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A Few Words: Thoughts on Alienation

Alienation is a concept frequently talked about in anarchist circles. Clearly, domination and exploitation can only develop in conjunction with alienation, so such discussion is important. But it is necessary to focus this discussion in order to make it useful to the anarchist project of destroying the present order and creating new ways of living.

I have always said that the revolt against the present order of things originates in the individual desire to create one's life as one sees fit. This does not contradict the necessity for class struggle or the desire for communism, but rather provides a basis for clarifying the methods for carrying out this revolutionary project. In terms of the present matter, it provides a basis for understanding alienation and its relationship to domination and exploitation.

When I talk about alienation, I am talking about a social process through which the institutions of social reproduction wrest our creative energy, our capacity to determine the conditions of our existence from us, placing their alienated form (not just as labor power, but as social roles of all sorts as well) at the service of the ruling order. This social process divides society into classes—the exploited whose capacity to create their lives as they see fit has been taken from them and the exploiters who benefit from this separation by accumulating and controlling the alienated energy in order to reproduce the current society and their own role as its rulers. The struggle of the exploited against the exploiting class thus finds its aim and method in the individual's struggle to realize herself by reappropriating her creative energy, his capacity to determine his life as she sees fit. This struggle must ultimately become collective, but there is no need to wait for the rising of the multitudes in order to begin.

But I often hear the word alienation used in a much more general way. One hears of our alienation from nature, from others and from ourselves. These forms of alienation are not without their basis. When our capacity to determine the conditions of our own existence is taken from us, we become dependent on the institutions of domination. This situation forces us to separate from environments that are not controlled, environments that have not been institutionalized, and frequently places us into adversarial relationships with these environments. It also forces us to carry out activities that have no immediate relationship to our needs, desires and passions and to enter into relationships the content of which has been determined beforehand by the requirements of the social order.

But often when these latter forms of alienation are discussed, their social basis is forgotten. Rather than finding their source in the alienation of the individual's creative capacities for living which puts them into the service of the dominant social order, these forms are instead traced to the alleged alienation of the individual from a greater whole, an imagined original unity. This idealist version of alienation moves it from the social into the metaphysical. In this form, it may be interesting on a philosophical level, but offers little or nothing for the development of an insurrectional anarchist theory and practice. In fact, it could prove detrimental, making concepts so murky that clarity gets lost.

Consider, for example, the way some primitivists use the word “civilization”. This enemy that we are to destroy becomes as nebulous as the original Oneness, Wild Nature or whatever other reified concept one may use to idealize and unify the uncivilized state. The struggle then ceases to be social in nature and begins to take on mystical and psychological connotations. One must free oneself of the civilized mindset in order to reconnect with the Oneness of Wild Nature. Revolution is seen as a return to a past Eden rather than a rupture with the present aimed at the liberation from all constraints and the opening of possibilities.

But civilization is not essentially a mindset, a particular ideological system or a fall from Eden. It is something far more concrete: an ensemble of intertwined institutions—the state, the economy, technological systems, religion, the family, the city, etc.—that work together to precisely to predetermine the conditions under which we exist, thus alienating our capacity to determine our own lives, producing and reproducing social relations of domination and exploitation. Thus, the revolutionary destruction of civilization would simply be the revolutionary destruction of the institutions through which domination and exploitation are maintained. It would not be a return to a supposed Eden or some alleged original Oneness of being. In fact, it would offer no guarantees. It would simply put the capacity to determine our lives back into our own hands—from there it would be up to us to decide what we would do with it.

Naturalizing alienation, casting it in a metaphysical form as the disintegration of an original Oneness, with the consequent vision of a return to an Eden that never was, offers nothing to the insurrectional project. When we recognize that the fundamental form of alienation with which we have to contend is the theft of our capacity to create our live as we desire, it becomes clear that our struggle itself must be where we begin to steal it back by refusing every attempt to institutionalize the struggle, by acting directly and autonomously to destroy the present social order.

Against the Logic of Submission: Security Culture and Expansive Living

Life today is far too small. Forced into roles and relationships that reproduce the current social order, it focuses on the petty, on that which can be measured, priced, bought and sold. The meager existence of shopkeepers and security guards has been imposed everywhere, and real life, expansive life, life with no limits other than our own capacities exists only in revolt against this society. So those of us who want an expansive existence, life lived to the full, are moved to take action, to attack the institutions that compel us to live such petty lives.

Moved to take back our lives and make them wellsprings of the marvelous, we inevitably encounter repression. Everyday, hidden mechanisms of repression operate to prevent revolt, to guarantee the submission that maintains the social order. The necessities of survival, the underlying awareness of always being watched, the barrage of prohibitions that meet the eyes on signs or in the person of a cop, the very structure of the social environments in which we move, these are enough to keep most people in line, eyes to the ground, minds empty of all except the petty worries of the day. But when one has had enough of this impoverished existence and decides that there must be more, that she cannot tolerate another day in which life is diminished even more, the repression ceases to be so subtle. The spark of revolt has to be suppressed; the maintenance of the social order requires it.

The expansion of life cannot occur in hiding – that would simply be a change of cells within the social prison. But because this expansion, this tension toward freedom, moves us to attack this social order, to take action that is outside and frequently against its written and implied laws, we are forced to deal with the question of how to evade the uniformed guard dogs of the ruling class. So we cannot ignore the question of security.

I have always considered the question of security a simple one, a matter of practical intelligence that anyone should be capable of figuring out. By developing relations of affinity, one decides with whom one can act. There is no need to say a word about an action to anyone who is not involved in it. This is basic and should go without saying for anyone who decides to act against domination. But such practical intelligence has no need to enshroud itself in an atmosphere of suspicion and secretiveness where every word and every thought must be watched, in which even the *words* of defiance are considered too great a risk. If our practice takes us there, we have already lost.

In the context of illegal activity, security is essential. But even in this context, it is not the top priority. Our top priority is always the creation of the lives and relationships we desire, the opening of the possibility for the fullness of existence that the system of domination and exploitation cannot allow. Those of us who truly desire such an expansive existence want to express it in all of our actions.

