



THIS IS NOT A PROGRAM: OR,
THE POLITICS OF AUTONOMY







from ANARCHISTWITHOUTCONTENT
gathered by LA SELVA

Brief introduction:

This Is Not a Program offers two texts, both originally published in French by anonymous French collective Tiqqun. In This Is Not a Program, Tiqqun outlines a new path for resistance and struggle in the age of Empire, one that avoids the worn-out example of France's May '68 in favor of the lessons of what they consider to be the still fruitful and contemporary insurrectionary movements in Italy of the 1970s.

Opening by the blog author:

If we understand politics not as the ontological ground upon which forces swirl but those forces themselves, then This Is Not A Program and Sonogram of Potentiality are perhaps the most political texts of Tiqqun. And for that reason, This Is Not A Program is not a work of philosophy but strategy. Just as Debord balked at being labelled a philosopher and instead called himself a strategist, This Is Not A Program employs philosophical dispositifs [devices, tools] but never philosophy itself; rather, it is part historical warning and part field manual for the present.

For those of you who never get around to reading the whole book, you should still read “living-and-struggling” in whole, but otherwise, here are the four most important take-home points:



I.

For Bataille, the Imaginary Party stands in opposition to homogeneous society. "Production is the basis of social homogeneity. Homogeneous society is productive society, namely, useful society. Every useless element is excluded, not from all of society, but from its homogeneous part. In this part, each element must be useful to another without the homogeneous activity ever being able to attain the form of activity valid in itself. A useful activity has a common measure with another useful activity, but not with activity for itself. The common measure, the foundation of social homogeneity and of the activity arising from it, is money, namely the calculable equivalent of the different products of collective activity." Bataille here points to the present-day composition of the world into a continuous biopolitical fabric, which alone accounts for the fundamental solidarity between democratic and totalitarian regimes, for their infinite reciprocal reversibility. The Imaginary Party is what consequently manifests itself as heterogeneous to biopolitical formation. "The very term heterogeneous indicates that it concerns elements which are impossible to assimilate; this impossibility which has a fundamental impact on social assimilation, likewise has an impact on scientific assimilation. [...] Violence, excess, delirium, madness characterize heterogeneous elements to varying degrees: active, as persons or mobs, they result from breaking the laws of social homogeneity. [...] In summary, compared to everyday life, heterogeneous existence can be represented as something other, as incommensurate, by charging these words with the positive value they have in affective experience. [...] This proletariat cannot actually be limited to itself: it is in fact only a point of concentration for every dissociated social element that has been banished to heterogeneity." Bataille's error, which would plague all the work of the College of Sociology and *Acéphale*, was to continue to conceive of the Imaginary Party as a part of society, to consider society as a cosmos, as a whole capable of being represented as beyond oneself, and to view oneself from this perspective, i.e., from the point of view of representation. All the ambiguity of Bataille's positions with regard to fascism stems from his attachment to these used-up dialectics, to all that prevented him from understanding that under Empire the negation comes from the outside, that it does not occur as a heterogeneity with respect to the homogeneous, but as a heterogeneity in itself, as a heterogeneity between forms-of-life playing within their difference. In other words, the Imaginary Party can never be individuated as a subject, a body, a thing, or a substance, nor even as a set of subjects, bodies, things, and substances, but only as the event of all of these things. The Imaginary Party is not substantially a remainder of the social whole, but the fact of this remainder, the fact that there is a remainder, that the represented always exceeds its representation, that over which power is exercised always eludes it. Here lies the dialectic – our condolences. [41-43]



II.

