ences. Where anti-terrorism is concerned, it's the intention that counts, and here the intention could only be laudable.[1]

The formula in question was an 'weapon.' And like every arm, it was appreciated for its 'effectiveness.' The police criterion of effectiveness was not very juridical, certainly, but it imposed itself like a Glock in the middle of the face: as they tirelessly repeated, there hadn't been an attack on French soil since 1995. The blackmail was couched in these terms: "Don't tie our hands or there will be deaths." From laws to decrees to the paroxysm of the latest 'law on intelligence,' it's an understatement to say that over the past twenty-five years the successive heads of government bravely submitted to this blackmail. In this way, little by little, the anti-terrorist services were placed above the law. Their field of action no longer knows any limit. The bulk of what they do is classified and the last channels of recourse against them have been dismantled. It must be admitted that governing figures with little purchase on developments in the world have found what they needed here: weren't the army and the police the last levers available to them, the last forces that were supposed to obey them? And what's more, the interest of the secret services in terms of communication – the real function of the governing authorities now – is that since the information they hold is officially secret, one can lie about it without risking to be contradicted. That the DGSI* has taken for its headquarters, at Levallois-Perret, the former offices of Euro RSCG,* is a coincidence worth thinking about. Thus, a Cazeneuve* can congratulate himself in a press statement for "the effectiveness of the services of the Ministry of the Interior in the fight against terrorism" as he did last November 10, and only events can reduce such a miserable little exercise in self-promotion to the nonsense that it is. They didn't fail to do so.

[1] Translated from the original French by Robert Hurley. For more about the context surrounding this text we recommend referencing the introduction of this issue.

Hostis 2

Beyond Recognition

Hostis

Against the State of Emergency [Contre l'état d'urgence, l'urgence de prendre la rue] (anonymous)

Gone are the days when they could cynically joke, in the Anti-Terrorist Sub-Directorate: "There are more people making a living from terrorism than there are dying from it." Gone, too, the days when anti-terrorism à la française, or rather, à la Bruguière,* dripped with self-satisfaction in the pages of the magazines. Didn't its prize formula, "criminal association in connection with a terrorist undertaking," enable it to preventively neutralize whomever one wished and keep them in the cooler long enough to "tenderize the meat," even though there was no incriminating evidence? And what wisdom on the part of the anti-terrorist judges and police! : their sense of the Republic was such that they never dreamed of exploiting that gap in the penal code which the formula effectively constitutes. They could have locked away just about anyone they wanted to on frivolous grounds, and they didn't. As a reward for this surprising restraint, it was agreed that one shouldn't focus too much on the falsifications, the doctorings and other little lies they were in the habit of inserting into the procedures and press confer-

construction of a sensitive communism is the only thing capable of punching through the historical nightmare from which we're trying to wake up.

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the West, has ever had any scruples about killing, or letting die, in its name. Each day of life in France offers sufficient confirmation of that. Moreover, the stupefaction effect produced by Friday's attacks is due precisely to their *spectacularly anti-economic* character: is there a more enigmatic, inexplicable act for the rational calculator trying to maximize his usefulness and his satisfaction, than this gang of guys wasting human lives right and left and finally killing themselves – pure human, cultural, social capital, patiently accumulated through daily efforts, having reached the age of its maximum productivity, and sacrificed for nothing, the economist would say, appalled. What have they *gained* by that? Haven't they lost everything, for no good reason? Those who speak of the 'mystery of terrorism' in this instance neglect to point out that the mystery exists as such only from *the point of view of economy*. They don't see that this is *done on purpose*: the pleasure of the suicidal attacker firing into the crowd lies precisely in bringing the arrogant Western economic creature down to the level of a rat stepping over its moaning fellow creatures to survive, in shattering the superiority of his false transcendence facing the miserable immanence of the struggle for life. If there's an attack against a certain happiness in what has transpired, it resides both in the massacre and in the reflex, after the carnage, to *defend* that happiness – for a happiness that needs defending never takes long to become a lie.

May last Friday's attacks, and those that are bound to follow given the spiral which the governing authorities have deliberately set in motion, make us truer and less distracted, deeper and less hypocritical, more serious and more communist. For us, this is the real war, the one that, in the West, merits the risking of one's life: the war to have done with economy. But it's a war, let it be said, that's not pursued via spectacular massacres, however anti-economic they may be. The warfare in our case is *essentially indirect*. It is through lived communism that the terrain of economy will be diminished, which doesn't rule out bold actions when they're appropriate to the situation. More clearly than ever, the

be Pascal, no doubt, who would be found in the camp of the 'terrorists.'

The stupidest thing to do when something or someone is attacked is to defend them because they are attacked. It's a well-known Christian vice. It makes little sense to defend 'France' – which is what, exactly, 'France'? – Paris, the hipsters, football, or rock because they were assaulted. *Libération's* front page about the attacks doesn't erase what was announced initially, which had to do, curiously, with the social and human ulcer that hipsters constitute in the heart of the metropolises, and more particularly in Paris. The kind of emotional coup d'État that attempted, last January, to make *Charlie Hebdo* into 'France' won't succeed this time in imposing identification with a certain form of metropolitan life. The cognitive-communicational petty bourgeoisie, the party highs, the hit-on and hook-up routine, the hip salary bros, the hedonism of the cool thirty-something, will never manage to pass for 'our way of life,' 'our values,' or even for 'culture.' It's a certain form of life, like there are so many of in these times, in this country, and which don't always only inspire good feelings. The instrumentalization of the attacks by certain propagandists in order to ensure the moral hegemony of that particular form of life can only contribute to making it loathsome.

The situation is the following. We are faced with two fundamentalisms: the economic fundamentalism of the governments, be they right-wing, left-wing, extreme right-wing, extreme left-wing – all across the political spectrum there are only believers in economy, calculation, work, measurement, accounting, and social engineering – and the ideological fundamentalism of the partisans of the Caliphate. Neither group is open to discussing the least of its articles of faith, even though their religions are *both defunct*, surviving only by dint of voluntarism, absurd massacres, endless crises, and therapeutic doggedness. There is an obvious fanaticism in the fact of responding to the crisis of neoliberalism by unleashing it on the world. While few are ready to die for the economy, no one, in

Introduction: Recognition and its Discontents

For reasons that will become evident in the course of this text and to save the reader the trouble of sifting through the details, we offer up our analysis at the start: the politics of recognition, insofar as recognition is treated as the means for collective emancipation, is nothing more than a mirage that welcomes those upstanding citizens of Empire into civilization's warm embrace. We view recognition as another way to fall back on the illusion of the 'neutral observer;' as a nonpartisan; as if innocence will save us from one more act of State violence; a respite from the surplus extraction part of Capital's growing expanse. It is in the name of partisanship, of taking sides, of choosing enemies, that we repeat the advice of our Tarnac friends: "To no longer wait is, in one way or another, to enter into the logic of insurrection. It is to once again hear the slight but always present trembling of terror in the voices of our leaders. Because governing has never been anything other than postponing by a thousand subterfuges the moment when the crown will string you up, and every act of government is nothing but a way of not losing control of the population.[1]"

Seeking recognition is always servile. We have little interest in visibility, consciousness raising, or populist pandering. Recognition always treats power as a give-and-take. On the one hand, the dispossessed use recognition as respite from exploitation; while on

[1] Invisible Committee, The Coming Insurrection, trans. anonymous (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 64.

the other, the State expects its authority to be recognized as the first and final say. According to this logic, for the dispossessed to even get a step up, they must first acknowledge a higher power than themselves.

The particulars of our own time are even more obscene. Following the spread of economic rationality on a global scale, it is clear that the flow of forces has reversed. The State pornographically exposes its long-protected interior for others to abuse while lasciviously grooming what is beyond its regular reach. Recognition chastely reassures the State of its powers. All the while, the most banal State functions are farmed out to the highest bidder. So when their parking ticket is authored by a private corporation, those who seek recognition fall back on the State dictum that nothing good comes from the outside.

Recognition is the last refuge of those unwilling to make a break with what is intolerable about this world. The worst of them are power brokers looking to sell access to those who subjugate us, urging us to find common interest with politicians, capitalist, and NGO cheats of every kind. It is easy to identify these swindlers by their pitch for ”making a difference” by ”working inside the system” with ”community partners,” or even worse, the business of ”social justice” aimed at ”serving the underrepresented.” They’re always generous, far too generous, with advice on pitching a project meant to enroll others. Ever wonder if, behind all their ’selfless’ marketing wisdom, they believe anything themselves? We’re convinced that their only strongly held beliefs are a nebulous faith in ’the power of people raising their voice’ and other vague populist propaganda about the benefits of civic engagement. The one clear thing is the consequence: of the projects that operate by seeking recognition, the only ones that succeed are those that also somehow benefit the powers that be.

By far the worst aspect of recognition is its role in resolution. From where we stand, civil society appears only as a degraded arm of the State. Collective process, democratic representation, and

> In point of fact, the end of human Time or History – that is, the definitive annihilation of Man properly so-called or of the free and historical Individual – means quite simply the cessation of Action in the full sense of the term. Practically, this means: the disappearance of wars and bloody revolutions. And also the disappearance of Philosophy; for since Man himself no longer changes essentially, there is no longer any reason to change the (true) principles which are at the basis of his understanding of the World and of himself. But all the rest can be preserved indefinitely; art, love, play, etc.; in short, everything that makes Man happy (…) If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play must also become purely “natural” again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult beasts. But one cannot then say that all this “makes Man happy.” One would have to say that post-historical animals of the species Homo sapiens (which will live amidst abundance and complete security) will be content as a result of their artistic, erotic, and playful behavior, inasmuch as, by definition, they will be contented with it.”

If one wished to be more cruel, and draw from an even more indisputable heritage, one would have to say rather that Friday’s attacks – against a stadium, bistros, a concert venue – were a bloody and pitiless offensive against entertainment, in which case it would

defend the ancient thesis that freedom begins with the fact of not fearing death, and in that regard it appears that last Friday's attackers may have been a bit freer than 'we' are. Moreover, because the freedom that one has on the sexual, professional, cultural, or simply social market is so tightly structured by the ferocious competition that prevails there that this freedom could just as well be called 'terrible servitude' instead. Lastly, because the freedom of "I do what I like with my hair/ with my ass/with my dick/with my tongue, etc." looks quite pathetic, really, in the sober light of the morning after. The bourgeois adage which, from the Middle Ages to Michelet, endlessly proclaimed that "city air is liberating" (*Stadluft macht frei*) lapsed into uselessness like just about everything else the bourgeoisie invented: work won't set you free any more either, and hasn't for a very long time. So on the contrary, the air of the metropolis makes you lonely, connected, depressed, miserable, self-centered, sociable, competitive, hard, opportunistic, fuckable or fucked…whatever, but not free.

The *doxa* of the moment has it that what came under attack was 'our way of life,' as represented on Friday nights by football,trendy bars, and rock concerts – a way of life that's uninhibited, liberal, libertine, atheist, transgressive, urban, festive, and so forth. This is what France, civilization, democracy, and 'values' would be: the possibility of living, without believing in anything, a life after the 'death of God,' a life which is precisely what His zealots would like to destroy. The only problem is that all the characterizations given of that 'way of life' by so many of its enthusiastic or melancholy believers pretty much coincide with what Western thinkers, recognized in other circumstances as being extraordinarily lucid, have consistently denounced. Read some of the opinion pieces and editorials of the past few days and then have a look at part five of the prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* concerning the last men. Consider Bataille's "Sacred Conspiracy." Skim through Michelstaedter's *Persuasion and Rhetoric*. Read Kojève's notes on the end of History in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*:

community accountability might feel radical, but they are the actions of the State dressed in black. They transform our desire for antagonism into 'agonistic' fuel for the engine of statecraft. The process of recognition begins with a riotous insurrection, makes it into an angry mob, then into an unruly crowd, into a gathering of concerned citizens, into a protest organization, into a political party, and finally into a class of legislators. Some enlightened 'direct democrats' believe in abbreviating the process of resolution in a return to representation. Our path is far darker. Ours is the 'mad black communism' that haunts the goodwill of these leftist party bureaucrats. This does not simply mean a politics where your socialist party finance minister wears a suit without a tie or walks the halls of Parliament with his hands in his pockets. It means, first of all, to transform what is present within riotous insurrection into sites of material leverage, to the point where any 'movement' worthy of the name is, in itself, irreversible.

However, it is worth noting that there is nothing new in saying we must move beyond recognition. Remembering Stokely Carmichael on non-violence, we refuse the ready-made game of back-and-forth; waiting for the State to recognize the violence it purports to shield us from. Add to this the reminder from our Tarnac friends that "waiting is madness… [because] we are already situated within the collapse of a civilization. It is within this reality that we must choose sides."[2] It is this manner in which we assert that *waiting for recognition is like waiting for the democracy to come: a war by other means waged through infinite deferral. As in warfare, there are enemies regardless of whether or not a declaration of formal conflict is recognized. Empire does not have a conscience. Empire does not give a shit about critique.*

We contrast recognition with the destruction of worlds. Our destruction is both affective and collective – *Hostis* nurses a hatred for this world, and it works to annihilate everything it hates.

[2] The Coming Insurrection, p. 63.

Our purpose is to make apparent to all what is already self-evident to us: that our collective self-interest lies in the destruction of this world. Orthodox Marxists argue that revolutionary politics emerges from the working class when they realize the benefits of overturning capitalism. This is why the *Communist Manifesto* denounces "philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind."[3] The line we draw is not between bourgeois/proletariat (good/bad, left/right, oppressor/oppressed, etc.) but between those who preserve what is intolerable about this world and those of us dismantling it.

We must learn how to weaponize the concrete asymmetry between Empire and the dispossessed. We are drawn to those who sharpen the gap between the State and its subjects, not into biting tongues but cutting edges. Thus, against the State's idealized invocation of authority, *Hostis* listens to military strategists who say that opening with a concession is to begin from a position of weakness. The point of *Hostis* is to spread the crisis of representation; to antagonize the vulgar translation at every step along the way. It is for this reason that we retain the language of anti-politics, the destruction of worlds, and so on. We have no interest in 'rights,' as they imply the exploitation of wider swaths of the global population. The State or Capital may grant some individuals rights, freedoms, or security, but is quite plain that these benefits only extend so far. The only guarantee we acknowledge is that the global population Fanon called *the wretched of the Earth* continues to grow. Following Fanon's advice, *Hostis* evades recognition altogether. It leaves the job of identification to the police. Abandoning the project of the struggle for recognition is already at work in various areas of the globe, and *Hostis* simply

[3] Marx and Engels, Chapter 3, Communist Manifesto, Part 2.

of attacks on our soil?" and that our general advisor, in his role as commander-in-chief, gravely and laconically replied: "Oui." Because the fact is, for a long time antiterrorism has shown its miraculous effects for leaders suffering total discredit and that these days it is preferable to be judged on the basis of one's enemies rather than on the basis of one's results.

We're not sure why, but the massacres claimed by the I.S. seem to have the virtue of triggering bouts of extreme confusion in response, and, for many, unusual crises of hypocrisy. As if the effective reign of hypocrisy in nearly every domain of Western societies could only be countered by an added dose of the same drug – which in the long run will surely lead to a fatal overdose. Thus, it can't be attributed to a lack of information that a cartoonist in vogue reacted to the attacks with a speech balloon saying: "The people who died this evening were out to enjoy life, to drink and to sing. They didn't know that someone had declared war on them." In the age of social networking, one has to be strangely intoxicated to pretend not to know that the French armed forces are projected over a good half-dozen theaters of foreign operations, and that certain interventions, particularly in Mali, in Syria, in Iraq, and also in Afghanistan, have rather incensed certain bombarded minds. We won't talk here about the militarization of law enforcement, the death of protesters hit by offensive grenades and others blinded in one eye by police flashballs – what would be left of the cartoonist's comfort if he became aware that every government basically conducts a continuous war for control of its population? And what would be left of his avowed casualness if it occurred to him that his 'champagne,' his 'joy,' and his 'kisses' are somewhat situated sociologically, culturally, ethically – in a word: that his 'freedom' is that of the winners? And it needs to be said, all this business about 'freedom' that's been tweeted back and forth and hashed over in articles and speeches for the past three days doesn't ring at all true. As a matter of fact, it sounds like a crude instance of mutual flattery. Because, to start with, we're not the first here to

> is the condemnation of everything that is recognized today, an inner exigency demands that we be equally imperious. What we are undertaking is a war."
>
> – Georges Bataille, Acéphale #1

Communicators and governing authorities, who can no longer sell the 'security' which they are manifestly incapable of delivering to any of their subjects, have pounced on the latest Parisian massacres in order to recast their rhetoric.[1] "We are at war," they tirelessly repeat, with the slight giddiness that always accompanies the manipulation of a new toy.

