in multiple dimensions at once. The tendrils of the web surge forward, capturing new space, linking new bodies, and then contract, deepening the intensity of those links. Just as the visible growth of a tree needs the attendant growth of the roots, a social struggle needs moments of subterranean expansion.

In Mediterranean Barcelona, the heat of high summer makes it easy to recognize that the dog days are not moments for going on the attack or sitting through meetings, but for relaxing, exalting the body, and reflecting on recent struggles and the upcoming autumn. But the leftist obligation to produce motion often deprives us of winter. All people in struggle need a time to confront their despair, lick their wounds, and to fall back on the comforting bonds of friendship. Not realizing this animal necessity, many anarchists exhaust themselves by trying to maintain a constant rhythm, or they mistake a slowdown for a loss of strength, and they allow their gains to be washed away. But winter can be an important time to hunker down, to carry forward the projects that sustain us (and realize which those are), to test the strength of new relationships, and to sound the depth of one's community of struggle.

These rhythms are not uniform, just as one winter is never the same as the next. Some winters, people light fires in the open and stand by them until spring, as the Greek comrades did in 2008, which we tried to imitate, in a way, in 2010. Other winters, everyone retreats to their private hearths, as at the end of 2012. But was that a defeat?

After the general strike of September 2010, anarchists discovered that there was tinder everywhere. They stayed busy in their burrows and prepared another great fire before the winter was out, and the general strike of January 2011 lit the way to May Day and the plaza occupation movement. With all the activity, that summer was short, and people were beginning to tire by autumn. The fall of 2011 was not the "otoño caliente" (hot autumn) everyone was expecting, informed by the logic of geometric growth. In their shrinking neighborhood assemblies, some new spaces of encounter, and

After the Crest

The Life Cycle of Movements

CrimethInc.

2013

are really only *half-disappeared*, that they are still there, blind and invisible, listening. When we continue the conversation, banging on bank windows, taping open the gates of the metro, setting off fireworks at noise demos, the half-disappeared can hear this, and they understand it to be an invitation back into the streets. That invitation is first of all a demand that they rethink their vision of the struggle. Those who do come back, come back stronger.

And even those who never go away do not stay in the streets consistently. They are for ever coming and going, deciding whether to let their projects die or try once more to resuscitate them. We have to recognize that even those who dedicate their entire lives to the struggle must also have their seasons.

Earlier, I described the struggle in a time of social coalescence as a constantly expanding web of relationships. That expansion gave people a new pulse. It contradicted the unflagging march of alienation. But when it seemed to subside, people lost the collective heartbeat they had only just found.

They did not lose the pulse because it had disappeared, but because the expansion that gives it meaning is not quantitative. It is no mistake that the science of Capital teaches us to recognize only one form of expansion. Because we are blinded to the horizons towards which the social body expands, we lose hold of it and fall back to the flat reality of alienation. Sadly, the same magic that makes the social body stronger than the chains of the State also shakes off those who have been trained to think geometrically, as much as they would like to remain in the presence of that new and growing collectivity.

When one catches a dragon by the tail, one must never expect a smooth ride.

The intensification of relationships that goes hand in hand with the coalescence of society is never a quantitative growth. It occurs

Metamorphosis: Shifts and Seasons

If the social upheaval in Barcelona was neither recuperated nor repressed, why has it faded away? Although some important errors and weaknesses did contribute to its decline, the decline was inevitable and even healthy.

Both leftism and the rationalist worldview it stems from train us to view the world in an unrealistic way. This generates false expectations and false criteria with which to evaluate our struggles. The crux of the matter is that we are not the abstract value both Capital and the Left see in us: we are living beings with our own autonomous rhythms that constantly fly in the face of managerial strategies and social mechanics.

People took to the streets with a social democratic idea of revolution. Encouraged by pacifist assurances about "people power," by media misrepresentations of the Arab Spring or the Color Revolutions, by Hollywood fantasies like the revised ending of *V for Vendetta* which subsequently found its way into specifically cyberactivist portrayals of revolution like the one projected in *Zeitgeist 3*, they thought they could bring power to its knees simply by taking to the streets.

When this proved false, they experienced the great emotional force of disappointment. This disappointment was delayed by the initial rush of overcoming alienation in the blossoming neighborhood assemblies, or by the recurrences of the dream of people power fostered in the massive protests organized every few months out of the 15M phenomenon. But when the assemblies shrank and the protests did not bring the results they were looking for, there was nothing left to hold back the disappointment.

When people disappear, it turns out that their eyes go first, and their ears linger a while longer. We can react to their disappearance as a completed fact, concluding that the others were never really in the struggle to begin with and giving up on the conversation that had begun with them. Or we can recognize that the disappeared

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they have imprisoned people, they have inflicted permanent injuries upon several people, and they have introduced new laws and surveillance measures that constitute a serious crackdown on popular struggle.

But at every step, spreading resistance has discouraged the authorities from continuing these campaigns of repression. When they arrested a list of mostly anarchists for spitting on or assaulting politicians during the June 2011 blockade of Parliament, spontaneous solidarity protests numbering in the thousands took to the streets, covered the walls with graffiti, and rained abuse upon the police. Neighborhood assemblies took up collections for their legal costs. Even though the pacifist leadership of the 15M movement, together with the media, succeeded in demonizing the violence of blocking streets and spitting on politicians, when specific people were arrested for that violence—people whom their neighbors and other protesters had gotten to know in the neighborhood assemblies or elsewhere—the entire movement claimed them as their own. When the repression failed to isolate the bad protesters and only brought more people out into the streets, the government quickly scaled down the attention they were giving to the case and quietly left it on the back burner.

A similar thing happened with their new public snitching website, inaugurated to encourage good citizens to identify rioters from photos taken during the March 29 general strike. On the whole, anarchists responded with a clandestine mentality, assuming the reality of repression and staying low or preparing to go into hiding. Fortunately, socialist independentistes, parents, and neighborhood assemblies protested the snitching website publicly, flooding the streets in indignation or refusing to accept the criminalization of rioters. After a few weeks, the government took the website down.

radicals who bring an anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist vision. However, as labor and democracy are recuperative lenses placed on top of the fundamentally radical fields of sustenance and organization, it is probable that even if nobody employs a successful strategy of recuperation, as long as radicals do not succeed in shattering the recuperative lenses already in place, ongoing social conflicts will not be able to develop a truly revolutionary character. Nonetheless, a conflict that cannot be recuperated will continue to destabilize the State.

One of three things could happen that would make anarchists incapable of preventing ongoing attempts at recuperation. If the media, aided by anarchist arrogance, succeed in isolating anarchists from broader movements, then the unions, activist organizations, and left-wing political parties will be able to bind social struggle within a discourse of democracy, rights, and reform. If anarchists give up their conflictive attitudes out of fear of some greater evil (such as fascism, which will be discussed presently), they will not be able to expose and criticize recuperators in the movement. Finally, if they unify and become a movement with which the unions or activist formations could negotiate, they will end up legitimizing the power of would-be leaders, and they will lose the ability to interact in a fragmentive way with other sectors of the movement. A fragmentive interaction is crucial in that it allows anarchists to criticize and create relationships simultaneously, thus generating a multiplicity of forms of both criticism and relation, undermining homogeneity and discipline in non-anarchist sectors of the social movements and potentially extending fragmentation well beyond the anarchist space.

Repression has not failed for lack of effort by the police. Police harassed neighborhood assemblies occupying plazas or marching in the streets, they brutally evicted the Plaça Catalunya encampment, they arrested twenty-two people for attempting to blockade Parliament, they arrested large numbers of people after every riot including over a hundred after the March 29 general strike,

What to Do While the Dust is Settling

At the high point, it seems like it will go on forever. You feel invincible, unstoppable. Then the crash comes: court cases, disintegration, depression.

Once you go through this several times, the rhythm becomes familiar. It becomes possible to recognize these upheavals as the heartbeat of something greater than any single movement.

Over the past six years, cities around the world have seen peaks of struggle: Athens, London, Barcelona, Cairo, Oakland, Montréal, Istanbul. A decade ago, anarchists would converge from around the world to participate in a single summit protest. Now many have participated in months-long upheavals in their own cities, and more surely loom ahead.

But what do we do after the crest? If a single upheaval won't bring down capitalism, we have to ask what matters about these high points—what we hope to get out of them, how they figure in our long-term vision, and how to make the most of the waning period that follows them. This is especially pressing today, when we can be sure that there are more upheavals on the way.

To this end, we have organized a dialogue with anarchists in some of the cities that have seen these climaxes of conflict, including Oakland, Barcelona, and Montréal. This is the first in a series of reflections drawn from those discussions.

Practically all of the participants in these discussions independently reported that it was really hard for them to formulate their thoughts: "I don't know why, but whenever I sit down to work on it,

I get depressed." This suggests a broader problem. Many anarchists depend on a triumphalist narrative, in which we have to go from victory to victory to have anything to talk about. But movements, too, have natural life cycles. They inevitably peak and die down. If our strategies are premised on endless growth, we are setting ourselves up for inevitable failure. That goes double for the narratives that determine our morale.

> *Movement* – A mysterious social phenomenon that aspires to growth yet, when observed, always appears to be in decline.

When social change is gathering momentum, it is protean and thus invisible; only when it stabilizes as a fixed quantity is it possible to affix a label to it, and from that moment on it can only decompose. This explains why movements burst like comets into the public consciousness at the high point of their innovation, followed by a long tail of diminishing returns. A sharper eye can see the social ferment behind these explosions, perennial and boundless, alternately drawing in new participants and emitting new waves of activity, as if in successive breaths.

In Occupy Oakland, a three-week occupation gave way to a six-month decline. This bears repeating: *movements spend most of their time in decline.* That makes it all the more important to consider how to make the most of the waning phase.

As all movements inevitably reach limits, it is pointless to bewail their passing—as if they would go on growing indefinitely if only the participants were *strategic enough.* If we presume the goal of any tactic is always to maintain the momentum of a particular movement, we will never be able to do more than react quixotically against the inexorable passing of time. Rather than struggling to stave off dissolution, we should act with an eye to the future.

This could mean consolidating the connections that have developed during the movement, or being sure to go out with a bang to

But new activist formations like Real Democracy Now have shown the most potential to capture popular outrage and redirect it towards superficial democratic complaints that focus on politicians and civic forms of participation. It has been in the organizational interests of unions to pull the focus of complaint back to the terrain of economics and labor—though this seems to have infected that terrain with the practice of assemblies and self-organization that was being co-opted by democracy activists. Thanks to the jockeying between competing would-be recuperators, the hollow discourse of the democrats has been contaminated with questions of economy, while the vertical terrain of the unions has been undermined by a renewed tradition of self-organization.

Recuperation is still a danger, and some would say the anarcho-reformist CGT (the third largest labor union in the country, a split from the anarchist CNT) is the most capable of synthesizing these two strategies of recuperation. In the meantime, both the terrain of labor and the terrain of democracy are constantly destabilized by

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the wood workers' and bricklayers' unions. The workers in those unions were (un)employed overwhelmingly by the construction industry, which was far more precarious and short-term than factory work. Construction work tended to be given out on a per job basis. It did not generate either the sense of neighborhood or the relatively stable collective relationships that the factories did. And for the dispossessed peasants who made up the ranks of those unions, the new forms of mass construction hardly constituted skilled labor. In other words, work in the construction industry a hundred years ago was not so different from work in the service industry today, an industry that employs the vast majority of Barcelona's underemployed anarchists. Yet those anarchists do not have a union. I would argue, in very unmaterialist terms, that the key shift has been cultural. The proletarian identity has been eroded and replaced by a democratic identity, aided by the strategic extension of commodities into the lives of the poor, and by the even more strategic universalization of bourgeois culture through television. In fact, it was probably the survival of strong feudal characteristics in Spanish society, and not the reality of factory labor, that enabled the exploited to identify so clearly as proletarian when they came to the city a hundred years ago. Although the unseen purpose of their wage labor was to unify them with their bosses, they transposed the peasant/lord division from the countryside to the apparently similar but essentially different inequality they found in the city.

and in another discussed getting rid of bad politicians or rescuing the welfare state. Not realizing that incoherence is a constant feature of life under capitalism, for anarchists as well as vaguely upset citizens, they turned their back on the new movements. The others stayed, seeking a balance between conflict and connection. Their conflictive approach drove them to seek fault lines and drive them open, while also trying to be part of a constantly expanding web of relationships.

Simultaneously, the new practice of engagement dovetailed with anarchist support for the general strikes. The strike was already an accepted tradition of struggle, and anarchists in particular have a long history of organizing them, so it was less a leap of faith for anarchists to work with unionists, influencing the outcome and character of the strikes. Their distrust of unions (which many CNT members share) helped rather than hindered their ability to radicalize the strikes, as long as they were willing to engage in some way.

As anarchist engagement in non-anarchist spaces brought clear results, many anarchists adopted a practice of participating in spaces of encounter and fostering relationships with people in institutionalized dissident organizations, while never joining those organizations. This positioning enabled anarchists to keep leftist institutions in check, holding them up to the radical values they purport to espouse and criticizing their betrayals more directly. It is possible that this is one reason why the social struggles in Barcelona have not been recuperated.

Another reason is that there has been no unified strategy of recuperation. The labor unions once occupied the critical position, enabling them to recuperate the most threatening of struggles.[5]

[5] One might argue that a change in the physical content of labor has made unions less relevant. But in the case of Barcelona, while factory labor has clearly declined and the service industry blossomed, this does not seem to provide a satisfying explanation. In the '20s and '30s, two of the largest (and most radical) sectors in the CNT, as well as two of the largest trades on an absolute scale, were

inspire future movements, or revealing the internal contradictions that the movement never solved. Perhaps, once a movement has reached its limits, the most important thing to do in the waning phase is to point to what a future movement would have to do to transcend those limits.

We had occupied the building for almost 24 hours, and we were starting to imagine that we could somehow hold onto it. I was about to go out for supplies to fortify the place when something caught my eye. There in the dust of the abandoned garage was a hood ornament from a car that hadn't been manufactured in 40 years. I reached down to pick it up, then hesitated: I could always look at it later. On impulse, I took it anyway. A half hour later, a SWAT squad surrounded the building for blocks in every direction. We never recovered any of the things we built or brought there. Over a hundred of us met, danced, and slept in that building, outside the bounds of anything we'd previously been able to imagine in our little town, and that little hood ornament is all I have to show it happened.

When I visited my friends in the Bay Area the following week, they were in the same state of elation I had been when I left the building: "We walk around and people see us and call out OCC-U-PY! Things are just going to grow and keep on growing!"

Keep perspective.

During a crescendo of social struggle, it can be difficult to maintain perspective; some things seem central yet prove transitory, while other things fall by the wayside that afterwards turn out to have been pivotal. Often, we miss opportunities to foster long-term connections, taking each other for granted in the urgency of responding to immediate events. Afterwards, when the moment has passed, we don't know how to find each other—or we have no reason to, having burned our bridges in high-stress situations. What

is really important, the tactical success of a particular action, or the strength of the relationships that come out of it?

Likewise, it is rarely easy to tell where you are in the trajectory of events. At the beginning, when the window of possibility is wide open, it is unclear how far things can go; often, anarchists wait to get involved until others have already determined the character of the movement. Later, at the high point, it can seem that the participants are at the threshold of tremendous new potential—when in fact that window of possibility has already begun to close. This confusion makes it difficult to know when it is the right time to shift gears to a new strategy.

We were outside at a café in downtown Oakland a couple months later. I was asking what my friends thought the prospects were for the future. "Things will pick up again when spring arrives," they assured me.

At first I believed them. Wasn't everyone saying the same thing all around the country? Then it hit me: we were sitting there in the sunshine, wearing t-shirts, in the city that had seen the most intense action of the whole Occupy movement. If there wasn't another occupation there already, it wasn't coming back.

Keep the window of possibility open while you can; if you have to split, split on your own terms.

Movements usually begin with an explosion of uncertainty and potential. So long as the limits are unclear, a wide range of participants have cause to get involved, while the authorities must hold back, unsure of the consequences of repression. How do we keep this window of possibility open as long as possible without sidestepping real disagreements? (Think of Occupy Wall Street when it first got off the ground and all manner of radical and reactionary tendencies mingled within it.) Is it better to

(at least, not yet). Characterizing people or spaces as reformist is erroneous, even if factually accurate, because reformism is an institutional force that captures people and spaces, rather than an essence that emanates from them. Anarchists who were justifiably concerned with avoiding reformist strategies walled themselves off from new relationships, not realizing that spaces of encounter always have revolutionary potential. The people who fill those spaces initially enact reformist strategies because that is what they know. The structures that institutionalize those spaces are imposed afterwards by internal or external recuperators.

