A Wager on the Future

Anarchist organization, the Islamic State, the crisis, and outer space

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The Successes and Shortcomings of Anarchism

At a moment when anarchism is growing worldwide, we also find, curiously, a waxing feeling of cynicism, loss, or existencial crisis, experienced individually as much as collectively, which is stronger, it seems to us, than the cycle of generational burnout typical of the last decades. Many anarchist tactics of destruction and confrontation—for example ways of rioting and attacking with covered faces—have been adopted by many people outside of anarchist circles, and in places such as Egypt, Greece, the US, Brazil, or Spain, we know that the passing on of tactics has been in part direct. The silence in which society tried to bury anarchism for decades has been definitively broken. In countries from Greece to Chile to the US, anarchism has become a political force, capable of influencing social discourses and unmasking at least some of the discursive defenses that democratic states use to achieve their goals. And here in the Spanish state we have seen the phenomenon of #yotambiensoyanarquista [#iamalsoananarchist], by which masses have positioned themselves on the side of anarchists who have not only been repressed but also labeled by the State as "terrorists".

Meanwhile, the positive ideas and practices of anarchism have not kept pace. And it is not due to a lack of familiarity. On the contrary, in many social movements that created important experiences and conflicts, practices of decision-making in assemblies, consensus, and a rejection of political parties and representatives, have been momentarily generalized, only to be abandoned. Self-organization spreads more and more, but distancing itself from a revolutionary horizon, championing instead financial feasability, productivity, alternative currencies, and other capitalist tools, disguising this blind path with a false sophistication, as we can observe in the most dogmatic sector of the Cooperativa Integral Catalana (which, to be clear, also includes many important and radical projects).

Ever more comrades in ever more countries have lived through surprising conflicts in which all the sacred lies were questioned, new complicities and broad relations of solidarity were opened up, and the forces of order lost control; but afterwards, everything went on as before, perhaps with a change in the configuration or the disguises of power.

It is true that struggles, as with everything in nature, are cyclical, and we must learn to abide this cyclicity. In that vein, the comrades from CrimethInc. have made a compilation of texts about what to do "After the Crest," recently translated to Spanish. But the current loss of morale goes much further. We believe we are on the brink of losing our chance of intervening in the conflicts underway and frustrating the attempts of capitalism to adapt itself to the new crises, that flash out worldwide and trans- thematically, crisscrossing the arenas of the ecological, economic, ideological, political, technological, and cultural.

With urgency we must analyze the shortcomings of an anarchism on the rise in the last years. Why is there so little complicity with anarchism's positive practices?

We cannot blame a lack of dissemination, although more propaganda always comes in handy. The mechanisms of anarchist propaganda have improved greatly in the last decade. And outside of our own activity, as concerns the reactions of official society to our presence, many academics and celebrities have mentioned and even adhered to anarchist ideas. Today, radical books can become bestsellers, as *The Coming Insurrection* proves. I don't mention this to celebrate it, but to prove that in many countries at least, anyone who wants to get to know anarchist ideas, can.

The Islamic State

Neither can we blame media distortion for spreading an erroneous idea of anarchism. The press fabricate their defamations and their police narratives constantly, and they have to be countered, but it would be victimistic to hand them the responsability for our isolation. We can make use of a comparison to put the problem in perspective: in the media, no one gets worse coverage than the Islamic fundamentalists. They are portrayed as the most extreme terrorists and monsters. Nonetheless, a large percentage of marginalized youth in Europe sympathizes or even directly support jihadist movements. Of course they tend to be immigrants from Muslim countries, but many of them were born here and were not convinced by "democratic Europe". There is also an important margin of converts. In fact, it is a very significant phenomenon for our age that the most attractive *antisystem* movement is jihadism. Or more precisely: attractive for some and totally repulsive and horrifying for others.

How do the jihadists recruit? Largely through Twitter and chatrooms, media that anarchists have been using for years, without achieving similar results.

If a comparison between the propaganda of the Islamic State and that of anarchism comes off as absurd or morbid, if it recalls the pseudo-intellectual operations of rightwing journalists and academics trying to connect different species of subversives, it is because its purpose is satirical. Today, the system comprised by the police and media once again oblige anarchists to play the part of terrorists, at least in some countries. But it is a casting that ridicules the very director, because in the spectacle of terrorism we anarchists can't keep up with the competition: we are not on par with the jihadists. It's as though Chuck Norris, after defeating an alien invasion of three-meter insects armed with lasers and chainsaws, had to beat a delinquent pizza delivery boy. It doesn't make a good sequel.

The specter of anarchist terrorism also ridicules those comrades who put great emphasis on the practice of *atentados* [atentats, attacks that function as "propaganda by the deed"]— in an age when the State is ever more capable of absorbing and taking advantage of the shocks caused by *atentados* much more devastating than our own—and those comrades who imagine themselves the unbreakable enemy of the State—in an age when the war is ever more unilateral. Perhaps our attacks need to take on a new symbolic meaning and a new relation with social conflicts. They are not the most important blows in a dramatic war[1], but a sort of *antimachine* that we introduce into the breaches opened by social conflicts, so that they generalize and sabotage the materialization of the relations of power.

However, the satire is above all directed at those populist comrades who try to reproduce the propaganda successes of any entity, no matter how distant it is from anarchism, such as leftwing parties or marketing companies. They would never dare to copy the recruitment formula of the Islamic State, not for any critique of the incompatibility of anarchist and authoritarian methods (which would also bar their copying of marketing techniques and the recruitment organized by

[1] In fact, it is necessary to underscore the fact that since the Second World War, wars no longer consist of battles between armies, but of the production of metamachines that mobilize destructive and organizational forces. Their field is none other than statistics

To those readers who take this for empty verborrhea, I recommend an analysis of the methodological contributions of Robert McNamara, previously of the Ford Motor Company, to the Office of Statistical Control and the US Defense Department; or of the management by MI6 of the intellectual production of the mathematicians of Project Ultra.

political parties), but out of an acritical impulse to flee from the things that generate bad press, the same way that they flee from those anarchist practices that are also stigmatized by the media.

The success of the Islamic State disproves any attempt to blame the failures of anarchism on defamation, ignorance, or bad press.

If there were anything attractive about anarchism, it would shine out despite the defamatory campaigns of the press. We will not find our shortcomings in the arena of dissemination and propaganda. Anarchist ideas are not hidden, rather they are not being looked for. They are not distorted, except insofar as no one cares to clarify them. If they are not triumphing, it is because they are not useful.

If the failure of anarchism has resulted in the rise of new leftwing parties, as we will see further on, it can be said that the failure of the insurrections of the *banlieue* [the poor suburbs of France, where major riots broke out in 2005, similar to subsequent riots in the UK] has contributed to jihadism. In both cases, large sectors of society failed in their attempts to self-organize their struggles, and subsequently, they searched for the power to achieve the changes they were seeking.

Power itself is the key element. A movement without social power, like anarchism, that, what's more, seeks to dissolve or decentralize power cannot copy the formulas of a movement that does exercise power. A fish has a better chance of learning locomotion from a duck.

Power always attracts more followers than a beautiful idea, and thanks to the geopolitical situation in the Middle East and the extremely myopic policies of the world's superpower, the United States (for some years now in an irreversible decline), the jihadists have been able to seize a significant quantity of power and to appear as the most dedicated and fierce opposition to the symbols and presumed leaders of the current world system.

And here we find the true importance of the figure of jihadist terrorism. Since 1991 and the fall of the Soviet Union, the capitalist world system has lacked an oppositional dichotomy that can modulate and recuperate all dissident movements. Liberal capitalism was the most effective in the developed countries and also on the global scale, whereas state capitalism (the USSR, China, Cuba, etc.) was at least as effective in underdeveloped countries where revolutionary movements might potentially abolish the economic system (capitalism in such countries needed the state to play a stronger role in its development, and also to institutionalize or neutralize the dissident forces that might interrupt it).

For decades, all the social movements in the world had to subordinate themselves to one of these two paradigms, daring at the most to constitute a loyal opposition. Since 1921—with the imminent Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War and the defeat of revolutionary movements in Italy and Germany (thanks to the bureaucracy of communist and socialist parties, as well as that of anarchosyndicalist unions), which inaugurated a statist *realpolitik* among the leadership of the USSR, who for decades dedicated themselves to suffocating any revolutionary movement that they could not control or that did not respond to their geopolitical interests—the revolutionary horizon had been blotted out. Any rebellious movement was conditioned to accept the precepts and the sponsorship of one of the two dominant poles. And the "freedom" of the first pole and the anticapitalism of the second were both lies.

From then on, the anarchists were completely marginalized. The naive leftists, allied with one of the two poles, denounced their supposed lack of pragmatism, while the right accused them of being communist agents. Anarchism had definitively lost its protagonism. These dynamics were

only accentuated by the Spanish Civil War, that brief blooming of hope in the last country where the proletariat still had not received the memo that the revolution had already been defeated.

In 1991, for the first time in seventy years, there was no global dichotomy capable of modulating revolt. The bad guys disappeared and with them disappeared any hope that the winners had of resembling good guys. The misery of the system only grew and now there was no one else to blame. The first autonomous lines of struggle to appear emerged from indigenous movements, at Oka as in Chiapas. These had also been subordinated to the politics of the Left, with disastrous consequences, as much for the victims of the socialist genocides as for those who opted for democratic patience. Soon, the antiglobalization movement appeared and within it the anarchists gained more and more protagonism and influence. The other pole in a new global antagonism had begun to define itself on its own. Its interior tension was drawn between those who had many resources and little legitimacy, and who proposed the legality of some dominant institutions against others, and those who projected a revolutionary horizon and a path based on horizontality and self-organization.

