coordinated arson attacks against the German energy multinational RWE in the vicinity of the Hambach opencast lignite mine [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg91]. We have delayed this communiqué until now for strategic purposes.

After a scout of the area, we split up and set fire to six pumping stations, two electrical transformers, one digger and a substation of the electrical grid.

Pumping stations are key pieces of the mines infrastructure used to lower the water table and prevent the flooding of the mine. They must often resemble a section of exposed pipe and an electrical door surrounded by construction fence. We prised open the electrical boxes using a crowbar and placed simple timed incendiary devices and a bundle of bicycle inner tubes inside to ensure the flames caught nicely.

The incendiary devices were composed of a candle secured to a firelighter cube with a strong rubber band. The candles burnt down slowly, then ignited the firelighters once we were safely away from the area. After smashing a window to gain access, we used the same devices to burn out the cab of the digger.

For the transformers and the substation we burnt car tires filled with gasoline soaked rags. We placed these beneath exposed insulated cabling on the substation and inside the transformers. Within several minutes these targets were engulfed in flames and as we departed the substation exploded, sending arcing electricity and purple flames ten metres into the night sky. Although this caused a blackout two kilometres wide, the local media-scum failed to mention it in any of their press, downplaying it to the burning of the two transformers alone.

As the techno-industrial megamachine grinds on every day, destroying and polluting all that is still wild and beautiful in this world, we feel that actions like this are a necessary measure to stay sane and remind ourselves that we are still alive amidst all of the destruction and misery of modern society.

After all, the only way one can enjoy the industrial landscape at all is by crawling around in the tall grasses and nettles with the other animals and finding a good vantage point from which to observe pillars of black smoke rising from the scorching machinery and infrastructure of civilization.

We wish to send a wink of complicity to the captive anarchists accused of bank robberies in Aachen and to Chilean prisoner of war Kevin Garrido, held for explosive attacks in the city of Santiago[11].

For the multiplication of attacks against RWE!

Death to civilization!

– Scoundrels In The Night

1. ed. – At the prison guards school, a police precinct and an electricity firm; arrested with him and accused of the first was Joaquim Garabito. They got pre-trial release after several months and went on the run, but was caught on a rural bus in Tríua and sent back with additional charges for the revolver he was carrying.
Let's Relaunch the Struggle Against Nocivity [+ updates] & random moments of solidarity (Italy)

Five years have passed [at the time of writing] since we were arrested in Switzerland when police at a checkpoint on the Albis pass, Canton of Zürich, found explosives, propane gas canisters, petrol cans and several copies of a claim by [E.L.F.] in the car we were in. The target of the proposed attack was the Binning and Rohrer Nanotechnology Centre, a structure that was under construction at the time, property of IBM in collaboration with ETH, the Federal Polytechnic of Zürich.

The [Swiss] trial took place a year and a half later where we were accused of: preparing deliberate arson; concealing and transporting explosive material; unauthorized trade (importation) of explosives. Federal prosecutor Hansjörg Stadler demanded sentences of 3 years and 4 to 8 months, broadly accepted by federal judge Walter Wütrich. The court confirmed all the charges, except that of illicit traffic (importation) of explosives, a charge we were cleared of.

Parallel to this, the Public Prosecutor of Turin had begun a thorough investigation of the explosive cartridges that the Swiss authorities had found on us to find out where the material had come from. When the investigation was completed, prosecutor Enrico Arnaldi Di Balme issued three more charges against us: terrorist activity involving lethal and explosive devices, possession and transport of explosives in the public space and receiving stolen goods (explosives), all charges aggravated with ‘terrorist intent’.

In these last 5 years our analysis of the present has been reconfirmed, and consequently our anarchist and environmentalist beliefs have simply strengthened. Nano-bio-technologies are the latest path beaten by the techno-industrial capitalist system in the plunder and devastation of the Earth. These paths, like all the previous ones (think of the Industrial Age), are presenting as miracles what we can easily imagine are destined to turn into nightmares. These technologies are born from the new vision of the world of the computer era that has substituted the mechanistic one of levers and gears with a mathematical one of information bits where the whole of reality must fit into one algorithm. This new vision has now taken root as it is more suited to the needs of the present system. In asserting itself it has opened up hitherto undreamed possibilities for science to carry out what the moment and self-cannibalism of the system are urgently pressing it to do: appropriate everything in the universe and break it down into its smallest, infinitesimal components, into ‘bits’.

In other words, to achieve some universal basic unit with which scientists can reduce the whole of the existent to a level of interchangeability and equivalence so that through the engineering of this new (inaccessible up until now) raw material it will be able to make anything in the universe usable for the needs of power. These technologies are therefore the pillars upon which the system will be able to re-arrange the processes of production and supply that are vital to its growth, a growth to infinity on a planet that has already been plundered beyond the limits of its possibilities. And, as in the case of GMOs [Genetically Modified Organisms], the convergence of the sciences is the latest promise of a development trend that is supposed to tackle the ecological crisis that ecocidal progress itself has taken us to.

As we have written elsewhere, the Binning and Rohrer Nano-technology Centre was rendered operative and inaugurated a few months before our trial in Switzerland. For almost three years it has been offering 950 square metres to collaborators in the basic research for new materials and elements of nano-metric construction. This site will allow the researchers of IBM, ETH and their partners to push the knowledge and above all the application possibilities of nano-technology far beyond, very far beyond, the current use reached by cosmetics, tyres and nanotech sprays. That is what the director of the structure Matthias Kaiserswerth is promising. For us, even if the men [sic] of IBM and ETH boast of having a laboratory that is unique in the world – and in certain aspects they are right – the reality is that the places where the engineering and manipulation of life and the planet are being pushed forward are numerous and scattered a little everywhere. From the research centres of the multinationals to the universities, from scientific hubs to international research institutes: this world is moving parallel to the reality we know, planning and building a future that will be imposed upon us, some aspects of which we can already see around us. This world has a name and address.

We have felt the urgency of trying to build struggles against this development more and more throughout the years, starting by understanding how indispensable bio- and nano-technologies are to the system and their potential harm. It is important to clarify that this harmfulness does not so much concern damage to human health or the environment as the relation between power and technology that is becoming a remodelling/substitution/destuction of living ecosystems. It is a far wider concept of nocivity [toxicity/harmfulness] directly linked to nocivity as a whole: the system itself. We still feel this urgency, and given the advance of the technological and industrial system we are still convinced that it must be translated into a radical critique, which cannot ignore the economic and social context of which these nocivities are both a product and a necessity. In turn, this critique must be able to transform the oceans of ink and words required to express and deepen it, into struggle and direct action. So we are still convinced of the need to develop radical environmental struggles against this deadly techno-industrial system; but we want to point out that the struggle needs to be seen as a real possibility to put everything into question, not just a space to find a role in the political theatre or for offering ‘eco-sustainable’ alternatives to the system.

What we see is how the places of techno-scientific power are being decentralized and molecularised into a
In the more than a year and a half, since these words were written, the legal labyrinth has only continued; although defence lawyers had called on the judicial principle of ‘ne bis in idem’, according to which one can’t go on trial twice for the same case, the investigating judge agreed to the prosecutor’s demand. Swiss and Italian security forces had already attempted a string of appeals to try to further indict the three while they were still in prison, on top of what the comrades described as “intense espionage activity, mainly addressed against the network of solidarity that had been created in the meantime and later against the most radical ecologist milieus that were more active in the struggle outside in order to follow our case and make questions such as that of nano-technology known”.

The last session of the trial took place in Turin on March 2nd, 2016. Prosecutors demanded 5 years and 8 months for Costa, 5 years and 4 months for Silvia and Billy. The verdict reading was given shortly after (the three comrades themselves didn’t attend); the principle of ‘ne bis in idem’ was upheld, so the trial was ruled inadmissible. However, the State Attorney of Turin has appealed the verdict, focusing on the transport of stolen explosive material and the ‘fact’ that the attack on IBM was prepared in Italy, not Switzerland. Their main ‘proof’ of this is that all three participate in the ‘Coalition Against Nocivity’, which during its active years has created an active projectuality against bio- and nano-technologies. IBM is in many ways the origin of the nano-technology boom thanks to the invention, in 1981, of the scanning tunneling microscope in another laboratory in Zurich. Now they are working to digitalize the world thanks to the chips, sensors and connections made possible by these same nanotechnologies (see ‘Smarter Prison?’), first released online in solidarity with Silvia, Billy and Costa in this legal process then printed as a supplement for Return Fire vol.3).

(Also, during this same time period, Silvia and Costa also had other charges resurrected from a decade before. In 2005, a high-voltage pylon owned by the electricity firm Terna was dynamited in the southern Italian province of Pisa, causing heavy damage, and an interim work agency was also bombed in Pisa itself. In total ten from the circle of the ‘Il Silvestre’ group, who bring out the eco-anarchist journal ‘Terra Selvaggia’ (see Return Fire vol.3 pg55), were arrested, but later acquitted. Five were once again charged, including Silvia and Costa, in 2015; but in the end dropped once again.)

Now, the comrades await more news. Like then, and like always, we will affirm our closeness with the ideas and decisions of these brave individuals, and the radical currents which have produced them. They have been backed since their first arrest in Switzerland with a range of solidarity actions around the world, a scant few of which we list below; whether the judges return the case of Silvia, Billy and Costa to the courtrooms or not, let’s turn up the heat on the nano-world and the capitalist order which wants it.

1. ed. – Silvia and Costa noted upon being informed of the resurrected charges that “[t]o the inhabitants of areas stretching along the line between the Pisa Mountains to the Apuan Alps in Tuscany, roars of revolt are nothing new. The La Spezia–Acciaiolo railway track has been the target of protests for over thirty years, not only because it carries French nuclear waste but also because it causes electromagnetic pollution. On this railway track alone dozens of dismantle attacks have occurred over the years[...]. Repression has also been there over the years: eco-anarchist Marco Camenisch’s arrest in the 1990s [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg75], also accused of sabotaging the pylons of the [Terna] railway track, did not stop the attacks; on the contrary in the following years such attacks also became the expression of solidarity with him and his struggle inside Italian and Swiss prisons.”

**RANDOM MOMENTS OF SOLIDARITY**

21.05.10, Bristol, U.K.: ‘A “T-mobile” repeater was destroyed by fire. [...] Destructive acts against the telecommunications infrastructure of capitalist economy are simple and reproducible, as are attacks against other facets of industrial society. [...] Far from being a faceless abstract enemy, the conduits of commodity production remain attackable at many points, vulnerable to our courage, rage and joy.” Cells of Fire: Storm of Butterflies”

24.06.10, Switzerland: A field of GM corn is destroyed. “The opposition to genetic engineering is part of an opposition that broadens to oppose total control of society and the living, that is being created thanks to the development of nano- and bio-technology. [...] with concrete actions with those and those who are opposed to this techno-scientific capitalist system and particularly with Marco Camenisch [see footnote above], Silvia, Costa and Billy...”

13.08.10, Castelvetro, Italy: The group ‘Black Like the Night’ release thousands of quail from a battery farm. “To Billy, Costa and Silvia, because it is in direct action that we stay on the common path that leads to the destruction of civilization, because it is in the attack that our hearts manage to feel close to theirs. In the breath of a dream that burns and opens the cages.”

24.09.10, Bern, Switzerland: Demonstration outside the regional prison: ten of the forty people penetrate the courtyard in front of the building and lit firecrackers, greeting Costa, while other prisoners beat on the walls in response and lit lighters behind the opaque glass. This is two weeks into a hunger-strike declared by the three and Marco, as “a continuation of all those strong affinities and relationships as ‘green/anti-civilisation’ anarchist individuals that connect us since many years”, as well as for “all of you revolutionary individuals
12.10.12. Varese, Italy: “[W]e sabotaged a Shell petrol station [by cutting] the tubes operating the petrol and sealing the ATM with liquid steel. [...] Solidarity with all the rebels attacking those responsible for domination!”

14.10.12. Lisbon, Portugal: Paint-bombing, graffiti and lock-sealing for the Swiss embassy, once again also for Marco too.

30.05.11, London, U.K.: Windows broken and locks glued at the Swiss embassy in solidarity, “Freedom for all!”

Argentina: “We sealed the locks and stained the walls of one of the torture and murder centers of animals, the Veterinary Medicine Society, which kills animals and teaches others to do the same. We will not give them peace, as this war began a long time ago...”

Russia: Visit by the E.L.F. (& Informal Anarchist Federation - Anarchist Liberation Front) to “two commercial fishing resorts. They breed fish to be hunted by tourists.” Two phone masts burn.

14.01.16, Trento, Italy: Arson of two mobile phone towers. “Let’s stop electronic control and electromagnetic pollution. For Silvia, Costa and Billy, still on trial.”

06.03.16 northern Somerset, U.K.: Multiple rails are sabotaged with a portable disc-cutter on a freight distribution trainline, carrying fossil fuel, construction materials and brand-new vehicles. “Severing the lines that feed the machine is not possible. [...] The war is not over when those moments stop, it sparks up in little raptures here and there, showing that we are not crushed, things can be brought to a grinding halt again, even for a split second.” This line had also been subject to a £100,000 attack in 2005, smashing cars being transported as they passed.

[“The sure thing is that we are not alone. We live in a home full of voices, dreams, desires, laughter, melancholies, actions... Our home has no hosts and guests; it belongs to all of us. In our home we do not speak just one language but many and we always communicate with our eyes. The basement of our home is full of weapons, explosives, plans, communiques, whatever the enemy snatches from us, our hands and desires will never remain unarmed. At the table of our home there are always spaces and glasses of wine for new friends and comrades who we never met before. There are as well some empty places for the brothers and sisters who are absent, for our dead, for the wanted, for the imprisoned, but their glasses are always full because they are always next to us too. Our home has no doors, no rooms, not even walls. Our home has no roof because it would hide the sky and stars. Our home has no windows because it would stop the wind. Our home has no street or number. Our home has no name and lives in our hearts.” – Lone Wolves Are Not Alone...]

On May 9th a protest was held in Pisa [Italy] outside the Sant’Anna University on the occasion of its Open Day, to question the role of this university with regard to the processes of preparation and implementation of war and concerning the role of scientific research in the construction of the world in which we live. Here follows one of the interventions made during the protest, on the theme of robotics:

Sant’Anna is distinguished mainly for robotics and bio-robotics studies and projects. These disciplines open the way for further technological and scientific advance in a society that is seeking to integrate more and more robots and machines with the living being for both civilian and military purposes: examples of this are industrial automation machines, exoskeletons, bionic prostheses, home automation, and so on.

In order for this mechanic scenario to be possible it is necessary both to develop an ethics applied to robotics that prepares the ground for human-robot coexistence both from a social and legislative perspective on the one hand, and on the other solves problems that could arise as the impact of robotics creates profound changes.

The introduction of technological innovation has caused radical social and organizational changes in general; think of how our lives have changed with the introduction of the computer or the telephone. It is no different in this case as it is evident that the current scenario could be operational in an environment that they are making totally artificial and to make the human being increasingly dependent on this artificiality which only scientists and experts know how to foresee.

Machines equipped with artificial intelligence that communicate via wireless, accumulating and exchanging data, replacing the human being in its activities and even in their everyday decisions, nullifying any kind of critique and reducing us to mere cogs.

These are studies and projects that are born from the arrogant idea that the human being can control, manipulate and experiment on the living in general, using it to their liking and adapting it to the needs of the current production and techno-scientific system.

Robotics and bio-robotics are examples of a new approach to science, that of the convergence of different areas and studies that are moving toward the same goal: controlling living beings and the earth that hosts them. So, to design a machine similar to us it is necessary to combine the results from bio- and nano-technology, neuro-science, computer science, engineering, cognitive sciences and life sciences. Sant’Anna University is a pioneer in these projects of implementing the human being with man-made structures; sensory capacities, motor and human perceptions transferred into the robots. They are trying to design a future that increasingly disables the human being, already unable to live without technology.

We know that the apparent medical reasons, need for companionship, improvement of human and productive performance that these gentlemen [sic, i.e. the scientists] are preaching to have these atrocities accepted, represent a practice to justify the deadly techno-scientific advance. And that is also why, we reject any kind of education to technology as it is a means of mental prerogative that leads to a constant mechanization of the existent.

The industrial economy; the growth of the world population with the consequent need for more and more resources and agricultural food production; the organization of large urban agglomerations, as well as the “management” of environmental disasters, are consequences arising from the continued exploitation of the earth and the anthropocentric logic and domination caused by a process of thousands of years of civilizing process, whose resolution cannot be entrusted to specialists and machines. Precisely the ones who caused these problems, we are moving towards a robotic and artificial ecosystem that has little that is natural and a technology that is progressing very quickly, always leaving us less space and freedom. If this is the future that faces us, the present still conserves some wild spaces, albeit shrinking, and is still inhabited by individuals who do not want to delegate their lives to intelligent machines and to the phantomatic technical machines and scientists that are behind them.
What came to be referred to as paganism was a mainstay of Greco-Roman civilization. It was the official ensemble of gods and rites, emphasizing the citizen’s responsibility to imperial authority, and embodying unity. In this way paganism was close to a general attitude of patriotism, respectful of civic tradition. Victor Ehrenberg declared paganism to be “a political rather than a religious matter... no question of belief or even emotional feeling.” Its ritualism left little room for spirit, its orientation more empirical than a matter of faith. And since its gods were tied to the reigning politics, paganism tended toward the same breakdown Rome was experiencing. Its gods belonged to an early age, and were far from omnipotent. Civilization renders citizens powerless, and its religious parallel is a monotheistic, uninvaded power over its subjects in the spiritual realm.

The word pagan originally meant one who lives in a pagus, or village. It didn’t exist as a religious term before Christians began calling non-Christians pagans. But the usage is clear enough to us, and though it had about seven centuries of tradition behind it by the 400s, paganism was lacking in substance. Too impersonal and far from totalizing, this civic religion was unable to bear much weight. It was overdue for a crisis, along with the rest of the ruling order. The old gods were too limited and too formal. They fell into the shade.

Roman globalization acquainted people with other options, via travel, trade, and conquest. With increasing insecurity, a feeling of “cosmic pessimism” grew steadily stronger. So-called “mystery religions” arrived, mainly from the east, as misery begot mysticism. Mithra worship became a mystery cult from a branch of Persian Mazdaism, via the Greeks. It was fairly strong in the army, but its appeal was limited by its exclusion of women. From Egypt arose sun-worship, the cult of Sol Invictus with his December 25 birthday, and also an Isis cult. Dionysus emerged, a powerful, universalizing god of salvation, prefiguring the Christian savior in several respects. Native paganism in its last stages took on a neo-Platonic coloring, a decidedly monotheistic move like most of the other religious tendencies, but not decisively enough.

The emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312, made it Rome’s official religion, and declared paganism illegal. Anti-pagan repression was often laxly pursued, however, and two centuries after Constantine the old cults lingered. Paganism persisted in part because of its lack of a center; still largely polytheistic, it was multiple and versatile. But especially in its old Roman dress, paganism continued to fade in the sixth century, its sacrifices and temples abandoned. By the 390s the Christian church, a unified institution, had already visibly secured its hegemony.

Christianity had rather suddenly and unexpectedly succeeded, providing a personal religion in place of an impersonal civic one. “Seldom has a small minority played so successfully on the anxieties of society,” as Peter Brown put it. Its central and original message of love was preached to the poor, the burdened, the outcast, not excluding women and slaves. Christian populism caught on with many in Roman civilization, especially the miserable urban masses. It not only offered heavenly reward, but also a stronger sense of belonging than that of the devotees of Mithra or Isis, for example.

Another central focus was of course Christian belief in a resurrected figure, Jesus as divine Saviour. It is clear that the early Christians expected an impending return of Christ, which gave their efforts a special intensity. The unique status of women and Christian care for the sick during epidemics were more down-to-earth contributors to success. The original churches were homes, which in itself gave women prominence, but during the third century the status of women was beginning to decline.

The Gospel of Luke, written in about 100, contains many condemnations of the rich, e.g. “It is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (18:24). These were typical radical sentiments – which became inconvenient as the Church grew to be a powerful financial institution by the end of the 3rd century. “The time was ripe for a reconciliation of state and church, each of which needed the other,” in Rostovtzeff’s judgment. Early on there were Christians who appreciated the relation between one god and one state, the helpful implications of monotheism for a universal and unified civilization. Constantine, less abstractly, came to the conclusion that Christianity was the only glue that could help hold conflicting social elements together. The old ruling elites, or paideia, were no longer able to maintain control. With Christianity as the new public religion, religious and secular authority became integrated in a more binding and powerful partnership.
Preaching in fourth century Antioch, John Chrysostom proclaimed, “Oh! how passing wonderful is the power of Christianity, that it restrains and bridles a man [sic]…” Ambrose of Milan, another Church father and an aristocrat, in the same vein in 388: “The bishops are the controllers of the crowds, the keen upholders of peace…” He also asserted that “priests should have nothing of the masses about them, nothing of the people, nothing in common with the pursuits and manners of the barbarous multitude.”

Christians had made the poor visible, and soon enough this made them more amenable to control. The Church took over much of the state’s armsgiving and adopted a new style of pacification in civilization’s never-ending task of securing its authority. More or less always stated in religious terms, the power of bishops, with their scores of guards, could hardly develop otherwise than along lines in tandem with the secular economy and society.

Rather like “closed shop” employment, where expulsion from the union spells loss of that employment, excommunication had temporal as well as spiritual consequences. It enforced the temporal power; e.g. soldiers who refused to fight in a war that the Church deemed just faced excommunication. Bishops preached increasingly to the elites, and the papacy made more and more of Rome’s glorious past. And yet Christianity never lost its power to offer a radical sense of community, even if that community was more symbolic than actual.

A monolithic and centrally organized religion and its professional hierarchy took charge of various administrative functions of the Christianized empire, including roles performed by barbarian authorities. The growing Church to some extent took over what Rome had created. Of course, there existed various philosophical differences; the searching criticisms of Augustine and – as we have seen – Salvian come to mind\(^3\). A united front against common enemies of Church and State certainly held sway, however. It is clear that almost every emperor urged the Church to define correct doctrine so as to enforce its official monopoly. Intolerance in matters of dogma was a new arrival to the Mediterranean world. Doctrine is of supreme importance for [ed. – apparently] the first time in civilization.

A striking counterpoint to the accommodationist, power-oriented direction of the Church was a primitivist monasticism that swept the Roman world in the 300s. It began in the deserts of Egypt, where the number of radically ascetic monks reached 200,000 by the beginning of the fourth century. The impulse to return to a pre-Fall, Eden-like simplicity pitted the movement against the Church hierarchy, civic authority, urban life, and even culture itself. Historians such as Rufinus described the ability of monks to mingle with wild animals. Their revolt favored egalitarian virtue over the achievements of civilization. “They had dropped out of the world, because they found society more than they could endure,” concluded Michael Grant. Bishops frequently allied with local elites to bar monks from their towns and to defend the ancient customs. “Emperors, too, in their edicts, declared the inmates of the monasteries to be fanatical, unruly, and rebellious.”

Violence was a not uncommon response to this challenge, which reached a high point with the Circumcellions in North Africa, in the second half of the fourth century. The anarcho offshoot of a non-radical sectarian heresy, Circumcellions (vagabonds, literally) sought to restore the [ed. – alleged] primitive equality of humankind. These millennium-seekers attracted fugitive slaves and destitute peasants, and their base consisted of native Berber and Punic elements. Hostile to urbanism and the dominant order, they preserved their independence until the Muslim conquests of the eighth century suppressed all forms of Christianity in the region.

[...] Another transition involved the symbolic institution or dimension of time. For the Greeks, cyclical time still held sway. Their sense of historical or linear time remained quite tentative at best. Roman Stoics (e.g. Cicero and Seneca) introduced a progressive, non-repetitive concept later developed further by Augustine. We have been under the sign of historical temporality ever since. Restlessly striving to dominate it somehow, while unable to escape the helplessness resulting from civilized, complex society.

Rome’s thousand years were, at base, just another civilization that came and went, subject once again to longings and anxious disquiet and requiring yet another new model of the same. Carlin Barton, in her often brilliant Sorrow of the Ancient Romans, refers to the Roman confrontation with time: “They were terrified by beginnings; this dread was one of the sicknesses of Roman culture.” One symbol of which was the gladiator, that figure of ultimate despair, with its thrill of what became inescapable. A fitting face of civilization.

1. E.T. Salmon, The Nemesis of Empire
2. E.R. Dodds, Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety
3. [ed. – from earlier in the original text:]

On the Government of God was Salvin’s 5th century Christian take on the virtuous simplicity of barbarians vs. debased Romans. Earlier and more famously, the historian Tacitus praised moral, democratic, hospitable, and happy denizens to the north in his Treatise on the Situation, Manners and Inhabitants of Germany. [...] The “barbarian” as a figure served various ideological purposes [to the late Roman Empire]. Violent barbarians were used to justify huge military expenditures by the state. Portrayed as noble savages, they were a means of criticizing degenerate civilization. [...] Petrus Patricius described the Scythians, in the east, as having “jeered at those who were shut up in the cities, saying, ‘They live a life not of men but of birds sitting in their nests aloft; they leave the earth which nourishes them and choose barren cities; they put their trust in lifeless things rather than in themselves.” In modern times J.B. Bury referred to Slavonic barbarians of late Rome “who could defy the justice of civilization in thick forests and inaccessible ravines – regions echoing with the wild songs and romances of outlaw life.” But the “barbarians” in Europe had been practicing domestication for at least four millennia, and the processes of state formation had been going on for four hundred years in the Germanic world. Nonetheless not all the earlier, treer modes were extinguished. Bury again: “The east German barbarians were still in the stage in which steady habits of work seem repulsive and dishonorable. [...] Aside from the nature of barbarian society and/or its dialectic with Rome – and the difficulty of generalizing about various groups – there were some connections with Romans that may seem surprising. Peter Sarris wrote of 4th century Goths and their “campaign of destruction aimed at members of the Roman governing classes” – in which “the barbarians were expressly aided [by] members of the Roman lower classes.” In On the Government of God, the Christian author Salvian declared, “A large part of Gaul and Spain is already Gothic, and all the Romans who live there have only one wish, not to become Romans again.” Joseph Tainter saw it similarly: “Contemporary records indicate that, more than once, both rich and poor wished that the barbarians would deliver them from the burdens of the Empire.”
A SHORTER HISTORY OF A NORTHWEST E.L.F. CELL

[ed. – Here we present a tale that was first serialised in the now-defunct Seattle periodical ‘Tides of Flame’; not long after documentation makers had released a longer film called ‘If a Tree Falls...’ about the rise and fall of one Earth Liberation Front (E.L.F.) group active in the ’90s and ’00s. Whereas that production came off as somewhat victimistic and defeatist (not to mention giving snitches and investigators themselves an inordinate amount of airtime), what we liked about this series was their placement of these events into the social context from which they arose, including more general activity across ‘North America’ from Vancouver to Mexico City, by the E.L.F. and others. Ordinarily, we would never read stories like this in print. The tragic part, of course, is that this amount of detail is publicly-known only because of the betrayal at the heart of the saga of Operation Backfire, the largest domestic terrorism investigation in the history of the U.S.]

Doubtless, this raises the question of what end ‘biography’-type accounts serve; but despite the danger of creating ‘celebs’ of the struggle, and them transforming from life-sized to larger-than-life, we have found it inspiring and empowering in our own ‘North American’ lived experience.[78]

We publish this in solidarity with many earth-defenders of the world, whatever name they do or don’t use. Whatever one makes of claiming actions under an acronym such as the E.L.F., it is inspiring to know of the high-impact actions that these people regularly carried out in these past decades – without fetishising the level of material damages above other considerations, it seems that those of even humble means can devastate the facilities and infrastructures that surround us, and that is a tale worth telling. But this is also a cautionary tale, and not just of what is at stake in terms of repression (sadly, since this was written two of the four fugitives – Rebecca Rubin [see Return Fire vol.2 pg73] and Justin Solondz – have been found guilty), but the potential for today’s comrade to become tomorrow’s traitor to the State. Nathan Block and Joyanna Zacher, two who did not snitch and who served their sentences with apparent dignity, have since release been outed as ‘anti-modern’ fascists and white separatists by longtime E.L.F. prisoner supporters and their former comrades. To us, as well as various strains of eco-radicalism in both Russia and Mexico also having gone in differently differing directions at times, this renews the importance of never separating ‘ecology’ or ‘animal liberation’ from our broader anarchist ideas, or making ‘marriages of convenience’ with such characters; rightists, leftists or the so-called ‘apolitical’, always distanced from our anti-politics.]

She and two other men launched the first attacks of a fledgling Earth Liberation Front (ELF) cell in the Pacific Northwest. The arson described above took place on October 28th, 1996, in Detroit, Oregon. Two days later in Lane Country, Overaker and her group of three began burning down the Oakridge Ranger Station. All of them had been involved in peaceful protests to stop the devastation of old growth forests in Oregon. They had seen these tactics fail endlessly and had seen Forest Service Rangers brutalize and imprison their friends who were attempting to defend the earth. When these arsons took place, many environmental activists did not know what to think. The most lucid of them were happy, understanding that their opponent had been attacked. Unfortunately, some activists were afraid and wanted to distance themselves from what had happened. They had no idea of what would come next in the summer of 1997.

It is not known why Overaker did not participate. What is known is that her group had grown and six of them burnt
down a horse slaughterhouse in rural Oregon on July 21, 1997. The Cavel West slaughterhouse bought wild horses that had been captured by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and turned them into meat. The massive fire they lit completely destroyed the plant. It never opened again. For months peaceful protestors had written letters and children had held signs outside saying “DON’T KILL HORSES,” all to no avail. The ELF managed to destroy a despicable company that murdered the last remaining wild horses in Oregon. The ELF destroyed it in one night and with one action.

On November 30th, 1997, Overaker, her boyfriend, and three others burnt down a Bureau of Land Management wild horse corral in south-western Oregon. Before burning down the facility, the group freed 400 horses back into the wild. Whereas the previous year the cell had focused its attention on the Forest Service, their activity in 1997 was dedicated to freeing wild animals that were being imprisoned and slaughtered. The members of the group proved themselves to be against anyone who wished to destroy the wild earth, whether it be a private company or a government agency.

In 1997, different ELF cells that did not know each other carried out attacks in Utah against a fur-breeding plantation and at UC Davis in California against their still under-construction Center for Comparative Medicine. Both of these targets suffered arson attacks for their practices of enslaving, torturing, and murdering animals. At the time, the action against UC Davis was seen as an insane act against a benevolent institution. Now, with everyone obsessed with free-range chicken and green technology, many people might not view the arson with the same outrage expressed in 1997.

In Olympia on June 21st, 1998, the group launched a new offensive on the US Department of Agriculture, the greedy overlords of the forests. But on the day before the attack, Overaker was caught shoplifting items needed in the planned arson. After being released from jail, she was told she could not participate in the action. Knowing this was true, she decided to establish a firm alibi while her friends continue onward. The next morning, four members of her cell burnt down a US Department of Agriculture building.

Simultaneously, a separate ELF cell burned down another Department building in a different part of town. On one day, the entire Puget Sound area saw fires burning in the capitol.

Despite being far ahead of most people around them (who were busy loving Clinton and “prosperity”), these groups were pursued by the FBI, labeled as terrorists and vilified by large segments of the environmental movement. Groups like the Sierra Club publicly denounced the ELF and applauded the government’s efforts. Nevertheless, true to themselves and their ideas, this Pacific Northwest cell of the ELF proceeded to scope out a ski resort in Vail, Colorado, make their plans, climb up a mountain and burn down a multi-million dollar project that would ravaged the ecosystem around it. On October 19th, 1998, everyone watching the nightly news saw images of a giant ski lodge burning atop a snow covered hill.

The arsonists had the remarkable experience of enjoying the true splendor of a mountain before burning a structure that ensured that same mountain’s destruction.

This was the high moment of the group. It appeared as if they could do no wrong, that the tide would turn, and that people would rise up and escape the stupor of the late nineties. We have focused our narrative around Josephine Sunshine Overaker for a simple reason: she is one of the few who did not betray their friends, renounce their beliefs, or go to jail. She is one of the few who remained free. The saddest part of the story is far off, so for now, please take comfort in the fact that she is free, that not all was lost, and that the struggle continues to this day across the same planet she fought to protect.

On the FBI wanted poster, where she is described as a terrorist, it lists Overaker’s possible professions as a firefighter, a midwife, a sheep tender, or a masseuse. This is the type of person they fear and seek to destroy.

