



The Next Eclipse

A vision for regional autonomy



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Forward

The following text was written in the weeks before a solar eclipse, the totality of which passed over southern Illinois on August 21st, 2017. In seven years, a second total solar eclipse will be visible from the same place. The two paths of these eclipses make an “X” across the so-called United States, intersecting in Makanda, IL.

The Next Eclipse is the beginning of a vision for regional autonomy, and a challenge to southern Illinois to build the infrastructure for such autonomy in the time between the eclipses. It is an attempt to allow these astronomical events, reduced by local governments and businesses to nothing more than opportunities for tourism, to have some deeper significance for the inhabitants of the region.

It has been a pleasant surprise to find that the text has resonated with people in other places as well. Reading groups have formed in a handful of places around the country, and we are releasing this zine format to make it more accessible to others in the hopes that it inspires similar reflections on their own region.

The night before the 2017 eclipse, a march led by musicians took the main strip in Carbondale, IL. A hundred or so people clapped in time and sang “Negra luna [Black moon],” a song from a musical tradition rooted in resistance to colonization. A banner at the front of the march declared “THIS EMPIRE, TOO, WILL BE ECLIPSED.”

Since that eclipse, it has become more and more clear that

certainties are scarce regarding even the near future. None of us know what seven years' time will bring. On the short list of certainties, things around which a life can be built, three things stand out:

First, it is certain that at 1:59 pm on April 8th, 2024, for 4 minutes and 9 seconds, southern Illinois will fall into darkness in a shadow cast by the moon.

Second, it is certain that we owe nothing to the institutions that prolong this empire, and that we owe everything to each other, to those working to retrieve the world from the ecocidal and biocidal clutches of the economy and its government.

Finally, it is certain that in the course of time, this empire, like all the others before it, will be eclipsed.

Nothing can prepare you for a total solar eclipse. It is worth stopping whatever else you are doing. It is worth traveling great distances for. And it is worth allowing it to take on significance in your life – not merely the dumb movements of rocks and gases, but a moment that reveals, that inspires, that ignites.

For life and joy; for freedom, equality, and dignity; for a patient, deep, and sensitive rebellion.

Carbondale, IL, February 2018
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The Next Eclipse



1. What is an Eclipse?

In ancient Greek, *ékliptes* meant “the abandonment,” “the downfall,” “a failing or forsaking,” or “the darkening of a heavenly body.”

Two of the most pronounced differences of the natural world – day and night – find themselves momentarily confused, reshuffled, paradoxically intertwined.

In those moments, all the ranks, badges, and hierarchies that bind the powers of the earth, are revealed for what they are: the stupid games of humans, who have forgotten their place in the mortal order of things. The eclipse reminds us, contrary to the meticulously structured optical illusion of this social system, that it is the sun and not money that breaths life into the inhabitants of earth.

The fact that the eclipse has been viewed by the ruling class of the area as a momentary economic manna from heaven only underlines their idiocy, their disconnection from the world.

The fact that we tie our fate to them, that we allow them to decide the fate of this beautiful region, only underlines ours.

What is an eclipse?

an abandonment of those dependencies which prevent our lives from flourishing;

a downfall of those powers that destroy us;

an honest recognition of what has failed and forsaken us;
a darkening of those entities who seek to decide our fate as
if from the heavens;

What is an eclipse?

Let's allow the eclipse to be an invitation to be present,
together, before the challenges we face.

Perhaps *to eclipse* is something we do. Perhaps an eclipse is
something we become.



This is a call. It is meant for those who hear it.

We're not trying to argue. We are writing for those who
have all the arguments and reasons they need. Consider this
a flare shot into the momentary night of the totality:

for those who are looking,

for those who are sending out flares of their own,

for those who may have caught sight, through an accidental
glance,

and recognize a part of themselves in what they see.