For us, the aim is of course to combine with the event as gesture the event as language. This is what *Autonomia Operaia* achieved in Italy in the 1970s. *Autonomia* was never one movement, even if power described it at the time as “the Movement.” *Autonomia*’s space was the plane of consistency where a large number of singular destinies flowed together, intersected, aggregated, and dis/aggregated. Bringing these destinies together under the term “*Autonomia*” serves purely as a signifying device, a misleading convention. The big misunderstanding here is that autonomy wasn’t the predicate demanded by subjects—what dreary, democratic drivel if the whole thing had been about demanding one’s autonomy as a subject – but by becomings [devenirs]. *Autonomia* thus has innumerable birthdates, is but a succession of opening acts, like so many acts of secession. It is, therefore, workers’ autonomy, the autonomy of the unions’ rank and file, of the rank and file that ransacked the headquarters of a moderate union at Piazza Statuto in Turin in 1962. But it is also workers’ autonomy with regard to their role as workers: the refusal to work, sabotage, wildcat strikes, absenteeism, their declared estrangement from the conditions of their exploitation, from the capitalist whole. It is women’s autonomy: the refusal of domestic work, the refusal to silently and submissively reproduce the masculine workforce, self-consciousness, making themselves heard, putting an end to pointless intercourse; women’s autonomy, therefore, from their role as women and from patriarchal civilization. It is the autonomy of young people, of the unemployed, of the marginal, who refuse their role as outcasts, who are no longer willing to keep their mouths shut, who impose themselves on the political scene, demand a guaranteed income, create an armed struggle in order to be paid to sit on their asses. But it is also the autonomy of militants from the figure of the militant, from the partinini, and from the logic of the groupuscule, from a conception of action always deferred – deferred until later in existence. Contrary to what the sociologizing half-wits – always hungry for profitable reductions may lead one to believe, the remarkable fact here is not the affirmation of “new subjects,” whether political, social, or productive, young people, women, the unemployed, or homosexuals, but rather their violent, practical, active desubjectivation, the rejection and betrayal of the role that has been assigned to them as subjects. What the different becomings of *Autonomia* have in common is their call for a movement of separation from society, from the whole. This secession is not the assertion of a static difference, of an essential alterity, a new entry on the balance sheet of identities managed by Empire, but a flight, a line of flight. At the time, separation was written *Separ/azione*. [53-55]



III.


Given the fundamental provincialism of French opposition movements, what happened thirty years ago in Italy isn't just historical anecdote; on the contrary: we still haven't addressed the problems the Italian autonomists faced at the time. Given the circumstances, the move from struggles over places of work to struggles over territory; the recomposition of the ethical fabric on the basis of secession; the reappropriation of the means to live, to struggle, and to communicate among ourselves form a horizon that remains unreachable as long as the existential prerequisite of *separ/azione* goes unacknowledged. *Separ/azione* means: we have nothing to do with this world. We have nothing to say to it nor anything to make it understand. Our acts of destruction, of sabotage: we have no reason to follow them up with an explanation duly guided by human Reason. We are not working for a better, alternative world to come, but in virtue of what we have already confirmed through experimentation, in virtue of the radical irreconcilability between Empire and this experimentation, of which war is a part. And when, in response to this massive critique, reasonable people, legislators, technocrats, those in power ask, "But what do you really want?" our response is, "We aren't citizens. We will never adopt your point of view of the whole, your management point of view. We refuse to play the game, that is it. It is not our job to tell you which sauce to cook us with." The [62] main source of the paralysis from which we must break free is the utopia of the human community, the perspective of a final, universal reconciliation. Even Negri, at the time of *Domination and Sabotage*, took this step, the step outside socialism: "I don't see the history of class consciousness as Lukacs does, as a fated, integral recomposition, but rather as a moment of intensively implanting myself in my own separation. I am other, other is the movement of collective praxis of which I am a part. I participate in an other workers' movement. Of course I know how much criticism speaking this way may provoke from the point of view of the Marxist tradition. I have the impression, as far as I am concerned, of holding myself at the extreme signifying limit of a political discourse on class. [...] I therefore have to accept radical difference as the methodical condition of subversion, of the project of proletarian self-valorization. And my relationship with the historical totality? With the totality of the system? Here we get to the second consequence of the assertion: my relationship with the totality of capitalist development, with the totality of historical development, is secure only through the force of deconstruction determined by the movement, through the total sabotage of the history of capital undertaken by the movement. [...] I define myself by separating myself from the totality, and I define the totality as other than myself, as a network [63] extending over the continuity of historical sabotage undertaken by the class." Naturally, there is no more an "other workers' movement" than there is a "second society." On the other hand, there are the incisive becomings of the Imaginary Party, and their autonomy. [61-63]

IV.


