SIDESHOWS AND WAYWARD LIVES

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First published March 2022
Ill Will Editions

Cover image by Andrew (@a_.ndrew)

It's July 10th, 2020. I'm driving home after getting off of work. As I pass the Target on Lake street, still burned out from the uprising just over one month ago, I notice fireworks exploding over a large crowd. People are climbing on the fencing and concrete barricades surrounding the parking lot, clamoring to get a look at whatever's going on inside. As I pull into the lot hoping to find out what the fuck is going on, I see a lifted F250 turning wide donuts, cutting closer to the fencing with every rotation. The fence has been cut and broken down to allow the sliders into the center. There are hundreds of cars parked here, some ready to spin, and plenty more being drawn in from Lake street like I had.

Seemingly without reason, cars start to peel out of the lot and those in the loop begin walking along the fence shouting out an address to others present. I put it into my phone and hop on I-94, alongside the swarm of cars from the previous location. As the caravan of cars five wide on a four lane highway hits 100 mph, my car struggles to keep up, but I'm giddy with excitement to see what happens when we arrive at the next spot.

Sideshows[1], once a relatively marginal phenomena, have taken the country by storm. Born in the Oakland, California hip hop scene in the late 20th century, in the last few years they have spread across the United States and now happen in Minneapolis alongside many other cities. Put simply, sideshows are events where drivers—referred to here as "sliders"—take over intersections or parking lots to do stunts such as burnouts and donuts. (Unlike common depictions in the news media, there is much less emphasis on "drag racing" and "hot rodding.")

While sideshows may be new to many cities, car subcultures are not. Car meets and street races have happened in cities such as Minneapolis for decades in various forms. In his youth, Afro-pessimist professor Frank B Wilderson III himself raced down Lake Street—now a popular site for sideshow takeovers following the 2020 uprising. It is precisely this uprising that we hypothesize created the conditions that allowed previously standard car meets to take on the antagonistic edge of the sideshow.

The opening of this vector follows from the convergence of three conditions. First, the uprising constituted "the largest downward redistribution of wealth in modern US history" as others have pointed out. Second, the uprising was a space in which sliders could meet each other for perhaps the first time and do stunts together, such as in the Target parking lot across from the 3rd Precinct. Finally, and most importantly, the uprising broke through the imaginative horizon for much of the city showing that what was possible was no longer as easily confined by the law. Just as militancy in activist circles has become more normalized, so too have other subcultures been more keen on brash displays of illegality.

We believe the nationwide advent of the sideshow is a noteworthy manifestation of the ungovernable energy unleashed by the uprising. We call sideshows *ante-political* because they create an impact on the world without yet being captured and brought into the traditional realm of politics.[2] Because of this, they are often admonished as either apolitical partying or a toxic indulgence in car culture (by leftists), or just senseless illegality (by the media). These narrow understandings offer us no clarity—and it is our intention to assist in better perceiving these events and understanding them in the context of today's wayward revolt.[3]

A crucial detail in grasping these events is understanding that sideshows are an eruption from existing car culture. While we will focus here primarily on the sideshow as a site of ante-political antagonism, they are not simply a blank canvas for getting rowdy, nor can they be painted with a neat ideological brush. It is our intention to take sideshows for what they are and not ascribe to them any inherent motives. The only common objective is the showing off of their cars, without which there is no sideshow.

Timeline

May 29th, 2021. We arrive at the roll-in spot, and are hit by a wall of sound as we exit our car. This weekend Chicago sliders are visiting Minneapolis, and we're excited to see what they can do. We arrive to find a crowd much larger than any previous event, easily a thousand people. The energy is unbelievable. Ten minutes after our arrival, people are spooked by apparent gunshots and the crowd dissolves and rolls out. As we disperse, my phone buzzes as the next address drops: one of the largest intersections in Dinkytown. The police are waiting for us, so drivers spontaneously block off the intersection one block away. The crowd reassembles with nearly as much volume as before, and merges with the usual Friday night Dinkytown crowd.

