On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets

Broken windows, imaginary jars of urine, and the cosmological role of the police in American culture

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What follows is an essay of interpretation. It is about direct action in North America, about the mass mobilizations organized by the so called "anti-globalization movement", and especially, about the war of images that has surrounded it. It begins with a simple observation. I think it's fair to say that if the average American knows just two things about these mobilizations, they are, first of all, that there are often people dressed in black who break windows; second, that they involve colorful giant puppets.

I want to start by asking why these images in particular appear to have so struck the popular imagination. I also want to ask why it is that of the two, American police seem to hate the puppets more. As many activists have observed, the forces of order in the United States seem to have a profound aversion to giant puppets. Often police strategies aim to destroy or capture them before they can even appear on the streets. As a result, a major concern for those planning actions soon became how to hide the puppets so they will not be destroyed in pre-emptive attacks. What's more, for many individual officers at least, the objection to puppets appeared to be not merely strategic, but personal, even visceral. Cops hate puppets. Activists are puzzled as to why.

To some degree this essay emerges from that puzzlement. It is written very much from the perspective of a participant. I have been involved in the global justice movement[1] for six years now, having helped to organize and taken part in actions small and large, and I have spent a good time wondering about such questions myself. If this were simply an essay on police psychology, of course, my involvement would put me at a significant disadvantage, since it makes it difficult to carry out detailed interviews with police. Granted, being active in the movement does afford frequent occasions for casual chats with cops. But such chats aren't always the most enlightening. The only extended conversation I ever had with police officers on the subject of puppets, on the other hand, was carried out while I was handcuffed—which if nothing else makes it very difficult to take notes. At any rate, this essay is not so much about the particulars of police, or activist, psychology as what the Annales school historians liked to call a "structure of the conjuncture": the peculiar—and endlessly shifting—symbolic interactions of state, capital, mass media, and oppositional movements that the globalization movement has sparked. Since any strategic planning must start from an understanding of such matters, those engaged in planning such actions end up endlessly discussing the current state of this conjuncture. I see this essay, therefore, as a contribution to an ongoing conversation—one that is necessarily aesthetic, critical, ethical, and political all at the same time. I also see it as ultimately pursuing the movements' aims and aspirations in another form. To ask these questions—Why puppets? Why windows? Why do these images seem to have such mythic power? Why do representatives of the state react the way they do? What is the public's perception? What is the "public", anyway? How would it be possible to transform "the public" into something else?—is to begin to try to piece together the tacit rules of game of symbolic warfare, from its elementary assumptions to the details of how the terms of engagement are negotiated in any given action, ultimately, to understand the stakes in new forms of revolutionary politics. I am myself personally convinced that such understandings are themselves revolutionary in their implications.

Hence the unusual structure of this essay, in which an analysis of the symbolism of puppets leads to a discussion of police media strategies to reflections on the very nature of violence and

[1] I'm adopting here the name most commonly employed by participants in North America. Most firmly reject the term "anti-globalization". I have in the past proposed simply "globalization movement", but some find this confusing. In Europe, the terms "alternative-" or "alter-globalization" are often used, but these have yet to be widely adopted in the US.

the state of international politics. It is an attempt to understand an historical moment from the perspective on someone situated inside it.

a problematic

There is a widespread perception that events surrounding the WTO ministerial in Seattle in November 1999 marked the birth of a new movement in North America. It would probably be better to say that Seattle marked the moment where a much larger, global movement—one which traces back at least to the Zapatista rebellion in 1994—made its first appearance on North American shores.

Nonetheless, the actions in Seattle were widely considered a spectacular victory. They were quickly followed in 2000 and 2001 by a series of similar mobilizations in Washington, Prague, Quebec City, and Genoa, growing in size but facing increasing levels of state repression. September 11th and subsequent "war on terror" changed the nature of the playing field, enabling governments to step up this repression quite dramatically, as in the US became clear in the extraordinary violence with which police tactics confronted protestors during the Free Trade Areas of the Americas summit in Miami in November 2003. Since then the movement has largely been in a process of regrouping, though at the time of writing (summer 2006) there are increasing signs of a second wind.

The movement's disarray was not simply due to heightened levels of repression. Another reason was, however paradoxical this may seem, that it reached so many of its immediate goals so quickly.

After Seattle, the WTO process froze in its tracks and has never really recovered. Most ambitious global trade schemes were scotched. The effects on political discourse were even more remarkable. In fact the change was so dramatic that it has become difficult, for many, to even remember what public discourse in the years immediately before Seattle was actually like. In the late '90s, "Washington consensus", as it was then called, simply had no significant challengers. In the US itself, politicians and journalists appeared to have come to unanimous agreement that radical "free market reforms" were the only possible approach to economic development, anywhere and everywhere. In the mainstream media, anyone who challenged its basic tenets of this faith was likely to be treated as if they were almost literally insane. Speaking as someone who became active in the first months of 2000, I can attest that, however exhilarated by what had happened at Seattle, most of us still felt it would take five or ten years to shatter these assumptions. In fact it took less than two. By late 2001, it was commonplace to see even news journals that had just months before denounced protestors as so many ignorant children, declaring that we had won the war of ideas. Much as the movement against nuclear power discovered in the '70s and early '80s, the direct action approach was so effective that short-term goals were reached almost immediately, forcing participants to have to scramble to redefine what the movement was actually about. Splits quickly developed between the "anti-corporates" and the "anti-capitalists".

As anarchist ideas and forms of organization became increasingly important, unions and NGOs began to draw back. What's critical for present purposes is that all this became a problem largely because the initial movement was so successful in getting its message out.

I must, however, introduce one crucial qualification. This success applied only to the movement's *negative* message—what we were against. That organizations like the IMF, WTO, and

World Bank were inherently unaccountable and undemocratic, that neoliberal policies were devastating the planet and throwing millions of human beings into death, poverty, hopelessness, and despair—all this, we found, was relatively easy to communicate. While mainstream media were never willing to quote our spokespeople or run the editorials we sent them, it wasn't long before accredited pundits and talking heads (encouraged by renegade economists like Joseph Stiglitz), began simply repeating the same things as if they'd made them up themselves. Admittedly, American newspaper columnists were not going to repeat the whole of the movement's arguments—they certainly were not willing to repeat anything that suggested these problems were ultimately rooted in the very nature of the state and capitalism. But the immediate message did get out.

Not so for what most in the movement were actually *for*. If there was one central inspiration to the global justice movement, it was the principle of direct action. This is a notion very much at the heart of the anarchist tradition and, in fact, most of the movement's central organizers—more and more in fact as time went on—considered themselves anarchists, or at least, heavily influenced by anarchist ideas. They saw mass mobilizations not only as opportunities to expose the illegitimate, undemocratic nature of existing institutions, but as ways to do so in a form that itself demonstrated why such institutions were unnecessary, by providing a living example of genuine, direct democracy. The key word here is "process"—meaning, decision-making process. When members of the Direct Action Network or similar groups are considering whether to work with some other group, the first question that's likely to be asked is "what sort of process do they use?"—that is: Do they practice internal democracy? Do they vote or use consensus? Is there a formal leadership? Such questions are usually considered of much more immediate importance than questions of ideology.[2] Similarly, if one talks to someone fresh from a major mobilization and asks what she found most new and exciting about the experience, one is most likely to hear long descriptions of the organization of affinity groups, clusters, blockades, flying squads, spokescouncils, network structures, or about the apparent miracle of consensus decision making in which one can see thousands of people coordinate their actions without any formal leadership structure. There is a technical term for all this: "prefigurative politics". Direct action is a form of resistance which, in its structure, is meant to prefigure the genuinely free society one wishes to create. Revolutionary action is not a form of self-sacrifice, a grim dedication to doing whatever it takes to achieve a future world of freedom. It is the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free.

The positive message, then, was a new vision of democracy. In its ability to get it out before a larger public, though, the movement has been strikingly unsuccessful. Groups like the Direct Action Network have been fairly effective in disseminating their models of decision-making within activist circles (since they do, in fact, work remarkably well), but beyond those circles, they have had very little luck. Early attempts to provoke a public debate about the nature of democracy were invariably brushed aside by the mainstream media. As for the new forms of organization: readers of mainstream newspapers or TV viewers, even those who followed stories about the movement fairly assiduously, would have had little way know that they existed.

[2] Obviously, this assumes that the groups in question are broadly on the same page; if a group were overtly racist or sexist no one would ask about their internal decision-making process. The point is that questions of process are far more important than the kind of sectarian affiliations that had so dominated radical politics in the past: i.e., Anarcho-Syndicalists versus Social Ecologists, or Platformists, etc. Sometimes these factors do enter in. But even then, the objections are likely to be raised in process terms.

Media Images

I do not want to leave the reader with the impression that many of those involved in the global justice movement see their main task as getting a message out through the media. It is a somewhat unusual feature of this new movement that large elements of it are openly hostile to any attempt to influence what they called "the corporate media", or even, in many cases, to engage with it at all.

Companies like CNN or the Associated Press, they argue, are capitalist firms; it would be utterly naïve to imagine they would been willing to provide a friendly venue for anyone actively opposed to capitalism—let alone to carry anti-capitalist messages to the public. Some argue that, as a key element in the structure of power, the media apparatus should itself be considered appropriate targets for direct action. One of the greatest accomplishments of the movement, in fact, has been to develop an entirely new, alternative media network—Independent Media, an international, participatory, activist-driven, largely internet based media project that has, since Seattle, provided moment-to-moment coverage of large mobilizations in email, print, radio, and video forms.

All this is very much in the spirit of direct action. Nonetheless, there are always activists—even anarchists—who are willing to do more traditional media work. I myself can often be counted among them. During several mobilizations, I ended up spending much of my time preparing press conferences, attending meetings on daily spins and sound bites, and fielding calls from reporters. I have in fact been the object of severe opprobrium from certain hardcore anarchist circles as a result. Still, I think the anarchist critique is largely correct—especially in America. In my own experience, editors and most reporters in this country are inherently suspicious of protests, which they tend to see not as real news stories but as artificial events concocted to influence them.[3] They seem willing to cover artificial events only when constituted by proper authorities. When they do cover activist events, they are very self-conscious about the dangers that they might be manipulated—particularly if protests they see as "violent". For journalists, there is an inherent dilemma here, because violence in itself is inherently newsworthy. A "violent" protest is far more likely to be covered; but for that reason, the last thing journalists would wish to think of themselves as doing is allowing violent protestors to "hijack" the media to convey a message. The matter is further complicated by the fact that journalists have a fairly idiosyncratic definition of "violence": something like 'damage to persons or property not authorized by properly constituted authorities'. This has the effect that if even one protestor damages a Starbucks window, one can speak of "violent protests", but if police then proceed to attack everyone present with tazers, sticks and plastic bullets, this cannot be described as violent. In these circumstances, it's hardly surprising that anarchist media teams mainly end up doing damage control.