Just before Christmas in December of 1998, the northwest Earth Liberation Front cell decided to strike the headquarters of US Forest Industries in Medford, Oregon. At the time, the group was based largely in Eugene and it was from here that they planned their attack. The members of the group who decided to carry out this particular action were Jacob Ferguson, Kevin Tubbs, and Kendall Tankersley. After deciding on a date, the three decided they needed a fourth member, and so Kevin Tubbs asked his friend Rebecca Rubin, another member of the group, to help them.

They drove down to Medford, placed an incendiary device near the building and left. But the next morning there was no news of any arson. After scouting out the headquarters, Jacob Ferguson saw that the device was still there in plain sight having failed to ignite. He contacted Kendall Tankersley and asked her to retrieve the device while he drove on to Sacramento to be with his mother for Christmas. When Tankersley drove back to Medford with an anonymous person who knew nothing of her task, she decided to not risk returning to the building.

After Christmas, Ferguson and Tankersley arranged to meet in Ashland, just south of Medford. Ferguson had his young son with him and the three returned to the headquarters. Ferguson got out of the car, made a new ignition device, and then drove with Kendall and his son to Dunsmuir, California where they rented a hotel room. The next morning they learned on the news that their arson had been successful. The entire headquarters of US Forest Industries was destroyed for a loss of $900,000. In the communique that was released in the middle of January, 1999, the group wrote, “This was done in retribution for all the wild forests and animals lost to feed the wallets of greedy fucks like Jerry Bramwell, U.S.F.I. President. This action is payback and it is a warning to all others responsible that we do not sleep and we won’t quit. For the future generations we will fight back.” This last line is significant, given that Ferguson’s young son was in the car and the fact that we are writing about them now, thirteen years later [when published].

In May of that year, different members of the group reconvened to plan another attack. Their next target was to be a meat company in Eugene. On May 9th, Jacob Ferguson, Stanislas Meyerhoff, Kevin Tubbs, Chelsea Gerlach, Josephine Overaker and (presumably) Joseph Dibee set out to burn down the Childers Meat Company. After Overaker and Dibee cut the fence, others placed and lit an incendiary device near a gas line in the building. As they were all driving away, they heard on their scanner that the fire had been reported. By the next morning, the building had been totally destroyed. In their communiqué released shortly after, the group wrote, “As long as companies continue to operate and profit off of Mother...
Earth and Her [sic] sentient beings, the Animal Liberation Front will continue to target these operations and their insurance companies until they are all out of business." Rather than claim this action as the ELF, they claimed it as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), a sister international group.

Over the course of 1999, the group did not commit any other large actions. After having grown to be over a dozen strong, the members navigated and agitated inside the growing links between the anti-globalization movement and the environmental movement. At the time, the potential for a mass revolt against global capitalism seemed possible. All across the world were millions of outraged people attempting to fight against the deregulation of the global market and the destruction of their traditional ways of life. For the members of the ELF, this was their chance to bring the fight to capitalism itself. They did not want a more humane capitalism as did their contemporaries, instead they wanted its complete destruction and an end to its war on the natural world.

Their opportunity for displaying their views in a more social manner arrived in the form of the planned protests against the WTO [ed. – World Trade Organisation] conference in Seattle in the fall of 1999. Several of the original members of the cell attended the protests. Amongst them were other young people who had been brought up in the environmental movements and the struggle to save the Pacific Northwest forests. Daniel McGowan, Joyanna Zacher, Nathan Block and Susan Savoie were all to become members of the ELF cell and all contributed to the anarchist effort to destroy and reroute. North America continued to party as the 20th century became the 21st. There was no communiqué released by the group. The actions and their intent to set up operations in the forests of Chile. Their communiqué ended, "Let this be a lesson to all greedy multinational corporations who don't respect their ecosystems. The elves are watching, Earth Liberation Front."

And then, on New Year's Eve, the same four members hoped to trigger the type of Y2K panic that the capitalist media had been predicting. They drove out to the plains near Bend, Oregon and took down an electrical pylon for the power grid. As the tower began to fall, electricity arced across the sky and dust flew into the air. However, there was no disruption because the power was rerouted. North America continued to party as the 20th century became the 21st. There was no communiqué released by the group. On the morning of January first, this old crew of accomplices awoke to the future, unaware of what the next few years would bring.

The Northwest ELF cell whose exploits we have been narrating transmitted their plans to each other by attending what they called "book clubs." A given book, such as The Dispossessed by Ursula K. LeGuin, would serve as the text in which the cell would decode their plans. With a key that read something like LINE 5, LETTER 26, the cell would assemble whole sentences until they had received their instructions and targets. In this way, they resembled the Red Army Faction of the 1970's who used Moby Dick as their transmission device. This is just one of the ways in which the ELF cell maintained their secrecy and were able to remain free from incarceration for as long as they were active.

After their actions during the turn of the century, the cell was inactive until September of 2000. They chose the West University Public Safety [police] Substation in Eugene, Oregon, as their next target. After months of repression by local authorities against the anarchist and environmental movements, the cell believed that the radical community of Eugene would welcome a blow inflicted on the same police that had brutalized and jailed many of their friends. On the night of September 6th, Stanislas Meyerhoff, Kevin Tubbs, and Chelsea Gerlach placed two incendiary devices beside the substation. One device failed to explode while the other, placed on a bicycle locked near the substation, tipped over and caused only minimal damage to the substation. The group did not issue a communiqué, given the relative failure of their action.

The cell struck again on January 2nd, 2001, this time with two new, younger members. Daniel McGowan and Susan Savoie accompanied Jacob Ferguson, Stanislas Meyerhoff, and Kevin Tubbs on a journey from Eugene to Glendale, Oregon. Their target was the Superior Lumber Company, a purchaser and processor of the felled woods of Oregon. The two new members served as lookouts while the other three placed two incendiary devices in the headquarters of the company. Once they were done, the group returned to Eugene. McGowan and Savoie were entrusted to write the communiqué. The two traveled north to Portland where they wrote the following words: "What happened should shock no one. This year, 2001, we hope to see an escalation in tactics against capitalism and industry. While Superior Lumber says, 'Make few items, and do it better than anyone else,' we say, 'choose an earth raider, and destroy them.'” During the whole of 2001, various ELF cells struck targets such as the University of Idaho Biotechnology building, various Bank of New York branches and an Old Navy on Long Island, a Nike outlet in Minnesota, and a genetically-modified cotton plant in California. In addition to this, a separate Northwest cell was spiking trees across Oregon, rendering entire portions of land purchases un-loggable. The actions and methods of the ELF were on the ascent, with the new cells proliferating at a quickening rate. However, there began to be signs of some impending calamity, some change in the weather.
In 2000, a man named Jeff Luers torched three SUVs at a dealership in Eugene. Unfortunately, he was being followed by undercover agents and was arrested shortly after his action. In March, the ELF cell decided to avenge his pending conviction. Stanislav Meyerhoff, Kevin Tubbs, and William Rodgers planned with another two new members to torch ten times more cars than Luers. It was decided that everyone participating in this action should not be Eugene residents. The two new members, Nathan Block and Joyanna Zacher, were involved in the environmental and metal scenes in Olympia and had met William Rodgers there. The group of five proceeded to the [same] Romania Chevrolet Truck Center in Eugene and torched 35 SUVs. In reference to Jeff Luers, the cell wrote in their communique, “The techno-industrial state thinks it can stop the growing resistance by jailing some of us, but they cannot jail the spirit of those who know another world is possible.”

Shortly after this, ten members of the cells decided to stage a double hit against two targets in different states on May 21st, 2001. One would be the Jefferson Poplar Farm in Clatskanie, Oregon, while the other would be the UW Horticultural Center in Seattle. The former was chosen because he conducted genetic research on poplar trees. And because hybrid poplars are an ecological nightmare threatening native biodiversity in the ecosystem. Our forests are being liquidated and replaced with mono-cultured tree farms so greedy, earth raping corporations can make more money.

The Seattle arson completely destroyed Merrill Hall at UW [and 13 SUVs], resulting in over $3,000,000 worth of damage. The group of five waited nearby, listening to their scanners, and did not leave until they heard confirmation that their fires were raging. The group then returned to Olympia. Shortly after the simultaneous attacks against these producers of genetically modified plants, it was discovered that neither establishment was actively engaged in genetic modification at the time [ed. – since this has been proved untrue; the University of Washington’s own website cited the professor whose research was targeted as “just one of many UW professors using genetic modification in their research”; with a grant from the timber industry]. For several of the cell members, this was a terrible shock and caused Daniel McGowan, Brianna Waters and several others to leave the group.

And then September 11th happened. Already considered domestic terrorists, the ELF cell now had to be even more careful in the new climate of fear. Despite this and the problems with the previous action, a group composed of mostly old members decided to return to its roots and destroy another wild horse corral. In the summer of 2001, Joseph Dibee and Chelsea Gerlach had done reconnaissance of a Bureau of Land Management wild horse corral in Northern California. After choosing to attack this specific corral, Dibee asked Kevin Tubbs, one of the founders of the cell, to participate. Next, he asked Darren Thurston and Rebecca Rubin to be involved. Once they agreed, he picked up the two Canadian citizens after they illegally crossed the border and brought them to his house in Seattle.

Tubbs and Meyerhoff soon joined the three and they began making their incendiary devices. After making the last of their preparation, the group traveled to Olympia where they joined up with several unknown individuals. From there, they traveled to Eugene to pick up Tubbs before finally arriving near the corral on October 14th, 2001. Shortly after midnight on October 15th, the group let the horses out of the corral and then placed their incendiary devices throughout the structure. With the fire burning behind them and the horses running wild, the group returned to Olympia. Dibee, Thurston and Rubin continued north to Seattle. On October 16th, Jenifer Kolar returned Thurston and Rubin to their border crossing and the pair re-entered Canada. There, Thurston issued the communique for the action.

And so it was that the various members of the once powerful ELF cell returned to their respective towns of Eugene, Olympia, Seattle and Vancouver. The arson of the horse coral was to be their final action and the hysteria of 9/11 only cemented their conviction to cease their activities. Some wanted to continue attacking, even going so far as to suggest committing targeted assassinations against high capitalists and leaders of industry. Ultimately, however, the group freed one last group of wild horses and then scattered themselves across the Northwest. Other cells continued to act in the region, but this particular group of people moved on to different projects. No one suspected them, nor could anyone imagine they had lit up the nights with fire and caused a panic in the timber industries of the the Pacific Northwest. Their lives from hereon out were varied and complex...

After the disbanding of the cell, the arsonists and saboteurs dispersed into their new lives, scattering themselves across the country. We do not have the means to narrate the stories of each person who participated in the ELF actions nor what they did once the cell came to an end. Nevertheless, we will provide a few stories about some of the people we respect. As you will find out next, not all of the people who participated
Joseph Dibee lived in Seattle after having participated in three arsons, including the synchronized attacks against two targets in Olympia. Oddly enough, he found employment with Microsoft and eventually contributed much technical expertise to the Internet Explorer browser. His work became his life and he sometimes spent 100 hours in the office. The same feverish personality that led him from a life of activism to urban guerrilla warfare seemed to still burn inside him even while he worked for one of the two major computer companies. Outside of work he went on hikes, kayaked, flew planes, scuba-dived, and explored the natural world he loved and had striven to protect. He was well-liked by his friends and co-workers. Apparently, his services were much appreciated by Microsoft as well.

Daniel McGowan, the young man who wandered into the Pacific Northwest and fell in love with the remnants of untamed nature, eventually returned his birthplace: New York City. He had grown up in a Catholic family and his father had worked as a cop for the NYPD. After rejecting a life in business, something his father frowned upon, Daniel had chosen the life of an activist. When he returned home, he eventually found employment with WomanLaw.org, a nonprofit group that helps victims of domestic violence avoid the traps and pitfalls of the judicial system. He met a woman named Jennifer and eventually married her, his new life becoming simple and increasingly removed from his previous one as an urban guerrilla.

Nathan Block and Joyanna Zacker remained close to the world they came from. They were in the Olympia metal scene and lived as a couple in a small house in the woods on Delphi Road. Nathan eventually began growing pot and soon had forty plants with which he could support himself. He and Joyanna were well-liked and well-known amongst their friends. Even their landlord described them as very nice people.

Justin Solondz remained in Olympia for a while after the cell disbanded. At the time he was dating Brianna Waters, another member of the cell. Both of them had attended the Evergreen State College and together they fought to save a forest in Oregon, working with the townspeople and making a film of the popular struggle against the logging companies. We have limited access to the facts, but it is known that at some point he and Briana Waters separated and in 2005 he traveled to Europe to begin a life of wandering.

While living these new lives, the world became increasingly bleak. The invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq took place, the public became infected with patriotic hysteria, and the housing bubble continued to bloom, creating new profits and expanding the market recklessly. It seemed as if everything that they had been fighting for had turned to nothing.

All of the forests were coming down to build new developments on land that was once wild. The public was swept away into the netherworld, electing the overtly-fascist Bush administration for another term in 2004. Pockets of rebellion survived in some major cities but the fight against capitalism entered a low period in the US, and a sense of defeat hung heavy in the air.

Though it may not be widely recognized as such, everyone in this country experienced a fascist coup following the attacks of September 11th. A small group of people took power and drastically altered the entire social landscape, first by providing cheap housing and easy credit to the public and then by cashing out, leaving everyone else to fend for themselves. In Chile, on September 11th, 1973, another group of fascists seized power and proceeded to turn the entire country into an experiment from which a small group of people could extract profits and then vanish.

The former members of the ELF cell lived through the rising fascism as best they could, always aware of the gravity their past actions held in the current political climate. Rather than see an uprising against the world system that was killing the planet, our protagonists beheld a public that continued to willingly plunge into its own destruction. All of them grew apart, numbing themselves to the horror unfolding around them, learning to live inside of it and survive as best as possible.

We do not know what the exiled ELF fighters would have gone on to do had they not been caught, but based on appearances they did not engage in clandestine struggle ever again and many of them permanently renounced their former tactics. When they were apprehended, the most hidden and rotten parts of the former fighters came to the surface. Only the strongest held onto themselves through the hell that we will describe...

After the final actions of the Northwest ELF cell in 2002, the strength of the national environmental began to fade. The tactical and theoretical unity of the anti-globalization era no longer kept people together and working for a common purpose. The majority of the mainstream support that had once bolstered the larger environmental network was slowly absorbed into green capitalism, becoming infatuated with corn-based fuels, windmills, and soy products. Simultaneously, the effort to discredit the data regarding global warming reached a disturbing high and was accompanied by the overt fascism being stoked by the Bush administration. It was in the midst of this counter-revolution, with the forces of order and reaction destroying the gains of the anti-globalization movement, that the FBI began what was to become known as the Green Scare[1].

It started simply enough. The FBI had a small lead and one suspect. His name was Jacob Ferguson, the young man who had also helped start the ELF cell. The FBI brought him in for questioning, threatened to put him in jail, and told him he would not see his son for decades. Although they only suspected him of a few minor acts of arson and doubted they could even connect him to them, the fearful Ferguson quickly revealed everything he knew about the activities of the cell. Much to the surprise of the FBI, this young man had participated in nearly every attack carried out by the cell. Totally consumed by fear, Ferguson agreed to act as an informant.

In 2005, Ferguson wore a wire and went on an FBI-funded trip across the country to meet up with his former comrades. He went to New York City and recorded a conversation with Daniel McGowan in which he was able to manipulate his old friend into admitting guilt to several arsons. When Ferguson brought up the possibility of someone becoming an informant, McGowan replied that it would be “some Judas shit.” Ferguson conducted similar operations against Stan Meyerhoff, Kevin Tubbs, and William Rogers, otherwise known as Avalon. With the information that Ferguson collected,
Between July 27th and July 29th, another cell burnt two [uninhabited] homes built in what had once been forests in Whatcom County. Starting on November 25th and lasting until the end of January, 2006, the ELF burnt down houses and construction equipment in Bothell, Kenmore, and Camano Island every week and half. While there is no direct confirmation, this offensive could be seen as retaliation for the arrests taking place during this time period.

Just as Briana Waters was being sentenced for her role in the infamous UW arson in March, 2008, another ELF cell burnt down four multimillion dollar Street of Dreams houses in Woodinville. This was to be the biggest environmental arson in the Puget Sound area and served as a reminder that the fight to save the planet still had life left in it. Law enforcement who responded to the inferno found a bed sheet nearby with these words painted on it: “Built Green? Nope black! McMansions in rural cluster developments are not green. ELF.”

We will conclude the story of the Northwest ELF. For now, take comfort in the fact that the dream some of them once had survived repression, suicide, betrayal, and entrapment. It lives on still in dozens of cells across the planet, fighting for the health and continuity of the earth.

While the Green Scare of 2006 may have been the end for one particular cell, the repression certainly did not stop the idea and concept of the ELF from growing. In the immediate aftermath of the arrests, multiple new houses were burnt by cells in Canada. The communiques issued after these arsons contained language against unrestrained development and were dedicated to the memory of Avalon, a member of the Northwest cell who killed himself while imprisoned by the state.

And then, in the last days of 2008, a group calling itself Eco-Anarchist Cell For Direct Attack decided to go on a spree in Mexico City (DF). First they threw multiple Molotov cocktails at the facilities for the new metro line, the construction of which had already resulted in evictions and tree clearing. Then the group destroyed a large telephone wire box belonging to Telmex, rendering over 100 lines useless. In addition to this, they completely destroyed eight telephone booths owned by the same company. Finally, the group burnt an ATM at a Banamex bank. The communiqué claiming this action ends, “How beautiful it is to see revenge of the exploited and the oppressors squeezed! How beautiful is the fire that trees! How beautiful is the abolitionist fire of the anti-authoritarians! No to metro line 12! Stop the deforestation and the displacement of entire families! For every eviction or abuse of power... fire in the streets!”

Although not officially claimed by the ELF, this group operated in the same manner and their action signaled the beginning of a new offensive against the destroyers of the earth. A few months later, the Frente de Liberación de la Tierra (ELF) burnt a construction machine that was being used to build a new campus at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in DF. They also destroyed the new administrative offices in the campus.

In the beginning of their communiqué they write, “We were informed that the university had been destroying a large part of the ecological reserve where a so-called ‘education’ center is being built. Several
varieties of trees and diverse plants were cut down, considered to be in the way of their ability to expand their facilities and their mastery over nature. The progress and education that they extol in their classrooms is always based on domination and anthropocentrism. In this act by the UNAM, it is more than clear that not only do they wish to dominate and mold the minds of students, they also seek to expand the same control over the land and the animals that inhabit her [sic]."

Over the course of 2009, ELF cells across Mexico began attacking targets in a diffuse offensive. Telmex remained one of their primary targets, as did the practice and spectacle of bullfighting. Multiple groups and cells set barricades afloat in the middle of highways, burnt construction equipment, burnt police stations, and freed abused horses. In 2011, an ELF cell aligned with the Informal Anarchist Federation [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg80] bombed a police station in Coacalco. One month later, a different ELF cell burnt facilities belonging to the National Institute of Forestry, Agricultural, and Livestock Research in Texcoco. These facilities were used to do genetic research on plants. The attacks in Mexico continue to this day.

In Russia, the ELF has also found rich soil. In 2011 alone, there were dozens of instances of arson and sabotage committed by the ELF, the first of which was the torching of construction equipment in the forests outside Moscow on New Year’s Eve. Most of the activity centered around the defense of the Khimki forest, one of the few remaining wild places in the Moscow area.

The government and developers had plans to destroy it, put in a large freeway, and build housing and strip malls. In a rare development, the ELF and the general public had united in their efforts to stop development and had forced President Medvedev to halt the project in the summer of 2010. A communiqué for an action in July of that year reads, “On July 17 2010 a tracked tree transporter was torched by a group of ELF activists. The action took place at the road construction site near Sheremetyevo airport in Khimki forest, North of Moscow, Russia. We support local activists in their fight against deforestation campaign of Moscow authorities, although we disapprove of their half-hearted liberal tactics.”

The battle for the Khimki forests has still not ended, but it represented a new era for the ELF. Unlike the schisms and splits that had occurred in the US between the environmental movement and the ELF guerrillas, the two sides in Russia were able to work together in their fight against Moscow and the international development companies. When suddenly the president himself suspended the project, it was as if the endless circle of history had been broken and for once, a group of humans using a diversity of tactics was united against the exploitation of the earth.

The last action [at time of writing] related to the defense of the forest took place on July 21st, 2012[1]. The full communiqué reads, “After having received news of new tree-cutting activity in Khimki forest, we decided to visit the workers. We aimed for 2 trucks and excavator parked on the clear cut. They were completely destroyed. Our solidarity goes out to eco-activists who broke the arm of private guard who was guarding the clear cut (this piece we learned from news). Enough of pseudo-legalism! Do like us, do better than us.”

The rulers of the world will never succeed in wiping out any of these groups, including the ELF. While the cell in the Northwest may have been arrested and neutralized, their efforts and examples live on from Indonesia to Mexico, from Russia to Chile. We wish everyone good luck, especially you.

Some comrades went to the left and others went to the right; the signal to start attacking was the flash from a Molotov, which sadly was not what we expected.

28.07.10: After an attack on their camp by Nazis hired by the construction firm, Vinci, opponents of the Khimki felling storm City Hall by the hundred (while police forces are massed at the forest cutting) with fireworks, stones, air-guns and smoke-bombs, hacking down the door with an axe. Cops flee, two cop cars molotov. Soon after over the border in Belarus, Russia’s embassy is hit by molotovs in solidarity with the struggle, as was the same with paint-bombs in Istanbul, Turkey.
First, we must understand that sabotage is a powerful tool. It is not just a means to an end; it is an end in itself. Sabotage is a way of life, a way of thinking, a way of being. It is the expression of the will to resist, to oppose, to change. It is the expression of the desire for freedom, for a world where the power of the few is challenged by the power of the many. Sabotage is not a simple act of destruction; it is a complex strategy of disruption, innovation, and renewal. It is a way of challenging the status quo, of shaking the foundations of power and authority. It is a way of creating new possibilities, of inventing new worlds. Sabotage is not a passive act; it is an active process of re-imagining, re-building, re-creating. It is a way of shaping the future, of defining the limits of what is possible.

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We are not for “striking a blow at the heart of the state,” as along with this claim being part of the logic of the taking of power, it otherwise would delimit the insurrectionary goal into a centralized attack when part of the goal is that sabotage spreads and is not a single attack every now and then carried out by a group of professionals, but rather many daily attacks against a world that stifles freedom, carried out by those who want to, as every attack is liberating. Nor are we for “hitting where it hurts,” as along with this claim smacking of the quantitative, it delimits the insurrectionary goal into attacks against a single structure within the pillar of domination, when part of the goal is the generalization of revolt, that the attacks be against all aspects of domination or that the goal be to attack, from the largest to the smallest, at an individual or affinity group level. Besides, hitting where it hurts, does the occasional – due to the need for specialization – attack really hurt? Why settle for what hurts the system? Why not destroy it? For us, revolt and insurrection are daily acts that take place within ourselves and are externalized from us as strikes against power.

We are in favor of an anarchy that understands attack as multiform and daily, carried out by those who desire to be free in the here and now, far from all specialization and professionalization (of the pen and the act). We understand anarchy as a tension with what exists, as a project for the destruction of power, and we are fighting to build a reality of struggle and true confrontation with domination. Telmex is just one of the pillars that sustain power, the state and capitalism. Telmex has many branches ready to receive an attack from those freedom-seeking individuals.

3. ed. – See Special Hydraulic Fracture for more recent action around the Khimki defence. Earlier, workers’ sheds had been molotoved, and 12mm carbine weapons fired on site machinery.

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For nearly two centuries, pre-Luddites throughout Europe delayed the widespread use of new machinery. Their outrage and sabotage moved town councils and emperors alike to ban the new inventions. But in the meantime, the political power of the merchants grew, new opportunities to sell textiles opened up in the form of overseas markets, and the downtrodden came to accept their position and identify as workers, and thus would react more to their exclusion from work than to their much deeper oppression, the loss of skill and handicraft, the further expulsion from the land represented by the move from cottage to factory labor. Once these changes were cemented, the political elite reversed their position, advanced the interests of the merchants and industrialists, and protected the machinery like a sacred object, with lethal force. The Luddites are remembered, curiously enough, because they lost. In being crushed, they could be presented as backwards, archaic, an inverse symbol for progress.”

“An Outrageous Spirit of Tumult & Riot”

“John Goodair had a factory in Stockport, Cheshire, the size of a city block with eight thousand spindles and two hundred looms. On April the 14th 1812 a mob of two to three thousand (in a parish of only fifteen thousand) descended on his mill and mansion after smashing the windows of other industrialists’ houses. At noon, led by two men dressed as women who proclaimed they were ‘General Ludd’s wives’, the crowd stormed his mansion. The following is a letter written by his wife: ‘Everything, I have since learnt, was consumed by the fire, and nothing left but the shell. The mob next proceeded to the factory, where they broke the windows, destroyed the looms, and cut all the work which was in progress; and having finished this mischief, they returned to the three cheers which they gave on seeing the flames first from our dwelling. It is now nine o’clock at night, and I learn the mob are more outrageous than ever…”

Rebels Against the Future

In fifteen months at the beginning of the second decade of the [19th] century a movement of craft workers and their supporters declared war on the then emerging industrial society.

The movement spread across the Northern counties of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. It smashed thousands of machines, looted markets, burned down factories and spread hope of a way out of the bleak future being offered the majority of the British people. It was a movement that, in the words of the late radical historian E.P. Thompson; “in sheer insurrectionary fury has rarely been more widespread in English History”.

It is important to understand the birth of industrialism. If we are to successfully dismantle the present system, it is essential to know how – and why – it was constructed.

The Birth of the New Society & the Destruction of the Old

The elites that built up Industry had been growing in power, and the ideas and technologies that allowed them to grow had been festering for centuries. Its conception may have been long before, but its birth was a sudden calamity that accelerated change in society at an unprecedented rate. The Industrial Revolution, from roughly 1780 to 1830, mutated everything. It altered the way the majority of people lived, first in Britain and now all over the world. Just as societies are being shaped all over the globe into one monoculture; so the life systems of the...
Insurrections and riots were so common like regiments in an army. Machines of different kinds stand in rows that no less than 600 spindles can be seen for miles around the town. The emergence of flowering plants and the arrival of limbed animals. Change beyond imagination.

But change has to burst forward somewhere, and it burst forward here in Britain.

**Lancashire, say 1780:** “The workshop of the weaver was a rural cottage, from which when he tired of sedentary labour he could sally forth into his little garden, and with the spade or the hoe tend its culinary productions. The cottage wool which was to form his wet was picked clean by the fingers of his younger children, and the yarn was carded and spun by the older girls assisted by his wife, and the yarn was woven by himself assisted by his sons...”

A family often had no single employer but hired its looms, supplied with the raw materials by businessmen who then marketed the finished products. Workers had a large amount of control over their own labour. They produced only enough to keep themselves comfortable and if the fancy took them they might not work for days. Even after the enclosures took away large amounts of common land they subsisted for a great percentage on what they grew in their gardens. Basically they shaped their work around their lives, rather than their lives around their work. These were a strong people.

**Lancashire, say 1814:** “There are hundreds of factories in Manchester which are five or six stories high. At one side of each factory there is a great chimney which belches forth black smoke and indicates the presence of the powerful steam engines. The smoke from the chimneys forms a great cloud that can be seen for miles around the town. The houses have become black on account of the smoke. The river upon which Manchester stands is so tainted with colouring matter that the water resembles the contents of a dye-vat. To save wages men and women have to be domesticated. One young man, a weaver from the village of Bulwell, some four miles north of Nottingham, a small band gathered somewhere in the darkness and... blackened their faces or pulled up scarves across their faces, counted off in military style, hoisted their various weapons...”

Factories meant regimented and unprecedented work hours, horrific pollution, dangerous working conditions, unsanitary living space with virulent diseases, early death, a starvation diet and a total lack of freedom. Nobody entered the factory system willingly. Men, war widows, young women and very often children, lived in a system one Yorkshire man described in 1830 as: “[a] state of slavery more horrid than that hellish system – Colonial Slavery”. These workers, who one doctor surveying Manchester in 1831 described as “a degenerate race – human beings stunted, enfeebled, and depraved”, were the refugees of a destroyed society.

Just as small farmers had been pushed off their land by enclosure, so the crafts people were purposefully pushed from relative autonomy to a situation of dependence. Whole regions, thousands of communities were broken up and reorganised to suit the wishes of the factory owners. Much of the populace were thrown aside to starve, or forced to become wage slaves in factories literally modelled after prisons. Cities and misery multiplied.

Petitions were handed to parliament, meetings and rallies were held but nothing came of it. With nobody to turn to but themselves, the weavers took direct action.

English poor have been characterised as one of the greatest mobs of all time. The spectre of revolution in France and America left the English rich with the realisation that they were walking on a knife edge; or more accurately that of a guillotine.

**Enclosure had given the new ruling class greater control over the land but crafts people still constituted a major counter current to the prevailing order. They had to be domesticated.**

Factories were not built simply because of technological innovations, but more as a project of social control to limit the power of the ‘poor’. To break their spirit.

In 1770, a writer envisioned a new plan for making the poor productive: The House of Terror, in which the inhabitants would be obliged to work for 14 hours a day and controlled by keeping them on a starvation diet. His idea was not that far ahead of its time; a generation later, the House of Terror was simply called a factory.

Andrew Ure, one of the greatest proponents of industry, wrote in 1835: “If science was put to the service of capital, the recalcitrant worker’s docility would be assured”.

The Birth of Luddism

“The night of November 4th, a Monday, was cloudy but still not winter-cold. In the little village of Bulwell, some four miles north of Nottingham, a small band gathered somewhere in the darkness and... blackened their faces or pulled up scarves across their faces, counted off in military style, hoisted their various weapons...”

Reassembling at some designated spot, the little band responded in turn to a list of numbers called out, and when each man had accounted for himself a pistol was fired and they disbanded, heading home.

A week later, this time on a Sunday night, the workers attacked again: same procedure, same target, only this time Hollingsworth was ready. In preparation for a renewed attack, he had sent some of his frames to Nottingham for storage and had arranged for seven or eight of his workers and neighbours to stand watch with muskets over the seven frames remaining. When the attackers approached the house they demanded that Hollingsworth let them in or surrender his frames, and when he refused a shot rang out and a fusillade of eighteen or twenty shots was exchanged.

One young man, a weaver from the nearby village named John Wesley was shot –
while "tearing down the window shutters to obtain entrance by force"... before he died he had just time to exclaim "Proceed, my brave fellows, I die with a willing heart!". His comrades bore the body to the edge of a nearby wood and then returned "with a fury irresistible by the force opposed to them" and broke down the door while the family and the guards escaped by the back door.

They then smashed the frames and apparently some of the furniture, and set fire to the house, which was a gutted ruin within an hour; the men dispersed into the night, never identified, never caught. That same night just a few miles away in Kimberly, another group of men raided a shop and destroyed ten or twelve frames...

On Tuesday a cart carrying eight or nine looms to safety from the Maltby and Brewet firm in Sutton, fifteen miles north of Nottingham, was stopped ... and men with their faces blackened smashed its cargo with heavy hammers, bent the metal parts to uselessness, and made a bonfire of the wooden pieces in the middle of the street.

That evening a thousand men descended on Sutton from nearby villages, assembling at a milestone on the main road to the north, and marched on the town with their axes and pikes and hammers; about three hundred of them were said to be armed with muskets and pistols. The number of machines they broke is given as somewhere between thirty-seven and seventy, said to be "the frames of the principal weavers" of the town, one of whom, named Betts, whose shop was completely destroyed, was reported to have died soon after, "deranged." [2]

Luddism had begun.

An Outrageous Spirit of Tumult & Riot

With weavers' taverns acting as rallying points, news spread from village to village. Inspired by the success of the first actions, communities all over the North started to act. At least a hundred frames were attacked in the last week of November, another hundred and fifty or more in December.

"There is an outrageous spirit of tumult and riot," the magistrates of Nottingham told the public in November 1811. "Houses are broken into by armed men, many stocking frames are destroyed, the lives of opposers are threatened, arms are seized, haystacks are fired, and private property destroyed."

The spirit of rebellion rapidly spread across the Northern counties of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

Posters were pinned up on the doors of offending workshops, warning them to concede to the demands of 'Ned Ludd's Army' or suffer the consequences. For many businessmen the threat worked as well as the act.

Most luddite literature makes reference to 'General Ludd' but there was no such leader. Instead it was a reference to a (conceivably true) folktale of the time. The story goes that a Nottingham lad at the end of the previous century had been enraged with his loom and had set his hammer to it.

