



# On the Oakland Commune





# Under the riot gear

We would therefore suggest that *Gemeinwesen* [community] be each time substituted for *State*; it is a good old German word that can very well do service for the French *Commune*. (F. Engels, letter to A. Bebel concerning the 'Gotha program', London, March 18–28, 1875)<sup>1</sup>

Both 'war machine and care machine', the Oakland Commune extended itself over the course of five weeks and one square. Generating both surprise and admiration, it peaked with the strike of 2 November 2011. This was only the second time since 1946 that there had existed the possibility of a general strike in the US. The previous one had also taken place in Oakland.

From its inception, the Oakland Commune had to come to terms with the reproduction of the proletariat in a way that overcame the preceding struggles and the other Occupy movements. Confrontation with labour was both its peak and its swansong.

The following text is an attempt to show the contours of the camp's five weeks, as well as the days of action which followed. These are contours which underlie the limits of this struggle. Limits are always intrinsic to a movement and they are its own dynamic. One should not see them as limitations. We do not therefore intend to bring an external moral judgment to bear on the situation, but to understand the dynamics of the struggle. If we interest ourselves specifically with the Oakland Commune, it is only to the extent that, according to its specificity, it was the unfolding of a front of attack sharper than that of the other Occupy movements. At the same time, we will focus on it as a singular event which allows us to understand the general nature of Occupy and also, more broadly, the movement of plaza occupations. Understanding the limits of this struggle means, therefore, understanding the dynamics of a *moment* of the general crisis of accumulation. This crisis, in all of its moments, carries within itself a horizon. Within this is contained the abolition of the present state of capitalist relations: the 'real movement which abolishes the present state of things', alongside its counter-revolution. Communism as the horizon of the current cycle of struggles is for us communisation, abolition of all the classes by the proletariat and communism as an immediate process. This horizon is for us neither a state of affairs which is to be established nor an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. The 'existing conditions', those of crisis and of the disciplinarisation of the proletariat, will find their abolition in the generalisation of the attacks against the limits peculiar to each movement, a generalisation that must necessarily manifest itself as a rupture with these same conditions.

## *The City*

Downtown Oakland, after having been a bastion of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, fell under the directorship of major business leaders in the 1930s. After WWII and the resulting mass immigration to the city caused primarily by the new war jobs in ports and factories, and alongside the general strike of 1946, the city witnessed the beginning of a crushing of the

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<sup>1</sup> Translation revised.

labour movement and the urban development of Oakland which enables us to understand the origins of the Commune.

Throughout the post-war period Blacks emigrated in the hope of finding a steady job at the same time that growing unemployment began to darken the horizon. 'In the old South blacks could be cooks and waiters but couldn't eat in public restaurants', whilst in the Bay Area, 'you could eat in the cafeteria, but you couldn't work'.<sup>2</sup> From 1962 the restructuring of the port, the replacement of a large portion of labour power with machines and the implementation of the container system created an unskilled labour force and a surplus population. That surplus was segregated into the ghettos designed for it,<sup>3</sup> whilst at the same time, the Federal government was democratising housing for whites.

Whilst the Black population was growing in number throughout the '50s and '60s, it became enclosed within West Oakland. The white population deserted the neighbourhood; racial harassment and the beating of Blacks became a common pattern of behaviour amongst the Oakland Police Department (OPD). The renewal of the Bay Area Rapid Transit System (BART, which would later connect Oakland to San Francisco via an underground network) was the final act in the destruction of any business activity in West Oakland. In 1958 the construction of the Cyprus Freeway achieved the separation of West Oakland from Downtown, displacing residents and creating a clear barrier between the two neighbourhoods. All freeway construction after this would only continue separating the city into different neighbourhoods, or, rather, to divide Oakland into ghettos and rich suburbs.

After the early '60s, the night-life had moved to San Francisco and most shops in West Oakland had closed down. As industry moved out, the area's unemployment rose to double the national average. The so-called 'war on poverty' program conducted by Lyndon Johnson, despite taking West Oakland as a case in point, did nothing to alter the exclusion of Blacks from the labour and housing markets.

By the end of the decade the port had the second largest container capacity in the world, and the Black Panther Party was implementing, amongst other things, the free breakfast program. The organisation was born in 1967 carrying out anti-police armed protection and, up until 1972-73 when the FBI carried through the COINTELPRO program which succeeded in dissolving the party in disparate gangs focused on the self-destruction of the

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2 C. Rhomberg, *No There There. Race, Class and Political Community in Oakland*, University of California Press, p. 119. On Oakland, see first of all *American Babylon Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, Robert O. Self, Princeton University Press.

3 Our apologies to any US reader who feel rubbed the wrong way by the use of the word 'ghetto' in this text, particularly to those who live in places that are described as such in the media. We by no way disregard the forms of solidarity and self-organisation that exist there and are constantly being ignored. We use this word only as a technical term that proved throughout the last 60 years to have a material ground. The use of this term does not intend its common sensationalist meaning, but to try to understand what positions some social groups are given in a class society that offers little much than absolute dispossession to the lowest classes and also to understand the long history of struggles that arose from the places where those groups have been very often forced to reside through a structure of both economical massacre, racist laws and urbanisation plans. Furthermore, we would like to add that this text was written by West Europeans. Any sombre tone about the living conditions in the poorest parts of Oakland might be due to the gigantic amounts of violence and misery that have been created there by US capital and capitalists, amounts to which some US residents might be more accustomed.

ghetto, was the strongest focal point for social tensions in Oakland. The existence of the party was based on a growing mass of lumpen-proletarians, partially fuelled by the return of desperate Black Vietnam veterans, and a strong armed resistance to the overtly racist and violent police department. It must be stressed that the memory of the Panthers is still shared by most people and that references to them in daily life are constant. It is also important to note that the policing of the Panthers by the OPD became a model for ghetto policing in the US.

A new Black middle class emerged from the '70s to the '90s. During that period, the number of Black professionals and managers rose from 11% to 23% of the population and by 1978 the civic authorities had passed into the hands of the Black bourgeoisie. Meanwhile, poverty and unemployment continued rising in the poorest parts of the Black population. In 1989, a quarter of all Black families lived beneath the poverty line. Alongside poverty and police repression emerged gangs, for whose members, aided by both the CIA (which emptied planes full of drugs on US territory and helped cartels set up in exchange of their support for the *contras*) and various political mafias, the main method of survival became the capitalisation of the massive influx of heroin, cocaine, and later, crack. The creation of these gangs succeeded in both the pacification of political conflicts and the institutionalisation of Black on Black murder. In other words, the ritual murder of the poorest by the poorest became, as in every other ghetto in the US, a feature of everyday life. In the same span, against the decay of the ghetto, the gang became, for those expelled from the job market, the last form of social community existing, alongside the Black Church. The history of West Oakland from the '50s to the '90s is the general history of the transformation of the 'community ghetto' into a 'hyperghetto'. What one can see now is a 'polarisation of the class structure which, combined with ethnoracial segregation and welfare state retrenchment, has produced a *dualisation of the social and physical structure of the metropolis*'.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time that the Black Panther Party was emerging, the Tax Revolt was initiated. The latter peaked with the vote of Proposition 13 in 1978, the nation's first property tax limitation. Since the '60s, work places in the region had been moving following the tax competition between different districts. As much as the emergence of a 'service sector' in the Bay area from the '70s from which Blacks were *de facto* excluded, the Tax Revolt sparked a constant attack against ghettos at all levels of administration. At the federal level, Nixon's government poured all the social housing funds into the private estate market.

From the '90s onwards, immigration increased the share of Asian and Latinos in the total population to 17% and 25% respectively. The latter found themselves largely segregated in East Oakland (although East Oakland is by far not entirely Latino and has very important Vietnamese, Black and Chinese communities), and in the last decade Latino gangs took over the drug economy of the city. The ripples of the war raging between the Norteños and Sureños, the two main US footsoldier organisations working for the Latino mafias, emerged in the form of constant local conflicts in California (which the Border Brothers are joining). Each of the principal organisations acts as a sort of family for local gangs who are forced into the defence of their territory, or 'set', against the constant incursion of rivals. In reality, for those in Latino gangs the risk of being shot makes the crossing of borders impossible. As in

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4 L. Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, Polity Press, p. 24.

West Oakland, the gang is for some the only possible way to survive economically and for them one of the last forms of community that remains.

The systematic gentrification of Oakland started under the mayorship of Jerry Brown (1999–2007). Project 10K served to re-develop Downtown via the building of yuppie condos and office spaces. The project was partly halted due to the start of the crisis in the state of California, but had already left its mark on Downtown. More recently, parts of West Oakland have been colonised by cafes where lines of young creative hipsters, amazed by the comparatively low rental prices, can work on their projects, sipping macchiatos whilst galleries open one after the other just blocks from ongoing inter-proletarian shootings. The surrounding area was redeveloped by private companies and City Hall as in the case of Telegraph Avenue, or invented, as with ‘Korean Town Northgate’ (KoNo). While many interested parties seek to conquer West Oakland and its Victorian houses, East Oakland, situated far off, without a transportation system and architecturally poor, interests no-one and a West to East emigration of the poorest people seems inevitable in the next few years.

At the time of writing, official unemployment in Oakland is 16.2% (the US average is 9.1%). Youth unemployment in West Oakland is estimated at approximately 50%. Recent job growth is negative: the number of jobs in the city decreased by 2.7% in 2011. Rate of violent crimes is sixteen in every one thousand, in comparison to four in every thousand nationwide and, despite being only the eighth largest city in California, Oakland has the third highest number of homicides per year. West Oakland, still the poorest area of the city, is now 67% Black. Outside of the newly gentrified areas of the neighbourhood there are only a few liquor stores and almost no cheap grocery food is available for local residents.

The geographical proximity of West Oakland to Downtown goes a long way towards explaining the class and race constitution of the Oakland Commune. Finally, for those who are evicted from either the West or the East and become homeless, Downtown becomes, assuming one can evade the OPD, one of the safest places to try to survive. As such, for many homeless people, drug-dealers and drop-outs the plaza next to city was already a camp, or at least the main spot to hang-out both night and day, a long time before the Commune.

### ***Chronology of the Movement***

- 17 September: Occupy Wall Street starts in New York and San Francisco.
- 7 October: The camp in San Francisco is destroyed by the police. Some people beyond the specific ‘radical’ milieu of the Bay come to support the camp and fight the cops.
- 10 October: In Oakland, a few hundred people march, tents are installed on half of the city hall square which is promptly renamed ‘Oscar Grant Plaza’.
- 15 October: 2,500 people march in support of the camp. Move On, a front for the Democrat Party, tries to take over the march. The actor Danny Glover is supposed to hold a historic speech with the mayor in the middle of the square. When they arrive they are refused entry to the square by the mass of people present.
- 18 October: When the first camp is unable to take new tents, a second camp is installed in parallel at Snow Park in Downtown.
- 20 October: Eviction notice from City Hall.
- 25: In the early morning, both camps are destroyed by a police raid. 102 arrests. The following night sees hours of showdowns in Downtown. A veteran marine is wounded in the head by police arms and taken away from the streets in critical condition.

- 26 October: In the afternoon a march of 3,000 people go back to the plaza despite the police covering Downtown. Generalised antagonism towards the police as solidarity march towards jail occurs. A general assembly takes place that evening on the plaza and the general strike is voted by 1,700 people. Meanwhile, the closure of 5 schools is voted for by the district.
- 27 October: A new camp is installed on the plaza. The City Hall, wary of provoking a reaction similar to one the night before, allows it to happen.
- 29 October: March against police violence in Downtown.
- 2 November: 25,000 people march on the port and blockade it without being stopped by police. Many stores are vandalised along the route and 'flying pickets' are organised to close down businesses remaining open. Many 'anarchists' are physically attacked by 'non-violent' types. At night, an attempt to occupy a building in Downtown is attacked by the police. Street battles and barricades. 103 arrests.
- 10 November: A young man is shot on the outskirts of the camp.
- 14 November: Second police raid on the camp. This raid is in coordination with the nationwide eviction of all Occupy camps.
- 21 November: Last camp in Snow Park is evicted.
- 12 December: The day of the 'West Coast Port Shutdown'. 5,000 people participate in Oakland. Ports of Seattle, Portland and Longview are also shut down in solidarity with ILWU workers struggle in Longview.
- 28 January: 'Move in Day'. 3,000 people are present at the beginning of the day to occupy a building in Downtown. No building is occupied and 400 arrests. City Hall is ransacked.

### ***Reproduction, Camp and Piggies***

If people came to the camp at Oscar Grant Plaza, it was first and foremost for what it could offer them, i.e. food, shelter, security from the police and the chance for social interaction. The mere existence of the Oakland Commune goes against the usual cliché which insists that the revolt of the most marginalised is always the most intense, the most violent and the quickest. Equally, it opposes the other cliché that posits the most marginalised as unable to participate with other classes in a common struggle and the opposition between the anti-CPE and the *banlieues* riots in France has become the starkest example of the binary vision through which struggles are often viewed.<sup>5</sup> This is why it is important to note the difference between the Oakland Commune and the riots of December '08 in Greece. The latter took place *at the level* of the reproduction of the proletariat, but never within it. They faced everything which constitutes the reproduction of the proletariat, but they never took it over. The questions of gender, food, housing, care and health were never even challenged and were left alone because the only form that the struggle took was a confrontation with the police. The reproduction of the proletariat was in front of the rioters, but only under the uniform of a cop. Looting was the only horizon on which to challenge it.

