MOMENTS OF EXCESS

Movements, protest and everyday life

The Free Association

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ON THE RIOTS IN LONDON, BRISTOL AND GREECE

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN HOLLOWAY

AGAINST LIFESTYLE POLITICS

Looting, arson and organisation

September '11 - January '12

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editorial

As a magazine we have always tried to published commentary on current affairs in movement politics, as well as allowing for undogmatic, critical reflection and debate. Recently this has been particularly challenging; a pattern has emerged for the Shift team over the last year. It goes like this. Develop a concept for the next issue, begin commissioning articles, band around a few ideas for an editorial, and then... seemingly from nowhere, an uprising. Suddenly, the students are smashing up the Tory HQ, Mark Duggan is shot dead by police and riots are spreading across the country and we find ourselves, our ideas, hopelessly irrelevant. Stop press. Change tact.

The riots, and the responses they have elicited (which are depressing both in their mundane predictability and their dystopian surreality), are dominating discussions by left-wing activists up and down the country. Accordingly we chose to adapt the theme of this issue to account for the complexity of feelings, analysis, solidarities and conflicts these riots have inspired. We're not going to re-hash these conversations here; what the events of the last few months have shown us, is that it's not about us any more. It never was. But the idea that 'we' (activists/anarchists/lefties) occupy some privileged vantage point from which we can put the world to rights, with our tried and tested methods and arguments, is more absurd, more irrelevant now, than it ever was. Judy, one of our three new columnists who will be sharing their thoughts on everything from the riots to the persistence of conspiracy theories in the radical left, contends "we need to get over the idea that we already know how to do social change". The idea that we need to give up our identities as activists, our insular anarchist culture and our direct action tactics resonates through all of our contributing articles.

Elsewhere in this issue, Emma Dowling, in her reflections on the heyday of the anti-globalisation movement, stresses the importance of everyday struggle, away from the spectacle of summits, camps and gatherings. It is through this 'everyday struggle' that we recover the agency of our own communities, on a local and global scale. Rather than making demands of the state, of capital, these struggles "act for themselves without the worry of representation and communication of their views and ideals". It is our task now, as John Holloway argues in his interview with Shift, to see the connection between the global struggles against financial institutions and the more localised battles on the streets against police violence or the draw and exclusion of consumer society, "the lines of continuity, the lines of potential, the trails of gunpowder".

The anti-globalisation movement has been described as being unified by 'one no, many yeses'. Can this characterisation, which accounted for the diversity of actors and demands that were present, be applied to the current struggles emerging in the UK, and beyond, in the past year? The student protests, the Arab Spring, the European square occupations of the Real Democracy movement, the UK riots? The gut response of many seems to have been to dismiss the riots as 'not political', in that they represent consumerism, thuggishness and un-channelled rage. Drawing on the anti-globalisation movement as a framework from which to explore the current uprisings, Emma Dowling argues that there was a tendency when reflecting on the summit-hopping movement to overstate the coherence of the participants and that, for the most part, it is only at the level of everyday struggle that we can overcome the divisions and identities that capital enforces on us and that the state uses to pit us against each other. When we consider the overwhelmingly classist response to the 'looting' and the draconian prison sentences they received, it is important to ask, how is it that we feel more solidarity with institutions that exist to control and exploit us, than with our neighbours, peers and friends?

So where does this leave us? It is obvious that not everyone is a comrade, and that the barriers that prevent us from organising and acting together can run deep, stemming from racisms, sexism, nationalisms, etc. Indeed the nationalist elements in the Real Democracy movement and the racism in the UK riots speak to this, but maybe the task is to engage with these struggles rather than to revert into the safety and insignificance of anarchist/activist theorising/direct action/lifestylism. After the riots many on the Left asked, "where were we?", but maybe the problem isn't that 'we' weren't there, but the 'we' itself.

L.W, R.S, J.H.

Raphael Schlembach

insurrection and conservative revolution

some thoughts on the recent riots

"Many people would have experienced these days in early August as empowering, not because of but in spite of the lack of formal demands made to politicians."

1. What if there was a riot and we weren't invited?

The question sums up the dilemma that an undogmatic and autonomous left has battled with since the riots and looting that started in Tottenham early last August.

After the black bloc on 26th March, Parliament Square on 9th December or Millbank on 10th November lat year, collective outbursts of anger on Britain's streets seemed once again inextricably linked to a progressive political project. Riots had become a bit of a romanticised ideal, fostered maybe by the kind of images that Crimethinc & Co have painted of them, by the youtube images of anarchist demonstrations in Greece, or by the battle stories recounted of the resistance to Thatcher's austerity Britain. So when reports came through of burning police cars in Tottenham, many would have had an initial moment of hope and excitement.

The problem was: riots are not always pretty, and do not always follow a clearly-defined political direction. This time, alongside a sense of collective joy, solidarity and youthful energy, they displayed a certain disdain for human suffering.

Most anti-authoritarian responses recognised this complexity. They did not feel the need to state an 'unconditional solidarity' with the rioters, nor did they let themselves be drawn into condemnation. But there is sometimes a tendency to fetishise chaos and violence as being insurrectionary, or even regenerative (in this case it was mainly the SWP that saw the riots as a legitimate and necessary expression of class anger, without – alas – forming a visible street presence themselves; one article in Socialist Worker called for 'All Hail to the Mob'). In an inverted form, the right has been guiltier of fetishising the rioting by focusing on violence as the main expression on the streets those days (neglecting the many other expressions of political anger, togetherness, and solidarity). When a man steals ice-cream from a vandalised shop to hand out to the crowd outside, as reported, this can hardly be explained away as 'violence' or 'rioting'. Or similarly, when a friend was given a few packets of cigarettes by looters coming out of a cornershop, this sounded more like Robin Hood than greed.

2. Conservative fears

A related problematic response to the events was the kind of Schadenfreude that can come along with the phrase 'we told you so'. Nihilistic and apocalyptic visions of an end to law and order can at times accompany insurrectionary theories, and many, secretly or not so secretly, would have taken pleasure in the talk of social collapse.

As insurrectionary literature goes, 'The

Coming Insurrection' is a good example for that kind of language of decline and collapse. The text describes a "permanent state of deterioration" and a "chronic state of near-collapse"; a state of capitalist modernisation that destroys traditional family and community ties.

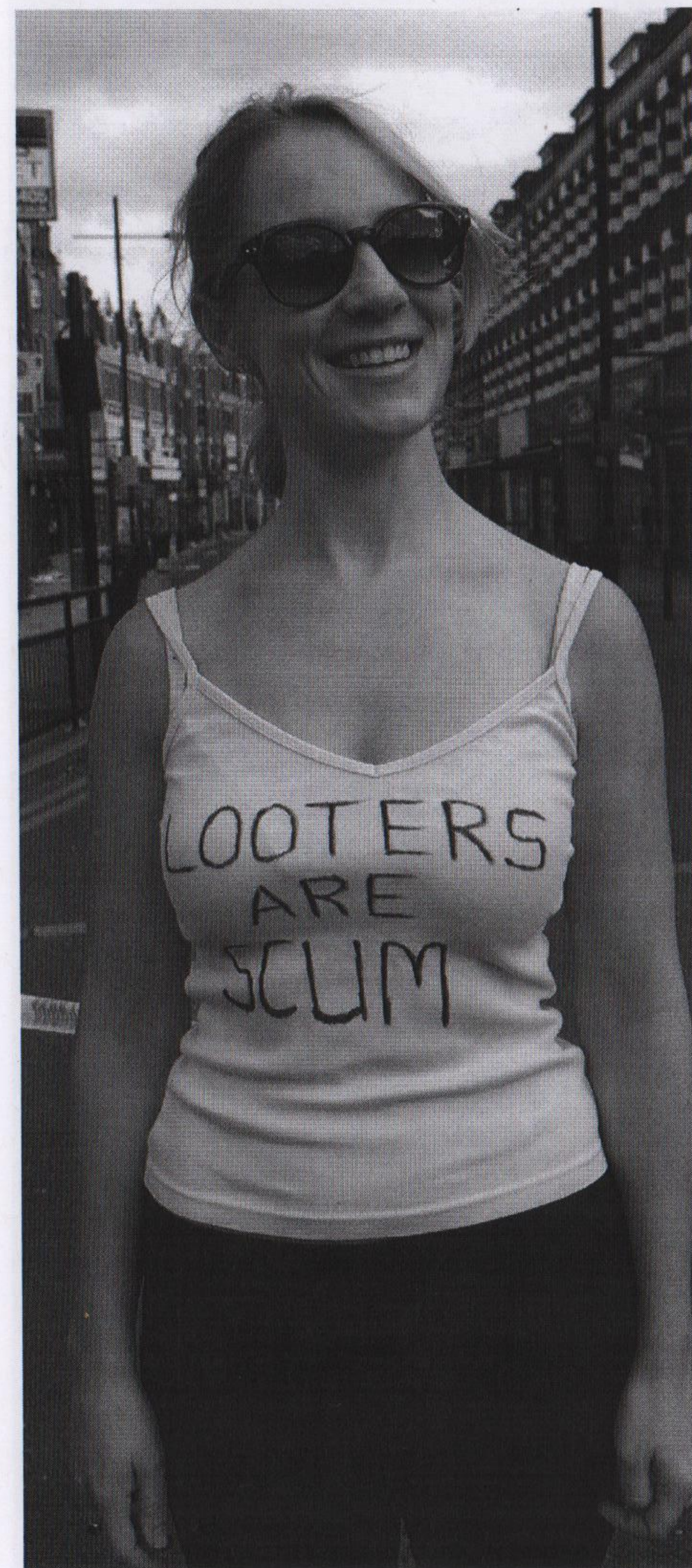
The problem here is that the prediction of social collapse, of decline of community and solidarity, of the kind of values that make society function, is often inherently tied in with a conservative fear of cultural and moral degradation. And this conservatism can sometimes disguise itself as openly radical.

The best example here is probably the 'conservative revolutionary' ideas that spread far across Europe in the early 20th century. These, like sometimes still today, were tales of deterioration and inadequacy of the Western values of social mobility and individual development in the face of a rapidly modernising world and portray a deep-seated pessimism towards progress. Mostly, the conservative revolutionary response was the call for a radical nationalism and chauvinistic authoritarianism. Oswald Spengler's book 'The Decline of the West' is emblematic for this, but many went much further and argued that only a complete radical transformation, a (spiritual) revolution, could reinstall the kind of social bonds that had been destroyed by Enlightenment-type liberalism.

