

On Radical-Leftist Strategy: *Propositions for Discussion*

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1.

The party's over. The great bubble of phantom assets has burst and the bill is coming due. The heroes of capital have pronounced themselves ready... to pass the pain onto others. The poorest—billions globally—will suffer most. But even in the Global North, the squeeze now beginning looks to be deep and general. Will the economic crisis turn into a real legitimization crisis? Will the rage yield the conclusion, that capitalism fails us? If events are vindicating the anti-capitalist movement, what will the movement be able to do about it? Where is the organized counter-power ready to act in this crisis? How will the movement of movements clarify and decide what to do? In fact, both agency and strategy are missing. The movement seems rather to have put its faith in directionless resistance, in beautiful tropes of flight and exodus. It cherished the fine hope of changing the world without taking power. But what if it has fooled itself, in these decades? What if this politics of expression and invention and the refusal of power, fine as it is, is not a pathway out of capitalism? What if power and effective direction are the conditions of successful struggle? What if the organization of agency and strategy are indispensable? Is it time for a reality check?

2.

The party's over: the vanguard parties are gone, and hardly anyone wants them back. Yet gone with them is the strategic focus of a whole revolutionary tradition. Orthodoxy finds few friends today. But the serious critique of orthodoxy would still seek to rescue the moments of truth that may be in it. To think the strategic deficit of this moment, to ask what a pathway out of capitalism could possibly mean and what it would practically entail, is to gain a renewed appreciation for the Marxist tradition—for its organization of collective experience and intelligence. Even to ask what went wrong, to inquire seriously into the defeats of the last century, is to come into contact with the core of truth in this tradition—a truth that survives its notorious disputes and splits, its terrible lapses and corruptions. Revolution is not just around the next corner. But it is necessary to ask, *why* isn't it? What do we mean, we of the radical left, we of the movements and protests, we of no party, what do we mean by these words we've been using: capitalism, revolution, struggle? And who are we—who in our suspicion of representation virtually forbid ourselves to use this word "we"? We who appear in the demos and protest actions of the Global North, we are a militant minority, whether we acknowledge it or not. We express our rejection of a capitalism that the majority should, we feel, also reject. But this majority evidently is not prepared, for now at least, demonstrably to do so. So we are also a vanguard, like it or not. True, we are not the substitutionist vanguard of

old; we are not the professionalized germ of a future state. We want to learn from the struggles of the Global South, not control them. This has been our pride: we are a vanguard that rejects vanguardism, a vanguard without agency or strategy. In fact, there is little consensus among us regarding aims or means, and we've tended to avoid the work of clarifying either. We're all tactics and no strategy, and we've let ourselves be reassured that this strategic weakness is our secret strength. Is this really more than a utopian feeling and, if it isn't, is this feeling really enough? It shouldn't be a crime to ask these questions insistently. What follows doesn't pretend at all to be a full-blown strategy. It merely asks what the conditions and basic principles of such a strategy would be. Strategy in any case is a long-term, collective project. What follows is a plea that this project be organized, that the movements acknowledge the strategic deficit as a problem and develop durable structures to recover strategic focus and intelligence. These propositions, arguments, provocations and provisional conclusions are a snapshot of a process—one attempt at critical reflection. They are offered to restart the discussion, not to be the last word in it.

3.

Know the enemy, Sun-Tzu warned 2000 years ago, and know yourself, and in a hundred battles you will never be defeated. Do we know the enemy? Do we know ourselves, we anti-capitalists? Strategy is the work of carefully thinking the pathway from here, where we are, to there, where we want to be. Do we have clarity about either the here and now or the other world that is possible? If we cannot fully imagine the alternative ahead of time, do we at least have enough shared clarity about it to reach it? The vision and concepts of traditional revolutionary theory have been poisoned by the experience of Stalinism and the repressive actuality of "really existing socialism"—and by the defeats of so many struggles in the twentieth century. This tradition appears to have failed emphatically, and many have pronounced it dead as a political force. With few exceptions, the remnant parties of the "Left," long without revolutionary hope or aim, have become as opportunist and cynical as their competitors. A so-called radical or undogmatic Left—us, the anti-capitalist minority in movement—positions itself outside this shabby politics and the legacy of monstrous orthodoxy that is behind it. And yet this revolutionary tradition is ours—is part of us, if we are honest. For us, it cannot be a matter of rejecting this tradition *utterly*. It is rather a process of appropriating it critically, of reaching an adequate understanding of the defeats and disappointments, of the mistakes that are not to be repeated. This is a necessary condition of a viable anti-capitalist strategy. Obviously there are many and divergent ways to interpret this tradition and history. We

all *operate* an appropriation of some kind; it informs our assumptions, positions and actions, however conscious we are of it. And with our lives to live, in and out of the struggles of the moment, who has time or desire to relive it all—to continuously process the nightmares of history? Fine. Some people do it—historians, theorists, academics and more or less isolated para-academics. We read the results, sometimes, some of us. It goes into the mix. Is this enough? Does this suffice to replace the focus and urgency, relentlessly intense, of the old vanguard party—of Lenin’s dreaded Bolsheviks, of the dreaded Maoists, or Trotskyites? Certainly we could organize a collective strategic capacity *differently*, through other *focused* processes, networks, counter-institutions. But we would first at least have to agree that such a strategy is indispensable to effective agency—and understand what it means to struggle without it.

4.

Where do we aim, where do we wish to go? We walk forward, asking questions, as the Zapatistas appealingly put it. But having a strategy means we also risk answering those questions. We imagine vaguely a colorful world of many alternative logics, liberated from capitalist domination and violence. Well and good. We don’t usually call this socialism, because that word conjures up the bad dreams of last century. We don’t call it communism, because that conjures the bad vanguard parties. We sometimes call it autonomism, emphasizing the anarchist impulses of self-organization and self-valorization that also circulate in the movements. Some Italian comrades are calling it real or “absolute democracy.” It is not the case, however, that the vision aimed at by the revolutionary tradition is so different from the dreams we carry today. The goal was, and remains, a world of real, positive freedom, in which social relations are not based on exploitation, oppression and domination. If there is interest now in recovering and reinventing the notion of communism, it is because this notion belongs to the core of the revolutionary tradition—a core that retains a powerful appeal, because it is so obviously different than what was done under this sign by the parties and states that took it over.

5.

True communism, as theorized by the young Marx, feels like where we would all like to go: the reduction of work-time to the minimum possible; the liberation of free processes of self-realization, no longer constrained and distorted by antagonistic, competitive class society; the progressive dissolution of the division of labor, the free development of human powers and talents in all directions, the real education of the senses. This is a revolutionary macro-theory of biopolitics, the production of differential subjectivities, the release of new forms of humanity. The leap from necessity to the realm of freedom, the real beginning of human history, would be the liberation of difference and non-identity *for the first time*. The real disputes in the tradition were not over this vision, but over the strategy that could actualize it. Reformists saw it as the eventual result of a gradual evolution, utilizing the power of democratic institutions to redistribute the surplus produced by exploitative relations. Revolutionary

anarchists held it to be conditioned on smashing the power of the state and its repressive bureaucracies, once and for all. Revolutionary socialists and communists held that there must be a transitional period of social reorganization, in which power must be seized and a transformed state utilized, to establish a base of production that can meet basic needs through non-exploitative relations. Others may disagree, but a serious critical appropriation of the tradition is likely to find the last position more compelling, because more realistic and strategic. This is not to say the old theory is flawless or that the mistakes of practice are not implicated in the defeats of last century. It’s not a matter of trying to repeat an inherited strategy considered to be perfect, but of collectively recovering every moment of truth from the tradition to shape a strategy to guide anti-capitalist struggle in contemporary reality. But so far, our new theories have not added up to anything approaching the coherence of traditional revolutionary theory: they don’t show us a plausible pathway, a realizable organization of effective agency, a viable coordination of means and ends in struggle. This is the task of a strategy.

