

# **Emergence of The Black Bloc & The Movement Towards Anarchism**

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# Contents

Introduction . . . . .	4
Section I -The Emergence of The Black Bloc: History, Tactics and General Constituency	4
Section II -The New Capitalism And Its System Of Radical Commodification And Consumerism . . . . .	10
Section III -Counterculture as Social Revolution . . . . .	16



*"Get Busy Living, Or Get Busy Dying!"* —The Kings of Nuthin, Boston, Massachusetts

## Introduction

*March, 2001, The Peoples' Republic of Vermont-* Since the Battle of Seattle, the North American left, and specifically the smaller yet growing revolutionary anarchist movement, has been invigorated at least as much as it has become a common reality in the consciousness of the public. This has not occurred in a vacuum. Nor has this happened due to a simple, quantifiable reason. The reasons are as much diverse and subjective as they are objective and empirical.

One facet of this movement (specifically of the revolutionary anarchist movement) is encapsulated and advanced by the militant actions of a group commonly referred to as the Black Bloc. This informal grouping has acted as a necessary radical action wing of the larger social protest movement. Where liberal inclinations have threatened to stifle large demonstrations under a blanket of acceptability, predictability and boredom, this contingent—numbering anywhere from less than 100 to over 1000 in a typical Bloc—has forced a creative unleashing of popular insurrectionary sentiment.

The following essay is primarily concerned with the Black Bloc. However, in order to more accurately discuss this faction, it will be necessary to paint a picture of the larger contemporary framework within and against which it operates. Towards this end this work will be divided into three sections. The first will deal directly with the Black Bloc; its historical roots, as well as the tactics it commonly employs. The second section will discuss the social, political, psychological and economic macrocosm in which the present movement is situated. The final section will discuss the smaller social context in which the revolutionary anarchist movement as well as the Black Bloc directly exists.

It is the intention of this essay to provide a historical, theoretical and practical base from which a more grounded understanding of the Black Bloc, as well as the revolutionary anarchist movement generally can emerge. Such a grounding can and will only lead to a more mature discussion and development of anarchist praxis and revolutionary progress. It is with this in mind that I here turn towards section one.

## Section I -The Emergence of The Black Bloc: History, Tactics and General Constituency

*"I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down, Livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town, I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime, But is there because he's a victim of the times."* —Johnny Cash, Man In Black

The Black Bloc can trace its historical roots all the way back to when and wherever people comprising an oppressed class or group militantly rose up against their oppressors. Elements of the particular

tactics of the Bloc were previously utilized by the Weather faction of Students for a Democratic Society (the SDS) in North America during the “Days of Rage” in 1969<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, the Bloc’s tactical aesthetic and more refined methods of state confrontation first began to concretely emerge in the 1980s Autonome movement in Germany. There, the seriousness of the anti-nuclear movement as well as the demands of the continuing anarchist/anti-fascist movement required that mass protests be brought to a higher level of militancy and anonymity. Hence, radical collectives—often from within the anarcho-punk scene and typically of working class composition—began to urge their members and social militants generally to assemble at demonstrations donning uniform black clothes (with masks), and to march as a single protest contingent (among many others). With their identities effectively hidden in temporary uniformity, they were able to more successfully push protest actions in more militant directions while protecting themselves from being singled out for direct state oppression or later legal charges or both. This process matured to the point where the emerging Black Bloc began to develop better self-defense and militant tactics. It must be understood that this formation was not the birth of a formal, or rather continuous organization. It simply acted as a temporary cohesive grouping with the immediate goal of creating a temporally contingent street fighting force, which in practice would dissolve with the conclusion of the action at hand. This is not to say that the sole focus of these included persons and/or collectives revolved around such action. On the contrary, those making up the Bloc commonly were rooted in the social and political organizations and projects which the specifics of their local community demanded. They had their roots<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the militancy and subsequent actions of the Black Bloc must also be understood as the embodiment of a certain means of struggle amongst many others, a means which are both legitimate and effective<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>During that action, approximately 600 committed communist youth converged upon the city of Chicago in order to protest the trial of the Chicago 8, as well as the continuing war in Vietnam. Their method of confrontation was that of direct physical conflict with the forces of the state (in this case the police). They organized themselves into small affinity groups, and showed up equipped with clubs, helmets, bricks and other means of low tech hand to hand combat. Once assembled they actively attacked the forming police lines and fought the cops with ferocity. Although the first day was the most effective (in terms of enemy injuries and material destruction of capitalist private property), a total of three more days of limited conflict ensued. While this action clearly represents a link between the present Bloc and past militant tactics, it differs in many regards. First of all, the Weather contingent organized themselves by strictly hierarchical means. They employed a chain of command that was not congruent with directly democratic processes. Second, their action occurred without the benefit of being part of a larger, more tactically diverse protest action. In this the police were able to focus their superior resources solely upon them. Third, following the action the Weather leadership did not believe such forms of protest could be maintained without resulting in a negative bloodbath (during the first night of fighting 10 Weather members received wounds from shotguns, and another by pistol). To paraphrase Weatherman Central Coordinating Committee member Jeff Jones, ‘we felt that we achieved a level of militancy which we could not surpass using aboveground tactics. Furthermore, the lack of public mobilization following the assassination of Black Panther, Fred Hampton, convicted us that our political role would only be sustainable and effective if we operated as a sort of guerrilla force, underground, behind enemy lines.’ [Info gathered by a private interview I conducted with him during the winter of 1997.] Hence the organization soon decided to move its operation underground as an urban guerrilla organization. For these reasons, the Days Of Rage must be understood as no more than a primitive prototype of contemporary Black Bloc actions and no more. For a decent firsthand account of this action see Albert (ed.), *The Sixties Papers. Shin’ya ono: You Don’t Need A Weatherman*, Pages 254-263, Praeger, New York, 1984.

<sup>2</sup>Such activity at the local level is 100% necessary in the on-going movement towards social revolution. In such, the relative limelight placed on Black Blocs must be subjectively diluted with this fact.

<sup>3</sup>Here it is necessary to understand that at this stage of the struggle, the tactics employed by the Bloc are most effective when performed in conjunction with others. This includes nonviolent lockdowns, street theater, ‘legal’ marches, etc.. In addition, it also must be clarified that such action, when used in conjunction with more militant tactics, are effective and legitimate. Lastly, it should be noted that many anarchists are involved in these actions as well.

As a Black Bloc, this grouping was an alliance of independent persons and/or affinity groups. Collectively, the Bloc acted by directly democratic means whenever possible, and by internal affinity group consensus when situations demanded. Other than that, the grouping conscientiously lacked any formal structure or authoritarian hierarchy.

Typically, the Bloc took positions at the front, rear, or perimeters of the protest march in order to provide a strong defensive presence at normally vulnerable points. In this way, the police were prevented from disrupting the movement of the demonstration without first having to subdue a highly militant, dedicated, and prepared section of the protest. In order to strengthen its capacity to achieve these tactical objectives, the Bloc began to carry metal pipes, wooden clubs, and don protective padding and helmets. In addition, other tactical developments included the use of large continuous banners, poles, or ropes lining the perimeters of this regiment. The purpose of these tools was to make it more difficult for the police to single out individuals for arrest. The cops would have to pass through a collectively held barrier, while simultaneously contending with blows from clubs in order to carry out arrests.

