

NIGHTFALL.BLACKBLOGS.ORG

**FRIENDSHIP**  
**AUTONOMY**  
**RESISTANCE**

no.

# INTRODUCTION

May 2018

THE FOLLOWING TWO ESSAYS WERE PUBLISHED JUST over one year apart in NIGHTFALL, a regular newspaper in the Twin Cities. They deal with the question of autonomous self-organization, particularly in the context of the Trump's victory in the 2016 election. In the days that followed, unrest kicked off in a number of cities across the so-called United States for several days. In the aftermath, the website Indigenous Action Media, best known for *Accomplices Not Allies*, published a call for "Anti-colonial & Anti-fascist Action":

*[Former Black Panther] Lorenzo Komboa Ervin stated, "We must make it impossible for Trump to govern the country, and must put power in the hands of the people in the streets."*

*Embrace your role in these struggles and organize. We are ungovernable and we must make it impossible for this system to govern on stolen, occupied land.*

It is in this spirit that the essays here explore autonomous self-organization as a practice to realize this ungovernability.

While the first essay describes this framework of organizing, the second essay analyzes much of the past year's activity in the Twin Cities within this framework. While there can be no assumptions made of the mindsets of the participants in these actions, autonomous self-organization remains a compelling way of understanding these events and of informing our approach to future actions.

## Photos

Inside cover: Black bloc assembling in Minneapolis on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Page 4: "Fuck Trump" graffiti during a freeway takeover in Minneapolis following the election.

Page 8: A smoke flare lit during the breakaway from the January 20<sup>th</sup> demonstration in Minneapolis.

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## SUGGESTED READING

“Call,” anonymous

“Communique From A Breakaway,” anonymous

“How To Start A Fire,” anonymous

“J19 Minneapolis: Well, We Tried To Have a Dance Party,” anonymous

“Reportback and Reflections on #J20 & #J21 from Chicago,” anonymous

“A Year Of Making Noise,” anonymous

“Signals Of Disorder: Sowing Anarchy In The Metropolis,” A.G. Schwarz

“A Field Guide to Protests: The Protest Marshal,” Belli Research Institute

“Don’t Try To Break Us—We’ll Explode,” CrimethInc.

“How To Form An Affinity Group,” CrimethInc.

“Anti-colonial & Anti-fascist Action,” Indigenous Action Media

*Now*, The Invisible Committee

*The Coming Insurrection*, The Invisible Committee

*To Our Friends*, The Invisible Committee

“Autonomous Self-Organization And Anarchist Intervention,” Wolfi Landstreicher

“Some Notes On Insurrectionary Anarchy,” Killing King Abacus

“Fire At Midnight, Destruction At Dawn,” A Murder of Crows

“Keep It Local,” Nightfall

*The Savage Peace*, Sasha Durakov

“Living & Fighting,” Tiqqun

the MPD substation itself. From the hand styles it again seems safe to assume these were often from different individuals or affinity groups.

For these practices to truly proliferate, they must spread beyond any particular subculture, scene, or identity. The state and the media have latched onto the term “antifa” as an identity for a certain set of rebels who participate in militant actions. With this label, or any other, individuals are put at a distance from everyone else, making them appear foreign rather than as one’s neighbor, one’s coworker, one’s friend. The goal with this maneuver is isolation, preventing rebellious practices from spreading all throughout society and reducing backlash when repression strikes.

Taking a step back, a fundamental component of affinity group-based autonomous organizing is of course *affinity*—that is, *friendship*. A lot of people don’t have a crew to go to a demonstration with, or go tagging with, or to even speak of these ideas with. Often, there isn’t anyone in our lives who we trust enough for these things, or who is even interested in them. Having public spaces to find each other in are vital to forming the bonds that grow into what we call affinity groups. Spending time together and sharing our lives with one another can strengthen these bonds over time and ultimately form the basis of the liberating experiences we create. Many who have spent time at Standing Rock or other protest encampments in the past have remarked that just the simple fact of living together, of making and sharing food around a fire day in and day out, caused their projects together to proliferate and bloom in ways that no amount of prearranged structure ever could. Putting our lives in common in such a way here in the city can be a more tricky proposition, as cities were in many ways designed to keep people locked into the role of isolated worker-consumers, but this doesn’t mean we can’t take small steps in such a direction. Reading groups, workshops, movie screenings, potlucks are a few of endless possibilities where we can come into contact with others who see the world as we do, with whom we experience *community*. Through these encounters, constellations of crews and affinity groups can emerge.

As a friend once said, the commune is that which sustains the attack and the attack is that which enlarges the commune. It is through friendship that we build the bonds necessary to self-organize and attack, and it is through attacking this world of misery that we can reclaim a sense of living, fighting because we have something to fight for: each other.