A squad car rolls up and begins attempting to disperse the cars. The person with the megaphone says, "Alright everybody, let's mob over this way." Suddenly the crowd is advancing first in a walk, then in a run towards the lone squad car. It seems like every other person is producing a ski mask from their back pocket, quickly throwing it over their face as they advance. The cop frantically tries to reverse away, but not before taking a barrage of kicks, thrown bricks, and fireworks; the windows of the car are smashed out, and its body deformed. Later, the police try to make another advance, only to be driven off in a similar manner. Immediately after the first squad car is warded off, the energy shifts. Windows are smashed, trash cans are dragged into the streets. Someone scales a light pole, and is convinced by a cheering crowd to catch a tossed can of spray paint and disable the camera. Someone tries to drive through the crowd despite warnings and their car is quickly totalled by a barrage of kicks and pistol whips. While walking back to the pit after the cop's retreat, somebody is heard asking "damn, so this is how y'all do it in Chicago?" The friend answers with "no, we could never do this in Chicago, they'd just shoot us." A dejected cop is heard speaking to a livestreamer a few blocks away, saying the department does not have the resources to contain this. Exasperated, he says to the streamer "thank you for feeding the disorder."

In the first weeks of June 2020 following the uprising, a video went viral across social media depicting a car doing donuts in one of Uptown's busiest intersections. Despite the astute user who shared it on Twitter (who captioned it "Minneapolis has turned into Oakland"), the performance

shown in the video shocked many viewers who couldn't seem to decipher what they were seeing.

Yet throughout the summer, sideshows continued to happen week after week across the Twin Cities. Unfortunately, as with every wayward expression, the state's revenge was not far behind, and by fall repression was in full swing. Assistance was called in from other law enforcement agencies, including a helicopter to track the movement of cars and ensure that police were among the first to arrive at takeover locations. Meanwhile major news outlets would publish arrest numbers every week, highlighting the "dangerous" nature of their crimes. Besides the repression, the season was largely winding down anyway—Minnesota winters are even less permissive of sideshows than the law. The first snowfall of the year came in mid-October, and only a few meets occurred afterwards, such as the one on Halloween.

The spring of 2021 started off strong. On April 10th, a meet blocked the Lowry Tunnel on the interstate, a feat yet to be repeated. Sideshows remained consistent every week into summer, culminating in the weekend of May 28–30. That weekend, crews from Chicago joined the Minnesota crowds for the year's largest sideshow yet. While Friday was rather mellow relative to the rest of the weekend, on Saturday the 29th thousands took over the main intersection of the student district, Dinkytown. When police responded, those gathered were quick to fight off the police with bricks and fireworks. Totally outmatched, the intersection was held for several hours longer until sliders dispersed of their own accord, reassembling and holding another intersection well into the morning. Both locations saw windows broken, cameras disabled, and garbage cans thrown into the streets. A similar scene repeated itself the following night in north Minneapolis, with the sideshow crowd quickly attacking responding officers and forcing them to flee the area.

The next meet occurred the first week of June, one night after Winston Smith was killed by law enforcement in Minneapolis. Between the previous week's show of ferocity and having to deal with a protest taking place elsewhere, police never responded to the sideshow that night, despite its having taken over several high profile intersections. Unfortunately, two young spectators, Vanessa Jensen and Nicholas Enger, lost their lives in separate shooting incidents at the meet. Many sliders decided it was best

to hold off on calling for more meets for the time being, and a candlelight vigil was held in its place the week after. Participants arrived in their cars to silently pay respects, while addresses were dispensed over the same online chat channels as the previous week's takeovers.

A second convergence featuring sliders from seven different cities had been planned at the end of June in Chicago. This weekend again saw thousands take over intersections across the city, yet unlike the Twin Cities, it is not as feasible to hop between jurisdictions in Chicago. Thus, with sliders less willing to leave spots as quickly, they faced off against a novel technique of repression not yet seen at a sideshow in Minnesota before (or since): the riot line. The sizable crowd was emboldened, and street fighting began to break out. The police were successfully beaten back, allowing the sideshow to continue into the daylight, with local Minneapolis slider E taking home the trophy for his skills in the pit.