One can now begin to understand the environment in which images of Black Bloc anarchists smashing windows, and colorful puppets, predominate media coverage. "Message" is largely off-limits. Almost every major mobilization has been accompanied by a day of public seminars in

[3] That policy can be summed up by the New York Times' senior news editor, Bill Borders, who, when challenged by FAIR, a media watchdog group, to explain why the Times provided almost no coverage to 2000 inauguration protests (the second largest inaugural protests in American history), replied that they did not consider the protests themselves to be a news story, but "a staged event", "designed to be covered", and therefore not genuine news ("ACTIVISM UPDATE: New York Times Responds on Inauguration Criticism": news release, (February 22, 2001), Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR).) FAIR replied by asking in what sense the inaugural parade itself was any different.

which radical intellectuals analyze the policies of the IMF, G8, and so on, and discuss possible alternatives. None to my knowledge have ever been covered by the corporate press. "Process" is complicated and difficult to capture visually; meetings are usually off-limits to reporters anyway. Still, the relative lack of attention to street blockades and street parties, lock-downs, banner drops, critical mass rides and the like, is harder to explain. All these are dramatic, public, and often quite visually striking. Admittedly since it is almost impossible to describe those engaged in such tactics as "violent", the fact that they frequently end up gassed, beaten, pepper-sprayed, shot at with plastic bullets, and otherwise manhandled by police provides narrative dilemmas most journalists would (apparently) prefer to avoid.[4] But this alone does not seem an adequate explanation.[5]

We return then to my initial observation: that here would seem to be something compelling about the paired images of masked window-breakers and giant puppets. Why?

Well, if nothing else the two do mark a kind of neat structural opposition. Anarchists in Black Bloc mean to render themselves anonymous and interchangeable, identifiable only by their political affinity, their willingness to engage in militant tactics, and their solidarity with one another. Hence the uniform black hooded sweatshirts and black bandanas worn as masks. The papier-mâché puppets used in actions are all unique and individual: they tend to be brightly painted, but otherwise to vary wildly in size, shape, and conception. So on the one hand one has faceless, black anonymous figures, all roughly the same; on the other polychrome goddesses and birds and pigs and politicians. One is a mass, anonymous, destructive, deadly serious; the other, a multiplicity of spectacular displays of whimsical creativity.

If the paired images seem somehow powerful, I would suggest, it is because their juxtaposition does, in fact, say something important about what direct action aims to achieve. Let me begin by considering property destruction. Such acts are anything but random. They tend to follow strict ethical guidelines: individual possessions are off-limits, for example, along with any commercial property that's the base of its owner's immediate livelihood. Every possible precaution is to be taken to avoid harming actual human beings. The targets—often carefully researched in advance—are corporate facades, banks and mass retail outlets, government buildings or other symbols of state power. When describing their strategic vision, anarchists tend to draw on Situationism (Debord and Vaneigem have always been the most popular French theorists in anarchist infoshops). Consumer capitalism renders us isolated passive spectators, our only relation to one another our shared fascination with an endless play of images that are, ultimately, representations of the very sense of wholeness and community we have thus lost. Property destruction, then, is an attempt

[4] One effect of the peculiar definition of violence adopted by the American media is that Gandhian tactics do not, generally speaking, work in the US. One of the aims of non-violent civil disobedience is to reveal the inherent violence of the state, to demonstrate that it is prepared to brutalize even dissidents who could not possibly be the source of physical harm. Since the 1960s, however, the US media has simply refused to represent authorized police activity of any sort as violent. In the several years immediately proceeding Seattle, for instance, forest activists on the West Coast had developed lockdown techniques by which they immobilized their arms in concrete-reinforced PVC tubing, making them at once obviously harmless and very difficult to remove. It was a classic Gandhian strategy. The police response was to develop what can only be described as torture techniques: rubbing pepper spray in the eyes of incapacitated activists. When even that didn't cause a media furor (in fact, courts upheld the practice) many concluded Gandhian tactics simply didn't work in America. It is significant that a large number of the Black Bloc anarchists in Seattle, who rejected the lockdown strategy and opted for more mobile and aggressive tactics, were precisely forest activists who had been involved in tree-sits and lockdowns in the past.

[5] Those with puppets have been attacked and arrested frequently as well but to my knowledge the corporate media has never reported this.

to "break the spell", to divert and redefine. It is a direct assault upon the Spectacle. Consider here the words of the famous N30 Seattle Black Bloc communiqué, from the section entitled "On the Violence of Property":

> When we smash a window, we aim to destroy the thin veneer of legitimacy that surrounds private property rights. At the same time, we exorcise that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us. By "destroying" private property, we convert its limited exchange value into an expanded use value. A storefront window becomes a vent to let some fresh air into the oppressive atmosphere of a retail outlet (at least until the police decide to tear-gas a nearby road blockade). A newspaper box becomes a tool for creating such vents or a small blockade for the reclamation of public space or an object to improve one's vantage point by standing on it. A dumpster becomes an obstruction to a phalanx of rioting cops and a source of heat and light. A building facade becomes a message board to record brainstorm ideas for a better world.
>
> After N30, many people will never see a shop window or a hammer the same way again. The potential uses of an entire cityscape have increased a thousand-fold. The number of broken windows pales in comparison to the number of broken spells– spells cast by a corporate hegemony to lull us into forgetfulness of all the violence committed in the name of private property rights and of all the potential of a society without them. Broken windows can be boarded up (with yet more waste of our forests) and eventually replaced, but the shattering of assumptions will hopefully persist for some time to come.[6]

Property destruction is a matter of taking an urban landscape full of endless corporate facades and flashing imagery that seems immutable, permanent, monumental—and demonstrating just how fragile it really is. It is a literal shattering of illusions.

What then of puppets?

Again, they seem the perfect complement. Giant papier-mâché puppets are created by taking the most ephemeral of material—ideas, paper, wire mesh—and transforming it into something very like a monument, even if they are, at the same time, somewhat ridiculous. A giant puppet is the mockery of the idea of a monument,[7] and of everything monuments represent: the inapproachability, monochrome solemnity, above all the implication of permanence, the state's (itself ultimately somewhat ridiculous) attempt to turn its principle and history into eternal verities. If one is meant to shatter the existing Spectacle, the other is, it seems to me, to suggest the permanent capacity to create new ones.

In fact, from the perspective of the activists, it is again process—in this case, the process of production—that is really the point. There are brainstorming sessions to come up with themes and visions, organizing meetings, but above all, the wires and frames lie on the floors of garages or yards or warehouses or similar quasi-industrial spaces for days, surrounded by buckets of paint and construction materials, almost never alone, with small teams in attendance, molding,

[6] In *The Black Bloc Papers*, compiled by David and X of the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective. Black Clover Press, Baltimore, 2002, p. 53. The references to diverting forms of exchange value into use values is clearly directly inspired by Situationist manifestos.

[7] I owe the phrase to Ilana Gershon.

painting, smoking, eating, playing music, arguing, wandering in and out. Everything is designed to be communal, egalitarian, expressive. The objects themselves are not expected to last. They are for the most part made of fairly delicate materials; few would withstand a heavy rainstorm; some are even self-consciously destroyed or set ablaze in the course of actions. Even otherwise, in the absence of permanent storage facilities, they usually quickly start to fall apart.

As for the images: these are clearly meant to encompass, and hence constitute, a kind of universe. Normally Puppetistas, as they sometimes call themselves, aim for a rough balance between positive and negative images. On the one hand, one might have the Giant Pig that represents the World Bank, on the other, a Giant Liberation Puppet whose arms can block an entire highway Many of the most famous images identify marchers and the things they wear or carry: for instance, a giant bird puppet at A16 (the 2000 IMF/World Bank actions) was accompanied by hundreds of little birds on top of signs distributed to all and sundry. Similarly, Haymarket martyrs, Zapatistas, the Statue of Liberty, or a Liberation Monkeywrench might carry slogans identical to those carried on the signs, stickers, or Tshirts of those actually taking part in the action:

The most striking images though are often negative ones: the corporate control puppet at the 2000 democratic convention, operating both Bush and Gore like marionettes, a giant riot policeman who shoots out pepper spray, and endless effigies to be encompassed and ridiculed.

The mocking and destruction of effigies is of course one of the oldest and most familiar gestures of political protest. Often such effigies are an explicit assault on monumentality. The fall of regimes are marked by the pulling down of statues; it was the (apparently staged) felling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad that, in the minds of almost everyone, determined the moment of the actual end of his regime. Similarly, during George Bush's visit to England in 2004, protestors built innumerable mock statues of Bush, large and small, just in order to pull them down again.

Still, the positive images are often treated with little more respect than the effigies.

Here is an extract from my early reflections on the subject, jotted down shortly after spending time in the Puppet Warehouse in Philadelphia before the Republican Convention in 2000, somewhat reedited.

> **(field notes extracts, July 31st, 2000)**
>
> The question I keep asking myself is: why are these things even called "puppets"?
>
> Normally one thinks of "puppets" as figures that move in response to the motions of some puppeteer. Most of these have few if any moving parts. These are more light moving statues, sometimes worn, sometimes carried. So in what sense are they "puppets"?
>
> Puppets are extremely visual, large, but also delicate and ephemeral. Usually they fall apart after a single action. This combination of huge size and lightness seems to me makes them a bridge between words and reality; they are the point of transition; they represent the ability to start to make ideas real and take on solid form, to make our view of the world into something of equal physical bulk and greater spectacular power even to the engines of state violence that stand against it. The idea that they are extensions of our minds, words, make help explain the use of the term "puppets". They may not move around as an extension of some individual's will. But if they did, this would somewhat contradict the emphasis on collective creativity.

> Insofar as they are characters in a drama, it is a drama with a collective author; insofar as they are manipulated, it is in a sense by everyone, in processions, often passed around from one activist to the next. Above all they are meant to be emanations of a collective imagination. As such, for them either to become fully solid, or fully manipulable by a single individual, would contradict the point.

Puppets can be worn like costumes, and in large actions, they are in fact continuous with costumes. Every major mobilization had its totem, or totems: the famous sea-turtles at Seattle, the birds and sharks at A16, the Dancing Skeletons at R2K (the Republican Convention in Philly), the caribou at Bush's inauguration, or for that matter, the fragments of Picasso's Guernica designed for the protests against the upcoming Iraq invasion in 2003, designed so that they could each wander off and then all periodically combine together.

In fact, there's usually no clear line between puppets, costumes, banners and symbols, and simple props. Everything is designed to overlap and reinforce each other. Puppets tend to be surrounded by a much larger "carnival bloc", replete with clowns, stilt-walkers, jugglers, fire-breathers, unicyclists, Radical Cheerleaders, costumed kick-lines or often, entire marching bands—such as the Infernal Noise Brigade of the Bay Area or Hungry March Band in New York—that usually specialize in klezmer or circus music, in addition to the ubiquitous drums and whistles. The circus metaphor seems to sit particularly well with anarchists, presumably because circuses are collections of extreme individuals (one can't get much more individualistic than a collection of circus freaks) nonetheless engaged in a purely cooperative enterprise that also involves transgressing ordinary boundaries. Tony Blair's famous comment in 2004 that he was not about to be swayed by "some traveling anarchist circus" was not taken, by many, as an insult. There are in fact quite a number of explicitly anarchist circus troupes, their numbers only matched, perhaps, by that of various phony preachers. The connection is significant; for now, the critical thing is that every action will normally have its circus fringe, a collection of flying squads that circulate through the large street blockades to lift spirits, perform street theater, and also, critically, to try to defuse moments of tension or potential conflict. This latter is crucial. Since direct-actions, unlike permitted marches, scrupulously avoid marshals or formal peacekeepers (who police will always try to co-opt), the puppet/circus squads often end up serving some of the same functions.

