

Hope in the Collapse

Punch Up * Kick Down Distro



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All really tested hope,
and all really militant optimism
must go through the ever more searching
and destructive experience
of the historical process

— Ernst Bloch

Don't ask what the world needs.
Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it.
Because what the world needs is people
who have come alive.

— Howard Thurman

Never Ending End Times

I thought about how for thousands of years there have been people who told us that things can't go on like this From Jesus Christ to the Diggers, from Malthus to Zerzan, from Karl Marx to Huey Newton but this shit goes on and on and on and on and on.

We are living through a moment unprecedented in human history. No amount of scientific data or apocalyptic rhetoric can fully portray the all-encompassing nature of the ecological and social crises humanity is facing. Biodiversity loss, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, ocean acidification, sea level rise, increasing global temperature, mass extinction of plant and animal species, and intensifying extreme weather events are each major crises unto themselves. These are all happening at once, interrelated and compounding. Research suggests that heat waves, coastal flooding, and drought will make the land areas where *nearly half of the global population* lives uninhabitable by 2050. What's more — predictions and projections about the climate regularly underestimate how quickly these changes are occurring, and how intense the fallout will be. "These are not the paranoid delusions of a religious fanatic. This is promised weekly in reports on the accelerating climate apocalypse."¹

This crisis is given a variety of labels — "climate change" or "global warming", among others — but a changing climate is only one aspect of a world-wide ecological shift and its knock on socio-political effects. The term "polycrisis" expresses how these are all overlapping, but we lack the language to fully describe a series of crises so vast, which is part of the problem; our minds cannot fully comprehend something so totalizing. In her book *Generation Dread*, Brittany Way notes,

It is impossible to think about as a contained phenomenon. By not seeing where [it] starts or ends, we don't know how or where to intervene to cause meaningful change.²

It is, however, not difficult to imagine what the future holds — wars over clean water, heavily militarized borders, increasingly displaced impoverished peoples — because these are simply further intensifications of the current social order. Intensified levels of wealth consolidation, housing

¹ Why We Fight — Shane Burley

² Brittany Way — *Generation Dread*

insecurity, forced migration, and the utter disposability of human lives which no longer serves an economic function are all but certain. Desperate attempts to survive will be further criminalized while popular resistance and collective action against these conditions will continue to provoke increasingly violent responses from the henchmen of the ruling class – the police. The fascistic aggression and xenophobic nationalism which is on the rise represents the worst case scenario for how our society responds to these crises. “If the public at large accepts preventable mass deaths as inevitable, the system will maintain itself.”³ Bummer, right? Not a lot of fun to talk about at parties.

As Naomi Klein has alluded to, it’s not just getting *hotter*, it’s getting more cruel, more hostile, more difficult to secure material and emotional stability. The acceleration of these crises *will* result in social upheaval and resource scarcity far greater than we experience today. In this zine, I refer to this this crisis of crises – ecological as well as socio-political – simply as the *Collapse*.

Capitalism and Collapse

The intersecting emergencies we face are the result of how our society is organized. The Collapse is not simply an ecological crisis, then, but also a social one. It is a crucial misstep to divorce crises “environmental” issues from their social and political causes. The Collapse is not occurring in a vacuum, but as a consequence of a colonial capitalist social structure which rules the world. The logics of capitalism and colonialism are the ideological foundation for the collapse: exploitation of labor and land, the genocide and displacement of indigenous peoples, and the massive hoarding of wealth and resources by the ruling class. “The pursuit of money is the driving force, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, behind global warming and the destruction of the environment.”⁴

Cynical claims that the Collapse is merely the result of “human nature” – that people are inherently greedy or incapable of a balanced relationship with the natural world – come either from ignorance or bad faith. This line of thinking is a “continuation of colonial racism”⁵ and insulting to indigenous struggles against colonial domination worldwide. Likewise, the notion that “overpopulation” is to blame for the Collapse fails to recognize that the global population’s basic needs could be met, but are denied because of a colonial/capitalist global order. The fact that enough food is produced to feed the global population several times over, yet millions are subjected to starvation, proves this point.

The largest contributors to the ecological crisis – fossil fuel extraction, increasing carbon emissions, the military industrial complex, agricultural mismanagement, sweeping deforestation, and so on – continue, despite their disastrous effects, because they are *profitable* to the corporate and state entities which have captured global power. At the same time, social crises of political instability, psychological distress, incredible wealth inequality, and growing populations of climate refugees are downstream effects of a global order structured by capital interest.

The Collapse is experienced unequally depending on economic status and geography, as the result of a highly unequal, globalized class society. David Camfield writes in *Future on Fire* that

³ Mariame Kaba & Kelly E. Hayes — *Let This Radicalize You*

⁴ John Holloway — *Hope in Hopeless Times*

⁵ Peter Gelderloos — *The Solutions are Already Here*

“as the climate changes, social arrangements will determine how many people will die and who they will be.” He continues,

How a society is organized is fundamental to how climate change effects people. Poverty makes this obvious. If during a heat wave you can’t get enough drinkable water and access to a cool space because you can’t pay for them, your chances of survival are generally much lower ... The same is true when it comes to climate change and migration. As rising waters, drought, and other effects drive more people to move, the impact on people will vary depending on their wealth and power ... such things are decided by how societies are organized, not by the climate.⁶

While many people are aware of the systemic injustices of our society and are fed up with the corruption of the socially powerful and the hyper wealthy, the social mechanisms for enacting change have lost all legitimacy, fully captured by capital. The primary function of modern political structures is to serve the financial interests of the ruling class and maintain the status quo. “Research has established that just a couple hundred companies are responsible for 71% of the world’s carbon emissions, a process in which the vast majority of humanity has very little say.”⁷ It is well documented that fossil fuel companies spend incredible sums of money to push a narrative about ecological crisis that points the blame away from the structural and institutional causes of the Collapse and towards the individual responsibilities of consumers. Recycling or using paper straws does *literally nothing* to address the systemic causes of the Collapse, and the belief that consumer habits are in any way meaningful only reinforces the neoliberal ideology which proposes that the only terrain for struggle is within the parameters of consumer choice. Similarly, without addressing the roots of social instability, political illegitimacy, and psychological misery – that is, capitalist ideology and its psycho-social structures – “sustainable” energy or “green” policies will only buy more time for further exploitation of labor and land.

While corporate institutions and colonial governments may appear indifferent to, or in denial of the climate crisis, the powerful understand the Collapse as a very real threat to their own status and safety. The ruling class is indifferent to the suffering of the populations who will bear the brunt of the Collapse, but they are diligent in shoring up their own private financial interests while further insulating themselves from the growing numbers of desperate and impoverished people in heavily guarded compounds and bunkers. The entities most responsible for the Collapse will be the last to experience its horrors. While growing numbers of people – unable or unwilling to participate in a delusional and destructive economic and social system – experience a declining standard of living, the hyper-wealthy “will live an affluent life in gated communities protected by security forces, whilst the majority of people live in relative poverty, in degraded and unpleasant environments.”⁸ Sound familiar?

“Unless the root ideologies and structures that precipitated this crises are confronted and done away with we condemn ourselves and future generations to nonexistence.”⁹ It is not only the *economic* model of capitalism fueling the Collapse, but the *psychological and social worlds built upon its logic*. Capitalist ideology is pervasive in our culture, so normalized that it goes unnoticed. Even if we reject the status quo as individuals, we are still forced to obey its logic – forced to labor for a wage in order to gain access to life’s basic necessities. In order to survive, we have to adhere to the logic of capital, no matter how corrosive it may be on our psychological or physical

⁶ David Camfield – *Future on Fire*

⁷ Richard Seymour – *The Disenchanted Earth*

⁸ Graham Priest – *Capitalism: Its Nature and Its Replacements*

⁹ Klee Benally – *Indigenous Anarchy*

health. Those unable or unwilling to adjust to the status quo are pushed to the societal margins, punished with carceral violence, or struggle with addiction as a way to cope with despair.

