

Resignation is Death

Responding to the negation of anarchy

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“It also poses the question: where will the revolutionary energy for the West come from? We hardly understand our own situation, pressed into pragmatic decisions based on a complex system of dependencies. Maybe this is the lesson we have to learn for ourselves: what is the truth of our common situation that we have to understand to begin? This is the same reason why no other army right now can push back the IS forces in Syria. In defending Kobanê, the YPG/YPJ based their defense on this same consciousness. Nobody could believe that they would free their city; it goes beyond rationalism. It’s more about faith in yourself and belief in your revolutionary energy, which evolves out of your desire to live. That is the thing that has been nearly beaten out of you if you’ve been raised in Western capitalism.

Another friend added that if you really want to create a new society based in non-oppressive relationships, you’re trying to build something that doesn’t exist yet. It forms part of a new world, another world. How could you possibly understand it rationally from your point of view today? It’s not in the books. You need to get crazy to overcome the status quo; you need to be convinced by your fantasy and your desire. That’s your problem in Europe, he concluded: you forgot how to do that.”

– Crimethinc, *From Germany to Bakur*

Introduction

Under the present conditions in anglo North American capitalist society I feel surrounded by a pronounced sense of resignation. As has been said many times before, those of us who seek an end to the dominant social order have been passed on a long history of loss. The post WWII eras are heavily affected by anti-communist rhetoric, and a strong identification with our roles in the consumer/producer economy. This history has set the stage for a general lack of solidarity between people, a lack of any attempt at critical thought or any practice which might break the death grip of domination.

In the general population, this resignation is at least as old as industrial capitalism itself. There is, however, something all together different, a type of resignation that is founded in cynicism, that is in my estimation, especially louder and more widespread than at any time in recent history. In my daily life that is outside of anarchist or radical circles, the cynical resignation I come across most often, is that of right-wing conspiracy theories. In this manner of viewing the world it’s all way too crazy to get up off your ass, educate yourself and begin to deal with the problems that affect you directly, or to challenge the structures of domination through any kind of act of rebellion, and it sure as hell is seen as impossible to attack.

Within the context of social movements there are a few types of resignation that are not so new, of course you have the activists with revolutionary sympathies who are still petitioning, charity or non-profit organizing, and doing the “good work” in lieu of revolutionary possibilities. But as time goes on, I am starting to notice that the agency and practice associated with this tendency is becoming ever more non-existent. Not only is one forbidden from acting out their own desires against the dominant social order, but they are forbidden from thinking for themselves or even seeing themselves, their agency and desires, as in any way important. Those who claim they want change in the world are becoming more and more resigned, to sit back and shut up, with every passing day. When sparks of rebellion (such as in Ferguson) do occur, the most

passive forms of resistance are often idealized, and the more destructive acts are only legitimized through privilege politics: “rioting is the voice of the unheard” ...until that voice is given a legitimate (community) channel. Sometimes both the right and the left find common cause in their cynicism, believing the same conspiracy theories about how the oppressed cannot possibly take action for themselves. Anything that looks like self-organized direct action is seen as the work of police to justify their brutality.

In the associated social scenes of the left (DIY queer punk for example), there is a tendency to disengage all together. Generations of leftists before them used to idealize and romanticize guerrillas and popular uprisings in other parts of the world while working towards statist and reformist ends locally. This newer generation of leftists chooses to “step back” in favour of their local idealized oppressed taking action. Their practice of “not taking space” limits the liberatory space of all, since no one is ever pushing or challenging boundaries. Those who are opposing the structures of domination as an immediate means of survival (indigenous rebels for example), are often limited within the framework of democratic rights and legalistic political maneuvering, at least partially, by the guilt and comfort driven resignation that plagues these social scenes.

For a number of years now, and from a completely different angle entirely, there has been a tendency towards resignation being put forward by people of a nihilist persuasion, primarily from the west coast of the United States. The trend has been annoying to watch on the internet and read about through some of it’s established writing and publication projects, but hadn’t much of an effect in my local circles, acquaintances and friendships until more recently. What privilege politicians and right-wing conspiracy theorists lack in admitted self-importance and critical thought, this tendency vastly eclipses with a form of cynical resignation based in purely academic activity, with an over-inflated sense of self-importance placed in their ideas alone. Any attempt to put ideas into practice which doesn’t fall into the militaristic logic of spectacular attacks on infrastructure, is passed off as activism, especially if it seeks to communicate with impure and non-nihilist others.

I hadn’t found it necessary to critique this tendency until I started running into the problem locally. The same people who chose disengagement from revolutionary activities with the cop-out of “manarchism” who like to distribute zines like “*why she doesn’t give a fuck about your insurrection*” now have *queer nihilism* as their basis for disengagement. Crust punks now have nihilist patches to add to a litany of other meaningless symbols. Comrades I meet who are totally fed up with identity politics and community organizers, but who have not even tried other routes of attack and engagement, are beginning to see a passive nihilism based in intellectual posturing as the only alternative to leftist garbage.

