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Can't Stop the Chaos: Autonomous Resistance to the 2007 G8 in Germany

A Complete Retrospective

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Germany

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Contents

Hamburg, May 28: Preludes to Summits	5
Rostock June 2: Nocturnes for Capital	9
Heiligendamm, June 6–7: Blockades Without End	13
Berlin, June 8: Anticlimax	18
Tentative Conclusions	21
Appendix: Two Narratives from the 2007 G8	25

angered and came along to the front. We pissed off the security team a few times by not letting certain cars through, but in the end this gave them more leverage to say, “Sorry, but these crazy assholes just wont move... there’s nothing I can do.”

Strategic insight: All in all, the effectiveness of a blockade is measured by its disruption. It should be explained as an important tactic in shutting down whatever evil matter is at hand. To frame it as a measure used to control people and make sure they are not whatever category of “bad guys” we happen to be protesting (delegates, cops, ambassadors, etc.) turns the blockaders into an occupying force, regulating the flow of traffic. Inspirational and radical possibilities of social interaction that did not replicate police but rather cooperation did occur during our blockade. Demonstrators aided in carrying groceries to residents’ homes, helped fix bicycles that had not left the garage in months, and exchanged conversation and respectful debate with people in the neighborhood. The mutual aid was indeed reciprocal, with neighbors providing gallons upon gallons of water to thirsty blockaders, and at times giving us some heads up of police activity up the road.

Ten years ago, Hamburg, Rostock, and the woods around the tiny German town of Heiligendamm witnessed massive confrontations as anarchists and other rebels attempted to interrupt and delegitimize the summit of the world’s eight most powerful nations. As the 2017 G20 Summit looms in Hamburg this July, we revisit the demonstrations that took place against the G8 summit in 2007—to seek strategic insights, study how the terrain has changed, and illustrate what it is like to lead lives of passionate resistance.

Hamburg, May 28: Preludes to Summits

Finally, something was happening.

After linking arms in flanks for five hours straight in a huge permitted march, we were getting antsy. This was the first major demonstration in the buildup to the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, and everyone wanted to start it off right. The city of Hamburg needed to send a message to the world that they had the “violent demonstrators” under control. The protesters wanted to tear the city apart, to show the G8 leaders that they were not welcome and that anyone who tries to host them will have to pay. With a thousand black-clad anarchists in the front and thousands of others behind, the tension was thick. Screaming “fight the system, fight the state, fight capitalism, fight G8,” the demonstrators were not willing to compromise their vision or momentum. But who would provoke whom first? Would the cops use the water cannons? Would the anarchists break through their lines and go off the script?

For two years, the German autonomous movement and the Dissent Network in particular organized from the USA to Turkey for one week of action. The stakes had never been higher: the “War on Terror” had cast a deathly pall over the worldwide struggle against capitalism and the state, but at the 2007 G8 anarchists and autonomists hoped to seize the stage of history by scoring a decisive victory against capital.

The modern incarnation of the Autonomien¹ in Germany is distinctly anarchist, mostly young, and very, very punk. Even though the movement had been in disarray over the preceding years, the arrival of the G8, combined with the police raids in early May on anti-G8 centers of activity, united the usually divided and overly self-critical autonomist movement. To the chagrin of the police, the raids also backfired in the popular press; most of the media and even much of the public came over to the side of the dissidents. Furthermore, in “Red” Hamburg, the home of insurrections, pirates, and the world-renowned anti-fascist football league St. Pauli, it is hard to distinguish locals from the Black Bloc in the streets.

Move swiftly. Stop. Fight a bit. Grab something. Then run. Turn around. Watch out for the Snatch Squad. Which ones are they? Wearing all black with red diamonds on their back. Damn, there they are. They’re gonna try and grab us. Move! But who are those pigs? Don’t worry, it’s just the green team. Green team? Yeah, green uniforms, they’re like the National Guard. They won’t arrest you, they’ll just tussle a bit. And them? Who? The darker green and dark blue. Oh them, well, they’re here to stop you. Be careful—Shhhhhhh. What? Be quiet, they’re looking for us. OK, hold it... hold it... NOW!

The police were nervous, and rightfully so. For months, cars belonging to German officials related to the G8 had been burned in the streets. As the mobilization got going, internationals were streaming into the well-run convergence center in Hamburg, the two-decade-running squat Rote Flora. The police wanted nothing more than to release their inner fascists and ruthlessly clear the streets of all protesters. But due to factors such as public opinion and their brutality backfiring on them in the courts, the police could not simply beat protesters without pretext. Instead, they could only vent their frustration with an anal-retentive attention to

¹ “Autonomien” is the German word for participants in autonomous movements, including Autonomous Marxists (see this issue’s glossary of terms) and anarchists; one can trace the European roots of these movements back to Italy in the 1970s.

neighborhood be able to drive through? How far down the blockade could media go?

Most of the neighbors just used bicycles to get through, for it was still pretty troubling to get a car through. After the first day of seeing fancy rental cars with out of town tags be let through, media come through on motorcycles and bicycles, people started to question the effectiveness of the blockade. The conflict was between having an effective blockade and being kind and respectful to residents of the neighborhood our blockade was situated in. In my opinion, we should have been an uncompromising blockade. To prioritize not wanting to look “bad” over the effectiveness of our action, logically, made it at times ineffective. Largely, we shut down the road from media, corporate lobbyists, and food being delivered—and absolutely no delegates would come through our blockade. At one point, in a comical turning of tables, the police trapped between the blockade and the summit begged us to let them drive their van out—for they were hungry and tired. We decided not to let them leave and for them to figure out another way.