So they have a rhetorical device they can try out, for sure, but not really use, as Arnauld and Nicole would have said. Because if 'we' are at war, then what could be more normal than enemy commandos coming and attacking the country's cities? What could be more normal than civilians being struck down? What could be more normal than asymmetrical bloodbaths? Isn't that what 'war' is since 1939 and perhaps since 1914? If so, then how can one reproach the enemy for barbarism when he's only practicing the contemporary art of war – which prescribes, for example, slaughtering a presumed enemy military commander along with his family from a drone, when the occasion presents itself? But more importantly, if in Algeria there had only been 'events' such as the bombs at the Milk Bar and La Corniche Casino, which were answered with 'police operations' that also involved massacres, bombs, forced relocations, camps, and torture – if these were just 'events' and not a war, what does it mean that 'war' is spoken of now? It's a good bet that when poor François Hollande, with his popularity down in the basement, decided to intervene in Mali, then in Iraq, one of his military advisers whispered in his ear, worried: "But Mr. President, you do realize that such an engagement greatly increases the risks

[1] This piece was originally a Lundi Matin editorial and is presented as such. Translation courtesy of Robert Hurley, whose contributions and comments made this issue possible.

seeks to add to this growing body of literature.

LAYING SIEGE TO EMPIRE FROM OUTSIDE THE CITY GATES

> **§1** *Royal etiquette demands specific protocol: paramount is the rule of no touching; one should never extend a hand in the expectation of a handshake. Begin by saying "Your Majesty" and wait to see if they initiate a handshake. If offered, accept, but do not squeeze too hard, as it would be seen as a challenge to their power. Similarly, refrain from conversation unless they start it…*

We were buoyed in 2015 by sustained activity in the U.S. against the police, who executed more than a thousand people. Through a perverse deployment of the legal right to *habeas corpus*, it appears that United States citizens are guaranteed representation by the State insofar as this right is granted, in large part, through the literal 'presentation and/or having of the *corpses'* of those it claims to represent. It was interrupted by parliamentary victories by the Left in Europe, with the short lived excitement of Syriza in Greece and recent success of Podemos in Spain, further bookended by attacks in France. What do these events have to do with our struggle to move 'beyond recognition'?

For one, it is increasingly transparent that the social categories of recognition take the perspective of State power, and that they are the means through which the State *represents* the power of a people. We see this activity in the public person of the good-citizen who has purified themselves of any cultural or religious heritage that may hint of any Islamic affiliation. Muslims unwilling to pass

as completely secular are compelled to make pre-emptive denunciations of violence to make public 'whose side they are really on.' This is where recognition reveals its true purpose as the State's biopolitical tool in the ongoing civil war.

On November 22, 2014, Tamir Rice was executed by two Cleveland police officers. The justification, as it goes, was that his airsoft gun constituted enough of a danger to the lives of the police officers and the community at large that Tamir's murder was necessary. In the eyes of the law, a young black body playing by himself in a park was all suspicion needed for police officers Timothy Loehmann and Frank Garmback to kill him. The most vocal activist response is to proclaim that 'the civil rights movement is not over,' implying that such brutality is a an effect of black Americans not being fully recognized as citizens in the eyes of the law. The only thing those rights guard is the path to innocence. They are the words of those who say with all honestly, "injustice is when the wretched of the earth are treated as a problem, for they are not one." In their haste to not be a problem, the innocent strip themselves of everything but their proof of good citizenship, which is a script only redeemable with those already looking to punish you. Innocence can only be cashed out to pay for a single act: the event of the sovereign adjusting the scales of justice so that punishment once again fits the crime.

What if Tamir's gun had been real, Mike Brown had actually charged like a demon, or what if Trayvon really did hit first? We would support them even more. Our solidarity does not extend in spite of alleged criminality but usually because of it. Though it is trite, one must remember that colonialism, slavery, the Holocaust, and apartheid were all legal. Yet we have nothing good to say about Clement Attlee, Abraham Lincoln, Dwight Eisenhower, or F.W. Klerk, even if it was their pen that ended each one of those terrible systems. Our heroes come from the ranks of the Haitian Revolution, the *Creole* ship revolt, Eastern European partisan units, and Umkhonto we Sizwe. We could care less about being recog-

The Real War [La guerre véritable] (anonymous)

"What we have undertaken must not be confused with anything else and cannot be limited to the expression of certain ideas or even less to what is rightly considered art. It is necessary to produce and to eat: many things are necessary that are still nothing, and so it is with political agitation. Who imagines, before fighting to the end, leaving one's place to men one cannot look at without feeling the urge to destroy them? But if nothing could be found beyond political activity, human avidity would only encounter the void. WE ARE FIERCELY RELIGIOUS and, inasmuch as our existence

a story where we win?

best,
The Editors

nized by those who see it as their job to rule over us, justly or unjustly. ***Fuck justice, we want revenge.***

Recognition has not evolved much since the days of that Royal etiquette we mentioned before. Though it has traded a bit of its gold gilding for bureaucratic banalities, the State still insinuates itself in all conflicts as the vanishing mediator – the ultimate arbiter of justice, and the final judge of what is good. Its goal is to ensure that anything not recognized simply ceases to exist at all.

Foucault clarifies the stakes with his concept of biopolitics – as we become modern, recognition expand from courtly game to principle of governance. The nation is no longer worn like a badge of honor by the sovereign and is actively grown according to scientific principles of security, territory, and population. The pompous social sport of recognition (as seen in any comedy of manners) is developed into a finely-tuned system of surveillance, development, and policing. He summarizes this transition from a monarchy largely indifferent to their commoners to a modern State obsessed with waging wars in the name of its population; from ”letting live and making die” to ”making live and letting die.” But how can the State go from letting live to letting die? Dispossession. Modernization is just shorthand for so-called land reform, which expropriates people from their ancestral lands and in turn withholds access to their means of subsistence. This is why the greatest violence today is not the State’s summary executions or that of those who fight back, but the biopolitical system of abandonment meant to make life outside the approving eye of the State unlivable.

The obvious strategy is to reverse one of the two processes: abandonment or dispossession. But what does a reversal of abandonment look like in the age of biopolitics? That the State act on our behalf? The recognition of a previously unsanctioned way of life as worthy of State support? The State codification of a freedom or entitlement as a right? All of these approaches already cede too much. Those who were never expropriated from their own means of subsistence do not suffer the same way from abandonment; they

can engage the State as an all-or-nothing proposition. So instead of expanding the system of recognition premised on the power of another, we are interested in strategies that reverse our dispossession.

Simply put, our goal is to lay siege to Empire from outside the city gates. For this, we are called barbaric. Not self-attributed but a smear, the term 'barbarian' was invented by Hellenistic Greeks as onomatopoeia for the blabber of those who could not speak their language. Lacking the capacity for reason, 'barbarian' is used to paint certain foreigners as unworthy of social, political, or legal recognition. They are not just any stranger, as not all strangers are vilified by the citizens of empire. Rather, barbarians have two defining characteristics: they refuse to be educated in the language of the polis, and they act with a savage roughness that exceeds the boundaries of appropriateness. The first jams the usual logocentric means of recognition that would extend them the communal rights of being a human. The second banishes them to the uncivilized realm of beasts that lacks decorum, protocol, and restraint. Nomads are perfectly satisfied with such a one-sided story. What initially appears as an insulting depiction of their limited capacities instead is a definition of how they avoid capture. As the Italian authors Crisso and Odoteo argue, barbarians can continue their siege as long as the likes of Hegel, "an honest subject of the Prussian state," cannot apprehend "a completely autonomous, sovereign, uncompromising opposition – a multiplicity that does not allow itself to be enrolled in any synthesis."[4] The outside to the new 'socially-conscious' economy, barbarians avoid the liberal trap of tolerance, compassion, and respect. The only risk is that ferocity will abate and passion subsides.

[4] Crisso and Odoteo, Barbarians: The Disordered Insurgence (The Anarchist Library, 2003).

Given that power does not always favor the subjects it produces, we offer this point of contrast: Plan C remarked that we have moved from an era defined by boredom (1960's) and into an era defined by anxiety (today). The burnout as danger is only exacerbated in a period where the generalized affective condition of individuals is an anxious one. We anxious subjects are flooded with stimuli, inundated with fragments of information from the world without the means for making those fragments meaningful. And in the era of Pharmacological control, Capital has found the means to turn a profit on the burnout. Our anxiety is turned into Xanax, our depression into Prozac. These lives are now a biochemically regulated existence that allows us to continue compromising ourselves every time we are called upon to hate ourselves – just a little bit more to get by just a little longer. In this state of affairs, the burnout is no longer simply a danger, but another site where pharmaco-capitalism exercises its control at the intimate level of bodies themselves. Given this situation, burning out does not simply mean subjective death; it is a source of value for those who oppress us. We are not chaste: do as many poppers as you please. In fact, we do not see such 'metabolic rift' as alienation from some natural long-lost existence. We want to experiment with chemistry within-against-and-beyond the value-form being written into our DNA. Such biochemical processes already bears fruit, but only as a poisoned gift for sabotaging the pharmaco-political system from the inside. So as potential burnouts ourselves, we interested in turning these bio-chemical commodities away from our own private anxieties toward their reason social causes.

In the end, we are not worried about queer vengeance being reactionary. We think that blackmail is an underappreciated art. Perhaps queer vengeance is often not reactionary enough – lacking the strength to defeat our enemies, not deep enough to rid ourselves of their systems of oppression, and without the persistence to destroy the world that they've created. Perhaps you can tell us

Our biggest complaint about this worldview is its failure to realize that "a power that produces more than it represses" does not always bend in our favor. Foucault calls it disciplinary power, which was born out of the ascetic practices of priests and was quickly adopted by the military, hospitals, schools, and prisons. For us, the shining example is capitalism, as it epitomizes a social system in which the oppressors actively improve the capacities of the oppressed. The novelty of such systems is that they do not treat power as a scarce resource whereby one's gain implies an other's equal-opposite loss. In fact, capitalists enhance their own position by partially advancing the interests of those who work for them. On-the-job training, fringe benefits, and career advancement opportunities are not a lie – it is just that these forms of 'expanded reproduction' all favor the firm in the last instance.

Do not mistake our vigilance for pessimism about excess. We still believe in the old anarchist maxim that our desires are too big to fit inside their ballot boxes. That is to say, we remain partisans in the fight against economies of scarcity, the policing of bodies, and the paranoid accounting of representation. We are equally sure that excess is not enough to save us. It would be nice if all it took to live a life of resistance was to speak rudely, fuck loudly, and act with wild abandon on the path to transcending social norms of all kind. For us, a burnout is not someone who has 'forgotten' about those forms excess; rather, the burnout suffers from excessiveness. The life of the burnout active, even exhausting, because they ritualistically re-enact a defiance for any use whatsoever. They are the ultimate rebel without a cause. This is how anarchy can be a bodyspray, riots are the meaningless content of popular music videos, and communist chic appears as just another nostalgic fashion trend. Is there any potential in slick anarchist magazines, communist conceptual art, or queer dance parties? Perhaps, but only as it realizes a fundamental contradiction of our age: *excess is simultaneously the condition of our liberation and the substance of our domination.*

ALL THAT IS RECOGNIZABLE MELTS INTO AIR

> **§2** *The State is not our sole enemy in moving beyond recognition. Capital proves time and again that the State is merely its functionary for the accumulation of global surplus in the hands of the few. It was already in the 1970's that Gabriel Ardent formulated what we are still witnessing in the beginning of 2016: namely, the neoliberal transformation of capitalism through the credit-debt relation. As Ardent notes, credit is "one of the most effective instruments of exploitation man has managed to create, since certain people, by producing credit, are able to appropriate the labor and wealth of others."*[5] *It is precisely through finance that the marriage between Capital and the State utilizes its mode of economic recognition as the means to determine which sections of the population are fit for the extraction of value from social life.*

Between the years of 2005 to 2008, Wells Fargo targeted Black and Latino families with mortgages the bank knew they could not repay: "Wells Fargo … saw the black community as fertile ground for subprime mortgages, as working-class blacks were hungry to be a part of the nation's home-owning mania. Loan officers … pushed customers who could have qualified for prime loans into subprime mortgages. Another loan officer stated in an affidavit filed last week that employees had referred to blacks as 'mud people' and to subprime lending as 'ghetto loans.'"[6] As Beth John, a former loan officer, recounts, "We just went right after them [black families] … Wells Fargo mortgage had an emerging-markets unit

[5] Maurizio Lazzarato, The Making of the Indebted Man, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012), 20-1.

[6] www.nytimes.com&

that specifically targeted black churches because it figured church leaders had a lot of influence and could convince congregants to take out subprime loans."[7] It is the power relation of debt managed by finance-Capital that destroyed whole neighborhoods and constitutes Baltimore's real looter. As Marc Belisle put it, "The real "thugs" in Baltimore wear suits."[8] In any case, whether we consider recognition from an economic, socio-political, or legal perspective, it appears to us as nothing more than a power relation used for the management and control of a population for ends other than its own.

From this perspective, our present state of affairs appears as a thief in the night with one purpose: to possess all possible futures by wresting them from us in the present. What is debt if not an obligation to future work? Thus, present day economic models of recognition (e.g., the determination of which social groups will reap the most profit through their debts) simply repeats the wisdom of the Middle Ages:

> "Usurers are ... thieves [*latrines*], for they sell time that does not belong to them, and selling someone else's property, despite its owner, is theft. In addition, since they sell nothing other than the expectation of money, that is to say, time, they sell days and nights. But the day is the time of clarity and the night is the time for repose."[9]

As we write, think, and struggle during these first months of 2016, that tired and worn-out slogan 'NO FUTURE' appears as relevant as ever. If for no other reason than this slogan signals a situation where the intersection of those processes of exclusion

[7] www.nytimes.com&

[8] reverbpress.com

[9] Jacques Le Goff, Your Money or Your Life, trans. Patricia Ranum (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 40-1.

A Cautious Reply

Mary and Friends,

We were delighted to receive your reply. Vengeance is at the top of our list. We want nothing short of complete revenge against the patriarchs who brought us into the terrible world, full retribution for all of the humiliating rituals of society, and the total satisfaction of seeing our enemies defeated. You inspire us by showing just how queer our violence can be, for which we proudly call you comrades-in-arms.

In the first issue of our journal, we used Bash Back! as a cautionary tale in our defense of the politics of cruelty. Telling a modern version of the tale of Íkarus, we suggested that they could not help but fly too close to the sun and fell into the sea. We thought that they had tragically perished as a result. So you can imagine our elation at hearing that Bash Back! lives on underground –not with card-carrying members but according to the principles of an "Undying Passion for Criminality" also mentioned in the first issue.

Even with this fortunate news, we are not less concerned with the risk of burnout. We will grant them that our struggle originates in the battle against morality. Yet our anxiety about burnout remains of a metaphysical disagreement. Our original claim about Bash Back! 'burning out' must be understood against the backdrop of their vision of the world. For them, the universe is bursting at the seams with plentitude. In their world, such unending abundance is interrupted by tyrants, haters, and the repressed. The burnout walks their earth as a failure – someone who has resigned themselves to control by the forces that separate them from their own self-satisfaction.

cial games.

We'll end with a story: A black trans woman was murdered in our neighborhood. Her name was Chanel, and she was turning a $20 trick before a putrid John shot her three times in the head. He was shortly thereafter arrested, but our affective responses and desires for vengeance don't square with juridical process. A call went out for a march, we answered, and a mob set out. Torches were lit, a masked individual announced the location of his house. Silently, without slogans – not out of somberness but seething rage – the torch-lit procession moved through the cold night. Upon reaching his house, windows fell away to hammer blows and the fire was thrown inside. We can scarcely describe the feeling of seeing this all this transpire. It was cruel, cathartic, redemptive, and sublimely indifferent to the managerial solutions offered by this world. While some wild ones were still attacking we could hear the distant wail of enemy sirens and made our way home through the night. While departing, we overheard some teenagers excitedly ask – *do you think this was Bash Back!?* – unaware that such a formation hadn't existed in that town for years. We laughed and hurried off. No communique was ever written, only whispers of this action remain. We may never know the brilliant ones who brought fire that night, but our worlds briefly opened onto one another in that moment and we carry that warm glimpse with us still.

best,
Mary Nardini Gang

and violence obstruct the orthodox tools offered to us by the Left. No longer able to affirm some unified class identity; no longer able to treat processes of racialization and the construction of genders/bodies as secondary or tertiary points of struggle; and living through Capital's debt extraction that operates differentially across race, class, and gender lines; we no longer can pretend to shore up our partisanship against this world in accord with the thesis of recognition and representation at the heart of much of the Left's strategies for struggle.

