

Solidarity to the Anarchists in Greece

**Αλληλεγγύη στους
αναρχικούς στην
ελλάδα**

*Selected Interviews from “We Are an Im-
age from the Future: The Greek Revolt
of December 2008”*

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An anarchist, squatter, publisher, and worker

First, I want to say that I am not a historian. I'm an activist, a fighter on the frontlines in the anarchist struggle, since the end of the '70s. I don't know how precise my knowledge of anarchist history is, as it is a product of my memory and the things I heard and learned from other comrades during the years of my participation in this struggle. As far as I know, concerning the post-war period, the first anarchists appeared early in the '70s and the last years of the dictatorship, as a result of the influence of the revolt of May '68 which mainly had an impact on the Greeks living abroad, but also on those living here. By saying the influence of May '68 I also mean what came before that, the Situationists and other radical positions. In that sense the birth of anarchy in Greece, as a movement, does not refer so much to traditional anarchism—with its most significant moment being the Spanish Revolution and its main expressions the anarchist federations and the anarcho-syndicalist organizations—but mainly to the antiauthoritarian, radical political waves of the '60s.

As I said before, in Greece anarchists appeared in the beginning of the '70s and that is when they made their first publications and analysis about the Greek reality from an antiauthoritarian point of view.

The presence and participation of anarchist comrades in the events of the revolt of November 1973 was very significant, not in terms of numbers but rather in terms of their particular, remarkable political contribution, as they did not limit themselves to slogans against the dictatorship, but instead adopted broader political characteristics, which were anticapitalist and antistate. They were also among the few who started this revolt together with militants from the extreme Left. And they were so visible that representatives of the formal Left condemned their presence in the events, claiming that the anarchists were provocateurs hired by the dictatorship, while they also condemned their slogans, characterizing them as foreign and unrelated with the popular demands. In reality, the formal Left was hostile to the revolt itself because they were supporting the so-called democratization, a peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy. And since they could not stop the spontaneous revolt of '73 in which youth and workers participated, they came with the intent to manipulate it, and then, after the fall of the dictatorship, to exploit it politically.

During the revolt of '73 there were two tendencies: those who wanted it to be controlled and manipulated, in the context of fighting against the dictatorship, in favour of democracy, and against American influence; and those, of whom anarchists formed an important part, who saw the revolt in a broader way, against Authority and capitalism.

These two tendencies continued to clash, also after the dictatorship, in the era we call *metapolitefsi*, which means after the colonels gave the power to the politicians. It was a conflict between those who supported civil democracy and those who were against it. The first tendency considered the events of the Polytechnic as a revolt for democracy, while those who were against the regime of civil democracy saw the events of the Polytechnic as a revolt for social liberation. The echo of this conflict lasts until today, in a way. So, this is how anarchists appeared, and this was their contribution...

After the colonels handed over power to the politicians, two major forces appeared in the Greek reality. From the one side, there were radical political and social forces disputing the existing political, social, and economic order, and this was expressed by parts of the youth and workers as well. And on the other side there were the political forces of domination, from the conservative rightwing which was in government to their allies on the formal Left which became incorporated in the political system after the fall of the dictatorship. The rightwing government was trying to repress and terrorize the radical political and social forces we mentioned before, and so did the institutional Left, with its own means, when it couldn't control and manipulate them. Among these radical political and social forces were the anarchists, who were in conflict with even the most radical traditional concepts of the Left, such as the central role of the working class, the hierarchical organization in political parties, the idea of the vanguard, the vision of taking power, and the socialist transformation of society from above.

An important moment of the social struggle during the first years of *metapolitefsi*, at the end of the '70s, was the struggle in the universities, sparked by the efforts of the rightwing government to institute an educational reform. In this struggle anarchists also had a significant presence, as well as other groups and individuals with an anti-authoritarian and libertarian perspective. To a large degree, this struggle surpassed the boundaries of the university, and also surpassed university students as a subject, assuming wider radical characteristics and attracting the presence and participation of many more people, not strictly students, but generally youth, like highschoolers, and workers as well. It was an important moment in which the anarchists spread their influence among wide social sectors that were fighting.

In almost the same period of time, a little while after this struggle against the educational reform, anarchists, almost alone, carried out another struggle—solidarity with the prisoners' struggles. There, they demonstrated another characteristic of their radicalism: they didn't hesitate to engage in questions that were seen as taboo for society, like the question of prisons and prisoners, and they expressed their solidarity with them, fighting together with them for their demands—the abolition of disciplinary penalties, denunciation of tortures, and granting

prisoners with life sentences the right to have their cases examined by appeal courts—while always maintaining their vision of a society without any prisons at all.

A very important event of that period which shows the political and social dynamics of the subjects of resistance and, at the same time, the ferocity of political power, an event which actually defined the political developments of those times, was a demonstration that took place on the 17th of November, 1980, on the seventh anniversary of the Polytechnic revolt. (Every year there was and still is a demonstration on the anniversary). That particular year the government had forbidden the demonstration from going to the US Embassy. The youth organizations, as well as the student organizations, controlled by the Communist and the Socialist Parties, obeyed the prohibition; however, political organizations of the extreme Left, which were strong in that period of time, decided to attempt to continue the demonstration to the American Embassy, defying the prohibition laid down by the government and the police.

So, on the night of the 17th of November, 1980, next to the building of the Parliament, in the street leading to the embassy, thousands of demonstrators were confronted by a very strong force of police. The effort of the first lines of demonstrators, who were members of the extreme Left, to push forward to the American Embassy, was followed by a mass attack by the police forces in order to disperse the crowd of thousands. But despite the police attacks there was a strong and lasting resistance by several thousand people, youth and workers, members of the extreme Left, anarchists and autonomists, who set up barricades in central Athens—barricades which the police used armored vehicles to dismantle. During these clashes two demonstrators were murdered by the police, Iakovos Koumis and Stamatina Kanelopoulou, both members of extreme Left organizations, and hundreds were injured, some seriously. Among the ones injured, two were wounded by live ammunition, one of them in the chest, shot by police outside the Polytechnic.

During these clashes many capitalist targets were attacked and looted, like department stores, jewellery shops, and the like. This type of attack, which was one of the first expressions of metropolitan violence not strictly limited to targeting the police but also expressions and symbols of wealth, was condemned even by the extreme Left, whose political culture recognized only the police as a legitimate target. But a new phenomenon was emerging then, metropolitan violence, where besides engaging in confrontations with the police demonstrators were also destroying and looting capitalist targets, and that is exactly what was condemned by the Left.

Those events of November 1980 were, as we mentioned, an expression of the political and social dynamics of the first years of *metapolitefsi*, but also the culmination and the end of the hegemony of the

extreme Left on these dynamics, since they didn't manage to explain, in their own terms, the extent and the form of the events neither socially nor even to their followers. However, these same events were a catalyst for the fall of the rightwing government, one year later.

In the beginning of the '80s, as a result of a major effort by a part of the political system to control and manipulate the social, political, and class resistances and demands, a new political change occurred and the Socialist Party, PASOK, came to power (October '81). This was something that in that period seemed to be a huge, historical change. It created a lot of illusions, incorporated and neutralized old militants in the institutions and marked the end of these first years of *metapolitefsi*, the end of a variety of spontaneous social and class struggles which had appeared in the first years after the fall of the dictatorship.

So, after this political change, anarchists who were hostile to any kind of mediation and incorporation into the institutions were in a sense alone against this new authority that had many controlled and manipulated supporters, many adherents full of illusions.

PASOK came to power in order to modernize Greek society, repealing laws that were products of the civil war era—when the Right had crushed the Left in an armed conflict—and the post-civil war era, and satisfying a series of demands coming from the people of the Left; demands that did not at all undermine the authoritarian and class organization of society, but, on the contrary, that modernized and strengthened it by making it come closer to the model of the Western European societies.

This political change meant that a large part of the Left was weakened and absorbed into the system, so it also meant that the anarchists together with autonomists and antiauthoritarians in general manifested a single effort to intervene socially, referring mainly to youth, and making the first squats in Greece, influenced by similar projects in Western Europe.

The project of the first squat that happened in Exarchia became for some time the epicentre of anarchist and antiauthoritarian mobilizations, and led to other occupations in Athens and Thessaloniki, but after a while it was attacked by repression and was evicted, in the beginning of 1982. The same happened with the other squats as well.

On that point, we could also mention that from the end of the '70s and especially in the beginning of the '80s a repressive operation by the State was conducted in order to corrupt and destroy the resistance movement by spreading heroin in the social spaces of the youth. This operation was very new then, unprecedented in the Greek reality, and anarchists came in face-to-face conflict with that, fighting against it in the social spaces, in the places of the youth, and also inside the squats.

