

apocalypse. catastrophe. failure. mob rule. desertion. extremism. insurrection.

Harbinger

fifth communiqué — two and a half years in the making

FREE

Some run for cover, we rush to bear witness.

a pioneer outpost of the future
a weapon for children
a secret passage into the CrimethInc. underground
for anyone who has ever seen a smokesack and winced

THE END OF THE WORLD

When the world ends, white dust will fill the air like the curtain at the end of a play. A rain of desperate bodies will fall from the windows of burning buildings, drumming the concrete below. Men with splinters in their eyes will stumble through streets choked with debris; women clutching babies will pick through the rubble and tear out their hair. Our generation will go to its grave shouting its last words into a cell phone.

Or perhaps it will arrive as a thief in the night, step by invisible step. Factories will disappear overseas and corporations vanish into thin air, taking jobs and retirement funds with them. Cities dying from the inside out will spread like ringworm, the shrapnel spray of suburbs slicing through forest and field. Wars will reach from continent to continent and neighborhood to neighborhood—the terrorists who won't make peace against the horrorists who enforce it at any price, who keep trying to impose harmony between oppressed and oppressor with fear and firepower. Tides will rise with global warming, acid rains fall with the last of the redwoods, computer systems crash with stocks and stock markets . . . until one day *everyone* has cancer.

Or else nothing will happen at all, business will continue as usual: prison guards pace concrete tombs, psychiatrists contemplate madness, demons glare from the eyes of ministers, consumers are bought and sold in the marketplace. *It's after the end of the world*, whispers the homeless man on the corner—*don't you know that yet?*

Others, mysterious and knowing, who have held themselves aloof from the discussion until now, finally interject: "*Which world?*"



When the world ends, people come out of their apartments and meet their neighbors for the first time; they share food, stories, companionship. No one has to go to work or the laundromat; nobody remembers to check the mirror or scale or email account before leaving the house. Graffiti artists surge into the streets; strangers embrace, sobbing and laughing. Every moment possesses an immediacy formerly spread out across months. Burdens fall away, people confess secrets and grant forgiveness, the stars come out over New York City; and nine months later, a new generation is born.

DISASTER

Yes, birth rates increase immediately following disasters, just as the rate of natural death declines during them. People don't often die of old age—that is to say, boredom—in the midst of catastrophes. Life, however precarious, is worth staying awake for; in fact, it's never tasted so sweet. The urgency of emergency provides just the spice that the constant low-intensity stress of daily life never could.

But what about the people who *do* die in disasters? It's true that people lose their lives in heat waves, flash floods, and airplane hijackings; they also die in automobile collisions, workplace accidents, of drug overdoses and heart attacks and lung cancer—and, in unprecedented numbers, alone and forgotten in rest homes. The really strange thing is that, as a society, we fixate so fearfully on disasters, when everyday life is statistically more dangerous to us; and that, at the same time as we fear them, we find them so fascinating. To get to the bottom of this, we must reexamine both disasters and their supposed opposite, normality, and figure out which is really which. Let's begin by looking at disasters from the dissident perspective, through the forbidden eyes of the secret part of each of us that rejoices in them.

Disaster as Interruption

It's a public secret: disasters are exciting. Trying as they may be, we come alive in them. In our "normal" lives, we accommodate ourselves to the smallness of what seems to be the world, and that accommodation becomes, itself, a prison. Disasters throw everything into disarray and into question: the wide world reasserts that anything is indeed possible, and we find ourselves tossed out of our prisons, ready or not, shivering on the sidewalk before the ruins. In these new conditions, we can become heroes, work and witness miracles, suffer tragedies rather than mere indignities; we find ourselves fully engaged, thankful for each other and everything we have, even for what we have lost. Danger and distress do not always arrive uninvited; to trade one's tiresome old fears and frustrations for new and compelling ones can be a real relief. In the wake of a disaster, everything has weight and meaning—tears and laughter both come easily, and no one knows for sure what will follow next. Afterwards, many find it difficult to readjust, to resign themselves again to all that knowing.

Disasters deliver the equality law promises but fails to fulfill. When disaster strikes, a boy in a wheelchair is no less than a haughty executive: the two watch the burning high rise side by side. Outsiders and outcasts can find themselves elevated to positions of prestige and approval—indeed, they may be the only ones prepared for the situation: when the Is evaporates, people who have invested everything in it must rely on those who have spent their lives pondering the Could Be. Skills that seemed specialized and irrelevant—fighting riot police, or surviving in the woods—suddenly become essential for everyone, and dissident futures the pragmatic once dismissed as impossible take over where the former chains of cause and effect leave off.

Disasters render the social facts that comprise reality negotiable; abrupt freedom takes the place of hackneyed choice. Lost hikers teach themselves to start fires with wristwatches, errand-running mothers lift automobiles off children, docile airplane passengers commit cannibalism and are celebrated

*It's not just birth and death rates, either—domestic violence decreased dramatically in South Central Los Angeles during the riots in 1992, for example, while it hits a national peak on the day of the Superbowl. "One ordinary weekend is more bloody than a full month of insurrection," as a French student commented back in May of 1968, having had the good fortune to experience both.

for it. When school is closed and the roads are impassable, when everything is up in the air, one is no longer at the mercy of routine, atrophying commitments, cowardice and inertia: complete self-determination, in the new and alien landscape of upheaval, is inescapable. Catastrophes are sometimes described as experiences of total liberation, heretical as such a notion is in our safety-first society. It's no coincidence the Millennium referred to in so many religious traditions is to be ushered in by a phase of terrible destruction: the kingdom of heaven arrives through the smoke.

That the notion of such an apocalypse—whether as nuclear war, final judgment, or total revolution—is so pervasive in our civilization suggests a popular fascination with extremes in which conventions no longer apply. Our preoccupation with danger and tragedy implies a barely disguised longing for risk and uncertainty. "What would you do if you learned you had only twenty four hours to live?" From inside our cubicles and confessionals, we can only envision total freedom and authentic living in the context of imminent destruction—so we do, constantly.

Here in the world of structure, safety, and routine, we know disaster only from afar, as spectacle: news reports, motion pictures, rumors. These representations serve a host of purposes, the foremost being intimidation: they keep us cowed, grateful for the protection of our noble leaders. The disaster we see through these screens, like the wilderness allegedly beyond the walls of civilization, is a nightmare in which life is short, brutish, and ugly. These portrayals also, more tellingly, serve an economic role: they cash in on the immense popularity of the apocalypse—vicarious living, through action movies and video games and the like, is bound to be in great demand in a society that stifles first-hand adventure. In the process, they teach the important lesson that the moments of truth we secretly pine for are distant, inaccessible, perhaps only fictional; certainly nothing we could participate in or, for

Nadia —, quoted in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's atlas of human suffering and inhuman repression *The Gulag Archipelago*, recalls the time when she was being taken to interrogation by an impassive, silent woman guard with unseeing eyes—when suddenly the bombs began to explode right next to the Big House and it sounded as if at the next moment they would fall directly upon them. The terrified guard threw her arms around the prisoner and embraced her, desperate for human companionship and sympathy in the face of the end. Then the bombing stopped. And her eyes became unseeing again. "Hands behind your back! Move along."

That was a disaster that didn't go far enough.

that matter, precipitate. That is to say: those noble leaders are simply protecting us from ourselves! Or is it themselves they are protecting?

After all, where do our leaders fit in the anatomy of calamity? Airlifted in by private jet to address the mourners (and cameramen), they speak as if they suffer our own tragedies more than we do, but they're not the ones who bear the brunt when something goes awry. Students of disaster tell us that while disasters can increase the opportunities for exploitation, they also reduce the motivations for it, at least among the population that experiences them; thus the only exploitation in disaster conditions is usually perpetrated by outsiders, profiteers who take advantage of the situation to fleece survivors. Our leaders are the profiteers of disaster; they rely on it—more precisely, on the terror the thought of it provokes—to

"Disasters bring people together, imparting a common context and project. In this suddenly opened and democratized atmosphere, individuals whose lives were formerly separated identify with each other. This sense of community offers intimations of a different kind of society, turning calamity into a harbinger of better things. Disasters are often the crucibles of millenarian and revolutionary movements: in such extremes, people experience the broad possibilities of life and subsequently set out to realize them." -National Research Council Committee on Disaster Studies, *Convergence Behavior in Disasters: A Problem in Social Control*

maintain their power. Disaster works for them—especially if we never experience it ourselves, but only see it on television, in the papers, in our nightmares. In fact, these leaders are the ones endangering us—it is their policies which give us cancer and turn suicide bombers against us. Our protectors run the ultimate protection racket.

But are they protecting us? Once upon a time oil spills and shootings were considered disasters; today these are practically standard features of our society, built into the social fabric and accounted for in advance. They are not anomalies, but routines. Real interruptions in which the system breaks down, on the other hand, such as blackouts and bomb threats, are still described as disasters, whether or not anyone dies. Already harrowed by the vicissitudes of the system itself, we dutifully fear them, but those who have lived through such disruptions know how sweet it can be when Something Happens.

The essential quality of disasters as we know them is the break with the status quo; this is the one feature they all share. It is not destructiveness that sets disasters apart: the slaughterhouses, suicides, and collateral damages of Business As Usual take more lives than all the worst catastrophes combined, while many disasters don't result in any deaths at all. If the casualties of all disasters were tallied and compared to those of "normal life," disaster would look very safe indeed, just as the number of deaths and injustices that have resulted from people obeying authorities far outnumber those perpetrated by those who have broken laws. Yet there are some who live in horror of disasters while unflinchingly extolling the virtues of war: these, then, must be people who fear the boundlessness and unruliness of life but are quite at home with the orderliness of its opposite. War, in particular, is a safe ritual—it is the protector of the status quo, the reassertion of normality. It is no coincidence that the runaway disaster of September 11, 2001 was followed immediately by a series of wars—and which calamity has ultimately been the more bloody, assuming you count foreigners as human beings?

So only the coward fears disasters—that is to say, there is a cowardly part of each of us that would keep everything familiar, whatever the cost in lives and life. This is fear of the unknown in its purest form: it projects chaos, destruction, and death onto everything beyond the pale of the ordinary, projections all the more ironic in that they can only be modeled on that which is known. From this irony, we can conclude that those who most fear the unknown reveal in doing so that the world they know is a place of terror. It is precisely the terrorized, those caught in thrall to fear, who most dread to leave its territory. The free, the fearless, ready to live and all too aware of what is insufferable in the everyday, welcome new horizons, disasters included.

The Disaster as Permanent Condition

Wait—how could that be, that disasters are the apex of adventure, community, life itself? Does that mean that if we really want to live, we have to spend our lives as disasterists, quixotically chasing the few brief moments of upheaval destiny affords each of us, longing for the fleeting, borrowed wings of destruction and rebirth as we wade through years of deadening routine in the meantime? Is that practical, practicable, worthwhile? Does the woman fed up with her car payments and marriage really crave tornadoes and typhoons, or is she just desperate for an honorable way out?

Perhaps we have everything backwards here—maybe disasters aren't so great after all, but the *real* Disaster, the worst one, is the Disaster we live every day: the emptiness of our full schedules, the trivia that trivializes us, the machinery that

runs on rivers of blood. That would explain why we feel so free whenever something, anything, however dangerous or difficult, interrupts all this. Perhaps the excitement and immediacy that break out in emergencies are simply indications of a return to our natural state, in the break they herald from the full scale slow motion train wreck that is our society. If that is the case, then it is not disasters per se that are liberating—it is, rather, a question of perspective: a "disaster" that disrupts a life of constraint is experienced as a moment of liberation, when that "normal life" is actually Disaster in disguise.