# AUTONOMOUS ORGANIZING IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

January 2017

SO THEY REALLY WENT AND DID IT. This time last year the Trump campaign was only just beginning to lose its comedic factor. Now Trump is just days away from taking office, and many are at a loss on how to navigate this new reality. Without promising any solutions, we would like to outline a combative strategy against the incoming regime and all manifestations of oppression and authority.

In the days following the election, even cities where riots did not erupt from anti-Trump demonstrations witnessed an antagonism unprecedented in recent history. In every metropolis throughout the country social peace was shattered, even where it was strongest. Even as the immediate momentum slows, calls to disrupt the inauguration ceremony on January 20<sup>th</sup> have picked up steam. Interfering with this spectacle holds potential, but the prospect of decentralizing conflict on the 20<sup>th</sup> and beyond is what really piques our interest. The model we elaborate here provides us with a loose strategy for spreading ungovernability, reducing the capacity of the Trump regime, and by extension local authorities of all parties, from operating.

This strategy is what we, and others like us around the world, call autonomous self-organization. Let’s take a moment to unpack what we mean by this. First of all, when we speak of autonomous action we

refer to action taken outside of or separate from official groups and organizations. While useful at times, formalized relations such as these can not only hinder our ability to act but also leave us vulnerable to repression when actions can be tied to offices, spokespeople, or membership lists. For these reasons, affinity groups are often proposed as an alternative to organizations. Affinity groups refer to those friendships that most of us already have—those handfuls of comrades with which we have built, or are building, a deep trust. With our affinity groups or even alone we have the freedom to take initiative, acting on our own accord and on our own timelines without waiting for instructions or invitations.

In refusing to become followers in struggle we are also refusing to gather followers for ourselves. For this reason reproducibility is prioritized when acting. Spray paint is 97¢ if you can't steal it, every home has a hammer, and concealing your identity is simple if you think ahead. The easier an act is to reproduce the more likely it is to generalize, and as attacks spread and more people join in it becomes more difficult for authorities to profile possible suspects, creating space for more to participate and for bolder actions to be taken. While isolated acts are manageable, generalized unrest can and does make it harder for law enforcement to operate, harder for them to harass, arrest, evict or deport us.

It is important to note that the framework of autonomous self-organization is not exclusive to small or clandestine actions. It can also inform how we approach mass actions such as demonstrations. Rather than the traditional march where we follow the bullhorn from point A to B, we can come together as a cluster of individuals and affinity groups who cooperate to carry out larger, public actions. The tradition of protest marshals solidifies a hierarchy between organizers and participants, stifling self-organization even when marshals aren't directly facilitating the work of the police. Instead, different individuals and groups can come prepared to achieve their own goals, whether this means bringing a banner along with flyers to hand out, acting as a self-defense squad against right-wing threats, or having the tools necessary to carry out a targeted attack when the time is right. In this sense, every public call should be viewed as a call for self-organization, a call to step up with our own contributions, with the hope that they can come together to strike a chord.

It might be difficult to imagine anything meaningful produced in our

before crowds re-converged at dawn. The police, who had been prepared for the threat of a single enormous crowd, were powerless to contain the decentralized and autonomous resistance that spread throughout Hamburg. The police would not regain control of the city until the end of the summit. In the meantime, a liberated zone was established and people were free to do as they pleased—perhaps they enjoyed a drink outside with friends, covered the walls in artful slogans, or looted a convenience store. Speaking on revolutionary organization, the Invisible Committee write “by successfully reclaiming urban districts and areas of the countryside, by establishing relatively secure zones, it became possible to go beyond the stage of discrete, anonymous activity on the part of little groups.”

Approaching this question locally, we're obviously starting from a much smaller scale. Still, there is something to think about when a masked individual steps away from an anti-fascist demonstration and tags “Antifa Zone” on a wall, as happened last August along Cedar Ave. It shows, first of all, that in this neighborhood we have some amount of power, that one could brazenly declare such a thing in broad daylight—if a right-winger could do the same with one of their own slogans, they haven't dared to try it yet. Second, and perhaps most importantly, it shows that police control is not omnipotent, that there are gaps in the police's ability to maintain order. It is by expanding these gaps in police power that we open up the potential to create a real “antifa zone” or a liberated space, just as the decentralized attacks in Hamburg opened up such a space despite the twenty thousand police officers summoned to the city.