More than acting as shock troops, or defensive units within the larger protest contingent, the Bloc began to take on an offensive role regarding the conscious destruction of capitalist private property. Here, affinity groups within the Bloc would facilitate the smashing of windows, spray painting of revolutionary messages, and trashing of police and/or military vehicles. Of course, all such activity was clearly directed against capitalist targets. Despite the inaccurate assertions of the corporate media, arbitrary vandalism never was, nor is, the goal or practice of the Black Bloc.

Another function of the Black Bloc is to push the protest at hand towards a more militant and socially comprehensive direction. Largely this was achieved by the Bloc positioning itself at the forefront of the demonstration and subsequently forcing an escalation between the state forces and the protesters. Simply by resisting arrest, refusing to remain on sanctioned parade routes, challenging police barricades, and by actively directing its anger at corporate targets, the Bloc ensured that such an escalation would ensue.

The purpose of such escalation in part lies in the belief that such conflict necessarily results in the unmasking of the brutal nature of the state. The subsequent brutality of the opposing police/military force is revealed. The idea is that by showing the larger population the violent means by which the status quo is maintained, a significant number of people will become further radicalized by this physical and visual demonstration of the nature of the State. Escalation also has a desired effect of forcing an action to transcend its often liberal underpinnings and become an actual example of contextually conditioned revolt. Direct action expands past the confines of simple symbolism and then delves into the very real territory of subjective and objective revolutionary insurrection. The demonstration here begins to assume its own identity free of the social spectacle of the commodified-consumer culture, and begins to move in a more fluid, self-defining manner. The role of the demonstration as a social pressure valve, both impotent and non-revolutionary, begins to be inverted into an actual expression of social unrest. In this regards, spontaneity, via militancy and violence, becomes an actual expression of the mass action. Hence, the action becomes a free means by which natural human identity is demonstrated through its basic rejection of subjugation, authority, capitalism, and status quo.

This element of social clash is necessary by way that it allows the oppressed and alienated person a real experience by which one's pent up and sheep-like identity and boredom is shattered in a situation of revolt. Here the person begins to feel the future reality that the streets and the city, as a basic creation of the worker, truly do belong to them. Here, possibilities of full revolt and victory are crystallized through the adrenalin of conflict. In short, this conflict is good in that it allows one's mind to understand real physical struggle, while also allowing one to feel, if only slightly, the possibility of collective self-management without the confused abstraction of police and government. The city, in the vicinity of conflict, truly becomes the people's to be won, lost, held or discarded.

To paraphrase Jean Paul Sartre, 'The reason the worker does not revolt... is because he does not imagine what a liberated society would actually be like.'

And further from the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, "Let us remember, no great step forward in history has ever come to fruition without first being baptized in blood."

Therefore, regardless of the particular success of the action at hand, the activity of those within the Black Bloc must be encouraged and understood as both necessary and positive in relation to the subjective requirements necessary in the continual advancement of the revolutionary anarchist struggle<sup>4</sup>.

The practice of such Blocs are as socially/psychologically healthy as they are real. In this capacity, persons claiming to be of the left, or even anarchists, which argue against the need for a Black Bloc, or that the Bloc is socially and/or tactically ineffectual, must be understood as persons who either do not understand the subjective dynamic of revolt, or ones who are so weighed down in indecision and tacit acceptance of the status quo that they must be considered ignorant at best, or the enemy at worst. These folk would substitute another generation of ideological debate, meetings and boredom for real action<sup>5</sup>. Despite their professed goals, they become the harbingers of defeat and alienation through their inability to understand risk, action, movement, and experiential freedom. The revolutionary

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<sup>4</sup>This is not to say that we should not be concerned with achieving certain objective goals regarding the action at hand. We should seek optimal effectiveness by refining our tactical abilities and subjective dedication. However, even when certain objectives are not met, we can often claim 'victory' in that this form of direct action translates into subjective advances. A good example of this is the A16 action: we failed to shut down the capitalist meetings, but made psychological advances by virtue of our demonstrated abilities in struggle against the forces of the state. In short, each action involving the revolutionary anarchist movement carries with it a plethora of potential victories and defeats beyond the single major stated objective at hand. As revolutionaries against boredom and alienation, our means and ends become intermingled in one continues organic demonstration of direct democratic process and struggle. —This section is not to imply that every Black Bloc must be violent or destructive by definition. In fact, there are times when the Bloc consciously decides not to conduct itself in this manner unless circumstances demand. At these times, the Bloc is present simply to show movement solidarity within a certain social situation. However, even without the actual practice of such violence, the Bloc still acts as the representation of a certain threat, possibility, and idea. The Bloc, through its person to person composition, is freedom and the unfettered human spirit embodied in a situational social form.

<sup>5</sup>This is not to say that debate, organizational meetings and other like activities are not necessary. In the contrary, they are. However, they are not desirable or required when they begin to become an end in themselves. This is a tendency which is often played out in leftist organizations by virtue of its liberal constituencies desiring of a means to feel better about their dominated lives and tacitly oppressive lifestyles without actually putting their position as a well fed consumer (i.e. their relative social stability) in jeopardy by advocating or taking part in direct revolutionary action. It should be remembered that it is always such left hesitation and status quo fetishism that is called on by the state to stabilize revolutionary situation (i.e. the French Communist Party in France 1968, the NAACP during the Black Revolt in urban America of that same year).

would do well to discredit their words through action and, as we are not bloodthirsty Neanderthals, the continuing development of legitimate anarchist theory.

Following the example of the German people, the formation of Black Blocs soon spread across Europe, where they are still practiced with relative ferocity and effectiveness today<sup>6</sup>. By the early 1990s, these tactics began to take root in North America. Black Blocs were organized during the 1991 Gulf War, during the Democratic National Convention of 1996, and at a multitude of other demonstrations throughout the decade.

However, the effectiveness of the Black Bloc in North America seems to be just reaching certain levels of maturity in this new decade; a maturity which is paralleled with that of the broader social protest movement as a whole.

During the Battle of Seattle<sup>7</sup>, the Black Bloc (numbering approximately 200) primarily focused its attention upon the destruction of corporate property. At the A16 (April 16, 2000) action<sup>8</sup> the Bloc (numbering approximately 1000) focused the bulk of its energies on combating police engaged in violent acts against the Bloc and nonviolent protesters alike. Black Blocs were also present at both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions of that year<sup>9</sup>. There they again demonstrated their tactics of physical self-defense and the destruction of capitalist private property and/or state property (i.e. police cars). Blocs were present at a multitude of May Day demonstrations in 2000, the first presidential debate in Boston<sup>10</sup>, at the inauguration of now-President Bush<sup>11</sup>, as well as at a number of other events.

