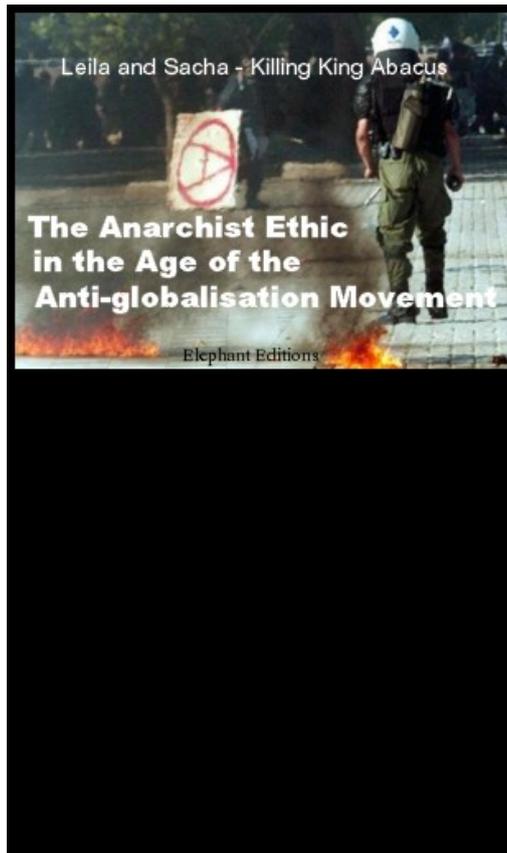# The Anarchist Ethic in the Age of the Anti-globalisation Movement

Killing King Abacus

Contents

Preface

Taking the antiglobalisation movement as its starting point, this article has wider connotations which should make it of considerable interest to anarchists and antiauthoritarians today. That is why we have taken it from its original context in the pages of Killing King Abacus in order to give it greater echo.

The key concepts of this thesis are to be found in the clear distinction drawn between ethics and morals, leading to active power as opposed to constituted or transcendent power, and a minimal organisational proposal for the struggle in the direction of a society without measure.

Of course the anarchist movement and the antiglobalisation movement are not the same thing and should not be confused. Many anarchists go on antiglobalisation demos. Many others do not.

Nevertheless, the antiglobalisation movement can be seen as more or less divided in two—the quantitative part composed of recycled Marxists and ecologists, and the qualitative one, composed of anarchists and antiauthoritarians. Naturally, it is this latter part that we are interested in (although we thought well to dedicate a couple of pages to some of the former at the end of this piece). The anarchist/libertarian element is where we can find our comrades in struggle, and it is with them that we wish to reflect on questions such as those raised in the pages that follow. We need to focus our thoughts on particular aspects of this reality within a wider context, using the analytical devices necessary for such an exercise.

What has clearly emerged over recent years has been a capacity to self-organize and act effectively and autonomously, with minimal preparation and organisational superstructure. What seems to be lacking is the will to maintain this capacity to self organise in a constant fashion away from the spectacular, carnivalesque dimension of the demo. One reason for this lack might be the refusal to recognise oneself as a real force of social transformation, preferring the symbolic one of the demo. (Even destructive demos are symbolic in that they exist within a specific context, within a preestablished and limited space of time: action occurs through a precise political and ideological filter, thus preventing its spreading in an insurrectional, social direction.)

By becoming more aware of what it is that distinguishes us and makes us different, we could venture beyond the boundaries of reactive, spectacular events into the deeper reality of social struggle. This involves both constant sabotage by small groups or individuals and theoretical and practical involvement in the direction of self-organised, mass rebellion. Armed with a lucid awareness of the quality and potential of our ethical strength and methods, we could direct our passionate free spirits towards an incisive, horizontally spreading attack, regardless of the deadlines of power.

J.W.

The Anarchist Ethic in the Age of the Anti-globalization Movement

Part I

The question always before anarchists is how to act in the present moment of struggle against capitalism and the state. As new forms of social struggles are becoming more clearly understood, this question becomes even more important. In order to answer these questions we have to clarify the relationship between anarchists and the wider social movement of the exploited and the nature of that movement itself. First of all, we need to note that the movement of the exploited is always in course. There is no use in anarchists, who wish to destroy capitalism and the state in their entirety, waiting to act on some future date, as predicted by an objectivist reading of capitalism or a determinist understanding of history as if one were reading the stars. This is the most secure way of keeping us locked in the present forever. The revolutionary movement of the exploited multitude never totally disappears, no matter how hidden it is. Above all this is a movement to destroy the separation between us, the exploited, and our conditions of existence, that which we need to live. It is a movement of society against the state. We can see this movement, however incoherent or unconscious, in the actions of Brazil's peasants who take the land they need to survive, when the poor steal, or when someone attacks the state that maintains the system of exclusion and exploitation. We can see this movement in the actions of those who attack the machinery that destroys our very life-giving environment. Within this current, anarchists are a minority. And, as conscious anarchists, we don't stand outside the movement, propagandizing and organizing it; we act with this current, helping to reanimate and sharpen its struggles.

It is instructive to look back at the recent history of this current. In the U.S., beginning in the 1970s, social movements began to fracture into single-issue struggles that left the totality of social relations unchallenged. In many ways, this was reflected in a shift in the form of imposed social relations, which occurred in response to the struggles of the 1960s and early 1970, and is marked by a shift from a Fordist regime of accumulation (dominated by large factories and a mediated truce with unions) to a regime of flexible accumulation (which began to break unions, dismantle the welfare state, and open borders to the free flow of capital). This shift is also mirrored by the academic shift to postmodernist theory, which privileges the fractured, the floating, and the flexible. While the growth of single-issue groups signals the defeat of the anti-capitalist struggles of the 1960s, over the 1990s we have witnessed a reconvergence of struggles that are beginning to challenge capitalism as a totality. Thus the revolutionary current of the exploited and excluded has recently reemerged in a cycle of confrontations that began in the third world and have spread to the first world of London, Seattle, and Prague, and in the direct action movement that has, for the most part, grown out of the radical environmental milieu. In the spectacular confrontations of the global days of action, these streams have been converging into a powerful social force. The key to this reconvergence is that the new struggles of the 1990s are creating ways to communicate and link local and particular struggles without building stifling organizations that attempt to synthesize all struggle under their command. Fundamental to this movement is an ethic that stands against all that separates us from our conditions of existence and all that separates us from our power to transform the world and to create social relations beyond measure—a measure imposed from above. This ethic is a call for the self-organization of freedom, the self-valorization of human activity.

In this article we will outline our understanding of the ethic of the revolutionary anarchist current of society that grows out of the movement of the exploited in general. Then we will turn to the question of action and organization, looking critically at the forms of struggle that are appearing in the recent cycle of social movements and arguing that informal organization is the best way for anarchists to organize as a minority within the wider social movement. By organizing along these lines, we believe anarchists can sharpen the level of struggle and develop social relations in practice that are both antagonistic to capital and the state and begin to create of new ways of living.

Ethic and morality

We use the term *ethic* in a very specific sense and contrast it to *morality*. Morality stands outside what it rules over, it swoops down from above to organize relationships and discipline behavior. For example, the relationship between two people can be set morally by a third party, the church, the state, or the school. This third party is not a part of the relationship; in other words, it stands *transcendent* to the relationship. The relationship between two people can also be arranged through an ethic. Unlike morality, an ethic never comes from the outside; an ethic lets us understand how to relate to other people or objects, other bodies, in a way that is beneficial to us. An ethic is thus a doctrine of happiness, one which never comes form the outside of the situation, which never stands above a relationship, but is always developed from within; it is always *immanent* to the situation instead of *transcendent* to it. An ethic is a relationship of desire. In an ethical relationship desire is complemented by desire, expanded by it. Morality, on the other hand, always limits and channels desire. A transcendent morality is alien to the situation at hand; its logic has no necessary connection to the desire of those involved or to increasing their pleasure. It is a fixed law whose reasoning is always "because I said so," "because it is the word of god," "because it is wrong," or "because it is the law and what would happen without the law." An ethic is a tool for the active creation of our own lives; it is never an imposed decision, a bought position in society, or a passively accepted role that we attempt to play. The most valuable thing one can learn in the struggle against imposed decision is how to act, how to become more powerful in our action.