The mistrust of reformism was overcome the same way in Plaça Catalunya and in the neighborhood assemblies. First, a couple of the more adventurous, eccentric, or leftist anarchists began to participate. Some of these felt comfortable in the new spaces, others were wary, but all of them were able to share space with reformists, either out of tolerance or thick skin. Then they spread the word within their circles, and soon it became popular for most anarchists to attend these heterogeneous spaces, though how they participated varied greatly.

This pattern defied a number of my expectations, though it makes sense in retrospect. Those with the sharpest social intuition, who arrived early in the spaces that later proved to be of great importance, were hippies, leftists, and, only very rarely, combative anarchists. Later, the insurrectionary anarchists and the intensely activist anarchists[4] flooded in. The activists tended to build up the structures of the assemblies and occupations without trying to distill their revolutionary potential or criticize their social democratic anxieties; on the whole, they avoided practices that would generate conflict with their newfound allies. Of the insurrectionaries, some denounced the hypocrisy of a spontaneous movement that in one moment called for revolution

[4] Those who, in my mind, have carried on the methods of the antiglobalization movement without learning most of its critical lessons.

ble, in the bus drivers' strike of 2008, in increasing attempts at citywide or regional coordination through 2009 and 2010, and afterwards in participation in neighborhood assemblies, plaza occupations, citywide coordinating groups, campaigns against foreclosures, campaigns against immigrant detention centers and raids, and labor assemblies for the organization of strikes. Clearly, the increase of popular resistance and the erosion of social peace helped to strengthen the anarchist space and created many more opportunities for methods of non-unified coordination to be put into practice, but the fragmentation of the anarchist space—which also made it impossible for any one part to dominate the others, and compelled anarchists to seek shared spaces—was already a fact.

Throughout these moments of growth, a major strategic tension has played out between those who sought to unify the anarchist movement and those who fought to preserve its fragmentation.

Neither Recuperation Nor Repression

In part because of the change in how most anarchists are positioning themselves, neither recuperation nor repression has been able to suppress the upheaval.

Initially, most anarchists positioned themselves in such a way as to not have any hope of nourishing or influencing the revolt. They either accepted it uncritically, happy that other people were finally taking to the streets no matter what their motives or expectations were, or else they dismissed it as reformist.

This dismissal reveals an important miscalculation. By correctly characterizing the new neighborhood assemblies or the occupation of Plaça Catalunya as "social democratic," radical anarchists obscured what proved to be the more important characteristic: that these spaces were spontaneous and not institutional

the space of the CNT. This interpenetration helped lay the groundwork for the subsequent shattering of the previously segmented anarchist space.

postpone clashes over ideological issues—such as nonviolence versus diversity of tactics—or to precipitate them? (Think of the controversial black bloc in Occupy Oakland on November 2, 2011.)

One way to approach this challenge is to try to clarify the issues at stake without drawing fixed lines of political identity in the process. As soon as a tactical or ideological disagreement is understood a conflict between distinct social bodies, the horizon begins to close. The moment of potential depends on the fluidity of the movement, the circulation of ideas outside their usual domains, the emergence of new social configurations, and the openness of individual participants to personal transformation. The entrenchment of fixed camps undermines all of these.

This problem is further complicated by the fact that the top priority of the authorities is always to divide movements—often along the same lines that the participants themselves wish to divide. It may be best to try not to precipitate any permanent breaks until the horizon of possibility has closed, then make sure that the lines are drawn on your own terms, not the terms of the authorities or their unwitting liberal stooges.

Push the envelope.

What is still possible once the horizon has been circumscribed? In a dying movement, one can still *push the envelope*, setting new precedents for the future so subsequent struggles will be able to imagine going further. This is a good reason not to avoid ideological clashes indefinitely; in order to legitimize the tactics that will be needed in the future, one often has to begin by acting outside the prevailing consensus.

For example, at the conclusion of November 2, 2011, Occupy Oakland participants controversially attempted to take over a building. This provoked a great deal of backlash, but it set a precedent for a series of building occupations that enabled Occupy

to begin to challenge the sanctity of private property during its long waning phase—giving Occupy a much more radical legacy than it would otherwise have had. One year's breakthroughs are the next year's limitations.[1]

During the burgeoning stage of a movement, participants often become fixated on certain tactics. There is a tendency to try to repeat one's most recent successes; in the long run, this can only produce conservatism and diminishing returns. Diminishing returns are still returns, of course, and a tactic that is no longer effective in its original context may offer a great deal of potential in another setting—witness the occupation of Taksim Square in June 2013, when no one in the US could imagine occupying anything ever again. But tactics and rhetoric eventually become used up. Once no one expects anything new from them, the same slogans and strategies that generated so much momentum become obstacles.

As soon as Occupy is in the news, anyone who had an occupation in mind had better hurry to carry it out before the window of opportunity has closed and nobody wants to occupy anything at all. In a comic example of this tendency to fixate on certain tactics, after Occupy Oakland was evicted, Occupy Wall Street mailed a large number of tents across the country as a gesture of support. These tents merely took up storage space over the following months as the struggle in Oakland reached its conclusion on other terrain.

[1] While it does encourage us to think of the ways that power is diffuse, not simply a top-down imposition that we suffer passively, the identification of "society" as the enemy reveals a disturbing ignorance as to what exactly the State forcibly disintegrated and reconstitutes with the bonds of nationalism and the Spectacle. It is this same unknown that palpably coalesces in the space of the riot and of struggle more generally. Margaret Thatcher's assertion that society does not exist, only the Market, was less an observation than the mission statement of capitalism.

ment; a *segmented space*, which is divided between multiple centers that generally do not overlap or communicate; and a *fragmented space*, which is comprised of numerous distinct groups or currents that, despite differing and often conflicting, intersect and overlap to an untraceable degree, so communication and connection are networked intensively. In their long history in Barcelona, anarchists have always been most effective when their space was fragmented.

An increase in their strength, or the potential loss of that strength, has generally led them to unify their space of struggle. Unified spaces have generally precipitated major defeats, as the weaknesses of a single line of struggle can affect the entire movement.[2] The contrasting interpretations of those defeats have repeatedly led to the appearance of a segmented anarchist space. In the last thirty years, the anarchist space in Barcelona has gone from unified, to segmented, to fragmented.

The last change occurred primarily between 2008 and 2012.[3] It was visible in the exodus of anarchists from the squatting bub-

[2] A classic example of this would be the disastrous strategy of collaboration with the republican government chosen by the CNT in July 1936, and their ability to suppress other strategic tendencies, such as the illegalist tendency of some Italian and Catalan anarchist expropriators in Barcelona, and the insurrectionary tendency of the Friends of Durruti group—not to mention the critical voice of Durruti himself, before he was killed by the Stalinists. The anarchist space throughout the Spanish state was far more heterogeneous and fragmented before the Civil War than is generally recognized. Dozens of different currents and tendencies were active, sometimes in conflict, sometimes in harmony. When the FAI succeeded in its important mission of blocking the syndicalist takeover of the CNT, around 1934, they also initiated the unfortunate unification of the anarchist space within and under the CNT. It is possible that this unification already bore rotten fruit in 1934, when the anarchists failed to show effective solidarity with the insurrection in Asturias, although it would take more reading to confirm whether the CNT's organizational hegemony hindered solidarity.

[3] Of course, its roots can be traced back further, as when insurrectionary anarchists were expelled from or broke with spaces controlled by anarcho-syndicalists (1996), were subsequently defeated by repression in the space they had created for themselves (2003), and took refuge in the space created by squatters or returned to resume a direct engagement with the anarcho-syndicalists in

States, a successful projectuality has allowed certain towns and cities to maintain more intense struggles where all around them the social peace has already returned. Revolt moves through the social body, but its specific functions may be performed by any of that body's cells. We are not external to the body, as a surgeon, a sociologist, or a vanguard, but neither are we its prisoners.

We imagine that it will be the concussiveness of repeated outbursts of revolt, and not the geometrical growth of a social movement, that will destroy the current structures of governance, the way the intense vibrations of an earthquake or avalanche liquefy the hardest materials.

If this is correct, one of the vital tasks of rebels is to unlearn the mechanical motions of the Left and the fatalistic expectations that a mechanical worldview inculcates, and to relearn rhythmic cycles of struggle.

The Anarchist Space

A couple years before the new social movements broke out, many anarchists had already begun to change how they interacted and how they positioned themselves in relation to the rest of society. This enabled them to be much more effective in the social coalescence that occurred from the general strike of September 2010 through the 15M movement to May Day 2012; to play a role in extending and radicalizing that coalescence; and to hold on to a good deal of potential as it began to fade away.

In the previous century, the anarchist space in Barcelona—the terrain of struggle which anarchists inhabit and help to create—has changed in shape and density numerous times. I would identify three different forms this space can take: a *unified space*, which is held together by an organizational center of gravity, with communication occurring primarily within a singular organizational set of boundaries that can presume to represent an anarchist move-

Don't regress to outmoded strategies.

Sometimes, after a new strategy that is attuned to the present context has created new momentum, there is a tendency to revert to previous approaches that have long ceased working. When people with little prior experience converge in a movement, they sometimes demand guidance from those who have a longer history of involvement; more often, it is the veterans themselves who demand to provide this guidance. Unfortunately, longtime activists frequently bring in old tactics and strategies, using the new opportunity to resume the defeated projects of the past.

For example, fourteen years ago, worldwide summit-hopping offered a way to exert transnational leverage against capitalist globalization, offering a model to replace the local and national labor organizing that had been outflanked by the international mobility of corporations. Yet when labor activists got involved, they criticized summit-hoppers for running around the world rather than organizing locally the old-fashioned way. Likewise, Occupy got off the ground because it offered a new model for an increasingly precarious population to stand up for itself without stable economic positions from which to mobilize. But again, old-fashioned labor activists saw this new movement only as a potential pool of bodies to support union struggles, and channeled its momentum into easily coopted dead ends.

In the wake of every movement, we should study what its successes and failures show about our current context, while recognizing that by the time we can make use of those lessons the situation will have changed once more. Beware of rising expectations.

When a movement is at its high point, it becomes possible to act on a scale previously unimaginable. This can be debilitating afterwards, when the range of possibility contracts again and the participants are no longer inspired by the tactics they engaged in before the crest. One way to preserve momentum past the end of

a movement is to go on setting attainable intermediate goals and affirming even the humblest efforts toward them.

The trajectory of green anarchist struggles in Oregon at the turn of the last century offers a dramatic example of this kind of inflation. At the beginning, the goals were small and concrete: protect a specific tree or a specific stretch of forest. After the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, the goals of green anarchists in the region hypertrophied until they reached a tactical impasse. When your immediate objective is to "take down industrial civilization," just about anything you can do is going to feel pointless.

Indeed, during a declining phase, it may be important to resist the tendency to escalate. When the SHAC campaign ran aground, Root Force set out to apply the same strategy against a much bigger target—scaling up from a single animal testing corporation to the major infrastructural projects underlying transnational capitalism. A SHAC-style campaign targeting a *smaller* corporation might have succeeded, empowering a new generation to go on applying the strategy, but Root Force never even got off the ground.

Quit while you're ahead.

The declining phase of a movement can be a dangerous time. Often, popular support has died down and the forces of repression have regained their footing, but the participants still have high hopes and feel a sense of urgency. Sometimes it's best to shift focus before something really debilitating occurs.

Yet quitting while you're ahead is complicated. If the connections that have been made are premised on collective action, it can be difficult to retain these without staying in the streets together.

Months after Occupy Oakland was definitively over, police brutally attacked an anarchist march against Columbus Day, making several arrests and pressing felony charges. It is an open question whether this showed that anarchists had overextended themselves,

Just as our actions had meaning in times of social peace—just as revolutions were not inevitable in times of austerity—our actions, our projects, and the positions we choose in relation to events can sometimes tip the scales to determine whether a social disintegration erases everything that was won in a period of revolt, or whether the lull that always follows the storm will soon be interrupted by another wave of revolt.

A simple comparison of events in the United States and events in Catalunya suggests that a highly disintegrated society is likely to sustain a single brief flare of resistance before normality resumes, whereas a more coalesced society can sustain multiple intense waves of revolt in relatively close succession before exhausting its hope and rage. Some of us hold that the activity of social struggles—understood broadly—is the best way to reverse the social disintegration caused by capitalism. The farmers and artisans who blindly resist modernization; the insurrectionaries who connect with popular rage; the activists who overcome themselves by spreading an ethic of mutual aid rather than the specialization of charity; the old people who insist on telling the stories of their defeat; and the artists who evade their own recuperation—all of them help society[1] to coalesce in the face of the disintegrating force of capitalism.

Just as the more densely knit society can sustain the reverberations of revolt for longer, the places within that society where comrades seek and generate conflict as part of an ongoing effort will not fall back into silence as quickly. In Catalunya as in the United

[1] While it does encourage us to think of the ways that power is diffuse, not simply a top-down imposition that we suffer passively, the identification of "society" as the enemy reveals a disturbing ignorance as to what exactly the State forcibly disintegrated and reconstitutes with the bonds of nationalism and the Spectacle. It is this same unknown that palpably coalesces in the space of the riot and of struggle more generally. Margaret Thatcher's assertion that society does not exist, only the Market, was less an observation than the mission statement of capitalism.

Rhythms of Struggle

The social upheavals in Barcelona were not caused by material conditions. The structures and traditions that became most important in the space of the revolt were already in place before the economic crash. And the greatest spikes in popular participation in the revolt were direct responses either to movement initiatives that resonated with people's perception of their problems, or to a perceived attack on their living conditions. Specifically, spikes occurred when the government announced an austerity measure—not when austerity measures took effect or the economic crisis as a whole began to be felt—or else when an initiative such as a strike or an occupation attracted many people and went off successfully. In other words, people's perception of their living conditions and the possibilities for resistance has proved more real than any objective measurement of those conditions on a material level, whether evaluated in wages, unemployment, or otherwise.

The key to gaining strength in times of social disintegration can be found in this approach. We are not mere subjects of social forces. On the contrary, we actively and confrontationally position ourselves to contradict the narrative that justifies or hides those forces. When the narrative depicted social peace and prosperity, we occupied a network of cracks in and margins of that prosperity, demonstrating that we were not content with the wages society was willing to pay us and that we knew we were not the only ones in refusal. When the narrative depicted change and reform, we positioned ourselves at the juncture of the mass of bodies beginning to appear in the streets and an imaginary horizon that contradicted the democratic ideology that mobilized and homogenized those bodies. When the narrative depicts disappointment and powerlessness, we approach the collapse of social movements with joy, because it unmasks the false promises of populists and reveals what is truly lacking for us to regain our lives.

but after a payback action the following night in Oakland, street activity in the Bay Area died down for almost a year. On the other hand, after the UK student movement died down, an explosion of riots in August 2011 suggested that many of the underclass participants felt abandoned by the withdrawal of their former activist allies from street action. It is possible that, had the movement continued in some form, the riots might have turned out differently—as a point of departure for another wave of collective struggle, rather than the desperate act of a marginalized population rising ruinously against society itself.

Be prepared for burnout and depression.

After the crest, when the euphoria is over, many participants will experience depression. Since the events that regularly brought them together have ceased, they are isolated and more vulnerable. Others may veer into addiction: substance use can be a way to maintain intimacy with each other and with danger itself when there is no more fire in the streets. The simple pleasures with which people celebrated their victories can expand to fill the space left by the receding tide of events, becoming self-destructive. This is another reason to establish new venues to maintain camaraderie and connection when the window of possibility is closing.

Save energy for the fallout.

All of these problems are often intensified by the explosion of discord that usually follows a movement's demise. Once it is clear that a movement is definitively over, all the conflicts that the participants have been putting off come to the fore, for there is no longer any incentive to keep them under the rug. Suppressed resentments and ideological differences surface, along with serious allegations about abuse of power and violations of consent. Learn-

ing from these conflicts is an essential part of the process that prepares the way for future movements: for example, contemporary anarchism is descended in part from the feminist backlash that followed the New Left movements of the 1960s. But participants rarely think to save energy for this phase, and it can feel like thankless work, since the "action" is ostensibly over.

It was a few nights before the eviction of the Occupy Philly encampment, and we were holding a General Assembly to decide what to do. Tensions were running high between the residents of the camp, who were primarily homeless, and those who participated chiefly in meetings and working groups. That night, a homeless man interrupted the GA to accuse several of those in leadership positions of being in league with the police, being racist, and planning to sell out the homeless. The facilitator tried to ignore the disruption, but the angry man drowned him out and eventually riled up a few more people who began shouting too. In this moment of chaos and heightened emotion, we had a unique opportunity. We could have shifted our focus from the threat that the government wanted us to react to, instead using that GA to finally address the tensions in our own group in hopes of building a force that could survive into the next phase of struggle. Instead, the facilitator tried to restore order by directing us to "break into small groups and discuss what 'respect' means." My heart sank. Our shared energy was explosive; we needed to channel it, not suppress it.