In this light, the call for the development of a “*security culture*” seems strange to me. When I first heard the term, my immediate thought was: “That is precisely the sort of culture we live in!”

The cops and cameras on every corner and in every shop, the increasing numbers of identification cards and of interactions requiring their use, the various weapons systems put in place for national security, and on and on — the culture of security surrounds us, and it is the same as the culture of repression. Certainly, as anarchists this is not what we want.

Many of the practical suggestions made by the proponents of security culture are basic good sense for one who is taking action against the institutions of domination. It is obvious that one shouldn't leave evidence or speak to the police, that one should take the due precautions to avoid arrest — a situation that would certainly not enhance one's struggle for a full free life. But it makes no sense to speak of a security *culture*. The caution necessary to avoid arrest does not reflect the sort of life and relationships we want to build. At least I hope not.

When anarchists begin to see security as their top priority — as a “culture” that they must develop — paranoia comes to dominate relationships. Anarchist conferences are set up with levels of bureaucracy and (let's call things what they are) policing that too closely parallels what we are trying to destroy. Suspicion replaces comradeship and solidarity. If someone doesn't look or dress right, he finds herself ostracized, excluded from involvement. Something vital has been lost here — the reason for our struggle. It has vanished behind the hard armor of militancy, and we have come to be the mirror image of our enemy.

The anarchist struggle slips into this joyless, paranoid rigidity when it is not carried out as an attempt to create life differently, joyfully, intensely, but is rather treated as a cause to which one is to sacrifice oneself. One's struggle then becomes *moral*, not a question of desire, but of right and wrong, good and evil, conceived as absolute and knowable. Here is the source of much of the rigidity, much of the paranoia and much of the unwarranted sense of self-importance that one finds much too often in anarchist circles. We are the righteous warriors surrounded on all sides by the forces of evil. We must protect ourselves from any possibility of contamination. And the character armor hardens undermining the joyful spirit that provides the courage necessary for the destruction of the world of domination.

This destruction, this demolition of the social prison that surrounds us would bring us face-to-face with the unknown. If we confront it with fear and suspicion, we will build the new prisons ourselves. Some already are, in their minds and in their projects. This is why our projects of attack must originate in and be carried out with joy and an expansive generosity of spirit. The logic of paranoia and fear, the logic of suspicion with its measured words and deeds, is the logic of submission — if not to the present order of domination, then to a morality that diminishes our lives and guarantees that we will not have the courage to face the unknown, to face the world in which we would find ourselves if the present order were destroyed. Instead, let's embrace the passionate reason of desire that defies all domination. This reason is absolutely serious in its desire to destroy all that diminishes life, confining it to that which can be measured. And because it is so serious, it laughs.

Countering Institutions

The method one proposes for carrying out the struggle against the present order reflects the sort of existence one desires. The anarchist project has its origin in the desire of individuals to create their lives for themselves, on the basis of their own passions, inclinations and capacities. This aspiration becomes insurrectional when it confronts the institutions that presently define social relationships and determine the conditions of existence and the individual recognizes the necessity of destroying these institutions in order to realize this desire.

The dream of unfettered, self-determined life is the positive impulse that moves us to rebel. But it is not a blueprint for a new social order. It does not provide the answers in advance, but rather raises questions and draws us into the unknown. It presents us with the task of destroying our prison so that we can discover what lies beyond its walls.

Some anarchists find such a dream inadequate. They desire certainties, clear visions and answers. They come up with plans, schemes, programs and blueprints of the new society — usually based on models from some real or imagined past. But perhaps the proposal that I find the strangest is the one that calls us to start creating counter-institutions now to replace the institutions of domination.

The contention behind this proposal is that the institutions through which domination is maintained also serve essential functions for the maintenance of social life. Since the mechanisms of social life must not be interrupted, it is necessary to put new “non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian” institutions in place to take over these functions. Should we fail to do so, we would be leaving the field open for new form of domination to arise, one that may be even worse than the present form. This is what we are told.

And the questions are raised: “With what shall we replace the state?” “With what shall we replace capitalism?” It amazes me when anarchists ask such questions with a straight face. Does one replace the hated chains which held one captive? Does one rebuild the burnt-down prison from which one has escaped? But the proponents of counter-institutions have more foresight than this. They would have us forge the new chains and build the new prisons now in order to avoid the encounter with the unknown, with a wild world that may make our lives unpredictable. At least this new prison would be self-managed.

The actual counter-institutions that have been created are rarely anything more than alternative businesses, charities, NGO’s and the like. They offer no challenge to the present social order, but integrate quite well into its framework becoming dependent upon it. Certainly, anarchist bookshops, infoshops and publishers can be useful tools, but they are hardly models for a world in which every individual is free to determine her life as she sees fit with full access to all he needs to do so since they have little choice but to comply with the requirements of the economy. Undoubtedly, these counter-institutions would fall with the collapse of the social order upon which they depend.

From an anarchist perspective, perhaps the most absurd of the counter-institutional proposals is one that originates in libertarian municipalism, the proposal for the creation of institutions for

directly democratic decision-making. (I will not go into the critique of democracy here, having done so several times in the past.) It seems to me that the institutionalization of decision-making is the basic description of socio-political authority. The power of decision is taken from the individual and placed into the hands of the institution representing society. This institution then decides for the individual, requiring that the individual abide by that decision. A structure of this sort is already an authority, a government. When it encounters self-willed individuals who refuse to abide by its decisions, would it refrain from creating further institutions to enforce its decisions — institutions which would constitute a state? In any case, there is nothing anarchist about this proposal; it is inherently authoritarian.

While in practice the conception of counter-institutions has only succeeded in producing mirror images of mainstream institutions, its theoretical foundation is a fallacy. The assumption that the institutions of domination serve any necessary social function that must be continued when they are destroyed is groundless as the inability of the proponents of counter-institutions to describe these functions shows. The fundamental function of every institution — what makes it an institution rather than a project, an activity, a free relationship — is the alienation of the creative energy of individuals and their capacity to grasp the conditions of their existence in order to take control of them and channel them into the reproduction of the social order and so of domination and exploitation. It has been said many times, but I will say it again: it is our activity that creates the conditions of our existence. Institutions simply take control of this activity to guarantee the continuation of that which is.