In one outrageous situation, on the morning of the second day of the summit and blockades, the sleeping mass of the blockade was awoken by people on the security team—a group of people who said they would work as liaisons to pass on the decisions from the spokescouncil to people trying to get through with cars. They shouted “Get up, clear the way, the firetruck needs to get through.” somebody else responded, “What business does a fire truck have here at 5 in the morning?” The security team responded, “There is a burning blockade down the way, it needs to be put out.” It turned out to just be a rumor anyways, but that the security people would allow fire trucks to be let through to shut down a fucking blockade was outrageous. In our affinity group, we decided to go to the front of the blockade to make sure nothing else like this happened. We told the AG of Danes in front of us, so they would know that there would be a gap behind them that needed closing—but they too were

we were doomed, that we should just give up now. Being so close, and having walked so far through stinging, wet, gross cropfields—I knew there was no turning back. My partner and I walked up to the police line after recovering from my burning sensations. We pushed each other to dare to break through the line.

“Come on, there’s a break, we can do it!”

“No, no one’s through, they’ll nab us—”

“Someone has to be the first!”

“But what about—”

“COME ON!”

I’m really glad I had a partner who could push me without making me feel unsafe. I recommend being in affinity groups with people who you feel safe with, but who encourage you to be daring outside of your comfort level. So... we outran a Bulgarian water cannon that was speeding down the road, and once we were on the other side... unscathed, not arrested, we saw others had broken through as well, and then more, and more, and more, until everyone was through safely.

At the second line, a large number of people lined up parallel to the police. In our affinity group we were preparing for more spraying, and even some clubbing at this point; but as we were scanning the line for a break in police, one officer just waved his hand authoritatively, as if to say “come on, just walk through.” My partner and I looked at each other in disbelief. We took some unsure steps, and then walked through to the other side. The police admitted powerlessness... at least a few did, and their line was only as strong as their weakest link. We made it through to the access road, which was in the middle of a residential area.

The Block G8 coalition decided on a strategy of nonviolence, so their tactic for self-defense was to encourage and escort as much media as possible through to stick around the blockades. This, combined with the fact that it was a residential neighborhood brought up some strategic questions... Should we let residents of the neigh-

detail about the smallest of the rules regarding banner size, demonstrators masking up, and so on: like a hybrid of the SS and school-crossing guards, they stopped demonstrations for up to thirty minutes or more for the most minor infractions of their rules.

This causes almost any march in Germany, including the march in Hamburg, to be an exercise in frustration, a chess game in which both sides try to bend, but not break, the rules through a strict process of negotiation—that is, at least until breaking the rules is advantageous. While marching, German anarchists more or less engage the police in careful negotiations until the permitted demonstration gets as close to the desired location as possible—such as a financial district, a fascist demonstration, or in this case the EU-ASEM Summit meeting in the town hall—and then all bets are off. After that, they often charge police lines, attempting to escape off the official route as a bloc or break into small affinity groups to build barricades and attack police cars—which is precisely what the march in Hamburg did.

As the melee between protestors and cops spread down the street, people started to hop a small fence into the parking lot of the soccer stadium. Soccer in Hamburg is a big deal; St. Pauli, the local team, is world-renowned for drawing some of the most anti-fascist hooligans in the world. I looked around and saw that we were in an enclosed space with few exits. It seemed only a matter of time before the police trapped us in this parking lot and beat us until we could be mass-arrested—so I hopped the fence into the stadium.

I’m short, so the climb was a little difficult, and I fell ungracefully over the fence—but when I looked up I found myself in a German teen anarchist’s dream-come-true: I’d escaped a police riot into the caring arms of the St. Pauli soccer team! Imagine running around Seattle during the WTO protests, air full of tear gas and the anguish of protestors being beaten by police, and opening a door to find yourself safely inside Rage Against the Machine’s practice studio.

The team was finishing up a daily soccer practice when they were interrupted by my hooded, masked fall from the heavens. We looked

at each other in silence before I asked... “ummm, can I stay here for a bit?”

“Of course—would you like something to eat?” They introduced themselves to me and told me to make myself at home. So I took off my mask and chowed down on their vegetable platters.

At the end of the march, Black Bloc affinity groups rampaged throughout the town, fighting police and wrecking cars; when the police chased everyone back to the convergence center at Rote Flora, even the locals began fighting back against the hated riot police. A giant banner reading “Total Freedom”—as opposed to any supposed freedom democracy or the State can offer—had sailed above the march. At the end, there were eighty-five arrests, but the rest of us were totally free.

They’ve surrounded the Rote Flora. What? The convergence center, you know, that huge squat. Are they going in? Not likely, I think they’ll get a beating if they try. Barricades are going up, let’s get behind them. The water cannons are coming out. Well, move. Down this alley! OK. Wait, are we all together? Close, too close. I know. We were gonna go back and get you. What? That’s insane, they would’ve grabbed you too. Hey look, they’re sending in more. Did they declare a state of emergency? I heard that too. Shit, there’s waves and waves of them. Back to the Flora? No, it’s not safe. OK, then disappear. Thousands of us in the march. Hundreds rampaging in the streets. About eighty-five arrested. Not bad for a start. No, not bad at all.

At one point in Hamburg, a police officer who had taken off his helmet and armor was caught alone outside his van as the riots closed in. In a moment reminiscent of the murder of Carlo Giuliani by a police officer at the G8 in Genoa, the officer drew his gun—but just as he raised it in the air, the back window of the van behind him exploded, struck by a projectile, and he retreated. Thrown bricks save lives.

force to accomplish. This was important in Seattle, where the police vastly underestimated the numbers they needed, and was true in Germany as well. We can also see this as a need for us to focus our direct action strategies to smaller towns where we can have a larger impact.

