

The Breath of the Possible

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He was surrounded by angry patriots with pepper spray and batons at the ready. To hop down would be to take a beating and maybe a felony charge, so he did the only thing he could: he breathed deep, lifted his arms, and flung himself straight out over the cops and the crowd, stage-diver style. The crowd let out a collective frightened gasp. It was the shocked response of people watching something so daring it looked, at first glance, suicidal.... My heart stopped too in that moment. It seemed both lightning quick and eternal, that one second when the flying anarchist hovered horizontally in the air. When he fell to earth, landing in the arms of his comrades and escaping the police, everything felt different, like we were living in the pages of history, as though in that moment there was a crystal clear delineation of past and future. Something had just Happened...the problems in the world had looked impossible before.... In that incredibly bold leap over the heads of the riot police, the option of saving the world from the jaws of destructive, violent capitalism seemed possible somehow. One quick, bold move—it made other acts of amazing audacity seem possible...if that flying anarchist taught me nothing else, it was that when shit looks absolutely impossible, don't worry. Don't stop to analyse too much. Be courageous. Do what they don't expect. Take a leap. Anything is possible.—Sophia Delaney, “Anarchists Can Fly,” in *Notes from Nowhere* (Ed.). *We Are Everywhere*, 2003.

In her account of this activist's daring leap of faith to escape from the top of a flagpole after having replaced the American flag with a black and red flag, Delaney focuses on what has been an important element in the global justice movement's understanding of itself and its actions: the importance of joy, desire, and mythic moments of potent affect. The focus

on these moments owes much to a particular thread of radical theory, which, orienting itself around the concept of festival, found a potential in these moments, and sought to mine it.

From the Surrealists to the Situationists to Reclaim the Streets, throughout the twentieth century an eclectic set of theorists and artists have picked up the gauntlet of festival and developed a line of theory that connects festival's effervescent moment to revolutionary social change. In picking up this thread, they argued that the festival's participatory aesthetic and religious experience held a catalytic potential untapped by the traditional left. Such experience, they argued, was absent in modern society, and its return held the potential for revolutionary social action.

However, it is crucial that the object of both their activism and theory was an experience that, as affectivity, was to some extent beyond rational analysis. This complicates their role as activists in creating such irrational moments of experience as well as their role as theorists attempting to understand the relation between these moments and social revolution.

Between 1937 and 1939, a group calling itself the College of Sociology met intermittently in the café of the Palais Royal and in a bookstore on the rue Guy Lussac in Paris. It was formed by Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois and was influenced by both the new sociology of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, as well as the Surrealist movement of the 1920s. Like the Surrealists they championed a euphoric subjective experience that was radically different than the dull, profane experience of modern life, and which, they hoped, would revolutionise it.

Instead of the Surrealist experience of "the marvelous," they termed their experience "the sacred," borrowing from Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. For Durkheim, the bounds of what is "other" are always socially determined, and the sacred is experienced as part of a social ritual of transgression. This logic of otherness (to which Bataille gave the name "the heterogeneous"—"the science of the altogether other") finds social expression in the exuberant abandon of religious festivals.¹ The festival's transgression of taboos through the loss of goods and self was intertwined with the personal transcendence of the sacred. Such festivals were exemplified by the "potlatch," which Bataille's tutor Mauss had identified in numerous cultures, or by the ritual sacrifices of the Aztecs. The sacred was then not only a transcendent subjective experience, but also a social phenomenon.

Like the Surrealists, the College of Sociology saw their project as connected to that of revolution. In his essay "The Notion of Expenditure," Bataille argued that this sacred festival experience would make itself felt in modernity through a violent proletarian revolution, inspired not by economic contradictions but by potent emotional forces and inspiring mythic images. The sacred was both end and means. Aside from their Surrealist dream of a

society reshaped by the force of the sacred, the College understood radical activity towards this end as bound up with an emotional, affective experience that could not be rationalised. Bataille's heterology was an attempt to engage with this experience in theoretical terms.

