popular tactics and the political horizons of the Eric Garner protests

# THE OLD MOLE




# CONCRETE

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This text was written during the 2014 Eric Garner protests in New York City, when the political moment was defined by the Ferguson uprising and its tactics. In hindsight, this marked an early moment in our cycle of struggle, and many of the points made in this piece stand out in starker contrast after 2020, when the marginal, locally-emerging tactics outlined here became the ground floor across the United States for a national uprising. We've reprinted it because it points to something we noticed in the encampments as well: the connection between local tactics— for example, de-arresting — and the strategic horizons they often imply without knowing it. This edition of the text will be included in Jarrod Shanahan's forthcoming *Every Fire Needs a Little Bit of Help*.

Lake Effect Collective

# THE OLD MOLE BREAKS CONCRETE

***Jarrod Shanahan · Dec. 11, 2014***

> *When history is written as it ought to be written, it is the moderation and long patience of the masses at which people will wonder, not their ferocity.*
>
> C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*

## Toward a Practical Grasp of the Present

The US working class is on the move. The militants of Ferguson, MO are the vanguard of a rebellion threatening to generalize across the United States. Individual cases of police murder are escaping the confines of their particular context and blurring into the total condition of life under white supremacist capitalism. The ruling class is breaking ranks on the question of police violence. The movement politicians are running behind the movement. The police are scared. There is no talk of the 99%.

As unarmed black men murdered in the street by pigs who the state calls innocent, Michael Brown and Eric Garner have many things in common. But most important to understanding the last four months in the United States is that they both stood up and said no more. Ordered rudely out of the street in Ferguson, Michael Brown refused. Harassed constantly by the NYPD, Eric Garner took a stand: "This stops today!" We can cite a million subtle causal factors for the ensuing mass movement, but we should not lose sight of its grounding in brave acts of defiance that cost two black people their lives.

If we are to understand this as something besides a movement against "police brutality"—a liberal myth purporting that police existence can be any other way—how do we view these acts of refusal, and the movement they have catalyzed? It is surely a black struggle against white supremacy. But is this within official society? One could hardly argue that to be the example set by Ferguson's sustained militancy. Is it verging on a more generalized rebellion? The events of the past two weeks make this hard to dispute. In any case, central is the figure of the refusal—the refusal of a racialized position in the capitalist division of labor, the refusal of polic-

ing as the central figure of social reproduction, and the refusal of an ever downward standard of living for the US working class, disproportionately weighing on working class black and brown people. This refusal has not been voiced in the halls of justice into which liberals now seek to push it, but as with Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and the militants of Ferguson who kicked this rupture off, the refusal has been in the streets, articulated with one's body on the line.

As we work toward an understanding of this refusal, what it means in terms of racialized class stratification, and what it portends for the coming class struggle, we'd like to also take a slightly more empirical look at the struggles in the wake of the Ferguson rebellion as they have played out in New York City. On a practical level, what do we make of the movement in the US since the Ferguson rebellion, and now Darren Wilson's and (Eric Garner's murderer) Daniel Pantaleo's non-indictments? What is this movement, where is it headed, and what is the role of revolutionaries?

If what follows seems amateurish, improvised, frantic, eclectic, and riven with contradictions, it will have perfectly grasped the flavor of present rupture. The term "far left", used throughout, refers loosely to a local agglomeration of anarchists, autonomists, left communists, communizers, and other anti-state communists; a rowdy bunch indeed. This piece has benefited tremendously from their insights, actions, courage, genius, and love. Special thanks are due to the Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee, and of course the countless anonymous proletarians who are always the real heroes of every class struggle and whose reward is almost always anonymity, at best.

## Blurred Snapshot of a Rupture in Progress

In New York City there have been four major mobilizations since the Wilson non-indictment, two of which corresponded with the non-indictment in the case of Eric Garner's choking death by the NYPD. Each mobilization originated from multiple points (or at least times) of convergence, and featured multiple marches disabling major infrastructure simultaneously almost constantly. While these larger marches have been called by mostly traditional organizers, like various front groups for the old Stalinist parties, the leadership quickly becomes irrelevant, especially as marches split. (Notably the Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee, comprised solely of anarchists and anti-state communists, has managed to call and lead two massive mobilizations, complete with militant chants and literature.) Marches of thousands converged at strategic (or miraculous) moments to outflank police, and diverged just as fluidly as police struggled to keep a handle on the situation. Diverse as the city itself and equally unwieldy, on New York's streets the class has become once more a "many headed hydra," popping up in three places when repressed in one.