The first years of government by PASOK were full of artificially cultivated aspirations for changes, changes that were of course neither essential nor subversive. They were years of a broad social consent to political power, where anarchists stood against it alone to a large degree. But very soon this political authority showed its cruel true face and its profound class character against the lower social classes, as well as its repressive ambitions with regards to those resisting—anarchists, leftists, and insubordinate youth. The turning point, the end of the illusions, was in 1985, a year scarred by the police murder of 15-year-old Michalis Kaltezas who was shot in the back of the head outside the Polytechnic during riots between anarchists and insubordinate youth on one side and the police on the other, after the end of the 17th of November demonstration that year.

This murder triggered a series of insurrectionary events of resistance whose major moments were the occupation of the Chemistry University and the Polytechnic. Moreover, it caused a deeper uprising of consciousness and hostile dispositions against the police and Authority which gave birth to numerous events of resistance in the following years, since it was not something that was expressed and exhausted in one moment, but became a precedent of many violent and combative moments of resistance in the following years. It formed a “tradition” of similar events; events that burst forth either as reactions to State murders, or as expressions of solidarity with the struggles of oppressed people, such as the prisoners. It is also within these conditions that a new wave of squats, mainly by anarchists and antiauthoritarian groups, appeared and rooted socially, thus broadening the fronts as much as the influence of the struggle.

For example we can mention the clashes with the police and the occupation of the Polytechnic for 17 days in 1990, after the acquittal of the cop who murdered Kaltezas...

...The extensive social clashes in the streets of Athens in 1991, lasting a full two days, after the murder of the teacher and fighter of the Left Nikos Temponeras by para-state thugs in a student-occupied school in the city of Patras...

...The uprising of anarchists and youth in November, 1995, during the anniversary of the '73 revolt, in which they occupied the Polytechnic in solidarity with the revolt of the prisoners which was going on at the same time. This revolt in the prisons was under fire from the whole propaganda mechanism of the State, by the media, and it was facing the immediate threat of a police invasion in the prison facilities.

In an effort to suppress the '95 Polytechnic revolt and attack the anarchists and the youth—not only for the resistance they were engaged in at that specific moment but also for all the events that they had created during the previous years, and the events which they were threatening to continue—the State made use of the major propaganda

assault by the media, which had been waged to extract social consent for the plans of repression. The police invaded the occupied Polytechnic on the morning of the 17th of November, 1995, and arrested more than 500 occupants, but the entire repressive operation was a failure: they wanted to present the anarchists as very few and isolated, as small gangs of rioters—the stereotype presented by the State is of “50 known unknowns”—but they turned out to have great influence on youths. They also failed to terrorize anarchists with the arrests and the prosecutions in the courts, because the majority of defendants remained insubordinate, turning the trials that followed into another point of strong conflict with the State.

In the following years, this phenomenon of refusal and resistance by anarchists, antiauthoritarians, and insubordinate youth spread socially, leading to a variety of political initiatives, social interventions, counter-information projects, events of resistance, and the creation of new self-organized spaces. No strategy of domination was left unchallenged, neither the policies against the immigrants, nor the 2004 Olympics, the international political and economic summits, the participation of Greece in military plans and operations of the West against the countries of the East.

Based on the political and simultaneously organizational values of social solidarity, direct action, equality, anti-hierarchy, and self-organization, anarchists didn't hesitate and didn't fail to answer, at least to the extent they could, any attack by the State against society, and its most marginalized parts. They always stood side by side with the oppressed people and with those of them who fought back, refusing the dilemmas and defying the blackmails that the State utilizes in order to extract consent. And they did that clearly and regardless of the cost they would have to pay. They consistently stayed outside and against all institutions, outside and against the political system. At a time when others, no matter how radical they appeared, were adopting the mentality of the State, the anarchists stood alone against such proposals. The result was that the Left lost its influence among the most radical parts of society, while for the anarchists, the same thing that was said to be a weakness that would lead to their social isolation, was and still is exactly their strength: the fact that they stayed outside the political system and all institutions. Because when the people revolt they surpass the institutions and their restrictions, and communicate very well with the anarchists. We hardly have any money, we work unselfishly in small, fluid affinity groups, but this is our strength.

As the events of December showed, those who lost contact with society's most radical and militant expressions were not the anarchists, but, on the contrary, those who were flirting with the ideas and structures of authority, claiming a role for themselves as representatives of the social subjects and mediators of social contrasts.

Through a long-lasting process of struggle, which I briefly described before, anarchists and anti-authoritarians in general gained a lot of ground in the consciousness of the people, something that was not evident to everybody until December. Because beyond the idea that the State lost a lot of social ground during the days of December, the more profound truth is that it had already lost a lot of this ground before the events of December, over a long period of time. And that is something that was expressed in a very revealing way from the first moment of the explosion of the revolt, with the participation of crowds of people in actions that were considered up to that moment exclusively as actions of small groups of anarchists.

In reality, December of 2008 has a profound historical, political, and social background that is connected to the entire history of the struggles of the last 30 years, and to the presence and participation of anarchists inside those struggles; a participation that is characterized by the praxis of social revolt without mediators and without illusions for a change inside the existing system, proposing self-organization against any kind of hierarchical organization, proposing counter-violence against State violence, and solidarity against individualization and the artificial divisions created by the Power.

Here we could talk about dynamic practices of struggle, such as the clashes with the police, that were appropriated by crowds of people in December, same as the occupations of buildings (universities, schools, town halls and many others). The same happened with self-organization through open anti-hierarchical assemblies which were created during the days of December and afterwards. Those practices were avoided and downrated by the Left and the result is that the events surpassed them.

However, even though December is a result of social and political processes going back many years, and it does have similarities and analogies with previous events, at the same time it surpasses them and expresses new situations, needs and desires, creating new potentials. To talk about the differences from past events, we should say that this time the events were not limited or focalized in a specific time and space. They were diffused to numerous cities all over the country and took many different forms, more or less violent but always antagonistic to the State, based each time on the inspiration and imagination, the inventiveness of the people who participated.

Furthermore, it is a process which, because of its diffusion and its multiform character, doesn't seem to have an endpoint; rather it seems to continue and renew itself taking new forms and bearing the promise of new eruptions of social explosions in spite of the current decline of violent events. Previously also the events concerned mainly Greek youth but in December what spread all across the country included people of many other nationalities, including migrants and refugees.

Dynamic methods of struggle and processes of self-organization were adopted by many people, without representatives and without putting forward any demands. December not only continues a culture of political violence, it is also laying down a new tradition of self-organization as an important social urge, to organize from below. Now these processes of self-organization which constitute a form of continuation of the revolt don't have as their only objective to respond to murderous police violence but to respond to all the expressions of Authority, from the way we live, the way we work, produce, consume, to the issues of health, the environment, everything. Every aspect of authority is a front of struggle for the people who self-organize and fight from below, not always violently but almost always antagonistically to the State. Another point is that the revolt justified certain positions inside the anti-authoritarian movement and disproved certain others. For example, the notion that claimed that everything is under control, that manipulation and control of people is so strong today that revolts are not possible, or that society is dead, that it cannot produce anything healthy and that we anarchists are alone against the State; this is a notion that was disproved. December proved that revolt is possible, and, much more, that social revolt is possible.

One more aspect has to do with the subjects of the revolt. There has been a lot of talk about who were those who rebelled and there has been a major effort by the media and representatives of the political system to determine the subjects of the revolt in order to write the history themselves; to control, even afterwards, whatever they can. They allege that it was a revolt of youth, and most specifically the Greek youth, and especially high school students, based on the fact that really part of the revolt was mobilizations of high school students, who, on many occasions, went as far as to demonstrate at police stations and assault them. But this is a very limited and falsified presentation of the revolt. The political system and the media want to conceal the wider social, multinational, and class character of the revolt. It was not only the students who were in the streets! And, in any case, most of the youth who came into the streets did not come down as students, but as insurgents against the world of domination, state violence, authority, and exploitation. They want to hide what was evident to everybody who was in the streets: that in those streets there were the poor, the salaried workers, the unemployed, those we call excluded. And a large number of them were immigrants, those who are the cheapest labour force and main victims not only of labour exploitation but also of police violence and state repression.

Consequently, the subject that each analyst presents as having a central role in the revolt indicates his or her own political purposes and reflects their subjective perception of the revolt and their future objectives. For example, when they talk about Greek youth and especially

about high school students, it is in order to separate them as “good” rebels, considering them easier to manipulate, from the “bad,” uncontrollable rebels. However the majority of the people who were in the streets basically belonged to the latter category, they were uncontrollable, oppressed people.

