

Guerrilla Warrior-Mages:
Tiqqun and Magic: The Gathering

ABSTRACT:

If, as asserted by the French collective Tiqqun's *This Is Not a Program* (2001), we are essentially living in a global colony, where the 1% control the 99%, then it follows that the revolutionary struggle should strategically reorient itself as guerrilla warfare. The agents of this war, Tiqqun characterize, in part, by drawing on ethnologists Pierre de Clastres and Ernesto de Martino, specifically their figures of the Indigenous American warrior and the Southern Italian sorcerer, respectively. Hybridizing these two figures into that of the "warrior-mage," the present article posits an actionable present-day exemplar thereof in players of the massively popular trading and online card game, Magic: The Gathering (MTG). More specifically, I propose a strategic mapping of MTG's five colors of magic onto the five divisions of a coalition against late capitalist Empire, which I call the "Warrior-Mage Guild," including liberation clerics, animal rights activists, propagandists (in W.E.B. Du Bois' sense), anti-psychiatrists, hackers, saboteurs, and those who (put strategically vaguely) appear to threaten decolonizing force contra Empire.

Keywords: Tiqqun; Pierre Clastres; Ernesto de Martino; magic; guerrilla warfare

The prognosis is grim from the anonymous French collective Tiqqun, whose name reflects an ancient Jewish phrase (*tikkun olam*, meaning "repairing the world"). "The unique thing about Empire," they assert, "is that it has expanded its colonization over the whole of existence and over all that exists" (Tiqqun 2011: 66). Thus, the appropriate response is a kind of global guerrilla warfare. More specifically, Tiqqun has been identified (along with Theorie Communiste) with the school of "communization," roughly defined as the immediate creation of communist spaces and practices, at intrapersonal, interpersonal and macropolitical levels (including through refusals to work, perruque, protests, sabotage, arson, hacking, etc.). Engagement with Tiqqun in Anglophone philosophy scholarship is almost nonexistent, and the few exceptions are categorically negative and dismissive, viewing Tiqqun and communization as naïve, aestheticizing, voluntarist, and as ignoring the reality of contemporary social conditions.¹

¹ See, for two examples, Roberts 2013 and Ruth 2014.

For my part, I advocate for a plurality of center-left and leftist approaches to social justice and revolution, and am uninterested in whether Tiquun is uniquely “right” about the left way forward. Rather, particularly in light of the Kyle Rittenhouse “not guilty” verdict and the “Great Resignation” sweeping the U.S. (in 2022), I wish to amplify yet another unique contribution, recognizing the Nietzschean value of experimentation and failure, the rejection of which would undermine the creativities that may yet repair the world. From an abundance of caution, I will frame this as a hypothetical proposal: *if we indeed lived in a global Empire and were thus collectively the colonized, then guerrilla warfare would be ethically justified, and one effective facilitator of Tiquun’s communization might be to repurpose and expand existing networks of Magic: The Gathering (MTG) players to empower desertion and decolonizing force.*

MTG was originally created in 1993 by Richard Garfield, an ivy league Ph.D. candidate in Mathematics, and now boasts 20 million users, having been translated into eleven languages.² The core of the game’s mythology is the concept of “mana,” the material energy basis of magic, which is divided into five colors (and one colorless form), each of which represents a different philosophical approach to the world. And MTG players, who are mythologized in the game as “Planeswalkers,” are invited to identify with any combination of these six colors. *Hypothetically*, one could retool this six-part system to correspond to six different communizing ways-of-life advocated by Tiquun. The result, what I will call the “Warrior-Mage Guild,” could help empower a more effective coordination of decolonizing guerrilla warfare today, and redirect intra-leftist quarrels into a concerted counterforce to late capitalist Empire.³

² For more on MTG’s history, see Duffy 2015.

³ The term “guild” here reflects this project’s origin in the Birmingham Philosophy Guild, a combination discussion/support/activist group that I founded ten years ago, and which I have previously argued (here in *Philosophy Today*) should be replicated and redeployed toward revolutionary social justice, on the model of ancient Dionysian practice. See Hall 2022a.

Broadly speaking, regarding the five colors of “mana,” green intensifies strength, blue siphons strength, white intensifies life, black siphons life, gray builds being, and red siphons being. When applied to Tiqqun’s communizing vision, some possible pairings of these colors and guerrilla warfare roles are as follows: “green” animal rights activists, eco-freedom fighters, and community gardeners, “blue” radical educators and propagandists (in W.E.B. Du Bois’ sense), “white” liberation clerics, medics and anti-psychiatrists, “black” martial artists and users of decolonizing force, “colorless” hackers, and “red” (alleged) destroyers of colonizing resources (put strategically vaguely regarding red and black).⁴ Overall, such a Warrior-Mage Guild could channel the constructive powers of green, white, and colorless warrior-mages into the resistance (away from propping up and reproducing Empire), while coordinating with blue, red, and black mages to make their acts of disruption and destruction more effective (instead of condemning anti-colonizer destructive force categorically).

Major benefits of this Warrior-Mage Guild would include (1) tapping into the energy and extensive gaming networks of MTG, (2) pushing back against contemporary leftist stigmatizing and marginalizing of violent resisters (which notably includes many Indigenous and other Third World people), (3) providing a vocabulary of rituals and language (especially bodily gesture) for solidifying practices and connections, (4) consolidating a veritable rainbow of reformers, revolutionaries, libertarians, and others who might be persuaded to join a leftist coalition (but tend today to instead fight amongst themselves), (5) rediscovering through its performance the true magic (which capitalist fetishism illegitimately redirects onto capital and its commodities), namely human interactions in spaces where people are free, spontaneous, improvisational, and creative. Admittedly, there are also drawbacks and risks to this approach, including possibly

⁴ See Du Bois 1926. For a contemporary application to mass incarceration, see Hall 2014.

diverting political energy into quietist escapism, perpetuating the illusion that self-contained aesthetic experience is necessarily and sufficiently revolutionary, and reinforcing the exploitation involved in MTG’s status as a capitalist commodity (the revenues of whose company, Wizards of the Coast, in the second quarter of 2021, were \$400 million).⁵ But as Ernst Bloch persuasively argues, to refuse the risk of hope is implicitly to endorse the vicious status quo, and every artwork has both an ideological and a utopian side.⁶ It is with the latter side of MTG that I am concerned here, as illuminated by Tiqqun’s *This Is Not a Program*, to which I now turn.