More importantly, there have been an almost daily diffusion of small activities by small or unaffiliated crews, spontaneous breakaway marches, unaffiliated folks new to organizing calling for marches that receive tens of thousands of responses. Everyday New Yorkers have been joining spontaneously, blocking traffic, at times confronting the police, and demonstrating a tactical militancy that would have put them in league with the far left only six months ago. While much has been made in the media of the prevalence of white faces at the New York demonstrations (so much so that a French comrade reached out to us for an explanation of this), this is largely bullshit, as the demographics at these marches, while skewing toward youth, have been a wonderful representation of the diversity of New York, and heavily black to boot. One protester on the West Side Highway remarked during an intense skirmish with the NYPD in which the police were embarrassingly outflanked and at times assaulted: "It's black on blue tonight!"

While of course this is a large umbrella of organizations, we can broadly define the base as working class, and potentially militant, but organized under the banner of reformist politics (sometimes in radical garb). This tension in itself, between enthusiastic young people trying to change the world, and the cold reality of the bureaucratic statist non-profits that trade in their enthusiasm and energy, is worth keeping an eye on, though we are not aware of any prominent splits at present. (A more satisfactory topography of this tension, and technical definition of the admittedly overgeneral signifier "non-profit" used throughout this piece, is forthcoming in future analysis.) There has also been an upsurge of unaffiliated proletarians of color taking part in these protests, rolling in small groups of friends or even alone, joining the marches from the streets and canceling whatever plans they had. Once in the streets, these young proletarians are quick to block traffic, lead militant chants, spontaneously hatch, advocate for, and execute direction changes to outmaneuver the police, and in many places surround and sometimes shove officers arresting marchers. This is at odds with (at least the leadership and guiding principles of) the more established non-profit sector, much more conservative in chants and tactics, to say nothing of a hard line against the police.

The major tactical figures we have witnessed are the unpermitted street march, the intersection blockade, the highway blockade, the bridge crossing, the bridge blockade, "die-ins," and various actions inside major retail stores to impede or shut down consumption. While none of these are totally new, what is remarkable is how general, diffuse, de-professionalized, and almost instinctive they have become, in addition to how frequently and coextensively they have been executed. Many far left comrades here predicted some months ago that a highway blockade the night following the Wilson non-indictment would be an unprecedented act of escalation,

only to watch in surprise as three different bridges were blocked the night before the announcement was even made. It is impossible to imagine such popularity of these tactics before Ferguson. Ironically, they would have no doubt been met with charges of "putting black and brown bodies at risk." Perhaps it was only when the proletarians of Ferguson elevated this risk to an accepted premise of the class struggle in the US that the class could move en mass elsewhere.

This level of mass militancy is something we haven't seen since Occupy, or arguably before that. What we have seen is the better parts of Occupy (emphasis on cohesive street tactics, socializing the response to police violence, media savvy mobilizations, ostensibly horizontal organizing structure) breaking free from the ghetto of the middle class professional organizer and taking hold within the consciousness of large numbers of New Yorkers. Chants of "Slow down stay together!" have emanated from all corners of snake marches, and an often excessive insistence on form (e.g. locking arms when not necessary) by very young marchers would be irritating if not so beautiful to behold. On the flip side, much of Occupy's liberal illusions such as "the cops are the 99%" have a harder time taking root in an issue that attacks the crisis of social reproduction, not from the perspective of Occupy's demand for a return to/of the middle class (which, tellingly, was nonetheless still greeted by police violence), but aimed at the central figure of contemporary social reproduction, which has replaced the welfare office: the violent police.

The degree of de-centeredness is something definitely not seen even during Occupy. Since the marches do not emanate from a central position, it is harder to bureaucratize them under a common leadership. Further the plethora of existent organizations, community groups, student groups, and generally pissed off people around the issue of the police is almost endlessly multiplicitous, and for many of these groupings this is not their first rodeo. At the present the imposition of a centralized authority has proven impossible, with so much spontaneous activity emanating from seemingly nowhere. This is a momentary tactical advantage for anti-authoritarians, but it is also fleeting. Soon enough, and this is already underway, the media-savvy and well funded organizations around "Black Lives Matter" and the various statist non-profits accustomed to swallowing up disorganized networks will attempt to gobble up all diffuse activity into one cohesive strategic umbrella, relying heavily on the "good protester / bad protester" dichotomy and a healthy dosage of liberal identity politics to purge the official movement of confrontational tactics and the larger revolutionary element. This will be compounded by the moment of street tactics meeting their limit, with a militant minority earning the ire of the mass movement, which has yet to noticeably occur but could be right around the corner.