6.

Our rejection of capitalist normality is deep, intuitive and passionate. But what is the capitalism we hate and oppose? The need today is not so much to repeat or redo the critique of capitalism. The critique exists and is there for anyone to study. What is more important is to understand how far our experience is once again confirming it. Capitalism fails us because it attacks the humanity in us, locking it up in an impoverished form. This has always been true, even if, historically, early capitalism played its positive role by vastly increasing human productive powers. Today we can experience what Marx, Luxemburg and others foresaw long ago: in a finite world, this form of society premised on ceaseless, profit-driven economic growth must have real limits. In numerous ways, including some that were not foreseeable, these limits are beginning to rear up on the horizon. And this transforms the situation. Historically, capitalist modernity—a nexus of relations and processes, as well as the culture inseparable from it—rose to global dominance by violent episodes of primitive accumulation. Still, as a pathway beyond the servitude of feudalism and the rule of arbitrary power, the capitalist revolution was not without moments of emancipation. The overcoming of scarcity and the promises of enlightenment culture and bourgeois law and democracy were real expansions of life, enrichments of human possibilities. Once its globalizing tendencies attained truly planetary scope, however, expanding capitalism began to close in on and push against its own logical and material limits. Today, the relentless imperatives of capital accumulation and the resulting cycles of competition, crisis and concentration are evidently undermining and destroying the conditions for life as such. Life today, globalized as well in the way it reflects its images back to us everywhere, reconfirms and clarifies what was sometimes obscured and forgotten: capitalism is a threat to humanity, from which humanity will have to free itself through strategically-waged struggle. It is the enemy.

7.

Capitalism as a system is not an external thing separate from the people who constitute it. It is the activity of those same people—all of us—given a specific form; social reality, the given, is not elsewhere. As a form of human activity and at the same time a form of humanity, capitalism is a product of history, not an invariable of human nature. More specifically now: it is a way of organizing the relations between people on the basis of a practical abstraction. This abstraction transforms labor into an exchangeable equivalent value. The valorization process is no less real for being this process of abstraction. “Congealed,” as Marx puts it, in fetishized commodities, the abstraction becomes social reality as a nexus of relations in the sphere of production. These relations are antagonistic. They produce and reproduce a division among people. This division is the hidden violence of exploitation, the theft by some of the labor of others. Passing their activity through the nexus of relations formed around this antagonism—that is, performing division and relations and thereby reproducing both—people sustain a whole social world and its form of humanity: *capitalist* humanity, the subjectivity that corresponds to competitive, possessive individualism. Out of this activity, over time, a powerful global logic has developed and installed itself in all the things and bodies of our social world: capitalist modernity. At every moment, what begins as the reasonableness and common sense of individual experience—each works to live, acts to satisfy needs and desires—ends as a global system that exceeds and escapes human control. As the totality of relations and processes unfolding according to logics that tend to become autonomous and override constraints, society takes on the mystical character of an alien external force, an inexplicable and uncontrollable second nature or fate out of which the storms of crisis and war are episodically set loose. History, made by people for themselves, becomes behind their backs an apparently separate reality that limits, dominates and does violence to them. And social reality *is* the activity that unintentionally performs this inversion. To regain collective control, capitalist power would need to be broken where it is incessantly regenerated. Capitalist relations—and with them this antagonism that splits humanity while forming it—would have to be replaced by others based on a radically different logic. This is the reach for emancipation, the aim of struggle.

8.

Again: Exploitation is the concealed theft of labor. Or better: the theft of value from the labor of others. Under capitalist relations it is legalized theft, instituted as property and ownership, yet theft it is and remains. It is the process of systematically expropriating surplus value by compelling workers, as the very condition of their working at all, to perform more labor than they are paid for. This trick of abstraction—the reduction of qualitatively different concrete labors to the single quantitative equivalent of abstract labor—disappears into the commodities that are produced by it. These get up and dance because they are charged by the real relations between people. There, where surplus value is produced and stolen, relations are structured as a fundamental antagonism between

owner-managers who control production, and workers who sell their labor from a position of dependency. This antagonism is the open secret, the irreducible core of capitalism. Its traumatic unfolding as social misery marks every aspect of capitalist modernity and the divided, contradictory and coercive character of our social world. Contemporary mutations in the modes of production and the forms of wage-labor—so-called post-Fordism—make the process of exploitation more diffused, in some ways more removed and difficult to see, feel and track. The dispersal of Fordist factories into networks of globally distributed sweatshops and the relative growth of the service sectors in the Global North have, together, tended to obscure the continuing basis of both in traditional manual labor and commodity production. Jobs are transformed into contract-labor and precarious “temp work”; some workers, forced continually to compete for and negotiate the terms of their contracts, are apparently transformed into entrepreneurs. Workers’ pension-funds, where they still exist at all, have long been invested in stock markets, apparently blurring the lines between owners and workers and encouraging a false identification with the profitability of corporations and the “performance” of the economy as a whole, the logic of exploitation itself. And so on. Exploitation persists, however, and generates the material inequalities and social misery that degrade life and block human possibilities at all levels. Exploitation is theft by the *indirect* violence of valorized labor. Historically, the conditions of exploitation were established by *direct* violence and theft—so-called primitive accumulation. But as we are forced to relearn again and again today, the indirect violence of exploitation and capital accumulation must have continuous recourse to direct violence in a world of shrinking resources, competing national economies and perennial revolts. New episodes of primitive accumulation, new wars of enforcement and new genocidal eruptions accompany capitalism as its necessary shadow.

9.

All of us who work are *exploited* by this system. Our labor, whatever form it takes, is valorized, the surplus turned into the profit taken by others. In addition, some of us, the luckier ones, are merely *dominated* by the social processes that make up our everyday life. We suffer the distortion and blockage of our potentials, our life possibilities, through the compulsive logic imposed on us. Forced to spend ourselves working, competing, chasing the fetishes we’re told we need and in any case are the only ones on offer, we empty our lives of the possibilities of living otherwise. We forget we share other needs, have other capacities and potentials. We forget there would be other joys to share, were we only free to realize them—and we are the lucky ones. Others of us have it much harder. The *oppressed* suffer direct repression and violence by the states that enforce this global order. Beaten by robocops, bombed and blasted from the air, walled into slums or driven into camps, starved or left to die on sick-beds of neglect, the oppressed are violated, brutalized, not just in their humanity but in their bodies as well. Exploited, oppressed, dominated: these terms refer to distinct processes of violence in capitalist normality. It matters, obviously, what

kinds and intensities of violence we are exposed to in everyday life. But while they can be distinguished, these processes still hang together, are all of a piece. They form a single global system. And thus there is a common interest among all the exploited, oppressed and dominated in resisting and overcoming it. This is what, today, is again becoming acute, as a globally shared experience. The basic categories Marx developed to grasp this still suffice to a remarkable degree. Many of the old words hold after all. The relentless processes of capital accumulation, the global production and capture of surplus value, alienates us—yes, that is the word—from what we are capable of and would have liked or would like to become. A repressed *negative humanity* struggles to free itself from the divided and miserable form of capitalist humanity. Not because there is a fixed human nature, but exactly because there is not.

