

In late July, 2016, subMedia conducted an interview with Tom Nomad on the recent RNC counter-demonstrations in Cleveland, and the political environment in the US in the wake of police shootings in Dallas and Baton Rouge.

COUNTERING **INSURGENCY**

An Interview With Tom Nomad On The 2016 RNC

with the space itself always changing, but one in which we are not only involved in, but fundamentally a part of.

The real fascinating dynamics occur at times where these two trajectories outlined in a general sense above come to fuse into a singular approach, one which takes the immediate as a space of engagement, and uses intelligence gathering and analysis as the framework through which to understand action. In this approach, which we are beginning to see glimpses of in certain circles within the US and the Middle East/Northern Africa, the space of engagement becomes immediate, the space that one is embedded within. But, rather than attempting to take the community-organizing approach, which is based in outreach and a loose form of polling around action, this approach attempts to take the immediate time and space as the terrain in which a group acts in relation to other groups within a complex dynamic. This requires both an intimate understanding of this space, a deep connection to dynamics within these spaces and an ability to act outside of a concept of political purism in order to create complicity and understand the forces at play. It is unclear what the impacts of this approach will be, but it is one that comes to mimic more of the structure of localized and organic resistance movements than the structure of removed and conceptual activism. It is also an approach that fundamentally implies an almost total rethinking of anarchist engagement as it has been framed over the past 50 years.

Anything else you'd like to add?

It seems as if we have covered enough ground, and we could continue this discussion seemingly forever, so for now I would just like to thank subMedia for the opportunity to engage in this discourse.

COUNTERING INSURGENCY

Hey Tom, how the fuck are you?

Good generally, and overjoyed that this convention nonsense is finally over. What many people from outside convention cities do not grasp is the way that political conventions, or any other large National Security Special Event, can change the local terrain, both strategically and aesthetically, and the way that this process begins and perpetuates long before the opening of the event itself. There is the beginning of a recognition of this around the discussion of the Olympics and World Cup in Brazil, and the ways that the state is using this as an excuse to purge the favellas, move armed convoys of troops through poor neighborhoods, obtain the weapons to crush popular uprisings and so on. In Cleveland, at least, the process was much more subtle, and grounded in attempts to use the convention as a mechanism to push through an agenda based on police militarization and gentrification in the midst of widespread criticism. It is not that the city necessarily planned for this to be the case before, but in the fallout from the demonstrations around the murders of Tamir Rice and Tanisha Anderson, the convention was clearly used as a lever to buy complicity from non-profit organizations, avoid criticism of the police and increase the presence of surveillance within everyday life while instituting a strategy that was centered around harassing and intimidating those that were involved in either radical communities or involved in organizing demonstrations around the murder of Tamir Rice. So, for us, the convention started two years ago when the police began surveilling some of the places that many of the local radicals hang out, including Guide to Kulchur bookstore, and ended with the end of the convention itself.

Many people were expecting the RNC to be a massive throw-down between the various factions supporting and opposing Trump's nomination. But in the end, far fewer peeps turned out than expected, and street-level conflict was easily managed and contained. Were you surprised by this? And why do you think things played out the way that they did?

Honestly, I was not surprised at all. There are a number of dynamics that played out in this situation that generated the events that occurred. Before delving into these dynamics in more granular detail, it is important to understand the meta-context of the city of Cleveland as a whole, and the political history that characterizes the city itself. For the past two years there has been a heightened level of activity within Cleveland. The city has always had a certain provincialism to the political culture — not in a conservative sense, but in the sense that the dynamics within the city have been recognized to be anomalous. This uniqueness has been coupled with a longstanding Democratic Party political machine that exists in well-resourced isolation, and interacts with most areas of the city as a far away force. This has fostered a very grounded, microscopic, political culture in many neighborhoods, where the concerns are hyper-localized. As such, discussions of national or international politics tend to take on a conceptual tone, with the discussion around action being grounded in immediacy. This has been particularly clear over the past two years, as demonstrations have given way to local organizing projects, of any number of different sorts. These projects have been aimed at grounding resistance and building neighborhood autonomy, rather than influencing local policy, and almost in isolation from a discourse around national politics as understood in the traditional sense. This explains the ambivalence that most locals had to the convention, outside of the impacts that it was having on the city itself, and on everyday life within the city.

