In the past fifteen years the world has become a more nightmarish place than even us cynics imagined in our wildest dreams. As I sit outdoors on a sunny October day, weather once reserved for the fourth of July, I am reminded, as we all constantly are nowadays, that if we don’t do something drastic fast we are screwed. Most of the old models of subversion and social organization, including those discussed in Killing King Abacus, were imagined in other times and places. In this case we borrowed ideas from the Italy of the 1970s and 1980s. The tendency among anarchists is to try to find an idea they can use as a badge of identity instead of using their own imagination to refashion tactics in the historical context in which they actually live. Instead of introducing Killing King Abacus in general, I would instead like to discuss how the world has changed in the last fifteen years and how some of the ideas discussed in the zine are still relevant today. I will also discuss some points on which my own views have changed.

Insurrectionary anarchism contains a glaringly obvious contradiction at its core: to take a life is the ultimate authoritarian act.
And if the argument goes that it is unacceptable to participate in authoritarian organizations as an anarchist, because to do so would result in a new social order that is also authoritarian, then it also follows that to use violent means will produce a violent social order. Look at violence rates in any country ten years after the end of a war. Take El Salvador for instance. Of course, in this case there is the question of lingering social inequality and the lingering presence of arms among the population. But once people have been psychologically broken down by violence, victims or perpetrators, they are more likely to commit violence. Just look at violence levels among returned Iraqi vets.

The classic anarchist line is that of course we would never support a group like the FARC, because they are authoritarian. But did the FARC bomb a commercial airliner because they are authoritarian or because they engage in violent acts? If we look at the history of authoritarian revolutions and regimes, it is difficult to separate out their authoritarianism and violence; the two join forces inextricably. Of course, violence itself is not the same thing when separated from a regime. Likewise, a single hierarchical organization is not the same thing as a state. A single violent act is a small-scale potential building block for authoritarian organization. Violence is coercive, and coercion is the heart of the state. If we are to be so very strict about what level of hierarchy is acceptable in organizations we participate in as anarchists, then it only follows to be equally circumspect when it comes to violence.

I am not making an argument that the only acceptable form of subversion is nonviolent. Imagine an alternate historical trajectory in which none of the revolutions of the past had ever taken place. What if the Sandinistas had left Nicaragua to Somoza? What if France still had a monarchy? If able to travel back to 1620 with a case of guns, who besides direct descendants of the Mayflower would not arm the Wampanoag at Plymouth rock?

Gandhi said that the most spiritually evolved way to approach injustice was with nonviolent resistance. He said a violent man could...
space has in turn been collectivized (though heavily mediated by
capital). Now we have a place to discuss our ideas, as long as they
can fit in 140 characters or less. Of course, social media has been an
important part of rebellions worldwide, but be careful. Every para-
noid fantasy we had in the nineties about the use of the Internet
was mild compared to the current reality where Facebook owns
more personal information than did the Stasi.

The Internet has created a white noise loud enough to block out
the sound of one’s own voice. The twitterization of ideas, where
ideas are simplified to post-size as no one has time to read an entire
argument never mind an entire book, has caused the capacity to
create coherent arguments to deteriorate. With the ability to form
arguments goes the ability for independent thought.

Hannah Arendt said the Nazi war criminal Eichmann, was “un-
able to think” and “lacked imagination.” For example, the internal-
ization of the language of the Nazis, where the murder of
sick people became “mercy killing” and extermination became
“deportation,” necessitated throwing rationality aside. He calmly
planned filling the trains to Auschwitz by simply crunching num-
bers. The abacus asserted its dominion over life once again. In-
dependent thought took a step down. Her characterization of Eich-
mann showed how the capacity to think is linked to the capacity to
feel. Thus a politics that lacks feeling will ultimately lack depth of
thought. (It can also have some unfortunate genocidal side-effects.)

In Killing King Abacus we emphasized creativity not only for its
powers of political imagination. We also saw creativity as a key
component of any life worth living. We didn’t want a revolution
that would create a society that lacked the potential for a rich emo-
tional life; we didn’t want a society that would bore us to death.
Now if folks happen to get bored, they won’t notice since psych
meds are even more over-prescribed; there is a real med called
Soma, the same name as the drug used for social control in Brave
New World, life imitating art once again. We wanted a society that
become nonviolent, whereas an impotent (passive) man could not.
That is, at least the violent had the gumption to rise against in-
justice, but passive folks were hopeless. I look at it as a spectrum;
nonviolent resistance should be prioritized for both practical and
ethical reasons. I would substitute creative for “spiritually evolved”
here. Violent tactics are often resorted to because of a lack of cre-
ativity. Can we be creative enough to come up with nonviolent
tactics? Violence, as distinguished from sabotage, should be an ab-
solute last resort.