June 29th, 2021. We're in Chicago, surrounded by some familiar cars and faces along with many others from several other midwestern cities. The crowd is larger than any we'd seen in Minneapolis, thousands strong. Spots are held as long as possible, with police pushed back by fireworks and other projectiles. When the forces of order amass a strong enough presence to attempt overwhelming the sideshow crowd, skirmishes erupt, until the crowd eventually scatters and regroups elsewhere in the city, usually only a few minutes away. At one location, the crowd stubbornly holds an intersection for several hours, as the police swarm steadily grows on the outskirts. Finally, the police exit their cars and form a riot line, advancing forcefully on the crowd. It may seem like an intuitive tactic for CPD to deploy, with thousands of people standing around on foot, but as soon as they make their advance it is shown to be a near-useless play. Immediately overwhelmed by scattering vehicles and pelted by fireworks and projectiles from an excited crowd, the riot line manages only to grab two random teenagers headed to their cars, before being forced to retreat as the crowd regroups a few minutes away. I recall the teenager last month lamenting that this could never happen in Chicago, and yet here we are. At the next spot, as the police make their advance in vehicles, they are fired upon with guns by the mob. The crowd is mostly unbothered at the following locations, which are held well into the daylight hours. Minneapolis

sliders and spectators return home to recount Chicago's ferocity, and chatter about how this energy could be brought home.

Back in Minneapolis, while several prominent hosts took a step back after the shootings, others stepped up to fill the void. In a unique case, an aspiring host organized to take over the major uptown intersection at Hennepin and Lagoon in early July, in loose conjunction with the militant activists holding down Smith Marie Square. Rather than rely on spectators to block the intersection with their cars, black-clad activists set up barricades around the area to keep it free from traffic and police, but still allow sliders to enter the intersection. While the night is notable for allowing these two different groups to interact in a way they had never done before, allowing fresh dynamics to emerge, it also exemplified the discord between those with and without political motivations. An activist leading chants on the megaphone became increasingly irritated with the sliders, who showed no interest in joining in. This dissonance proved to be sufficiently annoying that many sliders opted to go home early, posting Discord messages like, "this shit is dead, it's just protestors out here." As a result, police were able to easily retake the intersection after a few hours.

Through the rest of the summer and into the fall, meets continued frequently, often several every weekend. It was around this same time that the first attempts at daytime takeovers were executed smoothly. But police had also stepped up their responses, and were able to shut down spots faster and faster as the year went on. The escalating repression—which included the arrests of well-known sliders and hosts, the towing of their vehicles, and one instance of police blocking entrances to a parking lot and ticketing everyone present—also had the broader effect of breaking some of the previously-held confidence at the meets. As the season waned, it would usually only take the presence of a single cruiser to send the crowd scattering.

Yet, unlike last year, meets have continued even into the snowy months, although the cold dampens much of the energy seen during the rest of the year, as most spectators prefer to remain inside their heated cars.

July 7th, 2021. It's barely past 10 PM and already someone is burning rubber just up the block from us. The crowd isn't huge, but militants have dragged traffic barriers into the street to block off the intersection. We're only a few blocks from where the cops killed Winston Smith a few weeks ago, and activists have been holding down a protest where he died ever since. A friend tells us that tonight everyone's working together, and we all agree that there's some exciting potential in this rare alliance. Our conversation is interrupted by the sound of roaring engines, and the occasional firework mortar decorating the sky. A passenger fires his gun in the air out of the window of a Charger as it spins, which barely seems to phase anyone anymore.

My friends and I walk over to what became known as Smith Marie Square, where those occupying the space are grilling food. We don't stay too long, however, as the sound of screeching tires beckons us back. We leave the square with more people than we arrived with, and there are more slogans on the walls since we last passed them. Yet by midnight, police sirens cut through the din and everyone seems to recognize there aren't enough of us to hold the space, and begin to scatter.