In 2001, with the jihadist *atentats* against the economic and political capitals of New York and Washington, DC, the world system adopted a new paradigm based once again in an oppositional dichotomy: between democracy and terrorism. Like every paradigm, it did not appear from thin air. Its laboratories were countries such as Spain or Germany that already had integral antiterrorism politics (more advanced than the anemic attempts of Reagan or Clinton to install antiterrorism). But starting in 2001, it was developed as a conjunction of moral narrative, political discourses, institutional mandates, interstate connections, and juridico-military resources that any government allied with the global powers could make use of.[2]

It is vital to recognize that we are again on the brink of losing any possibility for protagonism or influence within global conflicts. Therefore, we must analyze the differences between the old and the new pole of the bad guys. On the one hand, terrorism is much more bad, more evil, than its predecessor. Only people of a very determinate identity could be seduced by jihadism, quite different from all the ignorant followers and acritical bootlickers that the USSR (or Cuba) won among the Left worldwide. The liberal bloc's necessary pretensions of freedom and equality during the Cold War often limited the repressive capacities of Western states with regards to their internal dissidents. They had to labor tirelessly to appear more just than the communist states, given their great inequalities. The same dynamics no longer prevail. Today's states have to do very little to differentiate themselves from the apparent barbarians of jihadism. It is again a clash of civilizations, but if the bad guys appear so extremely uncivilized, the good guys can get away with a greater degree of barbarity, above all if it is packaged in the appropriate gloss of

[2] It is interesting to underscore how the United States and its allies have enabled the rise of jihadism, though an extensive analysis falls outside the scope of this text. It is enough to signal how the injustices that feed jihadism (for example, dictatorships in Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Egypt, and Indonesia) are funded by the world powers; the fields on which jihadism evolved and trained—in Afghanistan and Bosnia—were created and supplied by the Western states; the secular, leftwing Palestinian resistance was replaced by a fundamentalist resistance less able to win international support thanks to the policies of the Israeli state and in some cases thanks to direct interventions by the Israeli secret services (and also thanks to the ineptitude and corruption of Palestinian left itself); jihadism in Iraq appeared out of thin air and became the principal force opposed to the occupation, thanks to a Pentagon campaign to give them more protagonism in the media; there are also difficult to substantiate accusations that the secret services of Great Britain and the US organized interreligious ***atentats*** (between Shiite and Sunni) that were blamed on jihadists, breaking the solidarity between sectors of the resistance and increasing fundamentalism.

uniforms, impersonal technologies, and orderly and disciplined military deployments, like those we've seen this autumn in Paris and other European capitals.

At the same time, the figure of jihadism is much less inclusive than that of communism. It is incredible for the Right to accuse the typical anarchist of being an agent of fundamentalist Islam, or for the Left to accuse them of being impragmatic for not supporting it, like they accused us for not supporting state communism. Worldwide, the majority of marginalized people are culturally distant enough from Islam that they are unlikely to ever identify with Islamic fundamentalism (although there are a billion people whom organizations like the Islamic State are seeking to represent and influence as coreligionists).

The new dichotomy has another weakness: quite the opposite of the ruling dichotomy during the Cold War, the current one has been constructed in an era when the principal world powers enjoy very little legitimacy and trust. The bloated, greedy, and arrogant figure of the United States in 2001 is a far cry from the heroic protector of liberty from the first two World Wars. And the Europe of 2015, the Europe of austerity, of corruption, of bloody borders, doesn't look much better.

In other words, we live in a world where the powerful are trying to hide and to crush revolts, the desire for freedom, and revolutionary movements behind a curtain of antiterrorism. Antiterrorism is still convincing, it still mobilizes people and serves to justify more repression and control, but at the same time, this is a world in crisis, in which the majority of perturbed people, angry people, precarious people, are reluctant to trust either of the two poles of power. It is a dichotomy made to be taken apart, to allow us to again create a self-defined space of struggle and freedom.

Yet it seems that few anarchists have taken notice that attacking antiterrorism, discursively and in practice, will not only decommission one of the most potent weapons in the state arsenal, it might also be our only chance of regaining our protagonism, self-defining a subjectivity of negation and rebellion, and projecting revolutionary paths in the coming years.

Fighting against the oppositional dichotomy of terrorism from an anarchist position might bring us into contact with unexpected allies, as the upsurge in solidarity with the Kurdish liberation movement foreshadows, because the true opponents and victims of Islamic State fundamentalists throughout the Global South will either have to ally with the West or develop their own anarchistic visions. In fact, Islamic State has a great deal in common with Syriza and Podemos; the most shocking differences are merely functions of the level of violence that has been normalized in the societies where each was born, and the relative legitimacy that such violence grants to discourses and practices of revenge.

The writings of Osama bin Laden demonstrate that al Qaida was largely an attempt to open space for an Islamic capitalism. This goal immediately suggests a predisposition to coopt and lead the broader anti-colonial movements in which the organization arose. In fact, al Qaida's original geopolitical need to fight against both the USSR and the USA foreshadowed the subsequent historical situation in which anti-colonial movements, still dazed from their failed successes in the '60s and '70s, when they lost by winning, would no longer be able to appeal for help and protection to one of two dominant world powers. Their decentralized, stateless organization was a necessary adaptation to a more difficult security situation. In order to exercise a vanguardist relationship vis a vis the directionless anti-colonial movements (which even then were gearing up towards their anti-globalization phase), al Qaida had to spread an ideology enabling orthodoxical purity (Islamic fundamentalism playing the same role as Marxism before it) and to use

spectacular tactics to capture the world's attention (similar to how groups like the RAF and the Red Brigades asserted hegemony over broad movements).

On both of these fronts, Islamic State has surpassed them, coalescing a decentralized network into an actual state structure. Whereas al Qaida simply overshadowed other elements of the resistance movement in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, IS has the possibility to actually monopolize the resistance, killing off any elements that oppose both fundamentalism and the West. (Incidentally, the fact that IS has centralized a decentralized network and given the West what its conventional military logic long craved—an enemy state—suggests the involvement of Western secret services in its creation; however, contrary to the conspiracy nuts, we would have to assert that it does not make much difference, because in either case, what anarchists oppose—the statist logic—would be equally present).

Likewise, Syriza and Podemos arose amidst decentralized but temporarily directionless movements, over which they quickly established hegemony, turning them into state-building forces. The fact that they spread misery with the instrument of law rather than bombs and knives is an aesthetic difference more significant to political scientists than to people interested in emancipating themselves.

The Crisis

Capitalism is in a profound crisis. It is not the first time and it won't be the last, but it is the first time in which its crisis of accumulation overlaps with a planetary crisis, the unfolding failure of the ecosystems that sustain life on this planet. And it is also the first time that a crisis of accumulation occurs in a world with nuclear weapons, in which it is unclear which will be the next political power to organize the world system and in which the power that has passed its zenith still has the military might to liquidate any competitor that seeks to replace it. Little by little the United States loses its hegemony, incapable of imposing its will in Southeast Asia, in the Middle East, in South America, in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, it maintains the force to ensure that no other authority can impose a new hegemony. If they don't reach an accord to share power in a new world system, half a dozen countries have the ability to blow up the entire planet to make sure that no one gets any of the pie.

The industrial expansion led by the United States after World War II reached its conclusion in the '70s, and since then the financial expansion has generated so much surplus value that there is nowhere to put it. Most economic activity has migrated to countries like China, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Turkey, and Brazil. But the structures and institutions of economic management belong to North America and Western Europe. And several of these structures were hit hard by the bankruptcies and scandals related to the 2008 crisis. The supposed world leaders can no longer offer a safe home for capital.

A recession and collapse of the magnitude of 1929 has only been avoided, for the moment, by the massive immigration of capital to the real estate markets—the fittest for speculating and absorbing great quantities of capital—of China, Turkey, and Brazil. The bubble is about to burst.

What could prevent it from bursting? If the pattern in force in the global economy since the 15th century continues, only a new industrial expansion. Where could such an expansion take place, and with what materials? It is not clear. Is there a new process of industrialization able to absorb the greatest quantity of liquid capital in history and turning it into profits? The run-

away production of smartphones and similar gadgets doesn't come close, and these products are already reaching the poorest corners of the world. And what new territories can be developed? Africa seems to be the only continent that could still host an intense process of capitalist development, but it is not big enough— neither in population nor territory—to absorb the unimaginable quantity of liquid capital that is currently seeking investment, nor do we imagine that being invested in Africa would allow it to produce immediate profits.

It must be understood that with each expansion, the quantity of capital in play grows exponentially. In contrast, the world population is not growing as fast and the planet isn't growing at all, in fact the energetic and biological capacity of the planet to sustain the economic processes of its most ungrateful species is decreasing.

Logically, the only country not conquered by capitalism, the only terrain able to host the next expansion of capitalism is outer space. We say it with complete sincerity: it must take the path of asteroid mining and the terraforming of Mars. Capitalism runs into a problem here, and it might be the only hope that we have to turn the present crisis into a blow that topples the world system rather than serving as impetus for another restructuring: for the first time in history, it may be that the crisis of accumulation has arrived before the technologies necessary for the next economic expansion. A few years still remain before a profitable colonization of outer space can be feasible.