In light of the past wave of protests, and insofar as something like NYC's 'Fight for 15' could have happened in Midtown while the Occupy protests got under way in Wall st. just some blocks south of the fast-food workers strikes in the same city; and insofar as it would be the Black Lives Matter movement that would take their place on the streets of Manhattan a few years later; it is clear that the ongoing decomposition of working-class identity necessitates our move beyond the politics of the civil and innocent citizen who remains respectable, and therefore recognizable. *All that is recognizable melts into air.*

Thus it is worth repeating how recognition fails, whether from the State or from the Left, insofar as our present situation is such that every identity is in a process of decomposition vis-á-vis the civil war waged by Capital in its current form: "Participants in the milieu observed that, even in factory struggles, the re-emergence of an affirmable working class identity seemed to be off the table: workers were self-organizing, but without illusions about the revolutionary potential of such self-organization…Meanwhile, many struggles were erupting outside of the workplace – concerning students, the unemployed, racialised minorities – with no interest in finding their way in. Workers in what were once bastions of working class strength…could no longer offer up their struggles as a container for the needs of the class as a whole. Struggles over "reproduction" were supplanting those over "production", even if the

former seemed to lack the power vis-á-vis capital historically wedded by the latter."[10]

THE OTHER: A RELIC OF RECOGNITION PAST

> **§3** *We all know the popular argument about anthropology being a perverse theater where the Other is always 'represented' or 'invented' according to the sordid interests of the West. Nothing can camouflage the paternalism of this thesis, as it simply refocuses the conversation back on Westerners too anxious to talk about anything but themselves. Doubling this subjective phantasmagoria of the colonial system simply piles insult upon injury. These critics once again suggest that all roads return to Europe, even if it is to challenge its civilizing pretensions instead of celebrate them. The result is that European history remains the only universal required reading – the only change is that we are to be wagging our fingers all the way through. By always seeing the Same in the Other, by thinking that under the mask of the other it is always just 'us' contemplating ourselves, we we can only see what is 'of interest to us.' Anthropology thus reveals recognition to be the mirror of Narcissus. In light of the narcissistic trap of recognition it is imperative to accept the idea that our "negation does not signify nothingness; when the mirror does not reflect our own likeness, it does not prove there is nothing to perceive."*[11]

[10] Endnotes Collective, Endnotes 3: Gender, Race, Class and Other Misfortunes (Oakland: Commune Editions, 2013), 2.

[11] Pierre Clastres, Society Against the State, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1987), 20.

to render our vengeful desires legible, we sublimate them into the very moral order which we'd prefer to destroy.

To address an altogether different point: you pose 'burnout' as one of the possible consequences of a praxis of vengeance. We respectfully disagree. Vengeance, in its unmediated form is nourishing. It is the machinery – *juridical, political, moral* – which burns out, tears apart, and breaks us down. Even still, the question remains as to how to sustain a praxis of vengeance in spite of these traps. Years ago we wrote:

> *Our dirty talk and our nighttime whispers comprise a secret language. Our language of thieves and lovers is foreign to this social order, yet carries the sweetest notes in the ears of rebels. This language reveals our potential for world making. Our conflict is space for our possible other-selves to blossom. By organizing our secret universe of shared plenty and collective-explosive possibility, we are building a world of riot, orgy and decadence.*

While committing this sentiment to page may have been a youthful mistake, we still hold it to be true. If we are to sustain a project of vengeance and enjoyment, we need to build a world in which we share and nourish that praxis. That world needs to be hidden, encrypted, ineffable, and hostile to the schemes by which others would represent it, surveil it, or render it visible. There will be betrayals and conflict in this world; how could there not be? The point is to deal with these situations without activating the machines we've detailed above.

Our proposal: direct, forceful, unmediated conflict; conflict outside of language, opaque to would-be spectators; conflict which eschews the machines of recognition; attack our enemies, but also undermine any who'd try to build political capital from those attacks. This means baseball bats to the skulls of our rapists, but without the subsequent communiques, programs, and diffuse so-

any of the numerous social dramas playing out around us. In each, assuredly, the terms and stakes of the debates are limited by this machine. Only one question is ever posed: to what extent does an action or individual fall within the bad category, the space of sin? (*Is this or isn't this transphobic? Was that sexual assault? Do we consider this snitching? Is he a fascist?*) Only in the most rare cases does a discussion of a particular action or individual move beyond a flat contest over where the lines of the category are drawn, which side one is on, and who is on the other. The implication smuggled into our lives by this drama is that if something crosses the line into the category, it is bad, and that which do not cross it are good (a choir of angels until proven otherwise). We wish we could tease out the implications of these designations of good and bad, but there is nothing there to discover. The call-out always follows something like this:

Evidence → Inscription into Category (call it what you will) → [therefore, bad] → ???

{even the critique of morality rarely breaks this formula, posing 'Moralism' as the name for the Category, the *bad* to be excised.}

Because the "therefore, bad" is bracketed – rarely spoken – the consequences of an act are never provided, let alone discussed. This is how anarchists keep morality intact. Instead of conflict or resolution, we are left with an endlessly diffusing social drama marked by resentment, guilt-by-association, distancing, desperate attempts at proving purity; in short, mediation upon mediation. While the boundaries of the category are negotiated and policed *ad nauseum*, we are left without the ability to handle anything. The whole process evades the more interesting questions: Why did this happen? How did it affect us? How can we ensure it doesn't happen again? How do we get vengeance? What do we want from all this? In the will to recognition, the moral machinery obscures our actual experiences and the power we might draw from them. By attempting

For a long time, and due to its acceptance into academic discourse, the 'Other' has come to be seen as the pillar of the politics and ethics of recognition. However, a *non-* and even *anti-*academic history of the Other requires special mention since we refuse to partake in the self-serving system of 'the Other' whether defined as "the face" of vulnerability, or as the non-White and/or non-Male/Masculine partner in that suffocating courtship of earning the privilege to see and evaluate oneself through the eyes of another.

Additionally, some of our contemporaries simply expand the narcissistic mirror, beginning from the myth regarding anthropologies tainted origins, to the whole world through a radical animism whereby humans, bacteria, and mountains all have minds that need to be recognized. Without even cracking a smile, one theorist honestly suggests that we 'respond to the call' of a littered bottlecap in the gutter. Such recognition presupposes that the world exists in some sort of primordial equality; between rivals struggling to be recognized by their Others. We do not criticize this perspective as anthropocentric, but rather, to stave off the ridiculous anthropocentrism of giving every-thing 'the human treatment.' Extending human virtues to all things does advance our position in civil war. In fact, some things do not deserve our recognition: we refuse to recognize that bosses produce value as capital has no value without the power labor; we refuse to recognize social solutions as they are the biopolitical management of our lives; we refuse to recognize the authority of the law as it is only the codification of routine violence; we refuse to recognize popular opinion as it is merely a reflection of the Spectacle. To them, to the extent we appear to them at all, it should only be as Rimbaud said: as an I that is essentially an Other.[12]

Let's take another case from film**:** Abel Ferrara's *Ms .45* (aka*, Angel of Vengeance*) tells a story of a mute woman who works as a

[12] 'Je est une autre' is the original French formulation, from Rimbaud's Letter to Georges Izambard, 13 May 1871.

seamstress in Manhattan's Garment District. While walking alone one day, she is raped by a male stranger. And even though he need not cover her mouth, since she cannot make a sound, he indulges in a few reaches at her face. However, in a world where speech has atrophied – in the lives of women who are violated even as they loudly make their protest public – our heroine finds other means for fighting back. She refuses to accept the unmitigated access men have over the female body, which gives her a new sense of purpose and the means for its realization (a gun). This is the very principle that Godard gave to cinema ('all one needs is a girl and a gun') raised to the level of the political/aesthetic education of our affects. The final scene tells us everything we need to know regarding cruelty and its taste for vengeance: when 'Ms .45' realizes that she has been stabbed (in the back, no less) by another woman, she mouths, though silently, the word 'sister'. That is, to her surprise, she has been betrayed by someone who is like her; and despite this betrayal, communication between women is possible only in the silent mouthing of the words which cannot be spoken. This lesbian moment ends before it can begin, with the literal killing of a 'love that dare not speak its name.' As if 'Ms .45' was uttering the phrase "Sister, why have you forsaken me? *Don't you know that your silence won't protect you!?*"

Ms. 45's lesson is clear: in all those forms of social life, structured according to the logic of hetero-patriarchy, one is silent because one is a woman and a woman because one is silent. This is the Fanonian insight manifest in a queer negativity that wants nothing more than to abolish the false promises extended by striving to be seen, to be heard, to be recognized. It represents our own world, where the only communication between 'Ms .45' and her male counterparts can take place by means of the bullet. We do not seek to form parties, organizations, or syndicalist organizations. It is not 'peace now!' but 'a piece, now!' that trades social recognition for political force. This is the 'counter-violence' of Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X, which produces a separation from

result is that some are lionized and others banished. Regardless of the side in which anyone falls, what remains is a toxic social world that feeds the machines with an unending supply of traumatized bodies.

Further, we could say that both these machines are expressions of a meta-machine: the moral one. The moral machine is a monster set in motion and offered to us by Christianity. While secularly coded in Western society as 'crime' or 'terrorism,' the rhetorical structure of sin – integral to the moral machine – has remained relatively untouched by progress and enlightenment. Far from rebelling against this structure, the anarchist milieu might be the most zealous enemy of 'the bad stuff' – sin. While certainly too self-aware to name the bad stuff as sin or crime or terrorism, the anarchists call it by different names: sexual assault, white supremacy, snitching, 'fucked up shit,' etc. We've even developed a word to describe *all the intertwining bad stuff*: kyriarchy. Whatever it's called, the structure of the machine stays consistent. The invariant component is the Category – the psychic space of the bad stuff which must be cast out. From here, the analogy follows: certain activities (sin) fall within the categories, these activities are evidence of specific subjects (sinners), and we are born into this original sin that requires us to do penance for it. Much of the ideological basis of contemporary identity politics is rooted in the concomitant moral schema that those most oppressed and victimized by these categories are inversely the most righteous, namely that "the meek shall inherit the earth."

This shouldn't be read as an apology for any of the noxious signifiers of the category, the trauma and misery caused in our lives (and the lives of our friends) by these. State collaboration, sexual violence, white supremacy is beyond reprieve. These acts are the genesis of our thirst for vengeance. We hate them; they are what destroys us and what we'd wish to destroy in turn. And yet, we must insist that the moral machine offers us nothing in the way of realizing this destruction. We implore you to recall the details of

traps of accounting or the specter of justice? Could we enact it otherwise?

We suspect that much of the problem in this misreading lies in the attempts at visibility that you (rightfully) criticized in the introduction to volume one of *Hostis*. The tendency toward visibility politics and representation in the Bash Back! communiques betrays a subterranean conflict between these actions (or at least the representations of them) and the moral order toward which they feign opposition. Your critique resonates with us because it highlights some of what was at stake in our own choice to disappear from that milieu. We, ourselves, always had more interest in the silence opened up by Bash Back!: the stolen feasts, shared weapons, and long nights of conspiracy. We could dwell in this forever, but we'd like to instead pose a question: why is the desire for visibility so omnipresent? What underlies the will to recognition?

We might contend that the strength of recognition's appeal directly correlates with the feelings of isolation and powerlessness felt by its object. No one yearns for recognition more than when they feel alone, when they fear their pains and joys might go unacknowledged by their friends, when they need co-conspirators the most. We understand these motivations all too well, but understanding isn't enough. To really grasp the dilemma of representations, we need to assess the tools we turn to when these anxieties rear their ugly heads. If we may, we'd like to contend that at our worst, we pursue a series of machines of recognition: *political machines, juridical machines, and moral machines*.

The juridical and political machines of recognition manifest themselves variously within our milieus, but they are perhaps most readily recognized in their archetypal forms: respectively, the accountability process and the call-out/communique. These machines call upon those they encounter to present evidence for analysis, to cast judgement that elicits apologies, to opine without necessarily taking sides, to condemn and/or condone. Why? To gain power, extract apologies, or maintain social cohesion. The

the system of recognition. Such violence is not itself political, yet the violent reciprocity of 'a direct relation of force' that breaks the abstract bond holding together State domination of its subjects and poses a disharmony that arrests the dialectic of recognition while opening a space in which politics can emerge.

This issue continues "Five Theses on the Politics of Cruelty," a restatement of the main features of our defense of 'the politics of cruelty' in *Hostis* issue 1. Though it should go without saying, such cruelty is not meant to be directed at friends and neighbors. It is certainly not an excuse to act shitty to members of your crew, be abusive to a loving partner, or sow divisiveness of any kind. Our cruelty follows in the footsteps of Spike Lee, who replaces the self-appointed Reverend Harry Powell's moralism in *The Night of Hunter* with Radio Raheem's struggle to fight the power. In his telling of the battle between love and hate, Radio Raheem does not act as a false prophet telling us how good prevails over evil. Instead, Raheem tells us that he divides the world in two: love and hate. Those he loves, he loves; those he hates, he hates.

This lesson is at the core of *Hostis* – we believe that we are in the midst of a civil war. There are two sides: our accomplices and our enemies. To our accomplices, we promise our undying conviction. For our enemies, we have nothing but cruelty. Insofar as the contemporary civil war is ongoing, we are, and despite ourselves, drawn into partisanship as a default condition of our everyday lives. To be and act as a partisan, it could be said, summarizes those founding theses of the politics of cruelty. Additionally, there should be nothing awe-inspiring in such theses. And if philosophy begins, and draws its inspiration from, wonder and awe as Aristotle thought, then thinking, feeling, and fighting as a partisan seeks to put an end to the tired and academic justification of "philosophy as a way of life." There is nothing wonderful or satisfying in contemplating "being" or some eternal "essence;" especially the "being/essence" of those power relations specific to the civil war waged by Capital.

BEYOND RECOGNITION

In their **"Letter to the Editors,"** the Mary Nardini Gang give the reader their assessment of *Hostis's* first issue; our stated aims, commitments, and their points of affinity and divergence. For these authors, what they have termed 'vengeance' is what *Hostis* calls cruelty. By reflecting on this point of agreement, and the resistance they met by other activists regarding the attempt to transform a praxis of vengeance into a politics proper, we get a better sense of where this resistance stems from. As they write, "We suspect that much of the problem in this misreading lies in the attempts at visibility…" The skepticism one meets regarding vengeance and cruelty is intimately related to the equation between politics and the struggle for recognition and one's visibility from the point of view of the State.

For the Mary Nardini Gang, it is clear that striving to be acknowledged by the State is symptomatic of the material conditions in which the civil war we effectuate against the World is undertaken: "We yearn for recognition when we feel alone, when we fear our pains and joys might go unacknowledged by our friends." In the shared project of the destruction of the world, the authors do not hesitate to underscore points of contention they maintain with our project. While we cautioned our readers that burning out was a real possibility and a real danger for a politics of cruelty, these authors see things otherwise. For them, the figure of the burnout is not a danger but a source of the continued nourishment of the praxis/politics of vengeance they call for. The figure of the burnout, in the end, turns out to be a case of misplaced concreteness. It is not *we* who burnout; it is the juridical, political, and moral machines that management the reproduction of globally integrated capital that burns out. For our authors, we have nothing to fear in burning out since it is capital that manifests as the global burnout of a society that is increasingly hard to believe in.

Letter to the Editor (by the Mary Nardini Gang)

Hostis,

We read your cruel little journal in a single sitting, deriving a great deal of enjoyment from the sandpaper-bound pages. While the journal generated much discussion in our private reading of it, we'd like to decrypt a few points to share with you at this time. In particular, we'd like to address your engagement with the anthology *Queer Ultraviolence* wherein a sampling of our writing appears.