Anarchism is an ethic in the most basic sense: it is an ethic because it calls for decisions to remain immanent to the situation at hand instead of alienated into a transcendent institution, it moves in an antagonistic relationship to all transcendent morality and institutions, such as the state, the party and the church.

Power and the alienation of power

Human nature has been a foundational concept for many anarchists. As such, the argument runs, human nature is good and power, which constricts and warps that nature, is bad. Anarchism becomes a philosophy that stands for getting rid of power and allowing the good nature of humans to flourish. In this section, we develop a different understanding of power, an understanding that doesn't automatically define power as bad. Instead of setting a particular conception of human nature as the foundation of anarchism, therefore, we suggest that an ethic of desire is the proper foundation for anarchist action and organization.

Power is the potential to exert a force, the ability to create and transform. Capitalism alienates that potential from us in the production process. The state also alienates our power; in fact, *the state is a form of alienated power that has been instituted, that has been constituted in the state form.* In its alienated form, power becomes the potential and ability to make others exert a force, to do work, or the ability to prevent us from exerting a force. It is a power that has been extracted from the social body through a complex process of force and consent.

Capitalism and the state separate the moment of decision from the act of its realization in both space and time: a decision is made before the action has begun and it is made in a different place, in some office of the state, corporate boardroom, or organizer's meeting. A law can be made years before it comes to control an act. The form of alienated power tends towards fixity, of setting and maintaining an order and a set of institutions—like the heavy-set granite structures that house the institutions themselves—that stand above society; it can thus be called *constituted or transcendent power.*

If power is the potential to exert a force, the ability to act in a creative, transformative, productive, or destructive way, the state as a transcendent institution is that which cuts us off or separates us from our *active power.* Our power is alienated from us, taken from us, and instituted in the state. We are only allowed to act in certain ways, whereas the state constantly acts and decides for us, acts in our name, or forces us to act in certain ways. It cuts us off from the creative energy of desire itself.

When power has not been alienated, it remains immanent within individuals and the social body as a whole. And, so long as it is not separated from the act itself, it remains a creative, productive, and transformative potential, for it refuses a fixed order. As Kropotkin states, "Now all history, all the experience of the human race and all social psychology, unite in showing that the best and fairest way is to trust the decision to those whom it concerns most nearly." But there is always a danger that this power will be recuperated by groups to form institutions and will become a constituted, transcendent power that stands above the social body: the revolutionary power of those struggling against capitalism and the state can be frozen in the form of 'the Party' and, finally, the state itself.

In studying primitive societies, Pierre Clastres discovered that societies without a state were really "societies against the state." They organized the social body in such a way that warded off the constitution of alienated power into an

institution separate from society. Stable, conserved power is prevented from crystallizing into a hardened state form. As Delueze and Guattari point out, the state "is defined by the perpetuation or conservation of organs of power. The concern of the State is to conserve." Thus the state is the political organization of passivity. Anthropologists have noted the appearance of conserved organs of power in small-scale societies and have called such early organs 'impersonal institutions.' Impersonal institutions are distinguished from an authority that is based on personal abilities or qualities, an authority that ends when either that person dies, they are no longer seen as holding those personal abilities, or when those abilities are no longer useful to society. Someone could become known as a great hunter in a band society and trusted as an authority on hunting; that authority is vested personally in the individual. A society could have several individuals with such authority or it could have none. As such, authority does not crystallize into an institution that tends towards permanence, into impersonal institutions. But once authority comes to be institutionalized into a permanent position that is filled as an impersonal role, power begins to be conserved and separated from society itself. The President is an impersonal institution in that the authority of the Presidency continues after one President leaves and another takes their place; the authority rests in the institution.

Such impersonal institutions are openings that allow the state to slowly form above society. But the society against the state, that attempts to ward off or destroy the state, does not die as the state grows into a hardened, ugly body; in fact, the society against the state is continually reemerging and transforming its methods as the movement of the exploited and excluded to decide their own fate. The long and twisted history of the development of the state and the creative movement of the society against the state has been written and analyzed elsewhere. This history has brought us to our present moment in which the society against the state rises again. In the present moment, the form that alienated power takes is also varied: while the party dictatorship, a form that still exists, is an obvious example of alienated, transcendent power, the democratic form of alienated power no less separates decision from the act, no less separates us from our active powers.

As with the society against the state, anarchists must always fight against the alienation of power, against the formation of transcendent institutions that turn active power into a constituted order, whether that order be called democratic or totalitarian. This is not only because such transcendent power separates us from our power to act on our desires, but also because as soon as our active power—our power to transform society and to create our own lives—begins to harden into a permanent order, a permanent organization, once impersonal institutions form within our midst, we lose the power to attack the state and capitalism effectively.

Value, measure, and social organization

The movement of the exploited, the excluded, of the society against the state, is a movement to destroy the separation between humans and their conditions of existence. It is a movement to build new social relations without measure. It is a revolt against the imposition of a single regime of value. Looking at the many struggles that are being called "the anti-globalization movement," we can see in their diversity a complex pattern of attack on and defense from capitalist valorization. These struggles are heterogeneous in that no single solution or system of valorization is being offered to replace capitalism (thus these struggles can not be contained by a single organization). Yet, while they are heterogeneous, there is a pattern, and that pattern is produced by the fact that they are all fighting a singular and hegemonic regime of valorization, capitalism, that is invading every human practice and relationship. Alienation is the gap between desire and what is socially valued, between our potential to transform the world and the theft and parasitic use of that power by capital and the state. As that power comes to be alienated in the state form, society comes to be increasingly ruled by numbers to the extent that humans themselves are even reduced to interchangeable numbers.

One of the state's most important roles is to be the guarantor of measure: the state maintains the value of money, the general equivalent, it sets the low point for wages, taxes, and guarantees the measure and protection of property. The state uses numbers to reduce social problems to simple math problems with solutions. But society isn't so easily quantified and reduced; society isn't just a problem that can be solved with a ruler. Thus, every solution is in reality a repression of the problem or a shifting of the problem to a new level or different sector of society. Solution and repression are a twined pair.

The largest of such social problems that states have to contend with are the distribution of wealth, the mediation of social conflicts that erupt from its unequal distribution, and the reproduction of society itself. Over this century, two solutions to the problem of the distribution of wealth, the setting of value, have dominated the world: Western capitalism and Soviet communism. Both systems separate humans from their conditions of existence, from what they need to live and follow their desires. Both systems also rely on transcendent institutions of power to maintain their

systems of valorization. In the West, capitalist valorization relies on the state to guarantee the general equivalent and to maintain the private property structure that separates us from what we need to live. The human is thus split into a producer of goods for sale and a consumer of other goods. This split allows the extraction of surplus value, and it is the production of surplus value that defines one as productive, producing and, thus, having value in society.

The Soviet system was a different solution to the same problem. One's value within the Soviet system was set by a different measure. Within the Soviet system, value operated as a quantified, measured need as set by the transcendent intuition of the state. The state, as an alien institution, a form of alienated power, decided what was needed through its great, calculating bureaucratic apparatus. By treating society as a mathematical problem, the Soviet system guaranteed an equality and homogeneity of existence. It flattened desire and individuals. Desires were judged to be of social value or not by committee. Use value came to be set by a moral system that stood outside of society. In the Soviet system humans were no less separated from their conditions of existence, for a transcendent system of property still existed as the state itself directly controlled property.

