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Willful Disobedience, Wolfi Landstreicher
Willful Disobedience Volume 5, Number 3
Spring 2006

Retrieved on 15 October 2018 from archive.org

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enough people believe the right thing, they will rise up. But have those who rise up for words, and not for their lives, really risen up at all or are they just embracing a new master? If my aim is to take back my life, to create my desire, my joy, my passion, then how can I tum my words into tools for a position? They would cease to be my own words. For me, words can only be a tool (or toy) for expressing and communicating my desire, my project, my life; one of the many tools I use to find accomplices, to create my enjoyment and express the intensity of my passions, the wildness of my dreams. But disconnected from life, from practice, they are empty. And any word in the service of a cause, any evangelistic word, any word intended to draw followers to a position, has been disconnected from life, separated from the immediate practice of freedom, and so is empty. Thus, in overvaluing words, we drain them of meaning, because their meaning comes precisely from our lives and our choices.

What is the point of asking questions if we are not free to answer?

What is the point of answering if the questions are always false?

Editor's Note

After this issue, I will stop publishing *Willful Disobedience* in order to work on a number of other projects. I have several translations in the works, as well as a few major writing projects. I am also working on compiling a selection of my writings from about 1995 to 2005 to put together as a book in order to better clarify the development of my ideas as well as the common threads that run through them. So for now I want to put my time and energy into these projects without having to think about publishing a semi-regular publication.

I originally intended to make this last issue a single long essay, an attempt to reflect on a number of problems and questions that I continually wrestle with, but that project has proven to be greater than I thought and is becoming a small book. So instead this last issue brings together a few essays, journal entries and translations that I feel are of some interest for sparking discussion and maybe provoking action.

Wolfi Landstreicher

The City: A Few Random Thoughts

(The thoughts below are rather random meanderings provoked by reading a few books of urban analysis. Within the present world I have tended to find wild areas on the one hand and cities on the other as the environments that most stimulate my thoughts and imagination. At the same time I recognize that every city that we know of has been a monument to domination, commerce and alienation. In these meanderings, I consider what it is about

cities that I find stimulating and raise questions about how these things might exist in a world without cities. This is not *a defense of cities)*

Ultimately I want to do away with the city. It represents the values of civilization which boil down to alienated and centralized power and wealth. Yet there are aspects of the city that I enjoy, particularly the opportunity for chance encounters with stimulating strangers. Where human beings do not congregate in large numbers, the opportunities for such encounters are much reduced or even disappear. But nowadays cities are built to serve the needs of capitalism and the state. And they have always served the interests of the ruling powers who had them built: priesthoods, military elites, those who stole the wealth and creative energy of others in order to set themselves up as rulers.

In her otherwise interesting book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs forgets this aspect of the city, its role as symbol and tool of the ruling class. This is not so surprising since at a certain point cities become too large and chaotic for the rulers to keep them in hand. So Jane Jacobs tries to look at cities in terms of how they actually function as relationships among human beings and between the human being and this particular artificial environment. What I find most interesting in Jacobs' book is her assessment that the city functions best as an environment for human life when it is diverse and vibrant with a wide variety of people and activities interweaving with each other. This parallels what comprises a healthy wild environment — it needs a wide variety of different life forms carrying out a variety of different activities that weave themselves together. The destruction of such diversity indicates a moribund situation.

Going back to the city as Jacobs conceives it, we see the need for an active street life. This is where the interweaving diversity manifests itself most clearly. According to Jacobs, for this to function most effectively, wide sidewalks where various ac-

social order that stands in our way? How do we give priority to grasping whatever space and time we can for this purpose? What spaces and moments do we currently have access to and how can we expand them? How can we steal those spaces and times that survival in this society imposes on us and use for our own purposes, against this society?

I don't pretend to have answers, but this is a project I want to pursue, a game I want to play, because in any case my life is at stake, so I might as well try to wager it on my own terms. My hope is that others feel the same and that we can begin to explore what this means together.

> *We, however, start from the beginning. We are poor, we have unlearned how to play. We have forgotten it, our hands have unlearned how to dabble.*
>
> —Ernst Bloch

A Few Last Words About Words

We have a tendency to overvalue words. We put so much time into producing them, as if they were the source of life itself. We believe that there are words and ways of using words that are inherent sources of oppression and spend vast amounts of time trying to suppress these words, impoverishing our language in the process. In the meantime, the real practices of oppression go on, often carefully using the correct words to hide the practical reality, At the same time, we think that if we find the right combination of words, this will spark rebellion. So we make flyer after flyer, zine after zine, with an evangelistic zeal, forgetting our own lives, our own desire for freedom, joy and the intensity of existence. By giving words such great value, we forget our own purpose in using them. They become our masters. This becomes evident in the attempt to evangelize, where our words become means for winning others over to a position, assuming that when

individuals in the situations described above were able to place their enjoyment, their lives and their projects above survival, because they made the decision to create their lives together on their own terms, and rejecting the fragmentation imposed by capitalism, this included figuring out how to meet basic needs together without being dominated by survival. We have a lot to offer each other. Let's figure it out and find the ways to defy this blackmail together.