Shortly after the publication of the anthology, a rather opaque and short debate played out within the anarchist milieu around the question of vengeance. If we are dissatisfied with the depth of the appraisal of the question, we are all the more grateful for your effort to raise it again. Some critics of the anthology were concerned with the emergence of a 'politics of vengeance' and saw in it a repackaging of the old ideas of 'justice' and 'accountability.' We tend to see this reading as overly simplistic, willfully conflating vengeance with that which would mediate it. Perhaps much of this misreading might have to do with the shift from a 'praxis of vengeance' (as gestured toward by the texts in *Queer Ultraviolence*) and the 'politics of vengeance' feared by its critics. If we conceive of vengeance, like you, as the destruction of what destroys us, then in what way is this conception undermined by the subtle shift from 'praxis' to 'politics'? How could a praxis of vengeance evade the

ship has its rivalries, and opinion has its antagonisms and bloody reversals.[3]

Friendship is already too Greek, too philosophical, and too European for our politics of cruelty. In its place, we should reinvigorate the politics of the Guayaki in Paraguay or the many tribes in that territory known as Zoma. That is, political cruelty does not seek to be included into the universality proposed by the history of Western capitalism and instead seeks to find the means of escaping from a universality that was never ours from the start. For those who would prefer reductive formulations, we could say that while the West continues its process of inclusion and expansion, our political-cruelty maintains its relation to the Outside.[4] **To our enemies** who get off on finding contradictions that abound in this politics of cruelty we say to them 'all the better!' For them, whose desire is to be the intelligible subjects of globally integrated capital, these contradictions are mere impasses on their road to being exceptions to the rule. **To our allies**, who opt for a politics of cruelty, we say 'savor these supposed contradictions!' From the point of view of political cruelty, the best part about a contradiction is that we can use both sides to our advantage.

[3] Deleuze & Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 88.

[4] Today the crisis deepens since the progressive subsumption of the Earth to the full body of Capital reaches an apex even capitalists could not have dreamed up. Namely, "There are parts of most countries, particularly in the global south, in which the state never had much interest. They might be deserts, they might be swampy, they might be 'empty quarters' as they're called, but they'd be areas in which the population is relatively thin, it doesn't produce much in the way of important resources of trade… In British and French colonial rule these areas were ruled indirectly by appointing some native chief over them and making sure they didn't cost the metropolitan country any money. The areas that were valuable economically as export zones, tax fields and so on, were ruled more or less directly. What's interesting (…) is that in the late twentieth century it seems that there's scarcely a part of the world that doesn't have some capitalist return that can be realized providing that this area's made accessible and resources can be extracted from it." James C. Scott, www.gastronomica.org.

The "Letter" ends in a manner that brings home the urgency and necessity for cultivating the vengeance we all compromise by engaging in political recognition. It is the recounting of the death of a black, trans woman, and the subsequent practice of seeking vengeance against her murderer that the Mary Nardini Gang conclude their piece. In the face of the indiscriminate murder of trans women, and the ongoing State-sponsored extermination of Black life in the US and across the globe, the politics of vengeance, the cultivation of cruelty, and destroying the world that has an interest in our collective destruction appears as simple necessity and not as a moral catechism we use against each other. We respond with "A Cautious Reply," which focuses on our points of divergence regarding the figure of the burnout, how our desire for excess is used against us, and a renewed drive for vengeance.

Regarding the question of recognition in its contemporary manifestation of State power, we have included translations of two responses to the recent state of emergency in France recently published in the online magazine *Lundi Matin*. Though the authorship is anonymous, it is obvious to us that the pieces emerge from a milieu targeted by State anti-terrorism forces for the better part of a decade. The first, "The Real War" [*La guerre véritable*], explores the effects of the Paris attacks on State power. Of particular interest is their description of a spectacularly anti-economic form of power, which reminds us of a recently translated critique of economics as the science of police, Jacques Fradin's "Economy, Ecumenes, Communism: Economy as the Devastation of Ecumenes, Communism as the Exit From Economy."[13] The second, "Against the State of Emergency" [*Contre l'état d'urgence, l'urgence de prendre la rue*] responds to the subsequent state of emergency. This text was originally written in response to a request made by the French news-

[13] Jacques Fradin, Economy, Ecumenes, Communism: Economy as the Devastation of Ecumenes, Communism as the Exit from Economy, trans. Robert Hurley (No New Ideas Press).

paper *Le Monde* who asked some of the "Tarnac" defendants ("*des mis en examen*") to comment on the 13 November 2015 attacks on Paris and what followed. Despite *Le Monde*'s initial request the piece was accepted but never published. The newspaper provided no rationale, so we leave it up to our readers to determine why. Perhaps it is their claim that "the real danger doesn't come from the Middle-East but from the successive governments that have plunged us into these dark waters and are attempting at present to close their trap on us once more."

Throughout this issue we have included images from Gabriel Salmon's "Notes on People Who Have Been Surveilled by the Police or the State Asked to Take A Picture That Reveals Nothing About Them." The project is a collaboration between the artist and people who have had the experience of being surveilled. The purpose is to use the artistic process to resist the act of surveillance and acknowledge the emotional impact of surveillance as an assault. Since 2012, he has been asking people to take a photo according to the following instruction: "Take a photo that reveals absolutely nothing about you." Earlier contributions to this project were included in an art exhibition looking at surveillance, forensics, and the way that artists are being changed by surveillance. As this archive grows it will continue to be used in public exhibitions and publications that share a critical rejection of surveillance as a tool of repression and control. In his artist statement, Saloman argues that the governmental technology has become so ubiquitous that it has changed our whole way of seeing. The consequence, he suggests, is not just that we see world as surveilled, but that "we produce ourselves for the world to be surveilled."

Building off the the themes of State surveillance and its models of recognition, "The Tyranny of Imagery, Or, Escaping the Zoopraxiscope," offers a critique of recognition in light of the context of cybernetic governance. Anonymously authored, this piece draws a line of continuity from the early days of media to today's Internet-connected world. The beginning stitches together

ing structural oppression into a fight for abolition and identifying existential abolition as the proper means toward the abolition of capital as such. In a word: "Even if we had the power to blow it up, could we succeed in doing so without destroying ourselves, since it is so much a part of the conditions of life, including our organism and our very reason? The prudence with which we must manipulate that line, the precautions we must take to soften it, to suspend it, to divert it, to undermine it, testify to a long labor which is not merely aimed against the State and the powers that be, but directly at ourselves."[2]

That said, the first iteration of altruism should not be given scant attention precisely because of its prevalence. In place of weaponizing our feelings of cruelty, social anarchism substitutes a straight forward Habermasianism sutured to the mantra of 'returning to class analysis'. The false clarity of the elusive category of class helps some sleep at night. Contra these political sedatives, we again confront the history and cruelty of our politics. What is at stake is the feminist lesson we must never forget: that emotions are political; that few emotions burn and catalyze collective insubordination like those of pain, vengeance, and cruelty. The point is not a never-ending discussion of what pains us; rather, that emotions such as cruelty are what constitute the armature of our collective antagonism.

A Brief Note For Enemies And Allies

We could care less about those whose politics amounts to being a good 'friend' to those who struggle, or being a good 'ally' by reading up on the history of people of color, queers, and so on. A politics of cruelty is not a politics of friendship; since we do not see a softer world here because sociability has its cruelties, friend-

[2] Deleuze, Dialogues II, 138.

recognition: metrics of intelligibility only pertain to situations of isolated actions. State recognition ignores situations of collective antagonism. What is more, is what we gain via the channels of State recognition (e.g., desegregation in the 1950's) was already being eroded through other State sanctioned economic mechanisms (e.g., redlining as early as the 1930's). The conclusion should be obvious by now: State-recognition is nothing more than the continuation of war by other means.

If we intend to destroy what destroys us through revenge – which means learning to hate the world instead of ourselves – then it is clear that our political cruelty cannot treat *any mediating other* as a reliable source for recognition.

5. While social anarchism sings lullabies of altruism, there are those who play with the hot flames of cruelty.

Altruism comes in at least two variants. The first is already well known – it advocates a collectivist ethics that diffuses antagonism through a criteria of absolute horizontalism. The second, more insidious, is a zealous altruism; the individual is offered as sacrifice in the service of actualizing an Idea. These are not the actions of the dispossessed. Rather, it is the altruism of an anarchist crucifixion where selflessness and selfishness intersect. If the latter at least agrees that struggle is an ineluctable fact of politics, the zealous altruists weakness lies in their belief that *civil war* entails burn out. Such self-sacrifice all but guarantees failure; but it makes failure all the sweeter, 'because at least they tried.' For every form of communal horizontalism that defers the moment of attack, there is a correlating tendency to collapse heroism and martyrdom.

It is true that we have said that our political cruelty seeks to destroy what destroys us. However, this does not entail our own self-destruction. There is a world of difference between convert-

the first film, Eadweard Muybridge's 1878 *Sallie Gardner at a Gallop,* and Alphonse Bertillon's early card-based police database. The former would have been initially viewed on a zoopraxiscope, a rotating disc-device invented by the filmmaker for projecting images in quick succession, the second captured the likes of criminals such as notorious French anarchist Ravochol. The essay winds through a discussion of Spinoza, Agamben, Debord, and Scott to arrive at today's world of Facebook, Google maps, and other forms of digital connectivity. The author's concerns could be summarized in the words of Félix Guattari, who said,"I am convinced that all of the possible variants of another May 68 have already been programmed on an IBM."[14] Fortunately, the essay ruminates on the version questions the preoccupy us: in a time as bleak as our own, how do we ward off our enemies while making a break for it?

Furthering our advance beyond recognition, K. Aarons' "No Selves to Abolish: Afropessimism, Anti-Politics, and the End of the World," uses the work of afropessimist theorists such as Frank Wilderson, Saidiya Hartman and Jared Sexton to suggest ways in which contemporary anarchist, communist, and queer approaches to coalitional, affinity-based radical organizing might respond to what Wilderson calls "the crisis of the existential commons." It argues that for non-Black folks, the philosophico-political consequences of Afropessimist existentialism's negative identity politics (or anti-politics) demand an overcoming of 'privilege-based' anti-racist politics of recognition, and its replacement with a regulative ideal of self-abolition.

Aarons specifies how afro-pessimism "wrecks affirmative identity politics." This begins with his rehearsal of the afro-pessimism claim that black bodies are structurally defined as *a priori* guilty. Yet he does not argue for a return to Eden, but a world in which

[14] Félix Guattari, "We Are All Groupuscules," Psychoanalysis and Transversality, trans. Ames Hodges (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2015), 365.

insurrections become just as guilty. There are two consequences he suggests: one, an ongoing refusal of terms of legitimacy such as 'the people,' 'the oppressed,' and 'the 99%'; and second, calling into question any liberatory framework which frames the recovery of lost wholeness (of land, culture, personhood, etc.) as a precondition to overcoming suffering. To conclude, Aarons proposes a geometry that draws lines of convergence in various insurrectional movements:

> If we fight because our own lives compel us to, and it is our own idea of happiness that orients us in these struggles, what is left of 'anti-racist solidarity'? While the notion of a 'solidarity' with Black suffering cannot be stripped of a certain paradigmatic incoherence, if it means anything at all it must be premised not on an attempt to identify, recognize, or render visible Black suffering, but on a *disidentification with ourselves*.

Aarons' radical redefinition of 'self-abolition' to eradicate anti-Blackness thus contributes to the communist theorization of the proletariat as 'the class of its own self-abolition.' But by challenging this intellectual tradition with the radical thought of afro-pessimism and practical politics of recent insurrections, Aarons also offers an ambitious new image of autonomy.

And rounding out our second issue, Helge Peters and Johannes Büttner's "Peak Panik" afford one an encounter, through a collection of works of performance art, with the question of subjective life in the context of ongoing crises - whether economic, political, existential, or environmental. Through the intersection between aesthetics and politics; and their mutual production of subjectivity; Peters and Büttner raise a set of questions that serve as heuristics in order to avoid further succumbing to those vague discourse that circulate around terms such as 'anthropocene' and 'crisis.' Peak Panik asks: what are we to do, identify or utilize? Is the task to

darity. Some say that capital and the state operate through cruelty, with the implication being that our role in the struggle is to take the higher ground. This is to misuse the few advantages we inherit from our position of inferiority. Our enemy's greatest weakness is that they must reproduce their bases of power, which is takes a costly investment in corrupt political systems, crumbling industrial infrastructure, and expensive wars of ideology. And these systems maintain appearances through consistency, such as law's promise to be enforced equally no matter what. Our greatest advantage, then, is to act *inconsistently*; which is to say, as anarchists. We spread anarchy with that understanding that we do not need to reproduce much – we do not need to justify our actions, we do not need to be systematic in our activities, and we need not defend any of the institutions of this world. So if ethics represents a guarantee to act consistently one way even when it does not benefit us, we refuse it. Never think that your innocence is enough to save you. There are no awards for consistency in civil war, only the fruits of acting cruelly enough to realize your interests.

4. Their actions speak with an intensity that does not desire permission, let alone seek it.

There is a qualitative difference between the cruelty exercised by us and the cruelty of capital and its State(s). In the United States, there is the idea that the 18th amendment guarantees the protection of citizens from 'cruel and unusual punishment.' This was to juridically curtail the power of the State over and against its citizenry. But due to the explicitly bourgeois heritage from which it emerges, this guarantee against *State-cruelty* only goes as far as the eyes of the State can see; that is, only insofar as two isolated individuals are coming into conflict with one another, and where the State intervenes impartially as the mediating third term. It is in this way that the curtailing of *State-cruelty* remains within the logic of

so on. As such, the subject of cruelty no longer convinces themselves to love the world or to find something in the world that redeems the whole. Simply put: the subject of cruelty learns to hate the world. The feeling of cruelty is the necessary correlate to the politics of cruelty; learning to hate the world is what correlates to the political task of destroying what destroys us all. And as we already noted, it is because these two principles have a long history behind them that a politics of cruelty does not posit itself as a novelty: The Women's Liberation movements are correct in saying: We are not castrated, fuck you![1]

3. Those motivated by cruelty are neither fair nor impartial.

Fairness is the correlate to the 'ethics-as-politics' paradigm. Why? Because fairness suggests that we relate to everyone in the same way. What an idiotic idealist projection. There is nothing about this world that encourages universal fairness or acting according to mutual support of all interests. Empire encourages fairness only to dull the cutting edge of our divergent interests. The resulting impartiality is the idea that power is symmetrical and that the law is there to establish a virtuous social contract between equal parties. Impartiality is thus deployed to neutralize the subject of cruelty. While the impartial subject furthers the myth that agreements can and should be forged, the cruel subject understands that there can never be peace between Empire and the dispossessed.

We know that we are in the midst of a civil war. We act as partisans. And as in any war, we have friends and enemies. For our enemies, we have nothing but disdain, hatred, and cruelty. Our only engagement with them is when it strategically advances our side in the conflict. For our friends, we extend care, support, and soli-

[1] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus (Minnesota University Press: Minneapolis, 1983), 68.

identify the motor of history or to utilize it? To identify one's gender or to weaponize it? To identify with peaceful non-violence or to understand that no side of our ongoing civil war holds a monopoly on violence?

Their answer to these questions is clear: *don't identify, utilize!* Sift through and salvage what you can from the junkyards of anthropocenic/digital capital so that you may be able to breathe in the toxic air of our future collapse and be capable of waging a war upon the wastelands that remain. As they state at the outset of their piece: "Peak Panik appropriates fragments salvaged from the collective écriture of our moment – manuals, manifestos, inventories, rumours - to draw partial maps, not only cognitive but material, for navigating crumbling anthropogenic landscapes precariously held in place by a metastasising techno-economy of identification, security and control. Along this journey we might just lose the Self and find each other." The analytic and pragmatic resources one can expect to find here are numerous: coal as the motor of history; how oil becomes a class traitor; the pleasures of insurrection and why we need to rekindle a love for the passions; the digital trap of opting for *identification* instead of *utilization* as seen through the 56 gender options, courtesy of Zuckerberg himself.

Five Theses on The Politics of Cruelty

1. The politics that seduces us is not ethical, it is cruel.

We contrast the politics of cruelty to the politics of ethics. Ethics goes all the way back to the Greeks, whose ethics was the study of 'the good life.' Our interests do not lie in being better than our enemies. There is only cheap satisfaction in telling yourself that you have more exciting sex, stronger friendships, or fiercer personal convictions. The point is not to be better, but to win. Perhaps this leaves a bad taste in some mouths. However, we ask: is ethics not the last of the impotent? Are not ethical people all that is left after struggles collapse?

If one feels disturbed when denuded of ethics, it is because ethics is a wholly personal affair. To be ethical today is not even reformist – it is politics rendered as fantasy, a live action role play of those who 'mean well.' The sphere of ethical life is a world of braggarts and bullies looking for others to affirm that they have made the right personal choices. Ethics valorizes the virtue of activist intentions while never getting around to the systemic destruction of globally-integrated capital. In other words, it is the feel-good elitism of 'being better than everyone else' without any of the risk of putting an end to what is bad. And the problem with elitism is that it plunges one back into the milieu. Our cruelty has no truck with the individualism of ethics. It does not guide political action with virtue or best intentions. We do not look to win the respect of

those we wish to defeat. Ethics is the trap laid for those who walk the earth searching for respite. But there is no use in making peace with an enemy whose realized interests entail your subjugation. There was nothing 'ethical' about the colonial world, yet it professed to being the most ethical system on the planet through educating the natives, advancing civilization, and the like. As Fanon reminds us, colonialism could not be destroyed with the 'ethical' method of 'being more royal than the queen' by protesting that Africa was the cradle of civilization, that Europeans should learn from the natives, or that Western education had something to offer. Fanon instead argued that decolonization begins with a violent curettage from all things colonial – good, bad, or otherwise. It is in this sense that a politics of cruelty picks up the old adage that one must 'destroy what destroys you'.