But here we see where the State has put us in check. Over the course of several decades, it has killed the popular capacity for imagination. A hundred years ago revolutionary imaginaries were alive. We insist that such imaginaries are indispensable for a revolution, that no insurrection can grow and overcome its internal obstacles without widely shared revolutionary imaginaries and without a popular imagination capable of adapting imaginaries, in a decentralized way, according to the needs of the struggle.

The revolutionary imaginaries died, drowned in blood on the battlefields of the First World War, a morbid drama that demonstrated the fatal weakness of the proletarian class, and suffocated by Bolshevik cynicism after their Russian Counterrevolution, another fetid affair that demonstrated that the institutions of power are stronger and more determinant than class, and that proletarians can easily be educated to serve as oppressors.

Ultimately, imagination—the capacity to generate new imaginaries—has atrophied to the brink of death thanks to the techniques of the Spectacle, the entertainment industry first modeled in Hollywood and more recently in the new technological devices: the computers, video games, and game apps that so few revolutionaries have pointed out as being among our fiercest enemies.

With the death of imagination, who could resist when capitalism offers us new worlds? The moment it achieves its self-interested dream, revealing it to be yet another step forward for exploitation, perhaps many revolutionaries will regret their foolish, lazy, acritical, populist, and cowardly postures in favor of technology. But it will be too late.

Collapse or Technosocialism

If capitalism does not manage to resuscitate itself and ignite an industrial expansion before the speculative bubble pops, we will be faced with a poverty much deeper than the one we already know.

Are we prepared to resist emigration and hunger, the break-up of our fragile communities by an extreme misery? Or are we not even thinking of it? Are we not betting on a violent and catastrophic rupture with the capitalist system that currently feeds us? Were we imagining that we could keep on eating from the supermarkets, that there would be a smooth transition between the system of money and businesses and a total self-organization, that after a general strike or similar event, we would take down some barricades, fix a few damages, and continue living as before, only without laws or bosses?

There is another possibility: a controlled collapse into a *technosocialism* worse than the most horrifying work of science fiction. The destruction of infrastructure and value has always been an important activity for capitalism. The devastation produced by a war or the deterioration which constitutes the first stage of gentrification are key to facilitating the posterior economic growth. In this sense, new technologies being developed by Google and Apple present a chance of clearing the way for a currently stagnant capitalism.

The *internet of things* could merely be an unprecedented augmentation in the level of technological control; the achievement, finally, of the panopticon society. But it could also evolve into a sort of *technosocialism,* which is to say, an extreme rationalization of economic processes, ultimately superceding the short term interests of the bourgeoisie (of the earlier epoch of capitalism) and of the multinationals (of the current epoch which might be coming to its end). To understand this more clearly, we can take the example of the new *smart cars.* Understood within the prevailing logic, this would just be another product: an automated, electric car that drives itself; a more expensive car model, more fetishized, available for wealthier consumers; another invention that would give the patent-owning company an ephimeral advantage in the market.

But if the approach—especially by Google—that seeks a transformative rationalization via new technologies is realized (and at the moment the only obstacle is the uncertainty as to whether states will support or impede this transformation, because the technology already exists), we will find ourselves faced with another possibility. The *smart car*, to take this one example, would not be another product bought by individuals in accordance with the logic of private property until now in force. New technologies would permit *smart cars* to function as alienated-collective property deployed in the most efficient manner possible (as an example we have the very primitive *Bicing* model in Barcelona [subscription-based collective bicycle service distributed throughout the city, like the Provo's "Yellow Bikes" program without the anticapitalist element]). Via an app, you would reserve a voyage and the *smartcar* would come to pick you up. You'd pay a subscription, as the car would not belong to you, but would be a facet of the city itself.

So what would be the consequences of such a techno-economic organization? Beyond the disappearance of the taxi companies, it would mean the end—or at least a critical reduction in—the most important capitalist enterprises of the post-war period: the automobile makers and the oil companies. It would permit a significant "degrowth" *as a path for capitalist expansion.* For the first time, the systemic destruction that forms a part of cyclical capitalist expansion would not be the semi-uncontrolled result of a process of war or deterioration, rather it would arise from a rational restructuration *par excellence.* Alienated-collective property and the algorithms that manage it would permit the most efficient utilization and deployment of the totality of vehicles so that they would always be in use or recharging. This would allow a great reduction in the total number of vehicles and in the transport infrastructure. Put another way, we are faced with a model of capitalist expansion (the production of new technologies, the total transformation of cities) that is completely compatible with precarity (any consumer can be transported without

having to own a vehicle, every person can get by with less consumption) and with the ecological crisis. What's more, the same concept of alienated-collective property, with hyper-rational management, can be put into effect in matters of housing, education, and other fundamental pillars that bind exploited people to the economy.

Just as Jason Radegas and Lev Zlody (2011) predicted, socialism was not made possible in accordance with the evolution of productive forces, but in accordance with the forces of social control. Collective property has always been feasible, but only now can alienated-collective property be a reality: property deployed according to a collective logic, shared property, but which is designed and controlled by the power structures.

Fascism

Until now we have insisted that antifascism is—and has been since the '20s—a leftist strategy to control movements and obstruct truly anticapitalist struggles. It has also always been a failure as far as fighting against fascism is concerned. Specifically anarchist strategies for combating fascism have been more effective, because they understand fascism as a tool of the bourgeoisie, equal in this sense to democracy, and thus they directly attacked fascism, not at the point where it enters into conflict with democracy (rights, civil liberties, moderation), but at the point where it converges with the interests of owners and governors. Since the end World War II, antifascism has based itself on exaggeration, panic, and error, as a more sober analysis of the phenomenon of neofascism in countries like Russia, Greece, or Spain will show. Fascism has been reduced to a puppet and a minoritarian weapon within the democratic arsenal.

But if an even stronger crisis arrives, if the democratic methodology for the management of capital is broken and delegitimized, will fascism come back? We don't rule out the possibility, but we predict this will only happen in a few less cosmopolitan countries, where the leaders and technocrats of a global perspective do not have specific strategic interests and where they also do not understand the cultural particularities (like Hungary of Bulgaria). In general, we see two possibilities: the survival of democracy, in which neofascism is tolerated as a minoritarian tool (like in Germany) or suppressed/warned if it dares exceed its very limited mandate (as in Greece or Russia), and in which non-fascist dictatorships are tolerated on the periphery, always with the hope that they one day become stable democracies; or the emergence of a new politico-economic structuration of power.

We make this prediction because fascism is the result of a very specific class relation, in which a national bourgeoisie unites with elements of the middle class, with organizers of unions or social movements, and with institutions like the press and the military. But today national bourgeoisies do not exist as powerful and independent actors. The totalitarianism of the current world system is a technocracy, a totalitarianism of the material, incorporated into the social architecture and the technological organization of life. In sum, it is completely compatible with democracy and has no need of charismas or conscious, agreed-upon alliances between classes, with their necessary protagonists and proactive actors. Of course, this would only change with the emergence of a model for a world system not only superior but also promoted by an authority capable of defeating and replacing the authority and architect of the current world system; or with the collapse of the current system and the absence of any hegemonic alternative.

Of Classes and Technocrats

In any case, collapse is just a possibility, while crisis and austerity are already here. We must counteract them, and for this we have to criticize the neoliberalism that currently predominates in the thinking of technocrats and state leaders. But this task cannot be completed the easy way, portraying neoliberalism and austerity as the greatest evil when they are just another facet of capitalism. Because if capitalism resolves this crisis, preventing an economic collapse, prosperity will return and we will have lost—*populist comrades take note!—all* the strength and influence gained through opportunistic discourses that sought superficial affinities and sympathies by speaking of the evils of the crisis, the evils of austerity. We must not forget how alone we were in the era of economic growth, when we were practically the only ones who protested against capitalism.

The doggedness of global capitalism in the face of a possible collapse demonstrates that the current structures of economic management (IMF, central banks, Federal Reserve, private banks protected by state treasuries) are much stronger than those of prior eras. And the ability of the Chinese state—a possible successor as world leader—to avoid or at least stave off the popping of the financial bubble on its home turf and the plummeting of its stock market has saved, up until now, the global economy, which left in the hands of the Wall Street-Washington axis would already have failed. This reflects the greater technocratic capacity of a more centralized state to direct the accumulation of capital and manage its excesses.[3] A single party system is clearly less able to obstruct and recuperate popular revolt, but perhaps this is no longer the chief concern of our rulers. If the Chinese model triumphs in the coming years, we already have an image of the organization of power in the future. If on the other hand democracy is not surpassed, fascism will also remain, because fascism is the intrinsic antagonist (which is to say, a little brother, a complement) of democracy. A strong democracy smothers fascism, a weak democracy uses it as a subordinate tool, and a failed democracy with no politico-economic structure to surpass it.