Composition and Spectacle

As might be expected, sideshow crowds skew heavily young, with many being in their teens, but still span a wide age range. The meets are highly multi-racial, predominantly made up of Black, latino, and white people. Contrary to public perception, women make up a significant portion of spectators, although there is a stark gender disparity amongst sliders themselves. It isn't just people from the city—many participants come from the suburbs or even further out, a consequence of the shifting geography of the metro Minneapolis area. Likewise, the meets often travel across city lines and into the peripheries as well. Against the social and geographic segregation of the Twin Cities, sideshows allow for the overcoming, albeit a limited overcoming, of these barriers—a trait it shares with the 2020 uprising.

Car meets are marked by an oscillation between opacity and transparency. On the one hand, strict rules proceduralize access to private Discord

chats or Snapchat stories. These verification processes vary depending on the group, but can include providing a photo or video of yourself already in attendance at a meet, or of your car, or even of your driver's license. Some groups require video evidence of dangerous or illegal stunts. Frequently the most extreme of these requirements are toned down as hosts realize most are not willing to jump through such hoops. Despite this, addresses are frequently posted openly on platforms like Instagram, public Snapchat stories, or Telegram groupchats. These practices have fluctuated dramatically over recent years, often being modulated in direct response to police operations, as waves of repression push participants to figure out new forms of communication. One or two organizers posting addresses in real-time to Snapchat was clearly insufficient when police were mobilizing their available arsenal to shut the events down. On the other hand, total clandestinity is not an option when hoping to assemble hundreds of people on the fly. Changes sometimes happen over weeks and months as new habits emerge, or sometimes over the course of a single night when sliders need to get the cops off their tail. This flux—familiar to anyone involved in any underground subculture—has meant that a degree of opacity remains while still being open to practically anyone that wants to come. Frequently, spectators aren't even in the loop themselves, but word spreads through Snap stories, groupchats, and the echo of screeching tires.

Organization is often done openly on social media. Hosts run long, unstructured Instagram livestreams during which they talk shop about their cars, roast each other, and invite friends as well as random people to appear on the Live. These create natural spaces for collective study as friends interact with the chat, reflect on what went well or poorly the night before, and coach spectators in the chat on properly blocking an intersection and keeping the police at bay. While these instructions aren't necessarily immediately adopted, it sediments participants' expectations for when these situations arise. Arguments and disagreements happen in the open through livestreams, discord server arguments, and shared story posts in between memes and clips of meets. Splits and schisms lead to a greater diversity of meets, ranging from aggressive daytime takeovers to de facto legalized parking lot meets.

A large amount of participation and initiation of these events is driven by aspiring influencers and microcelebrities trying to make a name

for themselves. Sliders often maintain a strong social media presence in the hopes of receiving sponsors, launching a merchandise line, or simply amassing followers and clout. While this can seem entrepreneurial or cynically based around profit motives, to the extent that such attempts at clout-building end up generating ungovernable gestures, we might also view it as short-circuiting the Spectacle. With each new stunt that is broadcast and bragged about, new participants are drawn in, and want to take part in creating the next spectacular event.

September 16th, 2021: Mexican Independence Day. A sizable crowd is gathered in front of what used to be a K-Mart, before the uprising hammered shut the coffin of the failing department store. Most people are congregated around a pickup truck with a loud speaker blasting music. There's a small fenced-in area of the massive parking lot, and someone begins to slide their car inside. I didn't even see how it got in, but someone must have cut the chain on the gate. There's one cop parked across the street, or maybe it's just a private security guard — either way, no one seems to care. Fireworks and gunshots ring in the air above.

On Telegram, someone drops an address on the other side of town. I grab my friends and we head out, but not much of the crowd seems to follow. When we get there, we realize that more than one meet is happening simultaneously tonight, with different hosts. Behind a warehouse in North Minneapolis, we crowd around an Infiniti G37, as people dangle from its windows, one waving a Mexican flag, as it spins around the parking lot. Not so much as a single officer bothers us.

