Anonymous
Brittle Utopias

Retrieved on March 7th, 2009 from www.geocities.com

theanarchistlibrary.org

Brittle Utopias

Anonymous

In the Istanbul of the Ottoman Empire there was a palace with seemingly endless corridors; where those outside had little idea what happened inside and those in one department didn't know what happened in the other. At least that's how it was in the imagination of Ismail Kadare, the Albanian novelist who wrote *The Palace of Dreams*. In his novel, the protagonist is given a job as a dream reader. He is sent to a room that he has difficulty finding, and told to read the dreams of others, sorting them into those that are of no interest, and that need to be investigated further: those that could be prophesies of events that will be threatening to the state. People throughout the empire submitted written accounts of their dreams to local offices in hope that their dreams would be selected, sent to Istanbul, and later proven to be prophetic. Little did they know that some dreams would be labeled as exposing threats to the state and that this didn't bode well for the dreamers. Kadare knew what we also know: that dreams have the potential to threaten the structures of power.

Without dreams, visions that reach beyond the death marches of this society,war, industry, pollution, boredom, we cannot destroy that which tries to doom us to a passive

yet stressful ambulant numbness. I recognize the stench of rotting flesh, but I'm not sure how to freshen the air. But is it necessary for us to conceive of a detailed plan of the world that we will build in the place of the putrefying corpse? Or is it more necessary to first perform the cremation rites? It is more important to know which path to take away from this social order than to be certain what one will do upon arriving at the end of it.

In *The Conquest of Bread*, Kropotkin laid out a detailed account of how, at that time, communism could be achieved without government. He even included statistics of production levels. These are long out dated of course, but I don't think that his vision was meant to be a strict model for communism even at the time that he wrote it, for in he same text he said: "Now all history, all the experience of the human race and all social psychology, unite in showing that the best and fairest way is to trust the decision to those whom it concerns most nearly. It is they alone who can consider and allow for the hundred and one details which must necessarily be overlooked in any merely official redistribution." (Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* p. 94) When we draw upon the utopian dreams of others we must be careful not to stick to narrow minded imitations of dreams that are born from other situations, on the other hand dreams that come from drastically different situations at times ignite a spark of inspiration that allows one to approach the present situation in a dynamic way. Some dreams are supple and resonate with the ever renewed present, others become fossilized, they are so dry and brittle that they crack and shatter to pieces when they try to move from the dream into reality.

Some utopias are visions of places in which humans can be truly present, places that lack the ever proliferating forms of mediation of this society. Others are non-places, these are dreams that are old even if just conceived of though they don't crack, they are too unified, too pristine. Ethnic cleansing, Communism with a big C, the nation, pure capitalism, these utopias

same. The cycles of software and fashion and other clones born from busywork escape death and were therefore never part of life. Our struggle should be a creative destruction, not the reproduction of living death.

We do not wish to become agents of the reproduction of the same. We dream of other ways of relating, of a utopia that is a real living dying rotting breathing place, a utopia of process not a brittle non-place. We wish to blast out of this history, a history of reaction. Hindu mythology conceives of creation and destruction as paired processes, life coming with death. It also envisioned that this age is part of the kali yuga, the black age, the last age, the cow is on her last leg and when the kali yuga ends she will be legless. The cow will go splat, the world will end. Maybe the ancient Hindu scholars saw it this way because since creation and destruction are paired, the world is a process of constant transformation, there can be no social order that is eternal, it too must eventually die. Maybe then it is not the realists who see things most clearly, since their vision is trapped in the present, but those dreamer utopians who know that this society could not possibly be permanent, those who are trying to kick at the cow's last leg.

can never be fully brought into practice, but that is not the problem. The problem is that there are powerful structures which try to bring these grand-plans into being, to the letter and with scientific precision. I don't want to live in a non-place where social problems can be solved with mathematical formulae and human beings become Xs and Ys. Social relations are unsolvable, we can only appear to solve them by temporarily forcing them into a relatively static position, at the cost of great human misery. Anarchy cannot be a great leap forward. Anarchy is not a non-place where human beings must bend to fit a mold.

