

Prison Break: An Anarchist Blueprint for Hedonism

Flower Bomb

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"I was outside of these circles, so I didn't take into account that I could have embedded my writing with a better emphasis that this is not a blueprint for hedonism. I never wanted anyone to hitchhike and dumpster dive and shoplift and feel good about themselves for doing it. If you're not taking that time, that freedom you're creating for yourself and trying to make the world a better place with it, then I don't have anymore respect for you than the 9 to 5 wage slave that's treating their life like it's disposable." - Mack Evasion, author of the book "Evasion"

Through a breezy, warm night in Arizona a BNSF freight car carries me slowly enough to sit on the edge of the miniwell and look across the desert. The moon light casts the silhouettes of small bushes scattered on the ground accompanied by a dried up creek. While physically paralyzed by such overwhelming beauty my mind races through all the memories of cleaning toilets at the casino, unloading trucks at Target and stocking shelves at grocery stores. If only years ago I would have known my life could be filled with so much adventure I would have never stepped foot into these workplaces. If only I had realized sooner that I could have dropped out of boring ass school, gotten so much free food, avoided ending up in a psyche ward, and that all my community organizing and activism would amount to the same repetitive circus of disappointment... whatever. It doesn't matter. I am here, now. Better late than never.

The way that I see it, industrial society is a multi-dimensional prison facility that stratifies its population according to the value of one's productive output. Those who contribute the most toward reproducing and maintaining this prison are rewarded with social recognition and greater access to survival resources. And those who contribute the least are ridiculed, shamed and left to die off. The overall collectivism created through mass participation normalizes this binary way of life, generating a social pressure that drives assimilation and discourages insubordination. In order to function, industrial society normalizes wage-enslavement through learned inferiority. As people grow to internalize this sense of inferiority, they become dependent on industrial society and its symbolic representation of order. As people accept themselves individually as weak and powerless, societal prison fulfills a sense of group power and belonging.

I view industrial society as a prison because like all prisons, its function is to subordinate through containment. But the construction of this prison requires individuals not only to surrender themselves to a collectivist vision of law and order, but also to a unifying acceptance of separation: One's alienation from nature creates a fear remedied by a sense of safety found in order, predictability, and structure. From this point of view institutionalization can be seen as the result of one fearing their own wild potential beyond the walls of civilized captivity.

On an individual level, the thought-crime of feral insubordination is contained with suppression that is conditioned with years of behavioral civilizing (for example the educational industrial complex and its deeply traumatic process of assimilating children into civilized society).

In mass society, the individual self ceases to be unique as it becomes controlled, homogenized, and assimilated into the collectivist mentality of social membership.

The physical body of an individual becomes merely a unit of productivity that is valued based on its material contribution to industrial society.

Individuality is redefined by society and suppressed by assigned social constructs that categorically position it within the broader collectivist system.

These socially constructed identities become representative of the Self as merely a member of fixed class, race, and gendered identity categories.

At this point in the civilizing process, individuality is exchangeable with identity, losing all of its color and freedom as a unique animal being.

In the societal prison the individual animal is transformed into an inmate collectively known as a “citizen”. Now, as a member of this prison society, every citizen has an obligation to contribute their mind and body toward its reproduction and maintenance. It is reproduced on an individual level through morals, standardized behavioral norms, cultures, and traditions. For those who refuse this obligation (or for any number of reasons are unable to fulfill it), they are condemned to the punishment of poverty.

I walked into the store with my reusable bag in hand, trying hard not to laugh at myself in the “nice” clothes I just stole from the thrift store. Adjusting to my new outfit topped with one of those long hipster beanies, I start calmly scanning the crowd. Who looks like LP? Could be anyone. But when you do this kinda thing long enough you notice a couple patterns. For example someone you see multiple times in the store at different spots with the SAME food in the basket. Or someone slowly pushing a cart and seems to be more interested in the customers than their own shopping. They almost always have a phone which is probably used to coordinate with whoever is watching the cameras. Anyways, I am just another shopper. I grab a cart and fill up, but not too much to stand out. This store has two exits. One near the cash registers, the other near the Produce section. I notice a few people stocking Produce near that exit but unlike the cash registers, they aren’t watching for anyone who didn’t pay. They are just busy stocking apples and shit. I have three options when walking out: 1. Smile and nod at anyone who notices me. 2. Pretend to answer an important phone call. 3. Pull out my fake receipt and just keep looking forward, maybe stop and glance at something on the way out to further express “Why would I be afraid? I paid for all this.” I decide to answer a fake phone call while reviewing my fake receipt. This is the most tense moment. If any Loss Prevention have been onto me, this is when I will know. They usually grab the cart or shoulder or purse. I place my reusable bag on the mound of food and begin my way out. If someone touched me during this part id probably jump straight up like a startled cat! Out the first set of doors... second set... into the parking lot. No “Hey!” nor anyone grabbing at me. Nothing except a cart load of free vegan food that will last me for the next month.