All of which should suggest, at least to the astute readers, an important change in the structuration of capitalism and class society. Class society has changed. It is a fact. A class of bourgeois investors united by class interests (which are interpreted subjectively by each individual) and divided by competition and distinct national affinities, functions differently from a system of networks of technocratic institutions and businesses in which individual actions are modulated by an impersonalized institutional functioning, and in which a huge part of the flows of capital are automated, managed by algorithms. This difference is evident at every level: the relations between states (or has it escaped anyone's attention that there have been no wars between major states, like those that defined earlier centuries, since 1945?); the diminished importance of individual capitalists, the proportion of fixed and liquid capital controlled by inhuman/institutional entities; the way large corporations function more as public/ private institutions than as businesses directed by a capitalist; the increase in the power of institutions and bureaucracies *vis-a- vis* rich individuals or charismatic politicians; the decline in the importance of the figure

[3] The events of the past few years also demonstrates the poverty of Negrist and anti-imperialist analyses. There is no conflict between the State and multinationals/ capital, only the same conflict as always between dominant states and their institutions, banks, and businesses, and the less powerful states that are subordinated to a global system that does not privilege their interests. The latter, the victims within an anti-imperialist framework, have their own institutions, banks, and businesses and they have proven perfectly capable of developing autochthonous capitalisms every time they have achieved the autonomy necessary to do it. Of course, the absolute dependence of the major banks on state bail-outs shows that it is a question of distinct structures in a unified system and not antagonists in conflict, nor a boss and a mere tool.

of the bourgeois owner or investor; the greater flexibility and the disappearance of fixed lines between workers and bosses/managers of capital and labor discipline; the astronomical rise in the importance of managers, directors, specialists, and other species of technograts, and a long et cetera.

Unfortunately, a detailed analysis of these changes, outside of the circles of specialists and academics lacking revolutionary perspectives or conflictive experience in the streets, has not been common.[4] Some even dogmatically attack the attempts to perceive and understand these changes, be it the almost religious attachment to the figure of the proletariat as evidenced by the comrades of Proletarios Internacionalistas or the laughable combination of ignorance and arrogance present in texts like *Cuando se senala la luna.*

The result of this lack of investigation are comrades who propose that the crisis is just a show and a conspiracy, and many more who have not thought of the possible exits from the crisis that the powerful dispose of.

To express it all more clearly, although also simply: austerity, which began shortly after the crises of the '70s, which signaled the end of the industrial expansion and the beginning of the financial expansion, reflects the vital need of capitalism to open more spheres of life and society to the investment of the excessively abundant liquid capital that it has generated. Privatization is one way to open more infrastructures and institutions to investment. Austerity does not avoid crisis—because the accumulation of capital is infinite and the successful investment of surplus only generates more surplus that must be invested or lost—rather it prolongs it. But the managers of capital are incapable of doing anything else, just as people dying of hunger will kill the chicken instead of waiting for it to lay eggs.

Ending austerity and once again giving priority to social funding, the powerful might be able to stop the advance of a popular revolt. But at the moment, and with good reason, they fear an economic collapse—which is inevitable, as long as some currently unknown frontier for economic expansion is opened up—much more than a popular revolt, which is merely a possibility, and a distant one, it seems. Even if they begin to fear a revolt, they cannot stop looking for new terrain for the investment of their capital, so they will continue to pressure for austerity. And only an economically self-sufficient state (and not even Germany, which has avoided augmenting its budget with loans, as the US does, meets this criterion) would be capable of resisting the pressure, or a state politically powerful enough to break with the dominant ethics and default on loans to important lenders.

The Promises Of THE LEFT

Against this panorama, the new parties of the Left have promised that which they are uncapable of delivering: ending austerity without destroying capitalism. As we have already seen, austerity can only end through a new capitalist expansion or through a social revolution that finally topples the incorrigible internal dynamics of capitalism. And as we have seen so many

[4] Neither do I think we're inventing the wheel here. There are several examples of lucid analysis of the aforementioned changes, standing out among them Terra Cremada, Aurt, or GEA la Corrala, but almost always on a micro scale, normally with the city as the frame of analysis. For a global analysis, one would have to refer to the followers of Communization Theory who, diminishing slightly their lucidity, fall into a fetishization of the economic sphere as the only lens of analysis and into a lack of revolutionary projectuality, giving an almost exclusive protagonism to Capital.

times in history, the State is not able to destroy capitalism (as long as an even more exploitative economic system doesn't come along) because the State is an apparatus of alienation and domination that is obliged to supply and fund itself via the most effectively exploitative economic structures available. If you impose your will with the gun, the only thing you can never do is close the bullet factory. A self-sufficient people does not generate the alienable surplus that a State needs to finance itself and impose its decisions.

We anarchists are perfectly positioned to indicate the incoherence, the unrealism, and the falseness of the Left, but we are lost in a great confusion. In part it is ideological. The refusal of many anarchists to develop profound and sensible critiques of democracy and technology turns them into cheerleaders of the principal axes of social control the State disposes of at this decisive juncture. They appeal to those two fundamental values of the current system of domination out of fear, laziness, opportunism, and a lack of any scrupulous analysis. It is much easier "to communicate with the masses" *["llegar a la gente,"* a term that has become popular in the last years] by denouncing the politicians of the moment rather than questioning the pillars of society itself. Today, anyone who criticizes democracy or technology exposes themselves to the worst marginalization and persecution. In the dismal simulation of a strategy, these populists surrender to the demands of the system itself and make apologies for the values that their supposed enemy has taught them must never be questioned.

But more than ideological, the confusion is emotional. After the waves of repression, after witnessing so many times how every success we achieve fades away for reasons we don't fully appreciate, we get tired. Without imagination, we have no revolutionary horizon. Without a renewed global analysis, we don't understand what is happening in the world around us. And without enthusiasm, we cannot generate the conflictive projectuality that would enable to learn in the course of action. We stagnate, we stop, we waste our energies in initiatives destined to failure.

The Anarchist Proposals

The new parties of the Left, from Podemos to Barcelona en Comu, arose from the death of the 15M movement. At least in Barcelona and Madrid, anarchist participation helped beat the left-wing parties and the grassroots politicians in their efforts to centralize the movement and use it exclusively to exercise an institutional pressure. Yes, part of the movement organized marches to Madrid and Brussels to demand constitutional reform, but in general the rejection of political parties was maintained, the majority of its energies were channeled into more direct protests, and at least in Barcelona the movement was rerouted to the neighborhood assemblies and other spaces that were more difficult to centralize. And the neighborhood assemblies formed part of a great laboratory for the radicalization of strikes, support for struggles that previously had been partial and isolated, the definitive defeat of pacifism and the improvement of methods of communication, dissemination, and assemblies.

The grassroots politicians were not able to capture the movement nor make use of its structures. They created their new parties after the death of the movement in the plazas. These parties have fed precisely off of the popular disappointment that the entire movement hadn't accomplished anything. As such, we could say that the anarchists were successful in negating the maneuvers for the institutionalization of the struggles, but we met with a sound defeat when

it came to introducing our proposals in the emerging social spaces. Some of us were ashamed of our oh-so-daring ideas and others lacked visions and proposals to begin with. Others, who tried to come off as the most radical, were so fragile that they did not even know how to express and put in practice their ideas in spaces where there were also opposing ideas. Did they think anarchist ideas cannot defend themselves when they enter into contact with reformist ideas? They surrendered the new spaces to the reformists without even putting up a fight.

It was an important achievement that many of those assemblies did not become centralized spaces of unitary decision-making capable of representing and controlling an entire movement. But we did not know how to formulate anarchist proposals that could also be useful to other people in the decentralized assemblies we had helped create.[5] In the end, the institutionalizes of the struggles won the conflict, though they had to wait two more years [between the death of the 15M movement and the rise of the new parties].

We achieved—and not thanks to us but thanks to the latent anarchic capacities in all people—a first step towards the self-organization of society. But people, and not without reason, chafed at the uselessness of the autonomous assemblies. Subsequently, and this time lacking reason, they placed their hopes once more in the democratic structures, this time betting on new representatives and new parties. Without a doubt, it is not our responsibility, as enlightened ones, to show people how they have to organize their lives nor make use of assemblies. But we live in a world in which all structural pressures inhibit us from practicing self-organization and redirect us towards representation and passivity. If we the anarchists, who spend every day thinking about these things, were not capable of conceiving nor putting in practice in those multitudinous spaces the proposals that correspond to our own desires and necessities, how can we blame anyone else for not having done so? (And I don't want to hear the individualist or antisocial comrades say that they have no need of multitudinous spaces, because they, with their own forces, have not been able to realize their desires nor to defeat the State. I would refer them to proven and consequential individualists and antisocials like Renzo Novatore, who had a more nuanced and real posture, rather than a dogmatic, defeatist one, regarding relations with the hated masses.

What might the anarchist proposals for self-organization have been? From a hypothetical standpoint it is impossible to give the most intelligent responses to this question. Only on the basis of practice and collective intelligence could the most suitable paths be developed. But we can offer at least a few suggestions, in order to leave the realm of abstraction.

The experience of the Mutual Aid Networks—a model of collective pressure in response to housing and labor problems, developed in Seattle and appearing first [among the iterations in the Spanish state] in the Barcelona neighborhood of Clot—was interesting. It gave rise to a few small but important battles, but in the end only demonstrated the lack of patience generalized among the anarchists and the great difficulty, in today's society, of avoiding dynamics of assistentialism [charity]. The majority of groups of this type gave up after a short time, instead of carrying out an intense work in the neighborhoods in order to find other people with economic problems and a desire to resist.

The Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) had much more success in this sense, but often at the cost of obstructing any advance in their own struggle. We're referring to re-

[5] When I refer to proposals that could be useful to other people, I am not talking about charity projects that we, the good anarchists, do for strangers, but about proposals that could be useful for us and for others. It seems that, rejecting charity, we don't know how to do anything with other people if they don't also start identifying as anarchists. And it is a sad shortcoming, because there is a huge gap between charity and recruitment.

formist demands and visions, criminalizing and unsolidaristic discourses towards other ways of struggle (the use of self-defense and riots against evictions, the squatting of houses that don't belong to the banks) and a refusal to critique private property or include people who rent. The minoritarian Platform for People Affected by Mortgages and Capitalism (PAHC) overcame some of these limitations, but the organization as a whole has ended up with few possibilities outside of the electoral path. And it has very few illegalist perspectives, given that very few anarchists (and I must include myself) participated in this organization of direct action and reformist discourses.

Within a larger space like the assembly of a city or a neighborhood, there existed the possibility—untested—of transforming this model so that it leaves behind the traits of a specialized activist group and adopts more radical and combative characteristics. In another time, the example of the autoreductions in the proletarian neighborhoods of Italy in the '60s and '70s was very important. It would have been an interesting model: *if they cut back our social services, instead of demanding change in the arena of the laws, we will install our own cutbacks, not paying sales tax or public transport, only paying half for the gas, water, and electricity, for rent, etc.* A broad space would have been ideal for organizing initiatives of this type, but in general it was not done. The matters of misery and precarity were left to be dealt with by each individual in an isolated fashion.

Yes, there were mobilizations in Barcelona against the price hikes in public transport, but the response was dominated by a reformist assembly that we anarchists were not capable of contradicting, even though we were among the most active organizers of the successive campaigns in the metro and the bus lines. Besides a few occasional protests, the proposal of free public transport was only spread on the level of propaganda and not of action. And there we lost ourselves in questions that were very important but at the moment hardly useful, regarding the anarchist city (would it exist?), and the ideal transport (would there be any?). The few times we proposed free transport, we hardly believed it ourselves, given that we weren't convinced that cities and metros would exist in our ideal world, nor had we had that conversation—the one about revolution—with our neighbors and new comrades. In our own eyes, we were impractical dreamers, so we bit our tongues even as we made our proposals. We didn't propose a refusal to pay—not during occasional protests but every day—as a form of counterattack, and we didn't understand the assemblies as spaces to propose and organize such measures.

All the elements for a successful struggle in the metro and bus existed: new technologies for visibilizing and evading ticket controls; associations or solidaristic insurance to collectively pay fines; popular rage against the price hikes and the tour- istification, precaritization, and gentrification that had become generalized in the city; assemblies in every neighborhood to organize proposals outside the control of political parties and negotiation-oriented platforms; and there was also still a diffuse capacity for sabotage. It would have been possible to link it up with the struggle against borders (given the complicity of metro security guards in identifying or beating up migrants) and the struggle against the expansion of social control (given the planned implementation of an integrated system of tracking and surveillance throughout the whole public transport network). It could have taken the form of sabotage against the technologies of control in the metro, the opening of stations, putting the ticket machines out of service, and massive propaganda advocating a refusal to pay, an action that is beneficial for everyone, that encourages illegality and that is not directed at negotiation with the authorities. Instead of this, there were occasional protests that blocked the lines of transport, only angering people who didn't want to

spend even more time commuting, and the only objective was to pressure TMB [the metropolitan transport administration] and City Hall to implement a change.

A successful campaign of this kind might have served as a step towards that great event, the rent strike. Such a strike demands much more commitment than the one day general strike, it weaves stronger connections of solidarity between its participants, and it also generates opportunities for combat (which is perhaps the only advantage of the spectacular general strikes), given that neighbors will have to defend against the inevitable evictions. Yes, a rent strike is very far off, but not so far as the revolution. What is lacking is not possibility, but seriousness.

Parallel to these activities for the construction of collective power and immediate counterattack against emiseration, more ideal activities were also lacking, focused on creating spaces of our own where the social relations we want can begin to flourish. Occupied plazas and gardens, networks of exchange and gifts, workshops for artisanal skills. In this line we do have some examples, like the atheneum in Poble Sec or the Agora of Juan Andres in Raval. The two projects have significantly increased the intensity and the possibilities of struggle in those zones, but their recognition as important examples has not been very widespread.

Then there are always those projects and activities—destructive as well as constructive—that only arise from anarchist groups organized along lines of affinity. These are indispensable, but if they are not accompanied by a parallel labor in broad, heterogeneous spaces, they will become isolated and enjoy small chance of attaining their objectives.

In summation: people do not distance themselves from anarchism because they believe statist dogma. They believe statist dogma because they are obliged to reproduce it. For most people, beliefs do not determine actions, actions determine beliefs. They will believe that which is most comfortable for them to believe as long as they must live under the impositions of the State.

Up against a prison society, anarchism will not be spread with better or more propaganda. It will spread if it can exercise force against the dominant structures, if it can put in practice—at least in a limited way—its ideas, and if these ideas are applicable to people's daily lives. The first people in a society who raise the anarchist banner are dreamers, but we are not so unique. We tend to be more sensitive—in one way or another—and for us anarchism is useful from the outset because we cannot stand life in this society with its lies and impositions. Anarchism fulfills our psychosocial needs. Other people are not blind to these lies and impositions, they just endure them and invent the appropriate excuses. The need for physical survival is one of the strongest and most reasonable arguments there is, and today, it is the State that guarantees people's survival.

Neither the activities of the affinity groups nor practical proposals in heterogeneous spaces have constituted the greatest effort carried out by many anarchists these last years. On the contrary, ever more comrades are dedicating themselves to revolutionary suicide. It seems to us that the greatest problem faced by anarchism today is populism.

If we place our chips on a tension between the social and antisocial needs of the struggle, we will recognize that self-isolation is the curse of those comrades who fail to overcome the contradictions of the antisocial position, and populism is the curse of those who fail to overcome the contradictions of the social position.

If the new leftwing parties are the consequence of the death of the movements against austerity outside the anarchist space, within the anarchist space the consequence is populism. One can perceive an anxiety, a panic, in reaction to the electoral successes of certain activists who previously had been in assemblies or protests with us.

Those trapped in an antisocial position react to the predictable, eternal dynamic of institutionalization by seeking to isolate themselves even further. If certain people in the heterogeneous movements against austerity, or before that, against globalization, are now in politics, they seize on this mundane tragedy as a meager proof that participating in such movements was a mistake. In this way they demonstrate the fragility of their position and the lack of radicality in their vision. Leftists, simply by acting as leftists, can drive them away from social conflicts, which are always messy, always complex, and always attract opportunists, institutionalizers, and other unsavory figures. Those who wear the mantle of the most radical are seeking pure spaces of antagonism that do not exist, because they do not know how to defend radical ideas and practices in heterogeneous spaces.

The populists, on the other hand, feel their isolation but they do not understand its roots. With an array of mistaken methods founded on chronic weakness and a historical amnesia that is really quite tragic, populist anarchists fall into an unstoppable rout, which they call "connecting with the masses" *["llegar a la* gente"].

The majority of populists I know have less contact with people outside the ghetto than the typical antisocial anarchist. I have seen some of them fail as insurrectionalists and now they are failing as organizers of the masses. They have not "connected with the people" in the least. Nonetheless, they are obsessed with "leaving the ghetto" and they inflate themselves with the idea that they are more dedicated than other anarchists, those of us who remain in the ghetto.

To begin with, they don't understand what the ghetto is nor where it comes from. We cannot be more categorical: the ghetto is constructed solely by the State. Not grasping this basic fact is to completely obviate the nature of present-day society. For them, the ghetto means living in a squat because it's cool, wearing black, going to occasional protests and talks, and partying, drinking cheap beers, and gratuitously sniffing speed in one of the typical spaces of our milieu.

But we don't all have the same experience. Some of us started squatting because we couldn't afford rent. Some of us wear the clothes we are able to dumpster or steal. Some of us don't go to parties, we don't insult our bodies with drugs and we happen to know our neighbors. I have friends who rent and work normal jobs and they are also in the ghetto, just like me.

What, then, is the ghetto? It is having to lie about who we are so we don't get fired from our jobs. It is having to hide the details of our lives when we speak with strangers. It is having to pretend to be normal people when we look for an apartment, fill out paperwork, or cross borders. It's knowing that they can label us as terrorists and put us in prison.

Those are the walls of our ghetto. They are social structures that control us, punish us, and isolate us. It strikes me as myopic that the populist comrades don't realize this. It is a sign of a grave lack of seriousness, a position of comfort, that they have never sought out the true walls of their prison.

And as an aside, yes, it makes perfect sense to speak of "normal people" in reference to a category from which we are excluded. The normal person is the normalized person, the one who follows society's norms. Being an anarchist is not normal. And what do they do with people who don't follow the norms of their society? That's right: they stick them in the ghetto.

We can decorate the walls of our ghetto and even put up nice tiles (or posters) to make it more cozy—as many aesthetic rebels do—or we can punch holes in it to pass secret messages back and forth. But it is completely erroneous to think that we are the ones who built this ghetto. As long as capitalism exists, the ghetto will also exist. It is nothing less than an integral structure of the society of the Spectacle and the State itself.

The populists are not breaking out of their isolation. In fact, outside the ghetto people are much more isolated than inside. Within, practices of solidarity and mutual aid are much more vibrant than in normalized society. Until the revolution comes, there is only one way out of the ghetto, and that is by obeying society's norms. And it seems that this is what the populist comrades are starting to do.

