

Black Bloc: the ultimate logo

tzigari 2003-11-19 03:21

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0. Disclaimer

The following essay is meant as an effort to understand what did actually happen during the anti-G8 rallies in Genova, by giving voice to different points of view - including the perspective of those who participated in Black Bloc's activities, and those who are sympathetic with this area of the movement. The Black Bloc has been, up to now, the object of a discourse with little possibility of reply.

Such inclusion is not the product of an unquestioned choice: there always are risks in the attempt to understand the reasons of those who are stigmatized for being "the violent ones". In different ways, the Black Bloc, is perceived - both by the state and by the movement - as "the enemy within".

The first reason why I am undertaking this uncomfortable task - as an intellectual and as an activist - is that I believe Freedom Fighters should always seek the truth, by any mean, at any cost: it is an important pre-condition for anybody who want to be active part of real social change. Coherence is never sold for cheap.

The second reason is that I believe in women's leadership in the present movement - advocating the possibility and a necessity of a different world - against capitalism in its neoliberal form and against its patriarchal, homophobic, and racist assets. All these aspects should be deconstructed as "interlocking categories of oppression" and fought against starting from now - they should not to be procrastinated as secondary issues. Such forms of oppression are pivotal for the functioning of neoliberal capitalism and do affect all social relations.

We all know how the movement and its "informal" leadership is not exempt either from issues related to class differences, sexism, racism and homophobia. The reason is simple: we are socially constructed too. Recognizing how the system works also within ourselves is a first important step for the building of new subjectivities.

We all know how male dominated decision making processes in our leadership often produce political and/or military actions which fundamentally do mirror the power relationships they are supposed to deconstruct and change. Leaders' arrogance - with the enactment of non-democratic decision making processes and the implementation of exclusionary practices - is well represented in all sectors of the movement, as denounced by women activists in Italy as well as in Greece and other European countries.

An analysis of what happened in Genoa cannot exclude the points of view produced by women in the movement, who are often working in the shadow, or in separate spaces because of the difficulty of relating with male (self-proclaimend) leaders. Mybe it is not casual, as we are going to see, the deepest reading around what happened around Genoa and the Black Bloc comes from a "foreigner", an American bisexual woman of color, whose "located knowledge" is of great interest for us: her critique to the existent assets of power includes all different perspectives in a comprehensive way. My contribution goes in such a direction.

1. What happened in Genoa?

If someone throw a stone against me

I am not angry with the stone:

I am angry with whomever threw the stone.

If some groups throw the police against a rally

I am not angry with the police:

I am angry with those who provoked their reaction.

Chat between Davide and Francesco, July 29.

Many felt this way, like the two young anarchists chatting in the exergo, at the end of saturday July 21st. What did really happen in Genoa? We have at least four different versions:

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- the police "pushed the Black Blocs where they wanted" - as phrased by former Communist Party militants in the popular neighborhood Marassi - in order to create division in the movement and military attack the rally (V28);

- the Black Bloc was so infiltrated it would be difficult assessing which actions have been done by them or by "pseudo-Black Blocs" (S26; P29);

- the Black Bloc was not infiltrated in a significant way, and has been "able to grow as political practice", strengthening connections and keeping its own control over the conflict space (H25; US3; D2).

- the Black Bloc "defended the rally on Saturday from the police attacks" (I28; N30; D32; E24). Police attacked the peaceful protestors in order to avoid the success of a huge demonstration of 300.000 people, by fragmenting and dispersing the participants. Most of the peaceful protestors believed the police was attacking the rally after being provoked by the Black Bloc.

All versions, most of our discussions after the mobilizations which took place in Genoa, and many of our tentatives of a comprehensive approach, imply an analysis of the role of the Black Bloc. The Black Bloc becomes a signifier with many significants - according to different perspectives and political orientations. Unwillingly, a small component of the movement became the key to understand all dynamics - a sort of semiotic black hole, about which almost anything may be said.

In letters, reports and reconstructions of what occurred in those days, the Black Bloc is given different meanings, also according to different experiences lived by the participants - which of course vary in different times and places during the demonstrations held in Genoa during the days of Friday 20th and Saturday 21st of July.

2. What the Black Bloc is?

Black Bloc: according to mainstream press, the term was conceived by the German Police in order to indicate groups of anarchists or punks who targetted banks and business during or at the end of public demonstrations in the Eighties. Yet, it is only after Seattle that the Black Bloc becomes a recognized area of the movement also in Europe.