There is, however, a different type of communism, one in which the institutions of private property backed up by state power are absent; this communism can be defined by the equality of access to the conditions of existence. This ethic is at the heart of the movement of the excluded, of the society against the state, that always remains antagonistic, however incoherent, to the separations that capital and the state impose upon it.

This communism offers no mathematical solution, imposed from above, to social problems. There is no guarantee of what individuals and groups will do with the conditions of existence once they have access to them, that is up to their desires and abilities. Rather, in the absence of transcendent solutions and institutions, social relations and problems remain as tensions within society, tensions that are worked through immanently in practice. Value comes to be produced immanently in ethical practice, as a self-valorization activity by those involved in a certain situation. A single regime of value no longer covers and organizes the social terrain.

This ethic of desire, which remains fundamental to the movement of the excluded, is antagonistic to the constituted social order that separates the multitude from its conditions of existence; and, it is out of this antagonism that anarchist practice—as immanent to the movement of the excluded multitudes—grows. Just as self-valorization becomes an ethical practice for the excluded, informal organization, in struggle against capital and the state, becomes an ethical practice for anarchists: *both create social relations beyond measure.*

Part II: The Anarchist ethic and the organization of attack

The starting point for understanding the relationship between anarchists and the new social movements is to recognize that we are a minority within the movement. This is, of course, the normal position for anarchists, but it does call for a specific theoretical thinking and practice in order for us to effectively operate in such a context. Anarchists are hopefully at an insurrectional level of struggle, they are, for the most part, working towards insurrection, while the movement in general struggles at an intermediate level. What does this mean? Anarchists, except those who hold a determinist and evolutionary view of history, understand that insurrection, which destroys the transcendent institutions of state and capital and allows the realization social relations that are immanently organized, is always possible as an outcome of struggle. Thus anarchists should always be working towards the goal of insurrection. The struggle of the new social movements that have developed over the 1990's, however, are mostly at an intermediate level, a level in which specific institutions may be attacked without a clear goal of insurrection against capital and the state. Direct action against the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, the movement to destroy genetically modified crops, the movement of the landless to directly appropriate the conditions of their existence, and the direct action environmental movement all contain the potential of moving towards insurrection. Anarchists must open and develop that potential. There are others within these social movements that, whether consciously or not, work to close the possibility of insurrection. This often happens as a result of certain forms of organization and organizing activity. Permanent organizations, organizations that attempt to synthesize the multitude of those struggling into a single, unified organization, and organizations that attempt to mediate struggle are all forms of organization that tend to close the potential of insurrection.

Before discussing the question of organization further, we need to clarify how we will use the terms 'the multitude' and 'the mass.' The multitude is what we will call all those who are excluded and exploited by capitalism; it is the multitude that struggles against the state and capitalism, it is the multitude that makes up the society against the state. The mass is the multitude as it has been synthesized into a singular block and disciplined to act in a unified manner. Just as a nation-state must transform a multitude of people into 'the People' or citizens in order to create a disciplined

nation, and the church must morally discipline its members to produce a flock, organizations of synthesis, such as 'the Party,' must shape the multitude into a mass in order to control its movement. The nation-state, the church, and the Party are all transcendent institutions in relation to a multitude in that they all stand above and outside the multitude and yet attempt to organize its social relations. They swoop down upon the multitude with a grid of identity into which all must fit—all relationships are organized from the outside with such a grid.

For anarchists, the question of organization, however, is an ethical (immanent) instead of moral (transcendent) question: in a given situation, how do we combine in a way that promotes our active powers? How do we bring a multitude together in a way that doesn't limit our potential, our power to act, and our different desires?

In the wake of Seattle and Prague many organizers are discussing how to build and control the movement. They talk as if they are artists standing over a lump of clay—the multitude—that needs to be shaped, disciplined. The discussion usually leads to talk of the need to limit the actions of the most confrontational and to be better 'organized.' Concerning the Prague demonstrations, one "American organizer" stated, "If we are really serious about doing an action, then we need to make certain there are de-escalation teams, people who are responsible for breaking up the violence." The goal of the type of organization that they promote, however, is to limit direct confrontational action and to encourage dialogue and mediation. Naively, they want to harness the power of a mass of bodies in order to get a seat at the table of power. For anarchists, of course, being against capitalism and the state in their entirety, there can be no dialogue with constituted power, with the transcendent institutions of the state and capital. The willingness of those transcendent institutions to initiate a dialogue may be a sign of their fear and weakness, but it is also the beginning of our defeat when we limit our active power to join them in discussion.

Our active power, our power to create and transform, is our only weapon, and that which limits such power from within the movement is our greatest weakness. This does not mean that we should remain unorganized; in fact, it poses the very question of organization: how do we combine in a way that promotes our active powers? The anarchist ethic is always a critical ethic, and thus it denounces everything that cuts us off from and diminishes our power to act.

As noted above, one of the greatest dangers to the development of the new social movements in a positive direction is that forms of organization that cut us off from our active power and close off the potential of insurrection in the present moment become dominant: these are permanent, synthesizing, and mediating organizations.

Permanent organizations tend to develop into transcendent institutions in relation to the struggling multitude. They tend to develop a formal or informal hierarchy and to disempower the multitude: power is alienated from its active form within the multitude and instituted within the organization. This transforms the active multitude into a passive mass. The hierarchical constitution of power-relations removes decision from the moment—the immanence— of its necessity. The practical consequences of such an organization is that the active powers of those involved in the struggle are stifled by the organization. Decisions that should be made by those involved in an action are deferred to the organization; and, permanent organizations tend to make decisions based not on the necessity of a specific goal or action, but on the needs of that organization, especially its preservation. The organization becomes an end in itself.

As an organization moves towards permanence and comes to stand above the multitude, the organizer appears, often claiming to have created the struggle, and begins to speak for the mass. It is the job of the organizer to transform the multitude into a controllable mass and to represent that mass to the media. Organizers rarely views themselves as part of the multitude; they stand outside of it, transcendent to it, and talk of 'reaching out to the community,' 'awakening the masses,' and 'building the organization and movement' as if insurrection was a game of numbers. Thus, as outsiders, they don't see it as their task to act, to do actions, but to propagandize and organize, for it is the masses that act.

Their worst fear is alienating the 'real masses' thus image becomes all-important. After Seattle many organizers were worried about the effect that property destruction would have on the image of the movement, and went to great lengths to distance themselves from the perpetrators of such acts. Direct Action Network went to the extreme of not offering legal aid to those charged with felonies during the Seattle protests. Seemingly, they subscribe to Napoleonic law in which the accused are presumed guilty, not innocent. Again, their image was at stake. Later, in L.A., the August collective asked D.A.N. if they could use its space for the L.A. anarchist conference. D.A.N. declined explaining that anarchists in general were too white and too male, and this would affect D.A.N.'s ability to reach out to the community. In other words, they wanted to appear to be in touch with the community, and anarchists would hurt their image.

For the organizer, who takes as his/her motto 'only that which appears in the media exists,' concrete action always takes a back seat to the maintenance of media image. The goal of such image maintenance is never to attack a specific transcendent institution, but to affect public opinion, forever build the movement or, even worse, the organization. The organizer must always worry about how the actions of others will reflect on the movement; they must, therefore, both

attempt to discipline the struggling multitude and try to control how the movement is represented in the media. Image replaces action for the permanent organization and the organizer who operates within the society of the spectacle.

