

The Failure of Revolution

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2010

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Sorry comrade, the revolution has failed you.

This is the conclusion I've reached over the last decade. It hasn't been easy to come to terms with the realization that revolution, that innate core of anarchist thought, was the final piece of Leftism that I carried on as I came to understand that my 'enemy' was civilization and not merely the State.

Ironically, I resisted the thought. I begged and pleaded with myself to make room for a revolution against civilization, but over the years I've come to terms with the undeniable reality; revolutions have always been and will always be strictly political in nature.

As I've withered off my once deeply held beliefs in anarcho-syndicalism from its anachronistic cynicism of human nature, it's become increasingly clear that no resistance to civilization can come through this mythic, fabled ideal: tied as it is to a looming techno-industrial, political nightmare of a reality. My doubts have come to the surface and the sacred cow was laid before me: a rotted corpse animated by half-truths and ideals of what liberation may look like. Not only could revolution never bring about a future primitive, it's become increasingly harder to imagine it bringing any society like what its dystopian forbearers had envisioned.

So before I bash revolution for my own sake, let me attack it for its own.

Revolution and Modernization

The problem with revolutions is that any failure can so easily be justified away. It doesn't matter what the principle; democracy, anarchy, fascism, communism, socialism, etc., there's always something in the way. Never mind that humanity was never meant to be organized and certainly not on any mass, political level; there's always something to blame. Lack of will, internal and/or external stresses and so on. No matter how many times people have tried, it's simply impossible to find one single revolution that lived up to its own propaganda. And that includes the agrarian, industrial and technological revolutions.

Communism gets stuck in socialism. Anarchism gets stuck in communism. Workerists get stuck in industrialism. Industrialists get stuck in agrarianism. Over and over again, the same sales pitch comes out in fancy, modernized clothes. And every time, it can never live up to its guise.

Time and time again, the carrot succumbs to the stick and the dead hand of Progress washes the blood from the streets. When the theorized revolution fails, the ideology becomes force.

There's something about human nature that makes us not want to work. Our brains aren't hardwired for the world of delayed return. The Church preaches the virtue of business. The State preaches the gospel of contribution and unity within nationalist agendas. And it's as simple as this; the people exploited in the dawning of a new era get caught in the treadmill of Progress. Giving up our lives for the building of nothing is simply too much to bear. The reality is too depressing to even comprehend the implications of saying no to the hype. We fear the truth: that our lives were wasted for the triumph of emptiness.

The gears of Progress simply produce used and spent fuel. Yet the architects of a forced and contrived attempt to modernize domestication can't just stop by the wayside and give into their failed ideals.

And the utopias crafted from such waste only show the tired, knee jerk refusal to lose faith. Revolutions carry the bland desire to pull our own leash, to believe our subjugation can be better. Progress encapsulated in the death of desire. We celebrate mediocrity at the altar of Modernity.

Yet the dogma remains. No matter how many failed and half-baked revolutions rise and fall through that dogma, that ideology of entitlement to the fruits of civilization, the bounty of a strangled earth stands strong.

All revolutions are bound to their time and place. They speak to the totalizing nature of domestication: the failure to see beyond your own cage or, more appropriately, your own field, factory, or workshop... or just shop.

Reduced to a part of the machinery of the time, the only way up is to turn your misery into your passion: to demand your worth. Farmers and trade workers form guilds. Workers formed unions. And in that moment of self-proclaimed worth, they found a moment of ecstasy. They got a taste of our primal need for community. And in its absence they cast their substitute and sought a way to stretch it out for eternity.

There's something to the madness of crowds. There's an acceptance and elation where you can do no wrong. You see it in riots, in festivals, in a drunken stupor, or any mutual release from stress. You can see it in the churches, stadiums or rallies: the semblance of community born of in a spirit of ecstasy. The elevated senses brought about by the "incommunicable thrill of the group deliberately united in joy and exaltation", as noted by the sociologist Barbara Ehrenreich in her study of communal ecstasy.¹ It's that feeling that breeds vigor for a revolutionary spirit. And in that madness, the dreams make sense: the fruit of our burdens could be our own.

Repulsive Utopias

The nightmare turns to addiction.

Caught in the populist tide, the idealist mistakes their desperate stand as a universal truth. The ideologues seek to control and direct the madness into their own vision. But there are always competing views and hopes. And under the universalized utopias comes the impending failure of Revolution.