"The Black Soul of the No-global Movement" is promptly indicated by the Italian press as the main danger - after the demonstration held against the Global Forum meeting in Naples (March 2001) - which will be remembered because of the police brutality shown in such occasion.

In Naples, about an hour before the rally's end in Piazza Municipio, a group of anarchists had attacked four targets: banks and temporary work agencies. The commando acted as a Black Bloc - even though they didn't wear a black "uniform". I witnessed one of their actions, where there was no use/display of the logo. I suppose this may be due to the unfamiliarity Italian insurrectionalist groups have with the Black Bloc - to be intended as a relatively new way to represent the old practice of property damage. For some, wearing all-black clothes may seem as un-necessary masquerade, or even a dangerous practice of recognition.

The Black Bloc as a political practice is phenomenon born in the United States: the logo appears for the first time a decade ago, during public demonstrations against the Gulf War; then against death penalty and to free African-american journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal. Yet, in the collective experience the Black Bloc becomes a recognizable marker of urban guerrilla only in Seattle, December 1999. Today hundreds of organizations with no connection with each other can be listed by searching "Black Bloc" on the net, where we find groups and associations having, as main moves, sports, the right to education and health, urban gardening, intelligent consumption patterns, or the quality of life in the neighborhood.

The Black Bloc in the U.S. also holds public demonstrations for historical dates - such as May Day - and for specific social issues. On April 22, 2001, in Washington DC, the Now (National Organization of Women) and the Black Bloc marched together for Women's Reproductive Rights around the U.S. Capitol and the Supreme Court. The massive presence of the police didn't deter hundreds of Black Bloc members to wear the black-clad gear and a banner inciting to "Riot Pro-Choice" - which became "quite popular with the crowd": several hundreds people attending the rally posed for pictures in front of the Black Bloc banner.

Far from being depicted as "the violent ones", Black Bloc militants find a place for transgression within peaceful demonstrations, by representing the most confrontational and antagonistic area of the movement. In a context that does not criminalize radical youth, their actions do not go beyond popular consensus - like in the case of destruction of billboard scale displays of aborted fetuses - gaining social tolerance for their "tongue-lashing anarchist style".

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2.1. Black Bloc components

Any individual and any group of people can become a "Black Bloc": this component of the movement does not have control over its participants - and this is one of its elements of vulnerability. The Black Bloc cannot be romantically defined as the casual gathering of homogeneous identities: it is both intentional and diverse in its internal components, which are today object of discussion. Among the components mostly mentioned in the press: anarchist insurrectionalist, punks (punk crusties), squatters - acting in small groups or as individuals.

There is also a non-political component which may become predominant in some situations (S26): angry teen-agers, football hooligans, "casseurs". Cobas leader Vincenzo Migliucci (Blue Block) has been physically attacked in Genova while attempting to deter a group of youngster from destroying stop lights. According to a document where Migliucci critiques both "il ribellismo confusionario e praticone"- and the attempt made by the institutional left to charge the Black Bloc of the destructions occurred in Genova - they are just "casinisti da stadio", football hooligans, violent youth out of control.

Looking at its non-political component, the Black Bloc may be seen as a deep symptom of discomfort, anger and displacement: punk crusties and football hooligans, are "bad boys" who do not want to be "integrated" in society, also by proclaiming their extraneity to all known forms of opposition. Their antagonism does not accept rules, not even those manufactured by the antagonistic movement.

I believe the problem is the following: the Black Bloc is a behavior, more than a political line; willing to aggregate who feels in synch with the "situation", by contamination. Prominence is given to the symbolic level: as the matter of facts, no real damage is carried out against banks or business - they do have insurance to cover such damages. What the Black Bloc seem to target is what they represent in the exploitation system and in the collective imagery.

The experience of the Black Bloc should not be assimilated to the experience of armed struggle in Europe during the Seventies: the Black Bloc emulates the Palestinian intifada and enacts an insurrectional scenario of escalating riots which would progressively involve larger popular participation. For many, though, their action is not goal oriented: its meaning rely in itself as an aesthetical subversive act.