Machine destruction had been a tactic of the weavers and their kind since at least midway through the previous century. What was different about the Luddites was exactly the opposite of how many imagine them. Read many accounts, especially those written by supporters of the trade unions, and the Luddites come across as mindless and disorganised, who if born a few centuries later would probably be kicking in bus shelters. True, Luddism was not the act of pre-organised political groups. However it was often more powerful; a defensive reaction of communities under threat.

The blackfaced figures marching over fields towards the hated factory had probably known each other since they were kids. They had played at similar 'games' (maybe 'hunting the French') as gangs of children. They had been brought up with stories of struggle, in which the actors were as often as not their parents, grandparents or 'im down the pub'.

Though actions in nearby villages would often be done at the same time to stretch the soldiers, there is no evidence to suggest that there was any serious co-ordination across the counties. But such co-ordination was probably unnecessary and dangerous.

Many Luddite attacks included women (although unsurprisingly this was not the norm). On the 24th April 1812, a very successful attack was carried out on a mill outside Bolton only an hour or so after the soldiers sent to protect it had left. "About fifty assembled near the mill...[descending on it]... they smashed through the gates and started to break windows in the mill, led by two young women, Mary Molynex, 19, and her sister Lydia, 15, who were seen, according to court papers, "with Muck Hooks and coal Picks in their hands breaking the windows of the building"... shouting "Now Lads" to encourage the men on. With the windows broken, men took straw from the stables and set a series of fires inside: "The whole of the Building," wrote the Annual Register correspondent, "with its valuable machinery, cambrics, &c, were entirely destroyed." [4]

The spirit of revolt spread well beyond the confines of the textile workers. Riots broke out in many towns and food was redistributed. The whole of the north-west was verging on insurrection.

Hangmen, Prison Ships, Spies & Battalions: The State fights back [...] Battalions of soldiers were sent to the North. But with the eyes and ears of the community protecting them, the Luddites were often one step ahead. No intelligence system in the world is better than the collective solidarity of a community. Byron[5] joyfully summed it up: "Such marchings and countermarchings! From Nottingham to Bulwell, from Bulwell to Banford, from Banford to Mansfield! And when at length detachments arrived at their destination, in all "the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war," they came just in time to witness what had been done, and ascertain the escape of the perpetrators, to collect .... the fragments of broken frames, and return to their quarters amidst the derision of old women and the hootings of children."

The state dramatically raised the stakes. Frame breaking itself was punishable only (?) by 14 years transportation to Australia. On March 5th 1812, a bill was
When you're talking, you're not fighting.

With the normal means of suppression failing the state organised an army of occupation in the north-west. More and more soldiers were sent. By May 1812 there were 14,400, including thousands of cavalry men and full artillery units. Three months before, the Home Secretary had admitted that the force sent to crush the Luddite rebellion in Nottinghamshire was the largest ever used in the history of the country. But as of the 1st of May, an army seven times as large was operating in the ‘Luddite Triangle’. The scale of the presence was such that one out of every seventy people in the counties was a soldier. There were a thousand soldiers stationed in Huddersfield, a town of only ten thousand.

[...] Professional spies were brought in, informers paid. Generous bribes for information (in what was for many a famine) were posted up. Communities, for the most, stayed strong. Surprisingly few turned traitor. However, many in the movement were scared into the inactivity. Luddite attacks on frames decreased. But this wasn’t solely because of the state. True, the towns were awash with soldiers, but there weren’t that many frames left to smash. Luddism changed form.

The Death of Luddism

To attempt to repeat the actions of the previous months would have been mad. Those luddites still active (a considerable number) changed tactics. Understanding that the rich had quite literally declared war, Ned Ludd’s Army began to arm itself. Luddite gangs roamed through the counties gathering, by force, guns from any source they could.

‘[John Lloyd, a government agent], told the Home Office that ‘bodies of a hundred and upwards … have entered houses night after night and made seizures of arms’ … Vice-Lieutenant Wood the same month reported that there had been ‘some hundreds of cases’ … leading him to fear it would all end in ‘open rebellion against the government of the country …’ A Parliamentary Committee reported in July ‘considerable’ theft of guns and ammunition in most towns, and in Huddersfield ‘all of the arms’ … ‘every article of lead’, wrote a correspondent from the West Riding, ‘such as pumps, water spouts is constantly disappearing to be converted into bullets.’”

[...] Although unions were technically illegal under the Combination Acts, courts often held them to be legal. Many voices within the establishment saw the unions as a way to pacify the workers. When you're talking, you're not fighting.

The unions themselves (then as now) told the workers to stay away from sabotage, and to negotiate with the factory owners rather than fight the system itself. In [John] Zerzan’s words: “Unionsism played the critical role in [Luddism’s] defeat, through the divisions, confusion, and deflection of energies the unions engineered.”

Less than a decade later, in 1825, the unions were officially recognised by the repeal of the Combination Acts – a measure supported by the majority of the British state.

The insurrection never came and Luddism slowly died, not with a grand finale but more with the actors leaving the stage one by one. The final event that can be accurately named Luddite came in June 1817. A state infiltrator named ‘Oliver’ convinced two hundred people from Pentrich, Derbyshire, to march out and join “a cloud of men” sweeping down from Scotland & Yorkshire on their way to London. Instead they were met by two mounted magistrates and a company of soldiers. Forty six were arrested, three of which were executed, fourteen transported to Australia and nine imprisoned.

Luddism was the last fitful struggle before, like a broken-in horse, the English poor lay down, resigned to wage slavery. The meagre struggles that followed rarely aimed at reclaiming peoples’ lives from work; but merely getting a better deal for the slaves.

The poor started to identify themselves more and more with the idea of work, abhorrent only 50 years before. Concepts like the ‘dignity of labour’ and ‘laziness is sin’ multiplied. As Leopold Roc put it, “There is always a tendency to rationalise insults when revenge does not take place.” The strange belief spread that technologies created to bolster obedience and elite power were ‘neutral’ – and could exist in a free world – in fact were the key. The idea that we should organise our lives around work was the very opposite of what the Luddites stood for.

The workers’ internalisation of industrial logic would be more disastrous than any army the manufacturers could muster. Even when the ‘workers’ movement seized power, its aim became to run industrialism itself. Revolutions came and went but to paraphrase the Anti-Election Alliance, ‘Whoever you deposed, the industrial system always got in.’ Party and trade union leaders easily made the transition to factory managers.

The internalisation of industrial logic by ‘liberation’ movements would lead to the ‘revolutionary collectivisation’ of the Soviet peasantry and its associated gulag, and many of the worst moments of the 20th Century. Whole generations were held both in slavery to industry and in awe of it.

The Rebirth of Luddism?

But many of us have begun, in recent years, to see industry for what is. To reject industrial logic and embrace our desires.

[...] Feeling out of place in this society, alienation is very painful. Much like realising that we are descended from apes, in fact are apes, gives us a feeling of innate connection with the rest of life. Walking the streets of Manchester or Leeds, knowing that you walk the same streets as machine-destroying, free-food distributing, prison-breaking crowds, gives one a feeling of being rooted.

Machine haters walk again in the Luddite Triangle[...]. The successful campaign in the early 90’s to stop peat extraction on Thorne Moors just outside Leeds, came to a close when saboteurs destroyed 100,000 worth of machinery. Two weeks later the company (Fisons) sold up. The Lancashire M65 campaign[6] was a turning point in tree-based campaigns, and before the A30 Fairmile eviction[7] was the longest eviction in British history.

[...] We are told by the media – the advance guard of the spectacle – to constantly change so that we can continue to be news. But nothing is truly new – with the exception of the scale and complexity of the problem. Our struggles are recent battles in an old war.

The 'Luddite Triangle' today: Yorkshire Dales 'national park' is torn apart by quarrying. In 2008 an aggregate processing plant had holes drilled in the engines and tyres of all their bulldozers, control rooms broken into and all computers and instrument panels smashed, as well as keys to all buildings and machinery stolen. 'Stop Glensanda' was sprayed on site (the company’s Scottish super-quarry levelwing 'Man' and 'Lag a 'Mhais' peaks).
The spectacle attempts to destroy its real history and that of its opponents while creating a sanitised version of the past, which it can then sell back to consumers as a commodity. When we learn about OUR history, our ancestors, it is both inspiring and instructive. By looking at past conflicts we can learn more about our ‘new’ ones. By learning about the mistakes of the past we may avoid making them in the future.

1. Quoted in ‘Rebels Against the Future’, by Kirkpatrick Sale
2. ibid.
3. ibid.
4. – [The romantic poet] George] Byron, whose close friend (also a great poet) Percy Shelley set up a fund for Ludlow orphans. Largely in reaction to Luddism his wife, Mary Shelley, wrote ‘Frankenstein’, still the most eloquent and beautiful treatise against the machine. Interestingly her parents were William Godwin, one of the founders of anarchism, and Mary Wollenscraft, the founder of feminism. In a further historical twist, Byron left his first wife and his daughter was brought up to hate the values he stood for. nature and love; growing up instead to be obsessed with machinery and mathematics. Working with Babbage, inventor of the first computer, she founded programming. In honour, the US nuclear missile control computer is named after her.
5. – ‘Rebels...’ [ed. – Three Ludlites also ambushed and fatally shot mill owner William Horfall of Ottwell Mill (who had pledged that he would “ride up to his saddle in Ludlittled blood”), on Crossdale Moor in Huddersfield.]
6. ed. – “The campaign began in May 1994 at Cuerden Valley which has now been totally devastated by Stage One of the £142 million (!) 12 mile M65 road extension, which stretches from Junction 29 on the M6 to Blackburn. There has been serious opposition since work began, with constant direct action, squatting of properties en route, and tree-sitting. The most well publicised period of the campaign has been the recent defence of the Stanworth Valley ‘Village in the Sky’, at the beginning of Stage Two of the motorway. A small group of people squatted the ancient wood and despite the grim weather conditions, and lack of full time people over winter, they managed to construct the largest tree village in England, if not the world! There were over 40 tree houses ranging between 30 and 70 feet in the air protecting both sides of the approximately 100 metre wide valley. High tension cable walkways connected all the treetop homes and crossed over the River Ribblesworth, that surged (due to the rain cloud vortex over Lancashire), through the middle of the valley” (It’s (Not Really That) Grim Up North). The campaign added an extra £12.2 million onto the cost of the road, an important part of the historic mass resistance to what the government had in 1989 announced as “the biggest road building scheme since the Romans”.

1. The millenarian movements, active in Europe from the 13th to the 17th centuries, attempted to realize a Golden Age or state of grace in real life. They grew out of a messianic Christianity which saw temporal authority – church and state – as the anti-Christ and a hindrance to the arrival of the millennium, the 1000 year rule of Christ on earth. Its adherents flaunted economic, sexual, religious and civic taboos, using a wide variety of tactics – some of them violent – to achieve their utopia.
2. During the same period in France, the silk-workers uprisings, which were also directed against the process of industrial domestication, were on the contrary already contaminated by the political lie.
POWER DOWN
– no to the 735kV power line (Canada)

735,000 volts. This is what will pass through the new very high tension line that Hydro-Québec wants to construct as of this year. The trajectory of this line is 400km long and will transport electricity from the Chamouchouane central to Sanguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, passing through Lanaudiere, towards an eventual post that does not exist at the moment, in Terrebonne, called Judith-Jasmin. This will be linked to the Montreal region by a second segment of 19km towards the Bout-de-l’Île post. This is the most important hydro line in 20 years, estimated at 1.3 billion dollars. In fact, it’s the 12th line of this scale in so-called “Québec”.

But firstly, they need to clear-cut the path where pylons will be planted. The deforestation has already begun in the north and in Lanaudiere. It has caused multiple expropriations and partially crosses the hunting grounds of Attikamekws in the north, St-Michel-des-Saints, St-Zenon, Ste-Emelie-de-l’Energie, St-Alphonse-de-Rodriguez, Rawdon, etc.

The project has been contested by many residents, farmers and ecologists for the past 6 years: “Useless, environmentally devastating and economically unjustified” (Citizens Under High-Tension). Beyond any doubts, it is a categorical refusal. The BAPE (Bureau of Public Audiences on the Environment) has recommended the government wait until they have more information, to deepen the study of the impact and to take into consideration the opposition of the area. Nonetheless, the State has adopted a decree imposing the pursuit of the construction. Hydro-Québec gave 4 million dollars in compensation to the Regional County Municipality of Lanaudiere and another one million to Manawan as compensation to make them swallow their salads. But there are still people who oppose; most have land concerns, they are angry property owners because the value of their houses will decrease or because they have farms and their animals can’t handle the strong electromagnetic fields of these high-tension lines. They refuse to sign the letters sent by Hydro-Québec that requests residents permission to cut trees on their lands as Hydro will not have compensated them personally in cash. In response Hydro is harassing them and has obtained an injunction. Even if it is heartwarming for people to be mobilizing against Hydro-Québec, this refusal only slows the process of systemic destruction and doesn’t aspire to halt it.

We can even say that the motives of this opposition are absolutely contradictory to the desires of wild freedom that live in us. Our desire is to expand the field of possibilities, so we wish to propose other avenues to break the realization of this hydro project. As of this moment, the project is going ahead and the deforestation has already begun.

Another National Myth

The Hydro-Québec mafia has no interest in retreating facing with a project like this that represents enormous profit. In fact, the era of combustible fossil fuels is in decline [ed. – see Special Hydraulic Fracture]. Facing the drying up of petroleum resources, the costs of extraction and transportation have become too high. The turn to green has been in the works for a few decades and in this context, hydro-electricity, perceived as a renewable and green energy, becomes a precious commodity. The large global corporations of commerce and finance are in the process of restructuring and transforming the industry and transportation in order to adapt to “green energies”. The new Minister of Transportation of Québec has for an innovative mission the electrification of public transportation with new hybrid and electrical vehicles. Electrical cars become more and more accessible, Hydro installs battery recharge stations in every corner of so-called “Québec”, even field vehicles will be electric in the near future. And all this with the objective to maintain the speed and the productivity of the industry. The infrastructure projects of energy transportation, as with roads, railroads, ports, pipelines and airports, are indispensable to the expansion of industry, a tentacular project in itself.

A myth is built around hydro-electricity as a green and renewable energy source. We brag about it almost as if it was the national joy of so-called “Québec” with its numerous fresh water rivers of high flow. In reality, we should perceive hydro-electricity as an exploitable resource, commodifiable as much as iron, uranium or petroleum. Today, the territory is completely disfigured, there remains only a few high flow rivers that haven’t yet been invaded by dams. The electricity itself that they speak of is actually a gigantic enterprise of ecosystem destruction, of river pollution and the destruction of ways of life of communities that depend on the river for survival. When a dam is constructed, the river is blocked and a reservoir of water that floods a large surface of the territory is created. The river in question overflows from its bed near the dam and dries up along all its length. The trees and plants that have been flooded die and release methane and carbon dioxide into the water and the air. The methane and the carbon dioxide are greenhouse gases; it is reported that 12% of greenhouse gases emitted on the colonized lands of the Canadian State originate from hydro-electric dams. Another consequence of these floods is the methyl-mercury contamination of the water, originating from the release of fossilized inorganic mercury in the soil. Once the ground has been flooded by water, the mercury is released and transforms into methyl-mercury, a neurotoxin that is consequentially found in the food chain. The fish, animals and humans that consume it may develop a variety of illnesses, such as cardiovascular disorders and cancer. It has been accordingly discouraged for people to consume the fish of these rivers for a period of 30 years following the flooding of a basin. To summarize, the plentitude of fresh-water rivers of so-called “Québec”, in the past potable, have all become toxic.

The animals and the humans that depend on them for drinking water and food are poisoning themselves or losing a source of potable water. As a result: thousands year-old ecosystems and ancestral forms of life disturbed and destroyed.
The first intention of Hydro-Québec is evidently the creation of consumer markets with the United-States, with a pretty discourse singing praise for hydro-electricity as being cleaner than coal electricity. On their website, they make the comparison. What they don't say, is that its the shitty industry put in place with its logic of monopolization since the beginning of colonization by the Europeans 500 years ago that causes the destruction of life. Hydro-Québec therefore explores all the American markets and talks of even undertaking other projects of dam construction for the few fresh water rivers still intact. They obviously don’t have any reservations regarding the real damages caused by their thirst for wealth.

The Bleeding of Electricity
Hydro-Québec owns approximately 62 hydro-electric centres. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the great rivers of the James Bay area and the North Shore have been used to feed a hydro-electric complex (i.e. the Caniapiscau, the Opinaca, the Eastmain and Ruper), and seriously disrupted following the installation of hydro-electric centers (i.e. Sainte-Marguerite, the Romaine and Touniustouc). These famous high tension lines transport the electricity coming from the North and supplied to the entire province, its urban centers, its suburbs, its industries and its mines. As an example, supplying a single mine in heating and electricity, to render its below ground environment inhabitable for the people who work in it, is the equivalent energy consumption of a city like Trois-Rivières. As those who oppose the project say, the province has no need to produce more electricity. In fact, most of the electricity produced is already surplus. At the moment we consume only 15% of the electricity produced, the rest is lost through transportation, or even wasted because it isn’t profitable to stockpile it in batteries. Actually, if the produced current isn’t consumed right away, its lost. Therefore, this 735,000 volt line will transport energy coming from the dams in the north: James Bay, Manicouagan, and the new dams of La Romaine on the North-Shore, projects that have faced intense resistance by the inhabitants of the region during the past years. The State accordingly justifies this project by saying the new dams provoke congestion on the existing lines.

Let’s not forget that Hydro-Québec is a State company that has the monopoly on matters of electricity, that frequently gives contracts to companies with cloudy numbers, that imposes high fees, that expropriates land in exchange for ridiculously low compensation, and who works solely with the goal of favoring industry. Here, what is important to us goes far beyond the value of houses. There is the annihilation of the environment, a reality erased by all kinds of false publicity of Hydro Québec. Because in reality, the energy of the industry comes from a carbon thermal center, nuclear reactors or hydroelectricity, the paradigm stays the same: productivity, the pillage of territories and the expansion of the market. No energy dedicated to industry could be clean.

We are fighting to re-appropriate our lives. We have the intention of destroying what destroys nature, because we need it to be well and live healthily. Industry, dams, mines, and deforestation are devastating parasites. It suffices to imagine being a bird flying in the sky contemplating the scenery to realize the devastation that has been initiated is irreversible, to see the holes in the forest, to see the flooded lands in the basins of the dams. We quickly understand that the ecology is far from being a priority of Hydro Québec and its shareholders. They pay themselves hunting and fishing trips in resorts for the rich, and appropriate the rest of the lands by buying cottages, they build chains and fences, put up signs that say ‘private property, access forbidden’. Those responsible for these companies aren’t entitled to forgiveness.

We honour all acts of resistance, we salute the courage of communities struggling for self-determination and wild freedom. We are those who oppose the ravaging deforestation in the forest of Ouareau, with the Cree who are opposed to the clear-cuts in the forest of Broadback, with Six Nations who are also fighting against deforestation in the Red Hill Valley related to the high tension line in the south of so-called “Ontario”), with the Mi’kmaq who are fighting against fracked gas [ed. – see Special Hydraulic Fracture], with the Mohawks who threaten to block the Energy-East pipeline, with those who occupy Lax U’ua (Lelu island) in blocking the construction of the Pacific Northwest LNG [ed. – liquid natural gas] terminal and with all the accomplices with wild and combative spirits.

In this very moment, deforestation of the company of the region has begun, as well as the establishment of access roads. There is still time to stop the construction and it isn’t the State or any representative, even those with good will, who will help us. What are we waiting for?
TO LOVE THE INHUMAN
– a critique of John Zerzan’s “Animal Dreams”

“Faced with the meaninglessness of the world – the real... the individual most often quakes and turns away. The experience of the real is literally unbearable, and philosophy has traditionally come to the rescue to save humanity from meaninglessness, to create the illusion of a truth...”

– David F. Bell, introduction to Joyful Cruelty by Clément Rosset

Anarcho-Primitivist[1] John Zerzan’s thinking exemplifies just such an attempt at rescue, one not only unnecessary, but in fact unwanted, for an anti-civilization critique lived as a joyful life. This essay examines John Zerzan’s recent “Animal Dreams”, first situating it in a typical anarchist critique motivated through the enshrinement of particular reifications, then exploring how such action leads to Manichaean thinking [ed. – i.e. that breaks everything down into good or evil, light or dark, or love and hate (named after an Iranian prophet Mani)]; essentially, dualistic thinking, and finally challenging specific claims made within his essay. An alternative mode of relating to the nonhuman closes the piece.

Tenacious Spectres: Morality & Nature

Radicalization, that is, the development of one’s critical theory, can be understood largely in terms of dispossession by reification[2]; as one’s critique grows sharper, one increasingly liberates one’s life from these enslaving concepts. All anarchists worth the name have dispelled themselves of State, most have excised Capitalism and God, and many have also banished such subtle ghosts as Family and Production – but some, as a result of their radicalization, not only fail to dispel, but actually enshrine all the more fiercely, Morality and Nature.

Moral socialization is an odd, dissonant thing in the dominant culture. Children are taught at an early age to share, to treat others as they would like to be treated (the Golden Rule), to believe everyone’s opinions are of value, and similar maxims according to the altruistic paradigm generally descended from Christian and Enlightenment [ed. – see ‘A Profound Dis-ease’] beliefs, even if those value tables are never explicitly cited during this socialization. Simultaneous to this inculcation is children’s experience of realities often at odds with the prescriptions they receive: they see not only the concerted exploitation of the majority by the few, but also commonplace avarice among the many; they see the obvious destitution of some, often disproportionately along visually recognizable demographic lines; and they see women’s opinions more or less subverted in quotidian conversation. This dissonance stirs feelings of moral distress that need some form of catharsis. For some, this release is a naturalization of perceived evils, perhaps via an unknowable divine plan, a misanthropic dismissal of humanity as essentially flawed, or a self-identification with Social Darwinism. Others, though, balk at the horrorshow, as their rationalization of the dissonance is that Morality’s normative purchase is genuine and reality is simply out of step with it; they demand either a sweeping change or annihilation of the status quo and the earthly manifestation of heaven. Pyotr Kropotkin[3], an inspirational figure to many radicals, preaches with precisely this kind of moral indignation: “Our principles of morality say: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’; but let a child follow this principle and take off his coat to give it to the shivering pauper, and his mother will tell him that he must never understand moral principles in their direct sense. If he lives according to them, he will go barefoot, without alleviating the misery around him! Morality is good on the lips, not in deeds.”

Thus, the process of radicalization for many is the moral impugnment of the world. Though I am unaware of any empirical study, it has been my own experience (and, I suspect, that of most readers) that the vast majority of radicals born into the dominant culture were at least initially radicalized in this manner, typically as especially indignant progressive liberals, and the majority of this set still occupy that analytical space, having only clarified their morality. Morality’s ontological status is never called into question; indeed, in its besiegement by either the openly immoral or the falsely moral – i.e., greed is good or people need authority or we would have the war of all against all – amidst an obviously bleak culture, it is all the more vindicated as the Real, the Good, and the True.

In the same vein is the burgeoning anti-civilization anarchist who sees, on the one hand, the culture in which they are forcibly immersed, with its multifarious horrors of dehumanization, objectification, willed affect, wanton waste, variegated and abundant interhuman oppression, and denuding of the Biosphere; and then sees, seemingly diametrically opposed, the nonhuman world with its vivaciousness, intimacy, immediacy of experience, nutrient and energy cycles in which nothing is wasted or wanted but the energy that the Sun or hydrothermal vents replace, various niches through which all lifeways are valuable, and species interactions in which, even as one kills another, one seemingly never acts against Life itself. It is a small leap, then, to see the Culture as the Evil against Nature, the Good.

Which Side Are You On?

Being a radical thus comes to mean taking a position on the Manichaean battlefield, fighting for and alongside Nature. Theoretically, it may mean embodying Nature or restoring an essential substance of wildness within oneself, as the battlefield may be not only material but also spiritual. Actionably, it may realize itself as protecting Nature via stopping particular non-human organisms from being killed, stopping industrial development in particular places perceived as wild or sacred, or attacking persons or infrastructure associated with Civilization; as well as aligning oneself personally with Nature via learning primitive [sic] skills, eating a particular diet, or adopting certain spiritual beliefs.

Again, these sentiments are eminently understandable and the actions may or may not be well placed, as what is beautiful in the organic, our habitat as human organisms, is being despoiled horribly by Civilization. The globalized, industrialized, spectacle-commodity culture is destroying kinds of beings at a rate one thousand times faster than they would normally go extinct, and huge portions of wildlife have been destroyed just in recent...
decades as the process accelerates, reaching such a rate as to prompt the creation of a neologism, “defaunaization”. Meanwhile, the always-present thinness of such efforts as conservation, sustainable agriculture, and green technology becomes an increasingly revolting joke, recently exemplified by the ridiculous efforts this past year of endangered species translocation and the attempted displacement of indigenous populations in Alvaro Obregon for the construction of a wind power farm [ed. – including the 3rd largest in Latin America, after a ‘wind-rush’ for industry; see Return Fire vol.3 pg39].

Considering all of this horror, it is not especially poetically adventurous to describe the culture as a death engine, essentially inimical to the organic. And emotionally intense or poetic writing can be a useful tool and a breath of relief amidst a general bleachedness, so long as it avoids obfuscation by being clear about how, when, and why it is doing so. As a perhaps unfortunate linguistic consequence, calling oneself anti-civilization might leave one feeling obligated to be for something else that is similarly grand in scope, something bigger than our immediate lives and relations. But while Civilization is a kind of useful shorthand that can be quite clearly defined, the abundant references to Nature, animality, and wildness coloring anti-civilization/anti-industrial literature, speech, and thinking are misleading vagaries at best and phantoms at worst.

Civilization, itself a set of overlapping and mutually reinforcing reifications and their corresponding material infrastructure, is characterized and reproduced by exactly this kind of absolutist, dualistic, universalizing thought. Abstract and transcendental values are themselves intrinsically authoritarian and antithetical to embodied and vivacious life, even if they are posited for ostensibly liberatory purposes, as I have written of elsewhere [7]. To reiterate briefly, to compartmentalize one’s raw, lived-and-felt, moment-to-moment experience in order to render it, to self-alienate it, into such categories as Nature or wildness is itself an act of separation. Insofar as our loving gaze assigns to our lover fantasies of perfection, mutilating them into a quasi-divine being into which we can dissolve our inadequacies and disappointments, thus completing ourselves, we have betrayed anything worth the name of love and entered into the realm of religion. Anarcho-Primitivism (AP, whether the nouns or the adjective) is thus, ironically, the stuff of civilized thinking, a pattern of thought that mourns for an imagined reunion with a de-anthropomorphized, but nonetheless extant, divinity.

To elaborate this point, I will unpack “Animal Dreams”, a recent essay by John Zerzan that appeared in the first issue of the biannual green anarchist journal Black Seed, as I find the AP analysis to be one of the most interesting ones with which I disagree because of something like convergent evolution: I arrive at superficially similar conclusions to the APs, but with a fundamentally different analysis.

Green Manichaicism: Anarcho-Primitivism as Cosmic Battlefield
Before examining “Animal Dreams” in particular, some context is in order. I am not merely accusing: for Anarcho-Primitivists, the world is avowedly a Manichaean battlefield. Zerzan has emphasized more than once on his radio show Anarchy Radio, as well as in personal exchanges, that he is dismissive of any anarchist analysis that does not regard a Civilization/Nature dualism as metaphysically fundamental: Civilization with its slavery, death, or undeath versus Nature with its freedom, wildness, and life.

In “Animal Dreams”, Zerzan adds to the Good seemingly all non-human animals, who apparently not only occupy the proper side of Mani’s ranks but also serve as models for us to do the same. I will examine how Zerzan assigns to various animals (predominantly charismatic megafauna) humanistic and Christian virtues and how these characterizations are either misleading (because they reflect only one or a few examples among a great many) or simply wrong. Later, I will propose what I find to be a more appropriate relationship to the nonhuman.

Couple Like a Goose; Love Like a Wolf
In sharp contradistinction to much of Zerzan’s writing that is, even where I disagree, compelling and provocative, “Animal Dreams” reads largely like a set of platitudes, some disturbingly normative for the culture. I want nonetheless to briefly begin where it has merit.

From both the piece itself as well as personal conversations with its author, it is clear that part of Zerzan’s goal was to repudiate the draftly composed and grotesquely speciesist [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg10] diminution of the inner lives/umwelts [ed. – environmental factors collectively capable of affecting the behaviour of an individual] of nonhuman organisms. This goal is certainly worthwhile and admirable, especially in light of Behaviorist/Cartesian [ed. – see ‘A Profound Dis-ease’] residues that linger in both popular and academic cultures. Zerzan aptly decries the allergy to so-called anthropomorphism, more accurately described in this particular case as qualitative inference to the presence of consciousness in nonhumans, an act of the very same kind of abduction that nearly every human commits with nearly every other human on an everyday basis [8].

The common critique that humans can report their mental states while nonhumans cannot is laughable and evinces what a lack of understanding there is about communication: the whine of a distressed dog, the enticing change of color of a ripe fruit, the limb-waving and stridulation of a threatening tarantula, and the garish and warning colors of a toxic nudibranch [ed. – a type of poisonous sea-going slug] are all communication. Almost any pet owner, forager, or anyone else who has spent a good deal of time with nonhuman animals, including this author, would readily say that nonhuman animals reasonably seem to have an inner life that they are capable of communicating to a greater or lesser extent depending on the particular case. I agree completely with Zerzan that “It is not ‘anthropomorphic to recognize that animals play’” [9]; and that we also can only loosely speculate what these inner lives are like, as “we do not know how to even comprehend consciousnesses different from our own.”

Where Zerzan errs, heavily and repeatedly, is his flagrant and nonsensical moralizing that dominates the piece. He seems to wish to tell us, implicitly, the following: that we should value animals because they exemplify our popularly held morals, as he lists a number of cases of animals seemingly championing them; but also that we should view animals as moral exemplars, models of behavior, as “we are lost, but animals point to the right road.” Besides the odd circularity inherent in this bifurcated claim that undermines its entire thrust (animals are good because they follow moral X; moral X is good because animals follow it), it is easy to find a number of counterexamples for every moral example Zerzan deploys.

Though he acknowledges, seemingly anticipating a critique like mine, that “All is not sweetness and light in the non-human realm,” he softens this admittance by adding “especially in this shaken and disturbed world”, as though the human, somehow causa sui, were perhaps really to blame. He proceeds to make this caveat close to meaningless by using the bulk of his essay to enumerate cases of non-human organisms exhibiting behaviors in line with liberal humanism or Christian ethics.

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Hierarchy & Domination in Non-Humans

As an anarchist, Zerzan of course desires a world without formal hierarchy; he seeks to find animals, needlessly, to validate this desire – as though it were not sufficient for him to simply desire it, but that it instead needed to be written in the cosmos to be legitimate – and thus offers a repudiation of the commonly held idea of animal pecking order. It may indeed be the case that domestication induces hierarchy in some animals in whom it does not exist in the wild, such as has been recently observed with the behavior of wolves versus dogs. There are nonetheless numerous cases of dominating behavior in wild organisms.

Many parasitoids seize control of their hosts’ bodies, ending their reproductive possibilities through death or debilitation—barnacles of the genus Sacculina castrate their crab hosts in order to hijack their bodies, including their sex organs, for reproduction; the Gordian Worm larva inhabits an arthropod host and, maturing, forces the host to drown itself so that the adult worm may erupt from its dead body to reach an aquatic habitat; and wasps of the genus Ichneumonidae inject their eggs and symbioticviruses into other insect larvae, restricting their metamorphosis and creating abnormally large larvae that, like bloated cattle, are gradually devoured alive by the maturing Ichneumon larvae. Similar behavior exists in diverse organisms, the behavior having developed numerous times among creatures not closely related to one another: mollusks, nematodes, flatworms, and so on, including non-animals like fungi and viruses.

Besides the parasitic dimension, the social Hymenoptera (colony bees, wasps, and ants) exhibit caste societies with a rigid division of labor and violent enforcement of hierarchy via physical mutilation, ritualized dominance/submission social interactions, infanticide, and other forms of what entomologists actually dub “policing”. Again, similar eusocial, hierarchical behavior is exhibited by non-Hymenopteran insects like termites as well as non-insects like certain crustaceans – creatures that are not directly related evolutionarily – suggesting that, like parasitoidalism, domination is a tendency that life produces again and again, an eddy that the organic regularly recapitulates. There is thus nothing to be gained from looking at animals in some generalized way in order to legitimate our desires for anarchy.