Here is a first-hand account by members of one such affinity group from Chapel Hill ("Paper Hand Puppet Intervention") about how this might work itself out in practice.

> "Burger and Zimmerman brought puppets to the explosive protests of the World Trade Organization in Seattle two years ago, where they joined a group that was blockading the building in which talks were being held. "People had linked arms," Zimmerman says. "The police had beaten and pepper-sprayed them already, and they threatened that they were coming back in five minutes to attack them again." But the protestors held their line, linking arms and crying, blinded by the pepper spray. Burger, Zimmerman and their friends came along—on stilts, with clowns, a 40-foot puppet, and a belly dancer. They went up and down the line, leading the protesters in song. When the security van returned, they'd back the giant puppet up into its way. Somehow, this motley circus diffused the situation. "They couldn't bring themselves to attack this bunch of people who were now singing songs," Zim-

> merman says. Injecting humor and celebration into a grim situation, he says, is the essence of a puppet intervention.[8]

For all the circus trappings, those most involved in making and deploying giant puppets will often insist that they are deeply serious. "Puppets are not cute, like muppets," insists Peter Schumann, the director of Bread and Puppet Theater—the group historically most responsible for popularizing the use of papier-mâché figures in political protest in the '60s. "Puppets are effigies and gods and meaningful creatures".[9] Sometimes, they are literally so: as with the Maya gods that came to greet delegates at the WTO meetings in Cancun in September 2003. Always, they have a certain numinous quality.

Still, if giant puppets, generically, are gods, most are obviously, foolish, silly, ridiculous gods. It as if the process of producing and displaying puppets becomes a way to both seize the power to make gods, and to make fun of it at the same time. Here one seems to be striking against a profoundly anarchist sensibility. Within anarchism, one encounters a similar impulse at every point where one approaches the mythic or deeply meaningful. It appears to be operative in the doctrines of Zerzanites and similar Primitivists, who go about self-consciously creating myths (their own version of the Garden of Eden, the Fall, the coming Apocalypse), that seem to imply they want to see millions perish in a worldwide industrial collapse, or that they seek to abolish agriculture or even language—then bridle at the suggestion that they really do. It's clearly present in the writings of theorists like Peter Lamborn Wilson, whose meditations on the role of the sacred in revolutionary action are written under the persona of an insane Ismaili pederastic poet named Hakim Bey. It's even more clearly present among Pagan anarchist groups like Reclaiming, who since the anti-nuclear movement of the '80s,[10] have specialized in conducting what often seem like extravagant satires of pagan rituals that they nonetheless insist are real rituals which are really effective—even, that represent what they see as the deepest possible spiritual truths about the world.[11]

Puppets simply push this logic to a kind of extreme. The sacred here is, ultimately, the sheer power of creativity, of the imagination—or, perhaps more exactly, the power to bring the imagination into reality. This is, after all, the ultimate ideal of all revolutionary practice, to, as the '68 slogan put it, "give power to the imagination." But it is also as if the democratization of the sacred can only be accomplished through a kind of burlesque. Hence the constant self-mockery, which, however, is never meant to genuinely undercut the gravity and importance of what's being asserted, but rather, to imply the ultimate recognition that just because gods are human creations they are still gods, and that taking this fact too seriously might prove dangerous.

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[8] From "Puppet Masters: Paper Hand Puppet Intervention brings its bring of political theater back to Chapel Hill" (Independent Ontline, 8/8 2001http://indyweek.com/durham/2001-08-08/ae.html, accessed June 2004.

[9] Similar themes recur in many interviews with radical puppeteers. This is from Mattyboy of the Spiral Q Puppet Theater in Philadelphia: "OK, I'm 23. I've lost 13 friends to AIDS. This is wartime, it's a plague. This is the only way for me to deal with it. With puppets I create my own mythology. I bring them back as gods and goddesses" ("The Puppets are Coming", Daisy Freid, Philadelphia Citypaper January 16–23, 1997.) One illustrated volume on Bread & Puppet is actually called *Rehearsing with gods: photographs and essays on the Bread & Puppet Theater* (Ronald T. Simon & Marc Estrin. White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green Pub. Co., 2004).

[10] Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Non-violent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

[11] The Pagan Bloc has been a regular fixture in large-scale actions since Seattle, and, unlike the Quakers and other Christian proponents of civil disobedience, was willing, ultimately, to recognize Black Bloc practice as a form of nonviolence and even to form a tacit alliance with them.

Symbolic Warfare on the Part of the Police

Anarchists, as I've said, avoid designing their strategies around the media. The same cannot be said of the police.

It's obvious that the events of N30 in Seattle came as a surprise to most in the American government. The Seattle police were clearly unprepared for the sophisticated tactics adopted by the hundreds of affinity groups that surrounded the hotel and, at least for the first day, effectively shut down the meetings. The first impulse of many commanders appears to have been to respect the nonviolence of the actions.[1] It was only after 1 PM on the 30th, after Madeleine Albright's call to the Governor from inside the hotel demanding that he tell them to do whatever they had to do to break the blockade[2] that police began a full-blown assault with tear gas, pepper spray, and concussion grenades.

Even then many seemed to hesitate, while others, when they did enter the fray, descended into wild rampages, attacking and arresting scores of ordinary shoppers in Seattle's commercial district. In the end the governor was forced to call in the National Guard. While the media pitched in by representing police actions as a response to Black Bloc actions that began much later, having to bring in federal troops was an undeniable spectacular symbolic defeat.

In the immediate aftermath of Seattle law enforcement officials—on the national and international level—appear to have begun a concerted effort to develop a new strategy. The details of such deliberations are, obviously, not available to the public. Nonetheless, judging by subsequent events, it seems that their conclusion (unsurprisingly enough) was that the Seattle police had not resorted to violence quickly or efficiently enough. The new strategy—soon put into practice during subsequent actions in Washington, Windsor, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Quebec—appears to have been one of aggressive preemption. The problem was how to justify this against a movement that was overwhelmingly non-violent, engaged in actions that for the most part could not even be defined as criminal,[3] and whose message appeared to have at least potentially strong public appeal.

One might phrase it this way. The summits and other events targeted by the movement—trade summits, political conventions, IMF meetings—were largely symbolic events. They were not, for the most part, venues for formal political decision-making, but junkets, self-celebratory rituals, and networking occasions for some of the richest and most powerful people on earth. The effect of the actions is normally not to shut down the meetings, but to create a sense of siege. It might all

[1] Videographers documented police commanders on the first day reassuring activists that the Seattle police "had never attacked non-violent protestors and never would." Within hours the same commanders had completely reversed course.

[2] The best source I've found on these events is in Joseph Boski's "The Costs of Global Governance: Security and International Meetings since WTO Seattle." Paper Presented at the CYBER Conference, Globalization: Governance and Inequality, May 31-June 1, 2002, Ventura California.

[3] Blocking a street is in fact technically not even a crime, but an "infraction" or "violation": that is, the legal equivalent of jaywalking, or a parking ticket. If one violates such ordinances for non-political purposes one can normally expect to receive some kind of ticket, but certainly not to be taken to a station or spend the night in jail.

be done in such a way as not to physically endanger anyone; the catapults might (as in Quebec) only be hurling stuffed animals, but the result is to produce meetings surrounded by mayhem, in which those attending have to be escorted about by heavily armed security, the cocktail parties are cancelled, and the celebrations, effectively, ruined. Nothing could have been more effective in shattering the air of triumphant inevitability that had surrounded such meetings in the '90s. To imagine that the "forces of order" would not respond aggressively would be naïve indeed. For them, the non-violence of the blockaders was simply irrelevant. Or: to be more precise, it was an issue only because it created potential problem of public perception. This problem, however, was quite serious. How was one to represent protestors as a threat to public safety, justifying extreme measures, if they did not actually do anyone physical harm?

Here one should probably let events speak for themselves. If one looks at what happened during the months immediately following Seattle, the first things one observes are a series of preemptive strikes, always, aimed at threats that (not unlike Iraq's weapons of mass destruction) never quite materialized:

> **April 2000, Washington D.C.**
>
> Hours before the protests against the IMF and World Bank are to begin on April 15, police round up 600 marchers in a preemptive arrest and seize the protesters' Convergence Center. Police Chief Charles Ramsey loudly claims to have discovered a workshop for manufacturing molotov cocktails and homemade pepper spray inside. DC police later admit no such workshop existed (really they'd found paint thinner used in art projects and peppers being used for the manufacture of gazpacho); however, the convergence center remains closed and much of the art and many of the puppets inside are appropriated.
>
> **July 2000, Minneapolis**
>
> Days before a scheduled protest against the International Society of Animal Geneticists, local police claim that activists had detonated a cyanide bomb at a local MacDonald's and might have their hands on stolen explosives. The next day the DEA raids a house used by organizers, drags off the bloodied inhabitants, and appropriates their computers and boxes full of outreach materials. Police later admit there never actually was a cyanide bomb and they had no reason to believe activists were in possession of explosives.
>
> **August 2000, Philadelphia**
>
> Hours before the protests against the Republican Convention are to begin, police, claiming to be acting on a tip, seize the warehouse where the art, banners and puppets used for the action are being prepared, arresting all of the at least 75 activists discovered inside. Police Chief John Timoney loudly claims to have discovered C4 explosives and water balloons full of hydrochloric acid in the building. Police later admit no explosives or acid were really found; the arrestees are however not released until well after the actions are over. All of the puppets, banners, art and literature to be used in the protest are systematically destroyed.

While it is possible that we are dealing with a remarkable series of honest mistakes, this does look an awful lot like a series of attacks on the material activists were intending to use to get

their message out to the public. Certainly that's how the activists interpreted them—especially after Philadelphia. Organizers planning the parallel protests against the Democratic Convention in L.A. managed to obtain a restraining order barring police from attacking their convergence center, but ever since, in the weeks before any major mobilization, a key issue is always how to hide and protecting the puppets.

By Philadelphia, it became quite clear that the police had adopted a very self-conscious media strategy. Their spokesmen would pepper each daily press conference with wild accusations, well aware that the crime-desk reporters assigned to cover them (who usually relied on good working relations with police for their livelihood) would normally reproduce anything they said uncritically, and rarely considered it to merit a story if afterwards the claims turned out to be false. I was working the phones for the activist media team during much of this time and can attest that a large part of what we ended up doing was coming up with responses to what we came to call "the lie of the day". The first day, police announced that they had seized a van full of poisonous snakes and reptiles that activists were intending to release in the city center (they were later forced to admit that it actually belonged to a pet store and had nothing to do with the protests). The second day they claimed that anarchists had splashed acid in an officer's face; this sent us scrambling to figure out what might have actually happened. (They dropped the story immediately thereafter, but it would appear that if anything was actually splashed on an officer, it was probably red paint that was actually directed at a wall.) On the third day we were accused of planting "dry ice bombs" throughout the city; this, again, sent the anarchist media teams scrambling to try to figure out precisely what dry ice bombs were (it turned out the police had apparently found the reference in a copy of the "Anarchist Cookbook".) Interestingly, this last story does not seem to have actually made the news: at this point, most reporters no longer were willing to reproduce the most dramatic claims by the authorities. The fact that the first two claims turned out to be false, however, along with the claims of acid and explosives in the puppet warehouse, or that Timoney appeared to have developed an intentional policy of lying to them, was never considered itself newsworthy. Neither, however, was the actual reason for the actions, that were meant to draw attention to the prison industrial complex (a phrase that we repeated endlessly to reporters, but never made it into a single news report)—presumably, on the grounds that it would be unethical for reporters to allow violent protestors to "hijack" the media.