It may be that many of these people would never have chosen a *practice* that breaks away from *the existent, it’s defenders, and it’s false critics*, no matter what was available to them. But I am not convinced that cynical resignation or an arrogant hatred of all others who have not developed critiques of the left (although many have this somewhat implicitly) will bring us any closer to even glimmers of autonomy, from which a lived anarchy can be more thoroughly practiced, and in fact limits our capability to produce it in our daily lives. It may be that revolution (in a planetary moment) is not, nor ever has, nor will ever be possible, but that should not stop us from carrying out our desires, whether in the form of attack or in the development of and attempts to spread, ideas and rebellious social relationships. This is the only way that revolution could ever be possible, and since we can never know for certain whether or not this is impossible, we should avoid cutting ourselves off from this possibility, no matter what the circumstances.

Insurrectionary anarchists in North America have chosen not to respond to this nihilist resignation by way of written critique. I know for myself I have hoped to present my critiques through different active experiments, but perhaps we haven't been taking seriously the disastrous effects that the internet is having on communication, and people's imaginations. I present this piece as someone who sees the left as something that is fundamentally recuperative, and also quickly dying; as someone who despises the project of civilization, and also loves the site of social conflict. Generally, as someone who deeply values and finds great meaning in lived experiences of conflict, and freedom with others. And especially as someone who wishes to point out that there are social ways of conceiving struggle that could leave the left in the dust it deserves, if we can just begin to experiment with them.

Nihilism Outside of Anglo North America

There is, of course, a very active nihilist current that operates outside of Anglo North America. Numerous informal cells are waging attacks against domination on an international scale. Of course attack itself is not inherently nihilist or anarchist, neither is signing off communiques for attacks as that of a coherent group or faction. Historically, the Galleanists, The Friends of Durruti, and many others have taken up this practice from an anarchist perspective. In the post WWII era we have seen such experiments as the Angry Brigade in the UK. Speaking specifically of the Angry Brigade their actions included a wide range of targets and purposes. Many of their actions were what has become a staple of insurrectionary attacks, that of responses to repression of anarchists. Some of their attacks were directed into ongoing social tensions of the time. Others were attacks against the spectacle itself, such as one on the "Miss World" competition, and a few against consumer society. When these attacks acted as critiques of society they were not directed necessarily at alienated individuals from within society but more at the functions and institutions of society that help to prevent self-organized revolt.

In recent years this practice of experimenting with attack and communication has gone in a very different direction. This trend appears to have begun partially with the Informal Anarchist Federation (FAI) in Italy. At the beginning, members of these cells were part of social struggles via their participation in local anarchist scenes and spaces. When they waged attacks it was not out of a stated disdain for others but as an attempt to expand the range of anarchist activity and solidarity to rebels (often incarcerated) anarchist and not. Nihilism was not the declared basis for involvement in these actions, and they were seen as another experiment on a long list of other activities. The publication *Escalation* (2006), which documents the positions of members in these earlier formations states as its purpose:

"We present these papers together here in order to provoke the debate, and to get the non-violence/violence issue over and done with, out of the way, and to provide an understanding of insurrectionary anarchist practice and theory. We call for greater auto-organized activity, at whatever level, as long as the conflict is permanent, so that all of our energies can be focused on the matter at hand. The total destruction of the market and hierarchy.

The time for talking is over, the time for actions is here..."

Around the same time as the anti-police insurrection that took place in Greece in December 2008, a different beginning for this tendency was taking place. The Conspiracy of Cells of Fire (CCF) developing out of the youth culture in the city centres of Athens and Thessaloniki, began waging spectacular attacks. And since this time, nihilism and cynicism towards revolutionary activity (unless it is coming from nihilists) has become the dominant philosophy for taking these kinds of actions. All around the world now, actions claimed under the banner of FAI/IRF and CCF are being framed as the only real anarchist activity, with websites like 325.nostate.net acting as a sort of ideological platform for actions and statements taken out of their social contexts. As has been pointed out by comrades in Barcelona¹ this tendency has a number of problems associated with it (even from an insurrectionary perspective), due to its romanticization, and the arrogance of the statements it's cells make, cuts itself off from critique and further development.

In "A Conversation Between Anarchists: Conspiracy of Cells of Fire & Mexican Anarchists"² the CCF imprisoned cell illustrate this problem very well. In the interview they make a claim that they, the CCF, are the only rightful carriers of an anarchist struggle given that they are the only anarchist prisoners who carry on their struggle inside of the prison walls. They claim, for example, that after an escape attempt by their members, that other anarchists "did absolutely nothing" when jailers were taking their comrades back to prison. This would seem a fair assessment of the incoherence of some anarchists when faced with repression, the problem is that they leave out some important information. In January 2014, when individualist anarchist prisoner Giannis Naxakis publicly criticized the behavior of some of the CCF imprisoned cell, for behaving in a manner not different from other prison gangs; for apologizing to the guards for the "immature" behaviour of himself and others to prison guards and administration, they ganged up on him and beat him with stakes, leaving him with broken bones. The public CCF statement justifying the beating, is written in a tone no different than you would expect from any Stalinist guerrilla, describing his critiques as slander, delegitimizing him as an anarchist who isn't following the correct line that the CCF was laying out.³ Their line in relation to the beating would vastly differ from the position they declare later, in the interview with the Mexican comrades, that a fundamental basis for an anarchist conception of society would be constant change "*anarchists who don't want to be in it and will carry out a struggle to reach something different, unknown territories never explored, territories of more freedom....new deniers of the existent*". Their general tone is instead that of a "with us or against us" attitude. They act as if non-nihilist anarchists have not been carrying out the same struggle for a long time. For example, the Greek prison revolts of 2007 were sparked by the beating of anarchist bank robber Giannis Dimitrakis. Is it not unreasonable that the divisions the CCF have intentionally forged between imprisoned "anarchists of action" might have created the context for the silence they describe from the other anarchist prisoners? Or perhaps that they are over-embellishing the silence of these other prisoners?

