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Tasting Abolition

Rustbelt Abolition Radio

August 12, 2020

What follows are some notes on something we've been ruminating on these past few months. It is an attempt to think-chew through the density of Abolition in its many textures and flavors... especially now that many more of us have gotten a taste of it.

What's in a name? Abolition, as a name, belongs to no one. Which is not to say that it belongs to everyone. Abolition inherits many names and so many other struggles. It is in itself a terrain of struggle. A terrain which, in the past few months, has become a tumultuous battlefield – perhaps ever more so than just months ago when we spoke of “survival pending Abolition.”

Abolition points to the many forms of action that disrupt and erode carceral society's instruments of capture and control. Instruments of capture and control that take on both legal and extra-legal forms. They express themselves through the economy of police, prisons, and property (constituted through racial capitalism's *surpluses*) as well as a parallel racialized libidinal economy (constituted through *surplus pleasure-pain* and moralisms of all kinds).

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The carceral reproduces itself beyond prison walls and police uniforms. As such, Abolition is a constant confrontation of the carceral far beyond those walls – it challenges the many cops amongst us and within us that decompose our relations, and ultimately weaken us and empower them.

Abolition is also creation. Creation of many worlds here and now (and still-to-come). Worlds that exist in and through the many cracks in the walls of the carceral’s “catch-all solutions” to our decompositions and missed encounters. Abolition is therefore also about redirecting and recoding our flows (pleasure-pains and collective capacities) away from the carceral and towards producing and reproducing these other worlds already here and still-to-come.

Within this, we encounter at least three different modalities, or flavors, that Abolition takes on today. Each modality, or flavor, has its own specific tactics and strategy. Each modality is different and not necessarily opposed to or mutually exclusive with any other. Here, “flavor” does not just evoke a sensation but it also evokes a science. Experiments both sensible and scientific.

Take, for instance, the experiments through which physicists realized that some quirky particles called “neutrinos” are not one, but three, at the same time. Three different “flavors” of neutrinos physicists call them. Neutrinos oscillate through their different flavors as they move. So, like a neutrino, that elementary particle whose mass is negligible and does not interact strongly with light (meaning it’s invisible and yet it is everywhere) Abolition oscillates through three different flavors as it moves through vast geographies and calendars (as the Zapatista *compas* say).

The three flavors of Abolition we have encountered are as follows: (1) autonomist (2) insurrectionary (3) and procedural:

1. Autonomist Abolition entails a strategy of *fugitivity* or constant refusal of the instruments of capture and their “catch all solutions” while, at the same time, building hyperlocal (though dispersed in undetectable networks) infrastructures

for sustaining bodies (people, collectives, swarms) in resistance.

2. Insurrectionary Abolition entails a direct *confrontation* and antagonizing of the “big P” Police and its constant attempts to maintain order, while simultaneously attempting to liberate occupied territories.
3. Procedural Abolition entails winning and defending *non-reformist reforms* enshrined in policies that diminish the reach of the carceral state while simultaneously redirecting collective capacities towards social infrastructures that do not reinstate carceral instruments of capture and control.

It seems to us that Abolition today oscillates through these three different modalities. Each of these flavors, in their own way, disrupt and erode the carceral society’s instruments of capture, and, at the same time, create worlds here and now (and still-to-come). There are likely many more flavors than those we have encountered and enumerated in these short paragraphs. We invite the reader to test this out for themselves. But note that there are no recipes. Abolition is an ongoing experiment (without guarantees) that is nonetheless a matter of life-death, differentially, for all of us.

–RAR