



We Give A Shit!

An Analysis of the Pittsburgh G20

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Intro: So It Begins

The police exist to organize us. They occupy and command over the spaces which we live our lives. They control the city, or try to, by sectioning off people into groups based on class and race, groups based on participation or spectatorship, the anarchists and the rest of the people living in the context in which we operate. It is not that we are totally blameless for this division between three sides in a conflict, us, the cops, and the general social context. Often we are marginalized, not because of some essential characteristic that prevents us from interacting with “regular” people, but rather as an operation of the organization of people in a space. The cops enforce division and isolation, they make sure that we will never find each other, that we can never fight together. To a certain extent this is the bubble that ruptured in Pittsburgh. There are endless stories about people meeting others from their city in the streets, but more importantly they also met people who lived in the space they were in. We engaged a dynamic that the cops were trying for weeks beforehand to prevent. They tried to scare people, occupy neighborhoods to prevent the possibility of resistance. By threatening us they occupied peoples' lives and ended up interrupting the everyday life of the street, of the energies that move the “social.”

To begin to get a handle on what happened there we have to begin with the political and historical terrain. Now, none of the people involved in this piece

are from Pittsburgh, although some of us are from the Rustbelt, so we cannot even pretend to be able to give an accurate description of the history of that very unique place. We can talk about some of what we call history, but in no way should this be considered a “historical analysis.” The city of Pittsburgh, however, has a long history of struggle. It was the Pittsburgh Congress of 1883 that is widely credited with being a beginning of an organized anarchist movement in America. This was the site of the Homestead strike in 1892, a huge steel strike that involved shoot-outs between strikers and Pinkerton guards and was the place where Alexander Berkman attempted to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, who now has a park named after him. This is one of those events that is now immortalized on plaques in warehouse districts and “historic areas.” Pittsburgh is also the birthplace of the United Steelworkers, who are still based there, the AFL (American Federation of Labor), the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations), and was also the site of their merger agreement. This history of struggle has shaped the dynamics of the city and its structure of enforcement. Beginning during the Homestead strike, when the Pittsburgh police refused to break the strike, the bosses called in Pinkerton guards and deputized them, beginning a practice in the Rustbelt of deputization to deal with social ruptures, something that has become a part of growing up and living in that area of the country. Homestead was also the motivation for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to create the Pennsylvania State Police, a large element of the enforcement structure during the G-20.

Like all cities in the Rustbelt, Pittsburgh is a city that has been completely

fucked over by capitalist globalization. Starting in the 1970s and 1980s, with the rise of neoliberalism, privatization, and globalization, the basis of the city's economy, steel, began to shift production overseas as the state began to build a security apparatus around the protection of economic investment. Today, despite being the home of the United Steel Worker's union, and commonly referred to as "Steel City", Pittsburgh is left with no functioning steel mills. Massive unemployment and political marginalization was coupled with the market abandonment of these areas, and this has left many with no hope in the ability of the market to provide for the needs of their daily lives.

This is the social terrain that we entered when the G-20 came to Pittsburgh. Obama claimed to have chosen Pittsburgh due to its recent economic "revival" through something called the Pittsburgh Model. This model of "development" is based on using tax breaks and the restructuring and colonization of poor neighborhoods to provide "favorable market conditions," (cheap or free land, cheap or free buildings, the lack of unions, tax breaks, etc.) to attract "investment". In Pittsburgh this has primarily concentrated around "green building", military engineering research, the biomedical field, and the building of large universities, as well as the demolition of a poor neighborhood to build a baseball stadium on the north side of the city. It is also a major force in gentrifying parts of the city, particularly Oakland (the university district), parts of Garfield, and East Liberty, among others. This has created a situation in which a few research and university jobs are created while the majority of the

city is left working low wage and/or temporary jobs. In contrast, 40 years ago this population had access to high paying union jobs in the steel mills. The city looks like it is reviving on the physical level, but under the facade the Rustbelt reality is that the poverty rate is climbing and the population has shrunk by almost half since 1950.

Pittsburgh is still a Rustbelt city, and those from the Rustbelt can attest to the reality of that space. Political and material dispossession are mixed with abandonment, failure, and a patchwork of capitalist attempts to reorient the space toward profitability, a process that has left more and more people out on the street. Poverty is a part of daily life in a place where crisis is life. It is a place that has been in crisis for decades, a place that is now structured purely around the management of crisis. It is a place where reality is no longer that capitalism is in crisis but that capitalism is crisis.