That was the last time I saw many of the comrades I'd befriended over the preceding months. The eviction wasn't the greatest threat we faced after all.

Repression hits hardest at the end.

Government repression usually does not hit in full force until after a movement has died down. It is most convenient for the state to attack people when their support networks have collapsed and

Fall 2011: The movement against the privatization of healthcare in Catalunya peaks with numerous blockades and occupations of hospitals and clinics.

January 2012: Public transportation workers, largely organized by the CGT, betray their promises and sell out a week-long strike before it begins, making a deal that meets none of their initial demands and wasting weeks of organizing, much of it carried out by allies and transportation-users. Fortunately, that same week, a student strike takes over the streets. Students disobey their leaders, riot, and attack the media.

March 29, 2012: A general strike paralyzes the country. In Barcelona and other cities, protesters engage in the biggest riots yet.

May 1, 2012: The police militarize the streets, expecting possible rioting in the anti-capitalist May Day protest. Most anarchists, however, prioritize countering media and government discourses around the earlier general strike. Thousands of flyers are distributed.

October 31, 2012: The minority unions hold another general strike. This time, the CGT organizes peace police to prevent riots. Most anarchists do not solidarize with the strike, and it passes practically without notice.

November 14, 2012: The major unions together with the smaller unions carry out the next general strike. The neighborhood assemblies, largely weakened, and the informal anarchists, doubtful or uninspired, do not play a major role in preparing. In Barcelona, the protests during the strike are massive, but the police control the streets and brutalize people from one end of the city to the other. The general mood after the strike is of disappointment or powerlessness.

Spring 2009: A huge student movement against Plan Bologna austerity measures is killed off by pacifist leadership. Once occupied universities are evicted, the radical part of the student movement turns to squatting empty buildings and self-organizing a "free university."

2009: Barcelona witnesses a growth of coordinated solidarity actions and attacks in solidarity with anarchist prisoners and anarchists in Chile and Greece, as well as daylight attacks against targets that can be easily associated with housing and job precarity. The support campaign wins the freedom of Joaquin Garces.

Spring 2010: The government in Madrid announces the first of many rounds of austerity measures. In preparation, major and minor labor unions, along with anarchist and other groups, begin preparing resistance across the Spanish state. In Barcelona, the first neighborhood assemblies are also formed to organize the upcoming general strike.

September 29, 2010: General strike, with major participation and heavy rioting in Barcelona.

January 27, 2011: Minority unions, primarily the anarcho-syndicalist CNT and CGT, launch their own general strike, without the major unions. Participation is significant though far from total, and complemented by several significant sabotage actions.

May 1, 2011: In a collaborative effort between anarcho-syndicalist organizations, socialist Catalan independence organizations, and insurrectionary or informal anarchists, a combative May Day protest successfully wreaks havoc in a rich neighborhood for over an hour.

May 16, 2011: A day after major protests across the Spanish state, a group of 100 activists begin an occupation of Plaça Catalunya in the center of Barcelona. Within a few days, the occupation grows to 100,000 and beyond. The 15M movement is born. Subsequently, new neighborhood assemblies appear across the city, and a series of massive protests and blockades are organized.

their attention is elsewhere. Operation Backfire struck years after the high point of Earth Liberation Front momentum, when many of the participants had moved on and the communities that had supported them had disintegrated. Similarly, the authorities waited until May 2012 to strike back at Occupy with a series of entrapment cases.

The chief goal of repression is to open the fault lines within the targeted social body, isolating it and forcing it into a reactive position. Ideally, we should respond to repression in ways that establish new connections and position us for new offensives.

Hold your ground.

How do we transition into other forms of connection when the exceptional circumstances that drew us together are over? The networks that coalesce effortlessly during the high point of momentum rarely survive. While new events were unfolding, there was an obvious reward for setting differences aside and interrupting routines to converge. Afterwards, the large groups that formed slowly break down into smaller ones, while smaller groups often vanish altogether. The reshuffling of allegiances that takes place during this period is vital, but it's equally vital not to lose each other in the shuffle.

During the crest of a movement, participants often take for granted that it will leave them at a higher plateau when it is over. But this is hardly guaranteed. This may be the most important question facing us as we approach the next wave of struggles: how do we gain and hold ground? Political parties can measure their effectiveness according to how many new recruits they retain, but anarchists must conceive of success differently.

In the end, it isn't just organizations with contact lists that will remain after the crest, but above all new questions, new practices, new points of reference for how people can stand up for themselves.

Passing these memories along to the next generation is one of the most important things we can do.

Further Reading

- Three Years since the Greek Insurrection, our interview with comrades in Athens about the months following the uprising of December 2008
- Occupy Oakland Is Dead; Long Live the Oakland Commune
- *Cracking under Pressure: Narrating the Decline of the Amsterdam Squatters' Movement*, by Lynn Owens

Whether it takes months or years, such gains are never lost, only surrendered. Social rebels can hold on to the strength they have won if they allow it to transform rather than expecting it to accumulate. It would be self-defeating to predict, from this vantage point in 2013, whether the anarchist struggle in Barcelona will lose ground or go back on the offensive, because that future rests largely on our own decisions.

Timeline of Events

2007: A conflict arises within the squatters' movement when one sector seeks legalization within a reformist discourse of housing rights. As a result, anarchists redouble their efforts to elaborate a critique of capitalist housing. They also question the practice of squatting for the sake of squatting.

End of 2007: CGT-led bus drivers' strike, with critical use of sabotage and anarchist solidarity, wins many of its demands.

Spring 2008: A campaign begins for the freedom of longtime anarchist prisoner Amadeu Casellas. A year later, a similar campaign begins for Joaquin Garces.

September-October 2008: US stock market crashes.

October 2008: In an action two years in preparation, populist but nonetheless practical anticapitalists in Catalunya use half a million euros robbed from banks through fraudulent loans to print and distribute hundreds of thousands of copies of a newspaper (published in three different volumes over the next two years) that criticizes capitalism and suggests alternatives. About three years later the group begins a complex of consumer and producer eco-cooperatives.

December 2008: Greece is gripped by an insurrection, with solidarity actions and important consequences in anarchist practice in Barcelona.

Barcelona Anarchists at Low Tide

This is the third part in our "After the Crest" series, studying how we can make the most of the waning phase of upheavals. This installment analyzes the rhythms of struggle in Barcelona over the past several years, discussing the complex relationship between anarchists and larger social movements as popular struggles escalated and then subsided. It concludes with practical input on how anarchists can take advantage of a period of ebbing momentum.

For best results, read this in combination with our earlier features on Barcelona: "Fire Extinguishers and Fire Starters," describing the plaza occupation movement of spring 2011, and "The Rose of Fire Has Returned,", focusing on the general strike of March 2012. Together, the three pieces trace the trajectory of an upheaval from its inspiring but ideologically murky inception through the high point of confrontation and into the aftermath.

Anarchists in Barcelona played an important and visible role in the social upheavals of September 2010 to May 2012, which in their turn were an influential contribution to the global upheavals taking place in those same years. By the summer of 2012, in the Spanish state and elsewhere, these upheavals largely appeared to have subsided. Anarchists in Barcelona have faced a number of important questions and difficulties as a growing social disintegration contrasts with the earlier times of social coalescence. Will the gains won in those moments of rebellion be lost now that the prevailing social mood is one of resignation?

The Rise and Fall of the Oakland Commune

This is the second part in our "After the Crest" series, studying what we can learn from the waning phase of social movements. In this installment, participants in Occupy Oakland trace its trajectory from origins to conclusion, exploring why it reached certain limits and what it will take for future movements to surpass them.

The Rapid Ascent

In setting ourselves the sobering task of narrating the decline of Occupy Oakland, we are at least spared any argument about when the high point took place. There might be disagreement about whether the "general strike" of November 2, 2011 deserved that title, but no one would dispute that it was the high-water mark of the local movement and a turning point in the Occupy sequence unfolding across the country.

At that moment, describing Occupy Oakland as the *Oakland Commune* was not just an exaggeration. For a short time, we really were a collective force with the ambition and capacity to transform the whole city and radicalize the national movement. The experience of that day has stayed with many of us, a brief and chaotic glimpse of insurrectionary horizons that closed as quickly as they opened. Remembering this as we go about our daily lives under capitalism has been enormously painful; for many of us in the Bay Area, the last year and a half has been a process of grieving the loss of that moment. This grief was present in all the successive stages

of that political sequence. Although the movement continued for months, bringing out thousands of people for explosive days of action, none of the later moments—December 12, January 28, or May 1—even remotely compare to November 2.

Before we can analyze the Oakland Commune's decline, we have to understand its rise and the various projects in the Bay that helped to foster it. The following narrative is not meant as a total account of all of the elements that combined to form the Oakland Commune, but rather the ones we experienced firsthand.

During the spring of 2011, with a backdrop including the Arab Spring, the European "movement of the squares," and its faint echo in the Wisconsin capitol occupation, comrades in the Bay Area began a slow process of reconstituting themselves as a force in the streets. This followed an extended period of decomposition and aimlessness. Many of us expected that the wave of unrest sweeping the globe would reach the US eventually, and we wanted to be prepared. That summer, the Bay Area witnessed a series of small but fierce and creative demonstrations. From the native encampment protecting Glen Cove against suburban development in Vallejo to the riotous protests in San Francisco after police gunned down Kenneth Harding when he avoided a transit fare check, the summer provided several opportunities for radicals from a range of communities to work together.

During June and July, a mix of anti-state communists and insurrectionary anarchists organized a series of anti-austerity actions dubbed Anticuts that got people into the streets to experiment with new tactics and forms of social intervention. These were intended to map out the local terrain of struggle and the various antagonistic social constellations that might participate in future rebellions. Through these small and sometimes frustrating excursions, new march routes and ways to understand the geography of downtown Oakland emerged. For instance, the third and final Anticut action—organized in solidarity with a hunger strike in California prisons—marched from the future home of Occupy Oakland in Frank Ogawa

Commune once it took the camp as the model for a project (barely realized) of reclamation, autonomy, and the disruption of capital on a much wider basis: neighborhood assemblies reclaiming abandoned buildings for their needs; social centers that could serve as hubs for organizing offensives and sustain all kinds of self-organization and care; occupations of schools and workplaces. These were the horizons that the Oakland Commune illuminated, in the positive sense, despite its limits. We believe it is likely that future struggles in the US will follow this trajectory in some way, using Occupy's attempted offensives and space reclamations as the foundation upon which something much larger, more beautiful and more ferocious can begin to take shape.

But the questions still remain: what would it mean to actually take care of each other and to collectively sustain and nurture an unstoppable insurrectionary struggle? How can we dismantle and negate the oppressive power relationships and toxic interpersonal dynamics we carry with us into liberated spaces? How can we make room for the myriad of revolts within the revolt that are necessary to upend all forms of domination? The effectiveness of any future antagonistic projects in the U.S. will be determined by our ability to answer these questions and thus transcend the limits that were so debilitating within Oscar Grant Plaza, forcing the Commune away from the very source of its power.

Another wave of struggle and unrest will undoubtedly explode in our streets and plazas sooner or later. Our task in the meantime is to cultivate fierce and creative forms of cooperating, caring for each other, and fighting together that can help us smash through the fundamental limits of contemporary revolt when the time is right. If we can make substantial strides beyond these obstacles, police attacks and jail sentences will be no match for the uncontrollable momentum of our collective force.

Some Oakland Antagonists, August 2013

The camp was no more violent or miserable then the city of Oakland is on any given day. Yet the level of everyday misery, alienation, and abuse that makes up the mundane reality of capitalist society is truly staggering, especially when concentrated in a plot of grass in the middle of an impoverished city. When we liberate urban space in 21st century America, we have no choice but to confront the devastation produced by centuries of capitalism, conquest, and domination.

Inside the reclaimed space opened up by the Commune, rampant interpersonal conflicts and forms of structural violence could not be contained or managed in the ways that capitalism normally does, through the violence of the police, the institutions of the state, or the ready-to-hand hierarchies provided by money and commodities. We had to confront these problems collectively and directly. But to do so adequately would have required the expropriation of resources and space far beyond what was within the grasp of the nascent movement. It also would have required the audacious dedication of participants to transcend their atomized lives and constructed identities under capitalism, going past the point of no return. The failure to overcome these fundamental obstacles enabled power relationships built on patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity to reassert their dominance within the movement while undermining and repressing the vital new relationships that had emerged through the process of struggle. These were the underlying limits that led the Commune away from the reclamation of space that had provided the basis for its initial rapid ascent, and ushered in its six month decline, passing the point of no return as the horizons of struggle that led away from the camp hit dead ends in January 2012.

This is the double bind we found ourselves in: the camp was both inadequate and essential. A potential solution to this bind is contained in the concept of the Commune, by which we mean the projected translation of the principles of the camp onto a new, more expansive footing. Occupy Oakland became the Oakland

Plaza down Broadway past the police headquarters, courthouse, and jail, holding a noise demo there before circling back towards the plaza to disperse. This small demonstration marked the first time this loop was tried. Months later, during the high-tension moments of Occupy Oakland, that march route became intimately familiar to thousands of people, sometimes repeated multiple times per day.

The rhythm of small and medium-sized demonstrations such as the Anonymous actions against BART police and the one-day occupation of UC Berkeley's Tolman Hall continued throughout the summer and early fall. But it wasn't until momentum began to build nationally after the establishment of the Zucotti Park camp on Wall Street—September 17, 2011—that the full potential of the relationships built over the summer could blossom. Oakland joined the national movement late, on October 10, immediately establishing a sprawling camp in the plaza in front of City Hall—renamed Oscar Grant Plaza, after the young Black man murdered by BART police in 2009. This became a liberated zone, off-limits to police and politicians and organized according to principles of self-organization, free access to food and supplies, open participation in all aspects of camp life, and autonomous action.

In hindsight, it is striking how quickly Occupy Oakland emerged, matured, and reached its peak. Only two weeks separate the beginning of the camp from the first police raid in the early hours of October 25. After the Commune repeatedly resisted attempts by the city administration to assert control over the camp—staging public burnings of warning letters during general assemblies in the amphitheater on the steps of city hall—Mayor Jean Quan authorized the militarized police operation that left the camp in ruins and over 100 in jail.

Later that same day, thousands of enraged people poured back into downtown, charging police barricades around the plaza and braving countless barrages of tear gas and projectiles until the early

hours of the morning. Partly because of the near murder of Iraq War veteran Scott Olsen by a police projectile that night, and the dramatic footage of the entire downtown area covered in gas, the next day the police withdrew in a storm of controversy. Exultant crowds reoccupied the plaza, holding an assembly of 2000 people—the largest of the whole sequence—and agreed to go on the offensive with the November 2 strike. The fact that it seemed possible to organize a general strike in a single week indicates the degree to which normal calendar time warped and stretched in those first three weeks. During the Oakland Commune's incredibly rapid yet brief ascent, there seemed to be no limit on what could happen in a week, a day, an hour.

It all came to a head on November 2. Looking back, the scope of that day remains impressive. In less than 24 hours, the strike unleashed all the tactics explored during the entire Occupy Oakland sequence. Flying pickets, work actions, marches, blockades, occupations, and moments of riotous destruction brought as many as 50,000 people to downtown Oakland, many of whom were participating in disruptive acts for what must have been the first time.

People gathered in the early morning under a giant banner, stretched across the central intersection in downtown, reading "Death to Capitalism." From there, the crowds quickly fanned out across the center of the city, shutting down businesses that had refused to close for the day. The camp at the plaza became a crowded anti-capitalist carnival offering music and speeches from three different stages. By early afternoon, as tens of thousands filled the streets, an anti-capitalist march led by a large black bloc smashed its way through downtown, leaving broken windows and graffiti on banks and corporations in its wake. Within a few hours, tens of thousands of people marched on the port of Oakland, shutting down all operations at its various terminals. Finally, as night fell, hundreds of people joyfully occupied the aptly-named Traveler's Aid building a few blocks from the plaza; long empty, it had formerly housed a nonprofit serving the homeless. Within

comrades in what would later become Occupy Patriarchy. Without something to take the place of what had been lost with the camp, there was little chance that we would regain the expansive prospects of the fall.

The strength of "the camp form" was its ability to carve out material zones of political antagonism that were not organized around petitioning the authorities for concessions through symbolic demonstration but directly providing for our daily needs through the repurposing and reclamation of urban space. This was one of the most appealing aspects of the camp: it offered the opportunity to explore ways of relating and surviving together that did not rely on the usual mechanisms—money, the state, police, predefined social hierarchies and categories—though the banishment of those things was always partial and provisional at best. This enabled the participants to bypass some of the more tedious ways in which activists develop political projects, equipping people to organize around their own survival, in their own cities, on the basis of their personal experience of oppression and need, rather than according to essentially moral objections to this or that injustice. In the context of this contagious form of revolt spreading through the communal liberation of space, the movement's rejection of the need to issue any specific demands to authorities made perfect sense. Occupy's power came from the proliferation and reproduction of these oppositional zones, not from its political sway.

