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Against War-Thinking

Julian Langer

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“War thinking is a problem.” “Why would we join a fight where we want both sides to lose?”

- Aragorn!, The Fight For Turtle Island

Throughout the larger portion of my life I have observed the spectacles of war, usually focused on those pertaining to conflicts in the middle east, with horror and revolt. I remember in my childhood being shown the television footage of the 9/11 bombings, hearing that the USA and UK had invaded countries in the middle east and being told that bombs had gone off in London and so I had to be extra careful when using public transport to get to school, by adults horrified and revolted by what they had seen through the spectacle. I also became drawn in and took active interest. With learning more of my family fleeing Poland, first to Palestine and then South Africa (before eventually relocating in the UK) as Jewish refugees escaping state violence, of the holocaust and of World War 2, I became more and more horrified and revolted by war and mass killing. This horror and revolt for war continues to this day, and will likely continue until my final breath — though perhaps

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there is the slight possibility that I might live to see the ending of war, in the sense of all things being possible.

I have come to write this today with the desire to articulate an aesthetic and ethic that is somewhat impossible, and also entirely affirming of possibility. This aesthetic and ethic, which is neither pacifism nor militarism, is that which I have articulated best so far in my anti-cull writings as preservationism — as a passionate and defiant yes-saying to life — that is wholly absurd, as the preservation of life is impossible, as death and extinction are invariant. It is clear to me that this is radically different to pacifism, as it will likely be to those who have needed to exert physical and even violent force that might or has harmed another, in order to survive — most immediately for myself through the killing of two tumours (one brain and the other ocular) that has preserved my life thus far. In much the sense of Camatte's inversion, Moore's eversion and Deleuze's involution, this is neither the negation nor synthesis of a war-thinking conflict vs peace dialectic, but the turning inside out and collapse of war-thinking into something entirely different.

To denounced both pacifism and militarism is to admit spiritual defeat as the loss of faith in war-thinking. It involves affirming that conflict, struggle and revolt do not end where there is life. War-thinking, be it pacifist or militarist, demands that the living sacrifice themselves to the-Cause/politics/the-ideology/the-idea and, to quote the metaphysical anarchist Benjamin Fondane (in his essay on Hitler, Naziism and Hegel, Man Before History) “... *the greatest heroism that we can ask of [anyone] is to not sacrifice [themselves] to an Idea*” — here I have changed “man” and “himself” for “anyone” and “themselves”. Militarism demands that the living sacrifice themselves to the military Cause and commit horrific acts of violence upon others and pacifism demands that the living sacrifice themselves to the idea of non-violence before militarist violence, whilst committing horrific acts of violence upon themselves. Much like how socialism is not anti-propertarianist or anti-productivist, but merely propertarianism and productivism turned upside down

from its capitalist form; pacifism is a mode of war-thinking that is merely militarism turned upside down, still standing and upheld. Pacifism requires War for its existence, in exactly the same way that militarism does and would cease to be without it; and I say this with no disbelief that most who embrace the ideology of pacifism and seek to promote non-violent protest see themselves as true War opponents, rather than participating in war-thinking and the processes of War. Preservationism, as a will-and-commitment-to the refusal to sacrifice our lives and the lives of others to Cause, and a defiant yes-saying to life, is different to both of these ideologies and, at least for myself, an aesthetic and ethic that is far more desirable.

In his 8-part series of short essays on war and killing, titled *Neither Victims Nor Executioners*, Albert Camus affirms dialogue as an activity that can challenge the ideological and political push for murder. For Camus dialogue based in Reason was the way to cut through the web constituting the logic of History whose net threatens to strangle us all, and he called upon those who read him to raise up their voices. In the affirmation of dialogue, I am very much in agreement with Camus; though I do not share his faith in Reason, as it seems plain to me that it is always possible to rationalise killing, murder and self-sacrifice — and I share in Fondane's affirmation, in the essay referenced earlier, of Hitler being "*not only reasonable but is Reason itself, sincere at last*". In my book *Revolting* I affirmed this refusal to embrace the logic of annihilation before Cause, which is History, with a focus on ecological annihilation, revolution and insurrection, as well as colonialism and industrial death camps; and my main regret regarding that book is my failure to respond to the logic of war in its pages — perhaps this is an effort to make up for this.