The attempt to control the vast image and opinion-making factories of our society is a losing battle, as if we could ever try to match the quantity of images put forward by the media or get them to 'tell the truth.' To come to a better understanding of the problems involved in such a battle and how the 'organizer' operates, we need to first better comprehend how 'opinion' functions in society. On a basic level, we need to ask, what is opinion? An opinion is not something first found among the public in general and then, afterwards, replayed through the media, as a simple reporting of the public opinion. An opinion exists in the media first; it is produced by the media not the multitude. Secondly, the media then reproduces the opinion a million times over linking the opinion up to a certain type of person (conservatives think x, liberals think y). Thirdly, as Alfredo Bonanno points out, "[An opinion] is a flattened idea, an idea that has been uniformed in order to make it acceptable to the largest number of people. Opinions are massified ideas." Public opinion is produced as a series of simple choices or solutions ('I'm for globalization and free trade,' or 'I'm for more national control and protectionism'). We are all supposed to choose—as we choose our leaders or our burgers—instead of think for ourselves. It is obvious, therefore, that anarchists cannot use the opinion-making factory to create counter-opinions, and hopefully anarchists would never want to operate on the level of opinion even if we could somehow exert control over the content spewed out of the factory gates. Anyhow, the anarchist ethic could never be communicated in the form of opinion, it would die once massified. However, it is exactly on the level of opinion that the organizer works, for opinion and image-maintenance are the very tools of power, tools used to shape and discipline a multitude into a controllable mass.

'The Party' is a permanent organization that attempts to synthesize all struggle into one controllable organization; in doing so, it cuts the multitude off from its active power and closes the door to insurrection. For the Party, the struggle is always in the future, at some mythical time; the present is for political work, for recruiting and disciplining party members. Commenting on Prague, the Communist Party of Great Britain noted that the most positive event in the latest Global Day of Action wasn't the action, but the fact that they sold or distributed 2,100 issues of the Weekly Worker and passed out 5,000 leaflets (what they call political work). Meanwhile the International Socialist Organization (the SWP) concentrated on image at the expense of action: they claimed they would bring 2500 people but brought less than 1000 and switched from an agreed upon position within the structure of the direct action damaging its success. But, of course, the ISO had other priorities than the action itself; they were present in order to recruit new members for the future, a future that their actions ensure will never come. As such, their decision wasn't adequate to the necessity of the moment; decision had been removed from the immanence within a multitude and brought into a transcendent institution. The ISO left a key intersection open and a few hundred anarchists, who could make decisions within the moment itself, covered the intersection as best they could. Transcendent organizations, such as permanent organizations and mediating organizations, by their very logic, will always forgo action and close the potential for insurrection. But transcendent organizations, such as 'the Party,' while they can stifle action, can never contain the desires and power of the multitude; they are always doomed to failure.

But, as anarchists, who refuse such a vanguard, transcendent position, we are part of the multitude, we are within it, we are immanent to it. We are exploited as the multitude is; we are excluded as the multitude is. While on the one hand the anarchist ethic is always a critical ethic that denounces transcendent institutions and morality, it is also always a constructive ethic that leads towards the building of new social relations and new forms of active power. As a minority within the struggling multitude, we choose a form of organization that follows both the logic of our position within the movement of the exploited and the anarchist ethic of immanently organized social relations—relations that are self-organized instead of organized by a transcendent institution (such as the state, the church, or the party) which stands outside the multitude. We must organize ourselves in a manner that won't tend towards permanence and hierarchy, which won't come to stand above the multitude, and chooses self-activity over image and representation. We must develop forms of organization that open to the potential for insurrection and move the struggle in that direction, instead of always shifting that potential further into the future.

Informal organization

What type of organization allows decision to occur in the moment of its necessity? We call organization that lacks the formality and authority which separate organizers and organized, informal organization. In this section, we are specifically discussing the organization of social struggle. We will discuss some general principles that have grown out of practice. Just as some small-scale societies lack formal impersonal institutions, informal organization lacks offices and hierarchical positions. Because the organizer's nature is to plan and control s/he often privileges the perpetuation

of the organization over other goals. Informal organizations dissolve when their goal is achieved or abandoned, they do not perpetuate themselves merely for the sake of the organization if the goals that caused people to organize have ceased to exist. The passage from informal to formal or permanent organization is analogous to the moment when a small-scale society creates impersonal institutions; it is a moment in which the group's power is alienated and placed outside of it.

Informal organization is a means for affinity groups to coordinate efforts when necessary. We must always remember that many things can be done easier with an affinity group or individual, in these cases higher levels of organization just makes the decision making process cumbersome, it stifles us. *The smallest amount of organization necessary* to achieve ones aims is always the best to maximize our active powers.

Informal organization must be based on an ethic of autonomous action; autonomy is necessary to prevent our active powers from becoming alienated, to prevent the formation of relations of authority. Autonomy is refusing to obey or give orders, which are always shouted from above or beyond the situation. Autonomy allows decision to occur in and during the situation of its necessity, instead of being predetermined or delayed by the decision of a committee or meeting. Organizational platforms impose a formality in the decision making process that inhibits autonomy. This does not mean to say however that we shouldn't think strategically about the future and make agreements or plans. On the contrary, plans and agreements are useful and important. What we are emphasizing is a flexibility that allows people to discard plans when they become useless. Plans should be adaptable to events as they unfold. It can be dangerous during a demonstration or action to hesitate to change plans when events take an unexpected turn, because one's group had originally planned otherwise. Since autonomy is born out of an ethic that rejects the blocking of active powers, it therefore implies a refusal to block the actions of others with an important exception. When others try to impede our action, we will not just sit by and let them. Examples of this include, those who tried to physically stop protestors from breaking windows in Seattle, those who take photos of illegal actions, those who unmask people who choose to be masked for security reasons, and those who mark protestors with paint to be identified later by the police. These people not only refuse to respect the autonomy of others' action, but take this to an extreme by trying to place those they disagree with in the hands of the police, enemies who have the power to take away years of our lives. We have no choice but to defend ourselves. The point where autonomy ends is the point where alienated power is formed, where our only weapon, our power to act is taken from us.

Just as an informal organization must have an ethic of autonomy or it will be transformed into an authoritarian organization, in order to avoid the alienation of our active powers, it must also have an ethic of no compromise with respect the organization's agreed goal. The organization's goal should be either achieved or abandoned. Compromising with those who we oppose (e.g.; such as the State or a corporation) defeats all true opposition, it replaces our power to act with that of our enemies. Since Seattle, global financial and trade organizations have been calling for dialogue. To get us to bargain with them they have tried to look sympathetic and concerned. During the protests in Prague in September, a World Bank representative said: "We sympathize with the questions the protestors are proposing but we disagree with their methods. We think they're going about this in the wrong way. We want dialogue not force." Another World Bank representative said: "These are important meetings, about ending AIDS and poverty; what we want is dialogue not diatribes." The fact that the World Bank wants dialogue is a measure of our success in the streets. They hope we will choose dialogue over direct action, because they know that dialogue with them would be ineffective, that they would never really concede to our demands. They can listen to us, politely respond, even make minor adjustments, but they all eventually go home to a gated community of oblivion and have a martini. This is why they want to channel the force of our direct action into appeals, petitions and attempts to manipulate the mainstream media. The World Bank recognizes the power of our direct action and is taking counter measures; it is trying to convince us to use ineffective methods.

The scraps handed down to appease and divert us by those we oppose must be refused. Compromise with any transcendent institution (the State, WTO, WB, IMF, the Party etc.) is always the alienation of our power to the very institutions we supposedly wish to destroy; this sort of compromise results in the forfeiture of our power to act decisively, to make decisions and actions in the time we choose. As such, compromise only makes the state and capital stronger.

For those who wish to open the possibility of insurrection, those who don't wish to wait for the supposedly appropriate material conditions for revolution, for those who don't want a revolution which is merely the creation of a new power structure but want the destruction of all structures which alienate out power from us, such compromise is contrary to their aims. To continually refuse to compromise is to be in perpetual conflict with the established order and its structures of domination and deprivation. Permanent conflictuality means that we will not wait for orders from

leaders or organizers who, by nature of their role, aim to control our rebellion and thus alienate our active powers. Permanent conflictuality is uncontrollable autonomous action.