The idea that counter-institutions would function in a significantly different way is an illusion already exposed by the proponents of this method themselves when they tell us that the mechanisms of social life must not be interrupted. The very existence of a social life that can be considered as mechanistic originates in the alienation of our creative energy and our capacities. If each of us is to become the creator of his own existence in association with whom she chooses, then social life must cease to be a mechanism into which we are fitted like gears or cogs. It is necessary that we reappropriate our creative energy and the conditions of our existence so that we can carry out essential social functions in terms of our desires not in terms of social reproduction — society is only useful as a tool for the full realization of our lives. In itself, it has no value.

In this light, it should be clear that the revolution toward which we anarchists make our efforts would be far more than a mere interruption of the mechanisms of social life. It would aim to destroy these mechanisms in order to free social life from a mechanistic, instrumentalist framework, to transform it into a tool for individual realization. Such a project not only has no need for institutions; it is by its nature anti-institutional. It requires a fluidity that corresponds to our passions and desires, to our individuality. There could not be a blueprint for such a world; there couldn't even be an outline. Any institution would be its enemy, the potential framework in which a new authority could arise.

So the argument for counter-institutions has gotten it backwards. Certainly, a disruption of the social order that opens every possibility is a gamble. No one would claim otherwise. Among the possibilities opened by an insurrectionary break is that of the return of domination. But providing such a potential power with the tools it would need to establish itself, institutional structures for defining and controlling social relationships, would only make their task easier. Institutions do not prevent domination; indomitable individuals do.

So the question is not that of what structures to create to replace those we destroy, but of how to go about destroying the present social order in such a way that we transform ourselves into indomitable individuals capable of creating and transforming fluid relationships reflective of our dreams and aspirations.

We all have a great capacity for self-organization. It is expressed every day as we go about our life, though in a form that is constrained to follow the limiting channels of the institutions that surround us. Proposals for counter-institutions and blueprints defining the new society in advance are simply more constraining channels, games of politicians looking for adherents to their cause. Such programs could only produce a society as alienated as the present one where the lives of individuals have already been defined for them before they even start living. Thus, in these kinds of proposals, the world that I see as the motivating force of anarchist struggle, the world in which every individual can create her life as he sees fit, has already been suppressed and the framework for new forms of domination set in place.

If, rather than starting from our fear of social rupture, our fear of upheaval, our fear of the unknown, we start from our dreams and aspirations and our capacity for self-organization, the need for programs, institutions and blueprints disappear. It becomes clear that what is necessary is revolt, insurrection, the destruction of the institutions that dominate our lives, or to put it more clearly, self-organized attacks against the institutions of domination. Rather than become politicians proposing programs and institutional frameworks into which to channel the struggle and seeking adherents to our programs, it makes much more sense for us to be comrades in struggle practicing and proposing methods of struggle free of formalization and institutionalization that encourage self-organization and self-activity in revolt. Only such self-organized revolt could ever create the indomitable individuals who would stop the rise of a new dominating power at its conception. Only in such a practice do we begin to see the glimmer of the new world we seek. Nothing is guaranteed by this, but if we hedge our bets in order to guarantee everything in advance, we have already lost.

The Internet and Self-Organization

The current restructuring of capitalist social relations began to develop with the rise of the “information age”, largely due to the growth of cybernetic and related technologies, so it is not surprising that the resistance to capitalism makes use of these tools for its own purposes. What is perhaps surprising, or at least disturbing, is the extent to which these tools have been embraced with no critical examination of the processes which produce these technologies and those under which they operate, nor of the nature of the sort of communication and organization they allow. In fact, it is not uncommon, even in anarchist circles, to come across accolades to the internet that leave the impression that this technology is what has made the organization of current struggles possible, what has allowed the present “anti-capitalist” movement to develop. At times, this praise reaches such a level that it seems to transform the internet into an icon, a symbol of the revolutionary struggle. But to the chagrin of the radical techno-fetishists, the computer lacks the romance of the machine gun, icon of so many revolutionaries of the 1970’s.

In any case, such effusive praise of one specific tool is certainly peculiar, particularly when it is such an integral part of the present social order. The internet has no connection whatsoever to the development of self-organized, autonomous relationships, and from an anarchist perspective, such relationships are central to the struggle against this world. The internet is actually a system that has been developed to serve specific requirements of capital and the state, so it is delusional to think it allows free interaction and association. Its form is conducive to the degradation of knowledge into (much more marketable) bits of information, of thought into binary logic, of relationships into virtual communication — just as the machine gun is conducive to killing.

This is not to deny that within the present social context the internet can serve as a useful tool for anarchists. One can find information about struggles, actions and state repression around the world; one can avail oneself of relatively instantaneous communication often at no cost that could provide a means for coordinating specific initiatives. But this is meaningless outside the context of a real ongoing struggle against the existing the entire network of institutions that dominates our lives. As I see it, this would mean a struggle against the kind of social relations that produced the internet and the technological systems upon which it depends.

But those within anti-capitalist circles who have praised the internet so effusively have seen it as far more than a tool. For them, it is the basis for a global struggle that is non-hierarchical and can lead to a “truly democratic” world. They ignore the systematic control of relations inherent in the technology that makes it hierarchical by nature. They ignore the hierarchy inherent in democracy itself. But above all they ignore the history of the struggle of the exploited against this reality. The internet is a very recent technological innovation, not more than a generation old, and there have been revolts against domination and exploitation from the time the civilized order arose. In the heat of such struggles, people have always been able to create ways to communicate with others in struggle, ways which, though technically less instantaneous than the internet, were far more immediate and truly autonomous. It was *self-organized* communication, often face-to-face.