3. More than victims

While a progressive answer to the conservative repression after the unrest is to state its social context of alienation and austerity, there is an inadequacy in the left's demand for more welfare support and better public sector provisions. It's not that these aren't bitterly needed. But it risks becoming a policy of appeasement, a policy that tries to pacify the 'dangerous underclass'. The logical outcome of seeing those engaged in the riots as neglected kids is to look towards the councils, youth services and welfare state for an answer.

So how should an undogmatic and anti-authoritarian movement respond? To begin with, we should probably be wary of treating those involved in rioting, looting, and mugging simply as victims of failed state provisions. To assume so risks being patronising. These kids and their families won't be bought off with a new swimming pool, youth club or basketball court.



It is of course very tempting to 'think like a state'. What would 'we' do if we were in government? How would 'we' redistribute wealth to benefit those that appear worst off? To counter this, many that see themselves as part of an undogmatic left have long argued for a notion of autonomy.

From the perspective of autonomy, the riots are surely political. They assert an agency against the idea that they are merely a reaction against urban poverty. They make no demands, not of the institutionalised left, not of the state, not of capital. They simply act for themselves without the worry of representation and communication of their views and ideals.

So importantly, these riots can be seen as 'more than just riots', with a sense of strength developing, a sense that (young) people are powerful if acting together. As Gus John, veteran chair of the Manchester Black Parents Organisation, says in his new book about Moss Side in 1981: they are "not just disenfranchised by lacking wages through which they can live dignified lives; they are also denied the tools by which they can organise in defence of their lives." Many people would have experienced these days in early August as empowering, not because of but in spite of the lack of formal demands made to politicians.

4. Community and consumerism

The problem for the left is also one made in-house. The values that these riots stand for and the values that the left represents are often fundamentally opposed. The first gap already appears when we look at the notion of community. This has not just been a left-wing buzzword but has received tremendous, and at times mislead, support from anarchist and anti-authoritarian groups. Community-organising has put on the map ideas of rootedness in a locality and belonging to a place.

> **"Annoyingly then, the riots are not political in the sense that we would like to see them. They are destructive without being nihilist."**

In their own way, the riots symbolise an attempt to break out of these communities. Community can be repressive. Community can be authoritarian, based around family and hierarchy, it can be small-minded and insular. Those who are burning their communities, their neighbour's cars, their social housing offices, their local off licenses certainly don't seem to have much respect for this kind of notion of community.

They look much further than the borders of their own estates and neighbourhoods. They present an individualism that cherishes adventure, machismo, and personal advancement. Just like the 1968 rebellion was for many young people also a rebellion against family ties and society's established structures, today's youngsters won't be much inclined to listen to local elders and community leaders.

Annoyingly then, the riots are not political in the sense that we would like to see them. They are destructive without being nihilist. They accept consumerism and entrepreneurialism, even to such an extreme that they are prepared to go to prison for a flat screen TV. These youngsters have chosen consumerist society as the society they want to live in, not the small idyllic communities that so many social conservatives want to imagine. As 'The Coming Insurrection' states so poetically: "They find it more humiliating to work shit jobs than to go to prison". They do not however reject the capitalist promise of a life in luxury.

If we want to detect anything radical in the riots then it is exactly that which is decried as immorality. It is the idea that we won't settle for the scraps of affluent society and be appeased by 'immaterial' values. But the left's task is to show that the consumerist promise in a capitalist system will always be unfair, violent and unfulfilled.

5. Conservative gains

The response to the social unrest of the past few months, including the public sector strikes and the student demonstrations, has been a massive shift to the right, and particularly to a conservative authoritarianism. This was surely to be expected from the usual quarters such as certain tabloid papers and the government coalition. However, this has also included liberal and social democratic commentators as well as the ostensibly non-partisan judiciary.

There has been overwhelming public support for harsher policing, for stronger authoritarian intervention and punishment, even for an outright class war upon the poorest in society. The calls for death penalties, for live ammunition to be used against looters, for benefit cuts for those convicted of petty crimes and their families, are essentially a moral assertion of conservative values.

Our first task is probably to identify and understand this social conservatism for what it is; especially where it hides itself behind a moral positioning against all kinds of deviance from rules and regulation.

A couple of popular arguments spring to mind here. The first follows a familiar, 'progressive populist' line: 'the self-enriching behaviour of bankers and politicians is morally just as deplorable as that of the looters'. It is not just left-wing voices; also the right has made the connection between looting and the MPs' expenses scandal. This is not surprising. The moral populism that demands decency, honesty and altruism from both poor and rich fits perfectly into the conservative framework.

A similar problematic was created by the short-lived appearance of vigilantism in some neighbourhoods and the longer-lasting and much-publicised 'community clean-up' of damaged high streets. Some have stated the principles of mutual aid and self-organisation as reasons for cheerleading such initiatives, and there were indeed some positive community responses in the aftermath. But again there is a more sombre side to this, not only because EDL activists were sometimes in the midst of such activity. The (far) right obviously lays a traditional claim to this sort of self-managed response. Historically, social unrest of the kind we've been seeing has given legitimacy to a vigilantism that is fundamentally racist and classist. As much as we want to see neighbourhoods and communities looking out for each other, there is an inherent view that authorities can no longer protect us from those elements that don't play by the rules.

What we have painfully felt in these days and nights in August is – once again – the lack of organisation of the left. The EDL mobilised hundreds of their supporters onto the streets within a couple of days of the rioting. The main TV stations, including the BBC, were practically calling for martial law. The courts made a mockery even of the idea of bourgeois justice. But it took days before any meaningful left-wing intervention into the ensuing debates. A rare example of in-the-streets organising was a 'Give our kids a future' march through North London.

It is clear that the gap between the left and the urban (black/youth) movements has increased drastically since the Tory years. The riots in 1980/81 were preceded and followed by much organisation, meetings, engagements, anti-racist music festivals and more. Without this connection, it is not surprising that such popular outbursts of anger don't take a more political turn.

Raphael Schlembach is an editor of SHIFT magazine.

Princess Mob

on the stokes croft riots

"the characterisation of the riots as 'anti-Tesco' is simplistic. Tesco's was a focus for a much broader anger."

The question of 'why' people riot seems a hot topic for some. Others of us can't see the mystery: as a man from Liverpool told the Guardian in August, "people are rioting because the riot is finally here." A more interesting question is: what makes the riot arrive at a particular place? People have put forward various explanations for the two riots in Bristol in April, including portraying them as "anti-Tescos riots" or as part of a deliberate police provocation. Both of these explanations fall short. The riots saw pre-existing tensions in the neighbourhood and widespread hatred of the police made visible.

"Stokes Croft"

The idea of Stokes Croft as an area with its own identity is relatively new. It's a few blocks of cafés, bars, small shops and squats branded by one-man lobby group People's Republic of Stokes Croft as Bristol's 'Cultural Quarter'. It's that old story of bohemian edginess, street art and young entrepreneurs as 'regeneration'. That is to say, gentrification. Stokes Croft is also an area with a lot of homeless services and a large population of street drinkers remaining stubbornly despite attempts to move them on through no alcohol zones – not to mention the chaos of party goers spilling from pubs and clubs. It is, despite the branding, an unpredictable and sometimes edgy zone.

Stokes Croft adjoins – that is to say, it once would have been seen as part of – St Pauls, a poor, historically Afro-Caribbean neighbourhood squeezed against the motorway by Stokes Croft in one direction and the recent Cabot Circus mall development in another. St Pauls is famous for the riots that erupted against police harassment and brutality in 1980 (the first of the wave of 1980s inner-city riots). The street that people fought on back then is still known locally as the Frontline.

Round One: Easter

On Thursday 21st April, the day before the Easter long weekend, police stormed a squat known as Telepathic Heights. The colourful three-storey building is directly across from a Tesco's Express store that had opened the week before in the face of a long-running campaign against it. It later turned out that police alleged that someone in the squat had threatened to petrol-bomb the store, though no one knew this on the night. Police blocked the whole road with riot police, many brought in from neighbouring counties. The spectacle of police overkill united squatters and anarchists who had come out in response to news of an eviction with people out drinking, or just trying to walk up the road. Soon there were burning barricades on the street and police were pelted with bottles. As the crowd was driven into St Pauls, many more residents joined in. When police eventually retreated the Tesco's was smashed and looted.

This first riot was a complicated and spontaneous interaction between these different groups. If it was anarchists who first tipped over bins to make barricades, it was other people who first took the chance to throw bottles at police. Over the night hundreds of people participated: what brought the crowd together wasn't Tesco's or the squat eviction, but the presence of police on the streets.

Round Two: The Royal Wedding

The intense police presence continued over the week, with high-visibility policing over the next few days. This worked to prevent any of the groups of people coming to look for a second riot from being able to gather in sufficient numbers. Police attempted to shut down a public screening of riot footage in a nearby park.

Someone on facebook called for a 'peaceful protest' for the next Thursday evening, the start of the special long weekend for the Royal Wedding. The official event was quickly cancelled under police pressure, but word had spread and on Thursday night people gathered outside Telepathic Heights. At first police were very hands-off, clearly trying not to provoke a reaction, and simply directing traffic around the street party that developed. However, sections of the crowd were deliberately provocative and tried to march into the centre of town. People wanted more than a street party. This attempt to move out of

the unofficially designated area brought the riot police and horses out of hiding. A large group of youths from St Pauls also appeared as soon as things got interesting. Again there were running battles and stand-offs in the streets, including an attempt to head into the Cabot Circus shopping area that led to a McDonald's being attacked.

There was more organisation and intent this second week: while still chaotic, it wasn't as completely spontaneous as the week before. Small groups – both anarchists/activists and local youths – were more prepared and coordinated. At the same time, there were more people on the streets explicitly to protest peacefully (against the police, Tesco's or both), and to attempt to intervene against attacks on police. If the first riot gave people just out for a drink the unexpected chance to join in a fight against police, in the second people went with roles prepared: 'rioter' or 'peaceful protester'. Some people say that the divide between people there to riot and people there to keep the peace aligns with a split between newer and long-term residents, but the fact is that there were people from both categories on both sides of the divide.

If it's not about Tesco's, why did it happen?

The political meaning of the 'No Tesco in Stokes Croft' campaign is complicated and beyond the scope of this article. The riots do play a part in that campaign: they've certainly added a new dimension to anti-supermarket campaigns generally. They've also probably added to Tesco's determination to keep the Stokes Croft store open, even when it's clearly losing money: they don't want to give the impression that rioting and looting a store is an effective technique. To their credit, the public faces of the anti-Tesco's campaign tried to assimilate the riots rather than distancing themselves from it. However, the characterisation of the riots as 'anti-Tesco' is simplistic. Tesco's was, if anything, a focus for a much broader anger.