Informal organizations may be composed of affinity groups with quite different political perspectives from each other. The disparate perspectives that may be found in an informal organization would not tend to be found within the affinity group. The affinity group would be based on a commonality of perspective that wouldn't necessarily exist in a larger group. Some people wish to open the possibility for insurrection, while others are only concerned with an immediate goal. There is no reason why those who share an immediate practical aim but diverge in their long-term goals might not come together. For example, an anti-genetic engineering group could form and decide to coordinate the tearing up test crops if there are many plots in an area and to circulate anti-GE leaflets. (In cases of sabotage, the fewer the people who know the better, information should only be shared between affinity groups when there is a reason to coordinate efforts, for example, when it is desirable for several affinity groups to hit several targets in one night.) In this case those who want an insurrectionary rupture with this social order and those who merely hate genetic engineering could easily work together towards this immediate goal. For those who wish to open the possibility of insurrection, such cooperation will not close the door on their dreams. Informal organization, with its ethics of autonomy and no compromise, does not control struggle; and, uncontrollability opens the possibility for an insurrectionary rupture with this necrophilic social order.

In the above case, we're assuming that all involved uphold an anti-authoritarian ethic that respects autonomy of action. Because authority can arise in any group, some anarchists feel safer if they only interact with other anarchists, thus avoiding authoritarians. But it is not the label anarchist that annihilates authority but an ongoing struggle with all those one interacts with. Every new situation and relation we enter poses the possibility for the rise of authority. Just as Clastres noted a 'Society against the State' other anthropologists who have lived in small-scale societies have noted a process of assertive egalitarianism, an active tendency to squelch attempts at creating roles of authority, or economic inequality. In an informal organization, we need to assertively counter the formation of authoritarian relations. The difficulty of this problem cannot be avoided by staying in an anarchist ghetto.

Anarchists could be a force that helps the anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian currents within the anti-globalization movement spread further. This could be achieved by opening up discussion between anarchists and other anti-capitalist groups, and between anti-capitalists and anti-corporate/anti-globalization groups. This discussion would in some cases lead to links of cooperation and solidarity. When we discuss the importance of links between struggles or the spread of struggle we are not talking about a growth in numbers of an organization or movement. The type of organization that we have been discussing is not composed of people who aim to increase its numbers at the sacrifice of the quality of the relationships of those who come together; the spark of rebellion cannot be quantified. Informal organization is a means for discussion between diverse individuals and groups to become focused action. Informal organizations, affinity groups and individuals have already given birth to many projects, some of which aim to increase communication and sharing such as gatherings, the creation of social spaces like info-shops, and publications, these projects are crucial when capitalism constantly puts up walls to separate us. Others have focused on the urgent task of directly attacking the existent social order.

"Make our struggle as transnational as capital."

This slogan is very compelling and has become the most common slogan heard within the anti-globalization movement. But how do we make our struggle as transnational as capital? This brings up some difficult problems for anti-authoritarians. How can a transnational struggle against capital and the state occur without creating an overarching massive authoritarian structure? How can struggle against a common enemy, capital, remain focused yet disparate, local and global? Transnational struggle, in reality, means struggle on many scalar levels. It also demands the development of many practices that allow us to work together and, at the same time, ward off the growth of transcendent institutions in our midst. Operating on many scalar levels will create tensions within the movement, and there is no simple solution that resolves such tensions. Yet, attempting to operate on a single scalar level, such as the national scale or the building of a massive international organization, dooms our movement to failure; nor can we build a local cocoon to hibernate in. Waiting only brings us defeat.

Capitalism is a very adaptable force; it has managed to embed itself in innumerable social and cultural realities. Capitalism operates from above and below; it imposes itself through the coercion of deprivation and then embeds itself in social relations. There is one capitalism, it operates as a system, yet it functions in millions of particular local ways. Any fight against it must destroy both the transcendent institutions that impose it from above (the state, companies, etc.) and transform the relations that sustain it from below. If the structures of domination and deprivation which

uphold capitalism, and the capitalist social relations that have penetrated nearly every facet of our daily lives are to be destroyed, this destruction must spring from the desire of the multitude. The desire to destroy capitalism is the spark which must arise in many localities and spread throughout the globe, in order for our struggle to become as transnational as capital.

There is no longer anywhere to hide. If we destroy the state and capital in one place, leaving the industrial military regime in the hands of our enemies, our little utopia will soon be crushed. Likewise if we try to isolate ourselves, as Hakim Bey so poetically suggests in T.A.Z., to create a self-sufficient autonomous zone free from capital, we cannot succeed. It is of course very important to create spaces for ourselves where we can breathe freely; where we can act and think without the immediate strait jacket of capitalist relations and roles, without the 9–5 production-consumption grind. But if we stop there we run into a problem, capitalism surrounds us. The squat is evicted, the self-sufficient rural community is surrounded by towns, or logging moves in until the only trees left are on ones land. One can no longer be completely outside of capitalism; it is a social disease that has touched all societies. This is not to say that it has fully penetrated them all, the few Penan of Borneo that remain in the forest do still share a social life that is in stark contrast to capitalist relations. But they are fighting for their lives and there is not much forest left. We must understand that just as a genetically modified test crop will spread into nearby fields, capitalism is a pest which seeks to take over everything it touches; it cannot be contained without being destroyed as a whole.

Many anarchists in the anti-globalization movement operate on the scale of the nation-state, imagining that Clastres' "Society Against the State" could be rearticulated as the "State Against Capital"; they seem to understand capital as becoming pure and separating itself from the state. And as an index of current pessimism the state is imagined as protecting culture against global capitalism. As we argued in our section on value, however, there can be no capitalism without transcendent institutions, such as the state, to back up its private property system. The state, in some form, is the condition of possibility of capitalism, that which is necessary for capitalism to go on existing. Thus capitalism can never free itself from the state and continue to reproduce itself. Of course, the transcendent institutions that allow for the reproduction of capitalism are constantly transforming themselves; they are not static.

As the scale of the state-capital relation changes so too must the organization of resistance and attack; yet, any argument that we need to compromise and even ally ourselves with older transcendent institutions such as the nation-state are sorely misguided. Any compromise with alienated power can only cut us off from our power to transform society and our power to create the life of our desires to the best of our abilities. Thinking about the issue of the scale of resistance, about how to bring the concept of a transnational resistance to and attack on capital into practice, demands a much more careful analysis.

1. When people start thinking on global terms there is sometimes a tendency to assume that the only way for a struggle to be global is to function like a state or corporation, to try to synthesize all struggle within one international organization, and thus unify practice through this organization. This is undesirable from an anti-authoritarian point of view, yet it is also impractical. How could one possibly bring all struggle under one organization, without first suppressing many local struggles. A large organization of this sort by nature separates decision from the needs of the exploited, it makes them wait to act until the moment which is most advantageous to the organization. Large organizations that bring together many social struggles often think only in abstract terms about capital. It thus becomes necessary to wait to act until the appropriate material conditions arise, for a crisis to arise in capitalism as a whole. Such thinking is blind to the multifarious local motivations for revolt.

   Transcendent organizations can only command revolt; in doing so they try to deprive revolt of its impetus, the immanent desire of the multitude. It is this desire that is the spark of insurrection; only it can transform the whole of social life. No individual, affinity group, or organization can command insurrection; insurrection is by nature uncontrollable. Those who dream of an insurrection cannot just will it into existence, they can only open up the possibility for its unfolding through direct attacks on this social order, actions which can communicate and spread throughout the social body.

