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Wolfi Landstreicher
Willful Disobedience (Volume 1)
1996–2000

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production. Computers and other office machines also require very specific, restricted motions of the people they use. And the technological methods of Taylorism are even applied to service work, as ten days of hectic wage slavery at Wendy's and several years in janitorial and dishwashing jobs taught me. None of this technology decreases labor. It just reinforces the role of the worker as a passive cog in the social machine.

Even the recreational use of technology – television, computer games, recorded music and so on – is a form of social control. Without even dealing with the social history of these means of entertainment as products of work, one can easily see their role in controlling the activities of people. Through these machines, millions of people take in the ideas and images fed to them, maybe, in the case of computer games, flicking a button or moving a joy-stick in pseudo-interaction with a passively ingested images. None of these passive consumers of entertainment technology are creating their own pleasures, their own interactions, their own lives. None are a threat to authority.

Technology and the civilized environment (urban, suburban and rural) have only one relationship to the creativity of the individual: that of suppressing it. They force it into extremely narrow and confining channels which only allow for the continuing reproduction of society as an ever more controlling and limiting system. In other words, the present society has declared war on unique individuals and their creativity. Within this context, our creative expression must be largely destructive – tearing down the walls, the dams, the channels that constrain us. Destroying the system of social control, including the monstrous technological system and its urban environment which define the non-lives that most people live, is essential to our self-creation, to making our lives our own.

Willful Disobedience

In this section of the site I am bringing together the theoretical articles that I wrote for *Willful Disobedience*, an anarchist zine that I published from 1996 until 2005 with some minor revisions that I have made to clarify my meaning where I felt it was necessary.

Though, inevitably, my ideas developed and went through changes during the nine years that I published this zine (as they continue to do now, since I am still alive), I did have specific aims in publishing *Willing Disobedience*, and these are reflected in the common threads that run through it from the beginning to the end: an anarchism based in Stirner-influenced egoism; an insurrectionary approach that sees individual insurrection in the present as being as important as social insurrection, because only the weaving together of individual insurrections can lead to a truly anarchic social insurrection in which leaders, parties, ideologues and wannabe bureaucrats have little chance of making headway; a *non-primitivist* critique of civilization that provides no program or model for a future society; explorations into a class analysis that rejects marxian categories, prefering to try to understand the actual social relationships operating in the world; an insistence upon the need for anarchists to develop a coherent practice of theory capable of calling everything into question including one's own ideas; and an anti-political perspective that is thus critical of leftism, identity politics and political correctitude.

If looked at carefully, this list of the ongoing threads of thought that ran through the project share the common trait of not offering any easy answers, instead making it clear that each of us has to figure out her own way to take back her life, seeking out accomplices whose rebellions may intersect with his.

When I first began *Willful Disobedience* in 1996, I intended it to be an occasional agitational zine. The first six issues (volume 1) came out whenever I got around to it between 1996 and 2000. The content reflected the agitational intentions (see, for example,

"Without Asking Permission" and "Steal Back Your Lives") and also explains why the selections from volume 1 makes up less than a tenth of the content.

Starting in the year 2000, I decided to make *Willful Disobedience* a regular publication with a news sheet format, including analyses of current events and social revolts, theoretical articles and some agitational material. I published it monthly in this format for a year. This was volume 2, in which I began the series of articles "Against the Logic of Submission". The intent of this series of articles was to examine ways in which the logic of submission penetrates into anarchist circles and to consider other ways of looking at certain questions. After a year on the monthly schedule, I switched to a bimonthly schedule and a typical zine/pamphlet format. I was writing and translating more theoretical pieces, and this was reflected in the content. I finished "Against the Logic of Submission" in the third volume of the zine, and began a new series, "The Network of Domination" which consisted of brief examinations of the institutions and structures that make up civilization.

