Ignatius
The Light Pours In
October 2025

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A PUSH TOWARDS RELATIONAL CRITIQUE

October 2025

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the existent. It necessitates a willingness to dive into the uncomfortable territory of recognizing we are not righteous actors destined for utopia but rather individuals who must learn to express their own desires and begin the process of bringing them about. There is no long arc of history bringing us towards an ever more utopic future.

No one is coming to save us. If we cannot speak, ourselves, of the suffering we endure, that suffering will continue. If we cannot understand our own positionalities, and the tools we make use of, in terms of the relations they exist within and engender, we will inevitably reproduce that suffering. I am not content to seek righteousness while remaining ignorant to the violence I reproduce in the path of that pursuit.

To want everything, to demand nothing short of the means to define for myself a life worth living, is to necessitate the ability for all those around me to see through the obfuscation in which we are submerged. Our tongues must remain sharpened so that our critique is always primed. Rupture is always imminent, always existent but so too, is recuperation and reproduction. If we cannot learn to see through noise to attack and undermine relations themselves, a life worth living will always be out of reach.

It really doesn't have to be this way. But so long as we are most concerned with our moral worth, we will continue to serve the death machines as instruments of reproduction.

So, I ask, as I always ask

What do you want?

Suggested Readings

- *At Daggers Drawn*
- *Reproduction of Daily Life*
- *The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism*

Every day it seems that the state of the world around us only grows more and more unbearable. I write this introduction as millions of already precarious people in the United States face an imminent escalation to their situation as the government shutdown brings with it an effective austerity measure of cutting food assistance programs. Despite the millions who will surely go hungry from this measure, money always seems to be found to continue paying the gestapo currently patrolling the streets of Chicago, Portland, NYC, and so many more cities and towns around the country, hunting for those defined as "illegal" by their relation to a line on a map. Money is always found for the genocidaires, abroad and at home.

State repression barrels forward with alarming heft and inertia. Casey Goonan caught the better part of two decades for property destruction in solidarity with the Palestinian resistance. The Prairieland defendants are being put through absolute hell for allegedly taking part in a noise demonstration outside of an ICE detention facility. Federal charges have been filed against a range of activists and potential future politicians in Chicagoland for their continued protesting of a similar detention facility in Broadview. NYC is a nightmare world in which ICE has been added into the mix of the already existent death squad that is the NYPD.

The horrors of this world remain as obfuscated as ever, even as their violences are borne more and more intensely by those most marginalized by the myriad of death machines. It seems that even as the violence becomes more commonplace, as the image of that violence becomes banal to daily life, we only become less able to articulate its causes and therefor less capable of meaningfully fighting against it.

This piece is a reworking of some older essays and collections (Fist Full of Concrete being home to a few) pointing towards the need for those of us who wish to really unmake this world of death machines to push towards a more cutting and incisive critique of the world around us. It is a call to move away from the language of

moral critique and towards an analytical frame that allows for more accurate articulation of the existent, the systems that produce and reproduce it, and what might be done to actually live differently.

Many of us struggle to accurately articulate the ways in which we suffer. We may be able to recognize the local or immediate manifestations of that suffering

> I got sick, missed work, and can't make rent
> The judge denied my sisters bail
> The state cut my food stamps and my kid is going hungry

but we struggle to put into words (and fail to meaningfully act against) the systems and ways of existing that produce and reproduce the social relations that give rise to these manifestations of our suffering. What's worse, our inability to identify and articulate these social relations (their causes and their effects) leaves us ignorant of how our own positionalities, desires, and actions serve their reproduction.

This ignorance is buoyed by an instinctive adherence to moral analysis that focuses primarily on defining actions or ways of existing along some axis of righteousness. We are more concerned with being able to defend the statement "I am a good person" than we are with actualizing the possibility of living differently. We choose a dogma (political, religious, etc.) within which we see ourselves as a righteous actor and move through the world as disciples of that dogma.