The particularities of each of these actions resulted in a variety of Bloc tactics. These differences deserve to be evaluated in order to ascertain what specific tactics are effective in certain situations. Such an analysis is required in order for us to better prepare ourselves for future conflicts. However, it is not the focus of this essay to go into such details. The primary concern here is simply to discuss the history of the Black Bloc and to place it within a certain larger social context. Therefore, such particularities, though important, will be omitted for now in order to stay focused at the task at hand. Thus, I will here again turn to the social origins of the North American Black Bloc.

### **Social Composition Of The North American Black Bloc**

The Black Bloc in North America, primarily composed of folk from within the contemporary counterculture, and more often than not coming from a working class background, is a political expression of the developing class conscious social revolution<sup>12</sup>. Persons and collectives making up the Black

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<sup>6</sup>Two recent examples can be found in the Prague actions directed against the WB/IMF meetings starting on September 26, 00', and the actions in Nice against the European Union meetings on December 6-7th, 00'.

<sup>7</sup>Protest against the meeting of the World Trade Organization, Seattle, November, 1999.

<sup>8</sup>To protest the meeting of the World Bank, Washington DC, April 16th and 17th, 2000.

<sup>9</sup>The Democratic National Convention was held in Los Angeles, California, August 14-17, 2000. The Republican National Convention was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 1-3, 2000.

<sup>10</sup>Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 3, 2000.

<sup>11</sup>Washington DC, January 20, 2001.

<sup>12</sup>Of course it is not here intended that it is the only, or even most important of such political expressions. It is only one, out of a multitude, of such developing trends.



Bloc can be generally described as semi-alienated youth from a poor, declassed, or working class background. This is not to imply that a number of Bloc participants don't come from the upper classes, for they do. However, before someone yells 'charlatans,' it should be stated that during this present age of neo-liberalism (the contemporary mode of capitalism), the basic strains of alienation run strong even outside of the more oppressed communities. On the other hand, I do not intend to imply that the natural focus of revolutionary potential has been stripped from the more exploited and materially deprived populations. It hasn't. It is only to say that as society moves in more abstracted and culturally undesirable directions that more and more people across class lines, particularly young people, will begin to seek social alternatives to the status quo. And, it is only reasonable to expect a number of them to side with the social vision of the actively revolutionary poor and working class. Besides, history has proven that while class origins can say much about the general potential and demeanor of large groupings, it also tells us that these generalities are not absolute laws when judged against the real activities of specific persons<sup>13</sup>. For example, one of the greatest anarchist revolutionaries/theoreticians in history was Mikhail Bakunin. Bakunin came from an aristocratic Russian family. He himself was briefly an officer in the Imperial Army. Yet he committed nearly his entire adult life to the emancipation of all people. He stood at the workers' barricades during the Bavarian insurrection, and for this his former class origins became both transcended and meaningless. Give us ten divisions of Bakunins, regardless of their past economic standing, and our work as revolutionaries would be over in a matter of days<sup>14</sup>. So, to all you pretentious class concerned critics, I challenge you to tell me what you've done.

This being clarified, I use the prefix 'semi,' in describing the Blocs participants as 'semi-alienated youth,' to mark the fact that the vast majority of those involved are rooted in counterculture communities wherein degrees of non-alienated social relations are actively cultivated. They may be part of a small democratic worker's co-operative, an artistically oriented consensus based collective, reside in a group run commune, house, or squat, subsidize off tax-exempt funds from the black market, or simply live as well as their anti-capitalist logic and intuition impels them to. In short, a good deal of their lives are focused around the living example of more natural and life/creativity affirming socialist<sup>15</sup> modes of existence. They try to be good folk with each other and the poor and working folk around them. They help each other out without expecting profit.

However, this is not to say that they, unlike more mainstream workers, are not alienated. For no matter how 'counter' one manages to live within an oppressive authoritarian society, one cannot escape the basic drugging of one's spirit by the hands of the state. If one lives on a collective farm, that collective is still coerced into paying property tax, or the land will be seized. If one spends their hours working to collectively create a liberating art -food, shelter, and art supplies have to be had; and often this is enough coercion to compel one to sell their labor as a wage slave. Worker co-operatives are no exception. Such operations are driven to continue dealing on a cash basis inasmuch as certain basic supplies (take paint for example, that is if the co-op is centered around that trade) are not easily attainable through barter or other means. All being said, the rat of contemporary capitalism can be spotted in the best homes.

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<sup>13</sup>To name but a two: Mikhail Bakunin and Karl Marx.

<sup>14</sup>Also for the record... Bakunin spent many years in prison, including some time chained up in a tower in St. Petersburg where he lost all his teeth due to scurvy.

<sup>15</sup>Here I use the term 'socialist' in its older and more accurate meaning. It is used simply to denote a more co-operative means of organizing society.

Still, the anarchist within a counterculture is less alienated from themselves and others as compared to the person squarely within the predominant culture. At least here radical commodification, consumerism, capitalism, and authoritarianism are viewed as crap yet to be overcome, as opposed to the bedrock of social meaning.

With the above understood, the question still remains as to what the deeper social, political and historical reasons are for the emergence of this revolutionary faction within the western nations. For the particularities of their cultural leanings seem to make them somewhat unique as compared to their proletariat ancestors. They are not friendly to the authoritarian analysis of the various communist parties, they are not often motivated by hunger (one can find lots of food in the trash bins of Uncle Sam) and they do not limit their demands and social vision to material equality. They call for a re-thinking and re-organizing of society along lines which challenge the very fundamental basis of contemporary western civilization. They are anarchists! But how did the broader social context give rise to them? Who is their constituency? What exactly is it that they seek to disrupt, and what do they intend to replace it with?

In order to answer some of these underlying questions, as well as to place the Block Bloc within a comprehensive sociological framework, I will now turn to a discourse on the particularities of the present capitalist reality.

## **Section II -The New Capitalism And Its System Of Radical Commodification And Consumerism**

As capitalism has moved into the new phase of radical commodification and consumerism, its hold on all aspects of the perceived mass existence has seemingly strengthened. Contemporary capitalism, by way of its inherent imperialism, has expanded its former material boundaries as to make a quantifiable commodity out of the hollows of one's private time, internal thoughts, recreation and personal relations. The older forms of classical capitalism, as found in the pre-WWII Euro-American theater, was primarily concerned with large scale domestic industrial production and the subsequent exploitation of the worker, through relatively straightforward means, for the ends of surplus capital (profit). The new concerns center around the exploitation of leisure, the construction of false needs along with the particular commodities to meet these superfluous and profitable ends, and the advancement of its psychological holds to include the subtle coercion of the worker to actively take part in her/his own oppression. Of course the old industrial modes of exploitation are still present, only now the pallet of oppression and dreariness is more well-rounded.

The immediate cause of this shift can be found with the ruling class's ability to export massive segments of the industries (coal, petroleum, machine/auto production, fabrics, etc.) to poorer, formerly agricultural-based third world nations where the worker is subjected by the iron heel of puppet dictators backed financially and militarily by the primary capitalist states along with their plutocracy<sup>16</sup>. Within these countries labor lacks the historical consolidation of organizational strength and past

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<sup>16</sup>This is different than colonialism in that these regimes are no longer exploited for their raw materials alone. Now their indigenous labor is utilized as a means of producing refined goods for general consumption.

accomplishments such as the eight hour work day and workers' compensation<sup>17</sup>. This of course is in conjunction with the fact that within these boundaries, safety/environmental standards are hardly allotted a whisper of concern, let alone precautionary legislation. Therefore, the primary capitalist nations, through their respected ruling class, can increase production at a fraction of the former cost while massively increasing profit<sup>18</sup>. In turn, the ruling class can then throw a few more peanuts of benefits and wages to the domestic workers, in order to decrease poverty-based insurrectionary sentiment while not experiencing any decrease in profit.

