

VOL 1

ACRID



*TRAJECTORY
OF
AN
UPRISING*

ACRID [ak-rid] adj.

extremely or sharply stinging or bitter; exceedingly caustic

This is an account of the trajectory that the Portland uprising of 2020 has taken, its successes and failures, as well as some suggestions on avoiding the pitfalls of contemporary protest.

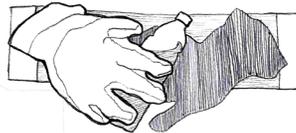
PART 1: THE TRAJECTORY

Catalyzing Event

Think of the event like the spark that ignites a fire. Though it might seem to erupt out of nowhere, there are very specific conditions that make a fire possible. A fire needs many things, not only to start, but to sustain itself. It needs a spark, but it also needs oxygen and fuel. Likewise, the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police did not emerge from nowhere. This was the spark that ignited uprisings around the so-called US, protestations which were themselves fueled by countless mechanisms of structural violence and oppression. In that moment, as with past uprisings, the accumulation of hundreds of years of racial oppression burst asunder in the collective righteous anger of a riot. People know that the forces of the state and capital have worked together through the police to purposefully marginalize black people, to stoke racist sentiment amongst the civilian population as conduits for their malicious designs and with this knowledge they take action.

Spontaneous Action

Contrary to popular coverage, people are not aimless in their attacks, but hyper-focused, their actions betraying a collective understanding of a repressed history, at times unspoken and other times screamed, but nevertheless etched in flesh and collective memory. These targets have illuminated themselves in the blood of our friends, families, and communities and they are assaulted with purpose. This is also a time of pure feeling. Reeling from loss and pushed to the edge, a community rises up against its oppressors. Police, the state, and the (symbolic or material) machinery of capital



are all attacked. A riot is not only a time of upheaval, but just as importantly a time of rapid change, wherein mourning is transmuted to joy in the acts of unburdening oneself from the shackles of the status quo.

Initial Repression

The police begin with two options, each sure to meet as one down the road. First, maybe they are hands off, understanding that the very sight of them as the source of pain so fresh will fan the flames of discontent, so they slip away into their precincts, invisible yet waiting and watching. The second possibility is a show of force. This is the 'alternative' that will become the only way forward once the pigs slink out of their dens. It is also the path the rank and file desire, to choke lungs and crack skulls and let the people know whose in charge. Their desire is palpable, it is written on the face of every white, no-necked goon in riot gear you will face. They narrow their eyes and lick their lips at the very prospect. Their opening salvo the flashbang or the tear gas canister. The police can and will oscillate between the two tactics at will, using the victimization as a means of propaganda to justify an increase in violence that was never anything but inevitable.

Opportunistic Affiliation

The initial phases will last anywhere from a few hours to a few days and it is at this point that the vultures, fence-sitters, and opportunists will push their way to the front. They will be the most prominent and most vocal right up until the tear gas, or the riot line, or the jail support. The opportunists will speak the language of subversion, but they will not act on it. They will raise money and profile that never quite seems to get to the most marginalized. Beware of the empty aesthetic. Sometimes they are outright police collaborators or apologists and other times they will be peace-policing liberals. Regardless of their affiliation with the police they are to be treated as the police adjacent reactionaries that they are. Use de-escalation when possible and physical confrontation when necessary to eject them from the movement as early as you possibly can. They are a danger to the movement precisely because of their half-hearted demands, their deflationary attitudes, and their willingness to compromise. Be assured that they will weaponize any and all facets of their being (race, gender, sexuality, etc) to secure personal benefits, while actively undermining real structural change. Once they have become the face of the uprising they will be unbelievably difficult to remove.

Partial Co-optation

It is at this juncture that the riot has ceased to be a riot, evacuated too of its current potential for radical change. As the popularity of the movement spreads so too do its revolutionary ideals. More and more the imagery of the uprising becomes its most prevalent aspect. It becomes necessary not only to join, but to make the world aware of your contribution, to share on social media a knee or a raised fist. And so things like Black Lives Matter signs, merchandise and hashtags go up, thus evacuating them of their radicality, and also subsuming their ownership back into the domain of capital. The protest has not only been co-opted, but in both economic and psychoanalytic terms it has been fetishized.