This same period began to see increasingly outlandish accounts of what had happened at Seattle. During the WTO protests themselves, I must emphasize, no one, including the Seattle police, had claimed anarchists had done anything more militant than break windows. That was the end of November 1999. In March 2000, less than three months later, a story in the Boston Herald reported that, in the weeks before an upcoming biotech conference, officers from Seattle had come to brief the local police on how to deal with 'Seattle tactics', such as attacking police with "chunks of concrete, BB guns, wrist rockets and large capacity squirt guns loaded with bleach and urine".[4] In June, New York Times reporter Nicole Christian, apparently relying on police sources in Detroit preparing for a trade protest across the Canadian border in Windsor, claimed that Seattle demonstrators had "hurled Molotov cocktails, rocks and excrement at delegates and police officers." On this occasion, after the New York Direct Action Network picketed their offices, the Times ended up having to run a retraction, admitting that according to Seattle authorities,

[4] "Police prep for protests over biotech conference at Hynes" by Jose Martinez, Saturday, Boston Herald, March 4 2000.

no objects had been thrown at human beings.[5] Nonetheless, the account appears to have become canonical. Each time there is a new mobilization, stories invariably surface in local newspapers with the same list of "Seattle tactics"—a list that also appears to have become enshrined in training manuals distributed to street cops. Before the Miami Summit of the Americas in 2003, for example, for example, circulars distributed to local businessmen and civic groups listed every one of these "Seattle tactics" as what they should expect to see on the streets once anarchists arrived:

> **Wrist Rockets** — larger hunter-type sling shots that they use to shoot steel ball bearings or large bolts. A very dangerous and deadly weapon.
>
> **Molotov Cocktails** — many were thrown in Seattle and Quebec and caused extensive damage.
>
> **Crow Bars** — to smash windows, cars, etc. They also pry up curbs, then break the cement into pieces that they can throw at police officers. This was done extensively in Seattle.
>
> **Squirt guns** — filled with acid or urine.[6]

Again, according to local police's own accounts, none of these weapons or tactics had been used in Seattle and no one has produced any evidence they've been used in any subsequent US mobilization.[7]

In Miami, the predictable result was that, by the time the first marches began, most of downtown lay shuttered and abandoned.

Miami, as the first major convergence in the new security climate after September 11th, might be said to mark the full culmination of this approach, combining aggressive disinformation and preemptive attacks on activists. During the actions, the police chief—John Timoney again—had officers pouring out an endless series of accusations of activists hurling rocks, bottles, urine, and bags of feces at police. (As usual, despite ubiquitous video cameras and hundreds of arrests, no one was ever charged, let alone convicted, of assaulting an officer with any such substance, and no reporter managed to produce an image of an activist doing so.) Police strategy consisted almost entirely of raids and preemptive attacks on protestors, employing the full arsenal of old and newly developed "non-lethal" weaponry: tazers, pepper spray, plastic and rubber and wooden bullets, bean-bag bullets soaked in pepper spray, tear gas, and so on—and rules of engagement that allowed them to pretty much fire at anyone at will.

[5] New York Times, June 6, Corrections, pA2. The original story was significantly entitled, "Detroit Defends Get-Tough Stance" by Nichole Christian, June 4, 2000, A6. The correction reads: "An article on Sunday about plans for protests in Detroit and in Windsor, Ontario, against an inter-American meeting being held in Windsor through today referred incorrectly to the protests last November at the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle. The Seattle protests were primarily peaceful. The authorities there said that any objects thrown were aimed at property, not people. No protestors were accused of throwing objects, including rocks and Molotov cocktails, at delegates or police."

[6] This document was transcribed and widely circulated on activist listserves at the time. According to one story in the Miami Herald ("Trade protesters mean business, analyst warns", Joan Fleischman, October 1, 2003), it derived from "retired DEA agent Tom Cash, 63, now senior managing director for Kroll Inc., an international security and business consulting firm." Cash in turn claimed to derive his information from "police intelligence" sources.

[7] A number of Molotovs were thrown in Quebec City, apparently by local people. But francophone Canada has a very different tradition of militancy.

Here too, puppets were singled out. In the months before the summit, the Miami city council actually attempted to pass a law making the display of puppets illegal, on the grounds that they could be used to conceal bombs or other weapons.[8] It failed, since it was patently unconstitutional, but the message got out. As a result, the Black Bloc in Miami actually ended up spending most of their time and energy on protecting the puppets. Miami also provides a vivid example of the peculiar personal animus many police seem to have against large figures made of papier-mâché. According to one eyewitness report, after police routed protesters from Seaside Plaza, forcing them to abandon their puppets, officers spent the next half hour or so systematically attacking and destroying them: shooting, kicking, and ripping the remains; one even putting a giant puppet in his squad car with the head sticking out and driving so as to smash it against every sign and street post available.

rallying the troops

The Boston example is particularly striking because it indicates that there were elements in the Seattle police actually training other police in how to deal with violent tactics that official Seattle spokesmen were, simultaneously, denying had actually been employed. While it's very difficult to know exactly what's going on here—even really, to figure out precisely who these endlessly cited

"police intelligence" sources actually are (we seem to be entering a murky zone involving information being collected, concocted, and passed back and forth between a variety of federal police task forces, private security agencies, and allied right-wing think tanks, in such a way that the images become self-reinforcing and presumably, no one is quite sure what is and isn't true)—it is easy to see how one of the main concerns in the wake of Seattle would be to ensure the reliability of one's troops. As commanders discovered in Seattle, officers used to considering themselves guardians of public safety frequently balk, or at least waver, when given orders to make a baton charge against a collection of non-violent 16-year-old white girls. These were, after all, the very sort of people they are ordinarily expected to protect. At least some of the imagery, then, appears to be designed specifically to appeal to the sensibility of ordinary street cops.

This at least would help to explain the otherwise peculiar emphasis on bodily fluids: the water-pistols full of bleach and urine, for example, or claims that officers were pelted with urine and excrement. This appears to be very much a police obsession. Certainly it has next to nothing to do with anarchist sensibilities. When I've asked activists where they think such stories come from, most confess themselves deeply puzzled. One or two suggested that, when defending a besieged squat, sometimes buckets of human waste is one of the few things one has to throw. But none have ever heard of anyone actually transporting human waste to an action in order to hurl or shoot at police, or could suggest why anyone might want to. A brick, some point out, is unlikely to injure an officer in full riot gear; but it will certainly slow him down. But what would be the point of shooting urine at him? Yet images like this reemerge almost every time police attempt to justify a preemptive strike. In press conferences, they have been known to actually produce

[8] See, for example, "Can Miami Really Ban Giant Puppets", Brendan I. Koerner, Slate, Nov. 12, 2003, http://www.slate.com/id/2091139/.

jars of urine and bags of feces that they claim to have discovered hidden in backpacks or activist convergence sites.[9]

It is hard to see these claims as making sense except within the peculiar economy of personal honor typical of any institution that, like the police, operates on an essentially military ethos. For police officers, the most legitimate justification for violence is an assault on one's personal dignity. To cover another person in shit and piss is obviously about as powerful an assault on one's personal dignity as one can possibly make. We also seem to be dealing here with a self-conscious allusion to the famous

'image of '60s protesters "spitting on soldiers in uniform" when they returned from Vietnam—one whose mythic power continues to resonate, not just in right-wing circles, to this day, despite the fact that there's little evidence that it ever happened.[10] It's almost as if someone decided to ratchet the image up a notch: 'if spitting on a uniform is such an insult, what would be even worse?'

That there might have been some kind of coordination in this effort might be gleaned, too, from the fact that it was precisely around the time of the democratic and republican conventions in the summer of 2000 that mayors and police chiefs around America began regularly declaring, often in striking similar terms (and based on no evidence whatsoever) that anarchists were actually a bunch of "trust fund babies" who disguised their faces while breaking things so their wealthy parents wouldn't recognize them on TV—an accusation that soon became received wisdom among right-wing talk show hosts and law enforcement professionals across America.[11] The obvious

[9] One has to wonder where they actually get these things. A typical example from my own experience comes from the World Economic Forum protests in New York in early 2002. Police at one point attacked a group of protestors who were part of a crowd waiting to begin a permitted march when they observed them distributing large plexiglass posters that were designed to double as shields. Several were dragged off and arrested. Police later circulated several different stories for the reasons for the attack but the one they eventually fixed on was a claim that the arrestees were preparing to attack the nearby Plaza Hotel; they claimed to have discovered "lead pipes and jars full of urine" on their persons—though in this case they did not actually produce the evidence. This is a case on which I have some first-hand knowledge, since I knew the arrestees and had been standing a few feet away from them when it happened. They were, in fact, undergraduate students from a small New England liberal arts college who had agreed to have their preparations and training before the march video-taped by a team of reporters from ABC Nightline (the reporters, though, unfortunately, were not actually there at the time). A less likely group of thugs would have been hard to imagine. Needless to say, they were startled and confused to discover police were claiming that they had come to the march equipped with jars of urine. In such cases, claims that urine or excrement were involved is considered, by activists, instant and absolute proof that the police had planted the evidence.

[10] There is also no clear evidence that '60s protestors spat on soldiers any more than early feminists actually burned bras. At least, no one has managed to come up with a contemporary reference to such an act. The story seems to have emerged in the late '70s or early '80s, and, as the recent documentary "Sir! No Sir!" nicely demonstrates, the only veteran who has publicly claimed this happened to him is likely to be lying.

[11] I have been unable to trace who first publicly announced such claims, though my memory from the time was that they were voiced almost simultaneously from Mayor Riordan of Los Angeles and a Philadelphia Democratic Party official, during the preparations for those cities' respective primaries. The claim was obviously also meant to appeal to conservative stereotypes of liberals as members of a "cultural elite"—but it had surprisingly wide influence. As Steven Shukaitis has pointed out, it has been reproduced even by sympathetic voices in the NGO community ("Space, Imagination // Rupture: The Cognitive Architecture of Utopian Political Thought in the Global Justice Movement", University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History 8, 2005.) While I have not conducted systematic surveys of the socio-economic background of anarchists in the course of my own research, I can rely on six years of personal experience to say that, in fact, "trust fund babies" in the movement are extremely rare. Any major city is likely to have one or two, often prominent simply because of their access to resources, but I myself know at least two or three anarchists from military families for every one equipped with a trust fund.

message to the officer on the street appeared to be: 'do not think of your assignment as having to protect a bunch of bankers and politicians who have contempt for you against protestors whose actual positions on economic issues you might well agree with; think of it, rather, as a chance to beat up on those bankers' and politicians' children.' In a sense, one might say the message was perfectly calibrated to the level of repression required, since it suggests that while force was appropriate, deadly force was not: if one were to actually maim or kill a protestor, one might well be killing the son or daughter of a senator or CEO, which would be likely to provoke a scandal.

Police are also apparently regularly warned of that puppets might be used to conceal bombs or weapons.[12] If questioned on their attitudes towards puppets, this is how they are likely to respond.