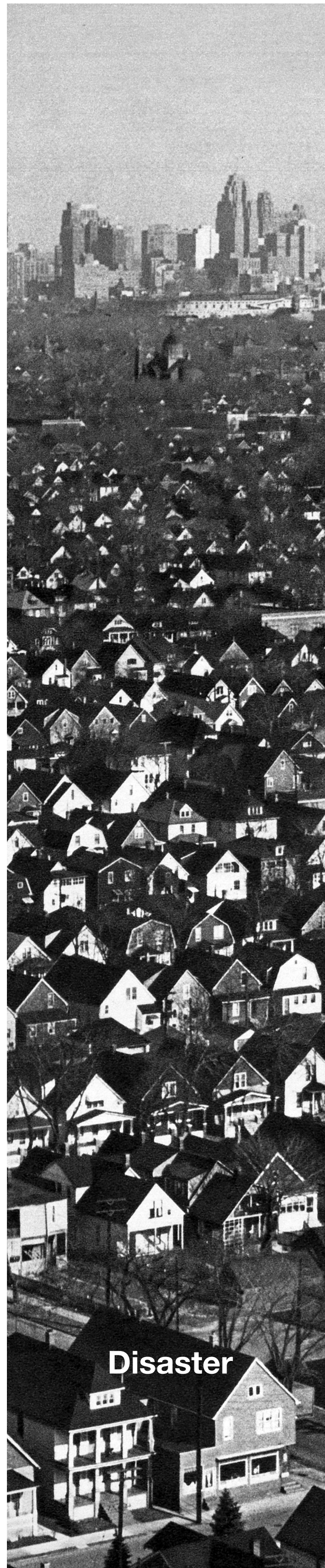
Most of the disasters we really suffer from can be traced to this invisible Disaster, anyway. The destruction of rainforests and the ozone layer, holocausts perpetuated with biological weapons and smart bombs, even global pandemics like mad cow disease, anorexia, bulimia, depression—these would not be possible without centralized state and corporate power, and the meaningless busywork of billions that engenders it. To live with the unknown ahead of and around us, to struggle only with the "natural disasters" our ancestors faced, would almost be idyllic after all this.

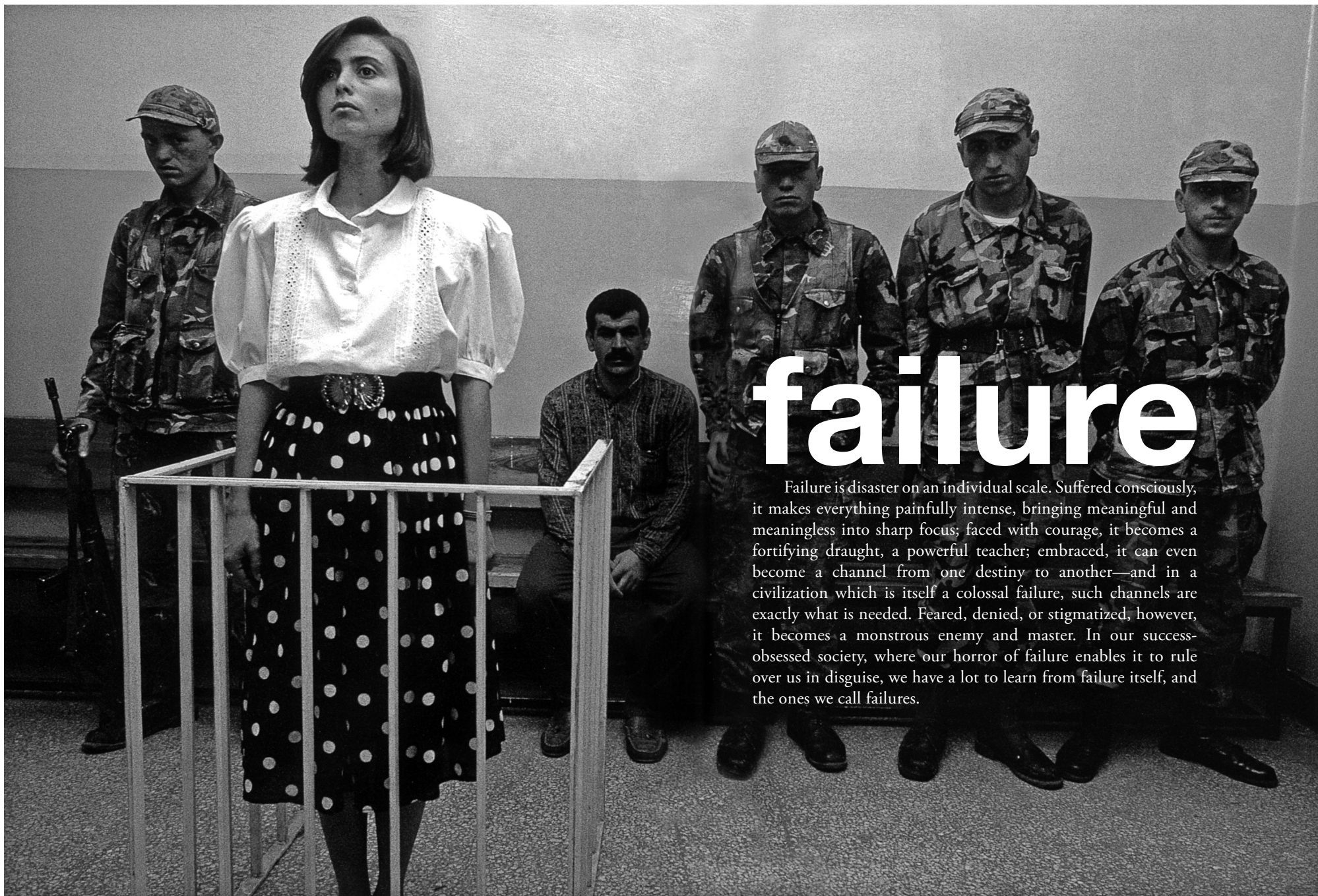
Could we fight Disaster with disaster? If we stopped feeding its flames with our hard work and attention, if we ceased paying tribute, the Disaster would surely crash and burn once and for all. If this status quo is the ultimate Disaster, if it really is disorder and tragedy normalized as a system, no lower-case disaster could be worse. *Interrupt the Disaster!*

Some of us are already practicing this. We don't live in the Disaster, but in encampments at its edge—yes, in a state of ongoing disasters and difficulties, but nothing compared to the misery of life in the Disaster area proper. We don't fall for popular propaganda about disasters; we're conducting our own experiments with them. We don't have to wait for catastrophe to strike to enjoy its benefits—we can throw a disaster any time we like. And we are.

-Diasastronauts Dilemma Goldman and Calamity Jane

Disaster will put an end to it once and for all. disasters but the Disaster they have to fear, the next in place, after all. When people recognize that it is not only popular fear of disasters that keeps the Disaster relationship to disasters, that specter is exorcised. It is itself—for as soon as we establish an immediate bona fide disaster out of the cages, the Disaster endangers bad cop to its good cop; but whenever it has to let a The Disaster needs the specter of disasters to play it says about disasters. disaster. We can learn a lot about the Disaster from what disaster could save us from the Disaster, which is the real The Disaster is that there is no disaster. Only a real could be more terrible than this? is, every last injustice and humiliation included—what that, unless catastrophe hits, everything will go on as ahead but that which is the most banal and familiar day after day—and it is this horror, not the unknown hoarse. The Disaster surrounds us, a desolation we live But in fact it is the present that holds our future the bend, holding the future hostage. always see them ahead of us: a gang of monsters around frightening—everything does. Thinking of disasters, we their supposed opposite. From in here, they look We contemplate disasters from within the Disaster, Disaster ruins everything, by leaving everything intact. The Disaster takes care of everything. That is: the





failure

Failure is disaster on an individual scale. Suffered consciously, it makes everything painfully intense, bringing meaningful and meaningless into sharp focus; faced with courage, it becomes a fortifying draught, a powerful teacher; embraced, it can even become a channel from one destiny to another—and in a civilization which is itself a colossal failure, such channels are exactly what is needed. Feared, denied, or stigmatized; however, it becomes a monstrous enemy and master. In our success-obsessed society, where our horror of failure enables it to rule over us in disguise, we have a lot to learn from failure itself, and the ones we call failures.

The next day we set out to mess up our lives. We started by defying our most insignificant fears, like mine of making bad impressions on strangers: I spent the morning on the subway attempting to start conversations about all the subjects no one is ever supposed to speak about. By the end of the week, we were quitting our jobs and setting our belongings on fire. It was kind of crazy, really, how quickly we were able to switch from anxiously safeguarding everything we knew to methodically wrecking it.

To transgress the borders of sanity and propriety intentionally, to engage with a straight face in behavior that provokes others to stare in mute incomprehension or blunt out questions despite themselves—this takes self-abnegation of a high order. But once you pass that frontier, the feeling is intoxicating: being able to act without regard for the consequences is a kind of omnipotence. You don't have to save up for plane fare to Nepal to climb Mount Everest; in this day and age, to interrupt a stuffy graduation ceremony by shouting out some unelcome truth is to dare the impossible.

Bound by this secret mission that wrested us from the comfortable acceptance of our peers, we found our togetherness all the more sweet. Once the initial sting of embarrassment wore off, it became a joyous thing to sit around laughing after a day of debacles, comparing notes and good-naturedly competing to outdo each other's tales of humiliation and disaster. This wasn't failure, after all—it was something entirely different.

SUCCESS AS FAILURE, FAILURE AS SUCCESS

In this world turned upside down, in which misery masquerades as happiness and truth is simply falsehood with powerful friends, the right kind of failure can protect you from that most insidious danger of all—capital-S Success. It is important to know what battles not to win, what callings not to excel in: some victories are more humiliating than any defeats, some fiascos are triumphs in disguise. The miserable waitress who is promoted to manager and stays at the restaurant long after she had planned to quit might have been better off getting fired, after all, just as the Russian working class could have given themselves a better shot at liberation by losing the revolution of 1917; likewise, it was for the best that Allen Ginsberg didn't make a well adjusted stockbroker.

This kind of failure is a blessing in disguise. Even when suffered by one who desires so-called success, it can be an antechamber of transformation. In failing at an enterprise of questionable value, the individual's condition and activity already diverge from the norms set out for her; it only remains for her values and standards to cross that fissure and join her on the other side, in the new world. When this happens, she can redefine success and failure for herself, so she will not be so busy succeeding that her hands are tied when she has the chance to try them at something that really matters.

As we got deeper into our experiment, we began to suspect it wasn't such an original idea after all. All our lives we'd been taught that the working class was composed of failures, losers who hadn't tried hard enough or hadn't gotten enough education or, at best, hadn't gotten a fair chance to lift themselves out of the pit of defeat—the implication being that anyone would choose to be a success, if only they had the option. Looking around with new eyes now, we saw evidence to the contrary. On-the-job sabotage and employee theft were so common that in-store surveillance cameras always pointed at the cash registers first; no mere economic desperation could explain this—it was insubordination for its own sake, a total refusal of work ethic and ambition. In low-income neighborhoods and trailer parks, middle-aged women wore skimpy clothes fashioned for emaciated models, brazenly flaunting bodies the mainstream media had been denigrating for a century or more. In these heroes and heroines, we recognized the same qualities the shock treatment of willful failure had bred in us. Our middle class mischief was child's play compared to such transgressive renunciations. Could it be there had been a secret cult, even culture, of failure, lurking beneath our noses all along?

SUCCESS AS IMPOSSIBILITY, FAILURE AS RESISTANCE

It is ironic enough that so many dedicate their lives to succeeding at projects that fail to fulfill their dreams; more ironic still is that it is impossible to succeed at these projects in the first place. Still worse is that, living in denial of this failure, they are not even able to learn from it.

Ours is a civilization of losers. Faced with the impossible ideals of beauty and perfection set for us, we fail without fail. This is an open secret, the open secret of our era: no one, but no one, is a winner. The faster we run to catch up to these standards, the faster they recede from our grasp. That's why bodybuilders and models are more insecure about their bodies than we are about ours, why millionaires read books about how to be more efficient. If you're so successful, what's to be the antidepressants?