A Few Questions to Consider

How does each of us conceive of our lives? How do we want to live both on grand social terms and in our immediate lives? Where do our various visions coincide? Where do they differ? Where can they enhance each other? Where do they actually conflict?

How do we perceive revolution? Insurrection? Subversion? Destruction of the ruling order? Where do these ideas coincide and differ? Where can they enhance each other and where do they conflict?

What great and small projects do we imagine? What ones are we actually doing now? How can these intertwine? What tools, knowledge and capacities do we have to share to enhance these projects and better interweave them in mutuality?

What stands in the way, on an immediately daily life level, of creating our lives on our own terms, of accomplishing our projects? In other words, where does the blackmail of survival have us by the throats? What ideas do we have for overcoming this? What knowledge, skills or means might some of us have to share for overcoming this?

We need to consider that creating life on one's own terms requires having the space and time for doing so, and capital does tend to dominate all space and time. So we need to ask as well, how do we take the space and time we need to carry out these projects of creating our lives on our terms and destroying the

tivities could take place would have to combine with a mixture of different sorts of uses of space in the neighborhood. Consider, for example, how a café with outdoor tables on the sidewalk in a neighborhood that also included people's homes and public spaces for other purposes could encourage regular interaction and discussion of experiences among those who live in the neighborhood. All in all, Jacobs considers a wide variety of different levels of relationship as necessary for making cities livable human environments.

Jacobs is wrong in considering the various suggestions of city planners that undermine this diversity and empty the streets to be well-intentioned mistakes. She is giving these well-paid servants of power too much credit. As I pointed out above, cities emerged with centralized power and wealth and have always been meant to serve the purposes of the rulers who hold these. As industrialism congregated greater and greater numbers of those in the exploited classes into cities, they began to turn the environment to their own purposes, and the ruling class had to take action to counter this. City planning as a recognized specialization can be traced back to Hausmann whose changes in Paris were intended to limit the possibility of insurrection by making it easier for the state's troops to maneuver through the streets. This should make it clear that the aim of city planning has always been control in the ruling class's interest. If, in times of "social peace", vibrant and varying activity on the streets prevents the petty unpleasantness that might otherwise mar people's daily lives, it also provides a network of relationships that can form the basis for self-organization among the poor and exploited in times of social unrest, with the potential of pushing that unrest in the direction of insurrection. In such situations, these networks of communication can be turned to such interesting purposes as keeping an eye out for the cops. It is in the interest of the ruling class to do all that it can to hinder the formation of such

networks of communication. And the forms of city planning Jacobs describes and attacks in her book do precisely that.

The division of cities into zones for different purposes is a prime example. Downtown shopping areas, more specialized shopping areas for "bohemian" tastes, arts districts, residential areas, industrial areas, may not always have strict boundaries, but they still indicate the specialization of space in cities. This specialization affects the nature of foot traffic, allowing for greater social control and reducing the opportunities for stimulating chance encounters. When I live in New Orleans in 1991, many neighborhoods had not yet succumbed to this sort of specialization. If I occasionally encountered some less than pleasant realities, I also encountered a vibrant, active street life that offered a wide variety of interesting encounters and led to the discovery of some wonderful secrets about the city. Of course, New Orleans has changed drastically since then. And the devastation that Katrina caused has opened the door to building the city completely in the service of capital.

Portland, on the other hand, already has its divisions. It is not as bad as some places, but increasingly the only public spaces that exist are those dedicated to commerce in some form, and these are being more and more concentrated into malls, strips and other areas devoted almost exclusively to commercial interaction. So these become the areas of activity while residential sidewalks are mostly deserted. Thus, for the most part, public gathering is specifically attached to commodity consumption. Nonetheless, in some of the poorer neighborhoods, the streets are more active with playing children, adults hanging out on their porches, at bus stops, etc. But it is not the vital street life Jacobs describes from fifty years ago.

So the question arises, where will we find the networks of communication we will need in times of social unrest? This is particularly important now in the US where class reality is often hidden under racial tension. In a riot provoked by another cop killing another black person, how are black people on the

is something we all have to remember. A habit has developed in anarchist circles of thinking of ourselves as weak, as damaged, as hurt. I think this stems from bringing too much of the language of disease, therapy and healing into our social analysis — but that is a question that would need to be gone into more thoroughly elsewhere. The point I want to make here is that we need to start from the assumption that we can accomplish the things we desire, from the smallest projects to the ultimate destruction of the social order we hate and the creation of our lives on our own terms. Starting from this assumption, we need to begin to assess the specific problems we face with the aim of overcoming them — recognizing that as long as this society continues to exist this will be an ongoing project.

So let's discuss our dreams and our rebellious aspirations not on a purely abstract level, but in terms of how we can develop relationships of practical affinity, complicity and concrete solidarity in the project of creating total lives of revolt here and now. Those of us who are feeling the crunch of survival in particularly hard ways can share their dreams and their needs, and among us, we should be able to figure out ways to open possibilities for getting beyond this without falling into the usual limited atomized solutions.