Rather than dialogue based in Reason, as affirmed by Camus, I have greater belief in dialogue based in philosophy, in the sense of philosophy as affirmed by Lev Shestov as an activity oriented towards the breaking apart logic and reason, and upsetting ideology,

wherein the act of dialogue breaks apart and destroys war-thinking. This is not an appeal for something as naive as belief in talking to generals and politicians on all sides of war efforts being a means of stopping war-thinking, militarism and pacifism — though, again in the sense of all things being possible, I have no issue with that being attempted by those individuals in positions to do so. This is an encouragement of a philosophical refusal of war-thinking at all levels of this culture, which is the apparatus of war, as dialogue with anyone who we have opportunity to engage in dialogue with. I am largely of the same mind as Daniel Quinn in the belief that it is not new programs or systemic improvements that will end the totalitarian violences of this culture, but changed minds oriented towards wanting and seeking something better for themselves. This pertains to what Nietzsche described as a transvaluation of values, refusing to accept the nihilism that is war-thinking and the mass annihilation of life it rationalises and justifies under its Reason/Cause. In his dialogic-philosophy Mikhail Bakhtin affirms the “carnivalisation” of dialogue as a means of challenging homogeneity, unitary languages that limits the scope of thought and conversation, and monologisation/totalitarianism, so that conversation has the qualities of a carnival or festival with an irreducible and unfinalisable multiplicity of voices, which, in the context of war-thinking, has the potential to disrupt both the “final solutions” of militarist-murdering and pacifist self-sacrifice. In such dialogues lies the possibility of refusing an answer that ends conversation before the logic of the Idea; and the possibility of preserving life as an unanswerable questioning of how to live in this world that always contains struggle, regardless of politics and programs, until our deaths.

I have no faith that it is possible for politics to bomb us into a world where there are no more bombs that is not the possibility of extinction through bombing — something I do not believe we have the technological capacity to do. I also have no faith that it is possible for ideology to self-sacrifice into a world where self-sacrifice is no more that is not the possibility of totalitarian self-

Attempting an ending to this piece of writing that is not an ending, finishing something that is not about finalising and is opposed to finalisation, has its obvious absurdities and ambiguities. For this I offer no apologies. Like Camus I am affirming here dialogue as a means of resisting and rebelling against war-thinking and History and all that that pertains to. Not a dialogue that seeks to use Reason against Reason, in the search for a final solution, but carnivalised dialogues, with ourselves and with others, of multiple, frequently unclear and irreducible philosophies and praxes affirming creativity and freedom, embracing the power of the imagination that the repressive forces of totalitarian Reason seeks to negate. This is to imagine how to break down war apparatus and thinking, and to imagine a world, still containing struggle and conflicts (as life just does), but with War and war-thinking destroyed and dead — which I affirm as being entirely possible and eventually, in the sense that all dies as death is invariant, inevitable. As I said in the first paragraph of this piece, it is possible that I will never see the complete collapse and undoing of war-thinking and War in my life, and it is also possible that I might. In a world without War and war-thinking, such as how it has existed through Leviathan for as long as Leviathan has existed, I have absolute belief in the possibility of other struggles, such as those that living beings experienced when Leviathan did not exist. I also have the utmost belief in the possibility of living beings surviving such struggles, as life has continued until today. Yes, this is a horrifically positive-pessimism; the complete inversion/eversion/involution of the negative-optimist assertion that without Leviathan, war-thinking and War, death is the only possibility and that we have achieved salvation through Leviathan, war-thinking and War, that is the dominant ideology in this culture. To imagine these endings, what joys and struggles they may well involve, I leave that to your imagination.

pacifistic self-harm and politically-rationalised-suicides, such as those done by individuals setting themselves on fire, bring about justice for those living amidst war today — whatever justice might mean — or pacify war machines? How do performative protests affect war-efforts, outside of spectacularisation in the media? My lack of faith and disbelief remains for both.

Of course being against war-thinking does not mean not-thinking-about-wars or being indifferent to the struggles and ruination that war pertains to. It is also true that there are those who are geographically immersed in war efforts for whom engagement is the most immediate means of preserving themselves and those who they love — as an anti-cull activist who has frequently called the badger cull a specicidal war effort, I could be accused of war engagement as a saboteur (and will openly accept the accusation). Ecologically speaking, separation is nonsense and I am not appealing to anything of absolute puritanism here. So here I return to something of ambiguity and with that an appreciation of the individual differences of ecological context and social setting, freedoms and responsibilities, and personal inclinations in praxes. But there is no requirement for belief in war-thinking to engage in a war effort for immediatist survival of those you love and yourself, as a saboteur, medic or many other contexts. That this is unclear is largely due to how clearing goes hand in hand with genocide and ecological annihilation — something well articulated by Erin Manning in her book *Out of the Clear*. Refusing clarity and clearing, in embrace of ambiguity, we are in the bewilderment (to borrow Moore's term) of forests and carnivals, swarms of insects and folk dancing together without direction, of rain fall obscuring your vision and pamphlet manifestos written by your mates, of revolting art projects and bodies covered in sweat, dirt, blood and tears, of camouflage to appear to be what you are not to preserve who you are. None of this is easy and I doubt all simplistic answers and solutions that seek to achieve finalisation.

sacrifice — again, something I do not believe in as I have too great an experience of the will-to-life/power that I have seen in folk I have known and experienced myself. I do believe in preservation and dialogue, not as answers or solutions to life and struggle, but as unfinalisable ways of engaging in eco-existential revolt and of disrupting the logic of war-thinking, until the point at which we die (as death is invariant) — this is belief as embodied, intuitive and instinctually felt truth, rather than rationalised-faith.