Many people on the streets the first night guessed that the spontaneous demonstration that developed was somehow related to the Tesco's, or were outraged at the sense that such a heavy police presence was being deployed to protect a supermarket. But it was the police presence rather than the store that was the catalyst. The attempt to define the riots as an anti-Tesco's protest points to a belief that such a disturbance has to be 'about' something particular: that we have to have legitimate demands (even if we go too far expressing them). However, the clearly expressed desire to take to the streets and fight police should not have to be explained. As a statement released by some anarchists afterwards put it: "When asked by a young person 'What are we protesting about?' moments before she hurled another rock at the police, we couldn't help but feel like she had answered her own question."

'Why did it happen?' - against conspiracy

There's a current of thought that's determined to believe that these riots were a set-up: that police deliberately provoked a reaction in order to justify future attacks. That is, that those who fought the police were in fact mere pawns of the police.

"If it was anarchists who first tipped over bins to make barricades, it was other people who first took the chance to throw bottles at police."

On the face of it the police actions do seem almost unbelievably stupid. Blocking a busy street in an entertainment area the night before a long weekend? But our analysis has to allow for the fact that the police force can be stupid rather than assuming that it must be vastly calculating. The credibility of the story that someone was planning on petrol-bombing Tesco's is shaky. But it's easy to see that police would either believe the story (as told to them by a Tesco's security guard) or at least feel that they had to take the possibility seriously just in case. And if their intelligence, flawed as it may have been, said that arson was threatened at that time, they'd look pretty bad if it did happen while they waited for a more convenient time to prevent it. And once they were planning to raid a three-storey building that might have molotovs in it, it's logical that it becomes a

major operation. The cost to police – in resources and in public relations – of calling in reinforcements and shutting down a street is less than the cost of having an officer killed or injured by a potential firebomb wielding maniac.

Yes, it was political policing: an attack on a squat that was a source of trouble for an unpopular new supermarket and was already due for eviction. And, yes, it was an over-the-top reaction. But the thing is, targeted, over-the-top policing is normal. It doesn't have to be a conspiratorial aberration that police are on the street being violent thugs. For all of the sophisticated English illusion of 'policing by consent', and for all of the effective use of soft policing tactics, the fact remains that the smiling bobby is always backed up by violence. For some people this naked force is only visible sometimes and appears as a surprise. The widespread attacks against police in the wave of August rioting suggest that many people are all too aware of police violence.

It's similarly argued that police deliberately left Tesco's unguarded on the night of the first riots, thus allowing it to be looted. However, up until that point the sole focus of attention had been the police. Police withdrawal – leaving the crowd with nothing to kick against – was actually a sensible strategy.

The conspiratorial view rests on the ideas that the police behaviour was something extraordinary that needs to be explained and that police gained more from the riots than they lost. Or that we lost more than we gained. But how do you weigh up the anti-riot backlash, the anti-police backlash, the people imprisoned and going through court, the hundreds of moments of individual liberation, a broken charity-shop window, a few packets of looted cigarettes, all the energy expended on defendant and prisoner solidarity, the friends who've left town after having their pictures printed, the moments of connection on the street between people who were otherwise strangers or enemies but found themselves fighting back together?

If the police gained more support for harsh measures (from a sector of the populace that broadly supported them anyway), they also gained a few hundred people with a taste for rioting. People clearly learnt – for example, about masking up - from one week to the next. When people rioted again in August on the same territory (with more successful attacks out of St Pauls into Cabot Circus), lessons, alliances and strategies learnt in April were put into play. Even if the conspiracy theories are right and when we thought we were acting on our own desires we were actually fulfilling some vast state game, I don't think it's working out for them.

'Princess Mob' lives in Bristol. A group called Bristol Defendant Solidarity has came together in the wake of the riots: http://bristolabc.wordpress.com/defendant-solidarity/

View from Leeds

After months of seething generalised grumbling against the Met, the Murdochs, MPs and other less whitewashed elements of neoliberalism, it seemed the Summer of Discontent was finally upon us.

Unfortunately, the rage of the underclass youth wasn't as class targeted, and was a lot more of the 'burn working class homes variety' than we originally dreamt. Worse, the public's backlash against this uprising belied all our fears giving free rein to ludicrous and terrifying sentences for things as inane as Facebook Status Updates. The cheers for curfews, increased social media control, and evictions for families of those suspected of being a bit naughty – it's like a night where the drugs didn't work but we still got the Mother of all comedowns anyway.

And where are we exactly? Instead of shrieking from the sidelines we're merely stuttering instead. Whilst serious respect goes out to those comrades who were stopping families being burnt alive or making sure the kids knew the magic words NO COMMENT, many of 'our movement' was battling it out on anarchist forums as to whether there should or should not be (theoretical)unconditional support for the rioters – Oh Glorified Other! - regardless of what they did, or holding veganism workshops at the Earth First! Gathering.

There might well be comfort in a subcultural periphery zone, but facing the complexities and compromises of everyday struggle is the only way we're going to reclaim any sort of street or any sort of story. There's some hard and tedious work to be done building connections and breaking down fear. There is potential for something new and beautiful in the next few months but if we remain frozen within a wasteland of ideological irrelevancy we won't be seeing the communist Christmas we've all been dreaming of.

Tabitha Bast, 08/2011

Interviewed by Ben Lear

an interview with occupied london

"for us, these all show us that peoples' conceptualisation of what is possible has changed, once and for all"

This interview follows our review of Occupied London's new edited book 'Occupied London: Revolt and Crisis in Greece'. The book deals with the uprisings in Greece in 2008 that followed the police assassination of a young man in Athens.

Can you briefly explain to our readers what the Occupied London project is and where the inspiration for editing this book came from?

Occupied London started off as a free anarchist publishing project in London in 2007. We felt that at the time neither of these was happening in the city often enough, so we strove to create a journal that would try and overcome the boundaries of anarchist discourse both in, and for the city; that would try going to print in spite of the digital times in which it lived; that would remain free despite the culture of commercialisation encroaching it.

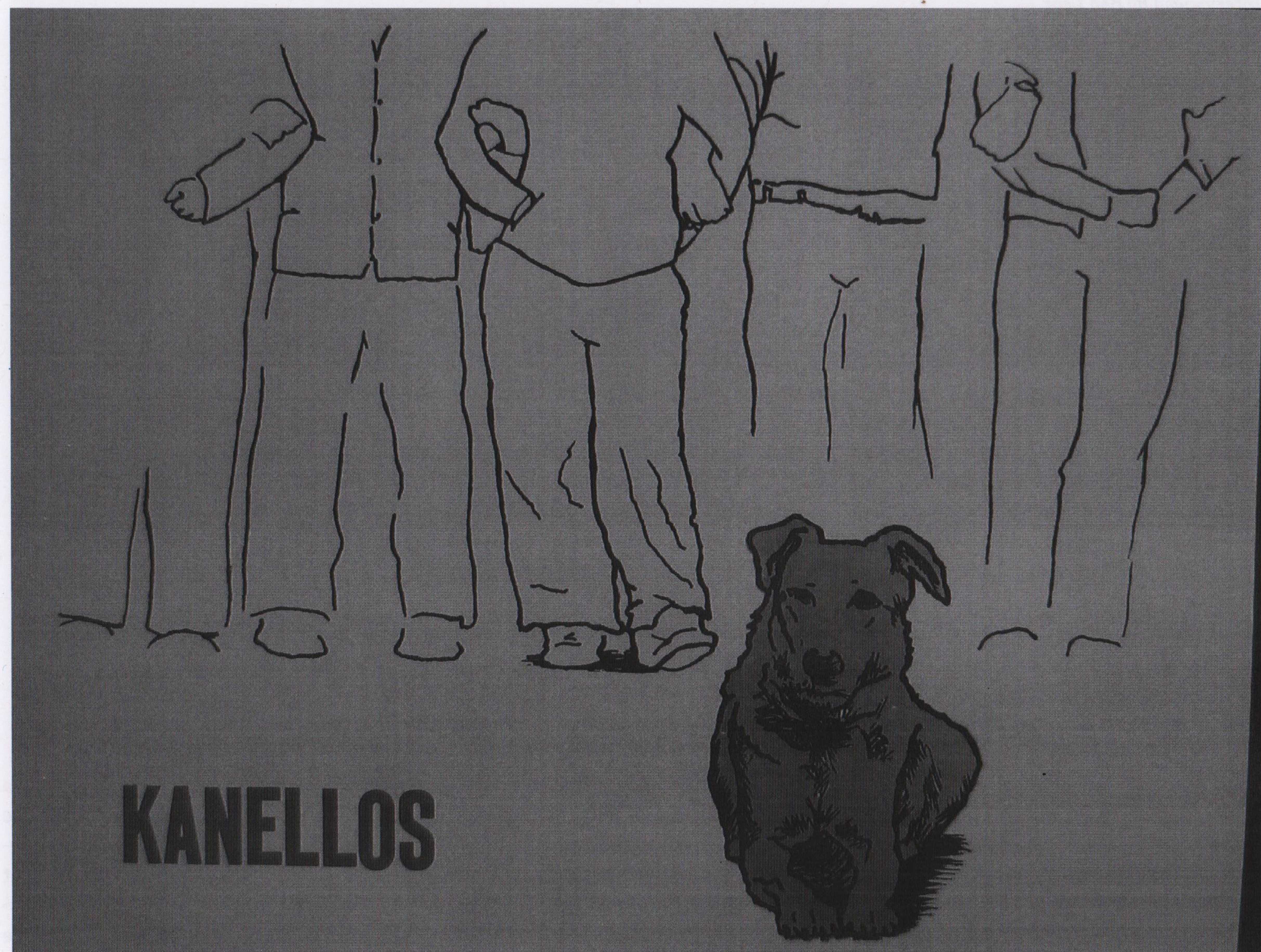
We also wanted to take a look at issues of urbanisation surrounding us globally and soon enough many of us found ourselves returning right where we had started from, that is, the anarchist movement in Greece. As we saw and lived the revolt of December 2008 and its aftermath we felt the urge to document what had happened and the traces of the revolt in our everyday lives. That is how the idea for the Occupied London blog and eventually the book came about.

As important as the 2008 December uprising was, of equal importance (if not more) are the possibilities which emerged out of this event. Several of the chapters discuss this legacy, could you briefly discuss the ways in which the December uprising has translated into more long term political projects?