The Greek riots were a turning point because they sounded the beginning of a new cycle of struggle at the same time that the news of bank crashes announced a new economic cycle.

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<sup>5</sup> The student movements in England also go against this particular grain. With tuition fees rising at the same time that family education benefits were cut, the student demonstrations were invaded by high school students claiming that they came 'from the slums of London'.



Since then, revolts have deepened at the same time as has the crisis. Ultimately, for most the memories of the Oakland Commune are more about gigantic kitchens, huge general assemblies, crowds, tensions between different parts of the camp, concrete questions such as how to 'treat a wound' or how to 'bring toilets', rats, fights, brawls and dances than pitched battles against the police. The Oakland Commune, in that respect, was a turning point: the space of the struggle was no longer restricted to the face to face struggle against the police, but leapt to the face to face encounter with the reproduction of the proletariat. What the Oakland Commune confirmed was that struggles tend to unfold more and more within the sphere of reproduction. The reason behind this is because, even in countries such as Greece which, once austerity measures were enforced saw a drastic lowering of the nominal wage, the first relation of proletarians to the crisis is through the devaluation of the real wage ('real wage' in its broadest sense, i.e. taking into account all indirect wages) enacted by the dismantling of the welfare state, the uncontrolled rise of unemployment, a housing bubble due to a withdrawal of investment from production to rent, the subsequent bursting of this bubble for private credit and a rising inflation. In the US, in a context where housing credit is an essential economic consideration (in 2009, 67% of the inhabitants of a house were its owners), the crisis remodeled class relations: houses are foreclosed one after the other.<sup>6</sup> At the same time the poorest neighbourhoods face head-on the rise of unemployment and keep on falling apart. The gentrification of certain areas must be considered alongside this dispossession. Any attempt to understand the crisis must pass through a revaluation of the real-wage and this means that it must take into account the price of rent. Michael Seidman reminds us that in 1936 the unemployed in Paris were spending 7.2% of their income on rent.<sup>7</sup> The real wage is intrinsically related to the cost of reproduction; it is not just a figure.

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The sphere of reproduction encompasses the domestic and private spheres and the individual's relation with the State. At the bottom of it, the sphere of reproduction is everything which is outside of the workplace. In it one is, theoretically, an individual, a citizen, and, as an embodiment of labour-power, always destined to find oneself in a direct confrontation with capital. Since the '70s,<sup>8</sup> a disconnection between these three modes has

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6 There were 1,887,777 foreclosure filings in 2011 in the US, which represent 1.45% of housing (1 out of 69). In 2010, that concerned 2.23% of the housing (1 out of 45), in 2009, 2.21% and in 2008, 1.84% (1 out of 54). California has had one of the highest rate of foreclosure since the beginning of the crisis. In Oakland 10,508 houses were foreclosed between January 2007 and October 2011. In 42% of cases, the housing was bought back by real estate investors. The price of renting per month is then about the double of the price of monthly paying back a 30 year mortgage.

7 Michael Seiman, *Workers against Work. Labour in Paris and Barcelona during the Popular Fronts*, University of California press.

8 It is true that any attempt of periodisation tends towards a simplification. In this fashion, the periodisation developed within the communising current is very eurocentrist. Therefore the point is not to put one's finger on a precise beginning and ending date for each period, but to be able to use the identification of a period as a tool in order to understand the changes of relation between capital and labour. By *restructuring*, we therefore mean the period that goes from loosely the early '70s to nowadays, that is to say, the period in which workers' power as the driving revolutionary force is no longer possible.

manifested itself in the simple fact that the latter confrontation is no longer a given and as such the individual and citizen is not necessarily at the same an incarnation of labour-power. From then on, the thing which had performed a constant mediation between the sphere of production and the sphere of reproduction in as much as it constituted the domination of the latter by the former, is no longer certain, and, as such, the sphere of reproduction appears as an autonomous moment. However, this cannot be the case, as it can only exist *for* the sphere of production. It is from this point, and as a result of this restructuring, that everything which was not questioned by programmatism becomes all the more obvious:<sup>9</sup> gender, sexuality, domestic labour, housing, etc. and that struggles largely take place around those very categories via a direct confrontation with the State.

The present cycle of actual struggle is therefore simply exaggerating a general tendency of restructuring: that of the decentering of class struggle from the sphere of production to the sphere of reproduction. The Italian creeping May, followed by the *Autonomia*, were, in that respect the mark of a historical rupture. The involvement of women in the self-reduction movement; massive movements of family flat occupations; the constitution of Lotta Femminista; the post-1975 demonstrations in defence of abortion; the *Wages for Housework* movement; prostitutes' struggles and the questioning of gender itself within the *Autonomia* milieu; these were only possible once the struggles left the factory, established their autonomy vis a vis classical organisation and moved towards the recapture of the real wage.<sup>10</sup>

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It must be noted that in Oakland this tendency was and is still present. Besides the West Coast Port Shutdown, all other important developments were around the question of reproduction. These included the day of action intending to occupy a Downtown building, self organised groups of women teaching first aid treatment for knife and gunshot wounds, the May occupation of a farm belonging to UC Berkeley, the re-occupation of Lakeshore school in July and the occupation in August of an empty library in East Oakland, etc.

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9 We call programmatism the period from the middle of the 19th century to the 1970s, the years of the *restructuring*. The point is not, unlike Moishe Postone, to look at this period as a mistake or as the result of a poor understanding of Marx, but as a period of the class struggle. Lenin, Makhno or Pannekoek were all programmatists. Describing the German left, Gilles Dauvé gives a precise definition of what programmatism is: 'The reality of the enterprise, as a form of production specifically capitalist, was not questioned. Thinking the abolition of economy was even less in the cards ... Self-management by the workers' councils is capital seen from the point of view of the worker, i.e. from the point of view of the cycle of productive capitalism.' (*Ni Parlement ni syndicats: les conseils ouvriers!*, new edition, Les nuits rouges, p. 6, personal translation.) It is futile to try to understand the 'mistakes' of programmatism. One now has to understand, through programmatism, how it is possible to affirm that we live in a different period.

10 The occupation of Capitole plaza in Roma between 10–20 March 1970 by the Committee of Suburb Unrest can be seen as setting a distant precedent for the Occupy movement. More generally, a work of reevaluation of *Autonomia* should take place, since the main texts of the communising vulgate refer only to 'autonomy' as a very vague concept describing struggles for the autonomy of the proletariat from capital, a concept which is supposed to apply just as much to Italy in the '70s, the Direct Action Movement or the Piqueteros of Argentina—an approach that we do not consider in any way useful.

The question of reproduction is the only way to frame a non-reductionist understanding of the link between Oakland and the other square movements. It is true that some of the occupations partly identified themselves in opposition to a singular moment of the reproduction process (the rentier State in the Arab Spring, the austerity cuts in Greece, housing in Israel), whereas others placed themselves directly within the whole sphere of reproduction (Spain and the US). The first type could be contained, if only for a time, under a form of frontism. These fell apart as soon as the main 'demand' was realised. The fall of Mubarak or Ben Ali turned itself into a never-ending cycle of riots, the epic battles of the Cairo Proletariat, and a wave of wild cat strikes in Tunisia. When this demand 'failed' (the voting through of austerity measures in Greece, the maintenance of the regime in Bahrain, the launching of a civil war by Ghadaffi, etc.) the movement fell apart. Spain and the US were the only two struggles that could never identify themselves under any particular demand: struggles that, as such, appeared as a pure general product of the crisis rather than of one of its particular features. Nonetheless, it remains important to emphasise that all of these struggles had a common ground which consisted both of a link to the global crisis, as content of the struggle, and of the taking over the reproduction of the proletariat as a whole, as form of the struggle.

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If there is a tendency for the moment of reproduction to realise its autonomy, this must generally occur around the relation with the police. There exists a *being-together* only because all proletarians have once again become poor and their past fragmentation within different strata are dissolving. However, this bringing together is accomplished only in the moment of reproduction, and it is done without any basis other than that of discipline, and discipline is the task of the State. That is to say, it is usually the task of the police and courts. It is for this reason that the figure of the cop ends up everywhere as the figure of the principal enemy. This is not due to misunderstanding, but due a simple return of fire. This occurs as the geographical segregation within countries becomes more and more pronounced and police violence is a daily affair, and often the only relation with the State and with capital.<sup>11</sup>

Police violence erased some boundaries within the Occupy movement (the 700 arrests of October 1st in NYC, the pepper-spraying of a line of impassive students sitting quietly at UC Davis, the pepper-spraying of a women at a march in NYC...) and many who were considered to be 'liberals' were transformed into 'radicals' within a few days. The destruction of the camps was, in certain places, the swan-song of that particular movement, but, in many, the moment of radicalisation. Oakland was of the second category. After the camp was destroyed

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11 For a more thorough development of the relation to the police and the State in the rentier State: 'Corruption is then ... a moment in the state's habitual, harassing reproduction of the mass of marginals in the restructuring Tunisian economy. Thus the increasingly particularised experience of the relationship to the state, is a universal experience of the class. One could say that in the moment of recognition that sparked the revolt, the particularisation of the individual's fate and the fragmentation of experience is understood as a class experience.' L.S., 'Hanging by a Thread: Class, Corruption and Precarity in Tunisia', *Mute*, 17 January 2012, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/arab-revolts-column/hanging-thread-class-corruption-and-precarity-tunisia>.

for the first time on 25 October—in a military style that spoke more of Fallujah than ‘social dialogue’—the night brought a pitched battle between the police and people attempting to retake the plaza. Downtown streets were covered in tear-gas for hours with the cops constantly shooting rubber bullets. The marine veteran Scott Olson was wounded in the face by a tear gas canister whilst reading the first amendment to a line of police. When people throw themselves on his body in an attempt to remove him from the conflict, they too are hit with projectiles. These images, alongside the news report of Olson’s critical condition and his new martyr status completely change the dynamics of the movement, as well as the general public’s reaction to it. When 3,000 people meet in the afternoon in front of the Downtown library, they march to retake the plaza. After hours of struggling with the police stationed in Downtown, a general assembly takes place and a general strike is voted for. (Out of 1,700 participants only 100 voted against and 15 abstained).

The Oakland Commune’s relationship to the police was, with regard to the rest of the Occupy movement, exceptional. Within the first few days the general assembly voted to keep the camp a police-free zone. Patrols took place at night to make sure that they did not come too close to the camp. As soon as a few cops would try to enter a mass of people would form and shout ‘Pigs go home!’ This despite the fact that cops, likely under the sway of City Hall, were aiming to avoid confrontation.

It is obvious that the memory of the death of Oscar Grant provided a strong reason for this resistance.<sup>12</sup> Memorialised in the name Oscar Grant Plaza, it remains a potent symbol of one of the most notoriously violent and corrupt police department in the U.S.<sup>13</sup> Of course, such things become symbolic insofar as they are representative of a banal and everyday reality.<sup>14</sup>

On top of previous factors, and the participation of people from the poorest parts of the city, should be added the part played by the ‘radical’ milieus in Oakland. The fact that these milieus formed almost entirely around the 2009 university occupations explains why they were able to so quickly intervene and organise within the struggle as ‘affinity groups’.<sup>15</sup> Again,

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12 The murder of Oscar Grant, executed in cold blood by the Bay Area Transportation Police on New Year’s Eve 2009, while he was handcuffed, head against the ground and unarmed, played a central role in fermenting Occupy Oakland. Many riots happened the following weeks and on the night of the court verdict (the cop was sentenced to two years of jail) in July 2010. The particular nature of this murder (somehow quite banal for the Oakland Police Department or BART) came from the fact that a train full of passengers was on the other side of the platform. The videos of the murder were viewed hundreds of thousands of times in the days that followed.

13 Twelve years after the dismantling of ‘the Riders’ and their common activity of planting fake evidence, racketing the black market and managing a part of the drug traffic, City Hall is still officially recognised as being unable to restructure the OPD, despite Juridical request. The police remain under threat of federal receivership.

14 Many Californian police departments are famous for being historically constituted by Texan supremacists. Individuals who were themselves invited with due care by an overtly racist hierarchy. See the brilliant *City of Quartz* (Mike Davis, Verso) for the case of William Parker in L.A.

15 Concerning these occupations see *Communique from an Absent Future* (<http://anticapitalprojects.wordpress.com/2009/11/26/communique-from-an-absent-future-on-the-terminus-of-student-life/>). Particularly in California, the occupations were an obvious precedent for the Occupy movement beyond the fact that they shared common participants.

it is the fact that the Oakland camp emerged approximately one month after the start of Occupy New York and after the the overwhelming experience of the defence of the San Francisco camp against police attack which allowed these milieus to take some distance to organise themselves in a different way.