If we remember that work is not simply the job but precisely the system of social relationships that forces us to give survival priority over life, joy, revolt and creativity, then it becomes clear that this reversal of perspective is a necessary basis for our revolt. The effort put into avoiding work without having an ongoing project of creating one's life as a whole itself stinks of work ~ here too survival still has priority. But if we have a clear life project and the specific means we use to get money and other necessities imposed by this society are only temporary tools for moving that life project forward. This already breaks down the logic of survival and work even if sometimes these specific means are jobs. But such a project is built precisely out of our relationships with the world and with each other. The

And I think it is this perception of life not as a series of random, disconnected moments, but as a totality to be created on our own terms that provides the basis for turning the blackmail of this society on its head and subjugating survival to the fullness of life and revolt. Of course, we will be doing this in a context that on the global and the everyday life scale absolutely opposes this. But this only means we need to have that much more resoluteness in our decision to carry on this project. Here is where a conscious choice to act with specific others can be of great significance. With others whose aspirations, dreams and desires correspond with ours, possibilities expand exponentially. But only if we actually talk with each other about our dreams, our desires, our needs, the tools and skills we have to share, the projects we are trying to create. We are all aware that when we have a small project to do — say cooking a meal or building a cabin — it is necessary to consider the details of what we want to accomplish, figure out the tools and methods necessary to accomplish it, figure out the various hindrances that stand in our way and how to go about eradicating them. The same idea applies to the project of creating our lives as an unfragmented, total project against this society. And so, if we have some affinity in terms of our broader conceptions of a life free from the state and capital, in terms of our dreams and desires for self-created existence and in terms of the necessity for destroying the social reality that stands in the way of this, we need to talk about these dreams and desires, about the specific ideas for projects of revolt and enjoyment we have, about the tools and capabilities we have to share and teach other, about ways to develop informal networks of mutual aid so that no one among us is ever really forced to place survival above their projects or lives.

I know that these are particularly tough times for such defiance, that a number of us are just scraping by. But we are smart, strong, defiant individuals capable of great dreams and great enmity toward that which tries to steal our dreams. This

street to know who their "white" accomplices are when day-to-day interaction is so minimal? This is not a minor problem.

In the context of industrial civilization, the desire for chance encounters with strangers is more readily fulfilled in cities than in any other human environment. But this comes about purely by accident due to the concentration of large numbers of people in these artificial environments for much less desirable reasons. (Cities have generally been formed for purposes of control and commerce — having military, religious and/or economic origins.) Over the last several decades, city planners, obviously working in the interest of the ruling order, have been doing all they can to reduce the possibilities for such encounters, keeping them confined to locales where they are easily controlled and generally connected to commodity consumption — bars, cafes, malls, etc. These environments are becoming less and less conducive to such encounters due to imposed noise, surveillance and the unpleasantness of most modern urban architecture. This combines with the reification and commodification of social identities and relationships that has made it harder for people to reach out beyond their own cliques and subcultures and the underlying everyday fear of the other that has insinuated its way into our minds from a variety of media scare stories to transform modern cities into wastelands of overcrowded desolation.

There are people who are content to stick with their cliques or retreat to small town or rural provincialism with only the expected and known relationships. But this is often a recipe for stagnation. The desire for chance encounters is a reflection of a desire to be stimulated and challenged in new ways, to be provoked to explore the unknown, to act and think outside one's usual habits. The people that we know too well, that we see and interact with regularly, rarely provide such stimulation. These known relationships are necessary for providing intimacy, comfort, trust, complicity, affinity and the support necessary for exploring the unknown. But it is the encounter

with the unknown, the stranger, the encounter with *difference*, that keeps life vibrant and lush.

But this brings up another way in which this society has been undermining the joy of chance encounters. The reification of social identities into defined categories, particularly in this age when mass media guarantees an increasing standardization of these identities, undermines the capacity for individuals to express their uniqueness. It is increasingly difficult for many people to break out of a character that is simply a collage of social identities to express anything deeper. So most "chance" encounters now have a ritualized style similar to the sorts of encounters this society imposes. This raises an immediately practical question: what can we do to break through these standardized rituals? Here the ideas of creating situations, *detournement* and subversion take on a significant personal meaning in the context of daily life.

As cities are increasingly designed to enforce the suppression of these encounters, to be stagnant swamps of enslaved humanity capable only of serving the needs of the state and capital, it becomes urgent for everyone who loves these encounters, and particularly those of us who see the need to destroy civilization and, thus, cities to reflect on how we could maintain the possibility for such encounters, both now within (and outside of) increasingly sterilized, prison-like cities, and in the future in a world without cities. The purpose of such reflection is not to come up with the solution, the blueprint, the guarantee of an ideal future. Rather it is an area for exploration and experimentation.

