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From Autonomous Space Towards Liberated Space: Some Points for Discussion and Debate

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Space: Some Points for Discussion and Debate

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How could we conceive of a liberated space in a world that is dogged by the absolutes of the economy? Or, how could one talk of freedom when one is not free? Perhaps we could only perceive the expansion of liberated space when we actually begin to liberate space. This seems obvious but it is a fleeting idea that can be obscured by the trivial demands of running an autonomous space. Creating liberated space is not a surgical operation whereby we cut one part of reality (that part being space) from the totality of everyday existence and doctor it accordingly. Our creation maybe relies on our understanding of this totality; that it reproduces itself in every aspect of our lives. So, our Liberated space could be crafted from a recognition of the totality and the need to attack it. And the creation would be an attack in itself. Our means and ends become inseparable as does our theory and our practice.

The social centre, squatted or not continues to provide a quarter where we can passionately debate and discuss our next move. Sometimes they afford us a momentary glance at the possibility of a life self-determined and of full enjoyment. Mostly they are racked by informal hierarchy and insipid ideology. In our experience, when we begin to liberate space or when we embrace the possibility of unlimited revolt the social centre regains its potential and its subversive qualities.

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“All of the models and structures in which we’ve taken refuge must be fiercely examined and critically dismantled, and we must learn to depend on ourselves. If we do not wish to find ourselves in a world where no one really lives, where no one really knows anyone else, where everyone has become a mere cog in a machine meshing with other cogs but remaining truly alone, then we must have the strength to attack alienation in every way we can. Otherwise, we may just find there is no place left where we can meet face to face”.

The gathering of people from across Europe around “Autonomous” Space has encouraged us to commit our experiences and ideas to paper. We have decided to present our common thoughts with the hope of sparking debate and finding affinity. These are not static words conceived of in the dry desert of opinion or in the hope of furthering an ideology, but rather they are forged through our shared experiences and projects as comrades and our desire for unlimited revolt.

Our lives in and around spaces considered autonomous have given us many things; friendship, escape, small glimpses of the world to be built and not least the critique that is written here. Our desire is not to abandon the project of social centres, communes and squats per se, but rather to go beyond them in order to further our projects of experimentation and revolt that we have seen hints of in “Autonomous” spaces. We ask ourselves; can an “Autonomous” space be created within the domain of capital? What does it mean to be autonomous? Liberated?

We should begin with our proposal to move from “Autonomous” Spaces towards Liberated Space. We conceive the “Autonomous” Space as a potential that has lost significance, direction and power as a weapon for destruction of the existent and as a tool of things yet to come. “Autonomous” spaces still have the potential for genuine face to face interaction between people, experimentation of relationships, music, art, rebellion etc. but are frequently limited to ritualized relationships and codified behaviour.

It is important for us to acknowledge that there are no “Autonomous” Spaces within Capital. We cannot simply step over the border of Capital into Autonomy regardless of how comforting that sounds. Capital seems to us a social relationship as well as a material force. It enforces its domination over all terrain be it the streets of Moscow, the plains of Africa or the wilderness of Antarctica. Every space is a commodity to be consumed or capitalised upon.

We believe for a space to be truly autonomous it must first be liberated. Liberated in our sense doesn't just mean taking something out of the hands of capitalists (the mere re appropriation of a building) but rather taking space and finding ways to use it as a weapon against the state and capital themselves.

Put simply, liberated space would not look like taking over a building and filling it full of barricades that block out any light that the outside world potentially has to offer, but beginning to reconceptualise space and see the subversive qualities in the architecture and space that surrounds us. A market becomes a point of interaction, a park becomes a training space, a car becomes a torch of solidarity, a field becomes a hideout, a roof a lookout, a prison a target.

We don't mean to imply that in order for a space to be truly liberated its participants need to be “militant”, far from it. We only suggest it needs to be based on the logic of attacking the arteries and veins of domination, from social relationships (including capitalism) to military barracks, power lines, banks etc. For us an increase in militancy would be completely useless and would mean an increase in specialization, sacrifice and alienation. The aim of the militant is to pressure the state and its institutions into granting his/her “demands”. The idea of constant attack is significantly different to this logic. Constant attack requires a refusal of the existent, its roles (including that of the militant) and its willfull destruction with the aims and means of unlimited freedom.

Others when questioned on the possibility of liberated space have spoken eloquently on the necessity of attack. We also suggest that any space that is *given* to us is a poisoned apple given by the hand of our enemies with the hope of distracting and neutralizing our energies. Every thing that is given — even through struggle — is always a double edged sword. Space which is taken and time which is stolen, turn the enemy's

gifts into mere absurdities. The take, is of course, a bone of contention and is the realm where the stale breath of ideologues is ever present. Taking for us is a methodology which is opposed to any ideology be it that of the activist or the reactionary. We can only say that the act of taking is limitless and would serve to open up further possibilities.

A recent example which highlights the differences in the mentality between attack and militancy and the unlimited taking of the revolutionary vs the acceptance of concessions is the case of the struggle for Ungdomshuset. We do not mean for this example to spark an endless debate around these events, but rather to try and draw out the differences between these conceptualizations of space and struggle.

The riots for Ungdomshuset, which, for a brief moment of time turned normalcy on its head, succeeded in creating small liberated zones where commodities value was subverted from useless junk in a store to burning barricades. People took control of their rage and self organized their hatred toward a world that had robbed them of already so much. These experiences became nullified, tamed and recuperated by the very activism that was complicit in organizing the revolt. Instead of broadening the struggle across the social terrain they pushed it into the cage of the single issue activist campaign, striving only for one limited goal.

This struggle did open up cracks in the facade of capitalist consensus where members of the excluded met face to face; finally with a real reason to communicate and a real reason to act! However the prevalence of the activist mentality in the movement to save Ungdomshuset meant that each brick hurled through a bank window with a genuine disgust and aimed at uprooting the whole rotten system, transformed mid flight into a ballot in the box for complicity and negotiations with the state furthering its (the states/capitals) project of consensus and dialogue.

We seem to only be able to say what a liberated space is not. How can we go from the mere negation of a thing into the lived experience of what we desire? This is a fundamental question which there is seemingly no answer to, only process and experimentation. A tension between the existent and our wildest dreams. But we can not just stop with this truism. We feel the pressing need to realize our dreams here and now. In order for this to happen discussion, communication and finding affinity with others are of the utmost importance.