Call for Demands

The state, the media, and the liberals will all coalesce around a singular refrain, “what are your demands?” which, to the suspicious eye should read as, “how can we do the bare minimum to make you go away?” During occupy this was temporarily resisted as the action itself became the demand. The occupation of symbolic sites of capital (most famously Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan near Wall St.) sought to directly confront inequality on its home turf. But as time progressed the allure of negotiated or marginal victories proved too strong, at once deflating the impetus of the action itself and allowing for an incorporation of its most mild desires into the mainstream political apparatus. Black Lives Matter and Standing Rock also began, if not without demands, seemingly impossible demands under our current political-economic regime. How can one realistically afford black people equal personhood or restore stolen land to its rightful guardians without the complete and utter dissolution of both the United States writ large and/or the wholesale destruction of capital and coloniality?

Drown in Rhetoric of Accountability

And so demands are levied against and at the behest of those responsible for the pain and suffering and repression. Just as before they will return in unison crying out that they “are listening,” that they “will do better,” that they will be “accountable.” Toothless police accountability boards will be created (or more likely rebranded) politicians, small and large business owners, clergy, and ‘community leaders’ will seemingly spontaneously come together with the same symbolic answers, while deftly dodging any and all of the protestors’ substantive demands. They will delay, stating that they need ‘experts’ to properly survey the problem (especially if its one that constantly recurs) until the fervor of protest dies and then completely

resume business as usual. This is a tactic, one that is incredibly effective at draining a protest’s most important attribute, its anger and energy.

Manufactured Factionalism

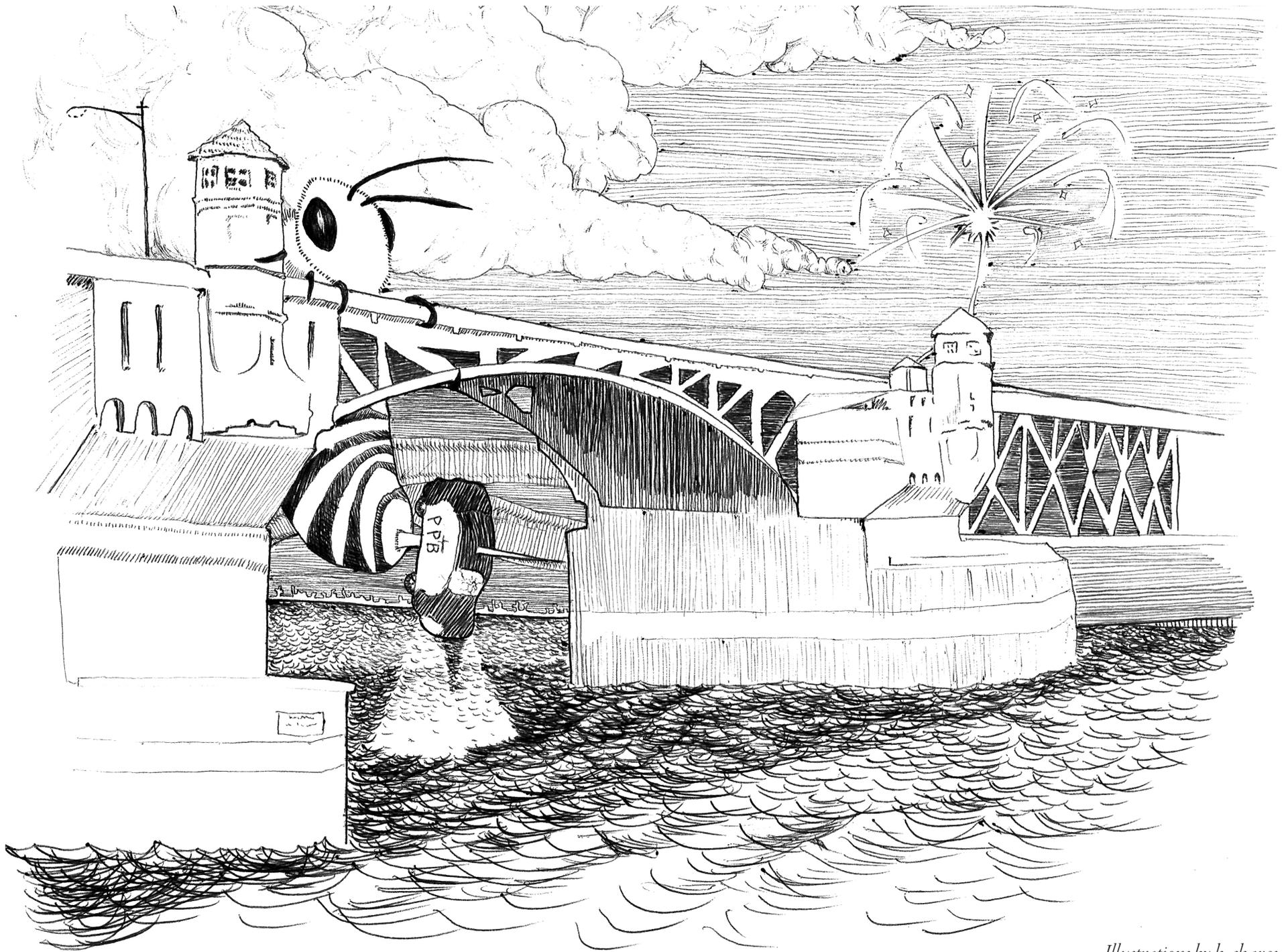
Where institutional roadblocks fail, personal and factional infighting is purposefully stoked. This can come in the form of counter-insurgent propaganda from various media, the introduction of infiltrators/agent provocateurs, or simply the powers-that-be showing preferential treatment to one or a select number of groups. Paranoia begins to set in (some justified, some not) about who can and who cannot be trusted. Importantly, this operates along numerous structural vectors, playing on already existing forms of bias, including, but not limited to: racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism, xenophobia, ageism etc., as well as more specifically political/cultural antagonisms: those rowdy kids, violent anarchists, good/bad protestors. Any and all means of breaking the protest mass into more divided subsections will be pursued.