As an integral part of cybernetic technological control, the internet is not and cannot be an expression of self-organization. It is qualitatively different from an autonomous assembly, an affinity group or a roving group of insurgent proletarians going to meet with other insurgents to coordinate struggles. The difference is simple to explain. If we make the internet the basis for coordinating our struggles, for communicating our projects, actions and dreams, then our struggles, our projects and all that inspires them will become the kind that can be communicated through the internet — that is, projects, struggles and dreams that can be broken down into interchangeable bits of information where people, their passions and desires are of little importance except to the extent that they are useful in producing marketable bytes. This is because the kind of communication and coordination that can happen through the internet has already been organized before we start to use it, and it has *not* been organized in our interest, but rather in the interests of the social order of domination. Dependence on that which has already been organized by one's enemy has two significant negative effects on one's struggle: it undermines one's own creative imagination and practical intelligence — one's capacity for self-organization — and it makes one dependent on one's enemy in the coordination of one's struggle, this undermining one's ability to strike the enemy fiercely.

Those of us who desire a world free of domination and exploitation, and therefore seek to destroy the state, capital and the entire ensemble of institutions that rule us, need to organize our struggles autonomously. This means creating our own tools for communicating and coordinating our struggles. It is necessary to develop relationships of affinity based on real knowledge of each other, of each person's projects, ideas, capacities, dreams and desires. These relationships provide the basis for developing projects of action and, on a larger scale, informal networks of solidarity. Various encounters, discussions, periodicals and papers — autonomously created projects — can hone our analyses and help us to work out our methods of struggle and coordinate our activities. But the specific details are not as important as the necessity of the *self-organization* of our struggle. Only with this basis, can we know how to grasp the tools at hand and turn them to our purpose — that of destroying the present society and creating our lives in freedom. In the context of such self-organized struggles, the internet may be a useful tool, but no more than that, and only one among many — one that I would say is destined to fall with the society that spawned it. And in the midst of a real uprising, when immediate communication would be essential, would we want to be sitting at a desk in front of a screen? Or out where the real struggle is going on?

Of Form and Content

Recently I read a book called *Wildcat Spain Encounters Democracy: 1976–78*. It describes an uprising that happened in Spain just after the death of Franco. The level of proletarian revolt at the time was the highest that had been experienced in Spain since the 1930's. The descriptions and analyses of events were certainly inspiring.

At the time, the insurgent proletarians did not act through the unions or parties that claimed to be their representatives — organizations that are well known for their reliance on compromise — but rather organized their activity themselves. This organization took the form of assemblies in the neighborhoods as well as the factories. Coordination between these assemblies was carried out through revocable delegates who were to do no more than relay the decisions made by those in the various assemblies. Since this was the spontaneous method developed by the insurgent population to organize their struggle against capital and the state, as well as against capital and the state, it is worth examining.

The analyses in *Wildcat Spain Encounters Democracy* make a mistake that often occurs in such analyses. The form of organization is given too much value. One is left with the idea that it was the assemblies and the system of revocable delegates as such that made the difference. But what was significant about the assemblies was not their form, but their content. In the assemblies, the separation between decision and the carrying out of the decision disappeared. The insurgents began to reappropriate the conditions of their existence and, thus, to supercede their proletarian condition. In other words, in practice, they ceased defining themselves as workers and began to define themselves as individuals struggling collectively to take back their individuality — not as an abstraction but as the practical appropriation of the capacity to create their lives as they chose with whom they chose. The assemblies could be vehicles for this, because they were specific organizations of struggle, not formal membership organizations with platforms and programs.

Of course, a content of this sort will affect the form of the organization used in struggle. A union, party or formal federation could never have such a content. History has repeatedly shown that these organizations would, in fact, act to undermine autonomy of this sort. But the specific circumstances of the struggle and the proclivities of the insurgent individuals as they discover the concrete meaning of their individuality in relation to others in struggle will determine the specific form this content will take.

History is not just something that happens to people. It is the activity of people, and therefore this revolutionary content may take a variety of forms — but always informal, always autonomous. It is essential to learn how to recognize this content as it develops and how to identify the forms of organization — such as unions, parties and other representational bodies — that are inherently recuperative, based on the continuation of proletarianization (or other exploitative social role and relationships such as race, age or gender) and thus anti-revolutionary. With this knowledge, it is necessary to fight the latter with the same ferocity as we fight every other institution that rules us.

Elsewhere *by H.T.*

(translated from *Diavolo in Corpo* #3)

“Real life is absent. We are not in the world.” — A. Rimbaud

Existence is elsewhere. By now, we know this much too well. We cannot find the fullness capable of giving any meaning to our time on this earth either in a job that sends us traveling along through the crossroads of the career or in a daily life from that no longer holds any wonder for us. We may be able to *have*, but we no longer know how to *be*. All the things that surround us and are within our reach in the form of disposable commodities to be accumulated are only scented balms for mortal wounds, for festering open sores caused by the renunciation of the vital minimum. The vital minimum is the possibility of creating and acting with authentic meaning, in other words, autonomy.

The critique of the miserable daily life that people lead today cannot be separated from the critique of the social order that determines it: capitalism. Our whole world has been shaped by exchange values; it has been built according to the principles of interchangeability, of quantity, of passivity, of irresponsibility. Our thoughts retrace the commonplaces dear to public opinion. Our desires are measured in terms of what can be realized thanks to a current bank account. Our dreams pursue models taken on loan from television and movie screens. Our words are inspired by advertising slogans. The very environment that surrounds us is constrained to assume the form most suited to the needs of the market as metropolitan architecture or the massacre of the surroundings brought about for industrial purposes shows. This has reached the point that soon, the very boundary between what is natural and what is artificial will dissolve.

Our identification with a world constructed to the measurement of the bank that even the project of an *other world* doesn't seem to escape the blind alley into which we are forced. Even the activity of one who wants to put an end to a social system based on money doesn't manage to avoid prolonging it, crashing against the reef of social reproduction.

Against a politics that was always a tool in the hands of the ruling class, a new parliament (however alternative) is elected. Against an economy preoccupied exclusively with its profits, new credit institutions (however ethical) are founded. Against a technology that does not facilitate life but rather renders it superfluous, one demands its mass distribution (however democratic). Against work that does not realize the individual but rather alienates her, one asks for its multiplication (however minimal). Against a power that causes infinite harm, one calls for its renewal (however revocable). Against this world one demands...this world (whatever small changes may be changed).