We also have to recognize a functional difference between the more conflictual dynamics that we have been seeing as of late, and past summit demonstrations. The summit demonstration dynamic tended to grow out of a sense of national organization, or organization based around some sort of political identity that transcended local context, and engaged in a conceptual politics based on discursive action. This symbolic terrain included the summit, which was framed as a site of total confrontation — one in which the “us” and the “them” would have some sort of televised conflict in order to articulate a rejection of some sort of conceptual policy or structure. This dynamic is what we defined in *Insurgencies 1* as activism: a form of action devoid of essential connection to the material

important tactical role. This is also leveraged in a number of campaigns where the demand is made to extract the greatest advantage within future engagements. Secondly, the approach to action is one that is grounded in intelligence-centric operations, or operations that take an understanding of the functionality of the enemy as its point of departure. Within this approach it ceases to make sense to, for example, attempt to engage with the enemy at the point where they are strongest, if we exist as a profound disadvantage, such as summits and conventions, which is almost always the case. This intelligence-centric operational format prioritizes research, analysis and the weaponization of analysis over emotive and discursive action, and a constant process of gathering and analyzing information.

The second dynamic, which we can see glimpses of in the social centers in Greece, Argentina, Bolivia and in Chiapas, is an approach to action that fundamentally breaks down the artificial distinction, formed in the fallout from Miami in 2003, between so-called community-organizing, what I refer to as embedded action, and direct action. This move has a number of profoundly important effects. Firstly, in taking the space around us as the point of engagement, we combat a tendency which has plagued radicalism within the US for some time: the idea that radical communities exist as separate and privileged sites of political engagement outside of the dynamics of everyday life. This tendency began to form in the US in the fallout from the 1960s, and derives partially from Maoist understandings of political purity, as well as a response to the culture wars under Reagan. Within this framework, radicals understand themselves as those that have come to understand something others have not, and then leverage this proclaimed understanding as a way to draw a distinction between “us” and “them”. This not only posits an artificial unity within the anarchist milieu, a sense that political identity is operative as a form of complicity, but also functions as a mechanism that removes action from its immediate context and moves it into a fundamentally conceptual dynamic. Secondly, the distinction between so-called community organizing and direct action posits its own odd phenomenology, one in which the community is understood as a terrain of political conflict, but one that is understood as unitary and outside of the context of direct action. A number of problematic conclusions are drawn from this point, as well as a number of omissions, including the disregard for everyday acts of illegality and obstruction that are common in many communities, and the separation of these from the category of acts of resistance. In the breakdown of this dichotomy within a number of conflictual trajectories internationally, there is an attempt to understand the space of engagement as immediate and complex, with any number of interests present within that space, and

context. On this level it is difficult to both understand the particularities of the deployment of tactics in other spaces, or to attempt to correlate the impact of actions in one space to potential impacts in another. Often, in avoiding these difficulties, we tend to isolate the tactic from the context and attempt some direct transference of our understanding of the tactic into another space, which often leads to attempts to replicate actions that we have little to no understanding of.

However, there are two tendencies that I would like to point to that carry with them an interesting potential line of flight out of our current impasses; intelligence gathering and the breakdown of the artificial separation between embedded work, often called “community organizing”, and direct action. Neither of these approaches are new, and both draw their lineages back to times before the contemporary anarchist milieu, but are being deployed in interesting ways within the milieu itself.