Simultaneously these so called privileged laborers are constantly pressured to utilize their new spending ability through the purchasing of capitalist controlled gadgets and instruments of supposed enjoyment and/or need, i.e. complicated phone services, large screen t.v.'s, brand name garments/sneakers, new top 40 musical CDs written and composed by assholes lacking even a hint of soul, and larger than necessary cars with remote locking devices.

*"[They'll] give you all the hits to play,  
to keep you in your place all day."*  
—The Clash

In other words, false or unnecessary needs are created within this market, and are then allotted to the populace at the expense of further capital. In this way, the ruling class is able to again accumulate even further surplus capital.

To bring about this trend in popular spending, the masses are bombarded with commercial messages of indoctrination commonly referred to as "advertisements." This force-fed propaganda meets the eye nearly wherever it may wander, and by subtleties and by sheer immensity, directs the hand of the still alienated, if not still half-starved, first world worker down the road of unbridled consumerism. Here the role of the worker takes on a bizarre character. On the one hand, the worker continues her/his former role as a person/class subjected to an exploitative economic relation. For s/he still does not own or control the means of production, and s/he is still used by the ruling class as no more than a drone capable (not without prodding) of generating profit earmarked, alone, for the already wealthy. S/he still does not control her/his own life. It is controlled by powers from economically above. And further, the general prosperity of the economy is still unattainable in any equitable manner inasmuch as it still rests with a minority of ruling economic elite, protected by both the laws of the land and the guns of the state.

On the other hand, by transforming the worker into a consumer, the economic system manages to make the worker into an active agent in her/his own social oppression. For here consumption is both subtly and aggressively made out to be the means by which the individual can escape the experiential

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<sup>17</sup>As I am editing this section of the work, I'm cold (Vermont winter with no propane), annoyed (my roommates won't leave me alone), have a sore throat, and am listening to Frank Zappa's 'Hot Rats.' Good fuckin' album. In all, it reminds me of the Motherfucker saying, "We are as utopian as Detroit."

<sup>18</sup>Here the capitalists must still contend with armed communist guerrilla movements as well as the occasional anti-authoritarian uprisings. These are major aspects of the continuing world social revolution, and in such they deserve a great deal of analysis. However, the scope of this text requires that I omit such commentary and this time.

emptiness of their so-called free, yet serf-like, life<sup>19</sup>. The unspoken message that every advertisement carries is that it is only by virtue of consuming that the single individual transcends the loneliness of provincial existence and takes part in the communion of the 'one' or at least of something greater and more meaningful. In this case the 'one' is capital and the means is the recognition of the self and other (both animated and unanimated, cognitive and non-cognitive) as facets of the universal representation of all commodities, that is money. And in turn, the individual must her/himself sell one's labor both as a means of material survival and, as this new social relation demands, as a means of becoming a commodity<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, the worker must now utilize the wages received as a means of again touching the whole through the accumulation/consumption of other commodities. The promise is that as long as this process remains constant, as long as the individual consistently retains an active relation within this process, one can know the universal wholeness of existence, and therefore the additional promise of an ensuing 'knowledge of a truth' and 'sense of wellbeing' is also granted. This occurs insofar as the 'one' or the 'universal' has always been described in conjunction with these traits since the beginnings of religion and permanent/city dwellings. Thus, the lie is painted as truth via an implied association.

Here, the worker, drunk on continual advertisements and no longer tethered by hunger and cold, immerses her/himself in a constant state of consumption. S/he becomes convinced that superfluous commodities are necessary elements of a good life, and actively seeks them out for consumption. This, despite the fact that the purchasing of these objects or experiences play an obvious and primary role in maintaining the wealth and therefore power, through continuing profit, of those in the ruling class who control the economic rights to these things. In addition, the consumer-worker is often required to further enslave her/himself to the plutocracy by acquiring these commodities by the means of credit (credit cards, loans, etc.). By doing such, the laborer must perform additional hours at work in order to accrue the necessary capital to pay back the borrowed cash, and subsequently maintain their access to credit and hence adequate levels of material consumption. Of course these hours of labor result in the rich further expanding their profit earnings at the expense of the wage worker.

This dynamic often results in the laborer becoming more docile in her/his capacity in the workplace, in that to be fired translates into being cut off from her/his role as a commodity (wage slave) and full consumer. This is something that the indoctrinated consumer-worker dreads, as such a severing from the perceived 'one' would destroy the identity of the self and society which such a neurotic system of relations demand. Therefore, where the worker of old would more quickly risk her/his job security in order to bring about positive change for their class (i.e. union organizing) the new consumer-worker is generally more conservative in order to carefully maintain her/his means to communion<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup>The state loves to sing "Land of the Free" while sticking it to the common wo/man from the cradle to the grave. The public schools teach obedience and reverence to the status quo; at one's job one is subjected to constant top down power structure; in the streets, laws written by the ruling class are enforced by armed pigs intent on tossing you in the can if you cross the line. There as many examples as there are bullshit justifications. As for specifics, I'm sure your personal experiences will here suffice (that is if you're not ruling class scum).

<sup>20</sup>Where under classical capitalism one was coerced into being a wage slave in order to materially survive, under the new capitalism one often becomes a wage slave for both this reason and because one becomes convinced that it is the metaphysically right thing to do. Here work becomes more than a means of survival. It becomes a cornerstone of identity and connectedness with the larger, so-called more meaningful 'one' of capital.

<sup>21</sup>Let it be noted that this desire for status quo is for the most part skin deep. It is a symptom of mass indoctrination, and in such it cannot be understood as natural or necessarily permanent. If one scratches the surface, one will often find

*"The basic tautological character of the spectacle [this system of commodity-consumption] flows from the simple fact that its means are simultaneously its ends. It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory."* —Guy Debord<sup>22</sup>

Where in the religious age ex-communication from the church meant social and perceived spiritual death, now unemployment serves a similar role. For even with such hard earned worker benefits as unemployment compensation, the jobless are still disconnected from half of the perceived process of meaning. In this system it is not enough to consume. A person also must be an object of consumption oneself (a commodified worker). This stands true unless of course you are among the ruling class, in which case you acquire a sort of living sainthood.

This mode of thought also results in a fractioning of class unity. For class no longer becomes the perceived focal point of social meaning. Here, the individual (or more accurately, the believer), along with the capitalist system of radical commodification, becomes the sole basis of human understanding. Each consumer and commodity demands its own separateness which only the unity of capital (as universal commodity) can bring together.