Today we are facing two things. One is the repressive moves by the State through the judicial system and the police, such as arrests, imprisonments, people being held hostage through prosecutions, decisions about installing surveillance cameras everywhere, the penalization of wearing masks and of insulting the police verbally, the targeting of squats, of self-managed spaces and generally of the self-organized structures of the movement. On the other hand we have the ideological attack launched by the State in order to divide the rebels of December into “good” students, aiming to incorporate them into the system, and the “bad ones,” who cannot or do not want to be incorporated and thus must be isolated and attacked by repression.

We should say at this point that while repression is basically expressed directly by the state mechanisms, the ideological war on the other hand is not being expressed only by them but also by other auxiliary mechanisms such as the parties of the institutional Left. While the judiciary and the police repression are immediately visible and understood as something that comes from outside, the ideological war is more insidious and it is also generated within the movement itself, since it is expressed not only by those who are hostile to the movement but also by people who appear as friends of the movement and who are selectively projecting those characteristics of the revolt which they like, which means those characteristics they think they can absorb and utilize. And at the same time they slander those characteristics and subjects of the revolt that they don’t consider agreeable, naming them non-political, anti-social, or even criminal.

This ideological war aims to incorporate, to terrorize those who are not incorporated, and to isolate those who hold the perspective of revolt.

The crisis of the system, though, which at its base is a crisis of its social legitimation, radically limits the possibilities of incorporation for a large portion of the people who react and resist. To clarify, this means that more and more people lose their trust in the institutions or the proponents of the system. This is why, even if they manage to incorporate some, they can’t really confine and intercept the influence of the radical ideas.

The ones that we have to be wary of, because of their erosive and undermining presence, are exactly the ones who have one foot in the old world and the other foot with us, talking about a new world. These double-faced enemies of the revolt are the worse. They can be even worse than police and judges.

We have to make clear that here we refer specifically to those who play a certain role, even not that important, inside the institutions, and not generally to people—workers, neighbours, youth—with whom we meet. As for the latter, people who are being acculturated and educated by the system to have faith in the institutions, it was much easier to communicate with them especially in the first days of the revolt, because the material conditions and the tension of the events was such that everyone was moving from their old positions to new ones.

Today, as time goes by, our political and personal ability to keep these contacts is being tested. And so does our patience when acting together with people different from us, recognizing that we have a lot more to learn about how to keep contact with all these people whom we met in the streets in December. And the most important way that we meet face-to-face, beyond the usual propaganda material, the texts and flyers, is in the self-organized assemblies. From our side, we encourage the creation of such assemblies, we participate and intervene in them. And it is there also that we're faced with the ideological war I talked about before. But apart from that, there are the prejudices; both the prejudice of other people regarding us, and our prejudice towards people who do not have a clear rejection of the existing system, either out of naivete, out of fear or just because they are accustomed to it.

But we are on the right path. The relations that have been developed between anarchists, antiauthoritarians, and other parts of society constitute a whirlwind and the outcome is unpredictable. For sure it is something positive, as we don't allow normality and alienation to re-establish themselves. Because in contradiction to the swirl of the revolt where everything is possible and we can hope for the best, normality is a situation where almost everything is predictable and most of the time the result is negative.

Things are unpredictable, not only concerning the relation between anarchists and antiauthoritarians with other people, but within the movement as well. And, mostly, things are unpredictable in terms of the relation between the anarchists, society, and the State. The anarchist/antiauthoritarian social movement produces many initiatives and acts of resistance against the State, some more dynamic and others less so, some more social and others less so. That is to say that there is not any central organ or single nucleus, but a variety of larger and smaller initiatives of struggle from below, some of which coordinate among each other while others do not. In every case, what should be avoided, in my opinion, is to be socially isolated, to be isolated among us, in the movement, and to be left alone to carry out a confrontation with the State. We understand that if a number of things that are done here were done in the US or in Italy for example, some of us would be dead and many more would be in prison for a lot of years. This balance of power that exists today—the fact that there is such activity and that we can talk about

these things—has been 30 years in the making. But our lives and our freedom are always imperilled and targeted by the state mechanisms. After December the State wants to change this balance of power, and it could reverse it. Just as in one moment, when Alexis Grigoropoulos was murdered, many desires for revolt were liberated from within the people, there could be another moment where, based on a different event, an explosion of state repression could occur; and anarchists, as well as other fighters, could be exposed to tremendous dangers.

The history of the movement in the US, in Europe, and in the world teaches us both what we can do and what we can be faced with. Having a deeper knowledge of what we are and what we want to do, but also of what the State is and what it wants to do with us—to make us disappear—what we should make sure of is not to isolate ourselves from society, but also not to be divided within the movement, so that as a whole we won't be left alone against the State, nor that every individual comrade will be left alone against the State. But it is also important not to restrain our impetus or compromise our inner desires, to act and make things happen, to use our courage and even our craziness.

We haven't said anything so far about the role of spontaneity in the events of December. Spontaneity has always played a role in the anarchist initiatives and did again in December. But there was also the spontaneity of the social groups that participated in the revolt, the spontaneity of the masses. According to Castoriadis, spontaneity is the excess of the "result" over the "causes." There were spontaneous forces that were expressed in December, forces that were hidden inside the masses of the people and which were not predictable before. And these forces still inhere in society, much more in a society that is on its knees, much more in a society divided into classes, suffocating by the violence of the system, by poverty, despair, fear. For people living in such a society, two possibilities remain: either the passive acceptance of the existing reality, which the State wants to present as the only option; or insurrection, which even when it is not visible as a possibility or choice doesn't mean that it doesn't exist and that it won't burst forth.

And there is one more point: in today's conditions of domination by the State and capitalism in the West, the explosion of revolts is not so rare, including metropolitan riots, mostly by groups of youth and usually triggered by incidents of police violence, such as the events in the French suburbs, or the black revolt in L.A. in '92. And as a different case, we could also mention the Albanian revolt in '97, even though it has many distinct characteristics. But what happened here in December, in comparison with other big insurrectionary events, was that political and social subjects met and interacted. Anarchists met with social subjects ready to revolt.

In this context, revolt becomes much more dangerous for Authority; when it is not just an outburst of social rage by a

specific oppressed social group, but the fertile meeting of the dynamics of various social groups who direct together their violence against the source of all the exploitation and oppression.

Revolts happen and cannot be avoided. Authority knows that, so, it prefers to suppress each one social group alone and not let revolts take clear political characteristics, not let them have a total criticism against the existing order. The presence and participation of the anarchists in December gave such wider political characteristics; and to a large extent a subversive criticism of the system as a whole was developed.

And that was right, and it is right for every comrade or group of comrades, wherever they are in the world, to attempt and to realize the meeting with social groups that suffer from the tyranny of the State and capitalism and have the desire to fight back, so that the unavoidable revolts become more widespread and not restricted.

If only we imagine what could happen with the meeting between political subjects who are consciously intending the subversion of the existing order, with all those social subjects who suffocate from the State and capitalism and have reasons to revolt. Only imagining this is enough to understand. And this is what happened to a large degree in Greece in December.

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Argiris

A longtime anarchist activist from Athens

So it was like this. We were sitting in a house, something like four hundred meters away from Exarchia Square. This was around June, 2003. It was like 2:30 in the afternoon, we were drinking coffee and smoking the first joint of the day. And suddenly they called us on the telephone. Our friend was in the square, she said to us that there were some workers on the square, and some machines, construction machines, and it was looking like they wanted to begin some construction on the square, in the general spirit of construction for the Olympic games. At that period there was gentrification in all the city for the Olympics. So immediately we understood that our turn had come to face this problem in the square. The funniest thing I remember is that immediately from the moment we hung up the telephone, though we were just four people in the middle of a big city, we had a natural, powerful feeling that we could stop all the Mayor's construction projects by ourselves. The most interesting feeling for me that afternoon was this passionate enthusiasm that had no rationality inside it, just this feeling of power and commitment. Because we decided that this would never happen, it would never happen for sure. We were sure. There were four of us walking to the square and I felt like I belonged to an army.

It was like we were carrying a monster with us, and this monster was the reputation, the mythology of the anarchist movement in general. We carried with us all the power of all the actions that had come before us. We were not just four people, we were 2000 people.

And so when we arrived there, we went directly to the workers and we asked, "What are you doing here? Who is responsible for this work?"

They say, "We don't know, we don't know," but they pointed out this fat guy in the cafe drinking a frappe and overseeing the work. He was in charge. And as we went to speak to this man, we saw that they had already made a big hole, 1.5 meters deep, 2 meters wide. So we go to this man and we ask him, "Why are you here? What do you want to do?"