Populism demonstrates the abandonment of radical practices. The representatives of various initiatives for mass organization in the Barcelona Anarchist Bookfair in 2015 knew how to disguise their words in order to avoid saying anything alarming. They insisted they were not watering down their discourse or their practices, while they constantly advocated a drastic dilution in order to "connect with the masses". But several of their followers, who did not know how to watch their mouths like good politicians, made a direct link between "leaving the ghetto" and "abandoning self-organization" in order to advocate working with public institutions.

In recent years, speaking of an abandonment of principles, we have seen a new wager on municipalism from leftwing parties, organizations, and platforms like the CUP, Arran, or Barcelona en Comu, and also from libertarian groups like Embat. For the Left, this move makes perfect sense: they need to find a new mask, a new aroma, so that the corpse of institutional struggle which they've never given up on dragging behind them can appear alive again, after so many deaths. But why would anarchists encourage this method? Municipalism is the perfect bridge between a social movement and its self-betrayal. It is just another path to institutionalization.

The conquest of a municipality is a delusion. Activities of state management on the municipal level are no less alienating for their proximity. Methods of political alienation, methods based in authority and obedience do not change their essence if the political body contains a hundred million or ten thousand people. The city-states of ancient Greece usually consisted of fewer people than the typical municipality today, and they were capable of organizing systems of slavery, punishment and execution, patriarchy, exploitative commerce, and warfare. In fact, the majority of early states were nothing more than municipalities.

The municipalists have no examples of truly revolutionary successes other than Rojava. But Rojava has nothing in common with the municipalism of Bookchin or that of the CUP. They did not achieve the autonomy necessary for beginning their experiment through a gradual process of protests and elections, but rather through a civil war in which they disposed of a large army. And if the Kurds manage to liberate a part of their territory in the long term, they will only have created a State that is much more decentralized than the typical bureaucratic butcher shop of the Marxist-Leninists. In the near future they will still have to resolve the contradiction between the inherent tendencies of centralized structures to constantly increase the centralization of power, and their desire for freedom. Either they will create a new State, a new system of domination, or they will abolish it completely.

We don't deign to tell them how they should organize themselves to overcome this contradiction; we don't know the answer. But any person on this planet can affirm—with good reason—that States cannot be reformed. They are destroyed, or they dominate you.

A supposedly revolutionary municipalism has no historical argumentation. It is founded in weakness, in the failure of other practices of struggle, and in the lack of visions for how to proceed.

Another practice abandoned by some of the populist anarchists is solidarity. In response to the waves of repression between 2013 and 2015 which has resulted in a total of 68 anarchists arrested as terrorists in the whole country, many people have stood in solidarity despite the chance that

they might be the next to be taken. But some assemblies and organizations—from what I have seen always of a populist character—have distanced themselves from the those repressed, refused to give support, and even justified the repression. It should be said that many sectors of the Catalan independence movement were more solidaristic than those anarchists.

Connected with their rejection of solidarity, there is also a distancing—generalized amongst nearly all the populists—from combative practices. In a press conference convened by various anarcho-populist formations after the arrests of the second phase of Operation Pandora (October 2015), the spokespersons articulated what was and what was not anarchism (and the capitalist media amplified their imbecile and unsolidaristic discourses). They rejected "violence". In the end, they attained their own pacification. The last medium that remains to them is propaganda, but lacking force and solidarity, the only thing they can disseminate are empty ideas.

When they take on the task of communication, populist anarchists appropriate the techniques of marketing without any scruple or historical analysis. It's helpful to be acquainted with the science of marketing and public relations, as techniques for the control of masses. But it is completely incoherent for anarchists to make use of such techniques.

To clarify our rejection of marketing, we should clarify what it is and what it isn't. Rejecting it doesn't mean denying the importance of aesthetics, of good design and good layout, of well elaborated propaganda techniques. There is a fundamental difference: anarchist communication starts with an idea that we want to communicate. Subsequently, we seek the most adequate format to communicate that idea. On the contrary, the practice of marketing subordinates the content to the form because its fundamental objective is not the propagation of an idea but the selling of a product, whether it is a new car or the anarchist "brand" (a ghastly expression I have heard uttered by a number of populist comrades). The propaganda produced by marketing has to be attractive and easy to digest.

These two practices are completely incompatible. Marketing is not capable of disseminating profound ideas and critiques, which are the only ones with any chance of helping us change this world, with its complex systems of domination. Marketing is designed to sell something—whatever bullshit—in large quantities.

We have seen how populist comrades have complained that texts were too long, in cases of skillfully laid out pamphlets, with a good distribution of space and texts written elegantly, lacking any superfluity. They did not suggest seeking a more adequate format for the text, nor a correction of the text that would allow it to communicate the same ideas in fewer words (I repeat that the formats and the texts were impeccable). What they wanted was to impose an implicit prohibition in texts too long to fit in a tweet. They are accomplices to the infantilization of their audiences and the atrophy of their own intellectual capacities.

Let's consider a concrete example. We can forget about the useless verbiage that certain populist groups spew out on Twitter, in order to briefly analyze one of the highest quality propaganda projects of all the populist formations: *Hola Dictadura*, a magazine that speaks about the use of the antiterrorism laws.

It is already apparent that the present text is full of very strong criticisms. But the aim is not to fling shit or provoke cheap feuds. It is also necessary to give praise where praise is due. *Hola Dictadura* reveals a high level of design and preparation. It is evident that its authors dedicated time and effort. If only all anarchist propaganda were prepared with such dedication, ability, and seriousness. But if we only analyze the magazine itself, divorced from the pacified and pro-capitalist practices of the populists, there are still some criticisms to be made. It is noticeable

that the authors subordinated the communication of ideas to the demands of marketing: being attractive, being easy to digest.

Hola Dictadura contains very simple ideas, scant information, and less analysis. It gives the reader the sensation that they are reading off the screen of a smartphone. It looks like one of those yankee magazines for brainless patriots like *TIME*.

The content of *Hola Dictadura* is, without a doubt, much better than that of *TIME*. In truth, it would be great if everyone in the world read it. There would be much less support for the politics of anti-terrorism. But in the end, the critiques they communicate are only progressive. There are no anarchist critiques of antiterrorism, which means that all the ideas presented in the magazine support democratic values. There is a reason for this: anarchist ideas are more complicated to explain and more difficult to accept, because all the education and information people have absorbed throughout their lives is produced by various social structures to support the fundamental beliefs of the State, patriarchy, and capitalism. It is much easier to use progressive arguments against antiterrorism if you want to convince people quickly. But faced with a movement animated by such arguments, the State would have no problem redirecting or recuperating it via a reform, because these are not radical critiques that get to the *root* of the problem.

It's not a question of an identitarian rejection. The problem isn't that the magazine isn't printed in all black, with a bad layout, full of circle-As and references to State and Capital. The problem is that it betrays itself, it opts for the easy way that the State already knows how to control, that doesn't contain the depth necessary to develop an intelligent struggle.

A better familiarity with history would veto any anarchists wager on marketing. It is not difficult to discover the origins of this profession. It is widely known that the "father" of marketing and public relations was Edward Bernays, an important advisor to a dozen presidents and global corporations. Any awareness of his work makes it clear that it is exclusively a question of the manipulation of the masses.

History also offers us other episodes that the populists ignore, either by laziness or by choice. Bernays invented the philosophy and science of public relations, but he was not the one who invented many of the specific techniques. Today's populists are not the first to try to use aesthetic methods to spread their ideas and change the world. Early in the twentieth century, the Dadaists already tried to make a revolution through subversive communication, and they did it with much more intelligence, creativity, and dedication. And it was a grand failure. But capitalist companies took note and appropriated the Dadaists' techniques. Their aesthetic advances, their methods of communication, proved to be more effective when linked with capitalist processes, utilized for the sale of products rather than as a revolutionary seduction. The innovative Russian artist Rodchenko suffered a similar destiny, with his work appropriated by the Bolshevik authorities and later by the public relations industry in the West.

The marketing mania is only justified by the unexamined weakness of the populists. They can tell they are alone, but they have not understood the social structures that provoke their isolation, and they have no revolutionary projectuality to break those structures.

What they seek to do is recruit.

In order to criticize the practice of recruitment, it could be fruitful to take the example of the FAC, the Anarchist Federation of Catalunya. It must be said that this organization is heterogeneous, and it would be unfair to label it as populist, though it contains populist elements. It must also be said that their campaign of introduction [to announce the creation of the federation and present it throughout Catalunya], in which we can spot populist dynamics, was carried out with

a praiseworthy energy and enthusiasm. We would be in a better position if every (open) anarchist project pushed itself as much to invite collaboration and open itself up to participation.

But it is necessary to make a criticism of the poster and video they published within this campaign, under the slogan: "Do you think you might be an anarchist?" The materials used in their introduction don't make a serious reference to social conflicts, to the realities of struggle, nor to the enormous challenge we anarchists are faced with. On the contrary, it calls on the public to identify as anarchists, seeking complicity without risks, without a depth of ideas, without strong commitments, without a process of total transformation (and I'm not even referring to the transformation of the world as much as to the personal transformation that all of us had to go through to become anarchists). Sure, in a poster or a video, one cannot communicate everything, but it can be made plain that there exist deeper critiques, risks, conflict.

Propaganda can be an invitation to seek, to investigate, to plumb the depths, to begin a process of transformation. But recruitment does not aim for any of this.

The introductory materials of the FAc fall into the demands of marketing: being attractive and being easy to digest. Going to prison isn't attractive. Getting beaten by the police isn't attractive. Spending hours on end in assemblies isn't attractive. Years and decades of defeat are not attractive. As such, they are left out of the vision of anarchism that the populists present.