But one more reason must be added in order to explain the particularity of the Oakland Commune: the city mayor, Jean Quan. Representing the 'leftier' fringe of the Democratic Party, she entered politics in the '70s via Maoist groups and was in the front of the marches following Oscar Grant's murder. Despite this, it was clear from the beginning that she never had the slightest amount of credibility within the camp. This is seen from the way in which the support march organised by the Democratic Party's front group, Move On, was received at the camp on 15 October. Also, each time any official communication from the city arrived at the camp (no music after a certain hour, allow a cleaning team into the camp, eviction notice, etc.) it was either torn down or burnt at a general assembly accompanied by shouts of 'Burn it!' which were inevitably followed by a Michael Jackson song playing on the speakers. Her inability to canalise any part of the movement away from itself is the very moment where struggle produces itself, and not as an exterior consciousness, but as an awareness of the impossibility of reform. There was no space in which to maintain the belief that it would be possible to humanise the economy or the structure of the city, including, along with it, the police.

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One of the main forms of organisation which at the same time provided a method of resisting police and bridging gaps between the 'radical' groups and the youth of the ghettos was the series of FTP (Fuck The Police) marches organised at the end of every week from 7 January onwards.<sup>16</sup> Even if those marches were never of a particularly impressive size, what was remarkable about them was that they were organised by youngsters representing the youth of West and some of the poorest areas of North Oakland. A part of the movement from the beginning, these young people developed for themselves within the space of a few weeks the kinds of practices that were, up until this point, seen as the exclusive property of 'radical' milieus. Growing with the anti-gang injunctions and the complete decay of the poorest part of Oakland,<sup>17</sup> their need for self-organisation would find its resonance from Detroit to Compton.

The question of reproduction became, in spite of everything, a limit within the movement once the camp no longer existed. We mean this in the sense that this reproduction was no-

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16 With the term 'radical' we do not mean to describe the bearers of a correct consciousness, to which the ghetto kids could never have access, just as much as we do not think that growing up in ghetto necessarily produces radicality (a position, incidentally, which ends up at immiseration theory). The 'radicality' of the 'radical' groups exists only as an ideology, an ideology which sometimes fits better with one struggle than with another one. As for true radicalisation, that is only the product of struggles.

17 Gang injunctions were invented in L.A. In the '80s and have since become a constant and standard policing method to such an extent many of the sentences handed down concerning the movement were of a similar structure i.e. Stay-away orders regarding the plaza, children forced into Child Protective Services, etc.

longer taken directly in hand but was once again merely *confronted*. This is why the Move In Day of 28 January found itself in the sole dynamic of an escalating conflict with the police. By targeting a colossal Downtown building with the aim of transforming it into a social centre, a part of the movement was trying to reconstruct it around a dynamic of the question of reproduction within the city. This came after the focus on the port and disaster of the Longview struggle. But on top of targeting a far too large and symbolic building in relation to the forces at hand, public threats were made beforehand that if the police were to not allow the occupation to happen then the airport would be shut down. In practice, despite the height of the threat level in the American consciousness, this never happened, showing already that the emphasis was being put more on the side of conflict *per se* than any necessary objective with regard to the conflict.

The question is not to understand whether the strategy was right or wrong, although this is often how it was posed afterward. Despite the exhaustion of the movement more than 3,000 people came on that day. But, as soon as the police made it clear that what was going to happen would have nothing in common with 2 November or 12 December, a part of the crowd immediately left. The following hours were dedicated to pitched battles between the police and the fewer than one thousand people who stayed. There was no hope that the building could be successfully taken and the battle took place purely for its own sake. The price was high, 409 people were arrested, and, from that day onwards, much remaining energy was absorbed into anti-repression and prosecution activities, responding to the threat of trials and personal stay-away orders. Despite still being situated at the heart of reproduction, a situation that must hit its limit if this it not experienced as a take-over, that day the movement was caught up a dynamic which became decidedly different from that of the camp, and reproduction returned to the level of the suit of riot gear.

### ***Labour, General Strike and Grain***

The Oakland Commune was focused on the question of reproduction. However, it almost never questioned the idea of production. Although many tried to expand the struggle to the labour process, this process proved to be its constitutive limit. The general strike was the moment in which the movement attempted to lean over its own limits and wanted to expand itself to the labour process. The linking of the movement with school closures may have been another one. Those two moments failed to the extent that they did not manage to overcome the limits of the movement. This was so, not because something was lacking in the strategy, but because this limit was a constitutive and defining limit and that *generalisation* of the conflict was not produced beyond the boundaries of Oscar Grant Plaza.

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With regard to the schools, a budget vote which took place during the third week of the plaza occupation settled on closing five of them, all located in the poorest neighbourhoods, at the end of the year. The measure is part of plan attempting restructure the school system in Oakland before the end of 2013. Up to 30 out of 101 schools in district could be closed. Despite this, and despite the important participation of teachers and students at the camp, no really long lasting link was created between the square and the schools, although some of them are only a walking distance from the plaza. The Oakland Commune could not recognise

itself in a struggle which addressed the reproduction of the proletariat and labour, a struggle located at the heart of where the crisis hit in the U.S., i.e. the local imposition of austerity measures. Outside of the square, nothing could be attacked.<sup>18</sup>

Beyond school closures, the key moment through which to understand the Oakland Commune's relationship to the labour sphere was the general strike and the port blockade of 2 November. Voted almost unanimously at the 1,700 strong general assembly that followed the first police raid on the camp (many more people were present at that moment but did not vote), the general strike was a challenge. One can see it as something quite ridiculous, as a general strike in which most people participating are not striking. Although it is not even on the unions' cards as most union contracts do not have clause stipulating the right to strike,<sup>19</sup> within those who had the potential to do so none of them asked to strike, although many thought that ILWU would.<sup>20</sup> Only a few unions, such as the SEIU (public sector) gave an official call-out for their members to take a day off in order to participate. (In this case a tacit agreement was made with city hall.) Consequently, besides the precarious workers, the unemployed, and the homeless, people who attended were those who were able to take day off for a holiday, and those who, working as civil servants, had the right not to come. Also were those who, like the port employees and some of those working in restaurants and cafes, had a free day due to the fact that it was impossible to keep their work place open, or those who took a sick day.

What has to be taken into account, on the other hand, is the support which many unions showed towards the general strike by urging their members privately, and publicly, to take a day off. Many saw the motivation for this as stemming from a fear of losing ground and credibility; a fear of falling behind the movement.

However, to see only this would be to put emphasis on only one side of the story. What was most noticeable on 2 November was the crowd. Images of this crowd blockading the port are what remain from that day. Since 1946, no one in the US had marched under the banner of a general strike, with the exception of 1 May 2006 when millions of Latinos went on strike and marched in defence of immigration rights and against the HR4437 law.

Seeing the general strike as merely the result of an activist tendency within the movement cannot answer the following two questions: Why did more than 1,700 people vote for the strike? Why did more than 25,000 people turn out in a country which has forgotten its tradition of striking? If, instead of proposing a general strike, a few anarchists had proposed to retaliate against the police eviction of the camp by burning down City Hall, would 25,000 people have shown up with molotovs?

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18 The occupation of Lakeview School which happened many months later (12 June to 3 July) cannot be presented as a real counter-example. Very few people participated in the occupation and the instructions coming from parents and teachers were clear: no relation with 'Occupy Oakland' would be tolerated.

19 The right to strike was destroyed in the USA following the Taft-Hartley act of 1947 which was implemented after the general strike in Oakland in 1946.

20 ILWU, a union representing mainly dockers of the West Coast was founded after the general strike of 1934 and is considered one of the last unions that can sometimes have more 'radical' positions. It played the central role in the Longview struggle.

The general strike represented the desire to extend the movement into the sphere of production, that is to say, into the workplace. This strike only took place in direct response to the quasi-military eviction of the camp. Some might say that people just wanted to express their disgust against City Hall and its decision to destroy the camp and that they wanted to send a warning to the mayor. But, if so, why was there any need to talk about a general strike as opposed to simply having a afternoon march like the events that were happening in New York after the mass arrests on Brooklyn Bridge? There were many marches after the death of Oscar Grant, but no one spoke of a general strike then. What is important is that everyone appeared to come with their home made sign saying something or other about the general strike.

When confronted with the police in their true guise, that of the forces of discipline, the population of Oakland, at that point largely sympathetic to the movement, naturally turned itself against that which makes it a compact whole: the labour process. As a result, that whole got a name: the proletariat. What could be seen happening during the vote on the night of 26 October is a generalisation, a contamination. Of course, it must also be taken into account that, for some, the general strike was 'a warning shot to the 1%', and came with a hope, albeit one not linked to any precise demand, that things could get better.

However, at the same time, the general strike, in contradistinction to the events of 1 May 2006, did not happen in as much as almost no-one went on strike. The moment where the possibility emerged to recognise oneself as a worker with her power became straight away a handicap. In other words, in the moment when class belonging was outlined, it was only produced as an external constraint. As soon as a struggle that thinks of itself as being solely political (and economic) comes to confront one of its limits and goes through the process of transforming itself, then it is a natural feeling to acknowledge oneself as labour power. But, the transformation of this struggle into something else by means of acknowledging everyone as labour-power could not, in this case, take place. The failure of the general strike was, then, the second step, after the moment of the vote, and after this the movement hit a wall and soon came to an end. Faced with this limit, the struggle could either die or progress through self-transformation, and it died. The moment between the vote and the day of the general strike should be seen therefore as a moment when a *rift* was appearing within the struggle.

An interesting parallel can be drawn with the European situation. In Greece, the occupation of Syntagma square managed to force unions to call for three days of general strikes on 15, 28 and 29 June 2011, the same days on which Parliamentary votes on austerity measure took place. In Greece, as in other countries in Europe, none of the numerous general strikes were able to prevent austerity measures. What one is witnessing more and more in Europe is the absolute loss of the power the general strike (or of the mass public sector strike) when it comes to the imposition of austerity measures. In the case of England, one day public sector strikes serve only to help stopping unions from losing face in a struggle always already lost beforehand.

The general strike in Oakland took another form. It was the moment of generalisation of the movement, at the same time as its swansong. After 2 November a larger and more confused camp was rebuilt for around ten days. The atmosphere and radicality of the first camp went away and after that no days action of action possessed the same resonance. Despite this, one must reinsert the Oakland Commune within its historical context: it was not a movement against a precise set of austerity measures, since austerity in the US is distributed



via individual relations to capital (credit, employment, etc.) and by State governments and City Halls rather than by the Federal government. The latter on the contrary is seen as having imposed the famous healthcare reform. As such, the strike in Oakland was a resistance to austerity, i.e. to the crisis, only to the extent that this can be seen through the prism of a particular police attack.

In programmatism, the world was viewed as having the capacity to be turned upside down. That view was only possible because programmatism only concerned itself with distribution. Production for it was an invariant horizon. The factory was an empty fortress, and communism could only be seen as the redistribution of commodities within society. This view no longer rings true. The meagre reformist perspective of managing the economy has disappeared with the beginning of the crisis. From that point the first perspective which this world has to offer is that of blockading: the idea of the 'strike' conceived as the shutting down or occupation of the workplace by only those who work there directly has, in many struggles, been replaced by that of blockading the economy. Sometimes, 'strikes' are nothing more than names for what are essentially movements of blockading.<sup>21</sup> From this follows the popularity of concepts such as the 'human strike'.<sup>22</sup> Some say that blockading is becoming more and more central out of efficiency, some because many people find themselves more and more excluded from production and it is the only way those people can then participate in struggles, but these are essentially two sides of the same coin. The concentration of the circulation of commodities at certain points, the absolute rise in the size of value manipulated per worker capita and absolute rise in investment per worker, the boom of the economy paid out of revenue and not capital (wrongly referred to as the 'service sector') and the rise of unemployment are all characteristics of the same moment of restructuring.<sup>23</sup>

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21 The movement against the pension reform in France in 2010 and the generalisation of the flying pickets was an exemplary case.

22 The importance of the appeal to the idea of 'human strike', in the discussions around the Oakland Commune echoes, somehow, the success that the term had in the movement against the french pension reform in 2010. Although distant then from its original signification as developed in the text 'Sonogram of a Potentiality' (*Tiqqun* no. 2) which was much more linked to the new types of strikes developed in the sphere of reproduction by Italian autonomist feminists, the use of the same concept betrays a will to broaden the notion of strike beyond the sphere of production.

23 One can use the term 'services' only if they are defined as immaterial production, which means nothing. There are only three sectors in the economy: the production of the means of production, production for the consumption of the proletariat (paid for by the wage) and production for luxury consumption (paid for by revenue). Someone employed at McDonalds or in a call centre selling mobile phone contracts performs now the labour that a farm worker picking up potatoes would have made before: she works for the consumption of the proletariat, for what her reproduction is at a given point. The idiotic idea of 'real needs' and 'fake needs' has no room in this; the reproduction of the proletariat is constantly extended; and its limits are what is socially necessary—'the transformation of what was previously superfluous into what is necessary, as a historically created necessity—is the tendency of capital' (Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, p. 528). Her labour, just as that of the farm worker, is paid by the wage, and finds itself in the next process of production only insofar as the body of the proletarian is sent back in the encounter with capital during the selling of the commodity labour-power. Thus the idea of a service sector that extends from finance unto fast-food chain is a carbon copy of the bourgeois economy and its wishful thinking.