Factors in my life gradually slowed down my production of *Willful Disobedience* and a the end of 2005, I was done with it, except for the idea of bringing out an anthology of selections from the book. This anthology finally appeared in 2010, thanks to the efforts of some friends with design skills and the folks of Ardent Press.

WITHOUT ASKING PERMISSION

The social system that surrounds us is immense, a network of institutions and relationships of authority and control that encompasses the globe. It usurps the lives of individuals, forcing them into interactions and activities that serve only to reproduce society. Yet this vast social system only exists through the continuing habitual obedience of those whom it exploits.

cially organized interaction with this piece of land. The city takes environmental control still further, creating an artificial environment for the social purposes of defense, commerce, religion and government. Its structure enforces conformity to these purposes. The activities of individuals in such an environment are restricted to specific spaces and to specific sorts of motions and interactions.

The origin of civilization remains a realm of speculation, but its spread is within the realm of recorded history. In light of the restrictions it places on human interactions, it should come as no surprise that historical evidence indicates that it has always only spread by the use of force against the resistance of non-civilized people and that it resorted to genocide when this resistance was too strong. Even in areas where civilization had already been established, there have always been individual resisters – vagabonds treated with distrust by both peasants and city dwellers and often on the receiving end of the violence by which the law is enforce.

But against this resistance, civilization spread. In the fields and in the cities, technology developed and, with it, social control. Architecture developed to create the majestic, fear-inspiring temples to authority as well as the nondescript cubicles that house the lower classes. Economic exchange became too complex to go on without the lubricant of money and with this development, the classes of the rich and the poor were established. The impoverished classes provided people who could be coerced into laboring for the wealthy. And what is their labor? The further development of the technology that enforces social control. Technology cannot be separated from work, nor is it without reason that each step "forward" in the development of technology has meant an increase in the amount of work necessary for social survival. As Nietzsche said, "Work is the best police", and technology is this cop's muscle.

Technology quite literally controls the activities of people in their daily lives. Any factory worker could tell the precise movements one is expected to make so many times each hour on the production line and how nonconformity to these motions can fuck up

TECHNOLOGY: a Limit to Creativity

Technology is a social system. In other words, it is a system of pre-arranged relationships that imposes specific types of interactions of human beings with each other and with their environment in such a way as to perpetuate the system. The development of agriculture is often equated with the rise of civilization because it is the first verifiable technological system to develop. Of course it did not develop alone. At the same time, the state, property, religion, economic exchange, cities, laws – an entire network of integrated systems and institutions developed. Taken together, these are what I mean be civilization and the integral relationship between these institutions must be understood if we are to fight authority intelligently.

Within non-civilized societies, the cultural limits placed on creative expression are often very rigid (there is no use in venerating these societies), but they are also very few. There are still vast areas open for unconstrained individual creativity, vast areas for creating interactions with the surrounding world that are one's own, that are sources of wonder rather than repetition of the same old habitual shit. The limits probably remain so few in these societies, because social control is personal and direct, existing, for example, in kinship relationships and sexual taboos. Little thought is given in these societies to social control of the surrounding environment.

With the rise of civilization, the nature of social control underwent a qualitative change. It became impersonal and, to a large extent, indirect – controlling and shaping individuals by controlling and shaping the environment in which they exist. While the more direct forms of this impersonal social control are the work of the state, religion, laws and education, all openly authoritarian institutions, indirect social control is the work of such subtle authorities as technology, economy and the urban environment.

Agriculture and the city both create a strict connection to a specific piece of land. Agriculture requires a specific, scheduled and so-

While some wait for the masses or the exploited class to rise up, I recognize that masses and classes are themselves social relationships against which I rise up. For it is *my* life as a unique individual with singular desires and dreams that has been usurped from me and made alien in interactions and activities not of my own creation. Everywhere there are laws and rules, rights and duties, documents, licenses and permits… Then there are those of us who never again want to ask permission.