Movement Decay

It is as each of these forms of manipulation come to a head, as well as the energy and resources of those involved, that the movement will begin to wane. This has no specific timeline, but it is as much a “feeling” as a materially calculable determination. Attitudes at the occupation, or camp, or in the streets begin to wane. Maybe not as many people are showing up. Mainstream media has lost its interest. Other forms of repression might take precedence. People begin to move on. In Portland, the way this has thus far been resisted is through daily actions, emphasizing and targeting a variety of locations, and a core group of experienced and dedicated protesters unwilling to capitulate without significant (and as of yet unacquiesced to) concessions from the city and police.

Reactionary Antagonism

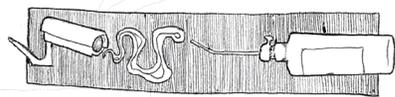
As the movement loses its mainstream appeal the sharks begin circling. Where once outright antagonistic forces were denied access via the sheer magnitude of the protest, dwindling numbers, factionalism, and liberal co-optation all provide a netter window of opportunity for conservatives and the far right to more explicitly and confidently assault the protests. We know from experience that these fascist interlocutors don’t necessarily have to wait to unleash violence, myriad shootings, car attacks, and more recently bombings, all testify to the omnipresence of right wing backlash to the struggles for racial justice and anti-police/anti-capitalist



action. Importantly, however, combined with a steady stream of reactionary media fervor, fascist ideologues see this time as an opportunity to strike. With tacit or overt support from the police they attempt to capitalize on each other's violence, steadily escalating both the scope and intensity of their attacks to undermine the protests. Their collective goal is fear. If one three percenter, boogaloo boy, or nazi gets away with pepper spraying a crowd, maybe they come back with greater numbers. Often times even the specter of their presence is enough to spread a virulent strain of anxiety through the crowd, as the perpetual refrain "proud boys are here" makes plain.