Within hacker scenes, and within some pockets of the on-the-ground anarchist milieu, we are seeing a move away from symbolic conceptually-driven action into a more functionally intelligence-driven and effectiveness-focused practice. Within the US this trajectory began its modern manifestation in the tendencies that came out of the anti-globalization movement, as well as those that came to form SHAC. We also have seen these very same tendencies at work in the more militant factions of the labor movement for some time. In this trajectory, action ceases to directly derive from some conceptual position. In other words, at the point where a conceptual position is determined, a second question is asked: how does one most effectively eliminate the thing that one is in opposition to? Rather than the traditional activist calculus of attempting to make disagreement known, this trajectory attempts to take the time to understand the dynamics of the enemy – whether this is an initiative, activity or body – and works to find the most effective means of disruption or elimination. There are two important aspects of this approach that bear articulation. Firstly, within this trajectory the concept of the articulation of disagreement is rendered useless, and in doing so the enemy is prevented from being in a position of existing as an interlocutor. In this elimination of discursive engagement, the legitimacy of the enemy is also eliminated; in the making of the demand, one necessarily recognizes the legitimacy of the interlocutor. Now, this does not mean that demands should never be made, only that in making demands, the attempt is to force the enemy into an untenable position. This was done well in the SHAC campaign, where HLS could have stopped animal testing, but that would have bankrupted the business, and the articulation of the demand came to play an

conditions of action as such. The dynamics that we are seeing now, though still based in articulating an anger through direct action, are coming from a very different space, one grounded in the spaces where fighting occurs – in neighborhoods, on streets, between spaces that are well traveled by the participants in the conflict itself. In other words, whereas the summit demonstration was grafted onto space from afar, the recent unrest is of the terrain that fighting occurs. These processes of grafting require the support for the graft to take root, and without that support, or the desire to provide support, it cannot function.

On a more granular level, the first dynamic that really prevented the conflicts that were almost universally expected was an almost complete lack of interest among local organizers. When the convention was announced, most local radicals quickly began to see the situation as one that we should attempt to survive, while incurring the minimal amount of damage possible. There had been a shift in the discussion locally, a shift away from movementism and activist politics and into a politics more thoroughly grounded in an intense study of, and engagement with, local conditions – with local, in this case, being understood more on the level of social ecosystem than geography. This strategic immediatism, as I would term it, precluded a sense in which engagement in a scenario which is based on a hypothetically national context, without clear goals, and with a distinct threat of repression was not viable. As the past couple of years played themselves out, this stance came to almost jokingly be known as ‘active disengagement’, not only not engaging in convention-related activities, but actively encouraging others to opt-out and to focus, instead, on immediate conflicts and defense against repression (operational security, the generalized use of encryption and so on). This prevented, outside of groups of liberals, there from being any more than the most basic infrastructure and no real, significant, calls to action. Not only did this prevent traditional movement organizations from coming into town, but it also focused the local discussion around strategic avoidance and engagement with the convention primarily on the scale of immediate effects.

The second important factor that can explain why events did not play themselves out the way that many outside of Cleveland had predicted, is the tactics of containment and repression deployed by the state. The data is still coming in, and there has yet to be a comprehensive review of police tactics during the convention, but a series of general dynamics can be identified at this point. Firstly, the state engaged in a process of harassment and intelligence gathering that preceded the run up to the convention. During the demonstrations around the murder of Tamir Rice

the police began working with an organization called the Peacekeepers Alliance, which they poured resources into expanding. This organization was tasked with “marshaling” demonstrations (which they failed at) as well as infiltrating marches and organizations to provide intelligence to the police; a civilian non-profit organization was used as a secret police structure by the city. This pattern of intelligence gathering and relationship mapping facilitated the over 30 visits that people around the city, many of whom were not involved in organizing around the convention, received from a number of agencies, including the FBI, Federal Marshals, local police, and sheriffs. These tactics can only be understood in light of the history of police retaliation that has characterized the last 40 years of anti-police activity within Cleveland. The intelligence operations served to mark out an “unacceptable” group within the local population. Those outside of this group were given the green light to demonstrate during the convention. However, these demonstrations were heavily contained, surrounded by police, channeled through the city and rendered pointless. This tactic of channeling, or what some have called mobile containment, is a tactic deployed widely by DC Special Operations Division, and which was adopted by the Cleveland police slowly over the past year or so. The whole city was modified, blocked by lines of police, movement limited, not through walls, except in some places, but through mobile teams of police on bicycle who blocked roads and contained marches to controllable avenues. This tactic requires an almost total ability to move through space, in order to quickly redeploy forces, as well as a generally static force of opposition content with launching pre-planned marches from announced locations.