Despite the best intentions of academic identity politics, there is no clear political line along the lines of race. What has emerged instead are the class ruptures within racial designations, as well as long-standing political lines between sects and organizations. At a march in East New York called after the murder of another unarmed black man (Akai Gurley) just before the Ferguson decision was announced, a group of older black militants berated the multiracial crowd for chanting "Hands up, don't shoot!" advocating instead "Arms down, shoot back!" This chant naturally caught on with the multiracial far left. However, it has met much resistance along the supposed lines of race by the non-profit crowd. We've witnessed non-black chanters being told to "check your privilege", and the blackness of the black people chanting it questioned.

Similarly militant street tactics have been pursued by a diverse swath of New Yorkers, perhaps most predominantly young black and brown people with no discernible group ties, while the right wing of the non-profits and more conservative voices advocate respectable behavior and non-provocation of the police (which extends right down to using unkind words). The class and political tensions within such abstract entities as "communities of color" are coming to the fore in the streets. With all due respect to the immense differences between people in different racialized strata of the working class, the foremost division in the streets, as usual, remains between those who want to things to stay under control and those who want to push the envelope toward more militant tactics, both camps being thoroughly multiracial.

Interestingly all this movement does not appear to be an extension of the so-called "movement of the squares."[1] This concept as described by *Endnotes* includes occupations across several city centers that involved alliances between multiple fractions of the working class and middle class. Outside of Ferguson, there has been no attempt to seize a piece of land and hold it while surrounded by police. Perhaps it is a shortcoming of these marches that the organic mass instincts seem to be wanting to out-maneuver, out-smart, and otherwise get away from the police. Nonetheless the success of the mobilizations and their momentum call to question the wisdom of a "square" for a movement comprised of locals in contemporary New York. If we can have daily activities carried out by well rested folks not constantly braving the winter elements, if we are freed from focus on the practical questions of holding a small piece of property, are we the better? Can we bypass the square? Do we need the square? Do we need an occupation? Did we ever? Or have we simply surpassed that moment?

It can of course be objected that the social relations being produced in the square or the occupation, especially taking on the reproduction of the class outside of the state as a concrete problem, created a qualitative shift in the relationships in the movement of the squares, and qualitatively shifted the

content of the politics toward, in some cases, a revolutionary paradigm. However we should not discount that these relations are being forged in the streets, and that these shifts are occurring on the run. This question, which is in no way answerable by mere analysis, should be of paramount practical importance to all revolutionaries.

If not the square, what? What is the highway blockade? What is the bridge crossing? What is the Macy's disruption? What is the seemingly endless (up to ten hours in some cases) snake march, diverging from one march, converging with another, flowing amorphously from one major infrastructure blockade to another? In our view this is the class groping toward a form of militant action in a period when direct confrontation with the state seems to be off the table. Ferguson has set the tone for the class struggle in the US, but Ferguson, where rioting has flared and at times live ammunition has been fired at the police, is difficult to emulate outside of its context. In New York City, state violence is advanced far beyond the rest of the US. Not only are the formal police the most developed in perhaps the world, but the informal police—from a gamut of nonprofits to trade unions, to local politicians like Charles Barron, Jumaane Williams, Letitia James, and even the mayor himself—serve the state well, demobilizing militant struggle and channeling it into legal channels. Unlike the pigs in Ferguson, the NYPD didn't need tanks in the street when the Black youth of East Flatbush rose up after Kimani Gray was murdered last year, because they had Charles Barron and Jumaane Williams to give the counterinsurgency a softer touch.[2] This is also what the New York ruling class has in mind when they decry the out of touch white ruling class in St. Louis. Up here, they congratulate themselves; class domination, like everything else New York's ruling class loves, is so much more *authentic, organic* and *locally grown*!