10.

The pathway out of this global system could only be the process that would change it radically. Reformist programs that seek merely to mollify the destructive effects of capitalism—global social misery—without aiming to reorganize the social relations that perennially produce this misery simply avoid the real problem. The reformist tradition and its Social Democratic parties imagined that with progressive reforms the power of the working-class would eventually grow so great that exploitative relations could at some point be eliminated peacefully. Those who waited for this are still waiting. So long as the class basis of society persists, the exploited, oppressed and dominated only maintain their position in the balance of forces through continuous struggle. The moment that struggle stops or weakens, the position gained is quickly lost. Held within a reformist horizon, social rights gained through struggle immediately come under attack by systemic logics seeking to roll them back. Representative democracy and the rule of law are, to be sure, achievements of bourgeois revolution. Formal equality and the principle of consent are political compensations for submission to economic competition and exploitation. But this kind of democracy excludes a reorganization that would eliminate exploitative relations altogether; it couldn't be a pathway out of capitalism without being at the same time the collective suicide of the class that dominates it. And the contemporary forms of capitalist democracy have long been compromised institutions. The influence of the power-money-media nexus over policy and the conditioning of public opinion probably has never been stronger. Contemporary democracies typically are little more than phantom processes for producing the gestures and illusions of consent and freedom. Never was the system's indifference to expressions of real democracy demonstrated as vividly as in February 2003, when some ten million people took to the streets in cities around the world and, in the largest linked demonstrations in world history, responded to the imminent U.S. invasion of Iraq with a resounding *no!* As for *habeas corpus* and the rule of law, civil and human rights are in theory precious protections from arbitrary power. But in practice capitalist power always has the option to ignore them by declaring a state of exception. When such protections are most needed, they revert to mere words on paper that cannot be counted on. They therefore can-

not be the basis of strategy, though a strategic anti-capitalism would not be in conflict with them. When rights are abused and the rule of law degraded, as they are under the “war on terror,” then anti-capitalists are right to demand their immediate restoration. The revolutionary process cannot slip behind or below the level of bourgeois human rights, even if only a world beyond capitalism could be the substantive realization of their promise. Many today are spooked by the word “revolution,” and not without reason, given the carnage and catastrophes of the last century. Yet it cannot be avoided, if we want out of this social misery, permanent war, perpetual catastrophe. Only a revolutionary process could change bad reality by reorganizing it. And only reforms that function strategically within a revolutionary process escape the traps of reformism. The problem, always, is what to do and how to do it.

11.

Again: Overcoming capitalism as a global system of exploitation and control means breaking the hold of capitalist power and reorganizing relations in the sphere of production. The redistribution of power there, in the organization of the labor by which humanity produces its basic needs, would be the precondition of a non-exploitative society. Systematically eliminating exploitation would not automatically liberate humanity from all forms of conflict, domination and oppression. But it would be the necessary beginning. On this basis alone could further steps be taken, aiming to liberate humanity—all people everywhere—as far as possible from the burdens of labor as such. This is the point on which traditional revolutionary theory is most cogent. In volume three of *Capital*, Marx makes clear that we can't expect to eliminate work *completely*. The requirements of materially reproducing humanity—of feeding and sheltering our bodies and meeting our basic needs—means we will always have to share a minimum of labor, even in the most egalitarian society. But the prospect of a socially liberated and collectively managed technology promises that this minimum could be reduced through automation to something humane and tolerable, something we could live with, globally. Basic needs met, to really decide together freely about further production and surpluses would truly be a new beginning. The leap from necessity to the realm of freedom becomes plausible with this reduction of work time, with free access to and democratic control over education and culture freed from the pressures of an antagonistic social context, eventually with the progressive dissolution of the division of labor and the state itself. If the sobering constraint of needing continuously to meet basic human needs at every moment of the revolutionary process is kept in mind, then it becomes clear that there could not be an immediate global leap to reconciliation and positive freedom. The conditions have to be constructed through a transitional period of radical reorganization. Despite historical bad blood, anarchism, autonomism, socialism and communism converge on the far other side of a successful struggle with capitalist power. The socialists and communists are perhaps more realistic in pointing out that the state can't wither away without the mediating period of transition in which the passage out of capitalist relations opened by the revolutionary

process is *defended* against organized global reaction. “Dictatorship of the proletariat” is indeed a monstrous name for this transition to socialized production, but the moment of realism expressed in it should not be lost: revolution *will* be attacked by material force, and if it cannot organize an adequate counter-power to defend itself, then it will not survive. This constraining reality cannot be avoided. It points to a weakness in some of the theories that inform versions of contemporary autonomism. And whatever we provisionally choose to call this projected form of new social life—autonomism, radically democratic socialism, libertarian communism—its actualization cannot be immediate, but will only be won by successful struggle on a global level. Hence the urgent need for strategy.

12.

The strategic problem lies in the tension between two justly famous passages by Marx. It is not a matter, here, of citing scripture or unquestionable authority. The idea that Marx could see everything and made no mistakes is ridiculous and misrecognizes what he did achieve. If these sentences stand the test of time and can help us focus a strategic reflection, it is because they vividly express the difficult passage that any adequate revolutionary process would have to make. The first passage, written in 1844, points to the material force that is the ever-renewing source of the revolutionary process: “Clearly the weapon of critique cannot replace the critique of weapons, and material force must be overthrown with material force. But theory too becomes a material force as soon as it grips the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But the root for humans is humanity itself.”

13.

The argument is rigorous, the conclusion strategic: humanity is the ultimate stake of social struggle. This is to say that humanity is a social concept, a product of human activity. But also a negativity: the non-identity and promise of reconciliation that haunt antagonistic social life. The revolutionary material force of the exploited, oppressed and dominated is the insight—embodied, grasped by the senses, lived as an urgency—that human beings can be more, that they are, in their very humanity, an open process that points beyond the socially crippled forms of life lived under capitalism. Beyond the struggle to reproduce bodily life, we all have needs and potentials that develop along with the level of collective human capacity, the so-called general intellect: productive forces, technology, the sum of human knowledges in all the arts and sciences. By exploiting human labor and organizing life as a war of each against all, capitalism drove this process of expanding human powers and needs. But the social forms that at first enriched humanity, and promised its liberation and enlightenment, eventually blocked and impoverished it. As a logic that developed an autonomous power of its own, capitalism made and remade human beings according to *its* needs, and not *theirs*. It produced a *certain* kind of humanity, but the poverty and limits of this

humanity are everywhere visible, even on the glossiest surfaces of commodified abundance. More than that, beyond even the social misery that exposes the paradoxical anti-humanism of this system, ecological degradation and global climate change teach us today that this form of life is irrationally destructive of the shared conditions of life on earth and thus hostile to life itself. All this we experience as the need for a leap beyond this form of humanity to a better one—to a form of social organization that would help us to develop and realize our human powers without exploiting, oppressing and dominating each other and without ruining our shared ecological base. The whole of this experience—which is a radical knowledge, a bodily knowledge that grips us, a lived conclusion of the senses—is a material force and biopolitics, our revolutionary power.