2. Capital can never be attacked in the abstract, it can only be attacked in its concrete manifestations; attack is always local but it can communicate globally. Local attacks can inspire people elsewhere—who have a common enemy—to take action. The points at which people perceive the commonality of an enemy vary widely, from a specific company, specific law or politician, to capitalism or the state as a whole. Actions and the publicizing of actions via communiqués and our media are opportunities for people to see the commonality between the oppressed in a faraway place and themselves. In this lies an opportunity for people to take their analysis one step further, and become critical of capitalism as a totality.

Recently in North America, environmentalists have been more successful than workers in letting local struggle communicate the global scale of capital. The environmental direct action movement is spreading quickly all over the continent, with very little organization at all. The ELF is not an organization, anyone can sign the name ELF (though those who started it request that those who sign the name meet certain criteria of perspective and goal). Yet, ELF actions have spread widely without the support of an organization, ELF actions occur because people are angry that the earth is being trashed, this ire spreads more effectively than would a permanent organization with its committees and paper selling. Not all people who engage in such acts of sabotage use the name ELF, there are innumerable other examples, the tearing up of genetically engineered test crops which has spread over several continents is the most well known example. In these cases, the local act of sabotage communicates a global enemy the capitalist industrial machine that is polluting our planet.

3. The recent upsurge of the global days of action offers an opportunity for specific actions to communicate and build links globally. But we need to ask what exactly is the nature of the opportunity that the global days of action offer anarchists? While the targets chosen, the international institutions of capitalism, do help to communicate an opposition to capitalism in general, perhaps the greatest opportunity these global days of action offer is the potential to link-up particular, local actions that attack specific targets with a general opposition to capitalism. In other words, the fact of the simultaneity of actions on a particular date may be more important than the spectacular shutting down of a huge meeting. By skipping the big event and instead doing smaller, local actions, anarchists can communicate the local consequences of the ever expanding capitalist death-machine. By the very simultaneity of many actions connections between regions and struggles are built. We are not saying that our actions should be determined by the dates set by the institutions of global capitalism nor should one only conduct actions on such dates, but we also should not ignore the historical opportunities offered by the growth of the global days of action. To be effective such actions should be part of an ongoing struggle. Doing actions locally also has the potential to involve others who may not understand how the big events of the global days of action—the attacks on institutions such as the WTO, the WB, and the IMF—are connected to their lives. Doing local actions on the dates of the global days of action is one important way to intensify such struggles.

4. The final—and possibly most important—key to an active, transnational attack on capital and the state is developing the practice of a critical and revolutionary solidarity. When we are critical of those who share our aims, critical solidarity is a way for disagreements over strategy, tactics and organization to be aired and discussed without trying to block each other's actions. If we continually block the actions of others no action will take place. Notably, since Seattle previously fierce theoretical divisions have taken on less importance. This was particularly clear in the call for a Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Block at the A16 Washington protest, which was a significant call for solidarity and joint action by all who consider themselves to be anti-capitalist revolutionaries. There has been a lot more activity on many levels since Seattle, people who didn't go have been inspired by the stories of those who did, suddenly now that there is plenty to do, theoretical divisions give way to concerns of practical importance. As a minority within the movement of the exploited, anarchists must find ways to work and interact with those with whom they disagree. At the same time this doesn't mean that disagreements are hidden. It is important that the concept of critical solidarity be understood widely, for all too often a critical attitude is taken to mean a lack of support. We can be critical of the Zapatistas while we act in solidarity with the struggle of the excluded in Chiapas against the Mexican State and the imposition of neo-liberal economics. It is always more important to act in solidarity with people's decision to create their own lives, than to agree with their theoretical perspective or the tactics they choose. It is the solidarity with the becoming-active and the refusal of the alienation of power that is most vital. As Nikos Mazotis said at his trial, "For me, solidarity means the unreserved acceptance and support with every means of the right that the people must have to determine their lives as they wish, not letting others decide in their place, like the State and Capital do."

Along with a critical solidarity that is always open to the autonomous action of others, we need to build revolutionary solidarity. Revolutionary solidarity should be active and in conflict with the structures of domination. Revolutionary solidarity allows us to move far beyond the "send-a-check" style of solidarity that so pervades the left as well as solidarity that relies on petitioning the state for relief or mercy. One example of revolutionary solidarity was Nikos Mazotis' action against TVX Gold in December 1997. Many people in the villages around Strymonikos in Northern Greece were struggling against the installation of a gold metallurgy plant in their area. In solidarity with the villagers, Nikos placed a bomb in the Ministry of Industry of Development that was intended to explode when no one was in the building; unfortunately, it never went off at all. Nikos is now serving

a 15-year prison sentence (reduced to five and a half years; he is due out this year). TVX Gold is a multinational company whose headquarters is in Canada, there are thus many points at which revolutionary solidarity with the villagers of Stryminikos could have been enacted. Fundraising on behalf of one's comrades is necessary and surely appreciated, but this could be combined with more active forms of solidarity with those who struggle against our common enemies. Revolutionary solidarity communicates the link between the exploitation and repression of others and our own fate; and, it shows people the points at which capitalism or the state operate in similar ways in very different places. By creating links between the struggles against the transcendent power structures that form the State and Capital, revolutionary solidarity has the potential to take our local struggles to a global level. Solidarity is when you recognize your own struggle in the struggle of others. Revolutionary solidarity is solidarity with the becoming-active of others and therefore with their refusal to accept the alienation of their own power. Moreover, revolutionary solidarity is always an active attack; it always involves the recovery of our own active powers that multiply in combination—in solidarity—with the active powers of others.

Conclusion

In this article we have argued that anarchism is a practice that is always in tension with the constituted order. The common thread of anarchist practice is the refusal of a *transcendent, constituted order*, the demand that decisions be made by those involved in a situation. Anarchism is an attack on all that separates us from our active powers; anarchism is the desire that animates our refusal to allow the alienation of our power. Thus the practice of anarchism is an ethic. The practices that we have sketched in the above essay have been developed by anarchists within the struggle of the excluded, and, as such, they constitute a continuation of the society against the state.

In order to remain vital, however, anarchism must avoid the constitution of transcendent power-relations within its midst. For such relations would both void the effectiveness of our attack and lead to the defeat of self-constituted social relations. Informal organization is a means for anarchists to combine with others of the exploited multitude without forming transcendent institutions. The practice of the anarchist ethic within the wider struggle will both allow people to remain active in their attack and bring into existence new, immanently created ways of living and relating. Through the very practice of informal organization, the anarchist ethic can spread further within the anti-globalization movement. Within the wider movement of the exploited and excluded, the movement—however coherent—to reclaim the power to create our own social relations beyond measure, anarchists are thus in a position to deepen the struggle against capital and the state.

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YaBasta: Police Dressed in White Overalls

There has been much talk about the Italian group YaBasta—and even imitations!—in anarchist circles. And while it should be clear to anyone paying attention that YaBasta (a.k.a. 'Movement in White Overalls') isn't an anarchist organization, the problems with YaBasta go much deeper. Not only do YaBasta openly dialogue and work with the State (including supporting and running candidates in elections), but they even collude with the State to suppress anarchists and anarchist projects. Yet it is not only YaBasta as a particular organization that anarchists should be wary of, but as a method of organization and a model of struggle—the focus of most anarchists' acritical jubilation—YaBasta is highly problematic. They have explicitly moved away from conflictual action towards mediated, public spectacles (often arranged with the police in advance). Thus we include the article below to clarify where YaBasta stands in relation to the State, anarchists, and social revolution. But don't take our word for it, look at the quotes from Ya Basta themselves at the end of the article. (KKA)

Unmask simulations in white overalls

The birth of the so-called 'movement in white overalls' traces back to 1998, when the social centers referring to the 'Charter of Milan' decided to break away—in their image as well—from the rest of the antagonist movement that didn't adopt the political positions expressed in that document.