Even someone like Madonna, who presumably represents the pinnacle of status in our society, has in common with all of us that she is *not* actually Madonna, not the two-dimensional caricature of success and sex appeal that saturates the airwaves. At the end of the day, lines on her face and doubt in her gut, she too turns on the television and feels her heart drop at seeing that flawless superstar cavorting through a digital paradise. In fact, she is worse off than the rest of us: for not only is she not Madonna, but she is also nothing else besides.

Face it—you're never going to look like the models in the magazines, no matter how much skin cream and lip gloss you apply. Hell, without airbrushing, even they don't look like that! Once you embrace this failure, you'll be free to excel at becoming something else.

A new revolutionary class, the proletariat of failures, could count even members of the ruling class in its ranks, were they able to own up to the hard truth that they are no more like the satisfied, veltch executives in Wall Street Journal commercials than we are like the brainless, well-adjusted working families next door on Channel 11. Having sought and failed to find happiness according to their prescriptions, having sincerely given it our best shot, we all have something at stake in making it possible to live differently. All that is needed is for us to come out of the closet, to come to terms with what we are and begin to fail at these roles *deliberately*, to explore the forbidden territory we already occupy.

Of course, there are safeguards in place to discourage us from doing this. In this civilization, failure is the ultimate abomination. Obscenity, drug use, sexual and religious heresy, these may become acceptable—but in our hierarchical society, failure itself will always be anathema. Under capitalism, failure to compete is punished by the severest measures: for if people are to keep on capitulating, non-participation must look utterly undesirable, must be associated with the worst dregs of society and the most unendurable tribulations. The homeless and chronically unemployed play as fundamental a role in our economy as bosses and bureaucrats do: they teach us to equate life off the treadmill with alcoholism and mental illness, they are visual cues reminding us that annihilation is the only alternative to wage slavery. But this intimidation tactic can only succeed so long as the unemployed cooperate by accepting their misery, and the miserable cooperate by accepting employment. As soon as a new class of self-proclaimed failures appears, visibly finding happiness by rejecting both options and making a joyous catastrophe of their lives, the jig will be up.

Pride would hold us forever in no-win situations, insisting we are happy and everything is going according to plan, struggling to prove we are "good enough" to make them work somehow. This is not even tragedy—it's just foolishness. We're good enough to deserve to be happy, for once, whether that be called winning or losing.

Enough of being successful failures—let us finally succeed in our failure! *From failure to mutiny!*

After weeks of sincerely propositioning every stranger we were attracted to, going to job interviews to hold our breath until we passed out, and attempting to sled down shopping mall escalators on cafeteria trays, we felt ready for anything. That was when Mark voiced his concerns to me, as we were riding an elevator to the top of an office building for our first stab at bungee jumping.

"What we're doing isn't really failing, Paul. To fail, you have to be totally invested in something, to desire it with all your heart—to believe, with real conviction, that life will be unlivable if it doesn't come true. We're not really risking ourselves—we've just been getting started."

"But how could we make ourselves want something that badly?"

"That's a silly question! You've got it backwards. Everyone has things they want that badly, what they call impossible desires—they just don't pursue them, because it would hurt too much if they never caught up to them. I think most people don't even let themselves know what they really want, they're so scared of not getting it. We, on the other hand, should finally be in a position to identify and pursue our truest desires, since after all we're trying to fail."

CERTAIN FAILURE IMPOSED BY FEAR OF FAILURE

If a person's dearest dreams can come true, then real failure, too, is possible. As failure is the most feared of misfortunes, being responsible for pursuing and perhaps failing to achieve precious dreams is everyone's ultimate terror. On the other hand, if the realization of such dreams is impossible, then we are free of this terrible responsibility: many people find it easier to endure the idea that everything they want is impossible than to face down their terror of being responsible for attaining it. And once they decide that what they really want is impossible, from that moment on they are invested in that being the truth—otherwise they are fools who have thrown away their lives for nothing. They may even work, subconsciously, to prevent their dreams from coming true, to prevent the things they long for from becoming possible. Imagine that, a planet of six billion people working around the clock to push what they want out of reach! It must require that much work—what most of us want is not really all that difficult or complex. It takes a Disaster of billions to hold us back!

For our masterpiece of failure, Mark and I took on the task of realizing the timeless wish of revolutionaries, that all power structures be overthrown and life be transformed into a joyous, carefree game. Myself, I'd always nursed a certain grudge against authority figures and regulations—and in the light of recent wars and mass arrests, it seemed like a project that had some civic value, as well. And talk about

The perfect ones. The beautiful ones. The right ones, the just ones, the noble ones. The ones who never break down crying in restaurants, who never do anything in secret they would be ashamed of. The normal ones. The healthy ones. The ones who always plan ahead. The content ones. The happy ones. The ones who work hard and reap the benefits, who brush and floss after every single meal. The well-adjusted ones. The popular ones. The ones who never disappoint, the little boys who do grow up to be president. The lucky ones. The ones with perfect skin and perfect teeth and perfect figures. The ones who want what they have and have what they want.

They don't exist. The ones posing as them are even more fucked up than you.

fighting a losing battle! Monarchy, communism, fascism, socialism, so-called democracy, all these ideologies had triumphed at some point in history and had their day, albeit to the misfortune of those who fought for them; only anarchism was utopian enough to have failed every time—it was a challenge custom-fit to our needs! That ambition of wild-eyed anarchists, whole generations of failures before us from Siberia to Santiago to Chicago, was crazy enough that we were at least guaranteed a good adventure in the trying.

Steeled by our experience as low-grade failures, it was nothing for one of us to charge into a corporate office and splash red paint across some murderer's suit, or stand up on a Greyhound bus and present an impromptu course to fellow passengers on how to disable a fast food franchise. Setting out to fail by trying our hardest to succeed at dangerously impossible tasks, we discovered just how much wider the margins between safety and destruction were than we had thought; not only this, but once we were engaged in the situations we had feared most, the constraints those fears had imposed dropped away and we felt more free than ever before. Running from the police was a real relief after years of worrying about whether they would notice us and give chase—at least everything was finally on the table. Laying outlandish plots to undermine equally absurdist orders, seizing intercoms to incite department store employees to riot, we had discovered our true calling; and no longer being afraid to desire or believe in outrageous things, but giving ourselves to them without fear of loss, regret, or disappointment—this turned out to be the only way to live.

BEYOND SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Here's an exercise, then, for the impetuous young freedom fighter: try failing at the duties you are most afraid of, and struggling with all your heart to succeed at the challenges you never dared undertake. What doesn't kill you can only make you stronger, whether it be the mortification of not being able to explain to your parents what you're doing with your life or the utter heartbreak of giving everything to follow a dream only to see it burnt to ashes.

Such a practice sharpens and strengthens, but it also can reveal just how arbitrary most of our deep-seated values are. Ultimately, liberation

is not a question of succeeding or failing, but of moving beyond such binary ways of thinking. Our pathological fear of failure exists only by virtue of our superstitions about success; to emancipate ourselves from the former, we must forgive ourselves enough to stop pining for the latter. The mystique of victory gives rise to the fiction of defeat.

To be free of internal as well as external pressures to achieve, to cease to judge oneself by any one-dimensional yardstick of value or success, to be able to do and live anything and appreciate it for what it is, itself, without imposing systems of evaluation—that would be a triumph sweeter than any victory.

After hours of searching, I found Mark at the top of a hill overlooking the city. By that time, the last of the gunfire was dying down below, and the black flag flew from practically every pole. Mark, however, was sobbing into his hands, inconsolable.

I put my hand on his shoulder. "Mark—it's me, Paul."

He offered no answer, but I couldn't contain myself. "Aren't you happy? Our crazy plan worked! The government has fled, the soldiers came over to our side of the barricades, former grocery clerks are giving out luxury appliances in the ghettos right now! The longest of long shots, and we did it, man. You should be down there with us, dancing around the fires."

"But I'll never know, Paul. We tried to do something that could never ever happen, to test ourselves—and it all came true! Now I'll never know if I could have borne it if it hadn't."

I paused and thought it over, then squeezed his shoulder again. "No, my friend, you've got it backwards," I said softly. "You took on the impossible, a paradox of paradoxes. You set out to fail—and you did. You succeeded."

I sat down next to him, and he dried his eyes on the bandanna around his neck. We gazed out over the metropolis; someone had begun shooting off fireworks from the capitol building.

Text by Eugene DeBacels. Originally rejected by publisher, revised over and over across a painful period of months until a shaky compromise was reached. Selections printed without permission from the unpublisable novel, *Invincible Defeat*.

It is the final night of junior musicians' camp, and the campers' parents have gathered at a gala dinner event to see their young prodigies perform. Awkward at the threshold of adolescence, embarrassed in the presence of their families, the fidgeting students count the minutes, each waiting in terror for his turn to come. Most awkward of all is the star pianist, a shy boy with tousled hair and wrinkled clothes whose performance is to be the highlight of the evening.

His instructor has picked a particularly difficult piece, eager to show off his pupil's rapidly developing abilities—not to mention his own coaching. Nobody has asked the youth what he would like to play—no one has asked him such questions since his mother signed him up for his first lessons: they take it for granted that he knows his responsibilities as frontrunner of a new generation of musicians. For his part, he wants so desperately to please them that he has not thought to consider the question either.

The girl before him is playing her violin solo, and he can't stop his hands from shaking. What if he misses a note, what if his fingers knot and stumble? There is a minefield in the middle of the composition, a series of difficult chords practically right on top of each other. He would give anything to be on the other side of the next twenty minutes, to have this behind him.

The girl ruefully bows to polite applause, and he takes his place on the piano bench. The hush now in the air is not etiquette alone; all eyes are on him, all ears alert. He opens the sheet music to the proper page, positions his hands above the keys, and begins.

The music that pours forth is elegant and precise. Mothers fold their hands and smile, fathers nod approvingly, silently reproaching their own offspring for failing to apply themselves. Even the instructor looks pleased with himself.

The minefield looms closer and closer; now the boy is in the thick of it, sailing through like a true maestro; and now it is behind him! There remains only the final stretch of the song, a victory march of sorts, a real walk in the park.

But suddenly, inexplicably, he hits a wrong note. Just one—but that's not all: far, far worse, contrary to everything



he has been painstakingly taught about concert performance, he stops cold, freezes.

There is nothing for it: he goes back, takes up the piece again from the beginning of the phrase, playing forward with all the grace and finesse he had been as if nothing has happened—and hits the same wrong note. This has never happened in this piece before, or any piece he has played in years. In shock and disbelief, he breaks off again, then inwardly kicks himself for doing so.

His face burning, he backs up and begins once more—and, once more, hits the note, freezing as if jolted by electricity. In the total stillness of the ensuing instant, he becomes aware of the others in the room—not just the monolithic pressure of their expectations, but their presence as individuals. They too are uncomfortable—they need him to get through this to rescue both the evening and their pride, to protect their faith in the investments they have made. It is up to him to save everybody

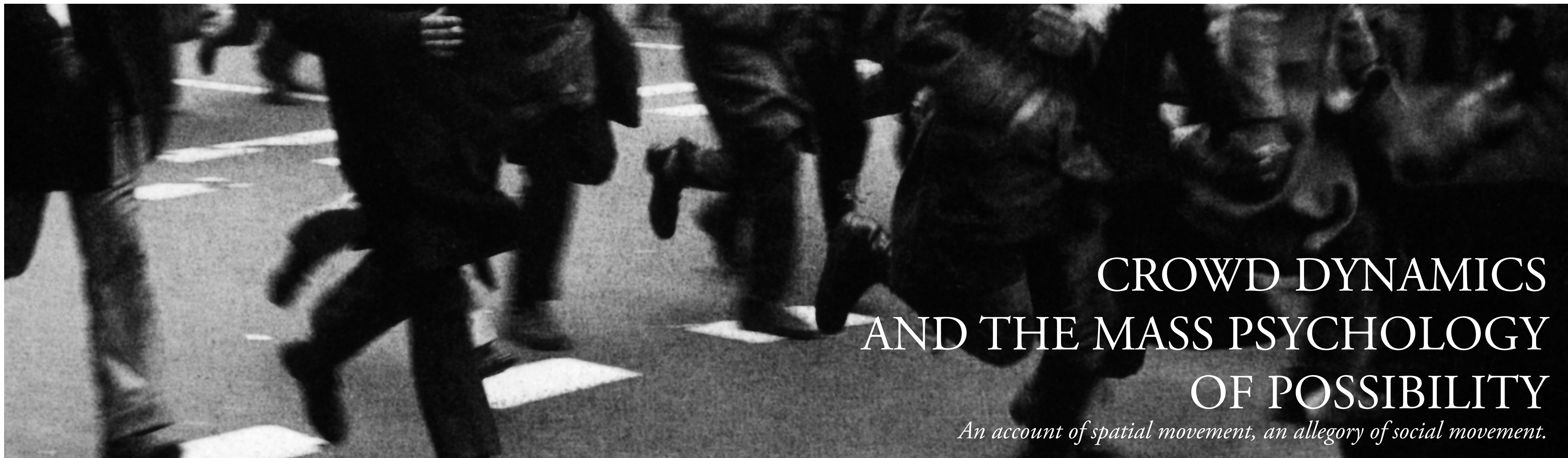
from the impending catastrophe, to fight his way to the end of the composition and then go home to hide his face forever.