Heterology stressed the *primacy* of the other. The sacred was an experience of the unknowable, of pure, irrational affect. Andre Breton compared the sublime experience to an orgasm and a religious transcendence. For Bataille, a late Freudian and briefly a priest-in-training before he lost his faith, it was also a *petit mort*. Rather than the Surrealists' union of the real and the sur-real, Bataille read such experience as a radical atheistic experience of self-loss, a brush with the void. He saw the drive towards otherness, even towards the other of death, as fundamental to the psychological and social organisation of society. Giving the example of a French village, he argued that it was not by accident that it was organised with the church and its graveyard at its centre, and that this centre was the place of sacred experience and religious festivals.

Despite this fundamental centrality, otherness is always that which is outside and cannot be contained by any totalising theoretical knowledge. Bataille's total experience of loss could not be logically built towards: its orgasmic eruption of desire appears in his writing as both the basis and the end of revolutionary activity. His heterogeneity breaks with the Hegelian theory of the dialectic that had been an influence on early Surrealism. Bataille's system began with a constellation of binary oppositions like self-other, profane-sacred and bourgeoisie-proletariat. However, where the dialectic looks to the resolution and synthesis of these binaries, Bataille maintained his interest in the transgressive moment when the negative value triumphs. It is at this point of the sacred's "impossible" experience of the self experiencing its own loss to the other, that Bataille takes his own leap of faith and asserts the negative moment as self-justifying. It is an impossible third space that attempts to step beyond and outside of the dialectic: an other which refuses recuperation.

Advancing a theory of the undoing of theoretical totality is a rather contradictory move. It presupposes a more totalising theory that can encompass this undoing: what Bataille termed "a system of thought exhausting the totality of the possible."²² Bataille often acknowledges the contradiction: "should I say that under these conditions I sometimes could only respond to the truth of my book and could not go on writing it?"²³ The primacy of the other can only be grounded in the evidence of the experience of the encounter with the other itself. Kojève would criticise the circularity of Bataille's argument, saying that he was putting himself "in the position of a conjurer who expected his own tricks to make him believe in magic."²⁴ In reaching the limit of reason, Bataille was forced to turn to faith in the sacred. Faith is an abandonment of the critical self to an idea, and Bataille had abandoned

himself to the idea of abandonment. Having seen Surrealism's "mad love" itself as a matter of self-loss, crisis, and undoing, Bataille allowed himself to fall in love with the falling itself.

This became an even more torturous theoretical knot when the College went on to assert that the return of these experiences to modern life was allied to, or even completed, the revolutionary project of the Communists. The theoretical impossibility of the sacred experience found in festivals, which Bataille had put his faith in, was also to be the basis of revolutionary social change. How could such change be built towards or encouraged? Was it a question of simply waiting for the spontaneous explosion of the sacred, or could it be brought somehow into everyday life in the meantime? How could the eruption of the sacred be made *possible*?

This created a problem for the College: how could they accomplish and articulate this leap of faith? How could such a critical impossibility be discussed without betraying it? The College's answer to this problem came in the form of myth. The revolution, bound up with the vertiginous experience of the festival, would take the form of an orgasmic eruption of joy and desire inspired by a powerful investment of emotion in myth. But, as the College turned to focus on myth as a means to radical social change, this faith in sacred experience translated into a flat opposition between activist engagement and theoretical understanding.

The College, like many sociologists of their time, worked with a model of society indebted to natural science. They understood the sacred as the centrifugal force at the centre of any social group and developed a novel notion of activism that entailed the unleashing of this force. Activism then was not simply a matter of forcing political change by practical means, but of playing agent or catalyst in setting loose an unstoppable infection or chain reaction. The College intended to spread a sacred "virus" through the social body that would bring the full explosion of the sacred ever nearer. The sacred, which they argued was both a profound form of transcendent communion and the heart of community, was also closely tied to primitive methods of communication. Activism meant creating myths; myth would be the inspiring, viral agent through which the sacred was communicated and activated in society. The College credited Georges Sorel as an influence, and they shared his understanding of myth as a means of "acting on the present."⁵ Myth tapped into the irrational psychological forces at the heart of the sacred, "the primordial longings and conflicts of the individual condition transposed to the social dimension."⁶ Myth's stoking of these desires would move subjects to action, drawing them into eruptions of sacred sociality. It was a psychological activism: where the Surrealists had conceived of their "revolution" as a matter of pure sentiment and subjectivity, the College attempted, through myth, to tie these sentiments to a more material notion of revolution. But, as they did this, Bataille found himself back in the tricky

position of having to relinquish theoretical enquiry. For myth's activism to be effective in sweeping one up in the experience of the sacred, one had to first believe in the myth. This meant that before he could take on society, Bataille would first have to put his own faith in the myth he had just created and leap into the impossible.