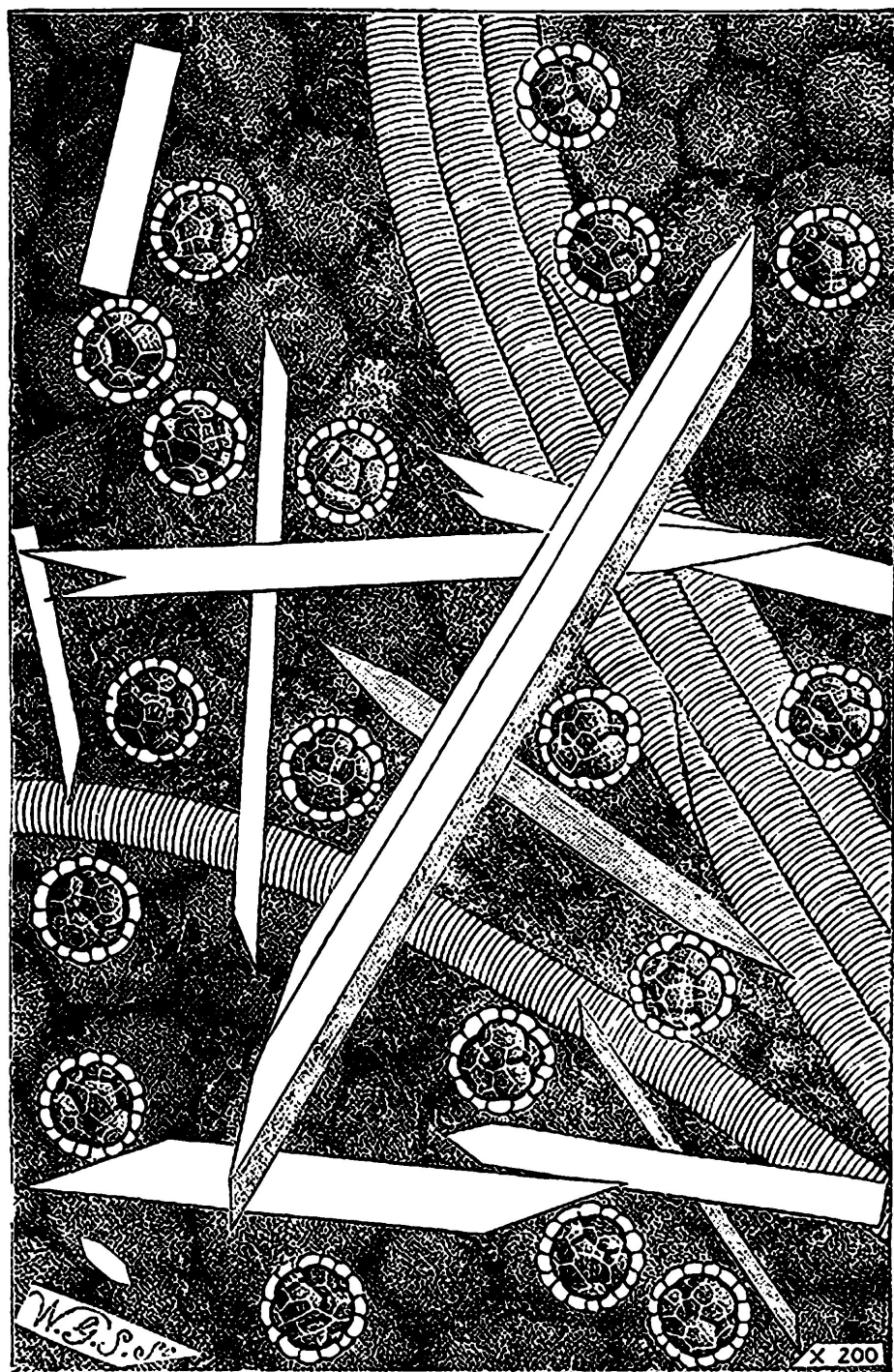
For those who understand that we are living through the
end of a civilization, and who want to build a new world
within its empty shells, its ruins, its ashes, its wake.

For those who see that such a world will not come from the
politicians or divine economic forces, but only from our
own prolonged and committed efforts.

For those who have given up faith in all the mechanisms of “change,” and are ready to assume responsibility for their own future.

For those who understand that there is no hope on the horizon, unless we create it.

We offer no argument. We only want to state the obvious and point the direction that follows.



2. What is Obvious

We all know it is ending.

Trump is not an aberration. There will be no “return to normal.” The damage has been done. America is over.

For some of us, America – while flawed and incompletely realized – was inseparable from an inspiring vision of human progress.

It is therefore not without some pain that we watch it become a parody of itself, its hallowed institutions transformed into reality television, its ideals turn into propaganda for the naïve, its most evil traditions of white supremacy, exploitation, and sexism once again resurgent.