It should be taken into consideration that we are talking about the psychology of those who are facing extreme repression at the hands of the greek state as well as a high level of disdain from the broader leftist anarchist tradition in greece. The fact that the state is presently charging many anarchists arrested for clandestine attacks and bank robberies as members of the CCF,

¹ "An Anarchist Response to the Nihilists", oplopanaxpublishing.files.wordpress.com

² "Another Critique of Insurrectionalism", <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-another-critique-of-insurrectionalism>

³ actforfree.nostate.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Conversation-book.pdf

³ actforfree.nostate.net/?s=naxakis

regardless of their actual identification with the label, as well as the star power they are receiving internationally can't help but contribute to the paranoia the imprisoned cell may feel. Of course these comrades didn't help themselves with this from the beginning by forming a *quantitative informal anarchist organization*, an identification with a label, a tally of attacks, an evaluation of pricier targets, etc. Rather they do not treat informal organization as *qualitative*, a tool to be used in the struggle for anarchy, a means of fluid organization and resisting representation. For example, is it any better to have the CCF describing the do's and don't's of real anarchists, legitimizing or delegitimizing the activities of other anarchists based on their own doctrine than it is from a card carrying Anarchist Federation member?

I don't intend on placing these actions and positions on everyone who makes the CCF/FAI/IRF their project around the world. I am merely pointing out the pitfalls of creating "us and them" complexes, that cut out, or ignore any possibilities for struggle that do not necessarily fall into either the "real anarchist" camp, or the leftist camp. I have faith that the informal anarchist possibility is stronger and more flexible than such a rhetorical position.

There are certainly some in the anglo north american context who treat the CCF/FAI/IRF as a stand-in for their own struggle against the existent. They have the romantic tales of warriors abroad that hold similar positions to them as previous generations of revolutionaries had Che Guevara in their time. I also know that there are many who are simply inspired by the attack for all its potential. I can relate to this, but I feel we might be setting a trap for ourselves if we can't separate the attack, informality, and a break from the left, from a purist and 'holier than thou' attitude. This attitude, it's disdain for others who don't practice informality and specific forms of attack, which often comes from a nihilist perspective, also exists here in north america.

Looking into the Mexican context we can see a certain digression taking place. The Autonomous Cells for Immediate Revolution – Praxedis G Guerrero (CARI-PGG) were one of the more interesting examples of the new anarchist guerrilla tactic who carried out a number of bombings in 2011 and did not place themselves "above" social movements and insurrections whether as vanguardist guides or as purist arrogant snobs. It is unclear why they disbanded. Individuals Tending Towards Savagery (ITS), who also started claiming attacks in 2011, and who's focus of attacks against progress and technology are perhaps the only interesting thing about them, are unfortunately a shining example of the purist militaristic logic that has been applied to an avowedly anti-social position. One that at least some nihilists in the anglo north american context, who seek whatever seems the most "badass" thing to be "into", as an understandable but wholly uninspiring reaction to the morality of pacifists and grassroots politicians within social struggles here, are uncritically cheerleading and apathetically holding up as a sacred cow. Ironically, people are seemingly technologically alienated – glued to the very technology that ITS is trying to attack, passively consuming the spectacle of these attacks, and so lost in the anti-social positions they then consume, that they cannot break themselves out of their social isolation, and turn their rage into revolt.

"Let's destroy the spectacle of representation and I'll be the first to break the microphone!"

– Jean Weir, *Armed Struggle and the Revolutionary Movement*

To Begin and End With a No: Nihilism in english speaking North America

“An awareness of how the whole society is structured to facilitate social control has directed the insurrectionalists in Barcelona with a more nihilist character to define all of society as the enemy and, in so doing, assuring their own self-isolation. There are those nihilists who define “society” as “institutionalized society.” It seems to us little more than a word game to be able to utter slogans as extreme, appalling, and cocky as “we want to destroy society.” Because of the etymology of the word “society,” the historical non-universality of the massified institutions and forms that are what the nihilists really want to destroy, and the lack of another term to signify a human collectivity bound somehow by distinct types of communication, it seems much more sensible to reclaim the term “society” as something neutral that can be hierarchical and institutionalized or not. To signify that which the nihilists want to destroy just as much as we do, the terms “nation,” “citizenry,” “the public,” “social classes,” “mass society,” or “society of the spectacle” could be used.”

– Another Critique of Insurrectionalism, Anonymous

Anglo North America’s versions of nihilist anarchism differ greatly from what one finds elsewhere in that they function primarily as an intellectual endeavor. As I stated earlier, critical thinking is becoming very lacking these days, the left and the associated social scenes of the left don’t exhibit a great deal more capacity for this than the rest of society. On the left, there are strict programs and ideological lines to follow, when one takes action, it is expected to be with a martyristic attitude, generally cut off from any theoretical development. As a consequence, anarchists who wish to break from the leftist stranglehold on social struggle have been very committed to developing their theoretical capacities. This is certainly a good thing. Thinking about what one is doing is very important so that one can find the fluidity necessary to change with the circumstances, as well as to avoid following blindly. Though, there is a problem I see developing in that anarchists are now taking another reactionary approach to intellectualism. Unlike the anti-intellectualism one finds across most of western society, this other trend in modern anarchism is developing a disdain for practice, and most notably a practice relating to social struggle, choosing instead to wall themselves up in intellectualism.