While this convoluted logic may sound rather esoteric, this turn to myth for the inspiration to action is readily evident today. The global justice movement often engages this territory of myth and powerful experience: consider the movement's self-representations, in its exciting and inspiring accounts of protests and actions, not least when it comes to the "great battles" of Genoa, Seattle, Prague, and London, often given iconic monikers like "J18." There has been a particular focus on collections of powerful, first-hand accounts of the experience of these events. Prevalent among these is, for example, the now familiar photographic image of the lone, heroic masked figure, standing perhaps before the massed police, perhaps by a burning barricade, with a flag held high, or a tear gas canister about to be returned to the police. For a group like CrimethInc, there is even a self-conscious theoretical embrace of myth: "So what can we embrace in place of history? Myth... When we tell tales around the fire at night of heroes and heroines, of other struggles and adventures...we are offering each other examples of just how much living is possible."⁷

In the College's time, sacred experience and myth were politically tricky theoretical tools. If the College wanted a perfect example of the social expression of the sacred as myth-inspired irrational effervescence in the streets, they had to look no further than the events of *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, only fifteen months after the College's first declarations. Sorel, whose ideas about myth they drew upon, himself swayed politically from far left to far right. Caillois observed, "At present, all the movements that show mythological characteristics display a real hypertrophy of this festival or ritual function." But the examples he gave were "the Hitlerian movement or the Ku Klux Klan."⁸ Engaging with myth's political ambiguity, the College argued that these forces had been all too effectively appropriated by the Right while at the same time being completely ignored by the deterministic materialism of the orthodox Left.

Since the global justice movement's inception, and its articulation of the ideas of festival, joy, and myth, our own times, too, have become darker and more pessimistic. Bataille's co-location of sacred experience and sudden social change might describe the agonistic, orgasmic moments of political and religious martyrdom central to fundamentalist terrorism. It might even be used to reflect upon the mythic status of September 11th and its accompanying images, in the discourses of both Islamic and American fundamentalism, which put faith before critical analysis in the service of reaction.

Eagleton does just this in *Holy Terror* when he argues that "Terrorism

is...a Dadaist or Surrealist ‘happening’ pushed to an unthinkable extreme.”⁹ He claims that the social realisation of sublime experience comes in the form of an unambiguous terror, in the “shock and awe” of the terrorist act, as “the Real stages an impossible appearance in reality itself.”¹⁰ Similarly, Retort argue that the terrorists of September 11th embraced and hijacked capitalism’s own logic of mythic representation, understanding only too well its cold and cruel logic: “Terror can take over the image-machinery for a moment—and a moment, in the timeless echo chamber of the spectacle, may now eternally be all there is.” After September 11th, an influential American conservative think tank asserted that it was now a question of winning “the battle of the story.” Some activists, such as those of the *smart meme* project,¹¹ have responded to these developments by asserting the need to build new counter-myths, to “create effective memes—self-replicating units of information and culture...viral by nature.”¹² In light of all this, the College’s engagement with the political ambiguity of myth seems uncannily timely. How are we to understand the radical potential of myth and affect in this context, when the potential of festival seems to have been outflanked by contesting social forces?