Second Wave of Radical Energy

At this point there may or may not be another catalyzing event that brings massive numbers and a reinvigorated energy back to the crowd. In Portland, for better or worse, it was the mobilization of federal forces in and around the downtown area. The imagery of people being snatched by unidentified forces and shoved into vans was enough to get even the staunchest liberals upset about infringements upon their most sacred but ultimately toothless text, the constitution. What this also provided, however, was a convenient scapegoat for the entirety of "the problems" that BLM aimed to address, Trump. National media outlets and progressive mayors alike (who it should be noted had for a month been beating and teargassing their own citizens without DHS's help) seized upon the narrative of the bad man who was responsible for everything while conveniently leaving out the culpability of themselves and their own police departments. Just as the wider public has been reinvigorated, there is also a resurgence of radical energy as well. This can take several forms. Some see the opportunity for an expansion of radical ideas to a larger group of people, while others harness the power of negative energy towards those they see as protest tourists, people who float in for the cameras and disappear after only a few days. In both instances there is a wellspring of activity which resists the urge for complacency.



The Banality of Protest

You have been doing this for months with no end in sight. The financial support you once had has dried up and it is no longer in vogue to even talk about the brutal repressions you square off against everyday. In short, others have moved on. Yet you still go through the motions because you don't really see an alternative and this

has become your new normal. One of the state's greatest weapons is its patience. It has the resources to outspend, outlast, and outviolence most small insurrectionary or revolutionary endeavors. This has become a war of attrition and the body/mind can only do so much. From those in tree sits to hunger strikes to long term building occupations there is one outcome that is inevitable, it will end. You may be able to secure some concessions from the state and/or you may be incarcerated as a result of your actions, but these actions are not eternal and neither should they be. Stagnation is just as important an adversary as repression and without tactically minded change all actions stagnate. No matter what the object of your protest is (a landlord evicting people, a local abuser, or the federal government) or your role in it (medical, frontlines, logistics, outreach, etc) it should not be boring. You must learn to constantly adapt to internal and external dynamics if you want to not be crushed by the opposition.

Accelerated Repression

At this juncture the state will move to crush any remaining dissident forces, which are typically the most hardened and committed and also therefore the easiest to paint as terrorists, radicals, etc. Corporate media will work in lock step with the police, alternatively demonizing and squashing stories as they see fit to keep the party line. Typically the most marginalized people will suffer the most extreme consequences as the temporarily suspended appearance of egalitarianism stealthily returns to its normal workflows. Following the Ferguson uprising, 6 people involved have been found dead under mysterious circumstances. One cannot under-emphasize this next point, repression does not end with the last big mass arrests. While the rest of the world has moved on, the state is hard at work undermining the support structures that gave rise to the uprising. Anyone publicly affiliated with radical action will be targeted. Anyone engaging in alleged criminal activity without adequately concealing their identity will be crushed. Grand juries will be called. You will be asked and expected to answer seemingly innocuous questions about who you know and their political affiliations. It is your ethical responsibility to politely tell them to go fuck themselves. There will be repercussions for this, including the possibility of jail time, but the consequences of working with the state are far worse. The personal and communal bonds which are the lifeblood of any substantive movement will be shattered by your betrayal. Entire friendship networks will be destroyed and people will lose trust in one another. With interpersonal relationships destroyed an entire generation of activists can be effectively defanged.

Full Subsumption into Capital

With the most radical elements of the uprising in disarray, the opportunists will finally win out. Any remaining energy against the police, capital, or the state will be reoriented as commodity. Brands claim allegiance to and over the movement itself, articulating demands that can only be met by the purchase of merchandise, the consumption of sufficiently 'ethical' media, and the outward performance of an aesthetic of justice. Familiar faces will crop up to sell these things to you under the guise of subversion or revolution, but their real aims will be transparent to those they have betrayed. You will be alternatively depressed, enraged, and anxious now that you have lost. You will have PTSD from countless nights of fascist violence. Your physical and mental health may be affected in any number of horrifying ways. Some of your friends will abandon you and the struggle, some will be incarcerated, some may even be dead. The forces of state and capital constitute an unforgiving machinery, unyielding and often doubling down when confronted by their myriad atrocities. To truly resist them is to accept the futility of doing so, as well as any violent reprisals that are sure to follow. Because in a few days, months, or years you will have to do it all over again.

PART 2: KEEPING IT RADICAL (FUCK THE TRAJECTORY)

This is the way things have gone in the recent past, but it doesn't have to be. If a riot is the language of the unheard, insurrection is its incomprehensible howl. In a world where language ceases to have utility, where every plea for reform is met by empty promises, platitudes, and placations, no demands will ever be adequate. Insurrection does not seek diplomacy, negotiation, or redress, it is vengeance and destruction aimed squarely at the oppressive mechanisms of our fascist present.