The march through the fields was somewhat surreal. For years, I’ve heard rhetoric thrown around about how protests have the significance of battles for our movement(s). For the first time, the imagery I saw matched my idea of “battle.” Files of demonstrators marched on the horizon, on hills so that the morning sun silhouetted them. At one point in the march, we passed a cattle farm. The cows, seeing what they recognized as a large herd, started to herd alongside us on the other side of the fence, the vegans in the march were delighted and erupted in animal liberation jargon.

Finally, we were getting closer to the road we needed to block. It was the designated emergency access/exit road for the G8 summit, not the main roads that delegates, corporate lobbyists, caterers, and media planned to arrive on—but the back up plan for if those roads were blocked... as they obviously were going to be. We had to cross two roads to get there. I don’t know if this was the feeling of every finger that day, but it sure seemed like we were always the ones sent in first to push through the cops. As we got closer, the police got meaner. Helicopters circled around us and dropped off more police to block the road with. Water cannons roamed back and forth on the streets, and then they started to fire. As one pointed its gun at me, I froze. I definitely had not prepared myself for the possibility of being shot by a water cannon.

So I got squirted. At first I thought it wasn’t so bad... after all it was a hot day and I welcomed being soaked in water. But soon afterwards the chemical weapons (mace, pepperspray, tear gas, something like that) laced into the water started to burn. This was happening all over the field, and a group of people started to get encircled further away. Some of the younger, inexperienced folks in our affinity group began to condemn the march, proclaim

each with two of the G8 nations flags. They perched themselves on the barrier between the crowd and band, and held the flags high for all to see. A fifth black mask emerged, this one with a torch. They parted the crowd and proceeded to burn each of the G8 nation's flags. BFM ended their set shouting, "See you at the blockades! Block G8!" before the final cymbal crash. Mmm, it really got me pumped. I took the train back to Camp Rostock and got barely three hours of sleep before waking up for our Bike Bloc to the blockade rally point.

Only a few people responded to our bike bloc call, and we got controlled on our way to the rally point. On our way we encountered another group of cycling German radicals coming our direction. They shouted to us to turn around, because a polizei van was hot on their trail. So we turned around, and as the polizei van sped up to close off the path ahead of us, the German bicycle squad shouted "OK! Now turn back!" and then darted off into a trail that the van could not follow—they tricked the police! It was going to be a good day!

We got to the rally point and people were handing out water, food, bags of hay to sit on, and there was a festive soccer game happening. The rally point was a soccer field in the middle of a very rural area. My partner and I fell asleep for what felt like hours, but must have been only thirty minutes or so. We awoke to the march from one of the camps converging on our site, which was the signal to form into our fingers. We lined up, parallel to the police line, but much further extended. I saw the yellow finger, all the way at the end of the line, starting to hop the local farmer's fence and trod into the field. No sooner did this happen than someone shouted out "Here we go!" and our blue finger began to move.

To my surprise, the tactic was working. The police just stayed on the road, at this point not even attacking any of the demonstrators. Strategic insight: if you know the police department where you are demonstrating does not have the jail capacity to arrest and hold your numbers, there is only so much they can use physical

Rostock June 2: Nocturnes for Capital

In 1998, at the very beginning of the so-called "anti-globalization" movement, the G8 met in Birmingham only to find themselves surrounded by 70,000 activists organized by various NGOs and a raging Reclaim the Streets party downtown. In fear, they fled Birmingham to a more tranquil manor. In 2001, the NGOs under the umbrella of the Genoa Social Forum organized a march straight to the forbidden Red Zone where the summit was taking place, and the whole city hosting that year's G8 was consumed in flames.

But the powers that be learn from their mistakes; unable to beat the demonstrators, they joined them instead, to lead them astray. In Scotland in 2005, the bizarre menage-a-trois of Bono, Tony Blair, and "anti-globalization" NGOs created the "Make Poverty History" march. In this guise, they tricked the vast majority of protesters into showing up in white—the color of surrender!—and marching in a parade through the half-empty downtown of Edinburgh, far from the summit. The theme of the parade was begging the G8 leaders to take action on their behalf, the opposite of direct action. This government-organized farce was the symbolic inversion of their defeats in Birmingham and Genoa.

A mere two years later, the slogan was no longer "Make Poverty History," but "Make *Capitalism* History"—and the team colors had changed to from white to black. The march in Rostock was organized by a broad alliance of groups ranging from the Interventionist Left to ATTAC, anarchists and reformists united. In stark contrast to the "Make Poverty History" march that attempted to provide a safe and legal alternative to direct action, "Make Capitalism History" explicitly endorsed blockading the G8. The fact that popular sentiment among the protesters was in favor of direct action was a triumph of organization and outreach by the Dissent Network, reflecting the delegitimization of the G8 in the popular imagination.

Like some strange suburban guerrilla army, the bloc gathered itself in the trees in front of the shopping center. At first, it was so small I could barely find it. After a few minutes, as I found one friend after another after another, it became clear there were thousands of us. We put on our masks—a mundane act elsewhere, but a tremendous step in Germany. In Scotland, all the white clothes had reminded me of the Scottish sheep our good shepherd, Capital, was fattening for slaughter. From the moment our black masks went up in Germany, we were not sheep but a pack of wolves.

However, pointless marches are still fundamentally pointless even if they endorse direct action and encourage their entourage to stop marching and start blockading the G8. Unlike the march to the Red Zone in Genoa, this was not a militant march, but a stroll to an anti-capitalist rock concert featuring musicians such as Tom Morello and Die Toten Hosen. The Nazis had been planning their own “anti-G8” rally in Schwerin, but the police canceled both the Nazi event and the anti-fascist counter-protest at the last minute—so most of the Black Bloc ended up in the middle of the Rostock march.