Like the lie of Progress, the ideologue places their view into their own dialectic of history. It looks so simple and easy when they lay it out in their own well-trodden path. For the Marxist, industrialism and capitalism create breeding grounds for communism by way of socialism. For the anarchist, communism is the natural step to a worker-run, co-op stateless society. The dualistic, linear drive of history underlies their action.

But life is never this simple. The linear path of ideals constantly hits the cyclical nature of wildness. The soils in Russia dried against the Soviet genocide of those who worked them. The Cultural Revolution of China gave a new speed and ferocity to civilization's ecocidal impulse. Cuba, despite outside shoves, could never be self-sufficient. Peru, Nicaragua, Chile, Guatemala; none could convince their indigenous occupants of the nationalistic urgency to feed the urbanites. And the ideologues sought utopia by force.

And the anarchists remained complacent for far too long in almost every case. Among the communist and socialist revolutions you can easily find the anarchists trying to shape or guide

¹ Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: a History of Collective Joy*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007, pg .16.

the revolutionary uprisings. They carried the buried dream that ultimately their dialectic would rise at the right moment. In those moments of ecstasy they stood alongside the Revolution for the sake of Revolution. And each time they failed.

During Russia's November Revolution of 1917, Emma Goldman took to the defense of Lenin and Trotsky "who hold the world in awe by their personality, their prophetic vision, and their intense revolutionary spirit."² Taken by the ambiguous mix of revolutionary dogma, some of which played greatly with the insurrectionalist ideas of the anarchists and nihilists, Goldman and a great number of anarchists at the time overlooked that the Bolsheviks took the reigns because they were more understanding of the force a successful revolution must take. Thrusting itself against the grain of human intuition, they were at least more honest about taking arms and securing their ideological stronghold.

Even among their own ranks, by 1920 Lenin had taken the revolutionary dogma to its fully open conclusion stating: "If we are not ready to shoot a saboteur and White Guardist, what sort of revolution is that?"³

In shock and awe, the anarchists were exiled and persecuted by the Soviets. Voline barely escaped the firing squads of the Bolsheviks while believing their comradeship in the struggle against capitalism unified them. Realizing the obvious within the grasp of a revolutionary cleansing, Voline recounted speaking with Trotsky before the guns were turned:

"It is inevitable that you and we should come into conflict. You will begin to persecute us just as soon as your power has been consolidated. And you will end by having us shot down like partridges..."

"— Come, come, comrade," Trotsky replied. "You people are pig-headed and incorrigible fanatics. Look, as things now stand, what is the difference between us? A little question of methodology, quite secondary. You, like us, are revolutionaries. Like you, we are anarchists, in the final analysis. The only thing is that you want to introduce your anarchism straight away, without transition or preparation. Whereas we Marxists believe that one cannot "leap" into the libertarian realm in a single bound. We anticipate a transitional stage during which the ground can be cleared and smoothed for the anarchist society with the aid of an anti-bourgeois political power. In short, it is only a difference of "degree", nothing more. Essentially, we are very close to one another. Brother in arms. Think of it: we will have a common foe to fight. Will it even occur to us to fight one another? And anyway, I have no doubt but that you will quickly be persuaded of the necessity for a provisional socialist proletarian dictatorship. So I really cannot see any reason for warfare between you and us. We will assuredly march hand in hand. And then, even if we do not see eye to eye, you are overstating things a bit to suggest that we socialists will use brute force against anarchists! Come, come, what do you take us for? Anyways, we are socialists, comrade Voline! So we are not your enemies..."

"In December 1919, gravely wounded, I was arrested by the Bolshevik military authorities in the Makhnovist region. Deeming me a militant "of some standing," the authorities notified Trotsky of my arrest by means of a special telegram asking his

² Goldman cited in Paul Avarich, *Anarchist Portraits*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, pg. 194.

³ Lenin cited in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pg. 76.

view of how I should be handled. His answer arrived snappily and tersely and plainly – also by telegram: “Shoot out of hand. – Trotsky.” I was not shot, thanks solely to a set of particularly felicitous and quite fortuitous circumstances.”⁴

And you have the same pattern repeating throughout history. The anarchist support and factions of the Spanish Civil War mirror the situation in Russia horribly. Even after ranting on the situation in Russia, Goldman continued to be surprised by the “communist sabotage of the revolution”⁵ to no avail. In Cuba, the anarchists still live on the run. And from the sidelines they cried out against the injustice and the betrayal of Revolution: treason to the proletariat.