But beyond the "shock absorber" politicians, there seems to be something stubbornly intransigent about a general aversion to property destruction, skirmishes with the police, and the like in this present upsurge in NYC. It may be an ideological barrier, a practical fear, or perhaps overall a bedrock reality of the moment. One tactic that seems to be used to bridge the gap between demonstrators being unwilling to face the police but simultaneously being interested in outmaneuvering and otherwise escaping police is the "de-arrest" (the forcible removal of a seized person from police hands), which should be put in the forefront by practice and propaganda (including shaming those who interfere). More generally there is a need to recognize the widespread class activity capable of bridging the current gulf between the most advanced actors of the class struggle (directly confronting the state with property destruction and violence on the table) and the broader mobilized masses, and to push forward these activities wherever they are found.

It is of course possible that the emphasis on entering retail stores in particular is a sign of the kind of "consumerist" fixation which many bring to contemporary politics, in a period where many on the left externalize political projects from their participation, and literally review them on the Internet as if they are rating a restaurant on Yelp (I wasn't welcomed with a smile, the rhetoric was a bit alienating, I didn't feel comfortable, etc.). However, may we not infer that this is a groping toward what it means to stop production in a largely post-industrial setting like Midtown Manhattan? Is there not an instinctive wisdom toward the site of commodity purchase as a moment of expanded reproduction in which capital accumulation just as disreputable as grinding the factory to a halt? Surely the emphasis on spectacle (e.g. the selection of glitzy shopping districts instead of more proletarian shopping areas like Brooklyn's Fulton Mall, across from the Barclay's Center, a popular spot for "die-in" actions) raises some skepticism on this note.

Regardless, tactics have ranged from active disruption through chanting and literally running around, to the more docile and media-oriented "die-in," which is nonetheless disruptive in its own right in the right place. And is it not so tantalizing to have so many taking direct action in such close proximity to so many wonderful commodities… In any case, the fact remains that the class is getting more comfortable entering "private property", the flow of the city, and generally breaking the law, and in a period that's conservative as hell, that's saying a lot and we should be attentive to its minutia.

On a very basic level, the tactical ensemble of the moment boil down to a slogan which has been oft chanted from everywhere and nowhere in particular: "Shut it down!" The instinct to stop business as usual, no matter the panoply of political possibilities this implies, should be taken very seriously (and is perhaps here understated). Everyday people want to "shut it down", echoing Eric Garner's words "This stops today!" and Michael Brown's refusal to get out of the street. The instinct to "shut it down", to be diffuse, mobile, amorphous, and all the while belligerent, is a defining characteristic of this period. At the risk of being excessively literary, it is tempting to imagine this as a broader call to cease the suicidal momentum of capitalism toward untold debasement of human life and the planet itself. Given the vast difference of protesters perspectives and agendas, even within the liberal camp, perhaps it is more pragmatic to imagine this impulse to "shut it down" as devoid of overarching positive political content beyond this refusal. Perhaps this places the "shut down" space on par with the square of the "movement of the squares", in which an opening is created through the cessation of daily life, in which a politics must be created (not inserted). Shutting it down could be a constitutive act, towards a praxis which does not yet exist. The question becomes: from what will this

concrete political content arise? How much of its form will be determined by conscious activity of political actors, and how much will arise from the conditions themselves?

## The Thorny & Overdetermined Question of Consciousness

Much of how we situate these tactics, their underlying impetus, and the broader questions they imply hinges on our understanding of consciousness, a subject which we find to be overrepresented in revolutionary theory and underrepresented in revolutionary praxis. Beyond all the grand theories addressing this issue en toto with proper names neatly affixed to them like a hermetic seal, the questions surrounding consciousness are more likely to be slogged out on an individual basis with the folks we meet in ones and twos. What's important to keep in mind is that these experiments, gropings toward a new form of expression, and pushing of the limits of the present form of political activity, remain open ended and their horizon is by no means clear.

Predictably enough the foremost observable contradiction has been between what people say and what they do. This much is reminiscent of Occupy: liberal rhetoric of justice and democracy accompanying the (sometimes felonious) breaking of the law. Some of us have found ourselves in the paradoxical situation of militant chants meeting resistance amidst such unprecedented acts of mass illegality as thousands blocking Manhattan's West Side highway in defiance of explicit police orders, and then police violence. This is not simply a matter of "dual consciousness," in which militant actions outpace engrained ideology. Instead, this marks a contradiction central to the movement itself, between civil disobedience as a tactic of achieving civil rights, and direct confrontation with the state as that which has lost all legitimacy. It is of course impossible to extricate where one ends and the other begins, as the two are often coextensive. And it is equally important to emphasize the qualitative role mass action plays in advancing class consciousness.