"They've made a plan for big changes to the square," he said. "The planning is already decided." He's not responsible for these decisions but he's responsible for finishing the construction. And we asked him very politely, "What is the plan, what will the square look like?" He said they would throw away the statue, the classical statue in the middle of the square with the ancient god Eros. The statue was symbolic for the punks and it was something like a guardian angel for the junkies who hung out there. They write graffiti on it, sticking posters or

announcements. It is the symbolic center of the square. We're surprised, so we ask if he's sure they were going to remove the statue.

He says, "Yes, all the middle of the square will be taken up by a pool, with a fountain." The benches of the square were old, falling apart, so we asked about the benches, will they put in new benches?

No, we're going to rip it all out and put in new things.

What kind of new things?

"We will put in a cement platform for the people to sit on."

"How is it possible for old people to sit on this cement thing? No one will come to sit."

"It doesn't matter, normal people don't hang out here. I don't care what you say, it's already planned."

So we said to him, "You stay here and wait, just see what happens."

All that afternoon, there were many people like us calling each other and talking about this. And through this, an assembly for Exarchia Square was called. So next afternoon, spreading the word by phone or word of mouth, about 400 people gathered. Half of them were inhabitants of the area, and half were anarchists who hung out on the square. And then we went and we threw all the construction machines in this hole, destroyed them, we told the workers that the people of the square would not allow them to work here, we would not allow them to build a metal barrier around the square to hide the construction from the public view. And we said that whatever construction will happen in the future, the locals will decide the design, and any construction will happen in the public view. Out of this struggle the Assembly of the "Initiative of Exarchia Residents" was born, and this assembly continues today, playing an important role in resisting the police presence in the neighborhood.

Because of this organized struggle, the construction stopped for many months, and in the period that followed, the representatives from the assembly of Exarchia went to the construction company and asked about the planning. In the beginning, the company said that because they were a private company they didn't have any obligation to show us the plans. So the assembly decided they didn't have to allow any construction, and that only if the construction company accepts the architectural ideas of the assembly would any construction be allowed to happen. So the assembly prepared plans, which included an expansion of the green area of the square, to add more trees and bushes, keep the statue, not put in the fountain, and they would install new high quality benches.

In the first months, the mayor of the city sent riot police to guard the construction site. But because of the inhabitants' negation of the plan, the riot police could not save the construction project. They couldn't enforce it themselves. And after one month the riot police left,

because everytime they went away for a moment, we destroyed the machines and the metal construction barriers. Three times this happened. So the works stopped. And they stopped for almost one year. And it was very funny because during that period, there was no cement, the construction workers had taken away all the paving stones to prepare the construction. Suddenly Exarchia Square was bare earth. So in the meantime we enjoyed this, we put up a volleyball net and announced that now we had a beach in the square.

To defend the square, the anarcho-punks stayed there. All around the square all different sorts of people regularly gathered, but in the middle of the square it was the anarcho-punks. This lasted for almost one year, the period of the beach in the park.

Due to all these factors, the construction company realized they had to accept the planning of the inhabitants' assembly, and they announced their concession. As this was the period of the reconstruction around the Acropolis, for the Olympics, this was when the first two neighborhood assemblies started. Philopapou, around the Acropolis, was the first one, and then the assembly of the inhabitants of Exarchia. Both of these assemblies were successful in stopping construction projects and stopping gentrification. The spirit of these two assemblies produced many other neighborhood assemblies in other parts of Athens and other cities throughout Greece.

This was the beginning of a new period in the anarchist movement, the meeting of the powerful direct action of the anarchists with the interests and the hopes of the inhabitants, their dreams for their own neighborhood. The inhabitants felt that this confluence between their dreams and the power of the direct actions of the insurrectionist anarchists, that it was good.

Lito

An Exarchia resident whose balcony overlooks the spot where Alexis Grigoropoulos was murdered

I'm not so involved in any political activities. I'm not an activist. I can only speak about the killing. I can't take a position on all the other things that happened because all these other things are very complicated and I don't have clear thoughts on them.

Exarchia has always been an alternative, counterculture neighborhood. For many years it was a frequent occurrence that something would happen on a street corner in Exarchia and suddenly everyone from the cafes and the bars and the sidewalks would pour out into the streets and run to see what was happening. Usually it was incidents between people and police, some fights, confrontations, insults, shouting matches. In the old times it happened very often. Then there was a period when this didn't happen so much, but in the last years it has started becoming more common again.

The reason that I found myself with a camera on the balcony that night was because I had always wanted to film one of these confrontations that are always taking place below my window. But every time I would come to my balcony to see what was happening, I got delayed. By the time I went back inside to get my camera it was too late, it was already over. This happened to me many times. And the last time that it happened, I said to myself, the next time, first I'll grab the camera and then I'll go to the balcony.

And in the end the next time turned out to be an incident that I never expected could happen. Two years earlier a friend visited me from Germany and he mentioned to me that the police here seem very provocative and dangerous. Even though he was a tourist, the way they behaved made him feel less safe, they made him feel endangered. And when this friend heard about what happened on the 6th of December, he wrote that he wasn't at all surprised. But I was.

All the previous times, I never got scared observing these fights between people and the police. It was part of my everyday life in Exarchia. It was something commonplace. Because the Exarchia locals express their negation of authority firmly, and they believe in it, whenever something was happening I didn't need to take a position or make a stand because it was just a part of life in this area. Of course in the ten years that I've lived in this flat, I've observed year after year a gradual increase in the police presence, an intensification. Policemen began to appear on every corner in the neighborhood, in groups, and also they were armored. The feeling of observing armored police in full riot gear carrying pistols, tear gas guns, and machine guns—it was getting more

and more intense. In this period the slogan started to appear on the walls: "on every street corner there are police, the junta didn't end in '73."

On 6 December I was here in the apartment with my German friend. He was cooking in the kitchen and I was in the living room. Suddenly I heard a bang. I hadn't heard any noises before that. Nothing was happening in the streets, no shouts, nothing. Without warning there was just a bang. It seemed to me that it came from down the street, on the lefthand side. Despite the surprise this time I remembered to grab my camera first. I was not in a panic, I didn't feel anything unusual, I just calmly got the camera and went to the balcony. I didn't think anything extraordinary had happened. I looked outside, but I didn't turn the camera on in the beginning because nothing was happening. I saw a few youths down to the left, sitting like they always do. The young anarchists are always hanging out down there, although this night there were fewer than normal. And on the righthand side, up the street, I saw a police car parked at the corner. One moment after the police car drove off, I saw two cops coming back on foot, and this was very strange to me. I asked myself, what are they going to do? They arrived at the spot where the car had been before, and started provoking the kids, saying come on you pussies! When I heard this I shouted to the German guy, come look! The police came and they're starting a fight. He would get a chance to see this phenomenon of the Greek cops provoking a fight by insulting people. It's normal that the police speak bad to people, but this was too much. It was provocative because they parked the police car and they came walking back and shouting challenges. That's how normal people start a fight. It was like a personal fight, not the usual provocation by police.

Immediately after that they both took out their guns, both the cops. This was never mentioned by the media. And I got one surprise after another. First they came back on foot, then they started a fight by insulting the kids, then they took out their guns, and then they took aim, in a moment when there was no challenge and no threat, there was no fight or confrontation going on. And they shot. I heard two shots but I can't say if both of them shot or if one shot twice. It's possible that one of them shot twice. And they turned around and just left, simple as that, as though nothing had happened. Me, until that moment, it didn't occur to me to look to the left, to the group of kids, because it was all so incredibly strange, the behavior of these two policemen. There was no need to look to the other side because nothing was happening there. And then I heard the people in the street shout that a kid had been shot. And then I felt panic. I ran inside, grabbed the telephone and called an ambulance, and I went down to the street. I saw just one kid lying there, and I was shocked. Everybody was shouting and many people were fainting. The kid wasn't dead yet, and a doctor had appeared and was trying to

administer first aid. Then the ambulance arrived and he died inside in the ambulance, I think.

I found out from other people that the first bang had been a concussion grenade. Apparently someone had thrown a plastic bottle at the police car and yelled an insult as it was passing and the police responded by throwing the grenade from the car. That's not so unusual here. It's normal to shout, everyone in Greece is shouting at each other. So I'm sure the policemen hadn't been threatened, they weren't defending themselves. Really, if a policeman feels a serious threat, he doesn't drive down to the next corner then walk back to clean up the situation. Usually when the police feel a threat or feel like they're under attack, they drive off, they get out of there. The police were not on the defensive at that moment.