To expand these gaps through decentralized actions, emphasis is placed on actions that are easy to do, with tools that are easy to acquire. Paint is cheap and easy to find—pouring it in a bottle and tossing it at a bank ATM is simple to accomplish. Ten more affinity groups inspired by the paint attack could easily do the same with a little effort. For example, from the end of summer until Columbus Day, the Pioneer Statue in northeast Minneapolis was vandalized at least four times, presumably by different people or groups. The first was communicated anonymously over counter-info site Conflict MN; those that followed it were apparently inspired by the initial defacement, finding it easy to repeat. Likewise with a wave of vandalism against the police also in northeast Minneapolis. Over the summer several anti-police slogans were seen spray painted in the area, and come autumn there were reports of graffiti at the police union headquarters, a cruiser and

one trusts deeply—as trust and a shared vision is necessary for acting together in a meaningful way. By self-organization we mean that there are no leaders to follow when acting, that affinity groups should strive to take active roles instead of passively participating. In addition to guarding against the threats posed by authoritarianism, repression, and co-optation, self-organization makes our struggles more vital and effective, taking away the passivity inherent in waiting for someone higher up to tell us how to achieve the world we want as well as the disappointments and frustrations we encounter when we go along with something that feels wrong to us just because the more experienced or legitimate people say it is the right path.

On January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017 perhaps a thousand people marched from south Minneapolis to downtown against Trump's inauguration. The night before, posters were wheatpasted along the route of the march with anti-state messages that interrupted the prevalent narrative that Trump was to blame rather than the whole system. After the mass march concluded in front of the county building, some came together on the light rail tracks and began shooting off fireworks, drawing in more and more people bored by the politicians' speechifying before deciding to march. The crowd shot off more fireworks at the youth jail and vandalized the nearby Wells Fargo headquarters before quietly dispersing. By all accounts, there was no one in charge, just a convergence of affinity groups who each brought their own goals and contributions—fireworks, banners, spray paint, a sound system, etc— together forming a successful action.

Between larger public actions, single affinity groups can take action in a decentralized manner while honing their skills. For example, multiple vandalism attacks on gentrifying businesses in south Minneapolis took place over the past year, with at least three reported in February and one more on Halloween. Beyond these types of attacks, the idea of affinity groups applies more broadly to any time a crew of friends organizes together to accomplish a task, such as a crew of graffiti writers who steal spray cans before painting the town.

It is hard to think of a place where this approach was better put to into practice recently than at the G20 summit in Hamburg. When the police cracked down on the large demonstration on the eve of the summit, the crowd fragmented into smaller mobs that split up throughout the city center, wreaking havoc as they went. Smaller groups attacked police officers, burnt luxury cars, and blockaded intersections all night

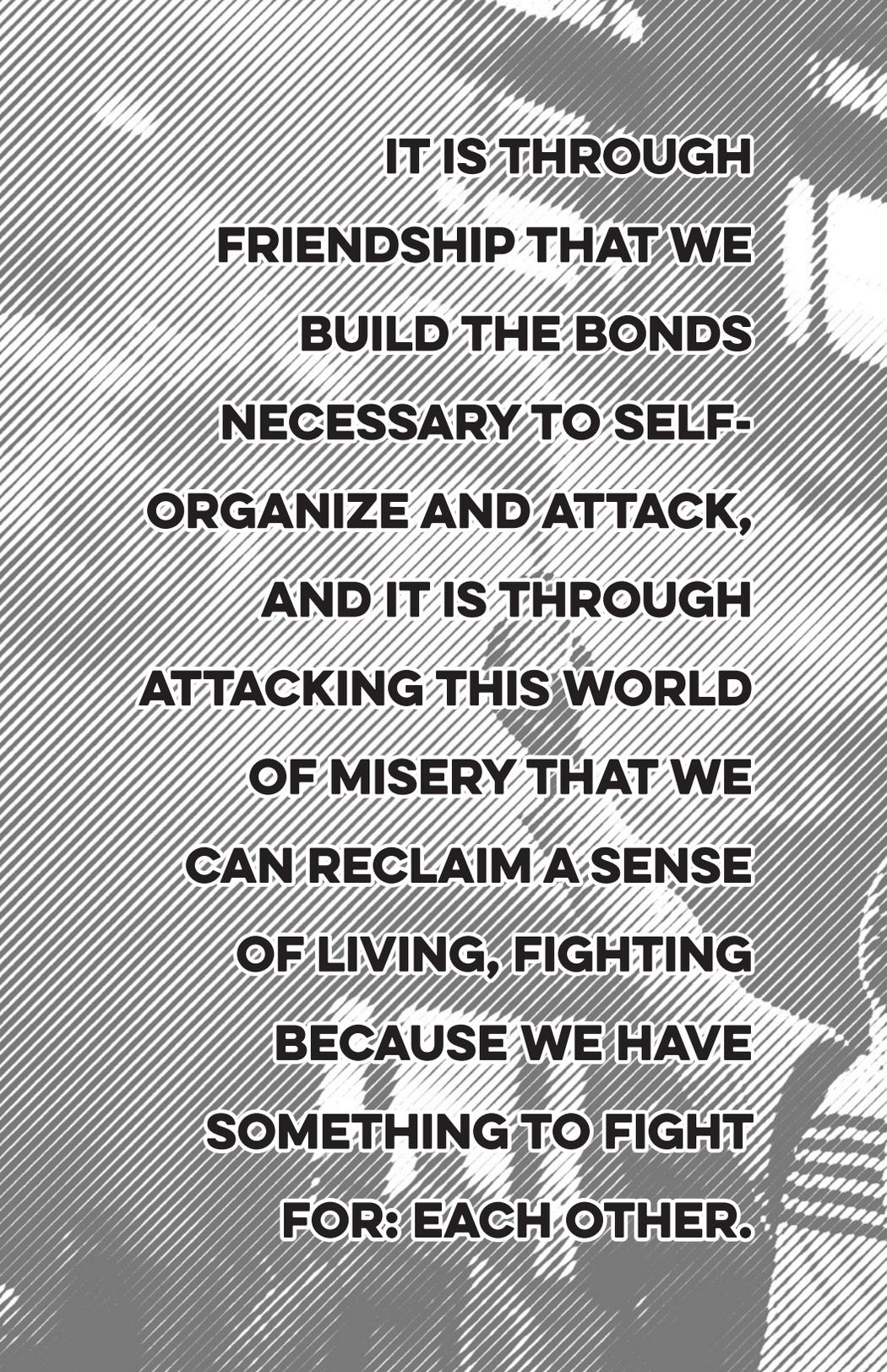
current context from a handful of isolated acts of resistance, yet the world abounds with examples: gentrifying businesses closing in San Francisco after repeated vandalism, immigration enforcement raids aborted in London after spontaneous blockades, eviction lawyers in Berlin dropping cases after their cars are burned. These are small victories within western urban centers, but we have just as much to learn from the self-organized communities of southern Mexico, the squatted forest of the ZAD, or the maroons of the eighteenth-century South.