For others of us, we say “good riddance” to a country whose founding values were inscribed in blood-red hypocrisy, and whose world-historical legacy is to have accelerated the genocidal and eco-cidal forces of capitalism.

But whether it is a moment of solemn acceptance or celebratory joy, the truth is obvious: America is over. The question now is whether we have the courage to go beyond it, or whether we will accept its zombie-like afterlife, marked by a blatant effort at total control over its population.



At a more local level, we can see the writing on the wall: the economic fate of Carbondale is tied to the University, which

is tied to state funding. State funding has revealed itself to be fundamentally unreliable. With Rauner, a process that has been underway for decades was merely accelerated to the point where it has become undeniably clear. The state cannot be depended on to care for the fate of this region. To some, this has been clear for a long time. The university has been ravaged for decades by a rotating managerial class that has shown itself unable to chart a path that works for the university, let alone the region in which it is embedded.

A new Chancellor arrives, carefully projecting a gruffy masculinity designed to assure us that daddy is here, that someone is going to save the day, that he's done it before. How many times will we fall for this? We know how these people operate: cut some things, build some things, send out applications to the next University. Progress on your C.V. is all that counts. The chaos of southern Illinois has been a ladder for too many administrative entrepreneurs.

The only plan that will ever count as "realistic" to that managerial class is to "streamline" the university. Liberal arts will be increasingly consolidated into fewer departments, and corporate money will be attracted to build the robots and drones that will displace workers, surveil everyday life, and wage war against anyone who challenges the power of corporations to turn the world into a giant open air prison. This is the only real growth industry of our time, hidden behind the innocuous banner of 'tech.' The university will be brought into the twenty-first century, a bit late, as a research&development extension of the powerful.

In this context, many are looking for a way to jump-ship, to leave town and find some stable employment elsewhere. But there's not enough room in the world's gated communities for everyone. Instability and precarity are the present and future of this world. You can desperately try to save your

own hide, but the odds are stacked against you. Another path must be created for those of us who understand that stability at the expense of others is an illusion, always threatened by the fear of those excluded others. Another path must be made for those who want to create the conditions for a good life – abundance, camaraderie, virtue, compassion – here where we call home.

Such a path cannot be found on the existing political or economic map. It is off the boring charts of liberal and conservative and libertarian and socialist. It is a road that must be made by walking.

There are some, in their own places, who have taken steps in this direction. Small experiments in resurrecting a sense of collective life, a concern for the fate of a whole community. A town of 3000 people in the hills of Spain, Marinaleda, has created an agricultural co-operative that is owned by and employs the whole town. They deliberately chose labor-intensive crops to make sure they could give everyone work. If you help build your house, it's yours for 15 euro a month. There are no police, because there is no crime, because there is no poverty. The city is cleaned every few Sundays by its own people, who make a party of it. While the unemployment rate in Spain is approaching 50%, and while the foreclosure crisis displaced hundreds of thousands, Marinaleda remains insulated from these market forces because it has built material and political autonomy at the local level.

There are other examples, each a unique attempt to forge a different world. The ZAD, or Zone to Defend: an autonomous zone the size of Carbondale and Makanda, composed of occupied farms and blocking the construction of an airport in the north of France. Two dozen small, interlinked communes inhabit the zone, building on it a world that is inconsistent with the airport and the world

that demands it. A few times a year, tens of thousands of people flock there to express their support and show their commitment to defend the zone from eviction.

Rojava: in northern Syria, the Kurds took the civil war as an opportunity to launch a revolutionary project in democratic autonomy against capitalism, patriarchy, and the state. They created a form of government that is answerable to neighborhood assemblies and have shown themselves the most effective combatants against ISIS.

On every inhabited continent there are tiny worlds breaking off from global capitalism, sometimes quietly, sometimes accompanied by a fight. People building the possibility of a world beyond this imploding civilization.

Meanwhile, in Southern Illinois, people are placing their bets on an eclipse to provide a windfall of cash... for what? So they can continue the same course for a few more years, against all the winds of history that are desperately trying to blow us in another direction. Why couldn't a dozen towns in Little Egypt¹ go the direction of Marinaleda?