In *Letters of Insurgents*, Jan describes his dream of possibilities in a world without the economy or the state: "We'll leave the clearing and walk through the forest to the neighboring village and we'll think we're dreaming, because the village won't be there anymore; we'll find thousands of people building a city like no city that's ever been built and they'll welcome us and ask us to help because they'll all be our friends; there won't be

And Us? Here? Now?

What do these examples have to say to us? Certainly, there is no use in trying to imitate any of these examples. Our times, our circumstances, our needs and our capacities are our own. But there are specific lessons that can be drawn from these examples. First and foremost, in each of these instances, those involved chose to put their projects and the enjoyment of their lives before survival, rejecting the blackmail that capitalism imposes. This transforms the means used for acquiring basic necessities into nothing more than tools for constructing our lives and projects. This is the practical meaning of a reversal of perspective with regards to this world. In order to achieve the capacity to do this, in each instance people acted together developing networks of mutual aid and complicity. Of course, the North Beach scene, based mostly on a fairly loose bohemian affinity, faded as the Beat scene disintegrated and many of those involved moved into the mainstream in different ways. The situation that I lived in Portland also eventually disintegrated as some friends chose to drop into a more mainstream existence and the rest of us started exploring different ways toward our shared dreams of anarchy and the fullness of life. Although the last I heard of *Os Cangaceiros* was in the early 1990s, it is possible that they are still living on these same terms — after all, they had been living this way, on their own terms, for over twenty years. Certainly there are other individuals in Europe who have come together for much the same purpose, continuing to develop their ways of living against the ruling order. I think that what distinguishes *Os Cangaceiros* from the other situations is that they clearly recognized what they opposed as a totality of intertwining social relationships that had to be practically fought in its completeness and also clearly perceived their own lives as total projects to create in conscious rebellion against this world for the sheer joy and adventure of doing so.

provised noise on various instruments, handing out flyers inviting people to come join us for an afternoon picnic rather than going back to work. We had stolen a fairly good supply of food and beer — quite a bit more than we ourselves needed. We had a delightful time and received quite a positive response (from smiles to "thumbs-up" gestures to encouraging comments), but I don't recall anyone else quite having the courage to take the afternoon off and join our picnic. Still we had a delightful time, and this event is reflective of the sort of life we chose to live together. Also these activities, a short-lived anarchist coffeehouse that we did in our house and our constant posting of poetic messages of revolt on telephone poles and other places helped us develop a network of connections that kept a fairly decent flow of all the material pleasures of life available. This network, which extended far outside specifically anarchist milieus, provided a good bit of the material basis for how we chose to live. If in North Beach, "what mattered most was poetry, freedom, creativity and having a good time", for us it was rebellion, poetic living, creativity and having a good time. If some of us had a revolutionary perspective that was lacking in the North Beach scene Rosemont describes, at the same time we certainly did not have the clarity about our life projects that *Os Cangaceiros* had. We had amazing utopian dreams, but did not really conceive of our lives as totalities for us to create against the totality of this society. Our visions lacked projectuality except in the broadest sense (and that only among the few of us who were anarchist), and this limited the extent of our projects. Nonetheless, at this time in my life I experienced in Portland something similar to what Rosemont experienced in North Beach, a kind of semi-conscious utopian practice against this world which made life a delight and created some of my closest friendships.

any policemen or prying old women because they'll all be too busy building or making love. We'll stay in our friends' beautiful city as long as we want and not a minute longer; we'll be as free as birds; we'll roam across the entire country; we'll visit streams and caverns and other cities, and in each city we'll find only friends; they'll all beg us to join them in what they're doing and we won't know where to turn first because every activity to which we're invited will seem more gratifying than the rest." Certainly, the capacity to freely roam will play a significant factor in the opening possibilities for chance encounters, as will experiments in creating different ways that human beings can be together, based upon the active creation of our desires.

1 also think of large festivals and gatherings that may last for weeks, based upon the sheer enjoyment of other people rather than on shared ideas — or shared subcultural style. It seems that in certain areas of the world, before permanent trading centers arose, temporary bazaars would be set up in recognized places for trade and other forms of human encounter. Although these bazaars originated in economic exchange, many other sorts of interactions could and did happen there. In addition, Native American powwows are an example of people coming together for larger scale interaction.

A writer who was once interesting (but who has sadly since become disgusting) suggested an area for exploration along these lines: "the importance of the time/space of non-work, which, until the stage of the real domination of society was reached (i.e., before World War II), was one of encounters between individuals as opposed to simply one of recreation. The city represented the space in which the activities of reproducing the labor force were détourned into the streets, cafes, festivals (especially traveling carnivals), dances and music, expressing the existence of individuals who were both unique *and* separated from their social relationships…"

Because I don't have or desire a blueprint for what a decivilized, anarchic society might be like, I would not rule out the possibility of a different sort of large-scale, more permanent gathering of human beings. — something for which we have no words since such gatherings certainly wouldn't be like any city that has ever existed, being free of all the economic, political, religious and military aims or constraints that have been the purpose behind every city since the beginning of civilization. The question of how any of this might manifest is an area for creative exploration and the practical application of imagination. There are numerous sources of inspiration: William Blake, the surrealists, the Diggers, various radical millenarian movements, Native American powwows and villages, the wide variety of festivals that have existed throughout human history. This is a realm for creative dreaming, for considering the broad spectrum of human possibilities and what we could create from it to realize our various and conflicting desires.