It Is, therefore, not enough to intellectually acknowledge that capitalism is morally corrupt or socially inadequate, we must act as if its continuation is a threat to all life on earth – *because it is*. As long as we are dependent on, obedient to, and conditioned by capitalist ideology – and made to adhere to its exploitative conditions to stay alive – we will be fundamentally incapable of confronting the Collapse. A wicked problem, a vicious cycle. If humanity is to have any chance of a future which is not utterly deprived, we must see capitalism as the pernicious force that it is in order to collectively dismantle it. This dynamic, as Umair Muhammad reminds us, makes clear that

it Is not Idealistic to seek to overcome [capitalism]. It Is In fact idealistic and impractical to expect capitalism to eventually become sufficiently reformed. Pragmatism is on the side of those who realize that capitalism must be overcome if we want to live in a sufficiently just world – indeed, if we want to have a world to live in at all.¹⁰

While a worldwide transition to renewable energy and away from fossil fuels is an absolute necessity, “sustainable capitalism” is a contradiction in terms because capitalism relies on a prioritization of profit, infinite extraction, labor exploitation, and ecological destruction. Any attempt to confront the Collapse without confronting capitalism as an economic model and social paradigm is to make meaningless reforms and marginal adjustments to a death machine. As long as we refuse to name colonial capitalism as the fundamental problem, we are “mystifying, and, as with all mystifications, supporting the status quo.”¹¹ We cannot “fix” the climate without dismantling an economic system which relies on continued expansion and extraction. We cannot effectively confront the Collapse without uprooting the underlying assumptions that colonialism has naturalized. As long as we are functioning under a capitalist economy, there will be no environmental or ethical considerations that stand in the way of profit.

Dialectic of Hope and Grief

If you’re reading these words, perhaps you’re in a similar position as I am, as I write them. At once “privileged” in the context of the Collapse – in that access to food, water, and shelter are not matters of acute scarcity – but also living in a state of constant acute stress, always *just* getting by financially, navigating increasing costs of living while also grappling with a deep existential dread about what the future may hold. For many working class people faced with the challenges of acquiring secure housing, navigating the healthcare system, and affording food, the Collapse seems like an abstract problem that takes place in some far distant future. People have no capacity for grappling with the big picture problems of social injustice, ecological devastation, or global economics when the daily grind leaves them financially stressed and emotionally depleted. In a state of constant overwhelm, the “climate” is experienced as just another thing to *worry about* while simultaneously so insurmountable as to leave one powerless to *do anything about*. In *Disenchanted Earth*, Richard Seymour describes this dilemma.

One would think, given the scale of the challenge, that there should be emergency public meetings in every village, town and city every week to thrash out solutions. Instead, given the

¹⁰ Umair Muhamad – *Confronting Injustice*

¹¹ Joel Kovel – *Enemy of Nature*

pervasive sense of powerlessness and futility, the most common response is what psychoanalysts call ‘disavowal’: I know perfectly well that things can’t go on this way, but because life is hard enough and I have bills to pay, I behave as if I don’t.¹²

The desire to numb out or simply ignore reality is understandable, but behind that aversion there is a sort of omnipresent, vague fear which has “structural causes and therefore cannot be linked back to concrete events.”¹³ Suspicion, confusion, and ideological manipulation create a kind of fog, rendering everything uncertain beyond comprehension. Facing these issues and their complex, entangled, pervasive and systemic causes, it is reasonable to fall into a deep despair that makes all action or hope feel pointless and naïve.

The world is confusing and frightening. We cannot thrust headlong into action without processing these emotions. We cannot take a shortcut to a better world without also grieving the loss and despair we are feeling in the present. Emotions inspire us towards movement, action, connection, and understanding. They can also be debilitating if they are not properly confronted, expressed, and processed. This can be particularly challenging in a society that is so averse to discomfort, and in a frantic political atmosphere which demands constant engagement and disincentivizes reflection. Britt Way gives voice to the importance of emotional processing in her book *Generation Dread*:

Despair and Fear are not inherently bad. Hope and optimism are not inherently good ... Emotions are what often lead people to act. It is possible that feelings of ecological anxiety and grief, although uncomfortable, are in fact the crucible through which humanity must pass to harness the energy and conviction that are needed for the lifesaving changes now required.¹⁴

While understanding the stakes of our situation and having a clear analysis of the root cause is critical, going through life in a constant panic is not an effective tactic for motivating action. “No fact is so shocking or profound that its utterance will spontaneously spark a movement.”¹⁵ It is people’s lived experience that shapes their understanding of the world, more than political theories, data, statistics, reason, moral judgment, or apocalyptic forecasts. Eco-distress can be a real problem when it stunts our ability to take care of ourselves, connect with others, and join up in action. However, when that distress is properly processed in a collective context it can deepen our resolve and reignite a sense of purpose.

We cannot lose sight of the urgency with which we must act, but we also mustn’t skip over the real grief and anxiety we are confronting. To harbor deep seated fear about the future is absolutely justifiable, and we shouldn’t deny those emotions or attempt to shut them out. However, if fear dominates our spirit and motivates our behavior, we become paralyzed and more prone to dissociation, alienation, loneliness, and distrust of others. Hope, in contrast, arms us with a trust and closeness — a belief in each other, and our collective power.

It is easy to roll our eyes at words like “hope.” But cynicism and detachment can be a pacifying excuse not to try, not to care — because caring is terrifying, especially in such extreme uncertainty. A belief that nothing will change, is a justification for inaction. In her book *Not Too Late*, Rebecca Solnit tells us,

Despair is the easy way out. Despair is also, quite simply, bad politics ... it encourages what I’ve called the “politics of powerlessness” ... Despair is a self-fulfilling prophecy ... When we look

¹² Richard Seymour — *The Disenchanted Earth*

¹³ Byung-Chul Han — *The Spirit of Hope*

¹⁴ Brittany Way — *Generation Dread*

¹⁵ Mariame Kaba & Kelly E. Hayes — *Let This Radicalize You*

at the political landscape before us we have every right to assess it as bleak. But nothing about it is inevitable.¹⁶

David Graeber and David Weingrow, in *The Dawn of Everything* insist that we are all “projects of collective self-creation” and ask “how is it that we have to be trained in such tight conceptual shackles that we can no longer even imagine the possibility of reinventing ourselves?”¹⁷ Radical hope recognizes the impermanent nature of capitalism as a form of social relationship which is specific to this particular time in history. Considering the historical timeline of our species, capitalism is a momentary abnormality. Though we may be conditioned by capitalist ideologies, radical hope guides us in “thinking and acting beyond and against them,” writes John Holloway. “We think negatively about the society that surrounds us because we are pushing towards a world that does not yet exist but potentially could come into being.”¹⁸

The current state of things is not permanent, natural, or immutable. We cannot allow our uncertainty to limit our sense of what is possible. We cannot allow despair to make us passive, to undermine our willingness to act. As Nick Estates has said,

Inaction is itself an action. Not doing anything is doing something. At root, we have this responsibility because as long as there are humans on this planet, it matters what their social conditions are. That’s why even a ravaged planet is worth fighting for.¹⁹

The future of humanity and the biosphere depends on the action (or inaction) of the people who are alive right now. We are presented with essentially two options: Either we make radical systemic changes to how our society is structured, or we continue on the path we are on. The former holds a lot of uncertainty, but “not doing anything” guarantees cataclysmic destruction unmatched in human history. Whether we like it or not, dramatic shifts to the world as we know it *are going to happen*. There can be no denying that ecological and social fallouts are coming. The stakes make any action we take towards dignity and collective resiliency a worthy cause.