The restructuring of the '70s occurred due to a crisis in valorisation that was only overcome by recentralisation in favour of the growth of revenue and a dismantling of the old production process with circulation becoming more and more central, since reducing circulation time allows a rise in the rate of profit. As pointed out in the text *Blockading the Port is Only the First of Many Last Resorts*: "The invention of the shipping container and the container ship is analogous, in this way, to the reinvention of derivatives trading in the 1970s."<sup>24</sup> This is one example of how circulation was put at the center of all technical developments and is now found at the core of many struggles.

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The disaster of the Longview struggle moved in parallel relation to the general strike insofar as it was the only other moment of the struggle which attacked the sphere of labour.

In Longview (State of Washington), a company known as EGT built a new grain terminal in the port and signed employment contracts without going through the union; employment conditions were thus far lower than those of other workers in the port. These actions ran directly against obligations between the port and the ILWU. Although the new contracts only concerned 50 workers directly, the aim was to set a new precedent for working conditions and through this to break the union's grip and free up West Coast labour markets. A conflict between the union and the company started in July 2011. In Oakland, after the success of the general strike, a day of action intended partly to be in solidarity with this struggle was planned for 12 December. The day aimed to shut down, not only the local port, but ports up and down the West Coast. Although participation was far inferior to the first shut down (falling from 25,000 to 5,000), the port was shut-down, as were those in Seattle, Portland and Longview. In the following weeks a caravan was also organised in order to block the arrival of the first boat coming into the terminal. This boat was then escorted by the army, and the militants who took part in the action were then taken to task by the ILWU hierarchy, which signed contracts with EGT behind the backs of rank and file workers. These contracts stipulated conditions far worse than the current ones in place in the port.

More than 3 weeks after the destruction of the last camp, the 12 December day of action was an attempt to maintain the energy of the movement, whilst linking it to a struggle over working conditions. In spite of this, the day of action came across as merely an attempt to replicate 2 November and to integrate the energy of that day with more port workers. Somehow, then, the day of action was the recognition of the central limit of the movement: its inability to attack the sphere of production and labour. However, as shown by *Blockading the Port...*, written in anticipation of 12 December, that day also carried the risk of a shift which aimed at transforming the movement by canalising the energy that had been created into a good old-fashioned struggle of the worker against her boss, as well as institutionalising the port blockade as the only possible form of action. The sharp decline in participation between those two days showed the impossibility of rebuilding the movement around the positive conception of the 'productive worker' just as much as it showed that the movement had lost its momentum. Unlike 2 November, the majority of port workers did not join the pickets and went back home. The complete defeat of those who went to Longview in order to

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.bayofrage.com/>

defend the rank-and-file showed the impossibility of managing to produce a carbon-copy of old struggles onto situations which are, once and for all, other. However, despite all this, 12 December was remarkable in the sense that, even if it marked an end to the movement, it succeeded once again in blockading the port of Oakland, and therefore in disrupting many chains of circulation—and it did this without many arrests, City Hall and the Police not knowing how to develop any kind of strategy to deal with it.

The nobility of mind of ILWU rank and file does not need to be questioned, nor the reasons for their struggle. What should be understood is how a movement, the defining limit of which was production and labour, can, simply by attempting to refocus on what it perceived as a lack and not as a limit, transform itself into a blind militancy and in the process alienate a large part of those who were a part of it. To attempt to push a struggle until it produces out of itself an overcoming of its own limits, is to tend towards *generalisation*. In the desire to fill a lack it returns to the position of an obsolete vanguard. Ultimately, this movement cannot answer the following question. How could people who came to Oscar Grant Plaza for everything that they had lost, or rather had lost to a greater extent, in the middle of the crisis (housing, jobs, health, food, etc.) have recognised themselves in a struggle which, although linked to the present context of crisis, was ultimately a traditional struggle over the working conditions of workers living 700 miles away?

Once it was confronted with the impossibility of unifying the Occupy movement and a classical struggle around working conditions, the Longview struggle ended in a bitter fight between the two camps, despite the fact that some union members remained in opposition to their superiors. Even if struggles over the wage or working conditions are still an important part of global struggles, they are often lost causes, at least in most of the Western world. The very reason that the union bureaucrats accepted new working conditions at Longview is because they knew that this was simply the beginning of many attacks on working conditions in the coming years, and that these attacks would inevitably end in the massive retreat of the unions.

In moments like this wage struggles show their structural inability to make the leap to that which separates them, as a specific struggle, to *generality*. The point is not to blame a wage struggle for being what it is, but to understand how a struggle which tends towards generality ends up shutting itself away in the hopelessness of particularity.

### ***Withdrawal from Production? The Haunted House and its Glorious Tenants***

Questions regarding the port blockades of Dec. 12th stand in direct relation to many other struggles and the ways in which their limits have been perceived. For December '08 in Greece, as in the English riots of August '11, the question of productive labour is, in some analyses, a central issue. The dichotomy is always the same. For the sake of these analyses, productive labour equals productive workers, therefore this type of struggle can only extend if it is to transform itself and by including 'productive worker' and by giving them back their first class seats. In opposition to this, the autonomist answer is still to try to prove that everything produces surplus value and that, therefore, everyone is a productive worker. To define what productive labour is, is to define what it is *for* capital. It is an important question to the extent that it allows us to understand the dynamics of capital, but it is in no way a question that allows one to understand which individuals will play the most central role.

Production, circulation and reproduction are three movements of the same totality, of the same process. Production is the ‘predominant moment’ in this process because it is the ‘real point of departure’. One could write about circulation and reproduction exactly as Marx wrote about distribution: ‘Distribution is itself a product of production, not only its object, in that only the results of production can be distributed, but also its form, in that the specific kind of participation in production determines the specific forms of distribution, i.e. the pattern of participation in distribution.’<sup>25</sup>

We absolutely agree with *Théorie Communiste* when they say that ‘if class struggle remains a movement at the level of reproduction, it will not integrate its own *raison-d’être*, which is production. This is currently the recurring limit of all riots and “insurrections”, which defines them as “minority” struggles. Revolution will have to penetrate production in order to abolish it as a specific moment of the relation between people and, at the same time, to abolish labour through the abolition of wage-labour.’<sup>26</sup> But, when they add: ‘That is the key role of productive labour and of those who at a specific moment are the direct bearers of its contradiction, because they live this contradiction in their existence which is both necessary and superfluous for capital at the same time. Objectively they have the capacity to make of this attack a contradiction for capital itself, to turn the contradiction that is exploitation back on itself as well as against themselves. The path of the abolition of exploitation passes through exploitation itself; like capital, the revolution is also an objective process.’<sup>27</sup> – this is point where our roads diverge. Productive labour is a category within the reproduction of capital, not a class division.

There was an active subject in programmatism that was not the same as the proletariat i.e. the working class: this was because programmatism had production as its sole horizon and distribution as its sole target of attack. It is from then on that the notion of productive labour, and therefore of the productive worker, was the Trojan Horse of programmatism. Since the end of that epoch, some have tried in vain to prove that every labour, including reproductive labour is ‘productive’, some persist in tracing an old model and look desperately for the hiding place of the new productive worker who could act as a revolutionary subject, whilst others want to get rid of these categories which they see as purely moral. Going back to Marx allows us to understand what the ‘productive labour’ really is as a *category* and not as a *class*. To undertake this project is not to start a theoretical debate on the sexuality of angels; it is rather the attempt practically to liquidate the categories in communist theory that do not let us see past the dead horizon of programmatism.

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From Marx, we can say that any labour paid for by capital is productive. We mean in the sense that it implies wage labour, surplus value and the transformation of surplus-value in capital. It is no coincidence that in the ‘Missing Chapter VI’<sup>28</sup> the section on productive and unproductive labour follows that on subsumption. We can go as far as saying that any labour

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<sup>25</sup> *Gundrisse*, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> ‘The Present Moment’, *Sic* no. 1, p. 135.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> See the appendix of the Penguin version of *Capital*, *Volume 1*.

*really subsumed* by capital is productive. Therefore, in the present time, we can say that almost all labour performed by the global work force is productive. But it is so only from the perspective of a *particular* capital.

Individual labour is productive when it fulfils the aforementioned three conditions (wage, surplus-value, additional capital), i.e. the three *moments* of the *immediate process of production*: the selling and buying of the labour force, surplus-labour, and accumulation. However, this can only be considered on the level of the *individual* capital. 'Hence labour as producing *value* always remains the labour of the *individual* but expressed in the form of *general labour*. Consequently productive labour—as labour producing value—always confronts capital as the labour of the individual labour-power, as labour of the *isolated labourer*, whatever social combinations these labourers may enter, into in the process of production. Therefore, whilst capital represents, in relation to the labourer, social productive power of labour the productive labour of the workman, in relation to capital, always only represents the labour of the *isolated labourer*.'<sup>29</sup>

What Marx was missing was the ability to unify the theory of productive and unproductive labour (only fully elaborated in the manuscripts of the *Theories of Surplus-Value* and the 'Missing Chapter VI') with the theory of schemes of capital reproduction based on the division of total social capital into three sections, as developed in third section of *Capital, Volume II*.

*At the level of total social capital, a labour is productive only according to the section in which it is realised.* Therefore, there can be productive labours in an unproductive sector and unproductive labours in a productive one. These two dynamics have nothing in common.

A worker in the sector of luxury consumption can be productive for the *individual capital* his boss represents, but he is not productive for the *total social capital* because the surplus value that he produces will be *realised* only when the commodity produced is bought, and this buying can only be done with the profits of another section. The surplus value that he produces for the individual capital is realised only by the *consumption* of a part of the surplus value of total social capital. Using the revenue, the capitalist 'spends the fruit of his capital'.<sup>30</sup> The surplus-value that the individual capital realises will be divided into additional capital and consumption. At the level of total social capital, this surplus-value did not disappear; rather it piled up in an unproductive sector. There is no possibility of accumulation from an unproductive sector, whatever the productivity of labour that it has obtained.

For the *individual capital*, there is a subsumption of *the productive worker*, for the *total social capital* there is a *distinction*. *Productive labour* can therefore only be understood at the level of the total social capital. It corresponds to a sector that cannot even be delimited to some commodities: the same flat screen sold to a proletarian who saved for months and to a capitalist who did not is, in the former case paid out of the wage, in the latter, out of the revenue. It therefore contains productive labour in the first case and unproductive labour in the second. The commodity that is being produced has therefore no importance whatsoever:

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29 *Theories of Surplus-Value, Volume 1*, addenda 12, section B, mark 1321.

30 *Grundrisse*, p. 468. 'The money which A here exchanges for living labour—service in kind, or service objectified in a thing—is not *capital* but revenue, money as a medium of circulation in order to obtain use value, money in which the form of value is posited as merely vanishing, not money which will preserve and realise itself as such through the acquisition of labour.' (*Grundrisse*, p. 467.)

'This 'productive' worker cares as much about the crappy shit he has to make as does the capitalist himself who employs him, and who also couldn't give a damn for the junk.'<sup>31</sup> Neither does the labour because, as seen previously, a worker is nowadays always productive for her own capitalist. The experience of labour is the same, the exploitation of the 'productive worker' being the same as the exploitation of anyone else.

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The attempt to identify productive labour and the productive sector was not just the result of a poor understanding of Marxian categories, but the Achilles' heel of programmatism. Marx himself could not go beyond his epoch, and he steps back towards the end of the section on productive and unproductive labour in the *Theories of surplus-value*. Thus he comes back to what he just affirmed and attempts to identify productive labour and material production.<sup>32</sup> It is obvious that *material production* can in no way be a valid category ('to be *productive labour* is a quality of labour which in and for itself has absolutely nothing to do with the *particular content* of the labour, its particular usefulness or the specific use value in which it is expressed').<sup>33</sup> The capitalist mode of production is the *production of commodities*, material or not and one can in no way divide the sectors of production into material and immaterial. This hardly convincing last minute about-turn is only the proof that in programmatism, productive labour could never be understood as a category, but always under a moral sign.

Marx couldn't avoid being programmatist. That era is over and one can now understand productive and unproductive labour only as categories. If those debates happened around the Oakland Commune (just as they did after the Greek riots of '08), it is because they are linked to the question of circulation, or to that of a 'service sector'. As we have seen, circulation per se does not enter in the category of 'productive' or 'unproductive'. As for the 'service sector', it exists only in the nocturnal dreams of the *Financial Times*' writers.

For all that, we cannot make the step which consists in saying that every proletarian is a productive worker or that it does not matter whether they are or not. This is not because it is wrong (that would not matter), but because to put the problem in this fashion is always to be motivated by political reasons, and those political reasons always hide what's at stake: the understanding of what capital is. For it is only from that understanding that our grasping of communism can be negatively outlined. An analysis that doesn't attack productive labour as a category at the level of total reproduction of capital can not envisage the abolition of economy.