Round and round in circles. The intolerable world in which we live is also the only world that we know, the only one we have experienced. Every project of social transformation is based on knowledge — on that with which we are familiar. Starting from these premises, we analyze, we criticize, we denounce every sort of social poison present on our planet. But even though we are

aware of the necessity to spew the poison out of our organism, we are seized with doubts: will we survive such a drastic treatment? What will become of us afterwards? In order to avert the risk that such an eventuality allows, we go in search of the formula for a painless antidote. Medical science rushes to our aid: the antidote to poison is a minimal dose of the poison itself (and the “cure” very quickly reveals itself to be not only useless but harmful, because it has no other effect than that of rendering the poison itself still more virulent). Thus, the critique of this world ends by proposing its models once again. Round and round in circles. But this is the surest way not to bring this world down.

Until recently, it seemed certain that the realm of freedom could find no place within the realm of necessity. The latter was limited to predicting and preparing the conditions for the advent of the former (from this we derive all the eulogies to the “development of the productive forces” and other pleasantries that favored “the mysterious identification of the capitalist economy with social revolution”). Under the rule of capital, happiness is elsewhere; this is impossible to doubt in view of the chains that leave their mark on our flesh, but its seed still had to hatch under the snow and one only needed to wait for the end of winter to see it blossom. This was what we were taught until recently. But now this certainty in the spontaneous succession of seasons has frozen to death along with the sporadic swallow that was occasionally seen on the horizon. And the weather becomes ever harsher. One cannot keep waiting for the spring. It is necessary to crate this spring, but the task is not easy. So why not just say that it has already started?

This is the way that some frozen victims of the social ice age have decided to get around this obstacle. A new ideological creed has replaced the old one; it is decided that the realm of freedom no longer comes after the realm of necessity, but rather flanks it, exists together with it. Freedom is no longer built on the ruins of the palaces of power, something that would first require their toilsome destruction. Instead it is built on their margins. The elsewhere in which one can finally be oneself is no longer an absent totality that is realized in the future, as soon as possible, but a partiality, already operating in the present. The state is not destroyed, but ignored, deserted, abandoned in favor of a “bipolar society” — in the stalinist version — or a “non-state public sphere” — in the libertarian version — into which one can enter, passing through the “crevices” of the capitalist mega-machine.

It is only by hearing these two bells — the stalinist bell and the libertarian bell — at the same time that one can clearly perceive the identity of their ringing. Here the first one tolls: “It is necessary first of all to tend to the construction of these experiments in liberation, rather than tending to the organization of the proletarian masses to the end of the rupture or supercession of the general arrangements of the system, because it is possible to carve out spaces of liberation even in the absence of this rupture or supercession, or precisely because liberation will come to pass through the gradual, molecular and interwoven expansion of these spaces. Thus, in this case, the state and the market would not be ‘overthrown’, but rather ‘marginalized’, ‘extinguished’.” And now let’s listen to the second: “Self-government submerges action tending to organize moments of collective participation extraneous to the presence of the state starting with a simulation in effect: ‘as if’ it were not there. The erosion of the aspects of existence ruled by the state mortgage can become a collective practice that makes participation trenchant if these moments are really laboratories of unheard-of resolutions for problems tied to social life...the spreading of moments of self-government acquires a sense of opposition that, from a phenomenon that is antagonistic or subordinately or subordinately reactive to a temporary lack of institutional services, is posed

as an unpublished rough draft of projected organizations of society.” The prose varies its range of expression, but isn’t the refrain really the same?

And so the smaller one’s desires are, the greater the possibility of satisfying them. The successes obtained through a realist politics cannot hide the naked reality that they have been paid for with the coin of renunciation. The “happy isle” carved out by an ocean of denials is not a free world. The “socially useful” job carried out in a small enterprise (no matter how collectively it is run) is not communism. The life passed inside the walls of “self-managed” spaces is not anarchy. Whatever their colors may be, flowers cultivated in an artificial hothouse are not the spring. The “experiments in liberation”, the “moments of self-government”, all these instances in which we feel that we are protagonists can certainly take place and perhaps even increase, but only to the extent to which they are granted. Only to the extent to which they would not constitute a danger to the social order that they would like to weaken. Only to the extent to which they represent the crumbs that fall at our feet from the table of those who rule us. A warning to insurgents: the state is not going to fade away on its own and it certainly has no intention of killing itself.

Until recently, revolutionary hope expressed the secular disguise of a messianic vision. The *great dusk* represented a kind of Final Judgment capable of splitting history in two, with the world before the revelation quickly disappearing as freedom, which has finally been acquired, erases the last traces of original sin. The disappearance of such millenarian assurances will never be adequately toasted. Only now we would be jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire if we were to replace it with the old Marxist idea of a freedom that “can only bloom on this reign of necessity.” With its blackmail, necessity renders only the terrain of constraint fertile, certainly not the terrain of autonomy. If freedom is elsewhere, we cease to experience shame when we do not know what will arise on the on the ashes of the prison in which we are presently enclosed.

If we want to be realists, we are finally such at bottom. A utopia cannot exist with both feet on the ground. What makes utopia subversive is the tension that it generates, the insatiability that leads it to never be contented and to never be resigned. To not look where one is going because one does not want to remain where the gaze reaches. On the other hand, the utopia that claims to be concrete, the one of modest practical reason, the one that is revealed in the contrast between the grandiosity of the ends and the cringing mediocrity of the means, the utopia of shopkeepers who want to subvert the world while still remaining at peace with every Christian neighbor, this utopia is only a reformist lie.

What else could reformism be if not the endeavor to find an artificial bridge — parties, conferences, social centers, nonprofit enterprises, rural communes, municipal lists... — capable of uniting means and ends, a supposedly unchangeable reality and the designated ideal, *after having abandoned the real forces of revolution*? Is not its psychological origin perhaps exposed by observation of the partial possibility of modifying social organization? Isn’t its stimulus possibly born from the need for victory, the need to say goodbye to the long trail of defeats that the revolutionary idea has known? Couldn’t its fortune derive from the radical opposition to extremism? It is of little importance to know whether its supporters sit in parliament in double-breasted suits or march in the streets in white overalls.