He hits the wrong note again. At this moment he would be grateful if a bolt of lightning struck him down, or he suddenly died of a heart attack. Everything he has built his young life upon—his prospects as a musician, his attempts to do what is expected of him—is in shambles. Faced with the unendurable, the boy must either perish or change. No bolt of lightning strikes; his heart goes on beating in his chest.

Once again he backtracks and plays up to the note again—but this time when he reaches it, he plays it wrong deliberately, blasting through all his deepest fears and values to redefine the meaning of the previous sour notes. The audience is none the wiser—they are too overwhelmed, mortified at having to witness this fiasco. Every father in the room is on the edge of his seat, every mother holds her breath; they would give anything to be elsewhere, to be spared this. Every note the boy plays wrong, every successive time he tries and fails, it is as if that failure reflected upon all of them, upon all humanity. Mediocrity they can stomach, even the professional musicians in the audience; outright failure is a contagion they fear worse than death, a harbinger of utter breakdown.

He botches the part again—and again. The dynamic is reversed, now: all the pressure that bore down upon the boy, the weight of the expectations of parents and teachers and students and by extension the whole civilization they represent, is turned upon them. The boy is in total control, free for the first time in his life, and they are helpless, paralyzed in a situation for which nothing has prepared them. The tension is absolutely unendurable. There is a nervous laugh, coughing, helpless fidgeting. The recalcitrant note sounds again and again, like a skipping record, like a fire alarm.

A few feet from the stage, the violinist's eyes light up: she understands. She turns and looks back at the anguished faces behind her: it is truly a vision of damned souls in hell. Peering around the room, she catches the eyes of another young girl a few tables away—they are shining like hers. The two nod to each other, grinning from ear to ear.



CROWD DYNAMICS AND THE MASS PSYCHOLOGY OF POSSIBILITY

An account of spatial movement, an allegory of social movement.

"It was not a column but a mob, an awful river that filled the street—the people of the abyss, mad with drink and wrongs, up at last and roaring for the blood of their masters. I had seen the people of the abyss before, gone through their ghetos, and thought I knew them; but I found that I was now looking on them for the first time.

"This fascinating spectacle of dread surged past my vision in concrete waves of unath, snarling and growling, carnivorous, drunk with whisky from pillaged warehouses, drunk with hatred, drunk with lust for blood—men, women and children in rags and tatters, dim ferocious intelligences with all the godlike blotted from their features and all the fiendlike stamped in, apes and tigers, anemic consumptives and great hairy beasts of burden, wan faces from which vampire society had sucked the juice of life, bloated forms swollen with physical grossness and corruption, withered hags and death's-heads bearded like patriarchs, festering youth and festering age, faces of fiends, crooked, twisted, mishapen monsters blasted with the ravages of disease and all the horrors of chronic malnutrition—the refuse and the scum of life, a raging, screaming, screeching, demoniacal horde."
—Jack London (socialist, reformist, etc., etc.),
The Iron Heel

"A sociologist is an authority on crowds like a policeman is an authority on people."
—Bill Buford, Among the Thugs

If you go to the experts to learn about crowds, you will read that they are mindless monsters: people gone mad or returned to their primitive state, animals out of control, flocks of sheep that must be properly dominated lest they become packs of wolves. The rabble long to be roused, to be hypnotized by their own brute force, and that is all there is to it. Such crowd theory gives the impression that the theorists are simply apologists for their patrons' crowd control; the analysis is all so one dimensional, the accounts all so superior, that you'd think the closest they ever came to the subject was in peering down from the high, narrow windows of their ivory towers.

And you'd almost be right. But in fact, they too are submerged in a crowd: it is simply a bigger one, so much bigger that it is unrecognizable as one. The crowds they claim to explain are disident microcosms of the same form; these can be identified as crowds only because they are distinct in some way from the colossal crowd that is the theorists' society. Inevitably, these smaller masses look crazed and irrational to the specialists of the status quo, because—for however brief a time—they are acting according to a dissenting sense of reality and value. So there are always at least two crowds in any equation: in the case of the mob that riots and loots a shopping district, for example, the other crowd is the one that built the shopping district, that owns the shops

and organizes advertising campaigns to promote their wares, that takes it for granted that that space—not to mention life in general—is best utilized for buying and selling. The fact that this dominant crowd is also a mob of sorts, only more entrenched and institutionalized, may only be apparent from outside it—for instance, from the perspective of one of the looters.

Reality itself is determined by consensus—that is to say, by crowds. What is possible, what is impossible: these are decided collectively, according to what people believe to be so. The world we inhabit is not made up merely of physical or sensory facts; these raw materials gain meaning as signs, tools, customs, and so on from their social context, and the resulting forest of signs is the greater part of what we mean when we say reality. It is those social conditions that create each individual, including her choices and the values by which she makes them; but, as these conditions are themselves the result of individual decisions, they only persist because people decide to reproduce them.

Why does this happen, then, in the case of notoriously unpopular social conditions like war, pollution, miserable employment? Generally, people make choices based on what they consider to be "realistic," rather than on what they would like to happen; and what they consider realistic depends on what they believe others consider realistic—this is how the stock market works, for example. Thus, any given social order rests on a kind of mob mentality, a collective psychosis—and is by no means guaranteed to be in the best interests of those who comprise it.

When people do not recognize themselves as part of a crowd, but think of themselves only as sovereign individuals who just so happen to speak, vote, shop, think, and feel the same way thousands or millions of others do, they tend to see reality as fixed and undisputable. This is the first kind of crowd, the most primitive kind—a crowd that lacks awareness of its own existence. This sort of crowd is no less powerful than other kinds, but the power it has rarely does anyone any good, as it is never wielded consciously. Crowds of this type are characterized by an inability to question their own assumptions and a total denial of responsibility for their actions; when eighty million televisions sets go on in unison at the end of the workday, that's an example of such a crowd in action.

The second kind of crowd is a crowd that is aware of its existence, but not its power. A good example of this is the mass of fans at a sports or entertainment event. People will go to great lengths to come together in such settings, to feel the excitement in the air when a great number share a common space and focus. Let's not be coy about this: there is something thrilling about being part of a crowd, something fundamentally pleasurable about feeling your experiences and reactions mirrored in the ones around you. The disappointment many voice at low-turnout

events indicates a common awareness that it is the atmosphere generated by the mass, not the supposed main attraction, that makes such affairs interesting. Yet the members of such crowds do not think of themselves as the authors of the situations they create. It is their money, their attendance, their interest alone that make these possible, but they attribute this power to others outside themselves—the organizers, the promoters, the Rolling Stones or Atlanta Braves.

But sports fans don't always limit themselves to buying tickets, shouting chants, and filing in and out of stadiums. Sometimes they get carried away. Every promoter who brings together a great crowd in order to sell them back their own togetherness runs the risk that some of his customers will take things too far and engage in some street sports of their own—football hooliganism, for example. The usual pundits decry this as barbaric, uncivilized behavior, but it is actually more cultured, more civilized, than mere spectatorship: these are people coming up with their own activities, not just following instructions like children. Joining in large-scale street fights, provoking riots and confrontations with police—these otherwise senseless activities give the participants the opportunity to form the third kind of crowd: the crowd that is aware of its own power to determine reality. This is the crowd as protagonist, as subject rather than object; that people willingly join in such violent, unpleasant activities is not just evidence of how screwed up they are, but also of how desperate they are to experience themselves as something other than passive vessels of commerce. Small wonder such misbehavior is so contagious; once a crowd gains a sense of its ability to reinvent situations, the peanuts and popcorn—even front row seats to someone else's game—lose their luster. This is not to say that every renegade crowd is a good crowd—lynch mobs are, after all, mobs—but only to point out how, in a society based on segregation and passivity, any self-generated, self-determined group activity is seductively subversive.

All the same, a crowd that has a sense of its own power is not necessarily liberating for those who form it. As a crowd, they may be free from the domination of other crowds, but this is no guarantee that any of them are free within the crowd. Individuals who know they are powerful together aren't always aware of the part each plays in creating that power, or of how to join in deciding how it is applied.

Crowds are vulnerable to authority, to being controlled by minorities or outsiders, to the extent that each participant is unaware of how to employ her agency in the group. Conversely, a crowd is capable, durable, and likely to act in the best interests of its members to the exact degree that all within it are conscious of their own power and familiar with applying it'. The fourth kind of crowd, then, is the crowd made up of individuals who recognize that the crowd is nothing more than the sum of their individual choices,

and make those choices accordingly. For such a group, mass activity is a chance to share selfhood with others, for people to multiply themselves by one another—not a cover under which to abdicate responsibility.

The affinity group of political activists, in which decisions are made by consensus among a group of friends who not only have developed their conception of what is meaningful together but also are in the habit of acting on it decisively, is a microcosm of such a crowd. The do-it-yourself music counterculture, in which pleasure itself is refined and redefined through collaborative experiments in aesthetics that influence and inform one another, is a somewhat larger-scale version of the same thing. In such contexts, where reality is determined consciously and collectively, one's freedom is the sum of all others' freedom, not the narrow space left over in the margins.

For those who desire this freedom, the challenge is to transform crowd dynamics. Actual throngs are excellent laboratories for studying ways to do this. In close proximity, the processes by which people read and respond to each other speed up; thanks to this feedback loop, new realities can quickly be generated in the collective psyche. This is why the mob is always maligned by guardians of the status quo: small, tight-knit crowds can be pressure cookers of social transformation. In our society, every effort is made to prevent people from coming together in masses, to prevent masses who have come together from recognizing themselves as masses, to prevent masses that recognize themselves as such from gaining a sense of their power, and to prevent those who participate in masses that have a sense of their power from recognizing their own individual part in this power. But all it takes to unleash the crowd is to name it for what it is, and engage with it; we are, after all, living in the most crowded era of human history.

A small group that behaves confidently as if they are living in a different world can call into question things everyone else takes for granted; if they take their departure far enough at the right time, they can make the impossible possible by persuading others that it is so on the strength of their own conviction. This can be done without coercion or instruction: one can demonstrate options with one's behavior that were invisible before, and others will join in if what they see is attractive to them. Thus the yearning of a very few can be taken up by a mass and become a self-fulfilling prophecy; all it takes is for a few dreamers to practice believing and desiring outside the lines while resisting the quarantine of pigeonholing, and then demonstrate those dreams and their faith in them in public.