Antagonize

The enjoined forces of state and capital are ferocious and formidable, all while being frighteningly omnipresent. They are powerful, but not invincible. They are adaptable, but slow to do so. Protesters in Hong Kong during the 2019-2020 uprising enacted a strategy of "being like water" to move with quickness and grace, striking throughout the city then receding, to coordinate and assault another

locale. 2020 Portland has for the most part done something quite different, trading fluidity for rigidity. With some exceptions, using unwieldy shield walls, medieval siege tactics, and long drawn-out standoffs, the demos in Portland have for the most part met the police on their own terms. A demo is called, entailing either a short march (if in the east, north, or ICE) or congealing at the object of protest (if downtown). Where at first (after the obligatory peace police infighting) the tenacity of the assaults surprised the police, they now know exactly how the demo will unfold. The spontaneity of the protests began to wither, as did the demonstrators aversion to the very forces of capital that the police exist to protect.

The argument has been made to more forcefully emulate Hong Kong and 'be like water,' which certainly would have more success than the current (lack of) strategy, but there is another more potent alternative, *to be acrid*. To do so, would be to, in rapid repeating succession: attack, corrode, and dissolve. Not just in Portland, but beyond. If being water offers the advantage of deftly moving across and around institutional infrastructure before receding, being acrid makes possible the wholesale deterioration of those organs themselves. Thus, we need useful strategies when confronting the multi-polar series of enemies we are currently squaring off against; not only the police, but the underlying forces of capital and the state, as well as fascist street gangs, militias, and paramilitary forces. To engender any kind of meaningful success one must disintegrate the institutional mechanisms that make oppression possible.

In this regard, our current circumstances give us some potentially surprising tactical advantages, namely, by exploiting the very same fragile architecture that has governed the US's pathetic response to the Covid outbreak. Capital is diffuse, but it has some concentrated nodes that can be very rapidly shut down. It relies on a persistent flow of people, goods, rhetoric, etc. Eating away at the mechanisms that perpetuate those flows can have outsized effects, not just on a local economy which relies on a relatively predictable series of inputs and outputs to sustain itself, but the global network of distribution and logistics that the world has come to rely on. Ports, rail lines, distribution centers, server farms, power plants, highways and pipelines are all exposed to varying degrees of corrosion.

Continually evolve

To stave off protest ennui, to undermine the tactical hardheadedness of the police, and to successfully antagonize capital at its weakest points demands constant

evolution and adaptation. The Portland protests though sustained (at the time that this is being written, over the course of four months) in some sense have languished. The police are being run ragged nightly, but so too are the protesters. As articulated before, the police also have the advantage of knowing almost exactly what will unfold on any given night, precisely because we have become routine. The reintroduction of spontaneity back into the demos would serve a twofold purpose, both offering a tactical advantage over the police and reinvigorating a crowd that must sustain itself on the vitriol of its own actions. This would mean: making anti-capitalism a central component of any action, understanding that the infrastructure of police repression extends well beyond precincts to courthouses, judges, contractors, prisons, politicians, etc., and making tactical adjustments as well, plotting actions that ensure accessibility, while at the same time affording a wide range of activities, from noise demos to occupations to spicier kinds of things. If the police are occupied at a demo, and already stretched thin due to long hours and being short staffed then other parts of the city are less likely to have coverage.

Make impossible demands

Or better yet, make none. It is a tired truth that there is no meaningful means of bargaining with the state. Rather than sitting down with your enemies, let your actions speak for you. Capitalists and the sorry state officials they steward have little respect for anything but private property. It is both the source of their ability to maintain control and the *raison d'être* for the police to exist at all. People are at their most powerful when they threaten the sanctity of the property relation. Each series of flames potentially erodes a bit more of the illusion that maintains contemporary society.

Persevere

In every sense of the word, outlast the fuckers. Part of any winning strategy is turning your opponent's strengths into weaknesses. The police have expended countless chemical weapons and impact munitions, as part of a full scale assault on the bodies, minds, and senses of protestors. To counter their noxious endeavors would mean to embrace a caustic politics oneself. To be *acrid*.