Police Preparation and General Operating Procedures

Trying to analyze the tactics of police in Pittsburgh is difficult for a series of reasons. Firstly, there were so many actions going on in so many different places that the very possibility of being able to look at their tactics as a single strategic body is impossible. Secondly, many people have reported long gaps between police sightings, periods of time with little to no police coverage of their movements. This attests to our ability to challenge their control of the streets and create zones where police had little to no physical control, but also makes analysis difficult. Yet from the Twitter feeds, from news reports, and from personal experience we can begin to cobble together some understanding of their thinking during the actions.

There are a series of things to keep in mind here. Cops need to build cohesive forces, they need to be able to generalize their needs for a certain situation and then build a force to deal with their definition of the situation beforehand. This takes both time and control, the time to build a cohesive force and the ability to use that force to stabilize a situation, to make the situation conform to the projections. If the situation cannot be made to conform, then their force ceases to be relevant and they have to begin to improvise, or move to a posture of response. This is what it means for the police to enforce definition. The state sets the limits of allowable action and the police must develop a way of enforcing those limits in a situation that is always changing, even though their

force is not. Their preparation time was limited in the case of the G-20, having only four months as opposed to the two years it took to prepare a comparable police force for the RNC. In contrast, it only takes us a short time to do outreach, plan within affinity groups, and link up with other affinity groups in a non-linear structure that is built to engage with and adapt to changing circumstances. Not that more time to prepare is not sometimes a good thing, but it is not as necessary for us. We do not need to create and enforce definitions, we are able to be mobile.

Maybe to compensate for their lack of time to prepare, maybe as an intentional tactic the cops began early in defining what their approach to this series of actions would be. First they engaged in raids that were meant to obviously accomplish two goals. They were meant to disrupt organizing and develop an air of intimidation. In other words, they were meant to build the feeling that the cops were everywhere. This was amplified by the fact that they kept catching the Seeds of Peace bus, as well as other cars, on the street instead of at static spaces, trying to create the impression that they could find us whenever they wanted to. They coupled this with very public announcements whenever they seized equipment. This approach backfired however, and led to not just lawsuits but also the embarrassment of a very public announcement of having found PVC pipe for “sleeping dragons,” only to find out later that they were being stored in an alley by a company using them for product testing. This constant presence also heightened the eerie feeling of the coming police state within the city, to the

dismay of many residents. This can partially explain the huge level of public support that many reported as they marched through the streets. These disruptions, like the tactics they were to use on Thursday afternoon, were as much based on psychologically intimidating both anarchists and the general populace as they were on materially disrupting organizing work.

This psychological tactic was amplified by the second characteristic of their tactics, posturing, especially through the media. In past mobilizations the press work by the cops beforehand was aimed at the general populace and meant to generate a fear of anarchists coming to burn the city to the ground, etc. The G-20 pre-action press was aimed differently, it was aimed at us. There were the obligatory warnings from the mayor against coming to “cause destruction,” but on top of that there was endless coverage of the police build-up, tours of the security perimeter, tours of their command center (something even the press was confused about), as well as constant police harassment before the actions. But without being able to carry out any raids of material importance, this all came across as posturing and nothing more. They were forced to backpedal from a lot of these statements in the days before the action as lawsuits and complaints started coming in from various groups, and business owners started boarding up stores. They were trying to strike a balance between inflating fears of an anarchist horde to justify the massive police buildup, and reassuring business owners that it was safe to remain open. They failed. Ordinary Pittsburgh residents were angry at the government for turning their city into a police state,

leading many of them to side with the protesters, and most downtown businesses shut down for duration of the G-20.

This was combined with the use of weapons of intimidation and staged force during the actual actions. They had announced beforehand that they “would not be the spark ,” betraying their public sense of confidence. It became obvious that they were anticipating the possibility of disruption but assumed that this was going to be downtown, or at least an attempt to get downtown. Twin Cities Indymedia, as well as a lot of people who were traveling to Arsenal Park on Thursday, noted seeing large columns of police behind the initial skirmish line at 34th and Liberty, there in case the initial lines broke down. The weapons they relied on were indiscriminate, they could not pick and choose targets, until they began to bring out bean-bag rounds and rubber bullets on Thursday afternoon. These indiscriminate weapons were used to keep people away from areas. But dispersing a crowd into smaller groups can never be their goal, as it makes the situation harder to define, so this tactic of dispersal, combined with the air of a total presence, was supposed to make us want to disperse ourselves. In other words, like all the pre-action preparation, these weapons are meant to have a psychological effect, they are used to demoralize crowds, to “take the fight out of them” by making everyone feel that resistance is futile. But these weapons backfired for a series of reasons. Primarily because a lot of people have seen them before, they lost their intimidating effect. Even the helicopters and gas that became constants at a certain point did little to deter people who have been in