2. Few emotions burn like cruelty.

It is already old wisdom that emotions are at stake when we talk about becoming 'politicized.' Emotions are what render the speculative and abstract into a lived reality. Winning is not simply a question of having the right ideas or right principles, this is why we define politics as the transformation of ideas into a whole mode of existence where one's principles are at the same time one's impulsion toward the world. If the politics of cruelty follows from the belief that we must destroy what destroys us, the emotion of cruelty is revenge. Only this taste for revenge offers resistance to the voices of this world that tell us to put up with the daily violence done to us. To feel cruel is to know that we deserve better than this world; that our bodies are not for us to hate or to look upon with disgust; that our desires are not disastrous pathologies. To feel the burning passion of cruelty, then, is to reclaim refusal. We refuse to compromising ourselves and the million tiny compromises of patriarchy, capitalism, white-supremacy, heter/homo-normativity, and

Hostis
Hostis 2
Beyond Recognition

The November 13 attacks confirm the total rout of French-style anti-terrorism, a kind of smug, cowardly, and sheeplike bureaucratic monster. The new rhetoric of 'war' that has supplanted the promise of 'security' doesn't come out of nowhere: it was concocted over the past few months in anticipation of the inevitable assault *and in order to mask the failure of a whole apparatus, the disaster of a whole policy.* Beneath its manly posturing, it has trouble hiding the obvious impotence and the profound disorientation of the governing authorities. As a general rule, every foreign war that a government declares should be understood first as an act of domestic war, aimed first of all *at its own population* – that is, at dominating, controlling, and mobilizing the latter, and aimed against the rival power only secondarily. This is something that the geopoliticians will never understand, and which always renders their considerations on 'the Americans,' 'the Russians,' 'the Iranians,' etc. so pointless. It's also what explains that the latest French air strikes, which were so urgently publicized, didn't do any decisive damage: they are their own purpose in themselves.

It needs to be said that apart from these cinematic strikes, the recent 'declaration of war' essentially consists in the establishment of the state of emergency – that is, in a revocation of the last protections the population has against the abuses of the government, the exactions of the police, and the arbitrariness of the administrations. It reminds us of the extent to which contemporary war is clearly counter-insurrectionary, or as General Vincent Desportes puts it so well, it "is not conducted *between* societies but *within* societies." "The target of the action is no longer the adversary, but the population." Its "objective is human society, its governance, its social contract, its institutions." "Military actions are really a 'manner of speaking': every major operation is now a communicative operation first of all, one whose actions, even minor ones, speak louder than words. [...] Conducting war is primarily managing perceptions, those of the set of actors, near or distant, direct or indirect." We are experiencing what is described very accurately

by the Invisible Committee in *To Our Friends*: "from being a military doctrine, counter-insurgency has become a principle of government." Thus for a whole day the government tested the 'opinion' reaction to its announcement of a possible quashing of the planned demonstrations against COP 21.* Given the general confusion and the organizers' irresolution, the prohibition of demonstrations was decreed the next day. Already, RAID* units have been sent to dislodge squatters in Lille, absurd curfews are being tested, and this is obviously only a beginning. Evidently, with this state of emergency, we are dealing with a policing measure against *all political liberties*. So one understands the population's current reluctance to pick up on the executive's martial refrains: the population knows very well that basically it is the target of the announced offensive.

For our part, and this won't surprise anyone, it seems to us that the real danger doesn't come from the Middle-East but from the successive governments that have plunged us into these dark waters and are attempting at present to close their trap on us once more. By getting us to go along with *their war*, they're already speculating on the benefits they'll draw from the next time we'll be taken as targets. The attacks and the present state of emergency realize the dream of every government: that everyone will stay home – absolute *privatization*. It's obviously the opposite that should be done: take the squares, meet in the streets, occupy the universities, directly debate the situation, find the right words for grasping our common condition, restore public space to its political calling, begin to organize and cease to leave our fate in the hands of the bloody imbeciles who claim to govern us. In this way we have some chance of becoming a crowd *that holds together*, and no longer that collection of anomic solitudes that's unable to defend itself when it's attacked – by its government or by jihadists.

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Note: The asterisked items above are easily searchable, but briefly:

Jean-Louis Bruguière is a former investigating magistrate in charge of counter-terrorism.

DGSI is the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure, a French intelligence agency.

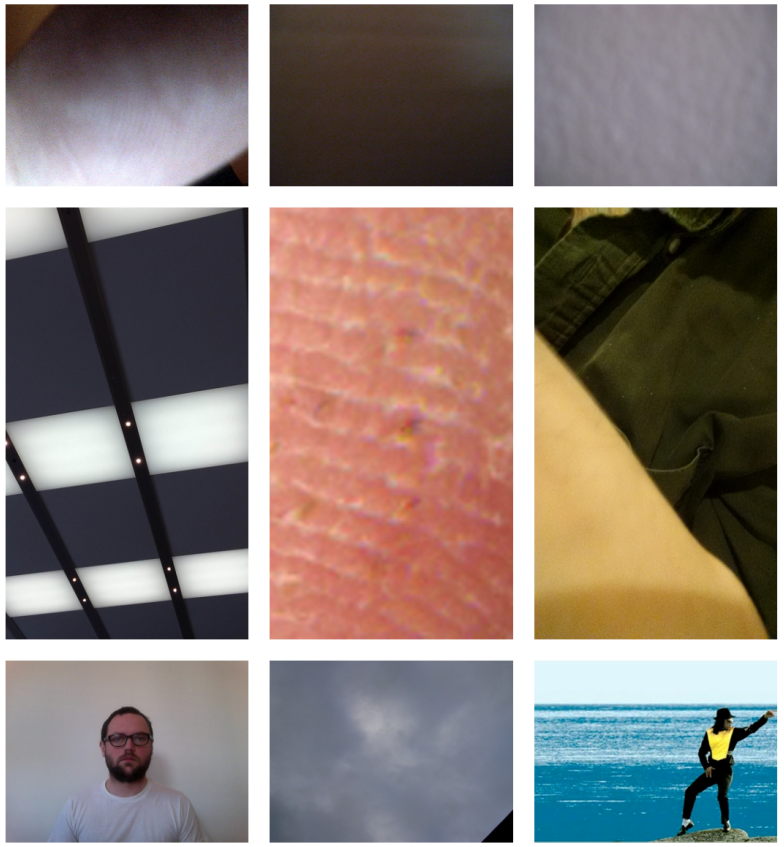
Euro RSCG is a global public relations corporation.

Bernard Cazeneuve is the current Minister of the Interior.

COP 21 was the recent Paris conference on global warming/ climate change.

RAID is France's primary counter-terrorism police.

People Who Have Been Surveilled by the Police or the State Asked to Take A Picture That Reveals Nothing About Them



Notes on People Who Have Been Surveilled by the Police or the State Asked to Take A Picture That Reveals Nothing About Them (by Gabriel Saloman)

The images in this volume are a collaboration with people who, like myself, have had the experience of being surveilled by the police or the state. Strangers and accomplices were invited to "take a photo that reveals absolutely nothing about you" and contribute that image to a growing archive. This prompt is intentionally useless – it proposes no solutions to the all encompassing reality of surveillance, no method of counter-surveillance, no tools for evasion. It is intended to produce a sequence of feelings, first of despair at the impossibility of accomplishing this assigned task and second a resurfacing of the embedded trauma that is the inevitable result of this continuous violation that has become the norm of contemporary life. This project will not heal anyone, but it might remind us of the violence that is woven into our lives through this mediated voyeurism, perpetrated as much by the state and corporate systems of control as by our our own engagements in everyday social relationships.

Surveillance is an interpolative act. Being surveilled by the police or the state makes us the subject that is being sought – the

threat to society, the enemy of the state – before we choose such a relationship for ourselves. This is only partly why the moralizing demands for 'privacy' and an indignant defense of political dissent are so pathetic. Both rely on a fantasy of a non-antagonistic, non-exploitative relationship with the state. It imagines that we are the victims of mistaken identity, that we have not been targeted intentionally, that someone in government has gone rogue. The truth: it is not that the state is clumsily targeting us in a misguided as it attempts to protect us; it is defending itself. To quote some friends, *counter-insurgency has become a principle of government*, and there should be no doubt who we are in this relationship.

Following David Lyon, we might define surveillance as "the focused, systematic, and routine attention to personal details for the purpose of influence, management, protection or direction." Surveillance is focused in that it directs its attention to individuals; systematic in that it is not random, occasional, or spontaneous; and routine in that it is a part of everyday life and essential to (some have argued constitutive of) modern, bureaucratic societies. It is always a set of practices which are connected to a set of purposes, even if its efforts to influence, manage and control are not *always* malignant or unsocial.

The banality of Lyon's definition should not temper our reaction tosurveillance's harm, but rather, to illustrate how widely it is distributed. Most of our assumptions about surveillance are wrong, nostalgically tied to George Orwell's Big Brother or Michel Foucault's consideration of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. This picture of the all-seeing eye, of the singular state, is inadequate. Surveillance is more quotidian and more ubiquitous than these models. There is no single watcher any more, but a multitude, – a network of managers distributing bodies as needed from one side of the wall to another. Even more proliferate through the casual social surveillance of being online. We are all watchers, and we are all watched by the many: *the synopticon*.

The insurgent in the street has witnessed the self-fulfilling prophecy of the liberal declaration that "we are the media" and that "the whole world is watching" lead to a toxic obliteration of secrecy that few utopians predicted. The black mask is necessitated by the marriage of total documentation and chemical policing. But it is less and less our physical bodies that are being surveilled, and more and more its double: *our data* body. The ocular primacy of surveillance has not been totally usurped by dataveillance, but instead, we could say that another form of vision takes shape through our data body: the composite self that is both us and not us.

This data body includes all of our various forms of ID – our financial transactions, our network of social relations as revealed by phone calls and email exchanges, our social media, YouTube views, Twitter feeds, Facebook likes, as well as patterns of movement which can be depicted through GPS in our phone, purchases made on credit, crossing borders, and any other instance where a digital process is simultaneously sited in a place. This data body is a bounty for social sorting, where groups of people are organized by various exclusions and privileges relating to economic access, mobility, criminalization, access to information and even incarceration. Our data body enables the state and corporations to do what we already do voluntarily, as we steadily disappear into our esoteric subcultures and narrow political milieus. We sort ourselves readily enough, making it all the easier to limit our reach and mitigate risk. All of these phenomena are only possible because of the surveillance practices and requisite technologies of this time. Changing technologies matter, and the change in our own distinctions between what is public and private have responded in kind.

In his 1972 book, Marxist art historian John Berger made an argument that our "way of seeing" is both ideologically formed and forming, and that what we look at is both constructive *of* and constructed *by* how we look. He argued that the technology of oil painting and perspective shaped our perception and our relation

salvaged from the collective écriture of our moment – manuals, manifestos, inventories, rumours – to draw partial maps, not only cognitive but material, for navigating crumbling anthropogenic landscapes precariously held in place by a metastasising techno-economy of identification, security and control. Along this journey we might just lose the Self and find each other." The analytic and pragmatic resources one can expect to find here are numerous: coal as the motor of history; how oil becomes a class traitor; the pleasures of insurrection and why we need to rekindle a love for the passions; the digital trap of opting for *identification* instead of *utilization* as seen through the 56 gender options, courtesy of Zuckerberg himself.

Peak Panik (with Johannes Büttner and Helge Peters)

PDF, For Printing & For Reading

> Helge Peters and Johannes Büttner's "Peak Panik" afford one an encounter, through a collection of works of performance art, with the question of subjective life in the context of ongoing crises – whether economic, political, existential, or environmental. Through the intersection between aesthetics and politics; and their mutual production of subjectivity; Peters and Büttner raise a set of questions that serve as heuristics in order to avoid further succumbing to those vague discourse that circulate around terms such as 'anthropocene' and 'crisis.' Peak Panik asks: what are we to do, identify or utilize? Is the task to identify the motor of history or to utilize it? To identify one's gender or to weaponize it? To identify with peaceful non- violence or to understand that no side of our ongoing civil war holds a monopoly on violence?
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> Their answer to these questions is clear: *don't identify, utilize!* Sift through and salvage what you can from the junkyards of anthropocenic/digital capital so that you may be able to breathe in the toxic air of our future collapse and be capable of waging a war upon the wastelands that remain. As they state at the outset of their piece: "Peak Panik appropriates fragments

to property in a way that was interdependent with the rise of the capitalist system. He also argued (following Benjamin) that mass media and photography transformed those relationships further, subverting the aura of the art object and re-distributing its image in such a way that individuals had a new agency in determining what is looked at and in what context. The question I propose, then, is *what is our way of seeing now*? My answer is that our way of seeing is defined by surveillance. We look at the world as *surveillant*, and we produce ourselves for the world to be *surveilled*. We produce this through the endless digital avatars and social documentation we are compelled to create. We produce this through the way in which we pose and gesture for the camera, priming ourselves to be seen by strangers. Even our actions are not intended for those who might encounter them in the moment of their event: we produce them to produce an image – a photo, a video, a meme – that will circulate and be seen by the many. Every banner drop, every bloc, every riot is a photo shoot.

What is lost in every critique, including this one, is the actual *effect* that surveillance has on people as individuals whose personal autonomy is being violated. Surveillance is assault. It only serves the perpetrators of surveillance to deny that there are emotional repercussions that stem from their actions. I am romantic enough to believe it is empowering to acknowledge our experience as survivors of surveillance and to break from the isolation that can come from this experience. To process our trauma in order that we might carry on without fear. Not to submit to control, but to accept the synopticon as our battlefield, and to come to terms with what limits occultation might have. Speaking of surveillance is a necessary part of resisting repression and finding other spaces of exodus. As Deleuze told us decades ago, *controls are a modulation*, that change to meet us on every platform from which we choose to engage. There is always a gap between modulations, a break in the rhythm, and in those spaces. All we have to do is use them to our advantage.

The Tyranny of Imagery: Or, Escaping the Zoopraxiscope (anonymous)

> There are rules, conventions, pieces of paper, technological innovations that organise the existent according to the needs of production and social management developed by the ruling Power.
>
> There are moments when all this is too suffocating for those who want to blow up this huge prison. Then you need other spaces, abilities and a different dimension in which to learn to move. It is the dimension of secrecy, a series of expedients, relations, projects and actions that allow you to keep your initiative and strengthen your ability of intervention without being identifiable, controllable and therefore locatable. The dimension of secrecy runs parallel to that of the existent as we normally intend it, it penetrates it or moves away from it according to our needs and goals.
>
> – Incognito: Experiences that Defy Identification

In 1878, a British photographer by the name of Eadweard Muybridge arranged several cameras along a racetrack and photographed a galloping Kentucky mare. The resulting twelve photographs, each separated by only a fraction of a second, revealed the motion of a horse. In full gallop, it lifted all four hooves off the ground, resolving a long-lasting debate. This opened up

- At what Wilderson refers to as the "paradigmatic" level, the geometry of self-abolitionist solidarity is therefore one of parallel rather than convergent lines. My own struggles and those of the friends I'm closest to proceed as if along a parallel line with Black self-emancipation, which it must make every effort to avoid obstructing as we continue to dismantle the conditions reproducing our own identities. Perhaps we can put things this way: the meeting point between Blackness and those who envision themselves as its 'allies' is not in a paradigmatic commonality to affirm, but in what we wish to deny in ourselves that might free the way for someone else to find a self – or something more important – presently impossible so long as we exist.

- This nonlinear thought of self-abolition aims not to re-center white identity, but rather to decenter and multiply the fronts from which the material and symbolic apparatus of Humanity can be destituted.

To orient our struggles around such a paradigmatic geometry in no way denies the importance of insurrectional moments such as the revolts in Ferguson, Oakland, Baltimore, etc. in which the aleatory power of events led parallel lines to cross momentarily, producing explosive and fugitive moments in which distinct grammars of suffering pushed folks together into the same streets, elaborating shared gestures and complicities – rags, gasoline, knowing looks – , that they might together attack the forms of social mediation through which Humanity and anti-Black capitalism as a whole is reproduced. The fires started in these moments still burn in the hearts of those who lived and witnessed them. Yet while their light may serve as a passional orientation for an uncertain future, we need paradigmatic cartographies to pursue it.

in antagonistic relations to one another at another level. We must therefore reject any model of solidarity premised on reciprocal recognition, on empathy, sympathy or charity, or on the assumption of common interests.