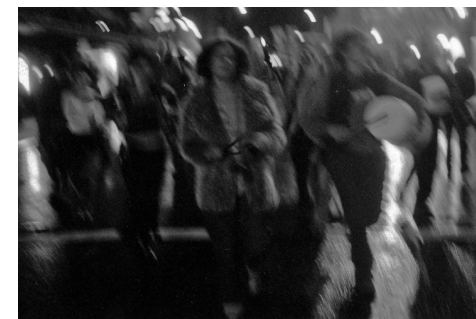
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"This stands in stark contrast to the military model of group participation, in which each individual is systematically broken of his sense of autonomy and independence so he can function more efficiently in a strict chain of command, with the implication that it is conformist, hierarchical unity that gives power to a group. Could it be that armies actually exist to strip power from their members, to create defenseless crowds under the pretense of defending them?"

Exiting the venue, the throng did not yet recognize itself as a crowd—it was simply a mass of consumers, as can be found in any shopping mall. Their movements and motives were determined from without: Mother Market had raised them to respond to certain aesthetic stimuli, and tonight they had come to pay to do so, following the directives from the microphones on the stage above them. Their choices were made individually and without any consciousness of their cumulative effects: this was freedom on the North American model, each customer deciding from a selection of products as if in a vacuum, and the results ascribed to the inscrutable workings of the Market rather than its participants. All the same, the heady experience of being packed into close quarters to join in an entertainment ritual had invested them with a sort of boisterous camaraderie—as had the rumors, which had arisen as if out of nowhere, that tonight's concert would be followed by a little extracurricular activity.

Piles of drums and noisemakers had suddenly appeared outside at the conclusion of the show, and some people were already playing them and handing them out—though afterwards, nobody would be able to say exactly who it had been. One thing was certain: they were part of the mass, not outsiders, or else no one would have followed their example. At any rate, they were not alone for long: the concert had generated an energy that had yet to be discharged, and others began picking up drums and joining in.

The events of the preceding weeks had created a tense atmosphere, but in this particular city, nothing had come of it yet. Right across the parking lot lay the town's main thoroughfare: some of the politically inclined among the concertgoers had thought of blocking or seizing it to give their opposition teeth, but such a thing was simply not possible. Politically engaged or not, everyone there knew what that street was for: it was for car traffic, just as the sidewalk was for pedestrian shoppers and the occasional street fair to attract more pedestrian shoppers; the question of whether these limitations were oppressive or constraining never even crossed anyone's mind, for the street's role was not negotiable.

And yet some of the drummers stepped into the street, right into the middle of it, halting traffic; a couple of them had a great banner,

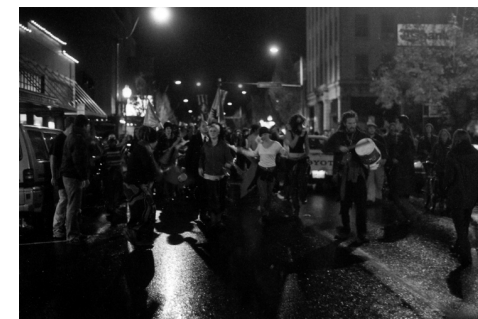


too. Now the street was also for drumming, for shouting and dancing and marching. The others watched them from the sidewalk, half-expecting something to happen to those who crossed this threshold. This was the crucial moment. At first it seemed that things would go no further—the crowd was narrowly stretched out, some rushing ahead and others lingering behind, and it looked like it might fragment and dissipate—but then the momentum of the first ones off the sidewalk spread to everyone else, and what had been a random assembly of consumers became a parade.

As the mass began to move down the street, a subtle transformation took place. Clearly, taking the street was possible after all, and was possible because a critical mass had deemed it so: now this mass, which had been composed of individuals and small groups, came to think of itself as a deliberate togetherness, a group possessing the magical power to renegotiate reality. Organs developed: individuals shared information (a boy on a bicycle reported that there were no police ahead of them yet), made decisions (a few turned left at the stoplight, the ones with the banner followed, everyone else fell in behind them), gave their shared feelings (chants were improvised and adjusted with humor as they spread from one side of the crowd to the other). But there was no master with a megaphone, no distinction between brain and body: this was not the kind of mass that once cheered for Mussolini.

This transgressive togetherness was intoxicating: suddenly everything in the familiar town was new, urgent, exciting. Something was happening! Police began to arrive, a few at a time; but with no foreknowledge of the event or context for what was going on, let alone orders from their superiors, they stuck to the sidelines in confusion. Had ten people attempted to block traffic at this time of night, they would certainly have been arrested; but when two hundred did the same, the laws themselves seemed to shift. One officer turned his car sideways in the middle of the street, as if to block the way; but, flushed with a confidence that had blossomed out of thin air in the past few minutes, the crowd simply walked around it, disregarding this now-meaningless symbol of power and leaving its driver huffing and impotent behind the wheel.

Just as the throng reached the town's central intersection, a bottle rocket shot up into the



air and burst overhead. This was the act of one individual, or perhaps a couple; but, sensing it to proceed from the context they had authored together, the whole crowd cheered, each participant feeling as if he had been the one to light it. Another firecracker shot into the sky. At that moment, moving swiftly to outmaneuver the police who were finally arriving from all sides, two people pulled a dumpster into the middle of the street; flames leapt up from within it as they disappeared into the mass.

At this moment, someone appeared in the midst of the crowd, standing on a mailbox: it was a member of the band that had played that night, waving his arms in agitation. "OK, that's enough!" he shouted. "Scatter! Disperse! Go, go! Do not take this back to the venue!"

When people in a crowd take over a street or carry off some similarly impossible action, all their strength comes from the sense that they can count on each other, all their confidence depends on the confidence of their companions. What a group, acting together, believes to be possible, becomes possible; what some believe impossible, becomes impossible, and thus no one can believe in it to make it so. And so, hearing one prominent personality loudly doubting the possibility of holding the intersection any longer, many suddenly doubted it themselves, and fled, as if taking orders.

In flight, the bulk of the mass remained together, but it was now a very different crowd. Its members were no longer bound by a sense of shared strength, but by their fear of the police—and, more importantly, of responsibility for themselves. In a dangerous situation, no risk could be more terrifying than the fact that every individual is ultimately responsible for the decisions that bear her to safety or misfortune. This is why people almost always flee en masse if they can, whether or not it is the wisest decision: by doing so, each hopes to evade the obligation of making wise decisions, placing it on the shoulders of those around—who are doing the same, unfortunately. A fearful crowd can be exponentially more fearful than a fearful

individual, just as a courageous crowd can be more courageous than a courageous individual: this is why it is important for anyone who dabbles in crowd participation to know how to extricate herself from the crowd's groupthink at a moment's notice.

And so, long experienced in crowd situations, our heroine—suddenly emerging out of the faceless mass at the conclusion of our story—withdrew in a different direction, down a side alley that bore her to safety. Walking calmly and alone, no longer wearing the jacket she had been earlier, she passed effortlessly by the police who were now scrambling to find some scapegoat to arrest or leader to blame. Later she joined some friends, checking in to make sure no one had been arrested and discussing the night's experiment: What would have happened if the police had showed up when people were first entering the street? Was it authoritarian that the ones at the front of the parade determined its route, or merely inevitable? Were the people who set the dumpster on fire irresponsibly endangering other participants, or was it good that they had escalated the situation?

Was it wrong that the guy from the band had felt entitled to give everyone instructions? How could individuals be prevented from seizing the reigns of group activities in the future? Most importantly, how could the sense of power that had enabled a few people to conceive of and initiate the event be shared with everyone who enjoyed participating?

The ones who set the parade in motion never gave any orders—they simply opened a window of possibility by carrying out actions that left room for others to join in. But for a total self-managed revolution to be possible, every individual must be versed enough in self-determination, and every group experienced enough in quick collective decision-making, that no one can usurp control. We need to be trying things like this constantly, the woman told her friends, in the streets and everywhere else, to get the practice we'll need to get our lives and our communities back in our own hands.

AND THE CROWD GOES WILD!

(some assembly required)

To learn more about instigating your own spontaneous crowd activities, consult the anarchist cookbook forthcoming from the CrimethInc. Institute for Subversive Studies.



The Occupation

Occupation. The word brings to mind images of Russian tanks rolling through the streets of Eastern Europe, or U.S. soldiers nervously patrolling hostile neighborhoods in Baghdad.

But occupation is not always so obvious; sometimes occupations go on so long that the tanks are unnecessary. They can be rolled back into storage, as long as the conquered remember they can return at any time—or behave as if the tanks were still there, forgetting why they do so.

How do you recognize an occupied people? The most common indication is a tithe they must pay to their conquerors, or a service they must render them. A tithe is a sort of rent the occupied pay just to live on their own lands; and as for the service—well, what's *your* occupation? You know, what occupies your time? A job, probably, or two, or preparations for one, or recovery from one. You need that job to pay for rent, among other things—but wasn't the building you live in built by people like *yourself*, people who had to work to pay their rent too? The same goes for all those other products you have earn money to pay for—you and others like you made them, but you have to buy them from the companies that employ you, and they neither pay you all the money they make off your labor nor sell the products at the cost it took to produce them. They've got you coming and going!

Our lives are occupied territory. Who controls the resources in your community, who molds the character of your neighborhood and the countryside around it, who sets your schedule day by day and month by month? Even if you are self-employed, are you the one who decides what you have to do to make money? For that matter, picture your idea of perfect bliss—does it bear a suspicious resemblance to the utopia you see in television commercials? Not only our time, but also our ambitions, our sexuality, our values, our very sense of what it means to be human—all these are occupied, transformed according to the demands of the market. As the days and nights of work and recovery add up, eventually you can't help but wonder: have you lived ten thousand days, or just the same day ten thousand times?

And we aren't the only territory under enemy control. The invisible occupation of our lives provides the resources for the military occupation of areas at the fringe of this conquered land, places where guns and tanks are still necessary to enforce the property rights of robber barons and the liberty of corporations to trade at the expense of hostile

seeing one too many fashion magazines. Guns don't kill people, entire civilizations kill people.

Meanwhile, somewhere else somebody is outraged about another shooting. He writes an angry letter to a newspaper or email listsrve, perhaps he even takes time out of his busy schedule to go to a demonstration. But between writing and demonstrating, he has bills to pay, so he, too, goes to work. Perhaps he works at a factory himself, or in an office or restaurant; regardless, his labor serves to keep the economy running at full tilt, and that economy keeps power centralized in the hands of the ones who ordered the shooting and benefit from it. Perhaps his hard work turns a profit that his employer deposits in a bank that loans money to the corporation that produces bullets; perhaps he serves lunch to an executive of the trucking corporation that delivered them; perhaps when he comes home from work, exhausted, he opens a bag of potato chips made by workers like himself in a factory owned by a company that pays taxes that fund the police department that used the bullets. He decries the injustices around him, but it is his labor and consumption, in concert with the labor and consumption of millions like him, that power the system that guns down innocents, cuts down forests, addicts people to nicotine, and teaches young people to hate their bodies.

Clearly, resisting this system can't just be a part-time hobby inevitably undercut by the full time jobs that keep it in place. When the economy itself is an engine of destruction, withdrawing from it isn't just a matter of personal taste, or a hedonistic exhibition of privilege—it's the only way to engage with the total horror of it all, the only way to contest it in deed as well as word.

The man in our example may feel tiny and powerless in the sea of millions like him—and he's right to feel that way, so long as the majority of his energy and time goes into perpetuating the processes he would oppose. But the good news is it takes all that labor to keep those processes going—modern capitalism is only possible on a global scale, can only sustain itself by expanding and expanding constantly. That explains all the pressure to stay employed, pay bills, and "get ahead," then: the

That is—not only is money costly to obtain, but like any addictive drug, it's less and less fulfilling! And the further up you get in the work hierarchy, the more you have to give up to remain there. The middle class worker must abandon his unruly passions and his conscience, must convince himself that he deserves more than the unfortunates whose labor provides for his comfort, must smother his every impulse to question, to share, to see through others' eyes; otherwise, he would be unfit to play his social role, and some more ruthless contender would quickly replace him. Both blue collar and white collar workers must kill themselves to keep the jobs that keep them alive; it's just a question of physical or spiritual destruction.