A revolt – a rupture in normality-so-far – would be nothing without this rupture marking a longer presence into peoples' everyday lives. The uprising of December is no exception to this rule. Apart from anything else, the rupture of the winter of 2008 has armed many people with a strong belief in the effectiveness of the politics of the everyday: from neighbourhood assemblies (relevant, more than ever, at the time of the supranational IMF rule) to concrete interventions at a local level (the self-organised parks in Exarcheia and in Patisia, Athens standing as prime examples) to the spontaneity and the dynamic nature of particular actions (such as the impromptu street confrontation and attacks on one third of all the MPs signing the IMF agreement to date). For us, these all show that peoples' conceptualisation of what is possible has changed, once and for all. And we can only thank December for that.

Some of the most interesting sections of the book challenge the existing anarchist movement to move beyond its current limits, discussions which resonate equally well here in the UK. Is there much willingness within the Greek anarchist scene to move beyond its limits and how successfully is this being translated into practice?

It would be very convenient (or perhaps even relieving) to say so – that the anarchist movement has kept up with pushing beyond current limits or, in other words, that it has kept up with what it has always been, at least for as long as we've known it: a transformational movement, a movement at the boundaries of society that is willing and ready to push things to an extreme, an awakening force at the time of the ultimate hypnosis, the comfortably numb financial prosperity of the nineties. Sadly, to say so today would mostly be a



lie. We saw a cataclysmic change in social order as we had known it, with the IMF/ EU/ECB deal changing the existing landscape of power for good. And yet the response from the ground – for the best part – has mostly been 'business as usual'. This glaring disparity could not possibly last long and, sure enough, it revealed itself and collapsed during the Syntagma Square mobilisations. The birth of the square occupation movement saw the anarchist movement split right down the middle: on the one side, the tendencies unwilling to give up what they had carefully cultivated and protected as a subculture surviving in the midst of a wild capitalist euphoria during the nineties. On the other side, a tendency that was willing to join, or at least stand close to some emerging forces that were trying to challenge the newly formed status quo. It is not possible to judge if the second has been successful, not quite yet – since history's page has yet to turn. It is only possible to judge who has at least tried to turn it.

The book deals with the event that was December 2008 and the potentials that have been opened up in its wake. Can you discuss the relationship between the anarchist movement and the recent struggles born in response to a new round of EU and IMF loans, most notably in Syntagma Square? Is there a connection between the "indignados" movement and the anarchist movement?

It is by now impossible to talk of a single stance of the anarchist movement in relation to these emerging struggles. It would therefore be more logical to talk about our own position, since we collectively participated in the Syntagma movement in a number of ways. The anarchists who participated in Syntagma had several reasons to do so. For many, it started off with the fairly straightforward wish not to see the mobilisations hijacked by fascists and other reactionaries – and the only way to achieve this would be by being present there and take action when such practices would occur.

Yet beneath this, there was a much larger opportunity to be grasped: the Syntagma mobilisation was a very dynamic and profound situation which had vast political potentialities not only in resisting the government effectively but also in forming a completely new political condition in the aftermath of this movement: we saw genuine popular general assemblies attended by four, five thousands at a time; we saw a near complete consensus against police and corporate media, and so on. Direct democracy is obviously not a panacea, as it is a practice that does not necessarily formulate the content: for example, an assembly could potentially decide, in a very direct democratic manner, for the most fascist things in the world. And yet, the daily assemblies in Syntagma were constituted by people who for their largest part would not tolerate racist and fascist statements or practices.

After all, rallying, marching and occupying Syntagma Square in Greece is an action that is symbolically linked with previous counter-establishment revolts that primarily originate from the far Left: the building housing the parliament in Syntagma used to house the palace before and has always been both the symbolic and actual centre of state authority. So the occupation of Syntagma Square had several anti-establishment implications from the beginning.

"direct democracy is obviously not a panacea...an assembly could decide, in a very direct democratic manner, for the most fascist of things"

This movement in itself was also hostile toward both State authority and the government. At the same time it was very inclusive and massive, with weekend gatherings peaking at 200,000 or 300,000 people. The majority of these people had never taken to the streets before. These newcomers – new political subjectivities – got a first hand experience of what State and police repression really meant during the Syntagma mobilisations. Naturally, the plexus of power of course did not discriminate and used its all-time classic repression, including corporate media propaganda, and the rest of the tactics that had been used for years against anarchists or far Leftists. These are the same tools that have always been used against the enemy within. It is just that this time, this enemy was too large and too inclusive. And so, many people saw their illusions about authority collapse. An old anarchist slogan in Greece claims that "[political] consciousness is born in the streets" - this time round, consciousness was born in the squares too.

From here in the UK the recent spate of struggles seem complex and chaotic, whilst many support the protest uncritically others are keen to highlight the role that nationalists and even fascists are playing. How prominent is the nationalist position within current struggles in Greece?

This question will inevitably link back to the previous one and the split of anarchist reactions to the Syntagma movement: indeed, several anarchists refused to be linked to Syntagma because nationalists were there too.

The Greek government and corporate media obviously played an old card, that of evil foreigners wanting to take advantage of Greece. "We are all in this together", they say, or "we all have to tighten the belt", as the expression would go, "because the country is under attack". It is true that the supposed "rescue" agreement eliminates some of the most basic principles of the so-called national independence, which was one of the illusions nourished by the Greek state for years in order to achieve social peace. So yes, there were nationalists waving Greek flags in Syntagma or people who just considered it unfair not to be governed by Greek passport holders but by "foreigners". But at the same time, a lot of these people do understand that what matters is not where a capitalist comes from, but that they ruin their lives. It is just that right now these bankers, speculators, capitalists, their political personnel and the rest of their gangs overdid it and stopped throwing to the rest even those crumbs they did before.

Puting aside those conscious nationalists who think that Syntagma is matter of national revolution, of the people there some would wave a Greek flag because they had no other flag to identify with any more – we don't think that's positive, but it doesn't make these people de facto nationalist, let alone fascist. The social dynamics there are far more complex than that. An example? On 27th June, anarchists marched to the square, fly-posting and chanting anti-fascist and anti-nationalist slogans. When they would chant slogans such as "In Turkey, Greece and Macedonia, our enemy is in the banks and the ministries" or "national unity is a trap", thousands would be clapping along, waving their Greek flags to the rhythm of the anti-nationalist slogans! Very

surreal, but also very typical of the fluid and complex new political subjectivities that emerged during the crisis.

“a lot of these people do understand that what matters is not where a capitalist comes from, but that they ruin their lives”

This is not to underestimate the nationalist potentialities of the Greek flag, nor to say that it is OK to participate in actions along with Nazis. In early June, during the Athens gay pride, some fascists in Syntagma Square tried to interfere in the parade – and anarchists were there to fight homophobia and Christian Orthodox ideals about sexuality and so on. Similarly, during the general strikes of 15th June and 28-29th June fascists who were spotted in Syntagma were beaten up and the riot police came to their rescue, attacking antifascists in order to save them. Yet at the same time, on 15th June fascists tricked a lot of other demonstrators into thinking that anarchists were undercover police officers and some anarchists were attacked as result.

This is all to say that the situation is extremely fluid; we must be extremely vigilant in dealing with and distinguishing between fascists and people just waving a Greek flag, as these are not the same. At the same time we should also be extremely alert about the nationalist elements incorporated in Syntagma: after all, it is possible that some of the people there participated in the anti-migrant pogroms of May 2011.

With the movements now leaving the squares and entering the neighbourhoods how will this affect the form and content of the struggles around the austerity package? Is it even possible to speculate on what is likely to happen in the next few months, let alone year?

It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible to speculate what might happen. One because this would amount to a prophecy and prophecies fail the prophets, and second because the situation changes so rapidly and the daily life in Greece at the moment is so fluid that just about everything is possible. Three months ago nobody would even imagine the Syntagma movement would ever happen; and two years ago we wouldn't have been able to imagine Greece ever getting an IMF loan. At this present moment, it seems that the local (neighbourhood) assemblies have got a huge boost thanks to the Syntagma movement; new ones were formed and the previously existing ones became more empowered and received more social legitimation.

We think that the move away from the square and into the neighbourhoods was a great idea that came out of the Syntagma assembly and kept being mentioned nearly every night during June. The question now is how to sustain the momentum during the very difficult winter that is coming and how to transform direct democracy into radical action. Both are necessary in order to challenge the establishment: the people's assemblies via creating an antagonistic socio-political formation and radical actions directly on the streets - especially now that the Greek police are becoming increasingly militaristic and the government passes new laws for the repression of any form of dissent. A final element that we consider important is that of materiality: how will the assemblies address the material issues of everyday life as these emerge during this crisis, how will they pick alternative/antagonistic economic practices and how will they establish more fixed and permanent material infrastructures across neighbourhoods?

This interview was conducted in July/August 2011 by Ben Lear, who is an editor of SHIFT magazine

View from Nottingham

The current crisis of capitalism and attendant death-throes of neoliberalism have made it increasingly uncontroversial that the ruling class' claims to manage capital as our representatives are illegitimate, and that contemporary capitalism does not work in the interests of any but a few. Other than the increasingly desperate ruling class whose whitening hands clutch at the tiller, few now believe that neoliberalism has anything to offer beyond deepening crises.

People are angry. Unrest has escalated and detonated in the past year across Europe. Things balloon quickly, beyond anyone's predictions or control. Tens of thousands of people suddenly show up and kick off in ways which would have been declared impossible twelve months ago. The whiff of radical political change is in the air – but where are we?

We're kicking our heels quietly in a corner. Our pretensions of expertise in social change are now even more laughable than they were a decade ago, when our tactics first came up against their limitations, curled in on themselves and began to wither. The conditions under which many of them were formulated have changed so substantially as to make them obsolete.

Now is the time for us – or more specifically, our politics - to flourish. This is the kind of situation in which our politics can resonate; in which we could have an impact far beyond our numbers, and help bring about an epochal shift.

First, though, we need to get over the idea that we already know how to do social change.

We need a collective critical reflection to invent new ways of organising and resisting. We need to recognise our past as such, draw lessons from it, jettison our maxims, and create something different, to become as politically exciting and vibrant as the times we're living through. So let's get on with it.

Judy, 08/11

www.glowfallover.tumblr.com

Lauren Wroe and Josie Hooker

give up lifestylism!

'Ethical lifestylism', or the practice of adapting one's individual lifestyle habits (where you shop/eat/work) as a means of promoting or facilitating social change, has always been something of a bug bear for SHIFT. However as the political climate transforms, with uprisings in the UK, Europe and the Arab world, we want to return to this critique as we consider how to relate to and act with the struggle against wide-scale economic and political crisis. Do our old methods and tactics still stand up to the challenge? Arguably they never did. This article will lay the way for a series exploring the relevance of lifestyle politics in the current political climate.