Functional MRIs show that new neural pathways can be formed
in the human brain. The brains of brain injury victims show that
neurons rewire around a damaged area. Normal brains have been
shown to change dramatically when trained. This has been shown
in musicians, master meditators, yogis and others. Through medi-
tation the brains of people with PTSD have changed their patterns,
providing relief from their trauma; those who are emotionally dam-
ged can heal to some extent. These findings blow old neuroscien-
tific theories out of the water. This means that human beings can
change in a far more profound way than was previously known.
Without this capacity for change, we could not hope for a post-
capitalist order. Any revolution—violent or not, must start in the
minds of the people. Otherwise, the same order will reassert itself
in time.

Social inequality is at an all-time high in the United States. Ac-
cording to the Pew Research Center, the gap in wealth between
whites and other groups has gotten far worse since 2007 with
whites now owning thirteen times the wealth as African Ameri-
cans and ten times the wealth as Latinos on average. Meanwhile,
capitalism has finally shown itself to be so exploitative at its core
that like a cancer it would kill its host, the planet, before relent-
ing; a dramatic change is needed in our hearts and minds. This is a
historic opportunity for profound social change.

Ursula Le Guin called anarchism, “the most idealistic of all po-
litical philosophies.” It’s not a surprise that one of our most imagi-
native writers has been drawn to it. Anarchism demands that you
dare to dream. There is no insurrection without imagination; it is
unique in each instance. What insurrectionary anarchism has to
offer radicals of all persuasions is its inherent openness. The only
way humanity can continue to survive is if it makes a quantum
leap of the imagination. To move beyond capitalism, we need new
social models and for these we need to look at history; we need to
study every form of social organization that has been practiced and
every Utopian model that has been dreamed up in political theory
or literature. And then we need to transcend these models.

Silence, Virtual Chatter and Creativity

Smart phones and other devices have colonized daily life to the
point that quiet moments to oneself are now rare. Silence is a space
for reflection, a chance to figure out what you really think without
having the question framed for you by someone else’s post. On
top of this people are required to work more hours. Silence and
idleness play a fundamental part in human creativity. Our brains
are wired in such a way that the calculating conscious brain has to
take a break in order for the subconscious to kick in with creative
solutions. This is why you come up with ideas in the shower, run-
ning or waking up from a dream. It turns out that the most driven
of us are fast approaching a neurological limit. Harvard University
wrote a letter to its freshmen asking them to take more free time.
It turns out that academic results were suffering, because the stu-
dents were overrunning their brains with busy work without giv-
ing the subconscious a chance to kick in and present imaginative
solutions. Google has created “play areas” for workers for the same
reason. If we are constantly busy and then plugged in to a din of
psychic white noise during the entirety of our free time, we lose
imaginary potential.

Walter Benjamin spoke of the way in which fashion mimicked
natural seasons; in a death-like twisted parody novelty mimicked
the actual regenerative qualities of nature. Now in order to be hip
you have to keep up with a lot more than fall fashions; nature’s sea-
sons move way too slowly. The only time that matters is now. As ev-
everyone is concerned with keeping current with the eternal present
of their news-feed, revisionist history can easily become convinc-
ing, since yesterday is already passe. In 1984, Orwell described a
world in which history could be revised in a day—all archives were
altered to agree with the new “truth.” Now the “truth” can be al-
tered much more quickly. If someone had a post on their feed at
10:16 AM that said “We are at war at Eurasia” and then a post at
11:45 saying, “We have always been allies with Eurasia,” some peo-
ple would think they must have been confused in the first place
since they’re so busy. If we look beyond the virtual instant to his-
tory we see that humanity has a remarkable capacity for change.
Empires have risen and fallen many times. People have organized
themselves in a myriad of ways, and most of human history and
prehistory was not Capitalist or Statist. The question is not whether
we can change, but whether we can change quickly enough for our
species to survive.

I have been racking my brain for twenty years for a new form
of political imagining that can carry us beyond this crisis and have
come up with nothing, no surprise. However, I feel it is on the tip of
the collective tongue. Einstein came up with the idea that became
the basis of the theory of relativity while daydreaming at work; starr-
ing at the same old elevator, he suddenly saw its motion in a
new light. Einstein had rigorously studied; he drew upon the his-
tory of science. In order for his “genius” to come forth, a lot of mere
mortals had to do a lot of work. Are we open enough to recognize
genius when it appears? Or are we stuck in the same dichotomies,
asking the wrong questions? I do not know what the right ques-
tions are but I ask this of you; when they are asked, please don’t be
too busy on Facebook to notice.

In Killing King Abacus we spoke of the destruction of common
space, from destruction of old working class neighborhoods of
Paris to the death of the precorporate cafe. Now common space
has shrunk even further as a part of our actual lives, while virtual