There are some of us who feel ourselves to be inseparable from this region. Some others are scrambling to get out. In the latter group, many came for work, at the hospital, at the university. Some were raised here with the idea that their future is obviously elsewhere. No matter how many years we stay, many of us still think we are merely passing through. This is a local symptom of a wider phenomenon.

1. Southern Illinois has been known since its early colonization as “Little Egypt,” a reference to its location between the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, which reminded Christian colonizers of stories about the Nile river delta from the bible.

In the last few decades, the economy's imperative to go where the money is has uprooted people from their places on a scale that is historically only paralleled by wars and colonization efforts. With that uprooting, we are sucked out of our networks of family and childhood friends, transformed into isolated individuals or nuclear family units, whose sole responsibility is to care for our small bubble. Nothing is worth struggling for in any particular place; if things get too hard, just move.

Of course, not everyone can. And not everyone will, even if they can. Two types of people are emerging: those who feel so connected to a place that they refuse to uproot themselves without a fight, and those who refuse themselves that contact with reality. The latter surf on the waves of a turbulent economy, thinking their work is more important than the ground they stand on to do it. Life is a highway and places are pit-stops.

The relation to every place as somewhere one is merely passing through is what prevents the kinds of struggles that are needed from emerging. It is what makes every particular place expendable.

Creating a future requires allowing ourselves to develop and take seriously our connection to a place. To recognize its fate as our own.



On April 8th, 2024, a second eclipse will pass through Little Egypt. We can let these two eclipses be nothing more than an astronomical coincidence. We can let the movements of planetary bodies remain separate from the movements of our hearts, let their migration have no effect on our social life apart from being two opportunities to scam the tourists. We can do that.

But why? Aren't we looking for something? Aren't we waiting for something to reorient us, to trigger the transformation of life that is necessary to survive, let alone to thrive?

Let the next eclipse be ours. Let the first eclipse be a period, a hard stop that brings relief to the long winded speech of those who have told us this is the only life on offer, there is no alternative, you'd tear yourselves apart without us, and on and on. Period. Thank you for your thoughts, but now its time for some of our own. What can be accomplished in seven serious years, here in Little Egypt?

Economic autonomy. The ability to meet the needs of Little Egypt through growing and producing in Little Egypt. With it, the confidence that, were the global economy to collapse, we'd be alright – better maybe?

A social safety-net from below. The ability to provide care for those whose health and well-being the state has abandoned, or is always a law or two away from abandoning.

Ecological restoration and defense. The ability to not merely beg those who call themselves our leaders to stop fracking, but to physically prevent such a disastrous industry from poisoning our region.

A sense of collective fate. Forms of celebrating the forgotten history of resistance, of feeling ourselves as we really are: fragile links in a human story of struggle.

How far can seven years take us? Seven years from now, will we have squandered our lives working to pay off debts and rents to those who we feel, deep down, that we owe nothing?

There are no maps for where we must go. There is a direction, and a path to make by walking.

3. Fragments of a Future

Every block has a garden and a tool library. Houses are fixed up and owned through use and care. Contracts are for people who hate each other, and they still get written up from time to time, but shelter is not something you deprive even someone you hate. In the garden, the neighborhood watch meets twice a week to practice de-escalation techniques and nonviolent communication, and trains for situations when those don't work. The strip is dotted with every variety of eatery, collectively run with locally grown food and some specialty items acquired through autonomous trade routes. We always have enough, but we don't have everything all the time. The excitement around sharing something special returns to us.



It's a shitty morning. It's the day of your twice-monthly shift for trash collection, because we still make trash for the time being. Your crew gets up early, because you all want it to be over by lunch time. As you roll up in the bio-diesel powered truck, someone gets the idea that turns the mood: death metal. You will blast death metal as you all toss cans of trash into the truck. Its perfect, as if the genre, invented decades ago, existed in a sort of limbo until it discovered its sole purpose as the soundtrack to a communal trash collection team. Those sleeping in along your route yell for you to turn it down, but whatever. When its their shift on trash duty, you promise yourself, you'll let them get through it however they need to.



There's a bonfire again on the strip, this time for the Tomato Fertility Festival, which has moved out of clandestinity and into the open air of the town. The chant of TO-MA-TO echos throughout the neighborhoods, as marches start from various gardens led by children carrying baskets of the first tomato harvest. Gallons of the red fruit are poured into a cauldron over the fire and a sauce is cooked slowly amidst dancing, which is still more fun because its in the streets.