Patriarchy, Sexuality, & Gender Relations in Non-Humans

Patriarchy is a repugnant aspect of the dominant culture that seems to lie at the core of Civilization, perhaps being among the first forms of alienation and generative of the compulsory division of labor [ed. – also see Return Fire vol.2 pg6]. Any thoroughgoing anarchist analysis demands a critique of it, but Zerzan seems to think, again, that we need to look to nonhumans to rationalize this critique – this venture is a useless one, as gendered behavior among animals reveals itself to be a riotous smorgasbord of possibilities.

Among our closest relatives, despite Zerzan’s highlighting of lioness hunting and elk matriarchy, the overwhelming majority of mammals are polygynous, often with harem-holding male dominance and sexual dimorphism that leaves the male considerably larger, stronger, and more aggressive. Perhaps the starkest example is that of the elephant seal, in which males violently compete for harems of females numbering up to the hundreds.

In a variety of invertebrates, again having evolved repeatedly in diverse phyla, mating takes place through traumatic insemination, in which a spined – literally weaponized – penis pierces the female’s body to deliver sperm directly to her viscera. One theory for why this vicious method evolved is to bypass mating plugs, an adhesive substance secreted by penises to literally glue a female’s reproductive tract closed after mating in order to block the sperm of competing males. I thus shudder at the brazenly general sentiment that “animals[…] are the right road.”

Moreover, even engaging in comparative gender relations among the incomprehensible diversity of nonhumans is a close to useless endeavor given the incommensurability of gender across species. In a great many animals, particularly many arthropods but also certain vertebrates like hyenas, females are physically larger and stronger, more socially and sexually dominant, and longer-lived, inverting the physical and social power relations characteristic of patriarchal humanity. And a good deal of genderfucking is present with the abundance of hermaphroditism and sex-changing among nonhuman animals – a huge diversity of animals are capable of changing their sexual organs to make the best of their conditions. One is moved to wonder what could possibly be gained by making human value inferences from beings so different from ourselves, most of whom are indifferent to these human values.

Coupled with Zerzan’s appeals to anti-patriarchy is a shockingly Christian sentimentalism for monogamy, as he cites geese and gibbons favorably for their long-term coupling. Why Zerzan is implicitly praising a human institution so closely associated with patriarchy, intimate abuse [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg46], and commodity culture is bemusing prima facie; but his information is also simply wrong, as this proposition has been debunked along with so many others about nonhuman monogamy: studies since the late 70s have found that, for the goose, “promiscuity is a part of the repertoire of yet another seemingly monogamous bird.” An estimated 95-97% of mammals are similarly nonmonogamous. In contrast, ruffs, wetland birds in the sandpiper family, mate in a manner reminiscent of a queer bacchanal that, I must say, were I ever to eschew my aversion to being prescriptive and morally reifying nonhumans, would be what I wish more of us would consider to be “the right road”. Among these highly promiscuous birds, there are three different male phenotypes, including a

The graffiti, in Oaxaca, Mexico, reads:

“Self-defence & offence against the anthropocentric patriarchal order”
female-resembling male that the very masculine, domineering male phenotype will mate with, both topping and bottoming, seemingly because the homoeroticism attracts the attention of observing females and entices them to join the orgy.

Zerzan similarly cites examples of animal familiality, devotion, and parental care—and, certainly, these exist, but only as some among a great many. With parenting and devotion, there is the octopus mother who, often fatally, vigilantly defending her young; all around her are the numerous and variegated marine organisms—cnidarians, mollusks, fish, crustaceans, etc.—engaging in the zero-parenting that is broadcast fertilization, in which eggs and sperm are both expelled into the water, the resultant zygotes carried away for a planktonic larval existence in which many are sure to perish. As far as familiality, we see on the one hand the whipspider mother who watches over her eggs and then carries her young on her back while, strikingly among arthropods, she seems to affectionately caress them. On the other hand, we see the cannibalism among young sharks and strepsiptera (parasitic insects who superficially resemble flies), who devour their siblings before even leaving the egg or their mother’s body, respectively; the incest among certain insects; and the parasitic parenting of cuckoos and certain insects, whose parents leave their offspring to be cared for by other species, as these host species mistake them for their own young through cloaking mechanisms.

There is thus among the animals no model for egallitarian gender relations and the ideal family. There is only an incredible variety of genders, gendered behavior, and familial relations that highlight how arbitrary human norms are at any particular time or place. If the world offers us no model, why can we not choose our own without recourse to it?

**MERCY & INDIFFERENCE**

Continuing with Christian sentimentalism, Zerzan attempts to devalue the wolf, and perhaps predators in general, by saying it may be the case that “wolves only kill animals that are near their end anyway—the old, sick, injured.” Though hedged as a supposition, it is difficult not to see Zerzan attempting to soften predation into a world of mercy and remorse. And, again, he cherry-picks his evidence to find the conclusions he wants, ignoring readily available counter-examples. A 2009 observation of *Canis Lupus* in a region in which they had a variety of potential prey found, based on sampling the wolves’ scat, that 96.4% of the scat held remains of either roe deer or wild boar, thus indicating the wolves’ primary prey. Of the prey, 74.1% of the roe deer and 84.2% of the wild boar were juveniles, less than a year old. Over time, the wolves took turns targeting the roe deer and the wild boar, each during its birthing period, for the reasons one might expect: “The positive selection of young roe deer and wild boar may be considered opportunistic behaviour, because the individuals of this age class are easier to capture than adults due to their inexperience.” Indeed, “Roe deer fawns are left alone by their mothers for long periods of time, making them even more vulnerable to wolf predation[...].” Mercy, it ain’t—babynapping, rather. The authors had occasion to cite six previous studies, ranging from 1970 to 2004, that supported the conclusion that wolves target vulnerable juveniles preferentially. One might reasonably infer, as others have, that they might target the elderly and ill for the same reasons—simple ease and opportunism. Far from experiencing mercy or remorse, the manner in which wolf pups play at hunting to gradually increase their skills suggests to me that the wolf feels hunger, desire, joy, and exhilaration as it hunts and kills.

Of course, Zerzan is likely motivated by a desire to redeem the wolf from its popular demonization as infinitely murderous, killing without even the need to eat. To make such a case, I much prefer Farley Mowat, who, besides indicting human civilization as being the real mindless killer, writes at the conclusion of his loosely autobiographical novel *Never Cry Wolf*, “Somewhere to the eastward a wolf howled[...] for me, it was a voice which spoke of the lost world that was once ours, before we chose the alien role, a world which I had glimpsed and almost entered[...].” Mowat here redeems the besmirched wolf not by apologizing for its killing, but rather by pointing at what seems a beautiful intimacy between the wolf and its world. Similarly, in a theme exhibited throughout his work, Nietzsche [ed. — see *Return Fire vol.2 pg52*] saw in animality (including uncivilized humans) a kind of profound, child-like innocence; not a moral innocence of being gentle, humble, and meek, all of which he clearly despised, but an innocence of unmediated life in which one is in tune with their senses, makes no apologies for their instincts, and is unafraid to grasp immediate joy.

**Gaianism[15] & Misanthropy as Closedet Humanism & Anthropocentrism**

At times, Zerzan exhibits nothing so much as his apparent biological ignorance. He writes, oddly misanthropically for someone who repudiates misanthropy, “We are the top of the food chain, which makes us the only animal nobody needs.” Besides the term food chain (Zerzan will later, inexplicably, use this same term in sneer quotes, as though he finds it unbelievable) being a bit of a misnomer—it is only one aspect of a food web, used to organize organisms into trophic levels, that is sometimes misleadingly employed to rank organisms in an Aristotelian Great Chain of Being-esque manner[16]—one is moved by Zerzan’s statement to ask whether he has ever heard of dust and face mites, roundworms, flukes, or tapeworms, to name only a few and those very broadly, or, if we extend beyond animals, any number of decomposers, human gut flora, mitochondria, and so on ad nauseam. Zerzan is most definitely aware of the evidence that North American Indians interacted with their forest ecosystems so as to create pockets of sub-climax forest succession zones that increased biodiversity in the forest as a whole[17], so why is he playing these self-shaming rhetorical games?

What is such a misanthropy except another form of human exceptionalism, another way of making the human the one and only Other who stands apart from everything else? As the Invisible Committee notes, referencing the anthropocentrism motivating the widespread move toward naming our era the Anthropocene, “For the last time, [Man] assigns himself [sic] the main role, even if it’s to accuse himself of having trashed everything—the seas and the skies, the ground and what’s underground— even if it’s to confess his guilt for the unprecedented extinction of plant and animal species.”

Underlying all of the problems outlined so far, moreover, is the deeper question of anthropomorphism that Zerzan uses to frame the entire piece. Zerzan quotes Henry Beston’s apt statement, “For the animal shall not be measured by man”, but he seems not to take it to heart. Yes, of course it is a mistake to have such an intense allergy to anthropomorphism that one is averse to the abstraction that nonhuman animals are conscious—such an attitude suggests massive alienation. But Zerzan has tumbled over the edge into an anthropocentrism that projects his own morality onto the nonhuman world. As I write elsewhere of his friend and frequent collaborator Kevin Tucker, Zerzan has committed the same error as the ancient Stoics: he rejects anthropocentrism, but, in doing so, he is in fact anthropocentric in a roundabout way.
Zerzan indicts others for projecting pecking order, Freudianism [ed. – for example, in Animal Dreams, that “the fallacy that the Freudian paradigm of murderous rivalry between fathers and sons represents the state of nature”], and hierarchy onto the nonhuman world, but he does the very same with his own values; once he has painted the nonhuman biosphere a color of his liking, obscuring and pretending not to notice its incredible variation, he sweats his allegiance to it. He asks, posing as the ingénue after his obfuscation, “ Might it not be that nature is for the happiness of all species, not just one?” I reply by asking what is this “nature” that is somehow different than the gestalt “of all species” and the world’s abiotic elements they inhabit and cocreate; and what would it mean for this totality to be “for” anything, as though the gestalt of innumerable valuing beings could somehow emergingly value something in and of itself or, even if it did, that we could somehow comprehend this evaluation? Like Tucker, Zerzan has regularly distanced himself from the Left and has written apt criticisms of it[18], yet he is still operating on the same Manichean logic that has characterized most forms of anarchism and leftism since their earliest days. Bakunin[19] saw human beings, originating in the objective good of Nature, as essentially moral until they were corrupted by the unnaturalness of the State; Zerzan extends this line of thinking by exalting the as-yet-uncorrupted nonhuman animals as moral exemplars.

To Love the Inhuman

Since I was a very young child, for as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by nonhuman organisms. The stranger, the more inhuman a creature was, the more I loved it – it fascinated me to know, for example, that a creature like a schistosome (a blood fluke that parasitizes first snails, then mammals during its lifecycle, eventually inhabiting a blood capillary) has a life incomprehensibly different from my own: sensing mostly through smell, metamorphosing multiple times, living as though “a vein is a river”[20], and mating perpetually as an adult. I am surrounded by aliens who are yet my kin, each enclosed in its own umwelt, such that the world is a nigh-infinite array of mutually mysterious yet mutually informing perceptual universes that are constantly spilling into one another. To call that vast and mysterious gestalt either good or bad, something to be either followed or rejected, is the greatest philosophical impurity, as it entails tremendously overstepping what can be known or evaluated. The only reaction that seems appropriate is something like Nietzsche’s Dionysian Pessimism, “a general approbation of the activity that is removed from the then passively-constructed object is projected onto a symbolic agent.” 3. ed. – A renegade of Russian nobility born in the late 19th Century, this anarchist was also a prominent naturalist scientist of the day, author of the famous book Mutual Aid. “Under the spell of [Charles] Darwin’s Origin of the Species, Kropotkin has sought in vain across history to uncover competition between creatures of the same species. In place of it, he has witnessed a thousand different manifestations of mutual support, perhaps the latter is a more decisive factor in survival than competition per se. The only exception he can think of are among his own people: bureaucracies that resist improvement, regimes that stifle their subjects, prisons that deform rather than reform” (Anarchists Traveling Through History, Part II: Kropodkin Escapes). This work he combined with his organising with secret councils of revolutionaries (who later assassinated the Tsar of Russia), for which he was imprisoned, before being bought out during a hospital stay and escaping to England, where he continued his naturalism publishing.


6. Many discussions of civilization are hampered by a lack of a clear definition of the subject. Briefly, by civilization, I mean a way of human life characterized by the growth of cities, areas of urban population sufficiently dense as to require the routine importation of food from corresponding rural surroundings characterized by agriculture. Civilized life generally includes all of the following, to varying degrees: collective activity tightly organized around a linear and numerical conception of time; a high level of ritual and symbolic culture; complex and explicit social hierarchy; political representation; the formation of a State, which attempts to monopolize the use of physical violence and delegitimize non-State violence; bureaucracy; compulsory labor (work); the overthrow and ideology rationalizing racial or cultural supremacy. 


8. The mere need for an international assembly of scientists in 2012 to sign a document declaring that at least some nonhuman animals are in fact conscious (“The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness”) is a testament to this incredible alienation.

9. The ancient problem of Other Minds – the fact that we ultimately have no way of knowing, of directly experiencing, the consciousness of other beings – is ultimately indissoluble. A difference of species does not change the problem fundamentally. Because we can only assume other humans are subjects of a life, it is just as reasonable to do the same with at least some nonhumans.
10. All unreferenced quotes following this one are from Zerzan’s “Animal Dreams” piece.

11. Parasitoids are organisms who, like parasites, spend a significant portion of their life upon or within a host organism that they use for some combination of food, shelter, and transportation. Unlike parasites, parasitoids necessarily kill, devour, or sterilize their hosts to complete their lifecycle. They are my favorite counterexample to the moralization of nonhumans, due to the fact that their behavior is often quite horrific from a Christian/humanist perspective – so much so, in fact, that no less a figure than Charles Darwin was moved to write of them to one of his colleagues: “I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designingly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars [...]” Here we see Darwin resisting a metaphorical flight from the real that David Bell describes in the epigraph.

12. Interestingly, Zerzan brings up the ichneumon, referring to it impressively as a fly (Ichneumon are Hymenopterans, closely related to other wasps, bees, sawflies, and ants; they are not Dipterans, the true flies), in order to showcase its marvelous senses; he avoids bringing up its reproductive cycle that might turn moralistic stomachs.

13. The earliest known monument, Goebekli Tepe, depicts numerous erect penises prominently, seemingly as signs of masculine power. Zerzan himself has suggested that patriarchy may have generated the first division of labor in his “Patriarchy, Civilization, and the Origins of Gender”.


15. ed. – see Invasive.

16. ed. – Aristotle’s hierarchical view of the universe was re-earthed by Christian theologians during the Middle Ages, and remained influential throughout to the birth of the modern era. God sits at the top of this pyramid, followed by angels, then men, then women, then ‘primilives’; then animals, then plants, then rocks, then sand, then soil etc. In the inherently body-hating tradition that Christian faith covets, those at the top are perfect, while those at the bottom are imperfect (soil being all ‘body’ and no ‘soul’, whereas God is all soul and no body). We could say that in secular modernity, now abstract scientific law has replaced God at the top of this still-accepted pyramid, and that machines (who live forever and don’t make ‘human error’) have replaced angels between God and men...

17. Jacke, Dave and Toensmeier, Eric. Edible Forest Gardens [ed. – also, see Invasive].

18. Consider his “The Left? No Thanks!” as well as his excellent examinations of the historical role of unions in Elements of Refusal.

19. ed. – Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin, another influential 19th Century anarchist from Russia and bitter foe of its imperialism in east and central Europe (amongst that by other powers). Departed from France, apprehended in Dresden for participation in a Czech rebellion of 1848, and imprisoned in Russia before escaping to Japan, the U.S. and then Europe, where he joined insurrections such as that in Lyon, France, 1870.

20. The quote is taken from Zimmer, Carl. Parasite Rex.


**WHY BE SO ATTACHED TO YOUR PENIS?**

- a fellow creature that gives new meaning to the phrase, “going both ways”

[ed. – For once something humourously written (as well as fascinating), which also could be read as a parody of the type of (“radical”– moralising-via-the-‘natural’­world described above; by anarcho-surrealist Ron Sakolsky, from Fifth Estate magazine #398.]

“I haven’t seen anything like this before.” – Bernard Picton, Curator of Marine Invertebrates, National Museum of Northern Ireland

Could the surreal imagination of even Karel Capek in his most bitingly satirical novel, War With The News, ever have conceived of a game-changer the likes of chromodoris reticulata, a red and white sea slug that can actually shed its own penis after mating and then replenish said appendage the very next day.

This disappearing penis trick is not the angst-ridden male nightmare erected by King Missile in their 1992 single, “Detachable Penis,” or the liberating sexual fantasy of temporary phallic disposability as a matter of choice which also pops up in that same song. Rather, it is a verifiable fact of nature recently discovered by Japanese researchers.

The astounding results of their study were published in the Royal Society’s Biology Letters Journal in February 2013.

The unaussumng thumb-sized shell-less mollusk in question, which inhabits the same warm waters of South East Asia as those in which Capek’s fictionalized newts were first discovered, has single-handedly turned “civilized” notions of phallocentric sexuality inside out.

Practicing a sex life that is quite unmerging to the border cops of sexual repression, it seems that this shape-shifting creature is a “simultanous hermaphrodite” or, in plain language, it has male and female sexual organs which it can use at the same time when mating.

So much for antiquated notions like penis envy! This versatile switch-hitting sea slug, with its exuberant double-barreled sexuality, might just be the most highly evolved creature in the animal world. During copulation, since both of the randy slugs involved can freely give and receive sperm, there can be two distinct parallel penises and vaginas at play in any mating situation.

Fancy that!

After copulation, each sea slug simply drops, ejects or snaps off its thread-like organ as the grand finale. Ouch, you might say! While geckos are willing to part with their tails, few animals would be willing to part with their penises.

No problem though, since each slug has two internally-coiled backup penises, each of which it can use about twenty-four hours after a sexual liaison. Then, to top it off, once all three penises have been spent, the creature is capable of eventually growing new ones.

At one level, such a unique sexuality is all about the none-too-liberating goal of continuously breeding more slugs. Yet, at another, the creature’s transcendence of normative gender categories upsets the Adam and Eve applecart and questions the dualistic assumptions of Noah’s Ark. At this latter level, its sluggish defiance of conventional male/female biology is positively blasphemous.

Maybe, as Canadian journalist Tahatha Southey has wittily opined, the discovery of the sex life of chromodoris reticulata is even the real reason for Pope Benedict XVI’s unprecedented resignation.

If he believes, as did his papal predecessor, John Paul II, that animals have souls, then what’s a pontiff to do? Southey writes: “Consider the moral issues a detachable penis raises; if one of God’s creatures uses a different penis every time he has sex, is he a virgin each time? Would any sea slug drawn into the service of the Lord have to stop being a priest for the 24 hours she didn’t have a penis?”

“All of this would be enough to throw any pontiff into spiritual crisis, but, what’s more, the sea slug penis in question appears to be covered with tiny spines that scrape out any competing sperm inside the vagina-like organ of his/her partner as he himself attempts fertilization.

“What Pope wouldn’t feel overwhelmed?”

Perhaps then it is only appropriate to end this inspiring unsettling story by hereby formally nominating the humble sea slug for surrealist “anti-sainthood.” And, fortunately for these lively creatures, Luciferian logic does not require the nominee to be dead as Catholic church dogma does for sainthood.

As an anti-authoritarian bearer of light, chromodoris reticulata illuminates our wildest dreams like an impossible anarchic silhouette shining brightly against the dark landscape of religious fundamentalism.
And on the eighth day, we burned it.

Some time after his initiation, the initiate may become ready for the ritual of invocation. The anarchists having no laws to determine one's readiness nor elders to appoint the time, the initiates themselves must determine their willingness and make the necessary preparations. Though this can be done alone, it is usually the work of a few, for the invocation is not only a ritual of power but also one of bonding.

The initiates' motives for calling the fire are varied. They may do it to destroy, to cause trouble, to have fun, or to feel powerful, but none of these is the fire's allure. It is not a ritual of exercising one's own power but one of occupying a space through which power is transferred. There is little effort required for the initiates to acquire the materials and skills, and the power they invoke is far too great for them to call their own. Though they may know it not, they summon the fire in order to be transformed: forged by its heat and fused to each other by its light. Fire will break down and cast to the wind what it can, but what passes through it intact will grow in resistance to the forces that seek to break it. This is a quality much desired by the anarchist.

The fire started, the departure underway, the adept turns for a moment and stares at the shape of the power roaring as it tears through the world. She chooses on an attempt to give voice to the desire the fire's touch awakens: that she would like to pause for a time, to absorb the heat and light of this towering blaze, to let herself be awed by the power she has summoned. But she knows there is no time to linger, and tastes the bitter deprivation, even in her crime, of the desired encounter with chaos.
“Geronimo walked alone down the back trail from where they had come. He disappeared in the shadows, pausing to listen, walking again.

The confinement of the hole and his days at San Carlos had deadened his trail senses. When running through the live oaks and piñon of the Dragoons, he had begun to feel them again faintly; the return of their life thoughts... their rhythms. Entering the shinoak grove, he had felt the return stronger, more intense.

Now, seating himself beneath a desert hackberry in full foliage, he watched a deer bird picking the yellow berries and dreamily relaxed the thinking of his conscious mind. Eyes closed, he shut out the senses of sight and sound.

Here, there were a community of plants, traveling together. A million years ago they had set out from the south, conditioning themselves as they came north, lengthening their roots to gather more drink; sparsing their foliage to release less of their moisture and their breath; heightening their perceptions for survival.

They had kept precariously between the Mother Mountain and the hot, dry plain to balance their needs. Their life rhythms were harmonious; they required order to survive. Their perception of danger was finely honed, not sluggish. They were alert.

Softly Geronimo chanted. Not words, but tones that matched the rhythm of their harmony. The tones were soothing and beautiful, rising and falling without break or abruptness. The rhythm became stronger. A haunting odor came to his nostrils from the leaves of creosote bushes. The burro bushes moved their branches in unison to the chant. Slowly Geronimo felt the rhythm tightening. Were the danger moving from them, the rhythm would have lengthened, growing more languid. Now, faintly, breaks of excitement came, staccato; and he knew the soldiers had not stopped. They were coming.

He rose, touching the trees and bushes lightly, and trotted back the way he had come.

His warriors waited.”
Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.
notes from an era of cybernetic delirium

Back when this article first began coming together, a telling story appeared among the sensationalist reports of the British tabloid papers. A 89-year-old retired art teacher and former Royal Navy electrician, named only as Anne, retired to the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland in order to end her life alongside others seeking less-restrictive assisted suicide laws than in their country of origin. Nothing remarkable in itself. What was more noticeable was her comments about what had led her there; namely that she could not keep up with technological-industrial society and found the world as it is today un navigable and unbearable. “Why do so many people spend their lives sitting in front of a computer or television?” she asked in the feature. “People are becoming more and more remote. We are becoming robots. It is this lack of humanity.”

No-one on these islands could be confused as to what Annie might be speaking of in these statements. Whether you consider it an exciting advance or something to be confused as to what Annie might be speaking of in these statements. Whether you consider it an exciting advance or something to be confused as to what Annie might be speaking of in these statements. Whether you consider it an exciting advance or something to be confused as to what Annie might be speaking of in these statements. Whether you consider it an exciting advance or something to be confused as to what Annie might be speaking of in these statements.

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These days it’s rare to attend a concert where the front row is made up of attentive faces rather than those bathed in the glow behind the camera-phone lens, eagerly consuming the performance through a secondary medium or even perhaps absent at a later date, with no remaining need to be “in the moment” to be able to exchange opinions with our friends about what was truly the highlight of the night. Indeed, often it feels as if the event itself (whatever it may be) is of secondary importance to the flurry of digital activity that crowds around it; from the social media promotion beforehand to the online reviews appearing simultaneously with the evening’s running order taking its course. “The most obvious use of Twitter,” according Eric Schmidt while CEO of Google, is in situations where “everybody is watching a play and are busy talking about the play while the play is underway.” Meanwhile, to text message your neighbours instead of dropping around unannounced has become entirely reasonable (finding acceptance even among age-groups who would previously have balked at the idea), more appropriate, more... neighbourly.

Computer games, previously thought by some to be found among the lower reaches of detachment from the social realm, have now been ousted from that scale by new depths: watching other people playing computer games becoming a mass spectator sport.

The writer Daniel Goleman gives us a familiar anecdote. “The little girl’s head only came up to her mother’s waist as she hugged her mum, and held on fiercely as they rode a ferry to a holiday island. The mother, though, didn’t respond to her, or even seem to notice: she was absorbed in her iPad all the while.”

There was a reprise a few minutes later, as I was getting into a shared taxi van with nine female students who that night were journeying to a weekend getaway. Within a minute of taking their seats in the dark van, dim lights flicked on as every one of the women checked an iPhone or tablet. Desultory conversations sputtered along while they texted or scrolled through Facebook. But mostly there was silence.

The indifference of that mother, and the silence among the students, are symptoms of how technology captures our attention and disrupts our connections. In 2006, the word “pizzled” entered our lexicon; a combination of puzzled and pissed, it captured the feeling people had when the person they were with whipped out their BlackBerry [mid-conversation] and started talking to someone else. Back then people felt hurt and indignant in such moments.

Today it’s the norm.” Sociological literature has labelled an instance of such a behaviour an ‘away’ – a gesture which tells another person “I’m not interested in what’s going on here and now”, now epidemic in a saturated media environment of continuous partial attention, from the boardroom to the living room. The new digital era is becoming so normalised in the minds of its participants that people born directly into the tech-boom of the 1980’s and 90’s onward can barely imagine the world another way – and yet there are many who remember a life less clustered by gadgets and some still of them who have not submitted to their embrace. “They say adapt or die. At my age,” stated Annie, “I feel I can’t adapt, because the new age is not an age that I grew up to understand.” That it is probably so easy to write off the complaints of an aged woman and her generation speaks of the callousness that has become so commonplace in industrial society towards its ‘spent resources’, as age-old respect for and wisdom from elders (that is, those deemed to have earned the title) becomes the scorn of the tech-literate towards the dismay of many of our predecessors at the dizzying pace of techno-acceleration, in a deskilled society less guided by attained and lived human wisdom than externally-implemented machine updates. The assumption is that it is they, as well as their more familiar technologies, that are ‘obsolete’ – without a place, without a future.

Yet these observations could elicit the retort that what’s at issue is simply mis- or over-use of the options that the digital medium are aligned towards. The tool is what we make of it, we tell ourselves. Here we encounter a classic trap in analysing a technology: focusing on the content (i.e. what information, stories, arguments etc. are conveyed, or what task performed) at the expense of examining the form (i.e. what the
The Message & The Medium

“I can feel it too. Over the last few years I’ve had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, reprogramming my neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory. My mind isn’t going – so far as I can tell – but it’s changing. I’m not thinking the way I used to think. I feel it most strongly when I’m reading. I used to find it easy to immerse myself in a book or a lengthy article. My mind would get caught up in the twists of the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I’d spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That’s rare now. Now my concentration starts to drift after a page or two. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. [...] Whether I’m online or not, my mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a jet ski. [My brain, I realized, wasn’t just drifting. It was hungry. It was demanding to be fed the way the Net fed it – and the more it was fed, the hungrier it became. Even when I was away from the computer, I yearned to check e-mail, click links, do some Googling. I wanted to be connected.” – Nicholas Carr

Until relatively recently, for centuries the dominant Western culture has operated under a prevailing model of linearity, as can be seen in the development of literacy for example: reading meaning pursuing a single body of text, with a priority on contemplation, solitude (in at least a mental sense), and attentiveness. The form which the internet takes, with the simple leaf of a book replaced by the scramble of toolbars, links, hypertext, advertising, automatically-streaming video and so on, is cultivating a shift into a non-linear realm. Today we who are immersed in the online world often don’t necessarily read left to right or top to bottom anymore, but skim around the page trying to pick out titbits of “key” information rather than try to absorb the piece as a whole. It’s no secret that by and large the media industries consider that “print is dead”, and the cultural direction is towards any and all publication eventually being virtual. Some researchers have claimed that their studies in topics such as subject, composition and narrative flow show creative writing to have steadily become less imaginative and diverse over the last decades, whereas graphic art for instance has shown an opposite trend as culture becomes even more spectacular and symbol-manipulating.

Do you remember how you feel when you come away from any prolonged time on the internet? How it feels like you struggle to ‘readjust’ to the elements of our daily life which remain non-digitalised? Is there even much space between these moments for you anymore, fluttering between phonescreen, tablet, desktop? We could consider the scientific narrative which has come to the fore among neurologists (those who study the brain) about “neuroplasticity”, as one potential story to consider among others in theorising our situation (obviously with an eye to the limitations, framings and biases inherent in its scientific tradition). Nicholas Carr quotes such a scientist, Michael Merzenich, who “ruminated on the Internet’s power to cause not just modest alterations, but fundamental changes in our mental makeup. Noting that “our brain is modified on a substantial scale, physically and functionally, each time we use a digital medium (…) to work out how it influences how we think, feel and act. How in control of the affects of the digital medium are we by choosing what we access through it? Or what, in itself, goes with the territory?

Each technology carries within it a reflection of the ideology that it was crafted in the context of. What we are experiencing at the moment is a change that is maybe similar in scale and depth to that which heralded the industrial revolution; a paradigm shift in the way that we encounter the world, born from the productivist and capitalising mentality and yet perhaps distinct in many ways from the previous era in terms of how we are conditioned to operate by the tools we use. Some have called this the ‘interface revolution’. At the centre of this, reaching even to a physiological level, is the internet. Before moving on to what this might mean for those of the anarchist space (or others) in search of a way out of the dominant culture, we would do well to examine these shifts. In much of the world the Net is no longer felt to be a distinct destination we access in a specific moment through a designated technology, but rather an environment we inhabit permanently, always on, always present, always transmitting and receiving; and despite the degree to which we almost accept it as a part of ourselves, to recall facts or retain social ties, one which simultaneously seems to fade into the background of many people’s awareness.
Imagine living without the Internet and online tools like the Google search engine, he stressed that "THEIR HEAVY USE HAS NEUROLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES."

What we’re not doing when we’re online also has neurological consequences. Just as neurons that fire together wire together, neurons that don’t fire together don’t wire together. As the time we spend scanning Web pages crowds out the time we spend reading books, as the time we spend exchanging bite-sized text messages crowds out the time we spend composing sentences and paragraphs, as the time we spend hopping across links crowds out the time we devote to quiet reflection and contemplation, the circuits that support those old intellectual functions and pursuits weaken and begin to break apart. The brain recycles the disused neurons and synapses for other, more pressing work. We gain new skills and perspectives but lose old ones. [...] Calm, focused, undistracted, the linear mind is being pushed aside by a new kind of mind that wants and needs to take in and dole out information in short, disjointed, often overlapping bursts – the faster, the better. John Battelle, a onetime magazine editor and journalism professor who now runs an online advertising syndicate, has described the intellectual frisson he experiences when skimming across Web pages: “When I am performing bricolage in real time over the course of hours, I am “feeling” my brain light up. [...] “feeling” like I’m getting smarter.” Many of us have experienced similar sensations while online. The feelings are intoxicating – so much so that they can distract us from the Net’s deeper cognitive consequences.”

Again, the temptation might be to blame the sheer volume of data which is available to us (the message) for all this – and indeed there’s more to be said on this point – yet, again, we can’t help but feel that there is something in the form itself (the medium) which pushes in this direction. Would this not be the roboteness, the remoteness to living social contact ‘off-screen’, which had so distressed Annie? Though in no way terminally ill, she feared ending up in the hospital or the nursing home. Perhaps what left her seeing no way out but a dignified end to a long (and, by her account, proud) life was seeing the world around her slip into delirium faster than herself.

**Digital Dementia**

“While dementia is a disease that typically plagues the elderly, a new type of cognitive condition is affecting younger individuals in their early 20s and teens – a disorder known as “digital dementia.” Digital dementia is characterized as the deterioration of brain function as a result of the overuse of digital technology, such as computers, smart phones and Internet use in general, Medical Daily reported. This excess use of technology leads to unbalanced brain development, as heavy users are more likely to overdevelop their left brains, leaving their right brains underdeveloped. The left side of the brain is generally associated with rational thought, numerical computation and fact finding, while the right side of the brain is responsible for more creative skills and emotional thoughts. If the right brain remains underdeveloped in the long term, it can lead to the early onset of dementia. Ten to 15 percent of those with the mild cognitive disorders develop dementia,” said psychiatrist Park Ki-Jeong. Common symptoms of digital dementia include memory problems, shortened attention spans and emotional flattening.”