- The only consistent and honest fight is one we engage in for our own reasons, oriented immanently around our own *idea of happiness*. By the latter is meant not an individual psychological state, but rather the affective complicity and feeling of increased power that arises between people who, based on a shared perception of the lines of force surrounding them, act together to polarize situational conflicts in pursuit of ungovernable forms of life, in whatever experimental forms this might take in the present.

- If we fight because our own lives compel us to, and it is our own idea of happiness that orients us in these struggles, what is left of 'anti-racist solidarity'? While the notion of a 'solidarity' with Black suffering cannot be stripped of a certain paradigmatic incoherence, if it means anything at all it must be premised not on an attempt to identify, recognize, or render visible Black suffering, but on a *disidentification with ourselves*. That self-abolition is a regulative Idea means that it is nonexistent in the present. If my struggles can be said to align themselves with the possibility of Black liberation, this is not in the moment I declare my "support" for it, or my willingness to be 'authorized' by whatever initiative the nearest Black person is calling for.[40] Rather, it is when we collectively clear the path for an assault on the conditions that enforce those identities that paradigmatically constitute a "self" that we contribute to making things easier for others.

[40] One occasionally finds Frank Wilderson falling back on such a logic of 'proximate authorization.' However, this should be regarded as a deviation from his more fundamental insight, which militates against the sort of surreptitious reintroduction of recognitional ethics that this would entail.

the field of motion analytics, and Muybridge spent the next two decades photographing animals and humans in movement. By reducing each activity to a series of photographic stills, he could analyze and understand it in its particularity. The movements of the galloping horse, of the stalking cat, of the human dancer, were dissected and broken into their component parts. The fields of bio-mechanics, medicine, and ergonomics resonate with his discoveries. So does Frederick Taylor's dissection of the production process, and the rise of scientific management in the factory. With medicine and comfort come exploitation and work speed-ups. The urge to know is never neutral.

Something else was lost in this inquiry. Not only workers' agency in the factory, not only the graceful mystery of the galloping horse. Something is lost every time we analyze a subject in its minutiae to explain how it functions. We forget that a body is capable of many things, that we do not know our own limits. The creation of medical conditions and identities has always been a tool of control. We know that operations of power, truth, and violence are required to turn someone into a woman or a man. We know of the many apparatuses that conjoin to create a certain type of subject. And it may seem obvious that all of these operations that conspire to place each of us at the center of a series of identities, that hold us in a spider's web of subjectivities, also restrict our potential. We are coded into certain permissible behaviors and other impermissible ones. But still, even within all of those restrictions, there is room for movement, play, and subversion. What is lost in the photographing of a horse, dancer, or production process, is the idea that a horse might gallop in a *different* way, that a dancer does not move only according to a certain schema of human capacity, but in fact subverts movement and profanes the functionality of the body.

Further, this analysis rests on an understanding of bodies as individual, separate, sovereign. Muybridge did not study *how a herd of wild horses gallops across dusty plains, fleeing a pack of wolves*,

but how a single horse, on a racetrack, moves on camera. And as for singular wolves? "How stupid, you can't be one wolf, you're always eight or nine, or six or seven."[1]

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A year later, in 1879, a young Frenchman by the name of Alphonse Bertillon took a job as a clerk for the Paris Police Department. Fascinated by the unique qualities of the human body, he began measuring prisoners. Height, weight, the thickness of a wrist or the length of a finger – he suspected that if he could take enough measurements, he would be able to positively identify any individual. When criminals were arrested, he would photograph, measure, and file them, and then check them against existing cases for any matches. He soon built an enormous database, pinning criminals to their identities with the same care that an entomologist takes in pinning and labeling the insects he collects – and the same dispassionate brutality. The information was collected in uniform indices called *Bertillon* cards. That punched cards for mechanical looms and data storage become popular in the same era is perhaps a coincidence, but a compelling one nonetheless. It was an age of standardization.

Bertillon's cards reached the height of their allegorical power in 1892. Anarchist terrorism was at its zenith. Everywhere in France the wealthy and powerful trembled at the thought of dynamite and daggers. Mustachioed Ravachol, that uncontrollable anarchist who bombed the houses and restaurants of the judiciary, was on the loose. Shortly after dynamiting the home of a prosecutor, Ravachol was captured in a cafe, betrayed by a waiter who tipped off the police. Upon Ravachol's arrest, Bertillon himself took the measurements, sorting through his meticulously organized cards. He positively identified Ravachol as Koenigstein, a petty criminal with

[1] Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1987),29.

bodies except on condition of being 'structurally adjusted' to non-Black grammars.[39] Hence there is only an indirect or ideational liaison between these paradigms, i.e. between the self-abolitionism of non-Black life and the anti-political program of the slave that Wilderson (drawing from Cesaire) distils into the phrase: "the end of the world." As distinct Ideas, self-abolition and the end of the world are not synthetic or integral. Instead, they are perhaps best conceived of as parallel vectors, parallel precisely insofar as their potential crossing constitutes a presently unthinkable vanishing point in socio-historical conjuncture.

Despite this paradigmatic distance, the past year has witnessed moments that defy this schema, moments in which, under the aleatory impetus of an *event*, the social hostility configuring each line leads them to converge. This is what happened during the seventeen-day revolt in the San Francisco Bay Area following the Darren Wilson non-guilty verdict in December of 2014, in which diverse groups of people were inspired to collectively block freeways, rail lines, roads and ports, to frontally attack the police, as well as to paralyze the quotidian functioning of the metropolis through the widespread looting and destruction of commercial spaces. Such intensely conflictual ruptures enact a kind of larval, potential, and fugitive convergence between paradigmatic lines, yet the miserable separation of those involved must resume as soon as order is restored on the ground, and the situation becomes once again governable.

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I will close with some tentative theses:

- That we find ourselves fighting a common enemy does not mean that we have a common *experience* of that enemy, nor does it preclude the possibility that we may actually stand

[39] On the concept of a 'ruse of analogy,' see Frank Wilderson, Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), part 1.

Put differently, when read through an Afropessimist logic (as I understand it), what is vital in the queer, anarchist or communist tendencies toward self-abolition is generally not their theorization of race, which often remain unsatisfactorily[38], but their tendency to locate the *means* and *aims* of revolutionary struggle in the immediate self-abolition of *and by* their respectively oppressed group. Though this may take its point of departure from a grammar of suffering marked by the exploitation of variable capital, or the marginalization of one's queer identity, both of which constitute 'human grammars' on Wilderson's reading, by refusing to regard the plenitude of existing subjectivity (labor power, or queerness, etc.) as in need of affirmation, they at least *potentially* avoid recomposing the human community around this same grammar and community, thereby opening up the possibility for an overlap with the struggle against white supremacy from other directions.

Since it draws its affective coordinates not from Black suffering (analogy) but from a disidentification with the Human community *emerging from the position in which it occupies*, self-abolition remains a regulative Idea rather than an actionable maxim. The role of it as an Idea is confer a sort of negative coherency on empirical acts. Again, that this must be ideational rather than empirically empathic is necessitated by the "ruse of analogy," i.e. the fact that Black suffering cannot *appear* phenomenally to non-Black

[38] "The capitalist class can equally centralize its counter-revolutionary action in the State as it can decentralize the confrontation by regionalizing it, dividing the classes into social categories, even ethnicizing them, because a situation of crisis is also an inter-capitalist conflict." Bernard Lyon, "The Suspended Step of Communization," Sic 1. This is one example among many. It is notable that a couple of the texts in Endnotes vol. 3begin to push in the direction of seeing racialization as a distinctive dynamic. Still, the piece on the London riots, "A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats," continues to frame this dynamic as a symptom of the generalized precarization of the wage-form, which is then 'projected' socially onto those who fail economically according to schemas of abjection that have their root in earlier models of racism. Hence it would appear that it is still the class dynamic that determines contemporary racialization in the last instance.

a sour reputation. The infamous and heroic anarchist Ravachol was pinned to his other identities, tried, condemned, and executed.

Bertillon and Ravachol were contemporaries and enemies: one sought to systematize order and policing, the other bombed judges and prosecutors, changed his identity, and evaded the police until his end. Bertillon went on to found and direct the Department of Judicial Identity and Ravachol's last words before the guillotine were *"Vive l'Anarchie!"*

Bertillonage soon expanded beyond the identification of new arrestees, and by 1912 was exported to France's colonies in order to register and identify potential troublemakers, undesirables, and immigrants. Within France, the Department of Judicial Identity began to register vagrants, nomads, and Roma people with the same techniques. What begins as a specific response to crime expands to a generalized treatment of undesirables, and then eventually to entire populations.

As with Muybridge's photography, there is something intimate lost with Bertillon's systematization of identity. Agamben tries to illustrate the inseparable link between the particular and the whole of a singular person: "[l]ove is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is."[2] In love, people are captivated by the intense particularities of the friend or beloved – the arc of a wrist holding a book, the gait and posture of a walk, the angle of one's head during a difficult conversation. In the cybernetic regime, technicians break people into component parts that are neutral, measurable, commensurate. In this way the eye ceases to be a pool of emotion, whose color changes with the light, becoming fierce with anger or softening with love. We all know the

[2] Giorgio Agamben, The Coming Community, trans. Michael Hardt (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1993), 2.

difference between the cold glare of our friends staring down the police and the warm gaze of thoughtful listening, and all of the irreducible degrees and differences between the two. Instead the eye becomes a set of unique, static pixels that positively link someone to a name and an address in a database.

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Control functions by capturing identities. It seeks to make people legible, to turn them into subjects (of a sovereign, of the state) and subjectivities (all of our identities, all of our predicates that converge to hold us in place as some stable individual). James Scott writes of the forcible tattooing of subjects in Thailand and Burma during the rise of centralized states: tax- payers, soldiers, and slaves were tattooed with their status and their owner, indelibly marking people as subjects. This was accompanied, of course, by the rise of bounty hunters and enforcers.[3] Codifying people is always also accompanied by violence: either contingent violence in the case of punishment for deviance, or structural violence as in the process of racialization. One need only look at histories of genocides, pogroms, detentions and expulsions to see the realized potential for violence that accompanies registration.

Categorization performs another function, however, one less about discipline than control. Linking people to identity or crafting them as subjects is never just a matter of organizing people according to their existing predicates. It is an active process that con- strains people to a certain type of activity. It is clear that being a man is never simply a neutral identification, but is always accompanied by both *pre*-scriptive and *pro*-scriptive statements: this is what a man does, that is what a man does not do. This much is obvious, but it is worth interrogating in the light of cybernetics and social media.

[3] James Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia, (Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 2009), 93.

> tion. The anarchist is the point where the most hard-lined affirmation of all western fictions – the individual, freedom, free will, justice, the death of god – coincides with the most declamatory negation. The anarchist is a western negation of the west."[36]

We might do well to ask whether, from an Afropessimist point of view, insurrectional anarchism, queer theory, and communization theory remain "humanist negations of the Human'? If so, is this necessarily so?

My hypothesis is this: to the extent that they can escape this, it is in the direction of a thought of self-abolition. That is, to the extent that struggles actively refuse to validate, affirm, or strengthen the forms of subjectivity presently produced under capitalism, white supremacy and cis-sexist patriarchy, these struggles can be potentially aligned with – or at least, *less likely to stomp all over* – the possibility of Black liberation.[37] Self-abolition therefore constitutes the only possible horizon for a non-Black struggle that does not reinforce anti-Blackness. This leads to what we might characterize as a *negative identity politics*.

[36] Invisible Committee, "Spread Anarchy, Live Communism," in The Anarchist Turn, ed. J. Blumenfeld (London: Pluto Press, 2013).

[37] 'Potentially' because for all its emphatic insistence that we can at present only figure communist or non-trans/queerphobic social relations negatively, there is a tendency all the same to frame the revolutionary process as a recomposition of Humanity around 'immediate' social relations. As the journal SIC describes it, it would be "a community immediate to its elements (…) [with] immediate relations between individuals – between singular individuals that are no longer the embodiment of a social category, including the supposedly natural categories of social sexes of woman and man." A similar move permeates the queer nihilist journal Baedan issue 1, which emphasizes a practice of destroying mediationsabsent of any positive foundation other than the immediacy of joy and chaos. These are clearly negative definitions, as promised: the negation of the mediations giving rise to the reproduction of the class relation or 'civilization' is immediacy, i.e. the subtraction of mediation, without further qualification.

> stroying them (Queer Ultraviolence: A Bash Back! Anthology).[34]
>
> [I]t is no longer possible to imagine a transition to communism on the basis of a prior victory of the working class as working class. […] There is nothing to affirm in the capitalist class relation; no autonomy, no alternative, no outside, no secession. […] [I]n any actual supersession of the capitalist class relation we ourselves must be overcome; 'we' have no 'position' apart from the capitalist class relation…[I]t is a rupture with the reproduction of what we are that will necessarily form the horizon of our struggles (Endnotes).[35]

Despite tremendous and certainly irreconcilable differences between these groups, what these theoretical camps share is the assumption that an overcoming of the existing conditions of suffering and exploitation will ultimately require not a valorization, empowerment, or even autonomization of presently existing oppressed subject positions, but rather the simultaneous abolition of the conditions of oppression and the social relations and the identities they produce: the liquidation rather than the consolidation and empowerment of identity.

This emphasis on the liquidation of present forms of desire, self-identification, and subjectification is arguably something relatively new. For example, it very clearly runs counter to classical anarchism's emphasis on individual self-expression, freedom and the like. As some friends recently pointed out,

> "For more than a century, the figure of the anarchist indicate[d] the most extreme point of western civiliza-

[34] Tegan Eanelli, "Bash Back! is Dead; Bash Back Forever!: Concluding Notes," in Queer Ultraviolence, a Bash Back! Anthology (Berkeley: Ardent Press), 2012, 285.

[35] Endnotes Collective, "What Are We To Do?," in Communization and Its Discontents (New York: Autonomedia, 2011), 26, 31.

Spinoza knew this about identity. He dismissed the later Enlightenment notion of the atomized individual, seeing instead a confluence of forces, of affects and flows and relations that determine us. We are never free, nor are we individuals. Instead, according to Spinoza, we lead lives of "passionate servitude." We pursue those things that affect us joyfully, that increase our power and we flee those things that affect us sadly, that deplete us. And our joys and sorrows and passions are not the result of a sovereign decision by some innate self, but the result of all of our past experiences, our future hopes, the passions of those around us. For Spinoza there is no individual ripped out of context, no powerful ego that decides. For him, the central question was always: what is it that we can do? What are we capable of ? Our abilities, our being in this world in the way that we are, is what distinguishes us, not the predicates assigned us. Deleuze sums up Spinoza's concern neatly:

> Knowing what you are capable of. This is not at all a moral question, but above all a physical question, as a question to the body and to the soul. A body has something fundamentally hidden: we could speak of the human species, the human genera, but this won't tell us what is capable of affecting our body, what is capable of destroying it. The only question is the power of being affected (…) We should notice at this moment that, depending on the culture, depending on the society, men are not all capable of the same affects.[4]

Spinoza revealed a contradiction: we do not know the limits of the body, but we are limited by our imagination. This is not a centuries-old preamble to new age drivel about the power of positive thinking, but a carefully deduced conclusion. "For whatever man imagines he cannot do, he necessarily imagines; and he is so

[4] Gilles Deleuze, "Lecture on Spinoza." deleuzelectures.blogspot.ca, accessed 1/8/2016.

disposed by this imagination that he really cannot do what he imagines he cannot do."[5] And he did not fail to see the connection between determining someone's desire and controlling them: "men are so to be led, that they may think that they are not led, but living after their own mind, and according to their free decision (…)For rewards of virtue are granted to slaves, not freemen."[6]

Frédéric Lordon follows Spinoza in rejecting the dichotomy of consent and coercion, arguing that the autonomous ego at the core of that dichotomy is an empty vessel, a myth. He sees us chained to our desires – desires that are co-created through the interplay with society, with others, with history. What we call consent, then, is not "the authentic expression of a freely self-determined interiority",[7] but the passionate pursuit of joy. Coercion, on the other hand, is motivated by sad affects – we are faced with a choice between performing a particular task, or facing unemployment, the displeasure of the boss, prison – and we flee those sad affects, choosing the alternative. In this way he cuts through the confused notion of the willing slave, the person who seems to consent to their own exploitation. And, Lordon argues, this relationship exceeds capitalism, and the state, and is instead the basic dynamic of hierarchy. Control, or what he calls "the bossing relationship", functions primarily by capturing others' desires and aligning them more or less closely with the desires of the master. This can be achieved through seduction – by presenting one's own desire as the only way to pursue joy, as the motivational industry does with workers: *realize your potential through work! find yourself!* – or through fear, the fear of starvation that comes without work and wages, the pleasure that comes with money.