I went back up and tried to watch the video on my computer, but I couldn't because I was missing some program. So I knocked on my neighbor's door and said I recorded something but I don't know what it is. Can we put it in your computer so I can see what it is? And we saw the video, and the way I felt, I had never felt that way in my entire life. We called down all the people from the entire neighborhood, everyone, we all came down onto the streets, and the energy, the atmosphere, was one of rage. It was overflowing all the streets, everywhere people were pouring out of their houses onto the streets. Everybody.

The riot police had the gall to come here, back to this corner where the first cop car had stopped, and where the shots were fired. And of course everybody started shouting at them, young people, old people, normal people, everyone was shouting at them to go the hell away.

About two hours after the shooting, it's impossible to say exactly how long but it was about two hours. The secret police came. I was back in my house listening to the radio and the TV, which were saying there were riots in Exarchia, that the police had been attacked and fired in self-defense, but this wasn't true. And the riots hadn't even started yet. And from my window I saw men without uniforms looking at the walls of the buildings around the shooting. The secret police had come to search for the shell casings and the bullets, to investigate the area. I was with my neighbor, and I told him I was going down. I wanted to react somehow to what they were saying on the news. So I went down and I said that what they're reporting on the television wasn't true. One tall old guy came up to me with a greasy smile, and said, yes, and who are you? And I felt an amazing fear. Because I'm very naïve, I just felt the obligation to go down and say the truth. But this guy, he terrified me. So I backed off and said, no, who are you? And he told me his name and his position. He was the chief of the secret police agency, and he was in charge of the autopsy and investigation. They took my name and telephone, and they asked me if I was going to come to the central

police station to testify, and I said yes.

He asked me what happened. I brought him to the exact point where the policemen were standing when they opened fire. And exactly at that point was where they found the shell casings. And they asked me if I had a vehicle, if I could drive myself to the station. And I said no and they told me I would come with them. I said I hoped the people wouldn't bomb the police car on the way, and the chief laughed and said have no fear. He directed me to where a large group of riot police were gathered, and I found myself in the middle of a MAT squad. It was right at that moment that the people attacked. The chief disappeared immediately, he ran away and they left me while the people were attacking, and I saw all the guns that the police had and I flipped out. I couldn't focus on anything, I felt how powerful the people were, they were full of rage. I can't remember if they were attacking with stones or molotovs or clubs, only that they were overpowering and I had to get out of there. I ran away by myself and came back to my house.

Of course I was expecting that they would call me for an interview as a witness. But they never did. I spoke with a lawyer of the movement, Yianna Kurtovick, she's one of the members of the Network for the Defense of Political Prisoners and Immigrants. And she brought me to the examining magistrate. I had to go to find the judge because the police never called me to testify. And after I testified, some days later, they closed the whole area to make the official report to prove whether the bullet hit the kid directly or if it ricocheted off the ground. That was the official story, that the one cop had fired at the ground and the bullet bounced up and hit him.

The magistrate, the photographer, and the secretary came up to my balcony to take photographs. The chief of the secret police was down in the street. I called out to him, Oh hello, you left me alone last time in the middle of a riot. And he answered, I didn't abandon you, it was you who was afraid that the rioters would burn us alive. And I said to him, Don't tell lies in front of all these people.

I remember telling myself some years ago that I lived in a military camp, with all the police around Exarchia. Now I say that I live in a warzone. What happened in December, I never believed that it could ever happen. Despite all the feelings of military occupation provoked by the police. For me, there was always a limit, always a final line, and when the police crossed this line, it was a qualitative change. Everything changed. Everyone understood that there was a certain horizon to the situation and beyond it everything was different. We have passed this horizon. And now I say that it is not a conflict anymore, now it is war.

For the month after the killing I was walking in Exarchia and I was feeling the rage, but also an unbelievable silence. It was the first time in ten years of living here that Exarchia was so silent, dead silent. It was very disconcerting. Now I've had some time to think about

everything but in the very beginning I was completely exhausted from talking about it, all the questions. I had put my video on Indymedia and from there the TV stations picked it up. Soon journalists were calling me constantly, and I was seeing my video everywhere. For the first few months I was in a very strange condition. I was never calm. I was in a state of shock for a month. Now I feel more calm, but whenever I hear a certain sound—the stun grenade that the police threw a few minutes before they killed Alexis triggered a security alarm in one of the shops, or maybe a car. So during the entire video you hear this security alarm going off in the background. I kept seeing my video everywhere, it was on the TV and everything, and when I hear this specific alarm on the other side of the street, the feeling of the shooting comes back to me. I really want to go ask them to change the sound of their alarm because all the memories come back to me. It's unbelievable that a sound brings up these feelings it took me one month to recover from.

In comparison with before December, everything is more powerful. The assassination of Alexis was like the cherry on top, the last straw. Now there is no more tolerance for the police. The killing was so outrageous, so far beyond the limits, that the people reacted and still they continue to react. They are getting empowered from the rage that was expressed at the moment of the killing. There were many other problems too besides police brutality, and these problems continue, but the people don't tolerate these other problems either, not anymore.

I don't know if Exarchia is more autonomous now than before. The people, the ones who are active, they try. But me, I always feel autonomous. But now I really know what terrorism means. From the day they killed Alexis to the day when the guerrilla group attacked the police, the police did not appear on the corner where Alexis was killed. But when Revolutionary Struggle made this attack, the first thing the police did was to occupy the spot where Alexis was shot, and they stayed there 24 hours. This was the riot police, with helmets, guns, everything. And when they came at midday, I was on the balcony. And one of them looked up at me. I think because during this whole period the telephone was ringing, journalists were calling and trying to find out where this video had come from. When the one cop looked up at the balcony, I gestured like, what do you want? And he jabbed the guy at his side and pointed me out, and I felt completely terrified by the way they were looking at me. That night, I heard some neighbors talking, and then crying, and the cops were sitting right on the spot where Alexis died. I came out to see what was happening, and because I couldn't see I peered out discreetly over my balcony and one of the cops saw me. I felt terrified so I crept back inside but the cop came down below my balcony and he made eye contact with me. I thought they would raid my apartment. So I went to my neighbor's house. I was terrified.

This is what I call terrorism. I found it impossible to just sit on my balcony looking down into the street. Another time, in February I think, there was a car burning down in the street, and the police again came and looked up at me, and I got scared and went back inside my house. The policeman shouted up to me, so you're hiding, eh? And then I realized, what the fuck, what is happening, why do I hide? So I went back to the balcony and I started taking photographs. And the police started taking photographs of me.

This window can see everything. That's why I'm thinking of putting a camera there. To put it there for the policemen and also for these young people who do many things without thinking about why they do it. Because everywhere there are a few people who can make a small mistake and everyone else has to live with the consequences. Some people say that this is Exarchia, the only thing to do is to burn the shops. But this is not the truth. There are many possible reactions outside the dogma of burning and smashing.

So I'll be in the trial of the policeman who killed Alexis. I was worrying about how I'll feel towards the defense lawyer, because he's defending a very bad person. Then I started to worry about the outcome of the trial, because if this cop ends up with only two or three years in jail, I don't know how I would react. How do you react to the decision of a trial like this? Because many terrifying things are happening, and we hear about them and see them on the news, but it is very different when you saw it with your own eyes. It is not just words, it is a clear truth for you, there is no doubt about this, there is no distance from it. It is such an absolute truth, the assassination, it is like if you steal something from me in front of my eyes and then tell me it never existed. It is not something you just heard about from somewhere else. And I fear very much that if they find this cop not guilty, maybe my reaction will get me thrown in jail. I think about this all the time, as I prepare to testify.

Andreas

A squatter from Thessaloniki

On Saturday we received word of Alexis' death by phone. Five hundred people met in the university at once. In the meeting we shared the information we had, but it didn't end so well. We couldn't agree on what to do, and we broke in half. The smaller half stayed around the university for hit and run fighting, and the larger half marched down Egnatia, the main street of Thessaloniki, to smash all the banks and luxury shops. I was in this second group. There were also small groups of friends all over the city hitting specific targets: banks, police stations, et cetera. But this strategy, or lack of strategy, worked quite well, because the police had to divide their forces and they didn't know what to expect. A lot were near the university, fighting with the students there and defending the construction site for the new metro, so on Egnatia we didn't find any cops. We had the streets to ourselves.

Another thing: we started with 300 people, setting out from Kamara, and we came back with 500. Because people on the streets were joining us. They weren't afraid because we were doing it calmly. Yes, we were angry, we were very pissed off about the death of Alexis, but we kept ourselves under control.

The banks had to be smashed, so we smashed them, but we did it calmly. One window, CRASH, next window, CRASH, here's someone who is afraid, okay, come over here, we'll move them out of the way, and then we get the next window. So no one had reason to be afraid of us, they sympathized with what we were doing and felt they could join us, so they joined us. Just normal people on the streets.