– New ‘Digital Dementia’ Plaguing Young Tech Users

Obviously, it’s not as easy as reductionist science [ed. – see ‘A Profound Dis-ease’] would have it to separate one aspect of relative unhealth from another, the “emotional” from the “physical” and so on. But clearly all is not at ease with human well-being in the civilised world, and the symptoms commonly described as “neurological” are increasingly prevalent. One study across the Western world, “focusing on the changing pattern of neurological deaths from 1979 up to 1997, found that dementias were starting 10 years earlier – affecting more people in their 40s and 50s – and that there was a noticeable increase in neurological deaths in people up to the age of 74. [The] speed and size of the increases in just 20 years points to mainly environmental influences.” Here in the U.K., new charities have appeared specifically for young sufferers of dementia and Parkinson’s Disease, joining those already responding to surging cancer rates.[1] Incredibly, it wasn’t until 2013 that the authors of the DSM, the official psychiatrist’s diagnostic manual, considered ‘Internet-Use Disorder’ enough of a worldly phenomena to warrant locking up into a discrete, individualising diagnosis for that year’s edition (complete with the usual standardising ‘solutions’). By around that time, others were estimating 5-10% of internet users to be addicted; as in, “unable to control their use”. In South Korea, home to the world’s largest population of internet users, addiction has been recognised across age groups as far back as the ‘90s. It was there that the term ‘digital dementia’ was coined, designating a deterioration in cognitive abilities that is more commonly seen in people who have suffered a head injury or psychiatric illness. South Korean doctors have since reported a surge among young people who have become so reliant on electronic devices that they can no longer remember everyday details like their phone numbers. By the time the DSM had published their diagnosis, the amount of people aged 10-19 who use their smartphones for more than seven hours every day was close to 20%, with children more likely than adults to suffer “emotional underdevelopment” because their brains are still growing.

In Korea, as in other Asian countries such as Taiwan, addiction among the young to gaming, social media and virtual realities is recognised as a national health crisis. But from where we are, you needn’t travel that far to see the withdrawal symptoms of nervousness, anguish and irritability when kids (and not only) are separated from their devices. As the age-range of “digital natives” grows, their maladies become more recognisable and widespread.

**Generation App**

[Howard Gardner and Katie Davis explore] how young people view themselves and their relationships when smart devices are nearly ubiquitous, social rites happen via text message and the currency of popularity is traded in likes and comments on social-sharing apps. [...] Gardner and Davis ask whether modern social networks are larger yet shallower than those of their parents and grandparents[...]. The app mindset, they say, motivates youth to seek direct, quick, easy solutions – the kinds of answers an app would provide – and to shy away from questions, whether large or small, when there’s no “app for that.” [...] But the external polish often hides deep-seated anxiety, outwardly expressed as a need for approval. In their conversations with camp counselors and teachers, Gardner and Davis were repeatedly told that youth today are risk-averse; the app generation, said one focus group participant, ‘is scared to death.’ “Is There an App for That?”

In Londonderry, Northern Ireland, one primary school has turned to speech and language therapy to try to ‘rehabilitate’ children three or four years old; who have become dependent on tablets and smartphones. “We find that they are less communicative. They prefer their own
company,” reported a teacher. “When we give them blocks to play with you find them using them as pretend iPads or phones.” The therapist herself recounted it as “a general trend throughout the schools I go to. [...] Attention, listening and turn-taking are necessary skills and they just don’t have them.”

Meanwhile, a sizeable chunk of those who have reached youth or adolescence casually report themselves to be pretty much always online through one device or another (or even several simultaneously). However, a good few also report their disenchantment with this “new normal”. Goleman cites one student who “observes the loneliness and isolation that goes along with living in a virtual world of tweets, status updates and “posting pictures of my dinner”. He notes that his classmates are losing their ability for conversation, let alone the soul-searching discussions that can enrich the college years. And, he says, “no birthday, concert, hang-out session, or party can be enjoyed without taking the time to distance yourself from what you are doing” to make sure that those in your digital world know instantly how much fun you are having.” Many who have interacted with those who have been raised in digital immersion comment on the devastating impact it has had on adventurousness and imagination; how many of today’s teens have never been lost (literally or metaphorically), nor seen the point in random walks or other ways of building resilience and independence. By short-cutting the exploratory path to knowledge via discovery, a host of apps and search algorithms diminish engagement with the world and lead to standardised possibilities91.

The costs of all this digital engagement surpass the obvious deficit in face-to-face interaction which leaves Generation App unable to pick up on the nuances of non-verbal communication. To return for a moment to the Far East, in some countries there as many as 90% of children are deemed short-sighted (myopic), up from under 20% just a couple of decades before – a significant increase in time spent indoors (and, more than likely, plugged-in) is suspected the cause. In the West, around one person in three is now myopic. A recent survey of children in the U.K. found that a fifth of them didn't play outside at all on an average day, while one in nine hadn't ventured into environments such as parks, forests or beaches for over a year. It was noted that, based on the same study, three-quarters of children in Britain spent less time outside each day than the one hour guideline which the United Nations advises for prisoners [ed. – though, it must be said, this can regularly be denied to inmates in reality]. It’s probably unnecessary for us to use up space here detailing all the profound spiritual and psycho-social intelligences undeveloped or engaged with as a consequence [ed. – see ‘The Stories Which Civilization Holds as Sacred’], besides the more limited “health” ones as commonly recognised.

We could continue at length about the results of this increase in sedentism; diabetes turning from a rare disease into a pandemic in the industrialised world; the links between WiFi signal exposure and cancer, reduced fertility, decreased ability to concentrate, and disturbed sleep85; or the specific deleterious effects of computer-time in general86, but for the purposes of this essay we’ll now turn to a modern sickness of another kind.

### Information Pollution

“ “The pace of life feels morally dangerous to me,” Richard Ford, the novelist, wrote six years ago. It has only gotten worse since then. As explains David M. Levy, a victim of information overload who is also a computer scientist at the University of Washington’s Information School. Levy is all but helpless, he says, when new e-mail arrives. He feels obliged to open it. He is similarly hooked on the news, images and nonsense that spilt out of the Internet. He is also a receiver and sometimes a transmitter of “surfer’s voice,” the blanched prattling of someone on the phone while dawdling around on the Web. “We are living lives of Web fragments,” he said. “We don’t remember that it is part of our birthright as human beings to have space and silence for our thoughts.” [He admits this affects not just him but,] in his view, most of the developed world.” – Information Sickness 5

It was 1981, long before the internet and the rise of the virtual, never-off, always-connected world, that the novelist Ted Mooney coined the phrase ‘information sickness’, and today many of us are not only receivers but often to come degree transmitters of this white noise of data overload. Indeed it has almost become a social expectation in the fast-moving blur of this stage of modernity that we be present in a media environment that more and more becomes ‘the environment’, that we participate in the never ending conversation about nothing, and respond. The weight of blocks of information hurtling towards us like a Tetris game leaves us too little time simply to reflect on what they really mean, while the constancy of paths these interruptions can take to now reach us (being in most Western consumers back-pockets at all times) scatter our thoughts, weaken our memory, and make us tense and anxious.

To bring us back to the question of the message and its medium; Jerry Mander referred in decades passed to his early stance against the television, continuing his attempt to understand “what was happening to the way that we think and understand information in the television age; our minds were being channeled and simplified to match the channeled and simplified physical environment – suburbs, malls, freeways, high-rise buildings – that also characterized that period (and continues to do so today). This effect would take place, I argued, even if the violence and sex shows and the superficial comedies and the game shows were all removed from the medium, because the process of moving edited images rapidly through a passive human brain was so different from active information gathering, whether from books or newspapers or walks in nature. As a result people would become more passive, less able to deal with nuance and complexity, less able to read or create. People would get “dumber,” and have less understanding of world events even within an exploding information environment. […] In our society, speed is celebrated as if it were a virtue in itself. And yet as far as most human being are concerned, the acceleration of the information cycle has only inundated us with an unprecedented amount of data, most of which is unusable in any practical sense. The true result has been an increase in human anxiety, as we try to keep up with the growing stream of information. Our nervous systems experience the acceleration more than our intellects do, […] As information is moved through different channels its character and its content change; political relationships, concepts, and styles change as well. Even the human spirit and human body change. Because of the way television signals are processed in the brain, thought patterns are altered and a unique, new relationship to information is developed: cerebral, out-of-context, passive.”

Our faculties of memory itself are now significantly shifting to accommodate the online medium. David Brooks commented on it thus: “I had thought that the magic of the information age was that it allowed us to know more, but then I realized the magic of the information age is that it allows us to know less. It provides us with external cognitive servants – silicon memory systems, collaborative online filters, consumer preference algorithms and networked knowledge. We can burden these servants and liberate ourselves.” What he here celebrates as a liberation strikes us more as an evacuation, an emptying-out of our imaginative capabilities and an increased dependence on depersonalised machine inputs. “We are becoming symbiotic with our computer tools,” one research group at Harvard
concluded, “growing into interconnected systems that remember less by knowing information than by knowing where the information can be found.” Some, such as Paul Suderman, identify how the Net “teaches us to think like it does,” arguing that “it’s no longer terribly efficient to use our brains to store information.” For those of us who consider that encounters with the unknown – and all the tangents, encounters and experiences that follow – to be a vital part of any process of knowledge-constitution, the ‘Googlisation’ of increasingly precise search results can only speak of another narrowing, another dumbing-down[9].

The 'human resource' managers and technocrats are often aware of the destabilising effects of this information-overload for the smooth functioning of capitalist labour; hence studies’ recommendation for office workers to take time from computer work or iddling around the ‘social networks’ between tasks to walk in the park; or even just to retire to a quiet room to look at photographs of ‘natural settings’, to allow the restorative powers the researchers wish to instrumentalise time to work their efficiency-boosting magic. However, it’s far from clear that there are many stable mechanisms as yet to dissuade employees in the gigantic factory this society has become from repetitively losing themselves in the endless, mesmerising buzz of the Net; especially when they are conditioned (if not outright expected) to pursue this dependency outside of the traditional workplace.

An aforementioned article uses Levy’s perspective to assert that “[i]nformation-polluted people need to organize and protect psychic space and quiet time. Levy believes, much as environmentalists organized in the 1960s to protect wetlands and old-growth forests.” The implication of this statement seems explicit: that the defeat of these ‘previous’ struggles must be not only acknowledged (which, thus far, of course it must) but also accepted, and the survivors must retreat one trench deeper into anthropocentrism [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg11] to defend something identified as a separable, essential human quality. Yet, outside of this reductionist framework, what is the psychic space formed between a digitally-intoxicated breed of humanity and its relations, not with sun-dappled glades, the flash of the deer or our reflection in the brook, but with the myriad screens it has raised between itself and its world?

Techno-Industrial Enclosure

“Now and in the future, everything must be in place. Wonder would break a frantically desired monotony, a sorry excuse for life, where the daily humdrum is broken by the ceaseless melodies [ringtones] that resound everywhere (from delirious concerts in non-places like the subway, to the solitary symphonies in the most unexpected places like at night at the top of Stromboll [ed. – a volcanic island in the Tyrrhenian Sea near Sicily]). The desire is to know everything – place, time, activities – in order to cry: I am here, I am there, no problem, no worry, nothing unknown; the buried desire for the unknown is utterly dead, replaced by security. Because waiting is no longer part of this life, capital urgently needs space and time to be occupied; and no squandering is allowed, no elaboration of fantasy is tolerated except that of accumulating more; no misunderstanding, no anticipation lived with passion, determined by desire, sought after in itself for the satisfaction it brings.”

– Mobile Prosthesis

Surely, one of the most ruinous elements of the information-age onslaught has been the hobbling of imagination, on a scale dwarfing the process already previously begun by the loss of our story-telling to TV[1]. What we can increasingly expect the psychic space occupied by many people to be was resonant with an experiment relayed to us via Bellamy Fitzpatrick on The Brilliant podcast. “[The researchers] felt that today’s youth, specifically the teenagers in the case of this study, are so used to being stimulated all the time, are so used to being on telecommunications, are not used to sitting with their own thoughts (as crazy as that sounds) – and I would definitely say this applies to a lot of people who are older than this as well – and they wondered whether ‘kids today’; as the saying goes, could sit and entertain themselves with their own imagination. And it was exciting to me because actually they used that specific word. And so there was a study on 68 teenagers between 12 and 18 who voluntarily spent 8 hours alone without access to any telecommunications (so no internet, no phones, no computer, no TV, no radio) and instead what they were allowed to do during this time were other activities like writing, reading, playing musical instruments, painting, needlework, singing, walking and so on. Out of the 68 only 3 were actually able to go the full 8 hours[…] 3 of the participants described themselves as having suicidal thoughts. 5 had panic attacks. 27 experienced symptoms like nausea, sweating, dizziness, hot flushes and abdominal pain; and everyone described themselves as feeling fear and anxiety. Almost all of them bailed by the second or third hour, and only 10 people were able to go 3 hours before experiencing anxiety. And so I think they didn’t quite go there in the article that I read, but it seems pretty obvious to me the symptoms that they’re describing are those of physical withdrawal, those that we are used to hear being associated with substances like cocaine or heroin…” Indeed, growing numbers of teens are apparently hoaxing symptoms of so-called Attention Deficit Disorder in order to get prescriptions for attention-heightening stimulants to offset the scatterbrain characteristics of their generation, while their parents seek these drugs and those for narcolepsy as routine ‘performance-enhancers’ to keep up with their jobs.

As we have said, the system’s engineers are attentive to these problems, and don’t hesitate to encourage their ‘resources’ to grant themselves the occasional ‘digital detox’: “[i]nitatives are blossoming that encourage people to disconnect occasionally (one day per week, for a weekend, a month) in order to take note of their dependence on technological objects and re-experience an “authentic” contact with reality. The attempt proves to be futile of course. The pleasant weekend at the

“Total immersion, loss of perspective, and loss of control tip us off to the link between the psychological process of addiction and the technological system. Addiction can be thought of as a progressive disease that begins with inner psychological changes, leads to changes in perception, behavior, and life-style, and then to total breakdown. The hallmark of this process is the out-of-control, often aimless compulsion to fill a lost sense of meaning and connectedness with substances like alcohol or experiences like fame. Throughout the technological system, the recognized symptoms of the addictive process are blatantly evident.”

– Technological Addiction
seashore with one’s family and without the smartphones is lived primarily as an experience of disconnection; that is, as something immediately thrown forward to the moment of reconection, when it will be shared on the Internet” (Google Déjage). At the more lucrative end, users of computer technology are invited to retire to designated ‘camps’ where, as the arrivals to one such place in California were assured, “the most important status we’ll be updating will be our happiness”. Rather than any attempted break with the social paradigm that pushes these technologies as necessary, such efforts generally serve to perpetuate their use by making it more ‘sustainable’. The ‘detox’ is the exceptional time, not the grave effects of intensive digital interfacing, and in the last case the retreat destination sees no need to dispense with the relentless Net-jargon such as the “human-powered search engine” of the camp notice board, or the ominous camp slogan: “Disconnected to Reconnect”, take your break then back to work(6).

Many, many more will never have even considered such a ‘disconnection’, as perturbing as it is for many people now in the post-industrial heartlands to even have a short trip suggested without their devices in tow. This shift first became so noticeable within our generation’s living memory with the advent of the modern leach, the mobile phone. At the time, the authors of ‘Mobile Prothesis’ analysed how “[this great invention isn’t necessary to support a part of the body, but, if anything, a part of the mind. The mobile or cellular phone (this illomened name hits the mark so well), this indispensable tool linked to individuals in such a blantly unhealthy manner, is not just electromagnetic toxicity, nor just a revolution in interpersonal relationships, nor even just a stupid consumerist gadget that fattens the usual pocketbooks as always.

Above all, it is the replacement of that bit of the unknown that this world still reserves for us, the very small wonders of a sought after solitude, of a journey with oneself, of a time away from known and unknown human beings. The terrifying unknown, inconceivable and unimaginable for those who are afraid of their own life, for those who don’t want to cut themselves off from the cord that links them to the other puppets of this little sham theater even for a moment, for those who want to know and inform others about their life, or more accurately about their own and other people’s physical presence.” Not so many years later, the children of today in many cases have exemplified an acceleration of this trajectory (see the last study mentioned above), and the social trend shows no sign of decreasing(6).

Undoubtedly one of the aggravating factors is the prominence which social networking via online platforms has assumed for even those supposedly on the margins of techno-industrial society. 2005-2008 saw an increase of Facebook users from 5.5 million to 100 million. By the end of 2015, Kevin Tucker recounted that “23% of the entire global population uses Facebook monthly, that’s up from 20.5% at the end of the first quarter of 2015. Short of fire, this is the most widespread and rapidly acquired social change in the history of the human species. That’s fucking insane.” This is far from a uniquely ‘First World problem’: the Algerian city of Constantine was only one of the more recent from the growing list around the world to open a clinic specifically to counter Facebook addiction, in a country whose users are growing around 10% year-on-year. “In the past,” reflected one writer in ‘Points For Further Discussion in the Digital Era’, ‘the idea of abstaining from Friendster or a particular digital social network seemed plausible, to do so simply meant not going on the computer and/or limiting computer use. Computer use largely took place at a specific site, something that we could essentially choose to interact with. In many cases, that is no longer possible. Over the past few years, the Internet has essentially become all pervasive. Through smartphones, the Internet is everywhere. While there are exceptions outside of so-called “industrialized” countries and among those who cannot afford smart phones, for the most part the discussion is more a question of when people will get the capabilities, not if (see for example, all the efforts to get computers to everyone across the world and to enclose the entire world in the web).

This has all had a real impact on how we relate to each other. Seamingly everything is mediated or interrupted by computer-based communication. There are relatively few private moments left, as shown by the numerous studies that track the phenomena known as “sleep texting” or the numbers of people who admit to checking their phones during sex [ed. – cited in one study as 20% of young adults]. The particular studies matter relatively little, what is important is the way in which this activity has more or less been normalized.”

Connecting to our earlier theme it would be a mistake to think of platforms as merely facilitating networking activities; instead, the construction of platforms and social practices is mutually constitutive. After going through the social changes wrought by the shift in Western literacy from the habit of reading out-loud and often communally to the habit of reading silently, Carr went into the direction he was already seeing in online culture. “Now that the context of reading is again shifting, from the private page to the communal screen, authors will adapt once more. They will increasingly tailor their work to a milieu that the essayist Caleb Crain describes as “groupiness,” where people read mainly “for the sake of feeling of belonging” rather than for personal enlightenment or amusement. As social concerns override literary ones, writers seem fated to eschew virtuosity and experimentation in favor of a bland but
immediately accessible style. Writing will become a means for recording chatter.

[...] A striking example of this process is already on display in Japan. In 2001, young Japanese women began composing stories on their mobile phones, as strings of text messages, and uploading them to a Web site, Maho no i-rando, where other people read and commented on them. The stories expanded into serialized “cell phone novels,” and their popularity grew. Some of the novels found millions of readers online. Publishers took notice, and began to bring out the novels as printed books. By the end of the decade, cell phone novels had come to dominate the country’s best-seller lists. The three top-selling Japanese novels in 2007 were all originally written on mobile phones.

The form of the novels reflects their origins. They are, according to the reporter Norimitsu Onishi, “mostly love stories written in the short sentences characteristic of text messaging but containing little of the plotting or character development found in traditional novels.” One of the most popular cell phone novelists, a twenty-one-year-old who goes by the name of Rin, explained to Onishi why young readers are abandoning traditional novels: “They don’t read works by professional writers because their sentences are too difficult to understand, their expressions are intentionally wordy, and the stories are not familiar to them.” The popularity of cell phone novels may never extend beyond Japan, a country given to peculiar fads, but the novels nevertheless demonstrate how changes in reading inevitably spur changes in writing.

Similarly, the so-called ‘social’ behaviour conditioned and reproduced on the online networks could be said to be at least in part produced by these means themselves. In this whole internet-social world, where the interactions between humans which have generally been so consequential in the past are relegated to shadow-presences that can be summoned up or banished with a flick of the wrist and a click of the finger, the broadcast becomes the key point, not necessarily the quality or relevance of the content itself. Yet simultaneously, the image created by the user of a social media profile is often intensively combed, with presentation of an identity (or, as we shall see later, a brand) at least as important as ostensible communication needs. The identity models generally conform to pre-existing roles even if from a widening pool of potential uniforms to wear. “The potential employee deletes last night’s drunken party photos to present a serious tone, while the frat boy eagerly shares photos of the previous night’s debauchery. Moreover, depending on the particular social network, the presentations differ. While ‘compartmentalization’ is something we all have done in civilized social contexts for quite some time, the speed and frequency at which it happens is different. The constant maintenance of how we present ourselves results in a compulsive ‘need’ to ‘check’ everything, seeing what is ‘happening’ on ‘social media’ at all times. There is always something better ‘happening’ elsewhere, whether that be the cool event that we didn’t know about or something ‘happening’ entirely in the digital realm. Consequently, the real ‘event’ may not be the one that we are physically at, but the ‘conversation’ that happens online. ‘Reality’ is increasingly redefined as that which is documentable online, and ‘conversation’ is the ‘discussion’ which happens through social media. Something is always happening elsewhere and we are never really present anywhere (while at the same time, we are stuck in a seemingly ahistorical constant present!” (Points for Further...)

Documentation replaces experience. The self becomes the selfie[11]. Moreover, the celebrated ‘connectivity’ of the information age seems as often to distance us from one another in real terms as well. Already when acquaintances ‘connect’ in the virtual world, typed exchanges may even feel more intimate than face-to-face conversations, and thus cause them to disclose things they dare not in actual presence. But the content itself can never be the same, being disembodied thus; losing the give-and-take, richness and depth, of real communication.

Jason Rodgers perceived as much in the arrival of texting. “Due to the addition of text messaging the cellular communication is trapped between orality and literacy. It has neither the improvisation and open ended nature of spoken language, nor the complexity and depth of written language. This contributes to a poverty of language. The exchange is constant, yet nearly meaningless. This poverty of language contributes to a poverty of thought.”[11] The rise of Twitter et al. has only compounded this. Proliferating cameraphones add a visual dimension, and the ascendancy of even the most banal pictures trading currency on Instagram etc. merely spectacularises the fact that every selection and representation is indeed an amputation, the context and specificity shorn. An image can tell a thousand lies, the main one being its own objectivity, it is always a viewpoint from a particular place. The least for the eye on offer speaks of a dissociation from the depth depicted and the present moment slipping away by the second; yet a dissociation that can pull on our heartstrings in a myriad of predictable, robotic ways.

“The media era is also the era of loneliness,” recognised Jacques Ellul even decades before the ever-present Net fully wove its way into our most intimate ‘private’ spaces and moments. More than half a century since he wrote on the alienating character of society traversing this technological trajectory, social fragmentation and a concomitant rise in the experience of isolation has travelled hand-in-hand with the arrival of TV, mobile phones, the internet. In 2014, Natalie Gil described loneliness in the U.K. as “a silent plague that is hurting young people most”, in response to studies suggesting that 18 to 34-year-olds surveyed were more likely to feel lonely often, to worry about feeling alone and to feel depressed because of loneliness than the over-55s (who at least have services on the assumption that they will be lonely in modern Western society).

On the other hand from the ‘groupiness’-as-euphoria, without the deeper emotional investment and vulnerability of more complicated, in-person relationships, the increased distance and decreased depth that formulates mediocrity and narcissism[13] also facilitates racist, (hetero-) sexist and classist attacks which probably would no longer be attempted so often in person in certain societies. (Perhaps this is significant in allowing a pressure-value of sorts in the interior of a democratic pluralism which frowns on such statements when in company but is in fact built on a foundation of racial ideologies, gender hierarchies and social stratification, which it must adopt and reproduce to itself exist.) The self-aggrandising cruelty of this commentary is constitutive of shifting and often anonymous strands of domination, parallel with what was highlighted in one of Alex Gorrion’s essays. “The new apparatuses of social networking also begin to quantify informal power (the very informal power that has always held primary importance, even and especially in the institutions of formal power, which could not work without it) in ‘likes’, ‘friends’, and ‘followers’. But this version of informal power is not the kind created by
Compelled to Communicate

“The cerebral flattening to the preordained schemas of intelligent machines, the homogenization of the cultures of peoples to the new languages of communications and production are the aim of the new imperialist colonialism. Cybernetic universalism, or multimedia communication, is a tool of the systematic and quantitative reorganisation of the new world order, in the sectors of the market, of capital, of the institutional order and of the territorial infrastructure...” – Pippo Stasi & Karechin Cricorian

While such apparatuses of power dynamics as we described in the previous section could by now be described as to some degree self-regulating and self-replicating, there is certainly a stake held by some of the more explicit institutions in the capitalist order and the nation-state in the new technological phase industrial society has entered. We will come in short order to the tech-industry giants themselves; but what we are speaking of here runs deeper, taking for granted the involvement of such multinational corporations in an ongoing change of such proportions and far-reaching implications for the future, yet penetrating into a tangled complex of statecraft, scientific research and ideology, and perhaps even technological determinism itself.

While it can barely be done justice here, in order to frame the topics which follow, the term ‘cybernetics’ cannot be far behind. “Cybernetics,” defined Lutz Dammbeck on the conceptual level, “is concerned with how the transfer of information functions in machines and living beings. The basis of cybernetics is the assumption that the human nervous system does not reproduce reality, but calculates it. Man [sic] now appears to be no more than an information-processing system... thought is data processing, and the brain is a machine made of flesh. The brain is no longer the place where “ego” and “identity” are mysteriously created through memory and consciousness. It is a machine consisting of switching and controlling circuits, feedback loops, and communication nodes.” In terms of potential ways to understand how this plays out today (and to trace its background), bear us through a lengthy quote, where the authors of ‘Google Dégagé’ speculate that “at the same time that the new communication technologies were put into place that would not only weave their web over the Earth but form the very texture of the world in which we live, a certain way of thinking and of governing was in the process of winning. Now, the basic principles of this new science of government were framed by the same ones, engineers and scientists, who invented the technical means of its application [and] laid the basis of that “science” that [the mathematician Norbert Wiener] called “cybernetics.” A term that Ampère [ed. – one of the founders of the science of classical electromagnetism], a century before, had had the good idea of defining as the “science of government.” So we’re talking about an art of governing whose formative moments are almost forgotten but whose concepts branched their way underground, feeding into information technology as much as biology, artificial intelligence, management, or the cognitive sciences, at the same time as the cables were strung one after the other over the whole surface of the globe.

We’re not undergoing, since 2008, an abrupt and unexpected “economic crisis,” we’re only witnessing the slow collapse of political economy as an art of governing. Economics has never been a reality or a science; from its inception in the 17th century, it’s never been anything but an art of governing populations. Scarcity had to be avoided if riots were to be avoided – hence the importance of “grains” – and wealth was to be produced to increase the power of the sovereign. “The surest way for all government is to rely on the interests of men [sic],” said Hamilton [ed. – one of the U.S. ‘founding fathers’, he established the nation’s financial system as well as The New York Post newspaper]. Once the “natural” laws of economy were elucidated, governing meant letting its harmonious mechanism operate freely and moving men by manipulating their interests. Harmony, the predictability of behaviors, a radiant future, an assumed rationality of the actors: all this implied a certain trust, the ability to “give credit.” Now, it’s precisely these tenets of the old governmental practice which management through permanent crisis is pulverizing. We’re not experiencing a “crisis of trust” but the end of trust, which has become superfluous to government. Where control and transparency reign, where the subjects’ behavior is anticipated in real time through the algorithmic processing of a mass of available data about them, there’s no more need to trust them or for them to trust. It’s sufficient that they be sufficiently monitored. As Lenin said, “Trust is good, control is better.”

The West’s crisis of trust in itself, in its knowledge, in its language, in its reason, in its liberalism, in its subject and the world, actually dates back to the end of the 19th century; it breaks forth in every domain with and around the First World War. Cybernetics developed on that open wound of modernity. It asserted itself as a remedy for the existential and thus governmental crisis of the West. As Norbert Wiener saw it, “We are shipwrecked passengers on a doomed planet. Yet even in a shipwreck, human decencies and human values do not necessarily vanish, and we must make the most of them. We shall go down, but let it be in a manner to which we may look forward as worthy of our dignity”. Cybernetic government is inherently apocalyptic. Its purpose is to locally impede the spontaneously entropic, chaotic movement of the world and to ensure “enclaves of order,” of stability, and – who knows? – the perpetual self-regulation of systems, through the unrestrained, transparent, and controllable circulation of information. “Communication...
is the cement of society and those whose work consists in keeping the channels of communication open are the ones on whom the continuance or downfall of our civilization largely depends,” declared Wiener, believing he knew.

[...] Officially, we continue to be governed by the old dualistic Western paradigm where there is the subject and the world, the individual and society, men and machines, the mind and the body, the living and the nonliving. These are distinctions that are still generally taken to be valid. In reality, cybernetized capitalism does practice an ontology, and hence an anthropology, whose key elements are reserved for its initiates. The rational Western subject, aspiring to master the world and governable thereby, gives way to the cybernetic conception of a being without an interiority, of a selfless self, an emergent, climactic being, constituted by its exteriority, by its relations. A being which, armed with its Apple Watch, comes to understand itself entirely on the basis of external data, the statistics that each of its behaviors generates. A Quantified Self that is willing to monitor, measure, and desperately optimize every one of its gestures and each of its affects. For the most advanced cybernetics, there’s already no longer man and his [sic] environment, but a system-being which is itself part of an ensemble of complex information systems, hubs of autonomic processes – a being that can be better explained by starting from the middle way of Indian Buddhism than from Descartes [ed. – see ‘A Profound Dis-ease’]. “For man, being alive means the same thing as participating in a broad global system of communication”, asserted Wiener in 1948.

Just as political economy produced a ‘homo economicus’ manageable in the framework of industrial States, cybernetics is producing its own humanity. A transparent humanity, emptied out by the very flows that traverse it, electrified by information, attached to the world by an ever-growing quantity of apparatuses. A humanity that’s inseparable from its technological environment because it is constituted, and thus driven, by that. Such is the object of government now: no longer man or his interests, but his ‘social environment’. An environment whose model is the smart city [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg31]. Smart because by means of its sensors it produces information whose processing in real time makes self-management possible. And smart because it produces and is produced by smart inhabitants. Political economy reigned over beings by leaving them free to pursue their interest; cybernetics controls them by leaving them free to communicate.”

In this light, what would our enmeshment in the circuits of the world of the web (and not only) tell us about our propensity to become governable; even (or especially) as we take this access to be evidence of our freedoms, our connections, our selves?

These are not popular questions to ask in today’s climate in the West, let alone hazard answers to. Yet some qualms, if undeveloped as yet, can be perceived in even the popular culture, such as the thoughts of novelist Benjamin Kunkel. “The internet, as its proponents rightly remind us, makes for variety and convenience; it does not force anything on you. Only it turns out it doesn’t feel like that at all. We don’t feel as if we had freely chosen our online practices. We feel instead that they are habits we have helplessly picked up or that history has enforced, that we are not distributing our attention as we intend or even like to.” More dominant, though, is an enduring belief that these vaunted new technologies not only can be understood as separate from the institutions and ideologies from which they emerged; but that they are in some way inherently ‘progressive’, liberatory even. Among the ranks of these techno-utopians (or at least among those who consider technologies to be inherently value-free and neutral) can be found not a few staunch critics of capitalist social relations, and maybe even of the State-form itself. Now would seem as appropriate time as ever to turn our weapons on these arguments.

Updated Illusions

“The truth is that technology magnifies power in general, but the rates of adoption are different. The unorganized, the distributed, the marginal, the dissidents, the powerless, the criminal: they can make use of new technologies faster. And when those groups discovered the Internet, suddenly they had power. But when the already powerful big institutions finally figured out how to harness the Internet for their needs, they had more power to magnify. That’s the difference: the distributed were more nimble and were quicker to make use of their new power, while the institutional were slower but were able to use their power more effectively. So while the Syrian dissidents used Facebook to organize, the Syrian government used Facebook to identify dissidents.” – Power in the Age of the Feudal Internet

Never before has such a hoard of data existed on so widely-accessible platforms concerning the aspects of the world today we might consider to be horrors. Rapes, climate-induced flooding [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg15], hostage beheadings, industrial ‘disasters’ [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg28] and police violence come tumbling out of our news-feeds and video-tubes, circumventing censorship and State borders. And yet never has so little been done relative to the immensity of the dangers we face. On the one hand, some positively see the potential for this visibility to spark revolts against whatever atrocity in question, rebellions of the type that have not been lacking throughout pre-digital history [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg87], if yet to be decisive. On the other hand, others see the mere existence of this ‘democratisation of information’ as a counter-balance to the excesses of our rulers. Both seem to rest on an assumption which we ourselves do not find to be true: namely, that there is a simple causal relationship between information and action. However, another angle to take would be that uprisings continue to exist despite the prevalence of digital media (including their protagonists’ own use of it) not because of it; and that the feast of information famishes our appetite to weaponise and make use of it, to make it our own.