Radical hope is not simply optimism, it is an active and participatory practice. Optimism is a passive expectation that things will simply be okay, and considering the realities of the Collapse, claiming that things will just turn out fine might be called *cruel optimism*, explained as follows by Johann Hari,

Cruel optimism [is when] you take a really big problem with deep causes in our culture, like obesity or depression or addiction, and you offer people in upbeat language a simplistic, individual solution. It sounds optimistic because you’re telling them the problem can be solved, and soon. But it is in fact cruel because the solution you’re offering is so limited and so blind to the deeper causes that for most people it will fail.²⁰

An unthinking “positive attitude” denies reality and relies on discrete behavioral solutions to a global crisis. Radical hope, in contrast, does not turn away from, ignore, or attempt to deny reality, however bleak it may be. Mariame Kaba proclaims that “hope is a discipline.”²¹ Hope is a commitment to our values despite the challenges we face. It calls people to unite around shared interests rather than isolating individual solutions.

¹⁶ Rebecca Solnit – *Not Too Late*

¹⁷ David Weingrow and David Graeber – *The Dawn of Everything*

¹⁸ John Holloway – *Hope in Hopeless Times*

¹⁹ Nick Estates quoted in *Future on Fire*

²⁰ Johann Hari – *Stolen Focus*

²¹ Miriam kaba

Avoiding the worst outcomes of the Collapse will be impossible if people don't have anything to believe in, if people don't see any point in trying. A hope for a radically different society can provide meaningful direction for our grief and rage, a sense of solidarity with those who we express these emotions with. Hope is a collective process – “the subject of hope is a We.”²² Without hope, without community, these intense feelings are impotent and debilitating. *With* hope and collective engagement, they can be a spark for action. Hope cannot be a substitute for action, but action is not possible without hope. George Marshall writes,

People will willingly shoulder a burden – even one that requires short term sacrifice against uncertain long term threats – provided they share a common purpose and are rewarded with a greater sense of social belonging.

Engaged in hope, we might be able to envision radical change not exclusively as “misery and pointless carnage, but perhaps constructive and useful trauma that could be built on.”²³ The realization we are living in the single most significant moment in human history is charged with meaning. This level of pressure can be incapacitating, but it can also provide an incredible sense of purpose. Radical hope transforms paralysis into possibility, or at least has the potential to.

The Collapse is not a singular event – there is no approaching horizon that delineates then from now – just a decline into increasing social hostility, and ecological instability which is so steady and persistent that it virtually goes unnoticed. Likewise, radical hope is not a means to an ultimate and decisive end, but rather a life enriching dignity in itself. It is the spirit's refusal to be crushed under the heaviness of the Collapse. We are facing the end of the world as we know it, but this current global hegemonic order *should* be ended!

Is it possible to experience this moment not exclusively as a disaster but also as an opportunity to radically reorient our social structures away from the profit motive towards meeting basic needs without destroying the natural world? How can we weather the storms that are already bearing down upon us? How can we remain resilient to the stronger storms heading our way? How do we maintain hope when the world is so clearly ending?

Hope is the envisioning of a new reality, creating that reality through everyday actions, both big and small. In order for us to realize this hope, we must internalize that “crisis is a crossroads.”²⁴ With hope as a foundation, meaningful action can find footing. Hope is not only more politically effective than despair, it is also more individually rewarding because it requires engagement with other people, meaningful collective processes, and loving relationships. Regardless of how the future unfolds, these are what makes life fulfilling and cannot be fully experienced when one is trapped in distraction or isolated in despair. Climate activist Tim DeChristopher has stated,

Our actions to build a more sustainable world and work for justice cannot necessarily be based on an expectation that things will work out. It's rather an expression of how much we love the people around us, of how much we love the world around us, of how much we love the people that will come after us.²⁵

Under our current conditions, to reject despair – to hope – is a radical act. We must soberly confront the Collapse – crucially, in relationship and in community with other people – and consider how we can organize and respond with agency and autonomy towards dignity and collectivity. If we are able to build our capacity to cultivate hope while we grieve, to grow com-

²² Byung-Chul Han – *The Spirit of Hope*

²³ angel Kyodo Williams & Lama Rod Owens – *Radical Dharma*

²⁴ Rebecca Solnit – *Not Too Late*

²⁵ Tim DeChristopher quoted in *I Want A Better Catastrophe*

passion alongside rage, to move through individual despair towards communal connection, we will be more effective in confronting the collapse in a way that both provides meaning and brings us into more resilient communal relationships. If we can believe in our own capacity for compassion, and embody a social ethic founded on collective wellbeing and solidarity, not only might we stand a chance at building a better future – *our lives are better for it now*. We are less suspicious, less cruel, less judgmental, less fearful of the existential dread and pervasive uncertainty. This requires we face our pain, allow ourselves to fully experience grief and outrage, using them to fuel our struggles and inform our revolutionary desires, rather than pushing them away or ignoring them – allowing them to weigh us down or burn us out.

If we can process these powerful emotions, collectively and compassionately, they can reinforce our hope rather than debilitate us in despair. Our capacity to feel is itself a radical confrontation with the status quo. This is not passive rhetoric, but a means by which we seek solidarity in the interest of common struggle and collective liberation. The urgency of this moment might provide motivation to stubbornly persist, to endure rather than simply acquiesce – to orient towards love rather than fear.

Letting Go

Radical hope is a dedication to ethical principles and political values *despite* the uncertainty and fear that accompanies the Collapse. It is more concerned with meaning than prediction. A society that is highly “results oriented” has driven us to Collapse, so we might do well resisting the idea that the only efforts worthwhile are those with quantifiable outcomes. What makes life worth living – connection, beauty, love, friendship, joy – are fundamentally immeasurable. Therefore, we cannot evaluate the success of our movements, actions, or organizing efforts in terms of immediate results. “An insidious capitalist logic holds hostage the far richer and better understanding of value that we use to appreciate our lives in their real fullness,” writes Richard Gilman-Opalsky, “and we must not subject ourselves, our struggles, and our movements to the reductionist thinking of our enemies.”²⁶

Byung-Chul Han, in his book *The Spirit of Hope* articulates hope as a way to open up to a variety of possibilities, stating that the hopeful are “susceptible to the new.”²⁷ Hope, for Han, is not about perfectly articulated predictions or concepts, but an increase in sensibility of what is possible – a preparation for what-is-not-yet. “The hopeful accept the incalculable possibilities beyond all likelihood.”²⁸ Our capacity for dynamic responsiveness and compassionate action is increased once we shake off the ideological shackles of capitalist logic. From there, we confront the future as it comes. Radical hope offers a willingness to figure things out collectively as they come, to accept failures along with successes, and to live without guarantees of any kind. Ultimately, hope is not contingent on how things turn out. Returning to Han,

Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. It transcends the world that is immediately experienced and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.²⁹

²⁶ Richard Gilman-Opalsky – *Imaginary Horizons*

²⁷ Byung-Chul Han – *The Spirit of Hope*

²⁸ Byung-Chul Han – *The Spirit of Hope*

²⁹ Byung-Chul Han – *The Spirit of Hope*

An attachment to any particular political paradigm or preconceived outcome can cause us to lose sight of the value or meaning provided in the act itself, whatever that act may be. “An idea of what should be happening ... gets in the way of being present with what is already happening and the capacity to be attuned to the transformative potentials in one’s own situation.”³⁰ Diversity of thinking and tactic is what makes movements powerful and communities resilient.