[5] Baruch Spinoza, Ethics, III, 28. trans R.H.M. Elwes (www.gutenberg.org accessed 1/8/2015).

[6] Baruch Spinoza, A Political Treatise, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, (Dover: Mineola 2004), 382.

[7] Frédéric Lordon, Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza & Marx on Desire, (Verso: London & New York, 2014), 55.

the informal *Bash Back!* network), recent currents in materialist and nihilist feminism, as well as in communization theory (journals like *Théorie Communiste, Troploin, Meeting, Riff Raff, Endnotes, Blaumachen, Sic*, etc.).

A few quotes may serve to illustrate this tension:

> Autonomy is a means by which we develop shared affinities as a basis for abolishing the relations of domination that make that self-organization necessary. And yet, even as we do this, we want to be freed of the social relations that make us into women, queers, women of color, trans*, et cetera. We want to be liberated from these categories themselves, but experience teaches us that the only way out is through (LIES, A Journal of Materialist Feminism).[33]
>
> Identity Politics are fundamentally reformist and seek to find a more favorable relationship between different subject positions rather than to abolish the structures that produce those positions from the beginning. Identity politicians oppose "classism" while being content to leave class society intact. Any resistance to society must foreground the destruction of the subjectifying processes that reproduce society daily, and must destroy the institutions and practices that racialize and engender bodies within the social order." […] With the revolution complete and the black flag burned, the category of queer must too be destroyed. […] [Bash Back!] isn't about sustaining identities, it's about de-

[33] Sky Palace, "To be liberated from them or through them – a call for a new approach," in LIES- A Journal of Materialist Feminism, vol. 1.

of life more broadly. Beyond the simple destruction of power lies its deactivation.[32]

- We must call into question the entire framework of expropriation in the widest sense of the term: the expropriation of once-possessed land, of culture, of relational capacity and of labor from the hands of the State and the capitalist, patriarchal class. We must no longer envision the remedy for suffering as entailing the recovery of a lost wholeness, entitlement or plenitude of which one is presently deprived. This is undoubtedly a more difficult conversation (particularly in the case of indigenous struggles), but one which I think is worth having.

In the past fifteen years of radical feminist, anarchist, queer and left-communist theory, we can see a widespread tendency to gravitate in the direction of these thoughts. What cuts across these tendencies and links them to one another beyond their otherwise significant differences is the way folks have begun to wrestle seriously with a fundamental tension that will animate any future revolutionary or insurrectional practice to come, namely, the tension between autonomy and self-abolition.

Though with very different emphases, this tension between autonomist organization and identity abolitionism can be found in *Tiqqun*, in US insurrectionary queer anarchism of the late 00's (e.g.

[32] To destitute an order of relations is first of all to deprive it of any relevance, to strip it of any significance. However, far from a strictly negative project, destitution is inseparable from the positive elaboration of a new evaluation of the important and the interesting, the alluring and the repugnant, the tolerable and the intolerable. Although such a process must inevitably originate in the frontal negation of an insurrectional sequence deposing the forces of order and immobilizing the infrastructure of the economy, it can ultimately be 'fulfilled' only through the elaboration of a divergent mode of living itself, one shot through with an anomic [i.e. law-less] idea of happiness. On anomic fulfillment, see Giorgio Agamben, The Use of Bodies (forthcoming in English).

Our problem is not that of the stifling and regimented consumer society that inspired the revolts of the 60s.[8] Nor is it, exactly, the strict categorization that accompanied early state-making. We aren't tattooed as slaves or tax-payers. Instead we identify ourselves in our particularities, in the very desires that were liberated by social movements a half-century earlier. There is a two-fold process in cybernetic management: first our desires, our relations, our identities are studied, broken down into component parts; second, they are sold back to us, or used to motivate us to participate in some project, to align our desires with some master desire of capital or control. We are made legible, *as whatever we appear to be*, rather than being forced into certain boxes of pre-determined identity. We communicate, we are made communicable. In that freedom, however we are taught to desire what capital desires, to become self-motivated, self-caring entrepreneurs who pour our lives and emotions into our work and into crafting our selves.

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At MIT, a computer program seeks to train people with social phobias how to interact 'normally'. An animated computer personality engages in a conversation with the patient, tracking their body language, eye movement, facial expressions, and choice of words. Afterwards they receive feedback on their conversational skills. They can review the session with a host of analytics: nod/shake, voice tone, eye contact. There are two operations at play here. The first is an advancement of Muybridge's project: the total dissection of movement, this time applied to emotion and speech, the idea that the whole can be understood by slicing it into small enough component parts. The second is perhaps more troublesome: that humans are learning to be human from computers.

[8] If boredom is counterrevolutionary, as the old situationist slogan went, then certainly today we are all revolutionaries, constantly stimulated, entertained, and distracted by our endless field of digital possibilities. Certainly the Silicon Valley entrepreneurs see themselves as revolutionaries, the neoliberal heirs of Bakunin's destructive urges.

This is an advancement in the project of cybernetics and control. While in the past cybernetics sought to understand everything, now it seeks to force everything to *be understandable*. By giving feedback based on variables that can be understood by computers, it teaches us to act only in ways that can be understood, traced, and ultimately manipulated. If habits, etiquette and social norms in the past served to craft people into certain types of citizens or subjects, at least these rules were not codified, and there was room for the eccentrics, the rebels, and the non-conformists. Now we are being taught, from the first time that toddlers handle the glossy screen of their parents' smartphone, that the only ways in which we can interact with the world are those ways that can be mapped and understood by sociologists and computers. In contrast to Spinoza's dictum that we don't even know what a body is capable of, the technologists answer by creating people about whom every capability is known. We could now say that, increasingly, we don't know that we are capable of anything except that which is measurable.

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Facebook employs a cadre of sociologists, casually called their "Trust Engineers", whose job it is to study human relations on Facebook. They seek to make it more civil, more trustworthy, more democratic. Last year, they noticed an increase in requests for photos to be taken down. The primary reason was that the photos were embarrassing. Ever seeking to encourage sincere human relationships, the trust engineers created a new form allowing users to request that their friends take photos down, but had only limited success. Deducing that it is awkward and uncomfortable for people to have conflict with friends, they decided to make the job easier. Now, when you ask to remove a photo, you are given an array of options to choose from – does it violate the terms of service? is it pornographic? is it embarrassing? If the last, then you are taken to another page, with a pre-written message asking your friend to take down the photo. The message is edit- able, but most

that occasions it. This would be a baseline: stop defending one's innocence.[30]

- Should a chain of local revolts spread and intensify to the point where it manages to destitute the *constituted* power structures enveloping us, collapsing their symbolic hold over the hearts and minds of its subjects and exposing the *coup de force* that always underpins them, we must attack any effort to replace it with a newly signifying '*constituent* power.' As some friends stated recently:

> The legitimacy of 'the people,' 'the oppressed,' the '99%' is the Trojan horse by which the constituent is smuggled back into insurrectionary destitution. This is the surest method for undoing an insurrection – one that doesn't even require defeating it in the streets. To make the destitution irreversible, therefore, we must begin by abandoning our own legitimacy. We have to give up the idea that one makes the revolution in the name of something, that there's a fundamentally just and innocent entity which the revolutionary forces would have the task of representing. One doesn't bring power down to earth in order to raise oneself above the heavens.[31]

In other words, the revolutionary process must not be understood as the constitution of a new law or constituent social body, but should rather be measured by our capacity to destitute the governmental and economic mechanisms of labor, and of the capture

[30] For a longer argument to this effect, the reader is referred to Jackie Wang's useful polemic, "Against Innocence," in LIES- A Journal of Materialist Feminism, vol. 1. liesjournal.net

[31] Invisible Committee, To Our Friends, trans. R. Hurley (NY: Semiotext(e), 2015), p.76-77.

istic grammar of suffering is a non-negotiable condition of struggle.[29] What interests me is how groups can orient themselves in their struggles around the specificity of the suffering they experience, without attempting to lay claim to a positivity for themselves on the basis of transindividual objects unavailable to Black flesh, thereby crowding out a linkage between these other struggles and Blackness. How can non-Black persons who are struggling against the miserable lives they are offered do so in ways that do not, as Wilderson puts it, "fortify and extend the interlocutory life" of the anti-Black existential commons?

A few preliminary theses can be outlined, which take the form of rhetorical and practical strategies that must be avoided across the board.

- We must reject any appeal to the register of innocence. To claim that someone deserves freedom or protection because of an absence of transgression – that one is experiencing undeserved oppression – implicitly distances oneself from the a priori or gratuitous nature of the violence that the Black body magnetizes, the tautological absence of any pretense

[29] That said, it is by no means necessary for non-Black organization to take the form of an autonomous organization around our identities (worker, queer, woman, etc.). In fact, recent struggles (particularly if one assumes a more global viewpoint) have increasingly taken place outside of identitarian coordinates, organizing themselves around perceptions of the intolerable that cut across diverse groups of people, carving out ethical rather than sociological lines of polarization. However, it must also be acknowledged that these forms haven't always led to a dis-identification, tending at times to instead propagate reconstituted forms of integrative populism and 'citizen-democracy.' Perhaps we can put the point this way: autonomous organization around identity isn't necessary for non-Blacks, so long as the ethical conflicts around which struggles are oriented tends paradigmatically toward self-abolition. (I am indebted to Matt for this point.)

people don't edit it. They are content to let Facebook resolve the conflict for them. The so-called trust engineers claim that this is designed simply to help people start conversations. We know it is the opposite. It is to place conversations inside our mouths, to speak through us. *Here is how you deal with conflict in a civil way: you can choose this, or that.* Facebook chooses for us, and we don't have to think. The result is the most incredible curtailing of our power and of the different ways in which bodies can interact, as well as the most fitting analogy for democracy. *You, citizens, are all equal. We will help you to resolve conflicts in an appropriate way, and together we will all act civilly.*

For a more physical perspective, consider Google Maps and real-time traffic updates. There has always been power in mapping: in naming territories, in placing cities on the map or leaving them off, in determining what is visible and what is not. Map-making accompanies state-making. Now this process is accelerated, ripped away from the inflexible state form and given over to cybernetics, but the effect is the same. Following directions from Google Maps determines what is physically real. In the 1800s the flaneurs of Paris would drift around the city, encountering people and scenes, seeking to be inspired and affected without any direction. Now, travel exists only to move bodies from one point to the next. What is between is incidental, and what does not lie along your path does not exist at all. Already we avoid car accidents and traffic jams. Thanks to Google we no longer have to see the death and dysfunction that accompanies highways. And if the central mandate of Google's traffic control is to keep things moving, to avoid interruption, what else will we miss? Certainly, those demonstrations and riots that seek to disrupt business as usual will remain in the background, seen only through our computer screens as Google redirects us and we read after the fact of some minor disruption or vandalism. It won't affect us.

In the past, good citizens were sometimes warned not to drive through the "bad part of town." Now, we don't even know that the

bad part of town exists to be avoided. It is simply invisible. This is a perfect physical analog for the human regulation at play at MIT and through Facebook: only these paths, this type of human, these types of relationships exist. Debord's warning about the Spectacle rings truer than ever: "That which appears is good, that which is good appears."

The study of how things work, of how ecosystems function, of how people move, conspires not only to identify us and make us legible to power, but to restrict our own potential, to create a menu of options that we can choose from. Some anonymous friends recently put it differently: "Categorization is not the naming of things. It is the transformation of names into prison ships."[9] By studying us as individuals, sociology creates the individual. By studying our motion, only a certain type of motion becomes possible. By tracking the identity of criminals and then including everyone in the database of fingerprints and biometrics, everyone is treated as a potential criminal. And now, through the study of our relationships, sociology and cybernetics render only a certain type of relationship possible. It is the most extreme limiting of what a body can do.

This process is accelerating to overdetermine all of our activities, our relationships, our affects, our potentialities. What we see now with Facebook and social media is a vast expansion of mundanity. Even as sociologists use the enormous amount of data available through social media to analyze our behavior, they also code our behavior into a set of options. On Facebook, you can "like" something, or ignore it. This flattening of affect to a binary choice – *like or ignore* – removes even our capacity for enmity, let alone hatred, joy, pity, envy, or emotions unnamed. There is no room here for waging war in defense of a friend, or in destabilizing our identities through friendship. There is only the horizon of a calm, stable future in which we all get along.

[9] HERE: At The Center of the World in Revolt

dition of any positive identity politics, wherein one seeks the valorize and augment the social standing and/or symbolic caché of one's group either by recognition from the State, or by constituting a community bound together by common values, cultural and familial ties, etc. – those who struggle against oppression therefore need to consider the difference between those groups accorded a sufficient quanta of social capital to become "junior partners" of white civil society and Black subjects who remain shut out of this economy of symbolic recognition.

In short – and this point cannot be overemphasized – if Afropessimism is anything, it is the wreck of affirmative identity politics, both Black and non-Black: whereas Black existence is stripped of the symbolic "capacity" to lastingly transform dominant structures of signification (at least, through hegemonic means), since its gestures don't register in the symbolic except on condition of being structurally "whitened," White life cannot effect such shifts 'in the name of Black existence' without reinforcing the latter's nullity at the same time, by speaking in a voice that precisely draws its signifying power from Black nihilation. Black and non-Black identity politicians who nonetheless continue to pursue a symbolic valorization of Black life (e.g. in certain currents of the "Black Lives Matter" movement) do so only provided they 'structurally adjust' or whiten the grammar of Black suffering to suit a Human grammar. In this way, rather than seeking a way out of the desert, they in fact only deepen it.

AUTONOMY AND SELF-ABOLITION

"[We live in a period in which] the struggle to defend one's condition tends to merge with the struggle against one's condition."[28]

I take it to be a libertarian axiom of our times that, where it is desired, autonomous organization around one's own character-

[28] Leon de Mattis, "What is Communisation," SIC, vol.1, 24

sense and hegemonic discourse. For this reason, the entire liberal discourse of 'ethics' – inasmuch as it takes place within the white discourses framed by the 'ignorability' of police and carceral terror – renders it totally irrelevant to Black existence.[25]

What Wilderson calls the "crisis of the existential commons" therefore describes the constitutive gulf across which any attempt to analogize and tether white visions of emancipation to Black life are bound to stumble. The product of asymmetrical regimes of force, this gulf renders the project of what we could call an "affirmativeidentity politics" untenable for Black flesh.

It is on the basis of this orienting problematic of social death that Afropessimists attempt to demonstrate the one-sided, regional, and limited character of Marxist, anarchist, feminist, and post-colonial visions of emancipation. Each of these traditions remains external to the paradigm of Blackness because of the way in which their *grammar of suffering* frames the subject of revolutionary practice – the working class, the subaltern, non-Black women – on the basis of "mediating objects" that allow each subject position to analogize itself with white civil society, and which in each case are absent and unavailable to those positioned by social death. Such mediating objects can include "land, labor-power, and cultural artifacts (such as language and customs)."[26] As Wilderson writes, "social death is a condition, void, not of land, but of a capacity to secure relational status through transindividual objects – be those objects elaborated by land, labor, or love."[27]

Since the ability to analogize or humanize oneself is the condition of a struggle in which the social coordinates of identity can serve as an orienting axis for struggle – i.e. humanity is the con-

[25] Ibid.

[26] Wilderson, Frank, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," Social Justice, vol. 30, No. 2 (92), 2003, 18.

[27] Wilderson, "The Black Liberation Army & the Paradox of Political Engagement." Forthcoming. A draft version has been circulated online here: ill-will-editions.tumblr.com

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From Muybridge to Bertillon, from cyberneticians to trust engineers, our enemies seek to restrain our abilities at every turn. They pin us to display boards and teach us what it means to be a citizen or a human. They hide political decisions about the lives we could lead in the built infrastructure of our world, in our environment and the tools we use. In pinpointing our presence as *such a person in such a place, performing such an action*, they render us only more absent from our own lives and capacities. And we are happy to comply, seduced by the easy life of phones that learn our routines and decide for us. We constantly record our own activity through Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter. Our sense of self becomes wrapped up in what has been recorded about us, and we become our own Bertillon and our own Muybridge.