I. “This Is Not a Program”

This Is Not a Program and its eponymously titled first section, do not mean (as its authors playfully suggest), the lack of any proposal or schema for revolution. Rather, the phrase means that the struggle for revolution today is not the sort of thing—politically or metaphysically—that admits of programming, insofar as the latter is a top-down activity associated with a centralized, hierarchical power. On the contrary, revolution for Tiqqun requires a hacking of all programs. A disruption, a fragmentation, and a secession, both without and within, in order to liberate the parts of oneself and the parts of one’s world that resist full programming. This position situates Tiqqun within the Autonomist tradition of Marxian theory, albeit at the extreme edge (or radical basis) thereof, insofar as Tiqqun reject not only the proletariat qua the privileged political subject of revolution. They also reject even the subject of “the subject” per se.

⁵ For more details on the economic dimension of MTG at present, see McCoy 2021.

⁶ See, for example, Bloch 1987. For a defense and contemporary application of Bloch’s view, see Hall 2022b.

More precisely, instead of a struggle between two economic classes, Tiqqun argue, “The front line no longer cuts through the middle of society; it now runs through the middle of each of us, between what makes us a *citizen*, our predicates, and all the rest” (Tiqqun 2011: 13). This distinction already opens the door for thinking and actualizing this thought within MTG, since each Planeswalker uses as many different decks of Magic cards as they wish (representing the powers of infinitely many “planes” of the multiverse), each card of which (in these decks) represents a possible predicate that the Planeswalker can adopt or discard at will. Put in the terms of communization theory, there exists virtual revolutionary being (or magic) within each of us. And that magical being needs only the ritualized practices and gestures of free interpersonal interactions to be actualized. For that purpose, MTG offers vocabularies (or choreographies), schemas and training grounds. Put more simply, MTG helps players dramatize the relativity of the different parts of their lives, empowering their creativity to actively shape all those parts.

One advantage that Tiqqun find in today’s situation (compared to that of the proletariat in Marx and Engels’ era) is that, in our present day, “A revolutionary process can be set in motion from any point in the biopolitical fabric” (Tiqqun 2011: 12). Borrowing the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, Tiqqun identify this fabric as belonging to “one plane of consistency,” namely “anti-imperial subversion,” to which subversion Tiqqun give the name “the Imaginary Party” (13). The latter phrase is particularly resonant with MTG, and at two different levels. First, at a linguistic level, given the centrality of imagination to MTG, and its social ontology as a party game for friends, one could literally describe MTG as an “imaginary party,” with each Planeswalker as both an actual member of everyday society and also (at least virtually) a mage on the plane of consistency that is the multiverse. Second, at a metaphysical level, as argued for example by contemporary Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, reality may in fact consist of

multiple planes or dimensions (including, in Amazonian tribes according to Viveiros de Castro, the planes of humans, nonhuman animals, plants, certain artifacts, and spirits), and it is the unique power of magic-wielders (in the Amazonian case, “shamans”) to cross from one plane to another.⁷ Thus, unless one baselessly assumes a Western metaphysics as superior to this Indigenous Amazonian one, the latter view remains a live, and potentially liberating, possibility.

In support of this resonance, just like this imaginary party of Planeswalkers and their magic card decks, Tiquun observe that, “Like every other plane of consistency, the Imaginary Party is at once already present and yet to be built” (Tiquun 2011: 13). That is, (a) there are many existing magic card decks already composed and ready for new Planeswalkers to play, and (b) Planeswalkers (or groups thereof) can always construct new decks as well. Elaborating on this point, Tiquun claim that “today,” as in MTG, “building the Party means *establishing forms-of-life in their difference, intensifying, complicating relations between them, developing as subtly as possible the civil war between us*” (13). That is, each Planeswalker is a unique, singular being, composed of indefinitely many other singularities, overlaid with late capitalist programming, so each of us is always fighting an existential civil war within, along with the intermittent civil wars in the form of MTG games among friends and strangers.

The historical basis, or social laboratory, for Tiquun’s analysis is “1970s Italy,” which according to the authors “remains, in every respect, the insurrectional moment *closest to us*,” as opposed to the conventional historical landmark of May ’68 (Tiquun 2011: 14). “We must start” in Italy’s Movement of ’77, Tiquun clarify, “not in order to write the history of a past movement, but to hone the weapons for the war currently taking place” (14). Similarly, MTG is also structured around external and internal histories, those of various real and imaginary worlds, and

⁷ See, for example, Viveiros de Castro 2016.

those of its own previous sets of cards, for the past twenty-eight years of their publication. In both cases, the idea is the same: the community is always at least implicitly drawing on, and weaponizing, some past. So it would be better to be mindful and intentional about which parts of which pasts we emphasize.

Digging into recent revolutionary history, Tiquun elaborates that, “In all Western countries, ’68 marks the meeting and collision of the old worker’s movement—fundamentally socialist and senescent—with the first *constituted* segments of the Imaginary Party” (Tiquun 2011: 26). The results of this intra-leftist civil war varied, according to Tiquun, with the condition of the worker’s movement in each country. In places where “the workers’ movement had long been eliminated, as in the United States or Germany, there was an immediate move from student revolt to armed struggle,” as for example with “the Black Panther Party, the Weathermen, the Diggers” (27). Note that each of these three groups was a small vanguard with a highly developed aesthetic and ethical program, and thus analogous in that respect to Planeswalker communities. The crucial difference being that the latter are openly aware of, and tolerate a much wider array of, of philosophical and political perspectives.