It is a cliché, but one worth remembering: *the world in which we live is one*. It is the world of authority, of money, of the market, of the state. It is the realm of necessity. Today in its pervasive presence, there is no elsewhere. There is no realm of freedom, miraculously preserved from the genocide in course, in which to find refuge. So if we are persuaded that existence is elsewhere, then we must realize that elsewhere here. Without deluding ourselves that the process of social

becoming is automatic and irresistible, and that it will spontaneously understand all of the obstacles blocking its interests. On a practical level, this delusional perspective would work itself out in the renunciation of all active and conscious intervention aimed at fighting against the activities of domination. Without deluding ourselves that those who built this world in their image and likeness will turn it over to us without a fight in the face of our supposed greater “technical competence” in formulating adequate solutions to social problems. The nightmare in which we live will not end in a peaceful sunset.

Although the idea is no longer fashionable, the great game of freedom cannot do without a radical break, a social upheaval. Simply because its realization has all the characteristics of a wager: it is a risk that depends to great extent on chance. On her behalf, the player only has the passion for the game and the determination of his will. We leave the reassuring promises to advertisements. It is true that we may never experience the enchantment of being in the world. It is true that we may never live our existence here, feeling instead that it is elsewhere. But why not try it? Is there really anything better for which it is worthwhile to take the trouble of living?

The Body and Revolt

The entire history of western civilization can be read as a systematic attempt to exclude and isolate the body. From Plato on, this has been seen from time to time as folly to control, impulse to repress, labor power to arrange, unconscious to psychoanalyze.

The platonic separation between the body and the mind, a separation carried out to the complete advantage of the latter (“the body is the tomb of the mind”), even accompanies the seemingly most radical expressions of thought.

Now, this thesis is supported in numerous philosophy texts, almost all except those that are alien to the rarefied and unwholesome atmosphere of the universities. A reading of Nietzsche and of the authors like Hannah Arendt has found its appropriate scholastic systematization (phenomenological psychology, idea of difference and a way of pigeon-holing). Nonetheless, or actually because of this, it does not seem to me that this problem, the implications of which are many and fascinating, has been considered in depth.

A profound liberation of individuals entails an equally profound transformation of the way of conceiving the body, its expression and its relations.

Due to a battle-trained christian heritage, we are led to believe that domination controls and expropriates a part of the human being without however damaging her inner being (and there is much that could be said about the division between a presumed inner being and external relationships). Of course, capitalist relationships and state impositions adulterate and pollute life, but we think that our perceptions of ourselves and of the world remain unaltered. So even when we imagine a radical break with the existent, we are sure that it is our body as we presently think of it that will act on this.

I think instead that our body has suffered and continues to suffer a terrible mutilation. And this is not only due to the obvious aspects of control and alienation determined by technology. (That bodies have been reduced to reservoirs of spare organs is clearly shown by the triumph of the science of transplants, which is described with an insidious euphemism as a “frontier of medicine”. But to me the reality seems much worse than pharmaceutical speculations and the dictatorship of medicine as a separate and powerful body reveals.) The food, the air, the daily relations have atrophied our senses. The senselessness of work, the forced sociality, the dreadful materiality of the chit-chat, regiment both thought and the body, since no separation is possible between them.

The docile observance of the law, the imprisoning channels into which desires, which such captivity really transforms into sad ghosts of themselves, are enclosed weakens the organism just as much as pollution or forced medication.

“Morality is exhaustion,” said Nietzsche.

To affirm one’s own life, that exuberance that demands to be given, entails a transformation of the senses no less than of ideas and relationships.

I have frequently come to see people as beautiful, even physically, who had seemed almost insignificant to me until a short time earlier. When you are projecting your life and test yourself

in possible revolt with someone, you see in your playmates beautiful individuals, and not the sad faces and bodies that extinguish their light in habit and coercion any more. I believe that they really are becoming beautiful (and not that I simply see them as such) in the moment in which they express their desires and live their ideas.

The ethical resoluteness of one who abandons and attacks the power structures is a perception, a moment in which one tastes the beauty of one's comrades and the misery of obligation and submission. "I rebel, therefore I am" is a phrase from Camus that never ceases to charm me as only a reason for life can do.

In the face of a world that presents ethics as the space of authority and law, I think that there is no ethical dimension except in revolt, in risk, in the dream. The survival in which we are confined is unjust because it brutalizes and uglifies.

Only a different body can realize that further view of the life that opens to desire and mutuality, and only an effort toward beauty and toward the unknown can free our fettered bodies.

Massimo Passamani

The Violence of Poverty *by Patrizia*

(reprinted from *Insurrection*, September 1989)

Yet another rape. But today violence against a woman is more amusing if it takes place in a group: of at least 14. This is what happened in a village in Sicily, Militello. A fifteen year old girl was raped by boys between 11 and 18 years old all looking for adventure. An adventure with a girl whose parents had just returned to Sicily after years of emigration.

The newspapers point out one particular: the girl, who became pregnant as a result of the rape, was mentally disturbed. Her womanhood, her freedom of choice, is trampled on before she starts. First by her parents, who almost kept the fact hidden because of their shame, then the whole village, who interpreted the event as a boyish prank to defend the rapist kids, then the judge. The girl is being prevented from having an abortion. The village priest shows off his sullen moralism.

This time they couldn't even use the alibi of a miniskirt, of the seductive gaze of the continental woman who — they say — attracts men and distracts them from their good feelings of father, husband or brother.

In that environment there is a more subtle violence, a violence that comes from ignorance and fear. The ignorance of the boy rapists who pursue images according to which a woman cannot be considered a human being to be respected and loved.