This phenomenon is as prevalent in self-described radical communities as it is in any religious one. The Leninist has their holy book from which to preach the good word. They learn to recognize the symbols that mark the correct path to walk and they look for others to bring into the church. It becomes far less important to accurately understand and critique the world, and far more important to adhere to this correct path. Before we get too comfortable

treated as commodities. This can be seen clearly in how firearms (one of the most common victims of the "neutrality" obfuscation) are commonly treated in the United States. The contexts in which they are produced and the social relations they engender or undermine are rarely part of their broader discussion. They are consumed as any other commodity is consumed, reinforcing the domination of capital, to make little mention of their reinforcement of castle doctrine, policing, and a myriad of other social relations I, personally, wish to unmake. Further comments on firearms specifically can be found in "Expropriate, Use, Destroy" (originally titled "An Anarchist Anti-Gun Manifesto") if you feel so compelled to explore this critique beyond this paragraph.

Don't confuse this critique of tools for saying we should never make use of tools. That would be as absurd as the suggestion that tools are neutral. Pretty much every object can be understood as a tool in some way, shape, or form. Rather, I want to see a more curious, incisive, and expansive critique of every aspect of the world around us, tools included. I want to push us to be more critical of how the objects we make use of work to reinforce or undermine the social relations that give rise to sufferings we ostensibly fight against. I want us to be as ruthless when it comes to questioning what we reproduce in our wake as we are in finding ways to strike against what presently exists.

The world is inundated with ever more horrific violences whose manifestations arise at ever greater frequency. Our heads spin as we struggle to make sense of where we are, what is happening around us, and what we might be able to do to combat that which terrorizes us. The longer our critiques remain constrained to moral frameworks, the longer we will remain ignorant to how our actions and positionalities reproduce the very systems that are killing us. We are all capable of reproducing the systems of marginalization and suffering.

If we are serious about wanting to live differently, that necessitates an active undermining of the social relations that produce

This failure supports, and is supported by, the inability to meaningfully critique the tools we make use of in the present. Ask the average leftist about a given tool and they're likely to tell you that said tool is a "neutral" object and that our critique would be better focused on who holds the tool (think of the state-communist's view of the state-apparatus). In this statement, the word "neutral" only has meaning within the context of moral analysis. In relational analysis, to claim anything is "neutral" would be absurd.

Every tool is produced within the context of existent social relations. For physical tools that includes where the raw materials come from, the conditions under which those materials are extracted, the intended use of the tool, the actualized use of the tool, the cost (material or psychological) of the tool's use, what positionalities are enforced by the tool's use, how those positionalities in turn shape desire. Every single tool that is produced and used is necessarily surrounded by, and emmeshed within, these relational contexts. To claim tools are "neutral" is to wave away these contexts as though they are dust in sunbeams rather than existent forces that shape the world around us.

The attempt to wave away these contexts can only ever be an obfuscation of the reproduction of the forces that dominate our lives. It can only ever be an exercise in self-delusion. When we purport the neutrality of tools we mistake our enforced ignorance for nuance. This ignorance bolsters and is bolstered by the moral analysis of the self as morally righteous actor. "Of course the tool is neutral. Even though it may be wielded for bad, I am good, so when I wield the tool, it is wielded for good. We needn't sully our hands with the details of the tool itself, and instead focus only on those who wield it". This is what it sounds like whenever a tool is claimed to be neutral. It would be embarrassing if it weren't so deeply tied to the reification of oppressive systems. So, it isn't embarrassing (or at least not only embarrassing), it's infuriating.

The most pervasive way in which the perceived neutrality of tools reinforces the existing death machines is in their being

leaning an elbow in at the Leninists, there are plenty of anarchists who may as well become men of the cloth given their predisposition towards a similar positionality (albeit with a slightly more varied collection of required texts).

In a world where the vast majority of us are denied both the means and imagination to define for ourselves a life worth living, the appeal of adopting the dogmatic positionality is understandable. It allows us ready access to a mode of meaning-making that asks little of us other than to adhere. It gives the feeling of being engaged in critical thought while keeping us firmly tethered to the comforting ground of an external authority backing us up. All we need to do is learn to apply the chose dogma to the world around us and we too might be saved. Through this application we become the righteous actors in a cosmic play designed solely for our salvation.