You can't get out of bed. You can't stand the light. Nothing happened to you; there isn't any reason. You just can't see other people, hear their voices, feel their touch. All that you can do today is feel. And even though it feels like pain, you don't mind it. It has messages for you, which you can hear if you have the time to listen. And you do now. You're allowed to feel. No one judges you or shames you and you won't get fired since there are no jobs. There's always work to do, but work and life and fun and play are integrated, and none of those things are jobs. The work you are responsible for can wait, or someone else can pick up your slack for the time being. You are allowed to feel. You are encouraged to feel. You are free to feel. And there will be no penalties, no consequences for staying in bed all day, all night, and for however many days it takes for you to feel all the parts and moments of that feeling. When you emerge from the fog, you remember you were cared for, and your responsibilities were cared for, and you are refreshed.



Hospitals are run as cooperatives. Specialist doctors and surgeons commit blocks of time toward patient care and

participate in skill share, which trains other health care workers to the extent they can. Through the collective nurses have become household physicians, the family doctor. Cooperative Hospitals provide access to tests, medicine, and are hubs for emergency treatment when a nurse cannot be accessed. They serve the severely sick, those with ongoing, intense treatment plans, and are sterile environments for surgeries, but most ailments are treated in the home. Babies are born where mothers want them to be – at home, at a house run by midwives, in the hospitals. Notably, with a large-scale diet shift from processed foods to regionally grown and raised, organic meat and produce, in combination with the shift from jobs to collective work forces which have reduced anxiety and depression, the health of the general public has increased dramatically. When people are terminally ill, they are placed with their families and loved ones, provided end of life care with a nurse (there's usually one in every communal unit), and are allowed to die in peace, however they desire. While we once required the need for death doulas — emotionally mature individuals who could guide the unfeeling through trauma—we now are able to take the time we need to mourn, to feel, and to celebrate the life of those who leave.



A group of kids and adults are repairing a broken node on the solar powered mesh network that keeps the internet running, free from the infrastructure of the big telecom companies who still dominate in some places. A few trucks are moving the day's harvest to neighborhood food hubs, where young kids load bags of produce onto bicycle trailers. You've had the longest day, you think, as you sip peach brandy on your porch. What did it start with? Death metal, right. And then there was the Yemeni festival for lunch, then someone asked if you would help mediate a

conflict they were having over in the Arbor district – a fight about someone sucking up all the block’s electricity, which admittedly tested your patience. Then there was that walk with that someone to that persimmon tree, the one with the candy-tasting fruit the size of tomatoes that you had kept secret til today. Then the hour of canning while the old woman read aloud from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Then the cleaning out of the rainwater filter, a quick but messy job. Then the dinner you shared with the sunset. And now the brandy, and the sound of music growing down the block. But your friend is on their way over, and you plan to continue tonight the friendly debate you’ve been having for a decade, since even before life became the pleasant chaos that it is: what is happiness? Its a question that doesn’t get old.



Across fires and under stars, we share stories of how silly we were. We have to look at it as silly, so as not to fall into a rage at the ideas and practices that our ancestors allowed to decimate so much beauty in the world.

“It turns out people like to create things, and like it even more when what they create is useful to others. This obvious fact about our being, so evident all around us, was obscured by the foggy lens of ‘the economy.’ They had actually convinced some of us that it was money and selfishness that made people work! Having never actually allowed people to live without scrambling for their basic necessities, the economists never actually got to observe free people undertaking free activity. As if humans before the economy were isolated misers, as if they weren’t born from and dependent on one another. As if our greatest joy wasn’t to be found in being the cause of joy to others!”

A child speaks up: “But what was ‘the economy’ you’re all always talking about?”

Old timers laugh: “We didn’t know either! That’s what was so crazy about it!”

A more serious voice rises: “When you were in it, it was hard to see it for what it was. When you were in it, it just looked like ‘the way the world worked’: you had to sell your time in exchange for some paper or numbers, in order to buy the ability to live and sell your time more. You got a weekend, a few holidays, some vacations if you were lucky, but otherwise your life was owned by the companies you sold it to. At the end there, it seemed like people turned themselves into little corporations, and forgot entirely what it meant to be free. Now, outside of it, we can see it more clearly: it was a way of controlling us, of governing us. Of keeping us ignorant of the fact that we didn’t need the companies and the governments who said we needed them.”