In some countries there is a critique of nonviolence. In Greece there is a critique of violence. But it's a very black and white issue. Everyone understands it is a part of the struggle, but some don't like it and others love it. There's no middle position. If you tell people you're in the middle they get confused. But I'm in the gray area. I think it's necessary to be careful with the violence. I don't say not to use it, of course you have to use it, but do it calmly, without losing control. You have to be calm. And you can do it this way at any level, no matter what degree of violence you're using.

Because we were calm people joined us on Saturday night and we came back with more people. We walked down Egnatia, attacked the police station, with a variety of ammunitions, you know, and then we returned by the same street, smashing the shops a second time. On the first day we didn't really understand what was happening. After the second day students were everywhere, setting dumpsters on fire, attacking capitalist targets. They just came from everywhere and started doing it on their own. I see two explanations for this: one is that they

were doing what they saw on the television. The other is that have a subconscious hatred for the mechanisms that were destroying their lives. The media were so dramatic in how they covered the riots, I think it's one of the reasons people started joining a few days later. But by the fourth or fifth day, the national media realized they were destabilizing the situation, and they tried to censor their coverage. They didn't show any more arsons, they didn't show masses of people fighting with police, and they prohibited the phrase "student riots." But the foreign media were more honest, and they were very interested in these riots, so after that Greece got all its coverage of the riots from the international channels. By coincidence there had been this conference in Athens about the role of the media in democracy, so all the international press was already in the country when the fighting started. The media were confused because they couldn't understand the general feeling and they messed it up really well.

After the students came the hooligans, and after the hooligans came the immigrants, and after the immigrants every exploited person came out on the streets. You could see yuppies with ties burning banks and grandmas and grandpas attacking the police for gassing the children.

During these days there were six or seven major demonstrations, really big ones. The first contained about 3000 people. Each of these demos destroyed a different part of the city. And all this time, there were small groups hitting the banks and attacking the police stations again and again. This is no exaggeration: at 5 o'clock if there was an attack on a police station, there would be another attack, by another group of people, at four past five. The cops were terrified, shouting, almost crying on their radios, yelling for back-up, thinking they were going to be burned to death.

The Park of Alexandros Grigoropoulos

On Saturday, 7 March, 1000 people converged on a vacant lot that for years had been surrounded by metal construction barriers several meters high, stealing the space from public view and public use. Going on fifteen years, the city government had promised to turn the lot into a park and still had done nothing. Recently the owner of the property, which was valued at 9 million euros, decided to retract their offer to allow a park there and were formulating plans for construction.

A confluence of neighborhood residents and anarchists from all over Athens acted first. In one day they tore down the metal barriers and began the process of creating a park, ripping up the asphalt, building benches and planting trees. One of the participants tells with glee:

“For years there had been these walls here, no one was used to thinking that there was an empty space behind them. And the day we tore it down, you see neighbors walking by, they come upon this open space and start looking around them, checking the street signs—they were lost in their own neighborhood. We transformed this place.”

A visitor exclaimed: “You know what the best part is? It’s seeing all the old people look at the park and how happy they are.”

“No,” interrupted a Greek anarchist. “The best thing is that we fucked the city out of 9 million euros.”

Daredevil

An active participant in Exarchia's new squatted park

Before December I wasn't directly involved. I followed what was happening and went to some protests but there was no strategy. It was just solidarity for other people's actions. There's a lot of small anarchist groups that do a lot of actions and they created the conditions for December to happen, but what happened exceeded these groups. They made some sort of a network and this network was very helpful, at least in the beginning. They started by occupying the national university, the economic school, the law school. They provided some sort of a basis for people to come and meet. The anarchists were more involved and they were more active before December. They also had street knowledge, they know about conflict and fighting. And the young kids, they picked it up very fast and in two days they were experts too but it was vital that this knowledge was present beforehand.

Two crucial events happened during this time: the death of the young kid and the attack on the lady, Kuneva. For Greek standards this was very brutal. It's unheard of. A lot of people felt like they had their backs up against the wall. That's why we saw such a powerful eruption of outrage.

At some point we formed a group, but this group didn't have an identity. It was part of our strategy not to have a name, not to have anyone speak for the group. I operated together with other people but I cannot speak for anyone else. What was important is this decision that we took not to have a name or identity.

Often, the strategy of the state, the authorities, is to separate the different groups, to differentiate anarchists from students from workers, so they can play one group against the other. Or they can represent a particular group as, for example, artists, so everyone who is not an artist, it doesn't involve them. But when we did things that got in the news they didn't know how to label us—students, anarchists, youth... I think that this has worked very well.

Sometimes we organized things in cooperation with a group that already existed, a group that was more visible, more broad. For example here there is a group of residents. With the park we did all the work but they took all the credit. This was a civic group, more open, so they couldn't be tagged as anarchist or whatever. This worked well for us. We did this a couple times, three times, with a big festival in Exarchia, for example.

We don't want to be in touch with the media, so we get in touch with more mainstream groups, and they can get in touch with the media.

For me this strategy has worked. What's new is that now a lot of people are united and doing things, but this is still mostly around action. There are a lot of ideological differences but there is some sort of unity around the action. Like for example here at the park. I think this is a new development, since December. This is a small country and everyone knows one another. The different groups have some solidarity but also they have differences, they were fragmented. But now you have osmosis, people going from one group to another. It's much broader.

In December we talked with some people about this strategy of autonomous zones and I think a lot of people liked the idea. There's a lot of new squats, a new discussion about this situation. It also happened after the student riots of 1991: there were lots of occupations and now it's happening again. But there are many different approaches. For example there was the occupation of the National Opera, that lasted for ten days. It was very big. And by Greek standards it was a very open squat. Lots of people came in who wouldn't feel comfortable going to other political spaces. There were people from the whole political spectrum. Lots of discussions, it was quite interesting. At the beginning you saw they all came from different backgrounds but slowly a connection began to form.

The park is wonderful. It's very open, anyone can approach it, there's no inside and outside. In the Opera there was the dynamic of one big group using the place and one smaller group that ran the place. There was a tension.

The starting point for our strategy was *parentoli*, intervening and breaking the normal routine. We intervene in the daily flow of things to interrupt it. The first intervention lasted one minute, then ten days, and now a more permanent interruption, with this park. These actions were done by different people, but what's important is that it goes from smaller to more permanent. It's part of the strategy that the same group of people doesn't do everything, so more people can participate and more people can relate. And the authorities never knew who did these things. One minute they thought it was 14-year-old kids and the next minute they thought it was veteran anarchists.

To occupy the park we worked with a civic group. They had been thinking about it for a long time, and for 6 months already they had been pressuring the municipality and the owner of the lot, which is the Union of Mechanical Engineering, to turn this place into a park. Some of our people who also participated in this civic group decided that it would be a good idea to make the park ourselves. In the beginning we didn't have this whole thing in mind, we thought maybe we would just make some holes and put in some trees, and you can see now how it's grown. But this is only because people put in so much work. They put in time, brought tools, and did so much. The park built itself. Some people provided the spark, and so many more people showed up and made it

happen. And now it operates through its open assembly.

And now if someone comes along, uninitiated in this way of doing things, of organizing assemblies, he would think this assembly is completely chaotic—nothing could possibly come of this. But the truth is that from this seeming chaos a lot of things happen and they work really well. They're well organized, no mistakes, no big conflicts. This is a lesson for new people but also for us, to believe more and more in this way of organizing and this way of acting. The idea that you don't need some sort of leader to tell you where to go and what to do and who is responsible. You must prove this wrong through action, not just say it's superfluous but prove it in action. And I think that on many occasions since December we have seen this.

Where do we go from now? There's this dilemma: do we do things that bring in more people or do we do the things that we like and if other people like it too, so be it, something like that. But I'm not sure how to do it. We need some kind of combination. We should hope that the things we like and do well appeal to other people also. Because we don't want to dilute our principles or our activities. There is this idea that we have to create the life that we like, parallel to a direct conflict with the authorities. Parallel to this we must build the reality on the ground of what we like and how we want to live. Like this park: we have to build it ourselves and organize it in some autonomous way, period. In my view, all the different aspects are related. Hitting the police, throwing molotov cocktails, these are different from creating a park and different people participate, but they fit well together. It's a multifaceted struggle. The strategy of the opposite side tries to distinguish between everything, to turn you against the others. But the same people, different people, same time, different times, it doesn't matter. We're all together.