The 'Charter of Milan' welled up in an assembly held in that town on September 19, 1998, at Leoncavallo social Center. It appears to be the converging point of various paths within the area of social centres, such as Leoncavallo, the 'melting' of social centers in North-East Italy (Padua, Venice-Mestre, etc) and some in Rome (Corto Circuito, Forte Prenestino). Later on centres of Liguria and Marche also followed in.

The paths followed weren't on the whole homogeneous, but had been rowing in the former period around the tendency marked by militants seeking re-definition and a new political role; the practice was carried out through connections with the institutional 'left' as well as with sectors of volunteer associations, Catholic ones in particular. At the same time negotiations had been undertaken with mayors—right wing ones as well—to obtain political recognition, and legalise squatted centres with the claim that they were offering public services and entertainment, organised through social cooperatives, tied to the 'non-profit' sector.

In Mestre (Venice) in particular, negotiations resulted in the town-council purchasing the squatted centre 'Rivolta'—formerly a factory —at the approximate cost of 1 million dollars paid with public funds, favoured by Benetton's economic group, followed by legalisation. Such a political 'turn'—applauded by both the left-wing press and TV—was then presented as the consequence of a theoretical revision assuming that the period of class struggle and communist subversion had expired, recognising a not well defined 'civil society' as a new interlocutor, and pointing out as a strategic goal a 'conflictual reform of welfare' through the claiming of universal rights, in the first place 'citizen's review'.

In order to support these views, the social centres of the Milan Charter discovered a queer federalism: municipalism and self-government were no longer seen as radical alternatives for social self-organisation, but rather as a 'new' model of democratic participation and political representation within institutions such as local administrations. Thus Leoncavallo ended up supporting a Christian Democrat like Martinazzoli running to be elected mayor of Milan. While peeping from behind the flag of neo-zapatism, the next step was participation of members of this area in local elections in the ranks of the Green Party or Rifondazione Comunista with an attitude expressing all but opposition to the centre-left governments. Luca Casarini, a spokesman (but really leader) of the White Overalls was assigned as advisor of Livia Turco, minister of Social Affairs whose name is bound to the law that introduced concentration 'kamps' for paperless or non-legalised immigrants, waiting for expulsion. Since 1998, as a consequence of this 'new' political course, a deep rupture has taken place within the antagonist movement, with on the one side White Overalls more and more involved in institutional and social-democratic context; on the other, social centres, squats and experiences of social and syndicalist self-organisation that keep their points of reference in 'Autonomia di Classe' or the variegated expressions of anarchism ranging from squatters to the anarchist Federation (FAI). During street demonstrations, one item occurred

to worsen fractures—so-called 'civil disobedience'. On more than one occasion it appeared plainly that some clashes between White Overalls and police had been agreed beforehand, as denounced in the daily paper 'il Manifesto' (Feb, 1, 2000) in an article by Livio Quagliata entitled 'Urban guerilla? But please!'. Moreover, on several occasions and in different places (Bologna, Aviano, Treviso, Trieste, Venice, Rovigo) White Overalls have been responsible for physical aggression, threats and informing against autonomists, anarchists, revolutionary communists and other sections of the movement for self-organisation who reject political hegemony that White Overalls claim to impose on the entire opposition movement, with the complicity of the media.

Sandra K.

Statements and Interviews

'The State is no longer the enemy to throw down, but the counterpart with whom we have to discuss things.' (Interview of Luca Casarini, leader of the White Overalls, supplement of the daily il Gazzettino, 23 April 1998)

'…Excuse us, comrades, but for us your intransigence regarding principles and the refusal of any mediation with the instutions are more bound to anarchist thinking and populist maximalism, like that of the former left wing organization Lotta Continua, than to our political formation of activists. There is nothing wrong with it, just clear up the question. Do allow us just to observe that the neo-anarchist propagandists of direct action and the fundamentalist and orthodox neocommunists have in common the same extremism in pseudo-revolutionary language.' (taken from the declaration 'Camminiamo interrogandoci', written by Radio Sherwood, responding at the Movimento Antagonista Toscana, October 1996).

'In the social centres in the North East part of the country, we have produced new cadres, serious people like Luca Casarini. They are ours or aren't they!? Now some social centres are orienting themselves as independent enterprises. They have Cacciari (the Mayor of Venice) as an intelligent interlocutor, and are thinking as a democratic lobby'. (Interview of Fausto Bertinotti, secretary of Rifondazione Comunista, in il Manifesto of 16 July 1998).

'They day they cease to call us 'autonomi' will be a feast [..]

Ideology has been outrun'. (Interview of Max Gallob, spokesman of the social centre Pedro in Padova in the daily Il Gazzettino of 15 March 2000).

'At Davos we have, along with Josef Bove, the leader of the French farmers, taken the megaphone inviting to isolate those who were breaking windows. We succeeded, with the help of the youngsters of the social centres of Mestre […] I did meet the boys of the social centres of Mestre and Padova who were taken by Manconi (ex-secretary of the Green Party). I spoke with them, I told them that at the first violent action they would be chased away; after that I listened to their reasoning. As a matter of fact in Davos they stood at our side, they didn't throw any molotovs. (Interview of Grazia Francescato, parliamentary and leader of the Green Party, in the daily Corriere della Sera of 25 May 2000).

'In the antique shop we find the remains of revolutionary traditions that passed by in the history of the XXth century: the communist one, the anarchist, the workerist and other ones. Let's look at them, disillusioned because of what they are: fragments of a time passed by that, with all their splendor and misery, victories and defeats, can't return any more, can't be reconstructed' (from a statement on line by Radio Sherwood, spring 2000).

Some of our Reflections on the Days in Genoa.

The heated comments about the events report (above all, obviously coming from the institutional press) the accusations from the heads of the organizations present in Genoa that speak, almost unanimously, of provocateurs in combat with the police (thoroughly filmed and photographed), or, in a minority of cases, of hooligans let loose to agitate, who played games with the police giving them an opportunity to attack the bulk of the peaceful demonstration.

The first observation that one can make is that these accusations have been methodically repeated for 25 years every time a street demonstration escapes the control of its presumed political organizers. We hear that there are always hot heads, comrades that blunder, people that 'fall into provocations' (by fascists or police), or, in the most scandalous cases, infiltrators.

This is the only justification of those who try to manage and use the wills of the protest of thousands of people in arguments that touch everyone, in direct and indirect ways. There are thousands of reasons for protesting: a meeting of powers, the most powerful in the West, protected by thousands of men fully armed, the same men who in the first instance, everyday, everywhere, apply the decisions of the powerful.

The G8 is nothing. Nothing is decided there. But it is a symbol. And symbolically there were those who wanted to protest against them. In diverse ways and terms.

And at this point it is necessary to understand its terms. To contest democratically (in the accepted meaning of the so called organizers and exponents of 'civil society', this means without offending, without doing damage, without defending oneself) also means to understand—just as those same powers have remarked through their spokespeople—that these powers represent nations in which democracy reigns, that they have been democratically elected, and that they therefore represent all those who accept voting and accept the terms of democratic management, being governed from this or that ordering politics. It is a system that doesn't leave grey areas: one accepts it or one doesn't. In this sense, those who thought of protesting democratically were practically demonstrating only the disappointment of an institutional minority about the decisions of the government that they themselves have legitimized by voting. We understand: even if there were a million people, they would have been democratically considered a minority. The electorate decided otherwise, they voted for others, and those elected democratically decide for everyone. Diverse millions of people have elected these powerful. The others continue to try. Scratch scratch maybe one time it'll be your turn to command.

What is the use of a demonstration of a minority? To let off steam, to show that we do not agree, to try to put pressure on our governors to make more just decisions… maybe because we must do it?