Eighteen years after the College’s last meeting, another small but far more famous group of theorists, the Situationist International, took up many of the College’s concerns, and focused particularly on the competing political uses of these irrational forces. The Situationists, reacting against the College’s turn from history to myth, tended to see such representations as a form of reification. Looking back on Surrealism’s embrace of myth, Raoul Vaneigem wrote:

The “spectacle” is all that remains of the myth that perished along with unitary society: an ideological organisation whereby the actions of history upon individuals themselves seeking...to act upon history, are reflected, corrupted and transformed into their opposite—into an autonomous life of the non-lived.¹³

The “spectacle” was the term Guy Debord developed to understand capital’s ability to recuperate new forms of thought and representation, created by people like the Surrealists, in terms of the totality of alienating capitalist relationships pervading society. Debord attempted to grasp this complex social totality of division and contradiction by employing a powerfully dialectical Marxism, and it is interesting to see the Situationists’ attempt to theorise and create autonomous spaces of inspiring, aesthetic experience in light of Bataille’s earlier battle against Hegel’s logic for an affective, subjective space.

Although myth had become spectacle, the Situationists did not give up on the realm of affect. They described their own project for creating spaces

outside of and opposed to the totality of the spectacle as the creation of “situations.” Defined as “a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organisation of a unitary ambiance and a game of events,”¹⁴ a situation was an affective experience defined by participation rather than spectatorship. This space was understood in terms different than those of the College of Sociology. Rejecting the College’s Freudianism and Nietzscheanism, the Situationists turned away from a sublime experience of crisis and apocalypse and back to the early Surrealists’ demand for a unifying and total aesthetic experience. The total, playful re-determination of social organisation; the ultimate situation would be the revolution itself and the new society it embodied.

When it came to describing the possibility for an immediate, total life outside and against the spectacle, Debord’s account of reification made things very difficult for the Situationists. Because the spectacle’s logic could turn any partial opposition into a passively consumed image, the Situationists decided it was essential to initiate a total refusal of the society of the spectacle. But, having set this scene, it became increasingly difficult for the Situationists to move from instances to a totality of refusal. How could a situation lead to a revolution when, its partial nature allows it to be reified by capitalist social relations and made complicit with the spectacle? Total revolt seemed both necessitated and precluded by the spectacle’s power to recuperate anything short of absolute refusal. The Situationists portrayed myth’s affectivity as caught in the dead hands of the spectacle and yet also as the potent force at the centre of a new world. The spectacle and the situation were represented within their theory as two competing totalities that could not be reconciled. They went so far as to define radical social change as a competition between artists and authorities over who would develop new technologies of conditioning. Like the College’s sacred, the situation had become an impossible space.

A common critique of this emphasis on totality is that it is disabling and that it had an awkward relationship both to the Situationists’ focus on aesthetics and to their avowed council communism. Jean Barrot’s 1979 *Critique of the Situationist International* argues that “The S.I. explained everything from the spectacle” and, as a result, “one does not know where it comes from, who produces it...by what contradiction it lives and may die.”¹⁵ In other words, this focus on the spectacle is at the expense of the real subject who produces capital: the working class. While the Situationists maintained that the spectacle only *appeared* determining and all pervasive, their rigorously totalising theory seemed to presuppose that it was both.

The Situationists’ analysis of the power of the spectacle only presents half the picture. There is a discontinuity between this analysis and their insistence on the role of the active subject. Caught in this gulf, the Situationists found themselves in an impossible position. In order to cross this gap, they

undertook their own leap of faith. To quote the graffiti on the walls of Paris in 1968, they said it was necessary to “demand the impossible.”

This placement of the affective moment alongside the impossibility of the theoretical subject is not so much symptomatic of an impasse as it is a leap of faith beyond the limits of their theory. Putting faith in the unscripted realm of the situation means putting faith in the realm of possibility. It was crucial in this respect that the experience of the situation, like the sacred, was a total experience that coincided with a totality of new social relationships. The transcendent terms of aesthetics and religion provided a language for possibility that theory did not. Vaneigem’s most poetic moments often coincide with his most urgent demands for a new life:

People are crushed under the wardrobe.... “The rationality of the wardrobe is always the best,” proclaim the thousands of books published every day to be stacked in the wardrobe. And all the while everyone wants to breathe and no one can breathe, and many say, “We will breathe later;” and most do not die, because they are already dead. It is now or never.¹⁶