Back in 2007 we attended the climate camp at Heathrow airport. The camp set out to tackle the root causes of climate change, and as difficult as it is to determine where these factors manifest and how best to tackle them (especially when you are tied by the camp/direct action model) camping outside large infrastructure targets seemed as good a choice as any. The political focus at this camp was often directed toward corporate expansion and profiteering and the subsequent and unnecessary short-haul business flights, rather than holiday makers on their two week package holiday from work. However we felt the choice of airport as target was in some ways a symptom of, and could all too easily slip into, an attack on flying as a holiday/'lifestyle' choice and quite often it did (see SHIFT Editorial Issue 1 and Jessica Charsley's article in the same issue 'Climate Camp- Hijacked by Liberals'). We felt that this failed to acknowledge the dimensions of class and privilege that make it harder for some people to take a 4 week holiday in a bus to southern Spain rather than booking a budget flight to accommodate for their kids and their 7 days off work. This isn't to glorify the limitations of work and money, but rather to acknowledge class and privilege as barriers that must be overcome, rather than reinforced, by radical political movements (see 'Climate Camp and Us', SHIFT, Issue 7).

We used the term 'lifestyle', then, as the focus of these actions were usually highly individualised, isolated acts in which a person made decisions on how they live their lives, within capitalism, in a more ethical or moral fashion. It is the individuality of these actions, their ignorance of the social dimensions of capitalism, that we found problematic, rather than the 'everyday' level at which the actions are taken. It can be argued that these actions are empowering, allowing the individual to regain control of their lives, but often it seems to result in division and finger-pointing; pinning the blame for social problems onto each other whilst letting the structural factors off the hook.

There is also an assumption here that social change will come about as more people realise the error of their ways. But the demands made by those advocating more ethical lifestyles are often impossible escapes, further trapping us into the work, consume, logic of capital. They are often easily co-optable/tolerable forms of resistance. This is not to say that skipping, shop lifting, skiving (to name a few) are not meaningful actions; it depends on the context and the manner in which they are carried out. For example thousands of people shoplifting in a non-identitarian, collectively politicised way, could potentially be very powerful (think of the radical and popular auto-reduzione movement in Italy)!

However there is often a strong element of 'turning one's back on society' characteristic of collective 'lifestyle' projects, housing co-operatives being an example. Whilst these mutual aid networks can be a vehicle for exploring new ways of housing and organising ourselves, if we retreat into these communities as 'viable alternatives' to capitalist reality, we run the risk of isolating ourselves from the reality of capitalism and the everyday struggles of work, housing and community. They are powerful tools if they remain engaged and antagonistic and don't become mere havens for 'radicals' and hippies. Along with many other lifestyle choices, veganism, squat-

ting, etc, we have to acknowledge that these are havens for *us*, not everyone's idea of autonomy from capitalism would look the same.

When we fail to acknowledge this we are guilty of a kind of ethical vanguardism, peddling the idea that we could live better lives within capitalism, if only we could be bothered or were educated enough. There is also pseudo-religious, sacrificial element here, that we are the martyrs for social change, but considering the often subcultural irrelevancy of our actions our sacrifices and preaching often fall on deaf ears anyway. When we make these sacrifices we are, in fact, not martyrs; we are further reinforcing our identities as 'activist' and 'anarchists', this is our haven, this is where we fit (un-problematically) into society.

As we see it then lifestylism as we describe it here is a tendency that emerged in a very specific context. In recent years it has represented, at best, an accentuation (in de-politicised form) of the New Left tendency towards identity politics; or perhaps a certain inertia vis-à-vis the absence of an exciting politics to replace that of the anti-globalisation movement or, with the mainstreaming of environmentalism, that of the radical green movement. At worst, however, it embodies the gravest shortcomings of identity or "new social movement" politics stripped of all radical (or even properly political) content.

The heady unraveling of crisis after crisis following the collapse of Lehmann Brothers in 2008 has of course transformed this landscape beyond all recognition, bringing structural factors to the fore in a way that the anti-capitalist wing of the climate movement could do only on limited terrain. Gone is the consensus that 'There Is No Alternative' (to capitalism) – and even the seemingly unshakeable paradigm of liberal democracy has taken unprecedented blows to its legitimacy in recent months. In short, politics – that is, possibility – is back! And it hardly takes a Marxist or a class war veteran to point out that this return of the political has been closely associated with the return of class as a serious political issue.

With the very fundamentals of our social organisation in question and the re-emergence of class-based politics, then, the inadequacy and irrelevance of the lifestylism into which our [the authors'] political generation was born is laid bare. Indeed, we imagine that our readers need little reminding of the fact that the recent ruptures (which, as we write in the wake of the August riots and the victory of the Libyan rebel forces over the Gadaffi regime, only seem to increase in pace and intensity) have had very little to do with the practices that we identify here as lifestylist: with living in a housing cooperative, consuming ethically or belonging to a minority subculture. Indeed, in this climate where "the alternative" is on the lips of hundreds of thousands of people, the alternative that an ethical lifestyle supposedly embodies (that old, self-satisfied call to 'be the change!'), not surprisingly, has very little traction.

So why, then, the continuing attention to what we can all agree is an obsolete practice? The answer, for us, is two-fold. Firstly, the allure of ethical choices and lifestylist solutions is still strong. With increasing pressure to find 'answers' to our present predicament, it's not surprising we look to our existing repertoires and their cut-out templates: when asked at a protest "so what is there if not capitalism?", we might offer the example of workers' coops. However, while important on their own terms (and the strengths and limitations of autonomous institutions and infrastructure is something we'd like to address in this series), these alone will not topple capitalism: indeed, taking (always limited) 'control' of our own exploitation is very different from abolishing capital/value as the root of the labour relation. Similarly, if we recognise lifestyle choices for what they are – that is, expressions of personal preference for a particular brand of freedom (the freedom we call autonomy) that can make our lives under capitalism more palatable – there is also a danger that in these harsh times we retreat inwards to these comfortable islands that shelter us materially (or however else) from the raging storm beyond. Yet this alluring comfort zone isn't only material. If we recognise activism as a lifestyle/identity in itself, there is surely also the danger that, faced with the disorienting new political climate (and the associated identity crisis of identity politics), we cling to that identity in a bid for status and security.

The second motivation for insisting so heavily on the exorcism of lifestylism speaks to the question posed by various contributors to this issue of SHIFT: 'where are we?' Because the ruptures of the past months and years have not only revealed, as we've argued above, just how heavy a price has been paid for our departure from the traditional left in the post-1968 period (in terms of a dislocation from class politics). They have also been a clear reminder of the weakness of the traditional left (testament, then, to the necessity of the departure in the first place): indeed, from the cowardice of the NUS leadership last November to the glaring failure of the unions to generalise the J30 strikes, more and more people are experiencing this inadequacy first hand (betrayal has indeed been a defining experience for the new 'Millbank generation').

In the present climate of social unrest and political possibility the stakes have therefore never been higher. Yet if we have the ambition in us to believe in an autonomous, radical left worthy of its name, we must be sure that the question 'where are we?' is interpreted as we intend it: as a criticism not of our absence, but of our tendency to assume the importance of our presence, regardless whether the latter takes a politically adequate form. Because for us 'where are we?' is patently NOT an invitation to head into the fray armed with vegan curry for the masses, to bicycle our way to global communism or to advise the rioters on how to source their loot ethically. Neither, though, is this call to a 'we' meant as a re-assertion of the identity into which we users of the 'activist toolkit' tend to fall. Indeed, the final lesson that recent events have given us is that we perhaps didn't go far enough with our critique of lifestylism and ethical choice first time around: it was all too easy to make jibes at those environmentalists whose "radical" credentials amounted to nothing more than the appropriation of direct action to ends of state and consumer lobbying in favour of individualist, lifestylist solutions. Targeting this unapologetic liberalism was perhaps a straw man that allowed us to cut short the critique of a practice that was perhaps too close to home: that is, activism as a lifestyle itself.

It is in this spirit that we wanted to publish this series. We wanted to remind ourselves of the dangers of the activist identity, and the lifestyle that goes with it; because it is these that present such an obstacle to our entering into the process of creation of a new politics. We [the authors] believe that there is a role here for the radical, undogmatic left, but only if the latter stands for more than an identity or a set of lifestyle choices; only if it is willing and able to formulate and promote positions that are adequate to the politically complex – and increasingly dynamic – world we inhabit. Give up lifestylism! Give up activism!

Lauren Wroe and Josie Hooker are editors of SHIFT magazine.

View from London

We've all been there, putting the world to rights with someone that seems intelligent until that awkward mention of the Illuminati. Like listening to a song's sublime lyricism exposing police brutality, ghetto voices for the voiceless, then a line about the NWO. Damn! Why are conspiracy theories so popular? Having been involved with some of the major players of the UK Hip Hop scene this is a scenario that is all too common.

Culturally Hip Hop is rooted in socially conscious politics, far from a homogeneous art form with many varying strands (gangsta, religious, conscious rap), the one unifying factor being an unhealthy infatuation with conspiracy theories. Maybe the Five Percenters, an offshoot of the Nation of Islam, holds some responsibility for its influence on Hip Hop's early development. But this would ignore the wider popularity of conspiracism that has exploded since the advent of the internet.

Which is a great shame; many well meaning enthusiastic people get lost down the rabbit hole, masquerading simplistic hypotheses as intelligence, while lacking any knowledge of the historical development of the Conspiracy Ideology. Its origins, as an answer to comprehending the French Revolution, replaced an understanding of how mass popular uprisings can overthrow authority, with a belief in elite secret societies dictating the course of history. An ideology that has been courted by both Left and Right, influenced with virulent anti-Semitism, racial supremacy and paranoia, producing venomous individuals like Hitler, Farrakhan, Stalin and Ahmadinejad. To be revolutionary it's enough to rant about the Illuminati, H.A.R.R.P and 9/11 being an inside job. This does a great disservice to what has always projected itself as a progressive cultural form with revolutionary potential, keeping itself trapped within an ideological ghetto, while rationality and real social change remains ignored. Ultimately it keeps back all poor communities from breaking the chains of their circumstances that the very real conspiracy of capitalism and the class system has shackled them in.