But when we are in the streets, even for the second, the third, the hundredth time, after years of bearing limitations, oppression, injustice, repression, violence, imposed by decisions on high, something else happens. It happens that we remember the anger of when we suffer wrongs, how it is impossible to manage one's own life because in each of its aspects we are limited and repressed by a system that has fabricated predefined platforms from which is impossible to escape. We understand how it may not even be possible to know who is responsible for that which befalls us. Our employers are not responsible—if it wasn't for them we wouldn't eat; it's not those who make us pay taxes (now they take them directly out of the wages, that way it is less painful); it is not he who fines us, in the end he's just doing his job; it isn't he who teaches us how to behave from the time we're children—we should have common customs—and afterwards if there are those who don't do these things, patience and endurance; it is not he who governs us, in the end they merely act as the expression of the majority of us; it is not he who beats and arrests us—someone has to do it—and then it is not with force that the divisions that keep some 'below' are created…

In this way, when in everyday life we understand that things don't work, no one is ever at fault, no one is responsible, they all have a justification, and it is not possible to do anything, if you don't beg, vote and ask for a few more crumbs (for some more money…). For the great collective questions, no one is responsible: pollution, hunger, disease, wars, we no longer find those who are responsible. And we are left there to wring our hands, impotent. There is she who has come down to the street with these long since rationalized feelings, who has felt them emerge during hours in the street. And so many have vented their anger, have exploded, understanding how, in these demonstrations, we have nothing else to do.

The fact is there was no other sensible way to behave when faced with 8 powers that decide for everyone and surround us with thousands of armed men. And he who has seen the endemic violence of the institutional demonstration, of its blocks, its walls, its divisions, even before direct violence, knows that the responsibility is that of the State and its protectors, independent of provocateurs. Their very existence is a provocation, a menace.

When we protest against those who govern the world, we cannot use measured means. The system wants someone (or some people) to govern everyone, and the individual can do nothing. And in these days thousands of individuals, not only a fews anarchists (given that we want anything but jumping on the bandwagon), have expressed and have lived their own anger without mediation. They know—the organizers, the mediators, the institutional politicians—that no one, neither us, nor them, nor anyone in the streets yesterday or in the future, can govern protest, can restrain the fury of those who are constrained every day to live under the aegis of the State, of laws, of justice.

They—the so called pacifists, social democrats, and reformists—cannot do anything but retrace the systems and methods of those they say they are contesting: hierarchical and specialist organizations, delegation, representation, control, censure, repression. Power against power.

They disappear.

Or they resign themselves to organizing trips for bored alternative-antagonistic tourists, even to exotic and far destinations, that don't touch them closely in their daily lives.

Some general critical notes: the danger of these demonstrations is that even the most determined and sincere subside when it is only on these occasions that one can express oneself, that is, only when there are mass situations, when the satisfaction of agitating is shared by many, and when these actions are disseminated by the media: the dangers therefore are the renunciation of projectuality and self satisfaction.

On the contrary, that which is materially extremely dangerous is the spreading of film, video and photographic cameras everywhere, even in our own ranks. The instrument most useful by repression for control is the identification and repression of individuals. It is necessary to eliminate first of all amongst ourselves, this practice, this stupid and useless habit of filming and photographing. Representation, the spectacle of reality cannot do other than deviate our actions.

El Paso, Sunday July 22, 2001

An Open Letter to Those Involved in the Black Block

The anti-globalization movement has brought with it an increase in public confrontations with those in power. Of course anarchists have been there. One of the tactics anarchists have used in these situations is that of the black bloc. I am not interested in going into a thorough discussion of the effectiveness of this tactic or discussing its merits as an anarchist practice. Rather I want to deal with a somewhat troubling recent developmentthat has made its appearance in discussions about the black bloc. In the Summer/September 2001 issue of Barricada and in the October 2001 issue of Tute Nere there are articles discussing the tactics of the black bloc. This is certainly not surprising, nor is it uncalled for after two years of regular summit demonstrations as well as other demonstrations in which black bloc participants were involved. What bothers me is the direction in which the examination of the black bloc has gone.

It has been said over and over again that the black bloc is not an organization, but a tactic. The organizational framework in which it has operated has been the affinity group (or at least, the small group of friends—each such groupcan decide for itselfto what extentto which it has made a determined effort to achieve true and deep affinity). The purpose for wearing black has been anonymity and a visual expression of solidarity, not the formation of an anarchist army. I am convinced that this informality has been the real strength of this tactic, providing flexibility and leaving real choice of action in the hands of individuals in relation with others of their choosing. The tactical organization here reflects the aim of a world without delegation or hierarchy, a world where the separation between decision and action has disappeared, at least to some extent.

But the extent to which the black bloc was developed and in which it has been used is that of mass demonstrations, often involving attacks against the symbols of the State and capitalism and pitched battles with the police. It was, of course, inevitable thatsome would start to raise the question of how to better coordinate black bloc activities. Unfortunately, this question has been raised without first dealing with more fundamental questions which would affect it and which I feel should not be ignored or given second place by those seeking to develop a specifically anarchist revolutionary practice. I would assume that very few if any anarchists would say that the defeat of the policein street battles is the central aim of anarchist struggle. Nor, for that matter, is the destruction of as much capitalist property as possible (as enjoyable and potentially useful as such destruction may be). Rather these are specific moments in the struggle that can certainly serve important purposes but that need to reflect the greater aim of an anarchist insurrectional project.

Yet in the articles in Tute Nere and Barricada, the questions raised are purely strategic questions of immediate effectiveness. The greater question of what it is we are really struggling for is lost. And so the solutions brought up involve an increasing centralization and militarization of the black bloc, an embrace of 'tactical' delegation and hierarchy. The writer of 'The Communique on Tactics and Organization...' in Barracada even goes so far as to talk of 'elected tacvtical facilitators' and 'anarchist principles of tactical leadership' with no hint of irony. The only aim reflected is that of out-maneuvering the police during demonstrations, as if these demonstrations represented the essence of the anarchist struggle.Putting the ideas of this communique into effect would transform the black bloc from a tactic taken up by individuals with those they know and trust into a formal and basically military organization. In my opinion, this would itself constitute an immediate defeat of our anarchist aims in our own practice here and now regardless of what improvements there might be in black bloc maneuvres.

As I see it, the central aim of anarchist struggle is the subversion of existence, the reappropriation of life by each of us, as individuals, the creation of our relationships on our own terms free of all domination, all hierarchy, all delegation and every chain of command, even those which claim to be merelt tactical, and the destruction of everything that prevents or supresses these possibilities. Rather than examining our practice first and foremost on the level of tactics and strategies, of effectiveness in battle, our first priority should rather be to examine them in terms of whether they indeed reflect and are therefore capable of creating—not just in the future, but also here and now—our aims. Do they reflect in practice the principle of individuals self-determination and the collective struggle for individual realization? Military methods involving tactical leadership are founded on chains of command, that is to say on hierarchy and obedience. As such they are in contradiction with the aims of the anarchist struggle.

As I see it, the questions those involved with the black bloc need to to be asking are: how do we carry out this specific method of struggle in such a way that it reflects our aims?Can this tactic be effective as a specifically anarchist tactic in the context of demonstrations? If not, then should we maybe consider the other areas of our struggle where we can continue to fight in a way where our practice reflects our aim?

The struggle against this order is the placewhere we can most completely implement the aims of anarchy here and now. If we give ourselves over to the domination of the strategic, to the ideology of efficiency for its own sake, we have lost what is most essential—what is left of our life. Our anarchy becomes just another political program, and not the life we desire to live here and now. I reject the sad and desperate slogan, 'By any means necessary', in favour of the principle, 'Only by those means that carry it in their very practice as I carry it in my heart'.

Killing King Abacus
The Anarchist Ethic in the Age of the Anti-globalisation Movement