*"What hides under.. [this separateness] is a unity of misery. Behind the masks of total choice, different forms of the same alienation confront each other, all of them built on real contradictions which are repressed."* —Guy Debord<sup>23</sup>

With this mass foolery intact, the worker is no longer as likely to take personal risks for the benefit of their natural historical whole (that being class). Furthermore, the relationship of the consumer-commodity necessitates an 'us vs. them' mentality. For all those who buy into this and who maintain a full connection to this process begin to recognize themselves in a similar way that insular religious and/or nationalistic ethnic communities tend to view themselves. For those included there is a passive acceptance. For those outside there are misgivings and even hatred. It is for this reason that the right manages to use those collecting welfare as a scapegoat on which the workers can place misguided anger and resentment. Ironically, the social benefits that such persons collect are the same benefits won by the working class struggle during previous times during classical capitalism. In short, under these new capitalist conditions, the economic system becomes a kind of social fundamentalism and/or capital based fascism.

To further undermine poor and working class unity, the ruling elite through the public schools, their paid-for political lackeys and mass media conglomerates aggressively disseminates inaccurate terminologies regarding class categories.

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an underlying desire to sever the social ties to the world of the commodity. This is played out in childhood instincts by the activity of random vandalism. In the adult life, this natural inclination is often demonstrated at the bar where at folks are known to become a bit destructive towards objects and relationships after a bad week and after a fist or two full of whisky. In my hometown, the local working class bar (where I did a lot of growing up) had a stockade fence lining its back. A favorite Saturday night pastime was punching holes through it. And I'll tell you what, this aggression was not simply foolish male aggression. If that's all it represented, I wonder why I never saw such holes punched in fences at the expensive upper class bars... Well, at least not by those fat bastards who could afford to drink there.

<sup>22</sup>See Society of the Spectacle, Section 13, Black & Red Press, Detroit, 1983.

<sup>23</sup>See Society of the Spectacle, Section 63, Black & Red Press, Detroit, 1983.

Towards this end the term 'middle class' has been reinvented so as to drive a dividing line between what is correctly a single working class. Wherein 'middle class' was formally considered to be the lower end of the upper classes (i.e. absentee farmers, owners of multiple chain store outlets) it is now used to describe a certain degree of commodity acquisition amongst laborers. It is not uncommon for a person who labors as a nurse, a construction worker, a low end clerk or even one who cleans gutters at \$16 an hour to be considered 'middle class' as long as that person is in possession of a new car, home, large television, etc. Of course these items are typically made available to the worker through the development of the credit industry, and as such cannot represent any real notion of equitable or bountiful wealth. In themselves, such commodities acquired by credit represent the very real increase in profit of those in the ruling class who own and/or control both ends of this industry. At the end of the day, if you work for a wage at a profession which is controlled from above, count on each paycheck to make ends meet, and if that job represents your sole livelihood, and finally if you often or sometimes (during moments of clarity) wish you did not have to be there at all, then you are most likely of a working class origin. In short, terms such as 'middle class' are as meaningless as they are divisive. They do no more than reinforce the relative stability of the plutocratic powers that be.

The stabilizing power of the new capitalism, that of a functioning process of commodification and consumption, derives from mass belief, and when a belief is misgiven, there is always the likelihood that it can and will be reversed. This is especially the case where error is contrasted with objectively material and intuitive experiential truth. And, it is just such a contrast that the contemporary masses are confronted with whenever breaks of continuity occur in the present oppressive system. These breaks are often fraught with existential fear, anxiety, anger, misgivings, and regret. Shit, psychoactive prescription drugs aside<sup>24</sup>, it's hard to imagine a person not reflecting on the absurdity, emptiness, and lack of social worth of this system when they lay their head on the pillow to sleep at night. Well, before this begins to sound too pessimistic, let's take comfort in the fact that the world is no longer believed to be flat.

During previous times, when industrial production was primarily based in what is still considered to be the industrial countries, the 'bottom line' of the ruling class limited this relation in that the general working population was not allowed the means to adequately consume in order to take part in this process. In short, the greed of the domestic upper class limited the stabilization of the system. They sucked the working class for all that it was worth and threw them pennies so as they might not starve in order to work and create capitalist profit again another day. Here the proletariat's meager purchasing power vastly limited their ability to consume, and hence the worker could not be as easily fooled into believing in the bullshit communion discussed above.

From the earliest times of serious industrialization, Europe and the United States were fraught with a nearly constant state of relative working class unrest for these very reasons. Capitalism lacked an experiential excuse to dull the knife of mass agitation against the obviously degrading circumstances under which the great majority of people were forced to live. It was not until after World War II

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<sup>24</sup>Psychoactive prescription drugs are a huge factor and should not be overlooked as a tool of social control. The fact is, there is NO normative model for human brain chemistry and any medical attempt to standardize such will inevitably result in a model which is most conducive to the modes of social interaction which are most prominent in the society in which they are formed. In this case, such approaches most often result in the drugging of a person in order to make them 'happier' or at least non-combative in their role as a means of production and consumer of capitalist controlled commodities.

that the social situation began to apparently stabilize<sup>25</sup>. This happened, in conjunction with other subjective reasons, as the above discussed economic strategy began to take hold.

However, this period of relative stability was not accrued without certain costs still to be felt today. By curtailing domestic rebellion by fostering an internationalization of capitalist oppression, the ruling class must continually pay the price of a greatly intensified mass alienation. This proves to be an expense in that it results in certain profound chinks forming in the armor of the plutocracy at the home front<sup>26</sup>. For by domestically decreasing material deprivation (poverty) amongst its domestic laborers, and by setting them upon a course for the nonexistent promised land of happiness within the 'universal commodity,' the social framework of society as a whole becomes bogged down in a world of shit, lies and experiential disappointments. In this way alienation becomes a factor which drives society in two directions; one sociopathic<sup>27</sup> the other revolutionary; neither of which bode well for future stability and a continuation of the status quo. This occurs due to the underlying experiential lie of the promise of the universal ability to achieve wholeness with something both greater and more meaningful. There is a reason why people fear death in this society, and it's not because of fire and brimstone; it is the fear that their whole lives as consumers may have been a waste of time as much as their apparent (forced) happiness was no more than a plastic carrot on a string. That is not a pleasant final thought. In short, 'The Jones' died miserable.

*"..do you see now that you see that everything they told us was wrong? The elephant caught like that and caged like that? The way they kicked us and caged us too? How sweetly sad it seems how sad and sweet passing lonely people on the street the skulls beneath the skin the arteries bravely pumping liquid as they rush to do all the foolish things that they must do..."* —Charles Bukowski<sup>28</sup>

With all this being said, it is important to point out that this new Capitalism is still forced to compete with its more backwards internal sentiments. For the ruling class, still being motivated by greed, often finds itself incapable of maintaining the necessary levels of commodity availability for the domestic workers<sup>29</sup>. Wherein it is rational (from the point of view of the capitalist) to allow the domestic population a certain degree of purchasing/acquisition power in order to guarantee a basic level of material based social stability, and a continuing profit margin based on commodity sales, the underlying greed of this class often acts as a self-defeating force. Today, certain economic trends seem to indicate that the ruling class has become increasingly concerned with drawing a quick fix of mass profit at the price of steady long term increases. Towards this end, it seems that a substantial number of the plutocracy, as expressed through their political lackeys, has forgotten the weaknesses of classical

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<sup>25</sup>For a well-documented historical account of this period within the United States, see, Howard Zinn's A People's History of The United States, Harper Perennial, New York, 1999.