Neither the police nor the Black Bloc seemed to be expecting anything to happen at this march, as most people had thought the street battle was to go on to be either later during the G8 itself or against Nazis in Schwerin. That gave the day a genuine element of surprise. Unlike Hamburg, where the police “kettled” the demonstration and contained it right up to the last minute, in this demonstration the police kept a safe distance from the march, instead massing on the streets paralleling the demonstration.

The march ends, and my elation drops into disappointment as, yet again, nothing has happened. My arms are locked with the members of my affinity group, ranging from an incredibly lanky and calm North American man to a small yet fierce Bulgarian woman. All armed with black flags, we’re at least making good pictures for the spectacle. In a second, everything changes. A line of cops charges the Bloc, batons swinging. The lines in front of us turn and run, nearly

running around Seattle in ’99, air full of tear gas and the anguish of protestors being beaten by police, and then opening a door to find yourself safely inside Rage Against the Machine’s practice studio. The team was finishing up a daily soccer practice when they were interrupted by my hooded, masked fall from the heavens. We looked at each other for a bit before I asked, “Ummm... can I stay here for a bit?”

“Of course—would you like something to eat?”

“Uh... sure.”

They introduced themselves to me one by one, and told me to make myself at home. So I took off my mask and hoodie, and chowed down on their vegetable platters.

Once things had calmed down, I said farewell to my athletic caretakers and headed back to the reconvergence point my affinity group had chosen earlier, near the Rote Flora. Each of us couldn’t believe the others were OK, but my story took the cake. As we walked around we saw hordes of punks, anarchists, and other black-clad people just chilling on street corners... while cops were across the street! We were sketched out as hell, but as we walked on it just did not seem like mass arrests were a German police phenomenon. There were some small riots around the Rote Flora, and in front of it to defend it from getting raided (which it was not!), and this is what made the nightly news. But for those of us who were there for the action earlier in the day... we knew real revolution wouldn’t be broadcast, mass arrested, or in the context of a large, liberal march. It set the tone for the rest of the G8.

Brigada Flores Magon were the last band to play in Camp Reddelich the evening before the blockades. They played a solid set with rowdy anarchist skinhead anthems for Latin America, solidarity, Carlo Giuliani, and resistance. During their last song four hooded figures wearing balaclavas emerged from behind the stage,

each other's pockets. It was exciting to see someone I had shared such a humble experience of international protest insanity with in another light, ready to cook up something different that day. The bloc came to a halt in a courtyard around the corner from the main strasse north of the City Hall. We rested for a moment, everyone silent.

People exchanged looks and picked up cobblestones. After a day of reacting and defending ourselves from the police, it was a bit alien to be in a position to act. But soon enough, someone called out "What are we waiting for?" and we charged into the street. Police were already chasing a few stray demonstrators up the road, and were swarmed by our group. For a few blocks the crowd dispersed and converged, attacking the police along the way. For an American like myself, it was a little strange that people weren't seeking out banks or property, content with focusing on fighting the cops as a target rather than an obstacle.

As the melee between protestors and cops rolled down the street, people started to hop a small fence into the parking lot of the soccer stadium. Soccer in Hamburg is a big deal; St. Pauli, the local team, is world-renowned for having some of the most anti-fascist hooligans (and for that matter, hooligan antifas) in the world. But these anarchists weren't rushing to get tickets for the game (St. Pauli righteously defeated Nazi-fan-based team Bremen two days prior), it was just a quick escape from the police. I looked around and saw that we were in an enclosed space, with really only a few exits... it seemed like a matter of time until the police trapped us all in this parking lot and beat us until we could be mass arrested. So I hopped the fence into the stadium.

Being short, the climb was a little difficult, and I had an ungraceful fall over the fence... but when I looked up I found myself before any German teen anarchist's dream-come-true... to have escaped a police riot and be delivered into the caring arms of the St. Pauli soccer team! Truly, a comparison cannot be drawn to an American context for how cartoonishly fantastic this fate was. Imagine

trampling us. If there's one thing German anarchists are good at, it's running from cops. Our black flags are useless in the face of the cop onslaught, and a few of us throw them at the cops. Separated from the rest of the affinity group, myself and my remaining partner join the fray. More well-prepared than myself, some clever anarchists begin using chisels to tear up the paving stones. It's not what's beneath the paving stones that counts sometimes, it's the paving stones themselves.

At the end of the demonstration, the Bloc found itself running more or less without incident into the middle of the "Make Capitalism History" concert and merging with the crowd. What precisely happened next is unclear, but an altercation broke out with one of the small squadrons of Rostock cops that were being sent in at seemingly random intervals to maintain order. The tactic of keeping the main forces hidden on the side streets served the purpose of protecting downtown Rostock from being destroyed, but failed utterly in controlling the Bloc.

Every time a squadron of Polizei were sent in, little clusters of black would form and move towards the squadron, like the attraction of iron filings to a magnet. When the squadron attempted to arrest someone or attack the crowd, the clusters of the Black Bloc would rain cobblestones and empty glass bottles upon the cops. The cops then blindly rushed into the crowd, resulting in the Bloc dispersing rapidly, a reversal of their earlier magnetic attraction to the cops. Then the bloc would slowly reform to rain projectiles onto the cops until they retreated, unable to weather such a torrent of rocks and empty beer bottles. After all, the riot was at a rock concert!

Scattered, the Bloc slowly regroups at the kiosk to prepare for a second charge. My partner is exhausted, but excited by the chance to try yet another attack we rush forward with the Bloc. Around me, I hear the sounds of windows smashing. Then, someone—a civil cop, I think—screams "Police!" The crowd panics, and in the chaos we lose each other. I look desperately for my partner. No luck. I begin pelting

the cops with glass bottles, in attempt to drive them back so we can rejoin the rest of the Bloc. Gotta love German beer, or at least the bottles.