But if the camp was the source of our strength, it was also the source of the limits we reached, and not only because without it there was no real future for Occupy. At root, the camp was inadequate to the project of finding ways to live together beyond the specious forms of community that capitalism provides. In fact, the Oakland camp was already in a state of degeneration by the time it was cleared, and probably would have broken down on its own eventually.

Yet the chance to regain momentum had passed in January. All of these efforts were still riding on evaporating momentum from the previous fall. In their increasing detachment from each other, they represented the long process of dispersal and decomposition that began with the strike on November 2.

Camp and Commune

At its core, Occupy was about occupying. In Oakland and elsewhere, it was about producing a form of life defined by mutual aid, self-organization, and autonomous action. It was about defending spaces free from police, politicians, and bosses, and the necessarily violent conflict between those zones and the surrounding capitalist world on which the camps nonetheless depended. Oakland took this about as far as it could go within the framework of Occupy, establishing a zone that fed and sheltered hundreds of people each day—sometimes thousands—in brazen defiance of the city officials fifty yards away in City Hall and the cops leering from the periphery. For all the hype about social media, livestreaming, and other information technologies enabling this new wave of revolt, the grounding of the struggle in the face-to-face relationships that combined to form the occupation is clearly what gave Occupy its unique potential and created the material foundation for all the political possibilities of the movement. The authorities understood this. That's why they cleared the camps in Oakland and everywhere else, using as much force as necessary to prevent reoccupation.

Once the camp was cleared, the Oakland Commune became a husk deprived of its central tactic and, arguably, its reason for being. This was the reason why the vigil clung mournfully to the plaza despite repeated battering by OPD. It was the reason why the decision was made to claim a building for the movement on January 28. It was why the planning for an autonomous occupation provided the initial impetus for the convergence of feminist and queer

an hour, however, riot police attacked and evicted the new occupation, provoking a night of rioting during which people wrecked most of the businesses and city offices around the plaza, including a police substation.

We were in the middle of something without recent precedent in the US. And yet the day was just a day. There was no continuation, no sense of what might come next. The following morning, after three weeks of great weather, the first rains of the season fell and the camp lay quiet, foreshadowing the dispirited mood of the months to come. The backlash from the previous day's anti-capitalist march and the more indiscriminate rioting later in the night was intense, as various liberal elements took the opportunity to demonize anarchists and the black bloc, calling for vigilante patrols by pacifists and initiating a reactionary backlash that caused many anarchists and radicals to steer clear of the camp for a few days. The mood shifted from elation to demoralization very quickly, especially given the failure of the occupation of the Traveler's Aid building, which might have opened up new horizons for the Oakland Commune. It was difficult to recognize this at the time, but we had already encountered the fundamental limits of this sequence of struggle. The slow decline had begun.

Days of Action, Horizons of Struggle

Arguably, the decline had been set in motion in the days immediately before the strike. Up until the raid on October 25, the power of the Oakland Commune lay in the camp itself: in collective activities that linked each day in the liberated plaza with the next, building momentum through consistent interaction around questions of survival rather than activism. When over 600 riot police fired tear gas and flash-bang grenades as they broke through the barricades protecting Oscar Grant Plaza in the dark morning hours of October 25, they were not only attempting to evict the

camp, but to break apart the continuity of the tenuous community that we had formed.

This first eviction backfired on them spectacularly. The crowds came back even bigger and called for the November 2 strike—a timely and effective decision. But it also marked the first moment when the energy of the Commune shifted from the daily process of holding liberated space to a strategy built around discrete "days of action." The day in question was only one week away, and the buildup to it ran parallel with the reconstitution of the camp. But with the historic decision to strike, there was a shift away from the reproduction and expansion of the original oppositional zone. Something was lost in this transition.

The consistent process of eating, sleeping, and organizing with many others in a liberated zone at the heart of a struggling North American city had proved to be a challenge for which few were prepared. At times, the Commune was a veritable inferno—a place of fistfights, constant emergencies, injury, illness, miscommunication, and stress. At other moments, it offered a kind of freedom and beauty unlike anything else. There were times when each person seemed full of limitless creativity, compassion, and dedication, matched by hatred of capitalism and the state. We could see the experience changing people day by day, hour by hour, and we could feel it changing us. The camp was a place of joy, laughter, and care, almost psychedelic in the confusion it provided to the senses. But mostly, it was a place that teetered on the edge of breakdown, a place in which none of the usual buffers and mediations that mask the daily violence of contemporary America were present. All the misogyny, homophobia, racism, and other poisonous dynamics that form the foundations of capitalist society rose to the surface in this liberated zone, challenging the Commune's ability to sustain itself. We were ill-prepared for the problems the camp raised, though people made heroic attempts to respond to each new emergency.

pression. Even after riot police with shotguns chased them off, the night was still not over. An FTP march was quickly organized. In keeping with tradition, participants took the familiar loop through downtown and unleashed rocks, bottles, and other objects at the police station and jail as they passed. The Commune was not going down without a fight.

Yet that was the end. The limits had emerged one by one over the course of January, and there was no new occupation or wave of mobilizations on the way. On January 29, as comrades scrambled to support the hundreds in jail while thousands across the country organized solidarity demonstrations with Oakland, over 300 gathered at the plaza in what turned out to be the last large general assembly. They voted enthusiastically to endorse calls emerging from New York and elsewhere for a May 1 global general strike—a strike that never materialized. Many still hoped that Occupy would reemerge with a spring offensive. But given the bitter defeat in the turf war over the plaza, the implosion of the port blockade campaign, and the failure to secure a new home for the Commune, this seemed unlikely. January was the end. Occupy's window of radical possibilities would soon be closed in Oakland and everywhere else.

Over the following months, people carried out many amazing and inspiring radical projects. Occupy Oakland organized a series of large neighborhood BBQs across the city. The anti-repression committee set an impressive standard for how to take care of arrestees and imprisoned comrades. The SF Commune temporarily held a building at 888 Turk. Insurgent feminist and queer comrades who had come together over the previous months continued a campaign of actions and interventions while writing and distributing propaganda and texts. Clashes and attacks temporarily erupted across the Bay around May Day, while a struggle over an occupied farm emerged in neighboring Albany. Foreclosure defense campaigns successfully held off a series of evictions. For a week, people occupied an Oakland public school that was being closed down.

and the state, transforming it into a collective occupation where people could take care of each other and organize further actions. Even though many remember that spectacular day as one of the most important in their experience as part of the Oakland Commune, in relation to its stated goal, it was a disaster.

In response to criticism of the clandestinely organized occupation of the Traveler's Aid building on November 2, J28 was organized in a radically open structure. Regular "Move-In Assemblies" of over 100 met publicly in the plaza to plan the occupation, while giving a smaller closed group the mandate to pick a building in relative secrecy. This assembly spent countless days organizing infrastructure for the new occupation, setting up guidelines for accountability within the space and planning a multi-day festival of music, speakers, and films. As the day of action unfolded, this ambitious plan was blasted apart in the first spectacular clashes outside the target building—the massive Kaiser Center Auditorium—in what became known as The Battle of Oak Street. It was probably because people believed so strongly in the dream that a new liberated space could emerge from the Kaiser Center and resuscitate the Commune that they fought so hard and with such a collective spirit that day. But OPD had no qualms about transforming downtown into a warzone to insure that private property remained off-limits.

A backup plan later in the day also failed to seize a building. As night fell, OPD called in additional police forces from across the Bay Area. After their first attempt to kettle a march of nearly a thousand people at 19th and Telegraph was outmaneuvered—the crowd dramatically escaped by tearing down the fences the city had recently rebuilt—the police finally succeeded in surrounding over 400 comrades outside the downtown YMCA. The arrestees spent the following days in filthy overcrowded cells at Santa Rita Jail.

Amazingly, those who remained on the streets remained undaunted. They broke into City Hall, burning the American flag and vandalizing the inside of the building in revenge for the police re-

For this reason, many comrades welcomed the first police raid in hopes that direct conflict with the state would breathe new life into a struggle slowly dying of internal causes. After the raid, people could focus their attention outward in offensive actions like the general strike, away from the overwhelming difficulties of the camp.

The decision to strike was not a mistake. On the contrary, it was one of the better decisions collectively made during the entire sequence. But it inaugurated a half-year period defined increasingly by days of action called for by the general assembly rather than the rhythms of shared experience. This process accelerated after the second eviction of the camp on November 14 and reached its terminal point with the late January call for another general strike on May 1—a strike that never materialized. May Day 2012 ended up being an exciting day of action, but it paled in comparison to the November 2 strike, which had been organized in only a week. The more that the Oakland Commune lost its footing, momentum, and sense of direction, the more it relied on arbitrarily chosen days of action that were increasingly few and far between.

In the shift away from the camp towards spectacular offensives, the actions of November 2 opened up three horizons of struggle, each of which hit a wall over the following months. In many regards, the limits of these approaches were already apparent during the strike.

First, there were the tens of thousands who laid siege to the port. Most would agree that the high point of the day—the action that had the most impact on capitalism and the local power structure—was this blockade of the port of Oakland. However, the success of that action empowered one tendency within the movement to push the struggle away from reclaiming space and disrupting the flows of capital toward a kind of trade union superactivism that later proved to be a dead end.

Secondly, there was the attempt, later in the evening, to occupy the Traveler's Aid building. But when riot police besieged the build-

ing, the participants failed to put up any meaningful defense. It was one thing to occupy public parks and plazas—but another thing to breach the sacred barriers of private property. Comrades had been discussing that trajectory from the beginning, but the failure of the Traveler's Aid attempt indicated that it might remain an unsurpassable horizon.

Finally, there was street fighting and the black bloc. This represented the dream of continuous escalation, in which a proactive offensive of black-clad rioters would usher in a new phase of increasingly widespread militant rebellion, culminating in a full-on uprising. Certainly, November 2 saw some of the most intense street conflicts up to that point, epitomized by the appearance of a large black bloc during the afternoon anti-capitalist march. Yet that night, when riot police were finally ordered to reassert control of downtown Oakland and evict the newly occupied building, this increased street militancy meant little. Police scattered the participants like a bowling ball plowing into a wedge of pins.

Few people were organized into affinity groups capable of acting intelligently and decisively in the face of the highly trained and physically intimidating Oakland police. Inexperienced rioters had the tendency to attack weakly and prematurely, then scatter when the police counter-attacked. In addition, the presence of vigilante pacifist members of Occupy—whose violent assertion of nonviolence underscored the paradox of their position—and amateur journalists too busy photographing the riot to help their ostensible comrades both produced confusion and dissension. As is often the case in the US, comrades were able to carry out attacks on property with relative ease, adopting an effective hit-and-run strategy. But when it came to standing ground or mounting an offensive against the police, the street fighters were rarely effective.

directly with the Longview Longshoremen to initiate a confrontational showdown. But in their determination to reorient Occupy towards labor activism, the tendency that had coalesced during the November 2 port blockade constructed a framework that was completely disconnected from the streets and plazas from which they had emerged. With every step from the November 2 strike through the December West Coast port blockade and towards Longview, these actions ceased to be participatory disruptions in the international flows of capital as a projection of the occupation's power beyond the plaza. Instead, they became solidarity actions, organized only with supporting the union in mind. There was naïve talk about the actions sparking a wildcat strike in the ports, or prying the union away from the bureaucrats who were eager to diffuse the conflict and cooperate with EGT. But none of this came close to materializing.

In the end, the labor solidarity tendency within Occupy Oakland and the handful of radical Longshoremen allies were no match for the political machinations of those at the top of the ILWU, who coerced the rank and file of Longview to accept a compromise with EGT that kept them on the job while stripping them of many benefits and their job security. This was enough to ease the tension and avert the showdown. On January 27, as the last-minute plans for the following day's attempt to occupy a building were finalized, a confusing statement emerged from the caravan organizers, announcing that the Longview workers had accepted a contract and that this was—in some unspecified way—a victory. This was how the port campaign ended: not with a bang, but a whimper.

The next morning, the final offensive of January kicked into action. Though in many regards it was the most significant day since the general strike, the planned January 28 (J28) building occupation was fundamentally an arbitrarily chosen day of action with all the limits thereof. However, unlike the port actions, this was a massive attempt to return to what had made the Oakland Commune so powerful in the first place: liberating space from capital

the wave of arrests around the plaza over the previous weeks, the people arrested at this first FTP march bore some of the heaviest penalties of the whole sequence, with some comrades eventually doing significant jail time.

The first FTP march failed to reverse the rapid decline of the Commune or reassert the movement's presence downtown. On the contrary, it accelerated this decline, signaling to the state that it was now clearly gaining the advantage. This was not the fault of TAC, who continued to hold weekly FTP marches over the following months that were usually less confrontational. Rather, it showed the limits of the uncoordinated and tactically ineffective displays of street militancy mustered by the black blocs of that period. At the time, this series of painful defeats failed to register to many comrades as a serious blow to the movement, even though the authorities had successfully swept the plaza clean and neutralized the attempt to mount a response. Many people were distracted, with their sights set on the upcoming days of action. In retrospect, the new year was clearly off to a bad start.

Planning continued for the convergence in Longview and the January 28 day of action. General assemblies decreased in size and regularity but continued to meet, increasingly retreating to the park at 19th and Telegraph since an increasing number of comrades were prohibited from the Plaza by stay-away orders. The source of the Commune's power, the defiant public occupation of space, was quickly drying up, though the upcoming offensives gave many comrades the sense that another wave of momentum was imminent.

This delusion was shaken when the bureaucrats at the top of the ILWU outmaneuvered the planned blockade of the scab ship in Longview, and all plans for the convergence imploded. Occupy caravans had been organized from Oakland, Portland, Seattle, and elsewhere, while the federal government announced it would defend the scab ship with a Coast Guard cutter. Comrades from across the West Coast were just waiting for word from those working

The New Year

After the camp was cleared during the second police raid of the plaza on November 14, many comrades continued along each of these three trajectories, moving ever farther from the camp that had brought them together in the first place.

The labor solidarity wing of the movement, born during the November 2 port blockade, increasingly viewed Occupy as a vehicle for supporting unions and intervening in existing workers' disputes. On December 12, this faction led a day of action to shut down ports across the West Coast (as well as in other scattered locations such as a Walmart distribution center in Colorado). This had been called for in response to the wave of repression and camp evictions across the country in late November and early December, as well as in solidarity with the struggle of longshoremen in Longview, WA against the efforts of the multinational corporation EGT to break their union, the ILWU. While not entirely successful, the day was still impressive, demonstrating the continuing power of Occupy. As 2012 began, this labor solidarity wing of the movement was busy spearheading a regional mobilization to disrupt the first scab ship scheduled to dock at the EGT facilities in Longview. Many comrades from the Bay planned to converge on Longview in what looked to be an important showdown.

Elsewhere, an alliance of insurrectionaries and comrades from a wide range of working groups that had sustained the camp were organizing another offensive. Regrouping from the failure of the Traveler's Aid occupation, they had called for a massive day of action on January 28, 2012 to occupy a large undisclosed building. This was to become a new hub for the Oakland Commune.

Finally, there was the assortment of radicals and rebels who continuously struggled to hold down Oscar Grant Plaza itself. Some of them had slept on benches in the plaza long before Occupy; some were young locals politicized over the previous months; others hailed from a range of eccentric Bay Area groupings including a

contingent of juggalos. The plaza was still contested turf with regular general assemblies, events, and a 24-hour "vigil" that held space, served food, and provided a social venue. The park and empty lot a few blocks away in the gentrifying Uptown district at 19th and Telegraph had also become a second front, following a brief occupation there on November 19 that ripped down the surrounding fences and established a camp before being quickly evicted.

This was the political climate in Oakland on New Year's Eve, as a spirited march left from the plaza for a noise demo. The crowd followed the now familiar loop from the plaza to the police headquarters, courthouse, and jail, where people unleashed a torrent of fireworks before returning to the plaza for a raucous dance party. With hundreds attending, it was powerful demonstration that even without the camp the Commune could still call the plaza home. It was also a celebration of the struggles to come and the next major wave of the Occupy movement, which many believed to be just around the corner. In those early celebratory hours of 2012, it was nearly impossible to grasp how quickly all of these possible trajectories would hit walls. But in January, the limits that first became apparent on November 2 became debilitating, ushering in the terminal phase of the movement.

Oscar Grant Plaza was first to go. Running scuffles between the ragtag rebels of the plaza and platoons of cops looking to scare them off had increased throughout December, becoming a daily occurrence by the final week of the year. Dozens were arrested. In contrast to previous mass arrest situations, the cops and DA were clearly looking to make examples of the arrestees, who were slapped with large bails, felony charges, and a new favorite tactic of repression: stay-away orders that threatened people with additional jail time if they returned to downtown Oakland. While not as spectacular as police indiscriminately tear-gassing and spraying crowds with projectiles, the most brutal and effective repression of the whole Occupy Oakland sequence arguably occurred during the turf war over the plaza at the turn of the year. Because so many

comrades were focused on organizing for the upcoming days of action, those facing the cops and courts in the plaza were isolated, without the support they needed.