In the debate developing on the net after Genoa, some questions about tactics and strategy of the Black Bloc have been raised: "The Black Bloc is a tactic (...) We should clarify what tactic and strategy are, and make no confusion among the two. What is the Black Bloc strategy? A tactic which believes to have no need for a strategy is meaningless" (Leonardo Montecchi, No-Ocse, Bologna)

An elderly Italian anarchist (G50) points out how - in the political practice enacted today by the Black Bloc - we may see the re-emergence of old situationist roots; luddist and communitist suggestions; and the relevance of the extra-legal sector, a new lumpen-proletariat. Yet, he adds, they do not seem aware of the history behind them.

Political positions taken by FAI (Italian Federation of Anarchists) and Centro Sociale "Pinelli" clearly distance themselves from any type of urban riot tactics. While the Centro Sociale "Pinelli" simply declared to the media their willingness not to be assimilated with the Black Bloc theory and practice, the FAI produced a document on the subject matter, dated August 10, 2001.

After posing an analysis of what happened in Genova, the FAI document takes a stand around what should be the priority for the anarchic movement by privileging mass work and grassroots organization instead of falling into the mass-mediated trap of producing spectacular actions. The FAI believe both the Tute Bianche and the Black Bloc failed to recognize such a reality and missed the opportunity for relating with people. While participating to the immigrants demonstration on thursday the 19th, the FAI decided to desert the rallies in program for the following days, choosing to be active outside Genova, in Sampierdarena with 15,000 workers who were on a general strike against the G8 meeting. After the killing of Carlo Giuliani, 2,000 anarchists belonging to the FAI decided to participate at the peaceful demonstration held on saturday 21, and became the object of police violence with no apparent reason.

The FAI political position is the one of both criticizing the actions carried out by the Black Bloc and denouncing any attempt of criminalizing them: the Black Bloc is not responsible for the indiscriminate destruction taken place in Genova, for which provocateurs and undercover police should be made accountable.

Most sources support the hypothesis the Black Bloc is springing out of the anarchist area exclusively. Only in a couple of

cases I found references to a marxist component: H25 believes the Black Bloc would include individuals who are not involved in Autonomia - with the only exception of the German Autonomi, who form part of the Black Bloc. Also G50 believes there may be the presence of marxist individuals in the Black Bloc: he argues the main contradiction in the movement is between spontaneism and organization. Such a division crosses both the anarchist and the marxist areas. Being the Black Bloc a supreme expression of spontaneous action, it may overcome ideological boundaries through the practical agreement on common targets.

A member (H25) indicates self-sustained peasants, marginal identities, and those who want to live out of the market, among the Black Blocs. Yet, a radical peasants document - while declining the invitation to criminalize disobedients, anarchists and other components - states that the use of violence today only serves the legitimization of repression, and opts for non-violence.

A document written by a member - signed Mary Black (published by Internazionale 397, August 3, 2001) states "almost all Black Bloc militants I know, during the day work for non-profit organizations. Some are teachers, unionists, students. Some do not have any work engagement and spend their time working for a better life in their community". Mary Black goes on, indicating to the police attention all "those who start urban garden project, circulating libraries, and those who cook for "Food not Bombs" ingenuity or what? In the worst missionary escatological tradition, she ends by comparing Black Bloc militants to nuns - "if it weren't for the different radicality of ideas" ...

According to an Italian member (H25) of the Black Bloc - who also participated in Geneva and Prague demonstrations - the quantitative composition ranks in the order "Germans, Greeks, Spanish, French, British and some Americans" while Italian participants would be negligible.

2.2. Race, Age and Class

Maximum age 28, average 22 (H25) with the presence of many teen-agers (S24), often with little political understanding (V58) and an enthusiasm for destruction (P29) as a mean to express rage and feel better; to feel somebody, exit anonymity through action, even random action: "senseless acts of beauty" as a way to affirm subjectivity.

Many women, also among those who have been charged as Black Bloc militants. "I was amazed (...) especially by the amount of women and the respect and equality that was shown to the women. (...) They were more comfortable to take on leading rolls" (US3).

When "dressed for action" often women pass as men: "we do not move around as women, the way I look with a black uniform and a black scarf around my head does not have anything feminine" (P29). No space for difference seem to be left to this type of woman warrior; a specific of thinking and practices seem to be unnecessary; the military action flattens emancipation on a powerful male role: the Destroyer.