Muybridge's project has more secrets worth unraveling. His photographs do not only capture movement, they eradicate motion. Muybridge didn't only look at the individual frames in sequence to deduce his results. He invented a primitive movie projector, a disc on which his photographs were arrayed in sequence. By spinning his zoopraxiscope and viewing through a fixed lens, he could emulate motion. But there is no motion there. Like Zeno's paradox, his dissection rendered motion impossible, and he was left with a series of static frames turning in an endless circle. And when motion is impossible, so too are lines of flight and routes of escape. Our only remaining movement is an endless re-tracing of prescribed paths through the mapped and permitted world.

The zoopraxiscope also imposes a rhythm. It turns, regularly, like a record, repeating the same image in the same place with every rotation. This, too, is a form of control: Barthes argues that "the first thing that power imposes is a rhythm (to everything: a

rhythm of lie, of time, of thought, of speech)."[10] Rhythm is metronomic, regular, discrete. It can be imposed from above, as in the forced march of an army. It can also be self-modulated – our FitBits track our heart rates and tell us when we reach our own personal goal. In either case, it is a digital, discrete measurement. Whether we march to a military cadence or to our own self-imposed goals, we are still marching, measuring.

In opposition, Barthes fantasizes about *idiorhythmy*, different rhythms, "a rhythm that allows for approximation, fit for imperfection, for a supplement, a lack, an *idios*: what doesn't fit the structure, or would have to be made to fit."[11] He also calls this *swing*, a deviation from the metronome. Tying free jazz to the Black Power movement, Philippe Carles and Jean-Louis Comoli ask "[i]n a world of finely honed scenarios, minutely calculated programs, spotless scores, well-placed options and actions, what blocks, what lingers, what stumbles and limps?"[12] What breaks the rhythm? What interrupts the spinning, allows something to escape, or to go unnoticed? They argue, optimistically, in favor of the frailty of human bodies which are "not yet well regulated by the law of commodities."[13]

Negative as always, Frank B Wilderson, III follows Fanon in calling for a 'program of complete disorder', " a politics of refusal and a refusal to affirm."[14] For him, if there is something outside the cybernetic regime, some site of resistance, it is the 'absolute dereliction' of the Black body, upon which all of civil society is built.

[10] Roland Barthes, How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces, trans. Kate Briggs (Columbia University Press: New York, 2013), 35

[11] Barthes, 35.

[12] Philippe Carles & Jean-Louis Comoli, "Preface to the 2000 edition: Free Jazz, Off Program, Off Topic, Off Screen." in Free Jazz/Black Power, trans. Grégory Pierrot (University Press of Mississippi, 2015).

[13] Carles and Comoli, Free Jazz/Black Power.

[14] Frank B. Wilderson, III "The Prison Slave as Society's Silent Scandal." Ill Will Editions, 16.

cause or justification, open to limitless expression, and enjoying institutional impunity.

Modernity is therefore fundamentally organized around a "double register"[24]. On the one hand, those included within civil society are subjected to a "contingent, ideological exploitation by variable capital" (a regime of hegemony or exploitation). Yet this hegemonic exploitation nonetheless tends to preserve for the non-Black worker an *existential commons* which places symbolic limits on their degradation. For example, even where they may be criminalized, as in the "bloody legislation against vagabondage" described by Marx in the first volume of *Capital*, still a transgression is always logically necessary for this criminalization to take place, and hence the violence never seeps into the *being* of the criminal *per se*, i.e. it never becomes ontological. In this way, a symbolic space of belonging is safeguarded within white civil society through the social reinforcement of a racialized pathos of distance, whose axiomatic was distilled by Fanon into a simple phrase: "simple enough one has only not to be a n_____ [epithet]" This horizon below which non-whites cannot sink without scandal is marked off by despotic direct force relations, which function as the existential border separating those who live in a *de jure* perpetual vulnerability to terroristic violence, and those for whom such violence could only be experienced under a *de facto* state of exception or subsequent to a transgression.

These two distinct modalities of power do not simply emerge at the same time; rather, one conditions the other. What Martinot and Sexton describe as the 'ignorability' of Black death and the impunity of police murder of Black bodies provides the constitutive background for the symbolic rationality of white democracy, and the symbolic currency of social capital within it. The incoherence of Black death, is the condition for the coherence of white common

[24] Martinot, Steve & Sexton, Jared, "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy," Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture, 9:2.

"Civil war, then, becomes the unthought, but never forgotten, understudy of hegemony. It is a Black specter waiting in the wings, an endless antagonism that cannot be satisfied (via reform or reparation), but must nonetheless be pursued to the death."[15]

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The present is bleak. We are frozen in static images of ourselves. Our ubiquitous digital presence hides a very real absence from our own lives, from relationships of intensity, from motion. And the function of producing identities and categories is becoming more diffuse. We are hemmed in on all sides: by the categories of states and police, by the social networks that identify us, by our own self-creation of identity in our profiles, by those activists who consolidate identity in order to seek recognition and power.

If combat is possible, it will take the forms which the present attempts to destroy: opacity and uncertainty, evading recognition, becoming present with each other and absent in the eyes of cybernetics and states. It implies movement outside of prescribed routes and channels, and alliances formed in unlikely places. Our points of departure are those experiences where identity and recognition become murky and uncertain. We seek experiences that destabilize our own sense of self, that make us uncomfortable, that unsettle us. It is possible that a politics of friendship and enmity might point towards an escape from this static life, an elaboration of intense and bold friendship and relentless hostility, of putting ourselves at stake for and with one another. It is also possible that a politics of friendship formed on the basis of what exists between us now will only create new cliques, that despite our intentions it will re-form our identities and preclude new encounters.

We don't know what it is that might allow us to escape the endless spinning-in-place of the zoopraxiscope. The human body seems too malleable, too flexible, to impose some sort of natural limit on cybernetic speed-ups – or, at least, the breakdowns and

[15] Wilderson, 17.

At a symbolic level, these theorists argue that the racial abjection of the slave was transferred to an "epidermalized" racial construction of Blackness, which had the effect of inscribing the social death and relationless objecthood at the level of appearance itself: the slave relation now marks itself within the being-as-such of Blackness.[23] Black folk today continue to be constitutively denied symbolic membership within white civil society (both culturally and politically), in such a way that no analogical bridge to white culture exists through which Blacks could conceivably wage a 'war of position' or sue for the sort of junior partner status otherwise accorded to white women, non-Black people of color, or 'dutiful' immigrants. The symbolic death or exclusion of Blackness from Humanism means that it is not 'whiteness' or white supremacy but Humanity as an ontologically anti-Black structure as such which stands in antagonism with Black bodies, since its self-understanding of its own subjecthood as value is coherent only so long as it is measured against the killable and warehousable objecthood of Black flesh.

At a corporeal level, the subjection of the Black body to direct relations of force has been institutionally carried forward through institutional paradigms of convict-leasing, police impunity and mass incarceration. Throughout, Black bodies continue to be marked by a *constitutive* rather than *contingent* experience of direct material violence. Prior to any transgression, the Black body is subsumed by relations of direct force that do not possess the same sort of logical or instrumental coherence characterizing the exploitation of wage laborers by capital, for example. The physical violence marking Black bodies is continuous with the slave relation, in that it remains basically despotic and gratuitous, awaiting no legitimate

[23] Wilderson, Red, White, and Black – Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonism (Duke, 2011), 51: "The visual field, 'my own appearance,' is the cut, the mechanism that elaborates the division between the non-niggerness and slavery, the difference between the living and the dead."

neuroses that accompany acceleration can also be incorporated into a responsive management of crisis. If there is no unmeasurable human essence, we must constantly look for different exploits, for different smokescreens to throw up to cover our movements. We might think fondly of the shuffling, stumbling walk that allows desert travelers to escape the giant worms in the science fiction novel *Dune*, a constant introduction of idiorhythmy that hides repetitive patterns. Or, perhaps, to cryptography: what escapes the cybernetic gaze needn't be an ineffable mystery, but simply the addition of random sequences, of complete disorder. Civil war, then, but a civil war that is incomprehensible, irreducible, nonsensical.

We can venture some guesses about what will not work. We can be sure that pursuing friendship through the technologies that control us will never result in real friendship. We can be sure that affirming our identities and seeking recognition for them will never destabilize the production of race or gender or any category. We can be sure that limiting our knowledge of movement through the physical world to directions from a mapping program will never let us escape surveillance or find new worlds. And even if a politics of friendship are no guarantee, we can be sure that anyone calling themselves a trust engineer, anyone teaching us how to be sociable, and anyone questioning us about our identity in order to determine our legitimacy, is an enemy. If nothing else, we know who our enemies are.

> "...we have not given the enemy the state of our political orientation, at no moment have we reproduced before the enemy any detail of the debates and instructions over which subcommissioners tenaciously excited themselves in the secret sections of their subcommissariats, we have permanently spooled false childhood memories, unusable biographies, nesting stories that abash and frustrate the enemy, that reveal

combination gives rise to a being experientially and socially devoid of relationality: the slave relation is a type of social relation whose product is a relationless object.[20]

In the late 1990's Saidiya Hartman, following on the work of cultural theorist Hortense Spillers, added to Patterson's criteria an ontological dimension: the slave, she argues, is one who finds themselves positioned in their very existence, their being-as-such, as a non-Human – a *captured, owned*, and *traded* object for another. The ontological abjection of slave existence is not primarily defined by alienation and exploitation (a suffering due to the perceived loss of one's humanity) but by *accumulation* and *fungibility*: the condition of being owned and traded, of having one's being reduced to a *being–for–the–captor*.[21]

Far from disappearing with the 13th Amendment, or even in the post-Civil Rights period, Afropessimists argue that the formal traits of the slave relation were reproduced and kept alive through the perpetuation of a form of social and civil death[22] that continues to *materially* and *symbolically* locate the Black body 'outside Humanity.'

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[20] Patterson, Orlando, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Harvard, 1982), 1-17.

[21] Saidiya Hartman, Scenes of Subjection (Oxford, 1997), 7, 21, 26: "[T]he value of blackness resided in its metaphorical aptitude, whether literally understood as the fungibility of the commodity or understood as the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves. [...] [T]he fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion."

[22] As Loïc Wacquant has noted, the prison-slave is subjected to a three-fold civil closure. They are denied: cultural capital (university credentials, Pell Grants, education), social redistribution (access to welfare, unemployment, veteran's benefits), and political participation (voting). See Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration," New Left Review 13, January-February 2002.

the means of antiracist struggle nowhere else than within these clashes themselves and the bonds forged through them.

In short, what we have seen in the past few years is a regrettable oscillation between0 a vicarious *acting on behalf of others' reasons* (i.e. a gesture of self-parenthesis) and *an acting out of one's own immediate reasons and assuming or hoping they are compatible or compossible with everyone else's* (i.e. uncritical self-assumption). What has so far gone largely unnoticed is the way in which Afropessimist anti-politics renders both of these positions untenable. And while many who struggle today and are currently unfamiliar with this body of thought might find a lot to sympathize with in the final analysis, it is important to note that the path Afropessimists take to reach these conclusions is in many respects diametrically opposed to core assumptions of the anarchist, queer, de-colonial and communist traditions.

AFROPESSIMISM AND THE EXISTENTIAL COMMONS

From a practical or historical point of view, the Afropessimist story reaches back to Assata Shakur, to the Black Liberation Army, even all the way back to the great Nat Turner, the Dismal Swamp, the Seminole Wars, and so on. But as an explicit body of theoretical work, it begins really with historian Orlando Patterson (despite his own liberal proclivities). Patterson argued in the early 1980's that, contrary to Marxist assumptions, what historically defines the slave's position in society is ultimately not the phenomena of forced labor. Although frequent, forced labor occurs only contingently or incidentally, and not everywhere slaves are found. The slave relation, Patterson argued, is rather defined by a threefold condition: a) general dishonourment (or social death), b) natal alienation (i.e. the systematic rupture of familial and genealogical continuities), c) gratuitous or limitless violence. This threefold

> nothing, that lead their specialized dogs astray, we have skimmed images of childhood at inopportune moments, we have inserted accounts of dreams where our spokespeople wanted confessions, we have not acted in accordance with the enemy's schedule…. We have always talked about something else, always."[16]

AN INFERNAL COUPLE: PRIVILEGE THEORY & INSURRECTIONALISM

My title adapts a formulation from Miriame Kaba's recent photo exhibition in Chicago, *No Selves to Defend*, which documents the legal disqualification in the US of Black women's bodies from the right of self-defense, from case of Celia the slave in the mid-19th century to Marissa Alexander in the present. Kaba shows how the anti-Black legal construction of the right of self-defense circumscribed this right exclusively within the symbolic framework of the Human. To have a right of self-defense first implied having a "self" or a personhood possessing sufficient social value as to be capable of violation in the first place. Yet, as Kaba points out, "For a Black woman, mere flesh is not a self. And for centuries, black women have had no selves to defend."[17] While I think we ought to worry about Kaba's limitation of this history to cases of "legitimate self-defense," which risks an implicit attachment to the liberal framework of innocence – even as it demonstrates the inaccessibility of this same category to Black women – her claim that Black women have 'no selves to defend' serves as a useful opportunity to reflect on another trope in anarchist, communist and militant queer thought in recent years, namely that of 'self-abolition.'

[16] Antoine Volodine, Post-Exoticism in Ten Lessons, Lesson Eleven, trans. J. T. Mahany, (Open Letter: Rochester, 2015), 43-44.

[17] Miriame Kaba, No Selves To Defend, Booklet, Chicago, 2014.

What follows is but one tiny part of an enormous conversation presently taking place around the preponderant role that anti-Black violence plays in social and interpersonal conflict and antagonism in the US, and with increasing intensity in the wake of the recent events in Ferguson, Oakland, and Baltimore.

For over a decade, anti-racist discourse in North American and Northern European radical left and anarchist movements has been dominated by what has come to be called "privilege theory."[18] Privilege theory's emphasis on liberal forms of consciousness-raising activism, often bound up in the largely-symbolic disavowal of accrued social benefits, presents a vision of anti-racist struggle that inadvertently centers the agency of benevolent white people, while tending to treat questions of racism as issuing above all from psychological sources. Too-often subscribing to idealist theories of power, these approaches prioritize practices aimed at increasing cultural hegemony or positive symbolic representation of marginal groups, rather than seeing race as reproduced through differential regimes of ballistic and carceral material violence like police and prisons and strategizing on this basis. Where they do acknowledge the central role of material violence and the consequent inevitability of anti-State revolt, they often lead to embarrassing efforts to 'shelter' homogeneously-understood 'communities of color' from State violence, erasing the ongoing histories of Black autonomous revolt and replacing it with a vision of struggle that looks more like a voluntary disavowal of privilege by white leftists and 'people-of-color-allies.' Finally, in addition to its being burdened by unstrategic, liberal nonviolent leftist tendencies, privilege theory also grossly underestimates the depth and scale of racism in the United States.

[18] For a useful selection of texts from the recent debates on privilege theory, identity and revolution, see the special issue of the journal Dysophia, "Anarchist Debates On Privilege," available at Dysophia.org.uk.

At the same time, an otherwise understandable dissatisfaction with privilege theory seems to have pushed some folks back either into a simplistic class-first Marxism (which I won't waste time critiquing here), or else into seeking a reference point for struggle exclusively in their own *immediate* experience. The latter idea, more common in certain insurrectional anarchist approaches to social conflict, emphasizes the positive intensive social bonds forged through street confrontation, and the consequent need for everyday forms of attack on police and prison apparatuses. We overcome the *whatness* of our constructed identities, the socio-institutional categories designed to reinforce our separation, by becoming a *how* together in the streets, when our bodies interact by means of a shared gesture of conflictuality (e.g. acting together while rioting, building barricades, looting, fighting the police, defending neighborhoods, etc.). Yet what doesn't always accompany this is an attentiveness to the different *orders* and *registers* of dissatisfaction which animate these conflicts (never mind the sometimes uncritically white way in which 'individuality' and 'freedom' is framed in these discourses).[19] What is forgotten is the fact that being willing to throw down alongside others in the streets doesn't mean that the characteristic or paradigmatic form of suffering that pushed one to do so is analogous to that of others next to you. And this matters so much more if one seeks to locate

[19] "More recent attempts to come to terms with this split between anti-oppression and anticapitalist politics, in insurrectionary anarchism for example, typically rely on simplistic forms of race and gender critique which…begin and end with the police. According to this political current, the street is a place where deep and entrenched social differences can be momentarily overcome. We think this analysis deeply underestimates the qualitative differences between specific forms and sites of oppression and the variety of tactics needed to address these different situations." Croatoan Collective, "Who Is Oakland: Anti-Oppression Activism, the Politics of Safety, and State Co-optation" (2012); accessible here: Who Is Oakland: Anti-Oppression Activism, the Politics of Safety, and State Co-optation