### *Classes Alliance, Identity and Percentages*

During more than two months, the Oakland Commune faced the reproduction of the proletariat as a whole, with all of its differences that make it an *unsustainable subject*. What does it mean to be part of the proletariat in Oakland? It can mean being a 50-year-old port employee who has seen her social level fall from comfortably middle class of the Fordist epoch to that of a proletarian suburbanite who knows she will never be able to come up with

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<sup>31</sup> *Grundrisse*, p. 273.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, addenda 12, section G.

<sup>33</sup> 'Missing Chapter VI' or 'Draft Chapter VI of Capital, Results of the Direct Production Process', mark 483.

the payments on the life she bought with credit.<sup>34</sup> It can mean being a teacher who will get laid off in the next six months and have absolutely no idea where she will end up on the labour market. But most of the time, it just means growing up as surplus population, as one of the absolutely dispossessed, who have for their sole horizon of survival the crack or meth economy, prostitution and the porn industry. And in that case, it also means being a walking target for any scumbag with a uniform. In any case, to be a part of the proletariat means the impossibility of identifying oneself under any identity other than that of having 'No Future'. What made people go to the Oscar Grant Plaza was not the idea of a communal identity but of a communal lack. It was on that basis that people organised.<sup>35</sup>

That base was situated in the public sphere, the movement being constituted around a camp, located in Downtown on the main plaza. But what one found oneself witnessing was a contamination of the public sphere by the private sphere. The reasons that pushed anyone to come to the camp were individual reasons shared by all, personal experiences of a general poverty.

It is important to emphasise that the Occupy movement in the US never really went out of the squares, despite noteworthy and praiseworthy efforts such as 'Occupy the Hood'. Considered as a neutral place, the squares had the property of a reconquest of a public space (often owned by companies as shown by the legal complications around Zuccotti Park), at the same time making the space a private space where anyone could bring her own tent and expose her existence. The comparison, often made, with a Baptist protestant church is not without sense: what it's all about is to feel born again, to recognise a new belonging, to lay bare one's difficulties and feelings and to make them public. The 'human microphone' as a form of relations of struggle expresses this the best. Developed only to counter the ban against sound equipment in Zuccotti Park, it ended up being the only form in which the movement could recognise itself, its *differentia specifica*, in that it served before all to express the public sharing of a private suffering.

Delimited to this space, this 'Commune', the movement could address neither the public sphere nor the private one. To address the public sphere would have required it to be able to address labour and production. To address the private sphere would have required it to be able to pull down the Jericho walls that surrounded it, to attack neighbourhood after neighbourhood, and address there the causes that determine and construct the private sphere. Nonetheless, one must take note of the contamination of the private sphere by the public

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34 The ambiguous term of 'middle classes' is here used for want of anything better. If it is undeniable that a good part of the American 'middle classes' are composed of workers (or their progeny) who saw their living standards rising in the same time as their credits during the years of economic boom, those classes have always had a particular vision of the world. Therefore, although they are part of it, putting them under the term 'proletariat' without understanding their particularities, is to not understand the collisions within the term once the many strata collapse. The re-proletarianisation of a part of the 'middle classes' is one of the main aspects of this crisis. Those people play therefore a major but also particular role. It is this particularity that we have to address.

35 The Tumblr blog 'wearethethe99percent' gives a quite precise idea of what all those who thought of joining the Occupy movement and still had an internet connection had in common: nothing, if it is not a life shattered by economic misery. Beyond the harrowing aspect of those texts, what is central is that no demand can get out of them. People expose their personal economic misery with the sad variety that goes with it and with the trace of hope being the 'Together we stay!'

sphere as a common characteristic of all the various square occupations. The change that happened with the restructuring, change reinforced by the crisis, has meant that, in contradistinction to programmatism, where any struggle was necessarily situated only in the public sphere, the private sphere is now no longer an impenetrable fortress.

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The class composition of the Oakland Commune was a key factor in its constitution compared to the other Occupy movements. In a city like Santa Cruz, which has a huge homeless population (mainly vets of the last wars), and a general population mainly composed of liberal middle-classes (the university of Santa Cruz is the main economic motor of the city and the price of real estate is amongst the highest in the country), the camp had no middle stratum and so could never get the same cohesion as elsewhere. In the end, it quickly turned into a homeless camp with discussions organised by and for middle-class liberals. When the occupation of a bank was happening literally on the other side of the river from the camp (a separation of less than a mile, each in complete view of the other), and that place was about to be taken over by the police, some present in the occupation went to the camp to ask for some support. A friend recalled that after trying to convince a homeless person that it was in the interest of the camp to defend the occupation, this person pointed at the American flag in front of his tent and replied, 'Have you seen that? Does it read *Occupy* on it?'

This counter-example is just here to show us a rule: the physical cohesion of the movement (in as much as its limits) was due to the class variety within it. As we have seen, the geographical situation of the Oscar Grant Plaza, located four blocks from the frontier between Downtown and West Oakland, played a major role. By comparison, Zuccotti park in New York is located 8 miles from the Bronx. This explains the difference of composition between the two movements, since many couldn't go to Zuccotti or felt they had nothing to do there. The weakness of many of those square occupations was seen to be a prevailing feeling of non-unification, due to the lack of middle strata. Seen through cynical eyes, one can say that in some cities, those camping are either those condemned to it and those who can afford it.<sup>36</sup> In those cities, the moment of disintegration always comes when the higher strata leave out of disgust for their proximity to the lowest ones. This disgust was present in New York, it was a central dynamic in Santa Cruz, but, with the exception of individual quarrels, it never took shape in Oakland. To this must be added the fact that a big part of the middle stratum present at the camp had in general either some links with the jobs of the city or of the port, or with non-profits or the 'radical' milieu—and therefore couldn't be perceived as classes withdrawn into themselves and their dreams of suburbia.

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<sup>36</sup> One must not forget that camps cramped with tents are a banal element of the American decor. Since 2009, the development of Tent Cities, cities of homeless built within the city or on its skirts of them, are following in parallel the numbers of foreclosures. Sacramento, with its famous Tent City of more than 1,500 people in 2009—including a main contingent of ex-truck drivers and workers in the building trade—was under the eyes of all cameras before being destroyed one week after the visit of the governor of the State, A. Schwarzenegger. In an unintentional rehearsal of the past, the Tent City was on the banks of the city river, the Mecca of the Gold rush.



The only form of conflict between the middle classes and the lower classes appeared after 2 November, in the continuous debates on the question of violence or non-violence. Many people from the middle classes tried to take over the GAs, pushing votes against any form of violent actions, but not taking part in the camp. Despite that, even if it was clear that during the GAs the debates on non-violence were mostly orchestrated by the middle classes, during the days of action, physical attacks against those smashing down shop windows were done by people of all classes and many poor Blacks participated, defending 'their city'.

Nevertheless there was less participation in general from the Latino population in comparison to the Black one, just as much as the numerically inferior participation of East Oakland compared to the West. The reasons for this are the distance that separate East Oakland, where the majority of the Latino population lives, and Downtown, its absolute isolation regarding transports, and the war that Latino gangs are indulging themselves in which makes sure that a lot of people are not able to leave the gang territory without risking getting shot. The organisation, from April onwards, of weekend BBQs in different neighbourhoods was a remarkable way to confront those problems and, even if the movement was by then gone, the success of this approach showed the richness of possibilities for local organisation.

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The class composition of this movement brings us to the question of *unification*, which is related to the sole slogan that can be highlighted from the US occupations (a slogan that sometimes pretended to be a demand but that can be nothing more than a house on sand) is: 'we are the 99%'. The movement of occupations was a cross-class struggle, admittedly, to the extent that a part was composed by diverse middle-classes petrified for their future. But the slogan reflects the idealism that drove a part of the crowd: that of a trans-class struggle, of a struggle where all classes would melt together under a common banner, but at the same time remain as they are, with their class particularities left intact. The disgust that quickly took over the liberal middle-classes towards the presence of homeless in most camps is the most basic proof that this slogan was nothing but a fantasised identity, an identity that was absolutely unsustainable *per se*. Furthermore, the other side of the coin of the 99% slogan is the police, and the recurring, and absolutely idiotic, question 'Are cops part of the 99%?' was somehow the most sober confession of the helplessness of the movement of occupations in the US. It is only because there could be this fantasised unity of the 99% that this unity can extend to the only executioner which faces it.

For us, *generalisation* is opposed to *unification*. Unification imposes the subsumption of all under a unity. In generalisation, particularities are intact but become linked with each other, organically. Unification could only function in programmatism, since there was subsumption of all under a unique subject: the white male worker. Generalisation is the only communist horizon of the present moment. But one has also to understand this generalisation as generalisation of conflicts *within the struggle*, conflicts forcing the struggle to self-transformation.

If the slogan of the 99% has a richness to it, it is that of *unification* and not of *generalisation*. But beyond the numerous critiques that the 'radical' milieux have formulated, one must try to understand why, in a country where no one was speaking of classes anymore,

such a slogan was able to bring together such varied classes; and one must also understand why such a question always brought forth one's belonging to the '99%' (which was becoming, as in a Baptist church, a purely performative function). The crisis, like all crises, brings with it the possibility of generalisation as much as a possibility of separation. The first aspect is that of a revolutionary moment, the second is the counter-revolution, these two aspects are produced jointly as the struggle unfolds. A generalisation is only possible once all the sub-classes forming the proletariat attack the mode of production. It is then that their class belonging falls apart and that they became *the* class, the *historical party*. The body of the proletariat then enters into the process of chemical precipitation. It becomes a body more solid than the milieu where it was born. The process of precipitation is this 'class-belonging'. But this class-belonging is already a handicap, an obstacle, an external constraint which, once accepted, turns out to be solely a burden which one doesn't know what to do with. The slogan of the '99%', particularly in the US context, is a class-belonging slogan, a weak one, but still a class belonging nonetheless. And it is in that fashion that it becomes such a handicap. In the internal struggle of this *becoming-class*, the movement of communisation will be the tendency which, once class belonging has been posed as an external constraint, will tend towards the abolition of this class, and, from then on, of all classes. But before that, the question of *generalisation*, neither as impoverishment nor as compromise, but as radicalisation, will be the main question. This generalisation will be a moment of rupture that will turn on the masses. At its peaks, there was a glimpse of that in the Oakland Commune.

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Another aspect of the internal tendency of the movement to recognise itself under an unsustainable identity was the presence of the national flag. In the US, the question of patriotism did not have the same resonance as in the occupation of Syntagma square in Athens. Blaumachen underlines four reasons explaining the presence of Greek flags in the Indignados movement: the social structure of the movement and the links between class struggle and anti-imperialism, the perception of austerity measures as imposed by 'foreigners', the meagre place of Greece in the capitalist nations hierarchy, the migratory crisis in Greece.<sup>37</sup> But none of those reasons can explain the presence of American flags in the Occupy movement (not even the social structure, since it was not necessarily the petty-bourgeoisie carrying the flags but often the most impoverished—vets with no future on the labour market). In the same manner as the constant reference to the First Amendment, those flags appear within the terrain opened by the idea of a civil society not separated from politics. This idea can only take place when the struggle attacks neither the private nor the public sphere.

In this fashion, any attempt to attack the private or the public sphere was an attempt to overcome the limits of the struggle. Somehow, self-organising as precarious workers or as women or queers were two sides of the same attack. But then one must answer the question: why did women and queers self-organise and not precarious workers?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 'The Indignados' movement in Greece', *Sic* no. 1

<sup>38</sup> Attempts to self-organise as precarious workers happened only once the movement had lost his breath and had lost the hope to reconquer a space. Furthermore, they never went beyond the 'radical' milieu.

***From One Cycle to the Next, From One Counter-Revolution to the Next***

The cycle of struggle of anti-globalisation rested on the idea of the *alternative*. Behind the slogan ‘another world is possible’ was the idea of a society redefined by its own needs, of a magical overcoming of capitalism that would place the human being rather than the economy at the center of social relations. The movement of plaza occupations (Arab Spring, Indignados and Occupy) showed, as if it was needed, that this alternative is obsolete. If one looks at the Occupy movement, the main characteristic is the absence of demands, not by choice, but out of impossibility. But when one takes a closer look at those demands (because behind this absence, one must see an uncontrollable multitude of individual demands—each one coming to the square with her own home-made placard), what one can see is a brand new reformism, albeit one that can’t be recuperated politically. Abolish the Fed, make the banks pay, stop speculation—everyone comes with her little idea of management and all that gets blended in the middle of yoga classes, never-ending bongo playing, the shouting of a homeless person pretending he is an FBI agent and the smell of incense. The characteristic of the present moment is the impossibility of the slightest reform. In such a context, the avalanche of reformist propositions that made up the daily bread in all those camps should be seen only in their entirety, i.e. as evidence of the fact that no single slogan could emerge.