The latter point is illustrated by the central importance of MTG’s “color pie” philosophy, which I mentioned above, and about which Mark Rosewater, Head Game Designer of MTG (since 2003), has written a lengthy series of blog posts for the official website. In brief, the color “white” values “peace” (using “structure”), while “blue” values “perfection” (using “knowledge”), “black” values “power” (using “opportunity”), “red” values “freedom” (using “action”), and “green” values “acceptance” (using “wisdom”).⁸ Translated into conventional political philosophy, and speaking approximately, white is communitarian, blue is liberal, black

⁸ For Rosewater’s recent introduction to this collection of writings, see <https://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/making-magic/lets-talk-color-pie-2021-10-11>.

is libertarian, red is anarchist, and green is tribalist. What is remarkable, given this political diversity, is that all are represented and included in the ritualistic space of MTG. Anticipating the terms that Tiquun borrow from Giorgio Agamben, each color could be understood as representing a “way-of-life,” which in turn suggests that MTG is itself a metalevel way-of-life, or “way-of-ways-of-life.” In this way, MTG might represent an ideal locus for leftist political education and recruitment, as recently championed, for example, by Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia.⁹

Thus, MTG, like the abovementioned Black Panthers, illustrates Tiquun’s claim that “*the proletariat is that which experiences itself as a form-of-life*” (Tiquun 2011: 30). In short, “It is communist or it is nothing” (30). In other words, the Panthers had so little, individually—but so much, insofar as they were interconnected—that their political union was arguably a matter, not merely of life-or-death, but of metaphysically existence-or-nothingness. So, too, the Planeswalkers, albeit to a different degree and in different ways. To wit, MTG players are taken almost exclusively from the ranks of the proletariat in Tiquun’s sense, namely “the rabble in all classes” (29). And without the community provided by MTG, many of them cannot exist in the way that makes them feel most alive, creating meaningfulness beyond the bare life of biological continuance.

The working class, by contrast, according to Tiquun, is the class of socialism. Thus, as the “history of creeping May demonstrates better than anything,” the working class is the class of compromising reform, “the vehicle for Capital-Utopia” (32). In this way, the working class, historically, became an army deployed against, for example, the Movement of ’77 proletariat, whom Tiquun describe as “an often cacophonous chorus of local revolutionary processes,

⁹ See Biglieri and Cadahia 2021.

moving, town by town, according to a distinctive rhythm” (33). So, too, the spread of MTG, from stranger to friend, game shop to website, each rowdy game flaring with conflictual views and styles, yet subordinated to the minimal rhythmic structure imposed by the game’s mechanics. Like the proletariat, the Planeswalkers’ form consists of grassroots practices and communities, albeit by pirating or siphoning resources from centralized institutions (such as MTG’s current parent company, the toy and game developer Hasbro).

II. *The Land of Remorse*

This rhetoric of “chorus” and accents of dissonance, particularly in light of Tiqqun’s invocation of Ernesto de Martino, also suggests Dionysian tragedy, especially when its energy and rage spill over into tyrannicidal revolution, as in the slave revolt of Spartacus. The latter, as historian Barry Strauss notes, was fomented by Spartacus’ wife/mistress, a priestess of Dionysus who offered a prophetic vision of his war with Rome.¹⁰ De Martino also affirms this connection between Spartacus and revolutionary Dionysian practice in his remarkable study of the tarantella dance of Southern Italy, *The Land or Remorse*.¹¹ (Tiqqun, though, do not discuss that work, instead focusing on de Martino’s *The World of Magic*, to which I return below). In the former text, de Martino notes that “in Magna Graecia, and especially in Taranto”—which gave its name to the tarantella and the possessed dance of tarantism—“tradition also gives a special prominence to participation in Dionysian cults” (de Martino 2005: 210). More precisely, “In the Bacchic revival of the second century, Taranto was one of the originating centers of the movement,” which “even gained sway in Rome, probably under the influence of the 30,000 Tarantines whom

¹⁰ See Strauss 2009, and Hall 2022a.

¹¹ See de Martino 2005.

Fabio had brought there as slaves,” leading to “the blatantly social character of the revolts which took place at the time of Spartacus” (210). In summary, the Dionysian cult spread from ancient Greece, through Southern Italy, which supplied the revolutionaries for Spartacus’ revolt.

This Dionysian tradition continues in a diluted form, de Martino claims, in present-day tarantism, where “as a ritual, tarantism is consistently characterized by the gradual choreutic-musical resolution of a crisis state in which the breakdown of individual presence prevails,” though this ritual has been “divested of any trace of cultural dignity or symbolic potency and receded to the level of individual morbid episodes, subject to the evaluation of a psychiatrist” (de Martino 2005: 93, 75). In short, Dionysian ritual has been historically quarantined from a political religion into a psychological prison. Therein lies the urgency for its resurrection by the Planeswalkers, described in MTG’s newly-released first graphic novel as “those beings with the *spark*, who may *dance* from one plane to the other” (emphasis original).¹²

It is precisely these openly violent tendencies of the historical proletariat, according to Tiqqun, that the worker’s movement used as a pretext to violently suppress the proletariat. “The call to denounce this or that person as a terrorist,” Tiqqun claim, “was thus the call to differentiate oneself from oneself *as capable of violence*, to project far from oneself one’s latent warlike tendency, to introduce in oneself the economic disjunction that makes us a political subject, a citizen” (Tiqqun 2011: 35). Returning to the example of Spartacus, as long as he was a gladiator, he was a celebrated and rewarded hero, but as soon as he turned that violence on the institutions that had literally enslaved him, he became the archenemy of Empire. Whereas repressing the warrior within turned the proletarian/warrior into a collaborator. Similarly, part of the stigma against MTG and other tabletop card gaming is its engagement in separatist,

¹² See MacKay 2021.

fantasized campaigns of violence against the existing order. This, despite the equally violent tendencies of socially lauded activities such as U.S. American football, in which aggressive energy is channeled into controlled violent competition. But in the latter case, only in such a way that it generates massive profits and social capital for Empire's most powerful institutions, including the academy, mainstream media, and the government.

Elaborating on the violence distinctive to the proletariat and its present-day analogue, and how that violence defines their identity or lack thereof, Tiqqun write that "The Imaginary Party is not substantially a remainder of the social whole, but the *fact* of this remainder, that the represented always exceeds its representation" (Tiqqun 2011: 43). Thus, anyone can become a proletarian warrior, but that identity is not something that a person can possess in a static way through the mere fact of their group membership. "There is no revolutionary identity" under Empire, Tiqqun insist; instead "non-identity" is what is "revolutionary" (43). Thus, in Tiqqun's formula, the Imaginary Party should aim "to become imperceptible, to conspire," which means "to distinguish between our presence and what we are for representation, in order to play with representation" (43). Put in the terms of de Martino's tarantism study, one should dance the role of each identity with improvisational virtuosity, exchanging identities like masks or costumes.