The big question we face now with the park, is that if you take the best scenario, that the municipality is willing to compromise with the owners and give them some money so that the park can legally remain, then the municipality takes ownership of the park. How can you guarantee the autonomy of the park so it doesn't just become another city park? In my experience at least this is uncharted territory. I'm sure that in other times and in other countries there were similar experiences so we must look to history. Our language is still in formation. The new language that we need to express these things, it lacks the means to communicate what is happening. And there are new challenges. Hopefully we'll learn from the past or create new ideas of how to do this, how to guarantee the autonomy of the park. An interesting idea is what has happened in the West, the creation of social centers that provide social services. This is a huge project. It takes lots of money and infrastructure and expertise. But if we can take this on and make it run autonomously and keep it open to the people it's going to be good. It's going to be really good.

The Media Try to Kill Memory

A.G. Schwarz

After the massive riots of December ended and the insurrection continued in new forms, the media adapted their counterinsurgency strategy to the new circumstances. In January and February, mention of the revolt disappeared almost entirely from the media. There were a couple important exceptions to this pattern. A few of the more visible and shocking attacks carried out by anticapitalists in those months were given sensational coverage completely divorced from the ongoing struggle that manifested in continuing protests, occupations, counterinformation, and so forth, all of which had disappeared from the media.

These now “senseless” attacks were portrayed as the work of the same disconnected and nihilistic hooligans who ruined the legitimate student movement with too much violence in December. The second exception appeared primarily in the Sunday magazines, which ran photo-filled retrospectives on December that sympathized with the high school students, sanitized their participation in December, forgave their youthful excess, and patted them on the back for their social consciousness. Because photography is assumed to be a presentation of reality more objective than the written word, all the images in these pieces succeeded in the Orwellian exercise of making many of the participants of December themselves believe what was inarguably a lie: that the students limited themselves to protests, occupations, assemblies, and a little fighting on the barricades, but they were not responsible for the smashings, the burnings, the attacks on police. The show of sympathy and the ostensible acknowledgment of their story made this lie much easier for the youth to digest. Thus, in a poll released in these months, the vast majority of the youth expressed the belief that the media coverage in December was completely false and irrelevant, yet a majority also believed that it was outsiders operating with unknown motives who were responsible for smashing the shops. The youth distrusted the media, but they were still influenced by them.

In March, the Greek media tacked into a new wind. They could no longer deny that the revolt was continuing without losing their monopoly on the social narrative, so they gave major, fear-mongering coverage to the continuing attacks, starting with and focusing on the daytime anarchist attack on Kolonaki, as though the breaking of a few windows was equivalent to the sacking of Rome (and as though the barbarians weren't perhaps a bit better than the Romans). They also gave coverage to the

continuing occupations, particularly in Thessaloniki, where the students had taken over Aristotelous University in solidarity with the struggle of the cleaning workers. They mixed up an alleged increase in crime with the occupation itself, suggesting university asylum functioned as a safe haven for antisocial crime and should thus be abolished. It seems clear that the anarchists themselves were an intended target of the media coverage, which sought not only to build popular confidence in a police solution but to threaten the anarchists. Building off the frightful Kolonaki spectacle, the newspapers filled the frontpages with articles on new police measures every day for several weeks in March. Shop owners call for greater protection to prevent more attacks like the one in Kolonaki! Police specialists from Scotland Yard are coming to advise the Greek police! The government is considering abolishing university asylum! The director of the university in Thessaloniki may call in the police to end the occupation! The government will pass a new law illegalizing masks and hoods in demonstrations, and criminalizing the insulting of police officers! A high judge is looking into ways to evict the squats! The police will create Delta Force, a rapid response unit to be deployed around the city in teams on motorcycles, for the express purpose of arresting the criminals responsible for these attacks! On 5 April the Athens newspaper *To Vima* reported that the police had about twenty anarchists suspected of participating in the attacks under surveillance, and they expected to make arrests soon. The arrests did not materialize, and in fact over the next months anarchists demonstrated the capability to carry out attacks against the very directors of the police and intelligence apparatus and get away with it. These articles were not a reflection of reality, rather they were part of the police counterattack to restore order and show force.

The media also continued their work of distinguishing the good parts of the revolt from the bad parts. For example in April, a large and sympathetic article with color photographs appeared in a major Athens newspaper featuring *Nosotros*, the social center of the left anarchist group Alpha Kappa. It portrayed the space as a cultural center that hosted artistic events and provided social services, showing that even anarchists can be embraced by the system if they learn to restrict themselves to acting in certain ways. It's beyond me to say whether Alpha Kappa self-censored their combative aspects or whether this was entirely the initiative of the media, but either way the result is the same. The same also happened with many sympathetic articles about the new occupied park in Exarchia.

In May, the media turned their focus on the immigrants with a vengeance. During the December coverage, they had separated out the immigrants as the elements responsible for the looting. In the following months, under the guise of humanitarian analysis, they looked at the crisis of immigrant living conditions in Greece in a way that could only substantiate the fascist portrayal of the immigrants as dirty and disgust-

ing. And of course they interviewed shop owners, who with the pragmatic voice of mass murderers insisted that the immigrants stole things and scared away shoppers; that the cities needed to be "cleaned up." In May and June, the media prepared the summer's pogrom.

It needs to be explained first that in the past years the European Union had enacted a new anti-immigrant law declaring that immigrants without visas had to acquire papers in the first EU country where they arrived. In other words, they could not go on to Belgium or Sweden or any of the dominant member states with a higher standard of living and more social welfare, and if they did they would be sent back to the country of entry, if not deported altogether. As Greece is one of the main entry points, the country as a whole was turned into a giant border prison, and it was responsible for making it as difficult as possible for immigrants to acquire papers. So, for example, the only place where asylum could be requested in the entire country was in Athens, and authorities did all they could to obstruct immigrants travelling from the islands or Turkish border towns to the capital. And the immigrants who did arrive had to wait forever just for a simple interview, after which they were usually denied even the paper that said they had requested asylum and their case was being considered. Practically nobody actually got asylum.

In Athens, there were tens of thousands of immigrants waiting around for their chance to get papers. This visible concentration of immigrants was successfully exploited by fascists, and in May the media announced an "immigration crisis." Naturally, the only solution proposed was a police solution. In May and June, the government sharply increased the number of immigrant concentration camps around the country. These were fenced in compounds where immigrants were herded together en masse and locked up against their will, called "Welcome Centers" with much the same sense of euphemism as when the Nazis called extermination camps "concentration camps." Amid all the hysteria, the fascist party LAOS gained a relatively high number of seats in the European Parliament elections in June. And in July and August the police carried out pogroms against the two major immigrant concentrations, in Athens and in Patras, destroying immigrant settlements and shipping immigrants off to the concentration camps or deporting them. In central Athens alone, thousands were arrested. And where once parts of Omonia had been bustling immigrant neighborhoods with thousands of people from dozens of different countries on the streets, in public, at all hours of the day, now they were "cleaned up," just as the shopowners had wanted. It was eerie, trying to find those streets again, and only seeing pleasant avenues with tourists strolling hand in hand, browsing postcards outside giftshops, with nothing to disturb their comfort.

In September, all the media coverage was focused on the upcoming elections, psychologically preparing the illusion that the govern

ment was going to clean house so that when the Socialists came into power, they would start with as much legitimacy as possible. December had successfully challenged the legitimacy of the State itself, and now the media had to do a bait and switch, centering specific controversies in specific political parties, so that the losers of December would be Nea Demokratia and not the government as a whole.

It is necessary to go back and look at the relationship between the media and LAOS over the last years in Greece. Though on not quite as large a scale, it seems that LAOS has mimicked the media machine used by Berlusconi of Italy to engineer the society, undermine radical movements, and set the stage for the return of a fascist party as an important political force. Even before LAOS formed from dissident members of Nea Demokratia, they had been consolidating control over several media outlets, so that now the fascists directly own or control three major television stations in Greece. They also have several influential tabloid newspapers that focus on voyeuristic and moralistic celebrity news in the guise of social problems.

In a sort of FOX News effect, as they brought more rightwing commentators and sources into the news programs, the other news channels were pushed rightwards as well. Perhaps even more important than the obvious effects on news coverage, has been the role of talk shows, soap operas, entertainment programs, and telemarketing, just like in the Italian phenomenon. The fascist television stations pioneered telemarketing in Greece, providing themselves with potent funding and flooding the airwaves with infomercials for books, videos, and other products relating to beauty (in this manifestation a very racialized notion reified by blond and brunette models with lilly-white skin), nationalistic Greek history and mythology, hunting, weaponry, and paramilitary gear, xenophobia and the protection of a homogenous and Orthodox Greek culture, Jewish conspiracy theories, and more.