Only based on these materials, my grandmother could be considered an anarchist. My grandmother is not an anarchist. It's not a problem, she's a great person and I love her a lot, but she's a far cry from a comrade. Though she thinks self-organization and resistance to injustice are great, she doesn't want to dedicate herself to the destruction of the State and she won't support the people committed to this project in the medium- or long-term. We don't win anything with illusory alliances and complicities.

We must ask: what kind of person would be recruited with such an attractive vision of anarchism? People who distance themselves from the struggle as soon as the police start breaking down doors in the early morning and taking our comrades away in handcuffs? People who let themselves get swept along to vote in elections and enter into municipal institutions? People who are not in any process of self-education, of profound study and critique, who don't understand how the world they live in works nor where to find the roots of oppression?

And if we recruit using superficial propaganda, what are the advantages of a large organization, inflated with people who have unrealistic expectations and a total ignorance of the history of struggle?

Delivering such criticisms, I have only encountered evasions. Contrary to such evasions, it is not a question of being many anarchists or being few. The majority of populist formations are as small as a gathering of affinity groups, or smaller.

Often, the obsession with recruiting or creating a large anarchist organization or "capacity for mobilization" is nothing but a substitute that hides an absolute lack of struggles of our own. In struggle, we deepen our ideas and practices and we encounter new comrades, new complicities. It is often the people who have no struggle in their daily life, who don't know how to find social conflicts, who propose creating large organizations based on recruitment, or creating a mobilizing capacity based on seductive techniques of communication.

Anarchist Organization

A large part of the initiatives for anarchist organization that we have seen fail over the last years were suffocated by people who did not have their own projectuality, who did not know how to find and develop their own struggles, who demanded that the organization itself be a space for generating struggles.

But struggles are not created by a set of initials. Struggles are born in the streets. Organizations either serve to coordinate and amplify an activity that already exists, or they don't serve for anything at all. As the comrades of the MIL said, organization is the organization of the tasks of the struggle.

As such, *the necessity for organization depends on the density of anarchist activity in a place or region.*

The most basic unit that conforms an anarchist density is the project. Individual projects tend to organize themselves. In this category we find social centers, action groups, propaganda groups, publications, groups of workers, gardens, assemblies, feminist initiatives, groups of self-defense and training, etc. Ideally they choose the structures and the level of formality or informality that best fits their project, free of dogmas or prefabricated schemas. They can use formal consensus, informal consensus, the separation of tasks and functions, delegation, and even voting if they know how to protect themselves from the danger of majorities.

A project might also be the initiative of an individual who looks for ad hoc complicity and collaboration, as is the case with a disproportionate number of small projects with the greatest quality and duration.

Among all these options, informality favors trust, affinity, and a fluid and rapid functioning. Formality facilitates the creation of a space that is accessible for new people and also facilitates a change in internal dynamics, *if there exists a decisive will to carry it out.* This last point is highly important. When we speak of internal dynamics a group might want to change, we are thinking of things like irresponsibility and lack of commitment, lack of self-criticism, hierarchy, sexist behaviors, etc. There are many who think that a formal structure in and of itself can change or overcome the internal dynamic of a group. This is completely false. As democracy well demonstrates—at a large or small scale— formal structures also serve to hide unwanted dynamics or to generate the illusion that the problem is being solved. The most important element is always the culture of the group, which is reproduced above all in informal spaces.

It is vital to understand that there is no dichotomy, symmetry, or congruence between these two terms. The informal always surpasses the formal. There is no formal structure capable of replacing informal space. Not even the most bureaucratic State is free of informal spaces and relations; in fact, it is within informal channels that the power legitimated and hidden by formal structures often moves. This is because reality itself is informal. An uncritical rationalism among certain anarchists has made them forget that the universe is chaotic, and this is one of the few advantages we have against the State.

So, in order to change unfortunate dynamics, the most important thing is for the group to have a decisive will to do it. Approving a formal structure to solve the problem is just a way to wash one's hands of it. Nonetheless, formal structures can serve as tools, if the necessary will is really present, because they oblige us to break with our habitual patterns and behaviors, which are often unexamined.

Formal structures can facilitate the entry of new people (which might not be an objective of the project), making it clear that the group is not just a closed circle of friends. But also, if they are excessive, they can scare off new people, given the appearance of a sect or bureaucratic party. A very isolated group, for example in a country or region with few anarchists, can make use of formality to facilitate contact with other isolated people who are looking for companions, or contact with comrades in other countries.

In heterogeneous and intergenerational assemblies, informality is normally better if it is not a space for making unitary decisions, because informality generates an environment of familiarity and trust, and normally it is the young political animals who most easily dominate formal structures. But if it is a space for making unitary decisions, formality can be better to help people learn to make decisions in conditions of equality (though they should know that equality is *always* illusory) and to prevent the assembly from becoming dominated by an informal hierarchy. There will be some people who are better at controlling formal structures, and this is a danger, but being a heterogeneous space and as such one with less trust, participants will not have as easy a time making direct criticisms, which is the best weapon against informal hierarchies.

Here an important dynamic becomes visible. In a space of unitary decision-making (decisions that are applied to everyone, with the idea that actions are also taken in a unified way), power is centralized, and thus the problem arises of the control of the assembly. In a decentralized space—one of coordination among autonomous groups and individuals, one of encounter, or one of voluntary adhesion to decisions—power is diffuse and the same problematic does not exist.

Before moving on to the question of metaorganization or larger scale organization, something must be said about the historical debate between the formal and informal postures. Although the debate normally takes place in an unnecessary way, opposing two forms of organization, each with their advantages and disadvantages, as though we had to choose between them, it is the partisans of formality who have tended to err most. They often ignore the history of the large formal structures, with their betrayals and failures, and they often use demagogery instead of lucid arguments, for example blurring informality with the failure of formal structures. If the people in a formal organization do not carry out the commitments they have formally engaged, or if they continue to create informal hierarchies, this is not an example of informality, but of a failure of formality.

Beyond individual projects exists the question of metaorganization—the organization of organizations—and the pretension of large scale organization. It is here that the criterion of density takes on a critical importance. When we speak of density, we are referring to the frequency, intensity, and proximity of anarchist activity, including all the individual projects we have just mentioned.

Too often, proposals for more organization are raised in anarchist deserts—regions with little activity or few anarchists— or anarchist swamps—regions with many anarchists, but who are inactive or in a rut (for example, Barcelona after the fall of the new popular movements). These are destined to fail. Organization itself does not generate more activity if there is nothing to organize. On the contrary, it spends a great deal of energy to constitute structures that will be immobilizing from the beginning. There are few things sadder than an anarchist "mass organization" or "platform" with 5-15 members in an entire country, like those that have appeared from time to time in the UK, the Balkans, North and South America. It is also sad to see dozens of comrades dedicating so much time to building a large organization while they go missing in their work in the neighborhood, subversion in the workplace, and the fight in the streets.

Metaorganization, with few exceptions, only makes sense where there is a high anarchist density. In those moments, comrades who had previously always opposed initiatives for large organizations will change their ideas and begin to support one or another initiative (hopefully without losing their early critique), as has happened in Catalunya or Greece.

When many anarchist projects exist in the same region, organization can amplify their force and help them overcome previously insurmountable problems and limitations, opening new dimensions of struggle. Or, organization can cause them to centralize, abandon their prior terrains of struggle, and become asphixiated by the demands of unity.

A text of the recent initiative of the "Gathering of Libertarian Infrastructures" gives an example of what *opening another dimension of struggle* could mean. In Catalunya there are many constructive projects (like gardens, workshops, printshops…). Individually, each one has to fend for itself, usually searching for the means of survival within democratic legality and the capitalist market, and sometimes falling into the ideologies of the same, when they begin to support alternativism, the use of money, and the production of "ethical" merchandise. But by coordinating, they would create the possibility of developing a gift economy, putting anarchic relations in practice, and becoming a more integral part of the struggles.

Another example, hypothetical but based in real experiences, would be a country where there are multiple prisoner support groups. Organizing together, they could share resources and experiences, avoid the duplication of work, and ensure that no prisoner goes without support and that all the aspects of support are sufficiently elaborated. The fact that the initiatives of coordination are posterior to the existence of the individual projects is a great help, because it demonstrates that each group already has a real practice and a capacity for self-organization. Having opened their own path, each group will have diverse and autonomous perspectives. On the contrary, initiatives and projects that arise from a large organization are like houses built from the roof down. They will lack an already developed activity and experiences of their own. Most likely they will be phantasmal.

If the appropriate density to initiate metaorganization is present, what form should it take?

The ENCOUNTER is the most informal option. It functions like an assembly or an array of diverse spaces that galvanizes the links between the people and the projects that constitute it. It is structured to facilitate self-organization between participants, multiple of whom can initiate a joint structure without everyone having to participate. In other words, it functions by adhesion. It can be a space of debate, but not of consensus (beyond a consensus on certain minimums). Proposals can be made in the encounter, but with the aim of looking for complicities and not arriving at a unitary decision among everyone. It is a decentralized structure *par excelence.*

Its advantages are that it does not present the danger of centralization or bureaucratization. It is a very fluid and lightweight organization that activates the potential of the participants' will and that dies the moment they stop dedicating energies to it. Its disadvantages are that it does not enable unified action or the preparation and planning of campaigns or activities among everyone, in those moments when it seems necessary to do so. In such a case it would have to function as an assembly, which might or might not work given the number of participants and the degree of difference among them.