The justification for this is commonly an antisocial position. The broad spectrum of individuals that we see trapped in this cage we call “society” are beginning to fill the opposing side of another “us and them” complex. This arrogance is certainly imported from the CCF and others abroad. I myself, until very recently, also spoke of a war on society in such a sloppy manner. But I think we all need to reconsider the way in which we use the term “social” and by extension “society”. As well, if such a sloppy terminology is a fundamental position for many nihilists, they may have a great deal more to reconsider.

The journal *Baedan*, and it’s 2012 publication *The Anti-Social Turn*⁴ is perhaps the hallmark North-American nihilist articulation of this problematic relationship to society. It’s fundamental premise is a break down of Lee Edelman’s book *No Future*, and proposes a queer nihilist anarchist expansion of the subjects contained in the book. While *The Anti-Social Turn* makes an effort to

⁴“Baedan”, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/baedan-baedan>

propose a practice of attack, and a rejection of activism as a result of their analysis, the conclusions they draw would seem to leave little possibility for experimentation, and thereby leave one with nothing other than a non-academic intellectualism, in place of an anarchist theory one develops through practice.

One proposal in the *Anti-Social Turn* is “pure negativity” from an anarchist perspective. This is put forward from the experience of queerness. This society, in trying to create subordinate intergenerational human productive machines, has historically attempted to repress and kill off queerness and any deviation from the project of capitalist progress and development. In modern times in North America, queerness is quickly being incorporated into the structure of capitalism. Those who hold the most conservative positions in upholding capitalist family values have reacted to this, trying to identify it as a threat. The response that *No Future* and by extension *The Anti-Social Turn* has to this is to reject the recuperative aspects of queer subcultures, and queer capitalism by taking ownership of the perceived threat that queerness may have to the social order. This is certainly understandable since this society has, and should have, nothing to offer us. But this perspective, upon further examination, takes us to a dead end which is most clearly identified when extended to an anarchist relationship to social struggle against the structures of domination.

The *Anti-Social Turn* identifies a number of anarchist projects (Food Not Bombs etc) that it sees as fundamentally recuperable. It also identifies the problematic positive positions that many leftist anarchists take in response to the charges of negativity from anarchist actions against domination. The problem is that it creates a number false distinctions in these challenges to the anarchist milieu. The problem with positive anarchist projects of self-organization is not simply that they propose an alternative to domination, but that they are often separated from a relationship of social conflict. A community garden can very easily be incorporated into the project of gentrification, but it is an altogether different project when it takes a conflictual approach to legality, property and civil society. The problem with anarchist proposals of direct democracy and social justice, isn't simply that these are alternatives, but that they are alternatives that try to make us legitimate to civil society. Our positive projects are vital in proposing and practicing a manner of living that breaks from the structures of domination, meeting our individual-collective needs and desires; driving wedges between the identity of the rebel who desires another life, and that of the productive white person or citizen who wants to make society more caring and fine-tuned.

In the critique of a positive anarchist possibility, *The Anti-Social Turn* would appear to leave us with nothing other than hopeless attack. Of course in pointing out the recuperative problems of many anarchist projects, from co-operative businesses to independent media to social spaces, they conveniently leave out the recuperative problems one finds too, in attack. In the more high profile examples of attack we have seen here in so-called “Canada”, from the 2010 anti-olympics convergence, to the Toronto G20, to the 2012 student strike in Montreal, it is clear that attack is just as vulnerable to being labelled militant reformism, as any other project is to its own recuperation. Of course, nihilists might immediately counter that this is due to the context of these actions occurring within broad-based social movements; but I think the problem lies in their conflation of communication with representation. While attack for it's own sake is highly valuable, it is vital that when anarchists attack, we must find whatever avenues possible to make our attacks communicative to other individuals and groups who might seek a break from participation in this society, to avoid the trap of being represented by liberal and leftist proposals.

While the nihilists would have us attack until caught, and hunger strike until death, all for our own sake, I would propose instead that we seek to spread subversive relationships of conflict at whatever level, for the personal joy we may get out of seeing domination lose its grip across every social terrain. It is also helpful to point out that like repression, recuperation can always be a consequence of our actions. These are the two favored responses that power has towards rebellion. Since the nihilists would not have us stop the attack for fear of repression, does it make any sense that we stop experimenting with any other self-organized activity, simply because power will always respond?

This is also leaving out the problem of passive consumption of internet communiques, and the spectacularized images that flash across anarchist media projects like submedia. Whether from the active or passive perspectives, these mediated forms of communication can influence and change the ways we relate to the world in a manner that can fall out of our own control. We must not allow the terms of revolt, or our relationships to be set by anyone other than ourselves. This would require an active and experimental approach that if we are serious enough that we want anarchy in our lives, we would not shy away from.