The combination of repression, a history of violent retaliation, surveillance, intimidation and containment tactics served to contain otherwise volatile situations. However, this has to be understood in a context of almost total ambivalence toward the convention by locals. As such, the tactics of the police served to contain a situation that was not volatile to begin with, while the surveillance served to intimidate a group of people already not organizing for the convention, lending the whole police operation a sort of surreal air. These discussions of police tactics during the convention are provisional at this point, however, and a more thorough analysis will be possible after a careful review of footage and firsthand accounts of police movements during the days of the convention.

The final factor in the way that the convention demonstrations played out had to do with the almost total lack of support that the far right has in northeastern Ohio. After the late 1990s, where there was an intensive ef-

tion. The urban guerrilla phenomena that we saw rise with the RAF, and that includes the CCF/FAI, is a classic example of the problems of taking magnitude as the sole measure of the value of an action; the action occurs, it attacks something symbolic, and then it ends without much resonance. It may be that the failure of radical tactics of the past is not a question of magnitude, but, rather, a question of kinetics, of movement and speed.

So, on the one hand there is this effect of the concentration of force in the attempt to engage in defensive action, in an attempt to prevent repetition. On the other hand the action itself has limited spatio-temporality, limited movement outside of the initial action itself. This generates a dynamic that we have been seeing play itself out in the attempt to counter ISIS-claimed lone-wolf attacks outside of the Middle East, a different sort of projection, one that is operative through intelligence operations and pinpoint strikes. The intelligence operation is an attempt to isolate the action and the agents of the action from the context of the action, and to gather information from the limited perspective of the intelligence target, with the target set expanding based on points of information. In other words, intelligence is an attempt to prevent the repetition of events through the prediction – and in the case of entrapment, shaping – of the future itself, rather than the physical deterrence of action, as in the patrol, which is the very structure under attack in these actions. We have already seen glimpses of this in the building intelligence and security state within the US. However, this move is likely to become localized as the threat model expands to not only include anarchist direct action, so-called sovereign-citizen attacks and jihadist terrorism, all actions that are largely viewed as coming from outside a local context, but also includes the constant possibility of ambush, which is largely viewed as a localized phenomena. It is this combination of variables that makes the effects of these actions impossible to predict, and worthwhile to study from a material perspective.

Are there any specific strategies and tactics being employed by resistance movements in other parts of the world that you think anarchists in North America should be paying more attention to?

This is a difficult question to approach for a number of reasons, reasons that are often overlooked in the contemporary anarchist milieu. This difficulty is the result of a distance from events, combined with a limitation on the perspective of any single observer or group of observers. To put it another way, the distance, spatially, combined with a lack of understanding of the particularity of localized phenomena and the limitations of the perspective of correspondents, often framed through a political lens, limits our capability to actually understand what it at play in any local

ulation in an attempt to identify sympathetic elements within Iraqi social space. This posture did not last long, however, and force was concentrated after the first attacks of the Iraqi insurgency, eventually pushing US forces into a posture of heavily defended, disparate patrols launched from fire bases far outside of population centers. This not only eliminated the projection of force across space, allowing open space for the insurgency to organize and engage in logistical concentration, but also cut US forces off from the sympathetic elements they were attempting to cultivate ties to. This concentration of force is now occurring in American cities, and is undermining the push toward so-called community policing initiatives, which requires close contact with communities that are often identified as oppositional. We saw this with the New York police “strike” after the Brinsley attack, and are seeing a similar dynamic in a number of US cities currently.