situations like this, and at this point that is a lot of us. When gassed we noticed a lot of people calmly putting on goggles and helping other to do the same thing and then calmly, yet quickly, moving out of the area into more open space. They also relied heavily on the LRAD for this reason, and that had such minimal effect that it became a joke on the Daily Show, and in our internal circles (note: many of us have switched our ringtone to the sound of the LRAD). There may be something useful in listening to such loud music after all, as loud noises don't really bother us. This approach is based in staging force, using increasing force physically instead of psychologically, as the situation escapes their control, and this is what they did. They moved from bringing out armored personnel carriers on Thursday but not really using them except to block roads, to indiscriminate use of force on Friday night.

Days Filled With Stones and Flowers

(An Analysis of Thursday and Friday Actions)

The People's Uprising "March"

To begin to attempt an analysis of the People's Uprising "March" is difficult. There was such widely dispersed action after the first half hour or so that we need to begin to look at the dynamics of the action instead of the actions themselves. In other words, the actions built a dynamic environment, and this is the dynamic to be focused on. What we know now is that outside the large police presence at Arsenal Park there was a much larger and more concentrated presence of police between the initial point of contact, 34th and Liberty St, and the perimeter downtown, staggered in increased concentrations the closer we got to the David L. Lawrence Convention Center.

The initial police contingent seemed willing to give the march the street. This is not surprising within a new, modified police tactic of containment/dispersal, or containment as dispersal, a tactic that we have encountered in Washington, DC. This works through a police analysis of the situation on the scene. If it seems like the march will be able to take the street, or is determined to, the police will set up a zone of control, an area of the street that they will give to the march to avoid confrontation, but they will contain everything outside this space to limit actions. So they may give the street but surround the march on the sides, they may give a lane, etc. As the march moved out, some noticed this and redirected

the march through the park to another exit point, which frustrated their attempt to contain the march from the beginning. This was evident as we were passing past small contingents of riot cops, spaced out on the corners of intersections, especially when we encountered two riot cops in a car as we turned onto Liberty. At this point the march began to split, some trying to head away from the massive police contingent in downtown and go to a commercial district. As the CrimethInc. analysis points out, while this was strategically smart it would have prevented us from gaining the legitimacy for barricades and other actions that was gained after police dispersal attempts. As we reached the corner of 34th and Liberty we saw a line of riot police, an armored personnel carrier (APC) equipped with an LRAD, and a series of other vehicles. Unknown to many at this point was that this was only an initial line, there was a much higher concentration of cops further on. The dispersal warning was given and then immediately they sounded the LRAD for the first time.

The march diverted down an alley and the first dumpsters came out and barricades were built. As we rounded the corner again, to attempt to get to Forbes and thus begin the move through the Strip District towards downtown, we were met with another line. That is when the first high concentration use of gas occurred. After their attempts to contain the march at the park failed they switched over to a blocking tactic, a tactic that is only meant to prevent access to certain areas. They were using a sheer show of force and shifting blockades to prevent access to downtown while also “convincing” us to disperse. This is

speculation, but it seems as if they made some mistakes in their projections of our actions. Firstly, they seemed to assume that our goal was to head into downtown, and they allocated force to prevent that movement. This became clear as the march “dispersed” into smaller groups, the ones who headed away from downtown saw almost no cops for a long period of time. Secondly, they made a big deal before the actions about training to defeat lockdowns, maybe expecting a repeat of the Republican National Convention, but few if any groups planned on locking down, many opting to remain more open tactically instead of using a tactic that becomes immobile at the point of deployment.

As the march “dispersed” into smaller groups, the situation became really fluid and dynamic. This constant change in the scenario prevented the cops from being able to account for numerous groups moving through the streets. We will focus here on two main movements. One group engaged with the cops in their own territory by trying to head downtown. This was a rather large section of the march and they got stopped in the Strip district. In this move toward downtown it seems like a lot of the cops were sucked up in trying to stop this group.

Another series of groups started to head the opposite way towards the gentrified shopping areas of the East Liberty neighborhood through Lawrenceville and Garfield. These groups began to notice a series of things. The most astonishing was that people from the neighborhoods, and these are largely working class neighborhoods, began to come out onto the streets to engage with the events, both in cheering anarchists on and in certain instances helping to barricade off

streets. These groups heading away from downtown set up a series of barricades to create space. In this vacuum a PNC Bank got its ATMs smashed.