For example, the online patterns of media consumption seem geared in the opposite direction to reflective engagement. A study some years ago reported that most web pages are viewed for ten seconds or less. Fewer than one in ten page views extended beyond two minutes, and a significant proportion of those seemed to involve unattended browser windows left open. And as mentioned above, when the floodgates of information overload are running full-steam, if you don’t have time, or make time, to live with that information, to reflect on it, it can simply have a numbing effect, or tend towards imparting pre-packaged options rather than critical thinking. How often do we come across some ostensibly exciting or horrifying case, or convincing or intriguing argument, online; only to promptly forget all about it until we are reminded again while back online? Obviously this isn’t the case in every instance, but it certainly should tell us something about how little this ‘information’ is finding ways to sit in our daily lives, when it is so hard to find time and space to make use of it – and specifically to make use of it with any depth of reflection. Combined with a ‘social’ life increasingly consisting of remotely exchanging banalities, the result is often individuals sitting alone staring into screens, ‘Liking’ topics that momentarily engage them or events they may or may not attend, then going to bed. Even when we do meet face to face, it sometimes feels harder to practice our being-together, to
develop a tangible sense of encounter and openness not defined by the exigencies of our mediated communications (texts, tweets, comments, etc.).

The results are visible in many of the modern so-called ‘social movements’, which often feature highly tech-savvy elements perceived by some to be important or even pivotal aspects of whatever struggle. This affects many on-the-ground activities, from banners and placards made more for the camera than street-level communication, reduction of dialogue between participants and bystanders to that of promoting a specific hashtag, and further ‘dumbing-down’ of ideas in order to produce text for leaflets that can easily be ‘scanned’. Whatever creativity and spontaneity remains in moments of contestation is domesticated on the spot via the reduction of whatever intervention into representational data to be broadcast via the media, however self-published. Again, the platforms themselves alter the way struggles are conceived and received, regardless of the content, and the more dependent movements become on them the less likely they seem to be to criticise them. Kevin Tucker looked back on the beginnings of this shift (in North America at least) in his eyes. “Through the anti-globalization movement and street riots that take root in the late 90s through the 2000s, you saw this element of involvement form into spectator roles. There was a change in focus on taking part in resistance to documenting everything. Suddenly Indymedia [ed. – independent self-publishing platform formed originally to facilitate and communicate action against the World Trade Organisation summit in Seattle, U.S.A., 1999] was the focus. There were certainly pros to it, but at the time it felt like it stole the spotlight a bit. In hindsight, it absolutely did.

And it made sense in a way, as repression raised[,] the need to document it was important. But in some ways we made the documenting the story, not the means. The spread of the internet was really the necessary piece of the puzzle to make that happen. I’m not sure if you can say it’s coincidental or not, but there’s a mirroring of shifts within the milieu and the culture at large towards a more internet savvy approach to radicalism.”

What kind of movements are created through such a shift? How are they different from what came before? These were the questions asked by Zeynep Tufekci, after she identified their lack of attention-maintenance and staying power. “The boom and bust cycle of consciousness-raising and resignation may only be a phase in the life of networked social movements. Or, it may be their distinct feature. […] Digital infrastructure may be said to follow a trajectory common to other disruptive technologies. Governments’ initial waves of ignorance and misunderstanding quickly gave way to learning about the medium’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as the development of new methods to counter dissent. However, changes to a movement’s capabilities that broaden its ability to coordinate actions or to publicize its cause are real as well. […] Social media have greatly empowered protesters in three key areas: public attention, evading censorship, and coordination or logistics. Old forms of gate-keeping, which depended on choke point access control to few broadcast outlets, neither work as effectively nor in the same way as they did in the past. Digital technologies provide a means by which many people can reach information that governments would rather deny them. Street protests can be coordinated on the fly. However, this does not mean that social media have exclusively empowered protesters; they have also aided governments and other factions of society by providing them with tools they can also use to their advantage. […] By allowing protesters to scale up quickly, without years of preparation, digital infrastructure acts as a scaffold to movements that mask other weaknesses, especially collective capacities in organizing, decision-making, and general work dynamics that only come through sustained periods of working together.

[…] Hence, digital technologies certainly add to protester capabilities in many dimensions, but this comes with an unexpected trade-off: Digital infrastructure helps undertake functions that would have otherwise [required] long-term organizing which, almost as a side effect, help build organizational capacity to respond to long-term movement requirements. Working together to take care of the logistics of a movement, however tedious, also builds trust and an ability to collaborate effectively. Consequently, many recent movements enter into the most contentious phase, the potential confrontation with authorities, without any prior history of working together or managing pivotal moments under stress.” After looking to the insurgencies of Turkey, 2013 [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg48], and in the so-called Magreb, 2011 onwards [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg87], she used the analogy of the 1963 March on Washington during the U.S. civil rights movement. “Once the march happened, it was no longer just a march of thousands of people, but rather, it signaled to those in power that an organizational capacity could threaten their interests[…]. In contrast, the massive Occupy marches that took place globally in over 900 cities on 15 October 2011 dwarfed most historical precedents in terms of size, yet were organized with approximately two weeks’ notice [but] without similar organizational capacity. While this appears a shortcut for protests, it also engenders weaknesses, as these protests do not signal the same level of capacity as previous protests, and do not necessarily pose the same threat to governments and power.”

Moveover, for those of us less interested in being boxed in and defined by whatever social movements our actions are unavoidably in the context of, it is harder to avoid exactly such an enclosure. Relatedly, the text ‘Fighting in the New Terrain’ touches on the way that “the internet has transformed anonymity from the province of criminals and anarchists into a feature of everyday communication. Yet unexpectedly, it also fixes political identities and positions in place according to a new logic. The landscape of political discourse is mapped in advance by URLs; it’s difficult to produce a mythology of collective power and transformation when every statement is already located in a known constellation. A poster on a wall could have been put up by anyone; it seems to indicate a general sentiment, even if it only represents one person’s ideas. A statement on a website, on the other hand, appears in a world permanently segregated into ideological ghettos.” Once more, this finds resonance in ‘Point for Further Discussion’…: “The rather laughable digital utopianism has
To address those who feel that the mere existence of information in circulation constitutes an effective check on those in power, information is weightless without the will and ability to make something out of it, contrary to the narrative of truth-as-power promoted by, say, the Wikileaks case [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg48]. Video footage taken of the police, as another example, can help them refine their public image by limiting them from doing things that look bad in the representational game of liberal democracy. But that’s different than actually enabling people to take action that would change the power differential, and has in some cases been used to strengthen their case for the increasingly-present bodycams they wear, leading to a further intensification of surveillance at points of potential confrontation. These days we are endangered additionally while confronting our enemies by the plethora of mobile filming devices wielded by members of the crowd, most of whom will not be as obliging as those the Mi’kmaq warriors and their allies requested to turn all of such equipment before torching the police cars forcing further extraction prospecting on their territories [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg61].

Another argument used in favour of utilising digital platforms during social movements, often to the detriment of more embodied communication and encounter, is that whose who don’t engage in that way will be ‘left behind’ the (real or imagined) ‘masses’ who are attentive to whatever issue in question. That’s as may be (though such thinking clearly prioritises quantitative aims, i.e. the amount of people ‘reached’, over qualitative factors such as the depth of the communication and the solidarity of any affinities discovered), yet it would seem a danger in ‘catching up’ via uncritical engagement is also advancing the evolution of digital media out of our hands. The ubiquitous and mostly either banal or highly-toxic comments sections many websites now host started out as an innovation of the Indymedia network, while the SMS text messaging program developed by the Institute for Applied

““One participates in mass society the way a computer relay participates in the machine; the option remains to malfunction, but even rebellion tends to be shaped by the forms technology imposes. This is the individuality toward which computerized life drifts: a narcissistic, privatized, passive-aggressive, alienated rage, engaging in a sado-masochistic play far removed from the consequences of its unfocused, destructive impulses. Information, as a new form of capital and wealth, is central to the new “hyperreality.” While the demand for information, the “democratic” distribution of “facts” is the battle cry of those outsiders who struggle to recapture the machinery of media from the centralized institutions of power, it is at least in part the nature of the fact – and finally of masses of facts transmitted on a mass scale as information – which lies behind the problem of the media. Not that facts have no reality at all, but they have no intrinsic relation to anything: they are weightless. The fact is a selection, hence an exclusion. Its simplification mutilates a subtle reality which refuses to be efficiently packaged. One set of facts confronts another, orchestrated as propaganda and advertising. The fact achieves its ultimate manifestation in trivia and in statistics, to which society is now addicted. [N]aive is the idea that the “information field” is a contested terrain. The field itself is in reality a web of abstract, instrumentalized social relations in which information expands through alienated human activity, just as the system of value reproduces itself through the false reciprocity of commodity exchange. It therefore constitutes subtle relations of domination.” – David Watson

“In today’s world of the computer, we are witnessing a greater degree of disassociation and de-sensitivity [c]oupled with the mental and emotional damage which ensues. Once again we only see what is convenient and not what is so detrimental. All the information at the tip of our fingers often desensitizes us before it enlightens. People live in a mental netherworld that is neither here, nor there, but some part of the techno-hive. If you go into the city streets you will witness people stumbling around in droves fixated on pocket-sized screens of various technological devices. What is real is the completely fabricated and what is completely fabricated is now of mass importance. Babies in their cribs are given the soft dull glow of a computer screen to curl up with, transferred at their new electronic parent. And many toddlers now prefer an iPad to the voice of their mothers. Many people that consider themselves ‘activists’ and ‘radical’ or ‘militant’ just mean that those are the kind of websites that get them interested and excited, and that their avatar and facade personalities online are rigid and intolerant. In the real world they are scared to make eye contact with strangers on a bus.” – The Cruelty of Industrial Technology

proved to be untrue – we haven’t arrived at an equal society as a result of equal access. Even in the best cases of open source tools, their challenge is a drop in the bucket and they can often be just as easily mobilized towards non-liberatory ends. Moreover, the Internet and computer technologies have contributed to a situation of information overload and the fragmentation into a seemingly unlimited number of different identities, making it harder than ever to be seen on the digital networks, arguably the ultimate goal. Added to this, the increasing fragmentation and personalization – enabled through sophisticated forms of behavior and browser tracking – assure that there is no universally accessible network that one can simply have access to, but rather a series of largely closed and overlapping networks. These technologies extend the logic of computers into all realms: success is the documentable and quantifiable number of “friends” or “connections” we have on various sites, future activity, preferences, and “personalization” are predicted by algorithms informed by massive amounts of stored personal data, and everything is ranked and rated.”
Autonomy for protests at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions served as a model for Twitter.

Ironically, given all the talk about the diversity offered by the internet, many anarchists and (other) radicals – even many who reject digital optimism – seem compelled to opt for the convenience of the all-encompassing Facebook et al. in the ‘informational mainstream’ above autonomous channels. This largely seems to facilitate continuing ghettoisation of radical critiques into just another identity niche online, another status in your profile, and accelerate the further fractioning even within these critiques into a series of silos in which one can be confident they will hear only voices similar to their own.

Rather than bask in the escape from the artificially-narrow debates which have characterised mass media paradigms in the years gone by (in many ways having been the glue that held the democracies of latter modernity together) – which social media indeed moves away from – we would do well to think about how the production of opinions still takes place in this new democratic terrain. As we’ve seen in past weeks, a candidate can win the U.S. Presidency despite the hostility of almost all mass media nationally, suggesting that social media platforms now command higher influence than these institutions. But of course, rather than signifying any kind of horizontalism or levelling of power, enormous disparities in influence, presence and resources continue to characterise the social network terrain, making it perhaps more accurate to describe as a polycentralisation of these spheres rather than decentralisation. More to the point, the ideology of democratic pluralism which these technological platforms sit comfortably within declares any opinion (liberal, conservative, anarchist, feminist, capitalist) to be equally valid – so long as it remains just that, opinion. Hence the departure from a central stage of social discourse and ‘fact production’ actually in this case speaks of a further atomisation – discourse and ‘fact production’ actually in the departure from a central stage of social capitalist) to be equally valid – so long conservative, anarchist, feminist, pluralism which these technological to the point, the ideology of democratic describe as a terrain, making it perhaps more accurate to continue to characterise the social network influence, presence and resources signifying any kind of horizontalism or command higher influence than these these various online niches never need succumb to the constant hum of the apparatus,” observed the text ‘Robots of Repression’, ‘albeit democratic par excellence. With nearly everyone taking part, internet comment forums created and used within anarchist struggles have become acceptable spaces for the intensification of sectarian divisions based on barely a shadow of critical difference, the proliferation of superficial or aesthetic anomalies, snitch-jacketing, rape-jacketing, the publishing of legally endangering information, the compromising of anonymities, the erosion of solidarity and its replacement with flippancy and instant gratification, and a deepening of the culture of TLDR [Too Long; Didn’t Read].”

Even if social network sites and comment boards fail to ensnare us, it’s just as easy to allow oneself to become intoxicated by the update stream of the specifically-anarchist online media. Our contemplative and creative ways, which have at times distinguished anti-authoritarian interventions in aspects of social life, succumb to the constant hum of the information exchange (often hyping formulaic and under-contextualised events/actions), and we become much like many other surfers experiencing momentary thrills on their topic of choice. This is perhaps an under-evaluated part of the conceptions of ‘anarchisms of action’ (often with many exciting qualities, to be sure) which has come to the fore in recent years. Aside from the perfectly evident strength which often comes from recognising hearts in some more-or-less distant part of the world beating to a similar rhythm to our own, it’s useful to question what effects the dominant cultural ‘groupiness’ feelings this inculcates in us too via these mediums can have on our struggles. Maybe never before have we ‘performed’ on a stage where the ‘audience’ is so many (and often probably so exclusively) other anarchists, even if none exist locally, rather than primarily inhabitants of whatever social environment we frequent.

While we recognise that complex factors both cause and result from our actions – as well as accepting the socialised or perhaps even just all-too-human subliminal drive for recognition – and thus feel no need to ascertain ‘pure’ motives to act, we should be conscious of the potential for such actions to be taken mostly for the sake of being able to participate in a virtual arena by claiming them. Or at least, when this is to the exclusion or detriment of attempts to affect our more daily surroundings and conditions.

At what point does it become less about spreading signals of solidarity to bolster an actual projectuality, or descriptions of methods used – which all strengthen us in real-world struggle – and more a question of self-gratifying web-games? Clearly this must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, without generalisations, but we think that Antonio Antonacci [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg71] might have meant something of the kind when he said that “[p]ersonally I have several concerns on projectual aims and spectacular propaganda. Even if I recognize that these can have some potential, I also think that they belong to the society of appearance, based on nothing and immersed in a time of hyper-information where the centralization of the will to communicate, or an excess of communication, risks creating confusion and degenerating into exaltation as an end in itself.” This new terrain feels seductive, and doubtless holds some potentials; and anyway, like it or not, it is the wider sea many of us now swim in. In part of their written contribution to a 2013 gathering at the Nadir anarchist space in Thessaloniki, Greece, on the topic of anarchist ‘counter-information’ structures to disseminate action claims, news and analysis, the administrators of 325.nostate.net argued that “we believe that the information war is a defining operational environment for the anarchist new urban guerilla as much as the metropolis or the border between the
urban and rural areas was for revolutionaries of the past.

[...] We want to make it very easy for those who hear of the direct actions via the mainstream media to easily find the communiques and context for the attacks, and for the informal counter-information groups to be able to grow and steadily produce the environment for widespread subversion. The access to information must be turned into a weapon against the system, which relies on its dominance of the media. "Yet later the same paragraph admits that "[n]ot only is the new media environment increasingly self-published, it's able to take in and assimilate all points of view, even realities of attack." In which ways does this interface with the aforementioned tendency towards democratic assimilation and ghettoisation? How can we maintain a presence to provide context for actions and such in the digital realm, while minimising the degree to which it is merely assimilated as another 'edgy' aesthetic for a distinct class of viewers, and robbed of its proper repercussions? It would indeed be a wasted opportunity if, when conditions hint at chances to push any uncontrollable situations into a direction amenable to the experimental forms-of-life we want to realise but perhaps also generalise [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg19], the dialogue we were most familiar with was publishing self-promoting texts to each other via the Net.

Yet increasingly this would seem to be many people's entry-point for what it is that certain types of anarchists do, as well as the bar for participation. This was a point highlighted in one issue of the Aversion paper: "Internet forces you into constant updating and everything is done at a speed well beyond human capabilities. What's the point in knowing what happens all over the planet in real-time? Our ability of intervention within our nearest reality is very limited in itself. Up to which point does this produce the same anxiety deriving from the speed with which, for example, technology and fashion change, thus losing their previous value and meaning? [...] Many of us became anarchist by participating in talks, writing letters to prisoners, reading pamphlets, visiting anarchist libraries, subscribing to periodicals from the other side of the planet, discussing with old saboteurs and fighters, etc... But at the moment formation occurs mainly through blogs and social networks. [...] It seems that today internet includes many aspects of our existence and profoundly affects human relations, thus contributing to isolation, atomization and alienation." In other words, as many people now 'learn' their anarchist from Wikipedia, forming their ideas from representations at a degree or few of removal from the actual lived complexities of attempts to live inside them, they are radicalised on a terrain only marginally within our actual influence; the form in some ways contradicts the content. Our question must be; in which ways does the Net open up space and in which does it enclose us? In which ways does it aid self-creation and inspiration, and which entail mere enlistment, or an online space to mouth off discontent to our own demographic?

Upon announcing their resignation from maintenance of the online source anarchistsnews.org, 'Worker' observed that "[i]t used to be that anarchism (the set of people who use the term) was filled with a bunch of people who did things. Since the rise of the Internet this has become increasingly NOT the case. My greatest disappointment in running anarchistsnews.org is that it has witnessed this degradation of interesting activity of anarchists. The Internet does not inform interesting activity, it kills it stillborn. Most new anarchists fear the attention of the broader anarchist community because it almost never comes off as supportive (and when it does it tends to be in the style of NGO shit sandwich [compliment-insult-compliment] rhetorical kindness). The Internet is now at the center of how we communicate with each other and it means our communication is worse than ever.

While I was not particularly naive about what I should hope for when I started anarchistsnews.org I did not realize how powerful the medium of the Internet would become in terms of shaping everything that happened here. It is nearly impossible to start a new DIY website in 2015 and have it noticed beyond your social scene. The big players absolutely dominate what is talked about and I am not motivated to play that part of the modern media game. I find Facebook, Twitter etc to be absolutely repulsive and, while I use them, I can’t support their use and see them as utterly opposed to our project here. “Currently, exactly these corporate platforms are entrusted by a large proportion of general dissidents with the kind of personal information which even the less paranoid among them would never entrust so readily to a national authority. Now we move to the consequences that no radical should be able to treat as a non-issue when internet technologies define so much of our reality: the landslide policing advances they offer.

Inviting Big Brother In
“Computer systems are not, at their core, technologies of emancipation. They are technologies of control. They were designed as tools for monitoring and influencing human behavior, for controlling what people do and how they do it. As we spend more time online, filling databases with details of our lives and desires, software programs will grow every more capable of discovering and exploiting subtle patterns in our behavior.” — Nicholas Carr

As if it needed saying, our enemies are also active in the digital field in many forms. Tellingly, one of the first people to actually be targeted in Spain by the new (and much-protested) 'Public Safety Act', known colloquially as the 'gag law', was a salesman on Tenerife who chastised the police on the mayor's Facebook wall for being 'slackers'. Within six hours of hitting 'send', police were knocking on his door, despite his protests that he wasn’t a ‘perroflauta’ (hippy/tramp) like those in the social movements the law was presumably drafted against[1]. More direct interventions against the organisational capacity associated with the new technologies include shutting down service to iPhones and the like within a 'protest area' (similarly to when phone signal for a particularly conflictual part of Berlin was cut during the annual May 1st mobilisation of 2010), but often it seems more in the authorities interest to monitor such situations than impose a disruption – hence the appearance in the U.S. of white single-engine planes circling flash-points such as Ferguson [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg76], Baltimore [ed. – see Authorities Finally Confirm Stingray (IMSI) Use in Prison Island – in Scottish Prisons] and most recently Olympia during a brief railway blockade to hinder fracking components reaching North Dakota’s Bakken oil fields in solidarity with the Standing Rock camp [ed. – see Special Hydraulic Fracture]. These are thought to be used by the FBI to suck up all cellular communications within their range, presumably for real-time sorting and analysis. The military are naturally
attendant to the implications for warfare in the information age and the increasingly asymmetric conflicts of the present day. In a very tangible sense, this already takes forms such as the three U.S. guided munitions which destroyed an alleged ISIS headquarters less than 24 hours after the division tasked with combing social media picked up someone’s bragging selfie within the base and triangulated from there. But, as General Nick Carter proclaims as part of the drive to make the British Army he heads ‘smarter’, contemporary military formations recognise that “the actions of others in a modern battlefield can be affected in ways that are not necessarily violent and [new strategy] draws heavily on important lessons from our commitments to operations in Afghanistan amongst others. “Indeed, ’digital warfare’ is described as central to British Army operations during this period, with 1,900 extra security and intelligence staff recruited. Two “innovative brigades” consist of regular and reserve troops with expertise in offensive and defensive digital warfare, warriors who don’t just carry weapons, but who are also skilled in using social media, and the dark arts of ‘psyops’ – psychological operations. In this we see the trend towards a blurring of military and policing functions in their ‘classical’ senses, as part of a trajectory of generalised counter-insurgency[16].

Clearly any use of digital tools becomes at the very least a double-edged sword; as people flee from the aftermath of those lauded ‘Facebook revolutions’ in the Arab world and beyond, since 2015 the European transnational police force Europol started a fresh partnership with the major social media sites to scan for any suspected agents facilitating this flight, under the supervision of none other than the European Counter-Terrorist Centre. To state the obvious, such platforms are in certain terms a sendoff to intelligence agencies compared with the work they would have had to do in days gone by to infiltrate target groups. (Narrowing down which individuals to actually target out of the millions is another matter, but it can’t be said that the authorities have had no success in this regard, perhaps as the science of network analysis combines with older intelligence efforts.)

This sense of disconnection leaves people feeling insecure which in turn contributes to fear of crime and anxiety about incidency in public spaces. In a world where the rule of law, equality before the law and respect for rights and freedoms provide the glue for a fragmented society, they become even more essential in sustaining the principle of policing by consent. If the public trust the police as legitimate authority figures, they are more likely to comply with the law and to engage with their community, coming forward to report concerns and wrongdoing.

These challenges formed the opening session of the second annual Police Foundation Conference, ‘Police Effectiveness in a Changing World’, which took place at the BT Centre last Wednesday. It was opened by Stuart Hill, Vice President of Central Government and Home Affairs for BT and included a stellar line up of speakers, including Professor Sir Anthony Bottoms [influential criminologist], Shami Chakrabarti [politician and member of the House of Lords], Sara Thornton [then Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police], Nick Herbert [then Minister of State for Police and Criminal Justice] and Nick Gargan [then Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Constabulary].

Seldom, if ever, have the police been under such scrutiny — both in a social and a political sense — and it’s widely accepted that they need to protect their operational independence, resisting any political pressure to solve social problems.

They need to use the power of communications and social media to their advantage, working with these innovations rather than against them. The recent riots highlighted how protesters could use social media to move more freely and speedily than police units so a logical response is for forces to establish a Twitter presence and use the medium to gain the trust and confidence of followers. After that spell of disorder itself, not a few suspected rioters saw prison as a result of their social media activity (or even just those who glorified and advocated for the like online, receiving sentences of 2-4 years for Facebook posts).

While the keyboard brazenness of some British insurgents or their admirers from those days perhaps could be partly put down to inexperience and naivety about police monitoring, it is mystifying why many with a greater exposure to criticism of the surveillance State are not more adverse to such exposed platforms. In 2012, the Nadir tech-collective noted the same thing; “having worked for years — and sometimes [earning] a living — with the net and with computers, system administration, programming, cryptography and lots more, Facebook comes as something like a natural enemy. [...] We just hadn’t realised that, after all the stress out on the streets and all those lengthy group discussions, many activists seem to have this desire to prattle at length on Facebook about everything and with everyone. We hadn’t realised that [the activist] along with everyone else enjoys following the subtle flow of exploitation where it doesn’t seem to hurt and, for once, not having to resist. Many people suffer from a bad conscience. While this may lead them to anticipate the
fatal consequences of Facebook, it does not seem to translate into action. Is it really ignorance? Just to give a short outline of the problem; by using Facebook, activists do not just make their own communication, their opinion, their 'likes', etc. transparent and available for processing. Instead – and we consider this far more important – they expose structures and individuals who themselves have little or nothing to do with Facebook. Facebook’s capability to search the net for relationships, similarities etc. is difficult to comprehend for lay people. The chatter on Facebook reproduces political structures for the authorities and for companies. These can be searched, sorted and aggregated not just in order to obtain precise statements regarding social relations, key people, etc., but also in order to make predictions, from which regularities can be deduced. Next to mobile phones, Facebook is the most subtle, cheapest and best surveillance technology available.

[...] That is why we see Facebook users as a real danger for our struggles. In particular, activists who publish important information on Facebook (often without knowing what they are doing), which is increasingly used by law enforcement agencies. We could almost go as far as accusing those activists of collaborating. But we’re not quite there yet. We still have hope that people will realise that Facebook is a political enemy and that those who use Facebook make it more and more powerful. Activist Facebook users feed the machine and thereby reveal our structures – without any need, without any court orders, without any pressure.” The same year they wrote these words, police based their round-up of Bolivian anarchists, syndicalists and feminists largely on information from Facebook profiles [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg68], and five anarchists were jailed in Spain for ‘membership of a terrorist group’ based on their involvement on Facebook groups. Continuing from their contribution to the gathering in Thessaloniki, 325.nostate.net underline the “urgent and serious need for the insurrectional groups and individuals to stop using regular corporate services (i.e. Yahoo, Facebook, Gmail, Hotmail, Wordpress, Blogspot, etc.) and learn about basic computer security. This task is urgent for anarchists in all countries but especially those with significantly repressive regimes. These companies will immediately co-operate with the authorities at the slightest excuse/pressure. This must be replaced as much as possible with movement services and encryption. From as early as 2003, at an anti-prisons gathering in Barcelona, it was confirmed by a lawyer of the movement that the European police and security services were using the internet corporations to identify, spy, track and monitor anarchists using their services. This has enabled Europol and the various state police services access to vast amounts of analysis data concerning location, content, who talks to who etc. Anarchists are being systematically targeted by the security services through the software they rely on for communication/publicity and we should aim to prevent, as much as we possibly can, their ability to disrupt us. The authorities aim to turn our use of the internet into a weapon against us, through IP [ed. – Internal Protocol address, identifying the location, technical details and service provider of an internet connection] tracking and dataveillance, leading to our prosecution – or attempted neutralisation.”

Already in France, opening ‘terrorist internet portals’ can get you two years in prison, while in 2013 the administrators of the anarchist web portal non-fides.fr were accused of “public defamation of public officials” and “incitement to the commission of an attack against a person without effect” for spreading a text denouncing the Parisian ‘night correspondents’[14]. (Both comrades refused to cooperate or voluntarily appear for hearings, or give fingerprints, DNA and biometric photographs, stating “we know that this affair is only a pretense for the pigs and the courts to further harass us, after having thrown us in prison for some months in 2011 for another affair[15], and after about three years of various almost-uninterrupted legal monitoring, during which we theoretically could not see each other, nor leave the country, and were required to check in with the police every week and pay a ransom of €4,000 to the state. All these measures (that affect us as they have impacted other comrades before us and tens of thousands of people everywhere) aim to break us, by isolating each of us from the other and isolating us both from a movement, but also by breaking dynamics of struggle.”)

As cited in the anonymous 2011 text ‘Desert’, “[a]ccording to a UK military mid-term future projection. “By the end of the period [2036] it is likely that the majority of the global population will find it difficult to ‘turn the outside world off.’ ICT [information and communication technology] is likely to be so pervasive that people are permanently connected to a network or two-way data stream with inherent challenges to civil liberties; being disconnected could be considered suspicious.” We are moving to such a future fast. When the French anti-terrorist police invaded the land community in Tarnac in 2008 [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg58] one of the public justifications they gave for suspecting that a terrorist cell was forming was that few on the land had mobiles!

The agreed convention is that the first step for those who, having planned the future, now wish to bring it about is to make oneself known, make one’s voice heard – speak truth to power. Yet “the listener imposes the terms, not the talker” [“Silence & Beyond’]. Much of the low-level contestation that characterises activism, and the limited social spaces that make up counter-cultures, actively mark out areas, and people, in need of potential policing. That’s not to say that all resistance is futile [nor that we should desist from growing communities in which to live and love; rather that we would be wise to understand that many ‘subversive’ actions – and social relations – increasingly serve the needs of power as well as liberty. The balance of advantage should always be taken into consideration. We need to always ask ourselves the question: To what extent is the planned action or method of social relationship likely to haemorrhage data on potentially resistive identities? With increasingly powerful surveillance states and storms approaching, our responsibility to each other, especially to those as yet uncomplicated, grows.”

This also shines light on one part of the governmental and corporate fervour to encourage people to use the internet. (“Encouraging the disconnected to hop online” was described by one Washington Post journalist as “a national priority.”[25] The high-selling political book ‘The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of Peoples, Nations and Business’, authored by Google’s (now former) CEO Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen (the director of Google’s ‘Ideas’ division), openly proposes the centrality of the digital sector in a global counter-insurgency strategy against the many threats that haunt their securitarian nightmares. Tech companies, according to them, are in a privileged position to combat ‘radicalisation’ internationally: they can go where governments cannot, without the impositional legacy of the local State; they can talk to people without diplomatic
on virtual profiles, online data systems or smart phones. Yet a government might suspect that people who opt out completely have something to hide and thus are more likely to break laws, and as a counterterrorism measure, that government will build the kind of ‘hidden people’ registry we described earlier. If you don’t have any registered social-networking profiles or mobile subscriptions, and online references to you are unusually hard to find, you might be considered a candidate for such a registry. You might also be subjected to a strict set of new regulations that includes rigorous airport screening or even travel restrictions.” We have already anecdotally heard of the German police arriving on the doorstep of one person’s friends after a burglary in the same housing complex, based on the fact they were the only inhabitants without Facebook profiles; did they have something to hide? And let’s not forget that the ‘The New Digital Age’ co-author Jared Cohen is the American government’s anti-terrorism adviser who, during upheavals in Iran in 2009 and that regime’s censorship of Twitter, directly urged that company to retain its services; or that Google themselves are primary partners of the universal PRISM spying program of the National Security Agency and others.

Just as important as recognising the machinations of various elites with their generals and bureaucrats are the behaviours inculcated into many more people as a result. Returning to ‘Robots of Repression’: “In the world at large, comment forums have been seized on by internet news sites to increase reader interest and also to further mold reader opinion. Given that the public has always been an imaginary force used to discipline collective and individual behavior, the opening of a new potential manifestation of a collectivity, on the internet, had to be replaced by a new public. And that public, as all publics, had to be disciplined. In the beginning, this was done by astroturfing: mercenary trolls in the employ of public relations firms or government agencies posting comments that would generate favorable opinions of specific brands and policies, and on a larger scale create a majority disposed to social peace and consumption. Increasingly, astroturfing is being automated as the PR firms and governments that carry it out increase their labor efficiency by turning their opinion workers into the overseers of multiple computer-generated opinion-spreading machines that create the impression of a sycophantic mass hostile to the extremists, favorable to the products, and unquestioning of the tropes and lenses with which the media represent the world.

As machines condition the workforce with increasingly mechanical behaviors and apparatuses condition their captives to act within the suggested channels, we can surmise that the roboticization of the workforce carrying out the informational and affective labor of the internet forums is of secondary importance to the inculcation of robotic attitudes among the remaining organisms. In other words, the horror of the mass production of an imaginary public through internet comments is not to be found in the image of real people being overwhelmed by corporate-employed robots who endanger a prior democratic balance; it is to be found, rather, in the image of real people becoming steadily more like the robots who replaced them, in their own turn making the robots redundant (but no less useful).” The forms of diffuse and anonymous power that abound online can expand pre-existing structures of domination as easily as they can throw disparate groups of people together. As a rather more dystopian twist on the ‘global village’ effect we were promised that digital communication would bring, the online neighbourhood group NextDoor is notorious in the U.S. city of Oakland for the rampant racial profiling by its white-identified users who encourage each other to call the police (over suspects with little more description than “black” or “wearing a hoodie” being near bus stops, standing in ‘shadows’, making U-turns, and hanging around outside coffee shops), share tips on how to reach law enforcement, and sometimes even alert cops and security guards about suspicious activity they’ve only read secondhand from other commenters. In 2014 the Oakland police and NextDoor (who estimate 20% of the city’s households use the site) launched a formal citywide partnership, and today police regularly publish alerts, suspect photos and crime statistics on it, and the company is partnered with more than 1,200 government entities – mostly police departments – throughout the U.S.