However, it's hard to imagine this alone could explain the level of personal vindictiveness witnessed in Miami and other actions—especially since police hacking puppets to pieces must have been aware that there was nothing hidden inside them. The antipathy seems to run far deeper. Many activists have speculated on the reasons:

> **David Corston-Knowles' opinion**: You have to bear in mind these are people who are trained to be paranoid. They really do have to ask themselves whether something so big and inscrutable might contain explosives, however absurd that might seem from a non-violent protester's perspective. Police view their jobs not just as law enforcement, but also as maintaining order. And they take that job very personally. Giant demonstrations and giant puppets aren't orderly. They are about creating something—a different society, a different way of looking at things—and creativity is fundamentally at odds with the status quo.
>
> **Daniel Lang's opinion**: Well, one theory is that the cops just don't like being upstaged by someone putting on a bigger show. After all, normally *they're* the spectacle: they've got the blue uniforms, they've got the helicopters and horses and rows of shiny motorcycles. So maybe they just resent it when someone steals the show by coming up with something even bigger and even more visually striking. They want to take out the competition.
>
> **Yvonne Liu's opinion**: It's because they're so big. Cops don't like things that tower over them. That's why they like to be on horses. Plus, puppets are silly and round and misshapen. Notice how much cops always have to maintain straight lines? They stand in straight lines, they always try to make you stand in straight lines… I think round misshapen things somehow offend them.
>
> **Max Uhlenbeck's opinion**: Obviously, they hate to be reminded that they're puppets themselves.

I will return to this question shortly.

[12] One common fear is that wooden dowels used in their construction could be detached and used as cudgels, or to break windows.

Analysis I: The Hollywood Movie Principle

From the point of view of security officials during this period, rallying the troops was presumably the easy part. The stickier problem was what to do with the fact that the bulk of the American public refused to see the global justice movement as a threat. The only survey I am aware of taken at the time that addressed the question—a Zogby America poll taken of TV viewers during the Republican convention in 2000—found that about a third claimed to feel "pride" when they saw images of protestors on TV, and less than 16% percent had an unqualified negative reaction.[13] This was especially striking in a poll of television viewers, since TV coverage during the convention was unremittingly hostile, treating the events almost exclusively as potential security threats.

There is, I think, a simple explanation. I would propose to call it the Hollywood movie principle. Most Americans, in watching a dramatic confrontation on TV, effectively ask themselves: "if this were a Hollywood movie, who would be the good guys?" Presented with a contest between what appear to be a collection of idealistic kids who do not actually injure anyone, and a collection of heavily armed riot cops protecting trade bureaucrats and corporate CEOs, the answer is pretty obvious.

Individual maverick cops can be movie heroes. Riot cops never are. In fact, in Hollywood movies, riot cops almost never appear; about the closest one can find to them are the Imperial Storm troopers in Star Wars, who, like their leader Darth Vader, stand in American popular culture as one of the most familiar archetypes of evil. This point is not lost on the anarchists, who have since A16 taken to regularly bringing recordings of the Imperial Storm Trooper music from Star Wars to blast from their ranks as soon as a line of riot cops starts advancing.

If so, the key problem for the forces of order became: what would it take to reverse this perception? How to cast protesters in the role of the villain?

In the immediate aftermath of Seattle the focus was all on broken windows. As we've seen, this imagery certainly did strike some sort of chord. But in terms of creating a sense that decisive measures were required, efforts to make a national issue out of property destruction came to surprisingly little effect. In the terms of my analysis this makes perfect sense. After all, in the moral economy of Hollywood, property destruction is at best very minor peccadillo. In fact, if the popularity of the various Terminators, Lethal Weapons, or Die Hards and the like reveal anything, it is that most Americans seem to rather like the idea of property destruction. If they did not themselves harbor a certain hidden glee at the idea of someone smashing a branch of their local bank, or a MacDonald's (not to mention police cars, shopping malls, and complex construction machinery), it's hard to imagine why they would so regularly pay money to watch idealistic do-gooders smashing and blowing them up for hours on end, always in ways which, through the magic of the movies—but also like the practice of the Black Bloc—tend to leave innocent bystanders entirely unharmed? Certainly, it's unlikely that there are significant numbers of Americans who have not, at some time or another, had a fantasy about smashing up their bank.

[13] Monday, August 21st, "Convention Protests Bring Mixed Reactions" (Reuters/Zogby). "In a Zogby America survey of 1,004 adults, 32.9% said they were proud of the protesters, while another 31.2% said they were wary. Another 13.2% said they were sympathetic and 15.7% irritated and 6.9% said they were unsure." Considering the almost uniform hostility of the coverage, the fact that a third of the audience were nonetheless "proud", and that less than one in six were sure their reaction was negative, is quite remarkable.

In the land of demolition derbies and monster trucks, Black Bloc anarchists might be said to be living a hidden aspect of the American dream.

Obviously, these are just fantasies. Most working class Americans do not overtly approve of destroying a Starbucks facade; but, unlike the talking classes, neither do they see such activity as a threat to the nation, let alone anything requiring military-style repression.

Analysis II: Creative Destruction and the Privatization of Desire

One could even say that in a sense, the Black Bloc appear to be the latest avatars of an artistic/revolutionary tradition which runs at least through the Dadaists, Surrealists and Situationists (the latter by far the most popular theorists in American anarchist bookshops): one which tries to play off the contradictions of capitalism by turning its own destructive, leveling forces against it. Capitalist societies—and America in particular—are, in essence, potlatch societies. That is, they are built around the spectacular destruction of consumer goods.[14] They are societies that imagine themselves as built on something they call "the economy" which, in turn is imagined as a nexus between "production" and "consumption", endlessly spitting out products and then destroying them again. Since it is all based on the principle of infinite expansion of industrial production—the very principle which the Black Bloc anarchists, mostly being highly ecologically conscious anti-capitalists, most vehemently oppose—all that stuff has to be constantly destroyed to make way for new products. But this, in turn, means inculcating a certain passion for or delight in the smashing and destruction of property that can very easily slip into a delight in the shattering of those structures of relation which make capitalism possible.

It is a system that can only renew itself by cultivating a hidden pleasure at the prospect of its own destruction.[15]

Actually, one could well argue that there have been two strains in twentieth century artistic/revolutionary thought, and that both have been entangled in the—endlessly ambivalent—image of the potlatch. In the 1930s, for example, George Bataille became fascinated by Marcel Mauss' description of the spectacular destruction of property in Kwakiutl potlatches; it ultimately became the basis for his famous theory of "expenditure", of the creation of meaning through destruction, that he felt was ultimately lacking under modern capitalism. There are endless ironies here. First of all, what Bataille and subsequent authors seized on was not, in fact, "the potlatch" at all, but a small number of very unusual potlatches held around the turn of the century, at a time marked both by a rapid decline in Kwakiutl population, and a minor economic boom had left the region awash in an unprecedented number of consumer goods. Ordinary potlatches did not normally involve the destruction of property at all; they were simply occasions for aristocrats to lavish wealth on the community. If the image of Indians setting fire to thousands of blankets or other consumer goods proved captivating, in other words, it was not because it represented some fundamental truth about human society that consumer capitalism had forgotten, but rather because it reflected the ultimate truth of consumer capitalism itself.

[14] Probably the destruction of productive capacity as well, which must be endlessly renewed.

[15] It might be significant here that the United States' main exports to the rest of the world consist of (a) Hollywood action movies and (b) personal computers. If you think about it, they form a kind of complementary pair to the brick-through-window/giant puppet set I've been describing—or rather, the brick/puppet set might be considered a kind of subversive, desublimated reflection of them—the first involving paeans to property destruction, the second, the endless ability to create new, but ephemeral, insubstantial imagery in the place of older, more permanent forms.

In 1937, Bataille teamed up with Roger Callois to found a reading group called "The College of Sociology", that expanded his insights into a general theory of the revolutionary festival: arguing that it was only by reclaiming the principle of the sacred, and the power of myth embodied in popular festivals that effective revolutionary action would be possible. Similar ideas were developed in the '50s by Henri Lefebvre, and within the Lettrist International, whose journal, edited by Guy Debord, was, significantly, entitled "Potlatch."[16] Here there is of course a direct line from the Situationists, with their promulgation of art as a form of revolutionary direct action, to the punk movement and contemporary anarchism.

If Black Blocs embody one side of this tradition—capitalism's encouragement of a kind of fascination with consumerist destruction that can, ultimately, be turned back against capitalism itself—the Puppets surely represent the other one, the recuperation of the sacred and unalienated experience in the collective festival. Radical puppeteers tend to be keenly aware that their art harkens back to the wickerwork giants and dragons, Gargantuas and Pantagruels of Medieval festivals. Even those who have not themselves read Rabelais or Bakhtin are likely to be familiar with the notion of the carnivalesque.[17] Convergences are regularly framed as "carnivals against capitalism" or "festivals of resistance." The base-line reference seems to be the late Medieval world immediately before the emergence of capitalism, particularly, the period after the Black Death when the sudden decline in population had the effect of putting unprecedented amounts of money into the hands of the laboring classes. Most of it ended up being poured into popular festivals of one sort or another, which themselves began to multiply until they took up large parts of the calendar year; what nowadays might be called events of "collective consumption", celebrations of carnality and rowdy pleasures and—if Bakhtin is to be believed—tacit attacks on the very principle of hierarchy. One might say that the first wave of capitalism, the Puritan Moment as it's sometimes called, had to begin with a concerted assault on this world, which was condemned by improving landlords and nascent capitalists as pagan, immoral, and utterly unconducive to the maintenance of labor discipline. Of course a movement to abolish all moments of public festivity could not last forever; Cromwell's reign in England is reviled to this day on the grounds that he outlawed Christmas. More importantly, once moments of festive, collective consumption were eliminated, the nascent capitalism would be left with the obvious problem of how to sell its products, particularly in light of the need to constantly expand production. The end result was what I like to call a process of the privatization of desire; the creation of endless individual, familial, or semi-furtive forms of consumption; none of which, as we are so often reminded, could really be fully satisfying or else the whole logic of endless expansion wouldn't work. While one should hardly imagine that police strategists are fully cognizant of all this, the very existence of police is tied to a political cosmology which sees such forms of collective consumption as inherently disorderly, and (much like a Medieval carnival) always brimming with the possibility of violent insurrection. "Order" means that citizens should go home and watch TV.[18]

[16] Some of this history is retold, and the story brought forward to Reclaim the Streets and the current carnivals against capitalism, in an essay by Gavin Grindon called "The Breath of the Possible", to appear in Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigation, Collective Research" (David Graeber and Stevphen Shukaitis, editors), AK Press, 2006.

[17] For one good example of such reflections, see "History of Radical Puppetry", by the Wise Fool Puppet Collective (www.zeitgeist.net/wfca/radpup.htm). Wise Fool traces their art more back to Medieval mystery plays than festivals but it provides a nice historical perspective.

[18] Where they will normally turn on shows which take the perspective of the same police in charge of getting them off the streets to begin with; more on this later.

For police, then, what revolutionaries see as an eruption of the sacred through a recreation of the popular festival is a "disorderly assembly"—and exactly the sort of thing they exist to disperse.