14.

In this first passage, then, Marx points to our strength, our material force, an indispensable source of our collective will and agency, our power to create our history and change our world. Against more orthodox and mechanical forms of Marxism that would arrest or even suppress the dialectic of spirit and matter in struggle, the young Marx reminds us that spiritual strength is itself a material force, a real strategic factor in the balance of forces in struggle. The philosophy that so far has merely interpreted the world is theory cut off from revolutionary praxis. By radically reposing the problem of humanity as an open and socially produced concept, theory returns to the spiritual source of historical agency.

15.

In the second passage from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte of 1852*, Marx points to the constraints on our agency, the power that opposes us, that of our enemy, the system itself: “Humans make their own history, but they do not do it just as they please; they do not make it under conditions chosen by themselves but under conditions directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.” Here Marx is criticizing the tendency to repeat the forms of past revolutions without going beyond their content. The revolutionary process that will open a pathway beyond capitalism “cannot draw its poetry from the past,” he goes on to say, “but only from the future.” The content of that future is the better, enriched, transformed humanity struggling to emerge from the current, blocked and crippled one. Out of the inherited conditions—the given social misery and the dominant power of the given order, its institutions and apparatuses, techniques and processes of reproduction and enforcement—we must create a “revolutionary point of departure, the situation, the relations, the conditions under which alone modern revolution becomes serious.” The revolutionary process of reorganizing the relations between us—our social forms and institutions, in short the whole social process of life—has to be developed from current reality in all its fluid weight and dynamic inertia.

16.

We have to get there from here, the social given, the real world: this is what the passage tells us. The struggle is

here and now, and the revolutionary process must open a pathway to the future from the given reality. Otherwise: bad utopianism. And here and now, the enemy is powerful—overwhelmingly, terrifyingly so. Giving due weight to each of the two passages, and looking soberly at the character of the here and now, we can draw a provisional conclusion. The revolutionary process cannot be a matter of fighting a war of annihilation against the class enemy who directs and benefits from this power of the system. Given the balance of military and economic forces, this would not be possible, in any case. It is rather a matter of developing a strategy grounded in our true material force, instead of a false strategy grounded in the power of the enemy.

17.

The exploited, oppressed and dominated—we could call this the revolutionary class, as long as we understand it is only potentially so, and not automatically or mechanically—cannot directly confront the main material force of the enemy. The global state apparatuses of enforcement, repression and terror have become too strong to attack head on. And even in places and moments where one state may be weak, the other states of the global system collectively are not weak at all and will move swiftly and ruthlessly to crush revolutionary openings. This has been the experience of the last century. In the twentieth-century, revolutionary movements to establish socialism suffered costly defeats—corrupted by counter-revolution within, or ground down by it from without. Fascism—capitalism’s emergency mutation for attacking revolutionary movements—did awful damage to the revolutionary process. This attack dog was put down by the allied states of liberal capitalism and the Soviet Union—but not before it was allowed to do its work. In the world that emerged from this traumatic experience, the struggles of decolonization and national liberation were pulverized, even where they appeared to win, between the two dominant forms of post-1945 imperialism, U.S. and Soviet. Such was the Cold War. The system proved resilient, riding out the global revolutionary upsurges of the late 1960s and ’70s. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its empire of so-called Peoples’ Democracies was experienced as a political liberation from repressive state regimes. But it was not only this. The removal of capitalism’s ideological other, however false or cynical that ideology had become under Stalinism, at the same time removed the only counterweight within the inter-state system to the global expansion of capitalism in untrammelled form. The intensification of exploitation by enforced structural adjustment programs—so-called neo-liberalism—led to deepening social misery for millions of people. A resurgence of protest and resistance—from Chiapas, to Seoul, to Durban, to London, Seattle, Genoa and dozens of other places—quickly ran up against the limits and intransigence of the system. These converging social struggles, however, were soon overshadowed and displaced by the bold and appalling attacks of al-Qaeda. The permanent, dirty so-called war on terror that followed opened the doors to a new politics of fear and a possibly qualitative expansion of the security-surveillance state. Under these conditions—“directly encountered, given and transmitted from the

past”—emancipatory social struggles remain fragmented and incoherent, unable to develop global critical mass or collective agency.

18.

Capitalism is not centrally controlled, but capitalist power is strategically co-ordinated through states and globalized institutions and enforced by state-security forces and their various proxies. The Communist International and vanguard party-form once played a similar strategic role for the working-class. With Stalinism, “socialism in one country,” and the subordination of internationalism to Soviet national interest, the parties and Comintern were corrupted beyond any possible rescue or repair. The working-class itself belatedly rendered its verdict, carrying out a “practical critique” of the party-form by abandoning it *en masse*. Given what it had become, the workers were not wrong at all. In the wake, however, there is an organizational vacuum and strategic deficit. The exploited, oppressed and dominated have no way at this time to organize their material force and shared desires into a collective agency capable of countering or defending themselves against capitalist power. Today, there are no viable global organizations to strategize and co-ordinate the revolutionary process, the struggle to open—and defend—a passage out of capitalism. The development of an adequate and effective revolutionary strategy requires the critical study of the defeats of the last century. But it also requires the close and continuous study of the enemy’s current forces, strategies and tactics. Beyond the capacity of any individual, this is necessarily a collective task and project that must be organized. The enemy has war colleges and funds think-tanks; it systematically develops weapons systems and contingency plans, and it trains its forces incessantly. The revolutionary process cannot mirror these institutions without becoming the enemy itself. This, too, is a lesson of the last century. Nevertheless, the revolution needs to develop its own qualitative organizations—and these, minimally, would need to be able to support strategic activity in an equally focused, sustained and committed manner. The tactical affinity groups and alter-globalization networks of the movement of movements now have to build up more durable and strategically effective forms of *internationalist* struggle.

19.

The exploited, oppressed and dominated—we, that is: the whole global aggregate of latent revolutionary subjects—are still a potential class, but one in reality fissured by stratifications and conflicts of interest that continuously deepen and exploit difference and pit groups against each other. At the top, the merely dominated in the Global North enjoy high standards of living and remnants of relative autonomy; at the bottom, in the sprawling slums and shantytowns of the South, a billion people deemed unneeded are left to rot or implode. As a whole, the sum of these groups still produces all the social wealth. Were this aggregate to organize itself and act collectively, it would still wield the power of withholding its labor and could potentially launch projects of radical social reorganization. Evidently, it does not do so. In the old language, it is a class in-itself that is not yet (or no more) a class for-

itself. The reasons why lie in the defeats of last century, but also in real social processes of class decomposition. The social effects of contemporary capitalism and reactionary politics have tended to disintegrate the social bases of internationalist class struggles, while simultaneously integrating populations through national and ethnic identities. Recomposing a revolutionary process of struggle from these social givens, here and now, could only mean rebuilding mass movements from alliances of class fractions of the exploited, oppressed and dominated. Obviously the members of this aggregate do not share identical life possibilities and expectations. Some have much to lose and will tend to be conservative. Others are pushed by conditions into perspectives that are or could easily become revolutionary. The gap between these two social positions and the subjectivities that correspond to them is immense. However, organizing an overcoming of this gap is not necessarily impossible.

20.