It is important for us to be able to separate the actual effects of actions from the conceptualization of the action itself. On this level we have to analyze the tactical efficacy of the attacks themselves, and this requires a discussion about the effectiveness of one-off attacks that have no continuation. On this level we can analyze these actions in the same vein as, ironically, pacifist sit in actions. This may seem like an odd comparison, given that the tactical ethics of these actions is as far from pacifism as we could possibly imagine. However, the similarity arises when we look at the kinetics of the action itself. In the sit in, and in these actions, the time and space of the action is confined to a limited scope, one that is easily contained and eradicated. A similar dynamic was in play with the Occupy camp, where the time and space of activity was clearly defined, easily surveilled and easily approached by the state. In these situations the goal becomes the elimination of the action itself, with the assumption that the elimination of the initial activity will eliminate the crisis generated by the situation, separate from the latent effects of the actions in themselves. It is on this level that we have to remain critical of these sorts of actions, not from a moralistic position, or from an emotional position, that is up to each of us to determine, but from a strategic position. From this position, these attacks contain within them the same strategic problematics that are contained in actions as widely disparate as pacifist sit ins and the urban guerrilla in a broader sense, a series of tactics deployed for symbolic reasons in generally inert ways, regardless of the magnitude of the action itself. In other words, what separates the attacks in Dallas and Baton Rouge from the sit in is not a difference of kind tactically, it is a question of magnitude, the magnitude of the action, and, I am suggesting, this may not be the correct category through which to analyze the efficacy of ac-

fort to destroy the far right, in the form of the National Alliance, there has been little to no noticeable and organized far right activity in the greater Cleveland area. Within the context of Ohio at large, the far right finds its base of support significantly further south, in areas around Columbus and farther south, with scattered but weak Klan groups around the state. This deprived the far right from having the localized base of support they would have needed to wage some sort of attack during the convention. The more moderate, but still far right (the ‘casual’ far right) of Trump supporters outside of the convention also have little local support, and had their demonstrations confined to a valley that runs on the outskirts of downtown, preventing any confrontation between pro and anti Trump groups.

If we look at many of the predictions about what would occur during the convention they were either written by local journalists with little experience in non-parliamentary politics, and even less connection to the particularities of politics on the streets of the city, or they were written by journalists and political commentators that have little to no connection to the city at all. As such, they tended to default to analyses that bear more of a relationship with traditional activist or social movement analysis (which is separated from the particularities of the dynamics of conflict on the ground) than they did to any coherent, focused, well researched, analysis. As an interesting, and loosely-connected aside, when the journalists began to come into town a few weeks ago, many of whom came to cover the state harassment campaign that had just started, they were shocked to find that no one cared about the convention, and that those that had anything to say about it at all refused, almost universally, to be on camera. This not only applied to radicals, but to normal, everyday, people on the street. I lost track of the amount of times I had to tell some young, enterprising reporter from some international news outlet that this was the best they were going to get, and that they should get used to a general desire for anonymity and a general lack of giving a shit about the convention. If they would have paid more attention to this, and less to their loose sense that conflict was inevitable, they would have been able to pick up on the sense that little to nothing was going to occur, and that most within the city were merely laying low and attempting to get through the convention with as little inconvenience as possible.

In the past, you have argued that one-off mobilizations, particularly those based around national special-security events, like Republican and Democratic National Conventions are ultimately counter-productive. Could you elaborate on this?