It is the latter art, according to Tiqqun, that distinguishes "the plebs" (or working class) from the "the proletariat," and which motivates "All the effort of the workers' movement to distinguish between honest, strike-ready workers from 'agitators,' 'rioters,' and other 'unconscionable elements'" (Tiqqun 2011: 46). In other words, Empire (in part through its worker-socialist collaborators, willing or no) is desperate to divide the "good" from the "bad." Thus, in Tiqqun's view, the proletarians must labor to pass as "good" in order to do the most revolutionary good. In the case of MTG, no Planeswalker is only a "Planeswalker," and none are

uniquely defined as such institutionally. Because in an institution, they are merely “consumers.” Moreover, no Planeswalker is only one color, or color combination, or card deck, or specific set of creatures and spells. Instead, they play with all these images and imaginations, and thereby their own imperial representations. They dissolve in their creative play, and thus practice a line of flight that escapes imperial control and surveillance.

Returning to the example of the *Autonomia* movement of ‘77, Tiquun claim its primary achievement was “to combine with the event as gesture the event as language” (Tiquun 2011: 53). I take this to mean that the Autonomists made the name “autonomy” stand for the irruption of new events or processes, each of which was empowered to grow and develop on its own terms. Clarifying this point, Tiquun write that “The big misunderstanding” on all sides regarding *Autonomia* “is that autonomy wasn’t [in Tiquun’s view] the predicate demanded by subjects,” but rather the predicate demanded “*by becomings [devenir]*” (54). More simply, it is not the proletarian “I” nor “we” who demand autonomy, but rather aspects and forces within the “I” or “we”—the best aspects of individuals and communities, in defiance of their late capitalist ideological programming and complicities. In MTG’s terms, Planeswalkers only want the best and most imaginative parts of themselves to come alive and grow stronger in their play, and they only want to translate those best parts into everyday life, forwarding the struggle against Empire in whatever ways they can, regardless of what that means for their (pre)existing identities.

In Tiquun’s words, what is at issue in *Autonomia* “is not the affirmation of ‘new subjects,’” but rather “their violent, practical, active desubjectivation, the rejection and betrayal of the role that has been assigned to them *as subjects*,” in a Deleuzian “*flight*, a line of flight” (Tiquun 2011: 55). More concretely, “Autonomy therefore means: desertion, deserting family, deserting the office, deserting school, deserting all supervision, deserting men’s, women’s, and

the citizen's roles...endless desertion" (56). Such desertion is also prevalent in MTG, as Planeswalkers desert "real life" to play the game, interrupting being a barista or factor worker or lecturer by becoming a blue mage, a goblin, and/or a dragon god. Crucially for Tiquun, these desertions never cohere into one trajectory or unified flow, which "is exactly the move that [Antonio] Negri now atavistically reproduces when he calls a singular *multitude* something whose essence is, in his own words, a multiplicity" (58). Countering Negri's unification, Tiquun assert that *Autonomia* "was nothing more than this incoercible movement of flight, this staccato of ruptures" (59). In MTG's terms, the Planeswalkers are the cacophony of noisy musical opera they make, conflicting arias and dissonant symphonies, in the revolutions of what are already, in de Martino's terms, a therapeutic ritual dance, and which may yet become Dionysian liberation.

Fleshing this out in terms of revolutionary strategy, Tiquun assert that "The first campaign against Empire failed," historically speaking, as evidenced by how "so many guerrilla groups have been easily suppressed" (Tiquun 2011: 65). Fortunately, however, "After twenty years of counterrevolution, the second act in the anti-imperialist struggle has now begun" (66). Likely thinking of Huey P. Newton's famous autobiography, *Revolutionary Suicide* (given their previous invocation of the Black Panthers), Tiquun define this historically second revolutionary campaign as follows: "*We must invent a form of war such that the defeat of Empire no longer obliges suicide, but rather to recognize ourselves as more and more ALIVE*" (66). In this way, Tiquun again trumpet Nietzschean-Deleuzian positivity over Hegelian negation. Empire is less threatened by a minority of the proletariat committing revolutionary suicide, than it is by a majority of the proletariat finding ways to become so alive that they increasingly withdraw from Empire (as for example in MTG), thereby cutting it off from the energy it pathologically and unjustly siphons from us.

Crucial to Tiqqun’s method of increasing vitality is their claim, initially counterintuitive, that “Empire is not the enemy” (Tiqqun 2011: 67). Instead, Empire for them is “no more than the *hostile environment* opposing us at every turn” (67). As for the collective organism struggling to survive and flourish in that hostile environment, Tiqqun assert that the Imaginary Party is “engaged in a struggle over the recomposition of an ethical fabric” (67). Note the extreme and costly implications of this view. This second campaign against Empire is fought on the universal terrain of ethics, fighting to renew human interconnection in an environment that is dead set on rupturing any such connection. For this reason, Tiqqun claim, “from now on *our very existence, every aspect of it, is war*” (67). That is, unlike the first campaign, which was of limited duration, and which only required able-bodied men in their prime to fight, and only part of the time, today’s second campaign is open-ended, enlisting everyone, and every part of them, to fight all the time (in the internal civil war of the citizen versus what escapes therefrom). Put in terms of MTG’s mythology, once a Planeswalker’s “spark” has been ignited, they are forever metaphysically extended across the infinite planes of the multiverse.

Tiqqun then launch into the details of this total warfare, writing that “the first movement of this war is *reappropriation*,” specifically of “the means of living-and-struggling” (Tiqqun 2011: 68). More precisely, through (1) “the squat, the occupation or communication of private spaces,” (2) “the constitution of autonomous languages, syntaxes, means of communication, of an autonomous culture,” (3) “the communization of combat techniques, the formation of self-defense forces, arms”; and (4) “the distribution of medical power-knowledge, of theft and expropriation techniques” (68). In MTG’s terms, this war requires Planeswalkers to (1) occupy and repurpose existing private spaces (such as individual living rooms and basements, and coffee shop seating areas) into communal spaces of play, (2) develop and perfect fantastic verbal and

nonverbal gestures (including the formal gestures of the game, and the informal gestures that accompany and enrich the overall experience), (3) channel the resulting groups of gaming friends and allies into real-life self-defense training, and (4) distribute information and resources regarding effective anti-capitalist decolonizing force (putting the last point vaguely, again, for strategic reasons).