As a result of this move, the Situationists notoriously lent themselves to heavy mythologisation—a tendency inherited by the global justice movement. As I write this, in the run up to the protests against the 2005 G8 meeting in Scotland, the literature of the groups involved stays true to this spirit: The Leeds May Day Group assert, “Our experiments in new ways of being are limited only by our imagination.”¹⁷ The flyers of the Dissent! Network echo this aesthetic of potential, claiming “Everywhere there are willing accomplices desiring to live our adventures” and they bring a Surrealist slant to *Zapatismo* when they state that “As we walk, we dream.”¹⁸ This inheritance is clearest in those groups most openly influenced by Situationist approaches, such as CrimethInc, whose flair for lyrically encapsulating radical ideas rivals Vaneigem’s own. What these groups have copied is the Situationists’ *style*, which more coherently captured radical possibility than their theoretical analysis.

More orthodox strains of Marxism would no doubt see such approaches as nothing more than bare-faced utopianism. Indeed, mass actions are sometimes described as “orgasms of history” that can seem so spontaneous that it becomes difficult to engage with them theoretically.¹⁹ However, the experience of another collection of radicals, the Italian autonomists of the 1960s and 1970s, can help us see that rather than simply constituting an ahistorical utopianism, the openness of dreaming and asking questions is in fact tied to practical political engagement, to walking.

Rather than a distinct group like the College or the Situationists, *autonomia* was a diffuse and heterogeneous nationwide movement that came

into existence in Italy in the early 1970s. One current within it, however, the network of *Autonomia Operaia* (Workers' Autonomy) explored the contested subjective space of resistance and domination that concerned these other groups, but did so not by referring to aesthetic or religious language, but by remaining thoroughly inside the Marxist lexicon, bending and redefining its terminology to rewrite Marxism from within.

The Situationists understood the subject as realising itself as fundamentally other to and outside of the domination of capital. But *Autonomia Operaia*, for example in Antonio Negri's theory of the socialised worker, understood the subject as necessarily moving and resisting *within* a system of domination that squeezes the subject just as it depends on it. This difference can be more clearly understood in terms of the theory of alienation which each employs.

The Situationists' approach rested on the Marxist concept of reification drawn from *Capital* and developed by Lukács, whereby "social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them."²⁰ Reification was a theory of alienation based on an analysis of the logic of the commodity, and *The Society of the Spectacle* generally understood society as divided between the passive subject who consumes the spectacle and the reified spectacle itself. This entailed the knotty problem, described above, of returning to the "impossible" totality of the subject outside of the spectacle.

Autonomia Operaia was instead informed by the turn, in the earlier Italian Marxist current of *operaismo*, to Marx's *Grundrisse* and the development of the real subsumption of labour in order to grasp capital's ability to enclose the world outside work. Marx argued that capitalism is characterised by the development from formal subsumption, in which production remains structurally unchanged but a capitalist collects the surplus value, and real subsumption, in which the new industrial relations of production subsume labour more thoroughly to the production of surplus value and in which workers become automatons who are only one—albeit conscious—part of a productive machine. The theory of the social factory, or the socialised worker, understood the increased time and space outside the workplace not as a realm outside the productive economy devoted to *consumption* and the reificatory logic of the commodity, but as an expansion of the realm of the *production* of surplus value. The Situationists saw all formerly sovereign areas of life as dominated by the reifying logic of commodity *consumption* in the society of the spectacle. *Autonomia Operaia* saw these areas instead as an expansion of the factory's alienated relations of *production* in the social factory.

This may seem even more dystopian than the Situationists' vision: it does away with the idea of creative space "outside" the relations of capital, however problematic. The College's theory of myth had grasped how fas-

cism spread first not through the rigid structures of the state and economy, but through affective and informal networks and relations. Similarly, the Situationists' notion of radical subjectivity is often read as anticipating the 1968 rebellion, proliferating in spaces invisible to the objective understanding of the state, unions, and Communist party. The social factory thesis now shows capital itself operating on these networks, relying on the subject's formerly autonomous social spaces for the production of surplus value.

