The St. Louis area has a history of police being shot at, and police are very aware of that. The police know people are armed and willing to shoot. From the beginning of the uprising, rebels made this very clear: one of the first things to happen after they killed Mike Brown was shots being fired into the air.

On The Finer Points Of The Recent Revolt in Ferguson, MO
The following is a transcript of a conversation between two friends shortly after the insurgency in Ferguson, Missouri. Bart was there and Nikola wasn’t, but both have participated in anti-police uprisings in the last several years on the West Coast and in the Midwest. We’re publishing this in an effort to explore the complexities of recent events in the United States, but also to contribute to the ongoing discussions and attacks against the existing order, everywhere.

Bart: Firstly, I just don’t know. The city feels like it will never be the same after this uprising. Things feel different and the tensions are still there. In ways it feels like a steam cap was blown and a little bit of anger was released over the twelve days of rioting. It is hard to connect with people because of how spread out and alienated the city is, but I think it’s important to keep showing signals of disorder, having visible attacks and signs of resistance. Also the Left is finally starting to get a foothold and organize these large days of action. These are totally recuperative, but at the same time there are still large groups of people who refuse to be controlled by these politicians and activists, and so it makes sense to engage in them. Whether simply to disrupt or push them in different directions. I also think it makes sense to act in conjunction but outside of these events. We are at a very crucial moment, where everything is being noticed, and that gives us a situation where, as anarchists, we might be able to introduce new analysis, new tactics and hopefully spread things into new terrains, both literally and figuratively. As for what anarchists elsewhere can be doing... while I think solidarity attacks are always impressive and wouldn’t discourage them, I think that on a broader sense only anarchists see them. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing, it gives us warmth and strength to see others attacking, but I think it makes sense for rebels to think about how things might spread and how they can act in ways that inspire rebellion in their own places. If not also acting in ways that could impact or deter the efforts of police in Ferguson. So I’m not entirely sure how this can look, but I know people are creative.
**GUNS, CARS, AUTONOMY**

**Nikola:** With that, another way of thinking about the question is the look at the question of anarchist identity. And that in the same way that the gendered and racial barriers that keep us apart and prevent us from acting in certain ways, the anarchist identity also dissolves in these moments. On the one hand you have all sorts of people, anarchists or not, spreading anarchic activities, arson, looting. And then on the other hand you have all sorts of people who weren’t anarchists being called such by the media. So for those of us who are anarchists and choose to participate in these struggles, it almost stops mattering who is an anarchist and who isn’t. Or maybe it matters to us, but in the broader sense doesn’t.

**Bart:** Ideally I’d like to think that the anarchist identity would also dissolve in a situation like this. When there’s an uprising it makes sense to lose ones identity; Not to lose ones’ ethics or ideas or desires or the tensions one holds with the world from an anarchist perspective, but to lose the way that any identity can be used against us. We saw this play out when the state labelled people as anarchists and tried to use that to separate militants out in the street. I think its important to let go of these identities and let go of any social baggage we have from participating in an anarchist scene, for better or worse. One thing that I can think of, and by no means do I intend to talk sh!t, but I can remember during the London riots, a situation where the whole country is burning, the FAI claimed responsibility for an attack against two or three cars. And while I highly respect the attack and the individuals who risked their safety to carry this out, it doesn’t make sense in my mind to isolate oneself and set oneself apart in that way. We should be acting, but we shouldn’t be acting in order to separate ourselves from people. So yeah, I think it was important for the anarchist identity to dissolve alongside all other identities.

**Nikola:** In a certain sense, moments like these are clarifying in terms of why we fight and why we do what we do. I’d say that for anarchists, especially those of us who desire insurrection, what is at stake is not a fight to affirm an anarchist identity or ideology, but to actually fight for anarchy.

**Bart:** Definitely

**Nikola:** The final thoughts and questions I have are about whats to come in the coming months and what to happen now. The space that was created in Ferguson is gone but the tensions that led to this revolt...
Bart: I would agree to a degree. I think there were steps taken towards creating a liberated space, or an autonomous zone. In general, I think a riot is a situation where a space is opened that is free of police or the State’s laws. So every night that there was rioting there were these temporary lawless and police free zones opened up. What made this different from other riots though, is how sustained the rioting was. Also how after three days of rioting, people reclaimed the burned down QT as central hub of activity for the uprising. I think the significance of the QT was that it expanded the autonomy and lawlessness of the rioting at nights into the daytime. It would be dishonest to say the lawlessness and anti-police sentiment of the riots completely transferred to the QT. There were times when high ranking police officers came into the parking lot to make statements to the press. But it did at least create an environment that was incredibly hostile to them, and usually any time a squad car or low ranking officer came into sight, they were attacked or shouted out of the area. It was obvious to the police and to the participants of the rebellion, that the QT was our space, not the space of the police or the capitalists.