In contrast to secession “from above” by the superrich, and secession “from below” in the ghettos, Tiquun explain, the desertion that they advocate here is “a secession *through the middle*” (Tiquun 2011: 69). Applied to MTG, while both the superrich and the destitute are small groups, and visible enough to be effectively managed and surveilled by Empire, even a fraction of the 20,000,000 Planeswalkers—many of whom possess at least some actionable knowledge and resources, including literal and social capital—would be both large enough and invisible enough to pose an overwhelming and uncontrollable counterforce to Empire.

III. “Sorrows of the [Civilized] Warrior”

“What we are simply getting at here,” Tiquun write, “is the constitution of *war machines*,” a term coined by Pierre Clastres but made famous by Deleuze and Guattari, and which Tiquun parse as “a certain coincidence between living and struggling, a coincidence that is never given without simultaneously requiring its construction” (Tiquun 2011: 69). Like a MTG card deck, these war machines are not provided beforehand, and are never truly finished or complete. Instead, they require intermittent, ongoing flows of time and energy, in which process the game itself evolves. Tiquun are careful to distinguish this “war machine,” however, from what it can become in the moment that it “degenerates into an *army*” (70). “All militant formations, all terrible communities,” the authors concede, “are war machines that have survived

their own extinction in this petrified form” (70). In the MTG world, for example, some infamous players fill their decks with maddening one-off tricks, or load them with cards that have been officially “banned” from tournament play, in most cases because such cards bring all play to a sudden stop.

It is crucial to distinguish this pejorative state, however, from the normal way in which MTG facilitates and rewards the breaking of its own rules. That is, most of the best and most popular cards include additional abilities that bend or break the regular rules of the game. For example, if a “creature” card’s description contains the word “Trample,” then any positive difference between an attacking creature’s “strength” and the defending creature’s “strength” is deducted from the “life” of the defending Planeswalker. (This is contrary to the usual combat rules, according to which the most damage that one creature can do to another is destroy it, with no direct impact on the defending player). There are many such functions in MTG, which could also be understood as rules that are themselves exceptions to more general rules; and the complex conflicts among these micro-rules and macro-rules is arguably one of the most enjoyable dimensions of the game.

Returning to Tiquun’s analysis of the positive militancy of the war machine, they claim that “There is no war machine except in movement, even hindered, even imperceptible movement, in movement following the propensity for increasing power” (Tiquun 2011: 71). This recalls de Martino’s analysis of the ritualized healing dance of the tarantella, regarding which “Everything takes place as if a certain rhythmic order of sound unblocks the movement, that very elemental sign of life” (93). Elaborating on this positive militancy, Tiquun assert as follows: “*never strike beyond one’s positivity*, such is the vital principle of every war machine” (71). More concretely, this means that “Each space conquered from Empire, from its hostile

environment, must correspond to our capacity to fill it, to configure it, to inhabit it” (71). This point also recalls de Martino’s analysis of tarantism, more specifically its elaborate rituals regarding the configuration of the performance space. Finally on this point, “in so doing,” Tiquun’s war machine, like de Martino’s dancing one, “will impose its own temporality,” and will do so everywhere, “since every local attack is also an attack on Empire” (71). This is also, according to de Martino, true for every attack of the *taranta* (the dancer) against the top-down imposition of Catholicism onto folk magic ritual. So, too, every Planeswalker attack against the top-down imposition of capitalism onto MTG’s potentially communizing creation of magical interconnection outside the surveilled market.

It is here that Tiquun first invoke Clastres by name, in a subsection entitled (after Clastres’ essay, “Sorrows of the Savage Warrior”), “Sorrows of the Civilized Warrior” (Tiquun 2011: 73).¹³ “It is commonly acknowledged,” Tiquun begin, “that the Movement of ’77 was defeated because it was incapable,” generally speaking, “of relating in any significant way, to its ‘violence’” (73). This incapacity is crucial for Tiquun given their view that “no consequential struggle has ever been waged without arms”—though Tiquun also emphasize “the difference between being armed and using arms,” implying that the mere appearance of the will to violence might suffice (74). On this basis, and channeling Clastres’ distinction between “primitive societies” generally, and the “warrior societies” subset thereof, Tiquun write that “Every war machine is by nature a society, a society without a state” (74). But “under Empire,” the war machine is “a *warrior* society, which means that “a minority of beings must take war as the *exclusive* aim of their existence” (74). In MTG, the latter would correspond to the Planeswalkers, as opposed to those whose metaphysical “spark” has not (yet) been activated.

¹³ See Clastres 2010.

Specifying, in the case of *Autonomia*, this incapacity to relate to violence, Tiqqun write that “To us, establishing a central relationship with violence only means establishing a central relationship with the warrior minority” (Tiqqun 2011: 74). It is here the authors reference “a text from 1977, the last by Clastres, *The Sorrows of the Savage Warrior*” (74). In Clastres’ words from that text, this minority is “*the ensemble of warriors*,” whom he describes as members of “an order whose superiority is socially acknowledged (a ‘nobility’ say the chroniclers),” thus constituting “a sort of chivalry whose prestige reflects upon the whole society” (Clastres 2010: 281, 287). In Tiqqun’s summary of Clastres’ view, “The warrior is a figure of amputation,” insofar as he is “a being who feels he exists only through combat” (Tiqqun 2011: 75). On the one hand, “nothing is sadder” than these warriors; but on the other hand, “nothing is more moving either,” because the warrior’s “sole desire” is “to disappear,” albeit with “a certain style,” in a glorious pursuit of death for the community (75). Put simply, the warrior lives for prestige from the tribe, which requires that he continually expose himself to greater and greater danger, the peak of which is attacking an enemy force alone, making him ultimately suicidal (on Clastres’ analysis). So, too, in MTG, where Planeswalkers are often isolated, brooding, young cismen, many of whom struggle with suicide.

However, as with Newton’s Black Panther revolutionary suicide, and de Martino’s peasants in Southern Italy, the Indigenous South American warrior is also deeply mindful of the welfare of his community, according to Clastres. In Tiqqun’s summary of his analysis, although the warrior “is unable to belong to any community other than the false community, the *terrible* community, of warriors who have only their solitude in common,” nevertheless “there is also a tenderness, even a gentleness about the warrior, which is this silence, this half-presence,” namely the fact that the warrior only withdraws because “otherwise he would only drag those around

him into the abyss” (Tiqqun 2011: 75, 76). Planeswalkers, too, often fail to belong outside of MTG, which can at times degenerate into a “terrible community” of lonely outcasts. Yet in unguarded conversation they often express compassion and thoughtfulness toward the larger community, whom they are typically anxious to protect from their own misery.