<sup>26</sup>Inherent weaknesses are not limited to the domestic scene. For this internationalization has also carried the scope of anti-capitalist struggle to every corner of the globe. However, the form of struggle taken in these less developed regions can be expected to develop differently from that of the domestic regions. There poverty is a more direct driving force than alienation. Hence, differences should be expected.

<sup>27</sup>This sociopathic tendency is a rudimentary reaction against this alienation in the void of no greater hope for a progressive mass paradigm shift and/or a lack of a sufficient social/political vocabulary and underlying understanding. Ostensibly this behavior is often demonstrated by the shooting of ones co-workers, teachers, fellow students, etc.. It is also demonstrated by the fairly common act of mass public shooting sprees.

<sup>28</sup>From Open All Night, 'Running On Empty', Black Sparrow Press, Santa Rosa, 2000.

<sup>29</sup>In the United States this regressive tendency is most often politically expressed by the Republican Party. In turn, the political expression of the new capitalism is more often voiced by the Democratic Party. Both suck.

capitalism, and therefore has embarked upon a course of streamlining domestic workforces (downsizing/layoffs), cutting back of social benefits (dental, medical, etc.), and facilitated a stagnation of real wages. Therefore, the present social realm is marked not by two competing social visions (one status-quo, one revolutionary), but three; the third being a regressive vision of capitalism. These more recent trends have motivated certain sectors of the consumer-working class rank and file to take certain basic stands against a perceived cutback in their social positions. While these rumblings in and of themselves are often no more than shortsighted complaints directed against those who would challenge their status quo as consumers, they also are indicative of a developing social uneasiness. For the consumer-worker is increasingly being educated to the authoritarian, abstract, and antisocial ways and means of the commodified society. They are more and more aware that the basic foundations of society are not geared for them, but rather directed at them only inasmuch as they are considered objects of manipulation from powers above. It is made more and more obvious that the basic mechanisms of society are not controlled by them; they are directed against them. As such, these realizations become increasingly tangible as this regressive capitalist trend is responsible for numerous lapses in commodity-consumer process. And here, some workers will inevitably reach the logical and emotive conclusion that such an economic process is ultimately not congruent with a more naturally meaningful, beneficial, and democratic society. These backslides inevitably act as a kind of social shock therapy, whose outcome will be the delivering of larger sections of the working population to the side of revolution. That's not to say that these anti-worker trends should be encouraged or justified by way of some long term revolutionary program. They hurt laboring people in the here and now, and therefore, working class revolutionaries must lend their hand in resisting these attacks. To do otherwise would result in the revolutionary movement becoming discredited in the eyes of the masses. As such, this is a danger which should be avoided. But still, this trend must be recognized for what it is; ultimately as a condition aiding in the radicalization of the masses.

However, while this is a very meaningful trend, it should not be utilized as a practical means from which to reinvigorate classical theories of revolution which are primarily based on a mass material deprivation. For the fact that these lapses become noticeable, the fact that they become part of a revolutionary equation, point to the reality that they represent breaks with the predominant social process as opposed to its norm. For the modus operandi of contemporary capitalism is commodification and consumerism. And with such being the case, a greatly intensified alienation, and not poverty (although poverty is still a strong motivating force), becomes the primary motivation towards social revolution. And again, it is this mass alienation which must give rise to certain conditions which inevitably must account for its eventual social transcendence. Alienation creates its own form of revolutionary breaches.

### **Section III -Counterculture as Social Revolution**

The increase in mass alienation has opened a new (or rather more mature) social front within the continuing revolutionary struggle. For the rise of radical commodification and consumerism has occurred alongside the rise of counterculture. This is no coincidence. Counterculture (cc) is a natural re-



action against this system and is also the living embodiment of the class conscious social revolution<sup>30</sup>. It develops as a natural answer to the intensified alienation brought on by this system. Counterculture becomes the living rebel base peopled by those (most often from the poor, working class, and declassed population) who become or are made consciously aware of the basic fallacies and oppressive nature of the larger social/economic system.

Mass expressions in counterculture first emerged in North America with the Beats of the late 1940s to early 1960s. Then again counterculture emerged with the hippy/radical movement of the 1960s and 70s. The mid/late-70s brought punk. Today we have a counterculture that is a kind of synthesis of previously disjoined branches. There is no snappy name for our community, but it clearly carries within it certain elements of punk, hippy, and other counter-modes of being. This is not surprising as the demarcation of this time as being the end of one century/millennium, and the beginning of a new one, subjectively seems to spark a kind of social re-evaluation of past eras. Here, this age is also marked by a synthesis of styles, thoughts and dreams. In this we truly are a people in between times; in between the death of an old system and a birth of a new.

Counterculture, as the above indicates, assumes different variations at different times. It dies and then is reborn as a former incarnation is either co-opted or simply no longer aesthetically expresses the particularities of the present age. However, as long as the greater society which it is pitted against still exists, the conditions which demanded its initial emergence will still be present. Hence, the particular death of any one form of counterculture is ultimately inconsequential insofar as the emergence of a new particular incarnation necessarily will follow<sup>31</sup>.

Sociologically, counterculture manifests itself in a conscious and organic unity of all those activities that constitute the natural, life affirming, human identity. Social relations, housing arrangements, economy, recreation, art and finally politics are all incorporated into one united, although diverse, alternative community. As this community matures, specific mores, style, and traditions develop. The binding factor lies simply in the conscious recognition of the common rejection of radical commodification, consumerism, and authoritarianism. In this a sister/brotherhood is formed which is inherently anarchistic and is that of the counterculture<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup>For all those who would like to ramble off arguments that counterculture is primarily an expression of upper class hedonism, or that it is somehow foreign to poor and working class communities, I would like to pointedly remind you that great numbers of cc social facilitators were historically of a working class origin. Take For example: Neil Cassidy (author of *The First Third*), Jack Kerouac (author of many books including *On The Road*), Jimi Hendrix (who's live Woodstock rendition of 'The Star Spangled Banner' is perhaps the musical embodiment of the 60's movement), Keith Richards (of the Stones), Janis Joplin (of *Big Brother and the Holding Company*), writer Charles Bukowski (although if he were still alive, and if he had the right amount of booze and was in a shitty mood, he might just hit me in the head with a bottle for putting him in such a grouping), Ozzy Osbourne (writer/ singer for band *Black Sabbath*, masterpieces include 'War Pigs', a song still barred in the UK during war time), Iggy Pop (of the *Stooges*), Johnny Rotten (of the band *The Sex Pistols*), and Shane MacGowan (of the *Pogues*).

<sup>31</sup>Not that we should give one particular counterculture up to our enemies without a fight. We must constantly struggle for the integrity of our cultural communities in order to allow them the time in which our modes of struggle and creation can become more mature. We will concede nothing.