Inspired by the success of the New Year's Eve noise demo and hoping to respond to the escalating repression, the Tactical Action Committee—a militant group composed primarily of young Black men from Oakland who had been busy defending the plaza and organizing other actions—called for the first FTP (Fuck the Police) march one week later, on January 7. On January 4, after a general assembly in the plaza ended and the majority of people went home, a militarized raid involving dozens of riot police successfully evicted the vigil. This was the third and final raid of Oscar Grant Plaza. A member of TAC was among those arrested in the operation. The rebel presence in the plaza had been successfully removed, and the upcoming FTP march took on increasing significance.

Nearly three hundred gathered at the corner of the Plaza at 14th and Broadway on the evening of January 7. Many were masked up and ready for a fight, feeling that this was the moment to present a coordinated militant response to the successive evictions of the Commune. Led by a massive "Fuck the Police" banner, the march took off once again down Broadway on the loop past police headquarters and the jail. Clashes erupted near the headquarters as a police cruiser was attacked, bottles were thrown, a small fire was lit in the street, and lines of riot police repeatedly charged the crowd. Yet once again, the displays of militancy were just that, displays—ineffective when it came to defending comrades. Fighters were able to get in a few hits on police, but quickly retreated and fled out of downtown in the face of the OPD offensive. Arguing erupted among comrades, as it became clear that the eagerness with which many went on the attack was not matched by any kind of organized defense or coordinated crowd movement. As comrades scattered, leaving the plaza abandoned once again, another wave of arrests ensued with police units picking off isolated street fighters who had been identified by undercovers in the crowd. As with

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the persisting spaces of coordination with the unions, people just managed to hold on through winter, riding the last of the wave that had begun in May. They kept their dreams and memories intense through lively debate, so that when the two major unions were finally forced to call a new general strike by an even greater round of austerity measures, people threw themselves into organizing it, and what was created exceeded everyone's expectations. Through force of will, people stayed on their feet despite heavy blows of repression. Striding forward, they made it through May Day, 2012, long enough to take the streets without being intimidated by the immense police presence, and to counteract the media narrative about the March 29 riots with an onslaught of flyers, posters, and graffiti.

After that, the social body fell asleep. The summer was long and pacific. In the fall people rallied to prepare a new round of strikes or to stop the growth of fascism, but could not see clearly how to carry those struggles forward. The next general strikes sputtered forward ineffectively, and in winter people holed up in small group projects they had created with friends, whether or not those projects had proven effective in the last months. These included specifically anarchist assemblies that organized debate and propaganda, neighborhood social centers, distros, free stores, or mutual aid networks intended to encourage anarchist responses to problems of job precarity or home foreclosures.

Narrated as the movements of a great social body, this rhythm of rise and fall makes perfect sense. After such gigantic efforts, the collectivity needs to sleep, and that sleep is not a form of weakness but a necessary activity in which gains can be solidified. Yet many people experienced the exhaustion of the social body as defeat, as loss. In accepting this as reality, they will learn all the wrong lessons, rather than identifying the activities most crucial to the moment.

To a slight extent, because conversations about a rhythmic rather than geometric resistance had already begun to take place,

comrades in Barcelona were able to shift their focus, despite widespread feelings of defeat. Anarchists gave priority to groups of a newly expanded affinity, in which they worked together with comrades whom they had gotten to know in the recent upheavals. They debated, they recovered their energy, and they strengthened friendships new and old. If the recognition that a slowdown was inevitable and healthy had been generalized, they might have carried out these activities with a sense of triumph and innovation. Instead, most comrades had the attitude that they had to be content with an inferior kind of activity, because it was the only activity that seemed possible in the moment. Thus, they correctly took advantage of the lull to debate the hot moments of struggle of the previous months, but they failed to recognize the particular value of that moment of social slumber.

The moment also demanded that anarchists strengthen their relationships of difference, seeking out the sincere neighbors, coworkers, and other people they had gotten to know in heterogeneous spaces such as the neighborhood assemblies. These were the people with whom they were losing contact due to social disintegration. It is of the utmost importance to resist that social disintegration, to seek out recent acquaintances and continue solidifying relationships. Obviously, it is much easier to struggle together with comrades of affinity in moments of social peace or defeatism, especially because so many other people ceasing struggling in these moments. But we must not confine our method of struggle to the "hot" moments of upheaval and coalescence. We must also learn a long, abiding struggle, and this requires reaching out to those we met and learning what practical things we can share when they no longer continue to participate in assemblies, debates, and protests.

As noted earlier, it is also important to keep making noise, whether via protests or attacks, to invite the disappeared to return to the streets. In Barcelona, this has happened with continued student strikes and actions enabling people to ride the metro for

free. However, if these actions are not undertaken as a conscious invitation, but as an attempt to maintain lost momentum, they will only contribute to the exhaustion and disillusionment of those in the struggle.

Finally, moments of defeatism and disintegration need to be seized as opportunities for propaganda. After a strong wave of struggle, people often fall away because they are exhausted and because they are disappointed at how little they have accomplished, how much farther they have to go. This is the time when anarchists have to unmask the false promises of the recuperators and reformists. This is the time to show that all the politicians, all the government, have to be thrown out, that the police and the media are our enemy, that revolution is not an easy affair. This is the time to celebrate our collective bravery in the streets, to remember what we were fighting for, and to point to promising directions that were revealed in the recent struggle, whether those include a practice of assemblies and self-organization, a defense of houses from eviction, the expropriation of food and clothes from capitalists, the occupation of land, or the burning of banks. It is rare that the death of a struggle does not leave behind some bones that can be fashioned into new tools. We should not leave them lying in the dust.

On the whole, anarchists in Barcelona did not seize on the temporary collapse of the struggle to point out the false promises of the recuperators. In fact, the opposite happened. When one of the neighborhood assemblies that functioned on largely anarchic lines started to flag and disappear—as had all the neighborhood assemblies at that point—some Trotskyists who had been saving their energy for that moment, and who had not committed their time and energy to keeping the assembly alive in the prior months, swooped in like vultures to blame the weakness of the assembly on the informal structure that anarchists had won in debates more than a year earlier.

Healing ourselves, strengthening friendships, building consistent and practical relationships with people we met in the upheaval,

inviting the disappeared back into the streets, showing that the disappointment only reflects the false promises of reformists and recuperators: these are the essential tasks in the moments of exhaustion, defeatism, and disintegration that nearly always follow social upheavals. These are the tasks that can set off a new wave of struggle after the inevitable low—that prepare the way for subsequent peaks and plateaus to reach ever higher. At the very least, they equip us to stay strong and be prepared for whatever comes next.

We also need a culture of lively debate to hone our social intuition so that we can keep up with changes in context. Struggle has its cycles, but these cycles are not repetitions, and not every metamorphosis in the social struggle is cyclical.

The context in Barcelona has shifted several times over the last couple years. At some points, anarchists cleaved to this shift like naturals, whereas they missed other shifts and had to spend months catching up—or simply lost in a terrain that suddenly behaved differently.

The struggle shifted after the first general strike. It shifted again with the plaza occupation movement. It shifted yet again when the plaza occupation dissolved and the neighborhood assemblies blossomed. That shift was recognized and to a certain extent even precipitated by anarchists, whereas the activists and would-be politicians entirely missed the boat: they stayed on in Plaça Catalunya, trying to salvage their precious structures. After wasting a lot of effort, they partially succeeded saving those structures, but happily their absence meant they were not there to recuperate all of the neighborhood assemblies.

Some time in summer or fall 2011, there was another shift. Most anarchists missed it. I certainly did, as I can't even identify when it happened. The growing strength of the struggle was not matched by a growth of opportunities for waging it. The labor unions would not call another general strike, despite our attempts to pressure the minority unions to make it happen. The struggles against auster-

ity in education and healthcare would not take a radical direction, even though they had moments of intense support and had moved towards building a practice of road blockades and occupations.

The strategic clarity of the previous months evaporated. It became necessary to identify what we needed to struggle. We were also forced to interrogate our relationships with others in struggle when a transportation strike was betrayed (by its leadership? by its own base? the argument continues) and a student strike unexpectedly cast off those who were managing it. Clarity returned when a general strike was finally announced for March 29, 2012. We knew how to organize for that. But the questions of the winter had not necessarily been answered.

If the growth of a struggle can only be traced geometrically, then we can only interpret it as defeat that the March 29 general strike was so strong, and the general strike of November 14 the same year was so weak. March 29 offered important lessons about organizing a strike and fighting in the streets. Given that the unions successfully pacified the November 14 general strike and the police dominated the streets, does that mean that our enemies learned their lessons, and we did not learn ours?

Looking back on the March general strike, a friend succinctly identified the proper question, though his attitude only depressed and confounded me at the time. Three weeks of incredibly exhausting preparation went into making the March 29 strike and riots possible, and afterwards all that energy dissipated, rather than coming back to us. Was it worth it?

Our exhaustion, along with the fear that the riots had produced in the unions, precipitated another shift. The general strike called for October 31 by the small radical unions and the general strike called for November 14 by all the unions were not unfolding in the same context as the glorious 29M general strike. Most anarchists could not find the motivation to throw themselves into preparing for them. Fortunately, this pessimism arose from a lucid social intuition. For our part, we had still not answered the question

of how to make the energy of the riot return to us rather than dissipating as a cathartic outburst. And the unions, for their part, were less concerned with getting a lot of people into the street and more concerned with proving to the police that they could keep things under control. The failure of the October and November strikes—the fact that they were boring, under-attended, and ultimately demoralizing—is a victory for the struggle as long as we follow up by exploring how to effectively create a visible, large-scale confrontation that cannot be pacified by the unions or the police.

Unfortunately, there is a time limit for finding the answer. If it takes too long to create another street confrontation, the collective lessons learned in the rioting of 29M will fade away. The answer may lie in convincing the radical unions to return to their previous combative stance, to agitate for confrontation from within the masses summoned by the major unions, or to return to large-scale occupations.

Whatever the outcome, anarchists were wise to save their energy rather than try to reproduce a previous victory in changed circumstances.

Unsubstantiated Dreams

One factor that has repeatedly made it possible to force struggles into dead ends is the refusal of anarchists to substantiate their dreams. While Barcelona's nihilists have frequently graced the ongoing discourse on strategy with caustically cautionary warnings against optimism or planning the future, they have insisted on including dreaming in the list of luxuries that true revolutionaries are not permitted.

Unsatisfied with the implications of a strategy of total destruction for the growing group of people who urgently need to figure out questions of access to food, shelter, and healthcare—a group

Finally, the next time we realize that total anarchist triumph is no longer in the cards, we should consider the advantages of going out with a bang.

Further Reading

- Report: Convergence for the Rentrée

that includes many comrades—most anarchists have differed with the nihilists to address the question of self-organization as a positive practice that might satisfy all life's needs.

Well into the rise of the movement for healthcare, some anarchists began to participate critically. Even though the dismantling of public healthcare affects them directly, they generally did not perceive the movement as relevant to them, as it was mobilizing primarily to preserve the welfare state and reinforce Western medicine.[6] Later on, some anarchists discarded this apathy and began to hold debates on the problem. A small minority took the lessons of those debates and intervened in the movement for healthcare. Unfortunately, that intervention took place after the movement had already broken apart on the rocks of its own impotence.

What some comrades discovered in the course of the intervention, nonetheless, is of great importance. Many of those active in the movement harbored strong criticisms of Western medicine and were amenable to critiques of the welfare state. Most of the movement seemed to agree that healthcare was not organized in our interests even before privatization. In group conversations, nearly everybody had stories to share about disrespectful or harmful treatment at the hands of doctors and hospitals. A few participants in these conversations had even created projects for self-organizing healthcare outside and against capitalism. What's more, many of them were friends of anarchists, or anarchists themselves—yet most of the anarchist space was characterized by an ignorance of their projects.

This ignorance proved not to be a coincidence. Even after the intervention made these projects better known, anarchists almost unanimously failed to make use of them. This was not a political

[6] By "Western medicine," we should not understand every European tradition of healing, but the proactively patriarchal and capitalist practice of medicine that was institutionalized in the Enlightenment and subsequently globalized.

decision, as not a single critique of these projects (at least, not the more anti-capitalist ones) ever appeared. Rather, it seemed to be entirely a question of habit and rhythm. Anarchist militants were simply too busy getting beaten up by cops—and skipping meals for meetings, and subjecting themselves to who knows how much stress to support prisoners or attend assemblies with syndicalists and socialists—to help support an anarchist healthcare project that at some points was even offering free massages and other forms of therapy to any participant in social struggles who would show up. Saint Durruti, martyr of our cause, may you smile in your grave.

These were not additions to a long list of projects that needed more labor power to keep from collapsing. They were projects that needed the encouragement of people walking through the door, projects that could give greater strength and wellbeing to anyone willing to stop being a robot for the revolution and take a sick day every now and then.

To be clear, we are not talking about anarchists who do not know how to stop. The impossibility of holding a debate on a Sunday morning, because of the evident sacredness of the previous night's party, attests to the dependence of Barcelona anarchists on leisure. It is not a question of being unable to replenish themselves, but of replenishing themselves in the manner of workers or machines. Once again, we are faced with a contest between the imposed rhythms of capitalism and the rhythms our bodies and struggles demand.

But it is not only a question of rhythm. Across the board, anarchists have been hesitant to approach any question of material self-organization. A group of people centered around the *Crisi* newspaper and Enric Duran's white-collar bank robbery have formed la Cooperativa Integral Catalana, a Catalan cooperative complex that includes consumers, producers, healthcare workers, and eco-communes. Unlike the United States, where cooperatives have either been a rational business decision for farmers or an innovative form of self-managed exploitation for radicals, cooperatives

and real freedom—it is incumbent upon us to determine how we should proceed towards our objectives, or live our politics, or both, in what is now a very uncertain political environment.

I will conclude with just a few concrete suggestions. First off, however we pursue our struggles in the future, we should strive to build more infrastructure, more formal communications networks, and more informal social networks that are autonomous of movements comprised largely of people with whom we have serious political differences. Doing this could make it possible that, the next time a large portion of society is drawn into the streets, we will be able to participate in the conflict without losing sight of our own values, building momentum that is not dependent on someone else's movement.

Once we have infrastructure and networks of our own, as many anarchists in Montréal already do, we should be sure to *use them.* The thing that distinguishes revolutionary infrastructure from subcultural infrastructure—that is, an anarchist social center from a DIY punk space—is that, alongside its role as another space to live, socialize, and make ends meet, it should also serve to encourage people to throw themselves into anarchist struggle, and to spread the skills necessary for that task.

The latter first.

There are many practical skills that some anarchists already have, and others need to learn: digital self-defense, trauma support, tactics for street action, proficiency in different languages, and so on. These are all useful for specific situations—but we also need to be prepared for *general* situations. We need to be able to recognize when momentum is picking up, when we are at a peak of opportunity, when things are slowly or rapidly coming to a halt, and *what is strategic for anarchists to do* in each of these situations. Studying history, not just because it is curious or inspiring but in order to identify patterns and apply lessons, is essential if we hope to orient ourselves in the trajectory of the next upheaval to come.

stration. The simple fact of being present in an illegal demonstration can be considered criminal in itself.

Of course, actual police tactics are ultimately more important than codes and ordinances. The SPVM have evidently taken time to analyze the events of last spring, identifying their errors, drawing lessons, updating their old techniques, learning new ones, upgrading their equipment, and training officers. The results are plain to see.

In Québécois student politics, the reformist federations FÉUQ and FÉCQ have seen their influence reduced significantly, whereas the more radical ASSÉ (the kernel around which the now defunct CLASSE was formed) has more student associations affiliated with it than ever before. This is good for us, if only because ASSÉ's direct democracy creates spaces in which it is harder to shut people up—and anarchists are precisely the kind of people that social-democratic politicos usually want to silence.

At the same time, ASSÉ is now disorganized and largely dysfunctional. The members who possessed revolutionary aspirations and the strategic ideas to match have largely abandoned the organization. There is good reason to think that, just as after the 2005 strike, it will take years before the organization is once again capable of mounting an effective challenge to the government. Whether or not anarchists choose to participate in that struggle (and some surely will, even if others don't), it shouldn't be taken for granted that the next social major upheaval in Québec will arise from the student movement.