On Wildness

The question of human "wildness" demands serious reflection. If it is something that each of us must create, it is also something that can never be created once and for all, definitively. Like uniqueness, it is a concept that has no content in itself. We give it content by the ways we choose to create it, to live it in each moment, and this content changes with each moment. This is why wildness must always remain an unknown, why it cannot be a reduced to a set of skills or an adherence to instinct nor raised to an ideal to which we surrender ourselves. As soon as it becomes something definable, it has been domesticated and is obviously no longer wildness. Sanctified "wildness" ("Wild Nature" or the "Primal Being"), like all gods, is a domesticated beast. This domestication becomes obvious when this beast is used to judge, to determine right and wrong. Those whose "instincts" tell them what

moved them to discover the means for living their revolt, their projects and their pleasures on their own terms, defying the alienation imposed by capital.

My Experience in the Early 1990s

From the time I first encountered anarchist and revolutionary ideas, it was clear to me that they couldn't simply be words tossed from one's mouth into the air. They had to affect how one lived. Thus, my decision to embrace such ideas was a decision to wrestle with how I would live. At this point, I have been wrestling with this for more than twenty-seven years. At various times, I have found others with whom to share this ongoing battle to create my life on my terms. What we created, how consciously we created it and how far it went in expressing our desires and dreams varied, but at no time did I simply give up my pursuit of a life of revolt and joy. Perhaps the most outstanding period of my life happened in the early 1990s here in Portland. In certain ways, what I experienced with specific friends and the networks we developed is reminiscent of Rosemont's description of North Beach in 1960. I moved to Portland at the end of 1991, where I met several people who were to be my closest companions and accomplices for the next few years, and a few of whom remain among my best friends to this day. While each of us had various ways of bringing in the money that we needed to get by, this aspect of our lives was always kept subordinate to our enjoyment, our revolt and our projects. Not everyone among our little group of friends was an anarchist, but everyone, at least for the time, had an irrepressible lust for life that couldn't help but express itself in rebellious way in this society. Our life together involved endless adventures: theft, travels, small attacks against various manifestations of the world we hated, public playful disruptions of daily life. I remember one May Day in which we wandered around downtown Portland through the business district playing im-

> "If we loot banks, it is because we have recognized money as the central cause of all our unhappiness. If we smash windows, it's not because life is dear, but because commodities prevent us from living at all costs. If we break machines, it is not because of a wish to protect work, but to attack wage slavery. If we attack the police bastards, it's not to get them out of our faculties, but to get them out of our lives. The Spectacle wanted to make us appear dreadful. We intend to be much worse."

In pursuit of their ongoing project of revolt and the full enjoyment and experience of life, they used whatever means gave them greatest control over their own lives, means that were often illegal. They refused any sort of meagerness or pseudo-revolutionary asceticism, squatting, for example, in luxury buildings which they armored well against the police. Being of the underclass, they were able to easily develop networks of support that went beyond the limits of any radical connections they had. Their way of living inevitably brought them into conflict with the law and in time started to focus a greater amount of their energy into attacks against the judicial and prison systems. This was about the mid-1980s. At this point they began to call themselves *Os Cangaceiros* (after a group of mystical outlaw insurgents who were active in Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century). They were active at this time in prison revolts, sabotage of prison construction, disruption of judicial activity, escapes and so on. Around 1990, they stole plans for the construction of new, advanced technology prisons, made thousands and thousands of copies of these plans and mailed them with analyses of the prison society to thousands of people. Unlike the previous example, these are people with a conscious revolutionary perspective, developed in the course of an uprising, who decided to go on living that perspective. This decision, rigorously embraced,

ideas are right or wrong, those whose "gut feelings" allow them to judge the choices and behaviors of others on a moral level, are domesticated creatures with domesticated "instincts" and feelings.

Of course, when I bring out what is in the depths of my being, what has been repressed by this civilized society, I do not lose the capacity to make distinctions. But these distinctions are not based on any absolutes, on universal concepts of "right" and "wrong". So I do not make these distinctions by casting absolute judgments, declaring, for example, that "I know in my heart this is wrong". Rather I use my capacity to make distinctions for determining whether something is likely to enhance my existence, increasing my self-enjoyment or not. In this process, I don't merely rely on "instincts" or "gut-level feelings". Rather I use all the tools I have at hand including my capacities to decide, to reason, to plan, to organize my activities, to consciously develop relationships with others with whom I can develop projects.