The struggles over so-called identity politics—epitomized in their emancipatory form by feminism and the great anti-racist struggles of the last century—have been inspiring and, obviously, are to be supported as resistance to persistent forms of oppression and domination. They cannot, however, replace the struggle against exploitation at the strategic level. Where the struggles of oppressed and dominated minorities do not link up with the struggle against exploitation, they offer no resistance to capitalist power. Indeed, to the extent that the social antagonism of exploitative relations goes unaddressed, identity politics becomes a divisive displacement of the antagonism—a displacement that contributes to the decomposition of the larger, potential class in struggle and actually aligns with processes of capitalist rationalization aiming to make the system function more efficiently. The way to global recomposition through struggle passes through the open question of *humanity as a whole*. Global crises—not just economic but ecological now as well, including resource depletion and species extinction, climate change and extreme weather events—potentially reanimate the problem of humanity as such, as soon as the causal links that connect them to capitalism and its systemic logics are demonstrated and clarified. To reach the level of interest shared by all members of the exploited, oppressed and dominated, it is necessary to go back to the root—to return the focus to the disastrous planetary inadequacies of the capitalist conception of humanity and the possibilities of going beyond it.

21.

The old high bourgeoisie, for its part, has also been decomposed and transformed. Degraded into a global *capitalist class* of the super-rich and chief executives, it no longer shares much common culture beyond an instrumental commitment to profit and privilege as such. This class of those opportunists who, at any given moment, occupy the dominant positions and largely monopolize the benefits is, however, a class for-itself in the strongest sense: it watches vigilantly and moves decisively against all emergent class enemies. As long as they do occupy their positions, the members of this class can count on the sup-

port of the durable institutions and state bureaucracies that organize the powers of repression. These bureaucracies employ millions of people whose self-interests tend to align automatically with those of the capitalist class. Every state is a singular force-field of interests, traditions and identities. Fissured by contradictions that must be continuously managed, conflicts that must be negotiated and renegotiated, states are dominated and directly responsive to the national capitalist class to differing degrees. But in the current global system, all states are at least committed to enforcing the conditions of capital accumulation. This is to say: states can be counted on to protect the most vital interests of the capitalist class as a whole. All this belongs to the constraining reality, the conditions that do not permit us to make history just as we please. From a strategic perspective, the most important form of the antagonism is between, on the one hand, the capitalist class, together with those bureaucratic fractions whose loyalty is tendentially dependable, and, on the other, the potential class of the exploited, oppressed and dominated. In the traditional categories of military logic, any global revolutionary struggle against capitalist power is obviously asymmetric. At the extreme—beyond the pale, but nevertheless existing as demonstrated and deployed powers, in short as historical givens—are so-called weapons of mass destruction, the reserve arsenal of state terror. To accept combat on these terms would certainly result in another defeat. To break the hold of capitalist power, the overwhelming military and economic advantages of the enemy must be neutralized by other, indirect means.

22.

The highest strategy, Sun-Tzu tells us, is to attack the enemy's strategy: to win not by entering into direct combat but by preparing and shaping the conditions of encounter so that it is decided before the long-awaited combat even begins. Again, this is not a game of citing scripture or authority. If this is the core of strategy, it will stand up to all critical interrogation. One does not oppose the enemy exactly where it is strongest and most unassailable, and there enter into a war of annihilation. (The name for this is suicide.) Instead, one moves the ground of struggle to the place of one's own greatest strength, where the enemy's strength is at the greatest relative disadvantage. In the asymmetrical struggle to supersede capitalism, this means: mobilizing the material force that is stronger than the enemy's economic and techno-military power. And here the argument that the young Marx makes in the first passage cited is sound. It tells us that the biopolitical material force we need to mobilize is a conception of humanity that is superior to the form of humanity capitalism produces today. Moreover, it tells us that it is not merely a matter of formulating this vision of potential humanity in theory or a rigorously rational discourse. Nor is it a matter of programs and blueprints for future social forms, though these would also have to be produced by a revolutionary process. Mobilizing our material force means transforming our misery, disgust, rage and despair into the courage of a hope beyond any need for naïve optimism. It means forging an unbreakable hope that has pushed through the cage of the given humanity and now insists on more. It means mobilizing this hope radically, as affect

and urgent bodily tension, and organizing it as a weapon for struggle. This is not a morality, though it has to do with what is called *morale*. It also, obviously, converges with *solidarity*, though this, precisely speaking, is a product of shared experiences of struggle itself.

23.

It is not enough for a revolutionary process to open a pathway out of capitalism. This pathway would also have to be defended in a tumultuous and vulnerable period of radical reorganization. Any emergent revolutionary process will certainly face repression by the combined forces of capitalist power. In every nation, practical critics of the given order are immediately put under pressure by police and state security agencies, and often by paramilitary proxy forces as well. The security-surveillance state tirelessly scours the urban environment for signs of dissent and revolt. Today London offers a glimpse of the future: above the city, where every inch of every street is monitored by recording cameras, additional cameras and sensors keep watch from unmanned drones flying at high altitude. State techno-military resources are indeed formidable. In the jungles of Colombia, a careless call on a mobile phone has brought missiles raining down on guerrillas. But such advantages can never be absolute. Again, the problem is not how to defeat the forces of repression in a war of annihilation. It is rather how to prevent them from being used against the revolutionary process. In revolutionary situations, when people are massively in motion, it is the action of the military, rather than the police forces, that will be most decisive. The situation must be shaped in such a way that the soldiers in tanks don't shoot and the pilots in jets refuse to bomb. In this regard, it is worth remembering the conclusions of a dedicated student of insurrection and revolution. Lenin, trying to process the lessons of the Moscow uprising of 1905, tells us that "unless the revolution assumes a mass character and affects the troops, there can be no question of serious struggle." Great attention and effort must therefore be directed toward radicalizing soldiers. Their wavering "leads to a real *struggle for the troops*." Lenin was not infallible; his remarks arguably assume the war of annihilation that we know today must be avoided. But they point to the need for a minimum of strategic subtlety—something that so far has not been a conspicuous strength of the movement of movements. Obviously the forces of repression are diverse and call for a discriminating analysis. While some elite forces and rightwing paramilitaries will never waver or be won over, in general there are many wedges of division to drive. There will always be ways to neutralize conventional military forces without firing shots, through political education and fraternization aiming at insubordination and desertion. This direction can be pursued intelligently and inventively on many levels, if only it is effectively organized.

24.

Consider some indicative "social facts" about the military force most directly involved in global enforcement. The U.S. military sucks up roughly half of all military spending in the world—\$669 billion in 2008. Just over 1.4 million soldiers are on active duty contracts in the U.S. armed forces, with another 850,000 in reserve branches.