Nikola: It does feel like its easier for people who weren’t there to see the more spectacular things – the looting, the arsons, the molotov cocktails – but unfortunately the efforts to create space without police is harder for people to see from afar. It seems obvious that this was really central to the ferocity of what was happening. What did it feel like to be at the QT? What was that space like? Also what were some of the more specific ways that people prevented the police from coming there or other areas that had been carved out?

Bart: Well for the most part the QT was this incredibly festive and joyful place in the daytime where people were doing graffiti, driving up with giant barbeques and giving away hundreds of hot dogs; everyone brought water to share, nothing cost money, everything was free. It became a weird cultural center as well. There were rappers, people break dancing, a teenage step-crew came in. There was a joyful street fair atmosphere at times. At the same time people would be handing out masks for the night, sharing stories from the nights before. At one point I hung out with a man who shared pictures of all the shoes he’d looted the night before and we traded stories. People were talking about what to do if they gas this way, what to do if they come from that way. So while it was this festive and celebratory atmosphere it was clearly also was out there saying “take your women home!” When you step back and look at the situation its apparent that the people discrediting the riots for being largely men in their 20’s were either the same parties or working with the same parties who were trying to push women and children off the streets at night, trying to stop the fighting in the name of defending the “women, children and elderly” that were in the streets. But the thing is, in the streets at night, when it was conflictual, people just weren’t taking it. Any time people were trying to racialize things or enforce strict gender roles that men should be the combatants and women should go home, people would actively refuse it, shout at them, tell them to go home, say “fuck you, this is our struggle”.

Nikola: There’s a really subtle way, that is also very intentional, where we can see in the Bay and in Ferguson, where the state, the media, the leftists, the police, are all pushing the same line. It is an attempt to take this crazy racialized violence, this day to day campaign of extermination against primarily young black men, and to turn it into this limited “issue” about a few racist cops or the need for a handful of small reforms to policing or prosecution. In doing so they mystify the fact that race isn’t an ‘issue’ but that race and racial violence is the foundation of...

Bart: American society!

Nikola: Yeah, all the misery that is inflicted on people here.

Bart: Yeah, it makes sense why they immediately try to reduce things to an issue. Because these rebellions and moments like this really break open the potential for what can happen. People were talking about how this isn’t an issue, it isn’t just about Ferguson, it isn’t a black and white thing. Its a people versus the blue, its a systemic thing. This is way past an issue, it was a breaking point. This wasn’t just an antipolice riot, it was an insurrection against dominant society, against the way things exist, against class, against white supremacy. It was no longer just about a bad cop, or justice. What people want is freedom, and up there we were starting to figure out how to take steps to get that. And this is terrifying to the leftists and the politicians and anyone with any sort of comfort in this world that they might lose. So it makes sense that these groups would join forces in order to calm things down and restore peace. The left talks about taking steps toward reform and all this bullshit, but people could see through it, that it was an attempt to push them back into the same ‘ole cages they always are in.
has been one of the first measures the state takes to put down rebellions. Whether it was class rebellions against the state in the sixteen and seventeen hundreds or anti-police rebellions in the past decade. The term “outside agitator” was actually first used in the US in the 60's by a southern Sheriff to describe whites coming down to collaborate and struggle with blacks against segregation. Being in this uprising was the closest I’ve ever felt to people taking real steps to break apart their identities based on race, gender, class, anarchist, etc. Obviously these identities weren’t actually gone, and there were still many dynamics at play based on them, but they started to weaken. And so that was one of the first things that the state (and the many micro-states, or anyone who sought to gain control of the situation) attempted to re-instate. It was visible when the police talked about ‘white anarchists’ and instantly some leftists groups picked up this same language. There was also a strong push by more ‘radical’ groups such as the Nation of Islam, and the New Black Panther Party, to racialize things. They were in the streets trying to push a line that this was a black issue, and it was a struggle for black power. Unlike the leftists and politicians, these groups were in the streets every night, but it was still obvious that their attempts to racialize things was only to gain control of a crowd and push their political agenda.