Though Tiqqun’s analysis of Clastres here seems true as far as it goes, it also arguably leaves out three crucial points in his work that bear directly on their schema for warrior-mages. First, there is the other most famous aspect of Clastres’ work (along with his characterization of Indigenous societies as “being-for-war”), namely his conception of South American tribal chiefs as completely lacking in conventional power or authority, even during warfare. This is expressed, for example, in his book, *Society Against the State*, which describes the chief as one who merely (a) performs a daily exhortation of the tribe’s conventional wisdom and moral values, (b) creates and distributes any goods desired by the community, and (c) attempts to resolve disputes (Clastres 2013: 29). Second, these societies according to Clastres are inherently anti-work. Even though they “produced a quantity of *surplus* food often *equivalent* to the amount required for the annual consumption of the community,” he claims, they nevertheless averaged a “mean apportionment of less than four hours daily for ordinary work-time,” leading him to dub them “societies characterized by the rejection of work” (14, 194, 196). Third, and most importantly, there are the “shamans” of the Tupi-Guarani tribes, regarding which there are four primary points worth mentioning here.

First, “the seductive power of the sorcerers’ speech” (in the missionaries’ words) singlehandedly saved the community from forcible conversion to Christianity (Clastres 2013: 158). Second, the shamans, at the time of Clastres’ firsthand experience with them, were “much less concerned to restore health to the sick body than to acquire, through dance, that internal

strength and firmness of spirit which alone are apt to please” the Guarani gods (161). Note here the centrality of dance, which further connects Clastres’ warriors to de Martino’s *tarantas* (who were similarly possessed). Thirdly, these shamans “are able to transform themselves into jaguars,” because “from a certain viewpoint, *shamans are jaguars*,” which recalls again Newtown’s Black Panthers and de Martino’s *tarantas*. For the latter, he writes, “it is necessary to dance with the spider, indeed be the dancing spider,” whose bite allegedly caused their possession, in an “imposition of one’s own choreutic rhythm upon that of the spider” (de Martino 2005: 149-150, 36). To repeat, the magic of tarantism involves, in some way, a human becoming a spider. And finally regarding the Tupi-Guarani tribes, one group of Guarani shamans deployed “a prophetic speech” to inspire the people to abandon their homeland, because their “society was increasingly coming under the authority of the chiefs,” thereby mounting a successful “insurrectional act of the prophets against the chiefs” (Clastres 2013: 215, 217, 218).

As if channeling this insurrectional power of the shamans, Tiqqun conclude their discussion of Clastres as follows: “The subversive counter-society *must*, we *must* recognize the prestige connected to the exploits of every warrior, of every combatant organization,” including each “kidnapping” and even “assassination”—but only (*pace* Clastres) “specifically in order to protect ourselves from warriors, *in order to condemn them to death*” (Tiqqun 2011: 78). Why? Because, as for example in the Movement of ’77, the Autonomists’ “fear was that the minority would break off into an autonomous military force,” which “is exactly what the state, with its ‘strategy of tension,’ was aiming at” (79). That is, the state “wanted to cut the minority off from the Movement and in so doing to make it as hated within the Movement as the state already was” (79). That the Italian state was successful in this endeavor is clear from the chapter’s closing claim that this militaristic separatism is “the *apparatus* by which Empire crushed the Movement,

and which it is now exhuming in order to prevent the return of anti-capitalist struggle” (79). The truth of the latter claim, I would add, seems vividly clear in light of the Black Lives Matter protests of the summer of 2020, and the way the U.S. state responded (which is the political movement in which today’s Planeswalkers currently seem most passionately invested).

Tiqqun then proceed to dig deeper into this collapse of *Autonomia*, further dividing the latter’s warrior minority into two parts, one invisibly diffuse and the other visibly centralized. Tiqqun condemn the latter as follows: “there is a strategic axiom common to the BR” (the Red Brigade, the foremost such militant group, linked to Negri) and “all combatant organizations, and that is to oppose Empire *as a subject*, a collective, revolutionary subject” (the collective political subject that Negri and Hardt famously dub “the multitude”) (Tiqqun 2011: 82). The fatal cost of this axiom of subjectivity, Tiqqun claim, is “forcing” the combatant organization’s “members to eventually go underground and in so doing to sever themselves from the ethical fabric of the Movement, from its life as a war machine” (82). Again deploying dance-resonant rhetoric, Tiqqun claim that “the armed groups never know how to get in synch with the existing movements” (82).

Against this militaristic model, Tiqqun valorize “diffuse guerilla warfare” as “the defining characteristic of *Autonomia*,” insofar as that type of warfare “alone is capable of bringing down Empire” (Tiqqun 2011: 84). This preferred method consists of “disseminating oneself in a multiplicity of foci, like so many *riffts* in the capitalist whole,” as for example with *Autonomia*, which “was less a collection of radio stations, bands, weapons, celebrations, riots, and squats, than a certain intensity in the circulation of bodies between all these points” (84). Put in de Martino’s terms, not the dancer, but the dance (not the *taranta*, but the tarantella) is autonomy. But this is exactly the truth that Empire cannot see, Tiqqun insist, which causes

Empire to generate the fantasy that will eventually prove its own undoing: “Desperately compensating for its inability to achieve any kind of ethical depth”—and remember, the reconstruction of an ethical fabric is Tiqqun’s central goal—“Empire constructs for itself the fantasy of an enemy it is capable of destroying,” namely the Imaginary Party (87). For example, Empire literally helped create MTG, and now it is up to the Planeswalkers to remake that creation into communizing ways-of-life.

Returning to the contrast between the first and second historical campaigns against Empire, Tiqqun claim that “Empire’s reconfiguration of hostilities has largely gone unnoticed,” precisely “because it first appeared outside metropolises, in former colonies” (thus echoing thinkers like Hannah Arendt in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*) (Tiqqun 2011: 90). That is, Empire has turned its colonizing weapons on the peoples of the Global North. In short, “*the enemy has been domesticated*” (90). And if “the army has become the police,” then “the enemy has become a ‘terrorist’” (91). Counterintuitively, one result of this change is that it has “gradually dissolved the liberal state into the Imaginary Party,” since “the only way to fight guerrilla warfare, to fight the Imaginary Party, is to employ its techniques,” according to famous theorists of Empire itself, such as “British officer Frank Kitson, the man who established the strategic doctrine thanks to which the British state defeated the Irish insurgency and NATO the Italian revolutionaries” (92, 94). This explains in part the wild popularity of MTG today, as it is comparable (in terms of its fantastic elements) to the even more popular Marvel films and television. To wit, to defeat socially dissident freaks and geeks, the state rebrands and reimagines itself as an increasingly antisocial, fantastical, imaginary phenomenon as well.