In the streets, meets move from location to location, hopping between precincts and city limits, rarely spending too long in one place. Few of the locations have symbolic meaning, and thus there are never moral concerns about abandoning one spot for another. This differs from most protest situations, which are often located in proximity to perceived centers of power, and frequently speak of "holding space," "occupying," etc. In the sideshow, the question of place is a purely tactical one, the primary factors being its size and the police response. In this way, sliders exemplify the ethos of "be water" articulated by Hong Kong rebels in 2019. But this fluidity can also become an obstacle, such as when spectators are too eager

to flee from a single police car and spots are busted too quickly for anyone to even slide their car.

Many significant obstacles are overcome through an active effort by participants and their connections to provide their own resources. There is a significant presence of those in informal "helper roles," such as nurses, tow truck drivers, and mechanics. Most injuries are quickly answered with shouts of "I'm a nurse, let me through." Minor car breakdowns can often be resolved on the spot by car enthusiasts that come with their tools and expertise, and major breakdowns and crashes can be hauled off by tow trucks invited into the loop by their friends and colleagues before police show up. Many participants work in the automotive field, and repurpose their expertise and connections to provide resources to the takeovers. Likewise, people take care to invite connections that have medical expertise, as well as others interested in providing snacks, alcohol, and drugs for passengers and spectators.

Facilitation, not Determination

As the events grew in size throughout the summer, it became clear that some small degree of formal organization was needed to facilitate the actual show. After an intersection was taken, there would frequently be long awkward pauses with no activity, with sliders not wanting to go out of turn and the intersection not open for new sliders to get in. Hosts began to bring megaphones in order to facilitate sliders moving in and out of the pit. The megaphone user would call specific cars out and goad them into showing off, keeping a consistent charismatic dialogue with the crowd and sliders, gauging the reaction to sliders and keeping the show moving along smoothly.

The introduction of the megaphone, while tactically sound, eventually led to a normative way of interacting with it. The megaphone holder began to determine, rather than facilitate at some meets. Initial instructions were in the interest of safety, and for good reason. Following a few incidents of spectators being struck by cars, the crowd was instructed to move back or stay in a safe spot. This led to a stronger sense of separation between participant and spectator, causing the energy of the meets to feel far more organized and orderly. Later, people would be reprimanded for

setting off fireworks, for climbing on nearby buildings and vehicles, or engaging in races and stunts outside of the main pit.

One night during a large meet in a major parking lot in the suburbs, participants felt especially stifled by the overbearing megaphone. The host had shouted down racers on the surrounding roads, as well as kids throwing fireworks. While the meet was well-attended, the night consisted of an orderly procession of cars doing donuts when asked to by the organizer. Although it was contained and orderly enough to avoid attention by the local police (save a few drive-bys), it resulted in a low energy night. A consistent slow trickle of people going home meant the night wrapped up earlier than usual with only one spot attended.

Later that night on social media and in group chats, attendees reflected on the previous night. "That shit was lame af" "The guy with the megaphone needs to chill tf out" "I remember when this shit was getting wild every night, now we just sit on the hill and watch the same five people spin." The next meet, the megaphone was noticeably used differently, again relegated to simply being the hype man for the actual stunts in the pit. This may appear as just one organizer taking feedback well, which they frequently do, but more is at play here. This transformation was enabled not just by widespread annoyance, but also by a supersession of its need to manage crowd safety. With these communities of people interacting week after week inside and out of the meets, a *collective sensibility* emerges and is sedimented through repetition. This includes catch phrases such as "get back or get smacked," which represent not just an ethos towards personal responsibility, but also a memetic way of teaching newcomers and the more reckless spectators the lay of the land. More experienced attendees will be able to identify when there is a greater risk of injury in how a car moves, and employ slogans to call the larger crowd back. The same slogans also allow crowd members to take responsibility for certain collisions away from the driver, which attests to a disposition towards care: on the one hand, by preventing injuries among lesser experienced participants, while at the same time acknowledging participants' autonomy and freedom to take risks.