Did the crowd reject the Black Bloc, pushing them out and sacrificing them to the cops? While some pacifists tried to “de-escalate” the situation by raising their hands in front of the cops, for the most part the crowd was angered by the police and merged with the Black Bloc. As the bands played on, one singer got up and said over the microphone “This is not the spirit of Scotland, this is the spirit of Genoa!”—a statement of somewhat dubious value out of context, but clearly the speaker thought this “Spirit of Genoa” was a good thing and intended to express support for those fighting the cops. Cars were overturned and set afire, cops retreated, water cannons came out, and the bands played on as the crowd repulsed line after line of police charges—this was no Bono playing to complacent crowds at Live8. This was the redemptive spirit of Genoa—the spirit of resistance in the face of state violence, spreading like a virus through a crowd everyone had expected would just listen peacefully to the bands. The battle in Rostock was a victory like the inaugural protest against the G8 in Birmingham, and the spell that had been cast in Scotland to assimilate and pacify the “anti-globalization” movement was broken.

I step around a corner and see a line of cops standing guard next to the broken windows—so I hurl a glass bottle into the face of the closest officer. My bottle leaves my hand a few seconds too late, as the cops are already beginning a charge—although I do hear the satisfying shatter of the bottle against his helmet. Panicking, I turn to run, but a baton hits the nape of my neck and I fall to the asphalt.

Batons are beating my back and legs, gloved hands twisting my fingers and joints. I wrest my joints and hands free again and again, resolving to stay put as the cops pull my head up by my hair to take my picture. After some indeterminate amount of time, I see rocks and bottles soaring overhead. Black out. Darkness. Light. Then the impossible: there are no cops on top of me! The crowd has forced them

Appendix: Two Narratives from the 2007 G8

The march came to a standoff with the cops on a bridge over one of Hamburg’s downtown canals. The organizers called off the march at this point, letting everyone know that if they stayed it was no longer a permitted action. This was not so much a way to separate themselves from the “bad” unpermitted demonstrators or to encourage people to leave, but rather a license for those participants who wanted to throw down to go ahead and do so. Roughly 500 in black bloc stuck around, milling about in AG’s and figuring out what to do. In front of the march was a line of cops backed by water cannons, behind the march was an intersection we turn from, the two sides of which that weren’t walked by demonstrators marked off by rows of police and water cannons. The bloc made an offensive on the cops, but could not push through. The police made a few offensives on the demonstrators, and arrested a few. As time passed and passivity persisted, the chances were looking worse and worse for the few hundred demonstrators left. The only ways out were back the route we marched, lined with police, or down a walkway that traced along the side of the canal. Our AG started to file out down the pedestrian walkway, expecting to leave the demonstration. But as we turned up a street that paralleled the road to City Hall (where the ASEM meeting was occurring), we saw that the demonstration was following us! A sea of black began to emerge behind us. And much to our delight, as we continued to look back, the cops had chosen to stay on their bridge and leave our slowly building mass alone.

We walked for a few humble, residential blocks in total silence, total anonymity. On a few occasions someone would attempt to start a chant, but those nearby would hush them back to our stealthy silence. We turned up a hill, and as I secured my bandana and hoodie, I heard a comrade greet me. It was an Italian I had shared the kitchen with a few days before at the Rote Flora. His English was not very good, so we joked by sticking vegetables in

with a lot more than cobblestones. It doesn't hurt to bring the violence that lies beneath the veneer of capital in Western countries up to the surface, either. The real question can no longer go unspoken: "What is the appropriate response to a world of capitalist violence?"

All anarchists are comrades in a new sort of international brigade, and we must set our sights beyond battles like the one in Rostock. The networking that happens before the blockade, before the battle with the cops, lays the foundation for all our future blockades and battles and gives us our ultimate chance for decisive victory over capital. The real international summit was not at Heiligendamm—that was just a PR stunt for a few would-be leaders, and the fact that they needed 16,000 mercenaries to protect them from the rest of us reveals the worthlessness of power. The real international summit took place in the convergence centers and camps where thousands of brave, unshaven, and driven men and women whose names will never appear in history books organized their own daily lives, found unexpected friendships, hatched hopelessly idealistic conspiracies, and took to the streets and fields together. Regardless of the outcome of any particular demonstration, our international brigade will return home to the snows of Siberia and the strip-malls of America to share stories with those who could not go and e-mail newfound friends. The international brigades grow, the network beneath the network, the hidden roots that will blossom into the open space our world so desperately needs: a world outside the death-grip of the G8, a world we have glimpsed in the convergence centers, the camps, and—in our better moments—ourselves.

to retreat! I stand up and run at breakneck speed away from the police and into the crowd, aiming for the only safe place within reach: the deck of the Greenpeace ship parked near the waterfront. Where's my partner? Was she arrested? Hurt? Due to my reckless charge? I feel my soul collapse. Those who are not behind bars have to live with the consequences of their actions, and for the first time in my life I wish I had been caught.

Heiligendamm, June 6–7: Blockades Without End

After Genoa, the next G8 summit was moved the literal summit of a mountain in Evian, far from the urban terrain protesters have been accustomed to since the Paris Commune. This tactic of placing the meeting in a rural location inspired a new counter-tactic: spreading the blockades across miles and miles of difficult rural terrain. The summit site was hopelessly walled off, so the idea was to block the roads leading to and from it, so reporters and other sycophants couldn't reach the gates.