In mass action, the radical ambiguity between "sending a message to the masses/lawmakers," taking on capitalism as an object of attack, and building social cohesion—which are so hopelessly intertwined it almost doesn't make sense to parse it all out on paper—prevents us from making any definitive analysis of these tactics. However we can only point to the fact that none of these explanations are a given on their own, and it is possible for this tactic (and other blockade tactics) to definitively break in one or another direction. In many ways this contradiction is contained within the blockade tactic itself. The act of blocking a highway, obstructing a store, etc., can be 1. civil disobedience meant to call public attention to a wrong to be righted by the state and civil society (the liberal perspective) 2. the weakening of the circulation of capital, and in itself a victory against our

foe the state (the "block the flows" perspective, however vulgarized) or 3. an exercise in building social relationships toward increasingly militant confrontations and breaks from legality (the communist perspective—according to which the bridge itself is meaningless and if the social relations could be better forged elsewhere doing something else, even with less media attention, that would be desirable). To be fair, as much was characteristic of the "civil rights movement," to which today's movement is being hastily compared.

Let's keep this discussion brief and take our questions to the streets. In advancing forward we advocate an agnostic position on grand theories of consciousness, which nonetheless takes them seriously. The emphasis however should fall on an experimental approach to engaging revolutionary openings, with an emphasis on the particularity of the situation encountered, mirroring and flattering the experimental nature of this entire period.

## The Bedrock of the Present Moment

To return to the civil rights comparison, is a key difference today from the civil rights era: the intransigent impossibility of reform. As the communizers have argued compellingly, the contemporary police force is the twin of the non-reproduction of the class by capital.[3] As labor power is purchased below the rate necessary to procure means of subsistence, and supplementary programs traditionally provided by the state (welfare, public housing, public sector work, school lunches, childcare, etc.) are continually withdrawn, a vast and disproportionately racialized fraction of the class is left with its social reproduction ensured by the threat of violence and with otherwise no incentive to keep working. This is not due simply to the greed of bankers or the so-called 1%, but in the worldwide reconfiguration of capitalism away from productive labor in the advanced industrial countries where its value had risen thanks to workers struggles, an increasingly falling rate of profit due to mechanization, and the transformation of capital accumulation based on exploiting variable capital to the trade of fictitious capital (which generates no value of its own but only circulates speculative capital that often doesn't exist).[4] Even the utopian liberal economist and anti-Marxist Thomas Piketty had to settle for a plan for remedying worldwide income inequality that would be slightly more difficult to implement than world revolution itself.

Contrary to the quixotic police reformers, we know that in order to even begin to end wholesale police murder the state would have to somehow manage to reproduce the class by traditional social democratic means. And even then, with perhaps the most egregious murders out of the headlines, the racist imperative of devaluing and disciplining black labor power, to say nothing of the racist imperative central to the foundation of the

police and the state itself, would of course remain. While politicians like Bill de Blasio and the army of non-profits and unions who channel grassroots energy into electoral campaigns have made much of the desire to return to this mythic golden age of American capitalism, it has proven to be quite impossible. This does not mean there is no desire on the behalf of a fraction of the ruling class to escape this situation; quite the contrary. The current tension between the mayor and the NYPD—the latter denouncing the former through the mouthpiece of their company union, the Police Benevolent Association, and the former distancing himself from the latter as they double down on their paranoid mantra "Its better to be judged by twelve men than carried by six"—is emblematic of the growing rift in the ruling class between its ideological figures (NY Times, Obama, Holder, De Blasio, Hollywood, etc.) and the executors of its practical functions (the police).