Mary Black admits the media stereotipization of the Black Bloc is true: it is composed mainly by whites. She serves another information: "We live in a racist, homophobic and sexist society". By omitting any reference to class, Mary Black offers an important element to guess (at least) the class composition of her affinity group: middle-class/ affluent rebels who may have no need to work, and whose "mission" may be a generational fact.

Such a intuition is confirmed by Otto Nomous, black anarchist film-maker, who declares how in the last twenty years the anarchist movement became very homogenous, being formed mostly by white bourgeois kids, coming from punk-rock subcultures. This is one of the reasons why the Black Bloc is not participated by elements of the most oppressed social and ethnic groups.

3. Documents

The first document written by a Black Bloc group - namely, without any will of representing the whole Black Bloc - has been distributed less than a month before the struggle of Seattle, on november 30, 1999. It is signed "Acme Collective", with a disclaimer as 'non-representative' of the whole Black Bloc, and titled "NO2WTO".

The destruction of banks and business is seen as a way to de-legitimize private property, more than a way to inflict damages to the system. Translated and published in several languages, "NO2WTO" represents a sort of "Black Bloc Manifesto of Intents", which can be subscribed by any individual willing to participate in such actions by taking part to occasional and informal groups.

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Breaking a shop window is depicted as a "liberatory act", which would "deconstruct violent social relations embodied in ourselves". Even though there are many types of direct action, what the Black Bloc practice is a specific form of direct action: direct actions aimed to destruction of multinationals sites, goods and symbols, more than to a frontal fight against the police. "The majority of us were not hurt since we kept moving constantly, avoiding to directly confront the police. We kept united and each one of us looked at the other's shoulders. Those who have been attacked by federals have been able to escape the arrest thanks to the prompt reaction and organization of the Black Bloc members. The sense of solidarity was great."

3.1. Document "International Genoa Offensive", July 17 (insert)

3.2. Italian supporters.

A flyer was distributed on saturday the 21st on the Beach. The title Parabellum and the epic* language, male oriented and male declined, a never heard signature "Few individuals supporters of the human community". The flyer strongly criticizes pacifists' actions and their leaders in the Genoa Social Forum, the Green Party and Rifondazione Comunista, the Tute Bianche. It revendicates the distruction of "banks and ugly business", and quotes Blanqui, L'Enfermé: "who has iron has bread". Concluding as follow: "We greet the Black Bloc and all the anonimous comrades who fought with courage. Yesterday, during the street riot, a universal community of struggle (my italics) has emerged; it constitutes the profound meaning of action of men (literally, in the text), when the uprising against the domination of Capital and State".

Breccia, magazine, number 0 (insert)

Teppa, magazine, August 2

The document starts off by expressing a complain: an aggression has been made by Tute Bianche in Venice against some anarchists who were collecting signatures in solidarity with those arrested in Genoa.

The author of this 'zine want to try a political evaluation of the anti-G8 mobilitation. No one of the compilers of this monthly publication participated in the Genoa demonstrations: prior to any statement, they admit to have only a second hand knowledge, filtered by the press, about the "so called Black Bloc".

First, they express some doubts: "we are surprised that comrades have been able to find such wide space for action in a context so dominated by a double control - by the police on one hand and by the organized protest (my italics) on the other". Then, they define "class conflict" what happened: "the attack to the structures of capital and to the guards who defend it, by the exploited" - and look at the Black Bloc with perplexity, yet with simpathy.

However, what seem to be central in this document, concerns their fight against the Tute Bianche, and the absence of an alternative for them, who hapened to be "beaten as if we were fascists". In their writings the Black Block becomes almost a logo of revenge, a symbol of strenght they can take on their side, given the political isolation in which italian minoritarian groups find themselves, when relating with stronger and more organized groups.

4. On infiltrations during the anti-G8 mobilization

All components have been infiltrated,
especially the Black Bloc.

We have been highly infiltrated. (M30)

Infiltrations in the Black Bloc have been widely documented: photos and videos testify in favor of the hypothesis that special corps of the police have been operating within the Black Bloc in order to:

a. promote and escalate actions meant to manufacture a "war-zone scenario" ab usum mass-media and justify military interventions against all demonstrators. With a double effect: the first, to re-educate a disobedient and radical movement - before it is too late. The second effect is the one of de-legitimizing the most radical parts of the movement, the anarchists and all those whom, after "the battle of Seattle", felt somewhat simpathetic with the Black Bloc logo.