No single ideology or political framework can adequately respond to the complexity of our situation. In fact, dogmatism of any kind often renders us less capable to respond to the unfolding and dynamic challenges we may face. Building and sustaining political movements requires an ability to find solidarity with people across lines of ideology, political views, and identity. While analytical frameworks, methods of organizing, and radical traditions throughout history are certainly useful tools, we should use them as such – pick them up when appropriate for the task at hand and lay them aside when they are weighing us down.

An embrace of uncertainty along with a willingness to collaborate in solving problems or resolving conflict is not only more socially fulfilling, but ultimately more politically effective than loyalty to any school of thought. The Zapatistas speak to the murky nature of a radical future, the unwillingness to speak in absolutes, stating:

Zapatismo is not a new political ideology or a rehash of old ideologies. Zapatismo is nothing. It does not exist. It only serves as a bridge to cross from one side to the other. So everyone fits within Zapatista, everyone who want to cross from one side to the other. There are no universal recipes, lines, strategies, tactics, laws, rules, or slogans. There is only a desire to build a better world, that is – a new world.³¹

Radical hope follows this desire, it takes action without attachment to outcome, it flirts with the spiritual, the paradoxical. The pure absurdity of our situation pulls us towards “an awareness of existential ambiguity and irony, to the humor of deep understanding, to the landscape of poets, artists, and tricksters,” as Donald Rothberg puts it. “Mature action is rooted in familiarity with paradox.”³² This paradox is rich with insight, and further illustrates the ways that joy and grief, hope and despair are not opposite ends of a swinging pendulum, but entangled sentiments which occur in relation to each other.

This is not to dismiss material politics, and to be sure: having goals is important! To be driftless and without any articulated political commitments or tangible goals is also not an effective way to enact meaningful change or combat an oppressive status quo. Non-attachment to outcomes does not mean a lack of dedication nor should it justify non-action. Rather, we act as an extension of our values, as an embodiment of ethical principles which cannot be articulated with rigid dichotomies of success/failure. David R. Loy further illustrates this point in *EcoDharma*

Acting without attachment to the results of action ... is easily understood to imply a casual attitude. Instead, our task is to do the very best we can, not knowing what the consequences will be. In fact, not knowing if our efforts will make any difference whatsoever. We don’t know if what we do is important, but we know that it is important for us to do it.³³

³⁰ Carla Bergman & Nick Montgomery – *Joyful Militancy*

³¹ Klee Benally – *Indigenous Anarchy*

³² Donald Rothberg – *Engaged Spiritual Life*

³³ David R. Loy – *EcoDharma*

We cannot know how things will play out. Letting go of prognostication frees us to most effectively address whatever comes our way. It is “as if giving up on saving the world opens us up to doing the things that will save the world.”³⁴

The harsh reality is, in many ways we have already been defeated. The fascists are winning, politically and culturally. The Collapse is in full swing. To be brutally honest, most people feel utterly powerless to enact meaningful change on the necessary scale because we are. Humankind may have missed its opportunity to avoid truly catastrophic Collapse. The powers that be have us right where they want us, in most respects, scurrying around for basic survival in a state of psychological dismay and social precarity. So, with that being the case, now what? When individuals, communities, and society at large face the chaos that the Collapse guarantees, we will be forced to ask ourselves: “Who will we become, now?”³⁵ Knowing we cannot “win”, what will we do? Richard Seymour suggests we

give up without giving up...We despair but we do not submit. Despair without fear, without resignation, without a sense of defeat.³⁶

Can we make the revolutionary changes necessary to confront the Collapse before it is too late? Do we have any chance of “saving the world” before human civilization is completely eradicated, taking much of the planet’s nonhuman life with it? How we answer these questions should not affect our willingness to, as best we are able, embody our ethical principles and remain committed to shared values: that nobody is disposable, that the natural world has intrinsic value, and that the current social order is not inevitable.

Radical hope is not attached to outcome but dedicated to ethical principles and committed to social responsibility in the face of impossible challenges. The authors of *Joyful Militancy* define ethics not as an “individualized set of fixed principles, but instead a capacity to be attuned to the situation, to be immersed in it, and to create something emergent out of existing conditions.”³⁷

What is important is not anticipating exactly what is going to happen but retaining our basic humanity *regardless of what happens*. Let us refuse the inevitability of a social arrangement of domination which robs us of dignity and meaning. Let us accept uncertainty, because “freedom from uncertainty is no freedom.”³⁸ There are no guarantees, but there are possibilities. We can dedicate ourselves to ethical principles of compassion without losing our teeth. We can direct our vitriol towards the systems of oppression which threaten us all rather than blaming individuals who are fellow victims of these structures and logics.

We haven’t got a chance in hell, but if we remain steadfast in our principles, the sacrifice and dedication required to make radical change is experienced not as a begrudging duty, but an irresistible desire. We engage in radically different ways of living, because *we cannot help it*. We act in accordance with our beliefs, driven by radical hope, because we feel called to, because we long for something better. If this calling is our foundation for action, rather than a delusional expectation of verifiable success, stultifying adherence to dogma, or an attempt to assuage guilt, those actions are authentic and far more likely to build meaningful connections and resilient communities.

³⁴ Charles Eisenstein — *Climate*

³⁵ Stephon Harrod Buhner — *Earth Grief*

³⁶ Richard Seymour — *The Disenchanted Earth*

³⁷ Carla Bergman & Nick Montgomery — *Joyful Militancy*

³⁸ Shoshana Zuboff — *In the Age of Surveillance Capitalism*

There are worse things than failure. They include capitulating to the grotesque logics of a capitalist society, accepting violent forces of domination and coercion as inevitable, and perpetuating the cruelty and injustice of our world. Despite being one of the most catastrophizing “doomers” in the discourse surrounding the Collapse, Guy McPherson, captures these ideas well:

...what better judge of our characters than how we act in the face of impossible odds. Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable on our way down seem like perfectly reasonable strategies to me We’re all going to die. But that’s not what this moment is all about. The focus must be on how we live.³⁹

In both nihilism and cruel optimism we find convenient excuses not to act, to maintain our personal comfort without challenging our assumptions or thinking critically. “Both of these positions are moral abdication, and together they suggest a false dichotomy.”⁴⁰ Whether these principles are “successful” in some abstract evaluation is of less concern than how they orient our lives as we live them.

The uncertainty and impossibility of confronting the Collapse in totality calls for a reorientation of the purpose of our political principles, as well as the meaning we ascribe to the actions we take. Rather than an abstract sense of individual righteousness, what becomes important, as Loy puts it, “is not the unattainable goal, but the direction of one’s efforts, a direction that ... orients us without providing any end point.”⁴¹

The human desire for ontological security is threatened under the psychologically chaotic and materially cruel conditions of the Collapse. By letting go of attachment to results, we unlock unlimited potentials for what the future may look like, while we remain grounded in ethical values of compassion and political principles of liberation. We are given a choice: cling to ideology, live in a state of perpetual existential dread, indulge in the delusion that things will remain this way forever *or* let go of the reigns and accept that the future is unknowable and unpredictable, harnessing that uncertainty to steer the course of history away from further cruelty and towards dignity. Paraphrasing Matt Christman:

We have to let down our shields, not reinforce them. We cannot control what’s coming, so our instinct is to batten down the hatches — but the shield has already been broken. So the question is: are you going to spend your time between now and whatever you’re afraid of arrayed against yourself and against the people around you, robbing yourself of the ability to have a genuine sense of connection and security? Frantically hurting yourself in the long term by distracting yourself in the short term? If you accept that the shields have already failed, you can avoid fixating on fear of the unknown.⁴²

We benefit from “refusing to separate the *effectiveness* of any tactic or strategy from its *affectiveness* — how it makes people feel, how it nurtures autonomy or dependence.”⁴³ Relinquishing attachment to specific outcomes in any given struggle creates a presence and attentiveness to the process of the struggle, shedding light on its most important elements — caring, loving, community-oriented relationships.