**Nikola:** It seems like gender was also a key factor. I’ve heard accounts of Al Sharpton and others calling for “strong black men” to step forward to help police the demonstrations, and for the young men participating in the riots to “grow up and be a man” by helping to end the rioting, or also calling for women to go home “to be with their children”. It seems like gender was an obvious axis along with race that politicians used to try to put things down.

**Bart:** Yeah, it was actually really funny to see the back and forth of these same groups. The leftists who were trying to gain control would be out there talking about how all the rioters were young men and there weren’t elderly people or women in an attempt to discredit the riots. Firstly, this just wasn’t true, there were so many types of people out there fighting. Even funnier was that their response was to create things like Al Sharpton’s ‘disciples of justice’ who were 100 black men that he called on to control things. They were really pushing these gender roles that women needed to go home or fall to the back, “there are women and children out here, its dangerous” or one night the Nation of Islam
also the general noise added to the insanity of the situation, so it was totally nuts to be out there. It was a situation that was completely uncontrollable and they had no idea what to do. If they came in on foot, they were attacked; if they came in cars, the cars would get stuck and they were attacked. Also a lot of the guns were kept in peoples’ cars, so people were mobile and armed. At times cars were also weapons. On one night cars actually crashed into police lines. People would use the cars as barricades; everyone would drive and park their cars across the street and form lines behind them. I remember at one point two young girls parked their cars hood to hood blocking all four lanes of traffic and on the other side of the cars, facing the police, everyone had guns. The cars were used as barricades to shoot from, as a means to stay mobile, as celebratory parade vehicles, and in general a way to confuse and intimidate the police. So I really think these two things particular to Ferguson, the gun culture and the car culture, helped to create and keep this autonomous police-free zone. Not to mention the fact that there were thousands of people participating.

**Nikola:** I’m under the impression, from a few accounts, that it wasn’t just the QT that the police were afraid to enter. I’ve heard that they mostly limited their activity to West Florissant and that there were certain streets and certain neighborhoods they wouldn’t enter.

**Bart:** That’s definitely true. Particularly the neighborhood where Mike Brown lived, Canfield Apartments, off Canfield Ave. The police would not drive down that street. People quickly learned that, but enforced that also. And so as the night went on and the police would force people off the main strip, people would fall back a block or half a block and that was often where people would shoot at the police from. They’d drive down the strip and get shot at from the side streets. Anytime a cop did come into the side streets, people would fall back further into the neighborhoods. If a cop tried to follow further they’d get shot at from the bushes, from the houses, from cars. People burned trash in the streets so they couldn’t come in. And so it was a repeated thing, night after night, that people would be fighting in west Florissant until the overwhelming police presence (including teargas and rubber bullets) forced them off the main street. They’d then either fight to keep the police out of the neighborhoods or they’d wait until the gas cleared to go fight on the street again.

**Nikola:** Thinking back to the Oakland Commune encampment, it is...
never experienced this type of rebellion and I think it was important for people to get that sort of experience in the streets; to experience what it feels like to collectively struggle and fight back. I don’t think that necessarily means that people shouldn’t do other things too. When we were up there, we found ourselves rapidly outpaced by other rebels. So even if you believe in an anarchist vanguard, that wasn’t a possibility because people were already so much more advanced than what most anarchists were prepared for. Also, due to certain racial tensions, those perceived as white outsiders needed to limit their ways of engaging, to follow rather than take initiative. It was such a tense environment that things could really go any direction in any moment, which felt really weird. At the same time it felt amazing to be up there with people struggling together. So I do think it was very important for us as anarchists to be participating in the heart of the uprising.

In addition though, as anarchists we have developed this set of specialized skills we’ve learned over the years as anarchists in the streets, and we should be thinking about how to use these skills in critical moments in different parts of the city that could have a big impact or help things to spread to another place. One of the cooler things that happened in a different place, involved all the gas and pepperspray supplies being shipped in. There was a distribution center in Minnesota where wildcat workers refused to ship any gas to Ferguson. Not that this is necessarily specific to anarchists, but it is interesting to note that there are key places where our enemies can sustain a critical blow by not getting the supplies or reinforcements they need in the streets. It can limit their capability to act. I think anarchists should be doing both, we should be in the streets and we should be thinking of ways to help the situation expand and last longer; to sabotage the attempts of the police to regain social peace; to imagine ways things can spread; to watch and study the city for other sparks that could be fueled; showing signs of disruption all over the city, even graffiti or small attacks – everything was noticed in those weeks.