“But how did such a thing ever take hold of everyone in the first place?”

“That’s a very good question.” The fire crackles. “Let me tell you about our ancestor, Tecumseh.”



Tecumseh was a Shawnee Indian chief, who led a rebellion against the colonizing forces of early America. In 1811, a year before the rebellion he fomented broke out, Tecumseh passed through southern Illinois during his ceaseless efforts to unite the tribes. He carried with him a bundle of sticks, demonstrating that while a single stick can be broken, a united bundle holds under pressure. This image was so powerful it was eventually taken up by his – and our

– enemies, to signify their commitment to a united force of colonization and genocidal conquest.

After Tecumseh's visit through southern Illinois, the New Madrid fault line let loose an earthquake that reportedly rang church bells as far as Boston. The most powerful active fault line in the North American continent, it slumbers, for now, in the southernmost parts of Little Egypt. The 1811 quake was taken as a sign of the justness of Tecumseh's cause.

"But what was his cause?"

Well, as he put it:

'No tribe has the right to sell land, even to each other, much less to strangers ... Sell a country!? Why not sell the air, the great sea, as well as the earth? Didn't the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children?'

You see, the game the economists and the others who controlled us played was to tell us that people like Tecumseh were not our ancestors. That they were backward or savage or that their way of doing things would never work again. And so they gave new names to the genocide and the destruction of all the possibilities in the world. They called them 'progress,' and they taught us that we were better than all those folks who'd lived for so many thousands of years.



We construct tiny utopian glimpses because they are potent exercises in unfreezing the imagination. *For too long its been easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.* Maybe the image of chaos that we are told lies beyond this tightly controlled society is just the

ruling class's view of what autonomy would mean: a world that could not be controlled from above. A world of free communities, unsubmissive to the rule of money.



4. Autonomy

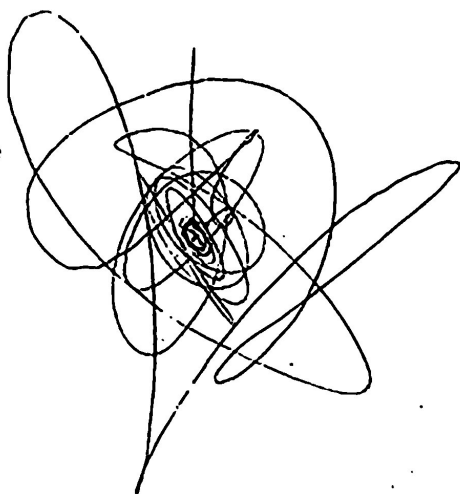
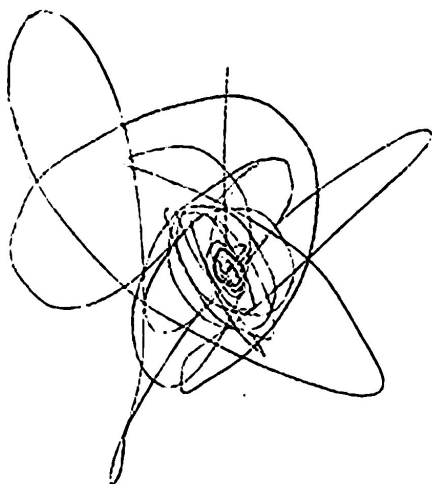
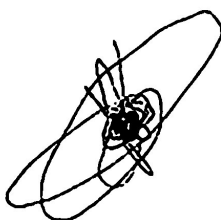
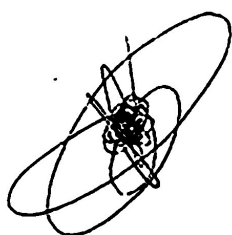
Autonomy. It's a word that today has more of a direction and a practice than a meaning, per se. Around the globe, from the Zapatistas of southern Mexico, to the Kurds of northern Syria, to networks of communes throughout Europe and North America, autonomy is the dream taking shape.

We could define it as collective self-determination, the ability for the people of a place to chart their own future. To eclipse the power of financial, industrial, and political elites.