The argument is not necessarily that they are counter-productive, but that the very mode of engagement that permeates this form of action is based on assumptions about action, spatiality and temporality that we have to abandon if we are to reimagine the anarchist project outside of the symbolism of activist engagement. In other words, we have to analyze the foundations of this sort of engagement. On the one hand, as the concept of the convention, or summit demonstration developed, there was an interesting dynamic unleashed – one that became grounded in a focus on strategic engagement, tactical deployment and an attempt to have some immediate and direct impact on some series of events in a material way. This discourse began to ground a certain sector of the anarchist milieu in tactical study, the discussion around movement through space, discourses on asymmetry and so on. Yet, on the other hand, it always became difficult to articulate why these sorts of engagements were undertaken to begin with, from this strategic perspective.

It is easy to argue that these engagements were forms of protest, but that form of engagement, at best, is one that attempts to discursively make some sort of conceptual point about a more or less general rejection of some thing. On this level we are not only assuming that the enemy is an interlocutor in this activity, they they can respond, but that discursive action, alone, can actually effectuate some fundamental modification in the conditions of everyday life. This is not only present in sign-holding pacifism, which is clearly incapable of actually challenging the state, but also in middle-of-the-night symbolic window smashing and Plan B-based property destruction.

In the attempt to move beyond this form of discursive engagement, and into a form that was more grounded in the particularity of the dynamics of conflict in time and space, a discourse of strategy and tactics, two problems arose in relation to the summit. Firstly, there is the clear and immediate problem; if the goal is to take effective action, then attempting to do so in the midst of a concentration of forces of the state, such as a summit, makes little sense, and the costs of doing so are generally high. Secondly, and more importantly, regardless of how it is framed, these sorts of engagements are, at most, symbolic engagements during some limited period of time in some incidental space. In other words, these sorts of engagements function in a parallel space, with parallel dynamics, grafted over a space that exists on another plane. It is no wonder, in this context, why these confrontations rarely leave the conceptually defined sides of the conflict, the ritualized anarchists-against-police (and vice versa) conflict that typifies these sorts of engagements.

ture, with this being an intentional acceleration of these tactics, combined with the use of state force and intimidation to eliminate opposition. It should be very telling that the police commanders most responsible for the community policing initiative are always the commanders for the special events operations that are organized to respond to demonstrations, including the RNC.

What's your take on the recent lone-wolf revenge killings against cops in Dallas and Baton Rouge?

The discussion around the lone-wolf attacks, as is typical in the activist milieu, has tended to focus around the emotionality of the reaction to the events themselves, whether one engages in a positionism grounded in agreement or disagreement; this is an irrelevant question. Rather, when taking a look at these events, as with the Brinsley attack or with Christopher Dorner, there is a series of more interesting and functionally important questions that have to be engaged with; questions around the causes and impacts of actions like this; questions separate from the question of agreement or disagreement. In other words, to develop a worthwhile analysis of these events requires that we abandon the question of the position, of agreement or disagreement. The question of positionism, as with the question of the activism that often exists as an operationalized articulation of positionism, functions only to the degree that we isolate the action from its dynamics and effects. The goal here, the important question here, is what occurs when we look at these actions in their particular context.

There are many questions that surround the actions in Dallas and Baton Rouge, questions of military training being used by those attacking the state, questions of the use of robotic weapons and their use as killing instruments within a domestic context and so on, but I would like to push beyond these questions as well. Underlying both cases are people that took the only actions that they felt were possible, given the failure of liberal reformism. But, after this general statement of cause, we also have to take a look into the conceptual structure of the action and the disparate effects of the actions themselves.

As with the Brinsley attack in New York, the impact has been to force police departments to concentrate numbers and limit patrol patterns, in order to engage in defensive action if necessary. Going back to the discussion of counterinsurgency, a similar dynamic is at play as was operative in Iraq. During the war in Iraq, after the invasion, the goal in some parts of the country – areas under the command of Petraeus and other partisans of counterinsurgency – the initial phase of the occupation was intended to be based in widely-dispersed patrols that openly engaged with the pop-

rest. This approach came to typify the way that Cleveland police came to approach marches – a hands-off containment approach that would increasingly tighten the perimeter around a march as it continued, or if the march approached an area of interest, such as a stadium or freeway, but largely based in containing the march and attempting to channel it away from key areas.