Public Enemy #1: The Lifestyle Anarchist

“Anarchism must not be dissipated in self-indulgent behavior like that of the primitivistic Adamites of the sixteenth century, who ‘wandered through the woods naked, singing and dancing,’ as Kenneth Rexroth contemptuously observed, spending ‘their time in a continuous sexual orgy’...”
-Murray Bookchin from *“Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm”*

What I hear often from leftists is the use of the word “lifestylist” as a way to describe what they consider an undesirable form of anarchy. When I first started reading post-left anarchist writings, I was inspired by the courageous adventures of self-exploration beyond categorical definition. I

enjoyed the writings of those who embraced anarchy as life - nihilistic and wild against the social forces of civilized domestication. So it struck me as odd that some self-identifying anarchists took issue with this way of thinking and acting - going so far as to use "lifestyle anarchist" as an insult. So I ask those individuals: What is the difference between social anarchism and the monotony of workplace wage-slavery? Year after year there are anarchist holidays, noise demonstrations, potlucks, commune gatherings and so on - all of which to this day have not led "the masses" any closer to any sustainable uprising. In a way, workplace wage-slavery has more effect on "the masses" than any radical organizing: workplace wage-slavery further expands capitalism worldwide, while radical organizing has only led to (at most) small waves of revolt that ultimately are managed and suppressed by the state. So where does the individual fit into all this? Is there a pull from two opposing directions that share the commonality of attempting to transform the individual?

I have had experience with both wage-slavery and radical organizing. And both ended with the same conclusion: unfulfillment. Both choices required the surrendering of my mind and body to maintain their functioning, which inevitably led to monotonous repetition. Both choices share a circular logic: participation, no matter how difficult, driven by the hope that one day things will be better. So rather than seeking another chamber of society to identify with and occupy, I am seeking emancipation - a prison break not only from the captivity of death-driven wage-slavery, but also from the mental workerism that conceals itself behind the banner of radical organizing.

So what is one to do if they are neither occupying their mind with wage-slavery nor burning out with radical organizing? Is *society*, the prison encompassing these two life choices, worthy of critique?

A prison can materialize externally and internally. The most successful external prison is one that finds its reflection within those it holds captive. Those held captive reinforce that prison by internalizing the "citizen" collectivist identity. If we are not free individuals who roam, dance, and explore the wild beyond the walls of industrial captivity, then what are we? We are inmates of society identified by social security numbers and birth-dates. We are subjected to these domesticating walls of confinement which institutionalize us, and in exchange we're offered materialism to fill the void where chaos once connected us to life at birth.

If one understands their enslavement to society thoroughly, they reach the logical conclusion that the lives we claim to own ultimately belong to those who utilize them the most. This is why I personally hate work and find no affinity with any ideology that glorifies workerist identity. "Full-time" employment means average 40 hours a week in which an individual's mind and body are owned in exchange for monetary access to mind-numbing materialism or survival necessities. Without getting into the details of wage-slavery in exchange for only a portion of what the product of one's labor is actually worth, we are talking about hours of one's life lost forever. Similar to a prison, society owns its inmate citizens by purchasing their slavery at minimal pay rates. Like a prison, society functions and flourishes with a massified labor force that collectively surrenders livelihood to the norm of law and order.

But what about the individualist who refuses participation? And perhaps not only refuses participation but also sabotages?