Indeed, in the wake of 2012's uprising, we should reconsider the strategies that have worked for us in the past. This is certainly true for all those who, in one way or another, sought to defend "the Québec model" over the course of the strike: the most significant student strike in Québec's history, by just about any measure, didn't even realize its most basic demand. For anarchists fighting in this province—and anyone else who would willfully jeopardize the comforts of welfare capitalism for half a chance at revolution

in Catalunya have a radical history. From the 1860s to the 1936 revolution, cooperatives were explicitly anticapitalist, sometimes utopian and often revolutionary, and fully integrated into the anarchist movement—supporting prisoners, helping create a libertarian culture, and equipping proletarian families to take care of themselves in a way that set them at odds with the demands of capitalism. They also spread practical visions—dreams, if you will—of how society might feed itself after a revolution. The CIC is also anti-capitalist and entertains revolutionary pretensions. It is by no means immune to becoming a structure for recuperation, but that is all the more likely to happen if it is shunned by revolutionaries who have a critique of recuperation.

While anarchists are quick to criticize or physically attack capitalist forms of housing, food production, and healthcare, they have generally not joined the CIC or any other project that puts anarchist social relations into practice on a material level. By staying away, they avoid conflict with those who would turn the cooperatives into reformist or anodyne structures, just as they avoided conflict with those who kept the healthcare movement in the dead end of pleading for mercy for the welfare state.

Capitalism is failing an increasing number of people in their simple desire to sustain themselves. This creates a ready opportunity to put other forms of sustenance into practice, but it also poses a problem. Other countries that suffer worse economic conditions than Spain have already shown that precarity can precipitate mass emigration that weakens social struggles. The same force that is beginning to oblige anarchists and their neighbors to take extended or even permanent trips to Scandinavia to work in kitchens or fish factories will also disintegrate the bonds that hold together a newly coalescing society.

Voline identified the anarchist failure to create structures in which new social relations could be put into practice on a material level as a key factor that allowed the Bolsheviks to hijack the Russian Revolution. The same weakness has prevented Barcelona

anarchists from enabling the major social upheavals to become revolutionary.

Eventually, people get tired of just protesting. For a long time, anarchists have used the inevitable failure of protest movements as proof of the weakness of pacifism or any other practice of dissent and demands. But people also get tired of going on strike, attending assemblies, and burning dumpsters. If the principles of self-organization and mutual aid are constrained to mere slogans on posters or formulations in debates, they lose their force.

Yet these constraints derive from very real weaknesses. Something as complicated as the self-organization of healthcare could only become reality on the basis of a profound reskilling and widespread participation. It has to grow from simple words to detailed dreams, and from small-scale to larger projects. Nor will this growth be unilinear: like everything, it will have ebbs and flows, setbacks and disappointments. But if we are not open to this growth, if we do not start these projects or spread these dreams, nor take part when others do—then who will?

The Problem of Nationalism

Predictably, the State has deployed a new set of mechanisms to make up for the collapse of social peace. Nationalism has been foremost among these. In Catalunya, this has manifested in two very distinct ways: fascist political movements, and the movement for Catalan independence.

As early as 2009, there were some in Greece who identified xenophobia as perhaps the most important state strategy to enclose and counterattack the insurrection. But they were few. Anarchist responses to xenophobia and fascism were too little and too late to prevent the concerted flood of media propaganda from redirecting popular angst away from the owning class to the most marginalized.

Legacy

It took a few months after the election for things to pick up again—but they did. Struggle in Montréal can cycle quickly from highs to lows and back again. February of 2013 saw demonstrations first against the Salon des Ressources Naturelles, a reprise of the previous year's Salon Plan Nord, then a major mobilization to oppose the PQ's Summit on Higher Education, at which the new governing party confirmed that, rather than freezing tuition, they would index it to inflation and the cost of living. This was not a broken promise on their part; it had been part of their election platform.

The next month started off promisingly, with the night demonstration on Tuesday, March 5, getting a little rowdy near the Palais des congrès. Yet that was the end of this second cycle. On March 12, another night demonstration—albeit much smaller—was crushed before it even left Berri Square. On March 15, the SPVM, with the assistance of the SQ, crushed Montréal's annual anti-police demonstration decisively. From that point on, all but one of the unpermitted demonstrations[6] that marched through downtown during the spring of 2013 were kettled and dispersed before they could become disruptive.

On the municipal, the provincial, and the federal level, the state has taken measures to prevent any reprise of spring 2012, passing laws to restrict or criminalize the essential elements of militant protest. The most ominous of these measures is Bill C–309, which finally became law on June 19, 2013. Applicable across the entire territory of the Canadian federation, it gives courts the ability to issue a prison sentence of up to ten years if a person is convicted of wearing a mask in the course of criminal activity during a demon-

[6] The "Status for All" demonstration on May 18, 2013, which was chiefly organized by the migrant justice organization Solidarity Across Borders, is the single exception.

like linear fashion towards our objectives. We are emotional creatures, and that is for the best. My criticism is that we staked our morale, our passion to fight, on the wrong thing: not on the health of the relationships of people seeking to be dangerous together, but on the health of the strike as a force that could interrupt capitalist law and order—which many of the people who created the strike never saw as a goal in itself, but only as a temporary means to a reformist goal.

As the strike was winding down, I should have dedicated more time to making connections with all those potential friends. There was one demonstration in August that I knew would be boring, but I went anyway. I saw someone there I'd seen a dozen times since February. He recognized me, too, and made a reference to the sort of thing we *should* have been doing. I laughed, but I didn't keep talking—even though that was the last chance I'd see him. I should have introduced myself, tried to exchange contact information, and passed on an invitation to get together at La Belle Époque. It was my last chance to do that.

As for the people with whom I was closest during the strike—partners in the street, fellow writers of timely propaganda, and other co-conspirators—these were the people with whom I should have been discussing what would come *after the strike*. What did our experiences together during those months mean? As the larger movement fell apart, could that history of working together transform into something else?

But relationships between specific people were not prioritized at the end of the strike. Instead, we prioritized relationships to *masses*—which, it turns out, are much more easily seduced by politicians than by people like us.

In Catalunya, the situation is different. Solidarity with immigrants was already a priority among anarchists and leftist activists before the crisis. At the same time, the state contains powerful forces committed to a progressive strategy of social control. The media, therefore, have not been unanimous in encouraging xenophobia and building a base for fascist political parties.

There is another factor that may have put fascists at a disadvantage. Events in Catalunya forced the fascists to reveal their hand several years earlier than might have behooved them. This deprived them of a period of invisibility in which to build a base before going on the offensive. The factor that forced their hand was the expansion of the Catalan independence movement.

It could be argued that the movement for Catalan independence as such arose during the transition from dictatorship to democracy, in order to recuperate the struggle against the State and sap support for radical anti-capitalists. That argument is beyond the scope of this article. In any case, the independence movement predates the economic crisis and does not exist as a merely recuperative force, but rather as a struggle in its own right. However, in September 2012, the conservative political party in power in Catalunya jumped on the bandwagon and put their support behind a referendum for independence, which political parties in Madrid subsequently declared illegal. Spanish military officials and then fascist parties and street organizations have gone public declaring war on the movement for Catalan independence.

This creates a number of conflicts, none of which is easy to understand. Much of the Catalan elite has entered into conflict with the Spanish elite, which further erodes the illusion of social peace and political stability—even forcing the European Union to deal with the impossible question of national independence, a can of worms that appears on the menu of many member states aside from Spain. But the conflict revolves around a fictitious community of resistance that is easy for people to join and easy for politicians to control. Just as the fascists present the immigrant as a scapegoat to

misdirect people's rage, the independence movement presents the bad government in Madrid, to be replaced by a good government in Barcelona.

A second conflict occurs within the independence movement itself, which has traditionally been socialist and has now been hijacked by conservatives. Who will seize the opportunity to take power? Who will remain true to the lurid dream of socialism, continuing the fight for a sort of Catalan Cuba? As the movement inevitably betrays itself, the principled part might radicalize, but as long as anarchists fail to address the forms of oppression faced by occupied linguistic-cultural groups (dare I say it; *nations*), the *indepes* are likely to adhere to a nationalist vision of revolution.

Some of them are sincere allies in the fight against repression, against austerity, and against fascism, but this is not without its own set of complications. As anarchists work alongside socialist *indepes* to fight the rising tide of fascism, they come face to face again with the question that was first highlighted by the 2010 general strike: how to position themselves in relation to events.

A functional component of fascism is its exceptionalism, not only in the juridical sense meant by Carl Schmitt, but also in how it is integrated into capitalist systems of governance. Even though fascism and democracy are fully integrated as complementing strategies of control—the unleashing of fascism by Capital is not exceptional, but systematic and functional—the structure of democracy predisposes us to experience the threat of fascism as exceptional.

Although Barcelona should be the first place on earth where anarchists would mistrust antifascist common fronts, this time as other times the threat of fascism has convinced anarchists to work together with political opportunists in uncritical alliances.

In a curious pattern, anarchists who knew very well in the plaza occupations how to deal critically with socialists suddenly started issuing common propaganda with them, working in the same organizational framework. They forgot that before the crisis broke,

ing rentrée and continuing the strike. In my own circles, there was never time or space to talk about how people felt about the situation as a whole, how they felt about their own personal situations, or what they hoped to get out of continuing to engage with the strike. Nor were there many discussions between people who felt political affinity with one another, or who cared about maintaining positive relationships with one another more than they cared about abstract political objectives.

During the spring, we shared some incredible moments together. We flipped over police cars, partied in the streets, forced cops to run for their lives, painted the halls of university buildings according to our tastes, made out with strangers during street parties that became riots, and generally lived life to the fullest. It wasn't all good, but the parts that were good were *really good*. Over the summer, like many other people, I made the mistake of attributing all that to the strike, rather than to the specific people who were in the streets acting to create those moments. The strike created the context in which those people were able to act together: it brought large numbers into the streets, it facilitated us running into each other over and over again, it frustrated and overwhelmed the forces that defend the capitalist economy.

But the strike had no agency of its own. It was itself the product of human agency—and by no means only the agency of anarchists. Although we were an influential minority in some regards, such as determining how confrontational the demonstrations were, we were not actually that important. Another influential minority consisted of careerist student politicians who were able to influence other aspects of the strike, like which images and narratives of the strike were broadcast on television and blogspace, much more effectively than we could.

Anarchists needn't have been depressed by the end of the strike. This isn't a macho admonishment that people shouldn't let their feelings get the best of them; I don't think the answer is for us to become coldly rational revolutionaries who move in a Terminator-

others threw themselves back into school or art or earning money. Some of these means of coping were healthier than others. But as a whole, they all contributed to isolating people from one another and atomizing the struggle.

It was worse for the sizeable number of anarchists who stuck it out longer, trying to do exactly what they had been doing a few months earlier: going to demonstrations, mobilizing people for them, trying to hype people up and "make things happen." After the electoral victory of the PQ, this simply didn't work anymore. The problem wasn't just that many anarchists had quit the strike by that time (although that certainly did have an impact). The problem was that anarchists in Montréal didn't quit *collectively*. Instead, we quit one at a time, and often only once we had reached a maximum of exhaustion, a low of misery, or both.

Of course, it's a stretch to speak of anarchists in Montréal doing anything in a coordinated way. There are simply too many organizations, nodes, social scenes, and affinity groups—each of which has its own distinct goals, outlook, and capacity. But none of these groups withdrew explicitly from the strike. Formal anarchist organizations in the city, except for a few propaganda outfits into heavy theory, had never fully engaged themselves in the strike *as organizations*.[5] It was individuals, usually working with others on the basis of friendship, who made the decision whether to drop out. The informal associations of people who worked closely *together* during the strike never met to discuss what people could do together as the strike was winding down. Consequently, these associations mostly evaporated with the strike.

There were many intentional discussions in June and July, announced ahead of time through social media and listservs, but most of these were focused on "the tasks at hand"—blocking the upcom-

[5] One exception is CLAC, which did make the conscious decision to organize demonstrations during the strike, and thereby did more than simply produce propaganda. CLAC's politics aren't explicitly anarchist, but anarchist ideas and principles are hegemonic within the organization.

they were already engaging in the most effective form of organization against fascism—the work they were carrying out against xenophobia. It goes without saying that anarchists always have and always must stand against fascism. Sometimes, this requires us to occupy common spaces of struggle with leftists. If we can only defeat the rise of fascism by pooling our strength with leftists, it makes sense to do so. But just because we share a common problem—fascism spells the annihilation of both anarchists and leftists—does not mean we have a common destination. We should never stop prioritizing the communication of specifically anarchist reasons to oppose fascism, which include our arguments against capitalism, against the State in all its forms, and against borders. Once some of them got scared into a common front, anarchists in Barcelona as elsewhere put their forces behind discourses that were essentially social democratic—attacking fascism as a violation of human rights, thereby distinguishing it from democracy rather than revealing the many common projects that the two systems of governance share.

Not only is this dishonest, it is also stupid. Fascist parties and movements begin to flourish precisely because people are losing faith in democracy. That loss of faith is a good thing. In treating fascism as an exception, antifascist common fronts serve to reassert faith in democratic values. The people who are suffering the most from the crisis in capitalism have already lost faith in those values, which have already failed them. It is no coincidence that antifascist fronts typically exclude the most marginalized in order to present the face of the normal citizen. They want to hide the very real crisis of immigration, in order to pretend that democracy can still work. Anarchists should not be arguing that we could all just get along if we protect human rights, but rather that the crisis of immigration is a problem of capitalism rather than ethnicity.

Even if fascism is defeated or averted, if anarchists have to abandon their struggle against capitalism to stop it, then it will have suc-

ceeded insofar as fascism is a tool deployed by the State to defend capitalism in circumstances when democracy does not suffice.

When the Tide Rolls Out

When the labor unions tried to abandon the growing social upheaval after the first general strike got out of their control, people organized a strike through the small, radical unions, and then created entirely new spaces of confrontation through the plaza occupations. When the plaza occupations disappeared, anarchists intentionally organized new assemblies conducive to debate via which we could refine our different strategies and take measure of our collective force, countering the dispersion that previously characterized the Barcelona anarchist space. Though there were some attempts to unify, on the whole we resisted the effort to create a new organization, a movement-coordinating body that would stave off the feelings of isolation or the appearance that the movement was disintegrating.

Such organizations tend to generate campaigns that exhaust our energies, rather than facilitating a collective process in which we find the struggles that rejuvenate us. They generate visibility for their own organizational existence rather than illuminating the fault lines that run between society and the governing apparatuses that interpenetrate it. These new assemblies did not attempt to create a social struggle for those who did not know how to find one, but to allow those already participating in struggle to sharpen their strategies. Although anarchist structures should support the participants, they should never encourage weakness, and the inability to find lines of conflict or to initiate a revolutionary project is a weakness anarchists cannot afford. Struggles are not started by activists, anarchist or otherwise. Those who seek an organization to compensate for their alienation or lack of initiative can only be a burden to assemblies oriented towards confrontation.

Many windows opened during the strike, but now we find ourselves "between strikes," as some people say here, which is to say in a period of demobilization. Compared to the spring of 2012, it feels unusually difficult to pull off even the simplest things.

Depression is an understandable but unfortunate response to the end of the strike. It's useless, and a little cruel, to tell people that they shouldn't feel sad about something that is an *objectively depressing* turn of events from an anarchist adventurist's standpoint. Like any period of social rupture, the strike offered an exciting and dangerous context, presenting challenges to anyone caught up in it. To be sure, not everyone wants excitement, danger, or inconvenience. Many people would prefer to drive down rue Sainte-Catherine without worrying about giant demonstrations, or go to school without running into hard pickets, or take the métro without fear of a smoke bomb attack or bags of bricks on the rails. In contrast, the kind of person who's going to become—and remain—an active, attack-oriented anarchist probably thrives on that sort of thing.

This is adventurism: the sin of actually enjoying the struggles we participate in. We may not all like the same things, or be capable of the same types of action, but our common thread—regardless of divergent physical ability, tactical preferences, skill sets, resources, and social privileges—is that we are fighters. The restoration of social peace deprives us of something we *need*. This peace is an illusion, and the social war continues, but it's harder to position ourselves offensively when it's no longer playing out in the streets every day and night—when thousands of people no longer see themselves as participants, having returned to the old routines of work or school or skid life.

There are lots of different ways to cope with depression. Hedonism is one way; after the strike ended, there was a heavy turn in some circles towards alcohol consumption, drug use, and hardcore partying. Another way is to switch gears entirely: some left town or put all of their energy into single-issue organizing, while

can be an ugly business, and there are times when it makes sense for us to hold our noses and work with people whose politics we consider objectionable. We should never attack or alienate those we dislike for no good reason. But, at the end of the strike, the benefits of making an open break were clear.

This is particularly important in light of the student movement's unforgivable failure to support those who were facing judicially imposed conditions including exile from the Island of Montréal, non-association with friends or lovers, and the possibility of serious jail time in the future. It doesn't matter whether the accused did what the state charged them with; the point is that illegal activity was essential to whatever success the strike had, and letting anyone suffer because the state pinned some of that activity on them sets a bad precedent for strikes to come. That's the strategic argument, anyway—the ethical one should be obvious.