It is possible that the police have fewer illusions in this case; namely, they know it is impossible to reproduce the racialized lowest rungs of the class in any other way, while the ideological mouthpieces of capital still proclaim a 20th Century line on upward mobility and the rule of law, which was never true to begin with and is now incommensurable with even the pretense of reality. This tension is particularly important to pay attention to. If the mayoralty and the NYPD continue to break ranks, an opening unprecedented in recent NYC history may present itself… Have you heard any news out of Oakland lately?[5]

Further, in the chasm created by the non-reproduction of the class, the non-profit complex and its growingly indistinguishable partners the business unions have emerged as a powerful force in political organizing, as well as a powerful economic and political presence in the reproduction of the class. Able to provide resources the state refuses to provide, including employment, to communities of color, while simultaneously espousing far left rhetoric and channeling all political energy into the mechanisms of state reform, the non-profits are a daunting challenge to revolutionary activity in this period and will no doubt comprise the bulk of the coming reaction to this spontaneous mass activity. This reaction will surely draw heavily on identity politics, taking the multiracial composition of the protests as a threat to the hegemony of established movement leaders and the liberal ideology in radical garb which they push on the movement. When the multiracial nature of the protests are attacked using identity politics, especially by legitimately enraged black and brown people, much of it comes from a genuine place of defending the autonomy of black political subjects, and not wishing to de-racialize the movement, place it under white leadership, or otherwise abstract from the historical context and lived experience of white supremacy. But from many liberal, academic, and definitely non-profit circles, especially those which traditionally fun-

nel revolutionary enthusiasm into reformist channels, what is also being attacked is the threat of continued breaks with legality, and the specter of a multiracial revolutionary movement escaping the framework of liberal institutions.

At the risk of being alarmist, this pushback is actually already underway. A march planned for this coming Saturday titled the Millions March, originally called by a small group of friends, has earned the attention of the entire city, including many professional activist groups. Suddenly a permit has been acquired (the first of the entire upsurge, and perhaps its death certificate), a stage planned and speakers announced, a list of social democratic demands quickly affixed to the webpage, and the organizers are now scrambling to poetically qualify the event's original "Day of Anger" subtitle. "Millions" proclaims itself to be in the spirit of the previous marches, only more organized and centralized, which of course defies the spontaneous tactical genius of the previous marches, and the empowerment of countless New Yorkers this enabled. Millions threatens to discipline and demobilize the momentum of the class by returning to the rigid parade style marches, led by politicians and penned in by police barricades, so beloved by the moribund NYC institutional "left." This little band of amateurs could prove to be the accidental Thermidor of the entire present rupture. Of course whether this disciplining of autonomous class action will be possible remains to be seem. And our experience of the last two weeks tells us that they will need a lot of "marshals" (paid movement police, likely union or non-profit staffers who they plan to have on hand) to push the class back into the pens which it has been pushing out of for two weeks.

## What Is It That We Should Consider Perhaps Suggesting To Be Done?

For the revolutionary (the term meaning here the self-identified far leftist, though this is surely not the horizon of revolutionary actors) not simply content with writing on the sidelines, organizing mass marches, or giving canned speeches to captive audiences—and especially for those of us who see independent class activity as a goal far more important than bolstering our particular sect—this is a dizzying moment. While it may be possible to rest content with the class in action, and seek only to push things along tactically in the streets, or to call for the next big march (or occupation), we are presented in part with the fundamental problem of mass activity outpacing mass consciousness. Refusing anti-police chants while defying police orders to cease blocking a major artery of the city, or even while actively fighting back against police, is a puzzling subject position indeed. We must grapple to understand it in theory while experimenting constantly in practice.

It is always a given that the working class taking decisive action does not need our leadership or sanction, and it's a good thing, because events never seem to pan out that way. But if we as revolutionaries are to avoid abstracting ourselves from the class (of which we are surely a part) altogether, and consigning ourselves to inactivity and idle speculation, it doesn't hurt to reflect on our position and its relation to the struggle. First and foremost, what is needed is for us to find the most advanced layers of the class in action, document and publicize their activities, assist when strategic, and help by any means necessary to generalize this activity more broadly across the class. And in each situation, like all combatants in the proletarian class struggle, we must weigh heavily whether our activity helps or hinders the class in motion.

It is in the spirit of this humility, and the foreknowledge that such prescriptions as follow always lend themselves to easy parody, that we offer up discussion points for what we can and should do amidst the present rupture. It is of course a common mistake we constantly risk as revolutionaries to assume we are the most advanced elements of the class, and typically finds us comically chasing after the very masses we kid ourselves into imagining tail behind us. It is from some controversial premises—that not everything self-identified revolutionaries do is a meaningless waste of time that leaves the struggle worse off than it would be without us, and that we may have a thing or two to show for our years of study, debate, and experimentation—that we move to the following points of discussion meant to inform taking action amidst the present rupture.