They coupled this approach with attempts to gain the complicity of more moderate forces within the coalitions that formed after the Tamir Rice killing. For example, early on a wide coalition shut down nearly every City Council meeting for a period of weeks. Some of the groups involved in these early actions, including the New Abolitionists, were significantly more moderate than most of the participants in the actions themselves. These groups were quickly brought into the fold, given an official seat at the table, given legitimacy, and used as a mechanism to silence the more radical opposition. This led to the incorporation of some liberal academics, along with these complicit activists, into the formation of the Citizen Commission, which was the body appointed by the Department of Justice to oversee the consent decree, a process used by the police department to re-establish legitimacy.

More radical groups progressively began to experience increased harassment and surveillance, often finding undercover police parked on their streets, or even immediately outside of their houses. This escalated to include the hovering of helicopters over a specific neighborhood on the west side of the city that is home to many of the more radical organizers around police violence and a large portion of anarchists in the city during a number of demonstrations later in the campaign. Many of these same people were the ones intimidated by the state in the lead-up to the RNC, even though they had no interest in organizing around the convention.

They have also doubled down on attempting to pull the non-profit organizations and progressive activists into the official city public relations campaign. This has incorporated tactics that span the gamut from arts events where kids do art with cops, all the way to the Peacekeepers Alliance intelligence operation and everything in between. This has caused a significant split within political circles within the city, with some being complicit and drawing benefits from this complicity, and others being cut off from funding for social programs – sometimes through the city, or federal officials pressuring foundations to take back grants that have already been given to organizations. In some senses this is unique to Cleveland, in which the political machine in the city had already been utilizing tactics like this for decades in a ward politics cronyism-based political struc-

As such, if we are to approach conflict as something that occurs in time and space, as something that structures the terrain around us in functional ways, and as something that we can engage in through a number of different tactics, then we have to approach the concept of the summit or convention demonstration in the same way, and analyze it as a possible tactic on the level of effectiveness. It is on this level that I would argue that the model itself functions in a way that not only perpetuates categories of engagement that function to separate our framework of analysis from the immediacy of our everyday life, but also that, purely on the level of effectiveness, these mobilizations, for all the good that came out of them during the past decade, are largely ineffective forms of engagement. This same critique can be leveled against activism as such, and the model of the summit or convention demonstration is firmly planted within the context of activism as a conceptual framework. As with any other tactic, there may be a time and place where this framework of engagement may lead to useful outcomes, but within the current dynamics it is difficult to see a way to argue that the risk, the cost and the resources would not be more well-spent elsewhere.

Many advocates of convergence-style models of organizing emphasize the need to build broader regional and national resistance networks. Do you see any validity in this? And if so, what are some other ways that this same result can be achieved?

The question I always ask when someone brings up an organizing initiative like this is, why? In other words, what is the purpose of organizing within the context of the conceptual framework of the region or the nation – especially as anarchists who base much of the general concept of an anarchist politics on the rejection of the nation as a model. I often follow this with a second question: on what basis is this formation going to be built? Purely based on conceptual agreement and political identity? Or more from the basis of actual affinity, actual relationships, actual trust. These questions are not criticisms, as much as questions that I am legitimately asking and would like answers to. The reason these questions are so important is that in the attempt to respond to these questions, it is easy to get a sense of the underlying political frameworks that are motivating the attempt to begin with; whether this is an attempt to form a network that will provide skills to reinforce grounded and immediate conflicts, or whether this is yet another attempt at a loose coalition politics grounded in the framework of activism and a concept of mass action.