In short, anarchists could have done many things other than what we *did* do, which was to stay at the core of the movement. It was already clear by the weekend of the Grand Prix that the movement was on its way out; the events of June and July (or the lack thereof) confirmed this. Yet anarchists continued participating in general assemblies and committee meetings; to be precise, anarchists either returned to those spaces after having left them, or came to them for the very first time during the whole strike. This was done out of a mistaken belief that it was *necessary to do so*, that the struggle *depended* on the revival of the strike.

Depression and Demobilization

The end of the strike was marked by a pronounced failure to address the widespread phenomenon of post-strike depression. We might better identify this as *post-uprising depression*, common anywhere that has experienced sustained periods of social rupture.

By adopting this approach before the economic crisis broke, anarchists were poised to radicalize struggles when larger numbers of people began taking to the streets. Carrying on isolated battles in the depths of social peace and capitalist prosperity makes perfect sense: it limits the options for capitalist accumulation, hastening the crisis, and puts rebels in a stronger position when the crisis breaks.[7] Anarchists betray that strength when they focus on the narrow economics of austerity as soon as the opportunity comes around. Those who tend towards populism will immediately tie their discourses to precarity and poverty, forgetting that capitalism is equally odious in its moments of peace and prosperity. They will lose all the strength they have built if capitalism passes into a new era of prosperity, or if fascism or some other political movement offers an apparent solution to the problem of precarity.

We are anarchists specifically because we do not water down our critique of social ills. We seek to strike the system at its roots. Positioning ourselves in conflict with both the dominant system and its potential recuperation also means not focusing on the conflicts that are the most visible, and sometimes illusory, like the conflict between workers and austerity measures. In fact, work and austerity exist in harmony. The true conflict is harder to elucidate, but it is our job to reveal it.

One way Capital has mediated this conflict is by imposing its rhythms on our lives, including our struggles. Social upheavals will always be followed by lulls of disappointment and apparent inactivity. Accepting these troughs and knowing how to take advantage of them is the key to preventing upheaval from being merely a flash in the pan.

To spark new upheavals, or at least be present at their beginnings, we need to hone our social intuition. When we understand

[7] Given the worldwide recession that forms the backdrop of today's social struggles, this formulation only deals with the possibility of economic crisis. But struggling in times of social peace can also provoke a crisis in governance that is not directly caused by economic recession, as in the rebellions of 1968.

how other people perceive their problems, we will be able to make or at least recognize a call to arms that speaks to them. For these upheavals to push past stagnation, they must avail themselves of structures for the revolutionary self-organization of life. We may create some of these structures, but many more will arise independently. Anarchists should connect with those who create them, even and especially if they are not revolutionary. Recuperation is not inevitable in spontaneous structures; it is the successful institutionalization of the structures that do not succeed in connecting with a struggle for the destruction of the existing order. The tendency towards creation is an essentially liberating tendency that capitalism consistently harnesses. But it is the harness, and not the creation, that constitutes recuperation.

What We Can Do after the Crest

- Strengthen the new relationships that formed in moments of rebellion. Learn to care for one another in practical ways.
- Identify which obligations neither sustain us nor succeed in inspiring new bouts of struggle, and give up on them. In Barcelona, this has meant activist projects like the mutual aid networks that made sense in a certain moment: projects that in theory should put us in contact with others who want to struggle, but in practice rarely do.
- Create spaces of encounter, debate, and fun for anarchists and other radicals. The purpose of these spaces is not to generate action, but to encourage reflection on our ongoing practices. Such spaces also strengthen new relationships of camaraderie. If people have the energy to go back on the offensive, these spaces will provide the necessary density to avoid dispersion and inspire action.

grenade, anarchists shouted down a few self-appointed leaders' appeals for people to express their outrage peacefully, successfully convincing the majority of the crowd to stop standing around in Berri Square and either physically confront the police or at least defy their commands to disperse. There were attacks on two different police stations that night, the first such actions of the strike.

In August, as on March 7, there were crowds of outraged people, but this time, they weren't outraged about police violence. Instead, as an outvoted minority, they were upset by their fellow students' decision to abandon the strike. The situation was a bit different: to go the fighting route would have meant ignoring the final verdict of a *directly democratic vote*, not just a few people with megaphones. In retrospect, it's not clear how many people would *ever* have been willing to do that, given that the authority of such a vote is almost universally accepted in the galaxy of Québécois student politics. But alas, it seems that, in the aftermath of those disastrous student assemblies, there was no one even able to *bring up the idea* to the hardly insignificant number of militants (student and otherwise) suddenly bereft of previous months' democratic justification for continuing the fight.

Pursuing a hard line against nationalists and their discourse would also have divided and weakened the movement, but it would have publicized anarchists' position on the Parti Québécois in clear terms. It would have offered an opportunity to call out their racist Muslim baiting in pursuit of the xenophobe vote, and their noxious valorization of French colonization on this continent. Had harsh critiques of CLASSE and/or ASSÉ come out when the strike was still in motion, rather than months later, this would also have divided the movement, albeit instructively. But if the movement is going to lose anyway, *why not divide it?*

It was clear after a certain point in August, if not earlier, that things were rapidly coming to a close. This was an inevitable result of the efforts of nationalists, social democrats, and others who had always been pursuing a conflicting agenda. Revolutionary struggle

address people who aren't particularly invested in the movement. All the adamant social democrats to whom anarchists' analysis of the situation might have been useful—given that they were legitimately seeking a freeze, not indexation—were completely unwilling to listen to anarchists during election time. That was their mistake. But our mistake was to keep trying to get through to the social democrats rather than reaching out to others who might have been a little more open had we been less alienating.

It's hard to imagine that the results could have been worse than what actually happened if, instead of trying to engage students and other participants or supporters of the movement with anti-electoral ideas, anarchists had used the same time and energy to advance a critique of Québécois democracy by other means. Sure, I'm skeptical that dropping a banner emblazoned with the words *NEVER VOTE! NEVER SURRENDER! À BAS LA SOCIÉTÉ-PRISON «DÉMOCRATIQUE!»* from a train bridge in a neighborhood full of francophone pensioners, then failing to publicize that this even happened, is the best use of anyone's time. But as confusing, poorly contextualized, and silly as that might be, at least it speaks for itself without centralizing the students' struggle to preserve their privileged position in society.

It's interesting to think about what other projects anarchists could have undertaken, unencumbered by the student movement. What if anarchists, in neighborhood assemblies or more informally, had pushed a struggle against gentrification and manifestations of capitalism in the areas where we actually live, while police resources were tied up watching night demonstrations and maintaining order downtown? In other words—what if we had taken advantage of the political situation to improve *our own* long-term material position, rather than improving the rapport de force between the government and the students?

We also could have done more to usurp the megaphone, both literally and figuratively. This happened earlier in the strike: on the night of March 7, after a demonstrator lost his eye to an SPVM

- Carry out withering yet humble propaganda against populists and leftists.
- Continue to send signals of revolt to those who are listening. Consider the benefits of highly visible, daytime sabotage actions, or actions that serve as invitations to illegality while also making people's lives easier, like forcibly opening up the metro for free riders or raiding supermarkets to distribute groceries. Do not feel obliged to keep up a high rhythm of attacks.
- Organize visible low-key actions that don't demand much energy, that keep people seeing each other and remind neighbors that the struggle is ongoing. These might include noise demos in support of those facing repression, or setting up a literature table in a public place.
- Learn a material skill that would be useful to you if the State and capitalism were destroyed, like carpentry or dentistry. Encourage your friends to learn such skills. Discourage them from embarking on a life path that is premised on the persistence of capitalism.
- Join existing projects that potentially constitute a material intensification of relations of collective self-organization, like clinics, gardens, and workshops. If none exist that suit your talents, talk with friends about starting one. Begin the discussion with questions like these: How we do this in such a way that it sustains us rather than exhausting us? How can this serve as an invitation to our neighbors to begin to abandon capitalist ways of life? How can this support those on the front lines of the social war?
- Challenge the legitimacy of all campaigns of repression. Cultivate awareness and outrage among your neighbors, coworkers, and other people you interact with. Organize

visible events such as potlucks in a public place at which people can symbolically support those facing repression. Go door to door if you have to.

- Tell stories of resistance. Organize neighborhood anarchist history tours that weave together the heroic battles of the previous century with those of last year. We've been fighting this war for hundreds of years; we will be for hundreds of years to come. Every scarred revolutionary who resists burnout and holds true into old age, and every young anarchist who does not have to start from scratch, constitute a victory against oblivion.

campaign. It was basically the same people doing everything, and they didn't have the energy to do everything; their energies were split between appealing to students to keep the strike going, and appealing to society at large not to vote.

Anarchists saw these as identical, which was a poor understanding of the social reality. For one thing, there was the statist, reformist, pro-voting stance of the majority of the student movement's participants—but do we really need to beat that particular dead horse any longer?

Meanwhile, a lot of people living in Montréal have a difficult time simply surviving because of the neighborhood they live in, the color of their skin, their lack of citizenship or status, or their accent in French—if they can speak it at all. There's no doubt that plenty of marginalized folks were down with at least certain aspects of the student movement. But neither is there any doubt that most of them had only limited interest in the self-centered struggle of a bunch of privileged brats who, broadly speaking, did not reciprocate by concerning themselves with the more dire struggles of migrants, indigenous people, and others.[4]

Now, I'm not saying you need to take off your red square if you want to start talking to such people about the moral bankruptcy of democracy. But maybe the fact that the PQ is going to sell out the movement shouldn't be the center of your analysis if you want to

[4] There were many people—including anarchists, but also others, particularly anarchism-skeptical feminists—who pushed to change the discourse of the student movement from within its formal structures, such as cégep associations, CLASSE congresses and committees, and formal and informal departmental associations at universities. The aim was often to see the struggles of women, queer people, and people of color mentioned in demonstration callouts and public statements. As a result of their efforts, the analysis presented in the manifesto that CLASSE released during the summer, Share Our Future, was less terrible than it might have been. Yet improved rhetoric never translated into meaningful action on the part of CLASSE in solidarity with indigenous people, Montréal's racialized youth, or any other marginalized category of people besides pro-strike students in Québec.

many people who had simply been caught up in the energy of the strike and received criminal charges as a result.

During the spring, anarchists organized some powerful noise demonstrations, and there were also actions at Montréal's courthouse, the Palais de justice. After the strike was over, in fall 2012, a large and spirited demonstration took to the streets in solidarity with everyone facing charges, living with restrictive conditions, or otherwise suffering as a result of things they had been accused of doing during the strike. Various texts appeared on this topic, as well. Yet at the end of the summer, during the period of the election and the rentrée, there was no organizing to speak of on that front.

The only thing anarchists did collectively in August, besides attempting to stop the rentrée, was to campaign against representative democracy itself. This could have been a promising terrain of struggle, but almost everyone involved was also wrapped up in the losing battle of continuing the strike. Things didn't turn out well on either front—but even more importantly, both undertakings were posited by the anarchists involved as being in solidarity with the student movement, when it was precisely the student movement that was facilitating the isolation and repression of anarchists by abandoning the strike.

In other words, the student movement was acting contrary to the principle of solidarity. And by buying into the PQ's proposal for an "electoral" truce, the student movement sabotaged its own most basic objective, with the PQ ultimately implementing indexation rather than a true tuition freeze.

As a side point, it's both facile and inaccurate to blame movement leaders and politicians for this turn of events. The strike was voted down in directly democratic assemblies. No matter how loud and influential certain individuals were, it was the students *as a whole* who chose to abandon the strike.

The hopeless attempt to save the student movement from itself took away from the effectiveness of anarchists' anti-democratic

Montreal — Peaks and Precipices

This is the final installment in our "After the Crest" series exploring how to navigate the waning phase of social movements. It is a personal reflection on anarchist participation in the 2012 student strike in Montréal and the disruptions that accompanied it. The product of much collective discussion, this article explores the opportunities anarchists missed during the high point of the conflict by limiting themselves to the framework of the strike, and the risks they incurred by attempting to maintain it once it had entered a reformist endgame.

For a narrative account of many of the events discussed in this text, read While the Iron Is Hot: Student Strike and Social Revolt in Montréal, Spring 2012.

Timeline

February 13, 2012. After many months of ultimatums to the government, mobilization on university and cégep campuses, and occasional actions and demonstrations, the student strike officially begins with a few departments at Université Laval in Québec City. From there, it spreads rapidly. Spring has come early.

February 16. The student association of Cégep du Vieux Montréal votes to go on strike; the school is occupied. Late in the night, police enter the school and break up the occupation.

March 15. After weeks of escalating violence on the part of the police, including an incident in which a cégep student lost his eye

to a concussion grenade, the COBP's annual demonstration against police brutality begins at Berri Square; the crowd that gathers is significantly larger than at any other time in the history of the event, and a night riot ensues. Although many participants escape, over 226 are arrested.

March 22. The largest demonstration of the strike thus far is an ultimatum from the Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE) to the Liberal government in Québec City: *repeal your planned tuition hike, or we will begin a campaign of economic disruption.* Although actions to this effect had already been taking place in Montréal, from this point on, they to begin to occur more frequently and with more ambitious objectives.

April 20. The Salon Plan Nord, a job fair, takes place at the Palais des congrès. Jean Charest is there to deliver a speech about his government's plan for the accelerated development of Québec's portion of the Labrador Peninsula—land which is still inhabited, for the most part, by indigenous people determined to live as sovereign, autonomous nations. The single largest street battle of the strike unfolds, paralyzing a large section of downtown for hours and capturing international headlines. For the first time in the strike, cops flee demonstrators. Its significance is immediately apparent to anarchists. Yet no one can predict how intense things will get.

May 4. A truce between the students and the government has come and gone. Angry night demonstrations have taken the streets, then been pacified; morning blockades of highways, skyscrapers, and other targets have ceased altogether. People have barely caught their breath from the largest anti-capitalist May Day demonstration in recent memory. And now buses from across the province are unloading militants of all sorts in the small town of Victoriaville; the goal is to disrupt the Liberal Party convention that was scheduled to take place at a Montréal hotel, then hastily transplanted to the countryside. The clash between demonstrators

an overly dependent partner who was not very appreciative of the help we often offered him unconditionally, sometimes was downright emotionally abusive, and really, do we even *like* this guy that much?

But anarchists often lack self-confidence. Sometimes we don't know when it's time to cut our losses and move on. We were under the impression that we needed the strike to go on in order to continue building up our own power. Yes, we had *invested* a lot in the movement, and it would have felt wrong just to pull out and let it do its own thing—which, no doubt, would have left us shaking our heads in exasperation. But was it really a good idea to invest *even more* in it when things were evidently headed in an ugly direction?

Our efforts to revive the movement did a lot to hurt the momentum that anarchists in Montréal had been building, in stops and starts, for years—since long before the strike. This set us up for disappointment and depression, needlessly demoralizing and demobilizing us. The problem was that we were pursuing a grossly unrealistic objective. The option of continuing the strike, *especially* given the general decline in confrontational activity during the early part of the summer, simply could not compete with the option of electoral compromise with the PQ. Democratic ideas have significantly greater sway in the student movement and among the general population than anarchist ideas. As unfortunate as this is, we should recognize this and act accordingly.

Missed Opportunities

The worst thing about the decision to prioritize continuing the strike was that, at that point, there were plenty more interesting and worthwhile paths open. For example, we could have focused on resisting and counteracting state repression. Repression had affected anarchists the most severely, but it also affected revolutionaries from other tendencies—most significantly Maoists—as well as

the top priority was to keep the strike alive. Hindsight is 20/20, but the negative consequences of that approach should have been predictable.

Maybe, instead, we should have just gotten out of there.

Now, I am not proposing that we should have withdrawn *all* support from the strike, but that we should have withdrawn *some* forms of support, especially the ones that involved considerable personal risk. Anarchists had previously proven capable of this. Many anarchists withdrew at the right time during the occupation of Cégep du Vieux Montréal and the night riot of March 15. In doing so, they left less experienced participants to face their fate alone—resulting in mass arrests in both cases. This was a little callous, no doubt; but during both events, anarchists made a point of offering advice to people who were making some pretty questionable decisions about how to conduct themselves. Anarchists eventually—and in my opinion, correctly—decided to take care of themselves once it was clear that things were about to get ugly and that their suggestions were falling on deaf ears. And in the aftermath, anarchists organized support for those arrested.

Regarding the strike as a whole, getting out wouldn't mean, for example, anarchists suddenly abandoning their critical support of the idea of free education. A common denominator position among anarchists in Québec, from syndicalists to anti-civ nihilist types, is that Québec's privileged proletariat deserves the nice things in life—like a useless liberal arts education—at least as much as Québec's even more privileged ruling class. To say it differently: "If capitalism, then at least welfare capitalism."