The obstacles to autonomy are twofold: on the one hand, a global economy that wraps people's everyday lives in an international network of money exchanges, and on the other hand, the governments and their police whose job, at bottom, is to keep it that way.

Struggles for autonomy, then, involve both building and fighting. Building the means for regional production outside the existing economic order. Fighting for the right to organize our lives in ways are inevitably contrary to the laws of the state. Those laws, whatever their stated intention, have the fundamental purpose of keeping us dependent on the institutions that are destroying the earth and its various worlds. Reducing us to isolated individuals, whose sole course for freedom involves submission to the gambling ring called the economy.

Autonomy is about creating different freedoms. Creating different worlds. Creating the conditions to create ourselves, with all the potential dangers and joys that such a project entails.



5. How?

How would we do it? How would we eclipse their power?

A. Many of us are already doing it. Around the continent and around the region, networks of organic farms are self-organizing. Spaces are being taken over and filled with people and projects for the struggle. What is necessary is not some party or political organization that sucks us into the dying gasps of a system that, with Trump, has shown its true colors. We are already a party, partisans, of a world that is inconsistent with this one. Acknowledging this fact, deepening our cooperation, and extending our ambitions are our first tasks.

B. Start with desires, and build what is needed to fulfill them. None of us want a life reduced to blandness and scarcity. We want a luxurious life that can be shared with others, and we're willing to work for it. A craft brewery or ice cream company that builds its own local production network can be a partisan project, building within the money economy a set of skills and resources that could just as easily be detached from it. Create something, share it, and link up with others.

C. Don't try to do everything. Make friends who have the skills you don't have to accomplish what you want. We need engineers, farmers, computer scientists, permaculture experts, listeners, singers, thieves, nurses, historians, visionaries, carpenters, plumbers, and a thousand other people who love the skills they've developed and want to share them. Make your skills available, and look at something you can't do alone as an opportunity to meet someone new.

D. What passes for “political debate” today is a trap. Political discourse today is designed to pigeon-hole us into pre-defined, easily manipulated categories. If you have a neighbor or a high school friend that is on opposite sides of the political spectrum, find a common practice or form of sharing material things that can create common ground for a relationship. Chart a course off the political spectrum with unpredictable friendships.

E. Build a culture of resistance. Non-cooperation with the police and the state, solidarity with those who resist. Turn out to demonstrations and make them true expressions of our collective capacity to transform life and the city, if even for a moment. Ask yourself how you can best contribute to creating or sustaining joyous chaos, a breakdown of the sad reign of normalcy, and make a plan with those you know.

F. Diversity is strength. Racial and class diversity, but also ideological, spiritual, age, and any other kinds. We want a world that values each of our perspectives and unique abilities to contribute, and this is an ethos that needs to be in the genetic code of our struggle. Keep in mind, the most effective tool of the powerful is division along racial, ethnic, or other lines. Within any identity, there is more difference than there is across its boundaries. The only lines that matter are ethical lines: how you are, not who you are; what you want, not where you come from.