³⁹ Guy McPherson quoted in *I Want A Better Catastrophe*

⁴⁰ Kathleen Dean Moore quoted in *I Want A Better Catastrophe*

⁴¹ David R. Loy — *EcoDharma*

⁴² Matt Christman, paraphrased

⁴³ Charles Eisenstein — *Climate*

Liberation Through Relation

The concept of “community” itself can be a sort of illusion, a desperate attempt to articulate a set of social relations which simply cannot exist in the devastating conditions of modern capitalist empire. The economic and technological infrastructure of modernity has robbed us of the skill sets, communal social structures, and intimacy with the land on which we have relied for nearly all of human history, while alienating us from one another. However, caring human relationships based on solidarity and reciprocity are the foundations of a meaningful response to the Collapse. Even if imagined, community is an expression of our “hopes for what the world can be” as the Pinko Collective puts it. They continue,

Though we may be mistaken about the resiliency or depth of our current social relationships, we are speaking a fantasy that expresses our political desire. Community at its best is our aspiration for genuine interdependence, mutual effective care, and a shared collectivity of human flourishing.⁴⁴

Peter Gelderloos, for his part, claims that community is nothing if not a “unit of shared survival.”⁴⁵ If that is the case, the Collapse may pull us kicking and screaming into community. Enduring the coming fallout will necessitate a radically different formation of social and communal relationships, and that transformation will be articulated by what we must do to survive. Rather than any particular political vision or ideological framework, it will be the means by which we meet our basic needs that might direct us towards more communal, egalitarian social relationships. When the power goes out, or there is a flood, we are more likely to check in with our neighbors. In the extreme, that propensity might give us a glance at what the future may hold. Our interdependence and our collective nature might be revealed through the terrain of crisis.

This will be far from romantic – harsher material conditions will be experienced unequally according to social and economic status. However, for a majority of people, the Collapse may create conditions which bring us – by necessity – into more embodied, less alienating social arrangements. The versions of ourselves which the moment calls for are forged in the (literal?) fires of the Collapse. Radical hope pulls us towards *tendency* in our lives, as we live them.

We know that we cannot depend on hierarchal, class based power structures to help us in the Collapse. Consciously or not, worsening conditions may force people into interdependent localized networks of mutual aid, communal problem solving, and reciprocal relationships. We may find in this great unraveling the kinds of acts of solidarity which are inherent in human communities under crisis or tragedy. “Our human tendency to pull together in emergency situations, even to risk our lives helping others, is well documented.”⁴⁶ Human nature is one of cooperation, and disaster often brings this out in us.

When the power goes off or the tap stops flowing, no amount weaponry, prepper gear, or stockpiled toilet paper will matter if we are not engaged in a reliable community of people we can trust. As the effects of the Collapse worsen, it is a community of people we are in physical contact with – whose wellbeing we are invested in, and who are invested in our wellbeing – which will be the most important resource of all. Establishing these relationships requires we dismantle the capitalist mythology of human nature as inherently cruel and selfish, and recognize that it is *capitalist exchange relations themselves* which have all but erased the interdependent community

⁴⁴ Pinko Collective – *After Accountability*

⁴⁵ Peter Gelderloos – *Organization, Continuity, Community*

⁴⁶ Joanna Macy – *Active Hope*

relationships in which humans have organized themselves (generally speaking) for the majority of our history.

Through embodied, face to face relationships of mutual reciprocity and material interdependence we might build exemplary frameworks for the resistance of capitalist logic. This is a vision of the future that we must create the foundations for, here and now. This process prioritizes the nurturing of relationships over rhetorical political theories. It means that even in the face of certain doom, we show up for each other in interpersonal relationships and show compassion for ourselves and others as best we can. Peter Gelderloos writes,

If we fight in a way that is consistent with the world that we want to defend, then every step we take — even if we don't make it all the way — leaves the world a better place and could make the difference between life and death for a person, a community, an ecosystem that right now is under threat. Recognizing that we live only thanks to a beautiful web of relationships with countless other beings, nurturing those relationships is the best possible way to live.⁴⁷

Easier said than done — relationships are hard! The challenge of collectivity is exasperated by our highly alienating social environment. The kinds of relationships we need to cultivate must be resilient enough to endure interpersonal conflict and material adversity, the messiness and chaos of being a person in relation to other people. Gelderloos continues to articulate this idea beautifully, so I'll just continue to quote him at length:

At a certain moment, we need to risk ourselves. We need to drop our guard. The Revolution is not the geometric expansion of our bubbles of autonomy, of our safe spaces. It is not a trajectory with an endpoint, in which we have all become perfect hosts for our principles and theories. It is a complete change in everything. We ourselves will not exist, not as we currently know ourselves. It is an insanely optimistic expansion of trust and solidarity to include nearly everyone else on the planet. That is why the idea of community is so important. It is not a group of friends and not an enclave of perfect souls. It is simply a body of people of all sorts, all rough around the edges and imperfections, who share their survival ... The supreme act of optimism, then, is not the belief that everyone will somehow become better, but that we will dare to lower our shields and approach life in a way that constantly beckons towards a shared community of needs and desires.[57]

We need to build and sustain communities that are not merely abstract ideas, but tangible networks of support, interdependence and mutuality — embodiments of a “principle of cooperation and the responsibility to each other and the earth,”⁴⁸ as Silvia Federici puts it.

Projects and organizations of all shades provide an opportunity for people to “participate more fully in the web of relations and affections in which we are enmeshed.”⁴⁹ For me, music is a tool for this sort of embodied engagement. For others it may be a community garden, a political organization, or a religious gathering. These encounters cultivate a sense of collective responsibility which is socially fulfilling. Other people become active participants in our shared lives whose wellbeing we have personal investment in. By cultivating trusting relationships and reinforcing structures of sharing resources, trading skills, and establishing rituals of meaning, our deep social and emotional needs for community belonging and a sense of purpose are met

⁴⁷ Peter Gelderloos — *The Solutions are Already Here*

⁴⁸ Silvia Federici — *Reenchanting the World*

⁴⁹ Carla Bergman & Nick Montgomery — *Joyful Militancy*

through the collective process. As Miriam Kaba offers, “Everything worthwhile is done with other people.”⁵⁰

Conclusion

Pacifying delusion, ideological confusion, and false solutions abound in the discourse concerning what is to come and what is to be done. While these narratives vary widely — from the whacky and conspiratorial to the grim and nihilistic — it appears to me that there are three broadly popular stories regarding what the future will look like, and what we should do. Each story corresponds to a general political affiliation, harboring their own discrete fantasy about the Collapse.

The centrist liberal fantasy is that we shall be saved through technological advancement — most recently expressed in the “abundance” agenda or what some refer to as “techno-optimism” — without ever confronting the underlying social conditions under which technology is produced, and to what ends. Regardless of its miraculous capability, technology cannot be removed from its social context. “The world teems with great innovations that deserve application as ways of checking the ecological crisis,” writes Kovel, “but will not be used because they run against the exigencies of accumulation.”⁵¹ Because we face fundamentally social problems, solutions to those problems must adequately address the underlying ideologies of our society. The idea that technological progress in and of itself will mitigate the worst possibilities of the Collapse is a liberal delusion which fails to call into question any underlying assumptions of our social order or dismantling reigning power structures.