In class terms, this volunteer force is recruited from the exploited, oppressed and dominated. The capitalist class does not serve or send its children to serve. Enlisted troops come from the traditional working class, with African-American communities contributing more than their share (13 percent of the U.S. population but one in every four soldiers). Recruits typically have no more than a high school education. While patriotism is obviously demanded from those serving in the voluntary force, it is not necessarily a motivation for enlistment. For families of the working poor, it is often the one available pathway for secure employment and the possibility of advanced education for its children reaching adulthood. The officer class, as well as the National Guard and other reserve branches, comes from the so-called middle-class: it tends to be ethnically white and college or university educated. By 2008, some 1.6 million troops had returned to civilian life after serving in the dirty wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of those, some 300,000—roughly one in five—suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depression. Many tens of thousands no longer have health insurance and now find they have to fight to receive adequate medical treatment; a class action lawsuit representing veterans had to be filed against the government's Department of Veteran Affairs. This scandalous treatment of the men and women sent into combat in the nation's name is of course well-known to the troops on duty. Veterans from all wars make up 11 percent of the U.S. population, yet they account for 25 percent of those who are homeless. Currently, on any given day, some 200,000 U.S. veterans are sleeping in vehicles, tents, or on the streets. Half a million veterans were homeless at some point in 2006 and another half a million were deemed to be at high risk of chronic homelessness. Before the Iraq war, the suicide rate among soldiers on duty was less than one per day—a rate below the rate in the general population (22 suicides per 100,000). By early 2008, no less than five soldiers were trying to kill themselves every day, and now the actual suicide rate has for the first time since records began climbed above the suicide rate of civilians. Since the "war on terror" was launched, the U.S. military unsurprisingly has had trouble maintaining its volunteer forces. Consistent with the public mood at the time, patriotic enlistment surged after the attacks of September 11. But once combat began, recruitment and reenlistment levels have repeatedly failed to meet goals, despite ample enticements and coercions. (And it gets ugly: in return for a period as fodder for the war machine, Latino migrants are offered citizenship and legal status.) Hence the growing reliance on mercenary forces such as Blackwater Worldwide, which claims to be able to draw contractors from a pool of "21,000 former Special Forces operatives, soldiers and law enforcement agents." In the first three years of the dirty wars, at least 8,000 soldiers and sailors deserted. Some troops become politicized by their experiences. Some, on returning to civilian life, have joined a growing veteran's component of the anti-war movement. Clearly, to simply condemn soldiers as "murderers" or abandon them to their oppression by the war machine would be a reductionist piece of idiocy. For the radical Left, it would also be a fatal strategic blunder.

25.

Reiteration: Revolutionary strategy today can be neither a war of annihilation against the capitalist state nor a pacifist avoidance of confrontation as such. The first is suicidal, the second reformist. Neither offers a passage beyond the given global order. The struggle against capitalist power will need to mobilize and organize our material force and put it into action against the enemy obliquely and indirectly. The revolutionary process will have to refuse the terrain of the war of annihilation, where it would be crushed, and struggle instead on the terrain that poses and prefigures a superior vision of humanity. On that terrain, capitalism is vulnerable because it is, in its innermost logic, hostile to humanity—an anti-humanism.

26.

The precise forms of struggle—the specific organizations and counter-institutions, the tactics and local terms of confrontation—will have to be developed from the struggle itself and cannot all be foreseen or set down in advance. Radically democratic forms of socialism, libertarian communism and autonomist councilism offer the positive elements of a new society; although these could not be fully realized until capitalist power is broken on a global level, they can be prefigured and partially realized here and now, in the forms and organizations of struggle—assuming that the deficiencies of past models and attempts have been critically processed. But again, strong and durable organizations of some kind, adequate to conditions and capable of effective action, will have to be invented and built up from the remnants of inherited forms. Certainly these can be more radically democratic than the old vanguard party model. But they must also be more *effective* than the direction-refusing networks and ephemeral swarms of a still directionless movement of movements. At least, the basic strategy that this struggle will need to follow today begins to emerge clearly. It may be helpful at this point to recall, by way of a mediating image, the Aikido master, whose awesome poise is the result of *diligent training* but is also the condensation of his own *spiritual-material force*. Refusing to be drawn into a crude slugfest with a giant opponent, the master calmly anticipates the aggressor's attack. Once it is launched, he steps into it and, with great finesse, blends into its force and momentum so closely that he is able, without any visible exertion, to tip and unbalance it. Using the opponent's committed momentum against him, he then steps out of the attack, letting the opponent throw himself to the ground.

27.

The metaphor is not perfect. (What metaphor ever is?) The state is too strong to await its attack in this way. Against small groups in fixed locations, the state's special forces and paramilitary proxies can strike with devastating speed. But generally, strong mass movements are not easily destroyed by these kinds of surprise attacks. (The coup in Chile in 1973 and the mass arrests in Italy in 1979 are sobering exceptions.) In liberal democracies, state offensives are sure to be signaled ahead of time in numerous ways. The institutions and bureaucratic apparatuses of the enemy's war machines can be studied and anticipated. Their strategic and tactical doctrines generally are not

secret. Despite the rhetoric of the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs, beloved of Rumsfeld and company, state forces remain relatively slow and clumsy and are put into large-scale motion only as a result of public processes that normally are not terribly difficult to read or predict. Finally committed to a direction, the bureaucratic machines adjust and change only with difficulty, by overcoming their own internal momentum. Thus a skillfully conducted struggle built on a strong social base could first aim to constrain the war machine to the maximum extent possible, by working with critical media, radical scholars and left-leaning NGOs—and, yes, even despised politicians from the compromised parties of the Left, if something crucial can be gained—to organize relentless critical scrutiny and robust civil and human rights campaigns. In the current context, that would mean attacking the discredited but still dangerous “war on terror” and politics of fear in a much stronger way than established parties have been willing to do; this resurgence of military logic has to be rolled back and buried by going on the offensive and imposing stronger legal and institutional constraints on the security-surveillance state. At the same time, educational and fraternization work directed to the troops themselves would aim to counter and undo the effects of indoctrination and official ideology and to close the gap between the troops and the potential class in struggle. Granted, these would be difficult and long-term projects, but they indicate what serious anti-capitalist struggle would entail, how much there would be to do and organize. Were these goals pursued effectively in a context in which the main lines of social struggle continued to develop further, actualizing a class re-composition and reaching critical mass, then the revolutionary process could plausibly accompany and imbalance the military in all its major movements, because it will have merged with the troops to the degree that their loyalty to the state could no longer be taken for granted. At that point every political form of struggle that mobilizes a critical mass (demos and blockades, but above all occupations and general strikes) would potentially be an internal crisis for the forces of repression. Such a strategy does not aim at the literal annihilation of the enemy's military forces or the liquidation of the members of the class enemy. It aims rather to undo the machines of repressive enforcement by blending with and decomposing them. It aims to tire and slow these machines before they reach deadly top speed, by constraining, dividing and demoralizing them, by fighting for the real people who operate them. In this way, the enemy's force is neutralized, its power to damage us contained. For state terror must be neutralized; it cannot merely be ignored and by-passed.

28.

This disciplined dance of asymmetrical struggle, however, must be more than a tactic. The endgame, the strategy, must at all times remain clear. The pathway beyond capitalism is opened up in the first place by mobilizing the material force of a superior vision of humanity. And it is held open and advances only by continuously moving the ground of struggle to the biopolitical root, to the radical question of humanity as such. That is: how do we want to live, what kind of human beings do we want to be? (Not

like this, obviously, and not this kind of crippled, servile subjectivity.) To always return there, to the source of our material force, and to refuse direct combat with state war machines that, on their own terrain, cannot be defeated, is to struggle radically, strategically. For, there, on this terrain, according to these terms of engagement, we are at our strongest and the enemy at its weakest. Such is the material force that is ours, the one the enemy cannot match or overcome, strong as it is.

29.