However, since this sense of festival as threatening does not appear to resonate with large sectors of the TV audience, the police were forced to, as it were, change the script. What we've seen is a very calculated campaign of symbolic warfare, an attempt to eliminate images of colorful floats and puppets, and substitute images of bombs and hydrochloric acid—the very substances that, in police fantasies, are likely to actually lurk beneath the papier-mâché façade.

Analysis Part III: The Laws of War

To fully understand the place of puppets, though, I think one has to grapple with the question of rules of engagement.

I already touched on this question obliquely earlier when I suggested that when politicians informed street cops that protestors were "trust fund babies", what they really meant to suggest was that they could be brutalized, but not maimed or killed, and that police tactics should be designed accordingly. From an ethnographer's perspective, one of the most puzzling things about direct action is to understand how these rules are actually negotiated. Certainly, rules exist. There are lines that cannot be crossed by the police without risk of major scandal, there are endless lines that cannot be crossed by activists. Yet each side acts as if it is playing a game whose rules it had worked out exclusively through its own internal processes, without any consultation with the other players. This could not ultimately be the case. I first began thinking about these question after my experience in Philly during the Republican Convention in the summer of 2000. I had working mainly with an activist media team. During the day of action, however, my job was to go out into the streets with a cell phone to report back to them what was actually happening. I ended up accompanying a column of Black Bloc'ers whose actions were originally meant as a diversion, to lure police away from street blockades in a different part of town. The police appear to have decided not to take the bait, and as a result, the Bloc briefly had their run of a wide stretch of downtown Philadelphia:

> (**based on field notes, Philadelphia, August 1st 2000**).
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> faced with a rapidly moving column of several hundred anarchists appearing out of nowhere, small groups of police would often abandon their cars, which the anarchists would then proceed to trash and spray-paint. A couple dozen police cars, one stretch limo, and numerous official buildings were hit in the course of the next hour or so. Eventually, reinforcements, in the form of police bicycle squads, began to appear and before long there was a rough balance of forces. What followed at this point could only be described as an episode of some kind of nonviolent warfare. A few Black Bloc kids would try to shut down a bus by playing with valves in the back; a squad of bike cops would swoop in and grab a few, cuffing them and locking their bikes together to create tiny fortresses in which to hold them. Once, a large mass of protesters appeared from another direction and the cops ended up besieged in their little bike fort, with Black Blockers surrounding them, screaming insults, throwing paint bombs above their heads, doing everything but actually attacking them. On that occasion the Bloc wasn't quite able to snatch back their arrested comrades before

police vans with reinforcements appeared to take them away; elsewhere, there were rumors of successful 'unarrests'. The police even suffered a casualty in that particular confrontation: one overweight cop, overwhelmed by the tension and stifling heat, collapsed and had to be carried off or revived with smelling salts.

It was obvious that both sides had carefully worked out rules of engagement. Activists tended to work out their principles carefully in advance, and while there were certainly differences, say, between those who adopted classic non-violent civil disobedience rules (who had, for example, undergone nonviolence trainings) and the more militant anarchists I was with, all agree at least on the need to avoid directly causing harm to other human beings, or to damage personal property or owner-operated "mom and pop" stores. The police of course could attack protesters more or less at will, but at this point at least, they seemed to feel they had to do so in such a way as to be fairly sure that none would be killed or more than a handful required hospitalization—which, in the absence of very specific trainings and technologies, required a fair amount of constraint.

These basic rules applied throughout; however, over the course of the day, the tenor of events was constantly shifting. The Black Bloc confrontations were tense and angry; other areas were placid or somber ritual, drum circles or pagan spiral dances; others, full of music or ridiculous carnival. The Black Bloc column I was accompanying, for example, eventually converged with a series of others until there were almost a thousand anarchists rampaging through the center of the city. The District Attorney's office was thoroughly paint-bombed.

More police cars were destroyed. However it was all done quickly on the move and larger and larger bike squads started followed our columns, splitting the Bloc and threatening to isolate smaller groups that could, then, be arrested. We were running faster and faster, dodging through alleys and parking lots.

Finally, the largest group descended on a plaza where a permitted rally was being held; this was assumed to be a safe space. In fact, it wasn't quite. Riot police soon began surrounding the plaza and cutting off routes of escape; it seemed like they were preparing for a mass arrest.

Such matters usually simply come down to numbers: it takes something like two officers in the field for every protester to carry off a mass arrest, probably three if the victims are trying to resist, and have some idea of how to go about it (i.e., know enough to link arms and try to keep a continuous line.) In this situation the Black Bloc kids could be expected to know exactly what to do; the others, who thought they were attending a safe, permanent event, were mostly entirely unprepared but could nonetheless be assumed to follow their lead; on the other hand, they were trapped, they had no way to receive reinforcements, and the police were getting a constant flow of them. The mood was extremely tense. Activists who had earlier been conducting a teach-in and small rally against the prison industrial complex milled about uncomfortably around a giant poster-board as the Bloc, now reduced to a couple hundred black figures in bandanas and gas masks, formed a mini-spokescouncil, then faced off against the police lines at two different points where it seemed there

might be a break in their lines (there usually is, when the police first begin to deploy); but to no avail.

I lingered on the plaza, chatting with a friend, Brad, who was complaining that he had lost his backpack and most of his worldly goods in the police raid on the puppet space that morning. We munched on apples—none of us had eaten all day—and watched as four performance artists on bicycles with papier-mâché goat heads, carrying a little sign saying

"Goats With A Vote", began wading into the police lines to perform an acapella rap song. "You see what you can do with puppets?" laughed Brad. "No one else would ever be able to get away with that."

The Goats, as it turned out, were just the first wave. They were followed, ten minutes later, by a kind of "puppet intervention". Not with real puppets—the puppets had all been destroyed, and the musicians all arrested, at the warehouse earlier that morning. Instead, the Revolutionary Anarchist Clown Bloc appeared; led by two figures on high bicycles, blowing horns and kazoos, spreading streamers and confetti everywhere; alongside a large contingent of

'Billionaires for Bush (or Gore)', dressed in high camp tuxedos and evening gowns. There were probably not more than thirty or forty of them in all but between them they immediately managed to change the tenor of the whole event, and to throw everything into confusion. The Billionaires started handing fake money to the police ("to thank them for suppressing dissent.") the clowns attacked the Billionaires with squeaky mallets. Unicycles appeared, and fire jugglers. In the ensuing confusion, cracks did appear in the police lines and just about everyone on the Plaza took advantage to form a wedge and burst out and to safety, with the Black Bloc leading the way.

Let's consider for a moment this idea of nonviolent warfare. How much of a metaphor is it really?

One could well make the argument that it is not a metaphor at all. Clausewitz notwithstanding, war has never been a pure contest of force with no rules. Just about all armed conflicts have had very complex and detailed sets of mutual understandings between the warring parties. When total war does occur, its practitioners—Attila, Cortes—tend to be remembered a thousand years later for this very reason. There are always rules. As the Israeli military theorist Martin Van Creveld observes, if nothing else, in any armed conflict there will normally be:

- rules for parlays and truces (this would include, for example, the sanctity of negotiators)
- rules for how to surrender and how captives are to be treated
- rules for how to identify and deal with non-combatants (normally including medics)
- rules for levels and types force allowable between combatants — which weapons or tactics are dishonorable or illegal (i.e., even when Hitler and Stalin were going at it neither tried to assassinate one another or used chemical weapons)[19]

[19] Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, New York, Free Press, 1991.

Van Creveld emphasizes that such rules are actually necessary for any effective use of force, because to maintain an effective army, one needs to maintain a certain sense of honor and discipline, a sense of being the good guys. Without the rules, in other words, it would be impossible to maintain any real morale or command structure. An army which does not obey rules degenerates into a marauding band, and faced with a real army, marauding bands invariably lose. Van Creveld suggests there are probably other reasons why there must be rules: for instance, that violence is so intrinsically frightening that humans always immediately surround it with regulation… But one of the most interesting. because it brings home how much the battlefield is an extension of a larger political field, is that, without rules, it is impossible to know when you have won—since ultimately one needs to have both sides agree on this question.

Now consider the police. Police certainly see themselves soldiers of a sort. But insofar as they see themselves as fighting a war (the "war on crime"), they also know they are involved in a conflict in which victory is by definition impossible.

How does this affect the rules of engagement? On one level the answer is obvious. When it comes to levels of force, what sort of weapons or tactics one can use in what circumstances, police operate under enormous constraints—far more than any army. Some of these constraints remain tacit.

Others are quite legal and explicit. Certainly, every time a policeman fires a gun, there must be an investigation. This is one of the reasons for the endless elaboration of "non-lethal" weapons—tazers, plastic bullets, pepper spray and the like—for purposes of crowd control: they are not freighted with the same restrictions. On the other hand, when police are engaged in actions *not* deemed to involve potentially lethal force, and that are not meant to lead to a suspect's eventual criminal conviction, there are almost no constraints of what they can do—certainly none that can be enforced in any way.[20]

So in the last of Van Creveld's categories, there are endless constraints. As for the other rules, anyone who has been involved in direct action can testify to the fact that the police systematically violate all of them. Police regularly engage in practices which, in war, would be considered outrageous, or at the very least, utterly dishonorable. Police regularly arrest mediators. If members of an affinity group occupy a building, and one does not but instead acts as police liaison, it might well end up that the liaison is the only one who is actually arrested. If one does negotiate an agreement with the police, they will almost invariably violate it. Police frequently attack or arrest those they have earlier offered safe passage. They regularly target medics. If those carrying out an action in one part of a city try to create "green zones" or safe spaces in another—in other words, if they try to set up an area in which everyone agrees not to break the law or provoke the authorities, as a way to distinguish combatants and non-combatants—the police will almost invariably attack the green zone.

Why? There are various reasons for this. Some are obviously pragmatic: you don't have to come to an understanding about how to treat prisoners if you can arrest protesters, but protesters can't arrest you. But in a broader sense such behavior is a means of refusing any suggestion of equivalency—the kind that would simply be assumed if fighting another army in a conventional

[20] See Egon Bitner, *Aspects of Police Work*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990, for a good summary of police sociology's understanding of these constraints and the general issue of "discretion". Since most Americans assume that police are normally engaged in preventing or investigating crimes, they assume that police conduct is freighted with endless bureaucratic restraints. In fact, one of the great discoveries of police sociology is that police spend a surprisingly small percentage of their time on criminal matters.

war. Police represent the state; the state has a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within its borders; therefore, within that territory, police are by definition incommensurable with anyone else. This is essential to understanding what police actually are. Many sociological studies have pointed out that maybe 6% of the average police officer's time is spent on anything that can even remotely be considered "fighting crime". Police are a group of armed, lower-echelon government administrators, trained in the scientific application of physical force to aid in the resolution of administrative problems.

They are bureaucrats with guns, and whether they are guarding lost children, talking rowdy drunks out of bars, or supervising free concerts in the park, the one common feature of the kind of situation to which they're assigned is the possibility of having to impose "non-negotiated solutions backed up by the potential use of force".[21] The key term here I think, is "non-negotiable". Police do not negotiate—at least when it comes to anything important—because that would imply equivalency. When they are forced to negotiate, they pretty much invariably break their word.[22]

In other words, police find themselves in a paradoxical position. Their job is to embody the state's monopoly on the use of coercive force; yet their freedom to employ that force is extremely limited. The refusal to treat the other side as honorable opponents, and therefore, as equivalent in any way, seems to be the only way to maintain the principle of absolute incommensurability that representatives of the state must, by definition, maintain. This would appear to be the reason why, when restrictions on the use of force by police are removed, the results are catastrophic. Whenever you see wars that violate all the rules and involve horrific atrocities against civilians, they are invariably framed as "police actions".