From my own perspective, the lifestylist prefers rebellion now rather than waiting for "the masses" - expropriating life, resources, and time for hedonistic adventure. And the lifestylist is not a specialist in anarchy: Any single individual subjugated by society is capable of individualist insubordination. There are grocery stores of food, wild food to be foraged, the moon and stars

to act as cover for black clad cells of earth and animal liberationists. There is plenty of logging equipment to be sabotaged, storefronts to be smashed. There are howls of feral revolt to be shared across the globe between those who are determined to enjoy their lives against the dominion of misery.

The first thing people ask me is “What do you do for a living?”. And my answer is supposed to include some form of wage-slavery that financially supports my living. When I was an activist people used to ask me how much I got paid doing it. I laughed every time and to my disbelief, eventually realized that activism too has a lucrative place under capitalism. I am used to tabling free zines and posting all my writing on The Anarchist Library (and where and who ever else tolerates my ramblings). But some people go around giving lectures and speeches at colleges gettin’ mad cash. I prefer makin’ cash illegally- not by attempting to commodify rebellion any further than it already has been. So my answer to what I do for a living is usually “Anarchy”; I live and survive this way, as free as I can be, with no intentions on returning to wage-slavery or radical organizing.

After exiting the car I can’t help but notice how calm and quiet the night is in the downtown area. It’s SO quiet I feel as if my breathing is too loud. So I continue panic controlling as we circle the block. We can now see our destination. Every step I take is more gentle than normal because I am worried about someone hearing our footsteps. Maybe I am just worrying a little too much. But it IS really quiet tonight. We approach our destination and I stop to kneel down, pretending to tie my shoe. *We both slowly scan the area searching for any other movement whatsoever. Nothing. I start to feel my heart pounding as we prepare, my hand gripping a fist-sized rock. After carefully reviewing the plans, taking one last scan for anyone in cars or on foot, we begin. The sound of my accomplice tagging slightly disrupts the silence, my heart pounds harder while my eyes dart from the road to the activity and back. Excitement washes over my entire body. The tagging is almost done. One last scan over the area for movement. Nothing. Now for the final touch. As flashes of slaughterhouse videos and pictures race through my mind, I wind up and throw the rock at the glass doors. With an obnoxiously loud thud, it hits and drops straight down. Half enraged and half laughing my ass off, I dart over and pick the rock back up and throw it again, but this time much harder. The rock smashes through both outer AND inner glass doors, hitting the counter on the inside. After an outburst of cheerful satisfaction I turn and run, racing behind my accomplice. My heart pounds as we race back around the block. It feels like we fucking parked miles away. The cool night air dries my mouth and throat out with every quick breath. Finally approach the car. Panic control. Gently open the doors. Don’t slam them shut. Slowly drive away down the planned route. Nobody saw a thing. But both the thud and eventual smash were loud as fuck. So maybe someone heard? But we’re gone now. Overwhelming joy and adrenaline are pulsing through us. We cheer with hysterical laughter and high fives. And the night is still young. We got two more to do.*

Privileged or just determined?

Another critique of life as anarchy that I have grown tired of hearing is the myth that train-hopping, illegally expropriating food and resources and other individualist forms of rebellion are a “white” activity that also undermines the working class. This critique often comes from an identity-based assumption that the “working class” and POC are a monolithic mass incapable of materializing liberation on an individual level. Leftism leads one to believe that the population, in particular POC, needs to be led to revolution through rigorous education by radical leadership. Not only is this mentality condescending, it relies heavily on the assumption that all POC and or workers think alike and share the same political interest. Is this perhaps the reason why despite years and years of radical organizing and propagating “the revolution”, capitalism still has a powerful workforce, further expanding this nightmarish technological industrial complex?

So I ask those who accuse the individualist of disregarding the workers: How many times do you spend time, money, and energy attempting the same thing, under the same assumptions, yet expecting different results? Do you honestly blame the lifestylists for refusing to surrender their lives to the draining repetition of either wage-slavery or organizing? When anarchy is limited to and defined by a duty to educate and organize others, it has already become domesticated. Does it not count as a racist blanket statement to assume only “white” people are capable of creating activities that are based on individualist empowerment?

I once heard someone say that lifestyle anarchists are privileged. I thought about it for a while. I tried to understand how taking the courageous initiative to reclaim one’s life was a privilege. I couldn’t help but feel that such an accusation comes from a place of internalized defeat; a defeat so powerful that one can only perceive individual emancipation as an unattainable luxury. Similar to the identity prisons of race and gender, this mentality encourages one to view their self as an eternally disempowered victim of society. Rather than seeing one’s self as the ultimate creator of freedom, one views their self only in terms of mental prisons.