After December, the celebrity talk shows openly promoted fascist and racist ideas and brought personalities from the far Right into the celebrity market. For example the wedding of a LAOS parliament member was turned into a celebrity event through multiple days of news coverage. Hundreds of people were brought to the wedding itself, making it a spectacular and popular happening. It was a clear attempt at social engineering designed to turn Greek society into a receptive mass every bit as fashion-obsessed, consumeristic, selfish, tolerant of policing and surveillance and unsupportive of social movements as Italian society has become, a society in which people hide behind designer sunglasses, chase after Aryan standards of beauty, despise anything poor, ugly, or foreign, understand politics as a popularity contest, and care more about the lives of celebrities than about the lives of other people in their community.

December

Revisited

Void Network. Excerpt from a longer text based on Questions from American Anarchists

Americans ask: "What new tools and strategies do people have since December?"

Greeks respond: "These are the most important characteristics."

Consistency: efforts to offer answers and direct responses to all the moves of the State and to keep the fight alive with actions and events that take place almost every day. Also, there are conscious efforts to avoid suicidal or sacrificial moves that will cause arrests or hard defeats. The riots and the clashes with the police are well organized, well equipped, and they occur at the place and time when they'll have the greatest possibility of causing the most damage without paying a high price or putting people in serious danger. With these victories the struggle attracts new people.

Political Work: based on direct connection with the problems of the society and not on ideological abstractions. The efforts to listen to the society, keep in contact with the worries and fears of the people, give answers where it seems that there are no answers, and attack the causes of the problems, not just the results. The ability of the movement to play a serious role in the political world of the country depends on the creation of deep roots in the social struggles and the ability to inject anarchist ideas and practices into the hearts of common people and young radicals. This happens through the personal cultivation of critical minds and the collective creation of open, all-inclusive public confrontation with all forms of authority.

Cultural Work: the meetings, the assemblies, the squares, the parks, and the public life tend to include people who have the courage to fight and the capability to think and create. For the first time in many years anarchists now are ready to achieve high visibility in this society and attract new people not only through their destructive power but also through the defense of public spaces (like the parks), and the creation of political spaces (like the squats and the social centers in all Greece). Also important is the collective culture that allows all individuals to benefit from the communes without losing their personalities within them, as happens in the Left tradition of organizing.

Constant Spreading of Counter-Information: the importance of typography, (not digital printing but 70cm x 50 cm offset printing!) for printing thousands of copies of large posters and sticking them everywhere is vital. As all different groups produce many different posters, a whole spectrum of theory appears on the walls of the city. You don't need to read anarchist books anymore. The theory is on the walls! Of course it is also very important to use offset machines (!) for thousands of copies of communiqués and books that you hand out for free in your city. These practices go together with the unstoppable use of spraypaint to write political slogans on every wall, signed with the circle-A, and to remove any neo-nazi graffiti. Also comrades go frequently to the central square of their city with a small electric generator and small sound system to play their music and read off their communiques, and to spread pamphlets. With this method of counter-information they attract the focus of the people to specific social struggles, they raise solidarity and have endless dialogues with passersby.

Some important struggles and strategies, as examples:

- The neighborhood assemblies, organized with invitation posters from door to door, offer answers to local problems and connect them with the general social problems.-The occupied parks offer a direct connection between ecological problems and every day urban life and produce new liberated public spaces where different kinds of people can meet and co-exist (or try to co-exist).
- The different new squats enable all different styles of anarchist thinking to achieve visibility.
- The new social centers offer workshops, free lessons, free food, cheap alcohol, free books, lectures, film shows, DJ sets, concerts, and open social meeting points for all kinds of people. They connect the political activists with common people and young students
- The small urban guerilla arson groups continue fighting. Formed by people who know and trust each other 100% they continue to upgrade their weekly attacks against capitalist and state targets. These huge catalogues of arson attacks expand the cartography of institutions, corporations, banks, and offices that society has to eliminate from social life for the people to be free and equal. In this way, the arsonists offer the society a signal that elevates mistrust of these specific targets and encourages suspicion regarding the exploitive function of these targets.
- The active anarchist student groups don't allow the bourgeoisie to control the university. These groups communicate day by day with each other and with all other students. They turn the university into a public space that can accommodate tens of public events every week, organized by comrades from other political and cultural col

- lectures as well. Of course leftist organizations and cultural groups also participate in the struggle to defend university asylum and the struggle for keeping the universities open to the public overnight.
- The defense of public autonomous zones like parks and urban hills and universities as well as urban areas, street corners, squares and meeting points like Exarchia and other similar points in the rest of Greece from police, mafia, drug dealers, neo-nazis and capitalist investors brings the people together. These meetings in public space produce an explosive mixture of all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds who get used to facing the policeman, the mafia, the drug dealer, the neo-nazi and the investor as an enemy. The day to day meetings in the public space empower the groups and the companies of friends to be ready and capable of fighting against the enemies at a moment's notice and to imagine that this area is something completely different from the surrounding territory.
- The empowerment of the imagination, intelligence, and critical mind is the best strategy.
- The solidarity movements encourage the people to continue fighting and take care, as much as possible, of the prisoners of this war.
- The open public solidarity for all prisoners, criminal and political prisoners equally, expresses the total negation towards prison institutions, reveals the real causes of criminality in this society and brings the anarchist prisoners closer with all other prisoners, gaining respect and support for them inside the prison.
- The fight for Kostantina Kuneva and all other workers sends a direct message to the bosses that when they hit one of us they have to confront all of us. Also, it proves that the collective struggle can reveal subject matters and attract the focus of all society.
- All direct syndicalist struggles self-organized from the base prepare in the consciousness of the people, year after year, a deep-rooted, radical strategy that intervenes in the sphere of work.
- Indymedia works like a strategic center for the organization of the struggles and as a digital public space where all the announcements, debates, and invitations can gain attention. In a way, all comrades start their day reading the indymedia calendar to decide what social action or assembly they will participate in.
- The creation of pirate communal radio stations and digital radio stations in universities and social centers sends the message of resistance on the radio waves and creates cultural and political communities around them.
- The critical mass parades, the street parades, the free party movement, the illegal rave parties, the squat events, the DIY concerts, the socially aware hip-hop, punk, indie rock, drum 'n bass, techno & trance scenes attract thousands of young people to temporarily liberated public zones. They offer an existential contact with the

- underground cultures and the radical movements. The gatherings of the underground cultures, when they are connected in solidarity with the anarchist political space, offer an experiential introduction to the political and social awareness that cannot be replicated in books.
- The demonstrations in malls and luxury areas or in the metro stations transfer the message of insurrection to privatized public spaces at the center of capitalistic illusions.
- The occupation of the National Opera Hall and interruption of the commercial shows created an example of a meeting point between the sphere of the arts and philosophy and the insurrectionary practices and ideas.
- The occupation of the building of the General Confederation of Greek Workers created a public, visible negation of the role of syndicalist leadership in the failures of workers' struggles over the last 100 years.
- The occupation of the offices of the newspaper editors by insurrected journalists and comrades active in the creation of underground media produced a lively meeting point for direct criticism to appear against the role of mass media in the building of social apathy.
- The occupation of the National Television Station studio by young artists and activists trashed the speech of the prime minister, expanded mistrust of the mass media, and sent the message onto the screen of every house in Greece: "Switch Off Your TV, Come Into The Streets."
- Occupations of government buildings and municipalities all over the country sent to the society the message of a different understanding of public institutions and constituted victorious fights in different causes and struggles.
- The anti-nazi struggle sends the message that there is no mercy for the enemies of freedom.
- The anti-nazi demonstrations in solidarity with the immigrants made obvious to all immigrants that we are standing on their side (but not without criticism of their own limitations).
- Videos and media work uploaded to the internet and used by mainstream TV channels proved that the police are working with neo-nazis against the immigrants and the social movements. Also they proved to everybody that the neo-nazis are a tool, the long hand of the State against any kind of social resistance.
- Independent amateur videos, like the video of the assassination of Alexis or moments of police brutality, played a very important role in the building of a new kind of public opinion.
- The creation of hundreds of blogs by all kinds of initiatives offered a digital space for the direct expression of the reasons and the theory of each struggle and attracted thousands of readers and partici

- pants. The blogs broke the authority and monopoly of mainstream mass media forever.
- The unstoppable writing, printing and hand to hand FREE distribution of hundreds of different publications, pamphlets, books, cds, dvds and the creation and sticking of thousands of posters in all cities bring the analysis to a level capable of covering many different subjects and reaching nearly every part of society. Also, they express the anarchist way of thinking directly to the other people of our times, and not through abstract theories and ideological labyrinths.

“After the students came the hooligans, and after the hooligans came the immigrants, and after the immigrants every exploited person came out on the streets. You could see yuppies with ties burning banks and grandmas and grandpas attacking the police for gassing the children.”

-Andreas, squatter from Thessaloniki

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