As reported by a witness, between via Assaroti and Corvetto "I hear someone screaming: 'Run away, there are the anarchists'. My impression is that these scary giants called Black Bloc do not want to go to Corvetto. In fact they attack us, peaceful demonstrators, breaking cameras and videocameras and throwing gas against us. The police does not make any intervention. We run toward via Montegrappa (...) A running boy, abou 20 y.o. asks me: 'From whom are we running away?' "From the anarchists" I say, while running. "But ... I am an anarchist" he says and slows down. Then he turns his head and start running again. The Blacks were breaking and putting fire on everything". Claudia Priano, Genova; published on Diario,

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August 3, 2001.

A moderator of the Black Bloc meetings held in Genoa declared "All the independent property I saw destroyed was done by police provocateurs and the police were being as confrontational as possible". (US3). Nevertheless, he sums up - among other actions - one which was evidently made by agents under cover (reported below): his group had come later on and unknowingly joined the provocateurs in their action. This supports the thesis that it is difficult - even for Black Bloc members - assess what was done by infiltrated agents.

Some of the Black Blocs do not even think infiltration is an important matter - as declared by Mary Black**, and in the following interview to Adrian from Norimberga:

Q. What is the difference?

A. Easy: We didn't hurt the city but corporation property.

Q. Also cars and trash cans were burning

A. It wasn't made by us.

Q. So, by whom?

A. I don't know and I don't care

(...)

Q. Are you worried about infiltrations?

A. What is the difference?

Q. It is about your image.

A. Yes, it bugs me a little. But there is no damage.

Both Mary Black and Adrian underestimate the impact of infiltration, its meaning and the consequences - in so detaching themselves from a movement's tradition of self-defence and surveillance around the issue of provocateurs' actions during demonstrations. They both seem young and unexperienced, unaware and careless around the dangers of hosting police informers, and the possible repressive outlets. Their attitude support the hypothesis of individual subscribing to the Black Bloc with no former political experience, the absence of older leaders/advisors, and the lack of any peer-training - which would be necessary for any group willing to defy capitalism, state, and all types of social injustice in the world.

A very differing image is given by Stefano Agnoletto: "They move with military discipline, infiltrate everywhere, some leaders shout orders which are promptly followed by the whole group. And shortly afterwards, Police and Carabinieri make their appearance". Many subscribed this description of what happened, re-enforcing the interpretation of the Black Bloc (or pseudo-Black Bloc) actions as functional to military repression against the peaceful demonstrators.

b. disrupt real actions - such as the defense of a given space - by diverting demonstrators' energies and attention.

While the Black Bloc was involved in the attempt of defending Piazza Rossetti (where the peasants had their stands) and avoid the breaking of the rally (which eventually happened) I personally saw a group of "pseudo-Black Blocs" getting to Piazza Kennedy closely followed by a crew of video-operator. This is not in their style: the Black Bloc does not want to be object of cameras attention during their actions. The pseudo-Black Bloc pretended to destroy bank windows which had already been destroyed the day before.

Besides producing nice pictures of vandalic acts to be stigmatized on the press, the pseudo-Black Blocs were locating themselves in a strategic position: inbetween the advancing police and the rally. For, they were diverting the demonstrators' attention from the real danger. In fact, the police was coming up with the clear intention of attacking the rally, breaking the river of people in two parts - despite the attempt of resistance opposed by few groups, including true Black Blocs.

The first part of the demonstration will then be chased - and its tail charged - by the police several times until the arrival in Piazza Ferraris; the second part of the demonstration will be prevented from going on, pushed back, and runned after for 4 hours - up to the near town of Quarto. In both cases, fragments of the demonstration being more vulnerable to the police attacks, were targetted by riot police and many people were hurt.

For the sake of clarity, all of the above happened far away from the red zone - or even the yellow zone - in the road where the Genoa Social Forum was located, where the Convergence Center and all groups were given their official location. The day before (July 20) the police had already tried to violate the GSF site during the demonstrations held in different squares of

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the city, as reported by Cobas leader Piero Bernocchi.

c. neutralize militants by anticipating their actions.