The reactionary conservative fantasy is isolationist and individualistic. Here we find the fascist inclination which is quick to separate mine from thine, the “prepper” movement’s fixation around amassing supplies sold by grifters cashing in on public anxiety, and a highly disaffected search for meaning presented through the online “manosphere.” This narrative generally revolves around hoarding stockpiles of resources for one’s own household and protecting it with violence from some imagined dangerous and intrusive “other,” with explicit racist and xenophobic overtones. While being well prepared for various disasters or crisis is appropriate given the accelerating ecological disasters and social volatility of our time, “there is no scenario when living out rugged individualist post-apocalyptic fantasies makes sense.”⁵² This is capitalist logic squeezing blood from a stone, cashing in on its own catastrophe.

Before moving on to the third general narrative, let us examine how the liberal and conservative tendencies are often inverted or reflected within leftist discourse itself. While the liberal’s blind faith in technological solutions is unwilling to grapple with how society is organized, some on the left cast the blame on “technology” as such. But technology is not inherently *bad* in and of itself — technology has no static moral value.⁵³ Scientific and technological advancements only contribute to worsening social and ecological conditions because they are created by, and in service of, the hegemonic capitalist empire. Agriculture, industrialization, and modern tech are all subjected to criticism by certain leftists. But these are merely the tools by which capital accumu-

⁵⁰ Miriam kaba

⁵¹ Joel Kovel — *Enemy of Nature*

⁵² Why We Fight — *Shane Burley*

⁵³ Brittany Way — *Generation Dread*

lation is carried out – they are expressions of a kind of social organization. Modern technology *could* be utilized in service of a wholly different kind of society.

Likewise, the “rugged individual” story prevails on the cultural right, but it also crops up in the imaginations of those who consider themselves leftist revolutionaries – if with different aesthetics. I know many leftists who are passionate about and put incredible amounts of time into learning practical skills – how to build shelter, hunt and trap, make their own clothes, forage, and practice plant medicine. While all of these are fine hobbies and potentially valuable abilities, it is also fantasy to assume these primitive skills can sustain us in total isolation. We should be careful not to reshape the reactionary mindset of rugged individualism in our own image. We cannot confuse a collective utopian vision for an escapist fantasy of micro-communities walled off from the harsh conditions of the world and indifferent to the vast suffering of those outside of our subcultural bubble. While tantric meditation communes and punk rock vegan potlucks may provide much needed relief and friendship, we must remain unsatisfied with individualized contentedness amidst collective oppression, violence, and exploitation. Good vibes, private comforts, or performative rebellion are not enough to liberate us from the conditions of domination or mitigate the oncoming horrors of the Collapse. Our response cannot be isolationist, *it must be collective*.

This brings me to the third Collapse narrative which is also, I think, cynical and individualist. This is the “anti-civ” contingency, or the congruent subcultural scene which Bookchin labels “lifestyle anarchism.” This narrative heavily romanticizes the downfall of civilization. The old world set aflame will warm our hearts and light the way to a new horizon – we will dance and make love in the ashes, so the story goes. Sounds fun! However, the real possibility of total infrastructural breakdown would mean immediate and untold suffering for incredible numbers of people – mainly the poorest urban populations. If, for example, the electrical grid in the US were to suddenly shut down, it wouldn’t take long for many people – mostly poor and marginalized populations – to die as a result. The techno-industrial society upon which our world is built simply cannot be burnt down without resulting in incredible suffering and loss of life.

By no means should we advocate for the maintenance of global capitalism or the ramping up of fossil fuel infrastructure, but we must denounce what has been referred to as “eco-fascism,” for it is always the poor, urban, racialized populations domestically and the hyper exploited citizens of the Global South globally who are, consciously or not, they hypothetical sacrifices of this rhetoric. This is only an echo of the human disposability which the capitalist ideology has normalized, an ideology to which we should be adamantly opposed.

In much the same way that “killing your local heroin dealer” does nothing to help people struggling with addiction, “punching nazis” does not challenge the social conditions which create fascism, and exiling those we deem “problematic” is an avoidance of productive conflict – these are *stories* which oversimplify structural problems and offer individual solutions whereby one can perform personal virtue in an aesthetically satisfying way.

It’s important to note – all of these various fantasies about what the Collapse will be like contain seeds of truth! None should be rejected totally, because they all offer valid critiques and cogent predictions. Technological innovations will certainly play an important role in any confrontation with the Collapse. However, neither yet-to-be-invented magic bullet, nor technocratic superhero will save the world. It should be obvious at this point: the Elon Musks of the world as clear an enemy as there can be. Without dismantling capitalism as a social structure and

hegemonic ideology, technological advancements will continue to enrich the ruling class while subjecting the masses to intensifying surveillance, psychological torment, and brutalization.

Being prepared for “natural” disasters or social emergencies within your household or community – stocking food and water and learning basic survival skills – are all beneficial in both the near and long term. However, independence is an illusion and the desire for self-determination can only be realized through healthy *interdependence* with a trusted community. The ability to coordinate effectively in a group, even in highly stressful moments, will be the most important skill set in the collapse. Strong communal bonds and reliable personal relationships are the most important resource to stockpile. Unique cultural affinities and looking out for one’s own community fosters those bonds, but we cannot become isolated pockets of relative privilege living alternative lifestyles while grave injustices occur outside our subcultural walls.

Total destruction of the dominating world order is necessary – agreed! However, the decay of our current social order appears to be, at least to a certain degree, inevitable. Let’s discard the angsty fairytales in which the heroes have alternative haircuts, perfect politics, and can overthrow capitalism with one well placed Molotov. I want to dance with you in the glow of burning police stations, truly I do. I also want to imagine and co-create a functional society which does not rely on violence to function, which meets people’s basic needs, and which will not send us spiraling into mass extinction – rather than exclusively fantasizing about the destruction part.

While the revolutionary dreams of those who indulge this “burn-it-all” mentality generally come from a good faith recognition of the need to overthrow modern structures of power and exploitation, to advocate for the outright undoing of communications technology, modern medicine, electricity distribution, and the rest of “civilization” reflects a utopian vision which is juvenile, callous about human life, and unappealing to those outside of our very small social bubbles. I can absolutely sympathize with an angst driven rage aimed at the whole world – a seething hatred for the way things are. This rage, though, cannot be detached from its dialectical counterweight – the hope for a better world. Richard Seymour puts it well:

To despise the world in any sense must of necessity be to love another world that exists, as yet only in the navels of our dreams. A world that has not yet been conceived, let alone born. World hatred is always implicitly utopian, presupposing the existence of another world where things work better, even if there’s no way to say what it would look like, even if it is unspeakable.⁵⁴

Recognizing the various social spheres we inhabit, and how they shape our confrontation with the Collapse, it may be helpful to distinguish between aesthetic displays of political affinity and how our ethical principles interact with real world situations involving people who do not share our subcultural tastes. We should make a clear distinction between our cliques and friend groups, the people with whom we organize large scale political projects, and the people with whom we are in physical, local relationship with. Difficult as it may be to accept, in the context of the Collapse, your relationship with your curmudgeon neighbor is ultimately more important than your twitter stats, your cool outfit, or your ability to quote theory. Politically eccentric as he may be, you know you can rely on him to borrow a chainsaw or use a tow hitch, and he can expect to get some of the baked goods you made. These are the moments where we might embody our values and establish the relationships which will be so critical in the Collapse.