However, there was also a positive side to this vision. From this perspective, the Situationists can be seen as granting the spectacle too much power to autonomously recuperate dissent, because they tend to ignore the working class as the subject that actually produces the spectacle and instead focus exclusively on the commodity relation. The autonomist perspective breaks with the Situationists' obsessive concern for totality. The Situationist subject, acting creatively outside the spectacle, but then recuperated by it, is replaced by the autonomist subject whose creativity is caught within and compromised by the machinic relations of the social factory. So, although the real subsumption thesis left *Autonomia Operaia* in a similar position to the College and the Situationists—insofar as these groups' total opposition between the subject and the objective world placed them in an impossible situation—*Autonomia Operaia*'s positioning of the subject “within and against” capital, and as productive *of* capital, put them in a position that was no longer impossible but “cramped.” Thoburn reads this cramped position in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a minor literature:

Deleuze and Guattari argue that cramped, impossible conditions compel politics, for if the most personal individual intrigue is always traversed by a wealth of determining social relations, then these social relations must be engaged with, disrupted, politicised, if anything is to be lived.²¹

This moment of engagement and disruption (which Negri terms “self-valorisation”) is a leap where the subject asserts itself against the determining social relations of capital and instead constructs others. Despite *Autonomia Operaia*'s thorough analysis of the real subsumption of labour, Negri, recalling the Situationists' impossible demand, asks us to presuppose a radical separateness of labour from these relations when it comes to moving beyond them, even if this entails oversimplifying matters:

I see it as a moment of intensive rooting within my own separateness. I am other—as also is the movement of that collective praxis within which I move... It is only by recognising myself as other, only by insisting on the fact of my differentness as a radical totality that I have the possibility and the hope of a renewal.²²

But despite this request it is clear that, for Negri, this is not a utopian faith in the sacred or the aesthetic but a positive matter of history and materialism:

It seems to me fundamental to consider the totality of the process of proletarian self-valorisation as alternative to, and radically different from, the totality of the process of capitalist production and reproduction. I realise that I am exaggerating the position, and oversimplifying its complexity. But I also know that this “intensive road,” this radical break...is a fundamental experience of the movement as it stands today.²³

For Negri, theoretical oversimplification in describing this leap allows a more accurate and complex account of material practice. Especially as, in his engaged writing, the urgency of the move *towards* practice is paramount in validating his theory. For example, in *Marx Beyond Marx*, Negri ascribes a scientific methodology to Marx that might seem a little unconventional:

It is not simply what permits a passive construction of the categories on the basis of a sum of historical acquisitions; it is above all what permits a reading of the present in the light of the future... To take risks, to struggle. A science should adhere to that. And if occasionally one is an ape, it is only in order to be more agile.²⁴

In this context of an agile theory that leaps in order to accommodate the movement of practice, Negri put his faith in the social phenomena around him that illuminated his writing. “The methodological precondition of an initial radical rupture is empirically corroborated by an extensive documentation.”²⁵ The “leap” of these moments of subjective assertion is not a practice simply opposed to theory. It embodies the intimate material negotiations of an engaged, critical subject. The accompanying theoretical leap in describing them is not a matter of utopianism but of historical engagement.

Communism for Negri does not take the form of a prefigurative or post-revolutionary totality, but is embedded in the open material practice of the movement. It is a cramped, not impossible, practice.²⁶ Where Bataille and the Situationists resisted the logic of the dialectic by seeking to persist in the moment of the “other,” *Autonomia Operaia* instead navigated in the streams of becoming. In either case, the elusive, radical quality these theorists are trying to describe is creative *potential*. For Negri, the more Marxist sounding “invention power”²⁷ replaces the Surrealist overtones of “creativity” and “desire” in describing the movement from virtuality to materiality.

In describing practices of self-valorisation, the College of Sociology and the Situationist International had recourse to the language of religion and

aesthetics. This was a leap of faith away from the aspects of their Marxist theory that suggested such a venture should not be possible. As we have seen in Negri's engagement with Marx, such leaps can be seen not as a turning away from reality, but as intimately related to the overdetermined social conditions of contemporary capitalism. We can recast the impossible gap, more practically, as a cramped space.