Revolutionaries should operate on the wager that consciousness is surely helped along substantially by mass action, and qualitative shifts of sociality are no doubt affected by common experiences, but ultimately there exists a basic necessity for intellectually articulated political alternatives to liberalism. It is difficult in 2014 to imagine spontaneously arising consciousness rising to this task, though it is surely not without historical precedent. In any case the class is hungry for news, analysis, and debate. If people don't get it from us they will likely get it from the "police reform" liberals, or worse.

One of the strengths of the non-profits is that they take people seriously as capable of learning and debating complex political positions. The city is awash in liberal identity politics, individualized privilege theory (think Tim Wise, not Noel Ignatiev), talk of reforming the police, simply removing Commissioner Bratton (to be replaced with another functionary with the same social role), and so forth. This is not spontaneous mass consciousness. This is the product of a hard working segment of the New York City political establishment—the non-profits, the community based organizations (CBOs), the alternative parties (Working Families, etc.), shadowy political action committees like New York Communities for

Change (NYCC), the "alt labor" movement (like Fast Food Forward), and a slew of academic institutions, anti-oppression workshops, etc.—taking working class people seriously as capable of engaging political questions. These reformists provide the liberal ideological framework, which has been challenged by the street activity but remains standing and will likely carry the day.

So where is our framework? Are we relying on mass action to solve the problem of mass consciousness? Do we seriously think that a highway blockade (and most certainly the more toothless "die-in") can't easily be recast as an act of "civil disobedience" intended to influence legislation? Most importantly, in our engagements with the people that we meet on the streets, how do we understand and represent the questions race, and more broadly, difference itself, in this period? Coherent and actionable theories of white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, and the like, should be the hallmark of any political groupings deserving of the class's attention right now. Otherwise these burning questions will happily be answered by the liberals, or the nationalists among the revolutionaries, or the outright white supremacists. For those who take their groupings seriously, this should be a time of self-clarification, advancing positions, and engaging in rigorous principled debate.

When in the streets, we must continue to push the situation while laying the foundation for groupings and political projects which will sustain and entrench a baseline of the present level of militancy should this movement prove to have hit its crest. To be clear, we should be among the last to accept that this movement has hit its crest. But we should be prepared for it at all times. This is not a defeatist position (that the struggle certainly has hit its limitations, and that the Millions March is evidence of this, etc.) but a responsible consideration that we should be ready for the lull period, and should be asking ourselves how we can best position ourselves for that time right now. This could be distributing literature and critiques at the coming marches, meeting as many new folks as possible, and most importantly, populating or helping to build sustainable radical projects (social centers, solidarity networks, community speak-outs, reading groups, writing projects, Cop Watches, public debates, social events, and so forth).

Further, we must push against the centralization of this movement by recuperators wherever they arise, including being open to the possibility that they are in fact us. In power struggles against centralization and co-option we must find the dissidents already struggling and bloc with them. We must find those practicing the most promising escalatory street tactics and support them. We must keep an eye out for the fissures of promising leftward splits in ruling class organs, especially the non-profits, and position ourselves to facilitate these splits, and given them political context if necessary. We must fight the deployment of identity politics as

a tactic of "de-escalation" back to the framework of civil society and legality, even when we're told we don't have a right to intervene. And we must call out and shame the "de-escalating" peace police in the streets, online, and wherever their despicable collaborationism with the state can be publicly denounced.

The flip side of this last item is popularizing militant street tactics, not only by our example, but also by popularizing the reasons for them. Why do we throw trash barrels in the streets during marches? To many liberals this is simply a symbol of lifestyle anarchism. Will peace police still interfere with this practice, and put the barrels back in place, when they know that this is a measure meant to prevent NYPD scooters from charging them and potentially running them over? Likewise with de-arresting, will people still get in the way of de-arrests when they are confronted with the facts that not only does this maneuver successfully keep people from the brutal hands of the state, but that interfering with it makes one an agent of the state itself, no matter how well-meaning they may be? This all remains to be seen, but in moments of mass upsurge we should try to err on the side of the masses of people wanting to do the right thing for the movement, without falling into pure naivety.