Those are the costs we pay individually, but there is also a global price to pay for all this working. There are work-related illnesses, injuries, and deaths: every year we kill people by the tens of thousands to sell hamburgers and health club memberships to the survivors. There are the pollution and destruction of the environment, obviously. And above all, more exorbitant than any other price, there is the cost of never learning how to direct our own lives, never getting the chance

to answer or even ask the question of what we would do with our time on this planet if it was up to us. We can never know how much we are giving up by settling for a world in which people are too busy, too poor, or too beaten down to do so.

Last time economic recession caused massive layoffs in Japan, a social epidemic spread in which out-of-work businessmen, ashamed to admit to their families that they had lost their jobs and so unfamiliar with freedom that they could not imagine what to do with it, would leave their homes every morning to spend their former working hours sitting in parks, alone and despondent. What a sad civilization this that creates such aimlessness and dependence!

The reproduction of production . . .

Why work, if it's so expensive? Everyone knows the answer—there's no other way to acquire the resources we need to survive, or for that matter to participate in society at all. All the earlier social forms that made cooperative, recreational lifestyles pos-

sible. In that sense, we become commodities, just like toothpaste and toilet paper. What once was a human being is now an employee, in the same way that what once was a cow is now a medium rare steak. Our lives disappear, spent like the money for which we trade them. Commodities are consumed, working to produce commodities, and we become less than the sum of our products.

Consumption—it's not just a nineteenth century disease anymore!

Having become merchandise ourselves, we rush to consume merchandise to prove we still have some power. Purchasing, once a necessary evil suffered to obtain the resources necessary for survival, is now a sacred act; in the religion of capitalism, in which value comes from financial power and spending is thus proof of worth, it is a kind of communion. The store is the temple in which the consumer's status as one who can buy is affirmed in the actual act of buying. That's why a certain class of people will gladly pay for bland food at an expensive restaurant when there is cheaper, tastier fare right down the street. For the consumer incarnate, spending money is the main point; everything else—taste in food and clothes, investment in the latest technologies, even political sympathies—is just a means to that end.

This compulsive disorder, which keeps us all running back to our jobs to earn more money as the credit card bills pile up, would be bad enough on its own—but it's also gobbling the world up from beneath our feet. In the absence of beautiful mountain tops destroyed by mining and pickup games of street hockey outmoded by televised spectator sports, we can't imagine what there might be besides consumerism to fill the aching void selling our lives away leaves within us.

Work Mentality: Servitude

Many of us have a real problem with initiative. We can't show up on time to band practice, but we never miss a day of work. We lack the discipline to keep up with the reading for our book clubs, but we always finish papers for school. This is a self-perpetuating symptom of employment; thanks to it, we are our own worst enemies when it comes to providing for our needs outside the exchange economy. When a person stops working, she usually goes through a period of restlessness and inactivity; but this is not a reason to keep looking to someone or something outside ourselves for direction—on

Déclassé War

dropouts cutting class (exiting the economy as a strategy for reclaiming your life and saving the world)

locals—some of whom may still remember what life is like without leases, salaries, or bosses.

You might not be all that different from them, yourself, despite having been raised in captivity. Maybe in the boss's office, or in career counseling or romantic quarrels, whenever someone was trying to command your attention and your attention wouldn't cooperate, you've been chided for being pre-occupied. That is—some rebel part of yourself is still held by daydreams and fantasies, lingering hopes that your life could somehow be more than an occupation.

There *is* a rebel army out in the bush plotting the abolition of wage-slavery, as sure as there are workers in every office and factory carrying on the guerrilla war with their own looting, pilfering, and absenteeism—and you can join up, too, if you haven't already. But before we start laying plans and sharpening spears, let's rewind a bit and go over all the reasons to make a break for it, just in case there's anyone out there who hasn't learned about working life firsthand.

Liberation—it's not working!

At this very moment, a black woman is looking after white women's children instead of spending time with her own, a tree is being hewed down in a rainforest, a bullet is being fired from a soldier's or policeman's gun into one of our bodies.

Let's focus in on the shooting. Those bullets don't come out of nowhere. Each one was manufactured in a factory by workers—and at each of those factories, there was a boss, and a secretary, and a janitor or two. Someone kept track of accounts, someone made coffee in the mornings, somebody tacked up motivational posters on the walls. Other workers drove the trucks that delivered the bullets, loaded and unloaded them, pumped gasoline into their tanks, repaired them when they broke down. There was an advertising executive who promoted the product, a designer who made sure it looked its best, a programmer who maintained a webpage, a sales representative who negotiated the sale to the police force. Inside that police force, writing memos, training new officers, taking out the trash, were hundreds more workers, not to mention the thousands who invested in the corporation selling bullets, and the hundreds of thousands whose taxes funded the purchase. Every murder has one million accomplices—as does every polluted creek, every case of lung cancer, every teenager who stops eating lunch after

cartels are terrified that someday, somewhere, someone will throw down his apron or briefcase with the words "I quit!"—and know exactly what he is going to do instead.

On that fateful day, whenever and wherever it happens, everything changes.

It sure costs a lot to make money!

"Cost of living" estimates are misleading, to say the least—there's little living going on at all! "Cost of working" is more like it, and it's not cheap.

Everyone knows what maids and dishwashers pay for being the backbone of our economy. All the scourges of poverty—malnutrition, addiction, broken families, debilitating medical problems—are par for the course; the ones who survive these and somehow go on showing up to work on time are working miracles, albeit for senseless ends. Think what they could accomplish if they were free to apply this power to something other than staying just barely alive enough to earn more profits for their employers!

What about those employers, those fortunate enough to be higher on the pyramid? You would think earning a higher salary would mean having more money and thus more freedom, but in practice it's not that simple. Every job entails hidden costs in proportion to the wages it provides: just as a dishwasher has to pay bus fare to and from work every day, a corporate lawyer is expected to be able to fly anywhere at a moment's notice, to go to push golf courses for informal business meetings, to own a small mansion in which to entertain dinner guests that double as clients. This is why it is so difficult for anyone, at any salary, to save up enough money to quit while they're ahead and get out of the rat race: trying to get ahead in this world basically means running in place*. At best, you might move on to a fancier treadmill, but you'll have to run faster to keep on it.

And these merely financial costs of working are the least expensive. In a well-known survey, people of all walks of life were asked how much money they would need to live the life they wanted; from pauper to patrician, they all answered approximately double whatever their current income was.

*"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that."

"I'd rather not try, please!" said Alice.

sible have been eradicated—they were stamped out by conquistadors, slave traders, and corporations that left neither tribe nor tradition nor eco-system intact. Contrary to capitalist propaganda, free human beings won't crowd into factories to serve if they have other options—not even in return for name brand shoes and software.

Working every day, selling our labor on the market rather than using it to create new alternatives, we perpetuate the conditions that necessitate our submission to that market. Capitalism exists because we invest everything in it: all our energy and ingenuity in the production process, all our resources at the supermarket and in the stock market, all our attention in following the mass media. To be more precise, capitalism exists because our daily activities *are* it.

Instead of each buying our own set of tools that inevitably sit rusting in the basement while we're out working to cover the payments, we could all contribute a little towards a neighborhood toolset to be shared; likewise, instead of all trying to make it on our own, we could save a lot of trouble by meeting our needs in cooperative groups, outside the exchange economy—but we don't, because we fear no one else would join in, because we're too exhausted from working to get started, because we're too busy to even meet each other in the first place.

Here we arrive at the catch-22 that maintains the status quo: revolution is not possible until people change their lives, and vice versa. But somebody has to break this vicious circle and test out its implicit corollary: that revolution *is possible when* people change their lives.

. . . and Submission

It is a foregone conclusion for the average white collar worker that she would never sell sexual favors on the street—but spending her life in a cubicle, engaged in meaningless repetitive tasks, she willingly sells away more precious parts of herself.

Obedying teachers, bosses, the demands of the market—not to mention traffic lights, parents' expectations, religious scriptures, social norms—we are conditioned from infancy to put our needs on hold. Following orders becomes an unconscious reflex. As free-lance slaves hawking our lives hour by hour, we come to think of ourselves as each having a price; the amount of the price becomes our measure of

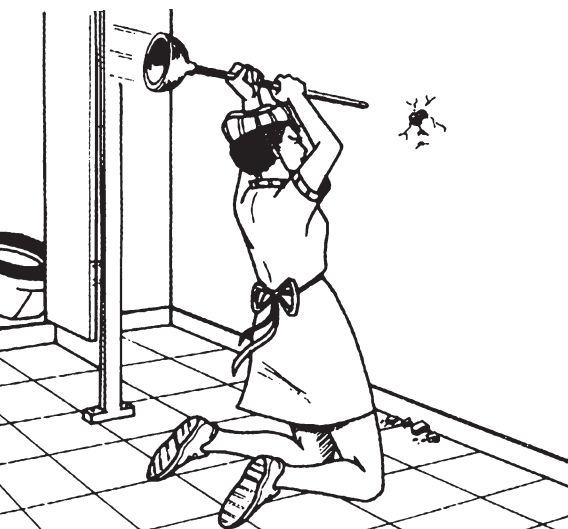
the contrary, it's one more reason to quit serving, so we can learn to come up with our own projects and come through on our commitments.

This is not easy in a society that punishes economic desertion with total embargo. But once our very survival depends on being able to direct our own activities rather than being incapable of doing so, we're sure to learn what it takes not only to survive but also prosper without work. Necessity is the mother of invention, and unemployment is the uncle of necessity.

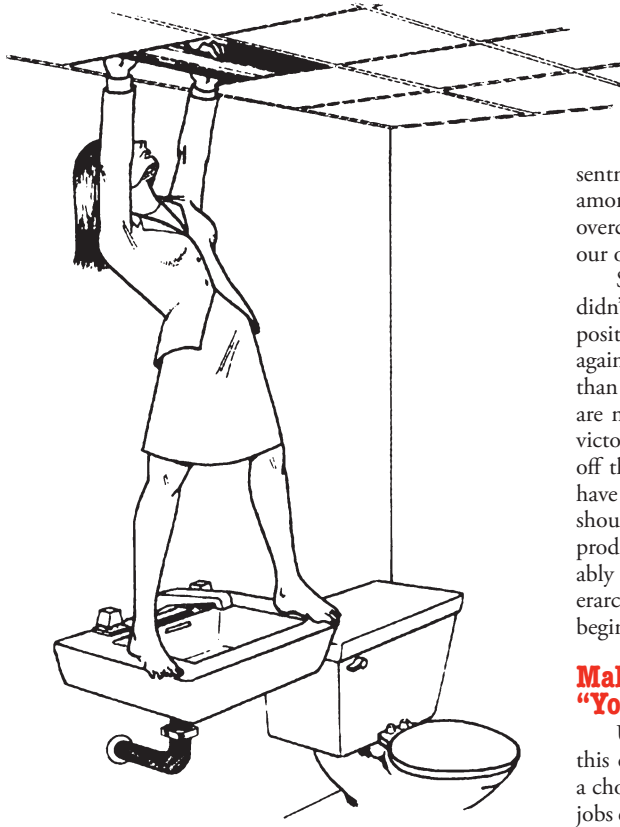
Work Morality: Sacrifice

Trading the moments of our lives away, we become so used to sacrificing that it comes to be the only way we know to express what we care about. We martyr ourselves for ideas, causes, love of one another, when these should be enabling us to find happiness together.

There are families, for example, in which people show affection by competing to be the one who gives up the most for the others. In such families, gratification is not only delayed, it is passed down from one generation to the next. The responsibility of finally enjoying all the happiness presumably saved up over years of thankless toil is deferred to the children; yet when they come of age, if they are to be responsible adults, they too must forswear all pleasure and begin saving to send their offspring to college.



Bang a hole in the wall large enough to crawl through.



Stand on the sink and pull yourself up on a pipe.

But the buck stops here. If postponement breeds postponement, mightn't the same be true of enjoyment?