<sup>32</sup>Here I grant that past incarnations of counterculture, such as the Beats, often failed to adequately develop political modes of expression. In addition, other countercultures, such as during the 60s and early 70s, at least in part, seem to have developed politically along more authoritarian communist lines. These seeming contradictions have more to do with the greater levels of cc immaturity than they did with natural internal inclinations. Hence, the Beats, being the first major example of a mass North American counterculture, were locked in a constant search for self-affirming identity. Here there

This culture is only counter in relation to the predominant culture of the commodity-consumer which its existence assumes and within whose borders of dominance it functions. Without such an other, it simply is natural, liberated, culture. But, in the context in which we here discuss counterculture, we must understand it as more than simply an opposition with the aim of dominance. For the predominant culture of the post-industrial age is that of an abstract and hierarchical social system. The common form of this system is found in the most contemporary modes of capitalism (although it is not limited to it) and with it the complete commodification of society. In short, the predominant culture is that of exploitation, oppression, and intense alienation. It is a forced totality specifically defined by the commodity and the process of consumption.

In this context counterculture can only live up to its bill if it rejects this totality. It is this totality which necessitates the levels of social alienation which in turn give rise to counterculture. Thus, by virtue of its very existence, counterculture is constituted as an oppositional force posited against its socially dominant other. In this it is a destructive force. However, for it to do so it must creatively construct (or unearth) as well. The basis upon which this creative process must be built is the unity of human dignity and solidarity as implied by the act of rebellion.

*“It is for the sake of everyone in the world that the slave asserts himself when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something in him which does not belong to him alone, but which is common ground where all men—even the man who insults and oppresses him—have a natural community.”*  
—Albert Camus<sup>33</sup>

Without committing to such a construction counterculture would fail to challenge the void upon which the all oppressive systems rest. In such, any apparent victory would be false as the death of the particular temporal form of an oppressive system would amount to little more than its reemergence in a new particular form. In short it must posit a constructive claim or fail to address the premises that the system rests upon. Counterculture must be, and in fact is, both destructive and creative at the same time.

*“The urge to destroy is also a creative urge.”* —Mikhail Bakunin

Counterculture, in our present context, must be understood not only contra the present form of Capitalism, but also for a liberated society free of the arbitrariness of masters and slaves. The counterculture is anti-hierarchical while being for the consecration of a new society of fully actualized human

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politics were little more than exercises in possibilities. Likewise, the 60-70s developed as the second functioning example of such. And to their credit, they realized the need to develop political modes. But, being relative pioneers in this capacity, they often failed to develop between anything more than rudimentary lines. More than not they identified an already established means of anti-capitalist expressions and tried to force themselves into the cracks. Hence the general friendliness towards Maoism. This mistake was not without exception (i.e. Black Mask/Up Against The Wall Motherfucker, Free Vermont), and it was not without a certain logic. In this case, Maoism was seen as the primary ideology of a global grassroots opposition to the predominate paradigm. And correctly understanding the struggle against capitalism to be both in their interest and necessarily international in character, they attempted to barrow from this analysis in order to mesh with a perceived revolutionary whole. All and all, the short-comings and mistakes of these earlier incarnations of cc must be viewed as almost necessary given the dialectical nature of the progress of struggle. Each particular cc tried and failed or succeeded where the next cc would pick up. Therefore, if one was to define counterculture in a very strict manner, it would be conceivable that one would term the Beats and the 60s-early 70s folk as a ‘proto-counterculture’, rather than that of the full kind. However, that borderlines on semantics, and seems to me to be a waste of time.

<sup>33</sup>See *The Rebel*, Page 16, Vintage Books, New York, 1956.

beings<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, as a creative force, it must actually create. If it does no more than postulate, then it is no more than a criticism, and a criticism alone does not qualify as a culture (be it a counterculture or otherwise). In the act of creating, it attempts to realize those new social relations that the fall of the present system will make fully realizable. In this respect counterculture is a liberating social experiment. It is “the formation of a new society from within the shell of the old<sup>35</sup>.” It is the formation of the social revolution before that of the political revolution.

However, at this point it is marked with a contradiction, for as long as it is a counterculture, it is limited by the repressive forces of radical commodification, consumerism and the State. In this it is impelled to commit certain internal contradictions for the sake of survival. It must abide by certain oppressive laws or at the very least function semi-underground to escape certain restraints. But even underground it is compromised. The long arm of the commodity extends to all corners (some less than others). In such a society, there is no complete separateness from these restrictive traits. But these limitations do not relegate the counterculture’s existence to an absurdity. Rather, it is these limitations which light the fire of creativity. For to find dignity and affirmation through the creation of an alternative community despite the dominate opposition is truly dynamic. Such limitations impel the human mind to expand its cognitive ability, and in this consciousness is sharpened. Furthermore, the limitations to its full actualization is the impetus to its destructive aspect. It must necessarily seek the eradication of that opposing force as the condition of its coming into full being. In this it is more than a decision to organize in a particular manner; It is a revolutionary force. Thus counterculture cannot be judged purely by its contradictions. It must be judged in regards to what it knowingly points to, and to the extent that it stretches the limitations of the predominant culture.

The counterculture is not a subculture, as a sub-culture is nothing more than a variant of the dominant culture insofar as it fails to reject the basic tenants of such. It merely rearranges the detail in order to create the desired illusion. A subculture stops at establishing its identity as quantitatively different from the present system, but in doing it fails to become qualitatively different from it. At certain times a subculture can be mistaken for counterculture in that it may exhibit similar behavior and language to that of the counterculture in relation to the dominant system. But, it is merely exhorting a claim to the throne without calling the institution of the throne into question. It may compete with the dominant culture, but its victory translates into itself becoming its former enemy. Such changing of the guard does no more than reinvigorate that which is already entrenched.

Subcultures which do not seek to transplant themselves to the seats of power, are no more than glorified fan clubs. They are incomplete or escapist at best, and social organs of enemy collaboration at worst. They are not counter.

Likewise, a counterculture which begins to demonstrate these above traits becomes degenerative, and hence must cease to be considered a revolutionary organ. Here, in its diminished state, it becomes just another subculture.

On the other hand, a healthy and functioning counterculture represents a legitimate threat to the predominant culture in that the legitimate counterculture’s expansion necessitates a weakening of its

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<sup>34</sup>Old cc had some hierarchy, especially in politics, however, that was forced and represented a general immaturity, not the developing line of internal progression.