So just what should we be striving to build? For the first time since Occupy and perhaps for longer, the possibility is on the table for a serious anti-state anti-capitalist (as opposed to anti-"corporate") political and cultural milieu in the city capable of attracting, educating, building with, and most importantly, learning from people outside of the traditional academic or subcultural pipelines to revolutionary politics. We should take seriously the panoply of social and political institutions this entails, and a practical critique and analysis of the success of the non-profits and CBOs in engaging the class (albeit in a disempowering way) is a project to consider. For those of us with active projects and perhaps a little baggage in the left, now is the time to talk to each other, see if we can network our projects, set aside old differences, and figure out what really matters, even if it means we hate each other all over again (maybe this time for better reasons).

Likewise there is now the capability to coordinate meaningfully on a national scale, to socialize resources, experiences, and coordinate actions together. The risk of course, as always, is falling in love with our own organizations, and putting them ahead of the imperatives of class struggle. But this ever-present risk is no excuse for inactivity on the national level when the struggle seems so likely to generalize. What we need is no less than a radical alternative to the non-profits on the local and national scale, not a project in building a better non-profit, "boring from within" to change them, or blocking with the "radical ones". Right now we on the far left have our own shit, with its own momentum, and if we can't meet

people outside an institutional framework, that says more about us as organizers than it does about the importance of working within reformist institutions.

This also means engaging as much as possible with the new groupings, the hastily constructed infrastructures, and all other forms of social relations that have arisen out of necessity over the past two weeks, and more broadly since the Ferguson uprising began. Many informal networks, small organizing crews, social media groupings, and so forth have sprung up under necessity. In many cases attempting to formalize such entities beyond their role as mere tools of advancing struggle kills them. But it is important to begin asking what they are, how they relate to prior-existent groupings (if at all), and most importantly, how they relate to each other. Most political groupings never overcome the accidents of their birth, and while this may help sustain small crews, it is not necessarily a good thing. We should be encouraging and facilitating the generalization of as many projects as possible, or at least the facilitation of a common ecosystem for them to inhabit in relation to each other without forfeiting their autonomy. This will be messy; it will entail nasty splits, bitter polemics, lots of hurt feelings and maybe some tears, but this is work as risky and uncomfortable as it is necessary. In other words, it is in keeping with the order of the day.

It is now tempting, in the fashion of the day, to conclude with some grand theory that casts all these goings-on in a neat framework. But that would sell the presently polymorphous phenomena short, and not do us any favors by reducing their complexity. Instead we must outline a tentative and actionable map of the movement's contradictions, be careful not to downplay them, and be ready to take decisive action on its fault lines. The real resolution to the questions this pieces raises and thousands more unspoken above can't be obtained by forcing these events into a theoretical schema, but by engaging with these questions in the streets on a micro level, by meeting individual people, pushing along individual acts of defiance toward their generalization, blocking with the right voices in meetings, boldly making mistakes, and occasionally getting it right. And the theory we write should serve this purpose, or will otherwise be met with detached curiosity.

It is impossible to say almost anything definitive about any rupture from the midst of it. Nor is it possible to periodize with finality the recent present (or distant past, really). For all the critiques leveled at Occupy, many of which remain justified and relevant to today, it is possible that on a long enough time frame we will come to see the Occupy moment as part and parcel of the rupture now underway. It is not important right now to make such judgments; we can leave it to posterity, or more likely, the US's failsafe memory hole. What we do know for sure is that most of what hap-

pens in the course of human social relations is outside of the control of the small pockets of self-identified revolutionaries like ours, the world over. The question, paramount at moments like this, is not: What is outside of our collective power? Instead, let's ask: What isn't? And this is a question that only tireless experimental praxis can resolve.

## NOTES

1. See Endnotes vol. 3, "The Holding Pattern: The Ongoing Crisis and the Struggles of 2011-2013" (These endnotes were provided by the author in 2024 and did not originally appear in this essay.)

2. The reader at the time would have understood this reference to be indebted to the Fire Next Time collective's seminal pamphlet "The Flatbush Rebellion," which, for better or worse, colored my thinking on these questions at this time—and probably still does. See: Fire Next Time, "The Flatbush Rebellion," 2013, https://eastcoastrenegades.wordpress.com/2013/03/25/pamphlet-on-the-flatbush-rebellion

3. The reader at the time would have recognized this as a reference to the journal Endnotes.

4. This section reflects the influence of the independent Marxist intellectual Loren Goldner, with whom I was studying closely at this time.

5. I have no idea what happened in Oakland that day, but it was probably a riot.

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