Greg Hall, 08/11

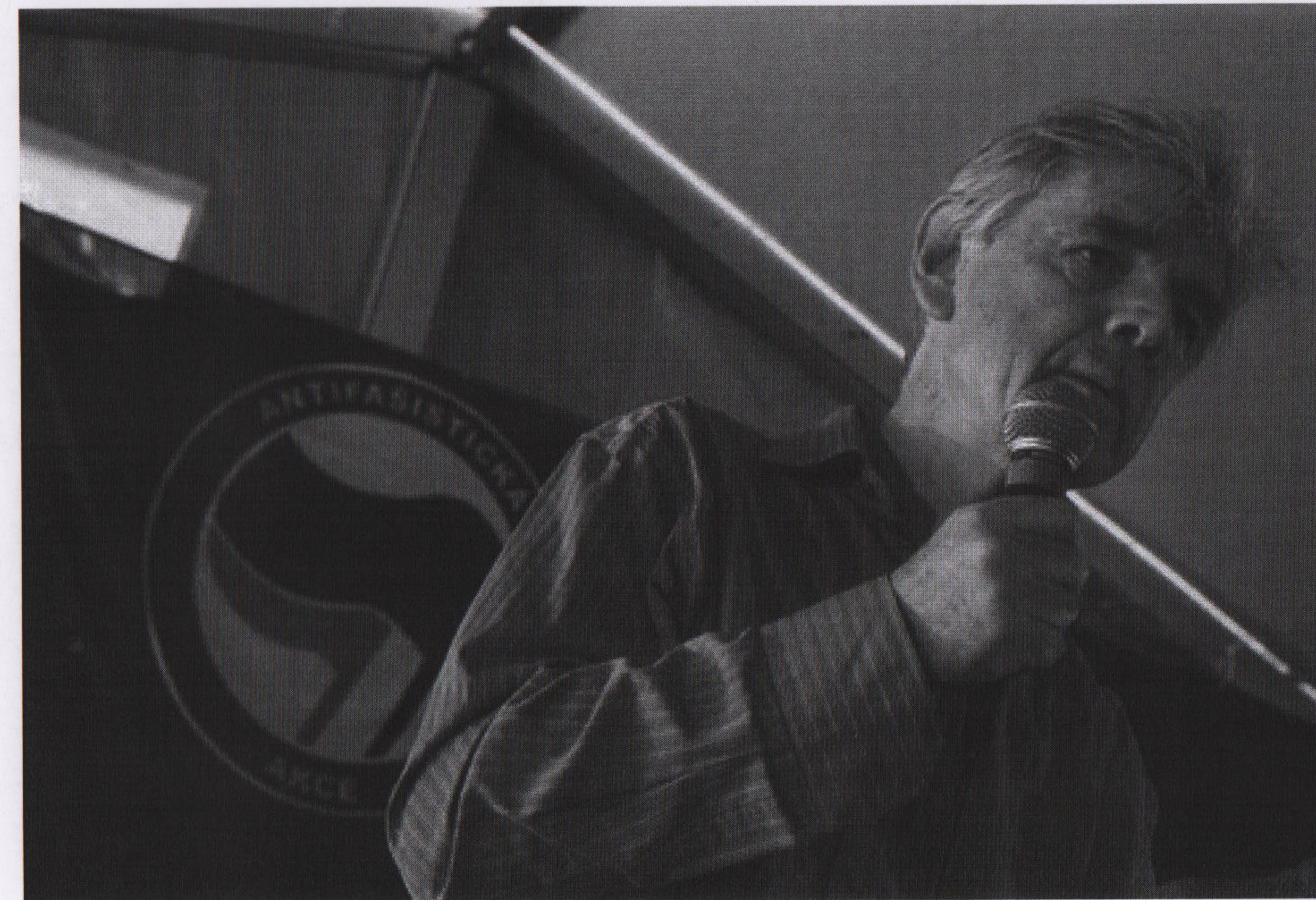
an interview with john holloway

"The very idea of being human, of wanting to be more than a thing, becomes inseparable from rage against the rule of money...we live in a world of rage, but not all that rage is rational, or dignified"

You write in the tradition of autonomist Marxist thought, locating the anti-capitalist struggle at the level of every day life. How were these ideas developed? Starting with a brief outline of the state derivation debate, what was this a reaction against? For anyone who is unfamiliar with your writing, can you explain how these ideas were developed through your work with 'Common Sense' and later 'Change the World Without Taking Power' and 'Crack Capitalism'?

Yes, I think that we have to start from the everyday nature of anti-capitalist struggle, to see that resistance to capitalism is an integral part of living in capitalist society. If we can't do that, then the struggle against capitalism becomes inevitably elitist, and self-defeating. This statement may seem a long way from the state derivation debate of the 1970s, but I don't think it is. The state derivation debate, which arose in West Germany at the end of the 1960s and which Sol Picciotto and I introduced to English-speaking discussion in our book 'State and Capital' (1978), argued that the best way of understanding the capitalist nature of the state is to see it as a particular form of the capital relation, the relation between capital and labour. In other words, in the same way as Marx derived the different forms of capitalist social relations (money, capital, interest and so on) from the more fundamental forms (ultimately, I would now say, from the dual character of labour in capitalist society), so it was necessary to complement that process by deriving the existence of the state as a particular form of social relations from the more fundamental forms of capitalist social relations.

The important thing is that this locates the capitalist nature of the state not in what the state does (its functions) but in its very existence as a social form distinct from other social forms. It is its particularisation that constitutes the state as capitalist. This is obvious in a way: it is the very fact that the state (by its very existence) takes the communal away from us and hands it to paid functionaries that makes the state oppressive and alien, irrespective of what it actually does. From this it follows, I think, that it makes no sense at all to think of changing society through the state. This seems an obvious conclusion, but at the time nobody actually said it, as far as I remember, and some people who had followed the debate then seemed surprised when I made the point explicitly in 'Change the World'.



For me the important step on from the state derivation debate was to argue that form has to be understood as form-process, as a process of forming social relations, a process of channelling them into patterns compatible with the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Thus the state is a constant process of statification, money is a process of monetisation, abstract labour is a process of abstraction of human activity, and so on. All these categories are conceptualisations of an active struggle that is taking place all the time, an active struggle that permeates the lives of all of us. Thus, to say that the state is a form of capitalist social relations, and to understand form as a process of forming, leads directly to seeing everyday life as an active struggle between this process of forming and a resistance that says "no, we refuse, we will go in a different direction, do things in a different way". Everyday life, then, is a constant moving in-against-and-beyond capital. (The article which makes the basic step in the argument from form to form-process was a paper called "The State and Everyday Struggle", which I wrote in 1979 but which wasn't published in English until 1991, when it was included in Simon Clarke's book on the 'State Debate'.)

There were of course other steps along the way, especially the London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group's 'In and Against the State', where working with Jeannette Mitchell, Cynthia Cockburn and others really pushed me into a different way of thinking about writing, and then the experience of the Edinburgh journal 'Common Sense' (with Richard Gunn and Werner Bonefeld as driving force) and the later books on 'Open Marxism' (published by Pluto in 1992 and 1995).

I moved to Mexico in 1991 and then came the Zapatista uprising of 1 January 1994, with their call to make the world anew without taking power, and this created such a stimulating new context for thinking and talking about these ideas, constantly animated by discussion with friends, colleagues and students here. From this flowed 'Change the World Without Taking Power' and all the discussion that that stirred up, which brought me into touch with lots and lots of exciting groups all over the place. And the constant question of "what do we do? What do we do when the world around us is falling apart?" – which led to 'Crack Capitalism'.

Elsewhere in this issue Emma Dowling and Begüm Özden Firat take a comparative look at the anti-globalisation movement and the new rounds of struggle opened up since the 2008 crisis. How in your view can analysis of the state of global relations of capital (crisis) and class contribute to our understanding of how current struggles differ from those of the anti-globalisation movement? Are there practical, organizational implications? What, in the arguments made in your previous work, must be kept and are there areas of the analysis that require further development in response to current/changing conditions?

"It is the very fact that the state takes the communal away from us...that makes [it] oppressive and alien...it [therefore] makes no sense at all to think of changing society through the state."

I see the Days of Rage proclaimed by the various Arab movements from the start of the year as announcing a new phase of struggle/life in-against-and-beyond capital – heralded by the Zapatistas' Festival of Righteous Rage (Digna Rabia – I tend to translate it as Righteous Rage under the influence of Linton Kwesi Johnson) a couple of years ago. The reproduction of capital in the present crisis can be achieved only through a vicious and probably prolonged attack on the way in which we live, work, play and relate to one another. Capital can survive only by transforming human life on earth, probably with the medium-term consequence that it makes that life (and its own existence) impossible. The great capitalist attack (what the Zapatistas call the Fourth World War, or what is often referred to as neo-liberalism, but

it is important to see that it flows from the logic of capital, not from the policy options of governments) is already doing enormous damage.