But what about the children?

For that matter, what about the insurance coverage, car payments, student loans, overdue credit card bills, cat food, eating at your favorite Thai restaurant, that digital camera you want to buy? Of course, existing in this trap, we've all invested ourselves in it, made lives out of our compromises with it—and that means whenever we think about getting out we have to consider the hostages affected by our choices.

But seriously—*what about the children?* Should they grow up with absentee wage slave parents, suffering secondhand stress and resentment—like we all had to? Should we go on selling ourselves to the highest bidder, treating our breakdowns with

common cause with others, and eventually make their way back to the ones whose society they fled—as the context for individual lives is determined by the content of all lives, liberation is for all or none. Resentment among workers and self-righteousness among ex-workers are twin obstacles that must be overcome—as are all sentiments that proceed from our own insecurities.

So much class war is really about envy. If we didn't subconsciously feel that the ruling class's position indicates their superiority, our campaigns against them would be conducted with more pity than spite. But if we're right that wealth and power are not the greatest goods, our foes, the supposed victors of the class struggle, can't be any better off than we are. We shouldn't strive for what they have and are, but desert the whole equation. We shouldn't seize their means of production—all this production is itself destructive, and would probably be impossible without the accompanying hierarchies—but destroy and replace them. This can begin right now, in our own lives.

Making a virtue of necessity: "You can't fire me, I quit!"

Unemployment isn't foreign to everyone in this country—in fact, many of us don't even have a choice in the matter. Textile factories close down, jobs emigrate overseas, family farms are seized, startup companies go broke, corporate offices downsize, and we end up with pink slips instead of paychecks. . . . and, as everyone knows, the longer you are unemployed, the less employable you become.

The unemployed, too, have a job to do in capitalism—to be miserably, forbidingly defeated. Fortunately, like any job, this is a job that can be quit.

If you've lost your job and can't find a new one, all the potential energy and free time that was being taken from you is now back in your hands—get active with it! Take all your crazy ideas, and whatever resources you can get your hands on, and put them at the disposal of all-out revolution! Make your liberation into a godsend, and choose—however retroactively—a life of gainful unemployment!

This is hard to do, of course, when it feels like the whole world is telling you that you are a failure and your life now has no meaning. This is where communities come in. We'll need each other's love and support more than ever as we set out into this unknown—not least because, as the demands of the market have broken up almost all the social infra-

Déclassé: (adj. or n.) having lost class or status in society De-class: (v.) to reject one's social and economic role

Antivoaction provocation by Average Guy Fawkes and Citizen Calne, CrimethInc. Labor Union of the Unemployed Local 47. If this sounds good in theory but you can't imagine how to go about it in practice, we can provide a wide variety of concrete testimonials through any of the various CrimethInc. addresses. As for the admittedly cursory analysis of class and declassing, we're confident you can work out the subtleties yourself.

structures our ancestors had, the workplace is now one of the only places people interact. We need to build connections with each other that can provide for all the needs we've relied on institutions to handle—and above all, we need one another to build up the *momentum* that living and acting against the grain requires.

Not only should our communities take care of their own, but they should also be accessible and welcoming to others. There are hundreds of thousands of people unemployed in this nation alone—think how much unharnessed energy they have! Must they languish in dejected isolation from one another, when they could be rescuing the world from corporate greed, mass alienation, and ennu? Every neighborhood and township should have an ex-workers' union, open to all, offering a variety of starting places for idle hands to do what businessmen have always called the devil's work.

But with what resources will we do this work, being fat broke and all? Workers aren't the only thing being thrown out, you know—wastebaskets and sidewalk overflow with our fellow trash, yearning to be put back into circulation. If there weren't enough food in the garbage to go around, we scavengers would be fools to encourage others to join us—but here in the flagship nation of conspicuous consumption and waste, there's far more than that. Every night at closing time, enough useful material to feed, clothe, and equip several armies of insurgent ex-workers enters the dumpsters of this country. Hell, there are whole districts standing empty, waiting to be occupied and put to use! Without jobs, we have the time and energy we need to reclaim these; all we need is the networks to do so, and the nerve to decide that we deserve such playgrounds.

The working class may not have yet managed to sock it to the system, but those of us without work have both the free time and a good reason to do so. And the alternatives—alcoholism, homelessness, incapacitating depression, total ostracism—don't have much to recommend them. All power to the unemployed—so we can learn to employ our own power!

The question of lifestyle

A person who fails to find a way of life that integrates her political beliefs, social inclinations, and personal needs into one total approach will forever be disabled choosing between them, her choices either cheating her of parts of herself or canceling each other out.

Once upon a time it was chic for certain radical infighters to accuse their foes of being "lifestyle anarchists," the implication being that they were more focused on enjoying their own lives than on Changing The World. But it is actions that matter, not theories, and an anarchist or activist whose practice does not extend into every aspect of her life, comprising a total lifestyle, is an anarchist or activist in theory only—that is to say, "lifestyle anarchism" is the *only* anarchism. Similarly, the ultimate question for anyone seeking social change is how to make it possible for people to live differently—and a little field experience goes a long way toward that end.

At war with class

Let's be clear: we're not just talking about quitting jobs here, but about deserting and ultimately destroying the class system itself. Traditional revolutionary ideology has extolled membership in a revolutionary class, the proletariat, which fights for its interests against other classes. In place of this gang rivalry, we propose a universal rejection of all possible positions within the social order, in order to create classless communities.

The capitalist economy reduces not only individuals but entire demographics and nations to their economic functions. This is the enforcement of stereotypes *as* reality: under corporate monoculture, you can't grow anything but bananas in the banana republic, and the same goes for silicon valley and motor city. Such stereotyping is a mania we should leave behind with capitalism.

Waging déclassé war means resisting the temptation to establish new standards or norms of resistance; the communist glorification of "the worker" is no less alienating than the capitalist glorification of the movie star. This is not a struggle for the triumph of one class or ideology over others, but an ongoing cultural war against all the roles currently on the market—and against markets, classes, and ideologies in general.

Refusing to play our class roles, ceasing to evaluate and engage with ourselves and each other according to the logic of capitalism, we undermine the assumptions that perpetuate it. When it is impossible for others to interact with you in any of the ways prescribed by the market—they can neither sell you real estate nor career counseling, neither peg you as a spoiled student carer a despondent pauper—your every encounter has the potential to jerk them out of their roles as well.

Alternatively, it could mean turning your job against capitalism: surreptitiously redirecting resources from the company to the community, or sabotaging from the inside. As no employer will ever pay you the full value of your labor, nor can playing by the rules in even the most civic-minded profession ever counteract the total impact of the system in general, you should never take a job without having some trick up your sleeve to even the scales. And if you have been thrown aside by the economy entirely, de-classing might mean taking advantage of having nothing to lose to make your poverty cost the ones who are counting on you to give up—or finding a way to convey how things look from where you are to people in very different social positions. Whatever it takes, no more business as usual.

Whereas merely individualist efforts towards workless living can remain within the territory of hedonism, a collective struggle for freedom from wage slavery amounts to civil war. Such a struggle requires that we build massive support networks and connections between disparate social circles. There are already individuals and groups from many different demographics out of work, or at least disillusioned with it; they must discover what they have to share with one another, and how to do so. This will demand a ruthless clarity from each of us about what our personal advantages are and how they can be applied for the benefit of all. Really de-classing yourself does not mean cashing in your privileges, but contesting them and privilege in general by putting them at the disposal of those who have less or different privileges.

This is the opposite of the charity usually practiced by the bourgeoisie, which reinforces deeper inequalities than the superficial ones it addresses: in offering handouts without actually correcting disparities in means and status, would-be do-gooders only send the message that not only are they harder working and thus wealthier than the unfortunates they assist, they are also morally superior to them. Children of the middle class, if they would establish solidarity with those of other classes, must actually live as they do, facing the same challenges; you can only make common cause in a common context.

Déclassé war manifests a working model of the world we fight for and dream of. Those who would otherwise be segregated from each other by class can forge mutually beneficial relationships in which each provides the resources to which the others have been denied access. Historically, the

Déclassé war!

Make no mistake about it—in a system that runs on exploitation, desertion and refusal are essential to any effective resistance, are indeed the essence of resistance. Whether domination and submission or cooperation and consensus triumph as the predominant social forces is decided every day by the activities people participate in. Most people don't much like pollution, warfare, or brainwashing, but are too busy selling their labor to manufacturers, warmongers, and advertising agencies to do anything about them. If we are to put an end to these, there is no substitute for taking our lives and assets out of their hands, and out of the cycles of contention of which their power is but a symptom.

The Disaster is not just the work of an elite few. Every class is complicit in maintaining it: the bosses' management would be nothing without the workers' labor, and even the unemployed do their part by staying out of the way. We all have to stop playing our roles, whatever they may be. This will take different forms for different individuals, according to the classes they are escaping and the details of their lives. It could mean quitting work completely: cutting your commodity consumption down to the bare minimum, exploring what resources are available in abundance outside the exchange economy, and staking everything on finding another way to

Out of Order—Sorry for the Inconvenience!

We are not merchandise or mercenaries. We are not products that sell themselves. We cannot be bought or leased—we are already self-possessed.

What child earnestly dreams of growing up to be a grill cook, a popcorn vendor? What young heart yearns to manage advertising accounts or supervise fellow "team members" at a corporate supermarket? We are dropping out because the market offers us no wealth we can recognize. Digital video discs? We're sick of watching actors, we want adventures of our own. Political parties, legislative solutions? We want, for once, the experience of using our own power, representing ourselves. Tell us we need more education, we'll laugh—we know there isn't room for all of us at the top, and we're starting to question whether we want to be there, anyway. Tell us we need better work ethics, prescription drugs, career counseling, psychiatric care, perhaps a summer on the student hostel circuit, we'll jeer—we know, finally, that the problem is not us. We are through with symptomatic treatment, blaming the victim. You always told us if we lost our jobs, it would be the end of the world—sounds like it's worth a shot.

"The reasonable adapt themselves to the world; the unreasonable struggle to alter it: therefore all progress depends on the creatively maladjusted. The one who listens to reason is lost—reason enslaves all minds not strong enough to resist."



MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is the antidote to everything stalling in democracy and polite society. Ultraists wage a life-and-death war against consensus reality for the liberation of all and of all other realities.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is a provocation, that's for sure. The devil, and the devil's advocate, both are Ultraists, and they've done more for freedom and range of thought than God ever has.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is the art of following every idea through to its logical conclusion. It means never doing anything by half. Ultraists mortify underhanded politicians by putting everything on the table for all to see. Even and especially when they are wrong, Ultraists do everyone the great service of revealing the virtues and weaknesses of theories and strategies in their purest forms. Every community needs a few Ultraists around to test out new possibilities.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM opens up horizons: every Ultraist is a pioneer. The Ultraist escapes disciples, and yet enables others who would never have dared before to try positions similar to hers. The Ultraist sets a precedent, and thus makes it possible for the less openly radical to give themselves permission to explore the middle ground that has now opened up between the "mainstream" and the radical.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is not dogmatic or doctrinaire. To be an Ultraist is not to surrender one's self or senses; orthodoxy, fanaticism, these are simply competing brands of Standard. The true Ultraist invents her own ultimates and issues her own ultimatums.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM does not call for converts; it is a challenge to all to establish themselves at extremes of their own.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is not a competition, nor a standard of measure for some new elite. More-ultra-than-thou is a contest without meaning—there are extremes enough for everybody. Moreover, the practice of transgressing boundaries and pushing limits reveals that there is no "center," and so no extremes either.