The problems are systemic. Not just for communist, capitalist or fascistic systems, but any mass level of synthetic social organization. Whether anarchists oppose the State or not, they merely pay lip service to the necessary bureaucracy and needs of a state-level society. Compared the rest, anarchists differ merely in their lack of imagination in understanding this point.

But they could continue to peddle this line for so long solely because they never got this far. What Yves Fremian over zealously called the “Orgasms of History”⁶ were merely premature wet dreams. The outcome of their dialectic was simply the delusion of linguistics. The red anarchists spoke of the need for increased production the same as the socialists: a throw back to the euphoric celebrations of councils drunk as they were on the outcomes of Progress.

In Alexander Berkman’s criticisms of the Russian Revolution he claimed his initial excitement was based on the premise that the Revolution was “the only one which actually abolished the capitalist system on a country-wide scale, and fundamentally altered all social relationships existing till then.”⁷ That historically laughable after-the-fact realization shows that his own premises about the nature of the Proletariat, their struggles and aims were no closer to reality than Lenin or Trotsky’s understandings. Outside of being exiled from Russia, it’s impossible to think Berkman would have done much differently had the roles been exchanged.

Like the Proletarian towing propagandists of the time, Berkman played the same lines:

“It should be clearly understood that the social revolution necessitates more intensive production than under capitalism in order to supply the needs of the larger masses who till then had lived in penury. This greater production can be achieved only by the workers having previously prepared themselves for the new situation. Familiarity with the process of industry, knowledge of the sources of supply, and determination to succeed will accomplish the task. ... Revolution always awakens a high degree of responsibility.”⁸

Berkman’s presumptions have failed field test after field test. Whether it’s the inability of South American socialists to foster support among the ‘peasants’ or even the infamous Russian example set in 1921 during the Kronstadt revolt when protest among the unwilling and unenthused workers went on strike only to have the arms of the Revolution turned on them. Goldman didn’t

⁴ Voline, *The Unknown Revolution* cited in Daniel Guerin, *No Gods, No Masters: Book Two*. Oakland: AK Press, 1998, pgs. 107–108.

⁵ Emma Goldman, *Visions of Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution* (David Porter, ed). New Paltz, NY: Commonground Press, 1985, pgs. 132–171.

⁶ Yves Fremion, *Orgasms of History*. Oakland: AK Press, 2002.

⁷ Alexander Berkman, *The Russian Tragedy*. London: Phoenix Press, 1986, pg. 14.

⁸ Alexander Berkman, *What is Anarchism?* Oakland: AK Press, 2004.

seem to sense the irony in attributing the strikes to a winter that was an “exceptionally hard one, and the people of the capital suffered intensely from cold, hunger, and exhaustion. They asked an increase of their food rations, some fuel and clothing.”⁹

Among the many failures of revolution, awakening “a high degree of responsibility” seems to rank fairly high. Revolution oriented and driven anarchists will beg and plead that this is due to the course of the revolution, not the nature of the society, but where is an example to the contrary? Would one be possible? Even more important, would it be worth waiting on? Had the anarchists of past or present attributed some foresight and even hindsight in recognizing why revolutions fail on anarchist goals alone, I’d be willing to entertain the notion. But when the ecstatic rage of the masses collects, it’s like hitting a reset button on the propaganda machine and the inevitable (and righteous) feelings of anger are left in a bloody aftermath when the guns get turned around.

Likewise Errico Malatesta, in his yearnings for Revolution called for land workers to “no longer recognize the landowners’ property rights, but continue and intensify production on their own account” while industrial workers “should take possession of the factories and continue and intensify production for their own benefit and that of the whole community.”¹⁰ And again, there’s a reason you don’t see this happening. In fairness, the Kronstadt strikers weren’t getting the benefits of increased production all around, but the equally stressed and reluctant “land workers” met an equal fate albeit with a less organized curtain call. Malatesta was only a step ahead of his contemporaries in addressing the farmers dead on. They most likely shared the delusions of Progress their former Russian allies held: “The Bolsheviks’ need to live off the land probably surprised themselves more than it surprised the peasants.”¹¹

Outside of power, outside of politics, their utopias gleamed in delusion. Given the chance, would they not take the path of the socialists? Would the utilitarian ‘will of the people’ be cast any differently?