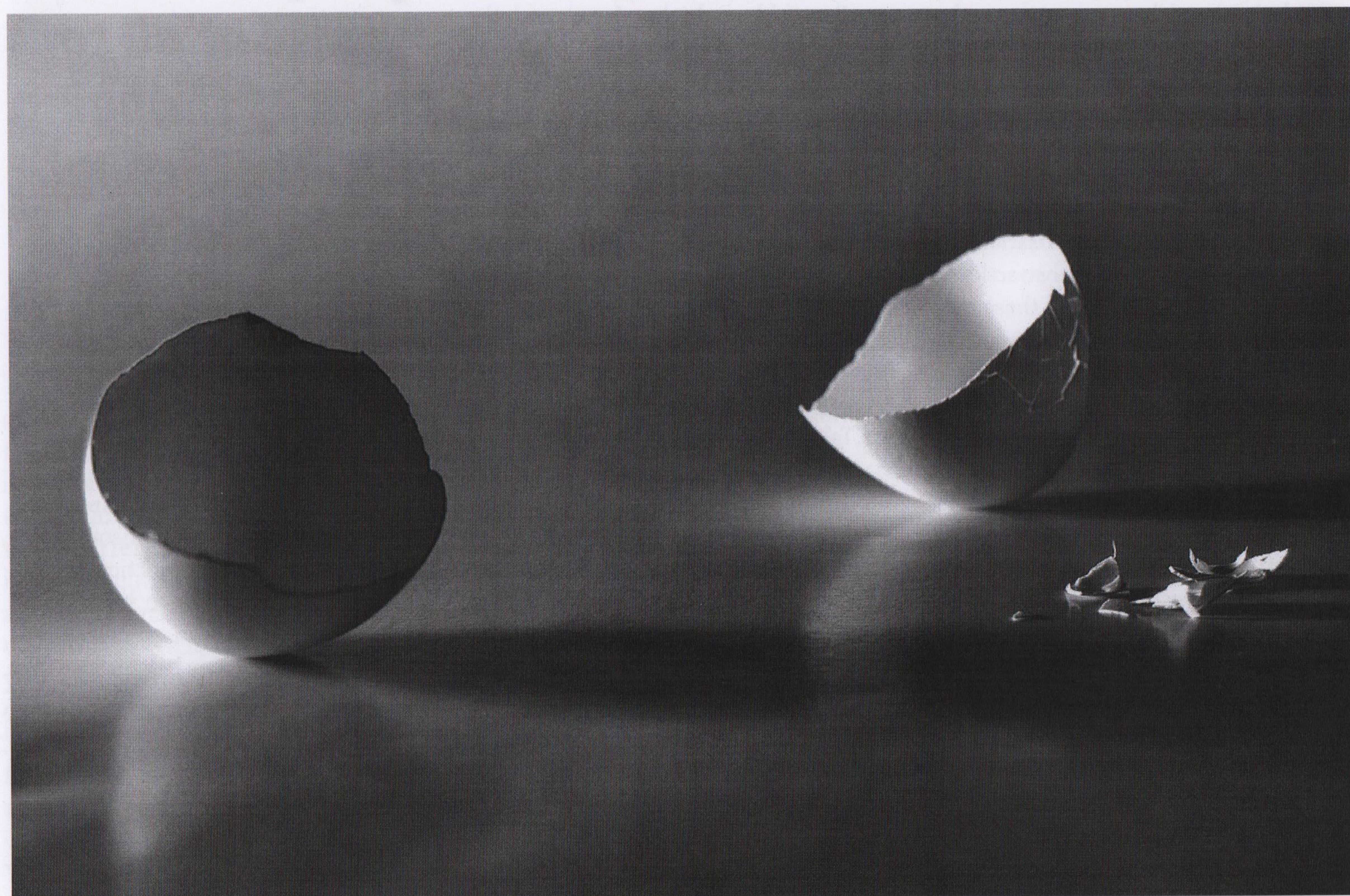
The very idea of being human, of wanting to be more than a thing, becomes inseparable from rage against the rule of money, rage against that which is destroying humanity. In a world of mass destruction, humanity rages, rationality rages, dignity rages. More and more, we live in a world of rage, but not all that rages is rational, or dignified, or points the way to a future for humanity. Perhaps the question for us (especially after the riots in England) is how we take our place within that tidal wave of rage, whether and how we can point it (or bits of it) in directions that open up a future for humans (and indeed other forms of life). This is not just a question of writing books or answering interview questions but of developing practices that point against-and-beyond capital. Hope lies in the fact that millions and millions of people are already doing that – cracking capitalism. I've just read a paper by Kolya Abramsky that is circulating, where he argues that the choice that confronts us now is between dignified and undignified rage: I think that is absolutely right.

You talk about living 'in, against and beyond' the dynamics of capitalism, in a constant struggle to live a meaningful life against the enforced meaninglessness of capitalist work, or abstract labour. However, when we push away from capital we enter into insecure and uncharted territory. To free ourselves of the limits of work, or to refuse to toe the line, is that not a rather privileged move?

It might be a privileged move – in many cases it is – but I don't think we should dismiss privilege so easily. Privilege may be a responsibility. If some of us live in circumstances where it is easier for us to disobey than it is for others, it would be absurd to argue that therefore we should obey, submit ourselves to the disciplines of capitalist labour.

But in fact it is not (or not just) like that. For most people, being freed from labour is not a matter of choice, but a result of being pushed out. To be unemployed or precariously employed is not generally a conscious option, but the question is then what we do with that and how we see it. People who are pushed out of the capitalist system of social cohesion are generally forced to develop other forms of social support, other ways of living. In spite of all the difficulties, these may be embryonic forms of a different society and the real, material bases of anti-capitalist revolt. The more radical piquetero groups in Argentina, for example, turned from campaigning for more employment ("the right to work"!) to fighting for creating meaningful forms of activity (doing) outside capitalist labour (most clearly articulated by the MTD Solano). And it is the creation of structures of mutual support by the excluded, particularly in the cities, that has provided the material basis for most of the important anti-capitalist revolts in recent years (in Latin America and elsewhere).

To us, it seems like the everyday instances of antagonism that you describe in your work, the girl reading the book in the park instead of going to work, are rather small victories. Considering the widespread resistance to abstract labour that you describe, and that we are currently experiencing with the increased militancy of workers and students, does your focus on these individual actions not lack ambition?



Not at all. The important thing is the lines of continuity, the lines of potential, the trails of gunpowder, that lead from the girl in the park to the 15th June in Syntagma Square or the Zapatista uprising. If we do not see and nourish those lines of continuity, we lock ourselves into a ghetto of despair.

We are finding it difficult to conceptualise how this widespread everyday resistance to abstract labour, the 'scream', can manifest as anything more than a form of moral or ethical lifestylism? Without a strategy for collective action is your argument not at risk of, at best, being interpreted as a form of lifestyle politics and at worse leading us into a false sense of camaraderie or community based on an unarticulated and abstract notion of rejection?

I don't understand. Is the revolt in Greece not a scream, or the Zapatistas' ¡Ya basta!, or the "que se vayan todos" (editor's note: "all of them must go") in Argentina, or the occupation of the squares by the indignados in Spain, or indeed the Russian revolution, or any revolt that you care to mention? And where did all those massive social screams originate if not in the daily unperceived struggles and discontents of thousands and thousands of people? And how can we understand the links if not by focusing on the lines of continuity? The point of talking about cracks rather than autonomies is that cracks move, often unpredictably and at lightning speed.

The overlap in values between the UK Coalition government's discourse of community empowerment under the Big Society initiative and anarchist, autonomist politics (see Percy's article in issue 12 of SHIFT) is a good example of how our actions and 'alternatives' can be incorporated by the state. How can the "against and beyond" of your notion of "in and against and beyond" be emphasized by those involved in community organizing in this political climate? How does it translate into practical action as we fight cuts in state services with alternative visions of social provision?

"The important thing is the lines of continuity, the lines of potential, the trails of gunpowder, that lead from the girl in the park to the 15th June in Syntagma Square or the Zapatista uprising. If we do not see and nourish those lines of continuity, we lock ourselves into a ghetto of despair"

The state is the movement of the incorporation of alternatives – that is what it means to talk of the state as a form of capital. How can we resist this process? Probably only by going in the opposite direction, by communising. To think of capital as a form of social relations is to say that power is not a question of who-whom (Lenin's brilliantly dreadful formulation) but of how. Capital is a how, a way of doing things, and the only way we can fight it is by confronting it with different hows. Our hows are the movement of communising, a coming together and determining from the bottom up, which clashes as it moves with the falsehood of community empowerment. Any process of determining from below will quickly come into conflict with property and money, whereas community empowerment promoted from above is premised upon respect for those forms which make community empowerment impossible.

There are already many attempts to translate this sort of idea into practical action against the cuts. I think the important thing is to show in practice what the alternatives mean. As far as possible, we should not defend ourselves in their terms but assert clearly what we are (often already) doing. In education, for example, many of us already take as a starting point the view that the only education that makes sense is one that points towards a future for humanity, and therefore aims at the destruction of capitalism. Sometimes we feel afraid to state what is probably obvious to most people, but often it is important to state the obvious. The best defence is usually attack: attack the schools, attack the universities, attack the hospitals.

With regards to the latter point, how do you think this analysis applies to the recent riots that were sparked by the shooting of Mark Duggan. These were clearly a reaction to state oppression and the exclusion of communities from capitalist wealth, but there were arguably regressive elements to many of the actions that were taken. Whilst these actions can be understood as antagonistic to the stranglehold of capitalism over our lives and cities, can we understand last weeks riots as part of a progressive, anti-capitalist struggle?

What the English riots make clear is the terrible danger of a world to which rage is more and more clearly central. It is only through rage (the scream) that social change can come about, but rage is terribly dangerous. It can flow very easily against us, into terribly destructive forms. On the one hand, I rejoice in the explosion of anger and the looting of the looters, on the other hand the riots make clear the destructive potential of social anger. I think Kolya Abramsky is right in pointing to the fact that our opportunities for creating a better world may be momentary. There is a sense in which the more negative aspects of the riots are an expression of the failure of the British students to do what the Chilean students are now doing, just as it might be argued that the appalling violence in Mexico today is due in part to our failure to seize the opportunity opened up by the Zapatista revolt. The war we must win is the war of rage and I suspect that the only way we can do it is through the nitty-gritty movement of communising. Crack capitalism, in other words.

A recent interview with Variant magazine picked up on your critique of political engagement with democratization, if the latter exists without a commitment to the abolition of "money-capital-state-abstract labour". Yet democratization is at the heart of the radical political ruptures we are currently witnessing – with a crisis of state power (dictators toppled in the Middle East and North Africa and liberal democracy in crisis in Greece and Spain) coupled with experiments in participatory democracy within the political movements that have pushed this crisis. For us, these are exciting as they have a mass element that has been missing in the political movements of our lifetime. Do you think the Real Democracy movement in Spain, or the democratization movements of the Arab World contain this element of rejection of "money-capital-state-abstract labour"? What can we take from these experiences in developing the radical politics you have in mind?

I agree entirely that these are very exciting movements. Real Democracy is a threshold-concept (as indeed are all the great concepts of struggle). It opens a door and invites us to go further. We can refuse the invitation and stay where we are, with the empty abstraction of democracy, as no doubt some will, or we can accept it (as will many others) and think what real democracy could look like. And there we see that the experiences of Tahrir Squate, of the Puerta del Sol and Syntagma and so many other squares in Spain and Greece point us clearly in the direction of a collective process of determining from below, a process of communising. And this movement of communising becomes immediately an attack on determination by the rich, by capital, by money. Inevitably, I think, it clashes with the rule of money-capital-state-abstract labour. I assume that people who prefer to talk just of democracy (Hardt and Negri, for example) realise this, but prefer to let the movement itself discover that money stands in the way of real democracy. I can see an argument for that, but I see the process of theoretical reflection as part of the struggle to go as far as we can along the road that has been opened. Part of the struggle against re-integration of the movement is to say clearly that real democracy is and must be a frontal assault on the power of money.

The great power of the movement in Greece is that it makes as clear as clear could be the frontal opposition between Real Democracy and the Power of Money. You've probably seen the video showing, on the one hand, the thousands of protesters in Syntagma Square, and on the other, just a few metres away, the democratically elected representatives of the state grovelling to the Power of Money. Dignified rage, righteous rage, bright light of hope in a dark night.