May 21st, 2021. A large crowd has formed along the hill in front of the Minneapolis traffic and parking services building, as cars spin on the street below.

A blue Infiniti G35 revs its engine, indicating the driver wants a turn in the pit. A camo Hellcat completes a showy exit and makes room for the Infiniti. It's obvious the driver has never been in the pit and is struggling to even maintain control of his car, let alone put on a decent show. In trying to get his tires spinning, he nearly hits the crowd twice. The crowd begins to boo and jeer, with shouts being heard of "get him out of there!" The driver, determined to redeem his reputation, begins revving up for another attempt. Suddenly, it happens: the Infiniti charges over the curb and into the crowd. Most narrowly escape being hit by the vehicle, but one person is not so lucky. Sent flying by the impact, his head bounces off the pavement and he's out cold.

An EMT and a nurse that were spectating the meet begin to assess his injuries and stabilize him, bandaging his head wound and holding his neck in alignment. The Infiniti attempts to flee as participants in the crowd drag the driver out of the car. He is pushed against a wall and yelled at, with participants striking him from several sides as he apologizes profusely. The police take this as their moment to push in, driving several squad cars into the pit as the crowd scatters. Pushing the people caring for the victim off of him, they make no attempt to address his injuries. Instead they shout down the crowd, demanding to know who hit him. "I know everybody here saw it, we need to know who hit him!" Nobody saw shit. As the cops roll up, the driver of the Infiniti is told to scram and gets off scene as the rest of the crowd scatters. Later in the night the meet picks back up when people get word the victim is in good shape after regaining consciousness. The crowd gossips about this event at the next spot, and these conversations are later rehashed on an IG Live the next morning. One of the hosts says "look, this shit needs to be common sense. If you don't know how to swing your shit you gotta practice in a parking lot before you try and get in the pit." This sentiment is repeated in group chats and social media, and becomes collective knowledge. Frequently at spots going forward, adjacent lots will have small groups of friends practicing discreetly.

Self Regulation and Violence

As we've noted already, many tactics have evolved very quickly, with crowds adapting week to week or even night to night. When sideshows struggled at effectively taking over intersections early on, participants (referred to as "blockers") were quick to figure out better methods, and

formed their own chat to coordinate in real time. The same could be said of the more offensive measures taken against police incursions, with street-fighting tactics being taken up hesitantly one night, and decisively the next.

Sideshows have shown themselves to be flexible and adaptable in ways that dramatically outpace other crowd formations, especially protests. Our hypothesis is that, unlike protests, which carry with them centuries-old traditions and leaderships to enforce them, sideshows completely lack a traditional choreography besides the showing-off of the cars themselves. Nor do many participants come with any ideological commitments either for or against certain tactical choices. This produces a much more open field for experimentation—it's not that "anything goes," but when there are far fewer moral hangups, the *situation* can be more clearly perceived. This allows for a tendency towards *self-regulation* rather than self-policing, allowing disagreements to be settled directly in the moment, rather than being inscribed as new laws.

What we find here is a sort of living example of self-regulation at a distance from police society. Its culture did not emerge from any felt duty to find an alternative to or "replace" the police of the sort we see in activist spaces, but out of participants' need to directly resolve problems in a space whose existence is precluded by the presence of police. Conflict over damage of cars, for example, is settled between participants directly; its resolution is driven by the existing relationship between the two parties, as well as their reputation among other participants. In other words, parties to conflict find themselves accountable to an actually existing community, a fact frequently espoused by, yet rarely embodied in, activist circles. Another night, a woman is feeling threatened and not being allowed to leave a man's car. She asks for help in a Telegram chat, and participants quickly find and separate her from the man, and the man from his car keys. If he is at future meets, others will remember this incident.