Anarchy always has at least two faces: one of chaos and one of self-organization. If the streets of Hamburg and Rostock exemplified the beautiful chaos of our movement, the self-organization of Camp Reddelich showed the other. Transforming an empty field of grass next to a slaughterhouse into a thriving village in less than a week, anarchists of every stripe proved that they are capable of running their own lives without governments or capitalists, police or prisons. Antifascist, Queer, Yellow, and Internationalist barrios sprouted organically as if from the earth. Kitchens dotted the fields along with security towers, tool-making workshops, Indymedia centers, training tents, info-booths, trauma tents, anti-sexist spaces, and thousands of other tents, all providing the physical and emotional spaces for people to organize, strategize, evaluate, share, dance, and live free. This autonomous zone, mirrored by two other rural camps and multiple

urban convergence centers across Germany, was the birthplace of a million secret plans.

Rural blockades require putting protesters in the countryside, so protest camps developed as a necessary prerequisite for large-scale rural direct action. In a step above the single camp at Stirling during the 2005 G8, hearkening back to the multiple camps at the 2003 G8 in Lausanne and Annemasse, the Dissent Network and the Interventionist Left set up three different camps. The first, Camp Rostock, was nearest to the city and held innumerable communists and NGO organizations—not to mention quite a few punks too drunk to get to other camps and a few clever anarchists who wanted some cover. The second, Camp Reddelich, was the closest to the “Red Zone,” and accordingly held almost entirely anarchists. The third, Camp Wichmannsdorf, was the domain of the more traditionally non-violent anti-nuclear blockaders—though in Germany, the line between the Black Bloc and non-violent civil disobedience against nuclear weapons is thin.

The camps were all incredibly well-functioning, with security shifts on watch-towers, self-organized canteens feeding thousands, anarchist-run bars (not serving the day before the blockades!), tents to deal with mainstream press, mobile Indymedia centres on wheels, endless conspiratorial meetings—and even showers! There was only one component missing: in the aftermath of Rostock, the alliance between the Interventionist Left and the autonomous movement started fraying, and the Dissent Network—perhaps having last minute qualms as the day of action approached—did not convene a public meeting about plans.

Raids were a constant worry at the camp and defensive measures were prepared in case of attack: barricades of scrap wood and metal, trenches to stop police vehicles, piles of bottles and rocks. The alarm was sounded one night at 3:30 a.m. when six vans pulled up to the front entrance and police in riot gear stepped out. The night

is that “the movement of movements” is fundamentally invested in open space, while the fascists want to reconstitute a closed world based on mythical ethnicities. It may be the battle between these two forces that takes the stage once the G8 is in the grave.

There is a logic to blockades and open space. Humans are creatures of habit, socially imprisoned by millennia-old closed systems of despair and discipline. To even begin to hear the voices of our desires that are otherwise muted by the hustle of everyday life under capitalism, we need open space. Here lies the paradox: today, the only way to create open spaces is through acts of closing, acts that blockade the circuits of capitalism. By blockading the flow of traffic, guilt, property, greed—whatever flows enable the growth of capital at the expense of the living—we create space for the living to flourish. These blockades may shut down roads or railways, but they open up space for new types of social relationships. During the blockades, we find ourselves accidental revolutionaries. By blockading the summit, our desire for safety is magically superseded, and our other desires flow naturally into the gap to become an unexpected reality. In a world enclosed, opening space this way allows us to shed our skins as workers, as students, as women, as men, as Germans, as members of this faction or that, and experience ourselves as part of something greater. These moments of freedom burn themselves into our memories, and it is our quest for such moments that causes us to keep coming back, summit after summit, regardless of the odds.

This is the secret of the rock thrown at the cop—and yes, the Black Bloc did throw the first stone! It is only through such a moment of negation, through the blockading of the police beneath a hail of stones, that we could create an open space, one that reflects the magnitude of what is at stake in these summits. Had the marches passed in peace, it would have been the tragic peace of the graveyard. Far better for us to throw our cobblestones—if trees and polar bears and the human beings marginalized in the ghettos of the global capitalism could, they would be going after the police

reaching a nadir in the United States with the FTAA protests in Miami 2003.

After September 11, suddenly everyone in the streets was “against capitalism”—not because of the growth or radicalization of the movement, but because its collapse had left what was once its periphery as its center. The anarchist critique of global capitalism incubated in these summits spread to many people outside the anti-globalization movement, and what was a defeat in the streets became a victory in the battle of ideas.

Starting at Evian, moving through Gleneagles, and reaching its apex at Heiligendamm, the true miracle of post-Genoa G8 protests was that what appeared to be the dying gasp of the movement in Europe has effectively reconstituted a growing “movement of movements” with anti-capitalism as its center. Everyone from the Interventionist Left to the Dissent Network put aside petty politics to work together to increase the momentum of the movement as a whole. Due to the work of the Interventionist Left, most NGOs of note endorsed blockading the G8—something still unimaginable in the US and Britain. Unlike the 2005 G8, reformist NGOs and political parties that tried to organize “alternative summits” and “rock concerts to fight poverty” met with low attendance, for the “hip” thing to do was direct action. The enemy—global capitalism—was identified far more clearly than it ever was in Seattle or Genoa. Thousands of people participated in their first direct action in the streets of Rostock and fields of Heiligendamm. The climate is changing: it’s becoming anti-capitalist.

One question for the new manifestation of the “movement of movements” is how to deal with those other “anti-capitalists,” the resurgent fascists—who took advantage of the G8 to articulate their own warped “Third Position” against capitalism by marching against the G8 in Berlin and Lueneberg. Luckily, the fascists were marginalized by the “movement of movements,” whose act of blockading and fighting police stole the show. The distinction between the “movement of movements” and the fascists in Germany

watch rang the alarm and within three minutes a large black bloc had formed at the front gate. The vans left as quickly as they’d arrived and the camp returned to sleep.