We have yet to see, but the red anarchists will never get their chance to be proven wrong.

In the euphoric delusion, the anarchists misunderstood the rage and discontent, just as the socialists and fascists had. Their vision failed to understand the problem wasn’t the spread of wealth, but the production of it: an unquestioned need to work. The Proletarian will that the socialists poured their faith into rang hollow as the eve of the Revolution was followed by business as usual. The counter-intuitiveness of the machine still bred lethargy. The orchestration of the machine called back the capitalists who drew the blueprints once more.

‘Transition’ became justification.

It comes back to the madness, the euphoria, the group therapy of councils, unions, and a shared plight or identity. In those moments, the elation gave a face and a name. It gave a name to the stick that dangled the golden carrot. And in these moments, the mass could almost smell it.

But the scent fades. The stench of manure, the heat of smelted iron, the cough of the miner, the torn body of the logger, the hunger of the baker, the emptying seas, the scarred face of the earth; all these feelings won out. The hollow promises of a better tomorrow taste too much like the stale after taste of yesterday.

And this is where revolutions die.

⁹ Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia*. New York: Apollo Editions, 1970, pg. 193.

¹⁰ Vernon Richards, *Malatesta: Life and Ideas*. London: Aldgate Press, 1993, pg. 175.

¹¹ Fitzpatrick, 1994, pg. 81.

The death march of Progress, the peak of civilized existence is always out of reach. The rage of the dispossessed cannot be fooled forever. In the end, a part of our soul always knows the only thing singing in the coalmine is the canary.

The Anti-Nature of the State

I'd be dishonest to claim that my lack of enthusiasm for revolutionary anarchists and revolutions past was solely do to a crude underestimation of the will of the people. There is no exception to the genocide and ecocide inducing prerogatives of Progress among the revolutionaries.

If there's one place that my disdain for revolutionary blindness comes about the most, it's in the highly held successes when and where they briefly occurred. It never ceases to amaze me when anarchists cite the few minute examples of forced and temporary 'autonomous zones' as a glimpse of anarchy in action. For all the revolutions, for all the occupied and reclaimed spaces, you have a shattered, intentional attempt to pull the pieces together and rarely have anything to show for it.

Coming back to Fremion's frightening wet dream of history, he salivates over the list of modernization and technological prowess put into place during the Spanish Revolution. Be it the dam built to bring water to "a million almond trees" which he further called an "out-and-out economic miracle" due to the speed of its construction. Or be it the new poultry feed, the "900 new shoe styles", or that the workers had, in his words, "no hesitation in diverting streams, clearing the land, erecting mills, setting up farms, and refectories" while in shops they "even assumed responsibility for the debts incurred by the previous capitalist owners."¹² I fail to see where the underlying lies and destruction of Progress are being swayed.

You'll have to pardon my lack of enthusiasm for what, in hindsight of the failures of revolution seems like pure revisionist history. In the eyes of the civilizers, Fremion's unbeknownst Blake-ian nightmare is typically part and parcel of the fast tracked modernizing any revolution undertakes. The Russian Revolution succeeded in massive overhauls on a nearly destroyed ecosystem, using fertilizers and technologically driven farming methods to wretch perhaps another century from complete ecological collapse in the region. The same can be said for the rapid building of dams in China after the revolution.

When revolutionaries embed their desires with that of the state and its needs, they become the flag bearers for the destruction of the earth.

States or state-level societies are inherently unsustainable and the greater the reliance upon technology and need to develop it, the more rampant the ecological devastation. We are innately nomadic beings. What has allowed us to live for so long, so far beyond our means and need for community and wildness is ironically our adaptability. What once kept us from being over dependent upon any certain food source or eco niche has kept our bodies' fighting against the carcinogen cocktail that is the air and water we breathe, drink and foul up.

Not one thing has happened over the past ten thousand years or so since societies settled, or were conquered, that has changed our essential being: our minds, bodies and senses. The underlying drive of Progress, once we stop looking towards our liberated future of techno-addiction, is to separate those needs and reassemble them around the socially constructed demands of a society tinkering on the edge of destruction. Whether we embody the spirit of domestication

¹² Fremion, 2002, pg. 158.

and leap into the brink of peak everything as an anarchist collective or a disembodied, cutthroat opportunist doesn't change anything about the grounded needs of all peoples and societies.