August 8th, 2020. It's around 1am right now, and the car meet has resettled in a long but narrow parking lot on the northside of town. People are regrouping after a handful of spots closer to downtown had been quickly busted by police. No one is sliding right now, people are just parked and hanging out. Someone walks over to the sound barrier between the parking lot and the

highway and begins spray painting "fuck 12." They barely finish before I begin to hear a commotion: a crew of people standing nearby are not having it. "I come here with my family," they tell the tagger, insisting they have to leave. They take the paint cans away, throw them over the sound barrier, and escort the person to their car. The taggers recognize their mistake, and call it a night. Gesturing towards the gathering behind them, the person walking them out says "Look at this shit, this whole shit is fuck 12, you ain't gotta say it."

Another night it's a different story. We aren't at a quiet neighborhood park, but a busy commercial intersection. The police have been chased off, and the area is ours. Graffiti begins to appear once again, but this time people don't have a problem, instead they ask "Let me borrow that can when you're done?"

A tension has emerged concerning the question of legalization. Some hosts have advocated for, and successfully held, sanctioned meets in rented lots, and even charged for admission. Other sliders and spectators insist on keeping things underground. While there are certainly countless reasons for this, it seems evident that part of the appeal of sideshows is their rebellious energy, an energy that would be absent from an official meet. At the same time, an overly simplistic analysis of "recuperation" seems unsatisfying to us: in our contemporary era, we must acknowledge that recuperation also works in the reverse, since, at an official event, tons more people would be exposed to, and come into contact with, the illegal underground of car meets.

In the final analysis, it is only this infectious, rebellious energy that provides the most reliable obstacle against the complete recuperation and enclosure of sideshows. Not only in the way it manifests socially—collectively taking over space, setting off fireworks above the crowd—but also anti-socially, in the gun violence that has persistently erupted. While it is certainly possible to enjoy a meet sans shootings, it is a much more difficult task to completely exorcize this spirit from the events entirely: there will always be illegal sideshows, and they will remain compelling both because of *and* despite their messy vitality. In this way, violence forms a bulwark against total enclosure.

This is not an endorsement, however, of such violence. It remains a double-edged sword, since keeping the law at a distance burdens us with

taking responsibility for ourselves. While in no sense can the problem be reduced to the presence (or not) of firearms, the latter represent the kind of harmful interpersonal violence we are capable of enacting on each other, whether intentionally or not. Without an external enemy like the police to direct this energy against, it all too often winds up pointed inward at each other, being shaped by pre-existing interpersonal and factional tensions that spill beyond any singular conflict. This was the case with the two teenagers shot and killed in June 2021.

In keeping with the principle of self-regulation laid out above, we believe that a *careful violence* can develop that keeps us free, while also inviting us to take on the responsibilities it entails.[4] The result would be not a new law but an *ethical relation* to each other, each of us having the capacity for care as well as harm. Developing this ethical relation has consequences far beyond sideshows or even protest spaces, but for life as a whole.

Conclusion

May 28th, 2021. We've only been here five minutes before the first cop arrives. I'm one of a few hundred people parked between two warehouses in northeast Minneapolis, enjoying the show as a few cars take turns doing donuts in front of us. It's only one cop, but everyone rushes back to their vehicles and start peeling out. A Dodge Charger, already in the middle, swerves just a few feet in front of the cop with a loud screech, before racing off in the other direction. In minutes, the parking lot is quiet and empty again, save for the lone police officer powerless to do anything but nudge the sideshow from location to location. At the next spot—a large intersection of south Minneapolis—people aren't as quick to leave when they hear sirens. Instead, firework mortars explode overhead as a warning that officers should keep their distance.

As the cops try to push their way through traffic towards the pit, someone next to me recounts the story of how they put the pigs on the run one year ago today—the day their precinct burned. Together, watching a RAM spin in circles with a high-pitched squeal, we laugh together about how incredible that night was, and I feel closer to that time than I ever had since.

As we write this, the snow is melting in Minnesota, and sliders are itching to burn some rubber again. There's no telling how the meets will look this

year, how they will improvise, mutate, and take on new dimensions. The field of possibilities remains as open as ever. No amount of police repression nor any outburst of violence has proven effective at halting them.