While we strengthen local community relationships of resilience and mutual aid, we must also connect to wider networks of resource exchange, support in whatever ways we can to global

⁵⁴ Richard Seymour — *The Disenchanted Earth*

movements of resistance, and be committed to solidarity with struggling people the world over. Or efforts cannot be exclusively localized, because any freedoms or comforts we may enjoy which rely on the exploitation and enslavement of others – be they across the globe or down the street – is not acceptable. Richard Gilman-Opalsky offers,

Our communities are precarious and tiny, and surely not enough to shield us from, let alone to reverse, global catastrophes like poverty and climate change ... We do not seek only being together, but also active forms of being against ... We cannot abandon the hopeful possibility for a larger struggle against the present state of things. We do not want to be islands.⁵⁵

The powerful and wealthy control the resources of land, housing, energy and the social weaponry of carceral punishment and ideological propaganda. In the Collapse, they will use these to further increase their own power and profits. We must identify and expand the terrain they are unable to crush entirely or control outright – our ability to hope, to experience meaningful connection, to love. This is where we find liberation – in our collective faith in each other, in a belief in humanity despite our misgivings. This faith does not come through adherence to strict moral code or loyalty to political ideology but through friendship, goodwill, and compassion.

It is through embodied relationships and interdependent communities that the future will be articulated. These relationships are not about “controlling things, but about response-ability: capacities to remain responsive to the changing situations”⁵⁶ The Collapse will rip us from the world of abstraction and force us to look around our physical world, in search of relationship, connection, support and interdependence. Bergman & Montgomery posit that with this outlook,

responses to ecological catastrophes are emerging. Not happy or optimistic responses, but capacities to respond to the horrors in ways based in lived and ever-changing relationships.⁵⁷

Through these responses, we might reject the logics of capitalism – a crucial step in the co-creation of a new world, of a radical imagining for a better future, and for living a decent life in the here and now. Averting the worst future timeline means challenging the entire matrix of demoralizing conditions which defile the human spirit and impose destructive hierarchical power structures onto humanity and non-human life. Silvia Federici states,

My objective is primarily to demonstrate the potential of communal relations, not only as a guarantee of survival and an increased capacity for resistance but also, above all, as a path to transform our subjectivity and gain the capacity to recognize the world around us – nature, other people, the animal world – as a source of wealth and knowledge and not as a danger.⁵⁸

Indeed, communities have the potential to come together in solidarity and support in times of crisis, but we mustn't downplay the reality of the chaos to come. We cannot assume that the disorienting and deeply traumatizing events of the Collapse will realign social conditions in favor of a more loving and egalitarian world. I suspect we will experience horror among banality, moments of chaos and moments of peace, joy and grief in varying degrees – just as we do now. Joanna Macy suggests that we don't,

have a language for this emotion in which the wonderful comes wrapped in the terrible – joy and sorrow, courage and fear. We cannot welcome disaster, but we can value the responses, both

⁵⁵ Richard Gilman-Opalsky – *Communism of Love*

⁵⁶ Carla Bergman & Nick Montgomery – *Joyful Militancy*

⁵⁷ Carla Bergman & Nick Montgomery – *Joyful Militancy*

⁵⁸ Silvia Federici – *Reenchanting the World*

practical and psychological. Disasters provide an extraordinary window into social desire and possibility.⁵⁹

We mustn't romanticize the coming disasters but prepare for them as best we can. A crucial part of that preparation is building resilient trusting communities and networks of resource exchange *now*, before things get even worse.

A cynical view of humanity at large, a sense of hostility toward the "other," or submitting to the fact that we are doomed make meaning and connection inaccessible. Perfection will never be attained, but we are capable of building resiliency and expanding our capacity to effectively address whatever may come. If we can overcome a neurotic desire for self-righteousness, accept our infallibility, and uphold general faith in the best intentions of our own actions and the actions of those around us, we can act in accordance with our values and meaningfully connect to one another. Hope orients us towards this connection.

Under the looming shadow of Collapse, talk of hope, love, compassion, and egalitarian utopias can feel simplistic, naïve, and out of touch. As Bergman & Montgomery state, however, these are not temporary escapes from reality but "the very means of undoing empire."⁶⁰ Radical hope is an effort that extends beyond the individual. "In hope, one places ones trust in what exceeds the self."⁶¹ Living with a sense of hope and in the service of common wellbeing – *even if it is futile* – is far more likely to create a contented and meaningful life than living in a state of impotent rage or passive detachment. Kai Cheng Thom, in her aptly titled book *I Hope We Choose Love*, insists we embody a "politics of love."

I mean love that is kind but also honest, love that is courageous and relentless, willing to break the rules and smash the system, love that cares about people more than ideas, that prizes each and every one of us as essential and indispensable.⁶²

It is better, by all metrics, to remain present, supportive, and caring for the people in our lives as the Collapse makes things more chaotic and challenging. If we can offer ourselves and each other compassion while we face the full reality of our situation, however terrifying it might be, our despair and loss is experienced collectively, meaningfully. The Collapse, for all the wreckage and horror that may be wrought in its path, might also break open a future where "the old divides between people seem to have fallen away," says Eugene McCarraher "and the fate that faces them, no matter how grim, is far less so for being shared."⁶³

The future will not be fully utopian or dystopian – it will not be heaven nor hell on earth, but an intermingling of chaos, grief, joy, and confusion all experienced in varying degrees. It is worth every bit of effort and energy we can afford to try and make our lives, and our social realities as dignified, humane, and compassionate as possible. To throw our weight onto the wheel of history calls for conscious choices to be made in our daily lives, to orient ourselves toward more compassionate relationships with those around us in the here and now. As we take on the very real threat and horror of the Collapse, we must hold steady to our humanity, to each other.

How we confront the Collapse is humanity's most meaningful project. There are no guarantees, but the collective pursuit of purpose and meaning is what orients our life around love and connection. No matter what happens, the best way to spend a human life is in loving, meaningful

⁵⁹ Joanna Macy -Active Hope

⁶⁰ Carla Bergman & Nick Montgomery – *Joyful Militancy*

⁶¹ Byung-Chul Han – *The Spirit of Hope*

⁶² Kai Cheng Thom – *I Hope We Choose Love*

⁶³ Eugene McCarraher – *Enchantments of Mammon*

connection with other people. Regardless of what the future holds, let us face it with a radical hope, with love and friendship as our guiding principle. “What a great last gasp if we realize we have fallen in love with each other.”[41]

Addendum: Faith

Navigating the Collapse calls us to radical imaginings beyond the lifeless logical framework of capitalist social reality. It requires a *belief* powerful enough to shirk our conditioning, renounce the status quo, and refuse the logical framework of profit motive which is spiraling us towards apocalypse. Hope pushes beyond reason, beyond the rational and measurable — it is an act of collective faith. The revolutionary social and political shifts necessary to literally save the world require, in a sense, a sort of *spiritual* dimension.

Of course, dear reader, your bullshit alarm may go off at first sight of the term “spiritual,” and for good reason. While we should remain alert to the commodified individualistic spiritual grifters so prevalent in the New Age, we need not veer into woo-woo territory to embrace a framework of reverence which values the sacred nature of life, and encourages social practices which bring us into communion with our neighbors, strangers, and the natural world. As Joel Kovel puts it, spirituality need not

be proclaimed as such. In the time of New Age huckstering, that spirituality is best which does not announce itself, and truest to the extent that ego is transcended in a greater cause.⁶⁴

For his part, Bookchin says of the intersection of spiritual practice and liberatory politics, “A truly natural spirituality, free of mystical regressions would center on the ability of an emancipated humanity to function as ethical agents for diminishing needless suffering.”⁶⁵ Of spiritual bypass, Bookchin has this to offer:

The effort in some corners of the ecology movement to prioritize the need to develop a pantheistic eco-spirituality over the need to address social factors raises serious questions about their ability to come to grips with reality. At a time when the blind social mechanism of the market is turning soil into sand, covering fertile land with concrete, poisoning air and water, and producing sweeping climatic and atmospheric changes, we cannot ignore the impact that an aggressive, hierarchical and exploitative class society has on the natural world. We must face the fact that economic growth, gender oppressions and ethnic domination — not to speak of corporate and bureaucratic incursions on human well-being — are much more capable of shaping the future of the natural world than our privatistic forms of spiritual self-redemption.⁶⁶

It is important for us to reject the egoic atomized spiritual practices which perpetuate the status quo or pacify collective outrage through individualized self care.