A call went out over Twitter to meet in Friendship Park, on the border of the Lawrenceville and Garfield neighborhoods. A trickle of people ballooned to hundreds. The park became a space to rest, get treated for injuries, and plan the next moves. Cops began showing up in droves, hoping to surround the park, but again the crowd was too large for them to box in. That march began, and headed towards the Oakland neighborhood, or the university district, and was dispersed after a series of confrontations with the police that set the stage for events later that evening. In those confrontations many students from the neighborhood began to notice both the violence of the police and the increase of their presence in the neighborhood, especially on the University of Pittsburgh campus. Many police were there as back-up to protect a speech being given by Barack Obama in Schenley Park. This led a group of students to gather in Schenley Plaza outside the entrance to the park to watch the events and to demonstrate against the police. They were tear gassed at 9:30pm.

These constant destabilizations of the situation, these fluid movements, kept the cops occupied in a game of reaction. They were trying to regain control of the situation and right when they felt like they had, they would have to respond to another situation blocks away. This set the stage for the Bash Back! March later that night. With the cops occupied trying to pacify students, the march was able

to take advantage of a small gap in coverage that allowed it to gain momentum.

Bash Back!

As the cops were tear gassing the first groups of protesting students in Schenley Plaza, the Bash Back! march began to gather at the corner of Desoto and Fifth Ave. The march rolled out around 10, only a half hour since the disturbances began on Pitt's campus. The march began down Meyran Ave to Forbes and along the way picked up six dumpsters. The first police vehicle arrived and was stopped by four of the dumpsters being turned over in the intersection.

Corporate shops began to get attacked, with windows busted out of Subway, McDonald's, and American Apparel, among others. While the cops were still stopped at the first barricade two more dumpsters were overturned, one on fire, at the intersection of Forbes and Desoto which created even more space away from the cops. Crowds of students and bystanders had crowded the sidewalks as the police substation got its windows busted out. The march then saw its first police line, a line of vehicles, about a block ahead. Instead of engaging, the bloc began to move through university property across from Schenley Plaza. The bloc then took a right and headed up past a university vivisection lab. A police van had caught up but some of the lab windows were busted out as other marchers began to confront the vehicle. The bloc moved on, taking a left and then a right and ending up on a street with three banks and a Quiznos, all of which got windows broken.

At this point you could begin to see the police cordon being set up at the intersections, a couple of cops per intersection, a car, and usually some form of wooden barricade with reinforcements of riot police down the streets. Little did many of us know at the time, but there was a much larger disturbance back at Pitt. In the wake of the bloc, students had swarmed the streets, chanting “cops off campus” and “we love Pittsburgh, fuck the G-20.” Contrary to media reports, students were not just swept up in the events but were actively participating.

The cops were split once again, trying to deal with dynamic situations moving in two different directions. Vehicles had caught up with the bloc again and were attempting to run it off the streets. Many small groups started to disperse down alleys and work their way back toward Schenley Plaza where cops had begun gassing students. At a certain point, around when they called “All units to Oakland” over the police scanner, so around 11:30-12, they had decided to cordon off the area. They set up skirmish lines on Forbes and Fifth and began to push students away from the commercial district and back onto campus. They began by pushing people down the sidewalk but that quickly escalated into firing tear gas down the street and even gassing students trying to enter their dorms. This escalated the situation and led more students out into the street. It took till 2:30 for them to finally quell the unrest in Oakland. What few of us knew was that when the march began they were trying to get Obama out of Schenley Park, the entrance to which is Schenley Plaza, ground zero for the

rioting. This even further escalated the situation till they began to clear streets completely and drive vehicles down residential streets in Oakland, repeating the dispersal warning from loudspeakers. One police commander mentioned that the situation resembled martial law without the official declaration.