In the book *Attentat*, another North American nihilist publication, insurrectionary anarchism is taken on as just another form of activism, by the simplistic criteria that *acts are carried out, therefore it is activism*. In the piece *Professional Anarchy and Theoretical Disarmament* (coming out of Spain)⁵, Miguel Amoros criticizes Alfredo Bonanno's influence on insurrectionary anarchism. The article lays out Bonanno's theoretical development through the rise and fall of the revolutionary social movements in Italy in the seventies and into the period after. The article points out like many others, the failure of insurrectionary anarchism to respond more effectively to repression, but fails quite miserably in its assumption that anarchist initiatives are failures because no revolution has occurred. One wonders what would have become of the anarchist movement in Italy had no break been made from the suffocating control of anarcho-syndicalism and an industrialist logic based purely in the identity of the worker. Amoros, coming from a more staunchly materialist perspective, also finds no value in the individualist nature of autonomous self-organization, and cannot grasp the concept that the mass is made up of individuals and therefore the individual is central to revolutionary activity. Given that anarchists are individuals with specific ideas about revolution we can then begin to act, personally and collectively, from the place of these desires, with the understanding that the rest of the exploited might develop their own ideas through acts of rebellion. Being unwilling to consider the needs of the individual who may be able to consider more than their role in the economy, Amoros writes this off as "vanguardism".

This is all very strange however, considering that the editors of *Attentat* are nihilists and don't appear to share the same critiques as Amoros from a theoretical perspective. In *Insurrectionary Anarchism as Activism*, the piece in which they lay out their reasons for including the Amoros article, the only worth the nihilists can find in insurrectionary acts, is exactly the opposite: individual satisfaction. As said earlier, they claim insurrectionary anarchism to be essentially "activist" and their positions on action to be a form of morality. I can't speak for other anarchists influenced by insurrectionary anarchism but I know for myself that I do not push it forward as ideology. Many of the insurrectionaries I have met have a wide variety of influences, contexts

⁵ libcom.org/library/professional-anarchy-theoretical-disarmament-insurrectionism-miguel-amorós

that they apply their lessons to, and projects that they engage in, hardly the sign of a rigid and inflexible ideology.

From the fact that they actually have no affinity at all with Amoros, but publish his critique as if they find something profound in it at all, to the fact that they provide no definition of activism or leftism – except perhaps to suggest that “the left in a peculiar form”, implies anyone who takes an active opposition to the state and capitalism. And finally that in response to their charges of activism, that they make no attempt to articulate what they actually intend to get out of “waiting” instead. From my perspective, their charges amount to little more than name calling. Perhaps most crudely of all, their name calling is articulated in their suggestion that North American insurrectionaries all came out of a culture of DIY skill-shares and bike fixing. To what extent this might be at all true (though quite rare in my experience), we can apply much of what Bonanno developed in Italy to our varying contexts. Much of the same principles of number padding, public education instead of action, and disdain for self-organization and autonomous action can be applied to the DIY queer and non-profit milieu that dominate grassroots social struggles here.

If the nihilists see insurrectionary anarchists as “closest to them” but direct their “critiques” in such a disingenuous manner, one wonders what their actual intent is. I can’t help but assume that they are merely looking for others to have a conversation with, and wish that others who hate the left would stop making so much goddamn noise. For all their attempts to distance themselves from contemporary anarchist institutions such as *AK Press* and projects like the *Institute for Anarchist Studies*, I don’t see much difference in effect. I find it trivial at best that their intellectualizing is extending outside of the university, and the history of social struggle. I find their proposals (or lack thereof) to be no less civilizing or pacifying. Just as anarchy is not direct democracy, militant reformism, or the self-management of my exploitation, it certainly is no philosophy class either.

If I am ever found melting back into the fabric of white-supremacist, misogynist, class society through inaction; if I am ever stepping away from the practice of attack due to the realities of isolation and repression; if I am doubtful that a mass uprising of the participating controlled and exploited is ever possible, I never want it to be through pretensions of reaching a higher theoretical plane, calling itself anarchism.

I hope that other anarchists out there can continue to keep in mind that there is a vast array of possibilities for mutual aid, autonomy, and freedom which include neither the activist with it’s head cut off, the liberal with it’s sustainable gardening project, the victimized first-world-third-worldist, nor the stuffy intellectual or the arrogant hipster. The secret is to really begin.

On “Strugglismo”

In *Laughing at the Futility of it All*⁶, a recent interview with *Hostis* journal, Aragorn, one of the more noted anarchist nihilist writers in North America, articulates some of his often more deliberately confusing positions. The interview covers a wide range of subjects, from second wave anarchism, to nihilism, to Aragorn’s publication projects, and humor. One subject I’d like to deal with here, is the label “strugglismo”, with which he paints anarchists who intervene in social struggles. Aragorn starts off this point by likening anarchists who desire to participate in social

⁶“Laughing at the Futility of it all”, incivility.org/?p=97

conflict to grumpy Murray Bookchins who see all anarchist projects outside of the workplace or civil society as “lifestyle anarchism”.⁷ He then goes on to claim that his label is more applicable to anarchists in the Bay Area where he lives, and that he doesn’t have the “skill set” to judge a wide variety of situations, but then immediately changes his tune by giving examples outside of the Bay Area.

“To put this a different way, the Strugglismo perspective is looking for other people’s struggles to intervene in, much the same way as alphabet soup communists of front organizations (many of which have seduced anarchists). Their strategy is borrowed from the Italian insurrectionary anarchist movement, but it is quite different. Let’s see if you can tell the difference. Around 2009, the Insurrectionary Anarchists of the Puget Sound area began to throw events such as banner and flyer drops around the issue of police violence against the local population. While in the early 2000s (as early as 1995 by some estimates), locals around the Italian town of Val Susa began to sabotage and protest the building of a high speed rail line in the town. Insurrectionary Anarchists came to participate in No-TAV. This distinction, between intervention by parachute versus by political desire, is a core anarchist question (and concern). The unfair characterization of Strugglismo points to the characteristics it shares with activists of the NGO, anti-globalization, and “ally not accomplice “ variety. Again, this is not about an individual but an approach.