IV. *The World of Magic*

On the title page of the concluding section of *This Is Not a Program*, which features de Martino's *The World of Magic* (to which I turn shortly), Tiqqun explain that this section "represents the founding of S.A.C.S., the Society for the Advancement of Criminal Sciences" (Tiqqun 2011: 135). The authors describe it as "a nonprofit organization whose mission is to anonymously collect, classify, and share all knowledge-powers that may be of use to anti-imperial war machines" (135). According to this second section's epigraph, from Reiner Schürmann, while "'metaphysics' designates that apparatus wherein action requires a principle," for the Imaginary Party, "action appears without principle" (137). Though not a principle, and (allegedly) "not a program," Tiqqun's game plan here is "the refusal to play innocently even one of the games THEY have devised to beguile us," while affirming "the FEROCIOUS desire to crate vertiginous ones of our own" (141). Just so, as I noted above, MTG is the paradigmatic game that one plays by breaking it, breaking it down, and remaking it, in a dizzying complexifying process with no predetermined end. More specifically, each session is a performance filled with speech acts, centered around "spells" that are invoked as verbal speech acts, and/or submitted as nonverbal gestures to be read and interpreted by one's fellow agonists.

Or, in the dancing rhetoric of the *tarantas* of de Martino, to whom Tiqqun then turn directly, in such games Planeswalkers whirl round their axes like dervishes. I use the latter rhetoric to allude to de Martino's claim that that the cultural origin of the healing tarantella dance is the cultural clash between European Christian soldiers in Italy and Muslim invaders, from whose religious tradition the "whirling dervish" originated (de Martino 2005: 215). As noted above, however, rather than this tarantism study, Tiqqun opt for de Martino's *The World of Magic* instead (the English translation of which is currently out of print). More specifically, Tiqqun discuss de Martino's thesis that the nature of presence, at a metaphysical level, is

fundamentally fragile and constructed. Mentioning Heidegger, who had a direct and profound influence on de Martino's concept of presence, Tiqqun observe that, in "extreme cases, known by various names" in Indigenous "civilizations, being-there is totally engulfed by the world, by an emotion, by a perception" (Tiqqun 2011: 144).

This state of crisis is what the Malay people, for example, call "amok" (as in the phrase "to run amok") (Tiqqun 2011: 144). More concretely, Tiqqun relate (from de Martino) that a Malay person, "suddenly finding himself face to face with a tiger," and thereby entering the state of amok, "will start to imitate [the tiger] furiously, possessed by this unexpected perception," much like the *taranta* responds to the alleged bite of the spider by performing a dance that imitates its dancing movements (144). It is to remedy this situation (the breakdown in individual presence called "amok"), that magic enters the picture as a salvific force for the community. More precisely, as Tiqqun summarize de Martino's view, "all magic beliefs, techniques, and institutions exist in order to respond to the situation—to save, protect, or restore threatened presence" (145).

For an example from Tiqqun that resonates strongly with MTG, on the island of Mota (in the South Pacific), one magical strategy to "overcome the crisis of presence provoked by a strong emotional reaction" is "to link the victim of such a reaction with the thing that caused it," which thing is then "declared *atai*" (Tiqqun 2011: 145). Then, the "Shaman establishes a common destiny between the two bodies which are from then on inextricably, ritually linked, to the point that *atai* quite simply means *soul* in the native language" (145). In this way, "supported by the Shaman—in trance, for example," the suffering islander "stages the disintegration in such a way that he gains control of it" (146). More simply, having suffered what one might call a breakdown of soul, the islander enlists the shaman to help create an external soul-supplement, the possession

of which supplement restores the broken soul. “What modern man so bitterly resents in ‘the primitive’,” Tiqqun claim, summarizing de Martino’s view, “is not so much his practice of magic as his audacity in appropriating for himself a right that is judged obscene: that of *evoking* the lability of presence and in so doing of making it *participable*” (146). In other words, such Indigenous people are willing and able to restructure their own perceptions and subjectivities in ways that heal themselves and promote flourishing. This is also done by Planeswalkers, at the cost of a sometimes similarly-intense stigma, infantilization, and abjection from mainstream imperial society.

But de Martino’s analysis does not go far enough for Tiqqun, who criticize his “egregious error, a substantive error, no doubt inherent to every *anthropology*,” namely to have conceived presence “as *an attribute of the human subject*” (Tiqqun 2011: 146). For Tiqqun, by contrast, “the ‘primitive’ displays a greater openness, greater *attention* to the COMING INTO PRESENCE OF BEINGS and, consequently, a greater vulnerability to its fluctuations” (146-147). In short, “modern man” is “simply a primitive who has been made indifferent to the event of beings” (147). In Tiqqun’s alternate metaphysical formulation, “Presence in itself is INHUMAN, an inhumanity that triumphs in the crisis of presence, when being imposes itself with overwhelming urgency” (148). What “must be historicized is not, therefore, the progress of presence toward final stability,” as in Heidegger and de Martino, but rather “the different ways in which presence is given, the different *economies of presence*” (148). Thus, the “generalized crisis of presence” today “is simply due to the ubiquity of the economy in crisis” (148). Just ask the many Planeswalkers today who are unemployed, underemployed, or unsustainably miserable in their work.

To manage this crisis, Tiqqun continue, Empire employs “an immense accumulation of *apparatuses*” (Tiqqun 2011: 148-149). Each “functions as an ek-sistential prosthesis which THEY administer” to the alienated community member, so that the latter “are able to live within the crisis of presence, albeit unwittingly, and to remain there day after day without succumbing” (149). For a few examples, “a cell phone, a sedative, a shrink, a lover, a movie”—all are “so many bulwarks erected against the event of things” (149). Simply put, under Empire, “THE WORLD GROWS HARD” (149). In fact, this hardening is Empire’s central objective, according to Tiqqun, because “biopolitics has never had any other aim but to thwart the formation of worlds, techniques, shared dramatizations, *magic* in which the crisis of presence might be overcome, appropriated, might become a center of energy, a war machine” (150). Even with MTG, Empire’s aim is to literally capitalize on it, reducing it to its commodity-being, which is arguably why a new set of cards is released every quarter (the same unit of time as corporate earnings reports).