No matter how hard anyone fights against the State, or for it for that matter, we still need to eat, drink and breathe. The revolutionary spirit, no matter how liberated its propagandists may believe it to be, can't feed itself. Even beyond meeting our needs for community and wildness, we simply can't survive on ideology and philosophy and social contracts. Revolutions fail because they perpetuate a society or social level that cannot, has not and never will be capable of sustaining itself for any prolonged period of time.

And that's certainly something I have no interest in fighting for or siding with.

In fixating on the State or a State as an enemy, the mantra of Revolution is to unite against one enemy and every interested party is hoping it's their dialectic or their unspoken desire that erupts. As we've already seen here and anywhere in the world where a revolutionary dogma creeps out, it demands uncomfortable partnerships that rarely turn out in any positive light.

And few are more likely to play on that ambiguity than insurrectionalists.

The Insurrectionalist Delusion

Of all types of anarchism, no one dances with the euphoric more than the insurrectionalist. I should specify that not all insurrectionary anarchists are insurrectionalists. The distinction that I make is when insurrection is the sole end goal, the idea being that sheer upheaval brings about positive change. Insurrectionary anarchists may append their hope for insurrection with a larger, grounded critique. What I'm referring to specifically here are the nihilistic anarchists who trump critique with the much-taunted hope for transformation through destruction without aim. Born of a nihilistic urge and revolutionary fervor, the insurrectionalist demands elation. In a selfish act of indulgence, the insurrectionalist anarchist basks in the glory of the Individual.

They feel the poetry of rioting like a dance. The smashing of anything tangibly relating to the 'old order' is like a chorus. Bakunin typified the rage when he stated that the "urge to destroy is also a creative urge." The unattainable sense of urgency and damning of ideologues cries from that same rage that the revolutionaries tried to tap into. Every act of self-expression and anger touches closer to the sacred self. The Ego bows to its reflection and becomes addicted to euphoria until it can no longer imagine a purer vision of liberation.

But, as we have seen, that euphoria can't last forever.

The disembodied Egoist has isolated themselves, mistaken joy for purity, and only bred the revolutionary delusion. In an embrace of the unknown, they grasp the trajectory of Progress, reaching for an unknown future and demanding its boundless potential.

And the unknown extends to all aspects of life. Max Stirner, founding egoist anarchist who remains the underlying source for insurrectionalist dogma famously declared "all things are nothing to me"¹³ in a statement of defiance to a society where he sees inter-reliance as weakness. In his vision, only once individuals recognized their uniqueness in and of their own right could they connect on any anarchistic level. Seeing the tattered community of the State, he made the common mistake of blaming human nature rather than merely the social circumstances of civilization. And mirroring the mistakes of domestication the individual is the only basis for understanding and relating to the world. The interconnected community of wildness disregarded and set aside

¹³ Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pg. 324.

removed from the earth, from community, Stirner's "Union of Egoists" can only remain a dream. And the nihilistic Egoist can only search for their own liberation in nothingness, some pure isolation from context. And like any philosophical quest, it can never be complete.

Had the power of Stirner's precious self extended beyond his body, he might have recognized the irony in having died of a bug bite.¹⁴ Unfortunately the poetic egoists and nihilists to follow didn't take note either. The rhetoric of the insurrectionalists stems from this tainted notion of the self as defined by civilization and, even worse, by modernity and seeks the source of change as a realization that our damaged psyches are capable of realizing in a moment of uprising within the concrete and steel cages of the modernized environment.

I believe it is within our own nature that we can find and recognize what is wrong with our lives, but for completely different reasons than the insurrectionalists. While they believe there is no human nature and that the future is unwritten, I see the opposite and in a liberatory sense. It is our connections that give us context, our community, our place within wildness. Civilization is perpetuated by the questions over the meaning of life, not wild communities. True to form, the nihilist and the egoist reject the question by refuting the possibility of knowing. It's taking the longest path to the simplest conclusion: that we know by feeling and experiencing what life is, not by externalizing.

The path of the insurrectionalist if taken by their propaganda rather than their unspoken hopes can find no end and no community. Life becomes a constant quest, born of strife and revolt against a truly imposing situation initially, but it lives out through trial-and-error sorting the mess of domestication without grounding. The dogma produced, inspiring though it may be, bites hard on social relationships such as the family and community without recognizing that the need for community is what spurs civilizers of all levels to tear apart and reassemble social networks as if the sum of all parts was equal to the whole. The relationships that we have as civilized beings are no doubt twisted versions of our wild cousins, but the complete rejection and search for a new starting point ignores who we are and what we need. That further pushes the real issue of why the civilizing process works for the most part in making innately wild humans tame consumers and civilians.