That said, I think that anarchists should be involved in unsexy, difficult, and slow infrastructure work. This seems to have fallen out of popularity due to its lack of social rewards (for many, it is a lot more fun to go drinking after the riot than to do Food Not Bombs). But so-called activists doing prisoner support, food infrastructure, collective housing, etc. continue to have my respect and attention.”

His counter position of “parachute” vs “political desire” is laughable here. Anarchists in Italy move (even geographically) to other contexts and struggles which could be considered just as much “not theirs” as could be the case for American anarchists fighting against the police as a murderous institution of domination. The anarchists in the Puget Sound (2009 – 2012) not only did banner drops and flyering as a response to police killings⁸, they engaged in small acts of property destruction, they organized autonomous assemblies to strategize and co-ordinate with other anarchists on how to intervene, and they participated in street demonstrations in a manner that broke the situation out of the control of leftists who tried to manage them. It is interesting that he leaves out the trajectory that the anti-police struggles in the Pacific Northwest took after 2009 since this would take away from the narrative of futility of anarchist action that he usually likes to throw at situations in North America.

Further still, Aragorn goes on to praise anarchist infrastructure as a worthwhile substitute for anarchist interventions in social struggles, that might be tainted by the baggage of authoritarian communism that has historically been so strong in North America. Interesting as well, that he doesn’t write off anarchist action altogether, for him only the most spectacular forms of sabotage

⁷ “Anarchy After Leftism”, theanarchistlibrary.org/library/bob-black-anarchy-after-leftism

⁸ “Burning the Bridges They are Building”, theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-burning-the-bridges-they-are-building-anarchist-strategies-against-the-police-in-the

are worthwhile. I ask though, what is infrastructure or attack, if it is not linked in some way to a struggle, a tension, or a trajectory?

Here in Vancouver, some of us started an anarchist social space at the end of 2013. Unlike another anarchist social space a couple years earlier, it has received little support from the broader radical milieu. Part of the problem has been gentrification: the inability of many to stay in the city for long periods of time, and to take time away from the grind for discussion. Another part of the problem is the subcultures and identity politics that much of the guilty milieu has retreated into. There are a few collective houses around which espouse anti-authoritarian politics, but are unable to take ownership of any kind of political desire and extend these words into anything meaningful, beyond perhaps a “safe” space from the horrible world we are surrounded by or a hip scene that reproduces its own passivity in much the same way as any group of friends out there without queer or anti-oppression politics. The biggest difference of all between this social space and the previous one is that there are very few struggles which anarchists are currently engaged in with very much effect. At the time that the other anarchist space was operating, the struggle against the Olympics in Vancouver made many people excited about anarchist ideas and direct action. At present there is a vicious cycle of behind-the-back shit-talk, and confusion about anarchist ideas stemming from an inability to put them into practice. The infrastructure is there, but has very little purpose.

Starting back in the seventies in “Canada”, a struggle for the rights of prisoners started out of hunger strikes by prisoners in Southern Ontario. Since then, an organization representing rights for prisoners called “Prison Justice” has been active in Vancouver. Through the eighties and nineties, anarchists were involved in this organization locally. These efforts had very little linkage to a broader anarchist struggle (or even a broader prisoner’s struggle), and there had very seldom been any anarchist prisoners other than the prisoners of Direct Action in that time period. The organization is now more or less a non-profit society focused only on providing much needed resources to prisoners locally, holding annual vigil events on Prison Justice Day, and is mostly too scared of losing its privileges inside the prison system to connect these efforts to a social movement or struggle in the streets. Newer generations of anarchists have had a great deal of trouble trying to make meaningful contact with organizers from this group, and have at times met outright hostility. Amélie Trudeau and Fallon Rouiller-Poisson, two Montreal comrades who were imprisoned in Mexico recently, highlighted this problem very well when they distanced themselves from an event (organized by another prison oriented organization) held in solidarity with them and other “political prisoners” that they saw prison reformism and support for “political prisoners” as fundamentally a project of recuperation when not linked to a broader struggle, in any form, against the structures of domination.⁹ Of course, Aragorn isn’t referring so much to these organizations, but more to the Anarchist Black Cross, it shouldn’t be hard to see however that such efforts can also become recuperating, as in only focussed on rights and resources, if the anarchist space was not engaged in continual conflict and subversion on the outside or the inside.

In the late spring of 2014, a house of anarchists and indigenous rebels was raided by the Vancouver police. The raid was in response to a number of arsons, window smashings and anarchist graffiti, including the infamous and viral “No Pipelines” tag around East Vancouver that year,

⁹“Open Letter from Amélie and Fallon”, theanarchistlibrary.org/library/fallon-rouiller-and-amelie-trudeau-open-letter-from-amelie-and-fallon

that had taken place in the city over the previous two years. Some of these attacks had taken place in the context of anti-gentrification tensions, and others in solidarity with prisoners internationally. Aside from the “No Pipelines” tags, these actions were not tied effectively to anarchist projects of counter-information or street demonstrations, and often lacked meaningful relationships with the struggles they intended to support. The communication for these actions took the form of “anarchistnews” posts that only communicated with disconnected anarchist individuals on the internet. After the raid it was very hard to take an offensive response to the raid, whether the comrades were involved in the actions or not, given that the attacks and communication of the attacks were not part of broader anarchist tensions and meaningful interventions into social struggles. The overall context not only made some comrades more vulnerable to repression, but even made a response which could have turned the raid into a more uncontrollable situation totally impossible.