Knowing that the reproduction of society depends upon our obedience, I choose a life of willful disobedience. By this, I do not mean that I will make sure that every action I take will break a rule or law—that is as much enslavement to authority as obedience. Rather I mean that with all the strength I have, I will create my life and my activities as my own without any regard for authority… or regarding it only as my enemy. I do all I can to prevent my life from being usurped by work, by the economy, by survival. Of course, as I go about making my living activities and interactions my own, all the structures of social control move to suppress this spark of life that is my singularity. And so I mercilessly attack this society that steals my life from me with the intent of destroying it.

For those of us who will have our lives as our own without ever asking permission, willful disobedience must become an insurrection of unique individuals intent on razing society to the ground.

PLAY FIERCELY: Thoughts on Growing Up

To become an adult in this society is to be diminished. The processes of family conditioning and education subtly (and often not so subtly) terrorize children, reducing their capacity and will for self-determination and transforming them into beings useful to society. A well-adjusted, "mature" adult is one who accepts the humiliations that work-and-pay society constantly heaps upon them

with equanimity. It is absurd to call the process that creates such a shriveled, mutilated being "growing up."

There are some of us who recognize the necessity of destroying work if we are to destroy authority. We recognize that we need to create entirely new ways of living and interacting, ways best understood as free play. Unfortunately, some of the anarchists within this milieu cannot see beyond the fact that the adult as we know it is socially diminished and tend to idealize childhood in such a way that they embrace an artificial infantilism, donning masks of childishness to prove they've escaped this diminuation. In so doing, they limit the games they can play, particularly those games aimed at the destruction of this society.

At the age of forty, I am still able to take pleasure in playing such "children's" games as hide-and-seek or tag. Certainly, if growing up is not to be the belittling process of becoming a societal adult, none of the pleasures or games of our younger days should be given up. Rather they should be refined and expanded, opening up ever-greater possibilities for creating marvelous lives and destroying this society.

The games invented by those anarchists who have trapped themselves in their artificial infantilism are not this sort of expansive play, or not nearly enough so. Becoming "mud people" in the business district of a city, playing clown at a shopping center, parading noise orchestras through banks and other businesses is great fun and may even be a wee bit subversive. But those who consider these games a significant challenge to the social system are deluding themselves. People working in offices, factories, banks and shops do not need to be taught that there are better things to do with their time than work. Most are quite aware of this. But a global system of social control compels people to participate in its reproduction in order to guarantee themselves a certain level of survival. As long as the domination of this system seems to be inevitable and eternal, most people will adjust themselves and even feel a resigned contentment with their "lot".

So anarchist insurgents need to develop much fiercer, riskier games – games of violent attack against this system of control.

I have been chided many times for associating play with violence and destruction, occasionally by "serious revolutionaries" who tell me that the war against the power structures is no game, but more often by the proponents of anarcho-infantilism who tell me that there is nothing playful about violence. What all of these chiders have in common is that they do not understand how serious play can be. If the game one is playing is that of creating and projecting one's life for oneself, then one will take one's play quite seriously. It is not mere recreation in this case, but one's very life. This game inevitably brings one into conflict with society. One can respond to this in a merely defensive manner, but this leaves one in a stalemate with retreat becoming inevitable.

When one's passion for intense living, one's joy in the game of creating one's own life and interactions is great enough, then mere defense will not do. Attack, violent attack, becomes an essential part of the game, a part in which one can take great pleasure. Here one encounters an adventure that challenges one's capabilities, develops one's imagination as a practical weapon, takes one beyond the realm of survival's hedged bets into the world of genuine risk that is life. Can the laughter of joy exist anywhere else than in such a world, where the pleasure we take in fireworks increases a hundred-fold when we know that the fireworks are blowing up a police station, a bank, a factory or a church? For me, growing up can only mean the process of creating more intense and expansive games – of creating our lives for ourselves. As long as authority exists, this means games of violent attack against all of the institutions of society, aiming at the total destruction of these institutions. Anything less will keep us trapped in the infantile adulthood this society imposes. I desire much more.