The insurrectionalist Feral Faun echoes Stirner:

"All social relationships have their basis in the incompleteness produced by the repression of our passions and desires. Their basis is our need for each other. We are using each other."¹⁵

He then continues to default on the passions and desires of individuals as the point of eruption and potential insurrection. And this sentiment is echoed through all insurrectionalist propaganda through time.

The dogma becomes as infantile as the disorders that perpetuate civilization. A recent example is an insurrectionalist magazine that boldly declared on its cover "For Nothing, Against Everything."¹⁶ The standard lines are poetic ramblings that have been used effectively by any lofty ideology from Trotsky to Hitler with anarchists sharing the vagueness in between.

¹⁴ Ibid, pg xxxv.

¹⁵ Feral Faun, *Feral Revolution*. London: Elephant Editions, 2000, pg. 46.

¹⁶ *Fire to the Prisons*, issue 7.

What's even worse than taking the insurrectionalists at their word is believing that they're not towing an ideological line in their calls for hopes and desires. In all past revolutions you have insurrectionary leaflets taking a central role in recruitment and continued perseverance, but when the smoke clears the hope of the revolution washes over the aspirations of the loudest harshly. In their lack of vision, the dogma falls short. That is why the nihilist inspired Situationists reeked of beautiful insurrectionary dogma amidst a poetic critique of modernity where Guy Debord could state that the success of production and its abundance "is experienced by its producers only as an abundance of possession"¹⁷ and Raoul Vaneigem could proclaim that we "have a world of pleasures to win, and nothing to lose but boredom",¹⁸ while ultimately defaulting to the power of the Worker's Councils.

We are beings of context. We have needs. Tainted by the whims of the domesticators, we are lost, but our damage is never complete nor irreversible.

Domestication is the process of taming wildness; a process, but not an act. It works so long as the environment is controlled, maintained as a reflection of the civilizers' linear drive. The rage that revolutionaries target, that insurrectionalists gleam, that fascists, priests and politicians damn, that is our stubborn refusal to die inside. Drowned, refused, and contorted, our rage seeps in contempt for our condition.

In a sense, the insurrectionalist knows this. They put their blind faith into it. They call for a subjection to desire unbound by circumstance even when those impulses stem from a civilized will to power and lust. Another misguided reaction to a disempowered life. As elating as the moments of insurrection may be, as much as they may open the door, they never lead very far in and of themselves.

We are beings of context. We have needs. The nihilistic denial of this is the delusion of the insurrectionalist: the dishonest acknowledgement that something makes us human. That some universal condition, some communal urge lurks within. Without embracing the full revolutionary utopia, the insurrectionalist merely hopes the rioter or the insurrectionary urge leads towards their same realization. They see the Union of Egoists freed from all seen and unseen restraints.

But this poetry of self-indulgence is merely another guise for the populist revolution. It remains just another implicit celebration of the ghost of Progress into the oblivious pursuit of modernity.

And in that linguistic dance, the insurrectionary poet can never be wrong. Instead they live out a purist pursuit and a fear of failure hidden beneath the half-frightened hopes for revolution.

In the revolutions, the insurrectionalists hide on all sides under a banner of anarchistic urges to destroy and the elated rage of the present: a mix of fear and hope and a refusal to accept responsibility for action. Soaking in the righteous, undefined glory: Progress stands triumphant.

The Trouble with Politics

The looming question when it comes to revolutions and insurrections is why they fail. The revolutionary sees a failure of technique, any number of tactical issues that weren't dealt with properly or an inability of the people being "liberated" to do what they must for the success of the Revolution. The insurrectionalist can simply default on their poetic discourse and claim the complete disruption of everything was not achieved. Both can fall back on the State, but by their

¹⁷ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books, 1995, pg 23. Italics in original.

¹⁸ Raoul Vaneigem, *Revolution of Everyday Life*. London: Rebel Press, 2001, pg. 279

very nature neither of them can question the power that a State or state-level society makes possible.

As beings infused with the sensibility and rootedness of gatherer-hunters, we were never meant to think on the size and scale of any civilization, much less one with a technological-industrial system at its disposal.