We believe sideshows offer a poignant expression of the same wayward spirit that animates the revolt for freedom and abolition. They express this spirit not through a *political* act—which would communicate a demand from a governing body—but as a pure practice of transforming our world in real time. Such transformation appears not as a goal to achieve, but is a power or potentiality immanent to the sideshow itself. Only through participation in it, and reflection upon it, can we perceive the dynamics at play, and what they have to teach us about revolt and, ultimately, revolution.

Notes

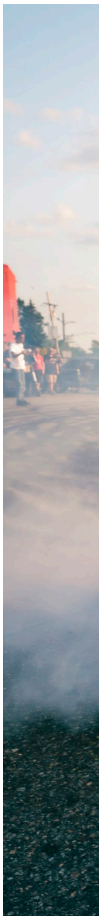
1 Althought we will predominantly use "sideshow" to refer to these events, given its widespread adoption in California, the term was not commonly used in Minnesota early on. More often, it would simply be a "car meet," "takeover," or occasionally "slideshow."

2 Our use of the term "ante-political" is inspired by Fred Moten, as a way to connote the actions and relationships that precede and exist beyond the properly political sphere. It should be read as a counterpart to, rather than in opposition to, the idea of the "anti-political" as discussed by insurrectionary anarchist thought, and elsewhere such as Cedric Robinson's *The Terms of Order* (University of North Carolina, 1980).

3 Our use of the term "wayward" here is drawn from the incomparable Saidiya Hartman. Below we reproduce a short section of her latest book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (Norton, 2018) to give readers a better sense of the word's use:

> Wayward, related to the family of words: errant, fugitive, recalcitrant, anarchic, willful, reckless, troublesome, riotous, tumultuous, rebellious and wild. To inhabit the world in ways inimical to those deemed proper and respectable, to be deeply aware of the gulf between where you stayed and how you might live. Waywardness: the avid longing for a world not ruled by master, man or the police. The errant path taken by the leaderless swarm in search of a place better than here. The social poesis that sustains the dispossessed. Wayward: the unregulated movement of drifting and wandering; sojourns without a fixed destination, ambulatory possibility, interminable migrations, rush and flight, black locomotion; the everyday struggle to live free. The attempt to elude capture by never settling. Not the master's tools, but the ex-slave's fugitive gestures, her traveling shoes. Waywardness articulates the paradox of cramped creation, the entanglement of escape and confinement, flight and captivity. Wayward: to wander, to be unmoored, adrift, rambling, roving, cruising, strolling, and seeking. To claim the right to opacity. To strike, to riot, to refuse. To love what is not loved. To be lost to the world. It is the practice of the social otherwise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies; it is the lived experience of enclosure and segregation, assembling and huddling together. It is the directionless search for a free territory; it is a practice of making and relation that enfolds within the policed boundaries of the dark ghetto; it is the mutual aid offered in the open-air prison. It is a queer resource of black survival. It is a *beautiful experiment* in how-to-live.
>
> Waywardness is a practice of possibility at a time when all roads, except the ones created by *smashing out*, are foreclosed. It obeys no rules and abides no authorities. It is unrepentant. It traffics in occult visions of other worlds and dreams of a different kind of life. Waywardness is an ongoing exploration of *what might be*; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated, when there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude, when the house of bondage looms in whatever direction you move. It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive" (227–228).

4 We might see this as a useful distortion of Frantz Fanon's theory of violence in *The Wretched Of The Earth* (Grove Press, 2004). As Fanon writes, "decolonization is the veritable creation

of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself" (2), and later, "violence can thus be understood to be the perfect mediation. The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence" (44). The careful violence that keeps law enforcement away works to affirm ourselves and our collective responsibilities outside of state-enforced subjectivities.

What we find here is a sort of living example of self-regulation at a distance from police society. Its culture did not emerge from any felt duty to find an alternative to or "replace" the police of the sort we see in activist spaces, but out of participants' need to directly resolve problems in a space whose existence is precluded by the presence of police.