In Oakland, among the reactionary tendencies within the movement, a large portion of the terrain was filled by non-profits, which, with their influence on Black or Latino populations, were one of the pillars of the movement at the same time as they were a brake pedal. Those non-profits pose the question the idea of a political legacy, of the transfer of ‘radicalism’ from one generation to another. Some who are part of them pretended that without their work, that is, the duty of spreading radical consciousness and maintaining struggles within local structures throughout the years since radical movements broke down in the ‘70s, that the Oakland Commune would not have been possible. This is probably a factor, but then one must once again ask the question of the break. If non-profits were able to carry on a form of the ‘radical’ tradition (a quite meagre and questionable tradition, however, seeing the compromises that the non-profits had made with the administration), their role during the Oakland Commune was to try to contain the movement. The first role of the non-profits was to install the debate on violence or non-violence after the general strike. But if some have seen here a battle over the question of legitimacy in the movement between ‘radicals’ and non-profits, the answer is of little matter. What matters is that, in most cases, it was the measures proposed by ‘radicals’ (refusing to compromise with the police, unauthorised demonstrations, the general strike, the occupation of buildings, posing the gender question, etc.) and not the ones proposed by the non-profits that were chosen by the movement.

But the non-profits raised the crucial question of racial legitimacy. One cannot think of a movement in the US without tackling the question of race and taking into account the particular functioning of capital in the US where its reproduction always ends up being racialised and where racism is based on urbanism and trans-class agreements as well as the role and the nature of daily-life state repression, and not just the simple will of a racist minority that would lead the country. Each time the non-profits endeavored to bring back order, they always did it under the banner of ‘Follow those whiteys and you’ll end up in jail!’ The fact that this question found a recurring echo in the debates shows that it is a central one. Even if not all the members of non-profits are from ethnic minorities, they are respected by most of

the people that compose those minorities. This is not always the case with ‘radicals’, who, for the most part, moved to Oakland out of free choice in the last few years. It is certain that a Black or Latino person from the ghetto does not have the same position in front of a judge as a white person, especially if their cases are considered political. During the movement, a relationship between race and sentencing was more than obvious. The fact must be added that growing up in the ghetto means often carrying with you a police record, past jail sentences or a suspended sentence. OPD indeed spends its time targeting Blacks and Latinos in the poor neighbourhoods and courts are similar to mass slaughter. Therefore ending up in penitentiary for many years for the reason that a cop decided that you correspond to the wanted notice describing a ‘young tall black man’ is more than common. This is particularly important in the Californian context of the ‘three strikes law’ where three felonies require a life sentence. The question of risks and legitimacy was therefore central in the debates in and around the movement, not to even mention the question of involving undocumented immigrants. What must be underlined is that, although they were present, racial conflicts were very rare and ‘radicals’ found a lot of support from the people coming from the ghetto.<sup>39</sup>

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To the extent that those two cycles of struggle belong to the same period, one could think that the limits present in this struggle (centrality of reproduction, impossibility of class affirmation, etc.) were already inherent to the period of anti-globalisation. The key leap separating those two cycle of struggle is the withdrawal of the idea of the alternative. The slogan ‘Another World is Possible’ would now sound as dated as ‘Bring the War Home!’ and it is noteworthy that none of the slogans of the anti-globalisation era were present in the Oakland Commune, although references to the Black Panthers were constant.<sup>40</sup> But one should see the alternative only in the way it interlinked revolution and counter-revolution in the previous cycle of struggle. The alternative was formalising practices of struggle once it was obvious that any workers’ identity was gone. The alternative wasn’t in itself a counter-revolution. It was counter-revolution that was using it, that was its achievement, working by solidifying the developed practices and positing them as a norm.

This cycle of struggle, like any cycle of struggle, has a horizon that contains within itself its own counter-revolution. The counter-revolution of this cycle of struggle has for its main content the creation of an identity that can only exist in the contamination of the public sphere by the private one—a contamination that is still not the abolition of both—and the idea of an autonomisation of the sphere of reproduction. ‘Every stage of the development of the class struggle must overcome the traditions of previous stages if it is to be capable of recognising its own tasks clearly and carrying them out effectively—except that development

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<sup>39</sup> Beyond all that, one question can be asked: why did the movement never succeed in integrating the Chinese population since the plaza is only a block from Chinatown?

<sup>40</sup> ‘Power to the people!’ was heard constantly, for example. Somehow, the Black Panthers appeared at this precise moment of the collapsing of programmatism, which means that their means of struggle took place only in the sphere of reproduction (free meals, free school, committees of neighborhood protection, women’s rights, etc.) whilst their theoretical and organisational structure was still purely programmatist.

is now proceeding at a far faster pace. The revolution thus develops through the process of internal struggle. It is within the proletariat itself that the resistances develop which it must overcome; and in overcoming them, the proletariat overcomes its own limitations and matures towards communism.<sup>41</sup>

When there is no generalisation there is the loss of the content of rupture that was present in a practice. In Egypt, Tahir square allowed a completely new role for women within struggles, caused, at least in the beginning, by the very simple fact that everyone had to share the same place day and night. A year later, aggressions and rape of women are more and more common there and demonstrations denouncing sexual harassment are violently attacked. Any activity which tends then to go beyond the practices developed within a struggle, beyond the identity that arises from it and therefore does not allow any practice or any identity to become fixed, attacks what the present moment produces as counter-revolution.

### *Self-Transformation, Event and Activity*

In its constitution, the Oakland Commune had to deal with the whole of the reproduction of the proletariat, without a revolutionary process around it. This meant organising for food, health care, shelter, activities, and all the rest of it, whilst still imprisoned in the relations and categories of capitalism and all the 'old filthy business that comes with it'. It therefore constituted itself around a community that was the real community of the struggle inasmuch as it was a community within the capitalist world. Drug deals, for example, were not forbidden and, knowing that the police wouldn't enter the camp, many came to escape continual police harassment and ended up participating in the camp but also using it as a place to sell, although traditional pushers of the plaza did see their sales decline during the Commune. In another example, a participant was found in the camp and shot just outside of it by a someone who was looking for him exactly a month after the camp's beginning. Reality then struck back and everyone present describes the scene as a moment where no one knew what to do. Besides that, many were surprised that such a thing happened so late, as fights and brawls were constant. But, for many, the Oakland Commune was a process of self-transformation. The personal story of S., often discussed, is a typical illustration of it:

S. lived on the Plaza before the Commune. 'As soon as the camp arrived, S. began diligently working in the kitchen, effectively helping to set it up and distribute the cartloads of food which began flowing in. But for reasons that are unclear, S. became increasingly irascible and one day he snapped, brandishing a kitchen knife at someone in response to a dispute. S. then began threatening people and getting into fights several times a day[...] Attempts to mediate the conflict essentially failed, and S. seemed immune to all reason. One day, after he had started another fight, a group formed and attempted to run him out of the camp. But S. came back, more enraged and more dangerous. Finally, in the ensuing scuffle, someone hit him over the head with a 2x4 and knocked him out. When he regained consciousness, he wandered out of the camp, followed by some street medics, who called an ambulance. Two weeks later, though, he returned. His affect was completely changed and he said he was taking some kind of medication. Once again, he became a dedicated participant in camp life, making new friends and involving himself in various projects.'<sup>42</sup>

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41 A. Pannekoek, *World Revolution and Communist Tactics*, Chapter III.

42 'But one day, after a police attack on the plaza, he was arrested for obstruction of an officer, a

The Oakland Commune was not a form or a model, it was a dynamic. Within the dynamic of the camp echoed the individual dynamics, in the process of self-transformation, but still prisoners of the old world.

But besides daily internal brawls, no organ of order or regulation was set up. The 'safe space committee', which existed from the very beginning of the camp, never had or wanted to have the responsibility to solve brawls. And, more important, the anti-police patrols were constantly called upon to play the role of security guards within the camp but always refused this role and broke any possibility that existed to transform them into an internal militia by imposing quick team rotations. The only way to deal with those problems and to pose the questions that had to be posed was then through individuals or affinity groups.

Located within the reproduction of the proletariat, the Oakland Commune had to face the gender category. By 'category', we do not mean an abstraction or a vague sociological classification. Each mode of production has its own categories and they exist as relations. If the camp was to be a haven for anyone (and it was a haven inasmuch as it was securing meals, shelter and a protection against the police), it had obviously to be one first of all for women or queers. And this is where the question of activity comes up. Women and queers *had* to self-organise for a matter of survival,<sup>43</sup> but they had to self-organise *within the totality that was the camp*. And this totality, as we said, couldn't exist as such. Women and queers self-organising were therefore one of the main dynamics that would prevent the camp from falling into a fantasised identity, that of the 'we are the 99%', because the 99% is a compact whole of the individual poverty and violence of capitalist relations. The 99% is harassment, rape and murder. The organisation of an Occupy Patriarchy front was a constant reminder that nothing that united this camp but in the negative. It was the creation of a struggle within the struggle and was one of the dynamics that went against the fact that the struggle, not facing its own limits, would fall into an identity. That became *concretely* clear when, in the second camp, women and queers were not as strongly organised (much preparation work needed to be done outside of the camp and this work forced old-school participants to be absent whilst new people were constantly flowing in) and sexual harassment became more and more frequent.

If the gender question was central in the internal dynamics of the camp, partly by the implication of certain tendencies within it, gender as a whole was not questioned. The

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relatively minor misdemeanour. The Anti-repression Committee was unable to secure his release, however, because he was on probation. He was transferred to the county jail where, as usual, they refused to give him his medicine. What happened next is unclear, but he is alleged to have assaulted a guard. The charge he received, felony assault on an officer, would have meant a potential 'third strike' under California's three strikes law and, consequently, a life sentence. Although there was an entire subcommittee devoted to his defence, he was forced to take a plea deal in order to avoid the third strike. He is now serving a 4 year prison sentence.' (J. Bernes, 'Square and Circle, the Logic of Occupy', *The New Inquiry*).

43 Concerning the Queer movement, survival and self-organisation, see the Bashback comrades [*Bashback! Queer ultraviolence*, Anthology, Ardent Press]. For those who consider the term 'survival' an exaggeration, let us recall two murders. Brandy, a Black transsexual, was shot, less than a hundred feet from where the camp was located, the following April by a man enraged to discover that s/he was a transsexual. Tsega Tsegay, active participant in the camp, was beaten to death by her husband a few months later.

connection between the gender question and the limit constituted by the sphere of labour is obvious: it is because the Oakland Commune couldn't attack the sphere of labour that it couldn't completely question gender. labour is what allows the separation of the totality into spheres: production and reproduction, public and private. labour creates gender and without grasping labour, gender always runs the risk of being essentialised. Despite all that, due to the anchoring of the camp within the reproduction of the proletariat and the activity of certain part of the camp, the gender question was addressed during the struggle.

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What is a 'rift'? It is an event that says: 'We have to *act as a we* but we can no more *exist as a we*.' It is the moment where everything that forms an external constraint ends up being put into question by the production of a new practice. Within a struggle, it is any moment that shows a possible overcoming of what the struggle is, of its conditions and its limits, towards generalisation. What are the margins for action around and within those events? They are taking part in struggles, understanding their limits and hitting against them, defending measures and practices that will open self-organisation—or the practices inherent to a struggle—towards its abolition.

Communisation will be the abolition of all classes by the proletariat and this overcoming is already being produced in present struggles as a horizon at the same time as its counter-revolution. But if communisation is nothing but a set of measures, those measures will have to be pushed for and defended. They won't come down from heaven. Some groups have coined the term 'rift' to name the activities in the present moment that announce communisation. It is of course obvious that those activities are not the property of a 'communising tendency' or even of a political milieu, but are a current in the sense of a shared horizon.

What is central is that these activities are not the germs of a revolution to come, they are not a model for what communisation could/should/will be, and they are not the beginning of the revolution. They are the activities that are necessary at a present situation because they struggle with communisation as their horizon. They are nothing other than practices within the current struggles, practices that can never be formalised.

Capital wants to turn any limit into a barrier that it can overcome. So does anyone in a struggle, at the moment of a rift. This barrier, built or present as a necessary first step, is self-organisation or any other form of practice developed by the struggle. Capital, as a mode of production, can never overcome its own limits. When a mode of production transforms its barriers into limits and overcomes them, it means that it grows into a new mode of production. Every limit always acts to define. Once a struggle overcomes its own limits, it leaves 'the struggle' behind and engages in a revolutionary process. There, there is no growth, but only rupture.

### ***Farewell to the Commune***

Some might question the fact that we chose to call the Occupy Oakland movement the 'Oakland Commune'. This name didn't come from the pure wishful thinking of militancy, but reflects somehow a reality of the struggle, with its splendour and its weaknesses. Condemned to a plaza and with the sphere of labour as its constitutive limit, the Oakland

Commune was one of the most prominent and sharpest moments of the present crisis (neither its product, nor its cause, but a *moment* of the crisis), but at the same time bound to be an enclave. If we have tried to analyse this struggle, it is to see towards which horizon it leads. Analysing a struggle is not to 'see in poverty nothing but poverty', but to see 'in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society'.

In all that it achieved, the Oakland Commune was the strongest echo from the future that if there will be a communist revolution, its content will be the complete abolition of all the categories and relations of capitalist mode of production. As a crystallisation of the present moment, the Oakland Commune showed everyday, in its defeats as much as in its victories, that every category of the capitalist mode of production creates a limit that the struggle must overcome. This overcoming is possible only through generalisation, contamination of all the cell tissues of society. This generalisation is not an enlargement, but a moment of rupture.