The failure of revolutionary dogma and action is in the inability to see beyond power.

Political, economic and social power, created by sedentary and surplus dependent societies underlies civilization. Technological innovations are a necessary response to the adapting needs of increasing populations with their increased dependence upon centralized, stagnant circumstance. That is what creates the stratified, hierarchical, bureaucratic institutions that we all know so intimately in our society as our ancestors knew or had to face down in their own lives.

All systems, whether they are theocracies, democracies, communist, fascist, capitalist, feudal, or what have you, must address the most basic question of the continuation of power. In our modernized reality, that comes in the form of electricity and then sheer force, but our belief in the necessity of stored resources is the focus of the domestication process. It always has been and always will be.

The strength of any system is the totalizing conviction with which that message can be conveyed. Politics are intangible. The effects of politics never are. Piles of bodies, prisons, televisions, buildings, concrete, steel, and plastic are all the physical creations of power and its assertion, but you can't touch a social network. As tempting as it might be, you can't assassinate an ideology. Yet this is the singular battlefield on which revolutionaries and insurrectionaries must play. If you wish to alter society, if you want to grab it by its reigns and innately change it, you must succumb to its delusion of power and the methods by which it is maintained.

So long as the State is the enemy, revolutions fail because they must play into the ideology of power. No matter what they hope to achieve or how they hope to spread it, they must wrangle the intangible and, in the case of anarchists and communists, collectivize it on some level while maintaining its unwavering path.

That is why the classical anarchists talked about the need to increase production. It's hardly a major talking point because it's a source of contempt and deception. But even the most convinced revolutionary knows that people need to eat. The more modernized the society, the less leeway for downtime in the food distribution networks.

Their premise must remain unquestioned: that in a more ideal society, the daily sacrifice of labor to the Megamachine won't feed an unapproachable system. That reflects a lack of understanding about why it is that humans don't want to work. By work, I'm referring specifically to production of a surplus by a fragmented system, a contribution to an unseen whole rather than the daily, immediate efforts of our grounded ancestors and cousins living closer to or within the cycles of our earth. There is no where in the relatively brief history of civilization where you see that sacrifice being taken easily and the reason is simple: it's not in our nature to work towards building some great distant future. We are beings of the present, we are wild animals: the only way we have been convinced otherwise is through a constant barrage of mental and physical reconstructions of our needs.

The issue of power is and always will be tied to the issue of production. No revolution will change that. No technology will change that. As much as visionaries have tried to open our eyes to unseen possibilities, we need to eat, sleep, drink and breathe. Revolutionaries come to power

seeking to give a new face to that sacrifice at the altar of Progress and they soon find that they keep it by forcing production.

That grasp of power is what unites revolutionaries and the systems they oppose. Politics and Revolution are tied, and so long as insurrectionalists play in the realm of established social relationships they are caught in the same track.

And despite the lofty, poetic dreams of liberation, the outcome is always the same.

When the Grid is the Enemy

This estimation of the failures of revolution and insurrection is far from a surrendering to the power of domestication and the politics it perpetuates. Quite the contrary, I'm interested in understanding what it takes to bring about the end of the civilized era. And the question comes back to power.

The revolutionaries focus on power in a strategic sense. Rather than questioning why politics continue to rule our lives, they seek to possess and redirect them. The problem is the existence of politics and the ability of a political system to self perpetuate.

That lies in the heart of production.

The roots of civilization spread back to the settling of nomadic gatherer-hunters around a surplus of storable foods; be it grains, tubers, or fish. Here you are more prone to see the areas of social and spiritual stratification surrounding the distribution of a steady stockpile of foods. The need to distribute becomes necessary as the society becomes increasingly dependent upon it. Breaking directly and starkly with the adaptivity that accompanies nomadic life. But this is a slow and far from inevitable pattern. Yet where it emerges you have a larger, stratified society, capable and in need of state level organization.

The dawn of civilization is built around permanent settlements with political and religious centers and food producing peripheries: cities. As that society grows through conquest and growth, the necessities of life include sources of fuel for the social centers and those living in and around them. Natural and created resources become a part of the power infrastructure.

In the age of peak oil, we should all be innately aware of the importance limited resources play in the life of a society pushing the boundaries of the ecosystem in which it is based. As oil wars rage, as water scarcity feeds civil war, as critics of food producers are brandished terrorists, it is horribly apparent how weak the network that creates and supports political power is in relation to its armed face: the military, police, and concrete infrastructure.