Again, if the context of our engagement remains immediate, then the question has to be asked, what is the purpose of the milieu at all? When

we analyze the question of alliances outside of our immediate contexts we have to evaluate this on a couple of levels, on the level of the depth of relationships, and on the level of the necessity of this for our immediate struggles. In other words, we have to separate affinities, friendships, and political alliances, and on the level of political alliances we have to analyze this on the level of whether these lend anything to the particular dynamics that we find ourselves embedded within – whether they are effective to engage in at all. Just as with conventions or summits, or with activism in general, this may be something that is effective to engage in, but it is not necessarily so.

Much of your writings focus on analyzing state counterinsurgency strategy, and how an understanding of its operation should inform anarchist practice. For those who aren't familiar with the concept of counterinsurgency, can you briefly explain some of the basic tenets, and how they are enacted against resistance in the United States?

I would argue that the concept of counterinsurgency has two interrelated definitions, one significantly more broad, and one much more historically specific. In a very broad way, counterinsurgency is nothing other than the attempt to eliminate or prevent insurgency. To put it another way, policing, in its very structure, is counterinsurgency, and I generally prefer to understand the concept in this way; it provides a rich conceptual basis for any number of discourses on statism as an active phenomena.

However, the way that the term is often used, and the way that Kristian Williams uses the term, is grounded in military strategies deployed against insurgencies beginning with the British campaign in Malaya and the French campaign in Algeria. In this context, counterinsurgency is a term that implies any number of specific tactics within a loosely defined strategy that takes its strategic object and terrain of engagement to be the population itself, rather than the gaining and holding of space. The most coherent explanations of this approach are articulated in *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife*, a book by John Nagl, and the *US Army Counterinsurgency Manual*, which was primarily written by a group directed by former General David Petraeus. In these texts the framework of analysis for military tactics shifts from one based in holding space, to one based in the modification of the dynamic of conflict within the population. Taking as its point of departure that conflict permeates space, and that this kinetic scenario fundamentally shifts the dynamics of this space on a constant basis, combined with the recognition that the state functions to the degree that conflict is contained, this body of thought focuses its attention on ways to de-escalate and decelerate conflict within time and space. In the

contemporary context this has lent itself to intelligence-led operations, in which local populations are used as mechanisms to project the force capacity of an occupying force.

In other words, sympathetic and unsympathetic elements are identified, with sympathetic elements, or elements that can be made sympathetic, being used for both intelligence gathering and as adjunct informal forces to bolster the otherwise limited capacity of the occupying force. This is combined with other mechanisms to limit movement, speed and conflict, as well as to make the space more legible to the occupying forces – including, but not limited to: checkpoints, the limitation of movement, the building of walls and passive surveillance mechanisms, as well as force presence, public relations campaigns and meetings with community power brokers. To understand how this methodology ports itself over to domestic policing, it is important to recognize the similarities in assumption, specifically two key assumptions. In both frameworks there is the assumption that the state only functions to the degree that conflict and crisis can be contained, and that formal forces of the state are incapable of deploying thoroughly enough to actually exercise control over space without mechanisms to project this force more widely and more consistently. In the domestic context this has taken the forms of structures like the Peacekeepers Alliance in Cleveland, which I mentioned earlier, which were used as an intelligence-gathering organization, even though they were ostensibly a non-profit organization. We also see this in your friendly neighborhood snitch club, the Neighborhood Watch, and community police commissions. This is also present in the increasing ubiquitousness of surveillance within everyday life, as well as so-called community policing, where the police use public relations techniques to build complicity within a population, and then use these complicit forces as a way to project police force further into the community.

Two years on from the riots in Ferguson, how has the state security and political apparatus in the United States adapted its counterinsurgency strategy in response to the upsurge in Black-led, urban resistance to police killings?

This is a difficult question to answer in any specific way, given the wide variance of approach in different areas of the US. The context I can speak to is the Cleveland context, and some of the mechanisms that they have deployed within this context in order to try to decelerate conflict. The methods of counterinsurgency were clearly deployed in the days immediately after the murder of Tamir Rice, where the police allowed a march to block off the Route 2 Shoreway, and march up the road without ar-