Within the global justice movement, groups like the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) or the Tute Bianche embody minor moments of audacity, exploration, and experiment. We can see the minoritarian "performed" by CIRCA as they embrace the figure of the scapegoat or the fool whose exclusion enables social renewal. For Bataille's scapegoat or Deleuze's minor, this exclusion entails a peculiar joyful affect. In the very moment of making themselves vulnerable and open to failure, appearing as ridiculous "bare" subjects, without guard or pretence, the clowns embrace possibility and creativity. "I may be different—a poor scapegoat...an object of ridicule...BUT—you-are-me.... Activist culture is often paralysed by the desire to get things right. The fear of not creating the perfect action/campaign that will change the world.... Yet many classic clown acts are founded on the idea that from failure comes opportunity."²⁸

Indeed, despite the great "stories of the battle" of Prague and Genoa, one might sense a recent minoritarian turn in the Global justice movement. In contrast to the apocalyptic sublime that Bataille theorised between two world wars or the Situationists' epic quest for a "Northwest passage," beyond the twentieth century, the global justice movement is often more in synch with the profoundly quotidian folk-mythology of the single steps of the Zapatistas' "Walking, we ask questions." This minor perspective provides a way to think the movement that gets us from here to there, the movement which is, of course, the material substance of the larger, audacious leaps of history which we see crystallised in the myths of Seattle and J18.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare used the metaphor of an old mole to bring the spectre of Hamlet's father back down to earth. Marx borrowed this metaphor to understand the virtuality of the spectre of Communism as grounded in the subterranean tunnels of the working class' cycle of struggles. Perhaps the old mole can also materialise "the breath of the possible" that Breton described in his Surrealist tracts and bring our mythology of sacred and sublime moments down to earth too. We can see the minor as grasping the movement of Marx's old mole, not only as an "other" rupturing the surface of everyday life to emerge in visible, potent experiences of self-valorisation (in 1848, 1968, or 1998), but also as an intimate, burrowing recompositional mechanism, digging away at a series of Northwest passages within and against capital.

Aesthetics can create possibilities for thought. Deleuze argued that the Surrealists' method of montage, developed by the cinema, made possible a

new way to think of movement beyond what he saw as the false movement of dialectics. It is not surprising then that some theorists have chosen the Surrealist aesthetic as a way to represent radical possibility against the limits of Marxist theory. The Situationists' and the College's leap of faith used aesthetics, which lends itself to describing the impossible and the virtual, as a way to talk about their "impossible" situation. Employing dialectics made it impossible for these theorists to grasp movement, to move from instances of refusal to total revolution. *Autonomia Operaia's* move away from totality allows us to see the theoretical leap of asserting subjective experience as an attempt to cross the gap to material practice. Similarly inspiring accounts, such as that of our flying anarchist, delineate the possibility of a (in this case quite literal) line of flight just as they describe the material praxis of the movement of movements.

The open nature of these vital moments of affect allows us to grasp the virtuality and possibility of the space of practical political engagement. Thus, we can see, in the figure of the minor, a way to navigate the space between bare-faced utopianism and blank impossibility. As Delaney's account describes, these vital moments of affect are bound up with the creation of possibilities, with living in the pages of history, and in the cramped space of capitalist social relationships.

Notes

- 1 Georges Bataille, "The Pineal Eye," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–39*, ed. Allan Stockl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 84.
- 2 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy—Vols. 2 and 3: The History of Eroticism, Sovereignty*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 14.
- 3 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy—Vol. 1: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1988), 11.
- 4 Roger Caillois, "Interview with Gilles Lapouge, June 1970," in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 143.
- 5 Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. Thomas Ernest Hulme and Jack Roth (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1950), 144.
- 6 Roger Caillois, "Introduction," in *The College of Sociology 1937–39*, ed. Denis Hollier (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 10.
- 7 CrimethInc Ex-Workers Collective, *Days of War, Nights of Love: CrimethInc For Beginners* (CrimethInc Free Press, 2001), 113.
- 8 Roger Caillois, "The Function of Myth," in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, 119.
- 9 Terry Eagleton, *Holy Terror* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University

- Press, 2005), 91.
- 10 Ibid., 47.
 - 11 Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 28.
 - 12 See <http://www.smartmeme.com>
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