Stepping away from specific examples about infrastructure, I’d like to give another example about attack and interventions into social struggles that I think highlights the headspace of some of Aragorn’s critiques. When I was in Montreal in May of 2012, there was a strong anti-authoritarian tension in the streets as a result of repression of the student strike that was going on at the time. There were nightly illegal demonstrations of thousands, which often had a very small minority that fought the police and attacked property. Aragorn, who was in Montreal for the anarchist book fair, was interviewed for a local independent radio station.¹⁰ The interview was focused primarily on anti-civ and indigenous perspectives on anarchism. Hid did at one point however, turn his attention to the conflicts that were happening in the streets at the time, only to point out how “effective” the police were at controlling demonstrations. This was a rather absurd position to take considering that it was such a small number of people (including anarchists) who were taking a combative approach in the streets. If the police were effective, it was more because of the passive approach that 99% of the people at the demonstrations were taking, not because of the futility of such actions in themselves, or because of the unbearable power they had. Aragorn was more than happy to discourage the entire social tension in the streets and those carrying out attacks, more or less promoting a kind of nihilist counter-insurgency in the face of the possibility of expansive revolt. Those who might have been fed up with the leftist manipulation of the masses, taking advice from such an argument, would have felt the best way to engage such a critique would not be to practice self-organized revolt, but instead to order books from LBC and maybe join an online discussion forum.

In my estimation, Aragorn and other North American nihilists, focus more on futility and fruitlessness in struggle, not because they are concerned with the recuperation that can come from social struggles, but more because they are seeking affirmation and a larger network of study partners. Aragorn’s publishing projects, including *Little Black Cart*, are exciting at times because of the broader range of thought that they allow rather than what one might often get out of *AK Press* or *PM Press*. Theory, like infrastructure, is highly valuable to a social struggle. The activist martyrs who eschew theory in relation to practice certainly hold a paternalistic viewpoint that suggests we cannot educate ourselves, as part of our liberation. But like theory and infrastructure, action and communication are vital to give the former two meaning, and to ensure that they actually have an effect in the real world.

¹⁰ “Indigenous, Indigenism, and anarchism: Interview with Aragorn!”, montreal.mediacoop.ca/audio/indigenous-indigenism-and-anarchism%C2%A0-interview-aragorn/11537

So Strugglisti, struggle on! And never forget to think and build, as you act, so that you do not struggle in vain! And to those throughout North America, who are smothered under the weight of the left and identity politics, do not let pretensions of theoretical sophistication civilize or pacify your rebel spirit nor strangle your abilities to find accomplices in the fight for liberation!

The Value of Vision

In conclusion, I think it might be necessary to go back to *The Anti-Social Turn* for a second. I think the reason it finds such resonance among young anarchists, especially those radicalized in the post-occupy period is the fact that it addresses the lack of a future that many across society are beginning to recognize. The current context of capitalist exploitation is one in which all possible dreams for autonomy from it are crushed. The welfare state is in severe decline and it is unlikely it will ever bounce back. Recuperation is becoming more and more effective while offering less and less all the time. Due to environmental catastrophe and social crises, capitalism is having to quickly change. In this context, a complete cynicism about the future is an obvious response, and as anarchists, we should certainly welcome a lack of identification with the future of capitalism.

The Anti-Social Turn proposes an equally narrow minded relationship to the concept of the future as it does to society, however. In tying together Lee Edelman's critique of capitalist control over the future via the interests of the capitalist family unit (signified by the child) and hostility to queerness, with Silvia Federici's point about how an attack on women's bodily autonomy was essential for the future of capitalism (in *Caliban and the Witch*), the authors of *The Anti-Social Turn* do their best to limit revolutionary possibilities for the future, and by extension, the present. The repression of queer sexuality, the commons, and women's autonomy over their bodies, a conflict of the future of early capitalism with the interests of the peasant who had "no care for the future", should not signify to us that the future itself is inherently capitalist; but that the medieval european peasants cared little for the future of the economy (what else could the future mean for capitalism?) since their own present entailed the seeds of their liberatory desire. Do we imagine for one second that these peasants experienced no joy in raising their children in such a present. Those of us in the modern context of near total domination should not take this history lesson as a pure rejection of the future, but instead as a lesson in the pasts which have existed without domination, even in it's shadow, and the possible futures. Is it so impossible to imagine a future or past in which there are no white people, and queer genders and sexualities are as mundane as heterosexuality? These are the possibilities we cut ourselves off from when we surrender our perceptions of time to capitalism, and imprison ourselves in our obsessions with negation, when we cut ourselves off from a projectual approach which seeks out accomplices, which we can then begin to practice in both positive and negative ways.