But this also means: against capitalist power, anti-humanist forms of struggle are to be refused as far as possible. The problem of violence remains a source of divisive disputes within social movements and struggles today. Negri has compellingly elaborated a “right to resistance”: the exploited, oppressed and dominated always have the right to defend themselves from processes that are already violent. The radical part of the movement seems to have adopted, if only sometimes intuitively, the correlative principle of “autonomy of struggles”: no one has a right to tell others how they should conduct their struggle. In any case, violence will not always be avoidable—the state and its ferocious proxies will see to that. However, these two principles put no limits on violence and, taken alone and without qualification, are strategically problematic. They must be accompanied by a situational ethics that carefully takes into account relevant historical, contextual and strategic factors. Violence is a tactic, but the problem of violence is a strategic one. Precisely because it has to do with ethics and human relations, it goes to the biopolitical root and touches the question of humanity. Certainly, the given world is founded and maintained in violence, and the goal of liberating the world from the structural barbarism we now endure will not be reached by pacifism. Discussing violence in the revolutionary process, are we talking about resistance to domination in the Global North, or to relatively much more brutal oppression in the South? The moralizing condemnations of “terror” broadcast incessantly from the North tellingly ignore the differences in everyday global reality. Obviously, the official security discourse of the “war on terror” must refuse to acknowledge history and context, for these would quickly expose the overwhelming and asymmetrical reality of state terror. (And after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, we know what powers of violence state terror holds in store.) The scandal is that the Left of the parties willingly participates in this offensive discourse. A situational ethics would recognize a right to resist an intolerable context of violence, but would still be capable of asking critical questions in solidarity. From a strategic perspective, struggles cannot be absolutely autonomous. It matters, whether the means of struggle are capable of attaining their aim. If these means draw a struggle into a war of annihilation that cannot be won, then they fail strategically. And in the globalized context of a struggle to supersede capitalism, the difficult balance is between the means of local resistance and the better humanity the revolutionary process aims to release. If the gap between this end, and the means deployed in its name grows too great, then the struggle is discredited. This balance thus involves both ethics and strategy. It can only be assessed by taking into account the

whole context of struggle, its situated character. Ideally, the struggle for a better humanity would never deploy alienated means. In the real world, the untrue given, this is a demand for purity that cannot be met. But if the gap between end and means grows too glaring, the gap itself becomes a strategic factor.

30.

Defensive violence—when it is clearly that—protects the struggle and does not harm it. The official security discourse of the politics of fear suppresses history and context, in order to dress state terror with the claim of defensive violence. This inversion of reality is the ideological core of the “war on terror.” At this writing, it is sickeningly on display in the new carnage inflicted by the Israeli war machine on the people of Gaza. The Palestinians are resisting what, in context, is an ongoing imperialist occupation: they are suffering vicious forms of daily exploitation, oppression and domination by the Israeli state and its global backers. In this context, Israel’s attempt to justify its new massacre of Palestinians as a defensive response to comparatively ineffectual rockets fired by Hamas is grotesque. And the historical trauma and injustice behind this situation makes it even more painful. The state of Israel was created in part as a response to the Nazi genocide; the trauma of having been targeted and annihilated *as Jews* makes the claim to a state that would guarantee Jewish safety a compelling one. But there is also no denying that the Israeli state was created only by displacing Palestinians. Within a region dense with colonialist histories and neo-imperialist occupations, the Palestinians suffer the structural barbarism of Global North against South in extreme form. In view of the continuing everyday oppression against them in Gaza and the West Bank—including political detentions, colonizing settlements, plunder of water resources, apartheid walls and restrictions on mobility, in addition to direct violence by military force—their right to resist is clear and obvious. Moralizing criticism of their means of resistance from the North, without acknowledgment of history and without the solidarity with the Palestinian people that this situation calls for, is hypocritical and obscene. Anti-imperialist struggles in ugly situations of protracted and brutal occupation, exploitation and oppression tend inexorably toward brutal means. In such situations, the oppressed may be driven toward terror by the intensity of violence they endure and by the constraints imposed on their other means of resistance. This is disastrous, in human terms. But it is a disaster that the imperialist powers involved impose by their presence and activity and drag on by their persistence. Any serious discussion of terror has to take all of this into account. In general, any recourse to terror as a means of revolutionary struggle represents a strategic defeat, for it means that a struggle has been drawn into the logic of a war of annihilation—a terrain of escalating and possibly unlimited violence on which the state can deploy all its advantages of repressive power. In light of all this, a compelling ethico-strategic principle could be derived from the insight of the first passage by Marx, cited and elaborated above. The right to resist is incontestable, but terror as a means of struggle is to be refused wherever possible, for the simple and clear reason that it is strictly

incompatible with the possible humanity that is our greatest material force. To give way here is to mock and damage this humanity in ourselves and sap the force that is our radical biopolitical asset in struggle. And *that*, in the long run and overall, could only be bad strategy.

31.

With regard to struggles against forms of domination in the Global North, a relatively more restrained context in which loss of life is the exception, the debates over violence are different in character. They tend to open between those in the movements who, hoping to expand the social base of struggle, argue for non-violent or even strictly pacifist means, and activists prepared to engage in more direct forms of confrontation and action. As confirmed by the uprisings in the French *banlieues* in the fall of 2005 and in Greece at the end of 2008, as well as by the protests against the G8 summit in Germany in 2007, the consensus is fragile on the Left regarding the destruction of property and the tactics of so-called black blocs. The differences in position are routinely exploited by state forces, which use them to divide the movement and isolate militants for direct repression. Still, they can't be ignored and avoided by the movements; the only way to move toward resolution and a common position is by a process of critical discussion and debate—conducted respectfully, with patience instead of rancor. Debates on tactics, however, only make sense in light of a clarified strategy. On this problem, traditional revolutionary theory offers a reflected, non-moralizing position that remains perfectly valid today. It tells us that the pressure for radical social change has to be organized patiently, from the bottom up, into massive movements that progressively engage and mobilize the whole class in struggle. In parliamentary, liberal-democratic contexts, such movements should work openly and as far as possible by non-violent means. No shortcuts in this. When movements have reached critical mass and, pressing for change, have become seriously threatening to established power, then direct repression by the state is to be expected. The means of state violence will depend on the state and the context, but certainly can be broadly anticipated and prepared for. The spectrum runs from robocops with tear gas and water cannons, to clampdowns, curfews and states of emergency, to military coups and full-on dirty wars. But only with direct repression does the option of revolutionary violence become viable and urgent, because in that case a movement already massively in struggle (or a people under occupation) will know how to draw the lesson from the situation. It will conclude on its own that the limit of what can be achieved by legal and parliamentary means will have been reached, and that to go further the movement will have to defend itself from state forces. Short of this kind of scenario, direct actions by a militant minority will generally have, at best, a merely symbolic value. Depending on the context, they may be effective as tactics for spreading awareness and building support. And as many have noted, demos that do not end in clashes and cause no disruption at all seldom have impact. But if militant forms of protest impatiently run too far beyond their social base—and especially if their actions result in serious injuries or loss of life—then they risk alienating it and becoming an obstacle to the expan-

sion of struggle. That said, pacifism is not a viable strategic alternative. As typically advocated and practiced today, pacifism is merely a withdrawal from confrontation as such—an avoidance of the social antagonism. Ward Churchill has pointed out that the exemplary pacifists of twentieth-century struggles—namely Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.—did not avoid the confrontation with power; in fact they deliberately provoked and then calmly endured direct repression, in order to expose it. Admirable as this may be, it is too much to ask of anyone, and in any case offers no strategic pathway beyond capitalist power.