From the helicopters’ perspective, we must have looked quite threatening. Groups of eight to twelve all over the camp were huddling in circles, poring endlessly over topographical maps and transportation routes. Whispers circulated in thirty languages from barrio to barrio about which intersections to target, how to get there, when to move on, whether to join the official blockades or form a suicide bloc to charge the gates. The bars and kitchens swarmed with international anti-capitalists debating past summit strategies, victories and failures, similarities to the present and new challenges. How would the sixteen thousand cops respond to a direct attack on the fence? To an attack on the police themselves? Which roads are still open? How can we get there? How will we hold them? Block G8 had a plan, but the insurrectionary anarchists didn’t—or if any of them did, at least no one would discuss it publicly. Paranoia filled the air and meetings got more and more clandestine, finally to a point at which the decentralization of knowledge was almost debilitating. Fuck it, we have to try something.

Earlier rural blockades in both Evian and Gleneagles had failed because they didn’t last more than a few hours and so could not actually “shut down” the summit. As one popular poster in Germany put it, *Bewegen, Blockieren, Bleiben*—“Move. Block. Remain.” That critical “remain” had been left out of previous summit attempts. The strategic change was not to blockade as either mobile blocs or small groups jumping in and out of the road, as at previous summits, but to mass as many people as possible in the roads near the main entrances to Heiligendamm to blockade them in a non-violent manner, staying until the police literally dragged people off. While previous blockades had aimed for small numbers and offered virtually no training, the “Block G8” campaign returned to the mass non-violence civil disobedience that was so crucial to suc-

cess in Seattle but curiously and detrimentally absent at almost all subsequent summit protests. While the pacifist nature of this approach caused many of the “more-militant-than-thou” anarchists to mock it, the simplicity and accessibility of this approach enabled thousands of untrained Germans to join in the blockades.

Due to their long history of anti-nuclear Castor blockades, the German autonomous movement—unlike autonomous movements in places like Greece and the US—is experienced both at throwing rocks and erecting peaceful blockades. Internationals were bewildered as the Autonomen changed tactics from throwing rocks to sitting in streets for the day of blockades. When Block G8 moved into action on Wednesday, the cops more or less permitted it happen, much to the surprise of all—as they had quashed all demonstrations in the area after the riot in Rostock. Perhaps now that the G8 had officially begun, the police had to prove Germany was a civilized country without a near-fascist police force. Combined with Rostock, it was like a left punch of Black Bloc aggression followed by a right hook of colorful and effective blockades.

It wasn't until I saw the multi-colored array of 5000 people marching in the bright green fields under a soft blue sky with helicopters above and police below that it hit me: we shouldn't have underestimated the official blockades. Although the international anarchists and autonomists had decided against forming a militant presence at these blockades due to pressure from Block G8 organizers to remain nonviolent, there were still a number of us in black ready to throw down if necessary. As we tore through fields evading police lines, you could feel the growing excitement and power of the crowd. Breaking up into different columns to get past the police, we succeeded again and again in reaching the streets. Finally we saw it, the fence, with six layers of cops protecting it. Many hopped onto the main street and laid down immediately. The autonomous bloc started tearing down a barbed wire fence next to a forest that would serve as our escape route if necessary. The official organizers were scared and tried to dissuade us while the media captured their sexy images. The clowns played

Tentative Conclusions

When revolutionary movements take the historical stage, as the “movement of movements” did at the end of the last century, there inevitably follows an equal and opposite wave of counterrevolution.² As the curtain falls upon the reaction to “anti-globalization” known as the “War on Terror,” it becomes ever more urgent for a new rupture to reorient the world for another revolutionary moment. Today, the crises of migration, climate change, and the failure of global capital are far more important than the bankrupt narrative of terror. Despite the hype of the Dissent Network, the 2007 G8 was not the rupture we were waiting for—but it was a strategic realignment of the global movement, positioning us to strike and tear the seams of history apart to create that much-needed rupture. As any martial artist can tell you, the positioning for the strike is as important as the strike itself.

Movements decline, dissolving into fragments and micro-parties, failing to grasp the imaginations of even their own most dedicated adherents. Movements rise, consolidating new assemblages, spreading hope to even the most forlorn hearts. After Seattle, there was a rapid if unarticulated consolidation across completely unexpected boundaries, leading to the christening of the “movement of movements.” Through avenues such as the radical “fringe” of the social forums and endless gatherings, a coherent critique of capitalism, most vocal in the Global South, began slowly but surely penetrating the movements in the West and North. After September 11, 2001, the movement fractured: the “center,” organized labor and NGOs, fled back to the welcoming arms of the State—or, in parts of the Global South, actually took over the State apparatus. This left only a ragtag bunch of anti-capitalists throwing themselves from defeat to defeat in the streets,

² These words ring all the more true ten years later, in 2017, when the worldwide wave of uprisings and occupations of 2008–2013 has given way to a worldwide wave of reaction, from Ukraine and Brazil to the the US and France.

crowd got there the police were already there. Strangely enough, there were almost no Germans at the Reclaim the Streets, and it ended without any more incident than a few destroyed cars.

While the Berlin police may not have known about Plan B, many anarchists did not either. Perhaps the vast decentralized infrastructure of three separate camps made communication impossible; it takes more than a good idea to get people involved. Also, there was a real lack of support from many Berlin autonomists, who originally seemed to pledge their support. This might be understandable: their primary social center, Køpi, is threatened with eviction, and a major riot in Berlin would have brought harsh repression upon them. It would have been far better for all involved if locals had been more upfront about their doubts instead of simply not showing up.