In the south, as in the north, sex is still something dirty, composed of violence and abuse. In Milan a girl is raped by a male nurse in a hospital bed. In Termini station in Rome eighty people stand by and watch as an attempted rape takes place on a station bench. The rapist was then covered by the crowd and escaped. So, look out. From the tiny Sicilian village to the huge metropolis, rape remains the alternative of idiots, the last beach of interior emargination and the incapacity to communicate one's rage in any other way.

But in a little village the authority of the priest, the judge, the carabinieri, the public opinion of "respectable" people who don't want any scandal, bears a fundamental weight on things. In such an environment it is even possible for abortion to be denied to a girl who has been raped.

Violence is practically subscribed to by a power structure which itself exercises a double violence on the population: on the girl who must submit to the decisions made by the family and the rest of the village; and on the boys.

They are all more concerned with obeying laws and morality than about the life of this young woman.

We must begin to shout our rage again, but not by asking for more severe laws or the application of new ones: this only helps the system to castrate any possible search for freedom, our own and that of others, men and women alike.

If we believe that the practice of rape is born from a precise social condition, then we must not humiliate ourselves with demands for laws that only play the game into the hands of those who rape and exploit us daily.

We are not interested in whether those who raped the girl are found guilty or innocent. That would be too easy. We must fight the whole structure that contributes to creating the idea of violence against women and against emarginated people and proletarians in general. And, as usual, the latter, instead of beating up the bosses, are fighting among themselves, numbing their minds with all the shit that power produces. Violence often grows from conditions of poverty and survival that create the need to possess at all costs what one cannot have through practices of freedom, be it sex or any other part of normal activity.

If we want to overcome this profound contradiction between the request to be “regimented” and a search for liberation within human beings, then we must struggle in our own way and with our own instruments against all the relations of dominion that generate violence. Perhaps that day in Militello the boys would have preferred to have beaten up a priest or to have created some perspective for a less rotten life. Today they are locked up in a cell and are asking themselves why. The state will pardon their misdeed, but they will always remain convinced that all that, even their very punishment, was right and fits into the normal way of things.

The Justice of the State

On June 11, Jeffrey “Free” Luers was sentenced to 272 months (nearly 23 years) in prison on charges related to an arson at the Romania auto dealership in Eugene, Oregon on June 16, 2000 and an attempted arson at the Tyree Oil company that supposedly occurred a few weeks earlier. During his trial, Free claimed responsibility for the fire at the Romania dealership that destroyed three SUV’s, but said that he had nothing to do with the attempt against Tyree Oil. The judge explained the severity of the sentence – a first offence felony in which no one was hurt – in terms of the impossibility of guaranteeing that the fire would not injure anyone.

One could go on about the injustice of the sentence, but to do so would be to speak on the state’s terms – as if there could be any sentence that was “just” in anarchist terms. In fact, the judge simply carried out the state’s justice.

Most of those reading this are quite aware that every time anyone uses an automobile, they are taking a dangerous implement in hand with no way of guaranteeing that no one will be hurt by their use of it. We also know of their environmental effects that most likely cut time off of all of our lives. And this does not take into account work-related injuries stemming from the manufacture of these vehicles. In this light, one could look upon Free’s act as reasonable self-defense. But whatever humanistic rhetoric the judge may have used, as a state agent his decision to give Free such a harsh sentence was not motivated by care for human life or well-being. Free’s action was an attack on a practical level against property, against profit, against the flow of commodity exchange. As such, it could be seen as a blow struck at the heart of this society – at the economy. If Free’s act had not been motivated by a conscious and socially aware rebellion against this society, it is doubtful that he would have been charged so severely let alone sentenced so harshly.

So this is how the state sees Free’s action. Free willingly attacked one of the foundations of this society. The bottom line of state justice is the defense of the economic and political institutions of this society. The state has carried out its justice. Now it’s our turn.

The Continuing Struggle in Bolivia

According to a report from Juventudes Libertarias (Anarchist Youth) dated June 17, 2001, about twelve thousand mine workers armed with dynamite occupied the city of La Paz demanding the expulsion of mining multinationals from Bolivia. Of course, the unions played their proper social role as “the vanguard of compromise”, promoting the idea that negotiating with the national bourgeoisie is the best way for the workers to gain their demands.

At about the same time a truckers’ strike closed down most of the country’s highways for seven days. And more recently, factory workers began their own action in the face of a failing economy.

As is always the case, the unions and other progressives have been pushing a program of nationalist class collaboration, trying to convince the exploited that their interests are one with those of the Bolivian capitalist class, that slavery to a local master is better than slavery to a foreign master — the same old lie used over and over again to prevent revolution.

But a significant part of the Bolivian economy relates to the cultivation of coca, largely for traditional use in its unprocessed form. Using anti-drug policies as an excuse, the Bolivian government, with some significant assistance from the United States, is seeking to eradicate coca cultivation in order to appropriate these lands for multinationals. In response, farmers have formed self-defense committees. Government attacks and repression are pushing the farmers toward an armed uprising — a large-scale insurrection that could easily develop without forming a specialized military wing, since current developments are in the direction of a generalized arming of the rural population.

In the Yungas region, one of the main areas of traditional coca cultivation, the government recently attempted military invasion to eradicate coca plants. As soon as they heard of this, local farmers came together and drove the troops out to the border of the region.

On June 21, peasants of the Altiplano region set up roadblocks to protest their situation of poverty. The government sent in the military and two people were killed and several others wounded. The peasants have said that they are not going to back down in the face of such repression, but are prepared instead to arm themselves and move their struggle in an explicitly revolutionary direction. They proved that this is not just talk when they attacked power line towers with dynamite in response to the two murders.

On July 2, impoverished debtors took over three government buildings: the department of People’s Defense, the office of the Catholic archbishop and the banking supervisory agency. The debtors, among whom were women involved with the anarchy-feminist group Mujeres Creando (Women’s Initiative), were armed with dynamite and molotov cocktails. In the banking authority they took top-level functionaries hostage in their office tying bundles of dynamite to them. In addition to these occupations in La Paz, people also occupied an archbishop’s office in the city of Sucre and there were street protests in Tarija. A large number of these poor debtors are peasants who are already suffering from intense poverty and would find themselves starving in the streets were the banks to foreclose on their loan. Their immediate demands are the total

cancellation of their debts, an end to the suits against them and an end to the impounding of the few things they have. Their method of struggle is that of direct action and attack. Their struggle has been going on for some time, starting as peaceful protests, but becoming increasingly intense as the method of attack proved increasingly necessary. Previous to this latest occupation, there have been attempts to burn banks. The situation of the poor debtors is desperate and many are prepared to take the most extreme steps necessary to end their misery.