Making a strategic exit wouldn't have stopped anarchists from intervening where it made sense to do so, either—but it *would* have meant that anarchists ceased helping the student movement whenever it stumbled, talking confidence into it whenever it hesitated, and trying to knock some sense into it whenever it was about to go in a stupid direction. In many ways, anarchists related to the student movement the way you might relate to a partner—in this case,

and the Sûreté du Québec police force is brutal; people on both sides are badly injured, but the red squares get the worst of it. Another person loses an eye; still another is put into a coma. Things don't feel as good as they did two weeks prior.

May 10. The streets of Montréal have been peaceful for a few days, but this morning, smoke bombs go off in four métro stations across the city; the whole system is shut down for hours. Thanks to a good citizen with a cellphone, the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) releases pictures of some suspects on its website the same day, and four people surrender at a police station soon thereafter.

May 18. Two new laws come into effect at midnight, both of which restrict the ability of participants in the strike movement to act. The night demonstrations turn confrontational again around this time, but despite heroic efforts against the police, the movement is unable to assert itself in the streets as effectively as it did a month earlier. That said, more people are participating than ever before. Spontaneous demonstrations begin in neighborhoods across Montréal, helping new neighborhood assemblies to take off.

June 7. The Canadian Grand Prix begins with a rich bastards' gala. Militants fail to disrupt it, but over the next few days, despite a seriously compromised rapport de force with the police, they succeed in disrupting Montréal's most important tourist event of the summer. Many inspiring things happen; yet it is clear that the movement is on the decline.

August 1. Confirming what people have suspected for weeks, the premier calls a general election for September 4. The Parti Québécois asks the movement to agree to an "electoral truce."

August 13. Classes at some cégeps are scheduled to begin. School authorities, however, shut down classes so that anti-strike students can attend general assemblies on the matter of continuing the strike. Of the four cégeps voting on this matter, three vote to end the strike; they join schools that had voted similarly in the days prior. Except for a few departments at UQÀM, the

strike collapses almost entirely over the next few weeks—though demonstrations continue, sometimes turning confrontational.

September 4. When the votes are counted, the PQ has won a majority in the National Assembly. The tuition hike is canceled by decree a few days later. Some call it victory.

Foreseeing Events

Anarchists should hone our skills at anticipating social upheavals.[1]

Sometimes, such events can be seen coming far in advance, offering us the chance to prepare in order to surpass the limitations of the organizations, discourse, and default tactics that are likely to characterize them. That was the case in Montréal in the summer of 2011, by which time it was perfectly clear that a student strike was on the way. By the middle of summer, it was widely known that the major student federations, ASSÉ, FÉCQ, and FÉUQ, were collaborating for a massive demonstration on November 10. This demonstration was conceived as presenting the Liberal government with an ultimatum before the movement resorted to an unlimited general strike. Earlier in 2011, the occupation of the capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin, had taken me and many other anarchists across the continent by surprise. In Montréal, on the other hand, we had advance warning of things to come; it was clear to some of us that we could make strategic use of this knowledge.

A correct analysis of any situation, combined with reflection on one's own objectives, should suggest a strategy with which

[1] Of course, upheavals are unpredictable. In Montréal and elsewhere, we have seen that whenever the police kill someone, it can spark riots. These sorts of upheavals are often led only by marginalized youth—and all too often, as with the riots that started in the London neighborhood of Tottenham in 2011, anarchists fail to contribute in any meaningful way.

It was argued, not unreasonably, that disruptive activity could hurt the PQ's chances of beating the incumbent Liberals. Consequently, pacifist vigilantes stepped up their efforts to interfere with confrontational tactics at the night demonstrations, and the cégeps unanimously voted against the continuation of the strike. The strike did continue in some departments at UQÀM, but the effect was marginal, and efforts to enforce a shutdown of classes were undermined by scabs, security, and police.

Anarchists had taken many risks and suffered severe consequences in their efforts to strengthen and embolden the movement as a whole. Many had already been beaten and arrested, and faced charges and uncertain futures. More than any other political tendency involved in the strike, anarchists were the ones who escalated the situation to the point that Jean Charest was forced to call an early election to end the crisis. Yet despite our best efforts, we had become foot soldiers for a movement that had always had a nationalist, social-democratic, and reformist character. Now this movement no longer needed us to win its unimaginative and ultimately shortsighted baseline objective: the cancellation of this specific tuition hike. It became difficult to avoid the conclusion that we had been *used*. Many of us felt, perhaps irrationally, that our efforts over the past few months had been utterly in vain. We told ourselves that we had gained experience, friends, and so on, that we had been part of something "historic," but this sort of positive rhetoric failed to improve morale. In some cases, it just made things worse.

Since the strike's end, many anarchists have argued that we failed to apply the right tactics to the situation. What could we have done differently? What would have produced a greater success for us in August?

But this line of critique may miss the mark. Perhaps we should step back and ask whether it was strategic for anarchists to try to revive the strike after militancy had withered over the summer. At the time, everyone embraced the "common sense" assumption that

Both peaks of opportunity, starting on April 20 and May 18 respectively, involved peak numbers of people engaging in particular activities—either the specific activity of fighting the police during the first peak, or the general activity of participating in the strike movement during the second. These were our chance to reach out to all the people whose political analyses, experiences, or backgrounds were different from ours. Most of them knew what they were there to do. If anarchists had articulated to others a method of *how to do it* while also encouraging people *to go farther*, it's possible that the movement could have reached still higher peaks.

Quit While You're Ahead

The strike didn't die over the course of the summer. It stagnated.

After the Grand Prix, the demonstrations and meetings continued—quite a lot, in fact, albeit less than during the spring. June 22 and July 22 saw tens of thousands of people come out; not a single night demonstration failed to take the streets. There was a bit of a ruckus in Burlington, Vermont, when premiers and governors in the northeastern part of the continent met there at the end of July. Plans were drawn up for a convergence for the *rentrée* (the return to classes and the recommencement of the suspended semester) in August, starting first at cégeps and then moving on to universities.

All of this happened, yet none of it materially improved the strike's prospects for defending itself, particularly in the face of an election campaign—one of the most effective tactics democratic states have at their disposal to shut down social movements. It had been suspected for weeks, then essentially confirmed in the days immediately prior, but Jean Charest, the premier, made the official announcement on August 1.

The Parti Québécois offered a deal to the movement: settle down a bit, we'll win this election, and then we'll suspend the hike.

to proceed.[2] But how do we refine our analytical skills? I don't want to reduce this to *experience*; plenty of "veterans" analyze situations badly, routinely making the same mistakes. In Montréal, that camp includes those who fetishize direct democracy, certain types of collective process, and the global justice movement that peaked here in the mobilization against the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Québec City. Québécois insurrectionists tend to dismiss that crowd—perhaps too hastily—as being attached to a romanticized notion of anti-capitalist struggle in Montréal at the turn of the millennium. And yet older insurrectionists are also guilty of using the same tactics that they've been using for years, often with no better sense of the political context than the younger people they are lecturing.

Rather than deferring to age and experience, we can sharpen our analytical skills through discussion groups, general assemblies oriented towards communication as an end in itself, and more writing, theorizing, and critique. These are the processes that enable a crew, a community, or a distributed network of subversives to gain mutual understanding and refine their analyses in order to speak precisely about what is happening, what must be done, and—most importantly—how to do it. It is essential to find the time and space to do this with people you trust, whose analysis you also trust, and ideally who come from a range of backgrounds and experience.

This isn't a recipe for success. The future can't be foreseen with total accuracy. But things sometimes play out in similar ways over

[2] The problem of strategy in chess is the problem of determining the best way to checkmate your opponent. The problem of strategy for anarchists is more complicated, because we don't necessarily agree as to what we are trying to achieve—but there are a few things we should be able to agree upon, such as abolishing police, prisons, and borders. Whatever our goals, strategy is how we attempt to reach them. Speaking of a correct analysis, then, has little do with a lofty concept like Truth, which is supposedly final. No analysis is correct forever; no analysis is correct outside the context in which it serves. For anarchists, who wish to bring about a revolution, a correct analysis is simply whatever interpretation of social reality best informs our efforts to achieve that objective.

and over again. There are patterns we can identify. We have a better chance of finding them if many of us are looking, and even better if we disagree on some things and draw on different knowledge.

If anarchists don't improve our ability to foresee events, we will keep repeating two grievous mistakes. First, we won't know when it's time for us to throw ourselves into a struggle with everything we've got—when the risks are worth the possible consequences. Alas, many anarchists in Montréal waited until far later than would have been ideal to get involved in the student strike. Second, we won't recognize when we should withdraw because the movement is headed toward a catastrophe that will hurt us—as the events of August 2012 did, at the end of the strike.

Once the school year started, some anglophone anarchists from outside the university, or who were students but who mostly organized outside of student spaces, made a concerted effort to insert themselves and anarchist ideas in general into student organizing at McGill and Concordia. This was sometimes as sloppy and disorganized as the individual anarchists involved. But that didn't matter; what mattered was consistency. Local anarchists' distribution of certain texts at McGill, such as *After the Fall* and "Communiqué from an Absent Future," probably contributed significantly to the occupations that occurred on McGill campus during the 2011–12 school year, both before the strike even started.

Many of the texts distributed were written in inaccessible insurrectionist jargon; anarchists often came off as total wingnuts. But the point was not to appeal to the masses. It was to make connections with specific people who would be participating in the strike when it began— a process that was developed further by inviting people to events at La Belle Époque, the newly-opened anarchist social center in the Southwest, or just by hanging out. This, in turn, encouraged those people to expand the discourse of the strike to other areas: struggle in defense of the Earth, against the police, against racism and colonialism, and so on.

This opened up a moment akin to the Occupy moment in other places.[3] What happened is that people with radically different ideas were meeting in the streets, vaguely united by their opposition to how things were going in their society. Perhaps they were excited by the energy of the moment; perhaps they were open to challenging preconceived notions about how things should be, and how to get there.

This didn't happen on the scale that it could have. Many anarchists cited the shortcomings of the casserole demos and the neighborhood assemblies to justify not engaging with them. Of course, there *were* shortcomings; that's to be expected whenever people more familiar with obedience to authority suddenly opt for defiance. Their strategies, rhetoric, analysis, and even attitudes weren't always ideal from an ideologically purist anarchist perspective. But this was as true of those who fought in the streets—including those young and patriotic Québécois men who saw their combat with the police as a continuation of the FLQ's hypermasculine methodology—as it was of those who opted to bang pots and pans or to participate in the "popular neighborhood assemblies" that had, in many cases, devolved after a few weeks into hangout spaces for all the local weirdos interested in radical politics.

The important thing here is that the confrontations of the book fair weekend marked the point when street fighting downtown started to deliver diminishing returns, in terms of its ability to disrupt the capitalist economy and improve the movement's rapport de force with the government. At that point, it was probably more feasible to *broaden* the disturbances than to escalate the ones already taking place.

[3] There were Québécois manifestations of Occupy, including Occupy Montréal, but they didn't arouse nearly as much interest as the movement did south of the border and elsewhere in Canada. Even more importantly, they never put much effort into making themselves relevant by developing a street presence—even a pacifist one.

Student militants at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM) and Cégep du Vieux Montréal had been organizing for much longer. These two schools, from which other strikes had historically emerged, were also the source of most of the momentum for the 2012 strike. Although both schools already had a strong radical presence, political graffiti within certain buildings was ramped up in the years before the strike. Occupations and demonstrations were organized. In early 2011, Hydro-Québec's downtown headquarters was smoke-bombed by students from Vieux, forcing an evacuation. There was also a lot of work behind the scenes—distributing propaganda, organizing informative assemblies, and the like. Syndicalist anarchists participated actively in their student associations and in the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ); this meant office work, balancing finances, writing articles for ASSÉ's newspaper *Ultimatum* or for individual associations' broadsheets, and a lot of organizing limited by the discourse of the official student movement. Some anarchists have been critical of this approach, but there's no question that anarchists on the whole benefited from the fact that some people were doing this.

Syndicalist methods created the strike; it could be argued that they also created the limitations that would ultimately produce the movement's downfall. A point that is sometimes missed, however, is that *every social upheaval will have built-in limitations*, and there isn't even a *chance* to overcome those limitations until the upheaval exists as a material reality. Despite the tensions that existed between various anti-capitalist and pro-strike factions at Cégep du Vieux and UQÀM, it is clear that the lowest-common-denominator mobilization approach of creating opposition to the tuition hike complemented direct action, if only by fostering a political environment in which other students could understand why "the issues" were serious enough that some people would take such action.

Crises create opportunities. This is perhaps the most important maxim for anyone who wants to defend land, freedom, and dignity

tion, to take the logical step from mass vandalism to the collective expropriation of goods and seizure of buildings—the kind of activity that would have quickly brought out even larger crowds than were already participating in the strike. Things might have gotten a little nasty after that, no doubt, especially given the lengths to which the state is willing to go to uphold the institution of private property. But had things escalated to this point, the revolutionary potential of the situation would have become apparent to everyone.

There was a second peak of opportunity a few weeks later, and it too was squandered.

To be clear, the opportunities that this second peak presented were not produced by militants' capacity to maintain a rapport de force with the police. On the nights immediately before and after the government passed its Special Law to crack down on the strike, there were major street battles that lasted long into the night, probably involving the largest numbers of any post-sundown street action and certainly producing the largest mass arrests. But while many experienced these clashes as inspiring, including many out-of-town anarchists who had shown up for the anarchist book fair, the battles proved ephemeral. They were the final and most spectacular clashes of a movement that was rapidly losing the capacity to go toe-to-toe with the police that it had gained in the early months of the strike, and particularly between March 22 and May 4.

New opportunities were produced, though, by the expansion of anti-government sentiment to parts of society that hadn't previously been involved in the strike. Suddenly, there were small roving demonstrations in neighborhoods across the city and in cities across the province. A sizeable number of these people were said to have supported the tuition hike, but fundamentally objected to the government's "anti-democratic" means of defending the capitalist economy and its monopoly on violence. The numbers also grew downtown; the demonstration on May 22 may have had as many as 400,000 people.

against the ravages of capitalism. In this context, it is problematic that many anarchists, in the years before the strike, were willfully ignorant of the political machinations that produced the flashpoint of the strike. It took a long time for anarchists who had been following the developments to convince their comrades of the importance of the impending events.

Of course, given the right circumstances and skill sets, *we can generate crises ourselves*. This is exactly what some anarchists, upon finding themselves as students at institutions with a tradition of direct democracy and a history of strike-making, proceeded to do in the years leading up to 2012—just as other anarchists had done in the years leading up to 2005 and earlier strikes.

Anglophone anarchists in Montréal—many of whom grew up in other provinces or in the US, whose French is marginal at best, often possessed of rather few francophone friends, frequently either university dropouts or enrolled at schools with less interesting political cultures—were usually not as disposed to help produce a crisis. This was also true of older anarchists, those with jobs, or those on welfare and genuinely poor; in essence, non-student anarchists of all language backgrounds. But, though anarchists from certain social positions may not have been able to contribute as much to *making the strike happen*, there was plenty for those people to do to improve their capacity to participate in the strike once it began.

The most important thing is consistency—doing what you can from where you are. It doesn't matter how limited your abilities or social position are. If you don't drop the ball, you'll eventually get a chance to shoot.

If you don't drop the ball,
you'll eventually get a chance to shoot.

Seizing the Peak of Opportunity

Though some prepared for the strike itself, few did anything to prepare for the situation that arose from it: the *peak of opportunity*.

There were two such periods, actually. One started on April 20, 2012, with the protests against the Plan Nord conference, during which it became clear that the police were temporarily outmatched, and lasted until May 4, when it degenerated into more brutal and less inspiring violence at the Liberal Party convention in Victoriaville. This was a period when *so much* could have been done, and yet many insurrecto-hooligans contented themselves with mere rioting—as exciting as that may have been. Soon enough, it was no longer fun. It wasn't just random unfortunates with presumably little street experience who were getting arrested and injured, but ourselves and our friends as well. This is all the worse because almost *anything* could have happened in Montréal at that time if people had been able to step back from the whirlwind of events, gather their comrades, identify an objective, and act.

In point of fact, it seems this did happen, but perhaps too late. On May 10, the most effective sabotage of the Montréal métro to date took place, with smoke bombs going off at four different stations across the city. If such an act had occurred during a large demonstration or riot in downtown Montréal, it could have created an even more uncontrollable situation across the island—perhaps opening new windows of opportunity for anarchists and others to seize territory or go on the offensive. By May 10, however, an uneasy peace had taken hold in Québec with the pacification of the night demonstrations and the passing of the last spectacular clashes during daylight hours, May Day and the Battle of Victo. In this context, the smoke bombing incident appeared as a daring attempt to *reignite* conflict, not as a conscious effort to expand its scope at the height of things.

The period that started on April 20 was not a revolutionary moment, but perhaps only because no one proposed, via words or ac-