The Permit March

The next morning the permitted march began to gather. At the gathering point itself there were relatively few police, but just blocks away there were hundreds of riot cops, spaced out in groups of 30-50, surrounding vehicles so they could be mobile, and accompanied by K-9 units. These were mobile units meant to deal with anyone who diverged from the agreed upon plan for the day. As the march moved downtown we started to notice more and more cops, in higher concentrations, till we got downtown and then they just lined the streets, standing in front of crowd barriers which held back crowds of people who had gathered along the march route. As the march stopped in front of the City County Building, the cops began to show a little of what they had in store for later that night. As the crowd stood in a downtown street the cops began to move 50-100 riot cops off a side street, even moving one into the crowd, and they were backed up by one of the LRADs. The bloc assembled and moved towards the cops to form a buffer between the cops and the rest of the crowd. As the march moved the police presence thinned out. They were gathering to move in behind us to seal off the area we were just in. They moved squads of riot cops into the positions that we had occupied minutes before and drove

Hummers with fences attached to their fronts to block off the bridges to everything but foot traffic. As the gathering in the park wore on, and as the time for the permit to expire approached, we noticed lines of riot police beginning to surround the park and a large contingent getting off a school bus and gearing up in the southwest corner of the park. These shows of force were a foreshadowing of the actions later that night.

Go Pitt, Fuck The Police

That night a large group of Pitt students, along with assorted anarchists and activists, gathered in Schenley Plaza to demonstrate against the police brutality from the previous night. Hours before the gathering, we could see large groups of riot cops gearing up in the Oakland neighborhood and hiding down side streets, particularly around Forbes between Meyran and Desoto. As people began to gather, the park was completely surrounded. After 45 minutes the dispersal warning was sounded and the LRAD blared, but there was nowhere for anyone to go. The cops began to move in but not as a unit. They sent small tactical teams into the crowd to secure an area, while the cops behind them gassed the area, and would pepper spray or attack anyone in range. Those they caught they cuffed and arrested. Larger lines would move in behind them to secure the area and process the arrestees. Groups managed to break through and head both out of the area and further into Pitt's campus. Those groups that ended up on campus were chased down by riot cops and beaten if caught. The

cops beat and gassed people indiscriminately, including launching tear gas canisters into open dorm windows on at least one occasion.

The gathering in itself was relatively innocuous, being largely people playing drums and giving speeches, but that is not the point. The police response was meant to send a message not only against causing disturbances that night, but to make anyone present think twice about stepping out of line again. The response was meant to psychologically damage and generate fear, not just to stabilize a situation. And this is a good lesson to learn. If we are going to be successful we have to be ready for and expect this type of response if we decide to gather.

While difficult to deal with, it is inevitable. The police are trying to stabilize a situation, and for them that means preserving control. That means constructing us as subjects which can be organized, who can be positioned to preserve the flows of the city, and if we can't be organized, forced back into a stable place. If we think about the effect of the police actions on Friday night, they accomplished their goal. There were few actions Friday night and the energy of the actions dissipated for the time being, but we doubt the resonance of those actions will disperse as easily.

The End...Or The Dawn of New Beginnings

There is little doubt that these were some of the most successful actions that we have undertaken in recent memory. They were not successful because of the fact that anarchists barricaded streets and created space, or that we fought back against the cops and actually held our ground. It is not in the fact that we had forced the cops into a stalemate by the middle of Thursday or in the scale of the property destruction. Rather it is in the glimpse of a form of action that we were able to grasp. Unlike past summit demonstrations, which are isolated in downtown areas like the summits themselves, these actions happened in a way that was both visible and invisible simultaneously. They engaged on a plane of daily life that our actions rarely touch outside of our own lives. The actions were dispersed and mobile, escaping the ability of the state to impose order on them.

It is mentioned that during the Greek uprising a government minister complained most about the inability to have an object or group to negotiate with, no demands to mediate. Those actions existed on a different plane than the state. As opposed to the state imposition of samenesses, divergence and multiplicity were created in the streets. The streets became indefinable as actions proliferated, changing the environment with the participants themselves. It became a terrain impossible to define, impossible to limit as the very structures of control had broken down. The inability of the state to mediate these actions was precisely due to their existence on a plane that could not be mediated. It

was not for anything specific but for the possibility of possibility, the very energy which destroys limits. This is a strategy of disappearance, unable to be defined, unable to be categorized, and therefore unable to be policed. It was a fight over the possibility of control.

Not that the G-20 was anywhere close to the intensity of Greece, but that type of situation can only exist to the degree that it is invisible to the state, that there are too many dynamics, too many actions to stabilize. But this disappearance from the plane of the state, from the state's gaze, is also an appearance on the level of daily life, a level where life and action link up in ways that can only create dynamic situations. Resistance struck a chord, it resonated and that resonance built itself into an energy that shook the city. It escaped the bounds of the removed specialists of political action and broke out, it became social war, or at least a glimpse of what that resonance may feel like. It opened a window into something else. What that is, is up to us to decide.

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