The social struggle in Bolivia is intensifying. As generally happens in such situations, the true colors of everyone involved are being exposed. The unions and progressive groups attempt to pacify the exploited, but reality exposes the worthlessness of compromise. And in the face of the cowardice of their so-called representatives, the exploited of Bolivia are beginning to act for themselves. As the anarchist of *Juventudes Libertarias* say: "Violence is justifiable, insurrection is indispensable."

Social War in Gothenburg

The European Union summit meeting in Gothenburg, Sweden on the weekend of June 15 and 16 was met with what may have been the fiercest rioting yet to occur at a summit meeting. Confrontations began Thursday when police set up a blockade around a school where about one thousand demonstrators were staying. This led to fighting between police and demonstrators that lasted into the night.

On Friday, demonstrators took to the streets, setting up barricades, smashing shop windows and battling the police. The ferocity of the rioting forced those who had planned the summit to cancel a gala dinner they had planned for the government leaders attending the summit. For those who still have illusions about the nature of the struggle against capitalism, one can hope that the shooting of three demonstrators – with very real bullets – will dispel these illusions. The stakes in play in this game are high – this is social war.

Of course, summits like the one in Gothenburg are not the real center of policy-making for the leaders of the world, but they do represent the unity of purpose shared by the entire ruling class in maintaining their power. So it is rather fitting that each summit is confronted with open, public rebellion where any demands that are made are of far less significance than the destructive rage and joy of those in the streets. But these public confrontations are not the heart of the struggle. The social war that the ruling class has declared against the exploited is everywhere all the time. Consider the shots fired by police without provocation during the funeral march for Timothy Thomas in Cincinnati last April. The state knows its enemies even when they don't recognize themselves as such. Thus, our attacks against the exploiters need to spread. While the confrontations at the summits may publicize the existence of our response to the rulers, of our counter-attack, it is the small actions that anyone can carry out in their own daily existence against their own exploitation and domination – small actions that can easily spread – that are the substance of our struggle against the social order. Having recognized the reality of the social war, it is essential that we carry on our attack against this society on every level that advances the necessary destruction of the present reality.

Action

BRENTWOOD, CA (May 16, 2001) — Opponents of biotechnology uprooted genetically engineered strawberry, tomato and onion plants at a facility run by DNA Plant Technology Holding that was recently acquired by ELM, a multinational bioengineering corporation that also own Seminis vegetable seeds.

CLATSKANIE, OR (May 20, 2001) — Saboteurs set fire to two buildings, several trucks and some machinery at Jefferson Poplar Farm near this town and left graffiti reading “ELF” and “You can’t control the wild.”

SEATTLE, WA (May 20, 2001) — Arson fire gutted Merrill Hall, home of the University of Washington’s Center for Urban Horticulture. This was not the first attack against this center which is involved in experiments with genetic engineering, as well as research for the lumber industry. Individuals using the name Earth Liberation Front (ELF) claimed the action.

BELGIUM (May 25–27, 2001) — During this weekend, saboteurs destroyed three fields of genetically engineered rapeseed (canola) plants. The “experimental” fields belonged to PGS-Aventis.

ARCATA, CA (May 28, 2001) — Unknown vandals defaced the statue of President William McKinley in the plaza. McKinley was assassinated by an anarchist immigrant named Leon Czolgosz nearly one hundred years ago.

ESTACADA, OR (June 1, 2001) — Unknown individuals attempted to set fire to six trucks belonging to a logging company that planned start harvesting trees in the Mount Hood National Forest. One truck was destroyed and two others damaged. Protesters have been living among the trees for two years in an attempt to prevent logging. A spokesperson for Cascadia Forest Alliance, showing the obtuseness of those who define themselves as activists, said, “The torching of the trucks strays from what is really important, which is the protection of the watershed.” As if an attack against the arsenal of the force attacking the watershed was not the most reasonable of protective actions. But those who still reason within the framework of law and democracy will never understand that in the context of a social existence that is an attack on the totality of life the only real defense is to attack that existence and try to destroy it.

FILER, ID (June 10, 2001) — Local farmers and crop truckers destroyed thousands of Round-up ready peas, plants that have been genetically modified to withstand the herbicide, Roundup. These peas were a test crop of the Seminis Vegetable Seeds company. In their communiqué, the saboteurs said, “A bunch of us around here doing farming and trucking crops decided to find out anything we could about Seminis.

And then the information we got made us take things into our own hands and go out into their fields one night and rip out the pea plants.”

ESCUINTLA, GUATEMALA (June 17, 2001) — Father’s day was a real holiday for seventy eight prisoners as family members and friends smuggled assault rifles and hand grenades into the prison known as “The Inferno”. Prisoners shot their way past eight doors and highjacked cars and busses to flee Escuintla. At last report sixty-seven are still free.

MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA (June 24, 2001) — Quebec’s annual St-Jean Baptiste holiday coincided with the weekly “Tam-Tams”, a huge gathering of young people at Mount-Royal Park to dance, play drums and generally have fun. Police were out in force harassing people, performing arbitrary searches and confiscating beer and other items. So it was no surprise that when there was a moment’s respite from police harassment, people started to riot. They attacked a McDonald’s at the corner of the park, smashed windows and throw in a Molotov cocktail. Other businesses were also attacked, including a luxury carpet shop, two gas stations and a state-run liquor store. A few of the buses carrying riot cops to the scene were also attacked.

BRABANT, NETHERLANDS (June 25, 2001) — During the night, a group of individuals calling themselves “Razende Hazen” (Enraged Hares) sabotaged two field tests of genetically engineered sugar beets. These tests of “Roundup-ready” beets were being conducted by Monsanto.

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