But I have veered from my main intention which was to speak about "wildness". As I said above, it is an unknown that has to be perpetually created and re-created. Since we have already been civilized and domesticated, it can only be of use to us as that which perpetually negates domestication and this capacity to negate resides precisely in its remaining an unknown, an empty concept which we perpetually fill with our desire to create our lives as our own as it confronts the world that has stolen our lives. Once reified into an ideal to which we must conform and from which we can cast judgments, it becomes a domesticator itself. Thus, its real use is as an iconoclasts hammer for smashing all reified concepts including that of "wildness" itself if that becomes necessary.

Conceived as this indefinable, unknown concept whose content we create in every moment, wildness is nothing more nor less than a poetic way of describing the uniqueness of each of us. For like wildness, uniqueness is destroyed the moment it is defined. It too is an empty concept that we endlessly fill through our perpetual creative activity. And since "wildness" has begun to have more

and more ideological constructions attached to it, perhaps it is better to simply speak of uniqueness as the tool through which each of us can negate the processes of domestication civilization has imposed upon us.

* * *

Subversion is a game of wild, barbarous forces.

Play Fiercely! Our Lives Are at Stake: Anarchist Practice as a Game of Subversion

When I first encountered anarchist ideas in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was quite common to talk about play and the subversive game, thanks to the influence of the Situationist International and better aspects of the counterculture. There is a lot to be drawn from thinking of our practice on these terms. In particular, I think that looking at anarchist revolutionary practice as a subversive game is a fruitful way of understanding anarchist aims, principles and methodologies as a basis for developing our strategies and tactics.

The thing that has distinguished anarchism from other conceptions of radical transformation is that anarchists have generally considered their ideas to be something to live here and now as much as possible as well as goals to be realized on a global scale. While there have certainly been anarchists who have chosen to turn their perspective into mere politics, the idea of living anarchy immediately gives anarchism a scope that goes far beyond such meager visions, opening it to the whole of life.

This aspect of anarchism is what makes anarchist practice resemble a game. Let me explain. A game could be describes as an attempt to achieve a specific aim using only those means that

acting together to guarantee that the ground on which to build their creative projects would be there. In this case, most of the people involved were not revolutionaries or anarchists, but simply individuals who had no interest in fitting into the normal grind of existence in this society.

Os Cangaceiros

We are all familiar with the uprising that happened in France in 1968. One of the slogans that reflected the most radical elements of this revolt was "Never work, ever!", and there were many who took this slogan to heart in the creation of their lives after the uprising was suppressed. One group is particularly outstanding in that their choices reflect a clear awareness that work wasn't simply productive activity or the "job", but rather was an entire system of social relationships. Thus, the refusal of work couldn't simply mean work avoidance or the reduction of work to the bare minimum. It meant creating life in a different manner and attacking the system of social relationships that is work. This group, which came together in Nice in 1968, was made up of "delinquents" already familiar with the world of crime who discovered a revolutionary perspective in the days of insurgence in France. When they first came together to share their capacities and resources for creating life on their own terms, they called themselves the Gravediggers of the Old World. This informal group of comrades traveled first around southern France, making connections taking part in struggles and doing what was necessary to provide the basis for their lives. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s they traveled throughout Europe, participating in revolts, including those in Italy in the mid to late 1970s, in Poland in 1980, in England, France and Belgium in the early 1980s. A statement they made in 1980 indicates the spirit they brought to their revolt:

North Beach, 1960

In the introduction to Dancing in the Streets, Franklin Rosemont describes his experience in the bohemian culture of North Beach, San Francisco in 1960:

> "Life in North Beach was the closest thing to marvelous anarchy it has ever been my pleasure to enjoy. Despite battles with landlords, harassment by tourists, and mounting police terror, the Beats and their allies — old time hoboes, jazz musicians, oyster pirates, prostitutes, drug addicts, winos, homosexuals, bums and other outcasts — maintained a vital community based on mutual aid, and in which **being different** was an asset rather than a liability. In this community made up of people of many different races and nationalities, the practice of equality and solidarity was second nature. Almost everyone was poor, but no one went hungry, and newcomers had no trouble finding places to stay. In North Beach, 1960, what mattered most was poetry, freedom, creativity and having a good time."

This brief description expresses more the general *feeling* Franklin Rosemont had of his experience living North Beach at that time than how this reality worked itself out practically. But those of us who have experienced similar situations can imagine such details, and I feel that Rosemont's evocative description brings out some significant points. In particular, the last sentence stands out: *"In North Beach, 1960, what mattered most was poetry, freedom, creativity and having a good time."* In other words, among the people Rosemont hung out with in North Beach, their creative projects and the enjoyment of their lives were their active priorities, and so they simply did what was necessary to live these priorities,

fit certain conditions accepted by those involved for the enjoyment they find in following these conditions, even though they may lower efficiency. The aim of anarchist practice would be to achieve a world free of all domination, without state, economy or the myriad of institutions through which our current existence is defined. I cannot claim to know what the most efficient way to get there would be. From an anarchist point of view, there has not yet been a successful revolution, so we have no models for efficiency. But those who desire this end, not out of a sense of duty as a moral cause, but rather as a reflection on a grand scale of what they want immediately, for their own lives, petty calculations of efficiency in achieving this end are hardly a priority. I know that I would rather attempt to achieve this end in a way that gives me the immediate joy of beginning to take back my life here and now in defiance of the social order I aim to destroy.