New Frontiers of Capitalist Accumulation

“If for nearly thirty years environmentalists, even the most radical among them, have kept almost silent over the computerisation of the world introduced by the microchip, it’s because they have failed to grasp the role that it has played in the modernisation of domination. Since they first appeared in the 1950s, the technosciences of IT and communication have constantly been gaining ground. In the most industrialised states, since the end of the 1970s their roll-out has impacted most areas of society. Things really took off with the arrival and multiplication of personal computers, partly as a consequence of massive opposition to “big science”. “Small science for the people” became a reality, on the basis of the rehashed illusions of a previous, particularly Californian, era. By way of robotics, it proved an effective weapon against the revolts which broke out at the end of the 1960s, especially against the long-term Taylorist mechanisation of work [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg28]. It brought about a change in the depth of the behaviour of the dominated classes, particularly in their cognitive behaviour, involving sensitivity, language, memory, imagination, relations with others, as well as their relationship to space and to time. People became accustomed to viewing the world by way of algorithmic logic. Technological power – which is part of, and a representation of, social power – tends to see the human mind as working in the same way as a computer and a focus on forecasting and calculation overshadowed any desire to understand the world. First of all, behind the great IT obsession with “smaller, cheaper and faster”, lurks the “time is money” of our old enemy, Capital. In the period of deep mutations to the system which we are currently experiencing, the gaining of time, at every level, is more important than ever in trying to accrue benefits. And given the central role played by the handling of information in the exercise of modern domination, the increase in the speed of microprocessors and networks, as well as in the mass of data handled, are sources of increased power. The totalitarian utopia of power is no longer Bentham’s Panopticon [ed. – see Panopticons Then & Now], the model of prison discipline, but the “global brain” envisaged by Bill Gates [co-founder of Microsoft], the model of control exerted by the network of networks.” – André Dréan

Capital has always seemed to need its high priests, its visionaries, those with both ambitions for the direction of the system
and the economic, technical and political power to influence it. The big tech elites today hold that function. One of the clear gains this class has achieved in the digital era (while obviously they themselves will in many cases also be victim to it on an individual level) is the extension of the workplace into pretty much all of time and space. It is often expected that employees (or the self-employed) will be available righ-on 24/7; even though the German Labour Minister admitted to the press that it is “indisputable that there is a connection between permanent availability and psychological diseases”, the norm is still that you answer emails on the train to work, publish blogposts over lunch, field work calls or Skype long after office hours, etc., just to keep up with the pace the tech giants enable. Already in the 1980’s some were calling office work the ‘electronic assembly line’; now, work has escaped the office as much as the shop-floor, and we all must produce value to be capitalised upon, even without recognising it. “Think about what people are doing on Facebook today,” enthused its chairman Mark Zuckerberg. “They’re keeping up with their friends and family, but they’re also building an image and identity for themselves, which in a sense is their brand. They’re connecting with the audience that they want to connect to. […] It’s almost a disadvantage if you’re not on it now.”

The authors of ‘The Smartphone Society’ recognised as much, without the same enthusiasm. “When we use our phones to text friends and lovers, post comments on Facebook, or scroll through our Twitter feeds, we’re not working – we’re relaxing, we’re having fun, we’re creating. Yet, collectively, through these little acts, we end up producing something unique and valuable: our selves. […] Individuals don’t get paid in wages for creating and maintaining digital selves – they get paid in the satisfaction of participating in rituals, and the control afforded them over their social interactions. They get paid in the feeling of floating in the vast virtual connectivity, even as their hand machines [Chinese term for smartphones] mediate social bonds, helping people imagine togetherness while keeping them separate as distinct productive entities. The voluntary nature of these new rituals does not make them any less important, or less profitable for capital.” This means profound reshuffling of the productive system we are ensnared within, including shifting roles of power-over dynamics (while in no way necessarily an undoing of them in any universal sense). “Today,” according to Alex Gorrion, “affectionate dedication and creativity are required of all those desolate souls who must inhabit a prison, regardless of their level of relative privilege.

The forerunner of this dynamic, now repeated at a greater intensity, is the patriarchal system of bribery that allowed any expendable proletarian or peasant man to play at being tyrant, and taste a small dose of the drug that made misery enjoyable. […] While capitalism has always relied on unwaged labor, until now that labor has been provided by patriarchy or colonialism. In the Wikipedia age, the voluntary character of unwaged production is largely different.” So despite Google owning their own attack jet, the force employed by these modern-day conquistadors need not always be so indiscreet, building as it does on the pacification and disciplining achieved so far and continually re-inscribed on the body by those prior drives for accumulation of wealth and power. We’d concur with those who wrote, in ‘Deserting the Digital Utopia’, that “new corporations like Google are updating the Fordist compromise via free labor and free distribution. Ford offered workers greater participation in capitalism via mass consumption; Google gives everything away for free by making everything into an unpaid job. In offering credit, Ford enabled workers to become consumers by selling their future as well as present labor; Google has dissolved the distinction between production, consumption, and surveillance, making it possible to capitalize on those who may never have anything to spend at all.” Yet compared with accumulation drives such as the attack on European commoning [ed. – see ‘A Profound Disease’], the mechanism of industrial work [ed. – see Memory as a Weapon; “An Outrageous Spirit of Tumult & Riot”], the relegation of a private and ‘feminised’ sphere for social reproduction, and the occupation and extraction of value from foreign territories, all this has met with relatively little explicit resistance so far. Rather, many celebrate the online worlds they both co-create and inhabit as liberatory, even as it becomes increasingly involuntary when we’re obliged to perform digitally for work, education and social life. We become both producer and consumer here too, both conduit and captive.

“Until the end of the 20th century,” reads a passage from “The Internet as New Enclosure”, “mass media was essentially unidirectional, with information flowing one way and attention flowing the other. Critics generally focused on this aspect of its structure, charging that it gave a small cabal tremendous influence over society while immobilizing everyone else as spectators. In contrast, underground media championed more participatory and decentralized forms. Participation and decentralization suddenly became mainstream with the arrival of widely accessible digital media. In many ways, the internet offered a liberating and empowering terrain for new modes of communication. Since the basic model was developed by researchers funded by the military rather than the private sector, it was designed to be useful rather than profitable. […] ‘The networks offered by Facebook aren’t new; what’s new is that they seem external to us. We’ve always had social networks, but no one could use them to sell advertisements – nor were they so easy to map. Now they reappear as something we have to consult. People corresponded with old friends, taught themselves skills, and heard about public events long before email, Google, and Twitter. Of course, these technologies are extremely helpful in a world in which few of us are close with our neighbors or spend more than a few years in any location. The forms assumed by technology and daily life influence each other, making it increasingly unthinkable to uncouple them.”

[...] As our need for and access to information increase beyond the scope of anything we could internalize, information seems to become separate from us. This is suspiciously similar to the forcible separation from the products of their labor that transformed workers into consumers.
The information on the internet is not entirely free – computers and internet access cost money, not to mention the electrical and environmental costs of producing these and running servers all around the world. And what if corporations figure out how to charge us more for access to all these technologies once we’ve become totally dependent on them? If they can, not only power and knowledge but even the ability to maintain social ties will be directly contingent on wealth.

But this could be the wrong thing to watch out for. Old-money conglomerates may not be able to consolidate power in this new terrain after all. The ways capitalism colonizes our lives via digital technologies may not resemble the old forms of colonization.

Like any pyramid scheme, capitalism has to expand constantly, absorbing new resources and subjects. It already extends across the entire planet; the final war of colonization is being fought at the foot of the Himalayas, the very edge of the world. In theory, it should be about to collapse now that it has run out of horizons. But what if it could go on expanding into us, and these new technologies are like the Niña, Pinta, and Santa María [ed. – ships used by conquistador Christopher Columbus in his first voyage to the Americas] landing on the continent of our own mental processes and social ties?

In this account, the internet functions as another successive layer of alienation built on the material economy. If a great deal of what is available on the internet is free of charge, this is not just because the processes of colonization is not yet complete, but also because the determinant currency in the media is not dollars but attention[21].

Despite having worked out how to stay the most dynamic sector of Capital and to continue to profit from enterprises outside of themselves, the tech majors are nonetheless consolidating their fieldoms. Silicon Valley and the like must constantly harvest the ‘cream of the crop’ of intellectual capital internationally (programmers, designers, scientists), and it becomes increasingly hard to make a living in the sector without enriching these companies. Independent developers might reach a huge audience through YouTube, for example, thus generating revenue for its owners Google not themselves first, but with the prospect of having to achieve sales into the thousands to recoup costs for the expensive design software: or utilise free or cheap versions, which entail relinquishing personal information and being spied on for the privilege.

In their narrative, the makers of the 2012 documentary ‘Metropolis’ redeploy ‘the maggot man’, a figure from the work of philosopher Frederick Nietzsche, to describe this new vanguard of the capitalist class. “The maggot man is the final human being, consuming up the rest of humanity that has been left for dead. The maggot men are the recuperative arms of virtual capital seeking nourishment, finding resistance and assimilating, appropriating and overwhelming, and at last conquering digitally-nomadic proletarians. Hopelessly mediocre, he sees himself as the pinnacle of human history. The maggot man transforms living energy and labour into electronic replicas of a dead culture’s skin, and then crawls inside. Not a cultural stone is left unturned by the maggot. In the spirit of digital capitalism, the maggot man is the machinery of dead labour and virtual value. He is a creative leader of virtual capital, feeding off dead flesh, the last harvester of human senses before their transition from human to cyborg. The maggot man, sick of himself, needs technology. In his future, technology separates from the human species. The human animal breaks off into the networked intelligence of digital technology.” If this latter vision sounds far-fetched, it is but a pale shadow of the rhetoric from the over-heated minds of the futurists who staff these companies up to the highest echelons [ed. – see ‘The Stories Which Civilization Holds as Sacred’]. Their technocratic ideologies already take shape within the vast ‘light-out’ factories which have already been robotised, shedding their human appendages almost entirely, while those not ejected from some sectors and pushed to the economic margins face the prospect of virtually life-long training and retraining to keep up with the evolution of the machines. There is only a certain threshold such a costly program of human updating is likely to reach. As humans become more disjointed and unreliable – in the ways described early in this essay – and combined with the technological fetishism of our culture, machine control will be justified by the bosses as more reasonable; as if they needed the excuse for choosing workers they don’t have to pay.

The bigger tech companies seem to be endeavoring to not just play loyal stooges to government, but in some cases to try an active hand in the miserable political process itself (besides lobbying). Sure, capitalists have been key players in this field as long as capitalism and democracy have existed, but in some ways this is more blatant. When the leader of the Canadian Green Party was pointedly not invited to a televised debate, Twitter announced that it would shoot and post video responses to moderator questions in near-real time, knowing such platforms to already be central points of political discussion. However, it’s already long ago that players from the industry were providing less to-your-face impetus for global affairs, along with more long-standing stalwarts of the capitalist elite: for instance, in the guise of philanthropy. A good example would be Bill Gates, until recently the CEO of Microsoft. “The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg36] dispenses the large amounts of money all across the world, selectively promoting and facilitating the growth of emerging technologies and cultural trends [and funding] various methods of population control. Not only does the Foundation promote the use and integration of Microsoft computers in the Third World; it is attempting to take control of the global food supply, by forcing countries to grow Monsanto Golden Rice, a genetically-modified crop that is copyrighted and tightly controlled. […] In 2012 a group of Microsoft company leaders met to discuss how Shakespeare’s The Tempest would help them make better decisions. The leaders were equated with the colonisers landing on the island. Any problems these leaders might encounter were equated with the dark-skinned native Caliban, and his mother Sycorax, the witch” (Metropolis).

Hi-Tech Heavens, Hi-Tech Hells
“In the event of non-accidental injuries (including suicide, self mutilation, etc.), I agree that the company has acted properly in accordance with relevant laws and regulations, and will not sue the company, bring excessive demands, take drastic actions that would damage the company’s reputation or cause trouble that would hurt normal operations.” – mandatory clause for employees of the FoxConn assembly plants in China

However much we allow ourselves to be wrapped up in its allure, our inheritance is a world disfigured by the digital on more than an individual level. As these technologies mould and colonise our minds and social interactions, so too must they and their industrial base expand materially, consuming electricity, land and labour. These technologies don’t appear from nowhere; rather, they are inseparable from the rest of the techno-industrial capitalist world system which...
spawned them. They require the gargantuan electricity flows sent arching through pylons that leave destruction in their wake [ed. – see Power Down], and the wireless transmission from routers or phone masts toxifying the species that surround us not just ourselves; and the ephemeral physicality of the ‘Cloud’ and such takes form in the vast server-farms like those vast plots of cooled hangars industrialising the Oregon high desert, sanctuary no more from the detritus of civilisation. Behind the polished, aseptic interior of the sleek devices which fill consumers’ backpacks in the Global North (and not only, at an ever-fastening rate), lingers the death and misery they wreck mostly in the Global South. As we are reminded by Gianluca Iaconacci [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg71], “[t]he technological race is financed by hi-tech companies such as Amazon, Apple, Samsung, Sony etc., which unscrupulously feed the market with computers, bio-computers and devices, all useless stuff producing imbecility, good for mass control and statistics, responsible for the polluting extraction of minerals used in the fabrication of circuits; the very circuits that at a later stage and in an absurd consumerist cycle will be dismantled with bare hands and the help of acids in China, Ghana, Vietnam and India; even by children whose little hands are particularly fit for the purposes.”

Key components for the production of modern electronics, besides highly-toxic synthetic chemicals, are a variety of heavy-metals and ‘rare-earth’ minerals. Coltan is one classic example of the latter that is essential in managing the flow of current in electronic devices. War and deforestation in Central Africa has exterminated precarious species and claimed literally millions of human lives as State and non-State actors vie over territory for their prison-labour mining facilities for this heat-resistant mineral ore. China supplies the world market with the vast majority of ‘rare-earth’ metals used in phones, hybrid vehicles, wind turbines, etc. A substantial portion of the Chinese workforce for extraction, likely to result in cancers and other serious conditions, comes from the occupied territory of Tibet, where the Chinese military forcibly disbands communities and dispatches them to such labour camps. As of 2014, a fifth of the Tibetan population (1.2 million and counting) had died in mines like these.

Upon surveying the sprawling industrial zone of Bautou, a desolate stain of endless smokestacks, refineries and waste-pools on the plains of Inner Mongolia, a BBC journalist noted that “[i]t’s the kind of industrial landscape that America and Europe has largely forgotten – at one time parts of Detroit or Sheffield must have looked and smelled like this. [...] The intriguing thing about both neodymium and cerium is that while they’re called rare earth minerals, they’re actually fairly common. Neodymium is no rarer than copper or nickel and quite evenly distributed throughout the world’s crust. While China produces 90% of the global market’s neodymium, only 30% of the world’s deposits are located there. Arguably, what makes it, and cerium, scarce enough to be profitable are the hugely hazardous and toxic process needed to extract them from ore and to refine them into usable products. For example, cerium is extracted by crushing mineral mixtures and dissolving them in sulphuric and nitric acid, and this has to be done on a huge industrial scale, resulting in a vast amount of poisonous waste as a byproduct. It could be argued that China’s dominance of the rare earth market is less about geology and far more about the country’s willingness to take an environmental hit that other nations shy away from.” Yet in a competitive and insatiable capitalist economy, diverse sources are needed, and you can also die by the droves as an indigenous Piaroa worker in the coltan mines south of Inírida in Colombia, while ‘rare-earth’ prospecting begun for a mine at almost the most westerly point of Europe; near Vigo, on the north Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula.

“Apple’s supply chain links colonies of software engineers with hundreds of component suppliers in North America, Europe, and East Asia – Gorilla Glass from Kentucky, motion coprocessors from the Netherlands, camera chips from Taiwan, and transmit modules from Costa Rica funnel into dozens of assembly plants in China. [...] Apple insiders refer to FoxConn’s assembly city in Shenzhen as Mordor – J. R. R. Tolkien’s Middle Earth hellhole. As a spate of suicides in 2010 tragically revealed, the moniker is only a slight exaggeration of the factories in which young Chinese workers assemble iPhones” (The Smartphone Society). This specific industrial nightmare grew on the back of the mobile phone alone; thirty years ago, this urban hive of 12 million was a fishing village surrounded by rice paddies. When the iPhone first came out, Apple leader Steve Jobs was said to be so upset that the screen could be scratched more easily than he wanted, he insisted that FoxConn use new screen coating that turned workers blind. In 2012, over 300 workers at a FoxConn plant manufacturing X-Box gaming consoles for Microsoft climbed to the roof and threatened to commit mass suicide. Under pressure to clean up Apple’s image, FoxConn addressed a run of suicides on the job – by hanging large nets from the factory building to catch any jumpers.

“Capitalism’s domination of our lives has to be fought on at least two fronts. One of these is today clearly seen and understood by more and more people – it’s opposing all those infrastructure projects which manage areas so that commodities can circulate and various industries can function. This means the construction (or the extension) of high-speed rail lines, airports, power stations (whether nuclear, solar, wind or biomass…), commercial centres, the mass production of toxic foodstuffs, the sinking of fracking wells [ed. – see Special Hydraulic Fracture]. [...] But there’s also another front which hasn’t been clearly identified and activated by enough people yet: opposing the colonisation of our lives by hi-tech devices. PCs, tablets, iPhones, iPads, iPods, iPhones and the networks that support them cause colossal amounts of pollution and energy consumption, which put the effects of industrial agriculture in the shade. Pollution through microwaves, pollution through manufacturing and disposal, power consumption by the devices, by search engines, by data centres… We would need ZADs [ed. – anti-industrial protest camps, see Return Fire vol.1 pg81] in China, Africa and Bolivia to stop the extraction of rare earth metals needed to manufacture all the wonders of technology. We would need ZADs in Ghana to stop the burial of all our junk made of plastic and toxic metals – last year’s novelties discarded with the arrival of the latest new product. We would need ZADs in Mali and Niger to fight against the mining of uranium to feed the nuclear industry (which in turn feeds the internet in France).”

– Sivens Without Restraint

Artificial lake filled with a barely-liquid toxic chemical waste by the city-sized Baogang Steel and Rare Earth complex in Baotou, one of the world’s biggest suppliers of such elements.
Yet to just fetishise these spectacular (and increasingly known) examples, especially within the borders of a nation widely-maligned in the West for labour and environmental policies which are in many ways an attempt to squeeze the centuries-long defilement and proletarianisation which birthed industrialism in Europe into less than a century to catch up, does not address the more general dispossession and stultification. We could consider the depiction given by the narrators of ‘Metropolis’ of the Microsoft headquarters east of Seattle. “The city of Microsoft is a desert. Its headquarters stretch across one-third of the geographical space of the municipality of Redmond, with 150 campus buildings[...] Employees are given access to their own indoor mall, and circulate every day through the parking lots, restaurants, cubicles and distractions provided by their employer. They are watched every moment of the day and are surrounded by advertisements for the commodities they helped create. This is the army that is digitising the world, transformed into circuitry, metal and glass. [...] Redmond campus is a hive mind, an apparatus of psychic repression that keeps its often-depressed employees in a long narcosis that destroys their ability to comprehend the limits of the natural world[,] their creativity and psychic energy sucked out and emptied. Everything they create is created for something else. In return for their services they are rewarded with an alienating and insular life, where work is all and all is work. Their individual efforts all contribute to unified products and the objects they create have objectified them in turn. Together they build the hive-mind. Together they strive to create the purest form of information; the digital cloud severed from all constraints [through] which the natural world is networked into the digital one.” In many ways these labyrinths of the hi-tech giants create the purest form of information; the objects they create have produced them in turn. Together they build and the objects they create have work is all and all is work. Their individual return for their services they are rewarded with an alienating and insular life, where ruthless as the tech sector is, does anyone really think they would ever let their employees stop working? Far from it: the days of punching the clock and going home are over. Just as cellphones nefariously increase worker productivity by forcing all of us to be perpetually on call, IT employees are increasingly being centralized in culturally stimulating neighborhoods where they can socialize with other yuppies, display their gadgets, and brainstorm ever newer applications for the latest technologies. They are not always on the clock, but they are intended to take their work home with them. The playhouses where they frolic, therefore, need to have the infrastructural backing to interface with the new apps that make up a large part of economic production today, and they also need the social and cultural allure that make such apps exciting, both for their designers and their consumers. These can include apps for dating, finding hip restaurants and clubs, and linking people with shared hobbies. A city that doesn’t cater to a wide range of hobbies, that doesn’t have good infrastructure, and that doesn’t boast first rate cuisine and night life won’t be able to attract the brightest young minds necessary for growth in the tech sector, nor will it inspire them to keep producing all around the clock. Just as work and leisure are fused, cultural production, material production, and intellectual production become indistinguishable.”

Perhaps there are only so many cities that genuinely can meet this standard, but a good many are certainly bidding to make themselves among them. More generally, as the applications of digital networks permeate public and private space, our environment is recast by programmers and engineers, with lines of inclusion and exclusion sometimes more subtle than others. When, amongst other issues, Google supplying dedicated bus routes in the Bay Area to shuttle its employees from residential areas to campus led to landlords along the routes deciding to hike rents 20% and issuing eviction notices, anti-eviction organisers threw up a few blockades of the vehicles. The attitudes encountered, as recounted by an author on the Mismanaging Perception blog, were telling as to the entitled demeanor the companies feed on: “Echoing the slogan of New York City’s former Mayor Ed Koch – “If you can’t afford to live here, mo-o-ove!” – one Google employee yelled from a blockaded bus, “This is a city for the right people who can afford it.” [From Portland, Oregon, to Miami, Florida, the same pattern keeps reappearing. Jobs are relocated to concentrated corporate campuses, while the higher-salaried employers settle in the inner cities, and cities are able to re-establish dominance over the periphery. Google’s control over much of the information flows through which the periphery connects to the center evinces the colonial quality of mass media in the era of hyper-modernism [ed. – see ‘A Profound Dis-ease!’, [...] Is not Google Glass precisely the manifestation of the crisis of the intelligibility of urban space?] Here, two classes, one rich and one poor, can co-exist in the same city while literally living on two utterly different levels of intelligibility. For the rich, the city is comprised of data and information that may provide elite accessibility, while the lower class, which lives outside of the city and works in the service industry, perform the role of automatons, reproducing a city that they, themselves, have no chance of experiencing.”

Without returning to the ‘public’ vs. ‘private’ canard raised by too many anti-gentrification efforts[5], ‘Precarity in Paradise’ turns to the specific niche the Catalan city of Barcelona has found in this arrangement, and what this has meant for its inhabitants. “With increasing success, Barcelona is branding itself as an ideal location for work/play, complementing rather than replacing the existing giants. [T]rade fairs encourage networking among the global delegates of a given industry, allowing them to show off their products and make new contacts. But they are also meant to have an element of fun. No one wants to go to a trade fair in Des Moines. Barcelona is not only a city with pizazz, it is also a site of innovation in IT and other industries. Barcelona is the number one city worldwide in the number of conference delegates it hosts (in fact 40% of visitors who overnight in the city come to town for an international event), and the third ranked city worldwide in the number of international conferences. Its most important fair is the Mobile World Congress, which is the largest cellphone and app trade fair in the world. The Congress is a source of resentment, and in past years it has been targeted by protests or even partially interrupted by riots. Though many people rely on the economic activity associated with the
MWC, the jobs generated are temporary and stressful, and the thousands of delegates who attend occupy the city with a grand sense of entitlement. Like any macro-event, the Congress also entails a heavy police presence and extreme security measures, imposed on adjacent neighborhoods and on its own workforce. This year [2015] the police blacklisted at least a dozen people who had already been hired to work the fair. Mostly anarchists, many of those on the blacklist did not have any criminal records, and none of them had been arrested for anything that would present a legitimate security concern for temp workers. Nonetheless, the Catalan police are in charge of security at the Fira, the large complex that hosts the major trade fairs in Barcelona, and they reserve the right to impose whatever conditions they wish.

To host a trade fair, a city needs a great deal of disposable, precarious labor. The Mobile World Congress employs over twelve thousand people every year, most of them for just over a week, often working them 14 hours a day. The only people who would work in such conditions are those who live month to month and, lacking stable employment, have to take whatever job they can get. With youth unemployment around 50%, Barcelona has that kind of labor pool. “Whilst this serves as a specific case in which the presence of the tech industry interests are rising influences in the composition of certain centres of capital, the projected reach of that industry’s creations is far wider. From architecture, utility placement, new veins of information and energy supply, traffic control and policing or exclusion techniques, the digital sector proposes its various ‘solutions’ for the impending crises generated in the urban monstrosities of the world: the Smart City[26], the nightmare-fantasy the State and Capital walk hand-in-hand towards. In this light, the further abandonment of subversive or resistant activities in physical and public spaces by radicals who instead privilege the online forms of contestation assumes a new gravity. The challenge appears to be the re-embodiment of the force of wilful insurrection which threatens to become ever more ethereal, at the same time as the spaces of our actual lives are gentrified, securitised, further paved-over and digitalised. But how to resist these encroachments in more than discourse alone? What are the precedents, and what is the terrain on which we stand today?

Chucking Rocks at the Google Bus

“This year someone will wake up, and as every other morning before anything else they will check their Facebook account or some other virtual media [developed] to turn our forms of interaction into mere algorithms used for continuing to feed their capitalist machinery. Today the vast industry has become essentially financial, and the development of technologies is yet another tool of this big monster to establish greater domination. Today their internet, telephone and television will not emit any signal. This morning will be extended several days, in which the enterprise will try to resolve what was caused by this act of sabotage.” – claim for the arson of a junction box belonging to Telmex [ed. – see Memory as a Weapon: A Shorter History of a Northwest E.L.F. Cell], Mexico City, 05.04.15

On May 22nd, 1971, a series of explosions rippled through the Special Branch HQ in Tintagel House, the London Metropolitan Police building on the Albert Embankment of the Thames. (The bombing, carried out by the ‘Angry Brigade’, was coordinated with simultaneous attacks in Paris by other European anarchist groups against a British Rail office, Rolls Royce showroom, and suppliers of Land Rover. It responded, amongst other things, to the arrest and accusation of two men in England with Angry Brigade membership and actions.) One of the blasts in Tintagel House was aimed at the police computer – a ‘state of the art’ U.K.-designed ICT 1301 mainframe. In their communiqué taking responsibility for the action, they wrote that: “We are getting closer. We are slowly destroying the long tentacles of the oppressive State machine... secret files in the universities, work study in the factories, the census at home, social security files, computers, TV, Giro, passports, work permits, insurance cards. Bureaucracy and technology [used] to speed up our work, to slow down our minds and actions...” Allegedly, damage was minimal.

If there’s one thing we can be sure of today, it is that to imagine the foci of digital domination to reside in such facilities is no longer the case. Still, it is instructive to see the trajectory of some others who, standing at the same precipice of the technological wave to come, initially utilised the same tactics. The example we’ll use of the anti-authoritarian group CLODO (‘Committee for the Liquidation and Subversion of Computers’, or ‘clodo’ in French also being a slang word for the homeless) arose from a context of sabotages on company or State properties related with nuclear construction (amongst other targets) with fire or explosions in southern France in the 1970-80’s. In the course of the series of actions they claimed over the years, most of them involving torching or otherwise destroying computer centres, they denounced the “domesticization” (domestication and mystification) this technology brought and pointing to “the abuse of the quantitative and the reduction to the binary” at its very point of origin, whilst also in cases linking their targets to U.S. imperialism. Their methods and discourse were often playful and informal, and they to this day have never been caught[26].

Interestingly, they claimed they were actually computer workers themselves, and so “consequently well placed to know the current and future dangers of data processing and telecommunications”[27]. “(If that’s what they actually were, then we must say we prefer their approach to that called for by the famous Wikileaks founder-in-exile Julian Assange’s appeal for computer programmers to defend their interests as a class; by analogy, CLODO’s aims could be read as abolishing themselves as a class...)” In their final communication, the group pledged to gear future actions specifically towards the impending telecommunications explosion (presumably abandoning claims), action which would apparently be less ‘spectacular’ than the firebombing of the Sperry-Univac computing facility for which they were most famous.

In the wake of that telecommunications explosion, where the computer proficiency skills to a fairly high levels are – while certainly not generalised – at least much more common than they used to be, we have seen the phenomenon of hacking

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March 2011: investigators on the scene of an anonymous arson of switchboards inside computing firm IBM's headquarters in Bologna, Italy, with graffiti left by the Earth Liberation Front.
It is interesting to notice events like the ‘largest cybercrime ever uncovered’ which between 2013-2015 saw a Russian-based group use computer viruses to infect networks in more than 100 financial institutions worldwide and spirit away £650 million, or the hack which seized and ransomd all the files of judges and the Udine prosecutor’s office in Italy. Besides expropriation, there was the case of an attack (of unknown origin) on a German steel mill which managed to inflict serious physical damage to the plant by causing outages after hacking into the mainframe. The increased interconnectivity of many objects and processes would seem vulnerable in this regard. In terms of hacks from a more explicitly ‘radical’ space, many will have by now heard of the umbrella-group #Anonymous and their exploits; including issuing an ambiguous threatening message the night before the New York Stock Exchange temporarily suspended trading on all securities due to ‘a technical issue’, and United Airlines briefly grounded all of its flights due to a systemwide failure. Sometimes hacking corresponds to or complements other, ‘real-life’ interventions, such as 2012 vandalism of the Facebook wall of Egypt Air while anti-deportation activists in Cardiff, Wales, clogged up their phonelines, smashed windows at the U.K. Border Agency office and attempted to block the coach carrying their friend to their ‘removal’ from reaching the motorway. The year before, anarchist arson of the upper floors of a €200 million Rabobank skyscraper in Utrecht, Holland (for the third time over a nine-month period, and while the arms that bank invest in were being used to suppress insurgencies in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Israel, Greece...), also happened simultaneously with a cyber-attack on their website.

From where we ourselves stand, without much technical knowledge to gauge the impact certain types of electronic disruption would entail, it’s hard to tell how effective some of these strikes must be. The ethereal reality that ‘cyber-attack’ seems to entail is something that perhaps feels reduced to those who have spent the necessary amount of time tinkering with computers; certainly the State seems keen to either severely punish the digital renegades it manages to ensnare [ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg72] or to enlist talented hackers to become ‘white-hat’ assets of governments and corporations. Is there a potential for electronic saboteurs to launch an offensive that seeks to undermine and implicate cybernetic governance and the reproduction of computer technologies themselves, rather than simply appropriate these technologies for supposedly ‘liberatory’ ends, or even just to continue the naive narrative of democratically distributing ‘facts’ which a ‘tyrannical order’ would like to conceal from the masses? We’ll leave that question to those better qualified to answer it; those with the patience, resources and resilience to subject themselves to even more screen-time than is already prescribed in daily life. For our part, we will turn to a more embodied resistance, and what that might hold.

If TV shows like ‘Black Mirror’, novels like Dave Eggers’ ‘The Circle’ and Holywood films like ‘Transcendence’ are anything to go by, there is definitely something subliminal in the pop-culture zeitgeist about our imprisonment by digital technologies and an impulse to escape it. (Those who speak too stridently of this outside of the steam-vent of the entertainment industry, however, have yet to be spared the accusations of paranoia or outright insanity which have stigmatised such critics in the past.) Considering this, attacks which could be said to mostly have a symbolic element (from repeated attacks on the Greek headquarters of Microsoft [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg35] to general ‘subadvertisement’ of tech industry propaganda, visible harrassment of employees and managers, etc.) perhaps have more resonance than before, to draw out clearer lines of conflict between the digital and its discontents. Just this June, a man was arrested in California after striking a vehicle mapping for Google’s StreetView feature with two molotovs, in a rage over its intrusiveness. (Police linked him to two more acts in the days preceeding; gunfire breaking glass at that corporation’s Mountain View premises, and torching another StreetView vehicle.) “An enterprise that maps the planet Earth, sending its teams into every street of every one of its towns, cannot have purely commercial aims,” the authors of ‘Google Dégage’ warn. ‘One never maps a territory that one doesn’t contemplate appropriating.’ If only more people recognised this preliminary occupation as such, and responded in kind! How many similar projects might be discovered quietly unfolding in our neighbourhoods were we to investigate, which count on not facing such opposition?