The coordination *[coordinadora]* is formal, but it also places great emphasis on the autonomy of its members. It can serve to share resources and proposals—by adhesion or in a decentralized way—and also to plan unitary actions and campaigns. The participants can be individuals and collectives, or only collectives, but the coordination is distinct from an assembly or collective

because it is a focal point for multiple forces, and the force available to it surpasses that of all the individuals present in the space. It is also assumed that its participants have their own struggles, resources, and networks. Planning in the coordination can be carried out by work groups, in the assembly itself if it is not too large, or member collectives can bring proposals that have already been elaborated. In any case, a process of delegation exists to communicate proposals between the central assembly of the coordination and the collectives that compose it.

In a coordination, participants can organize debates, but it is not such a common activity, given that they are not seeking greater unity, as in a federation, nor a deepening of relationships, as in an encounter, but a pragmatic contact for concrete activities.

The FEDERATION is formal and centralized. To be a true federation it needs at least three organizational levels: that of the local groups; an intermediate level for groups in the same area or region; and a high level that includes all the groups. Nonetheless, some very reduced federations only have the first and third level.[6] Parallel to the assemblies or plenums at each level, there can also be a secretariat or committee. This greatly augments the bureaucracy and the danger that it becomes an authoritarian organization (as has been the case for much of the trajectory of the CNT, the largest anarchist federation in history), but such structures can be necessary to give consistency and agility to the work of the organization. If the federation is anarchist, the posts in the secretariat and committee will be rotating and revokable.

In order to function as a federation, all the local groups that compose it must be symmetrical (for example, they must all be neighborhood assemblies, or syndicates, or free schools, etc.). If not, the federation is illusory.[7] These groups are not autonomous, rather they aim for a certain unity; and the contact between them is not flexible, rather it aims to be long-term or permanent.

Unlike a coordination, the federation can create new participant groups and change the way in which the base groups relate. It works by delegation. Although the plenums might be open to all members in order to encourage transparency, each participant group must speak with one voice, an artificial imposition that comes with authoritarian tendencies, given that no human group is truly homogeneous.

If one were to sketch the organizational schema of a federation, the result would be a triangle. The horizontal line contains all the base groups. In the middle are the intermediate levels of organization, successively narrower, and the tip is the central space that unites the whole federation: the superior assembly with its committee or secretariat, if there is one. It is vital, from an anarchist perspective, that the tip of this triangle is on the bottom and not on the top, because the triangle with the tip on top is also the organizational schema of the State.

What does all this mean, beyond cliches? That the most important organizational level and the concentration of force must reside among the local groups, and that the central assembly must have a limited importance and frequency. For example, a large part of the initiatives could arise from the local groups, reaching the intermediate levels and from there spreading to other local groups; the local groups could be self-sufficient in a large part of their activity and only go to the higher levels to seek resources or amplify their results, instead of always waiting for the campaigns and directives set out by the central level.

[6] There are also various affinity groups, assemblies, or coordinations that call themselves ”federations” owing to an organizational fetish.

[7] Leaving aside the possibility of a confederation of federations, each of which organizes base groups of a different type.

We can compare two federations of interest for anarchists. The Haudenosaunee, or "Six Nations," are a confederation of six indigenous nations in North America, among them the Mohawk and the Oneida. Their confederation is more than 700 years old and it has served to resist various attempts to impose state authority.

The CNT is the most potent and effective confederation anarchists in the West have erected in their history. Within 26 years, it turned into a hierarchical organization, imposing state authority on a large part of the lower classes in Spain, where state power had been negated in the insurrection of July 1936. In a wide territory, governmental authority had disappeared, replaced by self-organization. The CNT, above all its local groups and lower levels, initiated part of this self-organization, but another part was spontaneous, whereas the leaders of the CNT stopped the expropriations and collectivizations that were opposed by the government. Only the CNT was capable of reestablishing state authority in the free zones (or impeding an insurrection when the communists and republicans crushed the free zones) by way of the antifascist politics of the Popular Front.

The difference between the two federations, the successful one and the failure, is that the local groups of the Haudenosaunee were villages or communal houses with a high degree of self-sufficiency, and that the importance, the strength, lay in what Westerners would call the "lower" levels of the federation, while in the CNT it was the other way around: it was the statewide congresses and committees that exercised power. Among the Haudenosaunee no one occupies a post in the central level and the assemblies of the totality of the confederation occur irregularly, in cases of need. Which is to say, the central or "superior" level of the federation normally does not exist. Another difference is that the societies that compose the Haudenosaunee are more or less anti-patriarchal (with differences between one nation and another) while the CNT was clearly an organization of men, even though women played a vital role in the contemporary struggles.

If comrades in a specific place decide—with lucidity and a studied familiarity with our history—that the degree of tight coordination made possible by a federation is advantageous or necessary, they should go right ahead. But it is vital that they never seek to be an all-absorbing organization, that they maintain a certain equality and solidarity with the revolutionaries (anarchist and otherwise) who stay outside the organization. A federation can be powerful, but it is the most dangerous organization, from an anarchist viewpoint.

In Greece, probably the country with the greatest anarchist density, there are currently two federations in the process of creating themselves. It seems to be a good signal that both of them pose the question of how to relate with the extensive sectors of the anarchist space that does not participate in either federation. Neither of them seek to include or absorb the whole of anarchist activity.

Next Steps

To have any possibility of destroying this prison society and averting the horrible destiny that is unfolding around us, it is indispensable: to stop conceiving of our weakness in terms of dissemination; to abandon the practice of recruitment and the delirium of mass organization that it represents; and to energetically criticize those currents that make use of marketing and populism. But much more than attacking our errors, we have to mark out other paths to follow, with actions more than with words.

To start with, it cannot be a single path. No one practice is capable of including all the activities necessary for a revolution. We must think of revolt as an ecosystem. If we try to be the only species, we kill the revolution.

But, in whatever form, we must all start posing the question of survival. This means that the projects and activities we encourage and amplify through organization should concern themselves with the self-organization of life; that they should be useful for us as well as for other people; that they should support and augment our capacities of struggle, understanding struggle as a basic aspect of survival for people who desire liberty; and that they should take into account the possible changes in the capitalist system, from collapse to a profound transformation in the architecture of the world system.

We should also seek out initiatives of synthesis, which confuse the categories of capitalist alienation and join distinct forces in order to overcome the typical divisions that the dogmatic anarchists, from the populists to some of the antisocial anarchists, only reinforce.

To speak concretely, this synthesis might take the form of a network of social and antisocial comrades, of artists and theorists, of those with a propensity for care and those with a propensity for the attack, who admire the skills and capacities of the others, who don't insult one another behind their backs, who use their talents not to boost egos or achieve personal advancement but for the benefit of all, who conceive of themselves as a community of struggle and search for a complementarity in their actions, not always agreeing, but maintaining a basic feeling of solidarity, mutual aid, and respect.

Projects that increase our capacity for struggle might take the form of a healthcare group that offers its skills to people injured in protests or comrades coming out of prison; of rural projects (those that often end up isolated) that act as spaces for gatherings, for rest, and also for physical work for the urban assemblies that maintain an unsustainable rhythm; of combative comrades who risk their bodies and their freedom not to target enemies who are often symbolic (also a necessary activity, albeit limited), but to defend a garden, a clinic, a house or a social center against eviction; of a group specialized in propaganda and dissemination helping to spread the most radical, provocative, and marginalized ideas; of networks of people who manage to meet ever more of their needs without recourse to monetized, commercial relations, not running from conflict with capitalism but inviting more people to join them in their mutiny.

As a Mapuche comrade said, explaining a project for generating electricity in a community in resistance, "We don't want to generate our own electricity just to achieve self-sufficiency. By making our own electricity, we can attack and sabotage the infrastructures of the State and the companies that occupy our territory, infrastructures we currently depend on."

That's what is meant by amplifying our capacities of struggle. And since the revolt is an ecosystem, each of us has our own role. Separation in different ideological currents, normally indicative of differences in character and not lucid critical theories, is another function of capitalist alienation in our own spaces.

Those who dedicate themselves to the attack have not been able to maintain it in the face of repression. Those who do not dedicate themselves to the attack have not avoided their own pacification. Those who have gone to the countryside have not left capitalism behind. Those who stayed in the city have not been able to plant any seeds in the cracks they have opened in the asphalt. We have to put these distinct tendencies in common again, so that a creative and fecund tension exists between them.

The paths that have already been marked out only lead to a horrifying future.

In Conclusion

…we have shared an evaluation of the current stagnation of the anarchist movement. We have considered the need for anarchists to seriously position ourselves with respect to certain global forces: the total transformation of society by emerging technologies and the geopolitics of antiterrorism. We have looked at possible outcomes of the crisis in capitalism and how these might affect the strategies we use.

In order to meet all these challenges, to break out of stagnation, to spread anarchic relations, to influence the outcome of social conflicts, and to stake a position outside the sterile contest between democracy and terrorism, I have proposed using a chaotic, pluralistic, ecosystemic vision of revolt and society in order to organize our activity in a way that opens new dimensions of struggle and avoids the dangers of centralization; in order to seek complementarity and creative conflict between different currents rather than trying to impose unity; and to reframe our activity as the reconquest of life (with all the concrete skills and questions of survival that entails) rather than as the production or negation of abstractions (dissemination, recruitment, ideological purity…).

May these words serve for further debate, and the honing of our practices.

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