The idea of separating aggressive demonstrators from pacifists by giving each their “own” day of action divides the movement tactically and temporally, which plays perfectly into the hands of the police. It’s far better to divide spatially if numbers allow, but to act all at once on the same day. Dividing the movement spatially over Rostock, Berlin, Hamburg, and Heiligendamm definitely stretched the police to their breaking point, but made coordination difficult at best. In hindsight, doing anything new and dangerous requires not only an adequate assessment of your numbers and strength but also *truly believing it will work*. Plan B failed on account of a crisis of faith.

We sat in the darkness, Berlin far from in flames and only the ghosts of our dreams to haunt us. Slightly drunk, a comrade from Greece muttered, “In Greece, you are welcome in my house. In Greece, all of us will make bottles together, and throw them at the fascists, and...” He was almost choking. He turned to me and said, “Now is time for that most sad of moments, the emptying of the Molotovs.”

their games, the cops stood their ground, and everyone just sat there, waiting, for days.

Since the Block G8 campaign organized openly, it’s possible that the police knew the locations of the blockades and funneled all important delegates down another road, letting the protesters blockade the “main gates” to Heiligendamm. This raises the disturbing possibility that the G8 leaders are happy to allow the spectacle of a blockade to happen so long as it remains colorful, non-violent, and does not interrupt their actual operations. While the Block G8 plan and non-violence guidelines were mostly respected on Wednesday, on Thursday all bets were off.

Protesters swept across the fields of Heiligendamm and tried to blockade nearly every road. The day started off with a nearly comic attempt to repeat the “Suicide March” Black Bloc that was so successful at Gleneagles during the 2005 G8. Only a few hundred people, the Bloc barely got out of Camp Reddelich before being assaulted by cops and fleeing back in; in retaliation, the cops surrounded the entrance to the camp, preventing the 6 am Dissent Bloc from leaving. At the same time, mostly German groups struck with a series of decentralized blockades on major roads, achieving varying degrees of success. The paranoia and tight-lipped nature of the German autonomous movement left many of the internationals at the camp isolated, frustrated, and surrounded by cops, with only the all-knowing and all-seeing “Infopoint” to help them—although the Indymedia dispatch line ended up being invaluablely useful for those who knew about it.

As the police left the front of the camps, the internationals formed a “rolling blockades” march that left camp at 9 am. In two hours they reached the gates of Heiligendamm itself, blockading the roads and using the “five fingers make a fist” strategy when confronted by the police: breaking into smaller groups and reforming on the other side of police lines. At one point, in a moment of long-overdue poetic justice, the Russian delegates were blocked by Eastern Europeans who smashed their car! By the end of the day,

the blockades had so disrupted the summit that the police began clearing them with unusual ferocity, using water cannons to shoot water mixed with tear gas. Some blockaders refused to leave and continued to resist, turning Block G8 blockades into autonomous blockades. In the end, what started as colorful blockades of clowns and pacifists gained the air of a battlefield, and what had seemed certain defeat became apparent victory.

At the West Gate, a car carrying Russian delegates attempted to pass protesters. It was stopped and the wheels were deflated and the exhaust pipe broken. Activists then opened the trunk and removed the belongings of the delegates, just as the G8 removes the freedom of those it claims to represent. Once the trunk was opened the car drove into people, resulting in its windows being smashed.

“A few days ago the BBC reported that Tony Blair was ‘concerned’ about the lack of democracy in Russia. The Russian government doesn’t give a fuck if he is concerned or not. Hopefully they will listen to this act of resistance.”
-From a communiqué posted to Indymedia

Berlin, June 8: Anticlimax

Our hopes weren’t dashed yet. The next morning our rural fun was to begin. We started early, around 3 am. First decision: suicide march or autonomous blockade? We chose the latter and moved slowly into position. Cars were dropping off packs of people by the woods. Affinity groups disappeared into the forest as endless lines of cop vans appeared. It seemed like the setting for a Wild West shootout, with both sides building up their arsenals and waiting for the other to move first. Seventy-five of us made it safely inside, transformed into a black mob, and moved like a guerrilla army through the brush, dodging under

tree cover when helicopters swooped by. Camouflage would have been better than black—but hey, we’re city folks; black’s our forte.

With saws and combustibles in hand, ready to light up the morning with a spectacular blockade, we called a last minute meeting. Speaking in four languages through our masks in the black forests of northern Germany, we called it off. It was a trap. Other blockades on the same road happened and all were arrested immediately with no effect. Disappointed yet feeling good about our judgment, we dispersed into our casual clothes and headed for Berlin, where the final show was about to begin.

Some of the internationals were frustrated with the entire “Plan A” of the blockades. Coming out of a year-long analysis of previous mass mobilizations, Genoa in particular, various insurrectionists decided that it was time to take the initiative and try something new. Instead of following the lead of the traditional Left, using its large marches and demonstrations as cover for breaking windows and burning cars, they decided to see if they could launch a strategic attack by themselves, one that would violate the traditional set-piece roles of mass mobilizations. With the help of some of the German Autonomes, a secretive “Plan B” was organized in case the blockades failed. While the blockades appeared successful, on the final day of action a banner appeared on the two decrepit cement towers overlooking Camp Reddelich: “Plan B: Burn Berlin!”

Plan B resembled the idea behind the Seattle Black Bloc, when an autonomous bloc took advantage of police being distracted by blockades to wreck the shopping district—but instead of happening outside the summit, it was to take place in the nearest large city. Tactically, it was attractive, since on the day when a thousand Berlin police would be distracted by dealing with the blockades a Black Bloc could more easily strike the heart of financial capital in Berlin. However, only a few hundred people showed up, surrounded by riot police and infiltrated with undercover civil cops. A piece of paper went from hand to hand notifying protesters they should move to Rosenthal Place to begin a riot, but by the time the