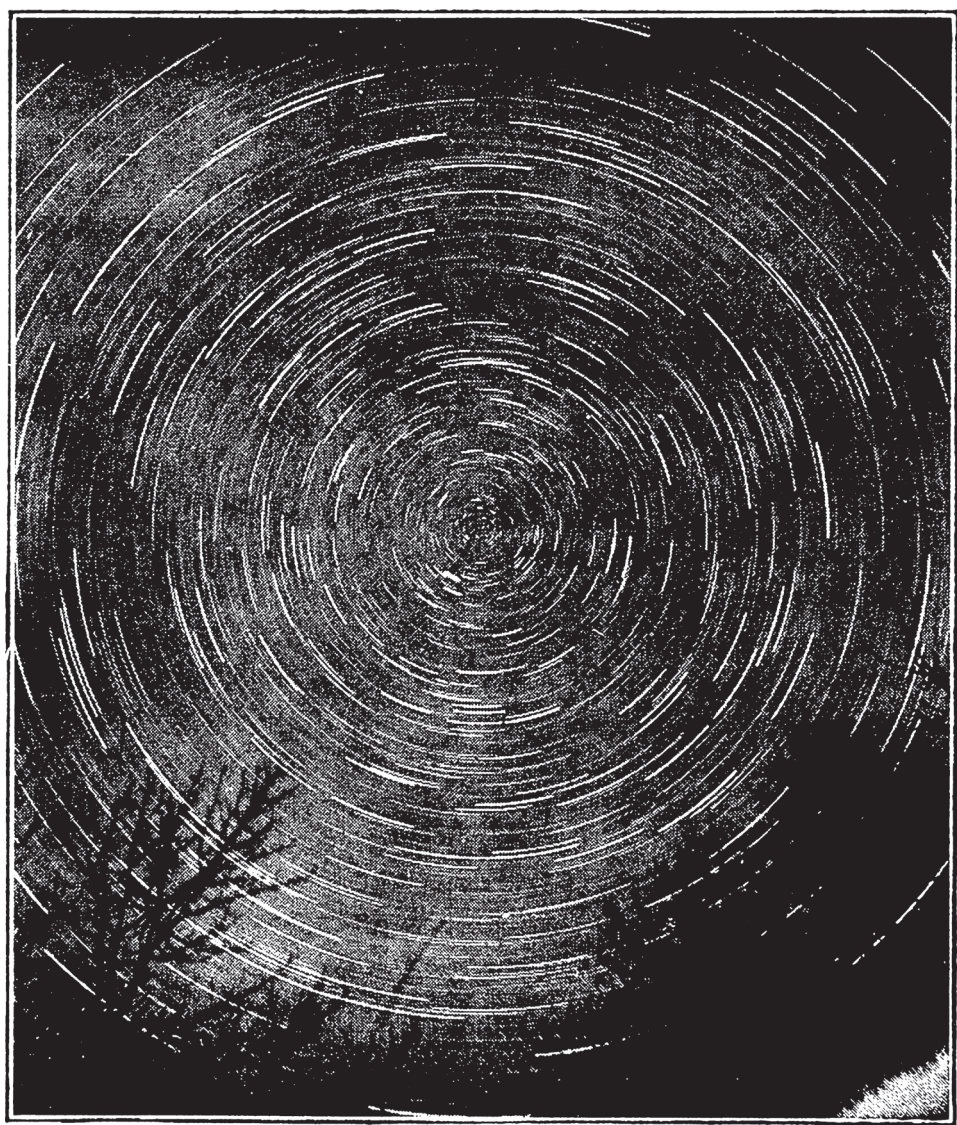
G. Think ethically and strategically. Breaking out of the structures of this world is not something that will happen simply because it is a good idea. Good ideas lay buried in the brains of millions of dissidents. Similarly, rigid moral principles paralyze people from acting in a context where no action can be safe from a context of suffering. I type this on a computer, using electricity created from burning coal, which is warming the atmosphere and destroying the lungs of people around the globe. Morality creates guilt

around these facts, which are beyond any of our control and therefore responsibility. Guilt paralyzes and brings out nastiness, resentment.

What is needed is a strategic ethics, which starts from what is practically possible in any given situation, and is oriented toward expanding those possibilities for the next moment.

Morality commands, whether it is from a church pulpit or a conscience. Ethics, in contrast, invites us to steer a course through the undesirable extreme consequences to grow more powerful in each unique situation.

For our broad situation, there are clear extremes we want to navigate between: on the one hand, we want to steer clear of what is normal, which is the destruction of the world at the hands of the economy. On the other hand, we don't want to catalyze the outbreak of open civil war in a context where the state and right wing paramilitary forces can be deployed to crush everything we love. Veer too far from normal, without having built enough strength, and the reactionary forces will be shipping us off to the camps. Come too close to normal, and our projects will be captured in the economy and become a nightmare version of what we hope for, as has happened so many times before.



6. Which Future Past?

Fifty years ago, no one could have imagined the world we have now. Fifty years from now, the world will have transformed several times over in ways that we currently cannot imagine. This is beyond question. The only question is whether the terms of these changes will continue to be set by the interests of the wealthy and their political lackeys, or whether a new historical force will enter the equation.

Eclipses are useful to historians, because they allow the precise dating of events that otherwise may have been recorded unreliably. What will these eclipses mean to the future? A moment where the sublime movements of astronomical bodies was reduced to a marketing gimmick for a dying region? Or a moment when, however subtly, some otherwise inconsequential earthlings began seriously organizing to save themselves?

**This empire, too,
will be eclipsed!**