Obviously, none of this actually answers the question of how rules of engagement are negotiated. But it does make it clear why it cannot be done directly. This seems particularly true in America; in many countries, from Italy to Madagascar, the rules of civil resistance can sometimes be worked quite explicitly, so that protest ends up becoming a kind of game in which the rules are clearly understood by each side. A good example is the famous tute bianci or 'white overalls' tactics employed in Italy between 1999 and 2001, where protestors would fortify themselves with layers of padding and inflatable inner tubes and the like and rush the barricades, at the same time pledging to do no harm to another human being. Participants often admitted to me that the rules were, for the most part, directly negotiated: "you can hit us as hard as you like as long as you hit us on the padding; we won't hit you but we'll try to plow through the barricades; let's see who wins!" In fact matters had come to such a pass that negotiation was expected: before the G8 meetings in Genoa, when the government opted for a policy of violent repression, they were forced to bring in the LAPD to train Italian police in how *not* to interact with protesters, or allow either side to be effectively humanized in the eyes of the other.[23] In the United States, however, police appear to object to such negotiations on principle—unless, that is, protestors are actually trying to get arrested, and are willing to negotiate the terms.

[21] Bittner's phrase. See also Mark Neocleus, *The Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power*. London: Pluto Press, 2000.

[22] Consider here the fact that "police negotiators" are generally employed in hostage situations; in other words, in order to actually get the police to negotiate, one has to literally be holding a gun to someone's head. And in such situations police can hardly be expected to honor their promises; in fact, they could well argue they are morally obliged not to.

[23] Organizers at Genoa uniformly spoke of their shock during the actions when suddenly, all the police commanders whose cell phone numbers they had assembled suddenly refused to answer calls from activists.

Still, it's obvious that on some level, negotiation must take place. What's more, whatever level that is, it is the real level of power: since, after all, as always in politics, real power is not the power to win a contest, but the power to define the rules and stakes, not the power to win an argument, but the power to define what the argument is about. Here it is clear that the power is not all on one side. Years of moral-political struggle, one might say, have created a situation in which the police, generally speaking, have to accept extreme restrictions on their use of force; this is much more true when dealing with people defined as "white", of course, but nonetheless it is a real limit on their ability to suppress dissent. The problem for those dedicated to the principle of direct action is that while these rules of engagement—particularly the levels of force police are allowed to get away with—are under constant renegotiation, this process is expected to take place through institutions to which anarchists, on principle, object. Normally, one is expected to employ the language of "rights" or "police brutality", to pursue one's case though the courts—with the help of liberal NGOs and sympathetic politicians—but most of all, one is expected to do battle in "the court of public opinion." This of course means through the corporate media, since "the public" in this context is little more than its audience. Of course for an anarchist, the very fact that human beings are organized into a "public", into a collection atomized spectators, is precisely the problem. The solution for them is self-organization: they wish to see the public abandon their role as spectators and organize themselves into an endless and overlapping collection of directly democratic voluntary associations and communities. Yet according to the language normally employed by the media and political classes, the moment members of the public begin to do this, the moment they self-organize in any way—say, by forming labor unions or political associations—they are no longer the public but "special interest groups" presumed by definition to be opposed to the public interest. (This helps explain why even peaceful protestors at permitted events expressing views shared by overwhelming majorities of Americans, are nonetheless never described as members of "the public.")

Negotiation, then, is supposed to take place indirectly. Each side is supposed to make its case via the media—mainly, through precisely the kind of calculated symbolic warfare that the police, in America, are willing to play quite aggressively, but activists, and particularly anarchists, are increasingly unwilling to play at all. Anarchists and their allies are above all trying to circumvent this game. To some degree they are trying to do so by creating their own media. To some degree, they are trying to do so by using the corporate media to convey images that they know are likely to alienate most suburban middle class viewers, but that they hope will galvanize potentially revolutionary constituencies: oppressed minorities, alienated adolescents, the working poor. Many Black Bloc anarchists were quite delighted, after Seattle, to see the media "sensationalizing" property destruction for this very reason. To some degree, too, they are trying to circumvent the game by trying to seize the power to renegotiate the terms of engagement on the field of battle. It's the latter, I think, that the police see as fundamentally unfair.

So Why Do Cops Hate Puppets?

Let's return, then, to the notion of a "puppet intervention".

In Philly, on the evening of the 1st, we organized a press conference in which one of the few puppetistas who escaped arrest that morning was given center stage. During the press conference and subsequent talks with the media, we all emphasized that the puppet crews were, effectively,

our peacekeepers. One of their main jobs was to intervene to defuse situations of potential violence. If the police were really primarily concerned with maintaining public order, as they maintained, peacekeepers seemed a strange choice for a preemptive strike.

By now, it should be easy enough to see why police might not see things this way. This is not to say we were not right to insist that the attack on the puppet warehouse was inspired by political motives, rather than a desire to protect the public.[24] It was. As we've seen, it appears, with its wild claims of acid and explosives, to have been part of a calculated campaign of symbolic warfare. At the same time, the *manner* in which puppets can be used to defuse situations of potential violence is completely different than, say, would be employed by protest marshals. Police tend to appreciate the presence of marshals, since marshals are organized into a chain of command that police tend to immediately to treat as a mere extension of their own—and which, as a result, often effectively becomes so. Unlike marshals, puppets cannot be used to convey orders. Rather, like the clowns and Billionaires, they aim to transform and redefine situations of potential conflict.

It might be helpful here to reflect on the nature of the violence—"force", if you like—that police represent. A former LAPD officer writing about the Rodney King case pointed out that in most of the occasions in which a citizen is severely beaten by police, it turns out that the victim was actually innocent of any crime. "Cops don't beat up burglars", he observed. If you want to cause a policeman to be violent, the surest way is to *challenge their right to define the situation.* This is not something a burglar is likely to do.[25] This of course makes perfect sense if we remember that police are, essentially, bureaucrats with guns. Bureaucratic procedures are all about questions of definition. Or, to be more precise, they are about the imposition of a narrow range of pre-established schema to a social reality that is, usually, infinitely more complex: a crowd can be either orderly or disorderly; a citizen can be white, black, Hispanic, or an Asian/ Pacific Islander; a petitioner is or is not in possession of a valid photo ID. Such simplistic rubrics can only be maintained in the absence of dialogue; hence, the quintessential form of bureaucratic violence is the wielding of the truncheon when somebody "talks back".

I began by saying that this was to be an essay of interpretation. In fact, it has been just as much an essay about frustrated interpretation; about the limits of interpretation. Ultimately, I think this frustration can be traced back to the very nature of violence—bureaucratic or otherwise. Violence is in fact unique among forms of human action in that it holds out the possibility of affecting the actions of others about whom one understands nothing. If one wants to affect another's actions in any other way, one must at least have some idea who they think they are, what they want, what they think is going on.

Interpretation is required, and that requires a certain degree of imaginative identification. Hit someone over the head hard enough, all this becomes irrelevant. Obviously, two parties locked in an equal contest of violence would usually do well to get inside each other's heads, but when access to violence becomes extremely unequal, the need vanishes. This is typically the case in situations of structural violence: of systemic inequality that is ultimately backed up by the threat of force. Structural violence always seems to create extremely lopsided structures of imagination.

[24] I have yet to hear of a passing pedestrian or other member of "the public" who was injured by even the rowdiest anarchist tactics; in any large-scale action, large numbers of passing pedestrians are likely to end up gassed, injured, or arrested by police.

[25] Marc Cooper, "Dum Da Dum-Dum". Village Voice April 16, 1991, pp.28–33. I have developed these themes in much greater detail elsewhere: see my Malinowski lecture of 2006, "Beyond Power/Knowledge: A Theory of the Relation Between Power, Ignorance and Stupidity."

Gender is actually a telling example here. Women almost everywhere know a great deal about men's work, men's lives, and male experience; men are almost always not only ignorant about women's lives, they often react with indignation at the idea they should even try to imagine what being a woman might be like. The same is typically the case in most relations of clear subordination: masters and servants, employers and employees, rich and poor. The victims of structural violence invariably end up spending a great deal of time imagining what it is like for those who benefit from it; the opposite rarely occurs. One concomitant is that the victims often end up identifying with, and caring about, the beneficiaries of structural violence—which, next to the violence itself, is probably one of the most powerful forces guaranteeing the perpetuation of systems of inequality. Another is that violence, as we've seen, allows the possibility of cutting through the subtleties of constant mutual interpretation on which ordinary human relations are based.

The details of this play of imagination against structural violence are endlessly complicated and this is hardly the place to work out the full theoretical ramifications. For now I only want to emphasize two crucial points.

The first is that the line of riot police is precisely the point where structural violence turns into the real thing. Therefore, it functions as a kind of wall against imaginative identification. Nonviolence training actually focuses on trying to break the barrier and teach activists how to constantly bear in mind what the cops are likely to be thinking, but even here, we are usually dealing with thought on its most elemental, animalistic level ("a policeman will panic if he feels he is cornered", "never do anything that he might interpret as reaching towards the gun"…) For most anarchists, the existence of the imaginative wall is intensely frustrating, because anarchist morality is based on a moral imperative towards imaginative identification.[26] On many occasions, I have seen legal trainers having to remind activists that, whatever their inclinations, one should not engage in conversation with one's arresting officer, no matter how apparently open or interested they seem to be, because chances are they are simply fishing for information which will help in a conviction. And during the actions themselves, one tends to hear endless dismayed speculation about what the cops must be thinking as they truncheon or tear gas nonviolent citizens; conversations which make clear, above all else, that really, no one has the slightest idea. But this is precisely the police role. The point of military-style discipline is to make any individual officer's actual feelings or opinions not just impenetrable, but entirely irrelevant.

Obviously no wall is completely impenetrable. Given sufficient pressure, any will eventually begin to crumble. Most of those who help to organize mass actions are keenly aware that historically, when anarchists actually win, when civil resistance campaigns of any sort topple governments, it is usually at the point when the police refuse to fire on them. This is one reason why the image of police officers crying behind their gasmasks in Seattle was so important to them. Security officials seem to understand this principle as well. That's why they spent so much energy, in the months after Seattle, in trying to rally their troops.

So this is the first point: the imaginative wall.

The second point is that this juxtaposition of imagination and violence reflects a much larger conflict between two principles of political action. One might even say, between two conceptions

[26] Peter Kropotkin, still probably the most famous anarchist thinker to have developed an explicit ethical theory, argued that all morality is founded on the imagination. Most contemporary anarchists would appear to follow him on this, at least implicitly.

of political reality. The first—call it a "political ontology of violence"—assumes that the ultimate reality is one of forces, with "force" here largely a euphemism for various technologies of physical coercion.

To be a "realist" in international relations, for example, has nothing to do with recognizing material realities—in fact, it is all about attributing "interests" to imaginary entities known as "nations"—but about willingness to accept the realities of violence. Nation-states are real because they can kill you.