The expansion of struggles outside the work place and therefore taking reproduction as a whole into consideration is a moment of the crisis, something that no one could have envisioned. In this fashion, the US Occupations, and in Oakland more than anywhere else, went a step further than December '08 in Greece. Many struggles now are within the reproduction sphere and the sphere of labour is then always a constitutive limit of those struggles. Three reasons for that: the end of the worker identity and its tradition of struggle (which is as well the clearance of its juridical framing), the diversity of the proletariat in times of crisis (once the different strata collapse) and, above all, the drastic fall in the real wage compared to the nominal one. Consequently, the autonomisation and the personification of the moments of the production process are often the horizon of struggles (seeing finance capital as parasite of the 'real economy', the '1%', etc.). But if labour and production are still ghosts in those struggles, it doesn't mean at all that the productive workers will be the central figure of the coming struggles. Labour and production will have to be absorbed fully *as categories* before measures can be taken for their abolition.

If a revolutionary period happens, struggles will then overcome the seclusion of those spheres, not by considering production as the so far missed or unseen centre, but by extending attacks from the heart of reproduction to the heart of production. Production won't be able to be the centre that it used to be, but only one part of a whole. The struggles won't transform themselves step by step, but will go through moments of rupture. Within the struggles, those moments of rupture will allow one to glimpse, in its totality, the mode of production that lies under a suit of riot gear.

Rust Bunny collective, Fall 2012

Note: warm thanks to all the comrades who, through their help, their information and their analysis, have made the writing of this text possible. 'We are on the side of the species' eternal life, our enemies are on the side of eternal death. And Life will swallow them up, by synthesising the two terms of the antithesis within the reality of communism.'<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> A. Bordiga, *The Revolutionary Program of Communist Society Eliminates All Forms of Land Property, of Productive Installations and of Products of labour* (personal translation from *Bordiga et la passion du communisme*, Spartacus, p. 69)



## Limit Analysis and its Limits

As a mode of inquiry into the conditions of present-day and historical struggles, much recent output from the so-called ‘communisation current’ might be described as a kind of *limit analysis*. This mode is something more than the usual exercise in unhappy consciousness we have come to expect from the ultraleft. Rather, we are told, limits are the very condition of possibility for struggles. They are generative, the source of struggles’ dynamism as well as their transience and inevitable failure. The horizon of communisation, in this sense, appears through these impasses, just as the virtual depths of a painting appear as the thickening of paint on a canvas surface. Each historical moment, in this sense, has a form of transcendence specific to the limits it presents for proletarian struggles—communisation, then, is that form of overcoming which opens from the particulars of today’s struggles. In attending to the two-fold character of the limit—both barrier and horizon—such analysis shares something with dialectical thought in general, and its willingness to think two incompatible thoughts at once.

But there are limits, alas, even to the study of limits, which can all too quickly pass over into fatalism and theodicy—as if the tragic text of history were already written, and our task only to discover the fatal flaw present from the outset. When done well, however, this method is about the search for the new in history: a new given by struggles themselves and merely registered by theory, a new immanent to the ever-changing terms under which proletarians meet capital and its powers. To register these new developments, however, requires close attention to all of the forces at play in a particular moment. Otherwise, limit analysis is just a machine for affirming assumptions.

‘Under the Riot Gear’ exemplifies both the good and the bad of such a method. There is no little amount of insight into what happened in Oakland during 2011 and 2012, and it is certainly one of the most rigorous and engaged accounts we’ve read. There are numerous moments worth commending. The distinction arrived at in the concluding pages, between

processes of *generalisation* and processes of *unification* is incisive and, even better, portable. But there is quite often a mechanical application of certain conceptual frameworks (a mechanisation with the ironic effect of naturalising its own assumptions, as we shall see later on). While we often agree with many of these frameworks, in whole or in part, we can't help but feel that the way in which they are applied leaves something to be desired.

'Under the Riot Gear' follows the analytical schematic elaborated by Theorie Communiste in essays such as 'The Present Moment' and 'The Glass Floor', in which it is suggested that, for proletarians at present, 'the very fact of acting as a class appears as an external constraint, a limit to be overcome'. This means that every time proletarians affirm themselves as a class—as labour power—they likewise must affirm and sustain capital. Under present crisis conditions, workers often struggle merely to keep their jobs; in other words, they struggle to maintain the capital–labour relationship as such. Minimal modifications and defensive struggles are the order of the day. As a result of the restructuring of labour, workers are compelled to make endless sacrifices, effectively adopting the standpoint of capital in order to preserve and extend their access to the wage. If previous generations might have imagined working-class struggle as a process of 'self-valorisation' in which workers gradually won for themselves an autonomy from capital, now the affirmation of class identity seems one and the same with an affirmation of the imperatives of capital and its right to manage. Action as a class becomes self-undermining.

This shift in the structure of the capital–labour relation has shattered the material coherence of the factory, of industrial production, in the formerly industrial core—via automation, off-shoring, disaggregation of productive processes, and the remaining litany of post-Fordism. Exiled from the factory floor, proletarian antagonism finds itself in the streets, departing the space of production for the space of reproduction or circulation. The December 2008 uprising in Greece is a paradigmatic example of this displacement, in the reading given it by Theorie Communiste: the most explosive encounters occurred between precarious, marginalised proletarians and the state, while the formal, unionised working-class involved itself rather late and ambivalently. Once antagonism has been displaced in this manner, proletarians face off against the apparatuses which reproduce their class identity: the police, the schools, the trade union offices and various governmental agencies. The promise of such struggle is that, in attempting to negate the forms of class belonging which now appear 'as external constraint', it might pass into open insurrection that puts both labour and capital into question and affirms neither. The concomitant limit, conversely, is that such antagonism remains at a remove from the heart of production and is unable to bring the economy as such to a halt.

While sometimes insightful about the differences separating Oakland from Athens and Thessaloniki, 'Under the Riot Gear' applies this analysis to Oakland somewhat heavily-handedly. We read, for instance, that the unique contribution of Oakland and the other plaza occupations is that, there, the proletariat took in hand the question of its own reproduction. Unlike Greece, 'the space of struggle was no longer only contained in the face to face encounter against the police, but in the face to face encounter with the reproduction of the proletariat.' Nonetheless, for the authors, this direct engagement with reproduction brought its own challenges, naturalising an 'autonomisation' of the sphere of reproduction consequent on the growth of superfluous, unwaged proletarians. This makes it more difficult to examine the ways in which the materials for the mutual-aid based structures of the camps

came from the surrounding capitalist economy (and were sometimes paid for with money earned from the sale of labour power).

This is where the piece displays its own taste for hyperbole, and we read, for instance, that as a result of this autonomisation, '[the Oakland Commune] never questioned the idea of production', a point contradicted shortly; the following pages largely concerns Occupy Oakland's two blockades of the Oakland Port, and its intervention into the struggle of port workers. This discussion also stands in contradiction with the likewise hyperbolic claims that 'Outside of the square, nothing could be attacked.' As is well-documented, all sorts of things beyond the square were attacked in the many nights of rioting, disturbances that spooked the Oakland Business Association enough for it to speak to the press about declining sales and businesses which had chosen not to relocate to Oakland given its lack of security. However, we find ourselves in agreement with the spirit if not the letter of our correspondents' wording, if by this spirit we are meant to understand that the Oakland Commune was unable to pass into a phase of sustained attack against the economic forms upon which it depended. It's true that the Commune's central feature was a fundamentally passive and defensive one: the camp, a space in which the reproduction of the proletariat was directly engaged through structures of mutual aid and free giving. Though this space was defended, the moments of open violence were responses to attacks on the camp, or alternately, responses to attempts to thwart its reestablishment. To overcome this limit would have meant the passage into open insurrection and the transcendence of the 'camp-form'.

That said, we are compelled to linger over the categories of *strike* and *production* which ground the critique—not to defend the virtue of the encampment, but precisely to shake these matters loose from a static conception and bring them to life in the present situation. Without this there will be no understanding of the Oakland Commune, nor the terrain in which the practices of communisation may unfold.

### *What Is a Strike?*

If such a passage to open insurrection were at all possible, it would have occurred during the climactic moment of the General Strike of Nov. 2, when the camp-form was left behind, briefly, for a moment of offensive expansion. This is where the authors' application of the 'class belonging as exterior constraint' thematic becomes most interesting and, in our view, problematic. For the authors, the declaration of a general strike, which might further have meant the transformation of the struggle into a form capable of challenging production as such, merely reproduced the externality of class belonging: 'inasmuch as almost no one went on strike, the moment where the possibility to recognise oneself as a worker with her power became straight away a handicap. In other words, in the moment when class belonging was outlined, it was only produced as an external constraint'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Once again, the piece relies on hyperbole to make its point, since longshoremen walked off the job in the morning, and there was a 'sick-out' by Oakland Teachers which shut down many schools. Furthermore, many other workers took personal days or simply refused to report to work that day. Though one might not want to call such actions a strike, they are nonetheless effective in crippling workplaces. The immigrant strike of 2006, 'el gran paro'—with which the authors contrast the Nov. 2 General Strike—was largely accomplished this way, through the individual withdrawal of labour power and for this reason not referred to as a 'strike' either at the time or afterward.

But it is unclear in what way the labeling of this event as ‘strike’ was a handicap: 2 November was doubtless the high point of the movement. If it’s true that the term ‘strike’ was a false one, this seems to have been a generative rather than limiting delusion. In any case, we don’t believe the term ‘general strike’ meant what the authors imagine it meant for the participants – that is, we don’t think it was delusion. *As we remember it, to call for a general strike meant, rather, to call for a general attack on the economy as such; in other words, it was a call for an interruption of the capitalist economy, whether by withdrawal of labour power (individually, collectively), blockade, occupation, targeted sabotage or generalised rioting.* All of these tactical elements combined on 2 November. This sense of *strike* is neither new nor lost to history, as we shall see; it persists in dialectical relation to particular conditions. As the authors themselves note, the ‘strike’ as withdrawal of labour is merely one among the ensemble of elements which come together in the ‘general strikes’ of the past. If withdrawal of labour was the primary element in the general strikes of the past 130 years—which from the outset involved blockade, expropriation, sabotage—increasingly that role is now held by the blockade. These blockades have as their subject proletarians in the expanded sense that includes not only labourers, but all those who are ‘without reserves,’ including the unemployed. The blockade is the form for an era of expanding superfluous populations, as the *piqueteros* of Argentina and more recently the *piquets volants* of France have already shown us.

### ***Where Is Production?***

In many respects, the participants in this new type of ‘general strike’ grasp something, organically and spontaneously, which ‘Under the Riot Gear’ misses. It is no doubt true that the spheres of circulation and reproduction depend upon the sphere of production and productive labour; however, the converse is also true. Production can be halted *from beyond*, by proletarians who are not productive labourers, through an interruption of the circulation upon which production depends. In the same manner, struggles in the sphere of reproduction might degrade capital’s ability to find the labour power it needs. If the commodities (raw materials, half-finished goods, finished goods) and bodies which capital needs don’t arrive at the factory, the warehouse, or the retail outlet, then all labour and all production of value stops.

Furthermore, production and circulation are today entangled in newly complex ways. Circulation is now internal to production. As noted above, with the supply-chain Taylorism of Toyotaisation and the related logistics revolution, the factory has been disaggregated, parcelised and distributed in planetary networks such that the production of a singled finished item might require the coordination of dozens of producers. These networks are highly brittle; the use of just-in-time transport schemes and sophisticated logistics protocols to accelerate and manage flows of commodities means that there is little room for error, as once-common stockpiles and buffers have been eliminated. Given the extent of these networks, disruptions of circulation at certain key chokepoints can have far-reaching effects on production. Finally, circulation is internal to production in the sense that, under the reign of Walmart and the new mega-retailers, production is driven by consumption in new ways. In the so-called ‘pull-production’ model, goods are not produced or shipped until data is received from the retailer indicating that stocks have fallen. Items are pre-sold under such an arrangement, at least ideally, and consumption exerts a determinative effect on production.

In all regards, then, an intervention into the sphere of circulation is, at one and the same time, an intervention into the sphere of production. And while interventions into the sphere of circulation do not have seizure of the means of production as their horizon in the same way that interventions into production do, it's unclear that such seizures are even workable today, in most areas, where production is limited to peripheral or secondary items of little use beyond capitalist social forms.

### What Is Production?

It proves significant as well that the authors misrecognise the character and present situation of productive labour. There is a risk of pedantry in all such discussions; the authors route around this by cherry-picking a partial idea from Marx, asserting that 'We can go as far as saying that any labour really subsumed by capital is productive.' Should the words of Marx be the measure, he himself refutes this in a dozen places; more significantly, his full assessment accords with the developments we have seen in the global economy, including rising volatility and declining profitability beyond the nominal price regimes of the Finance/Insurance/Real Estate sector. Such developments are consistent with, for example, Marx's careful analysis and verdict in Volume 2 of *Capital* regarding the non-productive character of work given over to transforming money capital into commodities or the reverse, said work which 'includes circulation, or is included by it'.