Here is where anarchist "principles" - the "rules" of the game — come in. The refusal to choose masters, promote laws, go to the negotiating table with the enemy, etc. are based on the desire to make our lives our own here and now, to play this game in a way that gives us joy immediately. So we choose these "rules" not out of a sense of moral duty nor because they are the most efficient way for achieving our goals, but rather for the joy we get from living on these terms.

In this light, we can also understand why in the area in which compromise is most forcefully imposed on us — the realm of survival in a world based upon economic relationships, which always opposes the fullness of life — we will choose whatever methods are necessary to keep us alive (how else could we play this game). But we will do what necessity imposes on us in these situations (work, theft, scamming, etc.) as temporary measures for sustaining our capacity to steal back our lives and fight for the world we desire, maintaining our defiance in the face of this imposition. This is, in fact, one aspect of the sub-

versive game in practice, twisting the impositions of this world against it.

Here, I feel it would be good to draw a distinction between the outlaw and the anarchist who is playing the game of subversion. Of course, every anarchist is to some extent an outlaw, since we all reject the idea that we should determine our activity on the basis of laws. But most outlaws are not playing the subversive game. Rather they are centered on the much more immediate game of outwitting the forces of order without seeking to destroy them. For the anarchist revolutionary outlaw, this immediate game is simply a small part of a much greater game. She is making a much bigger wager than that of the immediate "crime". He is grasping his life now in order to use it to grasp the world.

So this game combines the goal of destroying the ruling order so that we can create a world free of all domination with the desire to grasp our lives here and now, creating them as far as possible on our own terms. This points to a methodology of practice, a series of means that reflect our immediate desire to live our lives on our own terms. This methodology can be summarized as follows: 1) direct action (acting on our own toward what we desire rather than delegating action to a representative); 2)autonomy (refusal to delegate decision-making to any organizational body; organization only as coordination of activities in specific projects and conflicts); 3) permanent conflict (ongoing battle toward our end without any compromise); 4) attack (no mediation, pacification or sacrifice; not limiting ourselves to mere defense or resistance, but aiming for the destruction of the enemy). This methodology reflects both the ultimate aim and the immediate desire of anarchist revolutionary practice.

But if we are to consider this practice as a game, it is necessary to understand what type of game this is. We are not dealing with a game in which two (or more) opponents are competing against each other in an effort to achieve the same

transforms the methods by which we meet our needs into tedious tasks stealing our lives away from us (or at best, as in my case, isolated scams that skim the excess off the state without in any way threatening it). In recent times, transformations in the functioning of capitalist social relationships along with a real deterioration in the economy have made precariousness the common experience of most of the exploited, Including ourselves. This has led to a situation in which a number of creative, intelligent people are being forced to eat away their time in search of the means to survive.

My own experience and the often even more nerve-racking experience of a number of close friends and comrades has been causing me to think a great deal about the need to develop ways of giving our lives in their potential fullness and our projects of revolt and enjoyment priority over survival. In other words, I've been asking myself, how do I and those with whom I share ideas, desires, life and enjoyment turn survival into a mere tool for creating our lives on our terms — obviously against the very logic of capitalism.

In confronting this question, for the most part, anarchists have continued to operate on a fragmented, atomized level. Scams, school, temporary jobs and so on are the ways we deal with survival. To some extent this is inevitable. We do live in this world, even if we also try to live against it. And the specific aspects of what we do to survive are less important than whether questions of survival continue to dominate our existence at the expense of enjoyment, revolt and the fullness of our lives and projects. And this is where I feel we need to make a serious effort to get beyond atomization and the fragmented ways of encountering life that this society imposes. I think it is worthwhile to look at experiences of people who have confronted this, whether from a specific revolutionary understanding or simply from a lust for life.

ety. How can we take advantage of such situations in a timely manner? What can we do to help extend the awareness and the rejection of the moral order beyond the moment? How can we expose the various politicians and bureaucrats of rupture — political parties, union leaders, militants and activists - without coming across as another one of that parasitical bunch?

So there is a vast and challenging game before us, one that I believe could make our lives into something marvelous. It is a game we have to play fiercely, because in this game our lives are the stake. There are no guarantees, no sure-fire methods for winning. But for each of us, as individuals, there is one sure-fire way to lose. That is to give in, to resign oneself to what the ruling order imposes. Who's ready to play?

Beyond Survival: Some Thoughts on Giving our Projects and the Enjoyment of our Lives Priority

> *The search for joy is therefore an act of will, a firm refusal of the fixed conditions of capital and its values.—Alfredo M. Bonanno*

Over the past few years, I have noticed that it has been becoming trickier to live my life and carry out my projects in the way that I desire while also managing to take care of my basic needs. And among my friends, I am one of the luckier ones. When I am strapped, I know that it will only last till the first of the next month. In fact, most of the people I know are struggling to get by, to pay the rent and bills, to take care of basic needs and have a bit of fun in the process.