"The social struggles of the Middle Ages must also be remembered because they wrote a new chapter in the history of liberation. At their best, they called for an egalitarian social order based upon the sharing of wealth and the refusal of hierarchies and authoritarian rule. These were to remain utopias. Instead of the heavenly kingdom whose advent was prophesied in the preaching of the heretics and millenarian movements, what issued from the demise of feudalism were disease, war, famine, and death – the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, as represented in Albrecht Durer's famous print – true harbingers of the new capitalist era. Nevertheless, the attempts that the medieval proletariat made to

“turn the world upside down” must be reckoned with; for despite their defeat, they put the feudal system into crisis and, in their time, they were “genuinely revolutionary,” as they could not have succeeded without “a radical reshaping of the social order” (Hilton, 1973: 223-4). Reading the “transition” from the viewpoint of the anti-feudal struggle of the Middle Ages also helps us to reconstruct the social dynamics that lay in the background of the English Enclosures and the conquest of the Americas, and above all unearth some of the reasons why in the 16th and 17th centuries the extermination of the “witches,” and the extension of state control over every aspect of reproduction, became the cornerstones of primitive accumulation.”

– Sylvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*¹¹

I remember when I first read *Caliban and the Witch* how this realization jumped out at me. How excited I felt that opposition to domination was not simply a matter of western progressivism or something that came explicitly out of the enlightenment. It is interesting how the authors of *Baedan* miss this point: that the freedom loving desires of the European peasants of that era were not simply a negation of the future, but existed in the context of a fight for a liberated one. It is funny how so many nihilists are quick to write off revolution as a goal, and point out how marxism and anarchism alike are a continuation of the pleas for liberation that often came through a Christian framework before. But they miss a very encouraging lesson from this; that the desire for a complete change in the world towards a liberating form of life is a common response to the misery of domination. And from the Ghost Dance, to the Pueblo Revolts, to the Maji Maji Rebellion¹² we have numerous examples that might tell us that this millenarian tendency is not merely something that comes from a Western context of the Christianized. An exciting possibility that anarchism, not only as negation, but as a positive proposition could be relevant in an infinite variety of ways.

As conditions degrade and the world continues to unravel, the millenarian tendency in human beings who are stuck under the boot of domination is bound to resurge in response. The question is, are we going to let Christian fascists and others who might want to continue the horror of hierarchy be the only ones who attempt to provide an alternative?¹³

¹¹ libcom.org/library/caliban-witch-sylvia-federici

¹² – In 1890, The Ghost Dance was a new religious movement incorporated into numerous Native American belief systems. According to the teachings of the Northern Paiute spiritual leader Wovoka (renamed Jack Wilson), proper practice of the dance would reunite the living with spirits of the dead, bring the spirits of the dead to fight on their behalf, make the white colonists leave, and bring peace, prosperity, and unity to native peoples throughout the region.

– The Pueblo revolt of 1680 was an uprising of most of the Pueblo people against the Spanish colonizers, in present day New Mexico.

– The Maji Maji Rebellion, was an armed insurgency against German colonial rule in modern-day Tanzania. The war was triggered by a German policy designed to force the indigenous population to grow cotton for export, and lasted from 1905 to 1907. The insurgents turned to magic to drive out the German colonizers and used it as a unifying force in the rebellion. A spirit medium named Kinjikitile Ngwale claimed to be possessed by a snake spirit called Hongo. Ngwale began calling himself Bokero and developed a belief that the people of “German East Africa” had been called upon to eliminate the Germans. German anthropologists recorded that he gave his followers war medicine that would turn German bullets into water. This “war medicine” was in fact water (*maji* in Kiswahili) mixed with castor oil and millet seeds. Empowered with this new liquid, Bokero’s followers began the Rebellion.

¹³ An earlier version of this essay was responded to on The Brilliant Podcast (<http://thebrilliant.org/podcast/episode-eighteen-desert-ii/>) by Aragorn and his co-host. It was a rushed version, unedited, and perhaps didn’t explain the purpose for the last section of the essay very well. In spite of their responses, I still think the original arguments

Of course, I am not pointing out this millenarian tendency or possibility with the intention to craft a kind of anarchist liberation theology in place of the nihilist trend. Instead I want to argue that anarchists can take strength in our vision, and put that vision into practice. As in the case of millenarian movements across the globe, and any struggle for radical social transformation, vision is utterly indispensable to a project of immediate revolt.

Anarchy requires strength, vision, knowledge and care as much as it does rage and destruction. It requires that we do not fall into the despair that so many others have. It requires that we practice social revolt in the face of social control. That we do not allow technology and the dumbing down of society to strain our relationships, and our capacity to dream. At the very least, it requires that we are not practicing the counter-insurgency of Alex Jones and all the others who say that our revolt is impossible, and there can never be consequences to our actions.

In our attempts to honour the negation inherent to the anarchist tradition let us ensure that we are not negating anarchy too.

Resignation is death.

Revolt is life.

The anarchist project demands more.

“OUR TASK as anarchists, our main preoccupation and greatest desire, is to see the social revolution come about: a terrible upheaval of men and institutions which finally succeeds in putting an end to exploitation and establishing a reign of justice.

For we anarchists the revolution is our guide, our constant point of reference, no matter what we are doing or what problem we are concerned with. The anarchy we want will not be possible without the painful revolutionary break. If we want to avoid turning this into no more than a dream we must struggle to destroy the State and exploiters through revolution.”

– Alfredo Bonanno, *Why Insurrection*

stand up as this essay is a response to the effects the nihilist tendency is having in my own circles, and not so much an attempt at an ego battle.

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