Violence here really is what defines situations. The other could be described as a political ontology of the imagination. It's not so much a matter of giving "power to the imagination" as in recognizing that the imagination is the source of power in the first place (and here we might take note of the fact that next to the Situationists, the French theorist one will encounter the most often in anarchist bookstores is Cornelius Castoriadis).[27] This is why imaginative powers are seen as suffused with the sacred. What anarchists regularly try to do is to level a systematic and continual challenge to the right of the police, and the authorities in general, to define the situation. They do it by proposing endless alternative frameworks—or, more precisely, by insisting on the power to switch frameworks whenever they like.

Puppets are the very embodiment of this power.

What this means in the streets is that activists are trying to effectively collapse the political, negotiating process into the structure of the action itself. To win the contest, as it were, by continually changing the definition of what is the field, what are the rules, what are the stakes—and to do so on the field itself.[28] A situation that is sort of like nonviolent warfare becomes a situation that is sort of like a circus, or a theatrical performance, or a religious ritual, and might equally well slip back at any time.

Of course from the point of view of the police, this is simply cheating. Protesters who alternate between throwing paint balls over their heads, and breaking into song-and-dance numbers, are not fighting fair. But of course as we've seen the police aren't fighting fair either. They systematically violate all the laws of combat. They systematically violate agreements. They have to, as a matter of principle, since to do otherwise would be to admit the existence of a situation of dual power; it would be to deny the absolute incommensurability of the state.

In a way, what we are confronting here is the familiar paradox of constituent power. As various German and Italian theorists are fond of reminding us, since no system can create itself (i.e.,

[27] Particularly Castoriadis' "Imaginary Institution of Society". Again, this is a theme that I can only fully develop elsewhere, but one could describe the history of left-wing thought since the end of the eighteenth century as revolving around the assumption that creativity and imagination were the fundamental ontological principles. This is obvious in the case of Romanticism, but equally true of Marx—who insisted in his famous comparison of Architects and Bees that it was precisely the role of imagination in production that made humans different from animals. Marx, in turn, was elaborating on perspectives already current in the worker's movement of his day. This helps explain, I think, the notorious affinity that avant garde artists have always felt with revolutionary politics. Rightwing thought has always tended to accuse the Left of naivete in refusing to take account of the importance of the "means of destruction", arguing that ignoring the fundamental role of violence in defining human relations can only end up producing pernicious effects.

[28] One might draw an analogy here to the collapse of levels typical of consensus decision-making. One way to think of consensus process is an attempt to merge the process of deliberation with the process of enforcement. If one does not have a separate mechanism of coercion that can force a minority to comply with a majority decision, majority voting is clearly unadvisable—the process of finding consensus is meant to produce outcomes that do not need a separate mechanism of enforcement because compliance has already been guaranteed within the process of decision-making itself.

any God capable of instituting a moral order cannot be bound by that morality…), any legal/political order can only be created by some force to which that legality does not apply.[29] In modern Euro-American history, this has meant that the legitimacy of constitutions ultimately harkens back to some kind of popular revolution: at precisely the point, in my terms, where the politics of force does meet the politics of imagination. Now of course revolution is precisely what the people with the puppets feel they are ultimately about—even if they are trying to do so with an absolute minimum of actual violence. But it seems to me that what really provokes the most violent reactions on the part of the forces of order is precisely the attempt to make constituent power—the power of popular imagination to create new institutional forms—present not just in brief flashes, but continually. To permanently challenge the authorities' ability to define the situation. The insistence that the rules of engagement, as it were, can be constantly renegotiated on the field of battle; that you can constantly change the narrative in the middle of the story; is in this light, just one aspect of a much larger phenomenon. It also explains why anarchists hate to think of themselves as having to rely in any way on the good offices of even well-meaning corporate media or liberal NGO groups, even, the frequent hostility to would-be benefactors, who nonetheless demand, as a prerequisite to their help, the right to place anarchists within their own pre-set narrative frameworks. Direct action is, by definition, unmediated. It is about cutting through all such frameworks and bringing the power of definition into the streets. Obviously, under ordinary conditions—that is, outside of those magical moments when the police actually do refuse to fire—there is only a very limited degree to which one can actually do this. In the meantime, moral-political struggle in the "courts of public opinion"–as well of the courts of law—would seem unavoidable. Some anarchists deny this. Others grudgingly accept it. All cling to direct action as the ultimate ideal.

This I think makes it easier to see why giant puppets, that are so extraordinarily creative but at the same time so intentionally ephemeral, that make a mockery of the very idea of the eternal verities that monuments are meant to represent, can so easily become the symbol of this attempt to seize the power of social creativity[30], the power to recreate and redefine institutions. Why, as a result, they can end up standing in for everything—the new forms of organization, the emphasis on democratic process

—that standard media portrayals of the movement make to disappear. They embody the permanence of revolution. From the perspective of the "forces of order", this is precisely what makes them both ridiculous, and somehow demonic. From the perspective of many anarchists, this is precisely what makes them both ridiculous, and somehow divine.[31]

Some Very Tenuous Conclusions

This essay thus ends where it should perhaps have begun, with the need to thoroughly rethink the idea of "revolution". While most of those engaged with the politics of direct action think of

[29] I am referring here of course to Karl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, and more recently, to Toni Negri and Giorgio Agamben.

[30] The T-Shirt of the Arts in Action collective that actually makes many of these puppets features a quote from Brecht: "we see art not as a mirror to hold up to reality but as a hammer with which to shape it".

[31] It is interesting to observe that there is a longstanding tradition in American thought that sees creativity as inherently anti-social, and therefore, demonic. It emerges particularly strongly in racial ideologies. This however is properly the subject for another essay.

themselves as, in some sense, revolutionaries, few, at this point, are operating within the classic revolutionary framework where revolutionary organizing is designed to build towards a violent, apocalyptic confrontation with the state. Even fewer see revolution as a matter of seizing state power and transforming society through its mechanisms. On the other hand, neither are they simply interested in a strategy of "engaged withdrawal" (as in Virno's "revolutionary exodus"), and the founding of new, autonomous communities.[32] In a way, one might say the politics of direct action, by trying to create alternative forms of organization in the very teeth of state power, means to explore a middle ground precisely between these two alternatives. Anyway, we are dealing with a new synthesis that, I think, is not yet entirely worked out.

If nothing else, some of the theoretical frameworks proposed in this essay provide an interesting vantage on the current historical moment. Consider here the notion of "the war on terror". Many have spoken with some dismay of the notion of permanent war that seems to be Simplied. In fact, while the twentieth century could be described as one of permanent war—almost the entire period between 1914 and 1991 was spent either fighting or preparing for world wars of one kind or another—it is not at all clear whether the twenty-first could be described in the same terms. It might be better to say that what the United States is attempting to impose on the world is not really a war at all. It has of course become a truism that as nuclear weapons proliferate, declared wars between states no longer occur, and all conflicts come to be framed as "police actions". Still, it is also critical to bear in mind that police actions have their own, very distinctive, qualities. Police see themselves as engaged in a war largely without rules, against an opponent without honor, towards whom one is therefore not obliged to act honorably, but in which victory is ultimately impossible.

States have a strong tendency to define their relation to their people in terms of an unwinnable war of some sort or another. The American state has been one of the most flagrant in this regard: in recent decades we have seen a war on poverty degenerate into a war on crime, then a war on drugs (the first to be extended internationally), and finally, now, a war on terror. But as this sequence makes clear, the latter is not really a war at all but an attempt to extend this same, internal logic to the entire globe. It is an attempt to declare a kind of diffuse global police state. In the final analysis, I suspect the panic reaction on the part of the state was really more a reaction to the success of an ongoing, if subtle, global anti-capitalist uprising than to the threat of Osama bin Laden—though the latter certainly provided the ultimate convenient excuse—it's just that on a global scale as well, moral-political struggle has created rules of engagement which make it very difficult for the U.S. to strike out directly at those against whom it would most like to strike out.[33]

To put it somewhat glibly: just as the structure of violence most appropriate for a political ontology based in the imagination is revolution, so is the structure of imagination most appropriate for a political ontology based in violence, precisely, terror. One might add that the Bushes and Bin Ladens are working quite in tandem in this regard (it is significant, I think, that if Al

[32] See *Radical thought in Italy: a potential politics* (Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, editors). Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

[33] The fact that almost all the principle figures involved in the repression of protest in America ended up as "security consultants" in Baghdad after the American conquest of Iraq seems rather telling here. Of course, they rapidly discovered their usual tactics were not particularly effective against opponents who really *were* violent, capable, for example, of dealing with IMF and World Bank officials by actually blowing them up.

Qaida does harbor some gigantic utopian vision—a reunification of the old Islamic Indian Ocean Diaspora? a restoration of the Caliphate?—they haven't told us much about it.)

Still, this is no doubt a bit simplistic. To understand the American regime as a global structure, and at the same time to understand its contradictions, I think one must return to the cosmological role of the police in American culture. It is a peculiar characteristic of life in the United States that most American citizens, who over the course of the day can normally be expected to try to avoid any circumstance that might lead them to have to deal with police or police affairs, can also normally be expected to go home and spend hours watching dramas that invite them to see the world from a policeman's point of view. This was not always so. It's actually quite difficult to identify an American movie from before the 1960s where a policeman was a sympathetic hero. Over the course of the '60s, however, police abruptly took the place previously held by cowboys in American entertainment.[34] The timing seems hardly insignificant. Neither does the fact that by now, cinematic and TV images of American police are being relentlessly exported to every corner of the world, at the same time as their flesh and blood equivalents. What I would emphasize here though is that both are characterized by an extra-legal impunity which, paradoxically, makes them able to embody a kind of constituent power turned against itself. The Hollywood cop, like the cowboy, is a lone maverick who breaks all the rules (this is permissible, even necessary, since he is always dealing with dishonorable opponents). In fact, it is usually precisely the maverick cop who engages in the endless property destruction that provides so much of the pleasure of Hollywood action films. In other words, police can be heroes in such movies largely because they are the only figures who can systematically ignore the law. It is constituent power turned on itself of course because cops, on screen or in reality, are not trying to create (or constitute) anything. They are simply maintaining the status quo.

The moment cop movies rose to prominence, cowboy movies effectively disappeared.

In one sense, this is the most clever ideological displacement of all—the perfect complement to the aforementioned privatization of (consumer) desire. Insofar as the popular festival endures, it has become pure spectacle, with the role of Master of the Potlatch granted to the very figure who, in real life, is in charge of ensuring that any actual outbreaks of popular festive behavior are forcibly suppressed.

Like any ideological formula, however, this one is extraordinarily unstable, riddled with contradictions—as the initial difficulties of the US police in suppressing the globalization movement so vividly attest. It seems to me it is best seen as a way of managing a situation of extreme alienation and insecurity that itself can only be maintained by systematic coercion. Faced with anything that remotely resembles creative, non-alienated, experience, it tends to look as ridiculous as a deodorant commercial during a time of national disaster. But then, I am an anarchist. The anarchist problem remains how to bring that sort of experience, and the imaginative power that lies behind it, into the daily lives of those outside the small autonomous bubbles they have already created. This is a continual problem; but there seems to me every reason to believe that, were it possible, power of the police cosmology, and with it, the power of the police themselves, would simply melt away.

[34] Clint Eastwood, of course, in his shift from Spaghetti Western to Dirty Harry, was the very avatar of the transformation.

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