32.

In uprisings the problem is different. If an incident of police brutality or murder unexpectedly ignites a social explosion, as happened in France and Greece and rather routinely happens in the U.S.A and other places, then some significant part of the oppressed and dominated has temporarily reached the limit of what it can tolerate and has passed into open revolt. At this point the challenge for those in revolt is to organize their uprising into a durable political struggle, by reaching out to and allying with other local groupings and fractions of the exploited, oppressed and dominated, while internationalizing the struggle through networks of solidarity. In any case, a war of annihilation with the state is to be avoided at all costs. The Zapatistas in Chiapas offer an inspiring example of what can be achieved by responding to acute local social misery through a combination of patient, long-term political organizing, inventive and poetic deployment of the symbols of resistance and revolution, and savvy appeals for globalized solidarity. The EZLN appeared as if out of nowhere. With a declaration of armed struggle, it picked up the gun and donned masks to establish its political presence and visibility. But then it quickly drew back from the war of annihilation with the Mexican state. Even so, it probably was saved from fatal repression by the global scrutiny and solidarity organized in its support. However, this certainly doesn't mean that Zapatismo can simply be imported as a style into very different contexts. Moreover, the relation between the EZLN and the corrupt Mexican pseudo-democracy remains tense, fraught and ultimately constraining. There as everywhere, the endgame of revolutionary struggle would have to reach and pass through the point at which the state has lost all legitimacy among a clear majority of those called citizens. Radical transformation is unlikely so long as the spell of constitutionalism prevails. Historically, large parts of the exploited, oppressed and dominated have tended to identify deeply with their national "democracies." Beyond expressions of a disgust that most often proves merely superficial, they see these institutions as "theirs." There is still a stubborn core of faith, that these institutions will secure benefits for them and protect them. This identification—a legacy of a welfare state era that since then has reversed into its opposite—easily links up with the toxin of bad nationalism. Where democracy objectively ends and repression begins, the potential class in struggle will have to learn for itself how and why the liberal state belongs, not to it, but to its capitalist enemy. The strategic point, again, is that struggle has to be meticulously organized and to reach what, in context, is critical mass before it can exert effective pres-

sure for radical change and become a political factor of emancipation. This is true of revolution and also of every Leftist program aiming short of it.

33.

Our world degrades. This is where we are, the here and now. Crises loom, planetary misery is about to worsen. In our hearts and nerves and senses, as well as our thinking minds, we will experience the world as capitalism's failure. And yet, in this conjuncture, we are unprepared. We lack the organizations and strategy we need to cope with and overcome it. We may produce what is needed, under pressure of necessity, as our activity increasingly takes the form of struggle. Or we may not. It's not up to anyone in particular, although it's up to everyone as the sum of all of us. It's a dizzying prospect, a huge and frightening task, even to contemplate, the radical transformation of our whole social world. If we could, we would certainly prefer to avoid it. We might rather be satisfied to join or remain among the merely dominated, the great middle-class.

This undoubtedly was the prevailing shared hope, open or secret, a global common sense. We all want to better our lives materially, to ease our share of misery, add what we can to our share of comfort. As long as capitalism delivered that—as long as this promised way of life demonstrably existed somewhere and therefore seemed reachable—and as long as we could see nothing better on offer, then we gave it our tacit loyalty, resigned ourselves, took comfort as we could. We could bear our misery as a momentary condition—or even come to see our poverty as our own defect. But capitalism will not and cannot deliver this dream to all of us. It cannot turn the whole world into one big, reconciled, happily consuming middle-class. That promise was always a lie. The cost of securing this for even some of us has been continuing misery, and deprivation for most. The Global North was built and is sustained on the backs of the South; wherever the sweatshops relocate, they still are there. The antagonism divides and relentlessly produces its effects: competition, imperialism, war, genocide. Streets of gold, walls of tears; shantytowns and gated communities. And now also: depletion, the return of scarcity, ecological ruin, planetary meltdown. If we cannot expect our “standard of living,” as defined by capitalism, to go on rising, we at least will not accept that it should go into freefall. Should capitalism fail to protect the little we have, there will be revolt. The current global economic crisis has already produced the stirrings of uprising. But if we want out of this miserable picture, the given reality, it will only be by breaking its logic, by releasing the negative and critical force of a different humanity. Either we struggle out of barbarism, or we go under in it, time alone will tell. But if we struggle, then we had better win, for to lose would be terrible—truly terrible. We will see if our hope and courage in ourselves are stronger than our fears. Strategy can only point to a plausible pathway; it doesn't suffice. Only the massive reality of struggle itself—confirming or correcting assumptions and conclusions in a continuous feedback loop of global collective practice—could open and defend a passage out of capitalism. That said, the struggle needs to organize its strategic intelligence and capacity, as an open process nour-

ished from the bottom up but still aiming at an effective internationalist co-ordination of struggles. The recovery of strategic focus would be a necessary condition, a helpful step and contribution toward restarting an arrested process.

34.

The collective leap from necessity to freedom is not guaranteed. After the traumatic catastrophes of last century, the myths of automatic progress are dead. The dialectic that thinks and negates the given social reality is not an unfolding of certainty, written in advance—no permission for that kind of optimism. Nor can history any longer be naively conceived as a positivity that recovers all loss and disaster as returning profit, the final solution of an ultimate identity. Reconciliation—the resolution of the social antagonism—would rather be the condition for the long-sought liberation of difference and non-identity. Until then, we live and struggle in unfreedom, imperfectly. The refusal of exploitation, oppression and domination and the struggle to reorganize life according to other logics has to engage the given totality, the whole global nexus of social relations and processes, tendencies and counter-tendencies, potentials and constraints—all so many force-fields that are incalculable in any complete sense because they are irreducibly open and in perpetual motion. Between necessity and partial freedom, structure and agency, no scenario is inevitable. We make our own history, but how we can do it and with what results, we can only ever learn by risking the struggle. Promises and predictions about the outcomes of strategy are speech-acts, no more or less: factors striving to become facts, rather than givens in advance. (If, due to the global economic crisis and shrinking demand for commodities, the sweatshops begin to close, what will the numerically awesome Chinese workers do? This is a strategic question no one can pretend to answer with certainty.) What we can know is this: “humanity” names what is at stake, nothing less. This struggle has been going on for centuries, and it will continue, because the antagonism persists and we bear it in our bodies. And because by opposing it, by naming it as the enemy and living accordingly, we discover and liberate some of the negative humanity we also embody. The better humanity that could emerge only by remaking the world more humanely is nevertheless grounded in the social realities we now endure. We don't get there, except from here. That is sometimes difficult to see and remember. The attempted passage beyond capitalism has already been a long one, with many false starts and many turnings through terrible defeats that still throb like open wounds. Yet this is the way, our indestructible material force, however it appears, moment to moment. This is the revolutionary process Marx saw and fought for in one of its forms, the process that criticizes itself constantly, interrupts itself continuously in its own course, falls, gets up, wanders, returns, learns, forgets, learns again, always seeking and sometimes finding the openings in social reality, always pushing against the given with a radical material force, until once more “a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: *Here's the rose, the moment of truth; here dance, the leap begins!*”

Alonzo Alcanzar tells us that he “would like to be, not a painter, but a person who sometimes paints, among many other things.”