Some dreams create people that are inscribed upon like a scratched record, they go around in circles always returning to the same point. Cracked dreams fall into the actual world in pieces, bite sized easily digestible bits, like a situationist slogan in a computer ad. Cracked dreams become the motor of a history that produces only novelty and nothing new. The frustrated dreams of one generation are reflected back at society in the slogans of the status quo of the next. These reflections are distortions, twisted mockeries of the dreams of those who itched to blast out of history into an utterly other utopia.

The distorted reflections of unrealized dreams inspire reaction. Unrealized desires cause frustration; when blocked from action people become reactive. They react to the limited choices that are relentlessly thrust upon them, an endless string of lesser evils. We have all experienced unrealized desires that have become resentment. Cracked dreams are ever recycled by resentment, by their lack of realization and our incapacity to act, by a society which limits our actions so severely that we are often left to merely react to its repressive mechanisms.

There are those who disdain all talk of destruction, who hold that creation is the essence of action, that destruction is the antithesis of any accomplishment or social change. But creation and destruction are twined processes like life and death. Modern science describes energy as being neither created or de-

stroyed but merely transformed. Transformation is simultaneous creation and destruction, for one state to be created another must be destroyed. Hindu mythology describes Shiva as a creator and destroyer. It seems logical to me that they should attribute both functions to one god.[1] So how is it that so many of those who call for social change above all else shrink away from the very idea of destruction, as if a new social reality can be created without destroying the state-capital leviathan? It is interesting to look at what kinds of activities many of these people hold up as being creative deeds. There are the progressives who think that it is important to work within the system, to vote, to be a good citizen. These people are often very busy re-creating the present social order. Busy work is elevated to a high deed by those who value reaction over action. Unable to act willfully, left with Pepsi challenge like options, one becomes frustrated but is compensated by a large quantity of possible reactions, the busy work of writing letters to congressmen, going to demonstrations, filing lawsuits. The frustrated desire to act becomes answering an opinion poll on a news show. Stand up and be counted, but what does all this counting add up to?

This mentality also surfaces among radicals. Miscellaneous forms of busy work, attending meetings, circulating pamphlets, running the local radical infoshop are considered necessarily superior to all forms of sabotage because these are viewed as constructive tasks, while sabotage is viewed as destructive. While some of what is held up as creative, the creation of places to meet, discussions and publications and flyers that open communication, are important parts of any social struggle, others are but 1001 types of busywork

[1] I use this example to illustrate a point. I do not intend to glorify Hinduism itself, which is force of oppression in India today; the caste system being just the most obvious example. When I was in India I noticed that many western travelers romanticized Hinduism without taking even a second to look at its effects, even when they brutally stared them in the face.

that only serve to reproduce the present social relations. Those that broke windows in Seattle, the ELF, neoluddites and other saboteurs, they don't do anything but break things. Meanwhile back at the collective, the same person who makes such accusations is splitting hairs to achieve a consensus decision about how to set up a fund-raiser. A brick through the window of Niketown, a firebomb in the GOP headquarters, these acts of destruction create more than the brilliant cascade of glass shards or sparks, more than the joys of redecorating that which we abhor. Behind the barricades and in the dead of night something else is born, our own active powers burn as brightly as Vail, when private property is no longer private nor property we have created new relations with each other and to the spaces that we have been locked out of for so long.

In this necrophilic society, reactive busy work bears many still births amidst the smokestacks and concrete.

The frustrated desire for change produces the novelty of seasonal fashions, Windows 95 98 2000, these things are qualitatively similar to their previous versions. Windows 2000 is only quantitatively different than previous versions. How many bytes do you have in your hard drive? Novelty is incomparable with the renewal of life, the difference between a mother and a daughter, a green shoot and a seed. The renewal of life in fundamentally connected to death. This society drains a little life from us every day in the same way that it hides death. Joyous cries on the subway are about as rare as a dead body on the road. A friend of mine came to visit me in China from the US, he was shocked to see all of those little animals in cages waiting to be slaughtered. He had eaten meat for 30 years before that without being particularly bothered by the idea. In the richer countries, though we breathe in cancerous fumes, death is hidden away, wiped clean. Where death is packed in Styrofoam, one has to wonder what kind of life can be lived. Creation which doesn't include a little death isn't part of life, it is instead the clonelike reproduction of the