**Nikola:** It seems like some of the other things anarchists can do in these situations include encouraging people to wear masks, attacking surveillance systems, trying to undermine more sinister or subtle types of recuperation or leftist attempts to seize control. These things are almost constants that we should expect and have some strategic perspective around.

**Bart:** I think there were bits of both. There were points at night where people would be there, and would get organized to go loot somewhere further away. And maybe people would have taken the initiative to do that even if they hadn’t been in Ferguson on that strip, but I really do think that everyone being there together allowed people to begin to act collectively. We were out there one night and people started chanting “Walmart! Walmart!” and everyone started running to their cars, doing donuts, and peeling out. Walmart was four miles away from where the riots were taking place, and so without the context of a place where people could discuss “oh we should go loot Walmart!” and feel safe and comfortable enough to do that, I don’t think that would have happened. In some ways it did allow for that type of spreading. But, in other ways I think it didn’t, because people were so attached to this space they’d liberated (and it did really feel like a liberated space) that people couldn’t imagine expanding or leaving. People were so focused on the QT and Canfield and West Florissant that it seemed hard to imagine the rioting spreading to somewhere else. That space had become so important to people, and because of that people were willing to do a lot to defend it. So to a degree it was used as a space to plan out attacks or expropriations in other parts of the city, but the rebellion never really spread far beyond that central area.

**Nikola:** Its inspiring to hear you talk about part of Ferguson as a liberated space because this is the same way that many of us thought of the Oakland Commune encampment. The first thing that happened when we took the plaza was to change the name to Oscar Grant Plaza, and with that it was almost as if a spell had been cast over the space. Things felt different when you were within it. A lot of people talked about
time feeling different when in that space; the concerns and pressures of their relationships and jobs and all the things that would usually weigh on them seemed to melt away when people walked into the camp. I think that in that space more things felt possible and to me that was something I haven’t experienced elsewhere – this immense opening up of possibilities and the ability to talk to people in a way that previously felt impossible. It feels like an entirely different world, so far removed from a life of work and responsibilities and indignities. In a sense this is maybe what’s at stake in creating spaces like this: creating magic places where we can discover new things about ourselves.

Bart: Definitely. In a lot of ways it felt similar. One of the small roles anarchists had was to push for a name change for the QT; people started calling it Mike Brown Plaza, sort of reminiscent of the occupation movement. It was clear knowledge that we hadn’t been given the right to assemble or protest or whatever. Everyone knew we could only do what we were doing because we had taken it. And because of that knowledge that we had taken the power away from the police, Mayor and Governor, the space became incredibly important to people. So yeah, a similar thing happened. Time didn’t make sense there. Somehow you’d be there and all of a sudden eight hours would have disappeared. I remember one night, we were all hanging out, there had been a lot of looting, the liquor store was on fire and we were all just sitting around watching it burn and this man said “fuck, what time is it!? I have to go to work tomorrow.” Our friend laughed because she also had to go to work in the morning and she asked, “do you really want to lose this very socially important space. So a lot of the combativeness disappeared. Also people were tired and the national guard was on the streets, and so this combined with recuperation by leftists and religious leaders helped to end things. It was a really big blow to the uprising to lose the QT, and then lose the streets of West Florissant.

Nikola: For me, this brings up the questions of anarchists’ relationship to spaces like these where previously unimaginable types of rebellions are playing out. Others who’ve participated in moments like these, where the activity of everyday people vastly outpaces what anarchists are doing, have posed the question of how to act alongside them or not. It seems as though there are two ideas. One of which is to be there, among others, to share the knowledge and tactical perspectives we have; to be within the crowd helping to push things where we can. Another idea is that rather than participating in the streets in these specific places (the plazas, etc), we could be advancing our own projectuality elsewhere and could find other openings and moments to act and carry out our intentions. Based on your experiences in Ferguson, how do you think about this question?

Bart: I don’t think this is really a dichotomy where you have to choose one or the other. In Ferguson I think it was incredibly important to be up there, particularly as a largely white group, to take steps to dissolve the segregation and racial tension that exists in this city by acting in solidarity with others; also to make connections. Also many of us have