A militant who participated to Black Bloc meetings in Genoa, aimed to organize actions to be carried out on Friday 20th, stated: " We had made decisions about our targets, and agreed about sequences of contact points. But for the whole day we have not been able to do any action: once we got to each place, everything had already been systematically destroyed, as made by professionals having plenty of time. I felt we were not the Black Bloc any more, we were like a Ghost Bloc, totally deactivated and frustrated, and disoriented, since we couldn't do anything: everything was already done and we couldn't understand what the fuck was going on" (S26).

However, we should not support the idea that it was mostly composed by infiltrated agent from the police and/or the secret services, nor identify the Black Bloc with its non-political components - even though it seems like they both were present.

As a Cobas document states, "The Black Bloc - which remains external to the GSF political milieu in all its parts, also the most radical ones - is a result of the globalization, the crisis of parties and unions, and all organizations which seemed to be able to channel mass rage and dissent, all them have not been able to give a non-anarchoid organization to the protest which burns under the ashes of Europe and the U.S. (...) Understanding the Black Bloc is something more then avoiding its extremism in the streets - which of course damaged the whole movement, allowing the police to infiltrate and make the repression against the movement more scientific...." (Document written by Cobas members, Pisa).

Understanding the Black Bloc is a necessity, in order to understand what happened in Genoa as the rescue of the black box after an accident occurred is crucial to have a clue.

Yet, different clue might rely somewhere else. As a Black Bloc supporter reminds us, "Carlo Giuliani was not black dressed. He was not an insurrectionalist anarchist. He was not a punkabestia (punk crusty). Nor a "squatter". He was only a boy, full of rage against this world - which defended itself by killing him. He was not one of the few, he was one of the many. Revolt is not a rare genetic illness. Revolt is in the air, ready to manifest itself, everywhere and in anybody".

Understanding the Black Bloc is a necessity to understand ourselves as a movement and as persons who adhere to this movement at different levels and degrees; a necessity to raise questions about our choices and wonder where are we going to. This is a necessity to be counterposed to any attempt of criminalization or exclusion of this smaller component or - even worse - to its banning.

For this reason, what the Black Bloc may want to say about Genova would be of special interest for the whole movement. Up to now, we only have individual assessments - with differences in evaluation: H25 believes the infiltration was minimum evaluating it in much less than 150 persons; S26 supports the idea of a massive infiltration - which changes also the assessment of the whole experience: fundamentally positive for the first, annihilating for the second.

I know the request of a collective document may sound unfamiliar to a spontaneous milieu, based on individuals and small groups support, with no leaders and no heads, no representatives, no delegates. There are precedents: part of the mentioned document "NO2WTO", authored by a section of the Black Bloc in Seattle - which contains answers to "10 myths on the Black Bloc", with clarifications about the position on violence and private property, about the practice of hiding the face, and the answers to frequently made (by peaceful demonstrators) accusations.

We can only hope someone will produce a document to clarify the actual position of the Black Bloc after Genoa, what the Black Bloc revendicates and what is extraneous to its practices - given the undeniable presence of police agents who acted in the demonstrations by improperly using the markers of belonging to the Black Bloc - i.e. under the cover of this logo.

5. On the relationships between GSF and BB

Why we were separating from the GSF.

We did not want restrictions

on our organizing and tactics.

One of the main clauses that GSF set up

to lead to us breaking off was that of

"no sticks, no stones, no fire".

The GSF was trying to define and hinder and control

the tactics of all groups of the protest,
(...) to push the "bad" protesters
out and away and to the police.

U.S. Black Bloc moderator

Governmental official sources, followed by the mainstream press, still insist on a possible cooperation between the Black Bloc and the GSF. Right wing intellectuals climb on glasses trying to demonstrate the existence of agreements, dissenting in a clumsy way on the common anti-global agenda - and even on history. Top opinion maker Baget Bozzo announces the establishment of a "Nihilist Party", with fascist and anarchist roots altogether - which would hold "a dangerous power of seduction" in the catholic milieu.

The material I envisioned actually supports the opposite version: there was no overlapping between Black Bloc and Genoa Social Forum. At times there was open conflict.

The GSF defined as "stupid and violent" those who didn't accept the set of rules and regulations for "good protesters" - and was called back "peace police" by the Black Bloc.