Engaged in the same sphere, the revolutionary is left to face that opponent on their terrain. They must plan to fight the State where all political systems must excel the most, suppression through force. The ideal of Revolution is to avoid this when possible, but there has rarely been a case where that outcome is even expected. Instead you have a deliberate conflict of forces and bloodshed.

When you look beyond civilization, the possibilities begin to open up. On the one hand you see the weaknesses instilled in a system sustaining the mirage of power and on the other you have the consequences of that same civilization pushing against the boundaries of ecological capacity. It always has and always will be a losing battle and at the same time opens up further cracks in the armor of Leviathan.

Innate in understanding civilization is the target rather than its political face is the reality of a self-consuming, narcissistic cannibal. In accepting our wild human nature and a deepening relationship with remaining and struggling ecosystems, the opportunities make themselves available in ways that the revolutionaries and insurrectionalists will never have or see.

Where revolutions fail is where the potential for the complete collapse of the technologically dependent, resource starved modernity flourish. When we stop identifying with the faulty premise of sacrifice to Progress, we can open ourselves to learn from the mistakes of our well-intentioned anarchist forbearers.

Primal War

The flipside of asking why revolutions fail is asking why indigenous resistance movements have withstood so much over time. Faced with brutal colonizing forces, whether it is nomadic gatherer-hunters fighting expanding agrarian neighbors or imperial armies, there is a long standing tradition of unrelenting existence and typically with greater results than most revolutions.

The reason is the one thing that revolutionaries and insurrectionaries consistently overlook: our innate need for community, for wildness and the primal anarchy that runs through our spirit and connects us. It's something you can't fault revolutionaries for, this oversight is the linchpin of domestication: the reorganization of our spiritual connectivity.

Revolutions fail because revolutionaries and insurrectionaries must tow the line of Progress, the dream that the sacrifice of individuals has some greater meaning in the realm of human history and destiny. That is a path that has led to ecological instability and rampant decimation of wildness. The outcomes of revolution have only ever affected the speed and scale of that destruction. The revolutionary is selling ideology while the insurrectionalist is selling a blind hope of an improbable and seemingly unpredictable future.

Revolutions fail because when the blood inevitably begins to flow and the face of Revolution so closely begins to resemble or take the place of the gallows of the State, leaving the revolutionary to rightfully question the sacrifice. And it's hard to imagine why this wouldn't be the case. At the end of the day ideas are simply ideas. The hopes and dreams envisioned by the propagandists ring hollow alongside every other lie of Progress.

The connections that we so desperately need remain denied and buried in a sea of convoluted sales pitches. And revolutions die.

Politics are intangible. Wildness is not. Community is not. These are things that we feel, live, experience and connect to personally. There are no sales pitches or revolutionary cries that can take the place of our primal anarchy, the spirit of wildness embedded in our genes.

Gatherer-hunter and horticultural societies have continued their resistance because this is something they know, something they are tied to. Community is not a political ideal. The food they have foraged and harvested is not an ideology written about in newspapers. The primal anarchy of their society is lived out rather than spoken. They fight because of what they feel rather than what they think they know.

But there is nothing unique about any of these societies past or present that is alien to us. Despite the lies of the civilizers, domestication has not changed who we are. It has wrought destruction upon our earth, but it is a constant and fragile process. Wildness continues to flourish in spite of the domesticating hand of the State. It creeps up through concrete, grows through

foundations, overcomes structures, and it resists our sedentary lifestyles whether we like it or not. And it is freeing.

Unlike the promises and hopes of Revolution, the vague possibilities offered by insurrectionalists, wildness is tangible and available. It is something we can connect with here and now. The refusal of domestication, the giving over to wildness, the unlearning of civilized interpretation through a simple humility in the face of the simplicity of ecological sanity, what I call the primal war, counters the failures of Revolution.

In giving up on the Left, in riding the shackles of politics, the world awaits. And within that recognition, through our own attempts to rewild and reform community lie the key to understanding that the revolutions fail because politics have failed us; domestication and civilization have failed us.

In recognizing the lies of Progress, the twilight of power makes itself apparent. We merely need to join with the earth in overcoming this plague. And if we look close enough, we will see that we merely need to follow its lead.

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The Failure of Revolution
2010

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