Thus **MAXIMUM ULTRAISM** is non-hierarchical; no self-respecting Ultraist looks down upon others as "less Ultra" than herself—to do so would be to accept the conformist myth that there is a standard of normalcy at all. The true Ultraist recognizes that all are extremists, that the mainstream is a myth of the sheepish and sheeplike.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is not about getting dolled up in a suit and tie for the administration, practicing diction for the cameras, or adopting local customs to seduce recruits. Insincerity is the foundation of this sick society; people have learned to smell it a mile away just to survive. You're not doing anyone any favors by reinforcing its ubiquity in your own activities, nor by insulting their intelligence and passion assuming they aren't ready to be as radical as you secretly are. Likewise, Ultraists don't disguise themselves as moderates to work with others towards moderate goals—your average group of moderates is just a bunch of closeted Ultraists waiting for partners with whom to go for it, anyway.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is a deliberate attempt to alienate the masses—for who is the greatest enemy of liberty and individuality, if not masses? Besides, let's not kid ourselves: those "masses" are the ones forming militias, gunning each other down in post offices and high schools, joining cult groups that promise immortality through self-castration—these people crave extremism, they're desperate for it! If all they needed to "join the movement" was a radicalism that looked exactly like the politics they're familiar with, the Green party would have won the last election. No, people are holding out for a *different way of life*. If your radical stance has isolated you, maybe it's because you haven't gone far enough.

Enthusiasts of **MAXIMUM ULTRAISM** aren't afraid of looking like the radicals they are. Bashfulness, embarrassment, watering-down—nothing makes us look more like we have something to hide in our politics than these. Ultraists' positions are more attractive for

being held with confidence and without apology in the long run, endless disclaimers alienate more people than they placate.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is failsafe, anyway. The Ultraist can set people against himself and his ideas if he does injury to them (through terrorism, etc.). This makes him less dangerous to society than the moderate, who can do a great deal more damage to others through common, accepted practices without attracting any attention at all.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM can complement positions and tactics perceived to be less radical. Some, who take stances they see as moderate, accuse Ultraists in the same camp of alienating their constituency—but in fact, such Ultraists can make those positions attractive to people and force their enemies to make concessions by providing a less palatable alternative: "Parley with us, or you'll have to deal with . . . the Ultraists."

Needless to say, no one associated with **MAXIMUM ULTRAISM** conducts surveys or gives a good goddamn about statistics. You're responsible for your opinions and choices; a glance at recent history shows the majority knows best only by accident. Life is not something to be voted on—you have one of your own, it's all you have to work from, no one else can know better what's right for you. The paralysis of "waiting until you've learned enough about the issues" does no one any good—draw some conclusions from your experience and act on them! Those who see an expression of their secret selves in your actions, or who stand to benefit from what you're doing, will take notice and join in.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM will not alienate your peers—it will win you the recognition of the most daring and passionate among them.

But let it not be said that **MAXIMUM ULTRAISM** is not for the weak of heart—Ultraism is a way to develop *strength* of heart. To move daily through a world that contradicts and denies your values, your very existence, is to forge a firmness of character that cannot be undercut by any peer pressure or passing fad. Ultraists can be counted upon to say what they feel and practice what they preach; they have nothing to lose and nothing to hide. An Ultraist, if she is of the same mind as you, is the most trustworthy ally you can gain.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM buries treasures for the future. Think of all the geniuses and visionaries who died marginalized and unsung! If they had worked instead to water down their revelations and adjust their visions to their times, they would have cheated us all of those riches. We should be thankful they were far-sighted enough to isolate themselves so they could channel into being the world that was to come. Seclusion, obscurity, the mask of insanity, these can enable one to discover truths and possibilities invisible to those blinded by expectation and the demands of being realistic. We can all be such geniuses, if we trust and follow our own visions. A commitment to Ultraism signifies faith in the boundless fertility of the imagination and the endless possibilities of the universe.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is a holistic way of life wedding theory to practice. The Ultraist's beliefs play an active role in her day-to-day existence—hers are not mere conversation pieces to be trotted out at dinner parties! By working out her own principles and acting in accordance with them, by taking herself and her destiny seriously enough to refuse any walk-on role in the scripted spectacle of some Silent Majority, she is guaranteed a leading role in a life story of adventure: high stakes to play, for

triumphs to achieve, tragedies to suffer. Boredom, feelings of insignificance and impotence, these will be the least of her many problems. When she laughs, she laughs all of her laughter; if she cries, she cries all of her tears. An Ultraist may live a life of desperation, but you can bet your bullets it won't be a quiet one.

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is the opposite of the happy medium promoted by the happy media. It is a challenge to those who oppose concentration camps in the name of moderation—a moderate degree of control, a moderate degree of freedom, a moderate degree of life and a correspondingly moderate degree of death. Ultraists counter this with a passionate dedication to life—for the ones dedicated to death are no longer with us!

MAXIMUM ULTRAISM is unique in its every manifestation. **MAXIMUM ULTRAISM** cannot be co-opted. **MAXIMUM ULTRAISM** is radically democratic. Individual Ultraism is an act of solidarity with all others believing, dreaming, acting outside the lines.

For a revolution without limits, against restraints and restraint! Long live the superlative!



—CrimethInc. Task Force for Moderation and Mediation

Maximum Ultraism ~~is~~ Action:

A few years back, the local environmental action group sent canvassers around to raise awareness about the harmful effects of the nuclear power plant that supplies electricity to our whole county. One of them ended up at a doorstep out on the edge of town—at Holly's dad's house, as it turned out. The young activist rang the bell and delivered his spiel to the grizzled veteran that answered the door, who listened patiently for its duration, interrupting only to swear in outrage at the accounts of injustice and contamination. Concluding his presentation, the youngster politely explained that the action group was collecting contributions, which were tax deductible, and invited the older man to sign a petition. The latter was nonplussed: "You're telling me these scumfucks are destroying the land we live on, and you want me to sign a petition? What good is that going to do?"

"Well, sir, we—"

"Look, if what you say is true, we should be going after these motherfuckers with guns! Seriously, that's just a piece of paper—are people gonna do something about this, or what?"

"Yes, er, but—we have to start somewhere, and..."

"Son, if you're not gonna be any help, run along—you've got a job to do anyway, right? I'll take care of this myself."

Holly's father called up Duke Power—true story!—and asked them if what he'd heard about their power plant was true. Their answers were evasive enough that he was convinced, and he demanded that they send a truck to disengage his house from their system. One can only imagine the bewilderment of the representative who took his call.

"Excuse me, sir?"

"That's right, I need you to send somebody down here right now to disconnect me from the grid. We're through with your services for good."

"I'm sorry sir... I'm not sure there's any—I mean, I've never heard of anyone asking to have their power disconnected like this—"

"Listen, I'm not just asking to have the power disconnected, I'm telling you you need to take down the whole rig, wires and all, and get it the hell off my property, or else I'm gonna do it myself! And don't think you can get away with this bullshit anymore. We're on to your tricks now, you scum-sucking leeches."

That's why when Henry went to start taking martial arts classes from him, Holly's dad had no electrical power at his house. Give us one hundred men and women like him and we'll finish this thing right now. That's Maximum Ultraism!

"If this is true, then all are Ultraists, whether they embrace Maximum Ultraism or not. In that case, an exhortation to Ultraism, such as this one, should not be read as an attempt to persuade people to choose one manner of committing themselves over another, but rather as

a refutation of the alibis of moderation and deference to popular opinion.

Lock up the kids and call the police!

*Armageddon has been in effect—go get a late pass.
Citizens of the first world, consider yourselves—gone!*



The world is coming to an end. Make no mistake about it, the days are numbered. Where you are, you can't even imagine what it will be like when the bottom hits.

Or, to put it differently, the world is *always* ending. What comes next is up to us. Every morning we wake up and sweat and bleed to put an exact duplicate of the previous day's world in its place. We need not do this, but we do, out of fear, or despair, or psychotically deluded petty ambition, or sheer stubborn lack of imagination. At any moment we could all stop paying rent and going to work—nothing could stop us if we all deserted together—and rebuild society from scratch without landlords or loan payments. Heaven knows we've all had that daydream at least once. It's not police or politicians that keep the wheels turning and the bodies burning, it's our own compliance and complacency, not to mention lack of faith in each another.

Yet even if we insist on keeping at it, the Disaster is not sustainable. Capitalism as we know it is not going to be here in five generations—any environmental scientist can tell you that. Likewise no one has to argue for the destruction of the middle class—it's already destroyed: it is the class of people laid waste by their own materialism and duplicity, suffering emotional and psychological consequences to which any psychiatrist can attest. It's no longer a question of whether the

system we grew up in has created the best of all possible worlds—everybody knows the answer to that question by now—but of how we're going to handle the mess next time the terrorists get through the checkpoints, the fuel supply runs out, the computers and power plants break down. Considering other options, trying them out, that's not radical—it's just common sense when the writing is on the wall.

But are we really going to live to see anything else? Do we dare hold our breath for another world?

Despite the seriousness of our situation, the future isn't one monolithic, inescapable doom. There are several futures ahead of us, just as today there are people who live side by side but inhabit different worlds; which one you live to witness will depend largely on what you do in the meantime. This nightmare exists precisely to the extent that we invest ourselves in it—every day we work for it, buy from it, and stake our lives on it, we are buying into the protection racket that keeps it the only game in town. Correspondingly, the world of our dreams exists to the exact degree that we behave as if we're already living in it—there's no other way it can come to be. The turning point for each individual is the turning point of society, in miniature. Don't ask when or whether that point will come, but how you can reach yours; if you can get there yourself, everyone else can too.

When you really start to go for it, when your actions open a bona fide portal to another way of life, others will come out of hiding and join in. What, did you think you

were the only one going crazy here? It takes an entire subjugated nation to keep things running, and there are plenty of others among that number who know how little they're getting out of it. They are the millions who don't get consulted for newspaper polls, who might pick you up hitchhiking but never appear on television. Ten thousand sleeper cells wait for the point of critical mass to arrive, ready to spring into action with their own yearnings to breathe free and private scores to settle, desperate for a war to fight in that really matters, a love to fall in that can command their attention—killing time and themselves in the meantime with anorexia and alcoholism, dead marriages and dead-end jobs. Every day each of us puts off taking the risks we know we need to take, waiting for the right moment to come or for someone else to go first or just feeling too beaten to try, we have the blood on our hands of every suicide who couldn't hold out any longer, every ruined love affair that couldn't endure in the vacuum, every sensitive desperado artist buried inside the corpse of a miserable service industry employee.

Next time the end of the world comes, we won't be paralyzed, watching it on television. We'll be out there deciding for ourselves what comes next, cutting down the transmitter poles with chainsaws if need be to get others to join us.

It's not too late to live like there's no tomorrow—indeed, all our hope for the future depends on it. Say your last words now, and start from there with whoever joins in. Dreams do rebel and come true.

QUICK EXERCISE IN FREEDOM

To push the old saw through timber once more, freedom is not choosing between set options, but setting the options yourself—not voting for or against, but creating the context that determines your choices (Radical: "We create the world by which we're made." Reactionary: "Quit your meddling."). To get a taste of it, tear this publication up into pieces and reassemble them in a form of your own choosing—to share it, pass your collage along with the same dare!

NO, don't just reflect on the clever metaphor and nod sympathetically, or shake your head in suspicion and malaise—*DO IT! RIGHT NOW!* Don't worry about the paper—there are *plenty* of these printed, you can always get another! Freedom, on the other hand, *cannot* be mass-produced, nor attained by mere agreement with any article or argument—it has to be *forged*, person by person, action by action, object by object if it comes to that, putting each one through the fire of reinterpretation and recreation. It's good practice not to be too deferential to mere things, anyway, if it's freedom you're after!

And don't just tear it up—*reform* it! (No, not *that* kind of reform!) Watch as fixed facts become negotiable, as new meanings appear under your hands. Now go out and repeat this process with *everything else!*

To prepare for this, spit out words, and suck on tongues.

*Waiting for you out here where the world ends,
armed to the teeth and dressed to kill—*



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Contact us to obtain further copies of this and other publications, to request resources and information with which to transform your life and local environment, or to inquire about participating in our efforts to overthrow the government and establish the kingdom of heaven on earth. By the way, we're also in the market for a nice, spooky-sounding accordion, if any of you have one sitting around.