"I find it disgusting how little solidarity with those in the Black Bloc were shown and the hunting of 'anarchists' like the witch hunt in Salem in New England during the 1700s. The fact is the 'black bloc' were thousands of dedicated individual, not all anarchists or foreigners, concentrating on certain targets and practicing self defense not 'senseless violence' (...) The truth is both force and peaceful demonstration is needed. (...) No movement is ever successful without a diversity of tactics against this corrupt and brutal system." (US3)

Another witnessed exclusionary practices: "we saw some men yelling and pushing some masked demonstrators out of the march and down a side street" while peaceful demonstrators yelled them "The movement does not need you".

Members of the GSF were aggressive against members of the Black Bloc, who were treated as if they were enemies, regardless their attempt to defend the rally: "A portion of the Bloc continued to hold the lines and keep the police back, but some tanks came in and the remaining bloc was pushed back and found themselves trapped between the permitted march and the oncoming riot police. He said that instead of people letting this small retreating bloc into the march they kept them out by locking arms or using flagpoles to push them away. This left them trapped. As the police drew closer they began to fire tear gas at point blank range, one hitting our comrade in the forehead, from which he fell to the ground unconscious and was dragged by friends into the march, as the "legal" demonstrators became aware that the police were shooting and planning to beat everyone, not just this small bloc of people".

Also the Cobas tried to isolate the Black Bloc, as lamented in the following statement: "When we passed the police station rocks were thrown at the windows and cracked, the security cameras destroyed and the walls spray-painted. About a block pass the police station, a certain sect of Cobas block the street and would not let us continue with them, leaving us trapped between them and the riot police station. This led to fighting between the groups, as these certain Cobas members were basically violating all standards and principles of solidarity by basically trapping us and pushing us back towards the riot police".

Also in the U.S. tension between the "non-violent" part of the movement and the BB occurred since Seattle. Yet, the ostracism never went beyond a request of a police intervention, promptly withdrawn. Such a difference of behaviour may rely in a better communication between the different components in the U.S. context - which allows a better understanding of differences and commonalities - while the Italian tradition of debate is more male-dominated and fight-oriented.

Also the American Black Bloc underlines differences with its European followers by demanding that group operate "only on very political targets. In order to avoid accusations of vandalism, great attention is put in preserving non-political targets, such as private citizens' cars".

The use of violence against persons is not admitted: only the damage of multinationals property or banks is considered to be legitimate. The confrontation with the police - considered to be the armed arm of the system - is mostly symbolic: actions such as launching empty plastic bottles are seen as "a necessary provocation to highlight the repressive and violent answer".

A Black Bloc moderator ends his report by underlining "The irony of the situation, of a group (the GSF) who claims some false moral high ground because their tactics differ from ours, are willing to physically harm us and push us in the hands of the

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police, whom most of us deem the greater enemy, because we are 'violent'".

Actually, much of the criticism in the movement regarding the Black Bloc does not want to criminalize, isolate or even denounce the "violent" window breakers. As posited by Massimo De Angelis, criticisms have little to do with issues such as the opportunity or the ethical correctness of the destruction of a window. They have to do with responsibility, i.e., with the question of "whether that action was a responsible action in that context".

Often the Black Bloc promotes non-responsible types of actions such as those called "parasitical tactics" by Walter Bello: "parasitical tactics arise when for example a group 'would stay at the edges of the march and from there provoke the police by throwing rocks at them. The police then would find the excuse to charge the demo'".

Proposed solutions have to do with searching for more dialogue with the trustworthy part of the BB in order to find agreements and reciprocal respect; and a set of measures to persuade and restrain non-responsible behaviours during mass demonstrations.

However, the main problem presented by the Black Bloc has to do with the logo itself: if some individuals in a public demonstration have their face hidden, they should have the trust of those who are marching. By any means they could be "self-selected" as the masked ones. For the Zapatistas, those who wear a mask are representatives of the whole community, they do not represent those who feel like spontaneously wearing a mask in a certain situation. And "the use of violence" is not considered to be the characterizing feature of the group - the tactic, for the Zapatistas, does not replace/overlap the strategy.

The Black Bloc tactic has been successful as a "surprise element" in Seattle - while in Genova it turned into the Trojan horse of a well designed plan to repress the whole movement. I feel to agree with Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis when they argue how "a number of tactics that proved so successful in Seattle are reaching their limit (...) the 'genuine' Black Blockers (i.e. those who were not provocateurs or camouflaged neo-nazis) failed to realize to what extent their tactics exposed them to being used by the government to attack the demonstration. As a result, their tactics provoked revulsion against them among the many demonstrators who found themselves facing a police charge and severe beatings on account of both their belligerence and their readiness to flee after an action."