It could well be put to me that, in my failure to escape the ambiguity of no definite answer or finalised solution, I have committed an injustice of some sort or another, towards any particular side of any war efforts you care to mention; be they militarist or pacifist. Such accusations may be made. However, in a similar way to that affirmed by Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, I have no faith in the ending of ambiguity through ethical-systematisation and refuse to embrace the violences of ending ambiguity through totalitarian-monologisation. Every Cause, Ideology, War, etc., in its push to annihilate the possibility of non-conforming voices, seeks to end ambiguity before its Reason — such is my belief and experience. To me though the ambiguity of refusing war-thinking is not an injustice but is revolting and in it being-revolting there is the possibility of revolt. The pacification of such revolt through attempting to negate ambiguity through systematisation is not something I have any desire for or faith in.

To speak of more current events, spectacles, news and wars, as well as past examples, as I have suggested is to affirm an irreducible terrain of choice and possibility, which is the presence or if you prefer existence of freedom, and in so doing to speak of the openness of freedom. It is only with the most grotesque bad faith that it can be suggested that the only existing choices are between Zionism or Marxism or Islamism or Capitalism, or that our only choices are between industrialist-annihilation and extinction. The choice is not merely one of being, in the words of Tolstoy, between patriotism or peace. We are not limited to either war or so-

cialism, as Kropotkin suggested, as our only options. These closures of possibility serve the logic of Idea and war-thinking, and trap the living into the roles of combatant/non-combatant, participant/non-participant, and other similar nonsense binaries that encode our lives within a systematisation that either rationally justifies our existences or our annihilations. Possibility is not reducible as Ideology presents it as.

In affirming possibility beyond Reason, Cause and the realms presented by Idea/ideology, I am inviting here a revolting-positivity for preservationist praxes, surmounting to an attempt to engage in the inversion/eversion/involution of the push for annihilation and death. Through our freedom, our creativity and our imaginations, which grow through internal-dialogues with ourselves and dialogues-with-others that are not seeking finalisation, solution and ending, we might live lives of active revolt against war-thinking(, war-logic, war-reason, war-ideology, war-Cause, etc.,) and in so doing break down such thinking. In the creative imaginings of philosophies different to that of war-thinking there seems to me to be the possibility of living lives more desirable than that of War.

I started this essay with two quotes from the infamous anarchist Aragorn!, taken from his book on indigenous experience and anarchism, in the context of anti-colonialism in the land called Turtle Island by many indigenous folk, better known as the USA to most of us. The first quote states that “(w)ar thinking is a problem”, which is not a statement I entirely agree with, as to say it is a problem evokes the dialectic of there being a solution that is finalisable. It is truer to me to say that war thinking is revolting and affirm the possibility of an irreducible terrain of rebellions against War and war-thinking. This is not to suggest that I believe war-thinking and War will never end, as I am entirely believe that all dies and so will War and its thought. This is an affirmation of the enormity and complexity of this matter, and to say that it is not as easy as problem = solution equations and simplistic reductionism. The sec-

ond quote — “(w)hy would we join a fight where we want both sides to lose?” — evokes many thoughts and questions for me. I do not want for any living beings to lose, in the sense of being annihilated by militarist machines or through pacifistic-self-harm, regardless of national-identity or Cause. I do want for all the ideologies and machines of war-thinking to lose, all the states/Leviathans to end, and for the inversion/eversion/involution of all that pertains to. As I affirmed in my book *Revolting*, I do not actually believe in win-lose politics and see the side taking as nonsense collectivism, all of which is utterly ecologically meaningless. This does not mean that I have lost my sympathy for the Iceni Celts who sought to resist the Roman Empire through War, or my appreciation for indigenous resisters of colonialism who have taken up arms to defend themselves and those who they love from Leviathan both in the past and across the world today. The need for those engagements in war-praxes, to seek to preserve life, strikes me as entirely in-relation to the nonsense and ecologically disastrous collectivist push for “victory” that is Empire and Leviathan. With this, it is still poignant that they do not pertain to the undoing or breaking down of War and war-thinking, and have provided nothing of salvation or escape from either.

There will no doubt be those who read this with the response that war-thinking remains rationally justified as justice/punishment/vengeance. There will be those who reply to this that war can bring justice to those who have been killed already; like Abba Kovner and Nakam, seeking to right the wrongs of Hitler through mass slaughtering. This is nonsense to me and I find myself untrusting of those who push such rhetoric. How does the murdering of someone change the death of another? How does the military of one political machine out-violencing the military of another political machine render right past historical wrongs? Likewise, there will be those who still rationalise non-violent pacifist praxes of political self-harm as needed to seek the end of War and provide justice for those living in war-zones today. How though does