I have watched over the years as anarchism has become a platform for internalizing and glorifying victimhood. I have critiqued this in previous writing, but the relevance here is that there is this subtle message in anarchism that says “if you are not a victim, you must be privileged. And if you are privileged, you should feel guilty about improving the quality of your life. If we suffer, YOU should suffer too.” I believe it is this type of subtle message, circulated in radical spaces, that is responsible for the trend that labels individualist thought “privileged”, and encourages the abandonment of any ideas that challenge the internalized prison of morality.

For me, anarchy as wildness is a bomb that never stops exploding. It is the pesticide-resistant weed that cracks the foundation of industrial society and organizational conformity. Anarchy is the abomination of formally organized structures. It finds its reflection in the hedonism of the brave, ungovernable individual who rebels today with no expectation of a tomorrow. There are no social constructs – race, gender, or whatever – that can truly represent those who refuse the definitions, roles, and limitations imposed by society. Feral individualism is the lunatic enemy combatant of society, setting fire to the social contract of mental subordination. Within this societal prison race, gender, and other socially constructed identities are like numbers branded onto bodies, grouping people according to some authoritarian vision. Identity politics reinforces the internalized prison that confines individual uniqueness, and projects the mind and body policing of others.

If freedom of individuality is only defined by an individual's commitment to the group, then what makes the group any less governing than a state? If the anarchist critique of government is that it can never give one freedom, then why would one accept the governing of an identity, commune or society?

While riding what is known as a "piggyback" on a freight train, I peek from under the semi trailer and slowly inhale to take in the beautiful view of a rushing river surrounded by tall trees. We cross over it on a high bridge and for the first time in my life I realize I am seeing before me something that I thought only existed on nature television channels. I tag "no hope, no future; let the adventures begin!" on the inside of one of the semi trailer wings along with my name, wondering what whoever happens to find it there will think. After a few minutes I lay down on my dusty sleeping pad and listen to the sound of the train. And during that ride from Bakersfield to Dunsmir, California I realized I was finally breaking out of prisons in my head that discouraged me from experiencing anarchy beyond politics.

A Prison Break

If there is any real possibility of the population rising up in any insurrectionary way, it will most likely come from an individual realization that being a wage-slave ultimately reinforces the walls of this prison we call "society". And as long as individuals continue to identify themselves as its inferior citizen members, submission will be internally and externally normalized.

If the neatly faced aisles of grocery stores aren't enough to make one question their role in adding bricks to the ever-expanding walls of this prison, how will best-seller-of-insurrection groups like The Invisible Committee appear any different? Anarchy as an anti-social, individualist way of life simply can't be preached to "the masses" without being watered-down and losing its hostility to civilized order. Under capitalism, anarchism as a social movement has become collectivized into a hobby activity that co-exists with wage-slavery. New faces enter and quickly begin the work of organizing, only to burn out and retire down the line in a new era of presidency. Like a new warden, a new president takes over and dominates.

As winter nears I reflect on my past summer of fun activity. I realize for each season there is a variety of different opportunities for more. I realize that no matter where I travel and where I settle down for a bit, capitalism is all around me. There are many prisons to break out of and many ruptures to enjoy during this rewilding.

This short essay *is* intended to be a blueprint for hedonism. If I am lucky enough, it will encourage people to commit crime, train hop, dumpster dive, shoplift *and* feel good about themselves for doing it. If the time that some individuals take creating their freedom somehow inspires other individuals in the creation of their own, who needs movements and academic vanguards? Inspired by the adventures of other nomadic rebels who escaped this societal prison, I refused to remain an inmate. I prefer feral adventure - good times *and* bad times - over wage-slaving away in the preservation of industrial society.

Love and support to those who dropped out of school and faced life with nothing more than a lock-pick set and a backpack. Love and support to those who riot within the prisons of asylums and "correctional" facilities. Love and support to those who weaponized their lives, taking rebel-

lion to their graves in choosing death over imprisonment. A howl to the lifestylist ex-workers who found fierce joy in the materialized anarchy of their wildest dreams.

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