The other strategy; not of war but of diffuse guerilla warfare, is the defining characteristic of Autonomia. It alone is capable of bringing down Empire. This doesn't mean curling up into a compact subject in order to confront the state, but disseminating oneself in a multiplicity of foci, like so many rifts in the capitalist whole. Autonomia was less a collection of radio stations, bands, weapons, celebrations, riots, and squats, than a certain intensity in the circulation of bodies between all these points. Thus Autonomia didn't exclude the existence of other organizations within it, even if they held ridiculous neo-Leninist pretensions: each organization found a place within [85] the empty architecture through which – as circumstances evolved – the flows of the Movement passed. As soon as the Imaginary Party becomes a secessionist ethical fabric the very possibility of instrumentalizing the Movement by way of its organizations, and a fortiori the very possibility of its infiltration, vanishes: rather, the organiza-



tions themselves will inevitably be subsumed by the Movement as simple points on its plane of consistency. Unlike combatant organizations, Autonomia was based on indistinction, informality, a semi-secrecy appropriate to conspiratorial practice. War acts were anonymous, that is, signed with fake names, a different one each time, in any case, unattributable, soluble in the sea of Autonomia. They were like so many marks etched in the half-light, and as such forming a denser and more formidable offensive than the armed propaganda campaigns of combatant organizations. Every act signed itself, claimed responsibility for itself through its particular how, through its specific meaning in situation, allowing one instantly to discern the extreme-right attack, the state massacre of subversive activities. This strategy, although never articulated by Autonomia, is based on the sense that not only is there no longer a revolutionary subject, but that it is the non-subject itself that has become revolutionary, that is to say, effective against Empire. By instilling in the cybernetic machine this sort of permanent, daily, endemic conflict, Autonomia succeeded in making the machine [86] ungovernable. Significantly, Empire's response to this any enemy [ennemi quelconque] will always be to represent it as a structured, unitary organization, as a subject and, if possible, to turn it into one.



“I was speaking with a leader of the Movement; first of all, he rejects the term ‘leader’: they have no leaders. [...] The Movement, he says, is an elusive mobility, a ferment of tendencies, of groups and sub-groups, an assemblage of autonomous molecules. [...] To me, there is indeed a ruling group to the Movement; it is an ‘internal’ group, insubstantial in appearance but in reality perfectly structured. Rome, Bologna, Turin, Naples: there is indeed a concerted strategy. The ruling group remains invisible and public opinion, however well informed, is in no position to judge.” (“The Autonomists’ Paleo-Revolution,” *Corriere della Sera*, May 21, 1977) . No one will be surprised to learn that Empire recently tried the same thing to counter the return of the anti-capitalist offensive, this time targeting the mysterious “Black Blocs.” Although the Black Bloc has never been anything but a protest technique invented by German Autonomists in the 1980s, then improved on by American anarchists in the early 1990s – a technique, that is, something reappropriable, infectious – Empire has for some time spared no effort dressing it up as a subject in order to turn it into a closed, compact, foreign entity. “According to Genovese magistrates, Black Blocs make up ‘an armed gang’ whose horizontal, [87] nonhierarchical structure is composed of independent groups with no single high command, and therefore able to save itself ‘the burden of centralized control,’ but so dynamic that it is capable of ‘developing its own strategies’ and making ‘rapid, collective decisions on a large scale’ while maintaining the autonomy of single movements. This is why it has achieved ‘a political maturity that makes Black Blocs a real force’” (“Black Blocs Are an Armed Gang,” *Corriere della Sera*, August 11 , 2001). Desperately compensating for its inability to achieve any kind of ethical depth, Empire constructs for itself the fantasy of an enemy it is capable of destroying. [84-87]



Historical conflict no longer opposes two massive molar heaps, two classes—the exploited and the exploiters, the dominant and dominated, managers and workers—between which, in each individual case, it would be possible to differentiate. The front line no longer cuts through the middle of society; it now runs through each one of us...