<sup>35</sup>An old Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) saying.

enemy's hold over the social and subjective realm. The enemy system survives first by the common belief in its false unity and second by its repressive institution (i.e. police and army). And history has shown the second of the two to be inadequate in ultimately maintaining dominance with the lack of the other. The present oppressive system recognizes the danger posed by counterculture and is thus compelled to take moves to neutralize it. Its first line of attack is indoctrination through education, media, and advertisement. This measure may prolong the day of reckoning but ultimately it is not enough in the face of continuing experiential oppression and alienation. The essential lie of the system and the intensified alienation of the great majority continually results in more persons from the dominated classes becoming disillusioned with the current paradigm. As discussed above, lapses in continuity do occur for numerous reasons, and it is during such lapses that the process of consumerism is unmasked as a process devoid of natural social worth. In short, the regular uneasiness of the subservient and alienated individual/class necessitates a certain anxiety which often impels the affected person to question the ultimate utility of the dominant process/system. At such a point it is only reasonable to expect that person to consider alternative modes of social interaction which appear to offer a more healthy social reality. In that capacity, the actual counterculture is viewed as an option which the affected person can consider. Its appeal will of course lie in its alternative social principals, strengthened by the fact that it stands as a functioning, ostensible, and invaluable example. Here counterculture can be expected to grow in proportion to this ongoing trend. The rate of counter-cultural growth must increase as more persons are included in its composition, or at least sympathetic with its revolutionary vision, necessarily results in the dissemination of its basic life affirming message at faster rates and with more prevalence throughout society.

This is not to imply that we are headed for a society where the old crew cut and blue collar shirt is altogether substituted for mohawks, ponytails, and nipple rings. Shit, it's not even to say that the odd attraction of Frank Sinatra will completely give way to Joan Baez, The Who, Bad Brains, or Crass. It's only to say that the emerging culture of life (counterculture) will begin to exert sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle influence over the day to day reality and outlook of the average worker. Ultimately it's not any more important to the dominant culture if the laborer wears a J. Edgar Hoover button to work and sleeps under an American flag than it is to the revolutionary worker to don tattoos, combat boots, and piercings. All that is important is that the mass of workers begin to view themselves as part of a living culture which, though presently situated in a more dominant culture, is inherently contra the basic premises of its would-be master. In other words, it's a matter of leanings regarding identity. For counterculture does not represent a threat insomuch as its counter institutions seek to replace the status quo (although to a lesser degree this is also true). Its real threat is that its very example can challenge the state sanctioned belief system. As already stated, the present system of commodification-consumerism primarily rests upon mass belief. If counterculture can subvert that belief, the present paradigm can be expected to destabilize. Hence, counterculture, by virtue of its existence, contains within it an element or means of mass liberation<sup>36</sup>.

This process of mass liberation has already begun. How many factory workers already listen to Jimi Hendrix, Black Sabbath, The Stooges, The Clash, or Rage Against The Machine? How many already take part in elements of counterculture, all the while desiring more? In a word, counterculture, aside from its more puritanical definitions, is more diverse and subtle than many would like to give it credit

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<sup>36</sup>For one reason or another, I'm here reminded of my friend Jon Tobias, who once said, "Sure -when the shit goes down I'll be on my porch with my shotgun, drinking beer and taking potshots at helicopters."

for. Its currents, like that of the dominant culture, move through many levels of society. It seeks to help facilitate the freedom of all people, unlike the dominant culture which seeks to make people as docile as they are drone-like.

Here it must be stated that such an expansion of counterculture will not take place purely by historically deterministic means. Such a building of popular base must be actively coaxed by persons within counterculture. If counterculture simply was to exist as an isolated community secure in the notion that it would persevere with or without campaigns of concerted outreach, it would die on the vine of passive isolationism. All things being equal, maybe this would not be the case. However, all things are not equal. The predominant culture actively seeks to maintain its psychological dominance, and likewise various subcultures rooted in religion, fascism and the like actively seek to divert popular discontent into their bases of support. For these reasons, counterculture cannot rest on its laurels. It must seek ways to build inroads into the common experience of the common wo/man. It must maintain a dialectical relation with those masses still not consciously brought over to the social revolution. Counterculture must position itself squarely within the larger poor and working class communities. It must support them in their day to day struggles even when those struggles do not take aim at the root of oppression and alienation. All the while, it must provide a sufficient and accessible revolutionary critique of these common problems. It must agitate. Even so, it is not enough to be immersed in the political field. In fact, the political field must be understood as secondary to that of the social/cultural field. For it will not be through creating things such as a living wage that the masses will be fully brought over to our side (their natural side). It will be through the common identification of art, literature, music, social happenings, and real friendship. These are things which touch a person directly and communicate a vision of freedom and camaraderie. It is through such a connection that more people will come to identify themselves as persons within a common culture of struggle, creativity, and future liberation.

The political field, while necessary inasmuch as the political holds legitimate importance in one's life, must be understood as primary to a lesser degree in that such activities often translate into notions of 'alliances', 'common fronts,' etc., and these concepts still imply a certain degree of temporariness and separateness and are not generally responsible for ideas of cultural commonality. They are provisional as opposed to communal. On their own they may foster issue by issue victories (which is good), but not an organic concept of unity through cooperative communities. While they are necessary, they are also incomplete.

Counterculture cannot be content to live on the fringes of the more dominant exploitive culture. To do so would be no more than escapism, and hence the perceived counterculture would, in actuality, be no more than a subculture with a veneer of angst. Ultimately there comes a time when this natural enemy of antisocial structures must attempt to surmount the palisades of oppression. It must seek to destroy that which prevents it from developing in its more mature forms.

Within such a counterculture it is only natural that certain people will carry the ball in this direction. And it is here that specific people and collectives will organically key in on revolutionary political action akin to that presently demonstrated by Earth Liberation Front cells on the one hand and the anarchist Black Bloc on the other. Here it cannot bide its time and wait for the perfect moment. It must lash out at its other as a basic means of its political expression. It must transcend its relative passivity

through the violent resistance of its own repression as well as the repression directed against the poor and working classes as a whole. And in such, it achieves an honesty which progressive impostors cannot readily provide. This is one form of its direct political expression. It is different from much of its other political activity which often centers around piecemeal issues and community outreach. It is animated by its own revolutionary aspirations. And here it hardens itself by experiencing portions of direct, unabstracted struggle with facets of its enemy. This and prison support for its jailed comrades become its most direct lines of political expression.

Furthermore, by not limiting itself to liberal dogmatic tactics, it further reaches into the hearts of the yet included poor and working class, who rarely could dig the horseshit of respectable protest and pacifism. In essence, it develops its own means, and limits itself to that which proves effective, both in regards to objective goals, and subjective (non-alienated) needs. In short, it becomes an oppositional force by opposing. It is honest in its opposition by striking back according to the necessity of struggle, self-defense, and victory. It is the physical and political expression of the self-conscious poor and working class social revolution; counterculture in political motion.

In conclusion, it is within the above social context that the North American Black Bloc emerges. In it is an important sphere of conflict between a culture of death (commodification and consumerism) which increasingly has nowhere to go but down, and one of life which must struggle in order to realize itself in a society of cooperation and creativity.

Of course there are many more tactical, practical, and theoretical issues which have not been addressed in the above work that we must continue to explore in order to realize the final victory of the revolution. And of course it may be necessary to modify or even disregard or reverse certain claims made throughout the above essay (absolutism is for shitheads). However, it has been my intention throughout the above document to map out a more thorough context within which we can further develop the necessary understandings of social process and transformation that will be required in order to bring a liberated victory within our collective grasp. So I trust the above met this task at least in part, and I look forward to the ongoing conversation. Well cheers for now, and I'll be seeing you on the front lines.

David Van Deusen  
Green Mountain Anarchist Collective  
Vermont, March, 2001

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