It’s easy to forget that the internet also has a more general physicality to it, and not just in terms of the less accessible nodes like the remote server farms, the under-sea cables linking continents, or even the interchanges known as ‘carrier hotels’ normally housed in urban facilities of the communications industry. In a district of Porto Alegre, Brazil, the group ‘Hostility Against Domination’ forced access undetected to the transmissions antennae of NetSul – serving the State, the army and various private companies as well as a fibre-optic network, internet TV – in May this year and set a destructive fire[28]. Similarly, in the run-up to the opening of the European Central Bank headquarters in Germany [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg10], arson inside the control panel of a pylon near Eschorn by opponents of the bank and its world was enough to cause outages in the data centres of Frankfurt.

In a world economy highly dependent on high-speed and uninterrupted data-flows, new long-distance private fire-optic lines are thrown up in some places for an advantage of literally milliseconds. It is precisely this digital backbone which the FBI in California is investigating at least 14 anonymous attacks upon since the summer of 2014. Following one such sabotage, where two fibre-optic cables belonging to AT&T (and legally considered a critical piece of the nation’s internet infrastructure) were cut in the Bay Area suburb that’s home to the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and many high-tech commuters, you could read in the news that “[the high-capacity lines, which aren’t much thicker than a pencil, carry vast amounts of data. Everything...
Police identification efforts, sometimes with been sabotaged by anarchists spamming crowdsourcing of repression has already to every action a reaction: this old fashioned "Wanted" poster. Of course, followed riots from London to Toronto: the neologism reflecting the previously Repression'.

Wherever the advance of the cybernetic monstrosity takes its own specific form, different possibilities might exist to undermine it, were we to seek them. In their case, the author's of 'Precarity in Paradise' assert that "[t]he Catalan government has no hope of projecting Barcelona onto an international IT axis if it cannot control its own population. People, after all, are supposed to be resources, not self-organized beings with their own dreams, an ability to define their own desires and needs, and their own visions of what their neighborhoods should look like. Some Catalans are buying in to the new model of city, studying web design, imagining their own tech startups, or contenting themselves with jobs in hip bars and restaurants. But many residents of Barcelona are not at all happy with the new arrangement, and they are increasingly constituting a force capable of blocking the plans of investors and l'Ajuntament. Trade fair delegates who get spat on and insulted in the streets, or who have their work-vacations interrupted by a student riot or a transport strike, do not come back. Tourists who get robbed, or who can't find cheap accommodations, look for other destinations. If neighbors collectively resist evictions, the character of their neighborhood can't be changed as quickly." All the better if such actors begin to link their struggles to a desire for a more generalised disruption, such as 'poor people vs. gentrifiers', 'citizens for a more democratic city', etc.

Provisional Conclusions for Adoption, Amendment or Advancement

"A specific space inhabited by an apparatus – a website, for example – functions as a shell. Even in the absence of management, its very shape suggests a certain use and flow which serve to regenerate it [...]. There are many anarchists who have run for the mountains, as it were, ignoring anarchist websites entirely and foregathering all the civilizational wonders of internettand, consigning themselves to discursive forms that are illegible from the lowlands. Through avoidance, they protect themselves from the recuperating trap of trying to resolve the problem, but they also run the risk, historically repeated, of losing a battle fought on a field from which they are absent, ensuring that they will subsequently be overrun and disappeared. Faced with the superficiality of internet communication and its pernicious effect on our own behaviors and networks, what are we to do? I don't offer you a solution to this question. I intend the question itself as a subversion, an invitation to counter the flow of the apparatus that is already leading you along to click on the hypertext that leads to the next article before even reading the middle of this one (because you skirted, didn't you?) by pondering – at length and unproductively – an invitation to look away, causing your eye muscles to remember distance and focus, to breathe in deeply and remember that you hadn't been, and to remember your back and your shoulders, that should be straight, ready for a fight or a long walk, but are instead hunched, as though under some great load that you must carry with you wherever you go. What are we to do?" – Robots of Repression

Once, not so very long ago, it seems like a de facto position for radicals (or even 'counter-cultural' types more generally) was not owning a TV. Now, though the digital medium, there is a screen in almost all of our rooms, if not every pocket. It feels typical for such radicals as much as anyone else to be hooked on the latest series; and for those of us who aren't, how differently do our actual lives play out if the media we avidly consume is anarchist rather than pop-culture? The acceptance is more-or-less apparent that, despite our misgivings, for us too socialising, shopping, polit-ing and finding dates (to the degree all these are currently separable) now happen online. But these forms of activity are not the same as they were; more and more they are shaped into varieties of production of the self, to be sifting into demographics and subject to cybernetic governance. The medium, once again, can determine as much as the content.

In terms of otherwise confronting the social processes through which the digital capitalist model is being imposed, we already mentioned the commuter blocades in San Francisco, although the execution and discourse leave much to be desired from our standpoint. When the forms of power we are up against are more ephemeral, opportunities still might not be outside our grasp in some cases, as mentioned once again in 'Robots of Repression': "One possibility opened up by the participatory nature of the internet is the crowdsourcing of repression. "Crowdsourcing" itself is an internet-era neologism reflecting the previously unimaginable phenomenon that has followed riots from London to Toronto: the police publishing thousands of megabites worth of photo and video and calling on the public to help them trace and identify lawbreakers, qualitatively surpassing the predecessor of this phenomenon, the good ole fashioned "Wanted" poster. Of course, to every action a reaction: this crowdsourcing of repression has already been sabotaged by anarchists spamming police identification efforts, sometimes with the help of computer programs that automatically flood the database with thousands of fake and funny names (the equivalent of ripping down the "Wanted" poster, drawing a moustache on it, or, à la Robin Hood, shooting a freaking arrow through it)."

Wherever the advance of the cybernetic monstrosity takes its own specific form, different possibilities might exist to undermine it, were we to seek them. In their case, the author's of 'Precarity in Paradise' assert that "[t]he Catalan government has no hope of projecting Barcelona onto an international IT axis if it cannot control its own population. People, after all, are supposed to be resources, not self-organized beings with their own dreams, an ability to define their own desires and needs, and their own visions of what their neighborhoods should look like. Some Catalans are buying in to the new model of city, studying web design, imagining their own tech startups, or contenting themselves with jobs in hip bars and restaurants. But many residents of Barcelona are not at all happy with the new arrangement, and they are increasingly constituting a force capable of blocking the plans of investors and l'Ajuntament. Trade fair delegates who get spat on and insulted in the streets, or who have their work-vacations interrupted by a student riot or a transport strike, do not come back. Tourists who get robbed, or who can't find cheap accommodations, look for other destinations. If neighbors collectively resist evictions, the character of their neighborhood can't be changed as quickly." All the better if such actors begin to link their struggles to a desire for a more generalised disruption, to a conflict against the environment as it boxes all of our lives into one or another form of metropolitan isolation, without continuing to valorise (a preceeding form of that isolation via lacklustre political groupings such as 'poor people vs. gentrifiers', 'citizens for a more democratic city', etc.

Headquarters of Facebook in Hamburg, Germany, vandalised 12.12.15 from phone calls to computer transactions, emails, and even the security camera feeds watching the cables themselves travel down the plastic or glass fibers as pulses of light. The cables are the interstate highways of the information superhighway. The FBI says whoever has been attacking the cables usually opens an underground vault, climbs inside and then cuts through the cables' protective metal conduit before severing the lines themselves." (The investigators also said that whoever is responsible may be dressing as telecom maintenance workers or ‘possess tools consistent with that job role’.) Back on this side of the Atlantic, we could take the example (among others in that country) of the blaze in a data centre of the mobile operator Base which temporarily knocked out their coverage in all of Belgium for 2G, 3G and 4G internet a couple of years ago.
Far be it from us to suggest some type of politics of purity or consumption, miserable like all politics, which only leads to confusion between the choices of those who design, produce and disseminate digital technologies and the rest of us who must navigate the terrain it imposes; a confusion which dampens rebellion. Yet how can we move, without only perpetuating the dynamics we've detailed above? The blogger Ian Erik Smith pondered a similar question about his own online activity. “Like so many others, I feel a compulsion to produce something, to express myself, and to advance a particular point of view. But I also experience a recurrent feeling that the effort is futile and potentially even counterproductive. As if everyone is shouting and my foolish but perhaps natural response is to attempt to shout even louder than the crowd. Nothing can possibly be heard and so, in truth, I’m merely adding to the noise.

I can generate what is now commonly called “content” – able to produce fodder for a format – and can then, in one way or another, place it into the world. I can make paper copies and stash them into the hidden letter boxes that are to be found in abandoned stone walls or I can stuff them into glass bottles and hurl them into the sea. But more likely, I will deposit whatever I produce into the digital marketplace of ideas where ideas aren’t ideas but are simply content filling a space. At this point, it’s likely that my every move has been anticipated and my purposes already circumvented; my efforts may be effectively channeled to serve purposes that are not my own. By contributing content to the digital realm I am propping up what I wish to tear down and yet throwing a bottle into the sea doesn’t seem promising.

[...] It doesn’t matter how insightful or well-crafted something is if there isn’t the space for it to be understood, considered, or comprehended. During the writing process one might focus on clarity and precision which are qualitative considerations; but once put into the digital realm it is almost exclusively quantity considerations that remain relevant. What we want is for our content to be loud enough to create a buzz everywhere else; to command space. If not the smartest voice perhaps we can be the loudest voice.

But are things really this grim?

Even in the noisiest of spaces we are generally able to make out coherent bits and pieces. Civilization is a homogenizing, totalizing force but it is not yet fully realized, not yet perfect. There remain cracks. There remains space for learning, dialogue, and ultimately resistance. One need only consult his or her own experience and will likely recall numerous times when something significant reached one’s ears or eyes in a most timely way prompting a change in direction.

In 1964 anarchist and art critic Herbert Read lamented that “the fall of the last civilization will not be heard above the incessant din”. This lament of a past anarchist can be a source of hope for contemporary anarchists who do not see civilization as something to be preserved or mourned but rather thrown off. [...] We should not expect to individually steer the direction of mass society in any direction as though we were generals on a battlefield; instead we should imagine ourselves as mice and rats chewing at the wires... soon there will be flames.” Although we may read much online that we forget again as quickly as we type the captcha for the next page, some things do stick, and finding a way to bring them off-screen into our lives becomes necessary.

How can we create less-digitalised spaces or moments, ones which make it possible to look into each other’s eyes again to voice our desire and joy for a life in hostility to what degrades us? If forms of online activity exist that actually equip people to engage in insurrectionary struggle that can transform our conditions (as some have cited virtual mapping programs doing during recent upheavals in Turkey) while actually undermining our wider dependency on the medium itself by contributing to spaces where potential rebels – and, why not, those they will have to learn to distinguish themselves from in the process – can meet in person, perhaps they are worthwhile to use for our aims. The key would be distinguishing that which creates upheavals in which the kind of surveillance that is possible on the internet is no longer possible on those who are in the struggle because they are acting outside of the field of representation, rather than coalescing new fields easily legible to our enemies. Such a focus would need at its base a recognition that the more dependent a struggle becomes on technologies produced out of its participants’ control, the more vulnerable it would be.

To combat the digital delirium within our own anarchist circles and beyond, one (deceptively simple) proposition will make it that comrades could take turns gathering news, updates, communiques and analysis while others were relieved of the need to trawl the Net for these details, and then share the (printed?) information at regular get-togethers in the flesh. In this way the media in question would find a way to sit back within a more social context rather than a more individuated and passive one, while also allowing a crew to develop real-world affinities and projectual direction off the back of it. Perhaps this face-to-face aspect could (at least potentially?) dilute some of the needless bravado and dehumanising aspects which seem to flourish online. Admittedly concerning a slightly different proposal, the authors of *We Are All Very Anxious* hit on some likely obstacles such a process would face in societies such as our own. “One major problem will be maintaining regular time commitments in a context of constant time and attentive pressure. The process has a slower pace and a more human scale than is culturally acceptable today. However, the fact that groups offer a respite from daily struggle, and perhaps a quieter style of interacting and listening which relieves attentive pressure, may also be attractive. Participants would need to learn to speak with a self-expressive voice (rather than a neoliberal performance derived from the compulsion to share banal information), and to listen and analyse.” (Another pitfall could be the creation of mere talking-shops to let off steam, were a drive to identify courses of action lacking.)

Whether by these means or another, it feels true that making sure we find the space to actually talk with a friend or few about whatever topic makes it more real, whether identifying a social dynamic, rescuing a prisoner from the oblivion and forgetfulness repression aims to instill, or highlighting a vulnerability in the system to be exploited.

Despite the horrific effects which are obviously non-reversible on ourselves and the rest of the biosphere from creating digital gadgets, there is reason to hope that at least some of the haziness that the Net clouds our vision with might be escaped, however temporarily. Carr recounts his experience of an experimental disconnection: “I cancelled my Twitter account, put my Facebook membership on hiatus, and mothballed my blog. I shut down my RSS reader and curtailed my my spying and instant messaging. Most important, I throttled back my e-mail application. It had long been set to check for new messages every minute. I reset it to check only once an hour, and when that still created too much of a distraction, I began keeping the program closed much of the day.

The dismantling of my online life was far from painless. For months, my synapses howled for their Net fix. I found myself sneaking clicks on the “check for new mail” button. Occasionally, I’d go on a daylong Web binge. But in time the cravings subsided, and I found myself able to type at my keyboard for hours on end or to read through a dense academic paper without...
my mind wandering. Some old, disused neural circuits were springing back into life, it seemed, and some of the newer, Web-wired ones were quieting down. I started to feel generally calmer and more in control of my thoughts - less like a lab rat pressing a lever and more like, well, a human being. My brain could breathe again.

My case, I realize, isn't typical. Being self-employed and of a fairly solitary nature, I have the option of disconnecting. Most people today don't. The Web is so essential to their work and social lives that even if they wanted to escape the network they could not." However, at least within the sphere of our online lives which revolves most around our radicalism (while never cleanly separable), we might be able to address the content which the form contains, to the degree that's possible, aside from minimising our individual screen exposure as described above. One suggestion, in terms of the content which crowds the counter-information networks, would be to prioritise pieces with a notable analytic, 'how-to', poetic or otherwise inspirational content, even (or especially) if it results in a slowed output: **if we must contend with the propensity for 'groupiness' the Net seems to hold, we could at least attempt to raise the bar for participation and challenge ourselves more. Doubtless there is a way that the tractive approach could degenerate into elitism; ourselves we certainly don't want an anarchy of the intellectually-athletic or practiced orators alone, but we do want to challenge the assumption that any and all of our anarchist lives should (or even could!) exist online, only feeding the quantitative frenzy. It should go without saying that we ourselves highly value the continuation and revival of print-based, fly-postable or hand-to-hand propaganda, which might offer a more suitable format for the types of content which wouldn't fit so much into what we described above anyway. A question to ask might be: what purpose does it serve to upload whatever in question to the internet, or to what degree does it become the easy option above seeking ways to give it a life we can more easily identify in the streets where we actually live and spend our time?**

Also, in situations where the sources of online dialogue are known to individuals in the offline world, those could be engaged with face-to-face (confrontationally or not, as the case requires) by those who consider their activity especially toxic, misleading, or a security liability; hence reducing the alienation between what one presents via an online avatar and the very real consequences this has in reality. Lastly, we echo the 325 contribution to the Nadir gathering that "[the distribution of "computer security guides" for beginners is really important, like the one produced by the comrades of America ('Anonymity Security') and it is especially valid for those using electronic means to organise and communicate in the insurgent's tendency facing police surveillance and investigations. It is the same as learning to do anything else in the struggle. **Some things are maybe not for everyone, but without reinforcing our struggle, sharing the skills and actually helping out others who ask for/need technical solidarity, we'll allow the enemy to outflank us, because there are too few people with the technical knowledge.** The general problems of internet and computer security is part of the general 'problem' of repression; specialisation hierarchy within the movement leads itself to decay and rapid degeneration during episodes of crackdown." To the degree that whomever of us do engage with the digital sphere, this choice entails responsibilities and dangers, which we would be fools to take lightly.

These are simply provisional and partial thoughts, yet to be properly hammered-out. So we won't put too much store in the proposals specifically, beyond the urgent need we feel to start more conversations to address the digital delirium we are sliding into. We'll wind down this survey of the thoughts of others and ourselves on the topic by reiterating: using the field of online representation as a means to disrupt the power structures which are preserved and intensified by the ongoing digitalisation of our lives is the only intervention which feels justified on that terrain, and it is far from clear what chances of success such an aspiration has. At best it is making the best of a profound disadvantage we find ourselves at; at worst it is a losing battle so long as the techno-industrial structure enabling the Net still stands. Far from the digital utopian illusions on the one hand or a moralistic boycott on the other, our assertion is simply that as the ecological, existential and economic crises deepen in the coming years, it is and will be force in the world off-screen that would leave us more mobility, and allow our ideas to become tangible through lived practice.

It would seem that, from reports of reported disenchantment with the new digital age among even younger tech-users, to even the unexpected explosion in rediscovery of embedded, embodied presence that was experienced in the Occupy movement from 2011 onwards (despite its practical and conceptual shortcomings, and the unfamiliarity of many digitally-native participants with the complexities of in-the-flesh interactions), there is at least some latent desire for an escape from the Net. While truthfully our own hopes aren't high (nor need they be as a criteria for our struggle for meaning and dignity), we see no need to assume that this spark will necessarily be buried entirely, and that it might yet give us flames to light this long social twilight.

All this forms a certain sphere, albeit a phenomenologically dominant one, of our predication as civilised beings in search for a way out of our culture. What we want to dismantle beyond the industrial system itself is the actual way of understanding the world that we've been brought up with; if this can often be done by drawing attention to one particular way it mutilates us. Our greater strength is measured by the degree to which, rather than stopping at different issues, we're able to intertwine them by deepening our critique and continuing the path to liberation. There, on the axis of passion and clarity, intuition and hate. Just as we despise the digital elites not just for their future visions but for the now-global trends into desensitising, depersonalising and deskilling that the computer has brought with it, our perspective reaches beyond civilisation to a way of life without class hierarchies and human-supremacist divisions. Ultimately, our hostility to the digital is but a partial aspect of a wider question of human cultures, what they have been in some cases, what they have in some cases become and what in some cases they could be. It's distressing enough to us that we and many in similar cultures spend the majority of our lives in constructed surroundings that simply mirror the neuroses of the civilised back upon ourselves, at a tremendous cost to the more-than-human and with it everything we hold dear. The further reduction into a virtual world where we experience literally nothing else, for a rising proportion of our waking hours, is simply one pathway of this, and perhaps a logical one for Western literate cultures as investigated by David Abram. "The apparently autonomous, mental dimension originally opened by the alphabet – the ability to interact with our own signs in utter abstraction from our earthly surroundings – has today blossomed into a vast, cognitive realm, a horizonless expanse of virtual interactions and encounters. Our reflective intellects inhabit a global field of information, pondering the latest scenario for the origin of the universe as we absenty fork food into our mouths; [...] clicking on the computer and slipping into cyberspace in order to network with other bodiless minds, exchanging information about gene sequences and military coups, “conferencing” to solve global environmental problems while oblivious to the moon rising above the rooftops. Our nervous system synapsed to the terminal, we do not notice that the chorus of frogs by the nearby stream has dwindled, this year, to a solitary voice, and that the song sparrows no longer return to the trees."
To live differently here and now, whatever the future may bring, defying the embrace of a web of anthropocentrism and ideology we would lose ourselves and our relations to (however ‘radical’ – “anti-civilisation” even – its varieties the screen can serve) would entail a process that Robinson Jeffers described as falling in love onwards with the Earth around us. Are we still capable?

We can think of no better words to end on than those plastered so recently on the streets of Paris, in the anarchist wall-paper “Blaspheme”.

“We’ve almost forgotten that when we want to talk with someone, we can go to their place and knock on the door. We’ve almost forgotten what it means to communicate in person, with emotions, laughter, or anger that can be read on our faces, in the tone of our voice, or in the trembling of our hands. We’ve almost forgotten that not so long ago these machines weren’t part of our lives, that we weren’t closed into these digital worlds that take more and more control over our days, that people lived, loved, communicated, and kept up to date on the news without these invasive technologies. Sometimes in the metro, we feel like intruders, as one of those rare individuals not absorbed by their little screen and headphones, oblivious to the people around them. By folding in on ourselves in this way, we don’t even notice how society is changed by these technologies.

[...] And if we relearned how to live without these machines? What if we cut the virtual cord and reconnected with each other, weaving compatibilities in person to fill the void created by our atomisation? We could reconnect with time, space, and each other, everything that the cold interaction with machines has pushed to the background.

What if we openly blaspheme against the religion of connectivity? What if we storm this much-vaunted technological heaven, but which seems more like a science-fiction nightmare?

What if we destroy the machines…"
work (Jacques Balamont, Introduction au siècle des mémoires, in the face of the scientific establishment who, having come to the end of his professional career and settled into retirement, sings like a canary) (Jaine Sempru & René Riesel).

10. – The author who was first transcribing our notes for this article accidentally typed ‘selfie’ first time round; we could comment on the irony, regarding the claim that we have ‘selfie-obsessed orientation users feel they must give themselves online.’

11. – This in itself being one step further along a trail already blazed by the telecommunications boom decades previously. This was, of course, already deemed by Stanley Diamond’s 1974 critique (of civilisation more broadly also): “The impetuous ring of the telephone [Interrupts] all other activities. Its trivial, dissociated and obsessive use reflects both the alienating character of the society that prizes it so highly, and the transnational corporations that profit from it. Thus the telephone as ordinarily used becomes a sign, not of communication, but of the lack of communication, and of the consequent compelling desire to relate to others, but to relate at a distance – and in the mode of frustrated ordinariness.”

12. – A 2012 study examined the Facebook habits of 294 students, aged between 18 and 65, and measured two “socially disruptive” elements of narcissism – grandiose exhibitionism (GE) and entitlement/exploitativeness (EE), GE includes “‘self-obsession, superiority, and exhibitionistic tendencies” and people who score high on this aspect need to be constantly at the centre of attention. They often say shocking things and inappropriately self-disclose because they cannot stand to be ignored or waste a chance of self-promotion. The EE aspect includes “a sense of deserving respect and a willingness to manipulate and take advantage of others”. The research revealed that the higher someone scored in these aspects of GE, the greater the number of friends they had on Facebook, with some amusing more than 800. Those scoring highly on EE and GG were rated to have the internet interrupt us every time someone sends us an email or wants our attention, or an app will show us updates from our friends or Facebook friends.”

13. – It seems unsurprising, if we remember that Facebook itself started life as a site that rated students by their looks, that the digital networks have led to the mixture of insecurity and cyber-bullying that the head of ChildLine described as “the biggest problem we’ve ever faced.” [There is no point in turning off their phone, because the messages will just be there waiting for them.”

14. – At the very least, even if some conversations do reach a wider and more diverse space on occasion when compared to pre-digital social networks, it doesn’t discount the alarming degree to which real embodied association is repeatedly shunned for the supposed ‘efficiency’ of the Net.

15. – “The gag law forbids a variety of online content, including video footage like that which is increasingly being used to expose police ‘actions’ in the US and which last month showed police beating demonstrators in the Basque country, according to the New York Times. The law also sets hefty fines for a range of offenses involving perceived affronts to public order or unseemly conduct, $500 for insulting a police officer, up to $30,000 for spreading damaging photos of police officers, and $600,000 for taking part in an unauthorized protest outside Parliament. It also exposes existing holes in similar laws for use by police ‘slackers’ on Facebook, falls foul of Spain’s new ‘gag law’.

16. – The less sophisticated end of what this might look like would be the ‘Twitterbots’ (automated accounts, with one person controlling 25-50 profiles) used during ongoing social revolts in Mexico to spam trending hashtags hostile to the regime – warning ‘neocolonialists’ after the country’s president – creating banal trends as a counter-weight, and running smear campaigns against activists and journalists on a weekly basis.

17. – The choice of venue for the conference in question was by no means arbitrary. BT, the massive telecommunications player who provide IT infrastructure to the British prison system and police while reforming civil life around an insidious infrastructure to the British prison system and police

21. – They were caught writing solidaristic graffiti under the name of ‘the Struggle Against Nocivity’ (2004) written by one of the members of the Facebook habits of the incipient ‘new police’ culture who have been ‘put out of use with acid around that time.

22. – A head-mounted wearable-computer with a displays in the shape of the member of users can navigate the Internet via voice commands. Some police departments are especially interested. After provisional introduction in 2013, Google retracted the technology after much more than privacy concerns of the headsets’ camera continued recording and scanning for data, including some public venues banning the glasses and the ‘Glassholes’ wearing them, and in at least one case a wearer being assaulted. An insidious group of glasses for their invasive presence in a San Francisco bar. Tentatively, Google have announced they will advance a revised prototype in 2017 (presumably the headset of which will appear slightly more unobtrusive).

23. – ed. – Indeed, the first protests in San Francisco against big tech apparently followed a speech by a venture-capitalist investor named Tim Draper duly filed a petition to split California into six, with an independent San Valley – putatively the richist state in America – abutting Central California, which would be poorer even than Mississippi.

24. – “Traditionally, activists who confront gentrification, commercialization, and the imposition of social control champion the dichotomy between public space and private space...” [But some of the anarchists and other anti-capitalists participating in these movements find the dichotomy misleading, presenting people with an artificially constructed choice. Their interventions in the movement against the privatization of healthcare highlight a third option: neither private, nor public, but communal. This trichotomy is at the heart of the analysis presented in the [Catalan] book, Yeath in Peril, Biodiversity in Struggle: From the breakdown of the cutbacks to the self-organization of healthcare, itself a product of the anarchist participation in that struggle. The vision contained calls progressives to task for their shortsighted embrace of public healthcare, ignoring the many ways the service prioritizes economic needs over human needs, treating bodies like defective machines, and the ways it is pervaded with a patriarchal practice. Instead of simply reversing the cutbacks, the book argues, we should allow the current spirit of solidarity to transform us and transform the very institution of healthcare, occupying and self-organizing the existing hospitals and clinics, rethinking medicine itself to promote a holistic, ecological, and preventive concept of health, and fully communicating healthcare, taking it into our own hands rather than entrusting it to the government or to private-care solutions. The same trichotomy can be applied to the battle for space and the fight for the city. Contrary to democratic mythology, public space does not belong to us, it belongs to the State, and it is a relatively simple matter for the government to turn it over to private administration. In fact, it does not really matter if space is policed by private security guards or by the police themselves; the critical feature is that in neither case does it belong to us, it can only be allowed to directly determine its use, its framing, its construction, or its disappearance...” While developing its civic behavior ordinances, passed in 2006, Barcelona hosted evangelist New York Rudolph Giulani, who advised the Ajuntament [Barcelona’s City Hall] on “Broken Window” policing [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg18], ‘Zero Tolerance,’ and cleaning up the city’s image. The “civismo” laws have since spread across Spain and Giulani has been cited as a major influence on [then] Barcelona mayor, Xavier Trias. [The civic behavior ordinances] were not in fact a privatization measure, but they heavily restricted people’s access to space all the same. The new laws greatly increased state control over space by instituting or increasing fines for many popular, working-class
uses of public space, such as playing music or doing laundry in the streets, found on balconies, graffiti, and so on. Some of these measures directly benefit privatized spaces, for example criminalizing someone drinking on a bench but allowing the noisiness of a party at a table. But has placed on the street (after paying the Ajuntament for a permit, of course). This just underscores what the new dominant development model of the “public-private partnership” already makes plain: that there is no profound tension between public and private spaces. The two ideals exist on a continuum that is bound by common interests. After all, if you compare the relatively mild urban conflicts generated by the recent privatization of public space with the centuries of enclosure, warfare, mass executions, deportations, evictions, and uprooting that modern states had to go through in order to destroy the vestiges of communal space and to understand the institution of public space, becomes clear where the true difference lies. The real question is not: which external power governs the spaces we are forced to spend our lives in? but rather: do we or don’t we have direct control over our vital spaces? That is the logic that constitutes the concept of communal space. Why is this theoretical nuance so important to the battle against gentrification? Because everything that doesn’t kill our capacity to organize it stronger. If we squander all this mobilized anger and energy by demanding a mere reversal of the most recent outrages, blocking one specific gentrification plan but continuing to entrust the city to an elite that has different interests at heart, instead of forestalling a deepening of our misery, just as the social welfare state forestalled revolutionary workers’ movements with a new array of public services [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg48], only to see those services once off the movements had disintegrated and neoliberalism could emerge” (Precariously in Paradise).

25. “1Ajuntament is still marketing Barcelona as a "Smart City," a city where the new information technologies are not only developed, but immediately put into practice, boasting the responsiveness, the flexibility, and the willingness to mold the urban terrain and the lives of its inhabitants to interface more compliantly with all the new communications, consumer, transport, networking, and surveillance apps. Both a marketing scheme and a technology growth sector, the Smart City showcases a number of methods for mollifying the plebs, using communications technologies and the novelty they still command to create the illusion of citizen participation (similar to how comments sections are intended to be supposed to revolutionize the news media). One example, mobileID, is a smartphone app that lets citizens securely access government websites, consult the census, copy tax documents, locate polling places on election day, and find where their car has been towed to, as the official Smart City website proudly explains. The Smart City concept has bamboozled the moderate environmentalist crowd, promoting models of rational urban planning that highlight a few feel-good features like electric cars while distracting from the real question is not: which external power governs the spaces we are forced to spend our lives in? but rather: do we or don’t we have direct control over our vital spaces? That is the logic that constitutes the concept of communal space. Why is this theoretical nuance so important to the battle against gentrification? Because everything that doesn’t kill our capacity to organize it stronger. If we squander all this mobilized anger and energy by demanding a mere reversal of the most recent outrages, blocking one specific gentrification plan but continuing to entrust the city to an elite that has different interests at heart, instead of forestalling a deepening of our misery, just as the social welfare state forestalled revolutionary workers’ movements with a new array of public services [ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg48], only to see those services once off the movements had disintegrated and neoliberalism could emerge” (Precariously in Paradise).

26. “In 1983 the group noted that “[f]or more than three years a security court of the State (may it rest in peace) and several dozen mercenaries have been looking for us: their material resources are sophisticated but pretty insufficient and our last action actually reveals that the Garonne municipality must have shown them we know more about them than they know about us!”

27. “When asked in a mock (self)interview why they sabotage computers, they respond: “[f]or challenge everyone, programmers and non-programmers, so that we can reflect a little more on this world we live in and which we create, and on the way computerization transforms this society. […] We are essentially attacking what these tools lead to: files, surveillance by means of badges and cards, instrument of profit maximization for the bosses and of accelerated pauperization for those who are rejected. […] Faced with the tools of those in power, dominated people have always used sabotage or subversion. It’s neither retrograde nor novel. Looking at the past, we see only slavery and dehumanization, unless we go back to certain so-called primitive societies. […] By our actions we have wanted to underline the material nature of the computer-tools on the one hand, and on the other, the destiny of domination which has been conferred on it. Finally, though what we do is primarily propaganda through action, we also know that the damage we cause leads to setbacks and and substantial delays. […] These actions are only the visible tip of the iceberg! We ourselves are not capable of working daily in a less ostensible way. With computers, like with the army, police or politics, in fact, like with all privileged instruments of power, errors are the rule, and working them out takes up the majority of programmers’ time! We take advantage of this, which unprofitably costs our employers more than the material damage we cause. We’ll only say that the art consists of creating bugs that will only appear later as little time-bombs. To get back to your question – what could be more ordinary than throwing a match on a package of magnetic tapes? Anybody can do it! The act appears excessive only for those who don’t know, or who don’t want to know, what most computer systems are used for.”

28. “This they claimed along with the burning of two items of material forcing urban expansion through a region in the expansion.

29. “Perhaps the same confusion reigns amongst those who assert that ‘modern humanity’ love their gadgets so much that in any potentially-transformative situation the pull of this addiction would bring material damage we cause. We’ll only say that the art consists of creating bugs that will only appear later as little time-bombs. To get back to your question – what could be more ordinary than throwing a match on a package of magnetic tapes? Anybody can do it! The act appears excessive only for those who don’t know, or who don’t want to know, what most computer systems are used for.”

30. “The Net that closes the space between us closes the spaces within us. It encloses commons that previously resisted commodification, commons such as social networks that we can only recognize as such now that they are being mapped for enclosure. As it grows to encompass our whole lives, we have to become small enough to fit into its equations. […] We contemplate a future in which digital systems will meet our every need, as long as we ask only for the present order delivered instantly. Tracing the trajectory of our digital imaginary, we will soon be always voting, always working, always shopping, always in jail. [From: ‘Deserting the Digital Utopia,’ Rolling Thunder #11]"