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Emma Dowling and Begüm Özden Firat

the mirror cracks from side to side

of global uprisings and movement in an age of austerity

"the so-called 'Tahrir generation' is no mere 'youthful' expression of temperament"

Events that happen in one place – especially with the instantaneous relay through communication technologies – make ripples in others. In Egypt, protesters occupied Tahrir Square and the Egyptian flag found its way to Wisconsin; protesters in Puerta del Sol declared 'they want to be like Iceland when they grow up', and hushed so as not to wake the Greeks. In 1999, after protesters descended upon the World Trade Organisation in Seattle, images of the 'Battle of Seattle' circulated the globe: soon after, wherever global elites met, protesters were there to challenge them. A ferocious force composed of a multiplicity of social subjects from a myriad of existing political movements had suddenly become visible under one 'no' to the neoliberal project. This 'movement of movements' put global elites under significant pressure and made opposition to global capitalism speakable within a broader public. It also generated its own forms of organisation, building on and challenging previous models of internationalism, by-passing the nation-state as the necessary primary political community.

Global Events, Global Spaces

Global – or at least globally interpellated – events, chains in an ongoing political process defined this movement, the global was constituted both as a terrain of struggle and as the very site of organisation. These kinds of events involved moments of open antagonism against global governance institutions in the form of summit protests in which the network People's Global Action (PGA) played a key role, and also included World (regional and local) Social Forums as spaces where a transnational social movement was forged in face to face meetings. The 'global' was claimed as context, emphasising global connections and making the links between what happens in one place and what happens in another. Collective experience created transnational networks grounded in the materiality of common exchange and engagement, strengthening the power to act across national boundaries.

Yet these processes had their own problems, not least the reification of the global as a distinct sphere. Protests against the G8/G20, the IMF or World Bank, created a picture of global governance as centralised at summit meetings, when actually the political economy of governance is multi-faceted and multi-level. Many emphasised that it did not matter so much what global elites did, it mattered more that movements could come together to recognise one another, feel collective power, articulate their resistance to a public and use the opportunity to build movement through being together. Nonetheless, the symbolic positing of a form of coherent political actor vis-a-vis vis a global sovereign power, misconstrued the nature of the state and global decision-making that understandings of a networked, decentralised and capillary form of governance and the state reveal.

Moreover, the evocation of the movement as singular political actor coalescing at these points of protest, overstated the coherence of a movement that was actually more fragmented, often with different 'wings' of the movement occupying the same space around a summit but having little to do with one another organisationally. Even where successful cross-spectrum mobilisations occurred, the alliances could not always hold beyond the event and more energy went into organising these events than did into ongoing everyday social struggles.

Social forums were both events and processes. Since 2001, the annual World Social Forum has attracted hundreds of thousands of activists from across the

world to sit together in assemblies and workshops figuring out the best way to organise collectively beyond the confines of a particular issue or tendency, in and of itself a political process producing new subjectivities, new alliances and new ideas. Many were emphatic that the forum should not be mistaken for the movement itself and that it should be used as an open space based upon a set of principles for the convergence of diversity and difference in a common strive for global justice (whatever that might mean in the particular). Thus, the outcomes would not necessarily be linear or even tangible, but complex, invisible, dispersed, and rightly so. Others lamented the lack of coherence and political programme as the forum's impasse.

Shifting grounds, recomposed antagonisms

It would be an oversimplification to say that the movement reified the global and forgot about the local. Indeed, it is not easy to say anything too definite about 'the' movement given how many differences were deliberately encompassed. The imperative to 'think global, act local' was part of a 'globalisation from below', from the grassroots. However, the attention to global events and spaces and the development of a network of activists with the time and money to travel to all of these places and stay plugged in to the process, meant that there were many disconnections that led to an inability to really globalise. It remained difficult to think through the material particularities of our 'local' existences, subject positions and relationship with multiple 'others' in a way that could inform global action. For sure, we must continue to value diversity and multiplicity highly, but we must be more discerning of what that means for our political practices. The state and capital thrive upon pitting us against one another where we live, in our workplaces and across the globe. It is painful and it is hard to confront the material reality of that beyond ethico-political rules of how to behave in a meeting or the negotiation of a diversity of tactics within the context of a particular mobilisation. It did not take people very long after the recent unrest in the UK to notice how alienated we are from one another within our supposed 'communities'. But there is more to this than simply getting along with those you happen to live in close proximity with. What we have seen playing itself out in the media and on the streets in recent weeks are the multiple lines of conflict that weave their way through society, pitting white against black, black against brown, the less poor against the more poor, the unemployed against the workers, the looting youth against the small business owners. To be relevant – to build a successful anti-capitalist movement – means confronting these material realities of class (de)composition in a global context, a context that is not out there, but right here.

Yet, this is not to suggest a retreat to a sphere of the local in response to a perceived overemphasis on the global. Nor are we suggesting that the eruptions of social conflict in various parts of the world are sufficient in their inspirational effects. The significant achievement of counterglobalisation movements was not only to draw attention to the nodes of power in the global management of neoliberal globalisation, but to solidify the feeling of being part of a global movement with the aspiration of intensifying these 'connections from below' through face to face and virtual exchanges. For a generation of political activists this was a clear manifestation of internationalism one more time, but one prefiguring horizontal radical democratic processes that sought to challenge and transcend the vertical stratification, local – national – international, and the forms of representative and institutionalised politics encompassed in them.

The Seattle moment ushered in internationalism with new understandings of global solidarity, new forms of organisation and a novel sense of being a global movement. Yet, nowadays we tell ourselves that social forums and summit protests are not as politically effective as they used to be. Everyone who has ever been to a social forum or a summit protest recognises that the success of these events lay partly in the strength and energy of the local social movements where the event was hosted. Also, they empowered local movements by making explicit how their everyday struggles formed part of a larger global movement, enabling unforeseen local as well as global political alliances. These are reasons why we should not simply abandon them.

The current protests and insurrections erupting in the wake of the crisis are – unlike the previous cycle of counterglobalisation struggles – much more explicitly directed to the politics of the local and everyday whilst recognising the connections across local and national boundaries. The great difficulty we face lies in addressing the opposition between the local and the global as spheres of organising. We often find ourselves working in a self-understanding of a local or a global space, even though in principle we are aware of how the local and the global cannot – and should not – be so easily separated. We know the two spheres are expressed in one another, nonetheless, we still need to ask, what it means to think this organisationally in ways that neither reproduces a global clique of transnational activists that easily creates its own vacuum, nor by rendering connectivity and networking ends in and of themselves. Of concern is how to connect the different struggles against austerity measures and cuts, debt, climate change, gentrification and housing, the crisis of care and social reproduction. The present so-called 'Tahrir generation' is no mere 'youthful' expression of temperament, nor is it going to disappear any time soon. It has clear demands, from real democracy to a decent future that the global political and economic system cannot adequately deal with. The debate is not whether they are political enough, but how we can learn from the experiences of previous rounds of internationalism to which the global movement of movements belonged, inventing forms of organisation and collective action that respond to the conditions of contemporary struggles.

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Emma Dowling is a writer, researcher, political activist and lecturer at Queen Mary, University of London. Over the last ten years, she has participated in summit mobilisations and in the organisation of European and World Social Forums (official and autonomous spaces). She has researched the transformations and crises of global neoliberal governance institutions in response to protest, including the mechanisms through which dissent is countered by global governance institutions. Her published work includes a number of reflections, analyses and interviews on globalisation, resistance and transnational organising.

fairy dust for all!

Cocktails under the magnolia at the Manchester launch of 'Moments of Excess'

Last July, SHIFT Magazine invited the authors of the new book 'Moments of Excess' to give a talk to the inhabitants and visitors of a Manchester housing project. For about an hour, they talked about sorcery, Harry Potter and 'fairy dust'.

The authors' collective Free Association that penned the articles in the book has long moved on from the more classical anti-intellectualism of its roots in the anarchist group Class War. Towards the close of the 1990s they had argued for the dissolution of Class War instead formed an affinity around theoretical readings and discussions.

When they talk about sorcery and fairy dust, this is with a nod to one of their intellectual engagements, that of the first chapter of Karl Marx's 'Capital'. Capitalism, explain the speakers of the Free Association, is not a rigid 'thing', but a set of dynamic 'social relations'. And for Marx, the specific character of capital makes these social relations appear as 'natural', unchangeable. Against capital then, the Free Association attempt to introduce magic: the 'supernatural'!

To see whether the magical imagery introduced by the Free Association is capable of demystifying the apparently natural and showing capitalist relations for what they really are – social and historical – let's have a closer look at their Marxian reference point.

Towards the end of his first chapter in Capital, Marx writes about the 'secret' of commodity fetishism. Not dissimilar to the language used by the Free Association, Marx also evokes the magical. For him, however, it is the commodity that is somehow "mystical", "enigmatical" and "mysterious", he describes it as a "social hieroglyphic" and "a riddle".

But for Marx, magic – or 'fetishism', as he terms it – isn't a good thing. It is part and parcel of a bourgeois ideology that deems itself rational, yet is much closer to the "mist-enveloped regions of the religious world". Just as people have invented God and have found themselves really governed by Him, they have granted magical powers to the commodity and to money.

So with all this capitalist sorcery at work, is it not a bit self-defeating that the Free Association wants to add another layer of fairy dust to "the mist" (Marx) of capitalist productive relations?

The idea of magic also pops up in the Free Association's book 'Moments of Excess'. It's not about fairy dust or sorcerers but about the magical feeling we gain from taking part in these moments of excess, be they Seattle, Stokes Croft or Millbank - experiences of togetherness, affinity and power.

The Free Association's book makes clear that we cannot put our hope in an activist magician to get us out of the capitalist mess. There is nothing supernatural required to begin thinking and acting beyond capitalist social relationships; no need for superheroes, priests or superstars. If capitalism is reproduced by us all, everyday, then it is on this everyday level that a lot of our efforts to build a different world have to be focused.

Indeed, the book does also tell the story of extraordinary events and possibilities created by ordinary people. Sometimes it is in these moments of excess, the authors write, "that we feel most alive, most human". Maybe it is the magic entailed in the experiments and alternatives of the 'movement of movements' that makes us most clearly see through the capitalist mist and gives us glimpses of new forms of social organisation. After all, the Free Association has taken its name from Marx's phrase (also in Chapter 1 of Capital) that "the life-process of society does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men."

Raphael Schlembach is an editor of Shift Magazine. 'Moments of Excess' is published by PM Press.

what next?

Issue 14 will be out in January.

We are always looking for new writers and articles, please get in touch if you have any ideas or would like to respond to articles we have already published. We're particularly keen to hear from people who'd like to contribute to our new series discussing the relevancy of lifestyle choices for radical politics - see the introductory article in this issue for more.

Finally, we'd like to encourage our readers to consider supporting us by purchasing a subscription (contact us for details).

Thank you,

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