Against this anti-magical tyranny, Tiqqun tout a “politics that challenges this monopoly,” the goal of which politics is “to create participable magic, techniques for inhabiting not a territory but a *world*,” which creation, in turn, “entails the subversion and *liquidation* of all apparatuses” (Tiqqun 2011: 150). What this anti-apparatus quest entails, philosophically, is a “science of apparatuses, a critical metaphysics,” responding to the “need to think our life in order to *intensify* it dramatically” (167). Put in terms that paraphrase the greatest of Italian poet-philosopher, Tiqqun write that “Hell is the experience and science of apparatuses, its purgatory the distribution of this science and the flight from apparatuses, its Paradise insurrection, the destruction of apparatuses” (169). Against this rich Dantean mythological/religious background, Tiqqun conclude, “It falls to each of us to play out this divine comedy, like an irrevocable

experiment” (169). MTG draws on the same themes of religion, fantasy, and horror that make the Divine Comedy so compelling and entertaining.

In this gaming spirit, just like the speech acts that are integral to MTG, Tiqqun write that “*What is real in language are the operations it performs*” (Tiqqun 2011: 168). By contrast, “To describe a being [*étant*] as an *apparatus*, or as being produced by an apparatus, *denatures* the given world” (168). And while the latter is decidedly pejorative in Empire’s everyday operations, Tiqqun propose to redeploy this denaturing in a constructive way. “We impose a distance between us and the world,” they explain, “in order to *be in the world differently*” (169). More precisely, “The distance we introduce is the space of play our gestures require” (169). Planeswalkers, similarly, play MTG by deconstructing and reconstructing it, in part by de/reconstructing their decks, their color “alliances,” and their playing groups.

Tiqqun then critique Marx’s repurposing of the concept of “fetishism” from Charles de Brosses’ study of “certain African religions” (Tiqqun 2011: 170). Toward that end, Tiqqun quote de Brosses’ Indigenous interlocutors as follows: “We make and break our Gods, and [...] are the inventors and masters of that to which we sacrifice” (170). Summarizing this point, Tiqqun explain that “Fetishes are those objects or those beings, those *things*, in any case, with which the ‘primitive’ magically links himself” (170). Tiqqun affirm this operation as necessary for the construction and sustaining of any order of presence (not just ancestral cultures or capitalist ideology), concluding that “the task, for a science of apparatuses, isn’t to denounce the fact that apparatuses *possess us*, that there may be something *magic* in them” (174). On the contrary, “*a science of apparatuses, a critical metaphysics, recognizes the crisis of presence and is prepared to compete with capitalism on the playing field of magic*” (174). In short, Tiqqun conclude,

“What we are describing is a MATERIALISM OF ENCHANTMENT” (174). And this, the Planeswalkers are uniquely positioned to do, as with the literal matter of magic cards.

Elaborating on this materialism, Tiquun return to the subject of crime, asserting that “what we call a science of apparatuses or critical metaphysics is finally nothing other than the science of crime” (Tiquun 2011: 175). The three phases of one’s “initiation” into this science—which I interpolate is also a science of magic—are “crime, opacity, and insurrection” (175). Step one is “the period of—necessarily individual—study of how an apparatus works” (175-176). This is comparable to collecting MTG cards and looking for ways to bend and hack the official rules. Step two “is the condition in which knowledge-powers acquired through study are shared, communized, circulated” (176). This is the period of playing MTG with friends, and configuring one’s bending with those of others, creating complex, living, dynamic shapes of expression and community, invisible to Empire’s insatiable eyes. Finally, step three is “the moment when knowledge-powers and cooperation among forms-of-life—with an aim to destroying-enjoying imperial apparatuses—can be carried out freely, in the open air” (176). This would be the revolution itself, when Planeswalkers deploy their collective magic to repair world.

Fleshing out step one, Tiquun claim that “each apparatus possesses its own little music, which must be put slightly out of tune,” so that it can “become unhinged” (178). In their dancing elaboration of this point, “Those who *flow* into the apparatus,” playing too close to the official rules, “don’t notice the music, their steps stick too close to the rhythm,” whereas for the communizing criminals, “another temporality is needed, a specific rhythmicity” (178). More precisely, this is what “the thief”—that consummate celebrated criminal of fantasy and folklore, as in Robin Hood and Bilbo Baggins—“learns: to unsync internal and external tempos, to split, to layer one’s conscience, being at once mobile and static” (178). In short, and here is where the

warrior learns magic, “TO BECOME A SORCERER” (178). Tiquun draw this figure of the sorcerer from de Martino, whose description they then quote as follows:

These are the steps taken by the sorcerer; he transforms being-in-the-world’s critical moments into a courageous and dramatic decision, that of establishing himself in the world. If being in the world is taken as a *given*, it runs the risk of being dissolved: it has not yet been given. The magician, through the establishment of his vocation and successful initiation, *undoes* this presumed given and *reforms* it through a second birth; he goes to the limits of his presence in order to reform himself into a new and clearly-defined entity (Tiquun 2011: 179).

This magical career, Tiquun boldly declare, “is the starting point of the communist program” (Tiquun 2011: 179). First, Planeswalkers’ communizing. Finally, communist revolution.

In conclusion, *hypothetically, if one endorses Tiquun’s analysis*, then one should perhaps tap into and repurpose the existing MTG organization and networks to create a Warrior-Mage Guild. Nonplayers could be encouraged to try the game, and existing players could be introduced to communization, invited to choose one or more colors of mana with which they identify, learn more about the kinds of action associated with those colors’ philosophies, and connect with kindred spirits. Then local groups, or “Magic Circles,” could carry out intermittent guerrilla decolonizing acts at will, under the protection of the effective (and true) cover story that they are merely fantasy/sci-fi role-playing gamers, the vocabulary and rhetoric of which could be used as a code to make written communications semantically encrypted. Warrior-Mage Guild, unite!

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