Over the past year, the Twin Cities has seen a number of acts that loosely fit within this framework. Some are claimed through anonymous communiques submitted to counter-information websites such as Conflict MN or It's Going Down. Others simply rely on the eyes of witnesses and passerby, leaving us guessing as to their intentions or allegiances.

In the spirit of self-organization, we at NIGHTFALL have no interest in becoming the single voice of anti-authoritarian views and critique in the Twin Cities. The actions we cover and the events we promote are not representative of any single group but instead resonate with us regardless of their stated affiliations or lack thereof. We look forward to others with whom this newspaper resonates putting their voices and clarifications out into the world in whatever format appeals to them. This newspaper only requires a printer and a few dedicated friends.

So far we have described a framework of attack—something we find to be a crucial component of liberatory struggle. However it is just that: a component. Equally important is to support each other and build communities to sustain ourselves. The balance between these two has been described elsewhere as *spreading anarchy* and *living communism*. Any attempt to sever one component from the other will surely lead to defeat. As a friend once said, the commune is that which sustains the attack and the attack is that which enlarges the commune.

Everyone agrees, the situation is bleak. The Democratic Party is scrambling for relevancy, desperate to redirect different struggles and campaigns into membership drives. Every leftist group sees an opportunity for a new organization to take the Democrats' place; that this organization is always their own is surely just a coincidence. These false solutions only offer the certainty of defeat, of death. We see in autonomous self-organization the potential for something more than bare survival, something like life. Our lives belong to no vanguard, organizer, or leader—only to ourselves.



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## FRIENDSHIP AND RESISTANCE

*February 2018*

**W**E'VE NOW PASSED THE ONE YEAR MARK OF Trump's presidency. This time last year we were fast learning what his reign had in store for us. Following the riotous eruptions nationwide on the day of his inauguration, immense numbers of people participated in Women's Marches, others spontaneously blockaded airports, and hundreds stormed the UC Berkeley campus on February 1<sup>st</sup> and laid siege to the police-protected venue hosting Milo Yiannopolous.

In the year since nothing has slowed down. The regime continues to launch assaults on a daily basis: voting down net neutrality, revoking the temporary protected status of thousands of Central American migrants, allowing states to require people to work in order to acquire Medicaid. All of which was punctuated by scandal after scandal, provoking our indignation at Trump's latest racist remark or indiscretion. Rage against the police as well as the far-right has escalated and spread to every corner of the country.

At the beginning of 2017, we published an essay "Autonomous Organizing in the Age of Trump" which looked to the year ahead while sketching the outline of a possible strategy for resistance. Without falling into passive retrospective we want to consider the past twelve months with this strategy in mind, and to see how we can prepare for the days, months, and years ahead.

*Autonomous self-organization* is the term we used to describe the approach we laid out. By autonomous we mean actions taken outside of formal organizations, parties, non-profits, etc. In place of organizations we suggest *affinity groups*, the close circle of friends whom