This is no surprise. We all know that we live in a capitalist society, and in our daily lives the essence of that society manifests in the opposition between survival and the fullness of life. The process of alienation by which capitalism is maintained

goal. In such a game, there could be room for compromise and negotiation. On the contrary, the subversive game is a conflict between two absolutely opposed aims, the aim of dominating everything and the aim of putting an end to all domination. Ultimately, the only way this game could be won is through one side completely destroying the other. Thus, there is no place for compromise or negotiation, especially not for the anarchists who are clearly in a position of weakness where to "compromise" would, in fact, be to give up ground.

The aims, principles, methodology and understanding of the nature of the battle at hand describe the anarchist revolutionary game. As with any game, it is from this basis that we develop strategy and tactics. Without such a basis, talk of strategy and tactics is just so much babble. While tactics are something we can only talk about in the specific contexts of deciding what moves to make at specific points, it is possible to speak in a more general way about strategy.

Strategy is the question of how to go about reaching one's goals. This requires an awareness of a certain factors. First of all what is the context in which one is trying to achieve these goals? What relationship do the goals have with the context? What means are available for achieving these goals? Who might act as accomplices in this endeavor? These questions take on an interesting twist for anarchists, because our goal (the eradication of all domination) is not just something we want for a distant future. Not being good christians, we aren't interested in sacrificing ourselves for future generations. Rather, we want to experience this goal immediately in our lives and in our battle against the ruling order. So we need to examine these questions in terms of this dual aspect of our goal. The question of context involves analyzing the broader global context, the nature of the ruling institutions, the broader tendencies that are developing and the potential points of weakness in the ruling order and the areas for potential rupture. It also involves examining the immediate context

of our lives, our voluntary and involuntary relationships and encounters, the immediate terrains that we traverse, our immediate projects and so on. The relationship between what we are striving for and the general context of this social order is one of total conflict. Because we are striving not only to destroy domination, but also to live immediately against it, we are enemies of this order. This conflict is deeply ingrained in our daily lives, in the variety of activities that are imposed on us by the rule of survival over life. So this conflict is central to determining our strategy. Since part of our goal is to grasp our lives back here and now, our means need to embody this. In other words, any means that involves surrendering our grasp on our lives (such as voting) is already a failure. But this is where it becomes necessary to distinguish what activities constitute such a surrender (voting, litigation, petitioning, bargaining with the enemy) and which can be incorporated into the reappropriation of one's life and the attack against institutions of domination (for example, a temporary job, certain sorts of scams, etc., that give one access to certain resources, information and skills that are of use in one's subversive activity). And our accomplices could be anyone, regardless of whether they have a conscious anarchist critique or not, who uses means in their specific battles against what immediately dominates and oppresses them that correspond to our own — means through which they are actively grasping their lives and struggles as their own immediately. And our complicity would last only as long as they used such means, ending the moment that they give up their autonomy or begin to bargain with their rulers.

Having established this basis, here are a few areas for discussing strategy:

Survival vs. the fullness of life - Strategies for continually overturning the dominance of survival over our lives, for making our projects and desires determine how we deal with survival to the greatest extent possible - for example, when one

needs to take a job, using it against the institution of work and the economy through theft, giving things away, sabotage, using it as a free school to pick up skills for one's own projects, always seeing it as a temporary means to ends of one's own and being prepared to quit as soon as one's desire requires it.

Solidarity - There are two distinct aspects to this. 1) There are many flare-ups of social conflict that partially reflect the desire to take back life and destroy domination and that use a methodology like that described above, but without a full conscious critique on the part of the participants. How do we connect our conscious, ongoing conflict with the ruling order to these flare-ups of conflict in a way that fits with our aims, "principles" and methodology? Since evangelism and "moral leadership" conflict with these "principles" by turning us into pawns of a cause that we are trying to promote, we need to think in terms of complicity and straightforwardness. 2) Then there are the times when the enemy grabs some of our comrades and accomplices and locks them up. There is a habit in these situations of falling into a framework of support/social work/charity. In terms of our aims and desires, I think this is a huge mistake. Without denying the necessity in building defense funds and keeping communication open, our primary question is how to turn this situation into a way for attacking the ruling order. The anti-prison activities of the French group *Os Cangaceiros* give some food for thought here.

Small-scale, everyday ruptures - There are events that happen every day on a small scale that cause temporary breaks in the social routine. How can we use these subversively against this order, to expose the reality of this society and to open other possibilities? How can we create such ruptures in a way that undermines resignation and acceptance of normality?

Large scale ruptures — Disasters, riots, local and regional uprisings all cause ruptures that can reveal a great deal about the ruling order and that move people to self-activity, generosity and a temporary rejection of the moral order of this soci-