Likewise, many have an aversion to institutions of “religion,” as such — a justifiable one, given the extent to which god has been weaponized for genocide, colonialism, war and oppression of all shades throughout history and into the modern day. When its message is distorted by hierarchies and logics of domination, religion can be the polar opposite of the sort of radical faith which is *so necessary* to our political and social hopes. While it is juvenile and silly to articulate God as some vengeful man in the sky casting judgement, it is likewise smallminded and simplistic to

⁶⁴ Joel Kovel — *Enemy of Nature*

⁶⁵ Murray Bookchin — *Social Ecology & Communalism*

⁶⁶ Murray Bookchin — *Social Ecology & Communalism*

reject religion and spirituality outright based on that same interpretation or conceptualization. It is true that religion has been used as an excuse for the most vile human behavior and violent structural oppression in history, but it is also undeniable that religion and spiritual communion have been a crucial sight of revolutionary struggle. Dedication to god (by whatever name) has been a social tool for fighting oppression, for communal connection and the sort of meaning making which is so integral to human wellbeing. When it comes to such a fundamentally human activity as worship, ritual, and mythology concerning the unknown, we cannot throw out the baby (Jesus) with the (holy) bathwater.

If the term “religion” is associated with childhood trauma or hierarchal oppression for you, and “spirituality” raises an eyebrow in suspicion, I fully understand. However, as David Foster Wallace famously said, “there is no such thing as not worshipping.” The grifters of the New Age and the megachurch reactionaries are two sides of a coin entirely divorced from the basic human tendency I’m attempting to articulate. Human beings are meaning seeking creatures – they tell stories to explain the world around them. Storytelling, mythology, and spiritual ritual are in large part what make humans, human. A secular (capitalist) society only redirects this inextricable part of the human experience towards the worship of wealth, with celebrities as deities and consumption as ritual.

When allowed to be fully possessed by capitalist ideology – a framework of worship, ritual, and meaning making entirely captured by greed, consumption, and status – these fundamental human tendencies become perverse, demonic even. Capitalist ideology is fundamentally anti-social, blasphemous. It is a worldview and socio-political structure which is driving us towards death, towards mass extinction. When life itself, in all its forms, is cherished with reverence, the destruction wrought by a capitalist global empire is seen for the desecrating and vile force that it is. The things that we should hold in reverence – the beauty and chaos of the natural world, the joy derived from meaningful work, the relationships we build with one another – are all destroyed by an all encompassing capitalist social reality. It is a monster that consumes all that is holy; it has created a literal hell on earth – a world engulfed in literal flame – from raging wildfires to bombs dropped on the heads of children. Capitalist logic is the devil incarnate, in a certain sense.

When they are not captured by the logic of capital, spiritual practices or rituals of worship – whether we wish to call them that or not – are capable of establishing social cohesion and a sense of communal obligation. Let us take, as a modest example, the assembly, or “fellowship,” of a church. Once a week, a congregation gathers, establishes and maintains face to face relationships with fellow members of their community, with whom they embody a transcendental ritual of reverence – maybe even hold hands and sing! While I recognize there are endless examples of exploitation and perversion of this activity, we should also admit that there is something to be said for the way these practices – each to their own, and collectively – establish a coherent social body which has profound emotional, psychological, and societal benefits. Regular reinforcements of common values and celebrations of the creative and loving spirit invoked through communal ritual are the tools with which a new world is built. Humans have engaged, in some form or another, in these sorts of rituals since time immemorial. These practices are not merely metaphysical, but articulations of *social* connectivity and belonging with downstream political implications.

Ritual might look different for everyone. For me, punk shows serve as a sort of embodied ceremony. A group of people with shared beliefs (and bad haircuts) gather in physical space to

express their feelings, reinforce their collective values, scream and dance and sweat. For others this need may be met by cooking for people, providing childcare, or joining an activist organization. These embodied collective rituals come in many forms, but without them our personal lives lose their vigor, and our collective future looks bleaker by the day.

Ernst Bloch, one of the great philosophical thinkers on the subject of hope, extracts from Christian doctrine a sentiment that can be applied here: that the ultimate liberation operates “neither above nor deep within, but in a transformed world of total friendship, a world of home.”⁶⁷ The Holy Ghost, for Bloch, is present in moments of egalitarian solidarity, in the possibility of a world free from domination. We are most free when we are among friends, when we release our expectations and cease to impose our personal desires and pursuits onto our surroundings. “When Christ is asked, ‘how will we know that you have returned?’, his answer is, ‘when there is love between you, I will be there.’”⁶⁸ Bloch applies this basic Christian tendency towards a hopeful utopian imagining,

this communism of love was the basic condition for the advent of the Kingdom, so it also became its worldly norm. That is the gist of many parables — that the giving away of one’s goods is a treasure laid up for one in heaven, where no moth destroys, but also that brotherliness makes this treasure present here and now. The Kingdom is present in this world, only as a tiny seed, but the seed is already a crystallization of the next world⁶⁹

This sensibility comes before any particular concrete goal. Bloch views hope not as a desire for a distinct outcome, but a philosophical precursor from which political conclusions arise. Hope isn’t a particular emotion or feeling, but a “philosophical base for existence.”⁷⁰

A recognition of intrinsic value is an apt way to frame this kind of spiritual orientation, “the quiet appreciation of everyday reality without regard for what can be made out of it.”⁷¹ This outlook reinforces the political, scientific, spiritual, and social realities of interconnection – it allows us to internalize the inherently sacred nature of all life, rather than seeing everything through a myopic lens of personal utility. It brings about a kinship with the natural world as well as the people and creatures who occupy it.

Any new radicalism must begin from a faith in this fundamental joy of being. A realized eschatology, if you will, the future in the present tense. Living the new world in the wreckage of the old. [...] We can reenter paradise—even if only incompletely—for paradise has always been around and in us, eagerly awaiting our coming to our senses, ready to embrace and nourish when we renounce our unbelief in the goodness of things. And we can do this in the midst of imperial decay and in the face of seemingly impossible odds. Knowing that the world has been and will always be charged with the grandeur of God, we can practice, in the twilight of a senescent empire, love’s radiant, unarmed, and penniless dominion.⁷²

With a foundation of hope, uncertainty is charged with potential, rather than fear. Our ability to navigate the coming disasters rests on our capacity to embody a system of belief which challenges the reigning ideologies of capitalist domination. Faith, in this sense, might make us more

⁶⁷ Ernst Bloch — *Atheism in Christianity*

⁶⁸ Slavoj Žižek – Lecture

⁶⁹ Ernst Bloch — *Atheism in Christianity*

⁷⁰ Acid Horizon – podcast

⁷¹ Joel Kovel — *Enemy of Nature*

⁷² Eugene McCarthy — *Enchantments of Mammon*

resilient and determined in our struggle, might transform our pacifying despair into a liberating hope.

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