Again, as written above in the paragraph on infiltration, the Black Bloc should give answers also to such questions: how are they going to face these criticisms? What are they going to change in their tactics? Are they still positive about the use of masks? What about parasitical behaviours and responsibility within the political community they belong to?

6. Conclusion

A letter written by Starhawk may give us the material for this attempt of conclusive remarks and for a continuing reflection around what happened in Genova. Starhawk is a U.S. well known and highly respected feminist with Native origins; she is a longtime advocate of nonviolence. She is active in the Californian bisexual community, and represents a source of inspiration and consciousness for the whole movement.

"The police used the Black Bloc, or more accurately the myth and the image of the Black Bloc, very effectively in Genova, for their ends, not ours. Some aspects of Black Bloc tactics made that easy: the anonymity, the masks and easily identifiable dress code, the willingness to engage in more confrontational tactics and in property damage, and perhaps most significant, the lack of connection with the rest of the action and the organizers (...). Acts were done in Genova, attributed to protestors, that were irresponsible and wrong by anyone's standards - but it seems like most of that was done by the police. Or if not, police provocateurs were so endemic that it is impossible to tell what might have been done by people in our movement or to hold anyone accountable. So the issue Genova presents us with is not 'How do we control the violent elements among us?' although that conceivably might be an issue someday. It is 'How do we forestall another campaign of lies, police instigated violence and retaliation?'."

While asking the right question, Starhawk also expresses the ambivalence most of us experienced in different forms since the Black Bloc logo proposed itself as an internal component of what is commonly called "the people of Seattle". Her words, once again can be useful to focus on which kind of relationship the movement should establish with its most radical part - since an abstract discussion around the terms of violence and nonviolence would be abstract and lead us nowhere.

"I have no intention of ever throwing a brick through a window or lobbing a rock at a cop myself, and in general I think breaking windows and fighting cops in a mass action is counterproductive at best and suicidal at worst (...) I like the Black

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Bloc, I've been in many actions now where the Black Bloc was a strong presence. In Seattle I was royally pissed off at them for what I saw as their unilateral decision to violate agreements everyone else accepted. In Washington in 2000, I saw they abided by guidelines they disagreed with and had no part in making, and I respected them for it. I've sat under the hooves of the police horses with some of them when we stopped a sweep of a crowded street using tactics Gandhi himself could not have criticized. I've choked with them in the tear gas in Quebec City and seen them refrain from property damage there when confronted by local people. I'm bonded. Yes, there have been times I've been furious with some of them, but they are my comrades and allies in this struggle and I don't want to see them excluded or demonized. We need them, or something like them. We need room in the movement for rage, for impatience, for militant fervor, for an attitude that says 'We are badass, kickass folks and we will tear this system down'. If we cut that off, we devitalize ourselves. (...) There is a great temptation to attempt to exert more control, to set rules, to police each other, to retreat to what seems like safe ground. (...) Identifying provocateurs in the midst of an action is like trying to spray for a pest in the garden: the toxicity of the spray, of the suspicion, secrecy and lack of trust, may be as great as that of the pest. (...) You can't just dismiss the Black Bloc and other militant groups as 'negative rebels' or immature adolescents acting out. They have a political perspective that is serious, thoughtful, and deserves to be taken seriously. But it also means that more militant groups need to stop dismissing those who advocate nonviolence as middle-class, passive, and cowardly. The Black Bloc is widely respected for its courage, but it takes another kind of courage to sit down in front of the riot cops without sticks or rocks or Molotovs (...) 'nonviolent' does not equate with 'nonconfrontational', or with wanting to be safe on the sidelines."

Starhawk discusses issues of communication and respect within the different souls of the movement - and how to enhance radical creativity, truthfulness and clarity in the political relationships: "we actually have to struggle to respect each other. No one gets to claim the moral high ground".

Exclusion/marginalization of a group can have the undesired output of artificially exacerbate the social conflict and lead to bad news for all. A strategic question raised by Starhawk is: how do we go where no social movement has ever gone before? Proposed answers have to do with thinking out of our fences, carving out a new territory, invent new tactics. In other terms, do the unexpected. And, yes, we need to make the effort of standing shoulder to shoulder, especially when we disagree.

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2003/11/280927.shtml>