Changing things, really living differently is fucking hard, at times seemingly impossible and so we lose interest in that pursuit, if we ever had an interest in it to begin with. Instead, we view our surroundings as opportunities to prove our own moral worth. The suffering we experience or witness is not part of a system we may desire to unmake but rather a mark in the ledger of our moral character.

As we grow more interested in demonstrating or proving moral worth, we grow more defensive of our current positionalities. We become less willing to question and interrogate if how we're moving is actually bringing us any closer to the worlds we claim to desire. We abandon the "ruthless critique of all that exists" supposedly vital to understanding our position among (and within) the myriad of death machines, yet claim to be the most serious of critics.

If you want to see this defensiveness in action, just push any anarchist currently invested in the Ukrainian war effort on how, exactly, following orders in the state military to kill and be killed for country is an anarchist positionality. Moreover, suggest to them

that the thousands of individuals actively deserting said military, undermining its conscription efforts, and helping those drafted flee across the border may be more aligned with anarchist positionalities than the self-described anarchist currently carrying out the orders of his commanding officer.

Similarly, you could ask the leftist professing Iran as a bastion of anti-imperialist resistance to explain how state violence against a marginalized population fits within their framework of anti-imperialism. Or you could ask how selling arms to genocidaires in Sudan is indicative of a politic of resisting colonialism.

We cut out our eyes, stuff our ears, pull our tongues out through our throat. We demand that others do the same. We demand ignorance. This ignorance creeps in most cynically through the imposition of a moral critique of tools and mechanisms we may make use of. The term "neutral" is the most common vehicle by which this moral framework is imposed, a term that cements ignorance as the status quo. But ignorance is often useful for those most interested in maintaining their illusion of being the singular noble actors in that cosmic play of morality.

I am not interested in acting out some prescribed role in pursuit of some pre-determined meaning. I want nothing less than world in which all have the means to define for themselves the terms of their lives. I want to live differently. I want things to really change.

In order for things to really change beyond the simple renaming of the death machines, we must understand and critique the world around us in terms of the social relations which fuel its production and reproduction. We must identify how those social relations are crafted by the systems we exist within and how our own positionalities, actions, the tools/mechanisms we make use of serve them.

Until we are able to meaningfully analyze, articulate, critique, and undermine the social relations that give rise to our sufferings, we will be doomed to reproduce the broader systems from which those sufferings arise. If we want things to change in more than name or image, we must learn to speak the language of relational

critique. What follows is not new or unique. Others have said it before and with greater precision and eloquence (see reading list at the end for some examples). That said, I believe there is worth in expressing ideas in our own words, especially when those ideas feel vital in the present moment. In that vein, take this piece as a call to push yourself to be ever more explicit in the critiques you make of the world around you.

Ask yourself, what kills you? What relations allow for that killing to take place. If you follow these questions far enough, you will have to confront the possibility that there are ways in which you have been complicit in this killing, of yourself and others. At the point of such a confrontation you have a choice. You either recede into moral frameworks and prioritize a redefinition of your actions or adoption of a new moral system to maintain the belief that you are good and of moral worth, or you push through the confrontation and sharpen your critique further.

The Tools We Use and How We Dream

Obfuscated in the muddy waters of political and moral dogma are the futures we dream of. Because most of us are not accustomed to articulating our desired worlds explicitly, exposing the possibility of their realization to the sunlight, we are not accustomed to applying much critique to them. When we are most comfortable navigating the world through the framework of morality, we often assume that if our moral positions in the present fall within the boundaries we have defined as "good" or "righteous", so too must our desired futures. When we lack the ability to analyze the world (both existent and as yet to be realized) in the context of the reproduction of social relations we prevent ourselves from understanding how the very systems we seek to undermine in the present may be supported by the projection of our positionalities into the future.