But suggesting that a certain labour is unproductive does not mean, at the same time, disputing the *social necessity* for such work: 'Just as the circulation time of capital forms a necessary part of its reproduction time, so the time during which the capitalist buys and sells, prowling around the market, forms a necessary part of the time in which he functions as a capitalist, i.e. as personified capital. It forms part of his business hours. . . The change of state costs time and labour power, not to create value, but rather to bring about the conversion of value from one form to the other, and so the reciprocal attempt to use this opportunity to appropriate an excess quantity of value does not change anything. This labour, increased by evil intent on each side, no more creates value than the labour that takes place in legal proceedings increases the value of the object in dispute'. Seen in this light, banking, bookkeeping, advertising, and numerous administrative tasks are at one and the same time essential to the reproduction of capital and, nonetheless, unproductive.<sup>46</sup>

This distinction has become more rather than less significant to capital's struggle for its own reproduction. As it has restructured away from industrial production, capital has sought revenue increasingly in the sphere of circulation—for the given capitalist acts under the

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46 Various passages in Marx are useful for grasping the relation between money capital and *productive* capital, between circulation and production, and between revenue and value. Consider for example *Capital* vol. 2, chs. 1 & 6; vol. 3 chs. 4, 16–19; *Grundrisse* Notebook 2 ('It is damned difficult for Messrs the economists to make the theoretical transition from the self-preservation of value in capital to its multiplication', 270–1); I.I. Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theories of Value*, Ch. 19 ('Thus the question of *productive labour* rests on the question of *productive capital*, i.e., on the well-known theory, in Volume II of *Capital*, of the "Metamorphoses of Capital". According to this theory, capital goes through three phases in its process of reproduction: money capital, productive capital and commodity capital. The first and third phases represent the "process of circulation of capital", and the second phase, the "process of production of capital". 'Productive' capital, in this schema, is not opposed to unproductive capital, but to capital in the 'process of circulation'). For a full discussion of the literature, see Ian Gough's 'Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour' from the *New Left Review*, 1/76.

compulsion to seek revenue rather than to produce new value. This compulsion precisely constitutes an internal limit for capital, setting profit against accumulation and price against value, and must be understood as an immanent character of the present crisis. It is of little interest to chuckle over the capitalist's failure to have understood his Marx; rather, we simply note that the shift of resources and jobs toward the task of realising greater portions of decreasing surpluses, at an ever-quickenning pace, provides as well an opportunity for capital's antagonists.

Since capital sustains itself through the generation of value—and enters into crisis where the production of value falls below a certain level—antagonists will want to understand which sectors are value-generating and which are not. But this value-analysis is often taken to be a strategic analysis; Marxists are all too quick to assume that value-productivity equals strategic centrality, and that struggles in 'productive' parts of the economy will be more significant. This is quite simply untrue. As above, whether or not something produces value does not, in the end, determine its usefulness for the reproduction of capital. The banking and credit systems produce no value on their own. Nonetheless, the freezing of the credit-supply can bring the productive economy to a standstill in a matter of days. Value-analysis might be a necessary preliminary to a strategic understanding of capital, but it is no substitute for it.

It is no doubt the case that the restructuring of capital, such that the productive sector is ever harder to discern in places like Oakland, presents real difficulties. Rather than a value-analysis, we might instead orient ourselves toward the concomitant difficulty in finding the use-values necessary our survival; the looting of a circulatory entrepôt, after all, can provide only temporarily for material needs. The seizure of reproduction *from* capital would have remained inaccessible to the Oakland Commune even if had passed beyond its limits. At the same time, attacks on capital's presently vulnerable nodes, where are aggregated the processes of transforming commodities to money, should be understood as a nascent and tentative advance in the tactics explored by the Oakland Commune. The question for us, then, concerns the elusive unity of practice in coordinating these twin imperatives: the destruction of capital's self-reproduction and the command of our own. We take the practical discovery of this unity to be communisation.

### Class Belonging?

Having forced the general strike rather unrelentingly into the mold of the Greek riots (perhaps because of its misunderstanding of the ways in which production and productive labour present a limit), 'Under the Riot Gear' misses the specific points of difference between the unfolding of class belonging and antagonism in the Greek case and Oakland. If class belonging was an external constraint in Oakland, it was one actually *personified* by particular factions and groups. To understand this, though, one has to look in detail at some of the loathsome political maneuvering that accompanied both the port blockade on the day of the general strike and the subsequent blockade in December.

Though the ILWU (the longshoremen's union) wears proudly a legacy of radicalism stretching back to the 1930s and is typically much more combative than the majority of American unions, long since domesticated to the needs of capital, it tends to engage in 'political strikes' (which are illegal in the US) through a rather peculiar, legalistic mechanism. Because a clause in their contract gives longshoremen the right to refuse to cross a picket line—even a 'community picket'—they initiate work stoppages by inviting 'community activists' to picket at the gates of the port. This bit of theater is performed for the benefit of an

arbitrator who perfunctorily declares working conditions ‘unsafe,’ allowing the dockworkers to stop work without risking sanction. This is a curious inversion of the ‘class belonging as external constraint’ thematic—the longshoremen exteriorise their antagonism in the form of a crew of outsiders because their own contractual identity as workers has become a fetter. Even when it originates with the workers themselves, antagonism must come at the workplace from the outside, through a strange political ventriloquism.

Though the idea of blockading the port on 2 November—in support of the call for a general strike—emerged from the exchange between community activists and ILWU union members, the size of the forces conjured up by Occupy Oakland made it something entirely different, a blockade rather than a piece of theater, as the workers had no chance of getting through to the port, regardless of how the arbitrator ruled. And though the blockade was later described as an intervention into the Longview struggle, for the most part, the tens of thousands of people that marched on the port that day had little knowledge of the Longview struggle. They marched on the port for the same reasons that people came out to the events earlier in the day—to protest the destruction of the Oakland camp and the concurrent attacks on Occupy camps throughout the country, and more generally, out of solidarity with the invitingly vague political stance of the Occupy movement, which allowed people to protest against the various conditions of impoverishment, unemployment, and dispossession (often dispossession of the rights and privileges of the American middle class) that they experienced. For all the vagueness of Occupy, the attendees were there for themselves.

But as plans for a second blockade emerged in the following weeks, the entire narrative was rewritten such that the sequence of blockades became largely about lending support to the heroic but insufficient activity of the Longview workers, as well as to the incipient struggle of port truckers in Los Angeles. This had the result of domesticating the antagonistic forces which were unleashed by the General Strike, essentially making the Oakland Commune into the volunteer militia of port workers who, for the most part, would not act on their own behalf. Thus the external constraint appeared once again, a mirror image of the first time: with the help of some labour activists in the movement, the port workers—as image of class belonging—harnessed the combative energy of Occupy Oakland and diverted it away from any question of acting for itself, which would have meant acting against this image of class belonging and of the self-appointed activist leadership which facilitated the second blockade. Such an arrangement was paralysing for both sides: the longshoremen were rendered complacent by the externalisation of their capacity for antagonism, and the tatterdemalion mob from Occupy was directed away from the question of its own needs and toward the defense of this essentially passive class identity, one it couldn’t even inhabit. The problem, therefore, is not that the assorted proletarians from Occupy deluded themselves that they were labour. Rather, the problem is that they accepted that such actions are only meaningful and potentially decisive when done *on behalf of* labour: that the labour strike must always subsume the strike of non-labour.

### ***The Morality of Production***

But there is a risk, as we shall see, of identifying the Commune’s reorientation toward traditional labour struggles as a tilt back toward some natural equilibrium. Instead, it registers an incomplete motion toward rearticulating the place of the strike. Though the temporality of narrative retelling underscores the sequence in which there were strikes at two different

times (one in November, one in December), we might instead suggest that *the Oakland strike was always in two places*: the place of orthodox labour, to which the ragtag crowd brought some novelty, and the place of non-labour, to which the unions brought a pernicious element of moral legitimacy. This doubling too is a form of the moving contradiction, the two strikes grinding against each other as part of a larger dynamic through which the mode of struggle develops, moving against capital by moving with it. But neither position in the contradiction is itself stable, much less natural.

It is here that 'Under the Riot Gear' lurches perilously toward the error of recreating 'labour' as the natural state of the antagonists. This happens more than once, for example, 'As soon as a struggle that thinks of itself as being solely political (and economic) comes to confront one of its limits and goes through the process of transforming itself, then it is a *natural* feeling to acknowledge oneself as labour power [*Se reconnaître comme force de travail est un processus naturel*]. But, the transformation of this struggle into something else by means of acknowledging everyone as labour power could not, in this case, take place' (our emphasis).

Contrarily, if the antagonists had a 'natural' reaction on 2 November, it was to attack capital where it was accessible and vulnerable—not from an ideological self-identification, but as an objective measure of capital's own necessary expulsion of bodies from productive labour. This process includes both the production of surplus populations and the redistribution of jobs toward necessary but non-productive labour.

Theorie Communiste argue that programmatism should not be grasped as a colloquy of mistakes, but as an expression of the conditions of revolutionary possibility within the era we now designate as programmatist. We would argue in parallel that the strike in the place of production, the strike of labor as hegemonic form of anticapitalist struggle, also belongs to an era. This era was inaugurated by the generalisation of the wage-form by the industrial revolution; now it wanes in parallel with the decline of the industrial wage and the receding primacy of production as capital's self-conception. Thus we see a corollary to the struggles of that earlier moment, both return and revision: the blockade, the strike beyond the sites of production, bears a genealogical resemblance to the 'export riot' of the eighteenth century. But now with a difference: if those struggles meant to prevent the departure of use-values, of the means of reproduction, from leaving the country, the blockade returns after the production of such use-values has long since fled. Instead it is capital's means of reproduction that come under attack. Capital, we must recall, has its own limits, and reforms itself in its drive to overcome them; it is precisely this we see in the intensified need to find revenue in circulation. The blockade is this present unfolding of capital's limits from the standpoint of the proletariat and expressed as immediate struggle. This was perhaps the best possible in the moment; it was not enough.

We would argue, consequentially, that the final inability of Oakland Commune to confront capital on an enlarged scale arises from, in addition to the overwhelming state force arrayed against it, a double dynamic. On the one hand there is the truth that the proletarians of Oakland are increasingly exiled from the abode of valorisation: an effect with an internal bifurcation between those who work elsewhere in the economy and those who do not work at all. On the other hand, there is the persistent moralising character which implies that every seizure from the state or from capital must have some appeal to liberal virtue: that an appropriated building must be a school or library, that a strike must receive a trade union



imprimatur—as if somehow these gestures would allow for broad sympathy throughout the larger population, or might defer the blows of the batons.

Indeed, the sequence of events can't be understood without examining the moral assumptions people preserve concerning strikes and blockades. Because of the history of the worker's movement, it is commonly assumed that workers have *a right* to strike their workplace. Strikes are legitimate because it is now widely understood that, even if workers do not *own* the means of productions, being the temporary caretakers of this property implies they rightly have some say over its disposition, while a random proletarian does not. Blockades of workplaces which do not involve the workers, on the other hand, are by the same token seen as illegitimate, which of course allows the state to respond with much greater ferocity.<sup>47</sup> In our view, these ideas about the legitimacy of the strike and the illegitimacy of the blockade are extensions of the logic of property in general. During the second port blockade, activists from Occupy Oakland sought out the legitimacy and shelter from attack which their association with the unspoken *rights* of the workers offered them, while not acknowledging in any way the dangerous preconceptions on which this legitimacy rested. This is yet another way in which class belonging—here as moral image—has become a constraint.

We return, finally, to the pivotal claim of 'Under the Riot Gear': that the Oakland Commune 'almost never questioned the idea of production.' We do not think it is self-evident what it would mean 'to expand the struggle to the labour process,' nor that this is a natural unfolding; it is a historical unfolding in a changed situation. Similarly, the claim that 'The linking of the movement with school closures may have been another [effort toward such an expansion]' discovers an important inflection-point in the struggle, but for the wrong reasons; in point of fact, the struggle was extended to the schools, including a fairly prolonged occupation of one venue. However, the turn to the schools did not discover there students intent on seizing the reins of their own intellectual reproduction. Contrarily, it found a coordination with parents and teachers to replace, in effect, the support withdrawn by the state apparatus and mitigate, somewhat opportunistically, against the bad press Occupy Oakland had received, by seeking out the legitimacy of parent-teacher associations and their sentimental politics.

We believe that the ongoing disarticulation of population from productive labour will inevitably undermine the moral linkage between struggle and labour as understood in its bourgeois form, wherein it appears as natural; indeed, we understand the disclosure of 'labour power' as a historically constituted category—one in need of overcoming—to be a critical aspect of communisation. On the necessity of 'extending attacks from the heart of reproduction to the heart of production' we find only agreement. *La forme d'une ville change moins vite, hélas! que le coeur de la production!* But on the question of the structure of production today and the composition and tactical repertoire of the class that will stage such attacks, we found it necessary to add these comradely criticisms.

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<sup>47</sup> Of course, such blockades will have deleterious effects on the workers associated with the blocked site. But activists don't treat these effects in the same way they treat the negative consequences—for potential allies—of any tactic. 'Harming workers' is seen as particularly unthinkable.



